

Woodland Creation Case Study

Eslack Estate

Diversification for long-term returns



The challenge

Following the sale of the Elslack estate in North Yorkshire in 2017, the new owners were keen to diversify their business and improve the long term capital value of the grade 4/5 agricultural land. It was providing marginal returns due to the poor-quality of the ground, with a market price value under £2000 per acre. Surrounding landscape comprises open pasture, moorland and blocks of mixed woodland, with few designated sites or known constraints.

The solution

New woodlands represented an obvious solution to enhance the value of this land and offer the owners an opportunity to diversify their holdings to create long-term value and income - whilst also locking up carbon and producing renewable building materials. Similar land on the estate had already been converted to forestry, with well-performing areas estimated to be worth £10,000 per acre after 35 years.

Key facts

- **Site:** Rectory Allotment, Elslack, North Yorkshire
- **Size:** 45ha, with 63,000 trees planted
- **Type:** mixed conifer and broadleaved woodland
- **Species:** Sitka spruce, Norway spruce, Douglas fir, mixed native broadleaves including oak, birch and hazel
- **Agent:** Edwin Thompson LLP, Carlisle
- **Grants:** Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG), Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation Grant (CS WCG)

Making it add up

Timber prices ~ Roughly **£70/ton** standing

Production ~ **15 ton** timber/hectare per year (YC18)

Possible timber growth over **£1000/ha** per year



"It was important to us that the woods provide a reasonable financial return in the future - but we also wanted to include a varied broadleaf element that would provide valuable wildlife habitat. Planting a largely productive crop would increase the capital value of land almost immediately, and this will rise as the crop matures."
 Owner, Elslack Estate

Creating the woodland

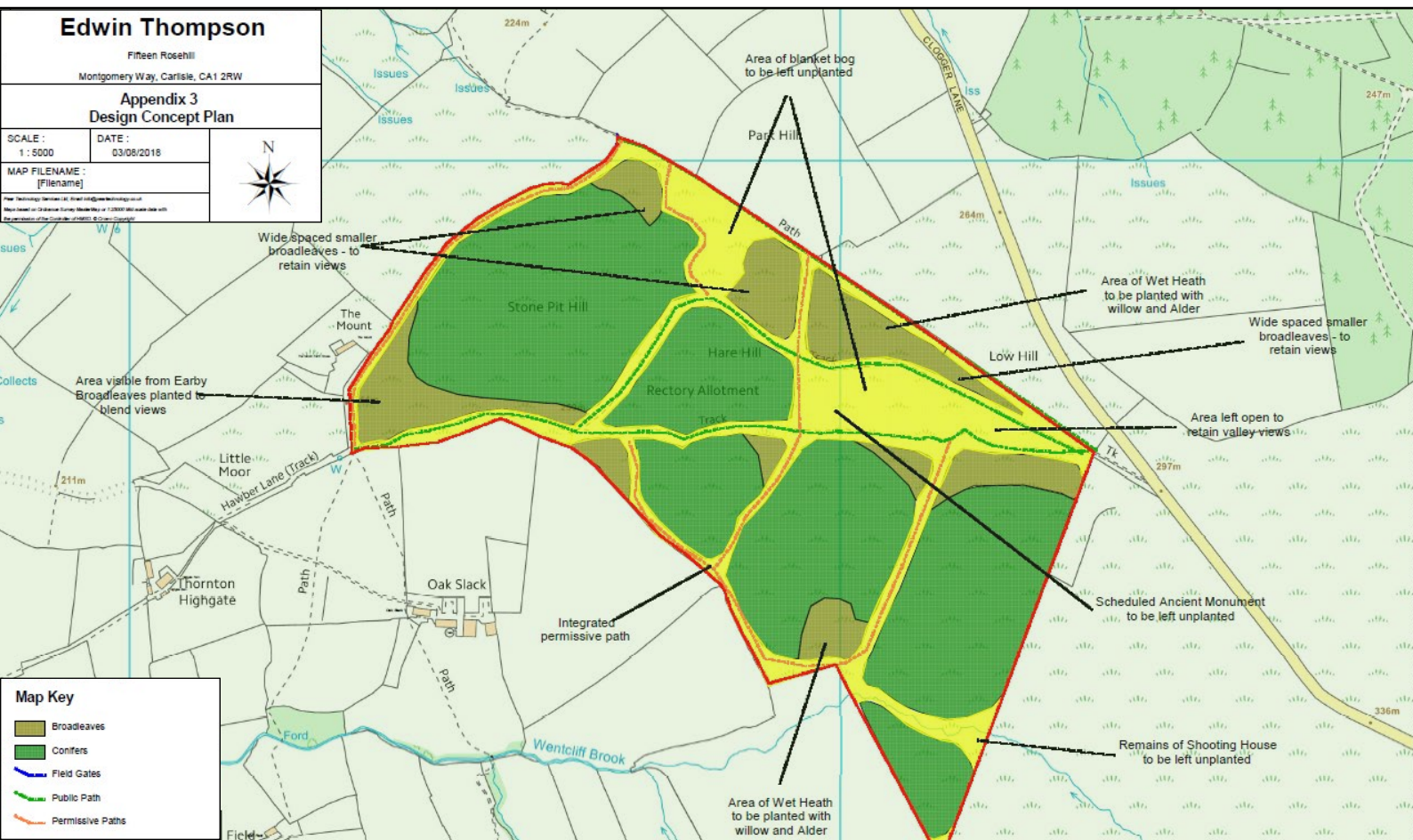
The first step was to engage with forestry and land agents Edwin Thompson, who assessed the holding and drew up a plan for afforestation. Opinions and views of multiple local stakeholders were taken into consideration throughout the development of the scheme.

