

Ten Year Plan for Hagg Wood:

Submission by the Friends of Hagg Wood (FHW)

Introduction

The Government recognises the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change and in recent reports has said “We must protect ancient woodlands and veteran trees.... Our trees are facing unprecedented environmental challenges and our woodlands need to be resilient to this”¹. “We will take steps to improve public access to trees and woodlands in a responsible way, encourage community-led tree planting and invest in partnerships with communities and local government.”¹

‘Forestry England (FE) manages the nation’s forests to provide benefits for people, nature and the economy. From the soil to the trees, and all the species living in them, the whole forest ecosystem is a resource known as ‘natural capital’. FE strive to get the balance right between the benefits, including spaces for people to enjoy and exercise, vital habitats for wildlife, a source of sustainable timber and a means of capturing carbon to help mitigate climate change.’²

FHW realise that there is no time to lose in the restoration of our Plantation on an Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS). Today there are many major issues which are of great concern: climate change, biodiversity, ecological conditions, social well-being, carbon storage to mention a few, all of which require immediate attention. We are facing a global biodiversity crisis and Hagg Wood needs to be protected and restored, using the most effective conservation management for trees, associated woodland plants and wildlife that we, as a group, can undertake with the help of the FE, to increase its resilience and habitat quality.

FHW understand the value of forests and we want to play our part by managing Hagg Wood with FE, employing enlightened policies to increase the value of the timber, the ecosystem and the biodiversity. FHW broadly support the strategic objectives contained in the draft Ten Year Plan for Hagg Wood:

- The high priority of Nature, protecting and enhancing the ecological, cultural and heritage value of Hagg Wood.
- Continuing the restoration of the PAWS to native dominant woodland.
- Improving forest resilience to climate change and plant health risks by increasing tree species and structural diversity.
- Controlling rhododendron and conserving ancient and veteran trees.

There are several specific issues which FHW would like to point out that would help with these objectives, marked with an asterisk*.

People’s connection to nature and environmental awareness are associated with positive behaviour and action. Access to an attractive local natural environment can play a positive role in educating and inspiring children, helping them to grow up to be environmentally responsible adults. Over the years Hagg Wood has provided a valuable local natural environment in which FE Officers have been involved in lots of inspiring projects with children, fostering a sense of wonder at the cycle of life and connection to nature, from which they have derived great knowledge and benefit.

Principles of Restoration³

Restoration involves re-establishing a functioning native woodland system by:

- Securing features from the former ancient semi-natural woodland.
- Removing introduced species of trees, shrubs and other plants.
- Encouraging the re-establishment of native species.
- Initiating or enhancing ecological processes which may be absent or damaged.
- Restoration must not be measured by the transformation of canopy cover to native trees alone; it is important to safeguard the condition of remnant features and maintain wider woodland integrity.

Our Plantation on an Ancient Woodland Site contributes substantially to our natural and cultural heritage. Restoration is a long-term process and the continued survival of many rare and threatened species depends on the stable ecological conditions created by continuity of woodland cover, and by the presence of native tree and shrub species. In Hagg Wood we need to secure and enhance ancient woodland features such as the many indicator species of plants: Bluebells, Wood Anemone, Fragrant Agrimony, Twayblade and many more associated flora. Hagg Wood can contribute to a woodland network, providing suitable conditions for colonisation and migration into adjoining habitats, although some of the more exacting species, particularly those with slow recolonization rates such as the above mentioned ancient woodland indicator species, may be lost if not carefully protected.

Overall Tree Species

Conifer is still the dominant species group, comprised primarily of pine and larch, with spruce, fir and hemlock as lesser components. The FHW would like to see the transformation of the wood to more broadleaf, principally oak, beech, ash, birch, rowan and alder.* Ash dieback is present in the wood (Cpt 5602a below the Corsican pine) which FE is constantly monitoring.

There is a considerable amount of birch and holly regeneration and care must be taken that these new growths do not get out of hand.

For biosecurity reasons, living plants/trees brought into the wood must be procured by FE nurseries.

Area by Area:

Bluebell Walk (Cpt 5602 south east)

PAWS restoration is about trying to encourage and support the process of natural succession. Good progress has been made towards restoring native oak woodland with a Bluebell dominated herb layer, also rich in Wood Anemone and Stitchwort. Lately, following Covid, brambles have crept back and there are still rhododendrons to be removed between the Stone Road and the Bluebell Path. This is an ongoing process which the FHW group will address.

