

Bewl Water Woods

(Plan period – 2022 to 2027)



WOODLAND
TRUST

Management Plan Content Page

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

The Public Management Plan

Location and Access

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

The Woodland Trust owns and cares for well over 1,250 sites covering almost 30,000 hectares (ha) across the UK. This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created over 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Our Vision is:

“A UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife.”

To realise all the environmental, social and economic benefits woods and trees bring to society, we:

- **Create Woodland** – championing the need to hugely increase the UK’s native woodland and trees.
- **Protect Woodland** – fighting to defend native woodland, especially irreplaceable ancient woodland and veteran trees; there should be no loss of ancient woodland
- **Restore Woodland** – ensuring the sensitive restoration of all damaged ancient woodland and the re-creation of native wooded landscapes.

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

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.

The following principles provide an overarching framework to guide the management of all our sites but we recognise that all woods are different and that their management also needs to reflect their local landscape, history and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene in our woods when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity, safety and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, 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. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.
4. The long term vision for all our 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 natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities 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 encourage our woods to be used for 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. We maintain a network of sites for long-term monitoring and trials leading to reductions in plastics and pesticides.
10. Any activities we undertake are in line with our wider Conservation Principles, conform to sustainable forest management practices, are appropriate for the site and balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

The Public Management Plan

This public management plan describes the site and sets out the long term aims for our management and lists the Key Features which drive our management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with our long, 50 years and beyond, and our short, the next 5 years, term objectives for the management and enhancement of these features. The short term objectives are complemented by an outline Work Programme for the period of this management plan aimed at delivering our management aims.

Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and we continually monitor our sites to assess the success of our management, therefore this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme.

Please either consult The Woodland Trust website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

or contact the Woodland Trust

operations@woodlandtrust.org.uk

to confirm details of the current management programme.

A short glossary of technical terms can be found at the end of the plan.

Location and Access

Location maps and directions for how to find and access our woods, including this site, can be found by using the following link to the Woodland Trust web-site which contains information on accessible woodlands across the UK

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods/>

In Scotland access to our sites is in accordance with the Land Reform Act (of Scotland) 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In England, Wales and NI, with the exception of designated Public Rights of Ways, all routes across our sites are permissive in nature and where we have specific access provision for horse riders and/or cyclists this will be noted in the management plan.

The Management Plan

1. Site Details
2. Site Description
3. Long Term Policy
4. Key Features
 - 4.1 F1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
 - 4.2 F2 Connecting People with woods & trees
5. Work Programme

Appendix 1 : Compartment Descriptions

GLOSSARY

1. SITE DETAILS

Bewl Water Woods

Location:	Wadhurst Grid reference: TQ657327 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 188
Area:	11.57 hectares (28.59 acres)
External Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
Internal Designations:	Ancient Woodland Restoration Project

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Bewl Water Woods are comprised of three woods, Combewell Wood (Compartment 3) and Pig Wood (Compartment 2) which adjoin each other and Frogwell Wood (Compartment 1) which is situated approx 250m to the north-east. The woods are situated on the north-west shore of Bewl Water reservoir on the Kent/East Sussex border. Situated south-east of the village of Cousley Wood, they are in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Character Area (NCA). The NCA is characterised by east-west sandstone ridges and valleys covered by a mixture of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads connected by historic routeways. Woodland accounts for 26% of the NCA with the majority being ancient (defined as existing since at least 1600AD).

Bewl Water Woods are predominantly ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and have a coppice with standards structure. Standards are predominantly oak and the coppice is either pure sweet chestnut or mixed broadleaves (birch, hornbeam, alder, hazel etc). Ground flora over most of the site includes ancient woodland specialist species such as bluebell, wood anemone and yellow archangel. A small area in the west of Combewell Wood is not shown on the ancient woodland inventory. Underlying geology is Lower Tunbridge Wells Sand and soils are stagnogleyic argillic brown earths.

The woods were previously owned by the nearby Whiligh Estate. Norway spruce and larch were planted over some of the site in the mid 1960s. These crops obviously failed to establish well and were also badly windblown in the storm of 1987. This allowed the previously coppiced areas to survive and continue to grow. The Woodland Trust removed a lot of the remaining conifers in 1998 and created new rides in Pig Wood. Two small areas were clear-felled and replanted with oak. An area of inaccessible, windblown larch with some standing conifers was left to develop naturally.

In parts of Pig and Combewell Woods the Trust initially continued the coppicing regime, with cants of sweet chestnut being cut in 1999, 2002 and 2008. However, due to the long extraction route, steep slopes and ink disease (*Phytophthora* spp) killing the sweet chestnut, a minimum intervention management regime was adopted in 2009. Ash dieback caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* is also impacting on the woods.

