Bathscape Woodland Advisory Service

Woodland Management Advice and Guidance

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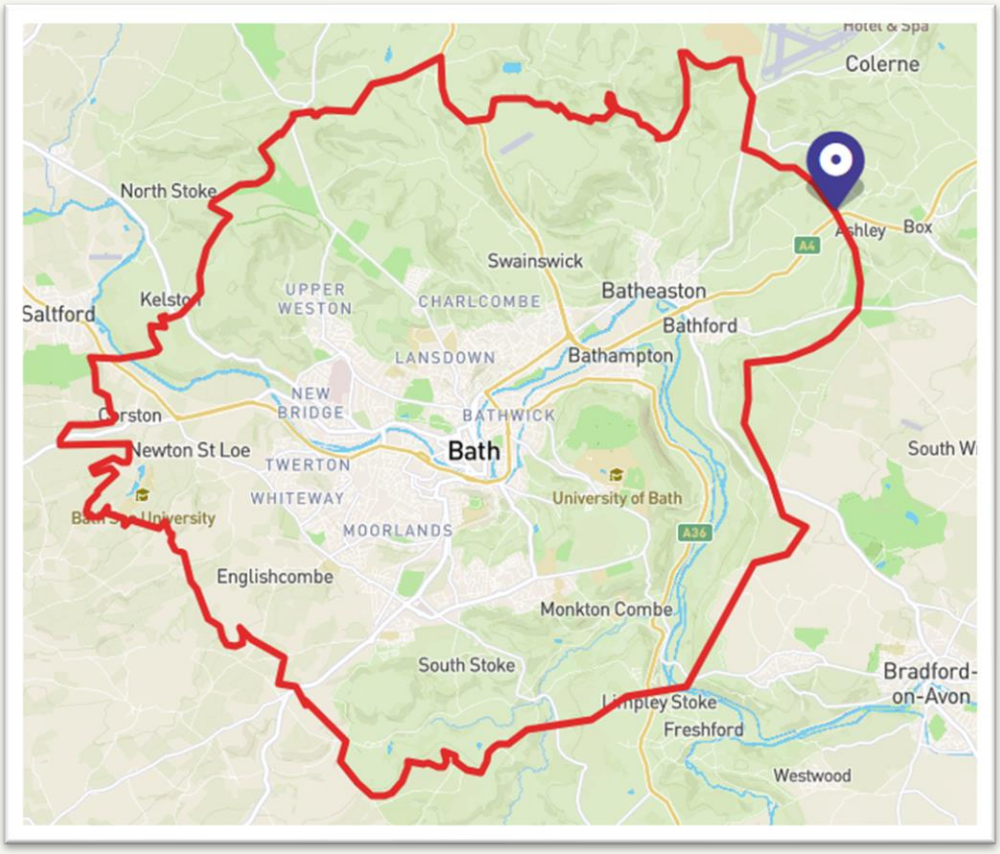
Forest of Avon

1. Introduction

As part of the Bathscape Landscape Partnership, Forest of Avon ran a free Woodland Advisory Service across the Bathscape area, finishing in 2025. Over this time, more than 300ha of woodland were surveyed and brought back into active management. This document will act as a legacy piece for that service, bringing together the most common pieces of advice that landowners needed over that time, so that woodland owners in the Bath region may continue to benefit from the Bathscape Landscape Partnership.

This legacy document covers considerations for felling licences and management plans (section 2), ash dieback management (section 3) and a host of woodland management interventions that came up over the years of the Bathscape Woodland Advisory Service being delivered (section 4). The final section includes a list of contact information for relevant parties in the area who may yet still be able to assist with woodland management queries.



