# High Weald Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Project

## First Year Report December 2005- December 2006

WOODLAND TRUST

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HIGH WEALD AREA of OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

# High Weald Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites Project

## First Year Report December 2005 – December 2006

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**Summary**

Since December 2005, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission have jointly funded a project to restore unmanaged plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS). A proactive search to identify owners and creation of a database of currently unmanaged PAWS in the High Weald has been undertaken, with a database of unmanaged PAWS providing the focus for project activity. 192 plantations on ancient woodland sites (2400ha) have been identified as sites without current management, and have been the initial focus of the project.

Specialist advice on PAWS restoration is provided to landowners in order to encourage gradual restoration of unmanaged plantations to broadleaved woodland. As well as site visits, a site-specific woodland information pack is produced, and to facilitate action, grant applications focusing on addressing threats and improving condition of PAWS are prepared for landowners. A training event was organised for woodland owners and contractors to inspect restoration works in practice, discuss approaches to management and raise understanding and awareness of the cultural value of ancient woodlands.

Of the 192 identified sites, 43 have been visited, and detailed site reports have been produced for 14 properties. Woodland Grant Scheme and High Weald AONB funding have also been secured for woodland work to restore the targeted plantations on ancient woodland sites.

## 1. Why was the project initiated?

The South East region contains some 40% of England's ancient woodland, and half of this lies within AONBs. The High Weald AONB, falling within the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent, and Surrey, is the fourth largest in the country, covering 146,000 hectares. It supports some 24,500 hectares of ancient woodland, more than double that of any other AONB, and representing 7% of all the ancient woodland in England (Figure 1) [1].

Over a third of the ancient woodland resource in the AONB has been replanted with non-native species, predominantly conifers. About a third of this area was considered to be largely unmanaged, principally as the woodlands were not within a Woodland Grant Scheme, or managed directly by the Forestry Commission. This area of PAWS was identified as needing a targeted approach to identify and advise woodland owners, and to enable sensitive restoration of their ancient woodlands. A decision was taken between the partner organisations to set up a PAWS project in the High Weald, which would help deliver specific actions from the 'Keepers of Time' Action Plan 2005-2007, a statement of government policy launched by Defra and the Forestry Commission in 2005.

A specific need was identified for a PAWS officer to gather together the necessary information on woodland owners, and provide specialist, targeted woodland management advice. By recording owners' attitudes to the need for PAWS restoration,

[1] England totals: ancient semi-natural woodland 200,000ha, plantations on ancient woodland sites 140,000ha. Source: Keepers of Time, A Statement of Policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland (Defra/ Forestry Commission 2005).

and barriers to management being undertaken, the project was also seen as providing a national pilot to help inform the targeting of PAWS restoration in other areas.

The project was set up and funded by a partnership of the High Weald AONB, the Woodland Trust, and the Forestry Commission, to run from December 2005 to March 2008. The project officer is based at the High Weald AONB Unit, near Flimwell in East Sussex.

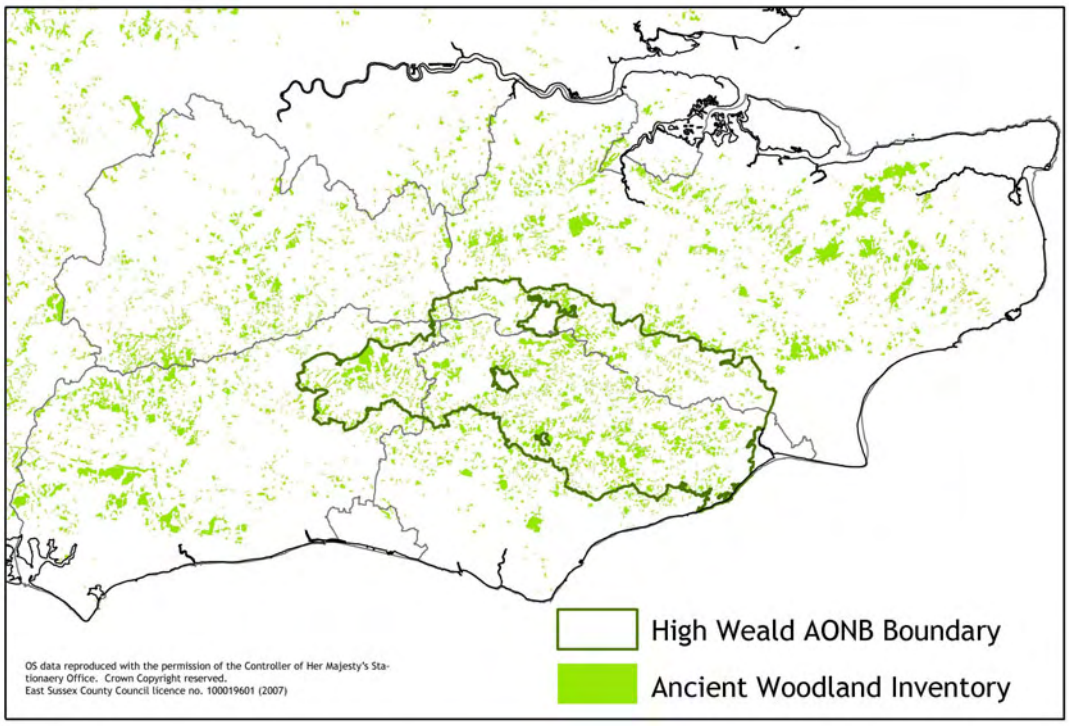


*Figure 1. Ancient woodland sites in Surrey, Kent, East and West Sussex; the High Weald AONB contains some 7% of all the ancient woodland in England.*

