

Operational Site Assessment

What is an Operational Site Assessment?

An operational planning document which translates broad Forest Design Plan prescriptions into a detailed work plan by providing :-

- Information on the physical, archaeological, conservation and recreation features of the site
- Proposals for silvicultural, habitat restoration and public access treatments which are drawn from broad FDP prescriptions and which are site and time specific
- A clear approved plan of operations which is accessible to all involved in working the site
- A historical record of work completed, changes in woodland structure and habitats and of issues encountered and how they were responded to

Operational Site Assessments (OSAs) are detailed site plans drawn together for each woodland / inclosure prior to work taking place. The OSA is drawn together by both planning and operational teams and requires input from a wide range of district team members. OSA's provide an essential link between the broad strategic objectives of the district management plan, the broad prescriptions contained in Forest Design Plans and detailed practical issues relating to time and site specific operational delivery.

Woodlands/inclosures are divided into five operational working blocks and each woodland/inclosure is considered for intervention on a five year rotation. An OSA is initiated for each working block area 12 months in advance of operations.

The OSA contains mapped details of site features relating to archaeological, conservation, public access and physical features of the site and indicates how operations should take site specific factors into account to afford protection and/or to provide enhancement during the planning and execution of operations.

OSAs relating to the 10 Open Forest management units have recently been developed. These are primarily concerned with recording Open Forest features which require consideration and/or protection as habitat restoration operations are implemented and for recording any issues that arise as operations are implemented.

Information in the OSA is archived after each working block intervention to provide an historic record of work undertaken and of issues encountered and how they have been dealt with for future reference.

What is a final operations map?

A detailed operational plan which forms part of and draws together all the relevant information from the OSA to provide clear guidance for implementation of the Forest Design Plan at the next intervention.

- A detailed map plan specifying actions required (or reasons for no action) and prescriptions to be implemented during the forthcoming intervention
- It must be consistent with the broad aims and the spirit of the Forest Design Plan
- It should draw on the expertise and input of all the beat/walk team members
- It must be widely distributed to all team members for reference as operations are implemented

The OSA contains a final operations map which brings together all of the practical issues relating to the woodland and operations relevant to the current intervention. The final operations map translates broad policy and prescriptions contained in the Forest Design Plan and interprets this into a detailed site and time specific operational map plan. The final operations map is widely distributed to team members including any contractors involved with delivery of work on the site.

The completed OSA, including the final operations map is circulated to senior managers for final approval and comment prior to commencement of operations.

Standard Guidelines

Standard guidelines have been developed which are designed to assist in the interpretation of broad Forest Design Plan prescriptions. Guidelines give a detailed account of factors relating to the management of particular woodland / habitat types described in the Forest Design Plan and the actions needed to transform one habitat type into another over a period of time.

The guidelines aim to give support to walk/beat foresters regarding the selection of appropriate time and site specific actions needed to develop the long term objectives of the Forest Design Plan.

Some of the guidelines use local case studies to illustrate broad principles.

The following guidelines have been produced:-

- Transformation of plantation to Pasture Woodland
- Transformation of plantation to Wooded Heath
- Management of old growth broadleaf stands (currently in development)
- Guidance to support implementation of the Cranborne Chase and North Dorset Forest Design Plans.

Production of the OSA is necessarily and essentially a district team effort and the key steps / responsibilities involved in producing a robust and effective OSA are outlined below.

Planning team

- Initiate an OSA for each site in the working block 12 months in advance of working
- Maintain local GIS data for use in OSA documents
- Provide copies of current approved plans and background contextual mapped information derived from local GIS data
- Provide details of relevant contacts
- Provide surveyed standing crop data for thinning control purposes

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- Review operations against the FDP & OSA
 - Update all records relating to the site following changes as a result of operations

Beat/Walk Forester or Open Forest Planning Officer

- Co-ordinate beat / walk / open forest management team input into OSA
- Produce final operations plan with input from beat / walk team members
- Manage local site based consultations

- Monitor progress of operations in relation to OSA and thinning control objectives
- Record crop/habitat changes and feedback to planning

Senior Management team

- Final check and approval of OSA prior to operations

Relationship of plans

The following diagram illustrates the relationship of the OSA to other district management plans.

The intention is that the planning system will be circular in character so that issues encountered and lessons learned during operational delivery can be fed back into to higher level planning documents.

