

Witley Forest Plan

South England Forest District

Woodlands Included Within This Forest Plan

Blackhangar

Boundless Copse

Frillinghurst Wood

Halknacker

Holmens Grove

Hurthill Copse

Pond Copse

Stroud Wood

Date of Commencement of Plan: **2018**

Approval Period: **2018 to January 2026 (10 Years)**

Summary of Activity within Approval Period:

A separate felling license provides approval for standard silvicultural thinning across the South Forest District estate as a whole.

Forestry Activity	Area (ha)
Low impact silvicultural system	171.8
Coppice	16.6
Permanent Open Space Management	1.4
Clearfell	22.4
Wet Woodland/Minimum Intervention	10.7
TOTAL MAPPED AREA	222.9

FOREST ENTERPRISE Application for Forest Plan Approvals

Forest District: **South England Forest District**

FC Geographic Block No: **89**

Forest Plan Name: **Witley Forest Plan**

FE Plan Reference Number: **304/89/18-19**

Nearest town or village: **Haslemere**

OS Grid Reference: **SU91013564**

Local Authority: **Surrey County Council - Waverley District Council**

I apply for Forest Plan approval for the property described above and in the enclosed Forest Plan.

I undertake to obtain any permissions necessary for the implementation of the approved Plan.

Signed:

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Bruce Rothnie, Deputy Surveyor, South England FD

Date:

Approved:

Forest Services Area Director

Date:

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Forest Planning

Forest Plans define the long term vision for a woodland or a collection of woodlands, usually looking 50 to 100 years ahead. It sets objectives and illustrates how management will move towards achieving this vision over the initial 10 to 30 years.

This plan represents the first major review of the Witley Forest Plan that was originally consulted upon and approved in 1999. The revised Forest Plan has been prepared following a review of the original plan undertaken by FC staff , and in consultation with stakeholders, It has incorporated developments in policy and local initiatives that have occurred in the intervening years.

Consultation and Approval Process

At key points throughout the Forest planning process, we seek the views of external stakeholders, including local communities and organisations involved with nature conservation, public recreation and the timber industry. Through this consultation process we can ensure that an appropriate balance of objectives is achieved. Details of the consultation strategy for this forest plan can be found in Appendix B.

Approval of the Forest Plan is granted by the regulatory arm of the forestry commission, known as Forest Services. This regulatory approval is usually valid for 10 years and grants a 10 year felling licence.

The approved plan will be reviewed at year 5 to ensure proposals are still relevant, suitable and in line with current policy and guidance. This will also be an opportunity to evaluate the success of management over the 5 year period

Objectives for the Witley Forest Blocks

- Maintain and increase the native composition of ancient semi-natural woodland.
- Initiate restoration of planted ancient woodland sites to native and honorary native woodland.
- Take opportunities to increase the nature conservation value of existing habitats
- Provide, maintain and enhance where appropriate the recreational experience of the woodland.
- Maintain and increase the species and age diversity of the woodland.
- Control Invasive plant species and reduce their impact across the sites.
- Provide a regular supply of quality timber to support local employment and local timber processing industries.

Location

The Witley Forest Blocks lie approximately 3km north east of the village of Haslemere in the county of Surrey.

Landscape

The Witley blocks cover an area of 221.6 hectares and are an important part of the surrounding landscape which occurs as a mosaic of woodland, agricultural fields, horse pasture and wooded heaths. The blocks are positioned over the Greensand Hills in the West and Low Weald to the East giving rise to a varied topography. The Forestry Commission managed blocks sitting within this intimate landscape are well connected to adjoining private woodlands & hedgerows (which in effect form an extension of the woodland environment) providing an important contribution to ecological connectivity in this part of South West Surrey. The Witley blocks occur at the Western edge of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The London to Portsmouth railway line bisects the complex running North-South through the landscape.

Rainfall is low with average annual figures between 750 and 850mm per annum. Altitude ranges from 75 to 215 metres above sea level and there are localised steep slopes and valleys.

The forest falls within South England Forest District and is managed by Forest Enterprise, an agency of the Forestry Commission.

Tenure

The Forestry Commission is the freehold owner of all the woodlands.

