



LOOKING AFTER FOLLY WOOD

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1 Introduction

Between July 2010 and June 2011, the members of Stroud Woodland Co-operative organised themselves into a number of topic groups in order to research how to look after Folly Wood. The research was gathered at topic group events and fed into regular core group meetings, open to all. The core group developed ideas and plans from these findings and fed these back to seasonal gatherings of the wider membership.

At these meetings further research was undertaken as to people's:

- aspirations for buying the wood
- ways of valuing the wood
- choice of activities in the wood
- location of activities in the wood

(see appendices for more detail).



Figure 1. Maps produced at the Spring Equinox gathering

2 Principles

Early in on in the process a set of principles were agreed as follows.

“Our overall principle is that the wood can be enjoyed for generations to come. Everything should start slowly and be low impact with full respect for the place, the environment and each other, that we seek to find a way of working together with respect when putting the spirit of this principle into practice. Examples of this principle in practice are:

Tree management: Folly Wood is not a completely natural woodland, and as such at times it will be necessary and desirable to remove individual trees and replant others: it's part of looking after the wood. Parts of the wood will be used for activities and other parts restored, and both will require woodland management.

The overall aim is to restore and manage the woodland, its trees, flora and fauna to be similar in nature to the ancient semi natural woodlands in this part of the Cotswolds, not withstanding that it will have a range of relatively intense uses by the group.

In practice this will mean gradually replacing the majority of the larches with a range of suitable species. Unless unhealthy and dangerous, existing mature species such as ash, beech, oak, sycamore, holly, yew and pines will be kept and self seeded and young saplings of these other species will be kept. A wider variety of species will be considered such as field maple, small leaved lime and hedgerow species.

The value of the woodland in the wider landscape, both as a visual feature and for its biodiversity value should be recognised as a part of the management operations. In particular, felling of larches should be a gradual process over at least a ten year period unless overtaken by the presence of Sudden Oak Death.

Permanent structures. Generally, and for the time being, we will not develop permanent structures (such as buildings, car parking, hard surfaced paths) - they require considerable investment of time, energy and materials and significant funds to construct and maintain. Permanent structures in Folly Wood are also more likely to attract interest from people who may not have the best interests of the wood at heart.

Vehicles in the wood: Visitors to Folly Wood should consider local residents and the environment when bringing their vehicles. Wherever possible visitors to the wood with cars should park on the main bit of Folly Lane. No motorised vehicles (i.e. motorbikes) should be driven within the wood: to do so would compromise the ecology of the wood as well as prevent others from enjoying the wood.

Nature reserve: All the wildlife of the wood is of value to us, and we may keep one or more areas largely as 'wild' areas with minimal intervention and disturbance. We also recognise that Folly Wood is a resource to be enjoyed by the Stroud Woodland Coop community and not a strict 'nature reserve'.

Materials - any structures in the wood (paths, fencing etc.) will use natural and local materials (ideally from Folly Wood itself) wherever possible.

Access - all Folly Wood members are welcome to the wood. We will develop a calendar to ensure that we can enjoy the wood in a variety of ways. In accepting that there won't be hard paths, we will need to strive to enable people with a range of abilities to gain access. We also need to devise appropriate access for members and the wider community, baring in mind our legal responsibilities.

Fires: Fallen dead wood is a finite resource in the wood and also important for woodland ecology. We should use wood for fires as economically as possible, monitoring our wood use over time.”

3 Towards a layout

Following the analysis of the maps produced at the Spring Equinox, the map and related principles below were produced and discussed at the Summer Solstice gathering.

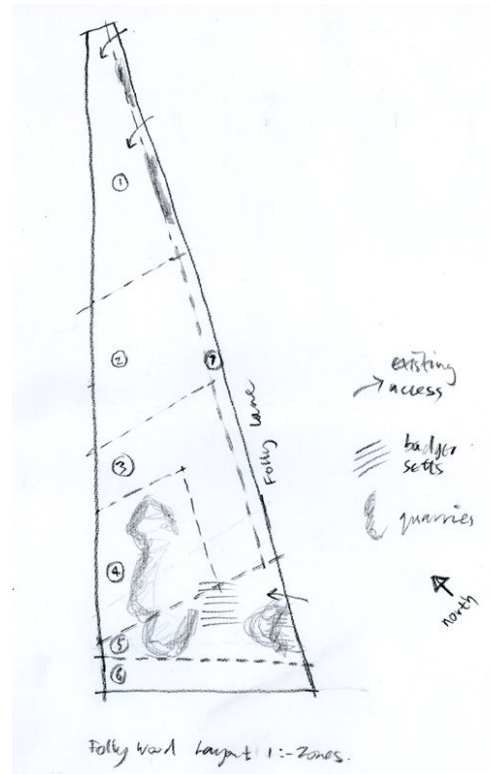


Figure 2. The map shows seven zones or patches into which specific uses and activities are placed.

