

Conservation - Habitats and Features

Habitat connectivity

There is plentiful existing and proposed open habitat available, with connectivity between these habitats being much improved, provided by proposed areas of new coppice and open habitat. The transient nature of woodland edge habitat will also be vastly improved by the increase in the amount of coppicing. Greater connectivity of these habitats and quality of woodland edge will play a vital role to support greater permeability¹ of species groups like lepidoptera, odonata and reptilia as well as supplying utilisable timber for fencing, firewood, pitprops and timber framing etc.

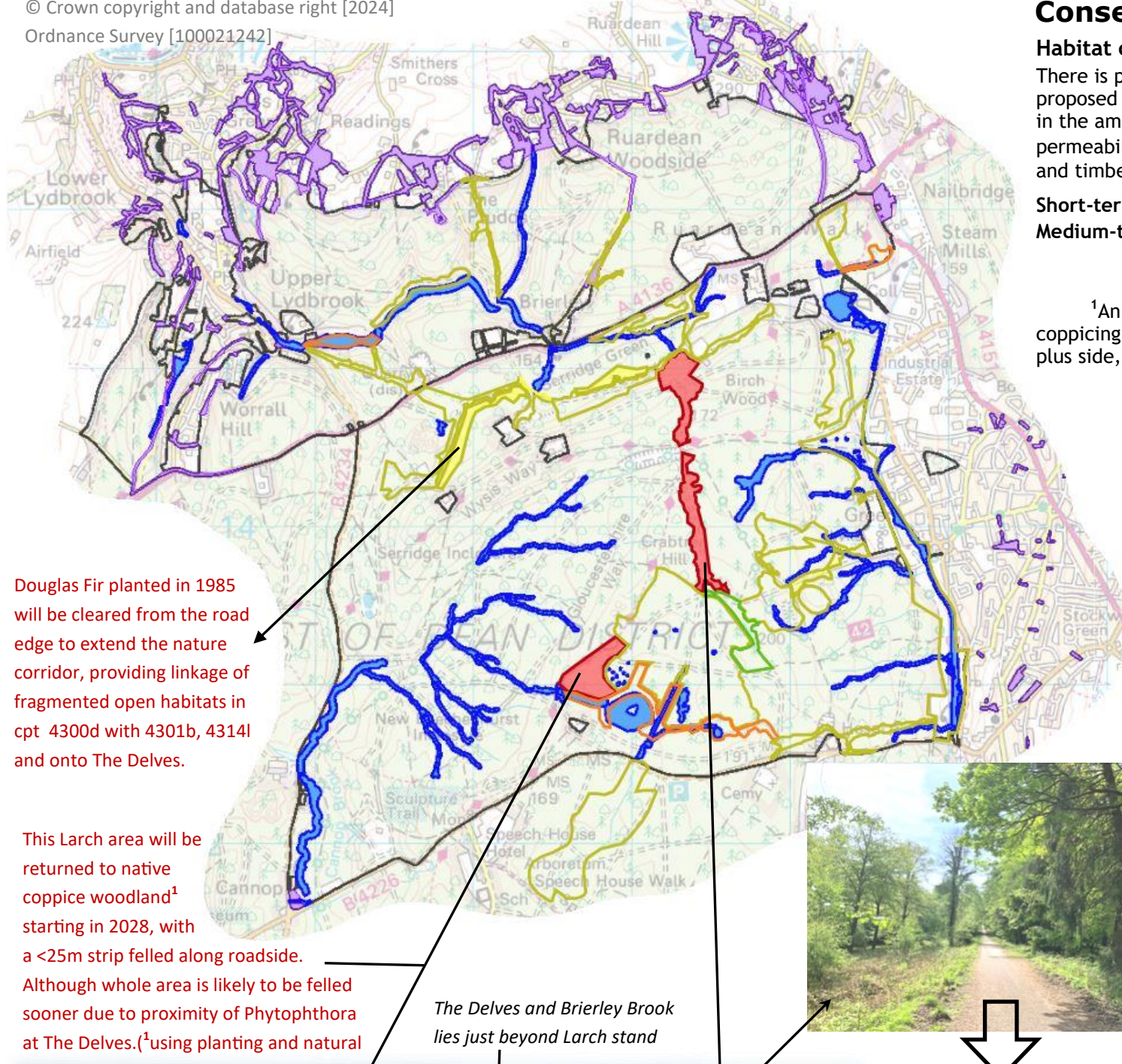
Short-term aim (10-15 years)

Develop the new proposed areas of open habitat and coppice within plan period.

