

8. WORKING WOODLANDS



Measuring trees using electronic calipers

8.0 Working Woodlands

8.1 Contributing to the Economy

The sustained marketing of guaranteed volumes of timber by Forest Enterprise provides a foundation for investment by the private sector – be it in harvesting machinery, processing capacity or woodfuel infrastructure. The volume that we harvest in any one year is constrained by our commitment to sustainable management, but by careful marketing and provision of information, we can help to ensure that this volume is used to best economic effect within the wider UK market.

In the South East, the SE England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) have set targets to address climate change in the South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy. These targets require 20% of energy to come from renewable sources by 2020. As a result, we are likely to be required to contribute to the country's efforts to meet renewable energy targets.

The Forestry Commission's Woodfuel Strategy for England was also launched last year, with the aim of increasing the amount of biomass made available through the woodfuel supply chain. The Forestry Commission will continue to work with partners to develop new markets for forest products, focusing efforts on the potential wood resource available in the 60% of English woodlands that are currently under-managed. In the High Weald AONB, less than 10% of woodland is managed by Forest Enterprise and only 24% is managed by private owners under the English Woodland Grant Scheme. Huge potential therefore exists to encourage management in the remaining 66% of woodland through the development of new markets for wood products.



**Wood fuel heating system at
Bedgebury Visitor Centre**



**Cut timber
resulting from
native broadleaf
regeneration felling
on an ancient
woodland site.**

In 2007, Forest Enterprise South East England carried out thinning and felling operations across 2,500 hectares of woodland, which resulted in the sale of approximately 118,000 cubic metres of FSC certified timber to the wood using industry. These ongoing operations employ local contractors and ensure that the management of our woodlands is financially sustainable as well as being ecologically sustainable.

We aim to continue to stimulate and facilitate activity in the wider woodland economy through our sustainable woodland management activities. These activities will often bring about a wide range of social and environmental benefits, in addition to the provision of wood products. For example, a thinning operation can increase light levels within a previously dark woodland and provide the conditions required by native trees to regenerate in mixture with existing conifer crops. The same operation may also increase the amount and quality of open space/edge habitat alongside roads and tracks, whilst providing the opportunity to clear vegetation from a protected ancient monument.

8.2 *Silvicultural Systems*

The following sub-sections describe the methods of forest management that will be used across the High Weald. Many of these methods are already used in our day to day management of the woodlands and an Operational Site Assessment (OSA) is always carried out before work starts (see page 6). Local users will be kept informed of the proposed operations via on-site signage.

We have chosen to use low impact silvicultural systems (see 8.2.3) across many of our woodlands, including those that are not ancient woodland sites, to bring about a gradual change toward native woodland cover. There are also sites where we feel that clearfelling is an appropriate method of converting existing conifer plantation to native broadleaf species and providing temporary open habitat (see 8.2.1).

The shape of the areas to be regenerated through clearfelling or native broadleaf regeneration felling have been designed to fit in with the scale and underlying landform of the surrounding countryside. The timing of these felling operations has been carefully considered to increase species and age class diversity within the woodlands. However, this timetable assumes that sufficient establishment of young trees will be obtained over the areas that have been felled, before successive blocks are removed. In the absence of sufficient natural regeneration or plant establishment after 10 years from the time that trees were cleared, the timing of successive felling operations will need to be adjusted and measures may be taken to plant a site with nursery stock or revisit the tree protection strategy (e.g. erect a deer fence).

The Operational Site Assessment will indicate the most appropriate source of new tree growth for a site before any of the existing tree canopy is removed. Where the soil type and surrounding seed source are conducive to the natural regeneration of native species, cleared areas will be regenerated in this way. On those sites where the natural regeneration of native species is less likely to occur, cleared areas will be regenerated through the planting of trees that have been grown in a nursery. Planting stock deriving from source-identified stands in the local native seed zone shall be used wherever it is available.



Young oak tree regenerating in woodland

In those areas of woodland that contain groups of trees growing close together, a proportion of the trees will be thinned to improve the quality of the remaining trees, accelerate individual tree growth and provide income (silvicultural thinning). These groups of trees may exist on a site that is already being managed under a low impact silvicultural system. For example, groups of trees may be felled across a site to bring about natural regeneration. However, the remaining trees may also be thinned at the same time for silvicultural purposes. Under silvicultural thinning, canopy closure will occur within 5 years of thinning for conifer species and 10 years of thinning for broadleaf species. These ongoing thinning operations will also enhance remnant ancient woodland features, including ground flora, where they are identified in the Operational Site Assessment and favour native species in the canopy. As a result of this work, clearfell operations are unlikely to remove all woodland cover by the time felling takes place as scheduled on the Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps (see Appendix 2).