

6. Land and Natural Environment



## 6. Land and Natural Environment

### 6.1 Location and Ownership

The Kent Downs woods are freehold woodland between Canterbury, Ashford and Folkestone - see map opposite.

### 6.2 Site Characteristics

“The Kent Downs is one of Britain’s most wooded AONBs. Woodland covers over 20% and is the second largest land use after farming. Woodlands are a vital component of the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, providing a green mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. They emphasise the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp, and frame the agricultural lower slopes and settlements.” (Kent Downs AONB, 2009)

Most of the plan woods sit at an altitude of approx 140 metres, rising to 180 metres in the southern part of King’s Wood and West Wood. They are prominent in the landscape along the top of the North Downs ridge and comprise large blocks surrounded by agricultural land. They all lie within the Mid Kent and East Kent Downs landscape character areas.

Soils comprise mainly clay-with-flints (Head, Head Brickearth, Dry Valley & Nailbourne deposits and Sand) over chalk.

The average annual rainfall is nationally low at 750mm a year.

### 6.3 Safeguarding our heritage

There are eighteen Scheduled Monuments in these woods, mostly burial mounds but with one long barrow in King’s Wood. All have an individual management plan renewed every five years. Conservation of the sites requires no specific woodland design but site specific vegetation control is important to prevent damage and to expose the sites to view where appropriate.

Other cultural and heritage features are considered during pre-operational site assessment.



Looking east to Eggringe Wood

(Steve Peters, FC)