## 2. Project Aim: targeting unmanaged Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites

Within the High Weald, plantations have been established on 8,734ha (36%) of the AONB's ancient woodland sites (Figure 2). A third of this area (2,821ha) was outside of the existing delivery mechanisms [2] for woodland management in December 2005 (Figure 3). Assessing threat and enabling restoration management on the area of currently unmanaged woodland is the principal aim of the PAWS project.

[2] Existing delivery mechanisms; Woodland Grant Scheme, Forestry Commission Ownership, Felling Licence or other environmental grant schemes.

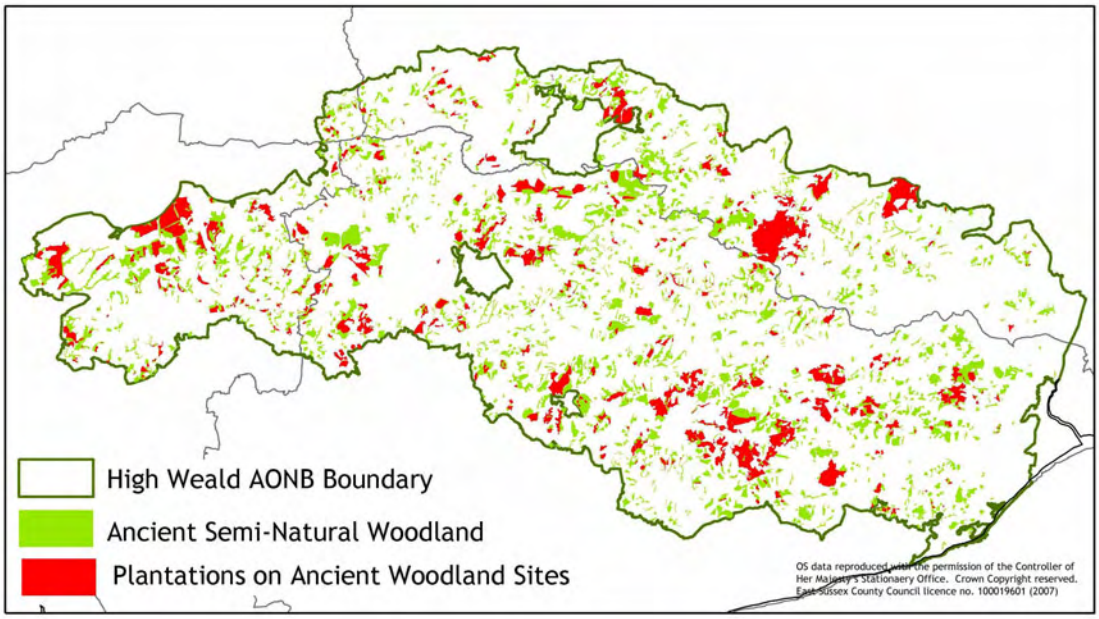


*Figure 2. The Ancient Woodland Inventory of sites within the High Weald AONB. Ancient semi-natural woodlands cover 15,751ha (64% of the ancient woodland), plantations on ancient woodland sites cover 8,734ha (36% of the ancient woodland).*