The Bathscape region outline

1.1 The Woodlands of Bathscape

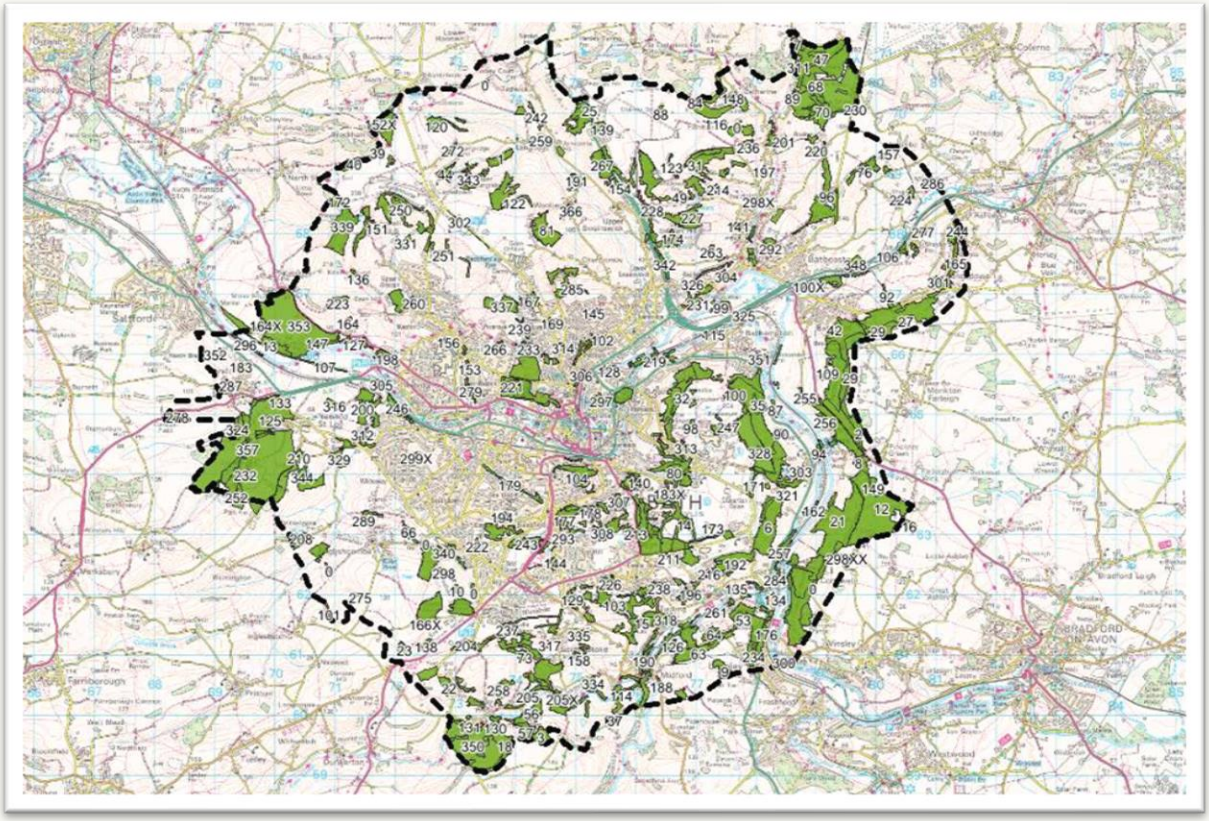
The woodlands in the Bathscape area are diverse, with everything from newly planted sites, plantations on ancient woodland sites, semi-natural deciduous woodlands and ancient woodlands, totalling 1485ha. Their size varies too, from small, atomised stands of trees on

farms up to the landscape-defining wooded valleys of Warleigh and Claverton. The 2017 Woodlands of Bathscape Report that formed part of the Bathscape Landscape Partnership Bid noted that at that time, 53% of the region's woodland had had no recent management. Over the course of the Bathscape Woodland Advisory Service, we have managed to reduce that number by 40%.

This work is crucial, given the significant ecological and social role that Bathscape's woodlands play in the region, as well as their critical contribution to the UNESCO World Heritage Site. These woods contain nationally significant plants such as the Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*). They are also host to a wide variety of Schedule 1 birds including firecrests, kingfishers, redwings and tawny owls and European Protected Species such as great crested newts, otters, beavers and myriad bat species. In this, they represent a vital resource in Bathscape's continued efforts to ameliorate the climate and ecological crises.

Alongside this, they also serve as a vital amenity space for the people of Bathscape, providing quality greenspace access and connection with nature and the history of their region. By bringing Bathscape's woodlands into management, particularly the publicly accessible and community woodlands, they will be better able to provide that resource for the community through increasing connection and engagement.

It is hoped that this legacy document will provide a resource for Bathscape's woodland owners in the future, so that they can continue bringing ever more woodland into management and bringing about the ecological, environmental and social benefit that that work creates.



The woodlands of Bathscape

2. Woodland Management Plans and Felling Licences

Managing a woodland requires careful planning and, often, many of the interventions you may make in your woodland will require permissions, such as for the felling of trees. In order to do this work properly, a number of considerations need to be made and a good understanding of the various frameworks and options in place is required. This section will outline woodland management plan and felling licence processes.

2.1 Woodland Management Plans

The Forestry Commission have a formal woodland management plan process, wherein a woodland owner can fill in a template document with information about their site and their proposed management interventions. This document, outlining a 10-year plan, can then be reviewed and approved by the Forestry Commission. The advantage of doing this is that it provides the landowner with a reference document for what they should be doing with their site over that time.

2.1.1 Woodland Management Plan Guidance and Templates

You can fill in the woodland management plan yourself using the templates online (link to the relevant government website below) or you can pay for a local woodland agent to do the work for you. If you are instructing a woodland agent, then you'll first need to fill in an agent authority form to allow that person to carry out the work on your behalf. A template and guidance for this is available in the below link.

There are two sizes of management plans you can fill in: standard or small.

Exemption	Notes
Small Woodland Management Plan 	For woodlands between 0.5-10ha. These woodland management plans won't qualify you for the woodland management plan grant or any other grants under Countryside Stewardship. They can still be used as part of a felling licence application.
Standard Woodland Management Plan	For woodlands >3ha, a standard woodland management plan can be used. A felling licence application can form part of this plan. When approved, a standard woodland management plan can be used to apply for a range of woodland improvement grants and the woodland management plan grant.

You will need to put together some site maps for your woodland management plan, outlining the area in question and the breakdown of your compartments. Compartments can be drawn up based on different woodland types, stand ages, or location. If your site is uniform and without any features such as rides (paths), then you can just split up your site 'arbitrarily' into compartments in order to help determine which area you're referring to at any moment.

The government webpage with the relevant information, template documents and example woodland management plans is available here. When you're ready to submit your management plan, send all the relevant parts (plan document, corresponding maps and plan of inventory, to adminhub.bullershill@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

2.1.2 Inventory and Plan of Operations Guidance and Templates

Alongside your Woodland Management Plan document and corresponding maps, you must also fill in the Inventory and Plan of Operations spreadsheet (a template for which can be found in the above link). This spreadsheet will outline your proposed felling and restocking plans and forms the main part of your felling licence application. You must fill in your compartment details in the 'compartments' tab, then details of the felling and restocking plans in the relevant tab for that. There's a guidance document on the government website, and also a tab on the spreadsheet itself that outlines what the various abbreviations mean.

