

# Habitats Regulations Assessment screening form - Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan 2024 - 2034

## European Protected Site type, name, and qualifying features

<b>Project name</b>	Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan 2024 - 2034
<b>Block name(s)</b>	Lea Bailey, Wigpool and Loquiers, Haywood and Castiard Vale

<b>Site type</b>	Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
<b>Site name</b>	Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC (UK0014794)
<b>Associated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and other site information</b>	<p><b>England</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaisdon Hall SSSI</li> <li>• Buckshraft Mine and Bradley Hill Railway Tunnel SSSI</li> <li>• Caerwood and Ashberry Goose House SSSI</li> <li>• Dean Hall Coach House and Cellar SSSI</li> <li>• Devil's Chapel Scowles SSSI</li> <li>• Old Bow and Old Ham Mines SSSI</li> <li>• Sylvan House Barn SSSI</li> <li>• Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI</li> <li>• Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI</li> </ul> <p><b>Wales</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Llangovan Church SSSI</li> <li>• Mwyngloddfa Mynydd-Bach SSSI</li> </ul>

# HRA Screening: Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Newton Court Stable Block SSSI</li><li>• Wye Valley Lesser Horseshoe Bat Sites SSSI (comprising 4 separate sites): Itton Court Stud; Penallt Old Church; Priory Llandogo; Tregeiriog Farm</li></ul>
<b>Qualifying features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• S1303. <i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>; Lesser horseshoe bat (LHS)</li><li>• S1304. <i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>; Greater horseshoe bat (GHS)</li></ul>

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## Conservation Objectives

<p><b>Conservation Objectives for Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC</b></p>	<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species</li><li>• The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species</li><li>• The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely</li><li>• The populations of qualifying species, and</li></ul> <p>The distribution of qualifying species within the site.</p>
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## Proposed Operations

<p>1. What operations are proposed as part of this project?</p>	<p>The Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan includes the proposed woodland management of approximately 1394ha of the Forest of Dean from 2024 to 2034.</p> <p>Woodland management will include forestry actions such as thinning, clear-felling, restocking and extraction. The forestry operations will include the use of various forestry machinery and will involve the maintenance of forest infrastructure.</p> <p>Additional activities will include (but not be limited to) coppicing, management of riverine corridors and maintenance of open habitats.</p> <p>The Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan includes 43.32ha of conifer felling, 22.13ha mixed conifer/broadleaf felling for watercourse buffers and 10.56ha of broadleaf felling (coppicing). The following work is planned:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1003 855 1753 1364"> <thead> <tr> <th>Coupe</th> <th>Fell period</th> <th>ha</th> <th>Coupe</th> <th>Fell period</th> <th>ha</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>40003</td><td>2027-31</td><td>2.38</td><td>40020</td><td>2032-36</td><td>4.87</td></tr> <tr><td>40019</td><td>2022-26</td><td>0.53</td><td>40023</td><td>2027-31</td><td>3.29</td></tr> <tr><td>40002</td><td>2027-31</td><td>8.74</td><td>40021</td><td>2027-31</td><td>6.62</td></tr> <tr><td>40049</td><td>2027-31</td><td>6.33</td><td>40058</td><td>2027-31</td><td>4.85</td></tr> <tr><td>41018</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.15</td><td>41023</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.01</td></tr> <tr><td>41019</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.14</td><td>41024</td><td>2027-31</td><td>0.90</td></tr> <tr><td>41020</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.11</td><td>41004</td><td>2032-36</td><td>4.87</td></tr> <tr><td>41021</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.15</td><td>41027</td><td>2022-26</td><td>0.45</td></tr> <tr><td>41005</td><td>2027-31</td><td>2.60</td><td>41015</td><td>2032-36</td><td>0.70</td></tr> <tr><td>41016</td><td>2032-36</td><td>1.36</td><td>41014</td><td>2032-36</td><td>1.19</td></tr> <tr><td>41013</td><td>2032-36</td><td>0.78</td><td>41012</td><td>2032-36</td><td>0.88</td></tr> <tr><td>41011</td><td>2027-31</td><td>1.04</td><td>41025</td><td>2027-31</td><td>2.26</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Coupe	Fell period	ha	Coupe	Fell period	ha	40003	2027-31	2.38	40020	2032-36	4.87	40019	2022-26	0.53	40023	2027-31	3.29	40002	2027-31	8.74	40021	2027-31	6.62	40049	2027-31	6.33	40058	2027-31	4.85	41018	2027-31	1.15	41023	2027-31	1.01	41019	2027-31	1.14	41024	2027-31	0.90	41020	2027-31	1.11	41004	2032-36	4.87	41021	2027-31	1.15	41027	2022-26	0.45	41005	2027-31	2.60	41015	2032-36	0.70	41016	2032-36	1.36	41014	2032-36	1.19	41013	2032-36	0.78	41012	2032-36	0.88	41011	2027-31	1.04	41025	2027-31	2.26
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	41089	2027-31	1.58		41070	2027-31	4.28
	41103	2027-31	1.31		41128	2022-26	0.47
	41116	2027-31	1.32		41129	2027-31	0.46
	41107	2027-31	1.72		41072	2027-31	0.86
	41106	2022-26	1.72		41042	2027-31	0.92
	41073	2027-31	0.97		41053	2027-31	0.37
	41022	2022-26	1.51				
	<p>Thinning operations will be conducted across the plan area. The broadleaf crops will be assessed for thinning every 10 years and the conifers every 5 years, as is the norm at other Forestry England sites, where forest operations almost always take place somewhere in the wood at least every five years.</p> <p>Full details of the proposed operations are included within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan.</p>						
2. How will these operations be carried out?	<p>All operations will be undertaken under best practice guidelines (UKWAS etc.) and will be preceded by an Operational Site Assessment.</p>						

