

National Character Profile: 105 Forest of Dean and Lower Wye
source: Natural England (April 2014)

The NCA area is centred around an undulating well wooded plateau of ridges and valleys. Sitting over shallow Coal Measures it is contained by an outer rim of more open landscape on Carboniferous Limestone and Devonian Old Red Sandstone. The NCA enjoys areas of extensive woodland concentrated on the central plateau that are contained within the Statutory Forest. The eastern edge of the central plateau falls away steeply into the Severn flood plain, the estuary of the Severn, and the Severn and Avon Vales NCA. From clear, unwooded higher ground along this eastern edge, the Cotswold scarp can be seen rising out of the flat vale.

Sitting between the River Severn and Wye with only 3 main roads (A4136, A40 and A48) there is a sense of isolation and historically the rivers - and then the railways were the main trade and communication corridors (most of which are now obsolete and derelict, but now many contribute to both nature conservation and also means of exploring the forest on foot or bike) - while the rest of the Dean is criss-crossed by relatively small roads and narrow lanes, continuing the relative isolation of some of its communities.

The woodlands feature rich wildlife habitats including grassland, heathland and traditional orchards. Wooded areas range from managed coniferous plantations to broadleaved woodlands, many of which are ancient woodland - defined as being continuously wooded since 1600; the Statutory Forest is an ancient forest, having been heavily exploited for timber, although the majority is considered either as ancient or semi-natural woodland. These woodlands form one of the largest remaining areas of broadleaf semi-natural woodland in the country and are home to suites of nationally important assemblages of woodland birds, butterflies, internationally important woodland, river and bat sites; and a range of other rare flora and fauna. The Forest Waste within the Statutory Forest retains characteristic acid grassland habitat although the dwindling of grazing due to foot and mouth means scrubbing up of many of these areas is now apparent.



View from above Blakeney on Stretfield Hill looking along the easterly slopes of Blakeney Hill

Often sprawling and linear in nature, encircling the edge of the Statutory Forest is a ring of villages and hamlets where buildings are interspersed with industry, open grazing land and often associated with iron ore and coal deposits, whose remnant workings are often subsumed by woodland canopy. Other earlier settlements of medieval origin, for example, St Briavels, Lydney, Newnham, Mitcheldean, and Ruardean, lie on the peripheral edges of this ring. Parkend, Soudley and Brierley are the only substantial settlements that are wholly contained and surrounded by woodland within the Statutory Forest.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (Character makes each part of the landscape distinct and gives each its particular sense of place, regardless of perceptions of quality or value)

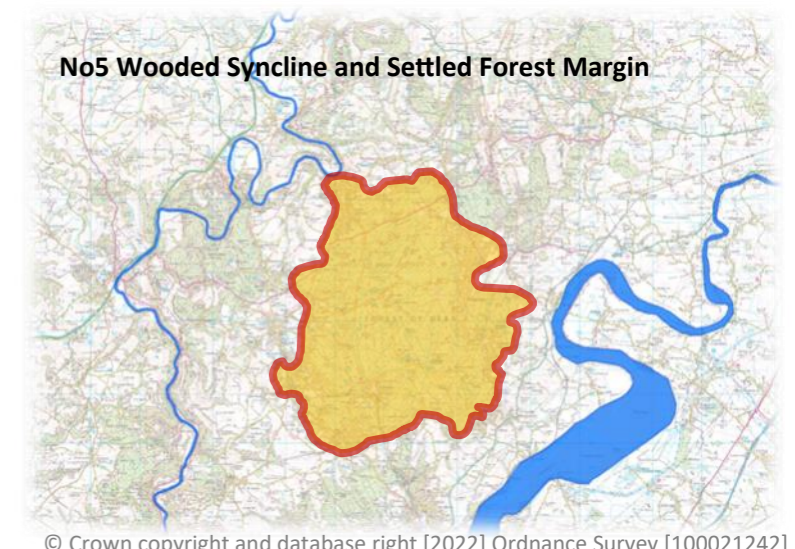
The grain of the landscape is generally north to south although this is rarely evident in the landscape due to dense woodland obscuring even the most dramatic relief features such as slades, valleys and ridges. The biggest influence on the landscape has been that of industry and mining, with the forest now being almost a continuous extensive blanket of both coniferous and broadleaved woodland draped across the syncline contributing to a strong and coherent “forest” identity that is carefully managed for its commercial timber, scenic qualities, amenity value.

The internal landscape is often small in scale and the dense woodland significantly limits long distance views. The old colliery tip at New Fancy provides an excellent striking vantage point from which to survey the extent of woodland within the syncline but these views are rare. The dense woodland is extensive and attracts thousands of visitors a year thanks to the perceived “wilderness” of many areas. This is especially the case within the Forest Core where the sense of isolation and wilderness is retained. The outer edge of the Forest has a high number of settlements generally located close to the Crease Limestone band that contains the iron ore, where as the central parts are almost devoid of settlement with the notable exception of Parkend, Edge End and Brierley. The forest creates a backdrop and edge to most settlements and so it is rare for buildings to break the skyline, although there are many instances of houses being in clusters that can be seen to climb up the sides of valleys in characteristic informal loose terraces.

The 17th to early 19th centuries saw extensive areas of woodland cleared either for war efforts or for local industries with the 1808 Dean Forest Timber Act seeing large scale enclosures for the planting of Oak and survivors from this period can be seen most notably around Speech House and Cannop Valley with extensive younger generations of Oak in Blakeney Hill. The extensive and dense woodlands harbour both small and large scale coal workings often visible in the landscape. For the smaller ones colonisation by birch and gorse ensures they remain prominent and visible in the landscape with larger ones developing massive spoil tips e.g New Fancy. Elsewhere the local term “sowle” refers to and indicates the location of ancient iron ore extraction.



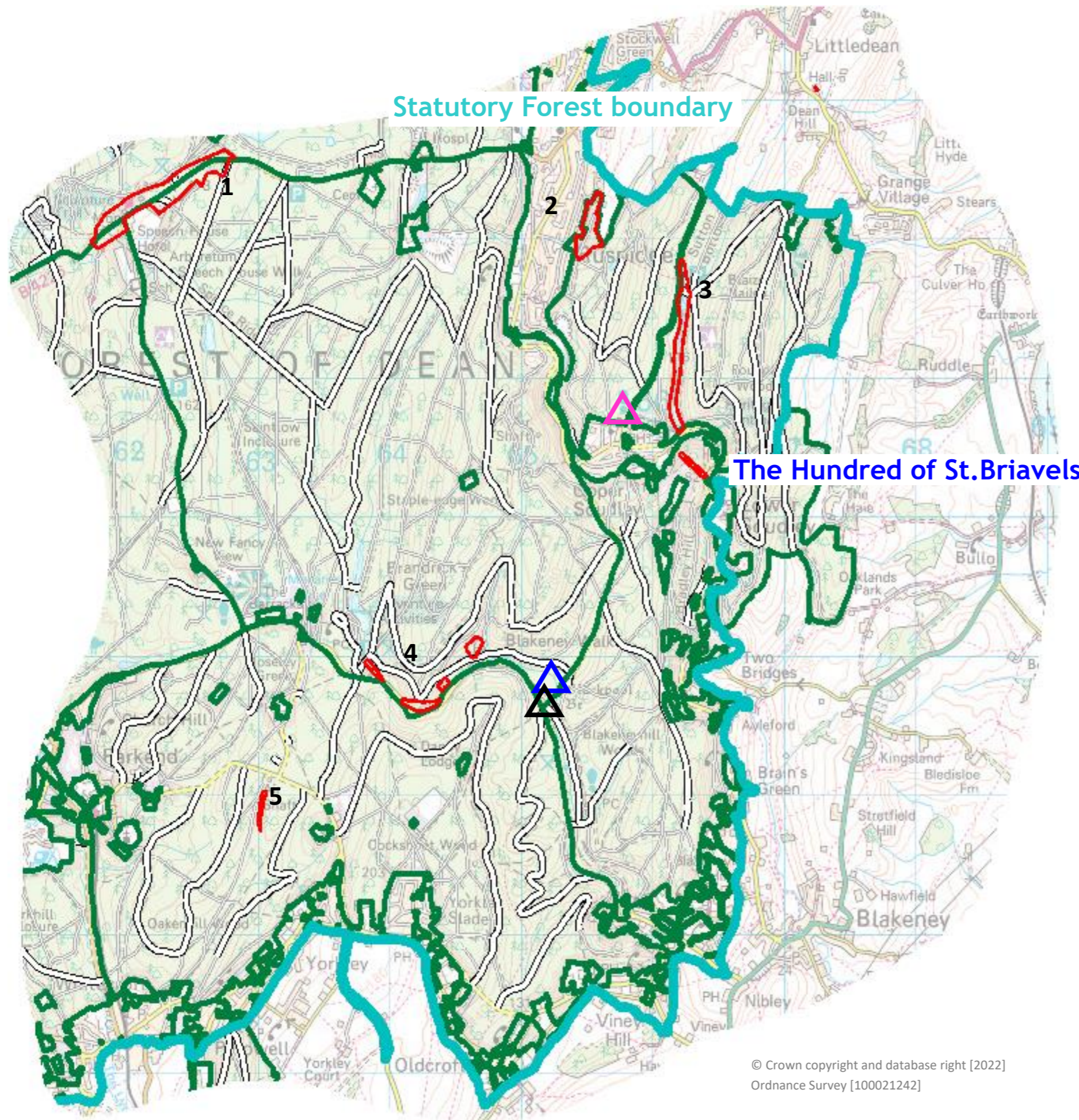
View from New Fancy north into Middleridge and Staple Edge



No5 Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin




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Designations



Scheduled Monuments within Parkend Walk & Blakeney Walk Forest Plan

There are three SMs within the plan area:

- ◇ Blackpool Bridge 
- ◇ The Roman Road 
- ◇ Soudley Camp 

Listed Buildings

Speech House Hotel

Sites of Special Scientific Interest within Parkend Walk & Blakeney Walk Forest Plan (outlined in red)

21Ha within Severn Vale FP are designated SSSI

- 1) Speech House Oaks (5.9ha part)
- 2) Buckshaft Mine & Bradley Hill Railway tunnel (4.9Ha)
- 3) Soudley Ponds (6.2Ha)
- 4) Oakenhill Railway Cutting (0.54Ha)
- 5) Meezy Hurst (3.8Ha)

Buckshaft Mine & Bradley Hill Railway tunnel are also both part of the Wye Valley and forest of Dean Bat SAC.