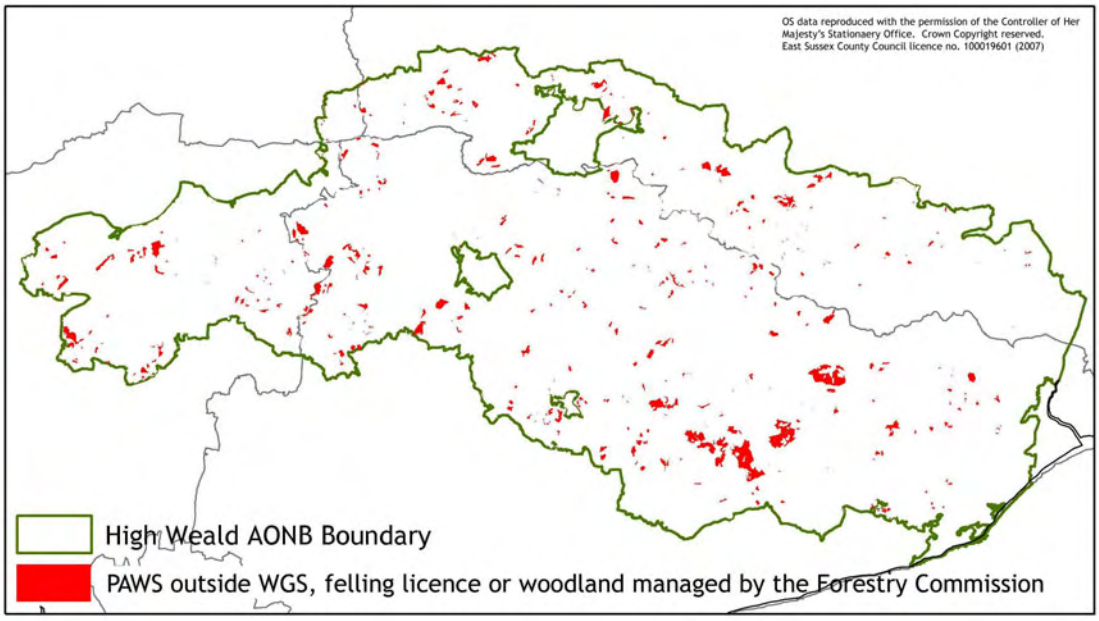


*Figure 3. PAWS outside of existing delivery mechanisms (i.e. areas managed directly by the Forestry Commission, in a Woodland Grant Scheme or having a felling licence) within the High Weald AONB extend across 2,821ha (12% of the total).*

In order to achieve this aim, the objectives of the High Weald PAWS project are to:

- Develop a geographic database of unmanaged PAWS, the condition of the sites, and record ownership.
- Undertake proactive engagement with private landowners of unmanaged PAWS.
- Provide a specialist management advice service to landowners, land managers and woodland contractors on the appropriate restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites.
- Develop and disseminate an 'inspirational' ancient woodland information pack and condition assessment. The site information is designed to inform owners, managers and contractors and can accompany applications for grants and felling licences.
- Research and collate information on the attitudes and motivation of woodland owners.
- Organise PAWS restoration training events to raise awareness and promote the importance of ancient woodland within the High Weald.
- Inform the strategic targeting of woodland grant aid.
- Identify new approaches to management of plantations on ancient woodland sites.
- Increase understanding of the management requirements for PAWS.

## 3. The Project Group

The project steering group has representatives from the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission, and the High Weald AONB, and meets quarterly. The steering group provides a broad range of knowledge and experience from the forestry and conservation sectors. In addition to individual steering group members, access to wider contacts through each of the organisations has been invaluable. The Woodland Trust is involved in a number of PAWS initiatives across the country and maintaining contact with these projects has been helpful when developing new approaches to condition assessment and mapping.

Working closely on schemes with Forestry Commission county Woodland Officers has also been particularly important in order to highlight opportunities for intervention and submit applications that deliver the shared objectives of the PAWS project partners.

## 4. Identifying unmanaged PAWS and their owners

Two geographic datasets formed the basis of the PAWS sites search. All ancient woodland sites larger than 2ha are recorded on the Ancient Woodland Inventory held by Natural England; sites are categorised as either ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW), or as PAWS. In addition, the High Weald AONB is licensed to use Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) data. The WGS dataset is a particularly valuable resource for identification of ownership and property details. Both datasets

were used to identify PAWS not covered by a current [3] WGS contract or by an existing felling licence.

Having mapped the target area, Forestry Commission Woodland Officers were consulted, and they identified a number of owners from their records and knowledge of the area. These contacts, together with the owners of out-of-date WGS contracts provided the initial list of properties. Further contacts have been developed through neighbours of landowners, contractors, promotions, woodland events, land registry searches and a demonstration day.

## 5. The High Weald PAWS Database

The PAWS database is designed to collate and store information on both PAWS ownership and woodland condition. A 'Property Ownership' layer holds information on all those plantations on ancient woodland sites that are currently without a live Woodland Grant Scheme. Fields in the database include; PAWS id number, owners name, woodland name, area, district, contact status, visit status, and condition assessment status. The ownership layer currently includes:-

- 192 properties 2400ha
- 50 PAWS Contacts 1200ha
- 43 Site Visits 838ha
- 14 Condition Assessments 250ha

The PAWS compartment information is intended to hold compartment level information for PAWS that are surveyed. By inputting information in a number of fields the layer can be used to generate English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) and felling licence maps and show current condition and semi-natural classes. Fields include; PAWS iD, compartment number, Forestry Commission species code, Forestry Commission management code, Forest Enterprise semi-naturalness class, and a 'Threat' code. Currently, details for 284 Compartments totalling 587ha have been collected.

Development of the database is ongoing during the project, as ownership details are identified, sites are surveyed and compartment details and conditions are recorded.