Current Woodland Structure

The range of soils is very much reflected in the diversity of the existing tree species and there is a significant broadleaf component throughout the blocks including Birch, Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Ash and other mixed broadleaves.

Conifer species present include Corsican Pine, Norway Spruce, Western Hemlock, and Douglas Fir.

The recorded age class of canopy trees range from 50 plus years to new plantings less than 10 years of age. The data shows that approximately 48% of the blocks are made up of 30 and 50 year old trees. However a large proportion of the trees are missing their planting year (12%) so it is not possible to give an accurate portrayal of the age makeup of the blocks. Storms during 1987 and 1990 make account for this as significant parts of the area was windblown and was either planted or allowed to regenerate naturally. There are no over mature stands, however there are small groups of isolated broadleaf's which date back to the last century. These are largely concentrated along boundary banks, and add considerable character to the woodland.

The introduction of continuous cover management systems aims to develop a much more varied age structure and more resilient woodlands in the long term. Across areas with lighter canopy cover, some significant natural regeneration of multiple species already occurs although this is mixed throughout the blocks. Depending on specific stands, supplemental planting may be used.

179.4 ha of the woodland is classified as Ancient Woodland which is 80.4 % of the total area, this in turn heavily influences the direction of future management. This can be broken down further to include,

- Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which comprises a total of 4.4 hectares and makes up 1.9 % of the blocks.
- Plantation on Ancient woodland which comprises a total of 176.4 hectares and makes up 79.1% of the blocks.

Silvicultural Systems

The forest plan favours the use of continuous cover forestry systems. This 'close to nature' approach has been deemed appropriate because of the large amounts of semi natural woodland across the forest blocks and the freely regenerating nature of the understory. Management will look to transform, where appropriate, even aged plantations to an irregular forest structure over the long term. These lower impact systems aim to provide a balance of objectives: a sustainable timber resource as well as safeguarding important habitats and improving the woodland's resilience into the future. For more specific prescriptions please see the felling table and habitat restoration maps.

Open Space

Open space is an important feature of a forested environment and this plan revision aims to provide a minimum of 10% in the woodlands at any one time. Due to the nature of the harvesting operations this will be primarily (though not exclusively) rotational in nature and consist in many cases of areas between 0.25–2ha in size depending on the species looking to be regenerated. In addition to this, many of the woodlands will have permanent areas created through a managed ride and road network. Specific prescriptions will be determined at the operational stage of management and could include a scalloped and graded structure providing pinch points, box junctions, forest glades etc. for a variety of key flora and fauna. These will also serve to improve the connectivity throughout the forest blocks. Sizeable pockets of permanent open habitat in Holmen's Grove and Stroud Wood connected to the aforementioned ride and road side margins will support a meadow type vegetation with a fringing and scattered scrub component.

Veteran Trees and Deadwood

Veteran trees are an important feature of a forested environment. The United Kingdom Forestry Standard (UKFS) classifies a veteran tree as a tree of considerable age that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition, including the presence of deadwood micro-habitats. Management interventions will aim to leave a proportion of standing and fallen deadwood in areas of high ecological value and create linkages where appropriate. Existing veteran trees will aim to be retained where appropriate and management will focus on selecting individuals to eventually take their place. The use of continuous cover silvicultural systems further advocates the retention of a proportion of trees beyond the rotation length and specific prescriptions in the felling table imply a interconnecting area of old growth woodland creation. The presence of a wide range of woodland bat species, fungi and lichens associated with older woodland and stag beetle in this landscape reinforces the importance of a high regard for the veteran tree, dead and decaying wood resource.

Biodiversity and Conservation

The Witley blocks are spread across a transition between the Wealden Greensand in the west and Low Weald in the east being positioned amidst an intricate mix of fields, streams and hedgerows. This configuration gives rise to a well-connected landscape which supports a wide range of protected and priority species. These include woodland bats, scrub dependent woodland birds, birds of prey, ground nesting birds, dormice, threatened butterflies & moths, amphibians and reptiles. The local topography, geology and hydrology supports a diverse ground flora including a variety of ancient woodland indicator plants which supports the long-established presence of woodland at this locality.