OUR SHARED FOREST

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TSI Oak at Danby Lodge: cpr 4628c

Whilst there are several veteran and ancient trees, there are even more that have potential to become ancient and veteran that are in various states of health providing a variety of habitat types. Some can be classed as “Trees of Special Interest” (TSI) and can be of any species. Trees with this potential are always valued and being discovered, whether through operational planning or through community projects like Foresters Forest.

Concept
The Forest Plan recognises these trees as important features. Their location and context within the wood will determine how best to manage them. Eg haloing to remove interfering conifer or invasive species such as Western Hemlock, the Oak at Speech House designated as SSSI or the many veterans in and around the villages and communities and peripheral edges of The Forest. All these contexts have differing management needs.



Open habitat with p1847 Oak at Perry Hay



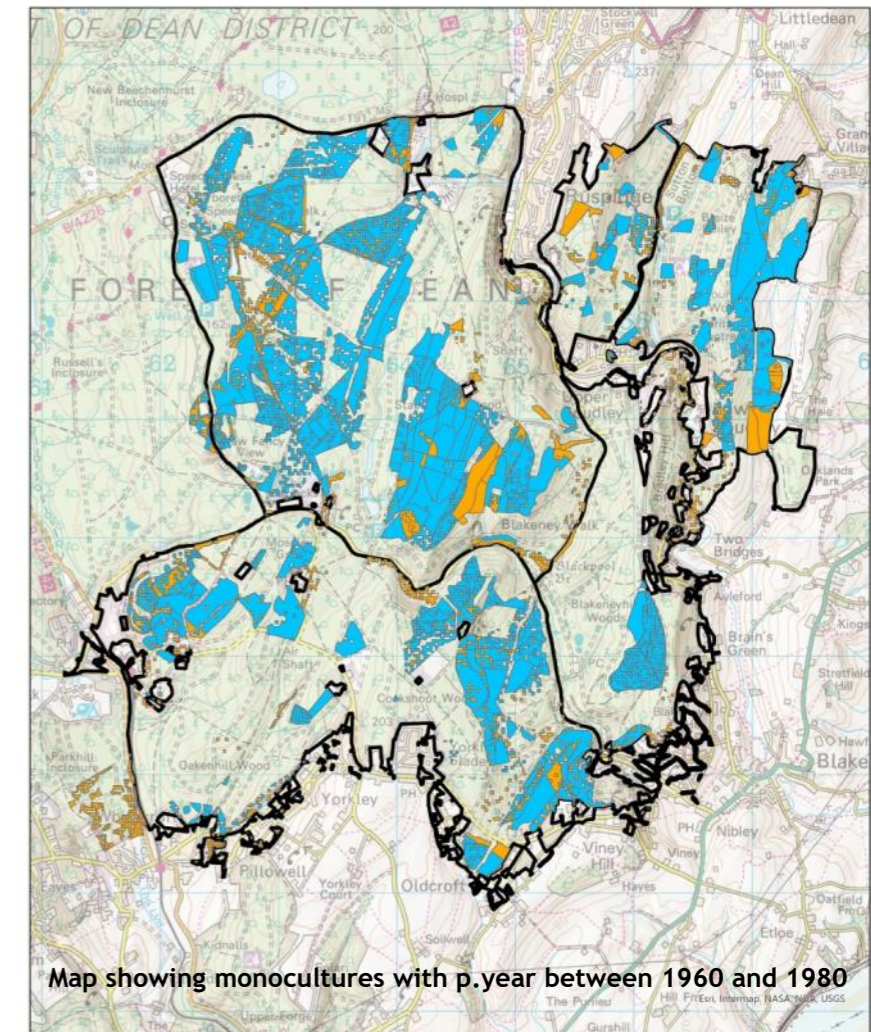
Hemlock and Grand Fir in Oakenhill

A large proportion of the woodlands were planted in the 1960s to 1980s mainly as monocultures (see map to right) and is true for both broadleaf (in brown) and conifer (in blue). Restructuring is underway mainly occurring in the northern half of the plan area through clearfelling and restocking that began in the 1990s, with younger crops that are establishing well. For varying reasons not all clearfells have been completed meaning restructuring should still be an objective for this Forest Plan.

Concept
The new plan will evaluate clearfelling for the next 10 year period to confirm if clearfell and restock remains the best option. Focus can then begin to shift from a mind set of clearfell and restock to one of using Low Impact Silviculture (LIS) whilst retaining the option for clearfelling and restock; since altering management of a site previously identified for clearfell and restock to LIS can be problematic for varying reasons. We must bear in mind that both clearfell and LIS have their place in successfully delivering ecological, social & economic objectives as well as policy and that management of pests and disease may also influence chosen prescriptions.

Woodland composition of the plan area currently sits with an even split of conifer and broadleaf and just under 20% of open space.

Concept
The plan will contain a more diverse range of tree species that reflect the changing soil and topography. As a general rule of thumb conifer should appear on the higher ridges and upper slopes with broadleaves in the valleys and gullies. In the long term there will be a higher proportion of broadleaf with conifer retaining a prominent part in composition. Open space will reflect the scale of the surrounding woodland, aiming to create better connectivity, permeability and flow between habitat types with an increase in woodland edge.



Map showing monocultures with p.year between 1960 and 1980

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IMPORTANT FOR SENSE OF PLACE: Across the plan area, mature conifer stands of Douglas Fir, Red Cedar, Norway Spruce, Scots Pine but also those of Oak and Beech all vary in density and size, that adds uniqueness and distinctiveness. These crops are often a valuable component in the internal landscape adding structure, diversity often engendering a sense of tranquillity. Externally these areas can be visually impressive, offering a sense of scale, awe and grandeur, with steep terrain in many places also bringing a certain sense of drama to the landscape. Along council roads on many occasion the age, spacing or species of tree define the character of the landscape; it could be the veteran Oaks along Speech House road, the mature Douglas Fir along the Soudley Valley, the Beech between Bullocks Beech and Wenford, the Tulip Trees and Red Oak between the Scroll and Yorkley or the scenic character along the meandering road of Soudley to Brains Green.

Concept
These types of landscape contexts contribute their own uniqueness and local distinctiveness to the “Sense of Place” at both external and internal levels and will be managed so as to sympathetically retain the Sense of Place.



Sequoia sempervirens (Coast Redwood) Churchill: cpt 4602h



Norway Spruce avenue of Soudley

The Plan area has several tree avenues some of which are of cultural ecological and recreational importance. Avenues include: Lime tree ride, Gees ride, Trafalgar Avenue, Spruce drive, Cherry tree ride, Sequoia sempervirens at Palescot and an avenue of Spruce from Soudley village hall to Bradley Hill pictured left.

Concept
Management will look to safeguard these avenues for the future. Some avenues need remedial reinstatement work whilst others would benefit from thinning adjacent crops to give the avenues more space to grow and mature fully E.g. Cherry tree ride.

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The pioneering exploration of tree species and their silvicultural characteristics in years gone by in certain areas like “The Wilson Plots” in Blaize Bailey, The Dr.Cyril Hart Arboretum, Yewtreebrake and Churchill Inclosure has left a legacy of richness that has helped shape the diverse and interesting species composition within The Forest that we know today.

Concept

Safeguard, maintain and where possible consider expansion of these sites. Use these sites as a source of knowledge and springboard of inspiration when restocking, enrichment planting or under planting. This will ensure the continued increase in species richness and diversity, helping enhance resilience to threats posed by future biotic and abiotic threats across the whole of the plan area.

Scattered old Oak and community woodland that can be diverse in nature occur typically within the peripheral woodland edges and associated villages, often coincide with areas of Forest Waste too. They are appealing due to their species and age, they are well used and explored by the public and supported by a network of desire lines that are important for quality of life.

Concept

Maintain these areas as community and amenity orientated woodlands, thinning will be permitted for ecological or health benefits.

The plan has several registered seed stands for the collection of acorns: at Sutton Bottom, Bradley Hill, Puttenage and Fowlswell Slade.

Concept

These stands will be managed in a more individually tailored way than other broadleaf crops, retaining and developing crowns of dominant acorn producing trees. This includes retention of the beech understory that aids good form and helps control heavy bramble growth detrimental to efficient acorn collection.

13% (339Ha) of the plan area contains Larch and Sweet Chestnut, with a further 80Ha of Corsican Pine, with Ash at less than 1%. Oak accounts for a fifth of the area at 523Ha.

All these species are at risk from pests and disease: such as Phytophthora on Larch and Sweet Chestnut, Dothistroma Needle Blight on Corsican Pine, Hymenoscyphus (was Chalara) on Ash, Chronic/Acute Oak decline and Oak Processionary Moth.

Concept

Pests and diseases will be managed through a variety of silvicultural means that include clearfelling, thinning, mulching, under-planting and species choice to diversify woodland composition that will see an increase in the use of mixed woodland.

Forest Research will actively monitor chosen sites to learn more about and monitor pests and diseases.

Some stands like those in Yewtreebrake, Acorn Patch, Blaize Bailey, Abbots Wood, Churchill and parts of Cockshoot are showing good signs of conifer and/or broadleaf natural regeneration, whilst others have had seed fellings undertaken in the past e.g. Yorkley Slade, Blakeney Hill and Churchill for Oak regeneration.

