

# Doddington North Moor

The Good, the Bad & would we do it again?!





# Project Initiation

- 354ha site.
- 89ha improved pasture, 265ha 'upland' grazing.
- Adjacent to approved timber haulage route.
- Afforestation vision in 2012, realisation opportunity arose 2015.
- Secured forestry investment backer:
  - ✓ IHT
  - ✓ Capital gain opportunity
  - ✓ Increased diversity of forestry portfolio
- Woodland Creation Planning Grant – de-risked the investment.



# Project Summary

- Would **NOT** have gone ahead without the WCPG.
- WCPG area of 339ha hence capped at £30,000 = £88.50/ha.
- Costs to date circa. £100,000 = £295/ha.
- Target is start of planning to 1<sup>st</sup> tree in ground within 2 years!
- Public reaction has been hugely positive:
  - Face to face at local agricultural show
  - Public meeting
  - Social media
- Main challenges to date:
  - Process – not clearly defined/understood
  - NGOs & Government departments
  - Presumption we have to prove planting trees is not bad
- WCPG – Time pressures cost us unclaimed grant opportunities.



- Our experience of Doddington North Moor was a big factor in guiding changes to WCPG.
- Main change was to move away from time bounded application windows.
- Also made it a two stage process.
- Stage one grant offered within 10 days of receiving eligible application and paid when stage 1 checklist complete.
- Stage two involves collection and analysis of information and development of a UKFS compliant plan. (Can include extraordinary payments).

# Stakeholder Consultation

A huge public success



Glendale agricultural show



Wooler public meeting

- **The public want to see new forests created, and are hugely supportive when given the opportunity to engage with and understand modern forestry.**

- Applicant requests our *opinion*.
- We determine whether *consent* is required through *screening* process.
- We give our *opinion* – if consent is required for the *project* we work with applicant to agree *scope* of the *Environmental Statement*.
- Applicant prepares *Environmental Statement* and submits this to us with an application for our *consent*.
- We give *consent*, usually with *conditions*, or refuse *consent*.

# Environmental Statement

EIA Scoping identified the following issues:

- BAP Priority Habitats
- Peat
- Landscape
- Breeding birds & BAP priority species
- Water Environment
- Heritage
- Roading
- Social Impacts
- Economic impacts
- Carbon – “unlikely to create significant environmental impact”
  - Cumulative effect for afforestation has to be huge.



**Key ES focus – BAP Priority Habitats & Peat**





# Natural England traffic light assessment system

- Only second ever project utilising the system.
- First ever forestry project to take advantage of the methodology.



## PART 1

### Introduction and Joint Outcomes

This document has been produced by Natural England as part of its chargeable Discretionary Advice Service (DAS) in partnership with Pennine Biomass to help inform the delivery of the following joint outcomes:

*To achieve a commercially viable forestry project that 'fits' into the landscape and provides considerable opportunities to protect, restore, enhance and create priority BAP habitats at Doddington Moor North.*

In practical terms, the objective is to maintain the quality and extent of existing BAP priority habitats across the site by retaining areas of non-planted land and areas of low density native broad leaved and Scot's pine woodland with an open canopy such that the existing vegetation is retained and where possible extended.

### Set of Principles

The document has been written in a non-technical picture – based format that will help guide the development of a planting scheme for a productive woodland application to the Forestry Commission for Doddington Moor North. The document is not intended as a template for other sites. It includes a set of principles specifically designed for this site and devised around an easily accessible and understandable red-amber-green 'traffic light' model as follows:

- red – areas of no tree planting where the focus is on priority BAP habitat protection, restoration and enhancement. This includes recommendations for specific conservation actions (e.g. invasive Rhododendron and tree clearance in the very rare lowland raised mire habitats).
- amber – the intermediate 'thinking zone' in some priority BAP habitats where carefully designed, lower density native tree planting would naturally fit into the landscape in a way that still maintains the BAP features (e.g. lowland heathland as a continuous understorey to open indigenous tree planting specifications of birch, oak, etc.). This includes specifications and protocols for the tree planting species mixes, densities and methodologies such that potential impacts on BAP features (e.g. disturbance by planting, felling activities and related machinery access, hydrological changes, shading effects) are dealt with.
- green – priority areas for commercial sitka spruce planting in areas of very low BAP interest (e.g. improved and semi-improved sheep grazing pastures, gorse scrub, rush vegetation, etc.).



Aerial photo of northern boundary of Doddington Moor North with schematic representation of 'red – amber – green' traffic light model to BAP habitats and tree planting options



## BAP Priority Habitat: Lowland Heath (Wet, degraded)



Degraded Wet Heath \ Purple Moor Grass vegetation at Doddington Moor North



Indicator species (see above)

Transitional vegetation with less than 25% cover of dwarf shrubs, typically heather and cross leaved heath. These dwarf shrubs occur in grassy vegetation dominated by purple moor grass (c.f. wet heath with more than 25% cover of dwarf shrubs and purple moor grass vegetation with little or no dwarf shrubs).

