



Approach to Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites

Introduction

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) are important because they often retain some of the characteristics of ancient woodlands and many sites have the potential for successful restoration back to native woodlands.

The government is committed to reversing the decline in the extent and condition of important habitats and species through the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Forestry Commission plays an important role in this programme by acting as the lead body for Native Woodland Habitat Action Plans. These plans include targets for the restoration of a proportion of the PAWS in Wales.

An important element of sustainable woodland management is ensuring that the special qualities of ancient woodlands and PAWS are conserved for future generations. It is possible to conserve ancient woodland characteristics while also managing PAWS for timber or recreation.

The purpose of this document is to provide woodland owners, Management Planners, Specialist Assessors and FC Wales' staff with an overview of the way that the Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) scheme addresses the management of PAWS.

Definitions

Native Woodlands are those woodlands which are comprised mainly of locally native trees and shrubs and are often referred to as semi-natural woodland.

The **Provisional Inventory of Ancient Woodlands** identifies and records information about ancient woodland sites which had an area of >2ha on the Ordnance Survey's First Series 1:25,000 maps.





Ancient Woodlands are those which have been in continuous existence since before AD 1600. The term **Ancient Woodland Site** refers to the location of ancient woodland irrespective of its current tree cover. Sites where the native tree cover has been felled and replaced by planting of tree species usually not native to the locality are referred to as **Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site** (PAWS). But note that sites where native species comprise more than 50% of the canopy cover will be treated as native woodlands and not PAWS although many of the same management principles may apply (see BWW document 'Approach to Native Woodlands (AT06)').

BWW Approach to PAWS

The requirements of the BWW scheme are linked to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS standard). In the revised (2006) standard there is an obligation on owners to maintain & enhance remnant characteristics of ancient woodland on all PAWS in order to progressively improve their condition. This is a minimum requirement within the BWW scheme. It is important to note that active management is often needed to maintain the biodiversity, environmental and cultural value of PAWS. This includes identifying and controlling threats to remnant features which may deteriorate further without protection and active management.

The BWW scheme provides support in the form of Management Plans and grant aid to help owners meet this requirement. The BWW scheme requires that PAWS be managed in line with sound practice. Recent research has placed emphasis on a gradual process of change in the majority of situations. Clearfelling will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that this will not adversely impact on remnant ancient woodland characteristics or cultural heritage interests or where highly invasive non-native species need to be removed.

It is not a requirement of BWW to restore PAWS back to native woodland. However, owners who decide to restore sites are eligible for higher rates of grant in order to carry out appropriate operations. On many sites the process of restoration may take decades and the restoration process may provide opportunities to realise the timber income from the current rotation of non-native species during the restoration. The definition of restoration does not require the removal of all non-native species and some owners may wish to retain a proportion of non-native species in perpetuity.

PAWS are considered to be restored when native species have been increased to at least 50% of the canopy cover. Once they have reached this point, sites may require further management but they are treated as Restored Native Woodlands and will be eligible for the same grants as Native Woodlands.

Owners who decide not to restore PAWS and instead wish to continue to manage these sites for timber production are free to do so providing that they meet the minimum requirements to maintain and enhance remnant ancient woodland characteristics. These sites will be eligible for grant aid for various operations albeit at lower rates of grant than sites that are being restored. Owners who do not wish to restore PAWS but wish to transform them to Continuous Cover systems of management may be eligible for grant aid to help them do this providing that they meet the requirement to maintain and enhance the remnant characteristics.



Planning Process

The BWW scheme provides an effective planning process for the evaluation and monitoring of PAWS in order to ensure that they are managed appropriately. PAWS¹ are identified at an early stage in the planning process. Where there are 10 hectares or more of PAWS on a property, a full PAWS assessment

using the BWW PAWS Assessment form is mandatory and BWW will grant aid this as part of the Management Plan. Where there are less than 10 hectares of PAWS on a property the minimum requirement is a 'brief' assessment comprising a map identifying the ancient woodland interest and a PAWS feature in the management plan. The feature should describe a vision for the PAWS and at least demonstrate how the ancient woodland interest will be maintained by setting clear desired characteristics and factors. There is no fee available for completing the brief assessment. However, planners can request a full assessment on areas below 10 hectares and, if accepted by the Woodland Officer, this will be paid for. Sites below 10 hectares will be treated as medium priority and will only be eligible for the 50% grant rate, unless a full assessment has been done to demonstrate that they are high priority.

As with other Specialist Assessments, the full PAWS assessment must be carried out by one of the people approved by FCW to undertake this work. The planner can complete the brief assessment.

If a CCF assessment is considered to be necessary, this should take place after the PAWS assessment has been completed. The Woodland Officer and Management Planner can determine the need for a CCF assessment based on the PAWS assessment results.

The PAWS Assessment will locate and quantify the remnant characteristics such as ground vegetation, shrub layer, veteran trees and deadwood. The key remnants will be mapped and threats will be identified. This will establish the baseline condition for future monitoring.

The Assessment will also consider the context of the site, its potential for restoration and its cultural heritage value in order to categorise it as a High, Medium or Low Priority site for restoration. This broadly based assessment identifies those sites where restoration offers the greatest benefits. However, it is ultimately for the woodland owner to choose either the Maintain & Enhance option or the Restore option for the woodland. This decision and the site priority have implications for the grant rates available for managing PAWS. Management Planners will need to advise woodland owners of these implications and their options in order to help them make decisions. The decisions are then expressed within the objectives in the Management Plan.

BWW Grants for PAWS

The scheme offers two main types of grant for PAWS:

Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs)

¹ The BWW scheme does not rely solely on the Provisional Inventory of Ancient Woodlands to determine the status of sites. Sites not included in the inventory but with strong evidence of ancient woodland characteristics will be treated as PAWS.

WIGs are available under BWW to support a wide range of operations on PAWS including:

- Controlling threats, such as rhododendrons
- Creating the infrastructure needed for management e.g. tracks
- Uneconomic thinning and felling operations
- Work needed to secure natural regeneration of native species

The grant rates for these operations on PAWS vary between 25%, 50% and 75% depending on:

- The type of operation
- Whether the objective for the site is Maintain & Enhance or Restore
- The priority of the site as determined by the PAWS assessment. PAWS which have not been assessed (because they fall below the 3ha threshold), will be eligible for WIG but will be treated as if they are a Medium Priority site.

PAWS are also eligible for other WIGs, such as fencing, that are available for all other woodlands. However, the grant rate will not be affected by the priority of the site.

Restocking Grants

Restocking Grants are available in situations where PAWS have been felled and natural regeneration is unlikely. BWW provides four rates of restocking grant according to the degree of restoration (see table below):

Options for Restocking Grant on PAWS	
1. Maintenance of PAWS	£500/ha
2. Limited Restoration (>25% site native species planted)	£1000/ha
3. Partial Restoration (>50% site native species planted)	£1500/ha
4. Full Restoration (100% site native species planted)	£2000/ha where best practice applied ² , otherwise £1500/ha
(Note: % refers to area, not the number of trees planted)	

Further Information

UKWAS standard
FC Practice Guide: The restoration of PAWS
BWW Grant Structure
BWW Approach to Native Woodlands

² The higher rate of grant (£2000/ha) is payable on sites where the PAWS assessment took place prior to clearfelling, identified clearfell as the most appropriate method of restoration AND where good practice has been applied (See Further Information – FC Practice Guide: The Restoration of PAWS) to planning and carrying out the felling to protect the sensitive areas of the site.