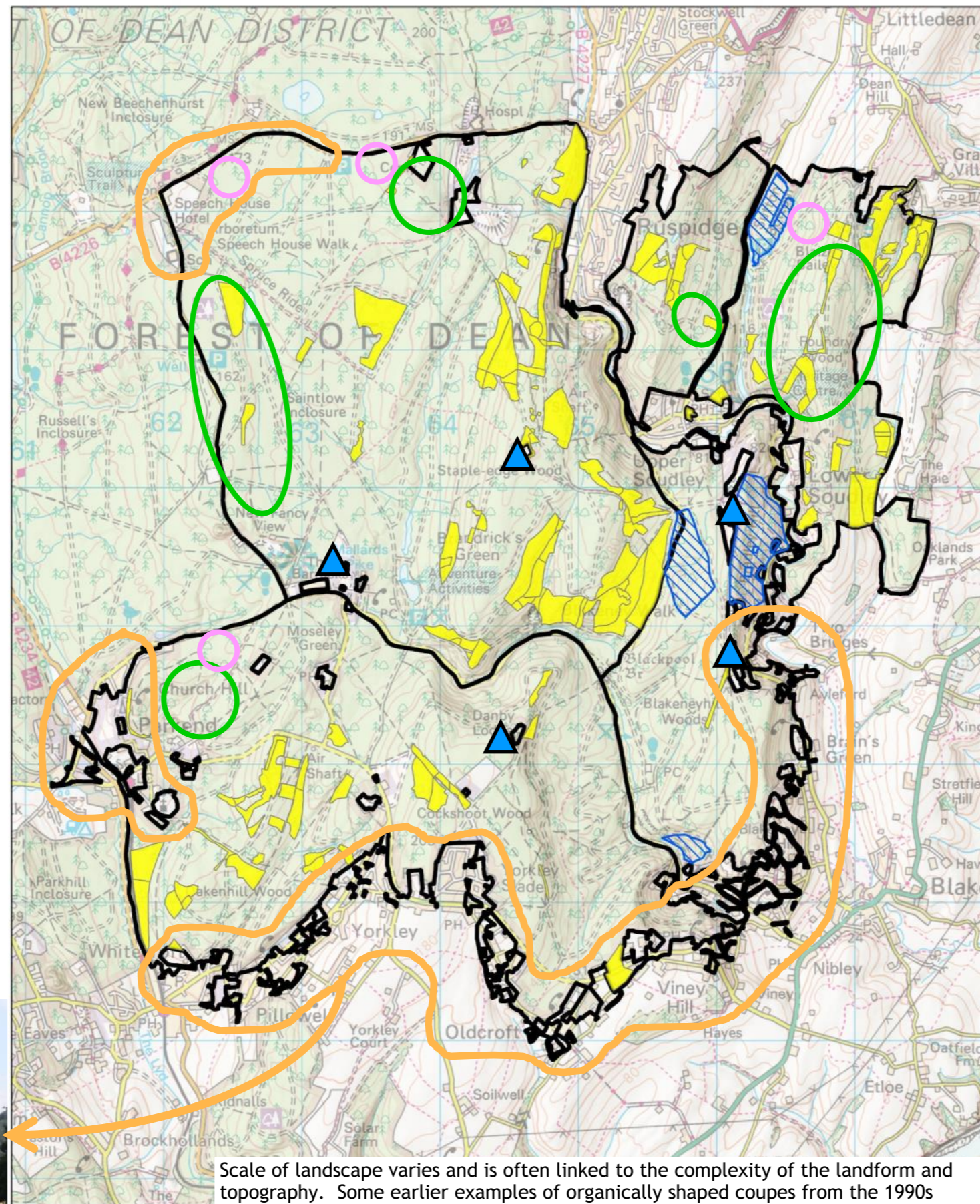
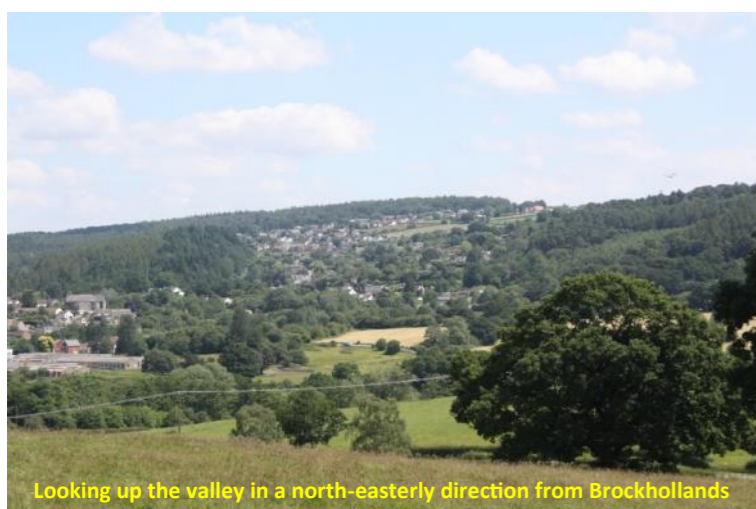
Concept

Recruitment of regeneration along with enrichment planting to form a component of the future crop should be considered, if it fits with plan objectives and there is no conflict with other management considerations. Eg Western Hemlock next to an AW / SNW or SSSI like at Soudley Ponds.

There are numerous dwellings that lie nestled within the woodland:- Danby, Blakeney Hill, Staple Edge, Brandricks Green and Bradley Hill all have their Lodges with scattered houses/cottages. This illustrates the interwoven nature of woodland and people within the plan area (see photo below)

Concept

Prescriptions and operations will reflect this interwoven nature by sympathetic management in line with plan objectives and landscape context.



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Scale of landscape varies and is often linked to the complexity of the landform and topography. Some earlier examples of organically shaped coupes from the 1990s worked well but were too small, whilst some coupes bear little relation to landform.

Concept

Coupes will be designed so as to take scale and landform into account. In some areas such as Churchill and Oakenhill scale is small and focused In other areas such as Staple Edge and Middleridge scale is much larger so coupes will be too.

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Speech House Oaks SSSI is designated for its composition of Oak and understory of veteran holly that supports an internationally important assemblage of lichens with several being red book data species. These Napoleonic Oaks originally planted for ship building now provide a variety of habitats for a diverse range of flora and fauna as well as contributing to the variety of deadwood, Sense of Place and contributing towards mental wellbeing.

Concept

Speech House Oaks are managed in accordance with the management plan for the area. The adjacent areas of p1800 Oak will be managed sympathetically encouraging similar spacing and opportunities for holly recruitment to extend opportunity for the lichens to spread.

Foxes Bridge Bog is marshy area managed in partnership with GWT. An adjacent area to the south has been felled to provide further mosaics of open habitat and broadleaf woodland. Much of the ground in the surrounding area is flat and poorly drained. The area to the south has been felled. Areas of Corsican Pine and broadleaf scrub are not performing well due to Dothistroma and the typically wet ground conditions.

Concept

Further felling work alongside conservation projects such as those to rescue and expand areas of sphagnum bog, will provide the foundations for a variety of much wetter woodland habitats, helping to create a much more functional waterway system throughout the plan area, with increased woodland edge that will also benefit other wildlife.

Awres Glow. This wet valley stretches from Lightmoor colliery in the north to just above Mallards Pike. Open habitat varies in structure from mature Scots Pine and Norway Spruce to mixed broadleaf and conifer regen to scrub and rough grass species.

Concept

Prescriptions will perpetuate the concept from the last 30 years of Forest Plans, to provide a mosaic of open habitats that run centrally N-S linking Moseley Green to Woorgreen and up as far as Wigpool.

The woodland behind Parkend Church contains a secluded mix of complex topography intertwined with watercourses that produce a variety of habitats. Complimentary to this there are also opportunities to reinstate and increase the use of coppicing throughout the plan area. (pink areas on map)

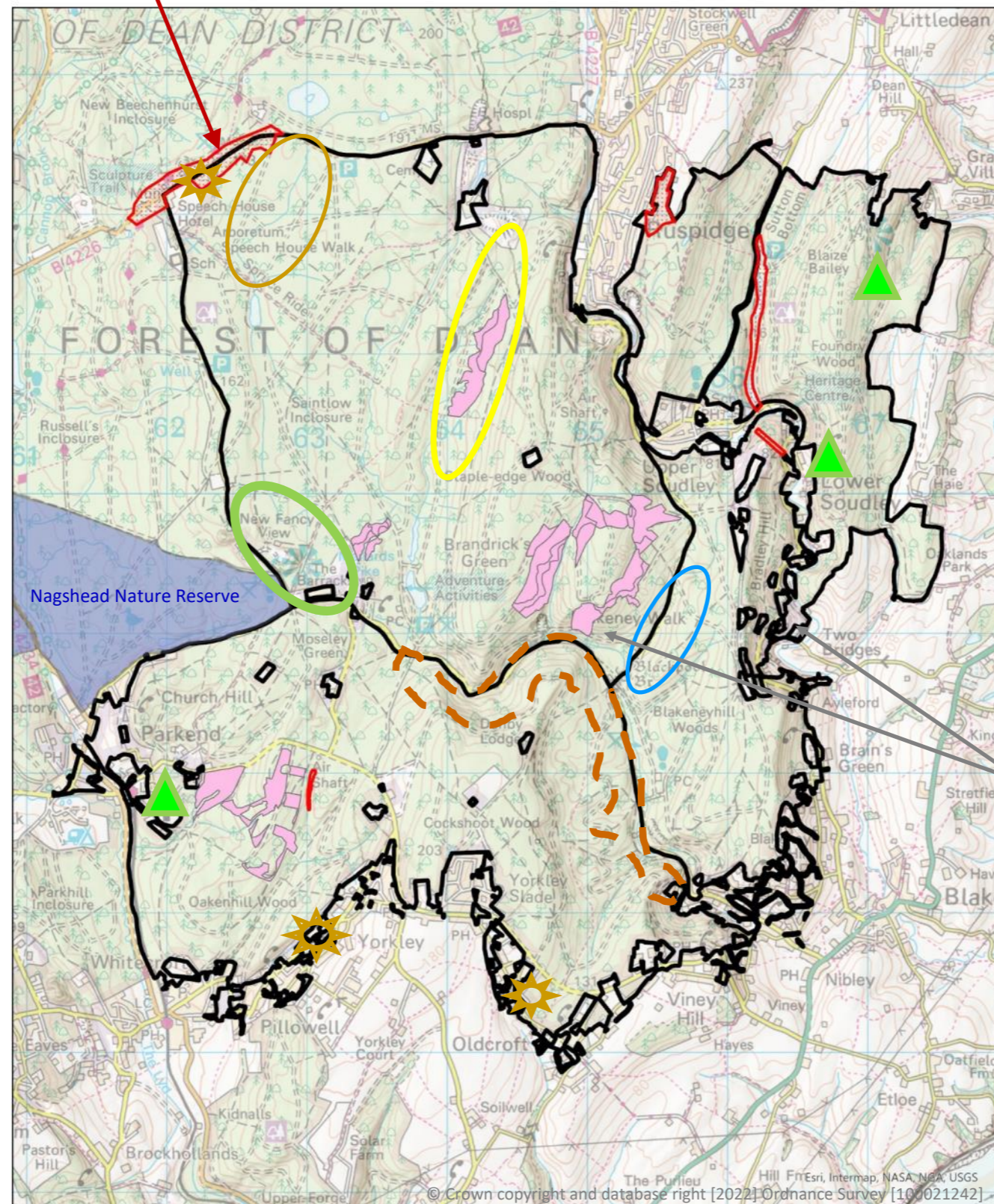
Concept

Opportunities exist to increase the amount of coppice work that will provide improved habitat links, ride structure and complement wet habitats.

