



Forestry England

Chopwell Forest Plan 2019

North England Forest District



The mark of
responsible forestry

Forestry Commission
woodlands have
been certified in
accordance with the
rules of the Forest
Stewardship Council®



Planning and District Context

The Strategic Plan for the Public Forest Estate in England outlines the delivery of forest policy at a national level. At a regional level there are six Forest Districts covering the country that directly oversee the implementation of policy actions in local public forest estate woodlands. Forest Enterprise England is the organisation responsible for managing the English public forest estate.

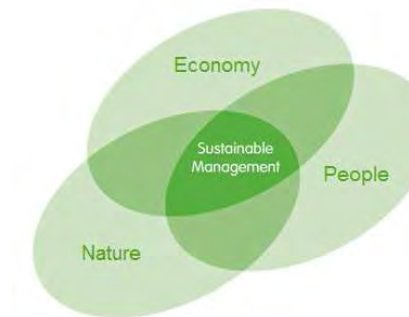
North England Forest District (NEFD) is the management unit that manages the public forest estate in Northern England. This is an extensive area encompassing 9 county or unitary authority areas from the Scottish border to Durham and Lancashire.



Our task is to realise the potential of each of the forests in our care for sustainable business opportunities, wildlife and nature conservation, and the enjoyment and well-being of local people and visitors. Each of our forests supports the economy through local jobs, sustainable timber production and the provision of recreation and tourism opportunities. All are funded by revenue from timber sales and recreation provision.

The woodlands of the district are currently arranged in 62 management areas, and their management is covered by individual ten year Forest Plans that identify local issues and the broad silvicultural management of the woods. Forest Plans are reviewed every five years.

These plans and their associated forest operations ensure that produce from the woodlands is endorsed by the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification™ (PEFC™) as being produced from woodlands under good management that meet the requirements of the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) and the UK Forest Standard (UKFS). Individual Forest Plans aim to deliver a range of public benefits with achievable objectives that deliver the three drivers of sustainable land management outlined in the North England Forest District Strategy.



These key drivers are supported by the following Forest District Policy;

- we will optimise the financial return from timber production compatible with achievement of other forest district objectives while complying with the UK Forestry Standard and meeting the requirements of the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme;
- we will provide public access to all our forests and woodlands where there are no legal or safety restrictions. We will encourage and permit a wide range of recreational activities from walking and quiet enjoyment to more specialised activities;
- we will ensure that rare and threatened habitats are protected and managed to maintain or enhance their conservation value;

Chopwell Forest Plan

This is the fourth revision for the Chopwell Forest Plan which was last revised in 2008. There are no significant changes to the previous plan but brings it up to date in terms of work achieved over the last 10 years and ongoing implementation of the management objectives. This forest plan now also includes the outlying blocks of Spenbanks Wood and Clockburn. Scaifes Wood is no longer in Forestry Commission ownership.

Part 1 Background Information

Introduction

North of the Derwent valley are located the Forestry Commission woodlands Chopwell, Spenbanks Wood and Clockburn. These areas of woodland have been drawn together to form one design plan, principally because they all share similar management objectives and are within the boundaries of Gateshead County Council. Chopwell is the largest at 375ha and Spenbanks and Clockburn are 64ha and 18ha respectively. Both Chopwell and Spenbanks are freehold and a 999 year leasehold interest for Clockburn was purchased in 1954.

All the woodlands lie within the urban fringe landscape surrounding Gateshead to the east. The presence of these woodlands breaks up the semi-urban and post-industrial landscape of the area, and Chopwell, being the largest continuous woodland within Gateshead forms a major landscape feature combined with the many other small woods within the region. Underlain by sandstone with coal measures, the area has an industrial heritage related to heavy industry and the mining of coal. Mining in the area has now ceased but it has had a significant impact not only on the physical structure of the area but also on urban expansion.