2.1.3 Woodland Management Plan Grant

You can access a £1500 grant for completing (and having approved) a standard woodland management plan. In order to do this, you need to have the grant agreement approved with Countryside Stewardship *before* beginning work on the plan itself. The land must be registered with the RPA as well.

2.2 Felling Licences

Many of the interventions you may make in your woodland will require the felling of trees. This is because much of the woodland in around Bathscape (and in the country as a whole) is post-war plantation aimed at rebuilding a domestic timber supply which was largely then left unmanaged. As such, is not spaced out and open as a woodland would naturally be. Contrary to wider discourse about the felling of trees, felling within a woodland is often the most effective ecological intervention you can make. However, there are legal restrictions on tree felling to protect our woodlands as whole.

To apply for a felling licence, you can either get a full woodland management plan (as discussed in section 2.2) or you can apply for just the felling licence separately.

2.2.1 Felling Licence Online

To apply for a felling licence separately to a woodland management plan application, you can use the online tool 'Felling Licence Online'. If it is the first time you have used the tool, you will need to register yourself and then the parcel of land in question. Thereafter, you can divide your woodland, using the mapping system in the tool, into compartments as you see fit, and then describe the felling operations you intend to carry out in each one.

You will also need to include information on how you intend to restock each compartment where you are carrying out felling operations. Restocking is a necessary part of the felling process. The restocking options available to you are:

- Create a designed open space
- Plant an alternative area
- Plant an alternative area with individual trees
- Replant the felled area
- Restock with natural regeneration
- Restock with coppice
- Restock with individual trees.

2.2.2 Felling Licence Exemptions

Not all felling operations require a licence, as there are exemptions in place to allow for small-scale interventions not to be inhibited by the same necessary bureaucratic protections that protect our wider woodlands. The exemptions relevant to the woodland management context are:

Exemption	Notes
Calendar quarter personal allowance	In any calendar quarter, you may fell up to $5m^3$ of growing trees on your property without a felling licence, as long as no more than $2m^3$ are sold. In this instance, your 'property' refers to the immediate property relevant to your felling. If you have two holdings separated by distance, this will be interpreted as two properties and therefore each would have their own $5m^3$ allowance per calendar quarter.
Small Diameter Trees and Coppice	Trees may be felled if, when measured at a height of 1.3m from the ground, they: • have a diameter over bark ≤8cm • if thinning (i.e. felling certain trees to stimulate the growth of others), have a diameter over bark of ≤10cm • if coppicing (or reinstating former, outgrown coppice), have a diameter over bark ≤15cm (for individual stems).
Dangerous or Nuisance Trees 	A tree or trees can be felled in order to prevent danger where there is immediate risk or abate nuisance where the nuisance is actionable (i.e. where the is actual damage or immediate risk of actual damage being caused by the tree). In woodland management terms, this exemption rarely applies, as 'immediate risk' is less likely in the woodland context than, say, in an urban park or residential garden). In the case of using this exemption, you may also be required to show evidence of how the tree or trees presented an 'immediate risk', which could include things beyond the capacity of layman woodland owners, such as PICUS tree surveys or tomographs.
Tree Health Order	If you have been issued a Statutory Plant Health Notice (SPHN), you do not need to apply for a felling licence to remove the trees you are being required to remove. You do, however, need to remove the trees in question.

3. Ash Dieback

This section will cover the background of ash dieback in the UK, and the various management interventions that woodland owners may need to consider.

3.1 Ash Dieback Background

Ash dieback (*Hymenscophysus fraxineus*) is a funghal disease affecting European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees. It was first documented in the UK in 2012, and since then has spread across almost the entire country and had severe consequences for our native ash populations. The disease is now completely endemic across the Bathscape area, and so all ash trees should be considered as having, or having been exposed to, ash dieback disease. It is, however, still a developing story and much of the response has been based on not repeating previous mistakes around tree disease, such as with Dutch Elm Disease in the early 1980s, where any diseased specimen was felled, along with any other elms within a certain radius, and therefore no tree was given a chance to develop an immunity. Trees and diseases have been in communication for millions of years, long before we had chainsaws, and so patience should be practiced when managing your ash trees, rather than felling simply because the disease is present. It is a lot easier to fell a tree later than put back a mature specimen.

Ash Dieback can be identified by a number of common symptoms. These include, amongst others:

- Dieback of the canopy, resulting in diminished leaf cover
- Upright new shoots, growing either out of the main stem, or along any main trunks or branches (known as epicormic growth)
- The browning and desiccating of the tips of growths
- Diminished bud vitality
- Lesions developing in young wood

Ash dieback spores are produced by the funghal fruiting bodies growing in leaf litter on the forest floor, and so the disease spreads much more quickly within the woodland context. Young trees are much more susceptible, not unlikely to die within a single growing season. Older and more mature trees can withstand and live with the disease (though so far it seems most succumb eventually). Some trees are showing signs of resilience or even resistance to the disease. In these situations, these trees should be treated as highly valuable specimens, protected and preserved, with any competition stress removed and any regeneration protected and monitored.

