

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH WOODLANDS

LONG TERM FOREST PLAN

SCOPING DOCUMENT:-

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The following sets of maps have been prepared, covering the University of Edinburgh woodland ownership.

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INTRODUCTION

Long Term Forest Plans

The Scottish Forestry Strategy is the Scottish Government's national framework which sets out the core principles for the long-term development of forestry in Scotland, based on sustainable development and social inclusion.

The Strategy is underpinned by the need for Sustainable Forest Management. This in turn encourages woodland owners to take a long-term view to ensure that their woodland estate is sensibly planned and managed in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard.

Long-Term Forest Plans are strategic management documents which aim to deliver long-term environmental benefits through sustainable forest management.

A Long Term Forest Plan is being produced for The University of Edinburgh woodlands. The production of LTFPs involves consultation with statutory and other organisations, with draft proposals being provided.

The aim of this document is to provide some background and contextual information for the woodland areas, to highlight some of the management issues identified, and to outline how these are intended to be addressed in the proposed plan.

The aim is to generate feedback from those consultees with a recognised interest in the future management of the woodlands. The feedback received will enable constraints and issues to be identified and addressed in the Long-Term Forest Plan proposals.

Woodland Description

Property

The woodlands owned by the University of Edinburgh are located in the rural landscape fringing the settlements of Loanhead, Bilston, Polton, Poltonhall, Glencorse, and Roslin to the southeast of the Pentland Hills.

The areas of woodland owned by the University of Edinburgh extend to 99.22 ha in total. This total is made up of 42 diverse woodland areas varying in size, age, type and function.

The woodlands include areas of small mixed broadleaf in the form of agricultural shelterbelts and copses, mixed coniferous woodlands, more substantial policy mixed woodlands, valley woodlands, and larger woodland blocks such as are present at Glencorse and Bilston Glen.

Three sets of maps have been produced to assist in the scoping process: -

- Map 1 – Location shows the location and layout of the woodlands.
- Maps 2a and 2b – Concepts Maps indicate current woodland compositions and identify known issues and opportunities that will be taken into account in specifying management proposals.
- Maps 3a and 3b – Blank Maps showing the boundaries and reference numbers for the woodland areas, and are intended for use of consultees to provide location specific feedback if required.

Management Objectives

The long term vision and management objectives for the forest are to:

- Manage the forest on a sustainable basis in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard.
- Maintain and enhance the amenity and recreation benefits provided by the woodlands
- Maintain the woodlands to safeguard public access, including management and monitoring of tree safety aspects
- Provide for conservation and biodiversity, focusing on defined areas (e.g. Bilston Glen SSSI, Ancient Woodland sites).
- Safeguard archaeological features.
- Maintain and enhance the landscape benefits provided by the woodlands.

The woodlands are diverse; both in terms of age and species, and management has been primarily focussed towards continuous cover management.

The Long-Term Forest Plan will aim to maintain the benefits provided by the woodlands in terms of landscape, amenity, and biodiversity, and will aim to manage the woodlands in as sustainable a manner as possible, and make best use of any timber produce arising as a result of management operations.

The LTFP will comply with best practice in terms of landscape, habitat, and cultural protection and enhancement in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard.

To date there has been limited works carried out within the University's woodlands and this has tended to centre on trees that pose a risk to Public health and safety. Some limited group felling of exotic conifers and broadleaves was carried out within Bilston Glen to restructure the woodland towards a more native composition.

Constraints and Opportunities

Designations

There are a limited number of designated areas relevant to and affecting the woodlands

Key Features

- Parts of Bilston Glen are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The site is notified both biologically and geologically. The site is notified biologically for the woodland type, and geologically for Stratigraphy.
- The ground flora of the SSSI woodland retains a number of species characteristic of ancient deciduous woodland, specifically Dog's Mercury and Wood Sedge, but is being shaded by a dense canopy of Beech and Sycamore.
- The most recent Condition Monitoring Statement reports the SSSI to be in an unfavourable condition.
- The Pentland Hills is a Special (Local) Landscape Area; this will affect the woodlands to the west of the estate that fall within the lower elevations of The Pentland Hills Regional Park.

There are no other designations on the woodland estate.

All protected sites and designated areas present within the woodlands will be managed and protected in accordance with the guidelines set out by the responsible authorities.

The Long-Term Forest Plan will incorporate proposals to improve the condition of Bilston woods SSSI in line with recommendations provided by NatureScot.

Ecological Interests

The woodlands provide a range of habitats and are important contributors to the ecological and biodiversity values of the area.

Key Features

- The principal ecological feature of the University of Edinburgh woodlands is riparian habitat, a good proportion of the woodlands are associated with the River North Esk and its tributaries; notably Bilston Burn, Kill Burn and Glencorse Burn.
- Rivers and Burns are a key habitat within the Midlothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).
- Many of the sites occupied by the University's woodlands are recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW), and generally recognised as being of a high ecological and biodiversity value.
- Bilston Glen is designated a SSSI in recognition of its biological interest.
- Much of the ancient woodland is classed as Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) as it has been felled and replanted with non-native species.
- Gorge Woodland, ASNW and Rivers/Burns are priority habitats within the Midlothian Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).
- Mature and veteran trees present within the woodland have a high biodiversity value but require monitoring and management in terms of tree safety
- A number of the smaller woodland blocks are nearing maturity, and are of low biodiversity value resulting from their composition
- Other, mainly coniferous, woodland areas lack stability as a result of their poor canopy structure. In such cases restructuring may take the form of felling and restocking to a more appropriate woodland type.
- Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are present within some of the woodland areas
- Herbivore browsing by is an issue in terms of managing natural regeneration within many of the woodland areas, and impacts particularly on proposals to restore native woodland.