Medium-term aim (40 years)

Establish functional rotations for coppice areas. This will take longer, given some areas need planting following thinning or felling and rotation lengths for coppice will vary from 3 years to 25 years to further enhance habitat diversity.

¹An Our Shared Forest objective is reduction of clearfelling - achieved by increasing use of Low Impact Silviculture Systems such as, coppicing and coppice with standards. This will help offset the loss in transient open habitat, usually provided through clearfelling. On the plus side, coppicing will provide a permanent network of transient habitat and in the future more coppice can be delivered if needed.



Douglas Fir planted in 1985 will be cleared from the road edge to extend the nature corridor, providing linkage of fragmented open habitats in cpt 4300d with 4301b, 4314l and onto The Delves.

This Larch area will be returned to native coppice woodland¹ starting in 2028, with a <25m strip felled along roadside. Although whole area is likely to be felled sooner due to proximity of Phytophthora at The Delves. (¹using planting and natural regeneration)

The Delves and Brierley Brook lies just beyond Larch stand



The NSM road lacks structural diversity and poor permeability, so woodland edge will be greatly improved by heavy thinning, use of natural regeneration and enrichment planting, to produce a graded woodland edge. This can then be coppiced, to provide a corridor of transient habitat between areas of permanent open habitat at Woorgreen and The Delves, via Drybrook Road Station and Mini Winns.

Map Legend			
	Existing open habitat		Wet woodland
	Areas of new open habitat, widening ride edges and bolstering existing open habitat		10m and 20m Watercourse buffering plus showing open water
	Areas of new coppice and new coppice habitat corridor to link habitats to north and south		Areas of Forest Waste
	Mature, veteran Oak - manage to wide spacing to link Woorgreens with open habitats in Crump Meadow		



Wood Lark

Ground nesting species, favouring wooded heaths, typically associated with Devon and East Anglia. With a pair recorded in 2023, observed in the Foxes Bridge Colliery area, presence of the species is locally important. Planned delivery of open, dynamic habitat will increase suitable habitat for this previously rare species within the Forest of Dean.



Wood Warbler

Population has increased in the plan area over last few years. They are a migratory red list species breeding in mature woodland. Kensley and Serridge are key locations for the species within the Forest of Dean.



Pine Marten

Released in the adjacent plan area of Middleridge in the last 5 years, they have spread and now, with a viable breeding population there is hope we will see a reduction in numbers of grey squirrel, and therefore an improvement in timber quality. This being the case, Pine Marten will support the endeavour of promoting connectivity of habitats through the proposed coppicing programme, as damaged broadleaved crops are stumped back, to regrow and in some areas, being singled to return to a quality High Forest.



Adder

Linkage of open areas provided by proposed coppicing and bolstering of open habitat should offer the Adder populations at Woorgreens and Laymore Quag space to expand and move around more easily and hopefully may even reach The Delves at some point in the future.



Lepidoptera

Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Wood White, Large White, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. These are all species that have tenuous populations in need of support. Ride-side habitat will be managed and developed throughout the plan area to help strengthen the fragility of these species in the Forest.



Beaver Habitat

Removing primarily conifer from within the water buffers and planting of them with wet woodland species such as Alder, Willow and Aspen, may create habitat potential for future Beaver habitat, helping to slow the flow of water following periods of heavy rainfall and create habitats to support a more diverse range of species.

Speech House Oaks SSSI

The SSSI is only a fraction of the Oak within this area, it is known for the holly understory and the assemblages of lichen that occur both on the Oak and Holly. This habitat will be safeguarded by adjacent sub-cpts of Oak being identified and assigned for similar management. Some areas will have conifer removed to release remnant 1800 Oak.

Semi-natural wet woodland

The headlands of Cannop Brook are fed from streams within the plan area and Woorgreens. Prescriptions will see adjacent woodland to Woorgreens lake managed sympathetically, through coppice and coppice with standards and native buffers being established along priority reaches.

Lowland Heath and Acid Grassland












Areas of Heathland will be managed through grazing and motor manual methods, areas of surrounding woodland will be thinned heavily along edges to improve gradation and habitat diversity.