3.2 Ash Dieback Management

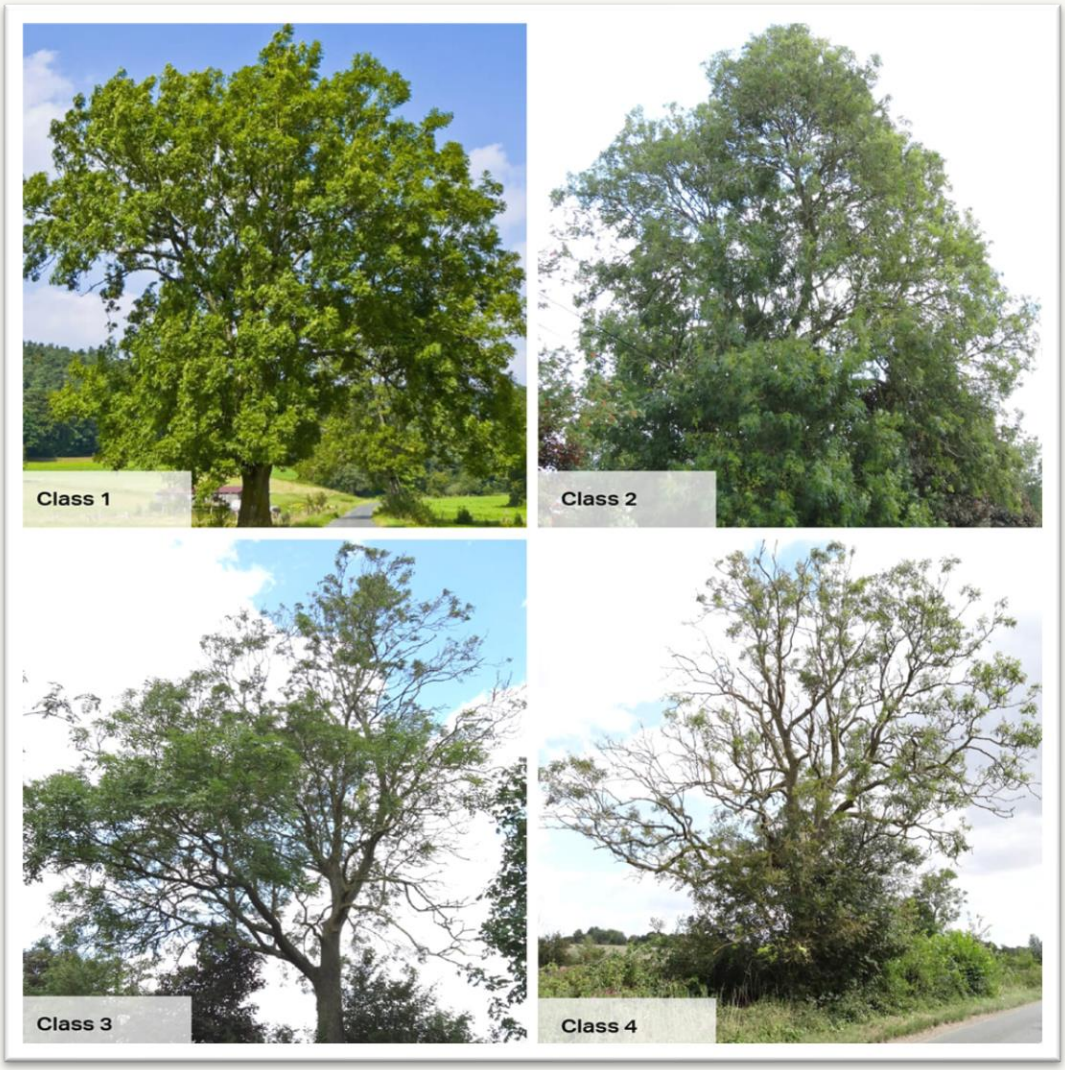
Managing ash trees in your woodland requires some sensitivity and context-specific decision making, specifically with regards to public access. It is worth noting, though, that our understanding of how ash trees respond to ash dieback is still developing – the disease having only been in the UK since 2012. Trees that initially showed severe impact have recovered, and other stands that seemed resilient for many years may all fail at once the following year. We can only give our ash trees the chance to develop resilience, or allow for naturally resilient trees the chance to put to seed, if we resist the temptation to fell every tree that doesn't look to be in perfect health.

3.2.1 In Woods without Public Access

For the most part the best thing you can do is not fell your ash trees; keep them standing and give them the opportunity to either develop a resilience or become the standing deadwood that diversifies your woodland structure. Ash trees, particularly the crowns of dead ash trees, play host to a wide variety of bryophyte species as well as lots of other wildlife, so felling them all because the trees themselves are 'dead' is an error. The general advice is not to fell the trees also for safety reasons: a tree in the middle of your wood is much less likely to hurt anyone or anything if it falls of its own accord than if you get a chainsaw operative to work on it. The disease desiccates the tree, starting with the crown but moving all the way down the trunk, making them unpredictable to fell and liable to 'barber's chair' when falling, splitting open and posing a huge risk to your chainsaw operatives. The safest thing to do in most situations, by a long margin, is leave them.

3.2.2 In Woods with Public Access

The above advice does not apply, however, where the trees pose a risk to the public or to others' property. For example, if you had some roadside ash trees, or a footpath running through your site, or if there is permissive access throughout your site generally, then it is necessary to consider a more active ash dieback management approach. In these instances, you should consider conducting a survey of your ash trees in the summer, assessing the extent of the reduction in leaf cover in the canopy. For ease, this can be considered in 4 stages of reduction.