Brandricks Green is an area of acid grassland and bracken next door to The Barracks and New Fancy that provides a mosaic of open habitats, host to some of the last sites in the Forest for Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary whilst at Moseley Green the habitat has shown to be important for Turtle Dove.

Concept

This area is isolated and in need of expansion to safeguard the habitats. Prescriptions will vary but will work to complement this area to provide a robust mix of habitats with much stronger links and corridors to other similar habitats around Mallards Pike, north into Saintlow Inclosure and south into Little Moseley.



The plan area enjoys expansive swathes of native Bluebells, especially from Soudley to Blackpool Bridge that is a popular scenic drive both for locals and visitors that is further enhanced by stands Large Douglas Fir and Scots Pine.

Concept

The Bluebells here are found in stands of Oak that have an understory of Beech. This understory should be maintained to ensure correct levels of dappled shade exist for the Bluebells to thrive. The stands of Douglas Fir and Scots Pine should continue to be thinned and allowed to develop to biological maturity.

▲ The plan area enjoys both large and small areas of Beech and Hornbeam particularly good for Hawfinch e.g. Parkend Church and Blaize Bailey.

Concept

Planting should be mindful to enhancing habitat for hawfinch by recruiting regeneration or enrichment planting.

The southern slopes above Blackpool Brook and the area around Holly Tufts, Brains Green and up through the Soudley Valley are naturalistic and diverse. There is much old mining activity that can leave disturbed soils and mixed woodland of varying density, with some wet woodland and areas of mature Douglas Fir.

Concept

Broadleaves will be dominant along the valleys, particularly along the Blackpool Brook and eastern side of Staple Edge. Alder, Willow and Birch will be the main species in wet woodland areas with Oak, (Ash & Sweet Chestnut), Hazel, Lime and Aspen featuring in other areas.

★ Scattered old Oak and Oak dominated community woodland is generally situated around the peripheral edges.

Concept


These areas of old oak contain fantastic opportunities to accrue valuable deadwood habitats for invertebrates, lichens and other species to thrive. In terms of management felling will be a last option.

The Blakeney Hill Valley that runs up from Blakeney to Mallards Pike has a very Semi-natural feel, polarised by plantation woodland that in some cases fragments the semi-naturalness feeling. Other instances illustrate well mixed and diverse range of species that feathers the transition from lower slopes to higher ground really well.

Concept

Where plantation woodland disrupts the flow of Semi-natural woodland, native species will be promoted, especially south of the forest road opposite Wenchford and the transition from lower elevations to higher ones will imitate those north of Danby Lodge promoting mixed broadleaf and conifer crops that will enhance future resilience of the woodland to future threats from pests, disease and climate as well as provide diversity of habitat in structure and biological maturity.



The plan area provides a vitally important range of bat habitat and refugia, with a number of bat hibernacula throughout the plan area. Those at Bradley Hill railway tunnel and Buckshaft Mine are designated as SSSI for greater and lesser horseshoe bat and the railway tunnel within Oakenhill railway cutting geological SSSI being an important roosting site. Surrounding woodland provides both feeding and roosting for bats as well as links to breeding sites north of the plan area at Littledean Hall and Blaisdon with a further SSSI hibernacula at Westburybrook Ironstone mine. Typical flight lines indicated by yellow arrow thus: 

Areas of peripheral Forest Waste and woodland edge to the south are also likely to be well used by the bats too.
Concept
Prescriptions will be sensitively selected to ensure that woodland will be carefully managed in line with EPS guidance to ensure habitats are protected.

Dormice have been noted within the plan area.




Concept
Prescriptions will be tailored to enhance existing linkages and create new ones especially through coppicing.

Lightmoor and New Fancy collieries. These old spoil heaps provide rich open habitats suitable for the likes of the Grayling butterfly or adder populations. However, these areas are generally isolated, fragmented and too small with habitats being transitional in nature so putting pressure on remaining populations of priority species.

Concept
Prescriptions will be tailored to enhance existing linkages and create new ones in order to provide better connectivity, functionality, diversity of habitat and woodland edge.

Historically much of the plan area was drained to establish the woods we have today. Until recently drains were routinely maintained.

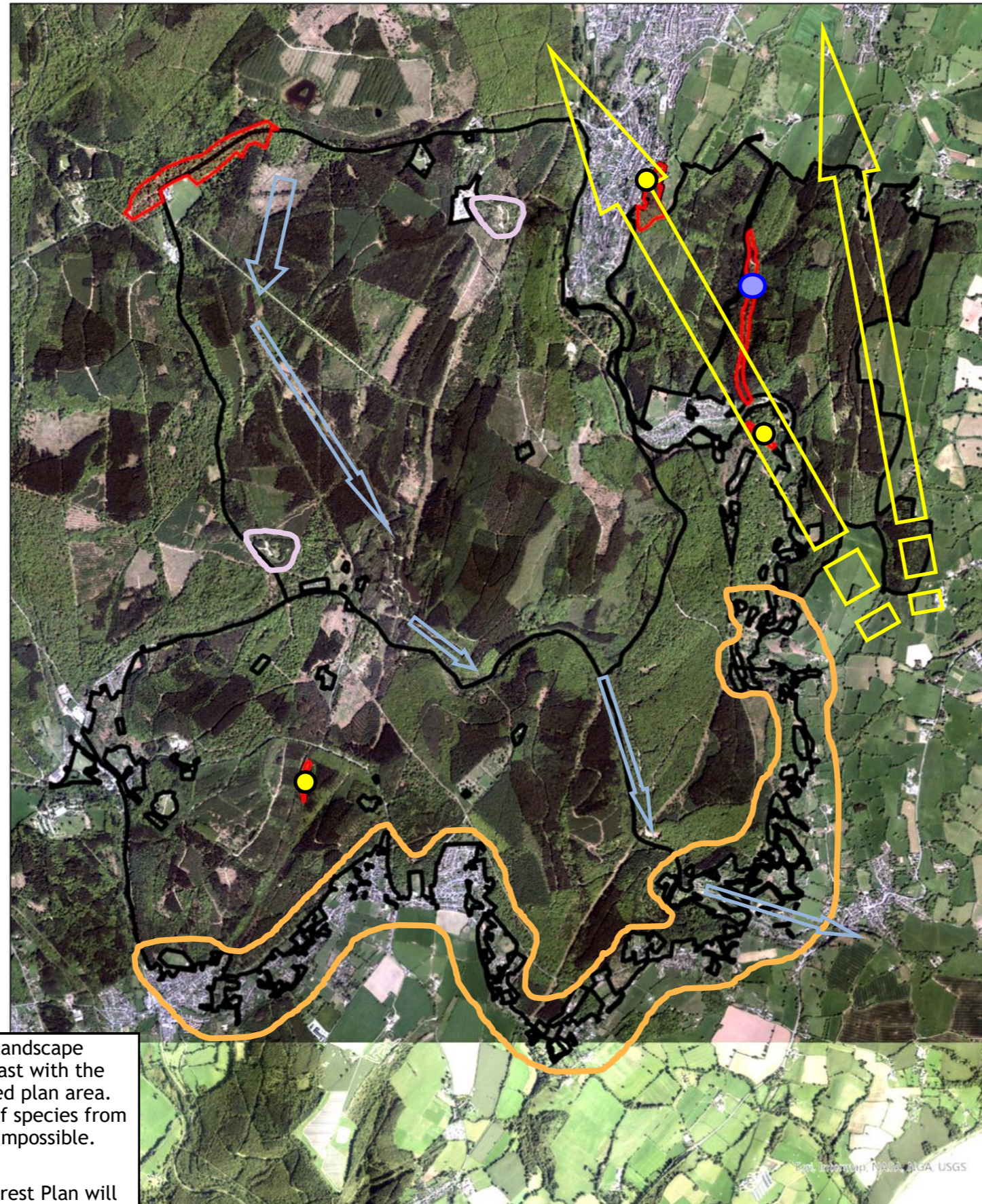
Concept
Management of water flow is being prioritised. In some cases, through implementation of identified prescriptions, stretches of watercourses will be promoted for the purposes of providing future potential beaver release sites.

 The plan area is unique in that it contains almost the complete catchment for Blackpool Brook starting at Foxes Bridge Bog, as well as partially 2 other catchments. Some of those watercourses are not ecologically in prime condition. The plan area is also home to important EPS species such as Great Crested Newts.

Concept
The plan will adopt the priorities laid out in the Water catchment plans for the Forest in order to improve the ecology and quality of the catchment. Each priority buffer will have its own management & restock coupe to highlight work required.


The nature of the aerial photo shows the surrounding landscape dominated by open pasture and arable land is in contrast with the densely wooded, monocultured nature of the afforested plan area. This provides poor permeability, meaning movement of species from one area to another can be slow, difficult and almost impossible.

Concept
Whilst celebrating diversity that the forest has, the Forest Plan will seek to diversify the age class, species composition and habitat structure by ensuring treatment types are as diverse as possible.



The plan area is capable of producing high quality timber from both conifer and broadleaves, with both the Oak in Middelridge and Blakeney Hill, Douglas Fir from Soudley commanding high prices, although squirrels, boar and deer are a challenge.

Concept
The quality of the timber needs to be safeguarded from natural predation by the likes of squirrels. This will hopefully be achieved through the reintroduction of Pine Martens, although the length of time it will take to reverse the impact on timber quality is not known but could be as long as 15-20 years or more. Fencing and culling will be used for other predators such as boar and deer.