South East England  
Kent North Downs

Location Map



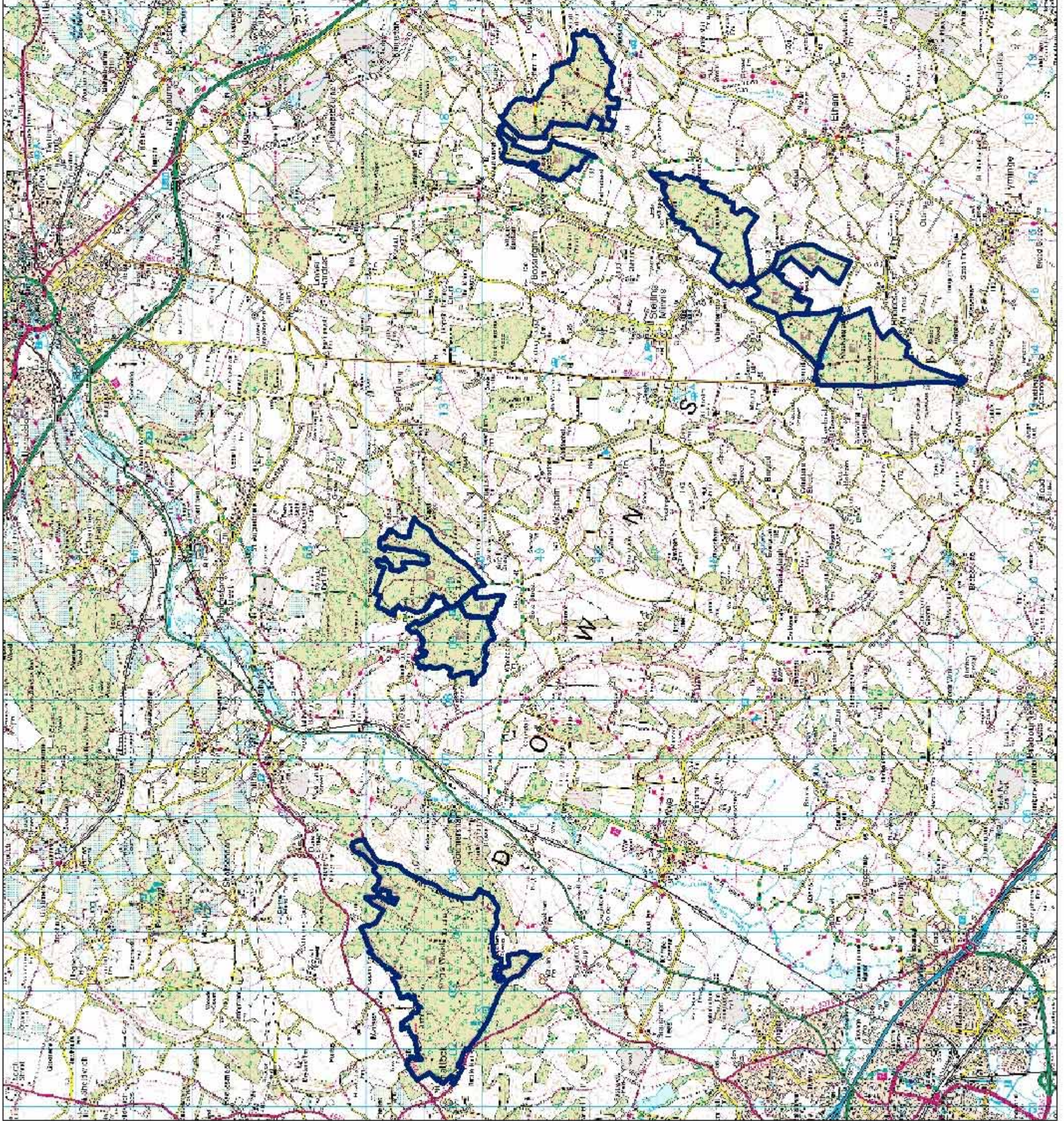
Management area

Produced by the Planning Team December 2008

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### 6.4 Conserving Biodiversity

#### 6.4.1 Existing Habitats

##### *Ancient Woodland*

Almost the whole area of the Kent Downs FDP is classed as ancient woodland (see map opposite), of which approximately 35 hectares is ASNW and 1525 hectares is PAWS.

The PAWS areas are dominated by Sweet chestnut, beech and mixed conifer plantations. The small pockets of ASNW tend to be in inaccessible valleys and on steep downland banks. Whilst there are some rare plant species present, much of the area is dominated by a bramble understorey. The dominant regenerating species is birch.

##### *NVC*

A range of NVC types are represented across the woodlands (see map overleaf) which reflect the underlying soil types and topography within the Kent Downs. These, however, are only a guide - much of the original character of the ground vegetation has been masked by plantations of conifer and beech and Sweet chestnut coppice. Sweet chestnut is also often present as an understorey in the conifer plantations. Everywhere, birch is regenerating where light levels allow.

##### *Rides*

The woodlands are generally well roaded ( FC network ) and have numerous un-surfaced rides. The ride networks in all North Downs woodlands have more recently been subject to re-structuring, creating a mixture of permanent and transitional open space

##### *Scrub and Coppice*

This habitat is also limited in extent, due to the narrow age-class structure - over 90% of the woods are over 40 years old.

##### *Deadwood*

Fallen deadwood historically has been left in many Sweet chestnut compartments. Dead conifer snags are left standing after programmed clearfells and episodes of wind damage, providing they are regarded as safe.

##### *Ponds and watercourses*

There is little or no water in the North Downs woodland. There are a small number of ponds in Kings Wood and Lyminge Forest but these are not fed by water courses.

##### *Open space*

Permanent open space is provided along many rides and beneath power-line wayleaves. In addition, specific areas in Kings Wood, Denge Wood & Lyminge Forest have more recently been created as part of bio-diversity and access projects. Transitional open space is created by active coppicing.

#### 6.4.2 Protected Sites

None of the woods is SSSI, but two woods have SSSIs against the boundary. To the south of Eggringe Wood is unit 21 of the Wye and Crundale Downs SSSI (favourable condition) and to the east of Elhampark Wood is Parkgate Down SSSI (favourable condition).

#### 6.4.3 Priority Habitats

UK BAP Priority Habitats	Comments
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Mapped for all of the woodland, but mainly found as intruded regeneration or understorey/scrub.