Careful woodland design is essential to ensure the landscape is both protected and enhanced. The Pennine Way public right of way runs through the site, a ring cairn Scheduled Ancient Monument is present, and an ecological survey carried out as part of the planning process identified some areas of priority habitat. The scheme design was adjusted accordingly, with key areas left unplanted, some species changed from conifer to broadleaf, and planting density altered.

Once the scheme was approved, the ground was prepared using continuous mounding to provide a

weed-free area, and to give the trees a boost during their crucial first year of establishment. Continuous mounding was chosen as it provides a much less intensive alternative to ploughing and releases less carbon. Bare root trees were then planted in the mounds during the winter, with broadleaves protected against grazing mammals by spiral tubes. The woodland is predominantly coniferous, in line with the objectives of creating a commercial forest, complemented by a range of native broadleaves throughout.

The Forestry Commission's Woodland Creation Planning Grant funded the design and consultation process, and the owners then applied for woodland creation grants to support initial establishment capital works and maintenance payments. Advice and input was given by dedicated FC staff throughout the process.



Top tips

1. Be clear about why you want to plant new woodlands and what you want to achieve.
2. Assess the site's suitability against your objectives, including potential future returns, environmental features and landscape constraints.
3. Speak to your local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer for support and guidance on planting a woodland.
4. Consult early on your proposals with key stakeholders and anyone who might have an interest in new woodlands - this will smooth over the planning process.
5. Obtain advice from professional foresters and ecologists throughout.

The benefits

The new woodlands planted on the Elslack estate will be multi-purpose, providing a commercial return through carbon and timber, whilst also providing a range of ecosystem services:

- **Carbon capture and storage.** Tree species were chosen for rapid growth, acting as a carbon sink to remove carbon from the atmosphere and storing it for the long term. This will both contribute towards climate change mitigation, whilst also providing the owners with an income through the sale of carbon units.
- **Natural flood management.** The woodland will help slow the flow of water on this hilly terrain, thereby alleviating flooding in times of extreme rainfall.
- **Timber.** Conifer species will be managed on a clearfell/restock cycle, with the trees thinned at appropriate points. As well as locking up stored carbon in wooden buildings and packaging, timber can offset use of more energy intensive materials like concrete and steel.
- **Habitat.** Broadleaf species will be managed as long-term retention woodland, with minimal intervention, to provide ongoing habitats for wildlife and help boost biodiversity in the local area.
- **Diversification and enhanced future land value.** This was the primary objective of the woodland, to protect the future business and capital value of the estate. Having a high-yielding, rapidly-growing and well-established crop of timber will boost and protect the land value, particularly with increasing timber prices.



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