Conservation - Habitats and Features (continued)

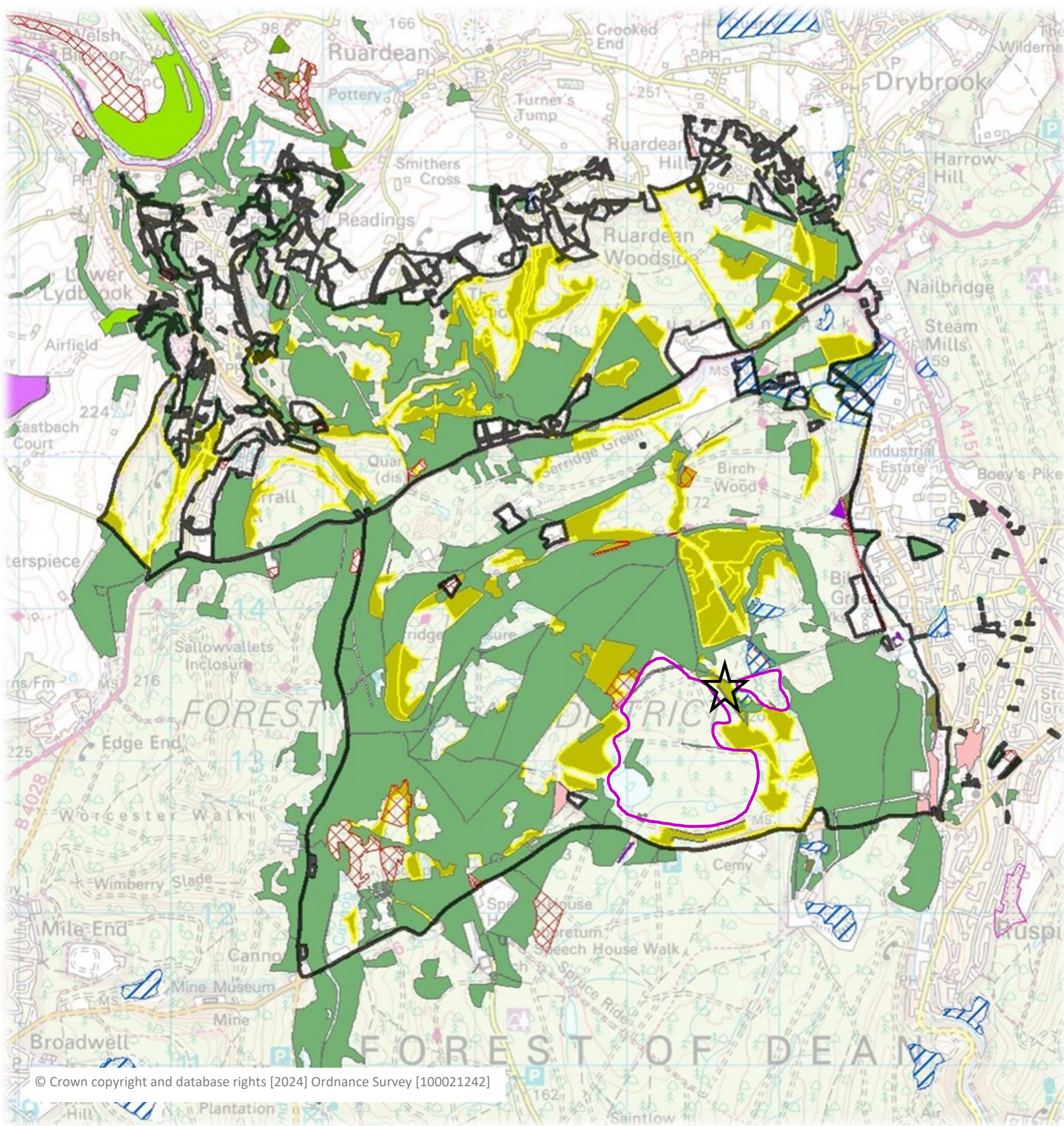
NE Priority Habitats

This map shows the Natural England Priority Habitats with an overlay that indicates areas going back to broadleaf cover in the future and these areas can be seen in context by referring to the Long Term Indicative Future Species mapping on page 36

LEGEND

-  Outline of Forest Plan area
-  Forest Plan - indicative broadleaf restock working to support and enhance existing deciduous woodland
-  Deciduous Woodland
-  Traditional Orchard
-  Lowland Calcareous Grassland
-  Lowland Dry Acid Grassland
-  Lowland Meadows
-  Lowland Heathland
-  Good quality Semi-improved Grassland
-  Open Mosaic Habitat
-  No main habitat but additional habitats present

NE Priority Habitats



These areas are being managed in a complex of open habitat that includes the priority habitats of Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland. Between the two (★) mature oak woodland dating to 1860 can be classed as wood pasture, and once the adjacent roadside coupes are felled (43060/43182/43156) the open nature of this oak and the newly felled coupes will create linkage of habitat in a easterly direction to Laymore Quag nature reserve and those around the old Crumpmeadow Colliery site.