#### 6.4.4 Priority Species Tables (see pages 16-19)

These show where our management activities can benefit priority species. Forest operations act on the vegetation structure of the woodlands, providing habitat level diversity. **Bold** type indicates a keystone species, where favourable management will benefit a suite of likeminded other species not listed but which rely on similar conditions.



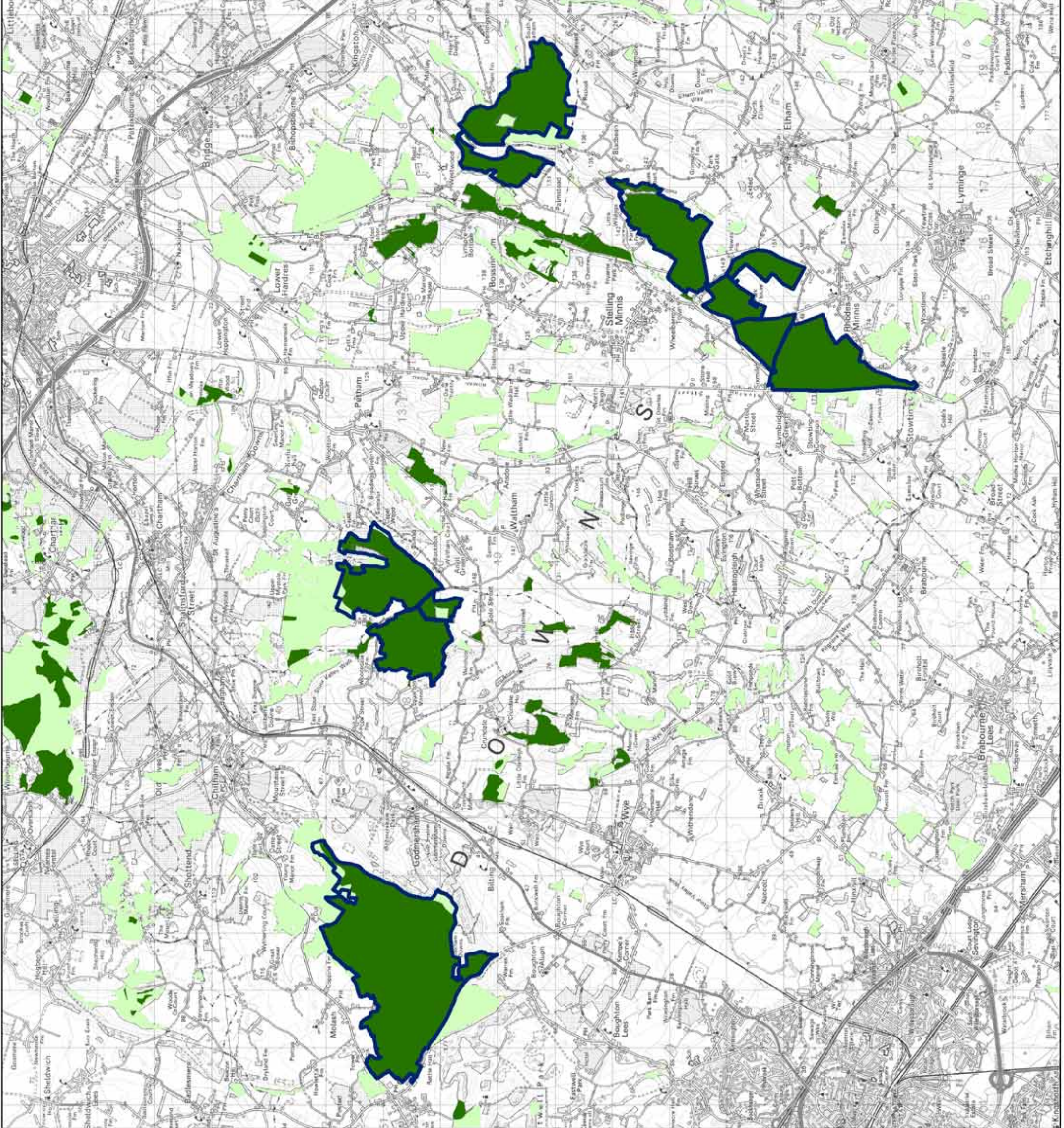
**Ancient Woodland**

*Indicates location of ancient woodland  
as held in the Natural England  
Ancient Woodland Inventory Dataset*

