



Railway Wood Co Durham

Management Plan

2017-2022

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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: | Railway Wood Co Durham, Morton Wood |
| Location: | Fence Houses, Fence Houses |
| Grid reference: | NZ316498, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 88 NZ318499, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 88 |
| Area: | 4.83 hectares (11.94 acres) 4.82 hectares (11.91 acres) |
| Designations: | Community Forest, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc) |

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Fence House Woods consist of Morton Wood and Railway Wood, which lie between the railway line and Morton House. Both woods were acquired by the Trust in 1999 and cover a total area of 9.72ha. Well used but have suffered vandalism at times.

2.2 Extended Description

Fence House Woods consist of two woods joined to each other along one boundary and lying to the west of Fence Houses Village between the railway line and Morton House (NZ 3177 4985). Both woods were acquired by the Woodland Trust in November 1999 and cover a total area of 9.72 hectares or 24.00 acres. Both woods are extremely well used but also suffer vandalism, fly-tipping and theft on a regular basis.

They are located in the urban fringe and are surrounded by a mix of arable farmland, woodland and residential housing and industrial land. Although located in the urban fringe, neither wood is much affected by services, though an underground electric cable does run under the public footpath passing through both woods. Management access to both woods is taken off the private road (also a bridleway) leading to Morton House from the A1052, then by following the route of the public footpath eastwards that passes through both properties.

Compartment 1, known as Morton Wood, consists of 4.82 hectares of existing broadleaf woodland and is identified as an Ancient Woodland Site (AWS) on the Durham County Wildlife Site Register and as Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) on English Nature's Inventory of Ancient Woodland. The accuracy of these two designations appears incorrect as the character of the existing tree cover suggests an oak dominated hardwood plantation probably planted around the turn of the 20th century and the name of the wood in the 19th century was Morton Grange Plantation. The site itself is flat and crossed by a public footpath running roughly east to west, continuing into compartment 2 and also has several well used informal permissive paths running throughout the wood. Evidence of past mining activities is clearly seen in the form of disturbed ground, particularly along the western edge of the wood and from the many coal fragments in the soil. Two old mine shafts are known to have existed at the southern end of the wood but are not visible on the ground anymore. An old building also once existed in the southwest corner of the wood.

Compartment 2, named Railway Wood, is made up of 4.9 hectares of new native woodland planted in March 2000 on ex-agricultural land put down to grass. It was created under the Trust's millennium project, known as Woods on Your Doorstep (WOYD) in partnership with Sainsbury's Homebase Ltd for whom the wood represents one of 20 national Woodlands for the Millennium sites they helped create as part of their millennium celebrations. The wood is planted on a gentle east-facing slope falling down to Morton Wood where the ground becomes wetter with standing water occurring during periods of heavy or persistent rain. The public footpath that passes through Morton Wood continues westwards through the northern end of Railway Wood and forms the main means of access to both sites for the public.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

For those wishing to reach the woods by public transport, bus stops are located on the A1052 in Fence Houses from where the woods can be reached within a few minutes by walking down the track leading to Morton House near to the war memorial or by following the public footpath from Durham Street over the old railway line and into Morton Wood. No car parking exists at the woods so anyone travelling to these properties by car will have to find on-street parking within Fence Houses.

The main access to both woods is provided by the public footpath that runs through both Morton and Railway Woods from Morton House to the west and from Durham Street in Fence houses to the east. A squeeze stile is located at its western end and an old step stile at its eastern end next to the railway line. A squeeze stile entrance into Railway Wood is also provided off the public bridleway track running between Morton House and Railway Wood, south of the main public footpath entrance. A gated entrance leading off the railway line at the southern end of Morton Wood provides further pedestrian access from the east.

Morton Wood is flat and has a number of unsurfaced paths running around it which are strimmed at least once a year. Railway Wood gentle slopes eastwards to join Morton Wood but overall the site is flat, though the ground can be soft and wet in places, particularly during winter time at its eastern end. A network of grass rides cover Railway Wood and these are mown three times a year to keep them open for visitors.

For those needing public conveniences whilst visiting the wood, public toilets can be found at School Terrace next to the junction of Lumley New Road (B1284) and the A1052. Two RADAR toilets are available in Chester-le-Street; one at Foundry Lane (9am-5pm Mon-Sat) and the other at Riverside (daytime).

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The wood will be allowed to reach maturity and will develop the characteristics of more naturally occurring woodland, as opposed to a plantation of single aged trees. For this reason silvicultural management will take place to ensure the wood is diverse in tree species and structure, with a good mixture of both young and mature trees being present. This will enable the wood to be more resilient to change in the future, and will ensure it supports the greatest range of wildlife.