Public access is available via the circular route around the reservoir or via the public footpath from Cousley Wood (along Butts Lane). Frogwell Wood has a short path through it with entrances onto public footpaths. Combewell and Pig Woods have two entrances off the circular reservoir route which allow access to a simple network of rides.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

Bowl Water Woods are characteristic of many ancient woods in the High Weald, previously managed by coppicing. Various constraints now make it impractical to carry on coppicing at the site including a long extraction route across neighbouring land, seasonally-waterlogged soils and disease in the chestnut.

A degree of diversity in structure and tree species can be maintained throughout the majority of the site by a policy of minimum intervention, allowing the processes of natural succession to take place, i.e. no silvicultural operations such as coppicing or thinning will be undertaken. This will allow species such as oak to develop veteran characteristics in the long term. The dieback and death of the chestnut coppice will create some structural diversity by creating small-scale gaps that will regenerate with species such as birch, willow, alder and sycamore. Ash is likely to be a very minor component in the future due to disease. There will be an accumulation of both standing and fallen deadwood with some large diameter pieces that will add an important habitat currently absent from the site. There should be no damaging invasive species such as *Rhododendron ponticum* present on the site.

The site will continue to provide low-key public access, adding to the interest of the reservoir circular walk. Signs, entrances and benches will be maintained to provide a welcoming aspect to the woods. Paths will be maintained as required, in line with the site's Access Category C designation: low usage sites where paths are maintained.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 F1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description
<p>Frogwell, Pig and most of Combewell Woods are ancient semi-natural woodland of National Vegetation Classification (NVC) W10a: pedunculate oak/bracken/bramble - typical sub-community. In spring the ground flora is dominated by bluebell with other ancient woodland specialist plants such as wood anemone, yellow archangel, yellow pimpernel, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, wood speedwell and hairy wood rush.</p> <p>The coppice with standards structure in most of the wood indicates a long period of active management. The dominant coppice species is sweet chestnut, however Frogwell Wood has a more varied coppice understorey with hazel and hornbeam. The Woodland Trust undertook chestnut coppicing in 1999, 2002 and 2008 in Cpt 3a. Oak standards (up to 120 years old) are rare in the chestnut areas of Pig and Combewell Woods but more frequent in Frogwell Wood.</p> <p>Alder dominates in the wetter, steeper part of Pig Wood where small streams flowing into the reservoir have created steep-sided gullies. Ash is also present in this part of the wood including a large mature tree at the head of the main gully.</p> <p>Coniferisation of parts of Cpts 2a in the 1960's has left a legacy of small groups of Norway spruce and larch. These do not pose a threat to the ancient woodland characteristics of the site and are slowly being reduced in extent by windblow.</p>
Significance
<p>The amount of ASNW left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century. Approximately 40% of England's ASNW is found in the south-east of England. ASNW is very important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years which allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop.</p> <p>Bowl Water Woods are situated within the High Weald AONB which has 27% woodland cover with a high proportion of ancient woodland. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and the prevention of its loss is one of the main aims of the Trust.</p>
Opportunities & Constraints
<p>Constraints:- Poor or no management access for timber extraction and haulage. Difficult terrain and wet soils.</p>
Factors Causing Change
<p>Dieback and windthrow of chestnut coppice due to Phytophthora. Dieback of ash due to Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</p>

Mammal damage: squirrel; deer.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Over the next 50+ years the longer-lived species such as oak will begin to acquire veteran characteristics (dead and decaying wood, rot holes etc). Younger cohorts of oak will begin to mature although many of the trees planted in the 1990's may not survive due to extensive squirrel damage.

Unmanaged coppice, particularly chestnut, will begin to collapse through age, disease and windblow and a more varied structure and species composition will eventually develop with regenerating small gaps.

In order to keep the ride network open and safe for visitors, some periodic intervention will be necessary to deal with encroaching growth and dead/dying trees. However most standing deadwood will be retained in situ where it does not pose a threat to visitor safety.

The woods will be free of damaging invasive non-native species such as rhododendron.

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

During the next 5-year plan period there will be no silvicultural management of the woods. Works will be limited to maintaining the ride network and monitoring for any renewed growth of rhododendron.