Conservation - Habitats and Features (continued) Watercourse and riparian management

Buffers of 10 or 20 meters either side of identified watercourses will be established, with the aim of improving the ecological value of the buffer itself, and the buffer, in the context of the woodland. This process may be achieved in one operation or realised over 2 or 3 interventions, depending on the work required and ensure crop stability is maintained. In all cases, the Catchment Management Plans should be consulted on during operational planning, with further advice sought from the Forest Waters Manager and District Ecologist. Work will be undertaken when the opportunity arises, either through routine thinning, specific contracts, through use of volunteer groups or partnership working.

Most tree species other than Willow and Alder species will be removed - with the exception of some native species (including Oak and Scots Pine) in certain locations - and where appropriate Willow, Alder and Aspen will be planted to cultivate and diversify ecological value. This will create buffers whose combination of retained and planted species achieves a diversity of light conditions, with canopy cover ranging between 50 - 70 %. In some locations across the plan area, it is hoped this approach will generate suitable beaver habitat, with potential for future beaver releases.

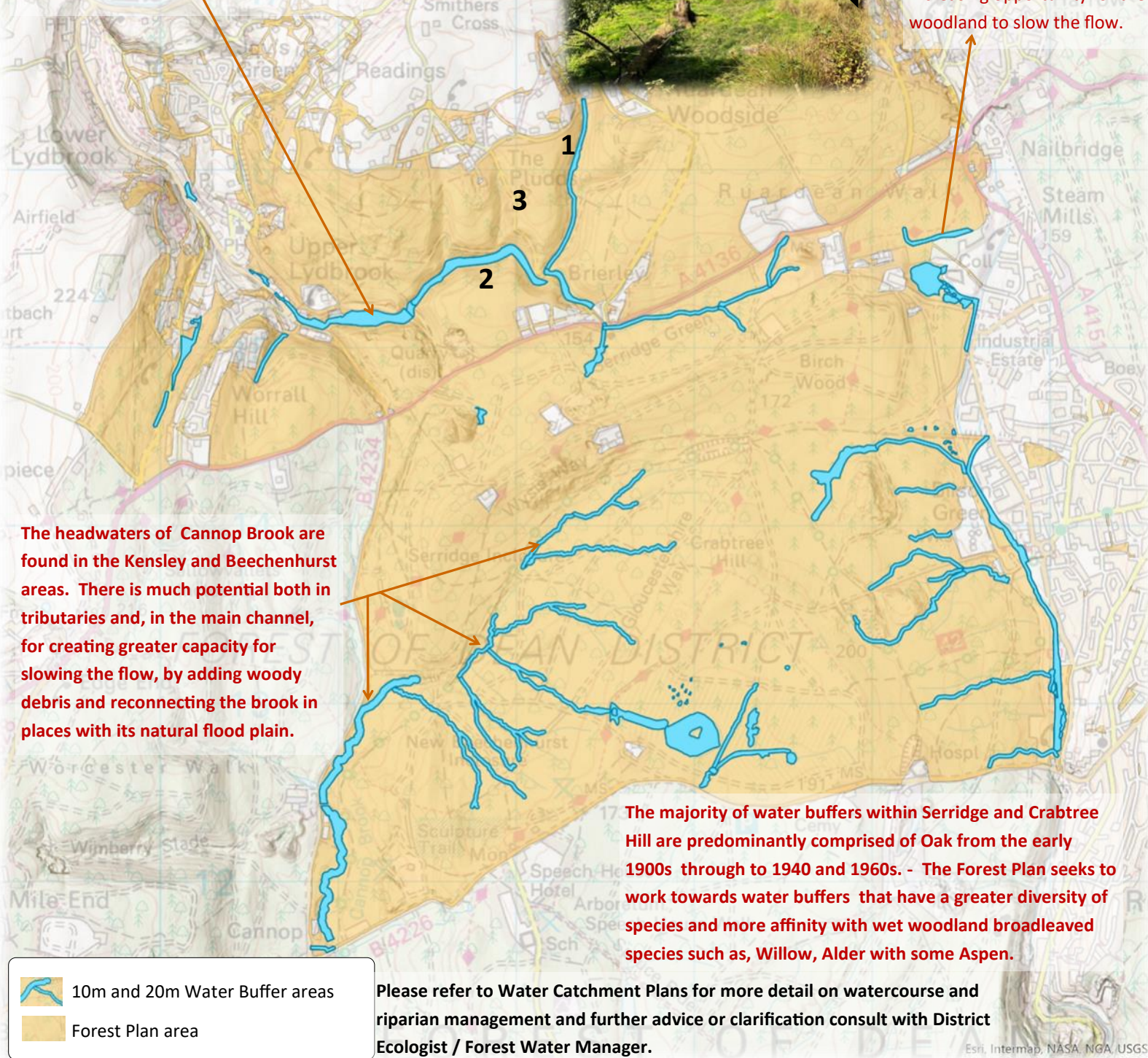
Levels of woody debris in watercourses have diminished through historic woodland management practices. Restoring and replicating naturally occurring levels of woody debris is therefore a priority; with some felled trees within buffers being left in length, whilst others will be purposefully placed into watercourses.

