

Abriachan Wood

(Plan period – 2022 to 2027)



WOODLAND
TRUST

Management Plan Content Page

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

The Public Management Plan

Location and Access

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

The Woodland Trust owns and cares for well over 1,250 sites covering almost 30,000 hectares (ha) across the UK. This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created over 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Our Vision is:

“A UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife.”

To realise all the environmental, social and economic benefits woods and trees bring to society, we:

- **Create Woodland** – championing the need to hugely increase the UK’s native woodland and trees.
- **Protect Woodland** – fighting to defend native woodland, especially irreplaceable ancient woodland and veteran trees; there should be no loss of ancient woodland
- **Restore Woodland** – ensuring the sensitive restoration of all damaged ancient woodland and the re-creation of native wooded landscapes.

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

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.

The following principles provide an overarching framework to guide the management of all our sites but we recognise that all woods are different and that their management also needs to reflect their local landscape, history and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene in our woods when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity, safety and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, 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. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.
4. The long term vision for all our 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 natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities 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 encourage our woods to be used for 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. We maintain a network of sites for long-term monitoring and trials leading to reductions in plastics and pesticides.
10. Any activities we undertake are in line with our wider Conservation Principles, conform to sustainable forest management practices, are appropriate for the site and balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

The Public Management Plan

This public management plan describes the site and sets out the long term aims for our management and lists the Key Features which drive our management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with our long, 50 years and beyond, and our short, the next 5 years, term objectives for the management and enhancement of these features. The short term objectives are complemented by an outline Work Programme for the period of this management plan aimed at delivering our management aims.

Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and we continually monitor our sites to assess the success of our management, therefore this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme.

Please either consult The Woodland Trust website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

or contact the Woodland Trust

operations@woodlandtrust.org.uk

to confirm details of the current management programme.

A short glossary of technical terms can be found at the end of the plan.

Location and Access

Location maps and directions for how to find and access our woods, including this site, can be found by using the following link to the Woodland Trust web-site which contains information on accessible woodlands across the UK

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods/>

In Scotland access to our sites is in accordance with the Land Reform Act (of Scotland) 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In England, Wales and NI, with the exception of designated Public Rights of Ways, all routes across our sites are permissive in nature and where we have specific access provision for horse riders and/or cyclists this will be noted in the management plan.

The Management Plan

1. Site Details
2. Site Description
3. Long Term Policy
4. Key Features
 - 4.1 F1 Mixed Habitat Mosaic
 - 4.2 F2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
 - 4.3 F3 Connecting People with woods & trees
5. Work Programme

Appendix 1 : Compartment Descriptions

GLOSSARY

1. SITE DETAILS

Abriachan Wood

Location:	Loch Ness Grid reference: NH575357 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 26
Area:	163.22 hectares (403.33 acres)
External Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Ancient Woodland Site
Internal Designations:	Welcoming Sites Programme

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Location and history

Abriachan Wood occupies a three mile stretch of the north-western shore of Loch Ness, between eight and eleven miles south of Inverness. It occupies a prominent position in the landscape and borders the main A82 Fort William to Inverness trunk road, a popular tourist route. The woodland is divided into two separate sections on either side of the 'B' road between the community of Abriachan and the shore of Loch Ness. The southern section is contiguous with the community-owned Abriachan Forest Trust site, which lies to the west.

Abriachan Wood is part of an extensive area of ancient native woodland remnants on the shores of Loch Ness (including other Woodland Trust properties at Urquhart Bay Wood and Balmacaan Wood). It is likely that it has been exploited and managed by local people to a varying degree for many centuries with periods of felling of oak, coppicing of hazel, grazing and muirburn. The presence of several ancient woodland lichen species (which require continuity of habitat and colonise very slowly) on hazels suggest that harvesting was by selection of individual stems, rather than cutting the whole stool. A path running from the southeast corner of the woods (Clansman Hotel) through the woods and towards the community of Abriachan is known to have been the 'coffin trail' between the settlement and the local burial ground. Around half of the site is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

In 1976, under Forestry Commission ownership, small-scale exotic conifer stands were established throughout the southern section of the site. In 1989 the wood was placed on the Forestry Commission disposal list. With the help of grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Woodland Trust was able to acquire the site in 1995. Since acquiring the site, the Woodland Trust has, with funding from the Forestry Commission, the Millennium Forest Trust, and through support from Players of the Peoples Postcode Lottery, worked to restore the woodland to a wholly native composition, and to develop access opportunities for locals and visitors.

