Lacy Wood Plantation Box Wiltshire

Introduction.

Lacy Wood is a good example of a community woodland and is an important amenity for local residents and visitors. It is not managed in anyway for commercial timber production.

The following notes may be of use for information and as discussion points for Box Parish Councillors/ trustees/ grounds-staff/contractors to use when considering future woodland management decisions and operations on this site.

Introductory Notes.

Accurately recording seasonal woodland management operations and documenting them in the form of ***compartment notes*** will assist the present custodians and will be very useful to future custodians who will have the benefit of documented management history for the site.

Planned long term sympathetic management (including enrichment plantings) of Lacy Wood could further strengthen the local landscape, improve habitat, natural diversity, sustainability, and the value of the wood as a teaching and learning resource.

A big danger for natural resource is redundancy…

Initially 'management' may be seen by onlookers as intrusive. Some of the woodland/forestry operations such as coppicing, pollarding, thinning weeding out invasive species (e.g. Sycamore seedlings and saplings) may appear initially as being destructive, invasive, and even somewhat untidy to the untrained eye.

In the long-term sensitive management maintains diversity of habitat and allows native woodland plants and animal communities to establish and flourish.

Interpretation boards, notes in parish magazines, guided woodland walks (spring flowers/autumn colour) may be useful in reaching and informing the public, promoting ownership and even recruiting volunteer help.
Excellent tree and shrub identification guides are available from a range of woodland related government and NGO organisations.

The site may need to be protected from unauthorised activities such as mountain biking.

Dog walking should be managed with all dog owners picking-up faeces and preventing their dogs from ranging, hunting and disturbing wildlife especially nesting and brooding birds.

The first job of conservation is education.

A policy of 'non-intervention 'laissez-faire' (*do nothing, let nature take its course…*) on what is a small ***semi-natural woodland plantation*** will at best result in neglected *derelict* woodland and habitat in decline, which is of limited value to wildlife and ultimately a poorer resource all round.

There is usually very little conservation through neglect or abandonment.

Lacy Wood can be identified by the practiced/experienced eye as an established relatively young (pole stage+), deciduous hardwood, mixed species even-age woodland plantation. At present the wood is lacking ***structur****e* and ***diversity***…i.e. layers (vertical and horizontal planes), sizes and ages of trees.

As a management plan priority Box PC should seek to improve the *structure* and *diversity* of the woodland and its available *habitat*; managing to create features within it, representing recognised ***woodland layers***: -

Litter *0-1cm;* fallen leaves and vegetation debris

Ground layer *1-10cm;* moss, algae, leaf litter, dead wood fungi… lesser celandine, primrose…

Herb layer /field *10cm-1m;* grasses, woodland wildflowers, taller herbs, ferns, nettles, bramble …

Shrub layer *1-3m;* woody plants 2.5m+…smaller trees, tall shrubs…

Sub canopy and Canopy layer *3m++;* juvenile and mature trees including some standing dead wood.

Woodland Management Plans

Proposed outline management plan short term (5 years)

To begin Autumn/Winter 2018. This plan aims to be proactive; to enhance and improve habitat potential of Lacy Wood through sensitive management of the existing woodland.

Proposed outline management plan long term (25years)

A long term detailed WMP will contain and involve the following:

Writing a clear * Mission Statement (see example below).

We the managers and custodians of Lacy Wood seek to manage and promote structure and diversity in a native species broadleaved mixed age woodland encouraging a natural assemblage of plants and animals. (In essence woodland from Seed to Senescence…) a mixture of seedlings, saplings and maturing trees through to veterans and monoliths). A woodland linked to surrounding habitats. A woodland for all, parishioners and visitors to experience and enjoy…

Idenifying the size (0.63 Ha/1.56 acres)
Location of Lacy Wood: Box Village London Road; Grid Ref ST 8281168947
Location map.

Identifying the Legal owners of Lacy Wood ; Box Parish Council.

Dividing Lacy Wood up into manageable compartments and identifying individual noteworthy trees and groups of trees and those warranting immediate action.
Work programmes should include not only tree management but also rides, glades, boundaries and any other management prescriptions.

Timing certain operations to coincide with adjoining land owners' operations as these can have a beneficial or detrimental effect on wildlife, archaeological features and/or crop quality etc. including any pest or disease management prescriptions; control of non-native /alien species e.g. rhododendron, cherry laurel, snowberry, phytophthora, Dutch Elm Disease, Ash Die-back, grey squirrel, deer damage etc.