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## Exempt Works Test

1. Are the operations proposed in this project already covered by a plan agreed with Natural England?	No
<i>If yes, which agreed plans cover the designated area?</i>	N/A
2. If no, are operations directly connected with or necessary for maintaining the site's listed features?	<p>The Edgehills and Wigpool Plan area contains two component SSSI of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC: Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI and Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI.</p> <p>Works within the vicinity of Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI and Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI will be undertaken for the benefit of these sites as detailed in the Forest of Dean Bat SSSI Management Plan, 2022-2032<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>No other works within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan are directly connected with (or necessary to the maintenance of) any component of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Forestry England, 2022, Forest of Dean Bat SSSI Management Plan, 2022-2032

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## Significant Effect Test

All operations on Forestry England land are carried out to standards defined in the following documents:

- UK Forestry Standard
- UK Woodland Assurance Scheme
- European Protected Species Regulations
- Forest Industry Safety Accord
- Heather and Grass Burning Code 2007

<p>In addition to being UKFS/UKWAS compliant, and with reference to the potential impacts and risk framework listed in the tables below, are these operations likely to have a significant adverse effect on the qualifying features?</p>	<p>Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC</p>	<p>The Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC is designated for populations of greater horseshoe bats (GHS) and lesser horseshoe bats (LHS). The Core Sustainance Zones (CSZ) of GHS and LHS are 3km and 2km respectively<sup>2</sup>. These CSZ and the maternity buffers described in the interim guidance published by Natural England<sup>3</sup> (GHS, 2-4km and LHS 3km) are considered to be functionally linked habitat.</p> <p>The Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan area includes two component SSSI of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC: Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI and Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI. All works within the vicinity of these component SSSI are detailed in the Forest of Dean Bat SSSI Management Plan, 2022-2032 and summarised within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan. The proposed works within the vicinity of Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI and Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI will be undertaken to maintain favourable conservation status of these sites and have been agreed with Natural</p>
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<sup>2</sup> BCT (2020) Core Sustainance Zones and habitats of importance for designing Biodiversity Net Gain for bats. Bat Conservation Trust, London. <https://www.bats.org.uk/resources/guidance-for-professionals/bat-species-core-sustainance-zonesand-habitats-for-biodiversity-net-gain> Access on 07/12/2021

<sup>3</sup> Natural England, July 2021, Interim Guidance; Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat SAC Development Management - Horseshoe Bat activity survey and assessment guidance,