Geology and Soils

The site lies along the Great Glen Fault; the underlying rock is principally comprised of granite with some Moine schist (quartz-feldspar-granite). It is on moderately to very steep southeast facing slopes rising from 25-400m, with large rocky outcrops and cliffs and large areas of exposed scree slopes with boulder fields below. The slopes in the northern section are higher, steeper and rockier and are bisected by deep vertical-sided gullies. Both sections contain small permanent streams that drain from the moorland above. The catchments on the southern flank of the northern section provide the water supply for the houses below.

There is a fairly complex mosaic of mainly acid soil types with some neutral and base-rich pockets. These include brown forest soils, humus iron podzols and rankers with some gley soils on the occasional areas of impeded drainage.

Plant Communities

The considerable variation in soil and drainage across the site is apparent in the fragmented mosaic of vegetation communities across the site. There are at least eight distinct National Vegetation Classification (NVC) types present [Morris 1997] and three Habitat Action Plans (Upland Ash, Upland Oakwood and Birchwood) apply to the wood. Due to ash die back being within the wood since at least 2019, the loss of the majority of this species is expected.

In the southern block the middle slopes are predominately remnant birch wood surviving from, what were, formerly oak/birch woodlands. Most of the oak has been removed from the wood by felling. In the richer soils on the lower slopes, ash becomes more common and there is an extensive area of hazel wood, totaling 18ha. There are large groups of alder on the wettest areas at the base of the slope and along the lower stream banks. Aspen, wych elm, bird cherry, rowan, goat willow, holly, hawthorn and juniper are also present. Small scale conifer blocks dating from c. 1970 and totaling c. 20 ha were felled to recycle in 2001 to allow restoration to native woodland. In 2003-2004 enrichment planting with oak, ash and aspen in open glades was carried out over some 5ha, although only very few of these trees have established due to high deer browsing levels. Regeneration of birch and hazel is occurring in some particularly steep parts of the lower areas of the southern block (compartment 2a), or areas typically where human disturbance is higher. Deer browsing and erosion of soils remains high to very high through much of this block, despite a period of increased deer management.

In the northern block (compartments 1a and 1b), the woodland is predominately upland birch, and is mature and quite dense in the southwest corner where there is also a small oakwood. Tree cover becomes more open and fragmented towards the north. As the woodland reaches its current upper limit, it gradually grades into gorse scrub, which is very dense in places, and then into wet and dry heathland over the open tops. Here the birch and some small areas of Scots pine are regenerating. There is less diversity of tree species here than in the southern block. In the past, natural regeneration has been inhibited by sheep grazing, muirburn, browsing by deer, and the spread of bracken. Bracken is hugely dominant across large parts of the lower slopes of this block (1b), and a significant area is a monoculture of bracken with open birch woodland. The challenging access into this block makes it very difficult to effectively manage the deer population moving between here and the south block, displaced through recent fencing on the northern edge of the southern block into the woodland area.

Deadwood is found in patches, and is generally poorly represented. Due to the naturalness of the site, and lack of information on saproxylic invertebrates, the creation of additional deadwood beyond tree safety work is not necessary at this time.

Lichens

A survey of lichens in 2001 found a rich community, with 251 lichen taxa recorded. Site assessment (based on the epiphytic lichen interest) is set at Grade 4 - Regional Importance. This grading is awarded particularly for the species-rich lichen flora on hazel, including the presence of viable populations of several species of the Lobarion community that are nearing the eastern limit of their range in Scotland (e.g. *Degelia atlantica*, *Lobaria amplissima* and *Parmeliella testacea*). It is also important for the presence of two Red Data Book species *Lecidea erythrophaea* (on hazel) and *Schismatomma graphidioides* (a UK BAP species, on oak) [Coppins 2001].

Wildlife

Pine marten, red squirrel, wildcat, red and roe deer and badger have been recorded on the site or in the local area, with one badger sett now spanning one of the public paths. A wide range of woodland birds is present including redstart, spotted flycatcher and willow warbler, along with black grouse on the higher moorland areas.

Three Species Action Plans (Red Squirrel, Black Grouse and Juniper) apply to the wood.

Services and Access

There are two wayleaves for power lines; one along the top boundary of the southern section and another above Abriachan Gardens and Nursery.

Management access is limited due to the steep slopes although a well surfaced track allows access on the western boundary of the southern compartment. A broad track runs diagonally through the southern compartment along the route of the 'old coffin trail' that can be used by ATV. The route below Balchraggan into the wood is in the process of being transferred to Woodland Trust, which has enabled improvements to drainage here.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

The long term vision for Abriachan Wood is for a biologically rich semi-natural woodland habitat, which forms part of a functional woodland habitat network on the north western shore of Loch Ness.

The processes of natural succession will remain dynamic within the woodland resulting in evolving age structures and densities of cover. The rich flora and fauna associated with the ancient woodland component of the site will remain secure and woodland specialist flora will be at least frequent throughout the woodland area.