Several members of FHW have been on training courses to use brushcutters and have successfully utilised them for many years, to cut back the Brambles especially in the Bluebell area. This successful intervention has placed Hagg Wood in the Top Ten of FE Bluebell Woods. FHW would respectfully request that FE review their policy on their blanket ban on the use of brushcutters by trained volunteers.*

The aim is to create oak woodland with a canopy of trees of different ages, heights and forms of growth. This will incorporate a tier of smaller trees typical of native woods on more acidic soils such as Holly, Rowan and Silver Birch along with a shrub level of Hazel. Conifer and Sycamore trees need to be removed in this area otherwise they will regenerate and create too dense a canopy. This part of the wood needs fewer trees, in order to fulfil its ecological potential.

Martin Hammond's main points (in his 2015 Report⁴) should be adhered to:

- The overall density of the tree canopy should not be increased.
- The woodland structure needs trees of different sizes, ages and layers of growth.
- Sycamores and Conifers need to be thinned in this area to reduce tree canopy.
- Hazels and other shrubs of lower canopies should be introduced.
- Sycamore regeneration should be curbed, by removal of seedlings and saplings.

Jubilee Wood (Cpt 5602 North)

The regeneration of birch and other broadleaf trees following the harvesting of western hemlock is a positive sign. The aim is to continue expanding the Jubilee Area, to connect the Stone Road and the Bluebell Walk by

- Removing Conifers, Sycamores and Rhododendrons. This would allow the ‘carpet of bluebells’, an indicator species of an ancient woodland, to expand significantly.
- The area around Ron’s Tree (an Oak Tree planted in commemoration of FHW Member, Ron Bielby) should be left open, for birds, bees and butterflies to enjoy.
- FE suggest that control of Rhododendrons, which is required throughout the wood, will have to be achieved by mechanical means, with more sensitive/smaller areas reserved for manual control. The FHW would welcome more effort from FE on this front.*

Southern Pond (Cpt 5602 South East)

The area around the Pond, a great source of aquatic life, needs to be checked regularly to ensure that it is not robbed of precious light. The light levels are generally more influenced by canopy density rather than the presence of regeneration. Nevertheless, Sycamore regeneration and even the Iris on the bank of the pond must be monitored and controlled to ensure plenty of light. Around the pond there is some good standing deadwood.

Area around Ron’s Way (Cpt 5602 South West)

The Sycamores are very prolific in this area but excessive regeneration must be prevented by:

- Regular removal of Sycamore seedlings and saplings.
- The Rhododendron need to be removed and Brambles need to be kept under control to allow the Bluebells to be seen at their best.
- Some regeneration may be respaced to reduce density and then the focus can be on growth of better formed stems.

Millennium Wood (Cpt 5603d)

The Millennium Wood represents the first step to re-establishing native woodland in a previously coniferous part of the wood. The area was planted with Oaks by schoolchildren and village organisations in 2000. Silver Birch trees quickly sprang up on the clear-felled area and were initially regarded as ‘nursemaid’ trees, protecting the Oak.

- Silver Birch trees are of a good form and should be left to grow for a period. In time these could be respaced but in the short term they will thin themselves to some degree. When the birch trees grow to a suitable dimension the area will require a thin. Some Birch trees may be allowed to decay ‘in situ’, to provide invertebrate habitat.^{4*}
- An understory will reintroduce itself over time.
- Scattered Gorse bushes should be left as they provide an excellent habitat for birds of open woodland such as Tree Pipit, Yellowhammer and various finches.⁴

Millennium Path (Cpt 5603 South)

The path needs to be widened, perhaps with a scalloped edge, to provide more light for the many valuable plants such as Heath Speedwell, Tormentil and Heath Woodrush.

- The ride at the moment is too shaded with overhanging trees and shrubs, it needs to be at least six metres wide and cut back annually in the Autumn.⁴ FHW Work Parties could remove some of the conifer/broadleaf scrub at the edge of the path to help maintain light.