## 6. Ancient Woodland Condition Assessment

Prior to visiting a site, a series of maps is prepared. The historic Ordnance Survey First County Series map (c.1880) provides the earliest accurate information for most woods (Figure 4). As well as the historical extent of the woodland, the First County Series map sheets include details of tracks, woodbanks, earthworks, woodland names and broadleaved or coniferous tree cover. The historical map thus gives a useful indication of the features that may still be present with the woodland. Aerial photos (Figure 5) are also mapped to show variations in tree species and cover across the property. Aerial photos from 1954 are available on the Internet and although the quality is limited these can be useful in determining tree cover at that date. The

[3] Current WGS: contracts that are still within their contract dates.

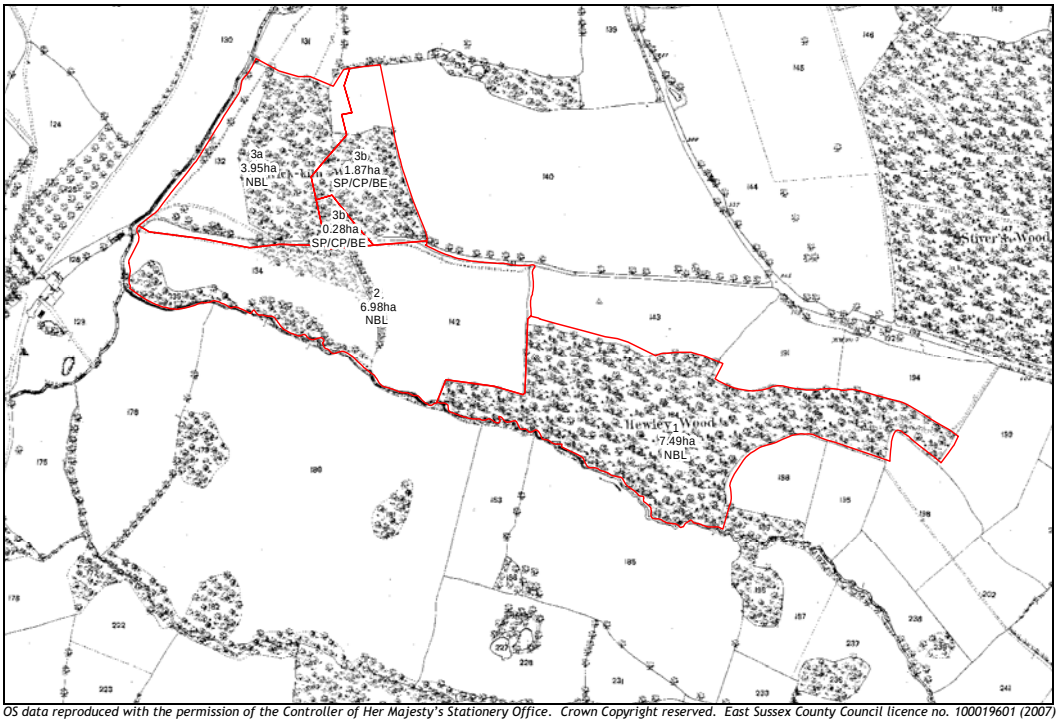



*Figure 4. Brick Kiln Wood – example of historical extent of woodland, as shown on the Ordnance Survey First County Series map (c.1880).*

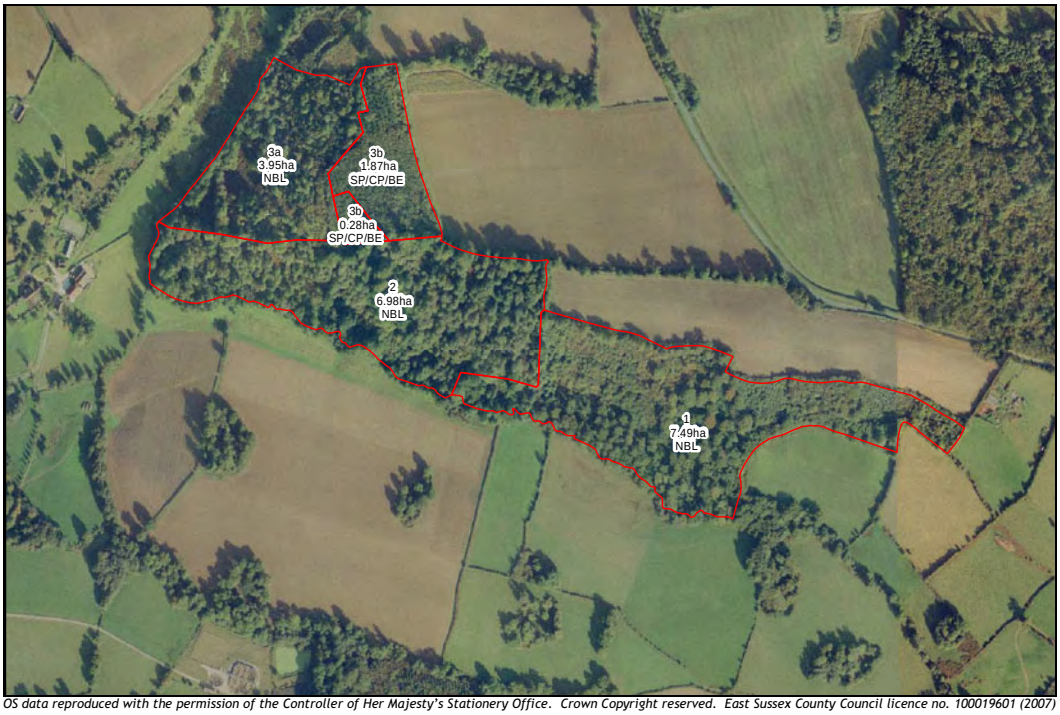



*Figure 5. Brick Kiln Wood – Aerial Photograph (2001), with compartment details and species information labelled.*

