

Fieldside Covert

(Plan period – 2018 to 2023)



WOODLAND
TRUST

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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

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GLOSSARY

1. SITE DETAILS

Fieldside Covert

Location:	Yelvertoft	Grid	reference:	SP616759	OS	1:50,000	Sheet	No.	140
Area:	6.17 hectares (15.25 acres)								
External Designations:	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)								
Internal Designations:	N/A								

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Fieldside Covert lies 1.5 km to the East of Yelvertoft and is accessed for both management and by pedestrians from the Yelvertoft - Elkington road at SP616767. The wood straddles the Grand Union Canal which itself has been designated as County Wildlife Site (Elkington Section No 131). Approximately two-thirds of the site are to the south of the canal (Compartment 1) and one-third to the north (Compartment 2). The site has a north-westerly sloping aspect and has an average gradient of 1 in 12 but with a convex slope at its south-easterly boundary. There is evidence of ridge and furrow in both sections which suggests that it is post-enclosure secondary woodland and its name suggests that its purpose was initially as a fox-covert.

The wood is essentially a broadleaved high forest where the canopy forming species were principally Oak, Ash, Sycamore and Elm. However the Elm element, which formed the core of the wood, was destroyed by Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970/80s and its position taken over by thickets of Blackthorn, Wild plum, Hawthorn and Elder. There are a number of fine Oaks throughout compartment 1 and they are dominant along the southern margins. The main canopy-forming species in the higher eastern sector is Sycamore. In areas of low light penetration the ground layer is principally mosses and male fern and in non-shaded areas bramble and honeysuckle proliferate. There are some ancient woodland indicator species in both compartments (including dog's mercury and bluebells, though the latter may have been planted at some point) - this could be an indication of small pockets of these species surviving in hedgerows prior to the planting of this wood (perhaps in encompassed and bordering hedgerows that were once part of a woodland).

North of the canal, in compartment 2, Ash, Oak and Sweet chestnut form the canopy species and Hawthorn, Field maple, Elder and Holly the under storey which is less dense than in compartment 1. In the higher light environment dog's mercury and nettles dominate the field layer.

There are reasonable amounts of standing and lying deadwood in all parts of the woodland.

The proximity of the canal, the multi-storey structure of the wood, the diversity of species, the deadwood, all combine to form a myriad of habitats for herbaceous plants, mammals, birds, and invertebrates and therefore the key feature for subsequent management will be the maintenance of biodiversity and resilience in this mature secondary woodland, as well as quiet informal public access (in compartment 1).

The restricted parking on the Yelvertoft-Elkington road and the long, sometimes muddy approach mean that the wood is unlikely to have heavy usage by the public for informal recreation. However, during the Summer barges often moor-up close to the wood and people use it for an evening stroll or walking the dog.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

The Woodland Trusts objectives and long term intentions for Fieldside Covert are determined after carrying out woodland condition assessments and following the balanced consideration of numerous factors. Where there is conflict, the interests of biodiversity take precedence over people (apart from in the interests of safety).

The intention is for Fieldside Covert to remain predominantly as a native broadleaved high-forest, with a diverse species and age composition. Standing and fallen deadwood will be retained throughout the wood, where safe to do so, adding to the overall site biodiversity. Species composition will be maintained and, if possible, broadened, through thinning the canopy, increasing the light levels to the ground and understorey (especially in areas of current native broadleaved regeneration) and through potential supplementary planting. Silvicultural interventions will be informed by Woodland Condition Assessments and be aimed at ensuring a woodland that is more resilient, with a varied age and species structure and improved biodiversity.

Essential tree safety work will also be carried out where required, as per Woodland Trust policy.

The site will be regularly visited and valued by local people for quiet informal recreation, with signs and furniture in good condition and the path network will be clear, easy and safe to follow.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 f1 Natural Secondary Woodland

Description
A post-enclosure secondary woodland probably initially established as a game covert. Although probably planted it contains largely native or long naturalised broadleaved species with a significant understorey of native trees and shrubs. There is little evidence of former management and as a consequence a mixed age, multi-storeyed secondary woodland with large areas of thicket has been allowed to develop providing a broad diversity of habitats. The proximity of the canal also provides an additional dimension to the diversity of habitats and species.
Significance
The degree of isolation ensures its importance to local biodiversity. The nearest woodlands of comparable size are 3 kms to the north and 13 kms to the south. Its uniqueness and elevated location mean that it is an important element in the local landscape. It provides an important facility for those birds and mammals that feed on the adjacent farmland but require the shelter of woodland for nesting and roosting.
Opportunities & Constraints
Constraints: The woodland is relatively isolated; almost an island in a sea of agricultural cultivation and so linkage with similar habitats is limited and mostly via the canal side habitats. As a consequence its contribution to local biodiversity is highly significant. Only 3% of Northamptonshire is covered by broadleaved woodland (Biodiversity Action Plan for Northamptonshire). Badger setts – consider when planning any operations within the woodland. Opportunities: Enhance stand structure, diversity and encourage natural regeneration through selective coppicing and thinning of sycamore and oak, and cyclically clearing some areas of mature blackthorn.
Factors Causing Change
Spread of sycamore through compartment 1a through natural regeneration. Tree pests and diseases – Ash dieback in particular is impacting the mature ash trees that make up a significant portion the stand within compartment 2a and along the site boundaries.
Long term Objective (50 years+)
The long term objective is to have a robust and resilient mixed broadleaf woodland with a diverse range of native species such as oak, elm, cherry, ash and field maple. The wood will have a diverse age range and structure, a healthy understorey, plentiful natural regeneration and a variety of habitats such as high forest and thickets. Standing and fallen

deadwood will be retained throughout the wood, where safe to do so, adding to the overall site biodiversity. Species composition will be maintained and, if possible, broadened, predominantly through increasing the light levels to the ground and understorey (especially in areas of current native broadleaved regeneration) and potential supplementary planting. The aim of these intervention works is to increase biodiversity and resilience in the woodland through greater species diversity and age structure, with the hope that the woodland will be able to better deal with issues such as climate change and tree pests and diseases as they occur in the future.