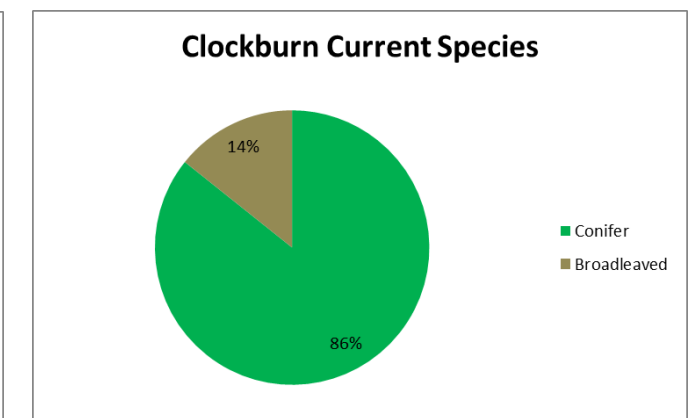
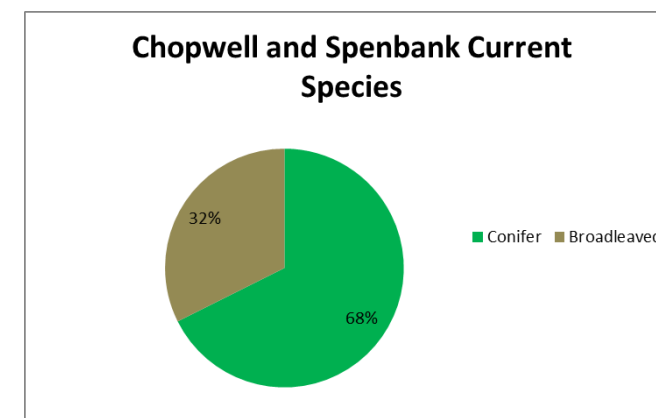
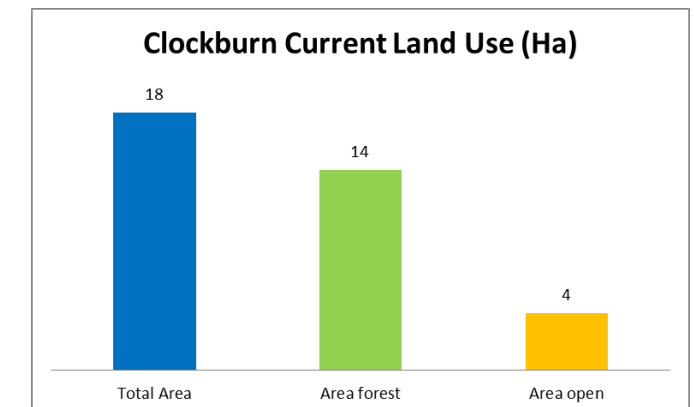
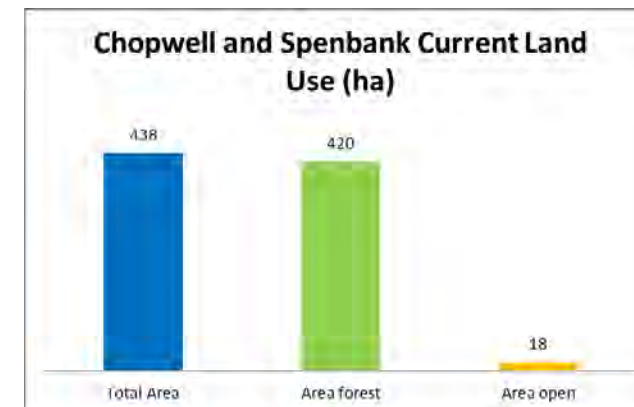
Current Woodland composition, species and timber potential

Chopwell has been managed woodland for many centuries and has undergone some major structural changes such as during the Second World War when much of the forest was harvested. Post war restocking of the sites were mainly with coniferous species in order to increase timber productivity, and even-aged stands of conifer remain though remnant elements of the native broadleaf cover are still present. The current tree species present through all the three woodland areas are a mixture of coniferous and broadleaves with the majority having been planted post WW2. In Clockburn the planting dates back mainly to 1974 restocking with some smaller areas of older planting dated 1925 and 1969.

The crops are productive with yield classes within the range 10 to 16 for conifers and from 2 to 6 for broadleaves. Although the wind hazard class of 4 is relatively high, compared to most other Forestry Commission forests in the North East these woodlands are relatively

stable and wind throw is not a significant limiting factor on management. However, the majority of the crops are at or approaching economic maturity.