Ordnance Survey MasterMap layer is used as the modern base map for recording compartment details in a Geographic Information System (GIS).

Using the mapping information as a guide, the survey is undertaken to record remnant features of interest across the site and potential threats posed by the conifer crop. Threats include excessive shading in unthinned stands, unmanaged rides, invasive exotic species, shading out of remnants broadleaved trees, and so on. Compartment details are recorded in the GIS layer described above.

## 7. Ancient Woodland Site Reports

In order to inform woodland owners about the condition of their property and inspire positive action, a site-specific ancient woodland report format (see appendix) has been developed. The report provides an overview of woodland type, features of interest and constraints. Management recommendations are presented together with an overview of possible income, grants and felling licence requirements. A series of maps of the site are presented including historic plans and recent aerial photos, compartment information on a MasterMap base and a photomontage (see appendix) of features of interest. Where other resources are available it is possible to include these documents for reference. These might include: Scheduled Ancient Monument details, Site of Special Scientific Interest details, Forestry Commission compartment records, and previous maps prepared for sites.

By following the format of the Forestry Commission's Woodland Condition, Opportunity and Threat Assessment, the ancient woodland site report can accompany an application for EWGS funding or a felling licence. The format of the report has evolved over the course of the project and contains a comprehensive account of the woodland resource for the owner. 14 ancient woodland site reports have been produced for PAWS, covering 250ha. Each report is sent in a wallet containing other relevant woodland information leaflets from the partner organisations.

## 8. Results; Initiating Restoration Works

192 plantations on ancient woodland sites (2400ha) were identified as sites without current management, and have been the initial focus of the project. Of these, 43 sites (838ha) have been visited. Detailed ancient woodland site reports have been produced for 14 properties (250ha). On 6 properties (127ha) work programmes, felling licences and grant aid is in place for PAWS restoration work, which is either underway or planned for this winter.

£22,792 has been secured for woodland work to restore plantations on ancient woodland sites. The grant aid comes mostly through the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme (£18,908), in the form of payments towards annual management costs and replanting costs. The High Weald Sustainable Development Fund provided funding (£3,884) towards works that aren't covered by Forestry Commission Grant, including provision for volunteer work tasks or educational visits.

In total 105.5ha of woodland has management plans and work programmes in place for appropriate restoration works, at the following sites:

- Causeway Wood 14.46ha
- Church Wood 10.78ha
- Moor Wood 28.33ha
- Hoth Wood 19.6ha
- Herons Ghyll 14.6ha
- Banky Wood 4.66ha
- Great Worge Farm 13.08ha

## 9. Promotion; Weald Woodfair

The Weald Woodfair is the largest woodland show of its kind in the South East of England. The PAWS project was promoted at the event, with a set of information posters and leaflets produced for display on both the High Weald AONB Unit's and the Forestry Commission's stands. The woodfair is well attended by a wide range of woodland organisations and businesses from across the South East and the event provided a valuable platform to engage with woodland owners and the general public.

## 10. Training; PAWS Demonstration Day

In October 2006 a demonstration event was held for private woodland owners, woodland contractors, advisors and managers. The event was held at Hundred Acre Wood, Bodiam, and the Woodland Enterprise Centre. The aim of the event was to:

- Share the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and High Weald AONB's vision for management of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites;
- Demonstrate the methods being used in the restoration of ancient woodland, and how to mitigate impacts on the woodland environment;
- Inspire other landowners and managers towards active stewardship of their woodlands;
- Share and discuss the lessons learned in restoring plantations in the High Weald AONB.

The event was attended by 33 delegates. Indoor presentations were followed by a site visit to see restoration work in progress at a nearby PAWS, owned by the Belhurst Nature Conservation Trust. Demonstrations of horse logging and selective felling were undertaken during the morning, and a woodland archaeologist gave a short presentation on best practice in identifying and protecting cultural heritage within woodlands.

Feedback from delegates was promising and lead to follow-up site visits to advise on restoration methods.