Over time this reintroduction will help reestablish and restore natural processes associated with woody debris, that promote natural watercourse behaviours such as, erosion and deposition processes, shaping the form of the watercourse, and helping to develop natural watercourse characteristics such as braiding, meandering, exposed gravels and sediment banks, riffles, pools and wood in varying states of decay.

This process of replicating natural levels of woody debris will enhance the diversity of, and create valuable wildlife habitats increasing feeding, spawning and resting places for waterlife. Work will encourage water to be held back within wooded and open areas of woodland during periods of prolonged rainfall and in doing so will delay and regulate the flow at which higher than normal volumes of water, reach downstream locations and is a means of 'natural flood management'.

Area of Alder/ Wet Woodland behind the Old Mill House. The watercourse has been diverted. Work will investigate feasibility of reinstating original route of watercourse that includes a 20 foot waterfall.

Area of Wet Woodland at Hawkwell enclosure at Steam Mills has potential to be encouraged to expand increasing opportunity for the woodland to slow the flow.



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Left: showing Cannop Brook and potential for natural Capital enhancements.

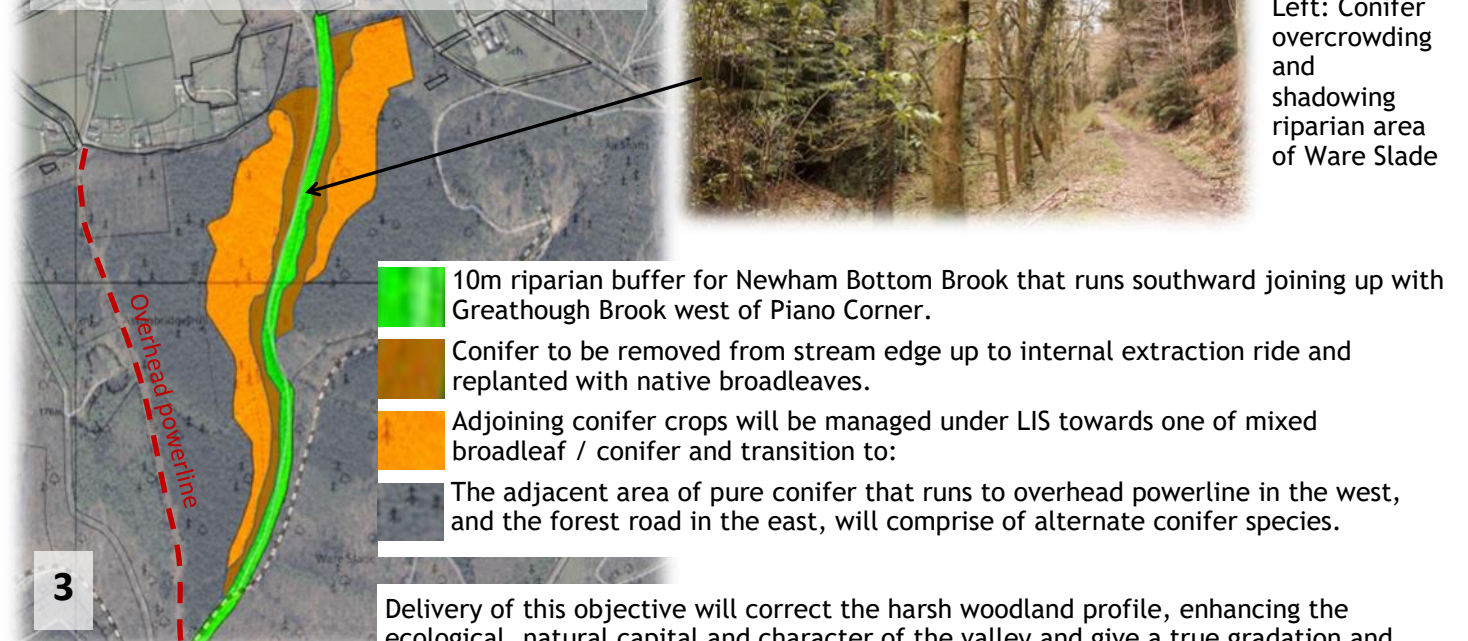
Right: One of the early dams created by the beavers in Greathough Brook .