The area lies on the productive coal measures but almost the entire area is covered with a considerable depth of glacial drift which gives great variation in the soils. In general, however, the soil east and north of a north-west to south-east line through Chopwell wood is sandy, varying from pure sand to a sandy loam. The area to the south of this line consists of clays and clay loams. The coal measure rocks outcrop in the valley of the stream flowing past Carr House.



Designated areas

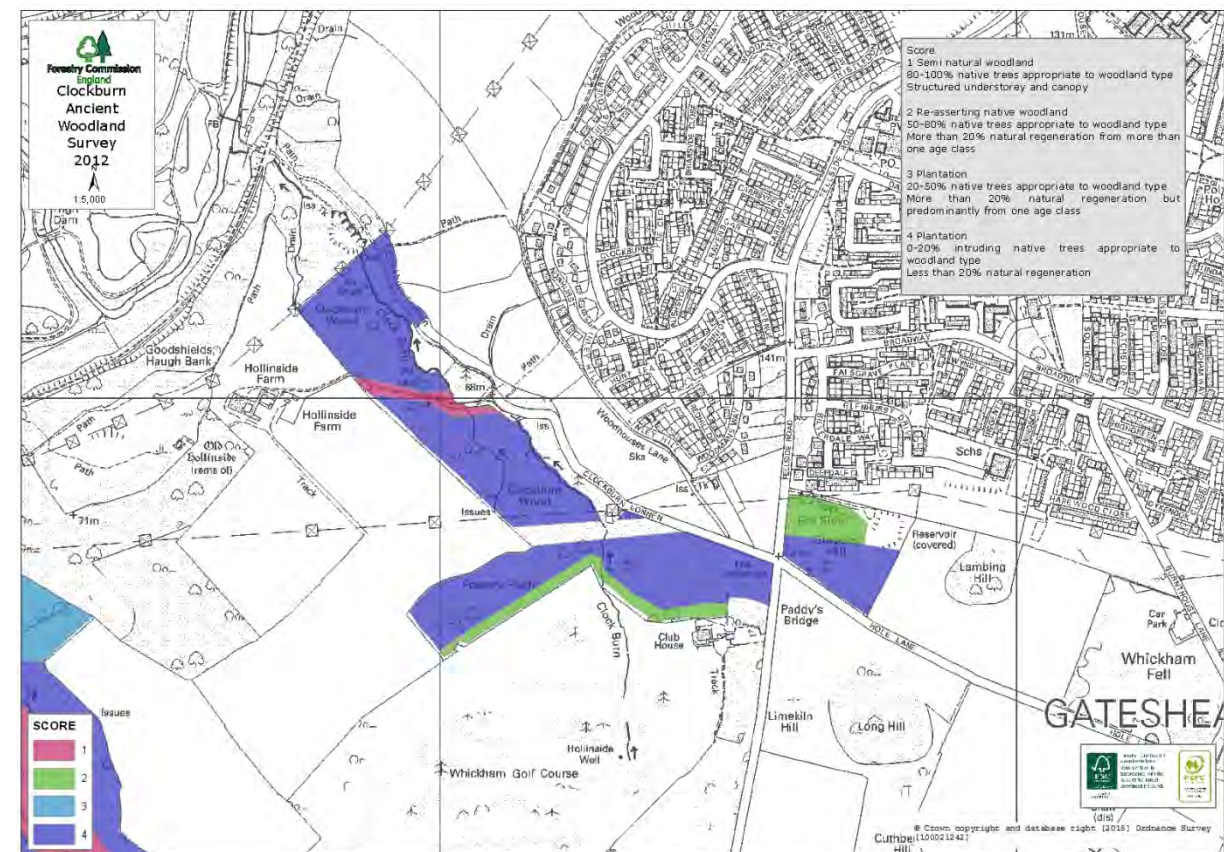
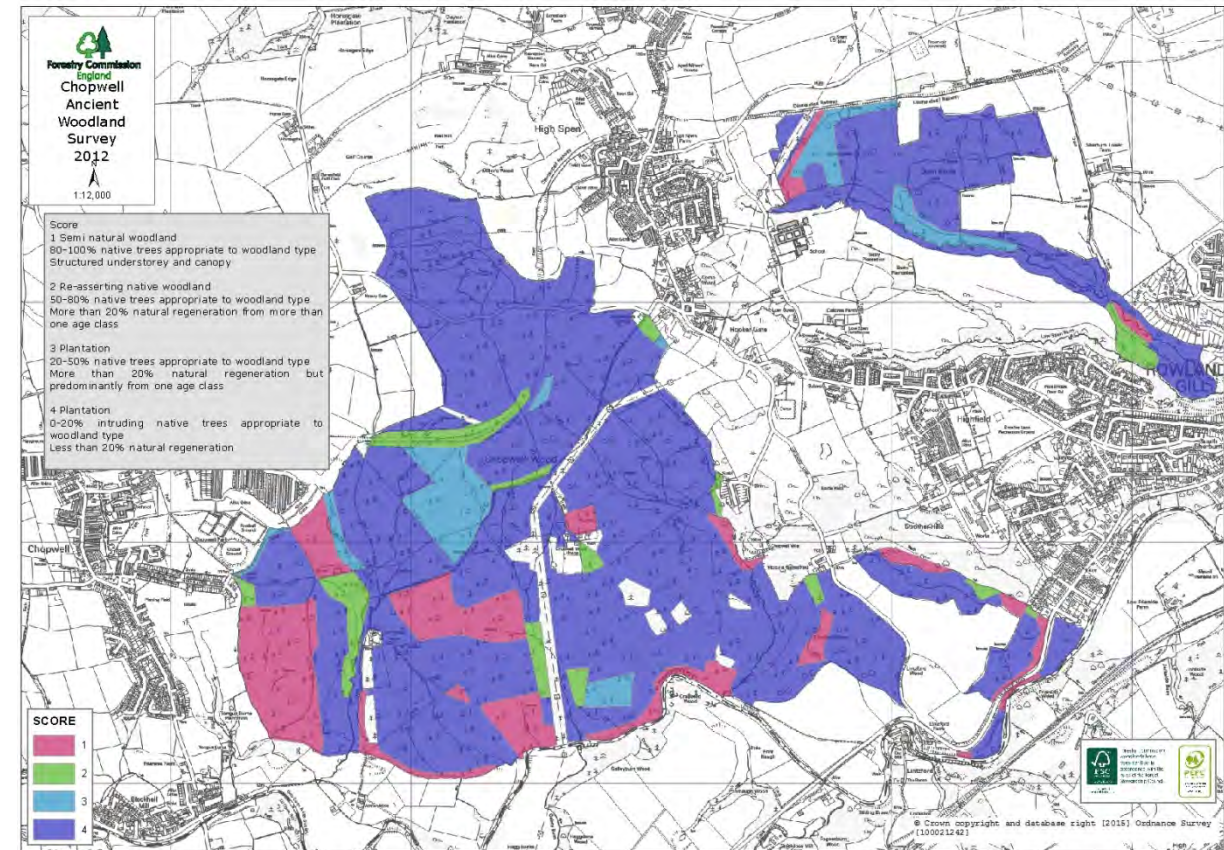
A small proportion of Strother Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located to the south of Spenbanks which is managed according to a separate plan agreed with Natural England. All the woodlands are either Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site (PAW's) or Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW). The ancient woodland status dictates that there is a presumption for conversion to native species in line with current Forestry Commission Policy. All the woodlands hold the local designation of Local Wildlife Site (formally Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)) making them sites of regional conservation interest.