Class 1 - 100%–76% remaining canopy

Class 2 - 75%–51% remaining canopy

Class 3 - 50%–26% remaining canopy

Class 4 -25%–0% remaining canopy

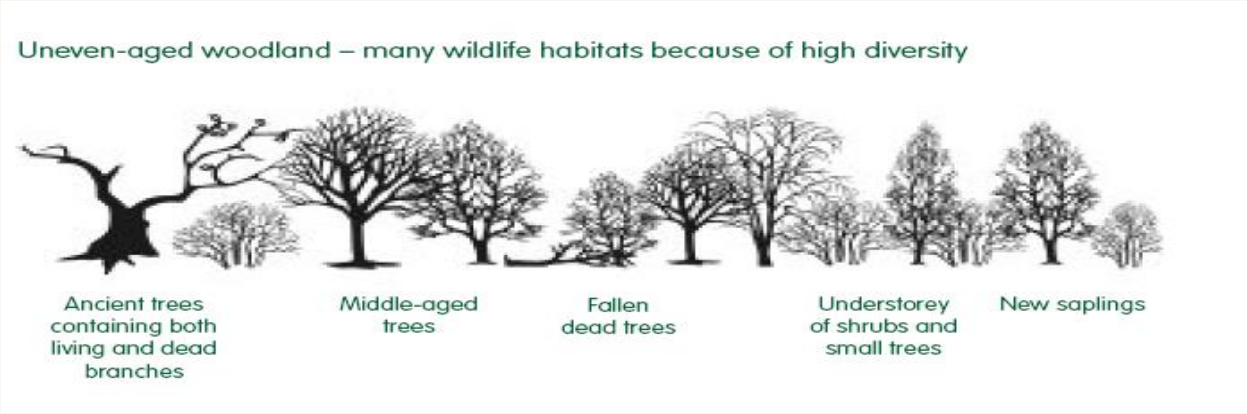
Where this process identifies class 4 trees or class 3 trees with particularly poor form in areas of high public use, such as highways or popular footpaths, felling should be considered. It is rarely possible to carry out crown reduction or other such tree surgery options on ash trees, as no operative will want to climb the brittle and dead branches. Ground felling is the only option, and so should only be done when public safety is evidently compromised (*N.B.* unless within one of the above exemptions, a felling licence will be required for this work). It is worth keeping an ongoing annual register of the relevant ash trees, so you can monitor their situation year on year and therefore make informed decisions based on their decline. Overall, even if your woodland has public access, do not simply fell all your ash trees just because they are showing signs of ash dieback. Only use felling as a last resort to ensure public safety when it is put at risk by certain trees.

4. Management Interventions

The following comprises a list of the main management interventions that were regular brought up throughout the Bathscape Woodland Advisory Service.

4.1. Structural Interventions

The following comprises a list of the main management interventions that were regular brought up throughout the Bathscape Woodland Advisory Service. Many of these are focused on improving structural diversity and, as a result, ecological diversity thereafter. Examples of interventions relating to improving structural diversity are ancient and veteran tree management, coppicing, ride management, scalloping and thinning. Other interventions here refer to maintaining public safety or reducing pest damage.



4.1.1 Ancient and Veteran Tree Management

A key part of the diversity of woodland is in the ancient and or veteran trees present on site. Ancient trees, as the name suggests, are typically very old and are in the final stage of their life cycle – decline. These trees, depending on species, tend to have very large, wide trunks,

gnarled branch networks, lots of cavities and signs of old age and a small, reduced canopy that appears to be growing back towards the tree – all signs commensurate with a life long-lived. 'Old' is of course a relative term, depending on the species of tree in question: a birch tree may be considered ancient at 150 years old, but an English oak wouldn't be considered ancient until it was roughly 400 years old. A yew tree, by comparison, may not be considered ancient until it was 7-800 years old.

Veteran trees on the other hand are not necessarily old, but they display the same characteristics, with branch tear outs, cavities, or any other structural diversity. This have come about not through age but rather through damage (either natural or unnatural), management or as a result of the tree's environment. All ancient trees are veterans, but not all veteran trees are ancient.

Management of your ancient or veteran trees should focus on slowing down the rate of decline, so that these trees can provide their vital habitat resource for as long as possible. It is worth noting that an ancient oak tree, for example, could well live out that state of decline for well over 200 years, and so this is by no means a short period in terms our own management timeframes. Management interventions should include:

Creating an ancient and veteran tree register

A register of all the ancient and veteran trees within your woodland should be produced. The first step in this process will be a period of identification of all the ancient, veteran or candidate veteran trees on site, and the recording of their locations, species, characteristics and conditions. This register should also include any suggested works required to best preserve the trees, as well as a column to record when and what operations have been carried out, to inform the timings of future works.

Haloing

One way to preserve and maximise the lifespan of your ancient and veteran trees is to 'halo' around them: remove the trees immediately around them, through their canopy or encroaching into their space, to reduce the competition pressure, creating a halo of cleared space around your particular ancient or veteran tree. It is important, however, that this work be carried out sensitively over time, removing only one large or maybe two small trees every year or two, rather than everything at once. This is important so as to not to overexpose or shock the veteran trees by changing their surroundings too quickly and increasing wind or sunlight exposure, which can kill off the tree you're trying to protect.

Ash Trees

Any apparently disease-resistance mature ash trees identified in this process will also be managed as veteran trees, with haloing and other interventions taking place to preserve them.