*Figure 6. Woodland owners and managers learning about horse logging and woodland restoration at the PAWS demonstration event.*

## 11. Market Research; Woodland Owner's Attitude Survey

A survey to assess owner attitudes towards unmanaged plantations on ancient woodland sites within the High Weald is underway. The purpose of the survey is to investigate the reasons why these areas remain unmanaged in spite of existing grants and incentives, and also to discover what would encourage owners to initiate positive action. The survey will investigate and obtain information about: what woodland owners in the High Weald want from their woodland, what they do with their woodland and get from woodland ownership, what prevents them doing more and what might help them overcome such barriers. The details of the respondent's ancient woodland sites will be available from the GIS database and it is hoped that it will be possible to consider what attributes of properties impact on owner's response.

The woodland owner attitude questionnaire (included in the appendix) has been sent out to all the PAWS contacts since September 2006. However, the initial response has been disappointing with less than 20 survey forms having been completed and returned at this stage. Further questionnaires will be sent out to new contacts in the coming year.

## 12. Future Targets

The priority for the coming year is to continue to increase the profile of the project and target the remaining areas of 'unmanaged PAWS'. This will include land registry searches to identify the owners of the remaining areas of unmanaged PAWS.

The first training event resulted in enthusiastic and positive feedback. By giving a practical demonstration of the felling work and the results of sensitive conifer removal, landowners were both encouraged and inspired. Organising a similar event in the western part of the AONB will provide an opportunity to promote the project to a wider audience.

## 13. Constraints

Making contact and subsequently developing a positive working relationship with woodland owners previously not engaged with forest and woodland management is a challenge, particularly when approaching prospective owners from cold. Producing a survey of the woodland is an excellent starting point, but in order to encourage positive works some form of grant aid is usually required to offset costs. The greatest progress has been made where woodland grant schemes have been put in place to cover a proportion of the costs involved. In order to initiate works in unmanaged woodlands a challenge fund would provide a useful incentive.

Although the current closure of the EWGS shouldn't affect the development of new schemes for funding in the financial year 2008/2009, it does make encouraging prompt action on sites problematic. Reluctant landowners are inclined to defer decision making, and a funding hiatus compounds this effect. It would be much better to have a deadline for applications and work completion that is within the project period. This would focus the owner's attention on initiating management and also allow the PAWS officer to provide an input during works.

## 14. Opportunities

There is considerable interest from woodland owners in woodfuel production for woodfuel boilers currently being installed in and around the AONB. The wood chip market appears to be well suited for much of the lower quality softwood found on unmanaged PAWS. The AONB provided Sustainable Development Fund funding towards South East Wood Fuel's spring 2007 woodchip production training event. PAWS owners and contractors will attend the event.

Potential exists to provide high quality input into the ancient woodland site condition assessments being undertaken as part of the UKWAS certification scheme. The revised UKWAS Scheme includes a number of requirements relating to ancient woodland sites. Providing an input on properties seeking to meet these requirements would generate interest in the approach and allow some of the lessons learned and methods developed to be disseminated.

Linking up and working with other woodland initiatives in the region has created useful connections between organisations and individuals. Piloting of a new Woodland Improvement Grant at Vert Wood in East Sussex demonstrated a useful model of a working partnership between the Forestry Commission, the PAWS project and Butterfly Conservation in developing contacts, mapping areas and completing EWGS applications. Currently, Butterfly Conservation is awaiting confirmation of funding for a project within the AONB. If successful, this will provide an opportunity to develop this partnership further.

There is considerable interest and expertise in woodland archaeology within the AONB. A volunteer group led by a woodland archaeology specialist, Dr Nicola Bannister, is currently surveying the Forest Commission-managed Bedgebury ancient woodland site. Extending this initiative onto private woodlands and undertaking further surveys of ancient woodland sites within the AONB would provide valuable information and generate increased interest in this area.