A good standard of access provision will be maintained. The path network will be kept open for use and the entrance will be accessible and clearly signed. The wood will be made as safe as practical for visitors through regular tree safety inspections in high risk zones.

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 Informal Public Access

Description

Fence House Woods represent an important local amenity for the residents of Fence Houses, Bournmoor and Colliery Row, being the only woodland freely accessible to the public within this locality. Both woods are also easily accessible due to the public footpath that runs through them and consequently they receive heavy use by local people of all ages. Besides the public footpath, two further pedestrian entrances, one south of the main entrance opposite Morton House and another at the extreme southeast corner of Morton Wood provide further access for the public to these properties.

Significance

Providing public access to woods is a cornerstone of the Trust's management approach to its properties and is encapsulated in its corporate objective of increasing enjoyment of woodland. Fence House woods is the only woodland freely accessible to the public within the locality of Fence Houses, Bournmoor and Colliery Row and therefore the woods are an important local amenity for people living in this area.

Opportunities & Constraints

Proposals to re-open the Leamside railway line that runs along the east boundary of Morton Wood have been suggested. If this happens, access to the woods from the east will be restricted to one entrance, reached by a footbridge over the line. Although re-opening the line will create an increased hazard alongside the wood's boundary, possible benefits this work could bring include a neater entrance to the woods from the east, upgrading of the public footpath surface and the installation of a high specification safety fence down the side of the railway line that would solve the unsightly fly-tipping problem this boundary currently suffers from.

Factors Causing Change

Vandalism of entrances and signs, Path damage due to horse trespass, Damage to rides due to motorbike trespass

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To ensure free public access to the woods continues to be available in the future by maintaining at least three of the four entrances currently in use and by keeping all major rides and paths free of obstruction for walkers.

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

The four entrances to the woods will be inspected at least once a year to ensure they are maintained in a safe and serviceable condition for just informal public access. The network of permissive rides, paths, glades and the public footpath will be kept open for walkers by mowing rides and paths annually and cutting back encroaching vegetation and collecting litter in Cpt 1 at least once a year. Public safety will be protected by carrying out periodic tree safety surveys along paths in Cpt 1. A site risk assessment of all known hazards within the woods will also be maintained and any necessary work carried out in order to minimise the dangers these hazards present to those visiting the woods.

5.2 Secondary Woodland

Description

9000 native trees and shrubs planted in March 2000 over a gross area of 4.9 ha in order to create native broadleaved woodland on former farmland.

Significance

Native broadleaved woodland is a vital habitat for many plants and animals found in the UK. Over the centuries, our countryside has lost most of its natural tree cover, with a consequent loss of biodiversity. By planting new native woodland we are helping to reverse this depletion and fragmented fragmentation of the countryside. Planting on former farmland provides a net gain in biodiversity that will increase as the wood develops. Consequently, increasing the area of new native woodland is one of the Trust's four key corporate objectives that the creation of Railway Wood helps to fulfil.

Opportunities & Constraints

Woodland is now well established on this site but vandalism, such as illegal tree felling and fires are still an on-going problem.

Factors Causing Change

Tree disease

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To ensure that native high forest broadleaved woodland is successfully established and to ensure this remains healthy and vigorous so that, over the long-term, the wood becomes self-perpetuating through natural regeneration, ensuring its existence in perpetuity.

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

Whilst the planting blocks have formed dense thickets of young trees whose canopy has closed creating the early stages of a woodland environment, ash disease will re-open pockets of the canopy allowing the development of regeneration and an understorey. Monitoring of this process through the Woodland Condition Assessment every plan period will guide future management. Currently this will be a minimum intervention approach.

5.3 Secondary Woodland

Description

The oak dominated secondary woodland forming the tree cover of Morton Wood (cpt 1). Includes a scattering of other species, such as sycamore, ash, black poplar, Scots pine and Corsican pine. Information given to the site manager indicates that the poplar is native black poplar. Until work was carried out in March 2002 to clear sycamore, this species made up a significant proportion of the canopy in the southwest part of the wood and dominated the understorey. Besides sycamore in the understorey elder, hawthorn, yew and some hazel also occur.

Significance

Morton Wood is designated a County Wildlife Site on the Durham County Wildlife Register and is the only significant block of mature woodland in the Fence Houses/Colliery Row area. Although secondary woodland, Morton Wood appears to have been a woodland site for a long time, existing when the first Ordnance Survey map of the area was drawn up in 1855. Its field layer also includes some typical woodland species, such as bluebell, wood anemone, wild arum, lesser celandine, wood sorrel, primrose and dog violet, recognised as species typically found in old woods.

