

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan



Spring 2009 Review

Introduction, Text & Graphs



Contents

The plan is presented in five separate sections:-

- Text
- Viewpoint Photos
- General Photo Survey
- Maps
- Computer Perspectives

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

- 1) Understanding Lowther Park
- 2) Developing a vision
- 3) Implementing the vision

The Viewpoints and General Photo Survey principally reflect 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.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Understanding The Forest</p>	<p>Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Survey • Achievements during last plan period
	<p>Maps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location • Social & Economic • Current Forest Species • Recreation and Access • Community • Aerial Photo • Water, Heritage and Nature Conservation • Wind Hazard and Soils • ESC Conifer Species • ESC Native Species • Landform Assessment • Achievements
	<p>All Photos</p>

Developing A Vision	<p>Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and Appraisal
	<p>Maps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Issues • Design Concept • Lower Slopes • Upper Slopes and Hill Tops
	<p>All Photos</p>
Implementing the Vision	<p>Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives of the Plan • Delivery of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan • Delivery against National Policy “ A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests” • Graphs
	<p>Maps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Woodland Management • Future Woodland Species • Future Community, Health and Wellbeing • Future Conservation and Heritage • Planning for Climate Change
	<p>All Computer Perspectives</p>

Gareth Browning
Spring 2009

Introduction

Lowther Park is situated only 5km east of Egremont just outside the north western boundary of the Lake District National Park. The woodland extends to 342 ha all of which is freehold having been purchased in six separate conveyances between 1928 and 1973. The forest is divided into four areas each with their own name Lowther Park, Sillathwaite, Uldale and Dent but for simplicity the four are referred to under the one name of Lowther Park.

The forest is visible from many roads and towns including the A5086 Cockermouth to Egremont road, the minor road over Swarth and Cold fells, Egremont, Cleator, Cleator Moor and Ennerdale Bridge. In addition the coast to coast long distance walking route runs through the middle of the forest..

Survey

Lowther Park, Uldale and Dent are popular with the local communities for informal recreation such as horse riding, walking and mountain biking. People can gain entry to the forest from a number of access points around the boundary. Although none of these provides formal parking facilities this is in keeping with the informal recreation carried out. The forests were dedicated as open access under the Countryside Rights of Way Act (CROW) and lie adjacent to other larger areas of CROW dedicated land such as Kinniside Common. The Coast to Coast route running through the middle of Uldale and Dent attracts many thousands of walkers on their way from St Bees to Whitby . Sillathwaite is used only by a handful of people mostly neighbouring residents.

Conservation interest has increased over the last five years with increased open space in Lowther Park but has changed little in Uldale and Dent. Kirk beck is valued for spawning fish and a small Red squirrel population is occasionally seen. The forest is home to Roe deer and badgers and a small range of birds and other wildlife such as butterflies.

Unfortunately, the proximity of the forest to areas of high population does lead to a higher than average level of vandalism and fly tipping. Also illegal motor cycle use of the forest has been an on and off problem over the last five years. In response local landowners including the Forestry Commission came together with the Police and have had some success in reducing the problem. In addition The Forestry Commission has sought to control usage by agreeing a permitted Enduro Bike route for 25 riders who wanted to ride a technical route aimed a balance and skill not speed in contrast to illegal riders who are characterised by riding fast noisy uninsured bikes.

The forest occupies a series of knolls either side of the valley of Kirk Beck which runs north east to south west. This landscape ranges in altitude from 110 to 300 metres above sea level with the full range of aspects leading to a wide soil distribution pattern with more stable forest in the valley bottom and more exposed, less stable forest on the knoll tops. Species distribution also reflects soil and altitude.

The only known feature of archaeological importance is a building or sheepfold at Grid Ref : NY 049114. As crops grow and felling proceeds other features of interest will be protected as they are found.

Access for timber haulage is generally good with improvements to a bend in Lowther Park in 2007 making it possible to avoid hauling timber through Wilton by opening access into Uldale from the Cold Fell road. However access for timber haulage into Sillathwaite is not currently possible as the existing access route has been found to be sub standard both in surface, gradient and alignment.

Review of Achievements during last plan period.

The previous plan objectives are listed below with achievements highlighted for each objective.