 Soudley Ponds are designated as SSSI as the ponds represent fine examples of wetland habitat rich in wildlife bordered by damp woodland.

Concept
Work will continue to be implemented, managing the tree cover in line with SSSI management plan to ensure levels of light and shade are retained at optimum levels.



Goshawk are an iconic species for the Forest of Dean and have been very successful due to the diverse mix of mature conifer habitat that support the Goshawk.

Concept
Mature conifer habitats will be managed through thinning, clearfell & Low Impact Silviculture (LIS) ensuring suitable habitat remains available for nesting and breeding.

Areas of Forest Waste are an important feature and component of the wooded landscape, enhancing the distinctive character of the area mainly around peripheral edges of the woodlands E.g. Moseley Green & Yorkley and provide habitat for the likes of adders, Glow-worms, other reptiles and invertebrates. Some areas are being lost to successional infill by gorse, bracken and pioneer tree species due to the lack of grazing since foot and mouth in 2001.

Concept
Areas of Forest Waste should continue to be managed both through mechanical means and volunteer groups. There maybe opportunities to incorporate Forest Waste into larger open areas for grazing by goats, cattle and sheep.

The Industrial past of the Forest has led to some areas of poorer, more impoverished and sometimes skeletal soils. Eg the eastern slopes of Staple Edge, the strip mining in Oakenhill, the quarrying at Lightmoor and Eastern United.

Concept

Following completion of quarrying, sites are restored but are often left open due to being acidic in nature or having a low nutrient value, although species such as alder, birch and pine are good pioneering species for these types of sites.

The plan area contains two important SSSI sites (shown ringed in blue) cited for their geological significance both locally and nationally:

- Meezyhurst occurs in four places along the southern slopes of Staple Edge with various important outcrops and strata exposed.¹
- The Oakenhill Railway cutting offers valuable exposures of Carboniferous rock layers.²

Concept

These sites will be maintained in accordance with their respective SSSI plans that generally require occasional scrub clearance and odd tree felling along with vegetation management and options to retain deadwood habitat.

Midleridge - fertile brown earths on the eastern slopes capable of growing productive conifer with poorer less well-drained central area on heavier clays and gleys on which Oak quality has been reputedly high.

Staple Edge - Eastern slopes are better draining mainly consisting of acid brown earths with some calcareous outcrops and occasional podzols. The disturbed slopes above Blackpool Brook give rise to ground due to mining producing high quality Douglas Fir and Sweet Chestnut. Further west, the broad shallow valley comprises of imperfectly drained gley soils, often nutrient rich but very wet. Just above Mallards Pike on the lower slopes of the ridge are gleyed and show good signs of natural regeneration.

Blaize Bailey and Abbots Wood - Predominantly brown earths with some gleyed areas mainly with a fresh moisture regime and rich to very rich Nutrient regime. Meaning that this block can produce high quality Douglas Fir of up to YC24.

Blakeney Hill - Predominantly brown earths with some gleyed areas with a fresh moisture regime and rich nutrient regime achieving broadleaf YC of upto YC 6.

Cockshoot - The eastern slopes are mostly gleyed soils rising to the relatively flat plateau consisting of free draining brown earth that continues down the western slopes.

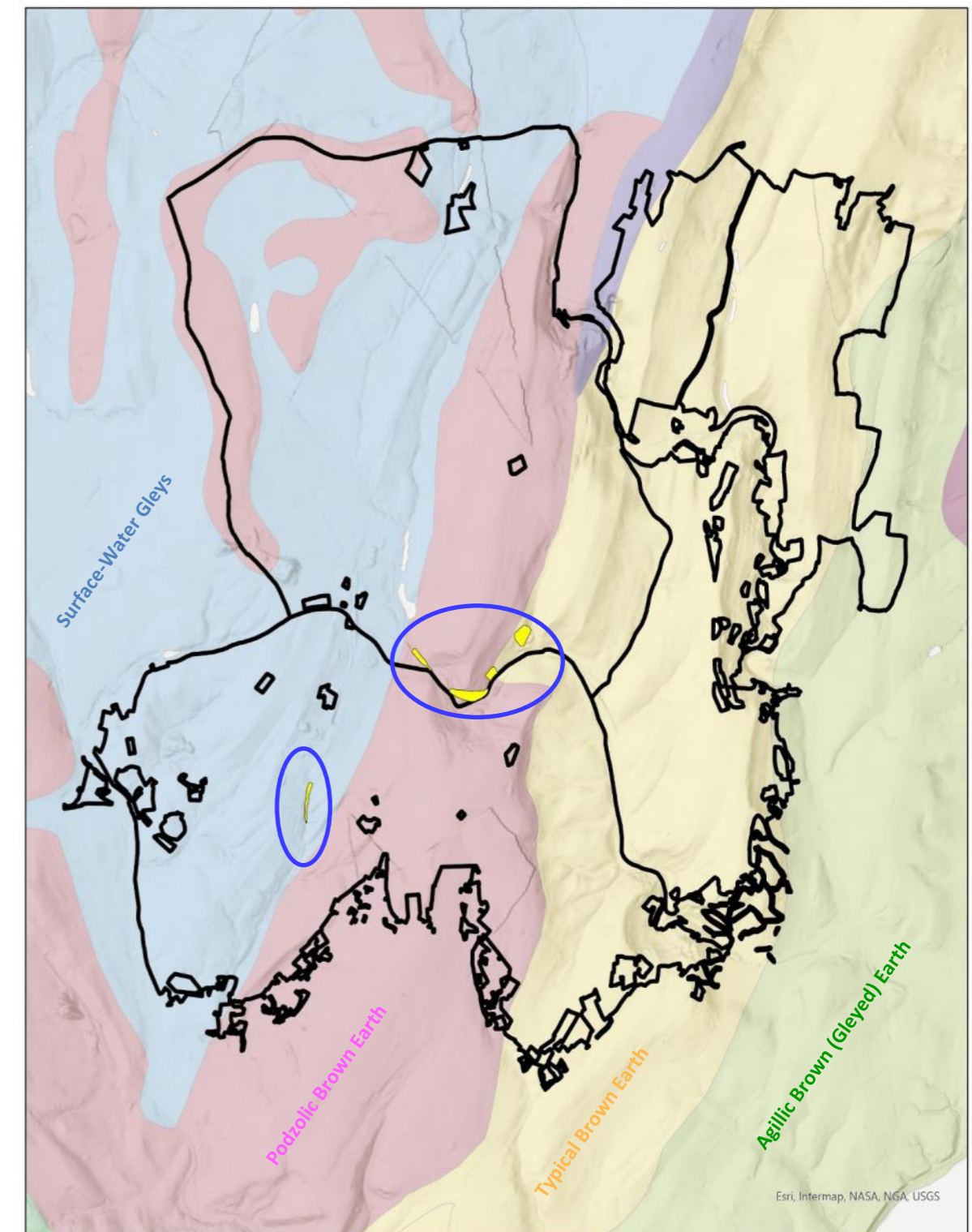
Churchill and Oakenhill- Both contain mostly gleyed soils that drain to the west with wetter pockets to the west too. Oakenhill was strip mined and so soil is more impoverished but still able to support conifer upto YC18.

Concept

With the use of local knowledge in conjunction with Ecological Site Classification (ESC) tools and where appropriate soil pits, the future woodland structure will move away from monocultures and continue to diversify an already diverse woodland composition to include those species classed as “Alternative” or “Emerging” species that will give the woodland a more robust composition suitable to face a changing climate and threats of pests and disease.

¹ The unconformable contact with the underlying older rocks is clearly exposed, and a more or less continuous section through the whole of Trenchard Group and lower Pennant Group of the Upper Coal Measures can be seen. This includes the Coleford High Delf, which marks the boundary between the two groups. The site thus provides the best opportunity to see how sedimentation first spread into this area during this part of the Westphalian. (source: Natural England SSSI citation)

² These consist of shale layers, separated by thin sandstones or coals form part of the Supra Pennant Group, a subdivision of the Coal Measures. This is the only extensive exposure of this group in the Forest of Dean and offers an important opportunity to examine the fossil content of these rocks, rarely found elsewhere in Britain. The site is of unique importance in understanding geological development of this area. (source: Natural England SSSI citation)