Opportunities & Constraints

Fly tipping and fires both occur in Morton Wood on a regular basis affecting both the aesthetic and nature conservation value of the wood. Honey fungus has also been identified in the wood and could lead to a loss of some trees in the future.

Factors Causing Change

Frequent fires, Vandalism of trees, Regeneration of sycamore, Presence of honey fungus

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the wood as predominantly native broadleaved high forest oak woodland, accepting the small amount of conifers and other non-native broadleaves that occur in the wood for the structural diversity they provide.

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

Following the removal of sycamore from the canopy and understorey in 2002, future tree felling will only be carried out in response to tree safety issues. The coppice regrowth from the sycamore stumps will be accepted as part of the understorey, so long as it does not suppress the regeneration of native species present. Ash disease will re-open pockets of the canopy allowing the development of regeneration and an understorey. Monitoring of this process through the Woodland Condition Assessment every plan period will guide future management. Currently this will be a minimum intervention approach.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

| Year | Type of Work | Description | Due By |
|------|--------------|-------------|--------|
|------|--------------|-------------|--------|

APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

| Cpt No. | Area (ha) | Main Species | Year | Management Regime | Major Management Constraints | Key Features Present | Designations |
|---|-----------|----------------------|------|-------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| 1a | 4.82 | other oak spp | 1900 | High forest | Management factors (eg grazing etc), People issues (+tve & -tve) | Informal Public Access | Community Forest, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc) |
| <p>Known as Morton Wood, compartment 1 occupies a flat site covering 5.13 hectares to the west of the railway line that runs into Fence Houses. Natural England classifies the wood as Ancient Semi-natural Woodland (ASNW) but this seems to be incorrect. A survey carried out whilst the wood was still part of Sunderland district identifies Morton Wood as an Ancient Woodland Site (AWS) presumably based on the ground flora identified at that time that included bluebell, wood anemone, wild arum, lesser celandine, wood sorrel, primrose and dog violet. Coal mining has taken place in the wood during the past, as is evidenced by the numerous fragments of coal found in the soil and the scarred and pot-marked ground between the permissive path and the western boundary in the southern half of the wood. Two old mine shafts are also known to exist in the southeast end of Cpt 1 but no obvious signs of these are now visible. The canopy is dominated by mature oak, with just a scattering of other species, such as sycamore, ash, black poplar, Scots pine and Corsican pine. Information given to the site manager indicates that the poplar is native black poplar. Until work was carried out in March 2002 to clear sycamore, this species made up a significant proportion of the canopy in the southwest part of the wood and dominated the understorey. The intention behind this work was not to try and eradicate sycamore from the wood but to significantly reduce its spread and dominance in order to allow oak and other native species space and light to regenerate. Besides sycamore, elder, hawthorn, yew and some hazel also occur in the understorey. The current oak high forest woodland has almost certainly arisen from planting, probably carried out around the beginning of the 20th century and evidence of drainage ditches is still seen on some parts of the site. A temporary pool of water covering anything up to 50 square metres can form in wet weather on the boundary with cpt 2 north of the public footpath where a stand of Scots pine is located; some of which are dying due to the wet conditions. MANAGEMENT LIMITATIONS: Seasonally wet areas.</p> | | | | | | | |
| 2a | 4.90 | Birch (downy/silver) | 2000 | High forest | People issues (+tve & -tve) | Informal Public Access | Community Forest |

Compartment 2. Known as Railway Wood, compartment 2 consists of 4.9 hectares of new native woodland planted in March 2000 on ex-agricultural land. The wood occupies a gentle east-facing slope falling down to Morton Wood where the ground becomes wetter with standing water occurring during periods of heavy or persistent rain. The area planted covers 4 hectares with the remaining 0.9 hectares made up of open ground in the form of path, rides and small glades. Pedunculate oak is the dominant species, accounting for 40% of the planted trees, followed by ash at 20%. Lesser amounts of silver birch, rowan, willows, aspen, alder and native black poplar were also included, along with the woody shrubs hazel, holly, hawthorn, elder and dog rose that were mostly planted around the margins of the planting blocks. Species such as willows, poplars and alder were concentrated in the northeast corner of the site and along the northeast boundary to create wet woodland habitat in these wetter areas. Railway Wood is one of the Trust's Woods on Your Doorstep (WOYD) sites, planted to celebrate the new millennium and was created in partnership with Sainsbury's Homebase Ltd for whom the wood represents one of 20 national "Woodlands for the Millennium" sites. Establishment began with a public planting event on the 18th of March 2000 with members of the public and local army cadets helping to plant around 1.1 hectares. Also planted by the volunteers were the 40 fruit trees consisting of 20 apple and 20 pear trees that form the woods special millennium feature. **MANAGEMENT LIMITATIONS:** Limited vehicular access within the compartment.

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.