### Clearfelling 8.2.1

In most of the areas where 60-100% of the woodland canopy consists of non-native species that are close to economic maturity, the area will be regenerated through clearfelling. This is where most of the trees are removed in one operation, although the Operational Site Assessment will identify any trees to be retained and any remnant features of ancient woodland to be protected. Cleared areas will be regenerated through the use of natural regeneration, where it is likely to occur, or by planting trees that have been grown in a nursery. The Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps in Appendix 2 indicate the location and timing of proposed clearfelling operations across the High Weald.



Photo showing an area that has recently been clearfelled as part of a long term programme that aims to break up large areas of even-aged conifer and introduce structural diversity within the woodland

### 8.2.2 Native Broadleaf Regeneration Felling

In most of the areas where 40-60% of the woodland canopy is represented by non-native species, the area will be restored to native woodland through native broadleaf regeneration felling. This is where most non-native trees are removed in one operation to leave at least 40% native broadleaf cover, which may be scattered or grouped in nature. Normal silvicultural thinning will continue to be carried out where the remaining broadleaf cover is grouped in nature. The Operational Site Assessment will identify any conifer trees to be retained in groups or as scattered individuals. Cleared areas will be regenerated through the use of natural regeneration, where it is likely to occur, or by planting trees that have been grown in a nursery. The Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps in Appendix 2 indicate the location and timing of proposed native broadleaf regeneration felling operations across the High Weald.



Photos showing an ancient woodland site in before the removal of non-native conifer plantation and the same site 8 months after the felling operation took place



# 8.2.3 Low Impact Silvicultural Systems

In most of the areas where 0-40% of the existing woodland canopy is represented by non-native species and adequate native seed trees exist, the area will be restored to native woodland through the use of low impact silvicultural systems (LISS). This form of management creates gaps within areas of existing woodland and allows these gaps to fill up with growth from existing tree seed. The Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps in Appendix 2 indicate where we propose to implement low impact silvicultural systems across the High Weald.

Low impact silvicultural systems will over time create a complex woodland structure with varying canopy layers and areas of temporary open space. This will increase habitat and visual diversity within the wooded landscape, whilst maintaining continuity of forest cover. Both the forest design plan and the Operational Site Assessment consider the visual effect of certain felling patterns, e.g. group regeneration felling, on the wider landscape. Low impact systems are not likely to be used in those areas of woodland that contain invasive non-native species such as western hemlock.

Management will aim to retain a minimum of 3 standing and 3 fallen stems per hectare after felling operations to create deadwood habitat within the woodland. Potential veteran trees will be identified and retained in perpetuity. Conifer trees will be left in groups or as scattered individuals where appropriate.

This forest design plan prescribes the use of two main low impact silvicultural systems. They are the 'Uniform Shelterwood System' and the 'Group Shelterwood System'. The Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps indicate the areas to be managed under these systems.

The Uniform Shelterwood System allows young crops to become established under the overhead shelter of existing crops. The existing crop will be evenly and gradually thinned over time in successive regeneration fellings, that are at least 10 years apart, to bring about natural regeneration on the ground beneath. A maximum of 50% of the canopy will be removed in any one operation, although a lower proportion is likely to be removed in most cases (as determined by the Operational Site Assessment - see page 6). Subsequent regeneration fellings will only take place when adequate regeneration has been achieved in the gaps. This operation differs from normal silvicultural thinning in that canopy closure will not occur within 5 years (for conifers) or 10 years (for broadleaves) after each operation.

The Group Shelterwood System allows young crops to become established under the side shelter of existing crops. Several areas of 0.25 ha will be felled across an area to bring about natural regeneration on the ground beneath the existing tree crop. Once adequate regeneration has been achieved in these gaps, further groups of trees will be removed and the cycle will be repeated until the desired area is completely regenerated. A maximum of 50% of the canopy will be removed in any one operation, although a lower proportion is likely to be removed in most cases (as determined by the Operational Site Assessment - see page 6). Normal silvicultural thinning will continue to be carried out in the matrix of trees that surrounds the felled groups.



Natural regeneration of ash on an ancient woodland site managed under a low impact silvicultural system (LISS)

### 8.2.4 Coppicing

Prior to the 20th Century, the woodlands of the High Weald produced sweet chestnut coppice to provide poles for fencing and the hop growing industry. The Habitat Restoration and Felling Maps indicate where woodland will be managed through coppicing to provide cyclical temporary open space. In these areas, the sweet chestnut will be cut to the ground every 15-25 years and the regrowth from the cut stumps allowed to establish.

### Natural Reserves 8.2.5

A proportion of those areas which are predominantly wooded and of particularly high wildlife interest or potential will be permanently identified and managed by limited intervention (unless alternative management has a higher conservation or biodiversity value). In these 'natural reserves', a number of site-native trees will be retained in perpetuity and allowed to reach their biological maturity. A proportion of site-native trees may also be ring-barked to provide deadwood habitat within the existing woodland. Forestry operations will only be carried out to increase the biodiversity value of the woodland, to ensure the health of the woodland (e.g. to reduce the spread of disease or control exotic plants) or to ensure the health and safety of the public or forest workers.

## 8.3 Working Together for Everyone's Future

Creating better places for people to live, an enhanced environment and biodiversity, a stronger contribution to the economy and a secure future for our woodland resources are the four objectives of this forest design plan. Achieving this vision for the public forest estate will very much depend on the effectiveness of our work at all levels with our partners, be they funding organisations such as the Heritage Lottery, the Regional Development Agency, the commercial forestry sector or conservation organisations.

Forest Enterprise is one of 28 partner organisations in the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme, which seeks to develop a landscape scale scheme that delivers tangible benefits. These benefits include the restoration of the special habitats of the High Weald Forest Ridge and the enhancement of public enjoyment of its unique heritage. As part of this scheme, Forest Enterprise proposes to carry out work in St. Leonard's Forest, Tilgate, Birchden Woods (Harrison's Rocks) and Sheffield Forest.

There are a number of other partnerships that we are involved in across the High Weald. These include the Gatwick Greenspace Partnership at Tilgate Forest, the Bedgebury Conifer Conservation Programme, the Rother Woods Project at Beckley Wood and a heathland management partnership with West Sussex County Council at St. Leonard's Forest. We also work with the National Probation Service, the Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust and local businesses at Bedgebury.

Huge potential exists for further partnership working in the High Weald and we will explore future opportunities to work with:

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to explore sustainable transport options for visitors to Bedgebury.
- The Environment Agency to develop wider community engagement, find out how we might support water management under the EU's Water Framework Directive and look at how we might contribute to the Environment Agency's delivery of the 'Creating a Better Place' strategy.
- Hastings and Rother Primary Care Trust (PCT) to encourage access and opportunities for people to be active in the local environment as part of the East Sussex Active Living Strategy. Potential EU funding exists through the Wealden and Rural Rother (WARR) Partnership to encourage active recreation in the Rother Area, which includes Battle Great Wood. Forest Enterprise woodlands might also be promoted on the PCT's activity websites.
- Rother District Council to promote sports, activities and health opportunities, including disabled access in Hemsted and Netherfield.

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