## BAP Priority Habitat: Lowland Heath (Dry)

**Potential impacts if planted with trees**

Recommended measures to deliver joint outcomes of delivering a commercially viable forestry project that provides opportunities to protect, restore and enhance the BAP priority habitat

**Note:** Rhododendron is a significant problem on this habitat across much of the site but particularly in the western half and if it is left unmanaged it will eventually cover the entire site. Removal of rhododendron is therefore essential for both the successful establishment of commercial woodland and for the retention/restoration of the existing BAP priority habitats.

**Direct disturbance during scrub control**

The proposed methodology for removing rhododendron is to pull it up by the roots using a tractor mounted arm, with follow up treatments as required.

- In the areas where the rhododendron scrub is very dense the process of removing it is likely to damage any remaining heath vegetation. In these areas there are opportunities to reseed heather in the understory with heather brush from an adjoining area once tree planting has been completed. This would enhance and extend the existing BAP priority habitat and would also help ensure that competition from weed species is reduced.
- In areas of scattered rhododendron scrub on good quality habitat care should be taken to minimise damage heath vegetation during the scrub removal operations.

**Direct disturbance during planting**

- In the areas cleared of dense rhododendron scrub mechanised inverted mounding techniques can be used.
- In all other areas tree planting should be undertaken by hand using inverted mounding techniques.
- Trees should be planted at low density to initially achieve 2-3m spacing (with a view to achieving low density 5-6m spacing as a result of thinning operations after 10-15 years – see below).
- Some areas of this BAP priority habitat should not be planted with trees and should be left as open examples of this habitat (e.g. on rocky crags).

**Direct disturbance or damage by future thinning or felling**

- Where possible, tree thinning should be undertaken by hand tools and methods to achieve low density 5-6m spacing after 10-15 years.
- As the woodland will be managed as a continuous cover forest the potential disturbance/damage by mechanical harvesting of selected mature trees will be small in comparison to a conventional clear fell operation. Nevertheless care needs to be taken to ensure disturbance/damage to heathland vegetation is minimised.
- Cut or felled materials should be moved to areas of non BAP priority habitat to be burned \ chipped \ mulched\ logged as appropriate or taken off site where possible.

# The Plan – 68.75% increase in actual Priority Habitat

Traffic Light Zoning	Area Ha	%
Red Zone Priority Habitat	48	13%
Amber Zone Priority Habitat	45	13%
Green Zone Priority Habitat (Degraded)	139	39%
Green Zone Improved Pasture & established tree cover	122	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

Species Type	Area Ha	%
Mixed Conifers	4	1%
Native Broadleaves	72	20%
Open ground	34	10%
Managed Priority Habitat	52	15%
Scots Pine/Native Broadleaves	46	13%
Sitka Spruce	146	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>

Balance as proposal Develops	Area Ha	%
Existing NBL	3	1%
Existing SS	7	2%
NBL Planted to Maintain Priority Habitat	41	11%
New MC	4	1%
New NBL Future Priority Habitat	67	19%
New SS	138	39%
OG	36	10%
Plantation NBL	6	2%
Retained Open Ground Priority Habitat	50	14%
Conifer on Priority Habitat to avoid landscape conflicts	2	0%
	<b>354</b>	<b>100%</b>
Priority Habitat @ 2017	96	
Priority Habitat @ 2027	162	



- WCPG first, EIA opinion second.
- Involve and work with relevant statutory bodies (e.g. NE) from early stage.
- Recognise the high level of FC staff resource required for large-scale woodland creation projects and plan for this (Woodland Creation Officers).
- Support and advise applicants whilst at the same time maintain “distance” appropriate for a regulatory body (separation of duties).
- Ensure organisation wide consistency in interpretation of policy e.g. BAP Priority Habitats (FC/NE statement out soon.)

- WCPG – Always!
- Woodland Carbon Fund versus CS Woodland Creation Grant
- WCF = large, productive, non-RDPE (so no RPA/RLR engagement) no annual maintenance.
- WCG = biodiversity or water as main objectives (if biodiversity – native species. RDPE grant (so RPA/RLR engagement ). Annual maintenance payments.

# My Road Map for future projects

- Plan for WCPG phase:
  - Look for issues
  - EIA scope the project myself
  - Challenge the 'DEFRA Family' & their understanding
- WCPG – Have I claimed all that I can?!
- Early stakeholder presentation & engagement, incl. public.
- UKFS Plan.
- Consider grant support during planning.