There are no statutory nature conservation designations within the Witley blocks but the complex occurs in close proximity to internationally and nationally important protected areas. The Witley blocks do however fall within two Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) which form part of a countywide network of priority areas for ecological restoration. Holmen's Grove, Stroud Wood, Frillinghurst and Hahnaker form part of the Low Weald BOA and Blackhanger, Boundless Copse and Hurthill fall within the Devils Punch Bowl and Hindhead Heaths BOA. 'Habitats of Principal Importance for Conservation' in this area include heathland, acid grassland, mixed deciduous woodland, meadows, ponds and wet woodland. Working at a landscape scale the forest plan will help contribute to conserving and enhancing biodiversity through sympathetic management of existing priority habitats within the BOA network with associated benefits for priority species. Identified priority species (of relevance to the Witley blocks) to be targeted for action within the respective BOAs include Adder, Lesser spotted woodpecker, Marsh tit, Nightjar, Woodlark, Grayling, Wood white, Bechstein's bat, Polecat and White-clawed crayfish. In addition much of the complex has been selected as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) owing to its County level importance for wildlife.

Forest management during this plan period aims to maintain and increase the native composition of the woodlands and initiate the restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) by reducing the non-native components employing low-impact silvicultural systems. Many of the blocks have impeded drainage due to the underlying clay soils and this gives rise to wet woodland and its characteristic ground flora. There are also a number of streams running through the area, many of which are shaded by both broadleaf and conifer species. Forest Operations will seek to restore and where feasible expand wet woodland and enhance stream corridors by maintaining a variety of conditions from minimum intervention through to wet scrub and temporary open space.

The Witley complex supports a significant amount of coppice dominated by Sweet chestnut. This resource will be managed under an appropriate rotation and to the benefit of a diverse wildlife assemblage including scrub dependent woodland birds, woodland bats, dormice and warmth loving invertebrates all benefiting from the different stages of coppice regeneration. The locally extensive areas of scrub spread across the complex provide similar benefits to the wildlife species associated with maturing coppice and operational planning prior to an intervention will aim to identify opportunities to conserve and enhance this habitat where appropriate. Heathland vegetation occurs on the more acidic sandy soils along road and ride sides and within open spaces. During harvesting interventions opportunities will be taken to maintain and enhance this local but important feature where appropriate.

The Witley blocks comprise a functional outlier of Chiddington Forest located a few kilometres to the east. Chiddington Forest and the easternmost woods of the Witley Blocks (Stroud Wood, Holmen's Grove and Frillinghurst) form part of a focal landscape for lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) as identified by Butterfly Conservation. The Wood white butterfly (*Leptidea sinapis*) is a priority butterfly species in this focal landscape. During management interventions opportunities will be sought to improve habitat for this and other priority lepidoptera species, mainly via the enhancement and maintenance of open space alongside the ride and road network.

People

A network of countryside Rights of Way run through the blocks as well as a range of informal footpaths. Future forest management will be planned to minimise disruption to these routes. Recreation is typified by local walkers, horse-riding and mountain biking which is popular throughout the area.

During management interventions opportunities to enhance the visual impact of rides and individual trees will be taken by selecting trees for retention based on character as well as widening rides.

Historic Environment

In the woodlands historic features include, brick kilns, clay pits, a pond bay and leat as well as a WWII aircraft crash site. These are all currently unscheduled. As with all FC sites continued monitoring will take place to ensure that anything relevant found in the future is recorded and fed into operational planning in line with statutory responsibilities and best practice guidelines.

Soils

The forest lies across transitional soil types with typical higher podzols at higher elevations to the east. The two soil types mix to create a rich and diverse ground flora ranging from dry heathland species, on the greensands, to ancient and wet woodland plant associations on the Weald Clays.

Water

Water is an important feature in a forested environment. All forest management operations follow the guidance set out in the UKFS regarding good practice when working with water-bodies. These deal with issues such as acidification, sediment delivery and nutrient enrichment. Water bodies are mapped within the forest plan as a reference to inform operational planning. Many of the woodlands are criss-crossed by a network of permanent and seasonal streams together with forest drains and a scattering of important wildlife ponds.