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

To promote any natural native broadleaf regeneration and maintain existing trees of interest through selective felling and clearance/respacing of sycamore regeneration (2028/9).

Selective cyclical cutting of some areas of dense blackthorn (2028/9).

Supplementary planting of native broadleaved species to improve species composition and resilience, especially in areas affected by ash dieback or other diseases (2028/9).

Monitor and manage trees along paths and the canals as per Woodland Trust Tree Safety policy.

Monitor woodland health through annual key feature observations.

4.2 f2 Informal Public Access

Description

Access to the wood is either from the Yelvertoft-Elkington road or from a footpath (Public right of way) some 250 metres south of the road and then via a permissive track over the canal bridge or from the canal tow path. No public access is provided to the wood north of the canal (Compartment 2). Access to the bulk of the wood to the south of the canal (Compartment 1) is either via a squeeze gate close to the canal bridge or the “management” gate in the south-east corner of the wood.

There is an established circular footpath around the southern section of woodland (Compartment 2) for site visitors to use

Particularly during the summer additional use is made by canal barge users who moor close to the wood.

Significance

There are few woods in the locality and none that provide public access. The sites elevated location and proximity to the canal enhance its aesthetic appeal and consequent public appreciation. The range of species and habitats and consequent biodiversity also add to the potential enjoyment.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

Despite the long approaches to the wood, use is well established and, because of its isolation and uniqueness, the wood provides an opportunity for public enjoyment not available elsewhere in the locality.

The nature of the variation in the structure of the wood and the proximity of the canal provide the visitor with a variety of different experiences within a relatively small area.

Potential for working with emerging forest school groups to utilise the woodland for environmental education.

Constraints:

The problems of parking on the Yelvertoft-Elkington road and the long, sometimes muddy approach may deter some

potential users. Compartment 2 is publicly inaccessible. Limited size adds to the deterrent of travelling to site.
Factors Causing Change
Scrub encroachment onto paths (particularly blackthorn)
Long term Objective (50 years+)
Low-key public access will be maintained in perpetuity through a managed path network, entrances and regular safety checks. Infrastructure and facilities will be minimal and only essential signage used. Use of the site will be monitored and provisions for informal recreation reviewed accordingly. Ride edge coppice work in selected locations will be undertaken to enhance visitor enjoyment, as well as structural diversity. Public safety will be assessed through infrastructure monitoring and tree safety inspections conducted regularly.
Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)
To keep paths and entrances clear of encroaching vegetation by cutting back vegetation twice a year (May and Aug). To monitor (through scheduled inspections), maintain and, where needed, enhance the existing pedestrian access points, signage and furniture. Signage to be cleaned by the contractor annually. Conduct tree safety inspections and required remedial works as per Woodland Trust policy.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2020	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,	June
2020	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone B	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside routes such as paths and rides within the woodland	November
2021	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone B	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside routes such as paths and rides within the woodland	June
2022	SL - Tree Safety Emergency Work	Work associated with unplanned emergency tree safety works – such as clearance of fallen trees/branches and associated repairs	August

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	4.27	other oak spp	1820	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Located straddling the Grand Union Canal on a north-facing slope. The occurrence of ridge and furrow suggest that wood was planted in the post-enclosure period, probably in the early nineteenth century. A stand of mature mixed broadleaves (Oak, Sycamore, Ash and Elm), the Elm was lost to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970/80s. As a consequence large areas of thicket (Willow Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Hazel and Elder) have developed and now form a central core dissected by the NW-SE ride. During the late 1980s attempts were made to replant this former Elm area with Oak, Cherry and Field maple and although some have been severely suppressed a proportion have survived and will form the next generation of canopy trees. Beyond the core and beneath the canopy there is a well-developed second storey of the thicket species and in some locations regenerating Sycamore. In areas of low light penetration the field layer is principally mosses and male fern and in non-shaded areas bramble proliferates. A number of Scots pine were planted along the NE boundary.						
2a	2.18	Ash	1880	null	No/poor vehicular access to the site	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Located north of the Grand Union Canal on a north-facing slope. The occurrence of ridge and furrow suggest that wood was planted in the post-enclosure period, probably in the early nineteenth century. Ash, Oak and Sweet chestnut form the high forest canopy at 20m whilst Hawthorn, Field maple, Elder and Holly occupy the sub-canopy at 12m in approximately 30% of the area. Thickets of Blackthorn and Elm are found in the NW corner. There are large amounts of standing and lying deadwood. Seepage from the canal provides wet ground in the southern sector. The field layer is principally Dog's mercury and Nettle. There is much evidence of badger activity.						

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.

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