

# Cropple How Forest Design Plan Review 2009/10 Text and Graphs



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

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

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.

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## Introduction

Crople How lies entirely within the Lake District National Park and extends to 39 hectares. The forest occupies part of the north west facing slope of Birkby Fell overlooking the valley of the River Esk.

The forest was acquired in two parcels, the first in 1952 saw the acquisition of Crople How Farm at around three quarters of the plan area. The second acquisition of Linbeck in 1964 completed the land holding. Planting began in 1961 and was completed in 1966.

## Survey

Crople How is a small forest in a remote valley with almost no recreational interest other than very occasional and informal local use of the lower slope. A photo survey is presented separately to illustrate key features of the survey.

The terrain within the forest is marked by a series of small cliffs and rocks that run diagonally across the contours from north east to south west. These divide the site into a series of sloped steps. In addition the forest is divided by a number of watercourses which have their origin above the forest in Birkby Fell. Ground conditions within the forest vary from scree and rock to wetter unflushed peat with areas of brown earth.

Looking at the position of the forest in the landscape there is a sharp contrast between the upper two thirds of the forest which is predominantly evergreen conifer and the surrounding fell. In addition distant views highlight the straight top boundary and the narrow strip of fell which is visible above this. Closer up the woodland fits into the landscape better as the straight top line and narrow fell strip are lost and the large conifer element fore shortened balanced by the broadleaf woodland element at the bottom of the slope becoming more visible. Native broadleaf regeneration has established itself in neighbouring gullies and helps soften the conifer edge. Winter sees the larch in the mid slope lose its needles and leave the dark spruce and pine on the upper slope even more visible and unconnected to the woodland in the valley bottom.

Conservation interest is linked to the existing native broadleaf woodland on the lower slope and the scatter of remnant native broadleaf associated with the cliffs and watercourses on the upper slope. Throughout the forest (both conifer and broadleaf) a number of ancient semi-natural woodland indicators are present. In

addition the shape and form of the Oaks scattered through the conifer wood suggest that a majority of the forest was planted on an ancient woodland site.

Evidence that Red squirrels are present in the wood can be found throughout the lower slopes especially in the thinned Larch and Native broadleaf woodland and in discussion with neighbours who actively feed Red Squirrels in their gardens.

Archaeological interest is limited to the dry stone walls that form the old field boundaries.

In terms of access to the main road network and timber markets Cropple How is in a poor position. Access from the forest to the main road whilst short in distance is on twisting, narrow minor roads which preclude the use of articulated lorries which means that shorter more flexible lorries are required. Positioned on the west coast of Cumbria access to timber markets is poor with the nearest major mills being at Carlisle and Penrith.

## Achievements during last plan period.

Since the last plan very little of the proposed felling and restocking have not been achieved for the reasons given below:

- The storm of January 2005 caused significant changes to harvesting plans as windblown areas were prioritised. Cropple How, whilst windblown, was felt to be of lower priority than other more visible, more recreated sites.
- Time spent considering and trying to find a solution to concerns by a neighbour (now moved away) about the proposed clear felling.

Given this there is no Achievements map included in this plan.

## Review and Appraisal

In visual terms the forest can be divided into the same two zones as shown in the Design Concept Map.

The "Valley Bottom Zone" is the least visible part of the forest and the most diverse with the majority of the native broadleaf woodland and thinned larch. This zone is valuable for conservation and links well with surrounding woodland

as well as providing a visual buffer to any felling of the “Valley Side Zone”. This zone has good access for future management but will also be heavily impacted on by the harvesting of the “Valley Side Zone” as all the timber will need to pass through this zone to new loading area.

The “Valley Side Zone” is the most visible and the most visually intrusive due to the straight upper boundary and sides and evergreen species. Lack of wind firm boundaries, unthinned areas and terrain difficulties make the felling of this in one phase the only practical option. When considering future species for this site the felling of this area in one phase will be critical to any proposed native woodland restoration scheme. There is a high risk of unwanted natural regeneration of conifers if any spruce is left in this area. This can be seen already as windblown areas are regenerating with conifer seedlings. The isolated piece of woodland at the south western end of the forest will be especially challenging for harvesting and will need discussion with neighbours over access. The remnant ancient woodland needs to be protected and should help break up the size of any clear felling.

Given the evidence for ancient woodland site, remnant native broadleaves, low value of timber due to poor access and distant markets the objectives of the Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWFS) would be best served by restoring Cropole How to native woodland.