Open ground is an important component of this woodland. A Species Action Plan for black grouse applies to the wood, which relies on woodland edge habitat. Anecdotally, glades within the site are good for pearl bordered fritillary. Gradual colonisation of Scots pine and birch on the upper slopes of the northern block (1a) will expand the area of woodland cover within our ground and hopefully increase woodland edge size as a consequence. Important glades within the woodland will be identified and could be retained, with bracken management occurring where required.

Threats to the sites ancient and semi-natural woodland features will be monitored, in particular the impact of deer browsing on the establishment of natural regeneration and planted trees and ground flora, and bracken cover on tree seedling recruitment throughout the site. Where a significant threat is identified, appropriate control and/or protection measures will be maintained or introduced.

The site will provide an extensive area of quiet informal recreation to a wide range of users both from the local community and from further afield. There will be a network of paths providing a range of linear and loop routes suitable for visitors, and linking to the surrounding path network. Interpretation will be maintained and renewed as required to highlight the conservation value and historic interest of the site.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 F1 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

Description

With elevations from 25-400m and a complex pattern of soil types and drainage patterns, the overlying vegetation has developed into a pattern of mosaics, with various NVC woodland and heath communities interspersed throughout.

There is no clear and absolute distinction between the woodland types. However, the following are represented across the site:

W9 Upland Mixed Broadleaf.

Mainly over the lower slopes of compartment 2, with hazel being the dominant species, probably due to past management. The ground-flora is quite lush, and in areas of flushing, or alongside burns, becomes rich and diverse.

W11 Upland Oak-Birch with Bluebell

This type of woodland comprises the majority of the lower slopes in compartment 1 and is a significant component of compartment 2. Due to past management practices, oak is only a minor component and silver birch is the dominant species. The ground-flora is grassy, and herb-rich and bracken is present, becoming dominant in open patches.

W17 Upland oak-birch with blaeberry

This woodland is the more prevalent type on the upper ground and in drier areas. The dominant ground layer in this community is heathy type. As with the previous woodland, the oak component has been removed in the past, and birch dominates.

Open ground occupies c. 40% of the total site, (approx 64% in compartment 1 and 17% in compartment 2) although the majority of this area is in sub compartment 1a on the heathy slopes. Elsewhere, there are pocket of heathy ground and some extensive areas of bracken.

The heathland varies considerably with the underlying changes in bedrock, soil and topography. Well-drained areas are occupied by dry heath, which grades into wet heath where hollows occur, or where drainage is impeded or concentrated. Flushed areas that follow the burns down through the dry heath support a richer, more diverse form of the wet heath. Birch, and to a lesser extent Scots pine, are regenerating into the heathland communities, and it is likely that scattered tree cover will establish at the higher elevations over time.

Bracken is frequent as an understory in the oak-birch woodland on the site, becoming abundant in open areas. On the upper slopes large areas of bracken have a relatively grass or heath rich under layer, but at lower elevations, out-with the tree canopy, bracken tends to become overwhelmingly dominant.

There are areas of dominant gorse towards the southern end of sub compartment 1a. Both bracken and gorse have

been controlled previously with some limited success in order to encourage native tree regeneration. Beyond gorse, the shrub layer is poorly represented in much of the woodland, including holly, wild cherry, hawthorn, and juniper.

The reduction of deer browsing is essential to improving the quality of the habitat and ensuring the diversity of the site is retained and allowed to recover. From 2017 to 2022, the average cull was 44 per year and this has resulted in some locations in the wood moving from 'high/very high' to 'medium' using the Herbivore Impact Assessment methodology. Significant impacts remain through the site that is not permitting the recovery of bare ground, ground flora, or regeneration.

Four 10m x 10m deer fenced enclosures were built in 2018 and planted with oak, aspen, holly hazel. These were to create diverse woodland cores of under represented tree species that would also protect more common tree regeneration, such as birch and rowan.

Fire is a very real concern here, with high fuel load, steep ground, and south aspect. In the south compartment, paths and the Corriefoyness track allow access for personnel and ATV's to take in fire fighting equipment. In the North block, access for managing a fire ground or monitoring a fire ground after helicopter deployment is currently impossible.

Significance

The site supports an unbroken succession of habitats from lochside to high moorland.

Site habitats included in the Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) are Upland Ash, Upland Oakwood and Birchwood, although it is likely that much of the ash could be lost in the life of this plan.

Species included in Species Action Plans (SAP) and Species Action Frameworks (SAF) are Schismatomma graphidioides (a lichen) Red Squirrel, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Black Grouse and Juniper.

Opportunities & Constraints

The site offers the opportunity to maintain and enhance a continuum of habitat types from elevation 25m to 400m.

