**Yester Estate Long Term Forest plan 21FGS56506**

**149.69ha of woodland**

**Scoping Support document**

**Owners objectives:**

* To catch up on 35 years of neglected Forest Management by previous land owners
* To make the woodlands safe for residents and local path users and neighbors
* To note issues and resolve them in a timely and considerate manner
* To enhance and protect individual trees that are ‘significant’ in the local landscape and typically features in the tree register of Scotland
* To respect the need for care and consideration for TPOS, Conservation areas and core paths
* To respect the Native woodland status of much of the woodland on the estate and restock or enrich with suitable native species, such as Oak, birch , aspen and alder.
* In relation to the design landscape, respect the need to retain some significant exotics and species diversity, even within a native woodland setting
* Manage the castle and surrounds as advised
* Make the woodlands self financing over the medium term.

**Felling**

Some felling has already taken place under an approved Felling Permission and this is reaching a conclusion with restocking of native broadleaves proposed.

The areas currently proposed for felling over the next 10 years are pockets dominated by Douglas Fir and Sitka spruce. Had the sites been proactively managed, many of these areas would have been thinned, and the trees would be robust, huge and stable. Unfortunately many have grown very tall, but slender and unthinned. This has forced the management decision to fell many of these areas and restock them for liability reasons as well as windthrow risk.

**Ash Dieback**

Many people will be sadly aware of this issue, a strong native species that is currently doomed at various rates of death. In the process of thinning and felling, their management is most dangerous primarily to the cutters and machine operators. The core agenda during thinning and felling must include their removal.

**Restocking- enrichment**

Areas that are felled are required to be restocked by law. Those areas that are within core native woodland area consisting of small patches of conifers will be restocked with Oak, Aspen, Birch, and regeneration accepted of Beech and Sycamore. Larger areas away from core native woodland will be restocked with Douglas Fir and Norway spruce with some Sitka Spruce with natural regeneration complimenting the mix. This offers a small cash flow to the estate to fund general woodland management duties in the medium term, without impacting on core native woodland, or other more visually significant areas of the Estates woodlands.

Areas of felled ash will be enriched with oak and aspen, and natural regeneration of sycamore and beech will be accepted.

**Thinning**

Much of the woodlands need thinning. This is a standard operation that helps to produce some income to the Estate but also forces a close assessment of the state of the trees, their health, there safety and to allow the development of an understorey and a move towards Continuous cover. Yester is not a standard type of woodland and includes multi age and multi species intimately mixed through out.

Thinning is therefore an **intimate and sensitive process**, area by area and is far from standard.

However there are some basic approaches as follows

* No more than 30% of the stems/ canopy removed
* Consider the tree canopy, not the stems themselves
* Remove dead, dangerous and poor form trees
* Remove ash dieback where critical to health and safety
* Accept safe standing dead wood for habitat
* Assess understory canopy and fell trees to release them to more light and nutrients
* Consider path, property and boundary wall liability and if necessary take third party advise
* Minimise impact on wildlife species such as badgers, bats, birds, otters, squirrels
* Focus on keeping the woodland mix diverse, textured and multi aged.
* Free up individual ‘specimens’ for viewing, appreciation and reduced competition of nutrient and light. Character trees should be retained where possible and safe to do so.
* Accept shade tolerant species where suitable
* During thinning, try to bring laurel and rhododendrons into management or preferably eradication.
* Assume further thinning take place at between 10-15 year cycles for hardwoods and 7-10 years for conifers. As a catch up, thinning may well take place twice in the 10 year period but at reduced intensity.
* Manage paths and rights of way, with signs, offer short term alternative routes and restore back to normal asap.

**Core paths**

There is a core path running through much of the estate. On going liaison with Nick Morgan is critical as each area is tackled. The objective is to offer public warning, to offer an alternative route, and complete the work in good time, and restore back to previous route. The owners are keen to improve the route, strengthen bridges and enhance the local landscape from the core path, but this must be seen as a long term agenda due to the potential messiness of forestry activity.

**Designed landscape**

There is no threat to the integrity of the Designed landscape. The estate is only looking to protect the facility for the long term and enrich it. Plans are underway to plant more specimen trees, replace trees lost over time with the same or similar species, and constantly enrich and support natural regeneration with species slow to take, such as Oak.

As well as this the Estate are keen to develop a community type arboretum in what is called cpt 1, nearest the town, behind the toilet block which currently consists of very tall un-thinned conifers needing to be removed.

**Specimen trees**

Through out the woodlands there are large 300-400 years old trees, oaks, pines, limes, sycamores, beech and a good variety of conifers. These specimen special trees form the true heart and soul of Yester woodlands and themselves are awe inspiring, even to hardened Foresters. They will be treated with due respect and regard, as ‘older statesman’ and hopefully won’t need to be removed.

**Deer control**

An internal deer fence already surrounds the core private area of the estate, and regeneration of shade tolerant species is very evident. Outwith this deer fence, control is less robust and regeneration is less successful. However some control will need to be exercised to ensure trees planted eventually develop to replace losses.

**Yester castle**

This is a key and significant subject but not one that the Forest Plan is intended to deal with directly. A site meeting was set up with HES and a conversation started with Yester Estate for the long term management of the site.

The key Forest Plan agenda is to remove nearly all the trees off the Scheduled monument site, other than a few specific trees to retain the designed landscape aspect, remove and control regeneration for the long term.

***The castle is currently closed to all visitors due to significant undermining of the stone work by inexplicable vandals, and the Police have been informed with a watching brief. Please do not force the Estate to confront you to leave the site, ( it is embarrassing for both parties).***

A developing Scheduled monument consent is being drafted, and funds sought, to arrange a series of operations to remove trees and secure the site to a safe condition, shore up and carry out repairs as directly by experienced Conservation architects and Historic Environment Scotland.

However vandalism of any form will not be accepted, and may well force the estate to take more draconian action that would be completely against the spirit of joined up thinking that the Estate is keen to develop with the community.



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On behalf of Mark Seed Forest and Land