15. Contact Details:

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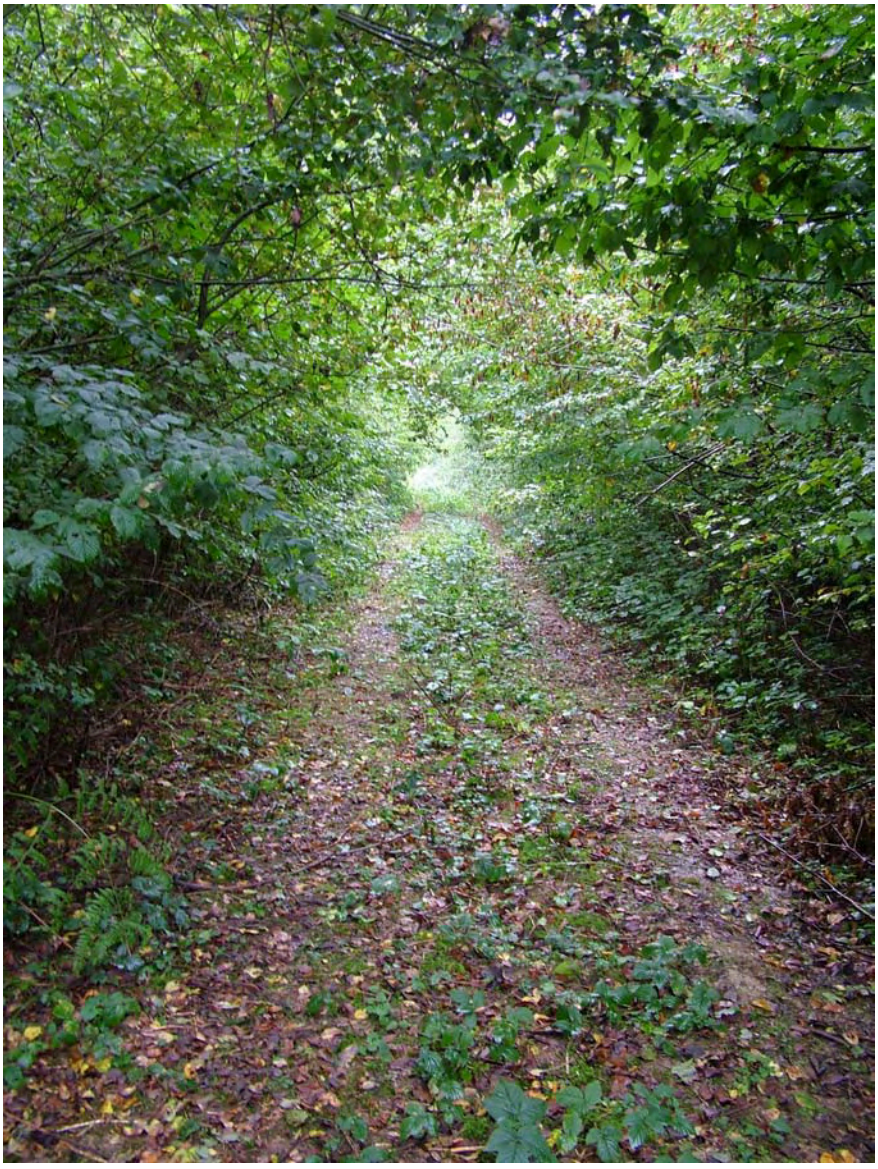
## Appendix

- **Hundred Acre Wood, Bodiam; Ancient Woodland Site Report**
- **Banky Woods, Mayfield; Ancient Woodland Features Plan**

# Hundred Acre Wood, Bodiam, East Sussex
# Ancient Woodland Site Condition Assessment

Mike Chapman (2006)



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The High Weald Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) Project

The High Weald AONB, the Woodland Trust, Lifescape your Landscape and the Forestry Commission jointly fund the PAWS project. The focus of the project is the restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites to native, broadleaved woodland cover.

The High Weald contains some 7% of England's ancient woodlands, with over a third of this area classified as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). These are woods that have been planted up in the past with trees which would not naturally grow on the site, particularly conifers. Many of these plantations have been abandoned - and are often of poor value for wildlife.

The High Weald AONB has identified the need for hands on advice and landowner networks to make positive woodland management practical and viable. The PAWS project therefore aims to:-

- Provide a comprehensive site specific advisory service for PAWS management restoration and enhancement - covering condition assessment and management plan preparation.
- Stimulate markets for the woodland products.
- Encourage networking and sharing of information and techniques through events and technical advice.
- Develop a map outlining ancient woodland sites most threatened by unmanaged conifer plantations.
- Assist owners in applications to the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme and Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

The project officer, works with woodland owners, and has produced this report to assess the condition of the woodland and provide recommendations on restoring native, broadleaved tree cover.

Further information on the project, including surveying and advice on woodland management, please contact:

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# Hundred Acre Wood, Bodiam, East Sussex
# Ancient Woodland Site Condition Assessment (2006)

## Property Information
Woodland Name: Hundred Acre Wood, Bodiam
Area: 30.1ha
Owner: The Belhurst Nature Conservation Trust

## Location Designations
High Weald AONB
Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site
Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

## Woodland benefits and desired outcomes
Restore the areas of planted conifer on the site to native broadleaved woodland.
Protect sensitive ground flora along water courses.
Identify, map and protect remnants archaeological features.

## Description
The 30.1ha woodland is an ancient woodland site, the boundaries of the woodland have not altered since at least the first edition OS map of 1875 (appendix 1). The OS Surveyors draft of 1800 (appendix 1) also shows the entire area of woodland as Bodiam Wood with a similar shape to what today is contains both Hundred Acre Wood and Bodiam Wood.

The underlying geology of the site is Wadhurst clay.

Between 1961 and 1962 areas of mixed conifers were established together with a small proportion (10%) of mixed broadleaves. In order to establish conifers the broadleaved woodland was felled and cleared.

The hurricane of 1987 caused considerable damage to the conifer plantation. Following the storm broadleaved trees including hornbeam, ash, birch and oak became established in the cleared areas (Figure 1).

In other compartments patchy establishment allowed broadleaved trees to become established alongside the conifers As a result only small areas of pure conifer plantation remain. The majority of the property is now under either mixed stands or native broadleaves. The mixed composition of the canopy shows clearly on the aerial photo of 2001 (appendix 1). The darkest areas are Corsican and Scots pine, the Norway spruce can be distinguished by the linear planting.