Main Ride

The plants on the main ride, some of which are quite rare, need extra protection. The section of the path below the Stone Road is herb rich with woodland plants and supports tall herbs such as Fragrant Agrimony, Wild Angelica, Meadowsweet and Valerian which provide valuable habitat, nectar and pollen for insects and thus foraging opportunities for insect-eating birds and bats. These plants need to be encouraged to flourish along the whole length of the Main Ride by better management:

- The strip between the ditch and the path needs to be cut in late summer (August to November) and the cuttings raked-up. The raking could be carried out by FHW Work Parties. The material must not be left as it would enrich the soil and encourage competitive grasses. The whole ride only needs to be cut every 2/3 years.⁴
- The ditch-cleaning spoil must not be left on the strip between the path and the bank.⁴ Some space could be created before excavation with chainsaws on the far bank, away from the Ride.*
- Wood Small-reed needs to be monitored to ensure it does not become invasive.⁴

Crater Ponds (Cpt 5603b)

The Crater area is a site of modern archaeological significance and its Second World War history is detailed in the FHW leaflet “Ponds and Craters within Hagg Wood.” The leaflet is available to the public so that the local population can continue to be aware of the historical and ecological importance of their local green spaces.

The smaller ponds have significant flora but

- The duckweed needs to be constantly removed.
- Iris needs to be controlled where it is becoming dominant in the smaller ponds.

The large pond has considerable potential but unfortunately the prospect of a rich wetland resource is hampered by the number of dogs indulging in bathing. (The veterinary medicines used on dogs pollute the water and prevent the pond developing into a wildlife rich habitat). Surrounding trees have been cut down to allow more light into the area and a small hedge has been planted around three-quarters of the pond. The remaining part of the pond was fenced off but unfortunately this was ripped down.

- The small hedge planted around three-quarters of the pond must be kept at no more than 0.75m or else it will increase shading and leaf-fall into the pond.
- The FHW urge FE to put up a sign with the words ‘By Order of FE - Keep Dogs out of Ponds’ or strict words to that effect.

Chambers’ Way (Cpt 5601 Ride)

The excessive flooding of the original path has led to another drier, parallel path being created among mature pines. Martin Hammond has urged that small ponds at the side of the original woodland track be maintained as they support a wide range of beetles, flies and other invertebrates including some uncommon species. Martin even suggests that FHW may excavate two or three small, shallow pools along the line of the old path. These damp, puddled areas support an interesting wetland flora including the rare Corn Mint, Water-pepper, Marsh Cudweed, Wild Angelica, Small Sweet-grass and Bulbous Rush.

FE may need to use the main path for access so any extra water features must be well away from it.

Breathing Places Area (Cpt 5601 North)

The FHW received a grant in 2007 to transform this area, which was heavily stocked with rhododendrons, into a more open space. The FHW commissioned the Trust for Conservation Volunteers to help and University of York students joined FHW working parties to clear the area of rhododendrons and brambles. It was considered a great success when Dunnington Primary Schoolchildren regularly came to the area during Book Week, to celebrate story-telling with poetry and acting, and at the end of the day the children were encouraged to create collages, bark-rubbings and engage in den-building. The Dunnington Scouts and Cubs had exploration evenings and sometimes spent the night in this part of the wood, under adult supervision.

The FE Contractors have cut back a number of Birch trees in order to allow excavator access to the drain for maintenance works, leaving lots of logs in piles.

- FHW suggested that some of the logs could be repositioned as they take up valuable space of precious wild flowers, but FE intend to retain them away from the drain side, where they have begun to decay, as a valuable deadwood resource.
- Old wood is exceptionally important, providing a range of specialist habitats for animals, plants, fungi and invertebrates in the decaying wood, sap runs, cavities and crevices. The dead wood also plays a vital role in long-term carbon stores, in the soil around and beneath.⁵
- The FHW will carry on with the task of removing rhododendron and bramble, which have crept back into the area.

Central Area (Cpt 5601 East)

Martin Hammond has always advised FHW to concentrate on working, with clear objectives, in the southern area of the wood, so the Central Area has been left for the Beech and Pine to naturally regenerate. There are many advantages to the system of 'Natural Regeneration'³ such as

- The maintenance of local genotypes by germination of seed 'in situ.'³
- Regeneration matches species to microhabitats across the site.³
- Produces more naturalistic woodland with greater structural diversity.³
- Cheaper than planting.³

The wood is presently managed under a continuous cover (low-impact) silvicultural system.

This area of the wood will require gradual opening up by several cycles of thinning over a period of decades, to facilitate conversion to about 80% semi-natural tree species. The first of these interventions was back in 2010 and the second more recently in 2021.