Ancient and semi-natural woodland  
(ASNW)

Ancient replanted woodland  
(PAWS)

Forestry Commission management area









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UK BAP Priority Species	Management Activity									Comments
	Restoration of ancient woodland to native species	Thinning of conifer woodland	Clearfelling of conifer woodland	Enhancement of open and edge habitat alongside roads and tracks	Minimum intervention management of woodland	Coppicing of broadleaf species	Enhancement of the deadwood resource	Enhancement and creation of stream corridors & ponds		
Adder	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	Structural enhancements and open space provision will improve conditions for this species.
Barbastelle bat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Present in the wider landscape - retention of older trees will promote roosting habitat in future decades.
Barn owl	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Retention of ancient and veteran trees together with identification of future veterans a priority. Expansion of open space both cyclical and permanent will boost its available foraging habitat.
Bechstein's bat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Present in the wider landscape - retention of older trees containing woodpecker holes will promote roosting habitat.
<b>Bee orchid</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				<b>Responds well to cyclical vegetation management on the woodland edge and on open chalk grassland.</b>
<b>Brown hare</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				<b>A declining mammal species usually associated with the open habitats beyond our estate but which benefits from the cover afforded on the woodland edge. Improvements to the structural diversity at the woodland edge will likely prove of benefit to the hare.</b>
Brown long-eared bat	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	A tree roosting bat. Retention of older trees and zoning of minimum intervention stands will boost its numbers.
Bullfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	A wider countryside species likely to benefit from open habitat creation and enhancements to the woodland edge
<b>Bumblebees</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	<b>A variety of declining bumblebee species utilise the road and ride edge corridors for landscape scale dispersal.</b>
Chalkhill blue butterfly				✓						Requires a mosaic of short and medium height chalk grassland feeding on Horseshoe vetch. Scrub invasion and lack of grazing a key problem where it survives.
Clay fan-foot	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Associated with oak woodland occurring locally in the South East.
Common frog	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Predominantly terrestrial in its lifecycle. Favours structurally diverse semi-natural habitats with well connected breeding sites and plenty of deadwood.
Common lizard	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Structural enhancements and open space provision will improve conditions for this species.
Common toad	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Associated with aquatic habitats for breeding season but a mobile species in the wider landscape both prior to and after the breeding.
Crossbill		✓								Overwintering on the FC estate feeding on conifer seeds and requiring a nearby source of water.



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Dark green fritillary butterfly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Requires open sunny habitats feeding on dog violets. Associated with chalk scrub and woodland rides and glades on the FC estate.
Dingy skipper butterfly				✓	✓						Internal corridor enhancement and buffering of the woodland edge to promote an ecotonal transition together with a localised enhancement of the chalk scrub and the chalk grassland resource.
<b>Dormouse</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>Ancient &amp; native woodland restoration likely to enhance habitat through the promotion of a more dense understorey and improved ride edge habitat will facilitate dispersal.</b>
<b>Duke of Burgundy</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>FC playing a leading role in a landscape scale recovery project at the Denge Woods.</b>
European Hedgehog	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	The enhancement of structural diversity and a softer transition between habitat types will improve conditions for this species.
<b>Firecrest</b>	✓										<b>Reside in tall, well-vegetated conifers, often Norway spruce, with some deciduous trees along rides. Also breed in semi-natural woodland with a well-developed shrub layer of holly or yew.</b>
<b>Glow worm</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>Road and ride edges, powerline wayleaves and the woodland edge</b>
Grasshopper warbler	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Red listed species requiring scrub, thick grassland and recently established forestry plantation.
<b>Grass snake</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>Structural enhancements and open space provision will improve conditions for this species. Will also benefit from enhancements to wetland habitats such as a network of ponds.</b>
Grey Partridge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	A UK and LBAP priority species of the farmscape which will benefit from beneficial woodland management where this adjoins its foraging areas.
Great crested newt											Likely to benefit from ancient and native woodland restoration and the cyclical management of wet scrub in and around water bodies.
Grizzled skipper	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	A characteristic spring butterfly of southern chalk downland and other herb-rich grassland habitats. Requires the maintenance of a continual supply of open space with occasional disturbance.
Harvest mouse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	A species benefiting from enhanced connectivity of native shrubs and grassland - improvements to the ride network will greatly improved the fortunes of this species in this part of Sussex.
Hawfinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Associated with mature deciduous forest containing a scrub element.