- Manage all work in accordance with the District Strategic Plan and England Forestry Strategy. This has been achieved. Whilst this forest plan has not been specifically audited under UKWAS, North West England was audited in 2005 and judged to have passed.
- Achieve the proposed felling plan. With the exception of the wind blow clearance in Sillathwaite the felling and restocking plans for the last five years have been achieved.
- Introduce Douglas fir into the Uldale valley both by under planting the existing larch and through restocking in mixture with larch. This has been achieved with approximately 10,000 Douglas fir seedlings planted in 2006.
- Regularly inform & liaise with users and visitors to the forest through attending parish council meetings and providing temporary information signing during major forest operations. Visitors to the forest have been kept informed about major operations through the provision of information signing at key locations. The Forestry Commission has taken an active role in the partnership with the Police and other land owners to reduce the impact of legal motor biking.
- Encourage native broadleaf regeneration and manage spruce regeneration either side of the watercourse in Lowther Park with the aim of creating open riparian broadleaved woodland. Native broadleaves are being established, albeit with slow growth, this area is developing towards native broadleaf woodland.

Other Achievements

- Following requests from Wilton and Haile Parish Council the forest road through Lowther Park was significantly improved to enable timber haulage to avoid using the narrow bridge in Wilton.
- A new track was constructed in Uldale Valley increasing the area of forest that can be regularly thinned.
- A permitted Enduro motor bike circuit was established.
- Agreement was given to realign the Bridleway into the Uldale Valley from Wilton onto the forest road which will secure access for people into the future.
- The majority of the plan area was dedicated as open access land under the Crow Act.

Appraisal

The forests covered by this plan are very visible in the landscape and play an important role in providing local recreation at the same time as growing timber. The management of Lowther Park, Silathwaite, Uldale and Dent provides continuing informal recreation opportunities. In 2008 the Forestry Commission agreed to accept a permanent realignment of the right of way from Wilton onto the Forest Road to ensure future access. Following completion of adjacent clear fell, opportunities may exist to improve parking at Wilton Gate, a popular access point, where unlike at the other main entrances vehicle turning and parking is more difficult.

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan Review - Spring 2009

Lowther Park and Sillathwaite are now well into their second rotation with a period of relative harvesting inactivity likely until around 2017-2021. By contrast the last 5 years have seen the completion of the first clear felling and subsequent restocking in Uldale and Dent. Further clear felling and restocking will need to continue in Dent if the mature forest is to be harvested before wind blow becomes significant.

Some harsh boundaries have been removed through felling over the last five years with more needed over the next felling period. In addition the shape of the boundary on the ridge between Dent and Uldale needs to be revisited.

A review of the permitted Enduro motorbike route is being carried out in early 2009 and will be used to decide the future management of this facility.

The area of Uldale managed under continuous cover has been thinned and the under planted Douglas fir have established and are growing well. Further thinning in Uldale and the achievement of first thinning across Lowther Park are critical activities to be achieved over the next five years.

Harvesting work at Sillathwaite and consequent improvements to the area around the watercourse through the establishment of Native Woodland are reliant on developing a new access route for timber haulage. The existing shared route is impractical to use as whilst the surface can be improved the gradient cannot and will always be on the limit for loaded timber lorries climbing out from the forest. In addition having shared access is far from ideal as the lorry traffic is likely to make the road surface unusable or difficult to use by residents. The ideal solution appears to be to establish a new access point where the forest lies adjacent to the Cold Fell road (see Design Concept Upper Slopes map)

Objectives of the Plan

Ongoing

- Manage all work in accordance with the District Strategic Plan, The Regional Forestry Framework, A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests and the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme.
- Consult and inform stakeholders, visitors and the local community about the ongoing and future management of the forest through local meetings, Regional website and temporary information signing.
- Take every opportunity to regularly thin the forest.
- Take into account developing advice on adapting to and mitigating against the impacts of climate change.

The next 5 years

- Improve the remaining harsh boundary on the ridge between Dent and Uldale.
- Establish a sustainable timber access route into Sillathwaite.
- Achieve the proposed felling and restocking plan.
- Investigate opportunities to improve parking at Wilton Gate.
- Implement the findings of the review into the permitted Enduro Motor Bike route.

These objectives are further explored in the following maps:-

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

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan Review - Spring 2009

- Future Conservation and Heritage
- Planning for Climate Change

Delivery against the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan

Lowther Park 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 Strategic Plan makes the statements below which are relevant to this plan.

- 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.
- At Forest Design Plan review consider further boundary improvements to forests in zone including land swap deals to improve most visually intrusive edges where appropriate.

Detailed below are the objectives of the Cumbria High fells zone (highlighted in blue), and how the implementation of this plan 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.

Implemented through

- Future woodland management proposes regular production of timber from Lowther Park, Sillathwate, Uldale and Dent.
- Restocking proposals include increasing areas of Douglas fir and not restocking difficult to access areas.
- The intention to maximise thinning is one of the objectives.
- Local contractors are being supported where economic constraints allow.