The Long-Term Forest Plan will aim at all times to maintain and enhance the high biodiversity values of all of the the woodland areas through appropriate management, of the woodlands and their associated and adjacent habitats.

Priority for habitat restoration will be given to areas of PAWS/SSSI through management of these areas under a Low Impact Silvicultural System (LISS), and supporting measures including the control of INNS and deer management.

Tree safety monitoring will be carried out in areas accessible to the public.

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations

There are a range of species and subject to legal protection. The A number of these are known to reside in or frequent areas of the University's woodland.

Key Features

- There are a number of known Badger setts within the woodland Estate.
- There are expected to be bat roosts within some of the older broadleaves across the estate.

- It is likely that Otters will use the various burns within the riparian woodlands however to date none have been noted.
- The peri-urban nature of the woodlands means that they provide suitable nesting sites for a wide range of birds, including raptors.

Under the Long-Term Forest Plan all protected species will be safeguarded woodland management operations and protected in line with current guidance.

Historical and Cultural Interests

The woodlands are located in a setting rich in features of historical interest.

Key Features

- There are no scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs) within the woodland covered by the forest plan, although a number are located in the locality. These include the stone circle at Rullion Green and the Battlefields of Roslin Glen (1303) and Rullion Green (1666), the battlefields encompassing some of the woodland estate.
- The Bilston Viaduct on the former Edinburgh, Loanhead and Roslin Railway is a Category A Listed Building, the viaduct appearing on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Maps of 1894.
- The Martyr's Tomb located at Rullion Green is a Category B Listed Building.
- Other recorded features include Bilston Glen Colliery which was located to the north of Bilston Wood, and is now an Industrial Estate owned by Midlothian Council. The Bilston Glen Bing was reclaimed and reverted to farmland and woodland in 1994.

Features of historical interest will be protected and safeguarded from disturbance resulting from woodland management operations in line with current guidance.

Landscape Interests

The woodlands form a framework within the landscape, and provide a setting for other land uses in the area.

Key Features

- The Pentland Hills is a Special Landscape Area; this will affect the woodlands to the west of the estate that fall within the lower elevations of The Pentland Hills Regional Park.
- North Esk Valley is identified as a Local Landscape Area, and part of the woodlands to the east located along the North Esk Valley fall within this area.
- The Roslin Glen area, including the south-eastern section of the Bilston Woods is also designated as a Designed Landscape and is recorded in the Gardens and Designed Landscapes Inventory.

Under the long-term forest plan it is proposed to retain the woodland areas as features within the landscape, and to maintain and rejuvenate these features into the foreseeable future.

Public Access

Levels of Public Access on the estate are high. In particular the woodlands around Bilston and Roslin are significantly used by members of the public.

Key Features

- The majority of public use is by walkers, with horse riding and mountain biking also common pursuits.
- There are a number of core paths cross the property, along with informal footpaths and bridle ways, with the levels of provision in terms of surfacing and signage varying, and generally low.
- There is a network of interlinking paths, both formal and informal connecting between these key paths and extending the local path network in the area.
- Increasingly the woodlands are used by mountain bikers and motorised trial bikes and some damage has been caused to footpaths and woodlands. The activity can pose a hazard to other users of the woodland, and is damaging to the sites in terms of ecological disturbance and erosion.
- Tree safety has historically been an issue given the high levels of public use, and has been the main focus of past management.

Under the Long-Term Forest Plan paths making up the core path network within and leading through the woodland areas will be identified, safeguarded, and promoted. Where appropriate key routes may, where resources allow, be upgraded in response to demand to make these fit for purpose.

Management Access

Currently management access into a number of the woodland blocks is limited, and restricts the nature and scale of management operations which can feasibly be carried out, often to the long-term detriment.

Key Features

- Management access to the woodlands, and, in particular, larger woodland blocks such as at Glencorse and Bilston Glen is limited.
- Health, biodiversity and stability aspects of many of the woodlands would benefit from thinning operations to improve the trees present. Such operations would require an appropriate level of management access being available.
- Tree safety along paths is an ongoing management issue. These may be difficult to address in areas where management access is restricted.

To facilitate management proposals, vehicular access improvements are likely to be required. These improvements will also facilitate access for non-vehicular public access.

Any such improvements will be carried out following consultation with relevant authorities and obtaining any permissions that may be required, and would be subject to the protection requirements of designated features present within the woodlands.

Your Response

The above details provide a brief context for the proposed Long-Term Forest Plan.

This scoping process is intended to offer the opportunity for statutory authorities, local interest groups, local communities, and neighbouring ownerships to provide feedback on aspects of the future woodland management.

We would be grateful if you could provide us with your comments and suggestions and to highlight any issues or concerns relating to the future management of the University of Edinburgh's woodlands.

Any such feedback received will then be assessed (in the form of a Scoping Report) and wherever practical, will be incorporated to form part of the Long-Term Forest Plan's future management proposals .

Once the Long-Term Forest Plan has been produced, you will be provided a further opportunity to make comment on the Plan and the management proposals.