

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

11 April 2014

7. ANCIENT WOODLAND RESTORATION IN HEREFORDSHIRE AND WEST WORCESTERSHIRE

Background

1. Ancient trees, forests and woodlands provide a unique link to our past. Ancient woodland is land that has been continually wooded since at least AD1600; some ancient woodland may even be a link back to the original "Wildwood" that covered the country around 10,000 years ago after the last ice age. Today, it contributes substantially to our natural and cultural heritage.
2. Ancient woodland is one of the country's most precious habitats. It is scarce and irreplaceable and supports 232 of the rarest and most vulnerable species. However, ancient woodland is under increasing threat and today covers only 2% of the UK (around 450,000ha), making it a priority within the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan for preservation and restoration.
3. Despite widespread coniferisation of much ancient woodland following WWII, research by Oxford University and the Woodland Trust has shown that some remnant features of the ancient woodland habitat can survive. By slowly removing shading conifers and enabling light to gradually penetrate the woodland canopy, specialist species can be encouraged to recover from their fragile state and reverse years of damage.

Summary

4. The Woodland Trust has recently secured £1.9 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund a four year project to restore ancient woodlands in ten priority areas around the UK. One of these ten areas is Herefordshire and West Worcestershire, including the Malvern Hills AONB. The aim of the project is to work with a wide range of landowners and organisations to help establish positive management and restoration techniques that will deliver healthy, thriving restored ancient woodlands and a range of benefits for people too. It is hoped that the project will signify a "step change" in the level of ancient woodland restoration activity across the UK.
5. A project officer has been appointed to each of the ten restoration areas. His/her job will be to liaise with private



landowners, carry our surveys and provide encouragement, advice and support towards appropriate woodland management. There is no money within the project to pay for practical management works and it is hoped that financial support for this will come through avenues such as the New Environment Land Management Schemes (NELMS) and possible income from timber extracted as part of the restoration process.

6. Within the Herefordshire and West Worcestershire Project area it is estimated that 56% (9,232ha) of ancient woodland has been coniferised to some extent. On the basis of survey work carried out 82% of this area has been described as 'threatened'. Within this area it is expected that 2,000 ha of coniferised ancient woodland will be assessed and that 800ha will be in active restoration management by the end of the project.
7. The Project Officer in this area is called Jeremy Evans. He is being hosted by the Forestry Commission in the Worcester office. Staff from the AONB Unit have already met with Jeremy to discuss opportunities for joint working and supporting this initiative, in the hope of seeing some new management of ancient woodland in the AONB.

Recommendation

8. The Committee is recommended to:

- a) **Note the ancient woodland restoration project which is just beginning in this area; and**
- b) **Suggest or offer to help identify possible woodlands and woodland owners in the AONB who might be interested in receiving further information about the project and/or advice.**