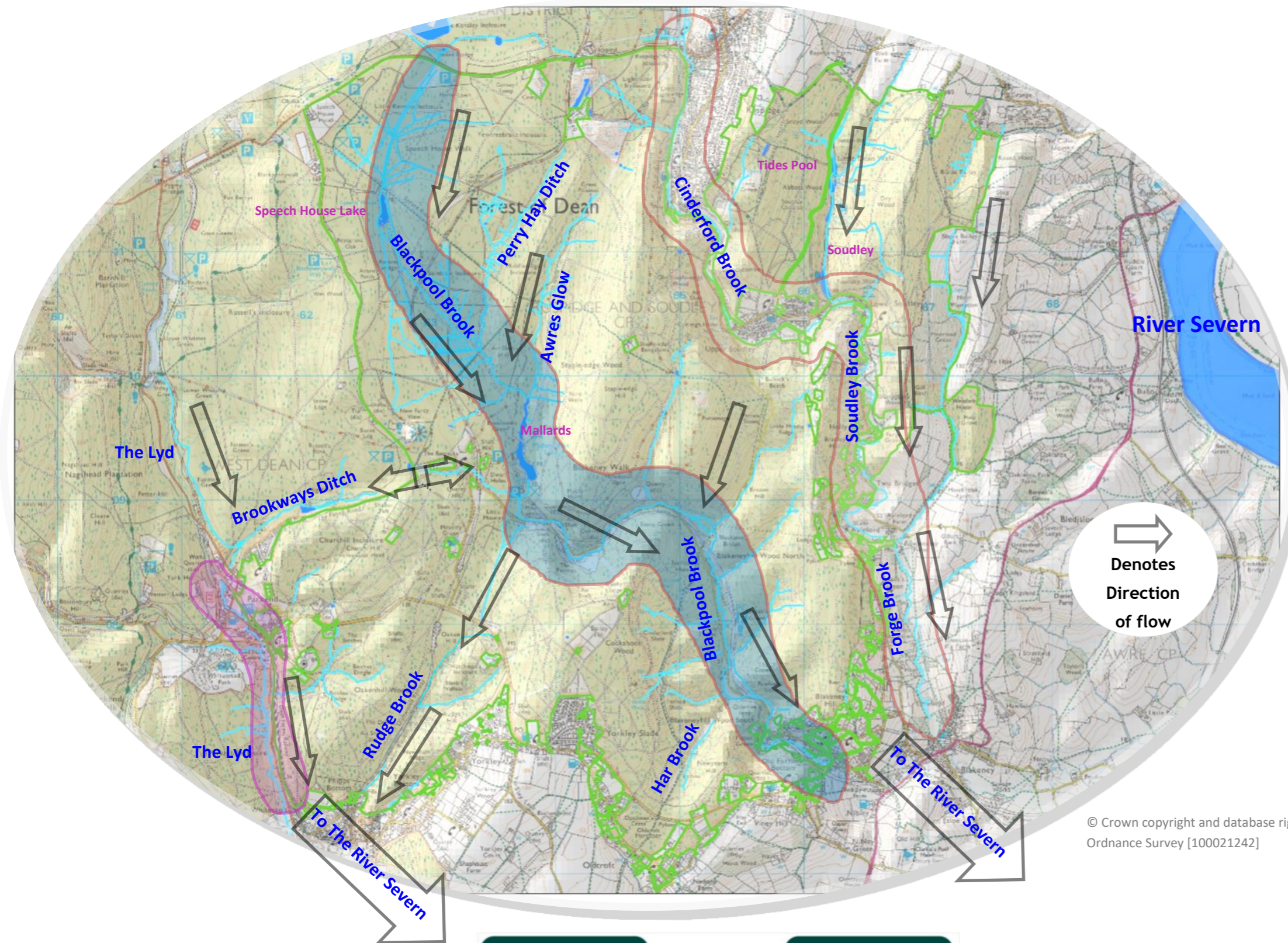
Left: Meezyhurst SSSI 1 of the 4 geological exposures just west of Morses Level.



Right: geological exposure at Oakenhill Railway cutting SSSI also showing deadwood retention.

OUR SHARED FOREST

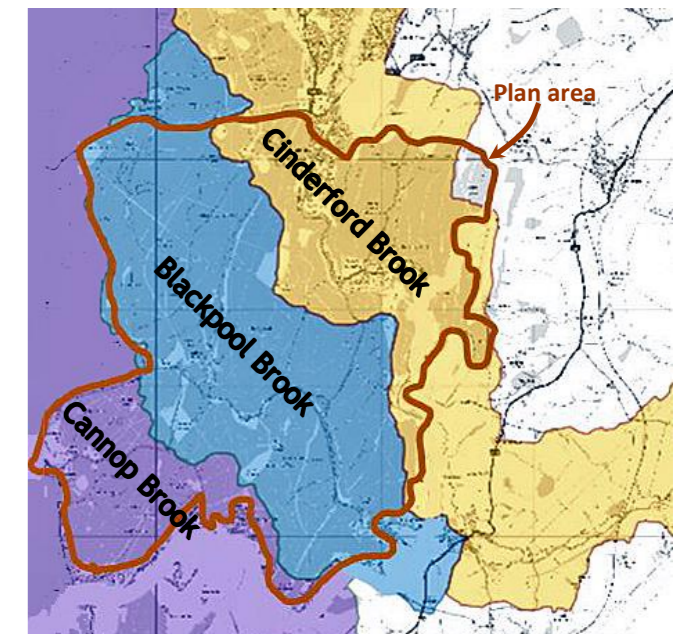
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Water catchments within the Forest Plan

The map below denotes the three water catchments covering the Forest Plan area as identified in the Environment Agency’s Water Framework Directive. The main watercourses involved can be seen in more detail on the map to the left and are colour coordinated to this table for ease of identification.



Catchment	Length (miles)		Catchment area (square miles)
	Total (from EA*)	In plan	
Blackpool Brook	3.0	5.5	6.4
Cinderford Brook	9.6	4.2	10.6
Cannop Brook	12.2	1.5	22.5

Concept

The Forest Plan coupled with the Our Shared Forest project will look for ways in which to harmonise forest management prescriptions with the character of freshwater ecology within the plan area. This will ensure natural features, processes and habitats are delivered that will provide protection from natural hazards such as flooding, soil erosion and help in protecting the needs of aquatic species. To achieve this the plan will embrace the principles laid out in UK Forest Standard Guidelines for Water.

The image to the right is taken from the Dasgupta Review of 2019 (HM Treasury) and calls for changes in how we think, act and measure economic success to protect and enhance our prosperity and the natural world.

Forestry England has embraced the [natural capital approach](#) and increasing Natural Capital is one of Forestry England’s core objectives.



Concept

This Forest Plan will seek to identify those watercourses in need of priority treatment in order that their biological and ecological values are greatly enhanced, achieved by following key guidance for riparian buffers laid out in the Catchment Management Plans prepared by the Forest Waters Officer and the District Ecologist.

Foxes Bridge Bog is a marshy acidic area managed in partnership with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Fed by water that flows from Woorgreen Lake, eventually finding its way through the marsh to Speech House Lake. Much of the ground in the surrounding area is flat and poorly drained.

Concept

Extend wet woodland and associated habitats south of Foxes Bridge Bog down to Speech House lake. This will be achieved through clearfelling and planting of tree species such as Willow, Alder and Aspen in sensitively selected areas, creating a woodland habitat that’s as diverse as possible and could support other future ecological goals.

The plan area is special in that the full length of Blackpool Brook is wholly contained within the plan area; from the headwaters emanating from Foxes Bridge Bog to Pitching Green and Fowlswell Slade at Blakeney, before flowing through to the River Severn. Blackpool Brook feeds both Speech House Lake & Mallards Pike, that in turn is fed by numerous smaller streams and ditches. A lot of these watercourses are overshadowed by conifer. This has begun to be redressed in places through the removal of conifer from riparian zones & flood plains and begun opening up stretches of watercourses such as those at the Reform Bridge (see photo, right) and Saintlow Inclosure.



Concept

Through clearfelling, selective thinning and group planting of native broadleaves along selected stretches of the brook, there are further opportunities to improve and enhance the ecological value of the brook and the surrounding habitats. From the water catchment management plans non-silvicultural options will also be applied that may include projects like raising river beds, the blocking of ditches in certain areas, use of woody dams or the reintroduction of Beaver in suitable locations.



The Forest Plan has 8 large man-made ponds covering four sites at Speech House Lake, Mallards Pike, Soudley Ponds & Tides Pool that provide a diverse range of benefits. Some ponds are known for the woodland and wildlife habitats such as Soudley Ponds (SSSI - see Wildlife & wild spaces analysis), Speech House Lake for fishing & filming and Mallards Pike providing the setting for a variety of recreational activities and events.

Concept

Through thinning and coppicing, light levels will be controlled. Features like the Scots Pine at the entrance to & around Mallards Pike Lake will be thinned to promote large crowned trees for the future. Conifer surrounding Speech House Lake should continue to be routinely thinned, opening up & pulling back the dense conifer that shrouds the pond edges. Soudley Ponds will be managed in accordance to the SSSI management plan.

● The valley of Awres Glow in Staple Edge runs in a southerly direction from Palescot in the north to Mallards Pike lake in the south. It has a wet valley bottom that once was dominated by mature Norway Spruce. Suffering periodic windthrow, over the last 15 years the Norway Spruce has been gradually removed through thinning and clearfelling. Although some stands remain, the valley now has a much more open feel to it, with some open areas and ponds being created in the northern parts of the site. Some parts now show signs of both conifer and broadleaf regeneration. Some stretches further south are showing signs of tufa formation, whilst in others the stream has spread across floodplains to create shallow pools full of watercress, then meandering through wet woodland of Willow and Alder before entering Mallards Pike lake.

Concept

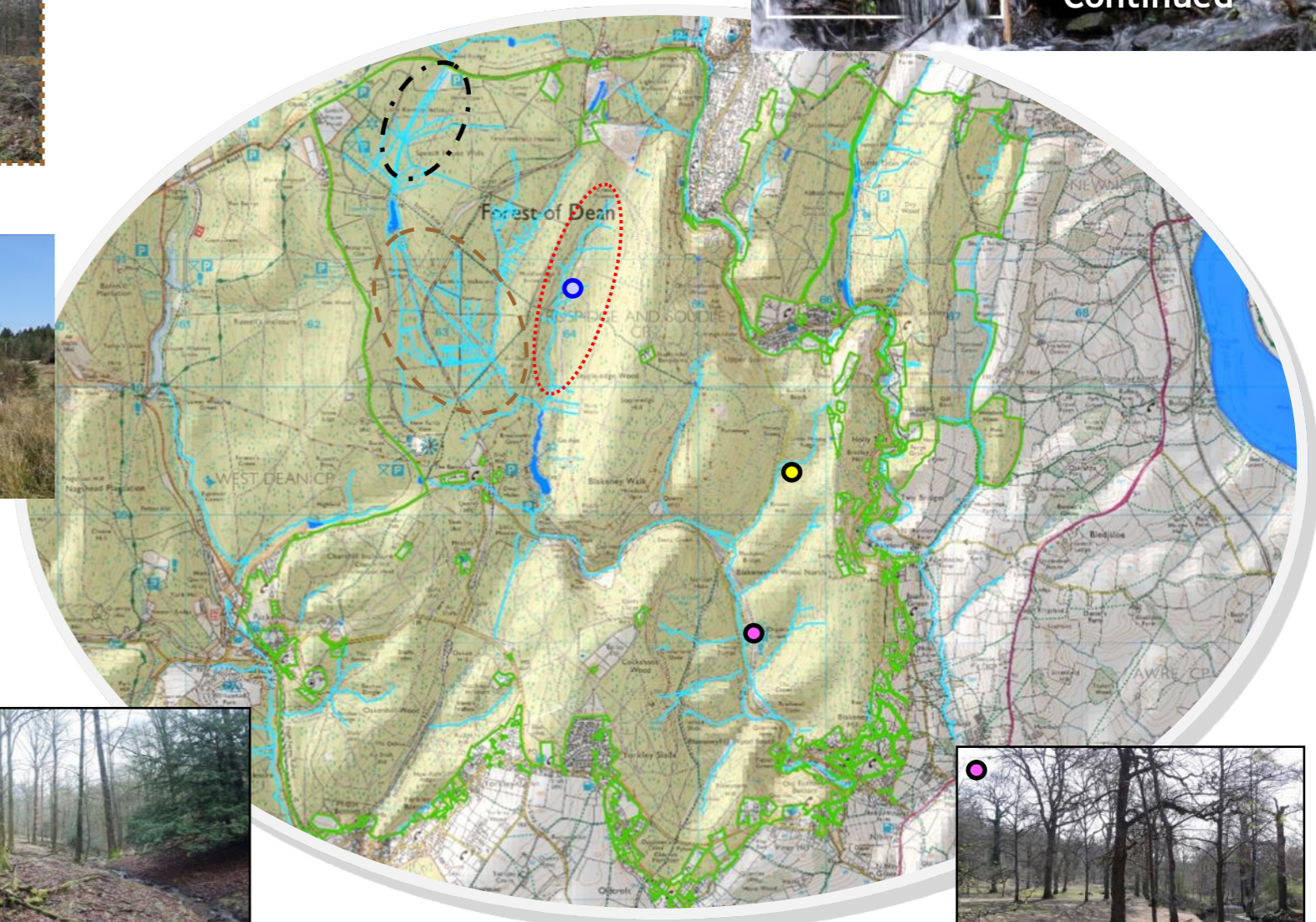
This valley already contains an interesting mosaic of habitats and features that will provide a backbone for the development of a more connected suite of habitats that are better integrated into the woodland setting. These maybe achieved through further felling, thinning, sensitive restocking or group plantings, grazing, open space creation and maintenance, reconnection of the watercourse in places to its surrounding landscape and possible consideration for the reintroduction of beaver.