Since thinning by FE Contractors a part of this compartment has developed into an extremely attractive area with well-spaced pine and beech trees with holly trees becoming established in the understorey. The beech trees look particularly beautiful in the autumn with their colourful, glowing gold, red and amber leaves but they do have the disadvantage of casting dense shade and can have a severe effect on the growth of other native trees, shrubs and herbs that grow on the site.⁷ FE is conducting an experiment to investigate how to introduce more diversity into beech plantations but Hagg Wood has a manageable proportion of these trees at the moment.

This area should be left for mature trees to live out their natural lifespan. This would eventually provide an excellent habitat for birds like woodpeckers which depend on mature and old-aged timber, as well as bats, specialised invertebrates and fungi.

- Some thinning of the regenerated trees may be necessary to prevent the formation of 'high forest' stands.⁴ *
- Planting a small number of Oak, Rowan and Hazel would help provide future continuity of mature trees and create a scattered understorey.⁴
- The emphasis should be on a low density of big trees rather than re-stocking to achieve continuous canopy cover.⁴

- Bramble may form a dense ground cover and cutting may have to be carried out in the spots where ancient woodland plants occur in any abundance.
- FHW would appreciate help from FE in the removal of Rhododendron in this area.*

Martin Hammond has advised us that the potentially invasive Wood Small-reed has increased greatly in the centre of the wood where it is now the dominant herb-layer plant in places. Its dominance may be a problem for any future re-planting. The FHW would appreciate advice from FE Officers regarding the management of this species.

Barbara's Glade (Area to the East of Styron Way)(Cpt 5600 East)

In memory of one of FHW's founder members, Barbara Pyrah, past Curator of Geology at the Yorkshire Museum, the FHW group decided they would like to create a small butterfly glade to commemorate her. Unfortunately, FE Officers thought that we were requesting space for a 'meadow' within the wood; this is totally the wrong idea. We were requesting a small area of open space in the damp area (not more than 1 acre out of 107 acres, a tiny fraction of the wood) to allow higher levels of light into the gloomy plantation section of the wood.* This will improve the ecological integrity by allowing the remnant woodland flowers and fungi to survive and provide a source of colonisation, into the area now dominated by shady conifers.

In 2020 Forest Research published the first Great Britain-wide assessment of woodland ecological condition, which revealed some stark findings which must stimulate urgent action. It found that so 'much of our woodlands do not contain sufficient deadwood, veteran trees or open space, or diversity of tree species, ages and structure, highlighting major issues that impact on wider ecological functioning'.⁵ Developing Barbara's Glade will contribute to the biodiversity of Hagg Wood.

Top North East Corner (Cpt 5600 East)

FHW organised work parties in the top corner of the wood, planting Field Maple and Rowan trees which are thriving along the secondary path (the continuation of Keepers Way to the edge of the wood). The aim was to remove Rhododendron, Bracken and Brambles but in the end it was concluded that it was not an efficient use of time and effort. When the work in the southern section is complete then work may resume in this area. FHW would appreciate help from FE in this section of the wood.

Ditches

FHW appreciate the work recently undertaken by FE Contractors to clear-out the ditches. FE maintain the ditches with due regard to environmental/social considerations using their operational site assessment procedures. This is very important work as the wood is very low-lying and subject to extremely boggy conditions after heavy rainfall, affecting the footpaths in the wood. At some point the adjoining landowners may be approached to discuss their legal drainage rights and responsibilities. At the top junction of footpaths (near the wooden seat) the paths are still extremely boggy and FHW would welcome advice from FE in order to improve the situation.*

Most of the ditches are lined with beautiful primroses and the FHW are determined to protect them and to allow them to flourish by monitoring them closely.

Rhododendron Ponticum

Rhododendrons look very beautiful in season, with their large, bold, colourful flowers. This non-native species was originally planted to provide shelter for game birds as well as their summer flower displays. With increased knowledge and experience, FHW realise that this invasive species is a major threat to biodiversity and its extensive coverage prevents native plants, shrubs and trees from establishing and it can harbour disease that can cause widespread death to several species of trees.⁶ Bearing this in mind FHW wish to remove the majority of the Rhododendron, leaving only small pockets on the northern periphery of the wood for the deer to flourish.