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	Restoration of ancient woodland to native species	Thinning of conifer woodland	Clearfelling of conifer woodland	Enhancement of open and edge habitat alongside roads and tracks	Minimum intervention management of woodland	Coppicing of broadleaf species	Enhancement of the deadwood resource	Enhancement and creation of stream corridors & ponds				
Lady orchid	✓			✓		✓						<b>Kent remains the most important centre of the British population. An open woodland and woodland edge species.</b>
Lesser redpoll	✓	✓		✓								Depends on a continual supply of pioneer woodland feeding on birch and alder seeds - a species that is negatively influenced by the creation of permanent open space.
Lesser spotted woodpecker	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						Increase in abundance of dead and decaying wood component a priority for long term survival. Well developed crowns with a high density of branches are needed for foraging.
Linnet	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	An edge specialist able to benefit from scrub expansion associated with ancient and native woodland restoration and natural regeneration.
Long-eared owl				✓		✓					✓	Favours smaller woods and thickets; close to open feeding habitats, usually where tawny owls are absent.
Marsh tit	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	Prefer mature, deciduous woodland where oak or beech is commonest tree species. Use wooded riverside habitat and alder carr. Intensively managed commercial woodland is avoided.
Nightingale	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	<b>Nightingale will benefit from cyclical open space as provided by ongoing forest management practice.</b>
Nightjar		✓		✓		✓					✓	<b>A UK BAP priority species primarily associated with low-land heathland but cyclical forestry and clearfell will provide useful habitat for this species during PAWS restoration.</b>
Noctule	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	Largely associated with deciduous woodland.
Pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly				✓		✓						<b>Recent extinction of this species in the past few decades could be reversed as part of a landscape scale reintroduction project. Significant beneficial habitat management underway in and around its former core areas.</b>
Pipistrelle bat	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	Creation of additional open space will improve foraging habitat and older tree retention will provide an increase in summer roosts.
Red kite				✓		✓						<b>A recovering species in the South East that was once widespread and abundant. Scattered retention of conifer in native woodland restoration zones a priority to facilitate its continued recovery</b>
Redstart	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	Favour mature broadleaved woodland edges. Conservation of older trees a necessity.
Silver washed fritillary	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	Breeds in broad-leaved woodland, especially oak woodland or woods with sunny rides and glades. Common dod-violet is the main foodplant.
Slow worm	✓	✓		✓		✓					✓	Structural enhancements and open space provision will improve conditions for this species.







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### 6.5 Delivering the Brief

There are five Land and Natural Environment objectives stated in the brief that the plan should address.

- The group of woodlands making up the North Downs Complex are all ancient woodland sites. The plans should maintain and where appropriate enhance the remnant features of interest, with the long term aim of restoring the woodlands to site native species in an appropriate and effective way.

The actions which deliver this objective are covered under the Working Woodlands section. The emphasis will be on gradual change, targeting the most shading conifers first. A proportion of conifers will be retained into old age to provide structure and diversity and to support raptor nesting.

- The woodlands are all part of a large SNCI. Management proposed will take account where appropriate of the SNCI features.

The priority species lists presented earlier show how different keystone species will benefit from the normal range of forest operations. The management of ancient woodland sites is covered above. Detailed site level management will take account of priority species and appropriate works will be identified in the Operational Site Assessment process.

- The ride network & open space are an important feature of the site and help to support a number of key species.