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.

Implemented through

- Continued maintenance of the route of the Coast to Coast long distance walk.
- Investigate potential for improving turning space at Wilton Gate
- Review the successes and impacts of the permitted Enduro Motor Bike route
- Maintain access points for people at Wilton gate, Uldale, Cold Fell and Nanny Catch Gate.
- At felling consider opening up permanent views along well used routes.

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.

Implemented Through

- Harsh boundaries improved through felling and restocking
- New native woodland developed in Lowther Park.
- Increased areas of wetland habitats through leaving wet soil types unplanted after felling.
- Maintaining mature coning trees and stable woodland habitats in Uldale will benefit a range of woodland species including Red Squirrels.
- Protecting wildlife and important habitats during operations.
- Investigate oportunities to include Juniper in appropriate areas identified in ESC.

Delivery against National Policy “ A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests”

The Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWFS) replaced the England Forestry Strategy as the core policy for forestry in England in 2008. The strategy has three themes Communities and Places, Land and Natural Environment and Working Woodlands.

Detailed below are the objectives of the ETWFS (highlighted in blue), grouped under its three themes and how the implementation of the revised Lowther Park, Sillathwate, Uldale and Dent FDP will deliver against the objectives.

Communities and Places

- involving local people in planning, managing and using local woodlands and the trees in streets and green spaces, to help achieve more cohesive communities and to show how individuals can contribute to environmental sustainability;
- making it easier for people to use and enjoy woodlands particularly in ways that benefit their physical and mental health, learning and personal development;
- creating liveable neighbourhoods, towns and cities by using trees and woodlands as part of the green infrastructure which frames and connects urban and rural areas, improves the quality of a place, and regenerates brown field and derelict land;
- using trees and woodlands to help minimise the impacts of climate change in built-up area

Implemented through

- Continue to use temporary signing as a way of updating the local community about operations and activities.
- Providing the Forest Design Plan in adobe acrobat format through a website page dedicated to this forest.
- Investigate potential for improving turning space at Wilton Gate.

Land and Natural Environment

To create, expand and maintain a network of sustainably managed trees, woods and forests that are resilient to climate change and make a full contribution to:

- protecting and enhancing our woodland habitats and associated species and facilitating their resilience and adaptation to climate change;
- safeguarding, enhancing and celebrating the characteristic elements of rural and urban landscapes and their cultural and historic values;
- maximising the full range of ecosystem services provided by trees, woods and forests, including the protection of soil and water resources now and in the future, as needs change.

Implemented through

- Ecological site classification used to plan choice of future woodland species.
- Increased areas of wetland habitats through leaving wet soil types unplanted after felling.
- Forest Design Plan process based around understanding the importance of sense of the place
- Managing the lower slopes of Uldale Valley as continuous cover to provide a stable woodland habitat.

Working Woodlands

The Government's objectives for this Strategy can only be delivered by a healthy woodland and forestry sector with viable businesses actively engaged in sustainable management and processing at national, regional, sub-regional and local level. This will require:

- the whole sector to have the expertise and capacity to ensure that sustainable management of woodlands delivers public benefits alongside business profitability. To achieve this, partnership programmes will involve the forestry, arboricultural, silvicultural, recreation, timber processing industries and related business sectors;
- innovation to develop new markets and modernise supply chains and infrastructure;
- Government resources targeted at the provision of public goods and at developing the capacity of the sector to adapt to future needs and diversify, creating a flexible industry run by well-trained people;
- substituting wood products for fossil fuels and other materials, as a contribution to UK targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Implemented through

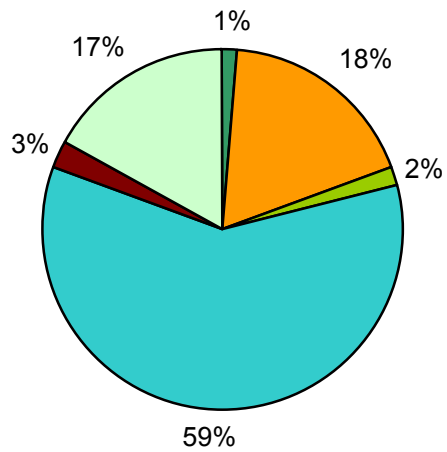
- Improved access to Silathwaite for timber haulage.
- Providing opportunities for the local community to gather firewood from harvesting sites.
- Developing local contractors by supporting training.

