

# Blengdale Forest Design Plan



**Text & Graphs**

**Winter 2006/7**



## **Contents**

The plan is presented as four separate documents :-

- Text
- Photos
- Maps
- Perspectives

This is to make for easier reading and allow the reader to have more than one part of the plan open at once.. However all three documents should be seen as contributing to the whole plan.

This process by which this plan has been developed is characterised by three main stages:

- 1) Understanding Blengdale
- 2) Developing a vision
- 3) Implementing the vision

The photo survey principally reflects the first two stages in the process whilst the maps and text describe the full process. The table below illustrates the way that the various maps, photos and text fit into the stages in the process and helps guide the reader through the plan.

<b>Understanding Blengdale</b>	<b>Text</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction</li><li>• Survey</li><li>• Review of Achievements during last plan period</li></ul>
	<b>Maps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Location</li><li>• Social &amp; Economic</li><li>• Current Forest Species</li><li>• Recreation and Access</li><li>• Community</li><li>• Water and nature Conservation</li><li>• Heritage</li><li>• Wind Hazard and soils</li><li>• ESC Conifers</li><li>• Landform</li><li>• Achievements</li></ul>
	<b>All Photos</b> (Plates 1 → 35)

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<b>Developing A Vision</b>	<b>Text</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review and Appraisal</li></ul>
	<b>Maps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review Issues</li><li>• Design Concept<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plateau and Western Slopes</li><li>• Main Valley</li></ul></li></ul>
	<b>All Photos</b> (Plates 1 → 35)
<b>Implementing the Vision</b>	<b>Text</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivery of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan</li><li>• Objectives of the Plan</li><li>• Graphs</li></ul>
	<b>Maps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Future Woodland Management</li><li>• Future Woodland Species</li><li>• Future Conservation and Heritage</li><li>• Future Access Community, Health and Wellbeing</li><li>• Planning for Climate Change</li></ul>
	<b>Computer Perspectives</b> (All computer perspectives)

Gareth Browning  
January 2007

## **Blengdale Forest Design Plan Review - Winter 2006/07**

### **Introduction**

Blengdale forest occupies the upper valley of the River Bleng and moor land to the east of the village of Gosforth. The forest lies within the Parish of Gosforth in the borough of Copeland within the Lake District National Park's "Quiet Valleys" zone and Natural England's Cumbria Fells and Dales Natural Character area.

### **Survey**

Blengdale Forest has a character born out of the big conifers, the River Bleng and views of the western Lake District fells. Unlike Miterdale to the south Blengdale has no recent history or local association as ancient woodland. Blengdale is a forest of two distinct halves with the valley of the River Bleng having a different character to the plateau of Hollow Moor which overlooks the Wasdale Valley. The comments below are reflected in the survey maps.

The Blengdale Valley is an attractive and popular area of forest which although dominated by productive conifers benefits from a diversity of height, species, tree size and areas of open habitats. The River Bleng itself is a significant feature which attracts people to walk and cycle the forest tracks along its banks. The mature Douglas fir, Larch and Spruce trees, including Cumbria's highest recorded Sitka spruce at over 50m (150ft), provide a real sense of grandeur which help create a unique sense of place. When seen from external viewpoints the valley forest is hidden or seen only in part and consequently fits in well with the landscape. For 20 years the forest in the valley bottom has been managed principally through thinning and regeneration which has ensured the protection of water quality, enjoyment of visitors and stable habitats for a range of wildlife including Red Squirrel, bats, deer, badger and dippers. The severe storms of January 2005 have left their mark with an increase in large deadwood, new gaps in the forest canopy and the River Bleng finally achieving its long held desire to regain its floodplain. The latter has led to the loss of access along the forest track which has been replaced by a new footpath located above the rivers floodplain.

The plateaus to the east and south of the River Bleng are much less diverse in species and height with no trees over 20 years in age. This area of the forest is dominated by spruce which reflects the wetter, poorer peaty and gleyed soils and more exposed outlook. Reflecting these soils and exposure much of this forest has been unthinned in the past. Recent restocking has increased the area of open non wooded habitats and native broadleaves through restocking and selective respacing of regeneration. The forest is also important for wildlife such as Merlin and deer and much of the open space within the forest hides archaeological features associated with the bronze age and a prehistoric cairnfield. The former includes a "burnt mound" feature which English Heritage have said is of a standard that should be scheduled. The high level nature of the ground does provide great views out of the forest towards the coast and into the fells with Haycock, Pillar and Wasdale Screes clearly visible. The views looking east from the public footpath between the River Bleng and Wasdale are especially valued and following recent clearfelling have significantly improved. When seen from external viewpoints the plateau areas of Blengdale do contrast with the fell land especially boundaries on the east and south.