Works have already taken place in many of the woods under a variety of projects to widen rides and link open space - further work is proposed. Open space creation will aim to produce some wooded heath where soils and site conditions are most suitable.

- A number of the woodlands are notable sites for butterflies according to the Species Action Plan.

Denge Wood is a grade A site for butterflies. FC is working with BC to support the Duke of Burgundy in the Denge woods as part of the South East Woodlands project. Both Skippers will benefit from the open rides and edge management.

- A number of the woodlands are important sites for native downland floral communities.

There are no plans to clear areas of forest to re-create downland, but opportunities will arise during management operations to widen rides on chalky sites which will allow

downland flora to establish, and downland species will take advantage of felling on suitable sites to seed and temporarily re-establish.

#### *Climate Change*

Forestry is in the early stages of developing strategies to help woodlands adapt to a changing climate. The Kent Downs are fortunate in that they will change gradually to native broadleaves and most of these will be managed under a continuous cover system, which is considered to provide a more stable environment for wildlife. All the native broadleaved species in the area are currently identified as resilient using the 2050 high emission scenario. There are a number of non-native broadleaves which are also resilient but they are inappropriate for planting on ancient woodland sites. The retained conifers will be suited to their sites and therefore more robust in the face of change. The continuing provision of a diverse woodland environment is the best protection for the wide range of species that currently live in the Kent Downs.

#### *Natural Reserves and protected local sites*

In general, the woods of the Kent Downs deliver more for nature conservation when they remain in active woodland management and therefore there is only one small area of wet woodland in Covert Wood set aside as a Natural Reserve. However, six small areas have been identified for management to specifically benefit open and BAP priority habitats and species.

Site name /description	Wood	Comp/Sub comp ref	Area ha	Target species or habitat	Management regime
Cutlers & Nut Valley	Kings Wood	9117abf 9130c	11.2 2.9	Reptiles & amphibians Downland flora	Conservation Annual cut and collect
Reptile Valley	Kings Wood	9137a	4.3	Reptiles	Conservation Birch & bramble control as necessary
Wildlife Glade	Kings Wood	9131c	1.0	Reptiles	Conservation Birch-bramble control as necessary
Meadow	Kings Wood	9110f	0.5		Recreation Annual mow
Bonsai Bank	Denge Wood	9299de	4.5	Duke of Burgundy Chalk downland	Conservation Annual cut & collect
Heath	Covert Wood	9222a	2.0	Nightjar, Woodlark Heathland	Conservation Birch-bramble control as necessary



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### 6.6 Land and Natural Environment Objectives

Forest Design Plan Objectives	Forest Design Plan Outputs At Year 10 (2018)	Monitoring
<p><b>Land and Natural Environment</b></p>	<p>Restoration of PAWS is underway and progress has been in line with the plan proposals.</p>	<p>Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photographs. Visual inspections.</p>
	<p>Thinning and felling has taken place as planned to provide habitat change and diversity for a range of species.</p>	<p>Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photos. Species surveys, assessment.</p>
	<p>The ride network has been maintained and improved and has features which can support the key species.</p>	<p>Sub-compartment database records. Aerial photos. Species surveys, assessment.</p>
	<p>Minimum intervention areas are in place and providing suitable habitat for key species.</p>	<p>Sub-compartment database records. Species surveys, assessment.</p>
	<p>The condition of the sites for butterflies (Grade A) under the SAP has been maintained or improved.</p>	<p>Species and site survey. Feedback from BC survey work.</p>
	<p>The small sites identified for their importance for other BAP habitats and species have been maintained in suitable condition.</p>	<p>Sub-compartment database records. Local monitoring reports.</p>
	<p>Records of cultural/archaeological interest within the woodland have been improved. The existing cultural/archaeological interest has been protected and conserved.</p>	<p>Operational site assessments have taken account of woodland archaeology and sought expert advice from English Heritage and the County Archaeologist where appropriate.</p>





New pond in Cutlers Valley, King's Wood

(Steve Peters, FC)

Dead standing tree in Covert Wood

(Steve Peters, FC)