In 2017 FE helped to clear Rhododendrons along Chambers Way, using a Raptor mulching machine, which FHW very much appreciated.*

Public Access

An important main objective which is given high priority by the Draft Ten Year Plan for Hagg Wood is to “Continue to provide an open and accessible woodland area at Hagg Wood for a variety of recreational pursuits”* and to “Protect and enhance public access and the benefits that accessible green space delivers”*. These points are of the utmost importance to the FHW and we would welcome any initiatives from FE that can help to deliver this objective.*

The existence of a public footpath along the main forestry track from Intake Lane into and through Hagg Wood has been confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate following a Public Inquiry in 2022 on the original application that was made by the Friends of Hagg Wood in 1997. However, landowners of the initial section of this track from Intake Lane have since installed a metal stile on the boundary with Hagg Wood which many members of the public find difficult or impossible to climb over in order to enter Hagg Wood along the forestry track. This is contrary to Rule 1 of the established British Standard BS5709:2006 on pedestrian Gaps, Gates and Stiles which requires the Least Restrictive Option to be chosen. In addition, the current structure has the effect of discriminating against less able members of the public, including those in wheel chairs.

In order that the above stated objectives of the draft Ten Year are actually delivered, a key question that needs to be addressed with some urgency by Forestry England is who has ownership and responsibility for the access gate boundary and the Point B on the Order Map that accompanied the Public Footpath confirmation.* The Order’s specification of a stile as a “lawful obstruction” at Point B merely permits a stile to be at that point if the installed stile is no more restrictive than what was there before, and does not require there to be a stile there at all. If Forestry England has ownership and responsibility for the boundary of Hagg Wood at the Point B on the Order Map many would agree that in order for Forestry England to fulfil its stated public objectives and obligations the existing stile should be replaced with a pedestrian-friendly gate or gap that does not discriminate against less able members of the public.

FE Access

A second importance access issue, which needs adequate attention for implementation of the proposed strategic plan*, is protection of the right of access of the Forestry Commission to Hagg Wood “with or without vehicles” along the forestry track from Intake Lane. This track has been blocked to Forestry England vehicles for more than 4 years since October 2019, impeding access also to the wood by emergency vehicles. The Forestry Commission’s right of access was clearly established by the Church Commissioners in their 1952 lease of Hagg Wood to the Forestry Commission (FC), which gave the Forestry Commission “rights of way at all times and for all purposes to and from the demised premises along the roads or tracks coloured brown on the said plan”. The forestry track from Intake Lane to the entrance to Hagg Wood is indeed coloured brown on the accompanying York Forest Plan No 5.

The right of access from Intake Lane into Hagg Wood was confirmed by the 1986 Conveyance of this land from the Church Commissioners, which reserved “to the Forestry Commission the right with or without vehicles along the public footpath the route of which is indicated by the purple line on the plan hereto annexed”. The Planning Inspector in his Order Decision following the Public Inquiry in June 2022 has confirmed the existence of the public footpath along this route. The sale of the land to the current landowners in 2019, and their subsequent ownership, is subject to this right of way, with the Land Registry’s Property Registers for the Title Numbers NYK478015 and NYK470861

explicitly requiring that the titles of the current owners of land along the forest track are “subject to the rights reserved by the Conveyance dated 27 June 1986 referred to in the Charges Register”.

Rights of access to the public forestry estate are themselves valuable public assets which the Forestry Commission has an obligation to protect, and which affect its ability to carry out its strategic objectives*. It should therefore ensure sufficient resourcing of its Land Agent and related functions so that this can be achieved without significant further delay within the next ten years.

Phenology

FHW is aware of phenology – the study of the timing of seasonal events. Very important records of this phenomenon are being kept by the Woodland Trust in partnership with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, with the purpose of highlighting biological response to climate change. ‘Not all species respond to temperature changes to the same degree which can cause a ‘mismatch’ in the timing of food availability between different levels of food chains. Without concerted action to address climate impacts, mismatch in breeding success and higher prevalence of pests and diseases spell bad news for woodland wildlife.’⁵ FHW will try and keep up-to-date with all the latest data.

The range of many tree species is changing. Guidance suggests that for future planting it may be worth considering better adapted native trees from more southerly English provenance within local regeneration. This is something that FE may consider in the restoration process following the next felling work, with the view that they will, potentially, be better adapted to expected climate change.* However, natural regeneration had developed well within the wood so far, and this may not be required unless to add species diversity.

