



Windmill Hill Wood

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Windmill Hill Wood
Location:	Ballynahinch
Grid reference:	J372523, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 21
Area:	2.86 hectares (7.07 acres)
Designations:	Woods on your Doorstep

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

This beautiful little broadleaf woodland sits atop a small hill just outside of town, its surfaced paths providing stunning views of the surrounding countryside. Now, it's hard to imagine that this tranquil spot, with its abundance of birdlife, was once the site of a major battle during the Irish Rebellion.

2.2 Extended Description

Windmill Hill Wood is a woodland creation site situated on the SE half of a drumlin close to the centre of Ballynahinch town in N Ireland. The remainder of the drumlin, known as Windmill Hill, is owned by Down District Council (DDC). DCC gifted the land to the WT on a 99-year lease in 1999 as one of the 51 Woods On Your Doorstep (WoyD) sites in Northern Ireland. The development and first 5 years maintenance of the 51 sites was 50% funded by the Millennium Commission. The Woodland Trust (WT) sought funding from Biffa Award in 2012, to work in partnership with DDC to develop the entire site to create a seamless walk. The stump of the old windmill remains at the top of the hill on the Council's land. Housing surrounds the hill.

Up until its acquisition by the Council in 2000, the field had been farmed, but had become very overgrown by gorse. Following consultation with the local community, facilitated by Ballynahinch, Drumanness and Spa Regeneration Committee, the 2.76 ha site was planted by contractors and the local community in Spring 2001 with a mixture of native broadleaved trees dominated by oak. Down District Councils side of the Drumlin was planted with a similar mix in 2012 again with the support of the local community and schools.

Public access is integral to this WoyD site. A circular path network was drawn up in consultation with the local community and links with the Council paths. Access is gained from Windmill Avenue, Windmill Lane, Hilltop and an additional entrance on Windmill Avenue. Forest Service has provided the Community Woodland Supplement grant to support the creation of this access.

Each WoyD site had a feature created to mark and celebrate the millennium. In Windmill Hill Wood this is an open area at the top of the hill in which is sited a series of mock fortified features, created from former railway sleepers. This reflects the history of Windmill Hill which was one of the last major battle sites in the 1798 rebellion between the Crown Forces and the United Irishmen. Children from the local primary schools helped to create these features. Unfortunately they are prone to vandalism, mainly burning.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Public transport: Visit translink.co.uk, Northern Ireland's integrated bus and rail public transport company. The site includes a journey planner, timetables and information on tours.

By car: From Belfast, take the A24 towards Newcastle. At Ballynahinch town centre, follow signs for Newcastle and turn left at Lidl onto Windmill Lane. After around 50m, turn right onto Loughside Drive, and after 100m, turn left onto Windmill Drive. The first entrance to the wood is 50m along this road on the left, and the second entrance is around 450m further along.

On foot: The wood is a five-minute walk from the town. Follow the directions above from the town centre.

3.2 Access / Walks

Public access is through gates on Windmill Avenue and Windmill Lane. There is ladder board signage at the main entrance and a gravel path network runs through the site. A play area at the top of the hill contains a rope bridge, monkey rings, balance beams and stilts.

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

In the long term, whilst maintaining the site for public access, we will establish 2.76 hectares of self-sustaining high forest of mixed deciduous woodland to develop. It is unlikely that it will ever produce quality timber as it is small and vandalism levels will continue to be high due to its urban nature. In the short term this may require thinning and restructuring to encourage structural diversity as all the trees have been planted at one time.

The open area and paths will continue to be maintained regularly - however the frequency of maintenance will be reviewed once trees are well established and reached canopy closure. Access features will be maintained to a high standard. Entrance signage will continue to make new visitors aware of the wood.

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 Informal Public Access

Description

The Woodland Trust provides public access through gates on Windmill Avenue and Windmill Lane. Within the site there is a network of hard core paths, allowing access to the majority of the site. Ladder board signage is at the main entrance. There is a wooden and rope play area at the top of the hill, this includes a rope bridge, monkey rings, balance beams and stilts.

Significance

The access facilities provide the opportunity to “increase people’s awareness and enjoyment of woodland”, one of the Woodland Trusts key objectives. The area provides a woodland experience for local people. As this was created as a Woods On Your Doorstep site, it will be important to retain informal public access facilities within the site including paths and signage.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

Management of quality access features is slow degradation of features by the weather and vandalism including burning, theft and graffiti.

Opportunities:

As an urban fringe wood, this site provides an opportunity for many local people to enjoy woodland. There is an opportunity to develop further access facilities over time as finances or local eagerness allows. This could include path upgrades.

Factors Causing Change

Visitor use of path, Weather, Vandalism

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain informal public access through the site by maintaining grass paths, seats and features, linking with the facilities on the wider hill.

To encourage local involvement in the ongoing management, monitoring and enjoyment of the developing woodland.

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

Regular cutting and maintenance of all paths should maintain public access until the trees close canopy. After this the requirement for path maintenance should be reviewed as public use of the paths may keep them open. However open areas will continue to be maintained. Access features should be maintained to a high standard. Signage will be maintained and graffiti removed.

5.2 New Native Woodland

Description

2.76 hectares of new woodland were planted in 2000

Significance

The aim of the Woods On Your Doorstep project was to create community woodland. This also fulfils one of the Woodland Trust's key aims to "increase new native woodland". In addition, woodland creation will add a variety of habitats to the site and improve its biodiversity value.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

Vandalism

Fires

Opportunities:

The development of native secondary woodland.

The development of a valuable habitat for local biodiversity.

Factors Causing Change

Vandalism, Natural succession and tree growth

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To encourage the development 2.76 hectares of self-sustaining native woodland and a good habitat for local wildlife.

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

Establishment of the planted areas is of primary importance. The need for thinning and/or restructuring will be considered upon canopy closure with the aim of encouraging age and structure diversity.

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	2.76	Mixed native broadleaves	2001	High forest	People issues (+tve & -tve)	Informal Public Access, New Native Woodland	Woods on your Doorstep

The whole site is presently treated as one compartment. It is bounded to the NW by the remainder of Windmill Hill; to the NE by Housing Executive housing in Hillfoot; to the S by housing and an open space; and to the SW by open ground behind Housing Executive housing on Windmill Avenue. The top of the hill/drumlin is relatively flat while the sides slope relatively steeply. An old field wall and ditch runs along the top of the hill from SE to NW.

Up until its acquisition by the Council in 2000, the field had been farmed, but had become very overgrown by gorse. Hawthorn bushes throughout the site were retained while the gorse was cleared and the site was planted in 2001 with 60-80 stock of native species. It was given a WGS New Planting grant in 2001 with the final payment made in 2006.

Improvements were made to the entire site (Woodland Trust and Down District Council) in early 2012 through funding from Biffa Award. This allowed us to upgrade the path network, improve the entrances and signage, install informal play area, replicate the woodland creation, paths and access features on the council side of the hill.

A gravel path network runs through the entire hill.

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.