### **Review of Achievements during last plan period.**

The last five years of the plan saw the following main objectives achieved which are also detailed on the "Achievements" Map:-

- With support from Gosforth Parish Council a new 180m length of footpath was completed to provide continued public access along the River Bleng.

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- In partnership with the Lake District National Park Authorities Footpath Team the footbridge over the River Bleng was refurbished with all new timbers sourced from Blengdale Forest and cut locally at Calderbridge Sawmill.
- Approximately 30ha of thinning was completed including some first thinning.
- A favourable survey by English Heritage identified the “burnt mound” feature of National Significance.
- A detailed management plan was produced for the valley bottom to ensure continued management, through thinning and regeneration, would maintain the special feel to this area . In addition permanent monitoring plots have been installed to monitor levels of regeneration.
- Felling of 78ha of conifer and restocking of 61ha completed.

### **Review & Appraisal**

Blengdale has seen significant changes since the last plan review. The majority of the mature forest on the plateau area has been felled changing external views of the forest and providing new view out. The completion of this work sees the passing of a major period of harvesting with a more stable future ahead over the next 20 years characterised by thinning as against felling. During the same period public usage of the valley bottom has increased and public access up the valley has come to the fore with the loss of the forest road to the River Bleng.

Much of Blengdale sits well in the landscape with the valley bottom linking into neighbouring woodland or remaining hidden from many views. There are a number of harsh boundaries, notably those to the east and south in addition to Lowcray Bank. These would benefit from a combination of reduced restocking, species change and more diverse stocking and will be addressed in the plan.

The existing area of Continuous Cover management in the valley bottom is the most popular area with visitors, provides a stable habitat for wildlife, produces high quality valuable timber and protects the water quality of the River Bleng. This review provides the opportunity to expand this type of management to encompass the length of the River Bleng and all wind firm areas.

These comments and others can be found on the Review Map and from this the Design Concept and following two maps explore the attributes and aims for the Valley Bottom and Plateau zones.

### **Delivery of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan**

Blengdale lies within the Cumbria High fells management zone of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan (NWEFDSP) (2005 to 2009). Within the general description for this zone the NWEFDSP makes the statements below which are relevant to Blengdale

- Presumption to thin all areas of WHC 3 and below (and more sheltered WHC 4). If necessary thin steep areas at zero surplus for both aesthetic and timber quality benefits.
- Main conifer species will be Sitka spruce, Larch, Douglas fir and Scots pine which grow fast and yield high quality timber when planted on appropriate sites.
- Apply continuous cover management systems to stands of Douglas fir on lower elevation sites, particularly near recreational facilities.

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- At FDP review consider further boundary improvements to forests in zone including landswap deals to improve most visually intrusive edges where appropriate.
- At Matterdale and Blengdale create permanent network of open space/broadleaves at restocking so that average coupe size can be reduced in next rotation.

Detailed below are the objectives of the zone (highlighted in blue), which are grouped under the England Forestry Strategy themes, and how the implementation of the revised Miterdale FDP will deliver against the objectives.

### ***Forestry for rural development***

Main conifer species will be Sitka spruce, Larch, Douglas fir and Scots pine which grow fast and yield high quality timber when planted on appropriate sites. Do not replant with Western Hemlock, Western Red Cedar or Grand fir as there is poor demand from saw millers, and replace with other species. At FDP revision felling will target the early removal of Western Hemlock where this does not significantly compromise other objectives to minimise problem of vigorous natural regeneration. The only exception to the above will be the retention of feature trees around the main visitor facilities.

Presumption to thin all areas of WHC 3 and below (and more sheltered WHC 4). If necessary thin steep areas at zero surplus for both aesthetic and timber quality benefits.