Through working collaboratively with neighbours on deer management when possible, to reduce the population within the North block through improving access and through working with Forest and Land Scotland and Abriachan Forest Trust on the population to the south, there is the opportunity to allow regeneration to establish.

Bracken presents a significant constraint to regeneration through open canopy and open ground in every compartment, even if deer browsing levels were reduced.

Gorse is locally dominant, particularly at the south end of sub compartment 1b. It doesn't appear to be spreading, from monitoring in the last five years, and may permit niches for regeneration. While a constraint for regeneration, it provides an additional habitat within the woodland.

Topography presents the largest constraint of all in this site, making access for machinery very difficult for some locations in the top third and impossible to much of it. Any operations have to carefully consider the practicalities of the access and the limitations this presents here. Creating a new access route for ATV's from the B road up into the North block through sub compartment 1b would create an opportunity to enable access more readily, which would benefit deer management and fire response.

On the cliff edges along the edge of the A82, removal of regeneration and diseased ash has reduced risk but is an ongoing task, as a location where browsing is not impeding regeneration due to the steepness and disturbance from the road. With time, there is the opportunity to reduce the risk here by gradually reducing the volume of mature ash and birch within a tree length and allowing a more secure hazel, cherry, hawthorn edge to develop, this is partly committed to through felling permission for work carried out in the winter of 21/22.

Factors Causing Change

Grazing, browsing, and ground damage by deer.
Encroachment of coarse vegetation.
Ash die back.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

There will be a diversity of semi-natural woodland and non-woodland habitats across the site.

The proportion of woodland cover to open ground in will be gradually increasing, however it is anticipated that at least 50% open ground habitat will persist within the mosaic of compartment 1, and at least 15% in compartment 2 .

A permanently irregular age structure will be developing at whole site level, creating opportunities for the recruitment of future veteran trees and the ongoing retention of associated ancient woodland species.

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

Woodland Condition:

To reduce deer damage levels from an average of 'high' to an average of 'medium' by Spring 2024 building on reduction work in the previous Management Plan. For every part of the site to be no higher than 'medium' by the 2027 impact assessment. This will be achieved through:

- Deer cull level and priority locations informed through the outcomes of annual monitoring.
- Cull achieved through carrying out disturbance outings during April to August and making use of authorisations from September to March to maximise effectiveness when required.
- Where possible, integrated deer management with neighbouring landowners agreeing a strategy for reducing deer damage throughout the wider woodland area as part of an informal deer discussion group. This could include the consideration of a community stalking initiative should there be the interest, suitably qualified and experienced personnel, and equipment and infrastructure available.
- Carry out annual monitoring of impacts across the site using the Herbivore Impact Assessment 2020 revised methodology.
- If medium average browsing level achieved by summer 2024, to plant oak, aspen, holly, and hawthorn in canopy gaps previously planted in 2003 and 2015 that partially failed due to over browsing. These will be protected using rabbit net caging or biodegradable shelters if available as part of the organisations move away from the use of plastic tree shelters. If not achieved by 2024, to review annually until this level has been achieved.

- In the four fenced exclosures, to whip bracken annually to encourage planted trees to establish and to beat up plant in these in Spring 2024 to allow these to continue as developing young diverse woodland cores. Species to be replaced will be confirmed through monitoring each plot in summer 2023. In areas planted in 2002/3, whip bracken annually to continue to allow these trees to establish while deer pressure reduces.

Retention of open ground habitats:

- Carry out regeneration monitoring in summer 2027 to evaluate recruitment ahead of the 2028 to 2033 Management Plan.

Other management:

- Create a 560m ATV access from the B road into the North block through sub compartment 1b in winter 2022/23. This will be a width of 2m and seek to avoid ancient woodland ground flora and mature trees. The route to be built to ensure drainage into the topside drain above the road, no material imported, turfs placed to allow swift recovery. As part of this to cut and maintain a 5m gap in the gorse as a fire break, reducing the risk of a high fuel fire leaving the site. From the edge of the gorse, the ATV route will continue on the heather.
- Through the plan period when the opportunity arises with volunteers, to have a 'mop up' sweep of PAWS areas in sub compartments 2a and 2b for non native regeneration and redundant tree shelters.

4.2 F2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

Approximately half of the site is recorded as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. This area of ancient woodland runs the full length of the site parallel to Loch Ness immediately adjacent to the A82 and rising to an elevation of 150-200m up the hillside. It supports a wide variety of habitats; broad-leaved deciduous woodland; mainly upland birch wood, hazel wood, wet and dry acidic heath, acidic grassland, screes, cliffs, wet flushes and riparian zones.