## Ongoing and Long Term Objectives

- Through clear felling of the “Valley Side Zone” establish a new native woodland which reflects the character of the valley.
- Manage the retained larch through thinning with the aim of securing replacement by native woodland over the next 20 years.
- Seek funding to repair the boundary walls where they serve a stock control function
- Investigate opportunities to retain the lorry turning point post harvesting as a basic car park and establish a basic path route between this and Birkby fell.

## Delivery Against Regional Policy

Crople How 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 the revised Parkgate and Irton, Sillathwate, Uldale and Dent 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.

Implemented through

Given Cropple How's remote location from markets connected to poor access to roads it is felt that Cropple How is an inappropriate site for restocking with conifers aimed at timber production.

### 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

Future establishment of native woodland may encourage more recreational use but given remote location this is never going to be significant.

Investigating opportunities to retain lorry turning point as a basic car park and establish a walking route from this to Birkby Fell thus improving access to the dedicated open access area.

### 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

The Future Woodland Management proposals will see improvements to the forest boundary with the open fell which will remove this stark boundary and create a more natural edge.

Future native woodland establishment will include Sessile Oak , through planting probably, and this will , in time , increase the area of this Cumbria BAP habitat.

## Delivery Against National Policy

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 Parkgate and Irton, 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

- The consultation process will include the Parish Council and a leaflet drop through neighbour's houses.
- Opportunities will be sought post harvesting and during restocking to establish new paths through the site to improve access onto Birkby fell.
- On completion of harvesting the opportunity will arise to retain the lorry turning point as a small car park if neighbours and Planning Authority agree.

## 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

- Creating new native woodland should add to the landscape of Eskdale and allow native species on lower slopes space to extend and if necessary move to cooler upper slopes in time.
- Future native woodland could be harvested for wood fuel (no local mains gas) as well as providing soil protection and water filtering services.
- Use of Ecological Site Classification will ensure appropriate species which should ensure healthy and robust woodland.