Tree Diseases and Pests

The main diseases of concern currently are Dothistroma Needle Blight (*Dothistroma septosporum*) on Corsican Pine (*Pinus Nigra*), Phytophthora ramorum (*Larix* species) and *Hymenoscyphus fraxinea* (Ash Dieback). Corsican Pine is a significant component and larch is present. However by actively managing the woodland and increasing the species diversity the threats posed by pests & pathogens can be mitigated against.

R. ponticum (Rhododendron) , *Impatiens glandulifera* (Himalayan balsam) and *Bambusoideae* (Bamboo) are present in the landscape and continued monitoring does take place to ensure that species posing a threat to native flora do not become established.

Guidance and action plans regarding plant health are constantly evolving to adapt to plant health threats. The sudden emergence of a disease can result in the need to fell a coupe earlier than planned or alter restocking plans. We will continue to monitor for disease as required and take appropriate action. Any changes to the forest design plan will be notified or agreed with Forest Services in accordance with the relevant guidance.

Deer species found in the woodlands will be managed in accordance with the South England Forest District Deer Management Strategy and in the wider landscape through partnership work with relevant agencies such as the Deer Initiative.

Climate Change

Climate change represents one of the greatest long-term challenges facing the world today. Conventional forest management systems have developed in a climate that has undergone fluctuations but remained relatively stable since the end of the last ice age (around 10,000 years ago). However, the average global temperature is now rising and there is evidence that rainfall patterns are changing. There is also likely to be an increase in the incidence of extreme weather and the frequency and severity of summer drought.

This is likely to represent the greatest threat to woodlands from climate change in the UK over the coming decades. UK forest management needs to respond to these threats in two principal ways: through mitigation, ensuring management is sustainable and adaptation. This includes species and age diversification as well as an increase in management intensity.

Wildfire Resilience

Reducing the incidence and impact of wildfires in forests and woodlands through good management planning is important for sustainable forest management and to protect the provision of forest ecosystem goods and services.

This plan will aim to build on the wildfire resilience already present in the woodland by acting on the following points

- Managing the vegetation to maintain a network of fire breaks, reducing fuel across an entire site especially along roads and rides.
- A wide use of continuous cover forestry to create a diverse woodland structure.
- Where appropriate fragment high risk species and habitats into smaller areas to reduce the risk of fire spread.
- Restore, maintain, enhance and increase broadleaved native woodland particularly around high risk areas.
- When restocking sites use appropriate species relative to the forest's wildfire risk.

These management principals will be implemented during the operational stage of planning and are intended as a guide only.

A site specific wildfire risk assessment for all the woodlands can be found in the appendices and should be used in conjunction with a wildfire management plan.

Forest Plan Maps

When consulting on the maps, please refer to the glossary for further detail about the prescriptions.

Aerial

Shows the location of the woodlands in the wider landscape using aerial photography.

Indicative Age Diversity

Shows the planting year and age of the trees in the woodland.

Species Diversity

Gives an indicative illustration of the number of species within the woodlands (includes open space). However it should be noted that the data only accounts for trees in the canopy and should only be taken as a general overview of the number of different species present within a sub-compartment.

Ancient Woodland

Shows which areas are categorised as ancient woodland (woodland which has existed for several centuries or more) and the percentage of native trees.

Current Structure

An overview of the current habitat types existing in the woodlands.

Medium Term Vision

Illustrates the proposed medium term structure of the woodlands and other habitats consistent with the Forest Plan objectives. While there is no fixed time scale for the habitat transformations depicted, an indicative term of around 20 years is assumed.

Long Term Vision

Illustrates the proposed long term structure of the woodlands and other habitats consistent with the Forest Plan objectives. While there is no fixed time scale for the habitat transformations depicted, an indicative term of around 100 years is assumed.

Habitat Restoration and Felling

Shows the management proposals in the shorter term, 10 to 30 years. These proposals are the initial stepping stones towards achieving the long term vision.

Fire Risk Map

Shows the current fire ratings for the woodlands as well as the existing fire break network and water sources.