

Parkgate & Irton Forest Design Plan



Text & Graphs

Spring 2009



Parkgate and Irton Forest Design Plan 2009 Review

Contents

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.

Understanding The Forest	<i>Text</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Survey• Achievements during last plan period
	<i>Maps</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Location• Photo Survey Viewpoints• Current Species• Recreation and Access• Community• Social Economic• Water, heritage and nature conservation• Soils & Wind Hazard• Roads & Harvesting• Aerial photo• Landform• Ecological Site Classification<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broadleaves• Conifers• Review of Achievements
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Developing A Vision	<p><i>Text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and Appraisal
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Implementing the Vision	<p><i>Text</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing & longterm Objectives. • Objectives for the next five years. • Delivery against the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan. • Delivery against National Policy “ A Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests” • Graphs.
	<p><i>Maps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Woodland Management • Future Woodland Species • Future access, community , health and well being • Future nature conservation and heritage • Planning for climate change
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Gareth Browning
Spring 2009

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Introduction

Parkgate and Irton is situated in the wooded Eskdale Valley between Santon Bridge and Eskdale Green approximately 6 km inland from the coast at Seascale. The forest lies within the Lake District National Park and extends to 158 ha with Parkgate leased from the Ainhouse Estate and Irton Pike purchased freehold in 1937. Sporting is retained by Forestry Commission within Irton Park and exercised jointly with Ainhouse Estate within Parkgate. Conifer planting started in 1956 but the forest also includes a large area of ancient semi natural woodland. The first Forest Design Plan was approved in 1998 and reviewed in 2002.

Survey

Parkgate and Irton lie at the western end of one of the ridges leading down from the famous Wasdale Screes. The two woods, whilst different in character sit well in the landscape, especially Parkgate which has very good connectivity to neighbouring woodlands. Irton Pike has been significantly improved following the felling of conifers around the summit of Irton Pike.

Recreation and access to Parkgate is restricted by the conditions of the lease whilst Irton Pike was dedicated as open access under the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000. However there are 3 rights of way through Parkgate which give people good access through the forest. Much of the conifer forest is well thinned and produces high yielding good quality timber. Patches of natural regeneration are developing suggesting an opportunity to develop continuous cover. The area north east of London Head is unthinned and following the 2005 storms has become increasingly unstable. Sitting on a steep slope this area will need to be extracted by skyline, an operation which is threatened by the increasing windblow making machine setup and manual felling increasingly difficult and unsafe.

The conservation value of the woodland is focused on the areas of ancient semi natural woodland found in Parkgate. A variety of native tree species including very large Veteran Trees such as Lime, Ash and Oak, and open habitats provide a home to a wide range of flora and fauna. These areas also contain a high percentage of deadwood much of it of large diameter. Over the last five years small group felling in Parkbreast wood has initiated regeneration and clear fells either side are also regenerating well with native broadleaves. The woodland either side of Low and High Frith Gills is principally regenerating from coppice growth.

Parkgate and Irton is home to Red squirrel, deer and badger as well as a range of other wildlife. The felling of Irton Pike has provided the opportunity to increase the area of open habitats within the forest but management to control regeneration is needed to ensure these remain open.

Where conservation interested is focussed on Parkgate, historic interest is concentrated in Irton Pike with a number of charcoal pit steads and part of a larger scheduled ancient monument known as Mecklin Park, SMR no 03709. These have suffered from spruce and gorse regeneration which is regularly trimmed to keep the monuments visible and free from sub surface root interference.

Achievements during last plan period.

During the last plan period the main achievements against the plan objectives are listed below

- Felling of windblown pine and spruce around Irton Pike Summit which has improved views out as well as the look of the forest from external viewpoints.

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- Successful restocking and establishment of previously felled areas.
- Establishment of 10 ha of new native woodland
- Protection and maintenance of rights of way and historic features.

Review and Appraisal

The diverse nature of the tree species within Parkgate and Irton are its strength coupled with an existing planting pattern which already reflects the underlying land form. This is especially true of Parkgate where the five knolls that underlie this woodland are not obscured by past planting. The continuing challenge is to ensure the character of this forest and its links with neighbouring woodland are maintained.

Parkgate and Irton fit well into the landscape with the exception of the area east of London Head where the boundary of the forest with the fell appears harsh. This area of forest is unthinned and difficult to access and would benefit from early clear felling to remove the harsh boundary before the unstable crop makes working impractical or unsafe.

The well thinned conifer forests of Parkgate with increasing regeneration, freely draining soils and low wind hazard class lend themselves to management under continuous cover. An assessment of the areas suitability in accordance with Forest Research Practice confirms this. Whilst regeneration is occurring this is dominated by spruce and hemlock and it would seem wise to underplant with larch and Douglas fir.

Western hemlock is found across Parkgate and through its high regenerative capacity and shade tolerant character it poses a threat to the ancient semi natural woodland. However little regeneration of Hemlock is found in the ancient semi natural woodland areas, suggesting that conditions are not suitable. This species will continue to be monitored.

