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WOODLAND
TRUST

Coed Merchlyn

Management Plan 2018-2023

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THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations. Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland. Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
- 10 Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site - their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Coed Merchlyn
Location:	Rowen, Conwy
Grid reference:	SH764734, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 115
Area:	2.71 hectares (6.70 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, National Park, Site of Special Scientific Interest

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Coed Merchlyn is an area of ancient semi-natural woodland, close to the Afon Gyffin in the lower valley of the River Conwy. Due to its small size, poor access and wet nature, public access is not encouraged. This undisturbed wood is nonetheless great for wildlife, which makes the most of the peace and quiet and finds its home in the many old and dead trees.

2.2 Extended Description

Coed Merchlyn comprises 2.7ha of ancient semi-natural woodland situated on gently sloping, heavy, damp (seasonally wet), base-rich, alluvial soils close to the Afon Gyffin in the lower valley of the River Conwy. The woodland is overwhelmingly dominated by ash (maidens and stored coppice) with frequent pedunculate oak, locally frequent alder, wych elm and crack willow and occasional beech, silver birch, and sycamore (which was formerly common but most was removed by the Trust in the late 1990s). Canopy gaps were created by the Trust in the late 1990s to add to the structural and age diversity of the woodland.

There is a well developed shrub layer and the field layer is species-rich overall though dominated by ivy, dog's mercury, enchanter's nightshade, field-rose and bramble. Broadleaved helleborine is locally frequent to the east and early purple orchid occurs scattered throughout. Damper areas and depressions support species typical of wet woodland communities. There is a small heavily shaded temporary pool at the north of the site. The site is designated as a SSSI for its woodland communities.

Deadwood is common including sizeable standing and fallen trees (due in part to the effects of Dutch Elm Disease on the elms which were formerly a major component of the woodland). A small temporary plot (fenced to exclude grazing animals) was established near the site entrance in 2003 by Oxford Forestry Institute as part of the Fraxigen Project to study ash phenotypes and regeneration.

Due to its small size, wet nature and value as an undisturbed area of mature ancient woodland with abundant deadwood, public access is not encouraged at this site and is therefore not considered a key feature. A public footpath passes adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site but there is no provision for access within the site.

The site is of landscape value as an area of native broadleaved woodland in the primarily agricultural valley floor.

The key feature is Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

There is no public access at Coed Merchlyn, although the site can be seen from nearby roads and public footpaths.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The aspiration is that predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure of the woodland will be maintained. The current dominant habitat type can be described as upland mixed ashwood, dominated by ash and other site-native species with well-developed, species-rich shrub, field and ground layers typical of this type of woodland and with small patches of wet woodland occupying damper depressions where species such as alder and crack willow dominate. Whilst the proportion of ash in the canopy appears likely to decline with the arrival of ash dieback, other native or naturalised species are likely to respond and regenerate in canopy gaps, maintaining the broad vision for the wood.

It is anticipated that little management will be required to fulfil this objective and maintain the dominance of site-native species (ash, wych elm, pedunculate oak, silver birch, alder, crack willow). Gaps are likely to be created naturally by falling trees. Natural regeneration will be sufficient to ensure the continuation of woodland at the site.

The volume of deadwood will continue to increase through continued retention of standing and fallen deadwood, possible throughout this site due to the lack of provision for public access. Individual mature trees will be retained to senescence.

Invasive species will continue to be absent and browsing pressure will not impact on natural regeneration or ground flora diversity.

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

5.1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The canopy is overwhelmingly dominated by ash (maidens and stored coppice) with frequent pedunculate oak and wych elm, locally frequent alder and crack willow, and occasional beech and silver birch. Sycamore was formerly common but most was removed by the Trust in the late 1990s and this species now occurs only as very occasional canopy trees and scattered regeneration. There is a well developed shrub layer with hazel, holly and wych elm the most frequent species present. The field layer comprises abundant ivy, dog's mercury, enchanter's nightshade, field-rose and bramble, each of which is locally dominant. Male-fern is frequent and there are a large number of occasional to locally frequent species including woodruff, common nettle, cleavers, wood avens, red campion, wood speedwell, sanicle, herb Robert, honeysuckle, broad buckler-fern, wood false brome, broadleaved helleborine and early purple orchid. (W8e NVC sub-community). Damper areas and depressions support species such as meadowsweet, remote sedge, hemlock water-dropwort, bugle, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage and creeping buttercup (W6 & W7 NVC communities). Deadwood is common including sizeable standing and fallen trees.

Significance

The woodland is ancient, semi-natural and native comprising mainly upland mixed ashwood (W8e) with tiny patches of wet woodland (W6 & W7) which are both priority habitat types in the UK BAP (subject to a UK HAP). The site is designated as a SSSI for its habitat type. The quantity of deadwood is notable. The site is likely to be of value to invertebrates and birds. The site is also one of a network of long term third party study sites looking at ash phenotypes as part of the Fraxigen project.

Opportunities & Constraints

Management access is very limited, however, this is not of major concern at a minimal intervention site. The lack of public access is an opportunity in terms of the retention of standing deadwood and veteran trees.

Factors Causing Change

Ash dieback, along with stochastic weather events, may accelerate the rate of gap creation and bring about shifts in species composition in the canopy and regen, although a range of native species are present among regeneration and there is a good shrub layer which may buffer these exposure effects. In the long term, changing tree species, possibly including the expansion of sycamore from adjacent stands, may impact on the detail of ground flora composition (favouring more common species such as cleavers, wood avens and herb-Robert) and gaps may be prone to dense bramble/ field rose/ nettle growth.

Neighbouring SSSI woodland appears to be subject to some sheep trespass. If this were to extend into Coed Merchlyn, it could be detrimental to ground flora and regeneration, notably the population of broadleaved helleborine. Fence integrity is therefore a factor.

Invasive species such as laurel may spread from nearby woods.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The site will support mature semi-natural woodland dominated by site-native species such as ash, elm, oak, and birch, as well as naturalised sycamore. Wet woodland and upland ash woodland types will be represented, although the exact composition of the canopy is likely to change over time, particularly in the context of ash dieback. The wood will support well developed and species-rich shrub, field and ground layers typical of these woodland types. Natural regeneration will be evident throughout, with a varied age structure maintained through natural gap creation. The quantity of standing and fallen deadwood will remain high and increase naturally over time.

Grazing/ browsing damage will be minimal and will not significantly affect populations of broadleaved helleborine or impede natural regeneration filling canopy gaps. Invasive species will be absent.

The woodland will typically be subject to very low levels of human disturbance, with management interventions being kept to a minimum.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

The woodland is currently in near-favourable or favourable condition, particularly in terms of its structure, species-composition and levels of natural regeneration. Naturally occurring occasional gap creation and regeneration should continue to ensure future structural/age diversity during the coming plan period. Standing and fallen deadwood will be retained throughout (subject to any safety considerations).

Invasive species will be monitored and controlled if necessary. Grazing impact will remain at very low levels.

The management regime will be one of minimal intervention, however, woodland condition will be monitored at least every 5 years.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	2.70	Ash	1940	High forest	Archaeological features, Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, National Park, Site of Special Scientific Interest

The entire site can be considered a single compartment comprising ancient semi-natural woodland (see key feature description). The woodland is fenced, though the boundary with the adjacent woodland to the south-west, Coed Gwern Borter, is not stockproof. The original external boundaries are sinuous and comprise old stone banks, probably of considerable antiquity.

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.