- Spruce larch and Douglas fir will be the primary future species. Some mature Western Hemlock still remains and this will be removed through selective thinning over the next 10 years.
- First thinning of 20 year old spruce has started and is already creating a more open feel to the forest. Further thinning is planned.
- Opportunities to increase the local marketing of timber for fire wood and specialist use have been achieved over the last 5 years eg Footbridge refurbishment and floor boarding for Ennerdale Field Centre Barn.

### ***Forestry for recreation, access and tourism***

Main focus of formal recreation provision and future development will be at Whinlatter Forest Park which is now managed as a single entity with Dodd Wood.

Apply continuous cover management systems to stands of Douglas fir on lower elevation sites, particularly near recreational facilities. Preference to regenerate naturally with planting as last resort. Retain some big conifers indefinitely at Whinlatter.

Thin to improve visual amenity around main recreational facilities and at net cost if required.

In timber marketing and operations management aim to minimise disruption to recreational facilities, particularly forest walks at Whinlatter/Dodd. Market timber from Whinlatter as a long term contract to achieve greater control.

- Recreation provision will continue to be informal however following comments from the local community, increasing usage, Friends of the Lake District and Lake District National Park Authority this plan makes some proposals to further improve the benefits to the health and well being of local communities. These included creating new paths to give access along the full length of the River Bleng, a viewpoint over the valley and improve an existing track with a new

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bridge over Scalderskew Beck and better surfacing. This is an ambitious programme and will only be achieved through partnership working generating sufficient funding and resources.

- The area under Continuous Cover Management will be significantly expanded under this plan with benefits to recreation, wildlife and water quality. In addition a survey carried out prior to the last thinning of the valley bottom has identified the 10 largest trees of each conifer species which will be retained for as long as they are safe. This will ensure that people will continue to enjoy the sense of walking beneath some of the largest trees in Cumbria.
- By moving to more Continuous Cover management timber harvesting should become more consistent with less high level production from clearfells causing disruption to recreational use of the forest.

### ***Forestry for environment and conservation***

At FDP review consider further boundary improvements to forests in zone including landswap deals to improve most visually intrusive edges where appropriate.

Consider re-aligning top boundary fences at FDP review to improve visual appearance of top margins e.g. Ennerdale, Dodd.

Manage and extend Upland Oakwoods according to HAP. In these areas nature conservation will be the prime objective.

At Matterdale and Blengdale create permanent network of open space/broadleaves at restocking so that average coupe size can be reduced in next rotation.

Work in partnership with tenant farmers to improve conservation and landscape value of farmland and open fell. In general, reduce grazing pressure from sheep to improve heathland condition.

Through a partnership with the National Trust and United Utilities develop a long term vision for the whole Ennerdale Valley based on the principle of utilizing natural processes and reflect this in the FDP, activities and operations on the FC landholding. This is a very long term, pilot scheme which has the working title "Wild Ennerdale". There will be considerable consultation with stakeholders.

Particularly high archaeological interest at Ennerdale to be protected.

This plan will see increasing benefits to conservation and water quality through a number of proposals linked to increasing open space and continuous cover management. The benefit will include:-

- Greater diversity of habitats and new open non woodland habitats such as on the recent large clearfell at Brown Edge.
- More stable soil structure and reduction in ground preparation reducing sediment movement.
- More stable forests through providing longer term stable habitats for Red Squirrel, deer, bats, dippers and other wildlife species.

This plan proposes significant changes to the forest boundary on Lowcraigh bank and Brown edge which will improve external views of the forest.

## **Objectives of the Plan**

### Ongoing

- Continue to involve the local community in the future management of and benefits delivered by Blengdale.
- Continue to work with the Environment Agency to ensure that the River Bleng provides good fish spawning.
- Manage the valley in accordance with the North West England Strategic Plan.
- Ensure the conservation and protection of archaeological features.

### The next 5 years

- Extend the path network to benefit the health and well being of the local community and visitors
- Complete replacement of stiles with gates where practical.
- Complete thinning of all wind firm sub 20 year old conifer crops.
- Explore opportunities to extend the successful bat box scheme and set up a new dipper box scheme.
- Complete the establishment of the recent clearfell at brown Edge , south of the River Bleng

These objectives are further explored in the following maps:-

- Future Woodland Management,
- Future Woodland Species,
- Future Community Health and Well Being ,
- Future Conservation and Heritage