Ongoing and Long term Objectives

- Manage the forest in accordance with the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan and the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWFS).
- Continue to consult and involve the local community through attending Parish Council meetings and site signing.
- Transform all suitable areas of the forest into management under Continuous Cover.
- Ensure the protection and survival of historic features especially the scheduled ancient monuments on Irton Pike.
- Ensure the regeneration, extension and survival of the areas of ancient semi natural woodland.
- Maintain public access to Irton Pike and public rights of way through Parkgate. Explore options with Ainhouse Estate to allow public access across Parkgate.

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Objectives for the next five years

- Complete the proposed felling and restocking plans.
- Remove the deer fences in Parkgate.
- Establish a management plan and monitoring plots for the areas of Continuous Cover including the ancient semi natural woodland.
- Continue to thin all accessible areas and take opportunities to favour the removal of Western hemlock.
- Underplant areas of well thinned mature larch with Douglas fir and larch as well as experiment with low impact ground disturbance methods to encourage regeneration in Parkgate.

Delivery against the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan

Parkgate and Irton lie 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

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- Continued thinning and transformation to Continuous Cover management.
- Western hemlock removed at every opportunity.
- Underplanting areas managed as Continuous Cover with larch and Douglas fir.

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

- Maintain access through forest along roads and the right of way.
- Explore options to open up public access across Parkgate with Ainhouse Estate.
- Maintain open views from the summit of Irton Pike.

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.

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Implemented Through

- Removal of harsh eastern boundary of Irton Pike.
- Protection and extension of native woodlands in Parkgate.
- Establishment of new native woodland in Irton Pike.
- Protection of historic features including the scheduled ancient monument in Irton Pike.
- Protection of Veteran trees.

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 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

- Continue to use temporary signing as a way of updating the local community about operations and activities.
- Creating new native woodland which will eventually be managed under minimum intervention thus locking up carbon for an extended period.
- Managing the majority of the plan area under Continuous Cover thus reducing ground disturbance through reduced ground preparation and clearfell thus reducing release of carbon dioxide.

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;

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- 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.
- Protecting and extending the ancient semi natural woodland.
- Maintaining and extending open habitats around Irton Pike summit.
- Establishing the ancient semi natural woodland in Parkgate as a Natural Reserve.
- Mixed species continuous cover protecting soils and producing a more stable sustainable forest structure.

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

- Preference for employing local contractors where possible.
- Working with the local community to increase use of woodfuel.
- Growing quality timber to maximise market opportunities.

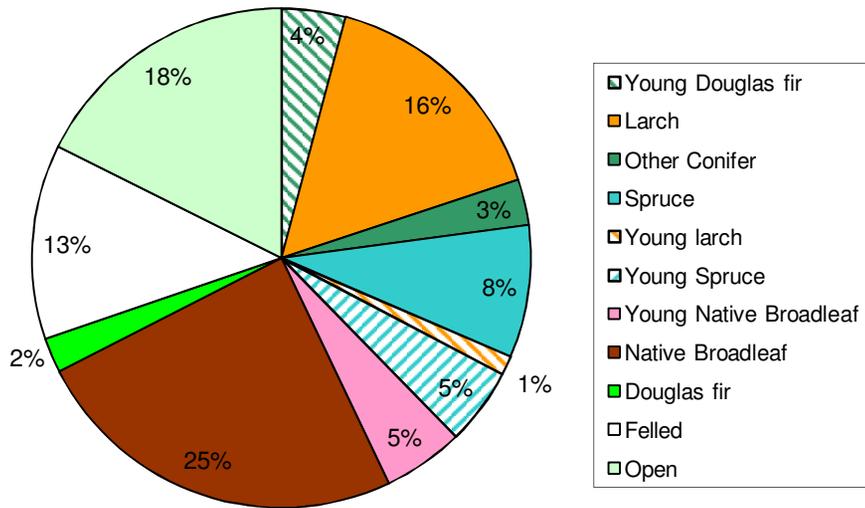
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Graphs

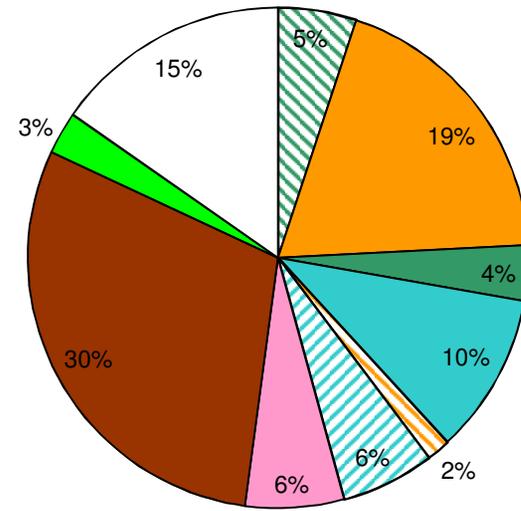
The following graphs illustrate the percentage split of current woodland species and land use, future felling phases and future woodland species and land use. These help to assess the plan against the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme guidance and ensure that the plan is balanced and will deliver the objectives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

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Current Species as a Percentage of Plan Areas