4.1.2 Veteranisation

If your woodland structure is particularly uniform and you do not have any ancient or veteran trees on site, you may consider undertaking a process of active veteranisation of certain trees. This will first entail the creation of a veteran tree register where a series of candidate veteran trees are selected and then their locations, characteristics and conditions recorded, as above. All these works should be carried out sensitively, with an eye on any wildlife potentially already present in the trees. You should only consider carrying out veteranisation on a couple of trees initially. These specimens will then be managed both for veteranisation and preservation, as described below.

Veteranisation

Veteranisation works on selected trees will include:

- The monolithing of some of those trees chosen for selective felling, reducing them down to just their main stems. This will provide some standing deadwood habitat.
- Branch tearouts using winches.
- Artificial hole and wound creation and coronet cutting.

Preservation

Preservation works will include:

- Selected trees will be haloed, to maximise their lifespan. This will involve removing the trees surrounding the selected trees to minimise competition. Any haloing and other works will be carried out sensitively so as to not to overexpose or shock the veteran trees and thus to risk their survival.
- Trees that have been selected for veteranisation will then be fenced off. This will be done for the twin reasons of protecting and preserving the trees and also for preventing any risk to the public (for example from standing deadwood or damaged branches). Signage will be placed on these fenced off areas outlining the nature of the veteranisation process where there is public access.

These veteranisation works, as with all the other felling works described, will be carried out by suitably qualified and experienced personnel. Further, all these works will be recorded in

the site's veteran tree register, including the operational dates to inform the timings of future works.

4.1.3 Coppicing

Coppicing is an excellent way to improve the structural and ecological diversity of your woodland, as well as providing opportunities for creating woodfuel and charcoal. Coppicing is a traditional woodland management technique, and many of our woodlands have old areas of coppice that have become overgrown by lack of intervention (overstood). Coppicing is simply cutting your trees right down to the ground, letting them regrow multi-stemmed and then after a period of some 7-15 years (depending on the species) repeating that cycle. This process adds structure to your woodland in the form of different ecological niches, and there are particular woodland flora and fauna species who benefit from the cyclical nature of these coppice coupe rotations.

Where there are areas dominated by good coppice species (typically hazel), a coppice coupe (discrete area) can be cut. Each hazel stool (a single hazel tree comprised on multiple stems) should be cut as flush to the ground as possible, and the size of your coupe depends mostly on your capacity to do the labour and on how much there is to cut. You may consider creating a rotation of 2 or 3 coupes that you cut on consecutive years, to add even more structural diversity. This cycle should take place every 7 to 10 years.

Where there are other trees that respond well to coppicing within the discrete hazel area (e.g. English oak), these can be coppiced to or left as standards within the coupe. You do not want to have too many standards, however, as this can shade out the coppice and the forest floor. Consideration should be taken not to over-expose retained standards within the coppice area.

Ash should not be coppiced, and should either be left standing or felled, according to safety considerations.

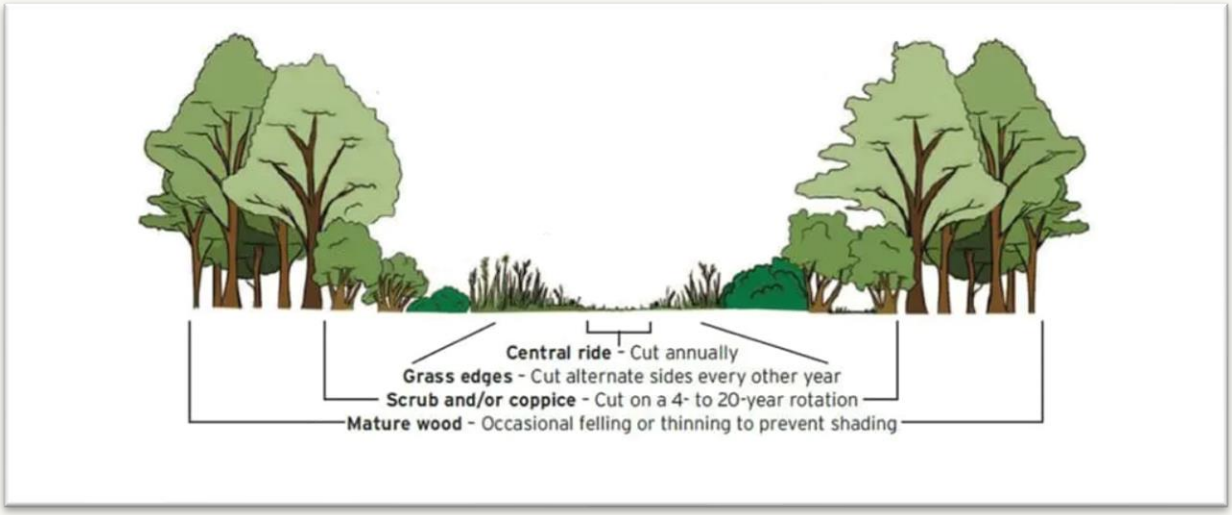
Brash from coppice can then be used to create dead-hedging around the coppice area, to help deter deer browsing and to act as habitat piles.

Any useful product created by the coppice cycle (fencing stakes, bean poles etc.) could be sold on to local markets or used on site to help build deer fencing.

4.1.4 Ride Management

Where you have rides throughout your woodland, these present excellent opportunities for adding extra structural diversity into your woodland. Your rides should be managed as open space and not allowed to grow into high canopy woodland. The best way to manage your rides is into a tiered structure.

