



Coombe Woods

Management Plan 2018-2023

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THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations. Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland. Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
- 10 Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site - their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Coombe Woods
Location:	Goodleigh
Grid reference:	SS595336, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 180
Area:	7.42 hectares (18.34 acres)
Designations:	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Coombe Woods lie on steep ground just to the South East of the Village of Goodleigh in North Devon, just outside Barnstaple. Surrounded by pasture and hedges, the wood was established as part of The Woodland Trust's 'Woods on Your Doorstep' campaign, to commemorate the Millennium.

2.2 Extended Description

Coombe Woods lies on steep ground just to the South East of the Village of Goodleigh in North Devon, 15minutes from Barnstaple. Surrounded by pasture and hedges the wood was established as part of the WT Woods on Your Doorstep project in 2000. Roughly 'L' shaped, the site is East to South facing and falls steeply to a small stream which is lined by a Grove of Alder trees. At the Southernmost point there is a viewpoint with a fine vista towards Barnstaple.. It sits within the Exmoor National Character Area No 145. There are other areas of woodland within 1km of the site and some large hedge banks however much of the landscape is intensive livestock farming.

Historically it has been woodland, scrub and open grassland. The site is a Local Wildlife site for its species rich neutral grassland communities, which include species such as bird's-foot trefoil, agrimony, and violets. The new native woodland was planted around the most botanically diverse areas and has developed well. Public access is via Goodleigh public footpath number 6 which leads from Coombe Cross on the western edge of the village to Coombe Farm and then out onto the Willesleigh Cross to Westacott Road. There are other permissive paths around the site.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Public access is available via the public footpath running through the site and other permissive paths throughout. The public footpath is level all the way through but can be very wet and is accessed by pedestrian gates, after walking down the track from Coombe Cross. Most of the permissive paths are steep due to the nature of the site.

Bus services run through Goodleigh From Barnstaple to Lynton and South Molten, the bus stop is within Goodleigh around 150m east of the entrance to the wood.

<https://bustimes.org/localities/goodleigh>

The nearest public toilets are in Barnstaple.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

Coombe Woods will be managed as a mixed habitat mosaic to maintain the diverse range of habitats but also importantly that the open grassland component is of a standard that ensures it remains a Local Wildlife Site. This will be done through low intensity grazing of the majority of the site, restoring the species rich grassland and creating a dynamic scrub edge to those parts of the woodland which will remain unmanaged and continue to develop into high forest.

Local people will freely be able to use the site and low level access will be maintained throughout. Over the long term the grazing management will ensure that paths are open and the goods views across North Devon are maintained.

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

5.1 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

Description

A combination of mixed native broadleaf woodland (Compts 1b, 1c, 1d) planted in 2000, the main species being ash, oak and hazel, with occasional cherry, rowan and field maple. There are a number of pockets of grassland (approximately 0.5ha) which were the original reason that the site was selected as a Local Wildlife Site by Devon Environmental Record Centre. Species in the grassland include black knapweed, violets, common cat's-ear and glaucous sedge. There are also areas of scrub dominated by hawthorn, gorse, bramble and bracken. An area of alder carr is found on the valley floor with large areas of opposite leaved golden saxifrage, along with an area of wet fen which includes species such as meadow sweet, greater bird's foot trefoil and water mint. A stream is situated not far from the eastern boundary.

Significance

The site is part of the Woods on Your Doorstep project, increasing woodland cover and providing access to woodlands for local people. When restored the grassland areas, classified as lowland meadow priority habitat of the national vegetation classification MG5 Crested dog's-tail - black knapweed grassland, which is nationally scarce and even more restricted in Devon, will contribute to the conservation of this habitat. The mosaic of woodland, scrub and flower rich grassland will provide a diverse and rich habitat for wildlife.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: The site is very steep making management of the grassland areas by mechanical means challenging. . Limited access also restricts the use of any large machinery

Opportunities: To put in place sustainable management of the open grassland areas to return them to the standard required to be a Local Wildlife Site while enabling a differently structured woodland to develop long term within the grazing unit.

Factors Causing Change

Ash die back which is present on site will have an effect on the woodland areas. Red deer are present as are grey squirrels which will also have an effect on natural regeneration and tree health in general. Without appropriate management i.e. grazing, the grassland component will decline further through a build up of scrub, thatch and nutrients eventually leading to the loss of the sites Local Wildlife Site status.

