

# MANAGEMENT OF MATURE WOODLANDS

## A. PREPARING A MANAGEMENT PLAN

Drawing up a management plan is a useful process which allows you to make logical decisions on how to care for your wood. There is no standard management plan, as every wood is different. Every management plan should, therefore, be drawn up to reflect your particular wood, its context, your aims and objectives and the resources you have available. The plan may cover 5 years or more and should be reviewed regularly as the wood evolves. An accompanying plan to identify the different areas and issues is very helpful. Plans do not need to be at all complicated; they are simply a way of ensuring that you make logical and consistent decisions. The following are some pointers towards things you may want to include, but the list is not exhaustive.

Your Management Plan could include the following :

1. Your 'Vision' for the woodland
2. Your 'Aims and Objectives'. These will summarise the primary and secondary intentions for your wood. Woods are valued for many different reasons which may be economic (eg for the production of timber ), social (eg for amenity and recreation ), environmental (eg for shelter, or as a wildlife habitat), or aesthetic (eg as a landscape feature ). However, in many cases, they are valued for a combination of all these reasons.
3. A Survey of the existing wood ( until you understand what is there, you cannot develop a plan). The survey may include :
  - a. An overall description, ownership details, location, size and general type
  - b. Any designations on the land
  - c. The existing species, age range, size, density, diversity, health and condition of the trees
  - d. The existing understorey and groundflora of the wood
  - e. Standing and lying deadwood
  - f. Invasive plants
  - g. Rides and clearings
  - h. Public access provision, car parking and safety issues
  - i. Boundaries
  - j. Watercourses - nature, condition, erosion
  - k. Historical / archaeological features present
  - l. Landscape fit
  - m. Views in and out
4. From the survey, you are then able to draw out the 'Threats and Opportunities'. These may include items like :
  - a. Sheep gaining access and damaging regenerating seedlings
  - b. Trees all of similar age range
  - c. Lack of species diversity
  - d. Low light levels in wood preventing regeneration
  - e. Routes becoming eroded
  - f. Some valued trees being shaded out by less valued trees
  - g. Option to create a new access point
  - h. Option to open up a good view

5. Prescriptions and Proposals can include all the techniques that will be required to achieve the aims and objectives and to address the threats and opportunities. They may be quite broad or very specific and could include items like :
- a. Fell dangerous oak overhanging path
  - b. Remove lower branches from spruce to allow access through trees
  - c. Coppice hazel every 7 years to increase light levels
  - d. Block off eroded route and redirect public by new path
  - e. Herbicide invasive Japanese Knotweed
  - f. Construct timber edging to main path
6. A table showing the phasing and timing of the various activities and perhaps the likely costs may be useful too.
7. General Conditions may include items like :
- a. Avoid felling work during the bird nesting season
  - b. Leave felled deadwood on the ground and retain standing dead wood unless it poses a threat to public safety
  - c. All tree work should be carried out by suitably qualified contractor

## B. WOODLAND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

A variety of techniques may be involved in the management of your wood. They may include :

Coppicing : Coppicing is a traditional technique used elsewhere on species like hazel and horse chestnut. Many other species can be coppiced, although this may be as a 'last resort' ie when a tree contains abundant deadwood in its crown (perhaps after storm damage) but seems to still retain vigour in its lower trunk and roots. It is usually carried out in regular cycles depending on the species and does allow extra light into parts of a wood which may encourage groundflora to develop.

Thinning : Woods often do their own thinning, as the more vigorous trees suppress the growth of slower ones. Some sources suggest that each tree should be allowed to develop its full canopy unhindered by others; however, many trees in healthy and attractive woods do not achieve this and a perfectly spaced woodland is not necessarily a very attractive or 'natural' looking one. Where thinning is required, the first trees to be removed should be the weaker, often sub-canopy ones and then perhaps those of less valued species which may be inhibiting the growth of more valued ones. In exposed conditions, thinning too radically may result in wind damage to other trees and may need to be carried out over a longer period of time than elsewhere.

Pruning : There may be various reasons to prune trees - to allow access, to remove damaged branches, to reduce shade etc. The work needs to be done in accordance with good practice; serious surgery to trees can put them under stress (especially where they may already be under stress eg from exposure). Only do work if it is needed.

Felling : There may be times when it becomes necessary to fell a tree. Remember that this can be a hazardous operation and should only be carried out by a skilled contractor.