A number of guiding principles have been allocated to each of the seven zones based on our current knowledge of the site's flora and fauna; there may be specific management operations needed to conserve/promote particular species.

Gradual restoration of the woodland has been estimated to take place over a ten-year period, 2012 to 2022. Each year, removal of ten percent of the agreed number of larch from each zone should happen, other than from zone 3 where 20% of the larch to be felled could be removed between 2017 and 2022. Each year new tree and woodland edge planting should take place and changes in ground flora should be monitored.

Installation of other infrastructure should happen in parallel, taking account of issues such as visibility from roads and footpaths, re-use of felled timber etc.

Zone/ patch	Existing features	Woodland management principles and operations	Activities and structures
1	Large number of pines with mix of broadleaved species. Relatively open. Quarries against lane. Remains of building at top corner. Easy, level access	Remove all but a few larch. Introduce limited number of new species such as Rowan and oak to create an open woodland. Create and/ or leave clearings for ground flora.	Formalise access. Provide sign board. Create shelter in ruined building. Locate appropriate place for simple seating. Bird and bat boxes.
2	Predominantly larch plantation with mature ash and other species especially along the boundary with field. Good views to east and north east,	Gradually reduce larch to 5%, starting with least healthy. Leave some lying for invertebrates. Encourage natural succession and also replace with appropriate native species. Create open woodland, leaving clearings to encourage ground flora. Include small areas of hazel coppice.	Paths through. Occasional seating to take advantage of views to the east. Bird and bat boxes. Some coppicing.
3	Predominantly larch with some beech, ash and other native species. Sloping to road. Potentially good views through trees to east.	Very Gradually remove 95% of larch, leave some lying, encourage natural regeneration and provide robust woodland mix including dense under story to screen active zone 4 from road and provide enclosure and shelter. Include areas of hazel coppice.	Some coppicing. Some play structures. Create views through from zone 4. Compost toilet facility.
4	Predominantly larch with specimen beech and some ash and holly. Quarries an important feature, Views out to south, east and west.	Remove all larch, starting with the least healthy.	Provide majority of activity space, including fire site, shelter in quarry with removable cover and banked seating. Play structures in northern quarry. Wood store.
5	Quarries and badger sett. Quarry next to road has good mix of tree species.	Gradually remove 95% of larch. Leave some lying for habitat. Encourage natural succession and plant appropriate tree species and shrubs to create dense woodland.	Discourage activities and structures. Redirect path. Provide sign unless provided in zone 7. Fence to discourage tipping and allow only very limited parking/delivery.
6	Predominantly larch with open feel and views to south (Stroud), south west and west.	Keep as open woodland, Gradually replace larch with deciduous species. Create clearing for flowers.	Simple meditation clearing. Simple bench.
7	Woodland edge with mature trees and flower rich areas in places. Access points.	Plant hedge using native, non-invasive species, leaving wild-flower verge adjacent to the lane. Consider running hedge behind either or both of the two long quarries at the northern end of the site to maximise habitat.	Consider creating access to woods, with signage.

N.B. Much of the boundary has the remnants of a stone wall. A decision needs to be taken whether to repair and replace this, whether to repair lengths, whether to remove or leave much as it is. Where possible the felled trees to be used for structures, including any path edging, steps and chipped for surfaces as appropriate.

Figure 3. Principles by zone/ patch

3 Further research and resources

Further research is needed before finally deciding on precise management regimes, in particular a fuller flora and fauna survey and more work on aesthetic appreciation of the wood, including its appearance in the landscape.

More detailed decisions about tree felling and planting as well as design decisions for some elements, particularly in patch/zone 4. The general approach is that these decisions will be delegated to those group members undertaking the works, co-ordinated via the core group initially and then the infrastructure and woodland management topic group.

At the summer solstice gathering it was felt that people would like to take responsibility for a patch (zone) or an element within it. The next step is to produce a fully costed work programme including people hours, training, tools, equipment and materials.

patch	people	activities	materials	equipment	additional resource	£
1						
2	Richard	Path layout, prepare for tree felling and replanting. Seating, coppicing in due course. Bird and bat boxes.				
3	Jo, Andy	Compost loo path layout prepare for tree felling and tree and shrub planting improve views out				
4						
5						
6	Martin, Barbara, Ruth	Path layout prepare for tree felling tree and woodland edge planting improve views out. Seating.				
7						

Figure 4. Annual template for looking after your patch

As well as taking responsibility for looking after a patch, it was agreed that people would need to be responsible for specific activities. This would include becoming specialists and offering advice and support to groups looking after their patch. The Infrastructure and woodland management group could eventually take this on board.

specialism	people	notes
Tree felling, including training		
Tree planting, including training		
Coppicing and green wood skills		
Path construction		
Bird and bat box construction		
Furniture and signs		
Play features and other structures		
Letting contracts		
First Aid		
Timber storage, seasoning and firewood		

Figure 5. Specialist advice and support