Conservation

The conservation value of the woodlands are mainly attributed to their status as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site (PAW's) and the primary objective therefore is to restore Chopwell, Spenbanks and Clockburn to ancient semi-natural woodland in line with the Forestry Commissions Ancient Woodland Policy. The interest is generally associated with the woodland habitat they provide, though areas of Chopwell in particular do have specific features of interest. These range from reflecting the industrial heritage e.g. the route of the old railway, to specific areas of biological interest such as the presence of wood ant nests, badger setts and notably a series of ponds formed by second world war bombing which are known breeding sites for Great Crested Newts. The value of the ride system as internal open space and remnant ASNW features such as veteran trees and deadwood are also significant. These will be safeguarded and enhanced during thinning operations.

Management towards the objective of PAW's restoration has been ongoing through thinning interventions and felling of non-native tree species over a number of years, particularly in the main woodland area of Chopwell.

An Ancient Woodland Survey was undertaken in 2012. The results of this survey for Chopwell and Clockburn, shown below will be used to formulate an intervention plan for the PAW's restoration. The rate at which this conversion is achieved will be dictated by successful regeneration of native species following thinning interventions rather than producing a regular sustainable yield.



Landscape and Topography

Other than Chopwell wood none of the woods form a significant feature within the wider landscape. The southerly aspect of Chopwell descending down to the Derwent valley provides a sloping landform intersected by a series of steeper gullies associated with water courses running down to the river Derwent. Chopwell wood is reasonably prominent in the landscape as viewed from the south, including side views from the A694 and A692 main roads. The woods are bounded by a mixture of housing and mixed pasture land use, and overall their shape fits in with the local landscape. For all the woods the internal landscape is of importance, and rapid large scale change would be inappropriate. Culturally and aesthetically a number of areas of mature conifers within Chopwell have a significant value, for example the remaining large Douglas fir and pines adjacent to the main car park.

Heritage

There are no designated sites of historical importance within any of the woodlands. However, the area has a rich industrial history in mining and timber production and there are numerous features of historic interest throughout the woodlands. Chopwell oaks were used at the castles of Norham, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh, and by the navy for shipbuilding. A detailed history of Chopwell is contained within the publication 'Chopwell Wood Past and Present' produced by the Friends of Chopwell Wood, a local association promoting community participation in the management of the woodland.

Communities and recreation

Chopwell is community woodland with Woodland Park status and has been an important recreational resource for many years. Chopwell is used by walkers, runners, dog walkers, horse rider's orienteers and cyclists. According to our most recent estimates from approximately ten years ago, Chopwell receives 200,000 visits annually. We work closely with 'The Friends of Chopwell Wood' who are an enthusiastic and active local voluntary community organisation and registered charity who work to promote and enhance Chopwell wood. The group organise events, activities and regular working parties to deliver conservation and educational projects that help to protect the woodland and keep Chopwell a welcoming and safe environment for all its visitors and wildlife. For further details about the work of the group see friendsofchopwellwood.org.uk

Clockburn wood is leasehold with retained sporting rights and there is no sanctioned public access other than along the public right of way. As such there is no formal recreational provision in the wood.

Pests and diseases

Roe deer are present throughout and the population is monitored to ensure that deer numbers do not compromise other objectives of management, particularly the promotion of natural regeneration and protection of ground flora associated with the ASNW status. Grey squirrels are also present throughout the woodlands and have the potential to cause damage to mature trees.

Larch is under threat from the disease *Phytophthora ramorum* and although there have been no disease outbreaks in the east of the district crops will be routinely inspected.

Access and roading

Internally forest operations are adequately served by a network of forest road and tracks and there are no plans for further development or extension in any of the woodlands covered by this plan.

Part 2 Analysis and Concept

The factors outlined in Part 1 present various opportunities and issues. These are summarised below:

| Factor | Opportunities | Issues |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Management type | Continuous cover management Long term retention of native MB | Natural regeneration may not always be the desired species |
| Biodiversity and heritage | Protection of features associated to ASNW, such as veteran/feature trees or ground flora provide opportunity to target thinning operations for greatest benefit. | Some exotic tree species or groups of non-natives may be of local significance |
| Access/Roading | Adequate internal network of forest road | |
| Harvesting | Continuous cover management will provide a gradual change in woodland structure which benefits both biological and landscape sensitivity | Yield and timing of operations unpredictable |
| Pests and disease | | Deer and grey squirrels present challenges to natural regeneration and hardwood timber quality Sporting rights are retained by the lessee in Clockburn. |
| Future Species/ Climate change | Conversion to locally native MB woodland remains the long term objective for the woodland. | |
| Landscape | Continuous cover management delivers gradual change with limited landscape impact. | Where clear felling is needed aim to keep coupe sizes to a minimum |
| Current species | Conifer species generally growing well which will provide a sustainable yield throughout the conversion process | Some areas of Western Hemlock in Chopwell are shade tolerant and natural regeneration is prevalent. Presence of larch (at risk from P. Ramorum), and ash regeneration (at risk from Chalara) will need regular monitoring. |
| Public access | Continue to work closely with 'The Friends of Chopwell Wood' Close proximity of all woods to | Leasehold restrictions limit expansion of public access in Clockburn. |