This photo shows intention of how the valley will look in the future.



Left: Conifer overcrowding and shadowing riparian area of Ware Slade



Delivery of this objective will correct the harsh woodland profile, enhancing the ecological, natural capital and character of the valley and give a true gradation and tempering from a native riparian zone to broadleaf, feathering into evergreen conifer species instilling a more softer, integrated and natural character and feel to the valley.

Heritage Features

Archaeology and Heritage of the area is heavily influenced by mans exploitation of the Forest of Dean's natural resources of stone and minerals that has left physical features behind such as scowle holes, stone lined culverts, bridges and tunnels. From the woodland, timber was widely harvested and processed on site for charcoal leaving numerous platforms and charcoal hearths behind.



All the materials being produced needed to be transported and over the years the means of transport progressed from sunken trackways, holloways, dram roads, tram ways and stoned roads, to more modern times, where railway lines were prevalent and used for public transport too, although the majority are now defunct and derelict. Photo above shows an embankment once part of the Great Western and Midland Joint railway at Laymore Quag.

Use of the land for Agricultural and Forestry purposes has also left behind frequent and interesting earthwork features such as the lineal woodbanks, enclosures, stone walls and ditches with some like the Great Kensley Enclosure bank that runs around the perimeter of Woorgreen, being further demarcated in strategic places by boundary stones.

Scheduled monuments and Listed Buildings in the plan area are:

- ◊ Bledisloe Obelisk
- ◊ Speech House Hotel
- ◊ Various boundary stones, enclosure markers and milestones
- ◊ Railway Bridge at Dilke Hospital