● Those Tributaries and smaller streams flowing through broadleaved valleys and gullies can predominantly be found within Blakeney Hill, whilst those occurring to the south in Cockshoot often occur with conifer.

Concept

Being of a broadleaf nature, there will be little change along the watercourses and tributaries that run through Blakeney Hill. However, along some selective stretches of watercourses within Cockshoot there remain opportunities to reframe the wooded context of the watercourses to one that has more of a broadleaf nature, although at some locations it is the conifer that adds a sense of drama to the landscape and these areas should be retained.



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● Blackpool Brook (Blakeney Straits) runs through Wenchford picnic site that is defined by the widely spaced Oak planted in 1869. The site is widely enjoyed by people for both the Oaks and the Brook. There is evidence that the brook is threatening the stability of some of the oak trees.

Concept

The site will be assessed for thinning or other remedial works such as crown thinning, crown reductions or as a last resort felling during routine thinning in Blakeney Hill. Work on Oaks should be an opportunity to improve the provision of all types of deadwood, enriching available habitats for a diverse range of wildlife, invertebrates and flora. Underplanting will help resolve issues with dieback of Oak.



OUR SHARED FOREST

“To Nurture a shared Forest unlike any other”

The industrial past of the Dean has left a legacy of features that provide opportunities for local recreation and education as well as recording cultural identity. Examples include:

- Oakenhill Railway Tunnel and cutting (SSSI) that provides educational opportunities to learn about the geological structure of the Forest.
- Extensive networks of dismantled railways - used as informal footpaths and also more formally converted for cycling.
- Colliery tips such as those at New Fancy that provide fantastic panoramic views over the forest. Others have been planted, usually with Scots Pine that become features of the Forest. Eg, Parkend Royal Colliery tip in Oakenhill.
- The railway line from Parkend to Whitecroft along the western edge of Oakenhill is still in use and run by The Norchard Steam Railway.

Concept

Each of these features in turn requires their own specific prescriptions, often relating to ensuring the quality of the landscape is maintained through sensitive management. This can take the shape of maintaining the impressive mature Douglas Fir and Scots Pine that grow alongside the Steam Railway line or along the Family Cycle Trail that runs through Middleridge - it means creating an interesting and diverse woodland edge with varying tree species and density with areas of open space mixed in to give vistas into the forest.



“Roll of Honour” sculpture at New Fancy commemorates miners that worked in the Forest



The Forest Plan contains around **150 to 170Ha** of Forest Waste. These areas are areas of non-productive open ground, and were traditionally grazed by commoners and their sheep. Since Foot and Mouth in 2001 the number of grazing sheep has dwindled significantly to a point where they are ineffective at retaining Forest Waste as open habitat, as a result some areas are being lost to successional growth of birch, bramble, gorse and other woody vegetation.

Concept

A number of these areas are now usually cut each year by flail or swipe, perhaps with opportunity to encourage further grazing.

Many of the ponds that the plan area enjoys were created following quarrying activity. Ponds provide numerous benefits for education, recreation, habitat and species diversity.

Concept

Management will reflect the high aesthetic value given to the ponds, the expectation that mature trees will be present as well as the needs of the associated habitats and their surroundings.



Limetree ride is an important feature of Common Lime that runs from Cinderford Bridge south easterly through Middleridge and Churchill Inclosure ending at Parkend Church. Other important rides include Trafalgar Avenue planted to mark the bicentennial celebrations of Lord Nelson visiting the Forest of Dean & the Battle of Trafalgar. Secondly the Spruce ride originally planted in the 1960s and now recreated to commemorate past Foresters who have tended the Forest. There are also several Scots Pine avenues that still feature in Middleridge dating from the C19th.

Concept

Through sensitive thinning of surrounding crops the avenues will be given more space for crowns to spread and to grow to full maturity. Younger avenues should have missing trees replaced.



The eastern slopes of Staple Edge have historically been an area of intense industrial activity, initially following iron ore seams and later coal and stone. The area is geologically diverse. This has left a rich legacy of industrial archaeology. Some industrial activity continues today. There are a number of bat hibernacula along the outcrop of limestone on the eastern slopes of Staple Edge primarily associated with iron mining caves.

Concept

Management will be sensitive to ensure these features are maintained through the site planning process and safeguard mining features that are of benefit to bats, complementing the Dean Bat SSSI.



Mining and quarrying in the Forest remains an important part of the Forest economy and continuity with its past. Features include: Lightmoor, Eastern United, Oakenhill opencast, sites at Meezyhurst, Furnace Bottom. - Old sites are now often an important part of the landscape with mature mixed woodland covering them and also imparting a valuable contribution to a variety of woodland habitat from the open scree slopes of Lightmoor for Lepidoptera, to the old opencast site in Oakenhill that provides valuable acidic grassland habitat.

Concept

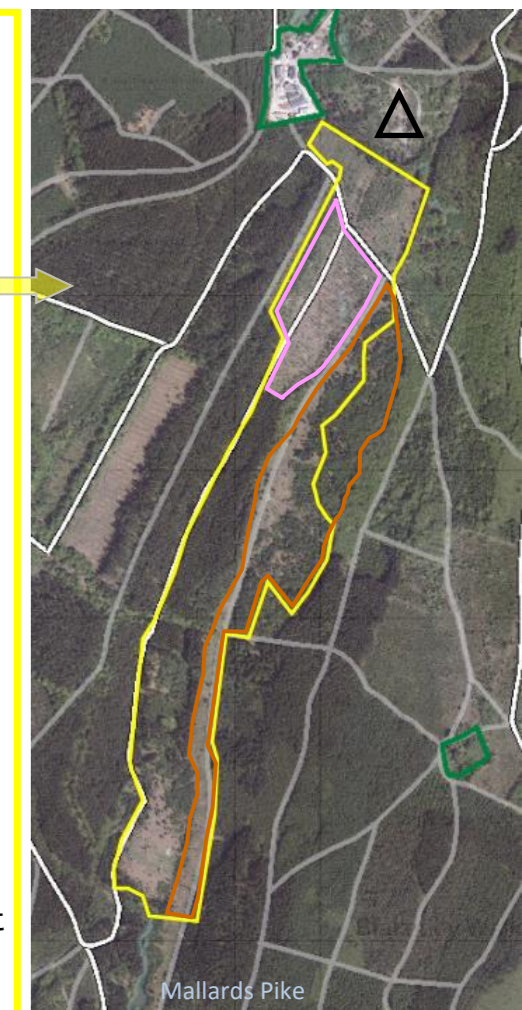
Where landscaping is important there will generally be a low level of change achieved through longterm retentions of conifer and broadleaves. In more open habitats they will be managed in accordance to their needs to retain their beneficial character.



Awres Glow. This wet valley bottom stretches from Lightmoor colliery in the North (▲) to just above Mallards Pike in the South and is a legacy resulting from historical industrial proposals, having been clearfelled in 2004. The now developing open habitat varies in age and species structure from mature Scots Pine / Norway Spruce to mixed broadleaf and conifer regen to scrub and rough grass species.

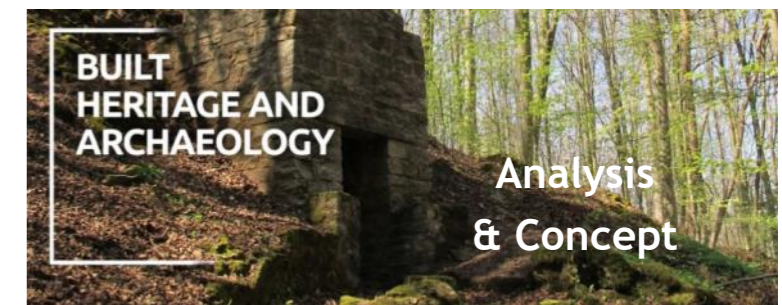
Concept

This site will now be managed for nature conservation providing opportunities to create a diversity of habitats through **grazing** and **coppicing** that will benefit a wide variety of invertebrates, reptiles and mammals.



OUR SHARED FOREST

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Possible site of C13th Saintlow Castle and later Lincolnhill Forest Lodge. Most Archaeological features recorded in Middleridge are of a later date dating back to C18-19th.


Concept
Ensure features are safeguarded during forest operations, retaining the integrity of remnant features such as earthbanks, stone walls, charcoal hearths.