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| | large urban area and location within Great North National Forest. | |
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Appraisal of Opportunities and Constraints

1. Landscape impact - the significance of the forests in the view from adjoining residential areas dictates that any changes in forest structure need to be progressive wherever practical so that changes do not dominate the view. The Historic context of the landscape needs to be protected where appropriate.
2. Ancient Woodland status - the forests are classified as Ancient Woodland sites and it is Forestry Commission policy to convert the species composition to native broadleaf. Where practical this can be done through a series of interventions encouraging and releasing broadleaf species on the site, thereby dovetailing this with the landscape requirements above. However, in some areas the planted species and/or the previous silvicultural history will preclude this.
3. Areas of Western Hemlock - Western Hemlock (WH) is highly shade tolerant and as such has the ability to regenerate densely in low light levels beneath an intact canopy. Therefore some clearfelling of WH will be needed to eradicate WH from the wood.

Part 3 Objectives and Proposals

The following objectives have been identified based on FEE National Policy and NEFD Strategic Plan

| Forest District Strategic Goal | How Forest Plan delivers |
|--|---|
| <p>ECONOMIC</p> <p><u>Wood Production</u> -</p> <p><i>'we will optimise the financial return from timber production compatible with the achievement of other district objectives whilst complying with the UK Forestry Standard and meeting the requirements of the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme'</i></p> | <p>Felling proposals are relatively simple based on the continued thinning of the forests under a continuous cover regime. Interventions will involve thinning out/removal of the conifer and non-native broadleaf component with the aim to undertake at least one thinning within the period of the plan. The Intervention Plan indicates the number of interventions likely required using the 2012 AWS to guide frequency and timing of management.</p> <p>5ha will be clear felled in the period 2018-2021 adjacent to Strother Hills SSSI and in Spenbanks (adjacent to Rowlands Gill).</p> |
| <p>NATURE, HERITAGE and LANDSCAPE</p> <p><i>'we will continue to diversify the age class structure of our even-aged woodlands and increase the value of all our woodlands and forest for wildlife'</i></p> <p><i>'we will ensure that rare and threatened habitats are protected and managed to maintain or enhance their conservation value'</i></p> | <p><u>ASNW restoration</u> is the primary objective of management and timing and yield of operations will be guided by how the woodland is responding to change and not be driven by productivity.</p> <p>Features of interest associated to the ASNW, such as veteran or feature trees, will be protected and enhanced during operations through sympathetic management.</p> <p>Re-survey of ASNW is planned for 2022.</p> <p>Historic features will be routinely identified and protected during our planning and implementation of forest operations.</p> |
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| <p>PEOPLE</p> <p><i>'we will utilise the land and resources at our disposal to assist communities close to our forests to enhance their environments and hence their quality of life'</i></p> <p><i>'we will provide public access to all our forests and woodlands where there are no legal or safety restrictions...'</i></p> | <p>Continue to work closely with 'The Friends of Chopwell Wood'.</p> |
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Part 4 Monitoring plan

The objectives identified in section 3 will be monitored in the following ways;

| Objective | Criteria for success | Assessment |
|--|--|--|
| <p>ECONOMIC</p> <p>Wood production</p> <p>Sustainable economic regeneration</p> | <p>Marketable parcels of timber on offer to the market</p> <p>Maintain timber harvesting access and infrastructure</p> | <p>Contract and sales records</p> |
| <p>NATURE, HERITAGE and LANDSCAPE</p> <p>PAW's restoration</p> <p>Historic features</p> | <p>Delivery of Forest Plan felling/thinning/coppicing proposals</p> <p>Ancient Woodland survey</p> <p>Protect and enhance features</p> | <p>Five year Forest Plan review</p> <p>Re- survey planned for 2022</p> <p>Operational constraints and five year review</p> |
| <p>PEOPLE</p> <p>Visual enhancement to visitors.</p> | <p>Maintenance of Ancient woodland and historic landscape characteristics and ongoing restructuring of the woodland.</p> | <p>Five year Forest Plan review.</p> |

Part 6 Forest Plan Outcomes

Nature Conservation

Restoration of Ancient Semi Woodland habitat is the primary objective of woodland management. This will be slowly achieved through the ongoing removal of non-native species principally by thinning with some localised felling of Western Hemlock or other species with the potential to generate shade tolerant natural regeneration.