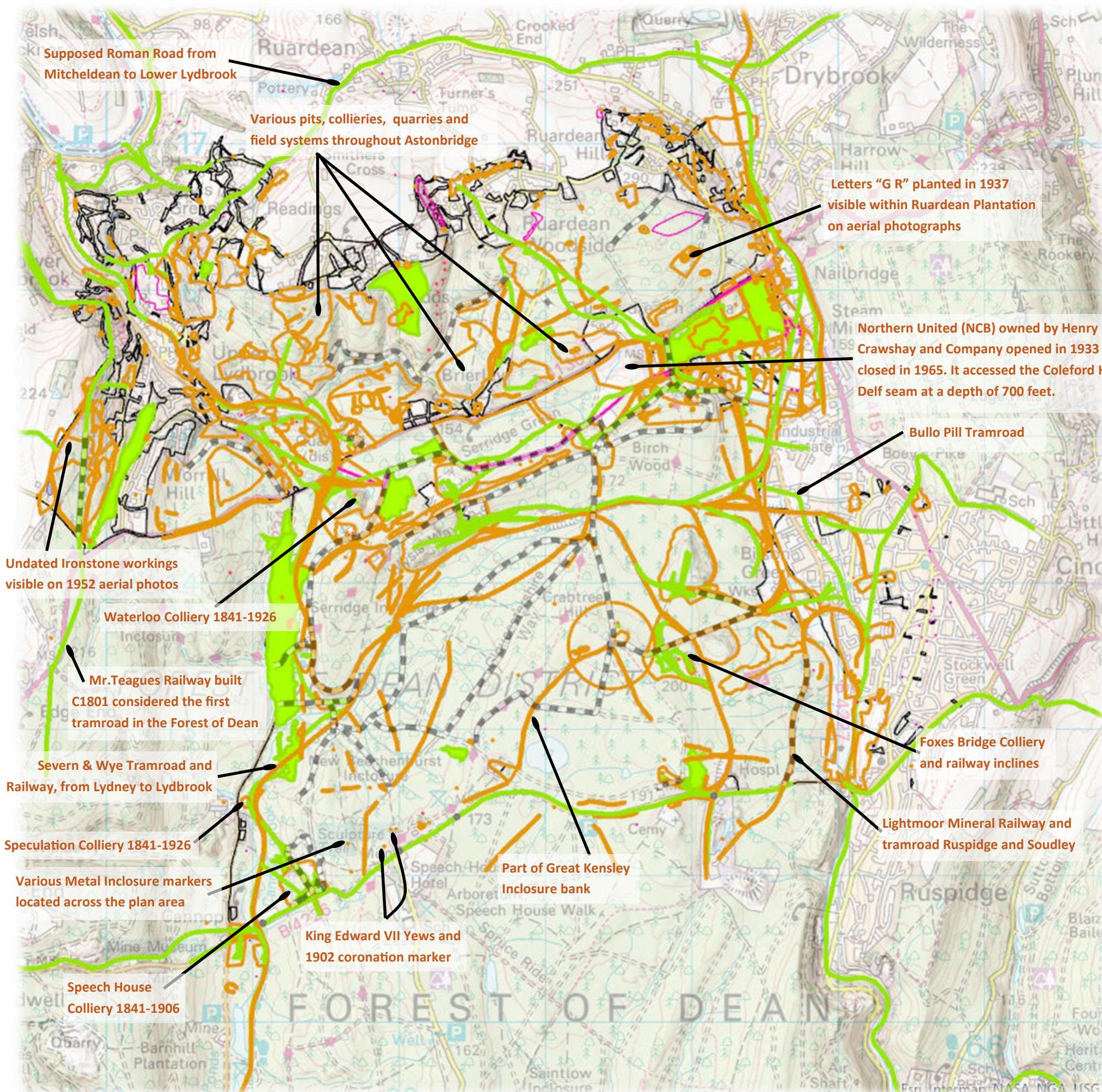
The use of Lidar in recent years has helped identify other previously unknown features or helped pinpoint others whose whereabouts have previously been sketchy at best. Complementing the use of Lidar, further Archaeological digs e.g. at Ruardean have turned up a wealth of other archaeological artifacts that all help paint a picture of the areas rich built and cultural heritage.

Heritage and archaeological features will be managed to avoid damage during any forest operation and where required will follow advice from the County Archaeologist.

Further information on archaeology and heritage can be found in the Concept and Analysis pages for heritage at the beginning of this plan.

Range of Importance

- National Importance
- Regional Importance
- Local Importance
- Other Sites - platforms/charcoal hearths
- Uncategorised



Recreation and Public Access

Whilst producing around 2000 cubic meters of timber¹ per year, and providing a wealth of habitat for a variety of wildlife; the woodland in Speech House Walk and Ruardean Walk Forest Plan is also a valuable asset to local communities and the public, for recreational, amenity and wellbeing² purposes, making the plan area a true exemplar of multi-purpose forestry in action.