Significance

The wood is classed as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and forms part of a larger complex of ancient woodlands in the Loch Ness catchment that includes other Woodland Trust properties, Urquhart Bay Wood SSSI/SAC and Balmacaan Wood, nearby. Important ancient woodland areas are concentrated along Loch Ness side and the main catchments of the Enrick and Coiltie with connections to RSPB at Corrimony and beyond to FCS NNR at Glen Affric.

There is a rich lichen community, with 251 lichen taxa recorded (Coppins 2001). Much of this could be attributed to the ecology associated with the proximity of Loch Ness. Some of the species found are more commonly discovered in the western part of Scotland.

Management and maintenance of the ASNW component on the site contributes to meeting the Woodland Trust objective of 'No further loss of ancient woodland'.

Opportunities & Constraints

With ongoing restructuring of non-native conifer plantations owned by Abriachan Forest Trust to the West of compartment 2, there is the opportunity in the longer term to expand the core area of native woodland.

As with Key Feature 1, deer browsing presents a significant constraint to the regeneration and diversity of this area in the locations that are not either adjacent to paths or are particularly steep.

Dominant bracken in some areas is inhibiting tree regeneration and may reduce the habitat value of open glades, especially for Pearl Bordered Fritillary. Bracken control in selected areas could provide the opportunity to diversify the habitat mosaic.

Access is a constraint to management activities due to the steep slopes and difficulties in getting off the A82 into compartment 1 in particular. The ATV access route proposed in KF 1 would create an opportunity to manage the ancient woodland element of sub Compartment 1b more effectively through reducing deer and having access for future work such as bracken management and planting if appropriate.

Two RDB lichen species *Lecidea erythropaea* and *Schismatomma graphidoides* are found only on mature oak. There is the opportunity to create succession for these species while deer numbers prevent oak regeneration through fencing.

Factors Causing Change

Grazing, browsing and ground damage by deer .
Encroachment of bracken.
Ash die back.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The total area of ancient woodland will not diminish.

Species and assemblages associated with the ancient woodland habitat will remain secure.

The processes of natural succession will remain dynamic within the ancient woodland resulting in evolving structures and densities of cover.

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

Short term objectives as per those identified in Key Feature 1. Beyond those:

Annually, in the last week of May, to walk the path network to identify locations and place protective temporary caging around flowering birds nest orchid ahead of the first path strim in early June.

In June 2023, to gather seed from wych elm on the Corriefoyness track and propagate, aiming to plant from Spring 2025, should browsing permit.

With local specialist, review status of hazels with *Pyrenula occidentalis* and *Pseudocypbellaria crocata* to ensure they remain stable and secure and not threatened by path use increasing. Monitor ahead of any planned operation that

could affect these trees.

Map all mature oak and identify areas suitable for fencing by the end of 2023.

By the end of 2024, to fence at least two enclosures no more than 10m by 10m in size and plant with oak at a density of 1 tree per 3m to allow sufficient light for RDB lichen species.

In 2026, to repeat the 2001 lichen survey to understand the impacts on the site following ash die back, the potential arrival of Dutch elm disease, and habitat changes through browsing to inform future management.

To reduce tree risk along the A82 corridor removing young trees growing on the cliff edges as part of tree safety management carried out every two years as identified through tree inspection.

4.3 F3 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Abriachan Wood occupies a three mile stretch of the A82 along the north shore of Loch Ness and is admired by the tourist traffic that passes by, uses the layby's across the road from the site, or stop at Abriachan Gardens, The Clansman Hotel, or take a boat tour with Jacobite cruises. It is a key part of a dramatic landscape with a high tree line, large cliffs and steep scree slopes.

Abriachan Forest Trust owns and manages 534ha of adjacent forest and open ground to the West of the southern block (compartment 2). They run an outdoor nursery, hold a range of community events, and have a popular mountain bike track.

The southern section contains a network of 3.5kms of footpaths, including an ancient 'coffin trail' which zigzags up from the lochside to the settlements of Balchraggan and Abriachan. There are two waymarked trails, the 'Old Coffin Trail' and 'The Squirrel Trail' with each taking in the variety of woodland and the spectacular views, these are marked starting from The Clansman Hotel and from Abriachan Gardens. The paths, including the right of way along the routes known as the old coffin trail are generally well drained and informally surfaced with grass for the most part, although some routes are bare ground with roots and rocks on the surface. In the last five years, work has been carried out in the steepest and dampest sections to improve the robustness of these routes. Throughout the site, the paths are steep in many places, have several sets of steps and are mostly grass covered.

The paths are well used by locals and visitors who can expect to ascend through the ancient woodland habitats and be awarded with stunning views to the south over Loch Ness. While there are no parking opportunities available onsite, car parking facilities are by permission of neighbours at The Clansman Hotel (15 spaces plus mini bus and coach parking, and always very busy) at the southern end of the wood that have a welcome café upon your return, Abriachan Gardens (five car parking spaces) at the northern end of the southern block (compartment 2) and a larger car park at the Abriachan Forest Trust centre (15 spaces) for a small donation. There is no formal public access to the northern section (compartment 1) due to the steepness of the site. The site is highly visible to traffic travelling on the A82, from boat traffic on the Loch and from the southern shore along a minor road.