Graphs

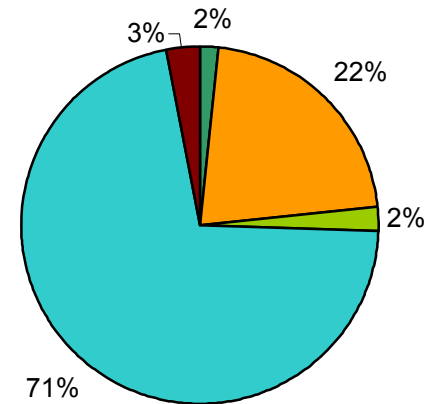
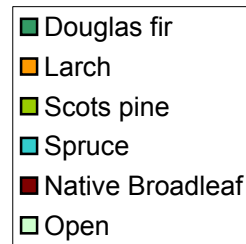
The following graphs illustrate the percentage split of current woodland species and land use, future felling phases and future woodland species and land use. These help to assess the plan against the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme guidance and ensure that the plan is balanced and will deliver the objectives set out earlier.

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan - Spring 2009 Review

Current Species as a Percentage of Plan Areas



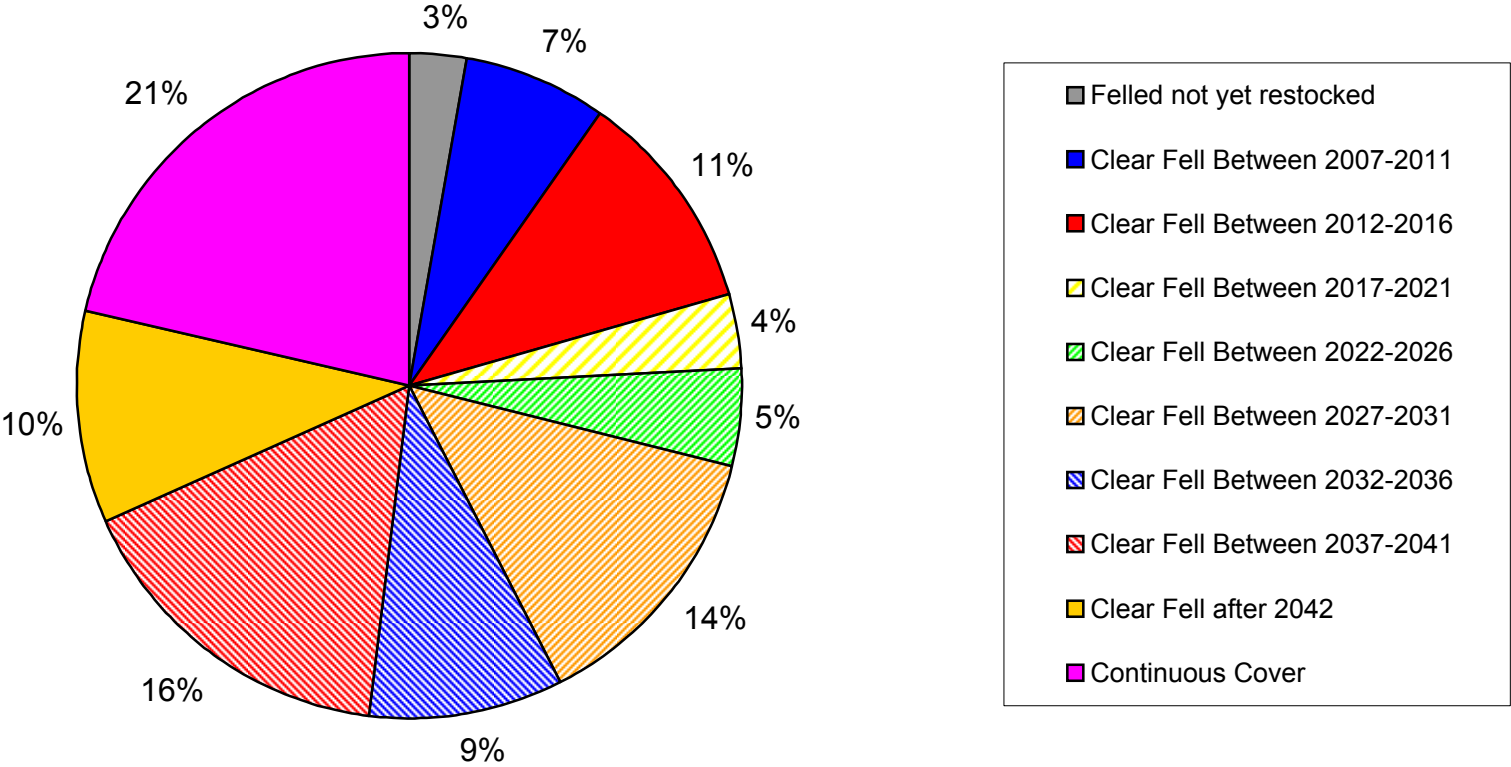
Graph showing all land



Graph showing all woodland only

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan - Spring 2009 Review

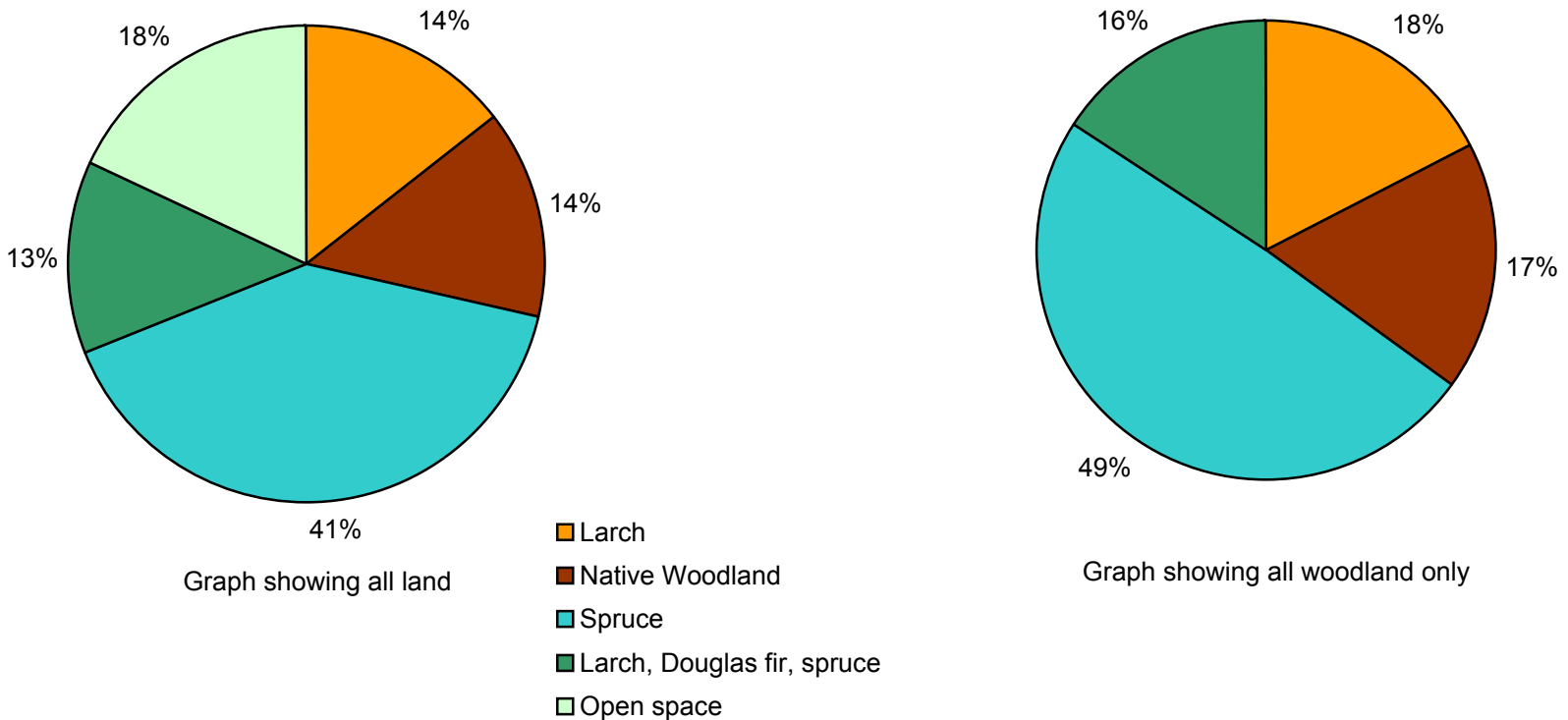
Felling Phases as a Percentage of Total Felling



This graph shows that the felling proposals are well within the requirements set by the UK Woodland Assurance scheme that no more than 25 percent of the forest should be felled in any one five year period..

Lowther Park Forest Design Plan - Spring 2009 Review

Future Woodland Species and Land Use as a Percentage of Total Area



This graph shows primary species only. All conifer restocking will include up to 30% other species in mix, eg larch or Douglas fir in spruce and spruce or Douglas fir in larch. Native species include Oak, Birch, Rowan and Juniper. The graph shows that the future species plan will meet UK Woodland Assurance Scheme requirements for <65% primary species, >20% secondary species, >10% open space and >5% native woodland