Reviewing management strategies and woodland operations to evaluate how successful they have been.

Applying for a felling licence from the Forestry Commission (in a calendar quarter 5 cubic metres of timber can be felled on your property without a license as long as no more than 2 cubic metres are sold).

Obtaining an additional licence from Natural England (NE) if there are any EP (European Protected Species) on site.

Informing neighbouring land owners of any prescribed operations.

Identifying relevant legislation and legal responsibilities to woodland management.

- Woodland management is largely a winter project.
- Major woodland management operations (felling, thinning, coppicing etc.) should be planned to take place to avoid nesting and brooding birds and disturbance to bats and wildlife in general (end of February spring deadline- end of September restart).
- Managed programmed felling and coppicing will allow for the maintenance of open sunlit glades and open sunny paths/rides providing good habitat for flowers and animals associated with the woodland edge (i.e. an ecotone).
- Increasing light levels to the ground in wooded areas is important to allow ground flora to flourish as well as giving opportunities for planting enhancement. A vast range of dormant but viable seeds can germinate given favorable conditions.
- Some selective strimming (in blocks rather than the whole site) could be carried out during late summer (after the nesting/ brooding season for birds) to manage invasive species such as nettle and bramble.
- Heavily shaded woods with closed canopies often result in fewer butterflies and birds and reduced ground flora.
- Coppicing is generally a winter task. The majority of native hard wood species can be coppiced. Coppicing benefits wildlife (flora and fauna) as it allows light down to the woodland floor which stimulates woodland wildflowers to establish, provides sunlit areas for butterflies and insects, and encourages natural regeneration of local genetic strains of trees and shrubs resulting in low dense cover.
- Coppicing is most beneficial if only a proportion/area (coupe i.e. 20%) of the wood is coppiced in any one year.
- Newly coppiced stools must be protected from browsing by farm stock, deer, rabbits and hares.

- Regular brush-cutting and coppicing of bramble and goat willow may provide attractive browse for deer and deter them from damaging tree and shrub stocks.
- Planting is an autumn/spring task when bare rooted tree and shrub transplants are dormant.
  Planting of containerised trees and shrubs is feasible at any time of the year subject to weather, but will be expensive than bare rooted stock.
- Felling (may be a summer task but will cause maximum disturbance to wildlife…) best carried out during the winter period.
- Dead standing (monoliths) and fallen timber are important for woodland…
  (Beware of "tidying" and no bonfires!). Brash stacks/ dead hedges/ eco-piles all provide important dead wood habitat. 60-70% of all invertebrates in Britain require deadwood at some stage in their lifecycle.
  Dead wood provides habitat for lichens, mosses, fungi, wood boring invertebrates, amphibians, birds, mammals plus it is important for stable hibernation sites.
- As the wood is still relatively young there are few trees with natural holes and cavities, there is much scope for putting up a range of nest boxes for birds and bats.
- Avoid cutting ivy off of all trees. Ivy is not parasitic, gains only support from the trees and is an important source of late nectar, berries and shelter for many woodland species.
- Grey Squirrels will need to be controlled (legally and humanely) to protect newly planted and existing trees from damage and predation on nesting songbirds.
- Maintain good stock proof fences to exclude farm animals from browsing, compacting and poaching of the woodland.
- Ash die-back is at present a real threat to individual ash trees and ash woodland in general, be vigilant this disease could potentially be a serious as Dutch elm Disease (DED) was in the 1970's.
- Avoid introductions of garden plants, non-native trees and shrubs such as cherry laurel, sycamore and buddleia which can be invasive and out compete native woodland flora.
- Avoid treating Lacy Wood as a separate (woodland island) habitat, encourage connectivity with surrounding farmland, hedges, ditches, railway embankments…

Subject to Environmental Impact and Risk Assessments many of the above woodland management proposals could be carried out by committed and energetic volunteers ("Friends of Lacy Wood") working with Parish Council grounds-staff. (Working-out in the green gym!).

Lacy Wood Woodland Management Calendar/Work Plan (Short term 5-year plan).

This Calendar/Work Plan is a document for use within the wood which in turn can be identified and divided into smaller/sub compartments/coupes. This calendar should highlight key tasks/jobs.