The area receives over 200,000 overseas visitors per year. Drumnadrochit statistics for domestic visitors from Visit Scotland recorded 19,000 day trip and 76,000 overnight stays. In Loch Ness side (postcode IV3 8AU) there are 137 residents, within postcode IV3 there are 22,376 as this includes parts of the west of Inverness. The community of Abriachan has around 120 residents.

Abriachan Forest Trust run a range of outdoor learning activities, including volunteering and community events. As Abriachan Forest Trust carry out many activities with schools, any work with schools within the wood would look to compliment the work of Abriachan Forest Trust. Given the type of work available and topography, work involving schools would tend to include high school pupils only.

There are two other Woodland Trust sites within close proximity to this site, Urquhart Bay and Balmacaan.

The site is part of the 'Loch Ness Woods' leaflet, which includes Balmacaan Wood and Urquhart Bay Wood. The Abriachan Wood details have a map showing the linked paths with Abriachan Forest Trust.

There are currently two volunteer wardens. One lives adjacent to the site and the other a few minutes drive away.

One Information board is in the Abriachan Gardens car park and is out of date. The other board at the Clansman end was removed during works around the car park.

There are five public entrances, two of which have ladder board entrance signs and the other three have smaller wooden entrance signs. All of these gain access to the southern block (compartment 2a and 2b).

There are ten benches on the trails that give views across Loch Ness (in places), and a picnic table at the top of the site.

Significance

Abriachan Wood is an important landscape feature and contributes to the iconic setting of Loch Ness.

A visit to the site offers the opportunity to experience a diverse and attractive ancient woodland with a rich ground flora, and dramatic views over Loch Ness.

Loch Ness is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Scotland and Abriachan Wood provides one of the most accessible opportunities to enjoy the scenery away from the busy main road. The site is only about 15 minutes drive from the tourist hub of Drumnadrochit and immediately adjacent to the Clansman Hotel and Jacobite boat tours.

Public access to the wood is important to the local community and the adjacent Abriachan Forest Trust. For local people, the site offers a quiet retreat from the busy tourist trail in the area and connects well with Abriachan Forest Trust land.

It is situated within a twenty mile radius of a population of over 50,000 including the city of Inverness.

Opportunities & Constraints

The path network links to Abriachan Forest Trust wood and the Great Glen Way (one of Scotland's long distance walking routes from Fort William to Inverness), which takes people to Abriachan from Drumnadrochit. There are opportunities for joint promotion of the network and working with the Great Glen Rangers to include work of the Woodland Trust beyond our own ground.

A section of the footpath network and 'Squirrel Trail' route of around 300m is along the B road to Abriachan, a steep narrow road. Should funding be available, to build a path route within the wood to link the paths away from the road. The part of the site is not ancient woodland and is largely bracken. The increased traffic may also benefit tree

regeneration and the route benefit management access.

A 300m desire line from the Old Coffin Trail to the bridge below Balchraggan is developing and could be developed into a formal route, offering stunning views across Loch Ness at tree top height. This, combined with the above, could create additional attractions to the site, and improve public and management access. External funding would be required to allow these proposals to progress.

The wooden steps at the Abriachan Gardens entrance are now failing and due for repair. These steps are in a damp location and have to be replaced periodically. While the management access is being created into the north block, there is the opportunity to use these contractors to build stone steps in this location.

There have been several new benches installed in the site, there would not be space to install any further benches on the existing routes. Should the above proposals on path builds progress, benches at appropriate locations would be considered.

There are potentially volunteer opportunities through the organising of dedicated work parties to carry out path repairs, bracken control and tree planting, for example. Should a group of people wish to carry out volunteer work on the site, these are an example of the sorts of activities that could be undertaken.

There is the opportunity to increase the links between The Clansman, Woodland Trust, and Abriachan Forest Trust through promotion and signage of the Whisky Still, linking to the Whisky Bothy at The Clansman. These would include replacing signage by the picnic bench.

The monitoring of the lower plant communities in 2026 identified in KF2 could be used as a wider engagement opportunity through citizen science and workshops with Abriachan Forest Trust.

The steep gradients and unstable scree in compartment 1a and 1b make it unsuitable for formal access development.

Abriachan Woods have a very high tick population and there is anecdotal evidence of the presence of Lyme's disease.

The sensitive nature of the site makes it unsuitable for permitting any further informal mountain bike trail development despite its apparent suitability for advanced riders.