An increase in the area of Laurel in compt 1b could cause a decline in native species.

Too much livestock access to the stream could cause poaching and therefore a higher likelihood of sediment going into the stream, lowering its ecological quality.

A change in livestock numbers, or availability of cattle, will affect the success of composition of the grassland and how grazing affects the structure of the woodland changes through browsing.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

A diverse woodland scrub grassland mosaic where the grassland meets the standards to remain a Local wildlife site under the lowland meadow criteria. The open grassland area should not be less than 1.2ha of the whole site with a wide scrub grassland mix throughout (Compt 1b). Compartments 1c and 1d will be left to develop through natural processes - intervention will only occur if there is a significant loss of canopy cover due to ash die back

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Allow the woodland areas in cpts 1c and 1d to develop naturally and to put into place the appropriate grazing management to achieve restoration of the grassland areas (cpt 1b). This will be done by:

1. Installing post and wire fencing around compartment 1b and allowing restricted access to the stream for cattle to drink.
2. Grazing cpt 1b at a low level with cattle through the months of late July to October / November so that most of the grassland vegetation is removed every year.
3. Control Laurel in Compt 1b.
4. Manual cutting of the open areas to speed up the recovery process for the first 2 years of this plan period.
5. Ash die back and natural regeneration will be monitored through the woodland condition assessment in 2023.

5.2 Informal Public Access

Description

Informal public access is via maintained paths throughout the site. A well-used public footpath (Goodleigh FP no. 6) leads to and through the site. It is level but the first 140m while on a hard surface can be very wet due to spring lines running along it. Once at the main site there is a pedestrian gate at either end. A circular walk goes around the upper western side of the site. This is very steep in part, around 800m long, and surfaces can be very slippery during wet weather. Another path leads down to the stream. Due to the nature of the site, visitors will have to be physically capable.

Significance

Whilst access is a fundamental Woodland Trust Objective, helping to reconnect people with trees and woodlands. The site was established as part of the Trust's WOYD project.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraint: The steep or wet ground limits the suitability of the site to predominately active walkers.
 Opportunity: To widen paths to ensure access is maintained and create a separation between livestock and people.

Factors Causing Change

Drainage in access lane makes the entrance route into Coombe Wood wet and muddy. The development of the woodland can cause some paths to become enclosed 'tunnels'. Livestock grazing may also cause some poaching of path surfaces. Some visitors may be put off using the wood while livestock are grazing the area.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

A site that is pleasant, easy and safe to visit with features and facilities providing an informal experience for local visitors.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Ensure that the woodland continues to provide a safe, well maintained environment that the public can enjoy, and not be adversely affected by the introduction of grazing. This will be done by:

1. Maintaining access points and footpaths in a condition appropriate for the level of use and type of demand from the local population.
2. Widening some of the more enclosed paths in cpt 1b, this will increase views, help dry out the paths, help to keep livestock and people in harmony and also help conserve the grassland remnant along those edges.
3. Scrape the first 140m of the entrance path to remove a build of leaf litter and mud.
4. Signage will be put in place when livestock are grazing the site so people are aware that animals are present.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	0.09	Hazel		Non-wood habitat		Informal Public Access, Mixed Habitat Mosaic	
Narrow, rural access lane. Steep hedge banks of native species either side with limited floral interest. Surface of lane is natural, unsurfaced stone and dirt..							
1b	6.13	Mixed broadleaves	1999	Wood pasture	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Informal Public Access, Mixed Habitat Mosaic	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tree Preservation Order
Predominately very steep sloping ground with an intimate mixture of Newly planted Native Woodland with patches of Species Rich Neutral Grassland (MG5). The terrain falls to a small meadow by a minor stream.							
1c	0.55	Mixed broadleaves	1950	High forest	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	Informal Public Access, Mixed Habitat Mosaic	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Impenetrable belt of Gorse, Hawthorn and Scrub Oak (P75) along boundary with absent ground flora.							
1d	0.70	Alder species	1975	High forest	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Informal Public Access, Mixed Habitat Mosaic	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tree Preservation Order
Small area of Alder Carr with some Willow. Stored coppice (P50) with varied ground flora including frequent Yellow Iris and hemlock water-dropwort. Beech and Hazel coppice are also present.							

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.