Tiered Structures



As these diagrams show, ideal ride management will have:

- a central area which is cut annually, acting as your actual walkway or path.

- either side of the central ride, there should a grassy verge cut on alternate years (so each verge is allowed two years' worth of growth)
- after your grassy verges, you should let some shrub species grow, or areas of coppice
- finally, behind that you have your high canopy woodland.

This graded edge provides the widest variety of structure and habitat. You'll have far greater biodiversity present through your rides as you will in your high canopy woodland, so do not underestimate their importance!

Scallops

To manage these areas for further structural diversity, you can create scallops along your rides – small areas of removed trees to add texture to the edge (imagine a layby shape). This felling, as with all the above felling, should consider your felling licence requirements of exemptions. You can also cut scallops into your woodland edges, as further discussed below.

4.1.5 Woodland Edges

As with your ride management above, woodland edges provide excellent opportunity for adding further structural diversity into your woodland. Often, where we have plantation woodlands, there are high canopy trees right up to the boundary line which, frequently, is an open field. In this situation, there is essentially a right angle from that agricultural land directly upward to the top of the canopy, and no graded edge. These hinterlands between two habitat types, known as ecotones, are actually incredibly valuable habitat in and of themselves, but are all too often overlooked. Where possible, and within your felling licence agreement or exemptions, consider removing a few of your woodland edge trees and either replanting with scrub species or just allow the regeneration to occur. Lots of really excellent woodland-edge species have less space than they naturally would in the past, so consider planting spindle, whitebeam, wayfaring tree, guelder rose, or dogwoods to add structural and ecological diversity into your woodland edge

4.1.6 Thinning

Often what our woodlands most need is thinning out – particularly in the case of planted woodlands (which is the case for much of the Avon area). Many of the afforestation incentives in the past have included clauses about stocking densities, with a lot of woodlands planted at 2000-2500 stems/ha (2-2.5m spacing). This has advantages, especially from a forestry perspective, in that the trees grow straight stems, and the canopy closes up quickly. This, however, is only advantageous if it is then followed up with a regular thinning regime which, by and large, rarely happens as there is less economic incentive.

The result is dense woodlands with pole-grown trees, no herb or shrub layer, little ground flora or regeneration and, likely, very little birdsong or life. If your woodland is in this condition, you should consider carrying out a thinning operation. Aim to remove up to 30% of the canopy (with your felling/thinning licence), prioritising healthy or ecological interesting trees, and keeping a variety of spaces. You can then either keep your deadwood on site or use the timber (though if you're carrying out this work within your <5m^3 allowance, you can not sell the timber on).

Monitor over the coming years and see how the woodland responds to this thinning – you should see more life, ground flora and regeneration begin to come up. If you just get bramble regeneration, this is fine – bramble is a natural part of the ecosystem and is there to protect new tree growth from deer browsing (as well as providing food and shelter to a whole host of other wildlife).

4.2 Ecological Interventions

4.2.1 Habitat Surveys

One way of keeping track of the ecological condition of your woodland is to conduct habitat and ecology surveys. These do not need to be too rigorous or formal but can still provide an interesting way of looking at your woodland. The best way is to plot a route through your woodland that encompasses roughly 5 stops/ha, where you cover as many of the different types of space you have (for example, rides, high canopy woodland, shrub, woodland edge, coppice, areas of different tree species) and then writing down everything you see in those stops, from ground flora and invertebrates to trees, lichens, birds and other animals. Record all of this information (by plot and by type), as well as the date and weather conditions of your survey.

You can then repeat this process over time, using the same stops and the same route, to measure how your woodland is changing. This is particularly effective if you're hoping to carry out any works in your woodland with a view to improving structural or ecological diversity. If, say, your works are to include the creation of a scallop along a ride, make sure to include

that area as a stop on your route both before and after the works. Repeat annually or biannually.

4.2.2 Invasive Species Control

Much of Bath contains large Victorian and Georgian estates with a high volume of introduced invasive ornamental plants such as cherry laurel and rhododendron. Alongside these, the urban areas, too, will have a fairly regular supply of garden escapees. If left unmanaged, many of these invasive species can overtake our natural woodland, outcompeting the flora on site and creating homogenous, structurally and ecological uniform sites of little value.

To best manage your woodlands for invasive species control, you will need to regularly walk your sites and look out for invasives. It's best to learn the more typical invasive species by eye (cherry laurel, rhododendron, bamboo, snowberry) to make this process a passive one when you're walking your sites anyway. Where any invasive plants are found within the woodlands, they should be removed as soon as possible, and the arisings taken off site. Any areas where such work has taken place will then be reworked the following year to remove any regrowth, as many of the typical species will sucker for the following year (such as the cherry laurel).

Regular monitoring of the whole area for such plants will take place on a regular basis, to ensure that further colonisation does not occur.

You should also keep abreast of any new invasive species or diseases to be mindful of when conducting future surveys.