There are numerous stone lined culverts throughout the forest such as this good example at Reform Bridge in Middleridge but often occur within the wood itself.




Concept
These features are lovely examples of industrial craftsmanship. The planning of Forest operations should identify any such feature and safeguard them where practicable.

Blackpool Brook features sections of stonework that line the Brook forming more of a leat type feature, engineered during days when mining was more active. Stone lining of the Brook helped to keep the mines from flooding.

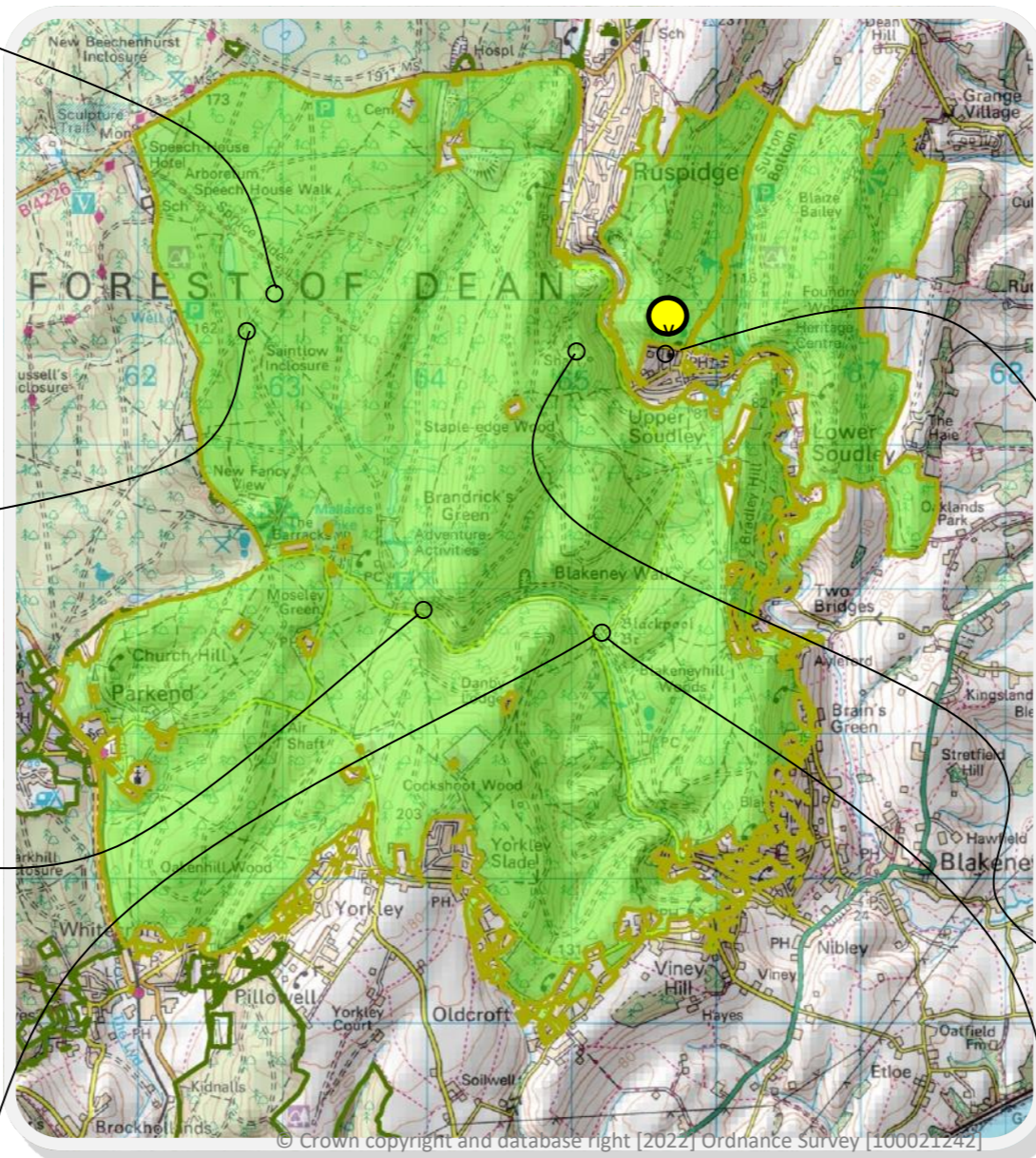



Concept
The leat is a heritage feature completed in its day for all the right reasons although now it is recognised that it carries the water off perhaps too quickly, especially during seasonally wet spells. The conflict between mining and conservation of the stream with associated habitats needs further investigation.

At Blackpool Bridge there is a section of exposed cobbled road known as “The Dean Road” or “The Roman Road”, it is a Scheduled Monument. The road is thought to continue southward through Cockshoot, but this is the most visible section. However it is threatened by encroachment from the council road whenever it is resurfaced.



Concept
The SM will be managed in accordance with the management plan. Council Highways will be made aware of potential threat to the Roman Road so as it can be safeguarded.



 Romano-British field system identified on LiDAR as Nationally Important.

Concept
Featured to be considered at time of planning of Forest Operations.

Railways of the area
Severn Wye Railway & Mineral loop / Great Western Railway / Forest of Dean Central railway / Tram roads & dram tracks.

Concept
Mostly disused, some are now cycle trails whilst others are overgrown. considered during the planning of Forest Operations.


There are numerous non-scheduled features that are important to the heritage of the Dean and include charcoal hearths, scowles, wood/earth banks, sunken tracks known as holloways.

Concept
The planning of Forest Operations will refer to and consider features captured on GiS, with any new features recorded appropriately.

The plan area contains numerous Forest Lodges that would have once belonged to The Crown, although are all now in private ownership. Most sit nestled within a woodland context. (see Trees and Woodlands concept and analysis page)


Concept
Forest management should be sensitive to the context of the Lodges.

Soudley Camp is a Roman Fort and is a Scheduled Monument that lies in the southeast corner of Abbotts Wood, adjacent to Soudley Primary School. In 2014 the site underwent extensive restoration to remove heavy layers of bracken litter and gorse.




Concept
The Camp will be managed in accordance with an agreed management plan.

Findall’s Chimney sits on the eastern slopes of Old Staple Edge. It was part of the ventilation system for the Perseverance and Findall Iron Mine complex. Built in the 1800s it stands about 100ft tall and is the only complete surviving iron mine chimney in the Forest today, undergoing restoration in the last 30 years with thanks to the Forest of Dean Caving club.



Concept
The Chimney lies in a secluded part of the Forest surrounded by beech and oak woodland that should continue to be thinned sympathetic to the chimneys woodland context.

Blackpool Bridge just above Wenchford and adjacent to The Roman Road is a rare survivor from the days of when the network of railways throughout the Dean were thriving.



Concept
Ensure the brickwork remains unthreatened by encroaching broadleaf regeneration and Ivy.

OUR SHARED FOREST

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Recreational use of the area is high with the most frequented car parks at Mallards Pike, New Fancy, Spruce Drive, Dr. Hart’s Arboretum, Foxes Bridge, Blaize Bailey and Wenchford, as well as numerous informal car parks. The woods are used by walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers, with an ever increasing appetite for downhill & cross country routes, with pressure to also increase horse riding facilities. These users are supported by a network of public rights of way, permissive routes and formal Forest Trails.

Concept

Whether that person is a local or a visitor, the woodlands, trees and associated habitats and species provide the foundation for Recreational enjoyment of the Forest. The Forest Plan prescriptions should be sympathetic to enhance the user experience and aim to enrich aesthetic appearances of the forest within a local and wider landscape context.

Visitors per year

Beechenhurst	350-400k
Speech House Hotel	c 30-50k
Mallards Pike	190-200k
Wenchford	50-70k

*Plus visitors to other sites

★ Beechenhurst and Speech House Hotel

▲ Most frequented carparking

● Secondary & minor carparking

*** Other facilities**

- New Fancy viewpoint
- Speech House woodlands
- Foxes Bridge & Cinderford Bridge
- Soudley Ponds & Blaize Bailey
- Bradley Hill
- Cockshoot
- Parkend Church

The plan area enjoys a multitude of recreational activities and events (mostly based at Mallards Pike) including: Go-Ape, Segway, outdoor pursuits, fishing, horse and carriage rides, husky racing and motor sports.



Concept

Whilst there are currently no major recreational developments planned, some sites may require forethought in the provision of additional car parking that may influence management prescriptions.

From various vantage points throughout the plan area one can appreciate the fantastic views of the surrounding Gloucestershire countryside especially those from the Blaize Bailey viewpoint. Internally within the woodlands there are also a diverse range of landscapes one can enjoy especially from New Fancy viewpoint that commands extensive views over the plan area and surrounding forest, along with the open habitats along Awre’s Glow, the more intimate open habitats like those at Foxes Bridge, or areas of Forest Waste like those at Blakeney Hill. There are also more oblique views like those from the top of Spruce Ride or Trafalgar Avenue.

Concept


The plan will look to maintain and improve these landscapes and view points through planned felling operations. Thinning operations should also identify and consider opportunities for enhancing both the existing internal and external views, or even possibilities of creating new vistas.

360° view 
180° view 

The Crematorium is a special and important part of the Forest life that enjoys the woodland setting bringing a “Sense of Place” to the site that the Dilke Hospital also enjoys.

Concept

The Forest Plan will recognise the “Sense of Place” that makes both sites so special and look to preserve/enhance the features that make it so. Carefully planned operations, use of appropriate Silvicultural techniques and consideration of under-planting to provide future species/structural diversity along with resilience will help safeguard the “Sense of Place”.

 Yewtreebrake Crematorium

The woodlands within this plan area have a high degree of interconnectivity with the villages and towns of the Forest. These include the “Forest Lodges” and clusters of homes set within the woods themselves.

Concept

The plan will recognise special features of the woodlands that make the interconnectivity to the integrated villages and communities of the Forest so special. In doing so prescriptions will be sensitive to these features and operations to implement the plan will look to safeguard and enhance them. Eg veteran/ancient oaks around Yorkley and Viney Hill the Native broadleaf dominated characteristics of Blakeney Hill or the large diameter Douglas Fir and Red Cedar within the Soudley valley.

 Main Towns
 Main Villages
 Near by Villages
 Forest Lodges