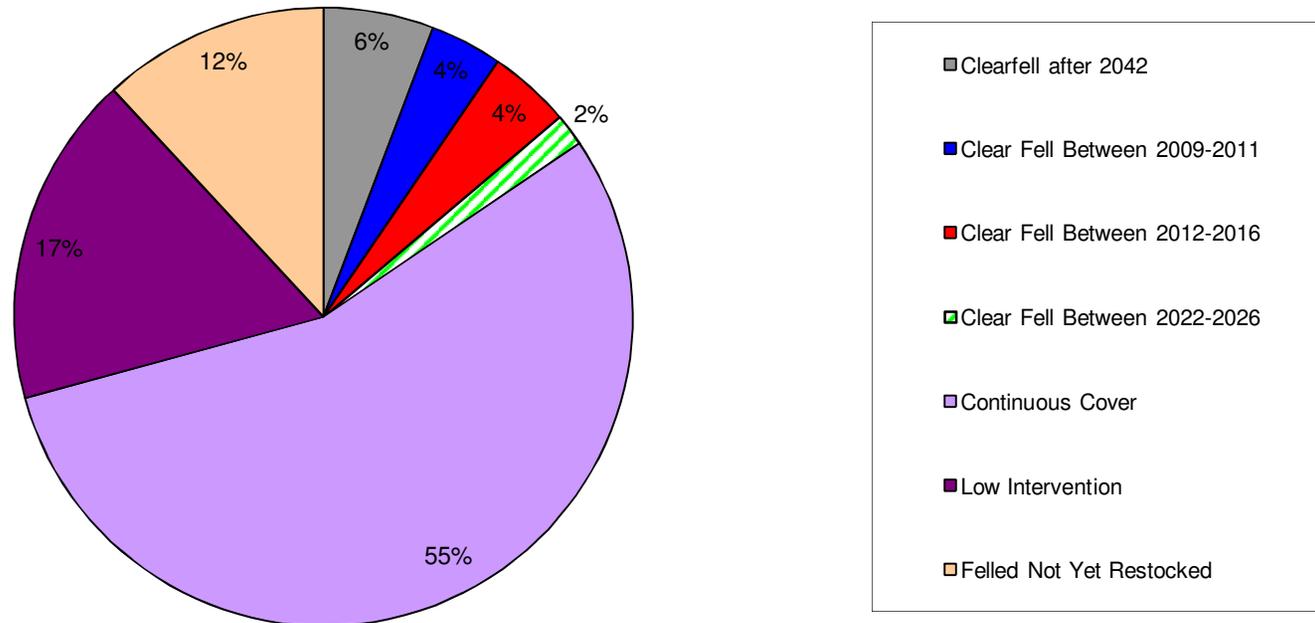
Graph showing all land



Graph showing all woodland only

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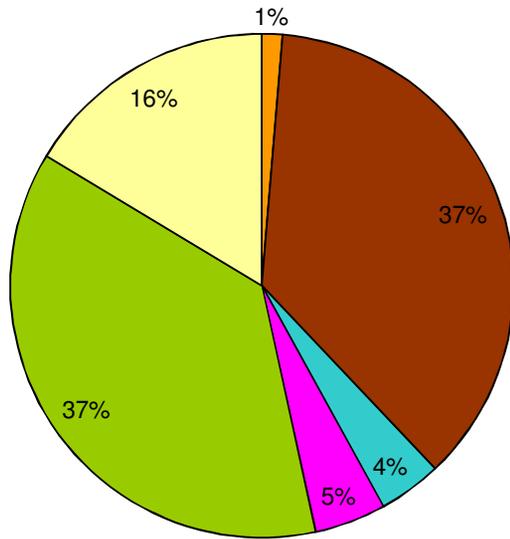
Felling Phases as a Percentage of Total Felling



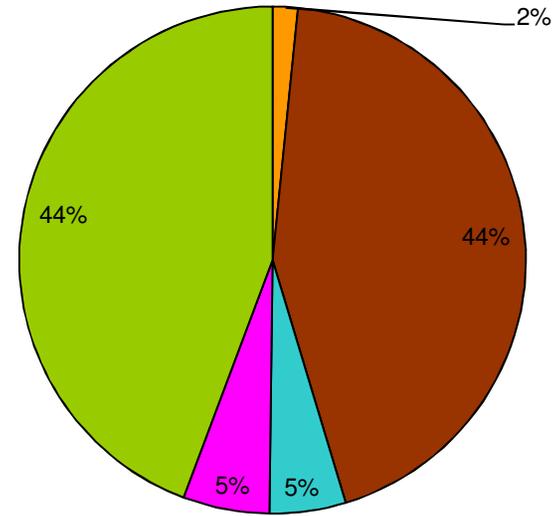
This graph shows that the planned felling does not exceed the UKWAS recommendation that no more than 25% of the woodland is felled in any one five year period.

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



Graph showing all land



Graph showing all woodland only

- Larch
- Native Woodland
- Spruce
- Juniper/Native Broadleaf
- Mixed Species, Larch, Spruce, Douglas Fir
- Open space

This graph shows primary species only. The graph shows that the future species plan will meet UKWAS requirements for <65% primary species, >20% secondary species, >10% open space and >5% native woodland