Over time, through the ongoing management of Chopwell, Spenbanks and Clockburn woods we will;

- Restore species richness of the semi-natural woodland communities.
- Maintain and enhance other habitats and heritage features of local and national importance.

Landscape Appraisal

Visual sensitivity is assessed with consideration to the importance and nature of views of the woodlands from key viewpoints. A comprehensive landscape appraisal was completed as part of the previous forest plan, at which time the landscape benefits of Continuous Cover management of the woodlands was recognised. All the woodlands fit well in the landscape in their current form and the ongoing continuous cover management through the period of this plan will continue to protect and enhance the landscape character of these woodlands.

Timber production

Timber production is not a major objective of the Forest Plan and therefore there is no analysis of future timber yield or productive capacity. The harvesting of timber, through the removal of exotic conifer or non-native broadleaved species will be dictated on the basis of progress toward PAW's restoration guided by ongoing Ancient Woodland survey.

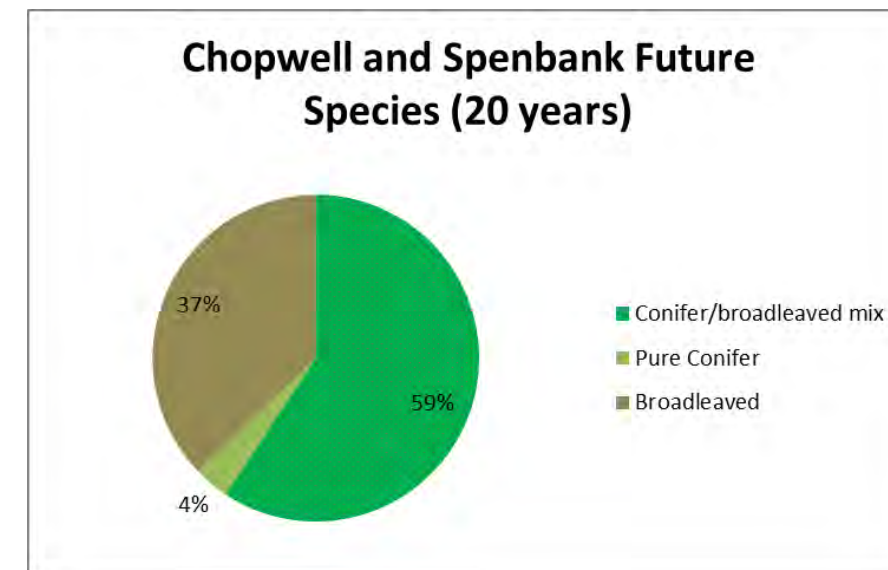
Historic and Cultural Landscape

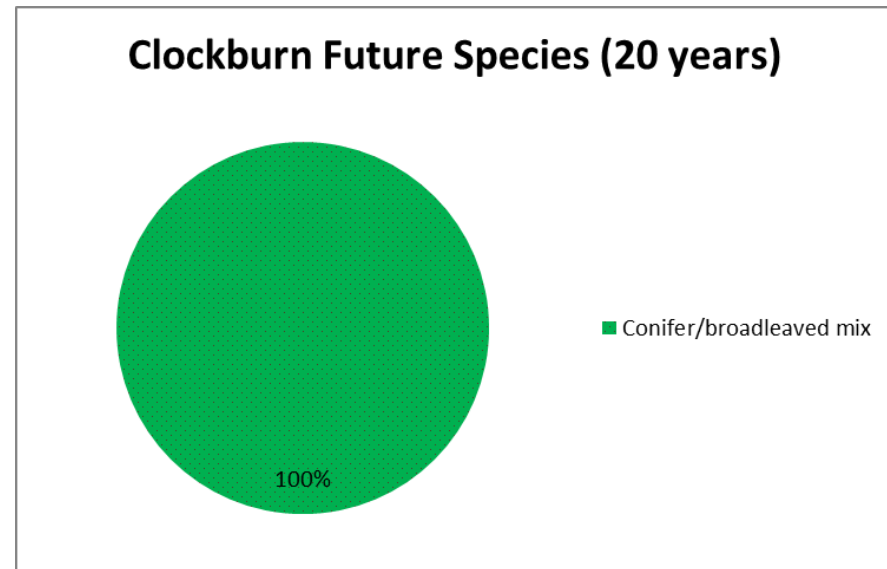
Non-scheduled historic features present within the area controlled by this plan will be routinely protected during operations and opportunities taken to enhance as appropriate. It is recognised that some trees are an important part of the internal landscape at Chopwell and are valued by the local community. Therefore, rather than a blanket presumption at this stage that these will be removed, during the

planning and implementation of thinning operations decisions will be informed by analysis of the cultural significance of these areas and individual trees, with those that add significance to the local environment retained. These outline areas are indicated on the Intervention Plan.

Future Species

The future species indicated below represents how the composition could be in 20 years' time given the proposed rate of conversion according to the intervention plan. This will be achieved through the promotion of natural regeneration in response to changing light levels through successive thinning operations. In the long term complete conversion to locally native species is desired, with consideration to areas of community and cultural significance, but this is likely to take many years to achieve.





The United Kingdom Forest Standard (UKFS)

The UKFS is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. The UKFS is supported by a series of guidelines which outline the context for forestry in the UK, defines standards and requirements and provides a basis for regulation and monitoring. These include General Forestry Practice, Forests and Biodiversity; Climate Change, Historic Environment, Landscape, People, Soil and Water.

