

Planning Statement for Horse Gill Wood Shed/Foresters Hut

4/21/2079/OF1

1. Background of Horse Gill Wood

Horse Gill Wood was purchased by the current owners in June 2016 as a family recreational woodland of 4.5 acres. It is part of the larger complex of woodland known as Salter Wood. Salter Wood is a key area of native woodland in the Ennerdale valley.

Horse Gill Wood is a mature mixed deciduous woodland. Whilst not officially characterised or listed as an ancient woodland, it is likely that trees have been present on the site for hundreds of years and there are indicator species commensurate with an ancient woodland. The canopy species are predominantly oak, beech and ash, but also includes alder in the wetter areas. There are also small numbers of sweet chestnut, rowan, scots pine, holly and sycamore. The under story comprises hazel stools, with evidence that these have been coppiced for significant periods of time, probably centuries.

A stream passes through the wood, and much of the woodland floor is also wet, so there is an abundance of plants which are specialists in wet woodlands.

The wood is home to a variety of mammals including bats, hares, roe deer and red squirrels. Bird species are also numerous and includes a number of raptor species and winter migrant woodcock.

2. Wood Management Plan

The primary focus of the management plan is that the wood should be managed for the benefit of wildlife, and since 2016 efforts have been focused towards this end and will continue in this vein. Examples of activities which have been undertaken and will continue are:

- A small area of new tree planting has been undertaken, using tree species which are of most benefit to red squirrels, including bird cherry and crab apple. Yew and holly have also been planted as winter cover for birds.
- Coppicing of the hazel stools has re-commenced and will continue. This lets light into the woodland floor and will significantly increase biodiversity.
- A small number of diseased larger trees including oaks have been felled, again to allow light to the woodland floor and to allow regeneration of the canopy species.
- Work has started on removal of ash trees, including saplings suffering from ash-die back. This work will need to continue for several years ahead.
- Areas of bracken and brambles have been cut back, again to allow light to the woodland floor, whilst leaving sufficient areas of brambles for bird cover.
- Where safe to do so, dead wood has been allowed to stand as vital habitat for dead wood specialists such as woodpeckers.
- 2 felled diseased oak trees have been moved into position across the stream to act as bridges to allow better access within the wood to undertake coppicing work.
- Access has been allowed to representatives of West Lakes Red Squirrel Initiative. This group provides feed to the red squirrels but also culls grey squirrels as part of the conservation efforts of the critically endangered reds. The woodland is therefore intended as a reserve for red squirrels.
- A future project will include digging small ponds within the wetter areas of the wood with the intent of attracting some amphibian species.

- The woodland is inevitably accessed by trespassers who leave litter and on occasion cause criminal damage. Time is spent cleaning up the litter and correcting the damage to the overall benefit of the environment.

A secondary benefit to the coppicing activities is that it provides firewood, which once adequately seasoned provides a sustainable fuel source. This fire wood is used for personal use. The green coppiced materials are used to make small wooden items as a recreational pursuit.

3. Relevance of Foresters Hut/Shed to Management Plan

3.1 Purpose/need for the Hut

Coppicing, wood management and green wood-working activities generally require small hand tools and other equipment such as wooden draw-horses. The primary intent of the hut is to provide storage for small and low value tools. The hut is sized at 6-10ft which is considered appropriate towards this purpose. This will avoid the need to continually transport heavier items to the woodland.

Coppicing work is generally best undertaken between October and March. This avoids possible stress to the hazel stools but also avoids the possibility of disturbance to birds during the breeding season. Therefore, the secondary purpose of the hut is to provide some shelter whilst working in the woods during the winter months. It will provide a location to make a hot drinks whilst working in the wood during the day.

Primary use of the hut will be from October to March, and the intent will be to access it most weekends. The hut is also likely to be used during the summer months for shelter whilst undertaking green wood working activities.

3.2 Materials of Construction

Consideration has been given to the environmental impact of the construction, such as to minimise the detriment caused to the woodland environment. The shed will be of preserved timber construction. The felt covering to the roof provides the only real environmental detriment, but this is difficult to substitute with greener alternatives. The hut size has been minimised to avoid environmental impact. The hut is effectively a temporary wooden structure, and could easily be removed with no or limited impact to the woodland floor. The support base will also be of either preserved timbers or recycled farm plastic timbers.

3.3 Additional Information Considered of Relevance

The location of the shed has been chosen very carefully such that it cannot be seen from any public roads or indeed any neighbouring fields or other privately owned woodland. It will only be visible from within Horse Gill Wood, which is a private woodland with no public rights of way and no public access.

Current access to Horse Gill Wood is via Red Beck lane and then via a private parking area, a locked gate and a private track owned by Woodlands.co.uk. The shed is to be located deep within the wood, which can only be accessed through walking across the woodland floor via a part worn path and then crossing the stream via an oak tree bridge. This does not present a significant challenge to the construction of the hut, as all materials can be carried by hand from the vehicle access track to the location of the hut. Construction and subsequent access to the hut will require no alterations to the current access infrastructure. No request for change to access has been requested by the planning application.

The hut design incorporates a small area of decking of 4ft by 10 ft at the front of the shed to be made from treated larch or recycled farm plastic timbers. The shed is to be located on a slightly inclined slope, so the intent of the decking was to make it easier and safer to access the door and windows. Access to the windows is likely to be needed to close wooden security shutters over the glass. Without the decking, which is really just wide enough to walk along comfortably and safely, it will be difficult to reach the front of the hut. Steps will be incorporated within the decking. A possible secondary purpose of the decking is as an area to stack and dry firewood, off of the woodland floor.

The photograph below shows the area of ground where it is intended to erect the hut, with the incline clearly visible.



4. Conclusion

The need for the foresters hut /shed is to support recreational woodland management and coppicing work, which are being undertaken in support of the long-term management plan for the woodland, as a reserve for wildlife including the endangered red squirrel.

The small size of the shed and the materials of construction have been chosen to minimise environmental impact.

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10/04/2021