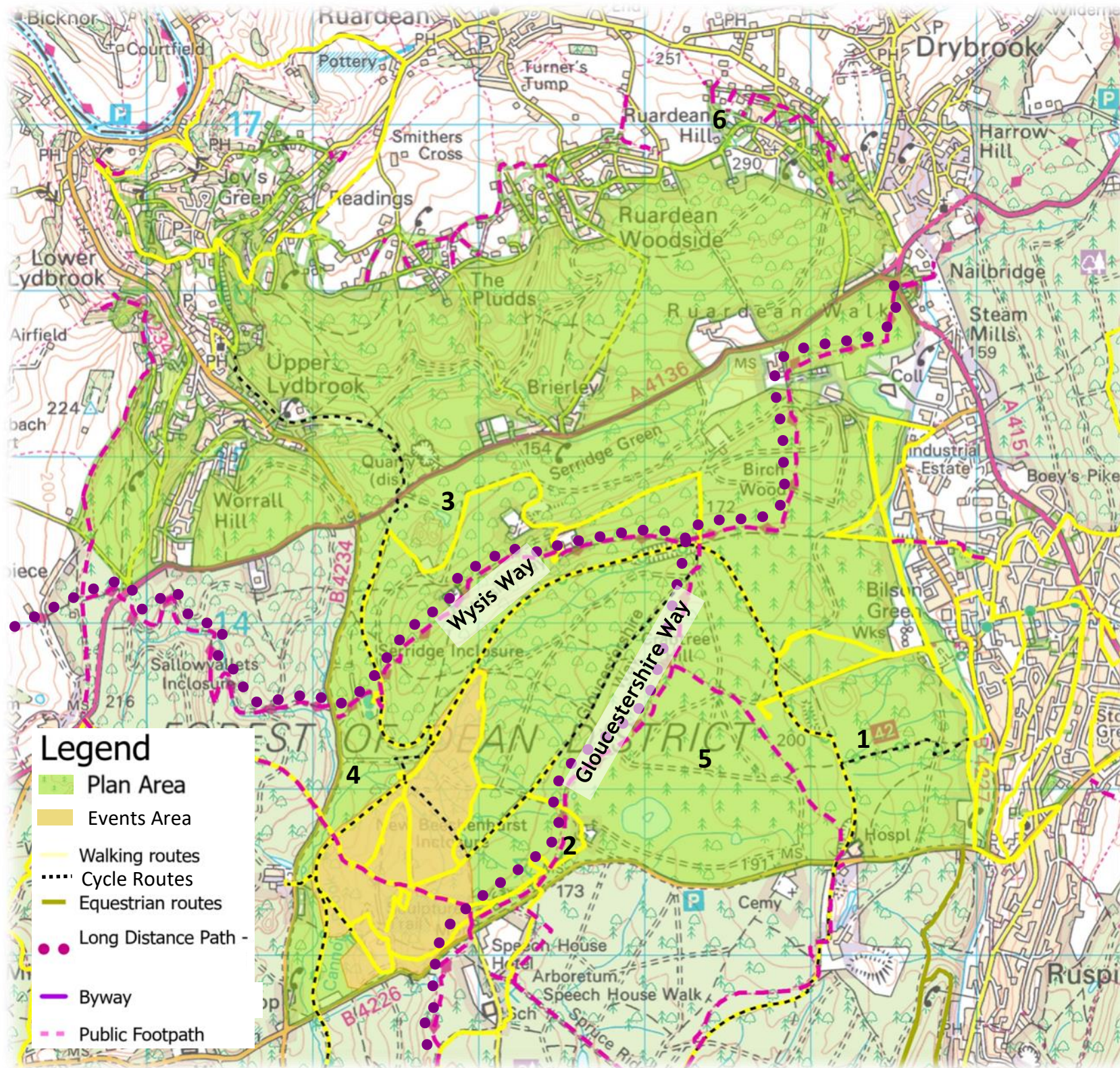
Below are a few of the woodland features & characteristics providing recreational benefit, that are photographically illustrated at the bottom of the page and numerically cross referenced on the map:

1. The woodland composition in a large proportion of this plan area is being managed through Low Impact Silviculture. This enables the continuity of tree cover & provision of a variety of tree species. The result is woodland that stimulates an immersive experience for users of the forest, due to its visual diversity.
2. The woodland enjoys several main areas that are managed for public relaxation and as trailheads. Beechenhurst is the main area, providing a variety of experiences e.g. Go-Ape and the well known and celebrated Sculpture Trail. Others include Speculation and Speech House Woodlands, from which many of the trails can be joined.
3. The woodland has rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of community that ensures connections to the past are celebrated and remain as features, for future generations to enjoy. In this example links are created through a sculpture at Waterloo Screens pond to commemorate Waterloo Colliery, and remember the colliery disaster of 1949.
4. Napoleonic Oak often coincide with the Woodland fringe, offering a glimpse and hint to visitors as to the rich, distinct, unique Heritage and Sense of Place the Forest has to offer.
5. Landscape is designed and managed, enhancing the visual aesthetics of areas, such as those at Woorgreens, and at the same time, this provides a greater depth of habitat for wildlife providing a more vivid immersive user experience.
6. The woodland offers fantastic views of the surrounding landscape, such as those from Pan Tod. At 290m asl it is the highest point in the Forest of Dean, that gives far reaching views towards the Black Mountains and into Herefordshire. Appendix 1 gives detail on how landscapes are managed to achieve a better aesthetic to the forest user.

Horse riders too can enjoy access to stoned roads and rides, including from the permissive equestrian trail, that brings riders from Staple Edge across to the Linear Park at Cinderford Bridge. For cyclists there is the Colliers Trail (used to be called the Family Cycle trail), that utilises the defunct mineral loop railway. Cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians can also enjoy the numerous provision of public access that is supported through a substantial network of Public Rights of Way and the CRoW Act.

¹ Includes clearfelling and thinning volume and worth around £100,000 and £110,000

² Physical, Mental and Spiritual wellbeing



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