A main ride runs the length of the property with an additional loop providing access to the eastern areas.

A number of watercourses are present. The watercourses are not steeply incised gills, but nevertheless they do hold remnants of woodland ground flora and large quantities of deadwood (Figure 4).

The woodland received an annual management grant for ride management from the Forestry Commission between 1996 and 2001.

## Deer and grey squirrels

Grey squirrels have caused considerable damage by bark stripping both the crowns and the bases of many of the hardwoods on the property. There is a major badger sett within the woodland. Deer are present within the woodland and are controlled by a stalker. As clear felling and regeneration are not planned at this stage, the threat from deer to the established crop is limited.

## Ancient Woodland Features

There are a number of relic ancient woodland features present. These include wooded gills, sawpits (Figure 3), external and internal woodbanks, ponds, earthworks and ancient woodland ground flora.

The remains of the tracks, internal and external boundaries and ponds shown on the OS Map of 1875 can still be seen in some places. The woodland ground flora changes from the drier upper slopes where NVC type communities W10 *Oak-hazel and bluebells* are present, to the moister bottom slopes where a flora associated with W8 *Ash-dogs mercury* occurs. The woodland ground flora is either absent or restricted to mosses and ferns in the areas where the canopy of conifers is most dense.

## Public Access

There are no public footpaths or bridleways within the woodland. Hundred Acre Wood has nearly 300m of frontage with the public road. Public access is not planned as part of this proposal. However there is potential to provide access from the National Trail to the north.

## Management Opportunities and Threats

1. Ride Improvements. Increase the width of the existing network of rides by felling trees adjacent to ride sides, and creating a series of scalloed glades at junctions along the ride network. The more open rides will benefit wildlife and should also dry more quickly.

2. Restore areas of conifer plantation to native broadleaved woodland by gradually thinning conifers. Broadleaved trees with sufficient crowns will be halo thinned.

3. Record and map archaeological features. Protect these areas during felling and woodland management operations.

4. Preserve canopy cover around gills not operating in these areas and leaving buffer zones on their sides.

5. Take care when undertaking extraction work during periods when the ground is wet, as the underlying clay becomes saturated very quickly.

## Management Proposals

1. Glade and Ride Management
   - Cut vegetation along the 2km ride network with machine mounted flail to create a central grassy strip with a mixture of herbaceous and shrub zones along its edges.

- Fell 4 x glades to create 'box junctions' along the main ride (Felling licence required).
- Thin 7 x 50m long scallops adjacent to the main ride for firewood (Felling licence required).

2. Restoration of Conifer Plantations to Broadleaved Woodland
   - Apply for a felling licence to thin mixed conifers in 1a, 2a, 2b, 5b, 5d, 5e and 5f.
   - Thin those areas where conifers are currently dominant in the canopy and the ground flora is most threatened from dark conditions.

3. Survey and map archaeological features.
   - Undertake a walkover survey for archaeological features on the property. Mark features on a map and provide copies to contractors undertaking operations.

Appendix 1.

Map 1. Compartments and Areas (OS Master Map)
Map 2. Aerial Photo (2001)
Map 3. Historic Map (OS Epoch 1: the first County Series cc 1875)
Map 4. Historic Map (OS Surveyors draft circa 1800)
Table 1. Compartment Details

Figures

Figure 1. Natural regeneration of hornbeam in the straight lines of what was previously a larch plantation. This area was cleared following the storm of 1987. The result of the clearance and regeneration is restoration of broadleaved woodland.

Figure 2. Norway spruce being thinned in compartment 5f (September 2006) to open up the crowns of the broadleaved trees (oak, ash and birch). Hopefully the increased light levels will improve conditions for woodland ground flora

Figure 3. Sawpit in compartment 5f. The sawpit is in a line that has been felled, in order to prevent damage during timber extraction a barrier of fallen trees will be placed either side of the pit to protect the feature.

Figure 4. Wooded gill in compartment 5f (June 2006). A native woodland ground flora is present and deadwood is accumulating in the watercourse.

# Banky Wood, Mayfield
# Ancient Woodland Features
# (June 2006)

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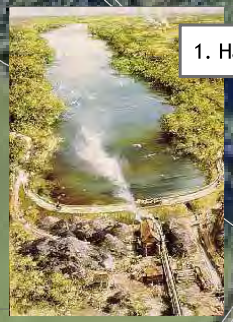
Forestry Commission England



1. Hammer pond

2. Remains of Mayfield furnace

3. Bluesbells under larch

4. Woodbank with veteran trees

5. 1987 fallen deadwood

8. Broadleaved woodland in cpt.1

7. Coppicing works undertaken winter 2005/6

6. Bluebells under conifers

1
1.68ha

2
1.64ha

3
0.55ha

4
0.30ha

5
0.49ha

558900 559000 559100 559200 559300 559400 559500

128300 128200 128100 128000