The calendar may also be useful in the interest, enjoyment and interpretation of the woodlands by volunteer groups, friends and visitors.

The calendar will also allow planning/budgeting for woodland operations that require specialist contractors. E.g. felling and wood-chipping etc.

SEPTEMBER

Most animal activity breeding, nesting, brooding etc. is finished this late in the season so disturbance caused by woodland operations should be minimal.

September/early October is a good period for identifying and recording (photo) tree and shrub species present in the woodland. It is also a good time of the year to observe and record the structure (woodland layers) and diversity of woodland.

Feasibly September/October could be a good time for a planned and expert led 'fungus foray',' autumn colour' events also for collecting crab apples and blackberries.

OCTOBER

Collect seed from hardwood trees for sowing e.g. Ash, Oak, Alder, and Beech. Hawthorn, Holly, Hornbeam may require stratification in sharp sand prior to sowing.

In subsequent years, lift seedlings and transplant (line out) to grow on.

October is typically a dry month, when ditches can be cleared.

NOVEMBER

November through to March, main period for planting trees and hedges.

Select species of trees and shrubs, choose size of stock.

Order planting stock and sundries (canes, spirals, tree shelters) well in advance. Provision should be made to store/heel-in transplants and new stock prior to planting.

Beating-up of plantings i.e. replacing trees that have died in new or young plantations, can take place through to early March.

Hardwood cuttings of woodland trees e.g. willow, poplar and shrubs e.g. dogwood, wayfaring tree, wild privet can be taken and lined out in the nursery.

Select and mark trees to be felled.

Felling operations start and continue through to February.

Thinning (removal of less healthy/desirable trees) operations start and continue through to February.

Pruning operations if required start and continue through to February, light pruning may continue later in the year, species will vary in tolerance to pruning.

Coppicing operations start and continue through to the end of February. Coppiced stools in coupes will need protection from browsing by deer.

Coppice product may be converted for charcoal.

DECEMBER

December through to Jan/Feb main period for hedge-laying.

Check plants in nursery area for 'frost-lift' or damage from mice.

Thinning, felling and coppicing operations continue.

Bundle pea and bean sticks.

Prime time for sales of firewood as cordwood or logs.

Long term storage of fire wood should be away from the woodland. Take care that firewood stacks are not left for long periods to become colonised by wildlife.

Good time for sighting, constructing/ obtaining nest boxes for song birds, raptors, owls, bats and dormice.

JANUARY

Planting. Woodland maintenance, fencing/gates/stiles, ditch clearance.
Avoid planting in periods of severe weather i.e. sustained frost, cold drying winds.
Thinning, felling and coppicing operations continue.

FEBRUARY

Planting. All woodland operations that potentially could cause disturbance to nesting birds and emergence of woodland flowers should be finished by the end of this month.
Thinning, felling and coppicing operations continue.
Start to identify and record (photo record) woodland spring flowers.

MARCH

Avoid any woodland operations and activities that may disturb wildlife from March through to the end of September.
Planting should be finished early this month.
Sow hardwood seeds in the nursery.
March/April are potentially a dangerous month for woodland fires if they follow a dry spring. Make provision for fire beaters/shovels etc. to be sited in strategic places.
March/April will see the growth of vegetation on rides/pathways through the woods and will probably coincide with visitors and groups wanting to have more access to the woodland.
Mowing and brush-cutting will need to be carried out in a sympathetic way whilst keeping nettles and brambles from encroaching too much over main paths. (But do not treat bramble and nettles in general as 'weeds').
Woodchip may need to be added to pathways, try to obtain local (home produced) hardwood chip, avoid conifer chip.
This mowing cycle (x 4- 6+ weeks) will carry on through the spring and summer months into the early autumn when growth naturally starts to slow.
Maintaining sunny glades and woodland edge is important for plants and animals especially butterflies.

APRIL - AUGUST

Aim to keep an area approx. 1 metre weed free around each new tree/shrub April through to August
Collect and sow seed of Wych elm.
Rabbit/ grey squirrel/ may now be evident, look to fence out/protect/deter/control these pests.
Weeding and cleaning in new plantations/plantings.
Be alert to invasive non-native alien plant species (and garden escapes) record, monitor and deal with them.
Weed young plantations.
Gather and sow Birch seed through to September
Collect and sow seed of Ash.
Weed young plantations.

Richard Cripps
Garden and Estate Services Consultancy
August 2018