Managing the Wood for People

FHW appreciate the FE sentiment ‘We believe forests (and woods) enhance people’s quality of life by providing places for them to enjoy watching wildlife and walking among the trees.....our Active Forests programme contributes to the wellbeing of the nation.’⁸ The wood is a national asset where public access is important.

Over the years FHW, with the help of FE, have organised children’s parties which included tree-planting and conservation activities in the wood. To celebrate FHW’s 20th anniversary a party was held when the Dunnington Community Choir sang a variety of songs, as well as a local folk-group.

Sustaining Forests for Future Generations

FHW support FE’s ambitions to generate most of its revenue ‘by sustainably harvesting and selling timber. It sells around 1.4 million tonnes of timber per year, supporting the wider British timber and forestry industry.’⁹ The timber harvesting revenues help sustain ecological objectives and also other benefits may accrue from growing wood in the light of climate change. FE considers that much of the woodland is robust enough to withstand mechanised forest operations as an appropriate way to continue to enhance wildlife and ancient woodland features. The short-term minor disturbances are more than offset by the achievement of long-term habitat improvements.

As well as timber production FHW see the future role of the wood as providing a home for wildlife, flora and fauna and for local people to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the beautiful setting.

Providing a home for Wildlife

‘Nature is in crisis. Currently ranked 189 of 218 countries assessed on a Biodiversity Intactness Index, the UK has lost more biodiversity than most other countries. The recent UK State of Nature Report showed that 13% of species are at immediate risk of extinction.’¹⁰ FHW are in full agreement with FE views: ‘As well as providing interest and enjoyment for visitors, wildlife contributes to healthy natural ecosystems. Our woodlands are some of the best places to spot wildlife from large

mammals such as deer, to some of the smaller inhabitants such as bats, dormice, butterflies and red squirrels.’¹² FHW are very conscious of the fact that Hagg Wood needs to be managed carefully to provide a resilient landscape where wildlife can survive and flourish. Brambles in the central area, at the edges of Barbara’s Glade, and around the edges of the wood are an ‘excellent source of food for butterflies, and bees, birds and small mammals, while also making great places for birds to nest.’¹¹ ‘Dead wood and dying trees can provide homes for bats, fungi, lichens and mosses, and birds and insects can find homes in hollow trees.’¹¹

In FE’s centenary year, 2019, a new initiative was launched: The Big Forest Find, with the aim of surveying England’s forest wildlife¹¹. FHW are aware of the importance of monitoring our work and commission expert ecologist, Martin Hammond, to regularly review our progress in managing Hagg Wood for wildlife. Also, Terry Weston, Voluntary Warden of Hassacarr Pond undertakes bird surveys periodically, Roy Crossley has completed Diptera Reports, Scale Insects have been recorded by Chris Malumphy of FERA, Sand Hutton, and Fungi Reports have been done by various experts. Past and future survey work will be shared with the FE Ecologist.

‘As climate change pushes wildlife to explore territories further north, it’s essential to gather as much information as possible about how different species are faring. This will help us take the necessary measures to support the species that call our forests home.’¹² It is vital to ensure wildlife corridors continue beyond the borders of the wood and FHW wish to play our part in keeping our wood healthy and full of life.

FHW Working Parties

FHW very much appreciate the support that FE Officers have provided at our recent working parties and hope that this may continue. FHW appreciate that the ‘nations forests and woods are a living treasure for all, deeply connected to people’s lives, improving the health and wellbeing of the nation.’¹⁰ FHW Working Parties are open and inclusive; they ‘approach challenges with creativity and adventure, embracing research and innovation.’¹⁰ FHW appreciate that FE work in partnership with Forest Research and use expertise from its ‘network of arboreta and pineta at Westonbirt and Bedgebury.’¹⁰

It is hoped that the administration of FE’s volunteering programme does not have a negative impact on volunteers, due to excessively long and bureaucratic online questionnaires.*

Natural Capital

On the first page we mention ‘Natural Capital.’ This is a very critical concept at the present time. Nature needs to enter economic and financial decision-making; it is the only way that governments can pursue sustainable economic growth and development. Mankind’s activities are affecting the Earth system as a whole; ‘estimates of our total impact on Nature suggest that we would require 1.6 Earths to maintain the world’s current living standards.’¹⁴ It is therefore imperative that we bring about transformative change. FHW can only contribute in a small way but we will do our best to conserve and restore our natural assets.