Factors Causing Change

Anticipating an increase in more rainfall, and coming in more extreme bouts, water on the paths together with an anticipated increase in the number of people using the site would require a higher specification path network that is more expensive and labour intensive to manage.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Abriachan Wood will provide an extensive area of quiet informal recreation to a wide range of users both from the local community and from further afield. The use of the site by tourists will be promoted through positive relationships with neighbouring tourist destination sites, with good signage and interpretation.

Entrances and signage will have a welcoming appearance and there will be a network of well-maintained paths providing a range of linear and loop routes with viewpoints over Loch Ness suitable for a range of visitors, and where

possible linking to the surrounding path network. Interpretation and waymarking that is fully integrated with, or compliments (where appropriate), Abriachan Forest Trust, and compliments that of the Great Glen Way, will provide visitors with information on routes and points of interest.

An increase in the involvement of volunteers would be considered through the work programme.

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

Access provision will be in keeping with WT access guidelines. Achieved by:

- a) Ensuring that entrances & signage are welcoming to visitors and well cared for (annually).
- b) Ensuring that all managed paths are kept well-drained and free from encroaching vegetation by strimming, and that access features (e.g. bridges, steps, entrances, boundary features, etc. are kept in good order (annually).
- c) Ensuring that all viewpoints are maintained free of encroaching vegetation, where it is obscuring the view (annually).
- d) Ensuring that the site is kept safe and welcoming by: repair of vandalism (when needed); clearing of fallen trees where access is obstructed (as needed); and regular site safety surveys (as per risk assessment).

The visitor welcome & experience will be further enhanced by the following path network improvements:

1. Replace 15 wooden steps from Abriachan Gardens car park with stone steps and remove old board by the end of the plan period.
2. Replace two bridges on Red Squirrel waymarked trail by the end of the plan period.
3. By the end of the plan period, to improve a 20m section of path on the 'Squirrel Way' route that is currently difficult for some users.
4. Seek funding to create a 350m path link between the white gate entrance and the entrance by the bridge downhill. To also carry out study on feasibility of 300m route below viewpoint and seek funding if there is the feasibility of a route.
5. Retain regular communication with Abriachan Forest Trust and Clansman Hotel on plans for paths and promotion to help on the delivery of partners aspirations when relevant through the life of this plan.
6. Plan public engagement through the lower plant survey in 2026 in collaboration with Abriachan Forest Trust.
7. Review condition of entrance signage and replace, if required, at the end of this plan period.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2023	PC - Deer Control - Shooting	Works associated with deer management by shooting – such as stalker costs, high seats, signage, maintenance of tracks and open ground provided specifically for deer management etc	March
2023	PC - Deer Control - Shooting	Works associated with deer management by shooting – such as stalker costs, high seats, signage, maintenance of tracks and open ground provided specifically for deer management etc	May
2023	PC - Deer Control - Shooting	Works associated with deer management by shooting – such as stalker costs, high seats, signage, maintenance of tracks and open ground provided specifically for deer management etc	May
2023	AW - Management Access Capital	Works associated with installing new or replacement management access infrastructure. Such as management access gates, vehicle bridges, fencing and surfacing works.	June
2023	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	October
2024	WMM - General Site Management	Works associated with maintaining conservation and physical features within the sites such as boundary ditches, fences and walls, hedges,	February
2024	WC - Tree Planting / Seeding	Works associated with tree planting / tree seeding for woodland creation sites	April
2024	AW - Visitor Access Infrastructure	Works associated with the construction of a new or extension to existing car parking facilities.	July
2024	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	October
2025	WC - Tree Planting / Seeding	Works associated with tree planting / tree seeding for woodland creation sites	April
2025	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	October

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2025	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	November
2026	WC - Tree Planting / Seeding	Works associated with tree planting / tree seeding for woodland creation sites	April
2026	CS - Ecological Survey & Assessment	Use of external consultants to support the provision of ecological surveys, assessment and biodiversity / species monitoring	August
2026	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	October
2027	WC - Tree Planting / Seeding	Works associated with tree planting / tree seeding for woodland creation sites	April
2027	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	October