- Zone B tree safety surveys/ash dieback assessment to be carried out every 2 years. Due June 2023/2025/2027.
- Woodland Condition Assessment (including invasive species and mammal damage) to inform next management plan review. Spring 2027

4.2 F2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description
<p>The two separate woods are only accessible on foot via public footpaths. There are 2 squeeze gap entrances to each wood from the 12.5 mile public footpath that runs round Bewl Water reservoir (part of the Sussex Border Path). The woods are approx 1.5 miles from the Bewl Water visitor centre (www.bewlwater.co.uk) where there is parking and other facilities. Other routes to the woods are from Cousley Wood to the north-west (3/4 mile) and Wadhurst to the south-west (1 mile).</p> <p>The nearest settlements are Wadhurst (pop: 4,883) and Lamberhurst (pop 1,706).</p> <p>The woods provide a short diversion from the popular reservoir footpath and allow visitors to experience ancient woodland with its displays of spring flowers and other wildlife. Each wood has a dedicated bench but no other visitor infrastructure.</p> <p>Due to their remote location the woods are not heavily used by the public and have a Woodland Trust access category C: less than 5 visitors a day.</p> <p>There is no public access beyond the western end of Combewell Wood where the ride comes to a management gate.</p>
Significance
<p>The site allows for quiet informal recreation as a contrast to the more active pursuits taking place on and around the reservoir.</p>
Opportunities & Constraints
<p>Constraints.</p> <p>Some sections of the rides are prone to waterlogging.</p> <p>The site is remote from any larger villages and has no nearby parking so does not get many visitors.</p>
Factors Causing Change
<p>Any increase in numbers of visitors using the reservoir facilities is likely to increase visitor numbers to the woods.</p>
Long term Objective (50 years+)
<p>The woods will continue to be accessible by visitors on foot who will enjoy their tranquillity and naturalness. In time the woods will contain large old trees and regenerating patches that will continue to attract a range of woodland wildlife in contrast to the aquatic habitat of the adjoining reservoir. Spring displays of bluebells and wood anemones will continue to provide a draw for visitors.</p>

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

During this plan period current visitor numbers will be catered for by providing a network of safe paths & rides, access points and simple signage. This will be achieved through:

- Summer path cut and entrance maintenance as necessary (biennial from 2022).

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2022	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	July
2024	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	July
2026	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	July

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	2.28	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Frogwell Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a). Oak standards (approx. P1900) over mixed coppice (birch, hazel, sweet chestnut, hornbeam). Also ash, hawthorn, elder and holly present. There is a large decaying veteran beech tree over a clearing with bramble and a sinuous central ride with coppiced edges. Ground flora is dominated by bluebell and wood anemone with wild daffodil at the W end.</p> <p>Disease present in sweet chestnut and ash.</p>						
2a	4.18	Sweet chestnut	1970	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
<p>Pig Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a/W6?). Oak standards over mixed coppice (sweet chestnut, birch, alder, ash). In 1970 it was partly converted to conifers (Norway spruce and larch) which were subsequently badly windblown in 1987. Most remaining conifers were removed in 1998. The northern half of the compartment is largely a valley with a small stream flowing into the adjacent reservoir. This area is dominated by alder. The south east part of the compartment has a large man-made depression; possibly a quarry, marl-pit or iron-ore digging. In 1998 a small area in the west of the compartment was restocked with oak. A veteran ash of 3.43 metre circum. and notable oak of 3.15 metres stand on the northern edge.</p>						
3a	2.69	Sweet chestnut	2000	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
<p>Combewell Wood. Ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10a). Predominantly sweet chestnut coppice with oak standards. Also birch, hazel, willow and privet present. Ground flora dominated by bluebell with bracken, bramble and foxglove. Coppice has been cut in 3 cants, the last one in 2009. There is extensive Phytophthora (ink disease) throughout the compartment affecting the sweet chestnut. Towards the south west of the sub compartment sycamore coppice</p>						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
becomes more prevalent. <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> has been present in this area but now largely controlled.						
3b	2.4	Oak (pedunculate)	1950	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Planted Ancient Woodland Site
<p>Combewell Wood. Part ancient semi-natural woodland (NVC W10).The western part of subcompartment is young oak high forest with an understorey of hazel, sweet chestnut and hawthorn. This grades into secondary woodland with aspen and birch. In the middle of the sub compartment is a large man-made depression similar to that in Subcpt 2a. The eastern part of the sub compartment is mixed coppice with oak standards and occasional conifer. A small area was cleared and replanted with oak in 1998. The southern boundary has a woodbank with overstood coppice of hornbeam, field maple, sweet chestnut and wild cherry. Ground flora is dominated by bluebell with bracken and bramble in open areas.</p>						

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.

Windblow/Windthrow

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

Registered Office:

The Woodland Trust, Kempton Way, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 6LL.

The Woodland Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales no. 294344 and in Scotland no. SC038885. A non-profit making company limited by guarantee. Registered in England no. 1982873. The Woodland Trust logo is a registered trademark.