## 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

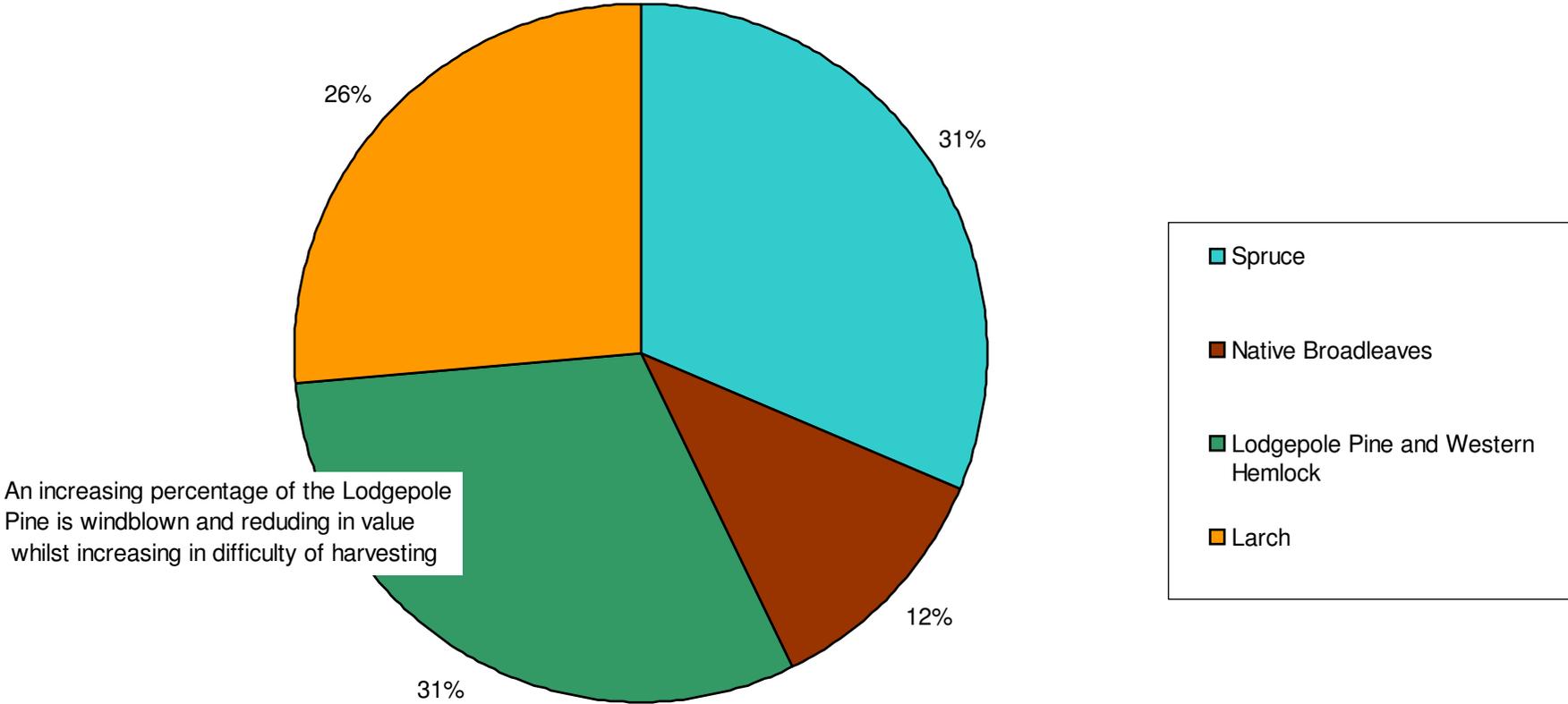
### Implemented through

- On completion of harvesting wood fuel scavenging permits will be offered allowing local people to gather their wood fuel locally.
- Future native woodland could be thinned and managed for wood fuel.

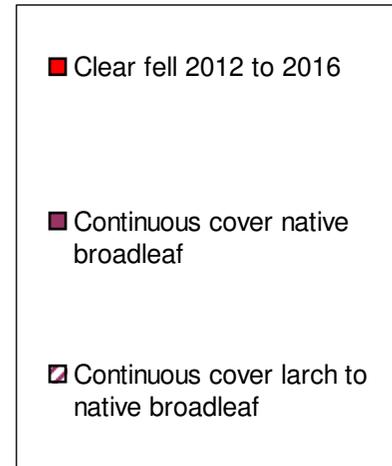
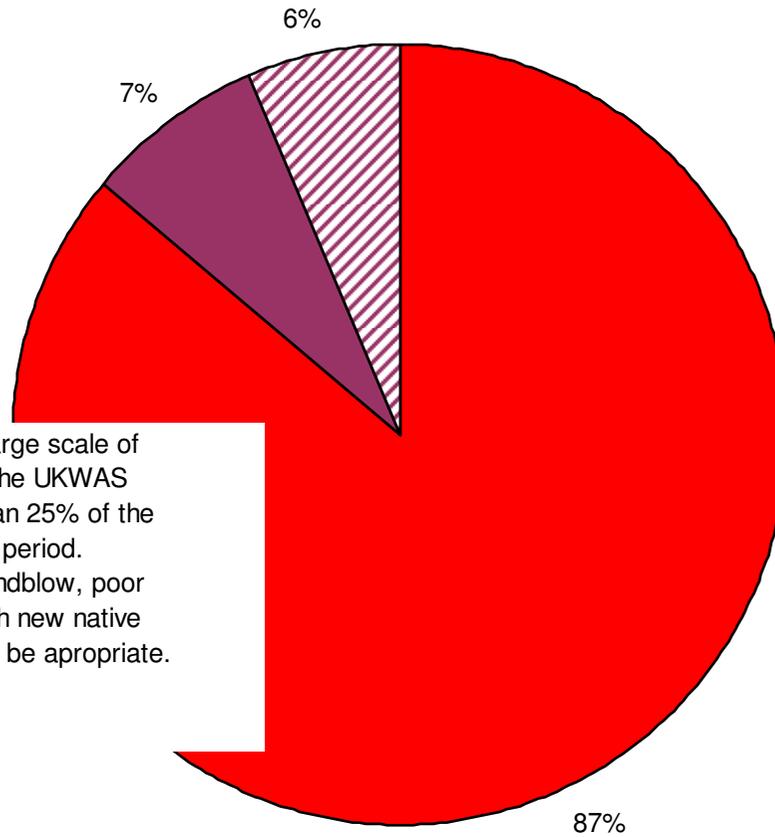
## Graphs

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.

**Area of Current Species as a Percentage of Total Area**



**Area Felled by Plan Period as a Percentage of Total Area**



This chart clearly illustrates the large scale of clear felling. This is in excess of the UKWAS recommendation that no more than 25% of the forest is felled in any one 5 year period. However given the increasing windblow, poor stability and proposal to establish new native woodland this approach is felt to be appropriate.

**Area Restocked as a Percentage of Total Area**