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		<p>England. The proposed works within the vicinity of Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI and Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI are not considered likely to cause significant negative effects and will therefore not be discussed further.</p> <p>The CSZ of GHS and LHS populations using the component SSSI of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC includes all of the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan Forest Plan area. All habitat within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan area is deemed to be functionally linked habitat.</p> <p>The Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan includes proposals for approximately 76ha of clearfell within the 1394ha Forest Plan area (approx. 5% of plan area). The areas planned for clearfell are typically building on existing areas of open space or are adding structural complexity to homogenous woodland. The planned works will be undertaken in discrete operations over the ten-year life of the Forest Plan and the surrounding woodland will not be affected. Following clearfell operations the areas affected will either be restocked with trees or be managed as dynamic open space, generally associated with existing areas of open habitat.</p> <p>Due to the scale of the Forest Plan and surrounding wooded landscape there have been no studies into the flight-lines of GHS and LHS and the relative importance of individual rides or linear features. The Forest Plan contains known breeding and hibernation roosts<sup>3</sup>, and therefore is important for connectivity and foraging. As such all linear features such as rides, roads and waterbodies are assumed to be part of a network of flightlines crossing the Forest Plan area linking breeding and hibernation sites.</p> <p>The majority of existing potential flight-lines across the plan area will not be affected by the proposed works, and those that are will be improved in the long</p>
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		<p>term through progression to more natural habitats. Short term changes to some existing linear structures (such as forest rides) will occur through the planned widening and clearfell. The widened ridesides will continue to be bordering retained woodland, meaning that any potential flight-lines will be modified rather than lost. Areas of clearfell will also be bordered by significant areas of retained woodland and will only affect a small proportion of the potential flightlines available. As such, it is not anticipated that the planned clearfell and ride widening are likely to significantly alter connectivity through the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan area.</p> <p>The planned restocking/natural regeneration or conversion of conifer woodland to dynamic open space should increase the proportion of suitable habitat for prey species for both GHS and LHS. The expansion of open space grazed by animals (both wildlife and stock) in the Forest Plan should also support this.</p> <p>The proposed works also involve the thinning of crop trees surrounding watercourses to promote scrubby and open riparian corridors, as well as installing woody debris structure to ‘slow the flow’. This is predicted to increase connectivity and foraging opportunities within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan area, as well as improve water availability for bats.</p> <p>Proposed thinning operations are deemed beneficial to the management of the woodland and likely to increase diversity of structure and species composition. This increase in diversity should in turn increase foraging opportunities for bat species.</p> <p>The proposed management is a continuation of existing Forest Plans that have been in place during an average increase in both GHS and LHS populations within the relevant component SSSI of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd</p>
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		<p>Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC since 2010<sup>4</sup>. It should however be noted that, at the time of writing, the only complete monitoring dataset available to Forestry England between 2012 and 2024 for the relevant SSSI was for Old Bow and Old Ham Mines SSSI.</p> <p>Populations of both GHS and LHS were observed to decline within Old Bow and Old Ham Mines SSSI during 2017, 2019 and 2021 when compared to recent years, however this was attributed to unseasonal cold weather in late Spring 2022 that caused increased mortality and reduced breeding success across numerous species groups<sup>5,6</sup>.</p> <p>Population counts in 2023 were higher than 2019 and 2020, with 2024 similar to 2020. Wigpool Ironstone Mine SSSI returned a lower number of bats in 2024 than in 2023, however it has been noted that the 2024 data was limited by a late survey date during warm weather. The survey in sub-optimal conditions for hibernation may have contributed to a lower number of individual bats being present<sup>7</sup>.</p> <p>The Buckshraft Mine component of Buckshraft Mine and Bradley Hill Railway Tunnel SSSI and Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI both returned higher numbers of LHS in 2024 compared to 2023, with Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine SSSI also returning higher numbers of GHS (numbers of GHS in Buckshraft Mine were comparable in 2024 to 2023).</p>
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<sup>4</sup> Monitoring data provided by The National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP), December 2021, Bat Conservation Trust, in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and supported and steered by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and Scottish Natural Heritage.

<sup>5</sup> Priddis, D. (11/01/2022), Re: Bats in the Forest of Dean, [email, personal communication]

<sup>6</sup> Schofield, H. (08/12/2021), Bats and Martens in the FoD, [email, personal communication]

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, B. (25/03/2024), GBG Underground Section bat hibernation counts - Noxon 16th Mar and Wigpool 17th Mar [email, personal communication]

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		<p>The population counts between 2012 and 2024 still show an average increase on the period 2002-2012.</p> <p>The proposed works detailed within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan are considered unlikely to cause significant effects to GHS or LHS populations in the surrounding area.</p> <p>No Likely Significant Effects to the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safleoedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest y Ddena SAC are therefore predicted as a result of proposed activities within the Edgehills and Wigpool Forest Plan.</p>
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