Chopwell Forest Plan is able to demonstrate that relevant aspects of sustainable forest management have been considered and the stated objectives in Part 3 show how sustainable forest management will be achieved. The plan provides a clear means to communicate the proposals and to engage with interested parties and serves as an agreed statement of intent against which implementation can be checked and monitored.

In addition to conforming to general sustainable forest management principles UKFS is demonstrated in the following key areas:

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| Productivity | Productive potential is optimised through the delivery of the thinning programme, ecosystem services and other non-market benefits included in biodiversity, climate change mitigation, water, people and landscape. |
| Structure | Long term future species composition; 100% native species and a minimum 10% open ground meets UKWAS and UKFS minimum requirements for PAW's. Long term structure will improve through linking of permanent broadleaved and open habitats. |
| Silvicultural | Continuous cover forestry (CCF) principles will be adopted with long term retention (LTR) of areas of broadleaved woodland as |

these develop. This will improve species and age class diversity over time.

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| Biodiversity | ASNW restoration and management of important habitats and species are the primary objective. Ecological connectivity achieved by extending and linking areas of native broadleaved woodland and open space will be enhanced ensuring that the area is managed with conservation and biodiversity as a major objective. |
| Climate change | CCF/LTR areas will minimise soil disturbance. Natural regeneration and species diversification will benefit forest resilience. |
| Landscape | The planning process refers to the Local Landscape Character Assessment to inform the appropriate woodland management and design. |
| Historic | Historic features are recognised and their safeguard will be incorporated into operational management. |
| People | The Forest Plan is consulted with individuals, the local community and organisations with an interest in the management of the area. |
| Water | Quality will be protected through adherence to Forest and Water guidelines as a minimum during any harvesting and forest management operations. |

Longer term management proposals

The proposals in this plan continue to build on the success of previous plans to support the management of Chopwell, Spenbanks and Clockburn with continued thinning under a Continuous Cover Management regime, gradually restoring the woodland to native species whilst continuing to provide timber to markets across the region. The retention of groups or individual exotic trees of localised landscape significance will ensure that cultural and species diversity can be incorporated into future plans. Public access and local community engagement in Chopwell will remain a major objective with the continued recognition of Chopwell's Woodland Park status.