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	53.48	Open ground	1976	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access to the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	
<p>Moderate to steep, south to southeast facing slopes ranging from approximately 200m to 400m. This compartment has some very steep, southeast facing cliffs, large rocky outcrops and scree slopes (c. 25% of compartment area) which run almost the full length of the hillside between approximately 150m and 250m. The compartment is dominated by <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> and <i>Erica cinerea</i> heathland which varies with underlying changes in soil conditions to form a complex mosaic, grading from dry heath on the well drained areas to wet heath where hollows occur in the landscape. Tree cover is limited to small areas of birch (NVC W17) within the surrounding heathland and some fairly large but scattered areas of regenerating Scots pine and silver birch, and occasional regenerating rowan. Silver birch regeneration is gradually encroaching from the lower margin of the compartment. On the upper southwestern slopes at 300 to 350m, there is a large area of Bearberry heathland that has probably been retained due to regular heather burning in the past. Two large areas of juniper are present in southwest corner. Open ground habitats, rock, and scree make up c. 80% of the compartment area towards the southern end, where there is a an area of dominant gorse.</p>						
1b	44.31	Birch (downy/silver)	1860	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>Moderate to steep (occasionally very steep) southeast facing slope with some rocky outcrops and scree slopes. An extensive area of very open birch woodland dominated by bracken with young and semi-mature silver birch in places, particularly in gullies, with occasional oak and pine, and a small area of hazel at the southern end. The ground-flora is particularly grassy, and herb-rich. Bracken is abundant throughout the vast majority of this compartment and is overbearingly dominant in patches. Narrow Leaved Helleborine has been recorded in this compartment. This type of woodland (NVC W11c) is typical of eastern Scotland and is characteristically very open (typically c. 60% tree cover). It is likely that there was a higher proportion oak historically, which has been removed, allowing the birch to become dominant. The area was grazed by sheep prior to Woodland Trust acquisition. Open ground habitats, rock and scree make up c. 35% of the compartment. This compartment runs parallel to the A82 and Loch Ness. In 2002 a significant landslip occurred along this section, closing the A82. Netting was subsequently installed by BEAR Scotland to stabilise the bank. Virtually the whole of this compartment is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).</p>						
2a	27.32	Mixed broadleaves	1860	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep	Ancient Woodland Site

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
					slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	
<p>Linear compartment running parallel to the A82 and Loch Ness. On the moderate southeast facing slope in the north and south section of the sub-compartment are extensive areas of hazel woodland (NVC W9b). Past coppice management is likely to have favoured hazel over other tree species typical of this community, such as ash. Some of the hazel, particularly towards the northern end of the compartment are veterans of >100 years old. There has been extensive regeneration of new shoots throughout the hazel stands, since 1970-80 when stock was excluded from the site under Forestry Commission ownership (Coppins & Coppins 2001). Silver birch and ash standards are present throughout. There are occasional large stands of pure silver birch and pure alder, especially at lower levels. In the more open areas, individual semi-mature aspen, wych elm, rowan, silver birch, bird cherry, goat willow and hawthorn are present, with rare oak towards the northern end of the compartment. The ground-flora is quite lush, and in areas of flushing, or alongside burns, becomes rich and diverse. The characteristic dominant throughout is False brome. The lichen flora is rich and abundant, particularly on hazel. A total of 87 notable taxa have been recorded on hazel including two nationally rare, one nationally scarce and one vulnerable red data book species (<i>Lecidea erythrophaea</i>). A hazel supporting <i>Pyrenula occidentalis</i>, a nationally scarce 'old woodland' lichen has been tagged at NH566341 adjacent to the path and is potentially vulnerable to path maintenance works. Six notable species have been recorded from two oak trees at the north end of the cmpt including one nationally scarce, two nationally rare and one vulnerable Red Data Book species (<i>Schismatomma graphidiodes</i>)(Coppins & Coppins 2001). Scattered blocks of exotic conifer on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) totalling approx. 2ha were felled to waste in 2000 and are returning to a semi natural composition through processes of natural regeneration and some enrichment planting carried out in 2003 and 2015. Virtually the whole of this compartment is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).</p>						
2b	37.9	Open ground	1860	Min-intervention	No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland
<p>Mainly steep southeast facing slope with some rocky outcrops and scree slopes supporting an extensive area of open woodland dominated by mature silver birch (NVC W 11c). At higher elevations this becomes increasingly open and heathy (NVC W 17). It is likely that this woodland was originally an oak/birch community and that the oak has been removed allowing the birch to become dominant. Other species present include mature individual oak and ash with occasional alder, hazel, rowan, holly, hawthorn and goat willow. Juniper is frequent near the upper (west) boundary of the compartment. Small areas of gorse are present. Scattered blocks of exotic conifer totalling approx. 13ha (and including c. 3ha PAWS) were felled to waste in 2000 and are returning to a semi natural composition through processes of natural regeneration and enrichment planting carried out in 2003-04 and 2015. Bracken cover has developed in the larger of these open areas, particularly towards the northern end of the compartment. Where bracken is absent, the flora is predominately mixed grasses and a moderately rich ancient woodland flora, grading into dry heath at higher elevations. Birds Nest Orchid has been recorded in this compartment. Approximately 1/3 of this compartment along its lower (Eastern) boundary is recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).</p>						

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.

Windblow/Windthrow

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

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