4.2.3 Squirrel Control

Another Victorian introduction, the grey squirrel has caused immense damage to our native habitats and species: so much so in fact that it is ranked in IUCN list of the 100 most invasive species, recognising its impact here in the British Isles on a global scale. Grey squirrels were first brought to the UK to decorate Victorian estates and there followed a series of releases throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1930, however, a growing understanding of the devastating impact these animals have on our ecosystems culminated in a ban of releases, recognising the grey squirrel as an invasive pest. Since then, the grey squirrel has spread across most of the UK, with only a few areas left, including Brownsea Island, parts of the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands, however its range continues to expand,

Grey squirrels have two key impacts on our ecosystems: eradication of our native red squirrel species and destruction of our young and regenerating woodland. The greys have effectively wiped-out red squirrels with great speed in two ways: they carry a disease that

the red squirrels have no natural immunity to and they can eat food sources sooner and before they're ripe, meaning that very little is then left for our native red squirrels.

They also destroy our woodlands by bark stripping trees, which kills them off. They do this in the late winter and early spring when the sap is rising and their food stocks are low. It is particularly frequent where their population is too high for that woodland to support. They typically strip younger trees (between 15-40 years), with a particular interest in oaks (where they strip the main leader from the top), birch (where they strip the leader and side branches), field maple and sycamore (where they will strip any part). The result is that most of the woodlands we are currently planting will, when they get to that age range, most of the trees will fail.

Squirrel Impact Assessments

The first step in protecting your woodland from grey squirrels is to carry out a Squirrel Impact Assessment. This involves drawing up a route through your woodland with a series of stops and then walking that route and assessing the level of squirrel impact visible at each spot and assigning it a numerical value. At the end of the route, that combined numerical value will give you an indication as to the extent of your grey squirrel damage. Full guidance on this process, including route design, images of what to look for and the template recording spreadsheet are all available at:

Management requirements for woodland supplement 3 (squirrel control): operations note 60 - GOV.UK

Control Methods

If your squirrel impact assessment shows a high level of damage, you may consider carrying out control measures in order to protect your trees and the other wildlife in your woodlands. There are a variety of methods, including traps and shooting. If you opt for humane culling with shooting, you must use a BACS-registered suitably qualified and experienced person and to UKFS-standards. Shooting typically involves setting up feeding stations with a good line-of-sight from a shooting point and regularly restocking them to get the squirrels accustomed to them. Then your stalker can attend and carry out a cull.

The other method for humane culling is with traps, and there's a wide variety available. Live traps will require you to attend every day, to avoid the animals suffering or dying of starvation, and will require you to dispatch them yourself. Kill traps can be more effective, however there are cons with these as well. For example, traps that attach to the trunk of the tree and tempt the squirrel in upwards (such as the GoodNature traps) can risk bycatch of other species that move in that same way such as treecreepers or nuthatches.

Following a humane cull, carry out a further squirrel impact assessment to check for any changes in impact.

4.2.4 Deer Control

As well as squirrels, deer can present a significant risk to our woodland habitats through browsing pressure on young trees and regeneration. Left unchecked, deer populations can completely remove a woodland's capacity to regenerate and can therefore cause it to fail. Deer populations are the highest they've ever been in the UK and will only continue to rise exponentially. Current estimations are that we'd need to be culling 700,000 deer every year just to keep the numbers the same. Of the 6 deer species present in the UK, only 2 are native: the rare red deer (isolated to highland areas, typically Scotland) and roe deer. In the Bath region, the deer species present are native roe deer and non-native invasive muntjac.

To control your deer, it is heavily recommended that you carry out a humane cull, using a BACS-registered suitably qualified and experienced person and to UKFS-standards. If you are struggling to find a stalker to carry out these works, get in touch with the Forest of Avon who can send you over a contractor list.

4.7 Restocking and Enrichment Planting

If your woodland is made up a single species stand, or a low diversity mix of trees, you may consider enrichment planting. This is where, as part of your restocking of your woodland, you add new species in that are currently not present throughout your woodland but that you may otherwise typically expect to see in a natural woodland in the area. Species to consider may include hornbeam, whitebeam or field maple for trees or spindle, guelder rose, alder buckthorn, purging buckthorn, wayfaring tree, or wild service tree for shrubs.

When restocking, consider using local provenance trees and sourcing from local nurseries. You may also consider protecting your newly planted trees with 1.2m tree tubes to deter deer browsing.

You may also consider adding non-native trees into your enrichment planting to take into account future climates. Our climate is likely to be similar to that of the south of France in fifty years' time (when the trees you're now planting will reach maturity) and so trees that do well in those conditions should not be overlooked. Species such as holm oak, Macedonian pine, Corsican pine or Italian alder are all considered part of the 'trees for the future' list by the Forestry Commission, available here.

4.3 Public Safety Interventions

Our country is blessed with a network of footpaths – something largely absent from other countries and often taken for granted. Where you have public access in your woodland, either through a public right of way or permissive access, you are beholden to make that area safe. For the most part, our footpaths are considered low-risk targets as they are seldom used,

and so there is little work required to make them safe, short of making sure there are no obviously dangerous trees or hangers (snapped off but caught branches) near the route.

If, however, you have a particularly popular public right of way through or next to your woods, or if your woodland borders a highway, then a more proactive approach is required. In these cases, you should get a survey of the trees within falling distance of the target and act in accordance with its recommendations. No tree is inherently safe, but the risks are usually considered low enough to leave them, however if your survey raises concerns about a particular tree and you do not act, and then that tree causes damage to person or property, you will be held entirely responsible for not preventing that foreseeable risk.

Other public safety interventions can include putting up signage deterring people from littering or discarding potential fire ignition risks or making good any access points such as stiles or gates.

5. Contacts

If you have any further questions about managing your woodlands in the Bath area, below is a list of relevant contacts.

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