Cottage Plantation and Scoreby Wood

The draft Ten Year Plan map for Hagg Wood includes the woods which are known as Cottage Plantation and Scoreby Wood. These woods also contains rights of way which are important for local pedestrians, such as health walkers, as well as cyclists along public bridleways. These rights of way need continued adequate protection from any potentially conflicting activities such as game shooting. Over time the freehold ownership of the relevant land may change so ongoing monitoring and protection is vital, especially as these woods also contain wildlife species whose legal protection needs to be recognised and enforced.*

PROW – Footpaths and Bridleways

Where the public right of way is a public footpath, such as within Hagg Wood itself, the strategic plan* needs to recognise that there is a risk that the paths within and into the wood can become very muddy if their use by horses and cyclists becomes excessive in a way that breaks up the soil. This risk can be minimised by recognising the established right of public access by pedestrians along public footpaths within Hagg Wood, and the additional public right of way of cyclists and horse-riders along bridleways, such as within Scoreby Wood.

Conclusions

1. Generally speaking, much of UK's woodlands do not contain sufficient dead wood, veteran trees or open space, or diversity of tree species, ages and structure which impact on wider ecological functioning. This results in biodiversity loss such as the decline in saproxylic invertebrates and cavity nesting birds. FHW have been working towards improving the ecological condition of our wood and, with the help of the knowledge, technology and expertise of Martin Hammond and FE Officers, we hope to make a positive difference.
2. There are various chemicals which could be used to suppress rhododendrons and brambles but FHW prefer to use manual and mechanical methods. This is because herbicides, however biodegradable, are likely to have some residual effect on soil ecology. The microbes and underground fungi in undisturbed ancient woodland soils are a functioning part of the ecosystem, just as much as the vegetation above ground.
3. Apparently deer like 'Goldilocks' woods⁵; not too densely stocked nor too bereft of trees. FHW would like some fringe areas of the wood to remain virtually untouched, to give the deer a chance to thrive, away from human intrusion. Brambles provide a good source of food for deer and unlike some woodland ecosystems, the grazing by deer is not a major constraint to woodland management in Hagg Wood. FHW understand that FE carry out humane and sustainable deer management to minimise damage levels on young trees, to reduce impact levels on sensitive habitats and to maintain a healthy deer herd, to meet UKWAS certification, but the numbers are not great in Hagg Wood.
4. Brambles have their place in the woodland setting; they provide an excellent source of food for butterflies and bees, birds and small mammals while making great places for birds to nest. They would be monitored in Barbara's Glade, keeping enough for a decent food stock whilst allowing the ancient indicator ground flora chance to flourish.
5. Overall, trees capture carbon, mitigate against the impacts of increasing summer temperatures and help manage the risk of flooding. They are also a vital part of our social and cultural landscape and FHW take the responsibility of helping to manage the wood extremely seriously as we care passionately about its future.
6. It is important that the newly planted trees are checked regularly and that tree guards are removed as soon as possible. The plastic guards must be disposed of in a responsible way; FE has a plastic shelter recycling process and will collect them at the end of their usefulness. The Government is currently considering ways in which to reduce the use of plastics in forestry; respondents to a government questionnaire suggested 'promoting the use of non-plastic tree guards'¹³.

References

1. 'The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024' UK Government May 2021.
2. 'Our natural capital approach' Forestry England Website, May 2021.
3. 'Restoration of Native Woodland on Ancient Woodland Sites' FC Practice Guide
Richard Thompson, Jonathan Humphrey, Ralph Harmer and Richard Ferris.
4. 'A review of nature conservation management at Hagg Wood (2015)' Martin Hammond.
5. 'State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021', Woodland Trust.
6. Information from poster at Culzean Castle and Country Park, 2021.
7. 'Restoration of lowland plantations on ancient woodland sites' FE Website, May 2021
8. 'Opening up the Forests', Forestry England Website, May 2021.
9. 'Managing for the economy – Sustaining forests for future generations' FE Website, May 2021.
10. FE Growing the future: 2021-26. FE Website, June 2021
11. 'Providing a home for Wildlife' FE Website May 2021.
12. 'Supporting England's forest wildlife for the next 100 years' Dr Andrew Stringer, FE Website,
May 2021.
13. DEFRA 'England Tree Strategy' Analysis of consultation responses. May 2021
14. The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review Headline Messages Government Report
February 2021

**Friends of Hagg Wood
January 2024**