

# Woodland Restoration Case Study High Speed 2 Woodland Fund – restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)

## West Wycombe Estate



## What is PAWS restoration and how can the HS2 Woodland Fund help?

Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS) are areas that have a long history of woodland cover. Historically, many ancient sites where semi-natural woodlands once grew, were partially or completely cleared and replaced with plantations to increase timber production. This degraded the ecological value of these woodlands because plantations, such as conifer trees grown for timber, tend to provide more shade and drop needles onto the woodland floor which hinders the growth of ground flora. However, the flora in the soil, such as wildflower seeds and fungi, can often remain dormant.

PAWS restoration is the process of removing these timber plantations and replanting native woodlands creating the conditions to revive the ground flora and restore a thriving habitat once more. These woodlands then need to be protected and carefully looked after in the long-term to ensure successful restoration.

The 'HS2 Woodland Fund – PAWS' scheme is applicable to you if your land sits within a 25-mile zone surrounding the HS2 route - currently on Phase One, from London to the West Midlands.

## Key facts

- **Site:** West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire
- **No. of hectares restored:** 9.5ha
- **No. of native trees & shrubs planted:** 15,347
- **Species:** A mixture of species, predominantly; Oak, Beech and Hazel
- **Date planted:** Four compartments split across the 2018/19 & 2019/20 planting season

*"West Wycombe woodland covers over 500 hectares and is a prominent part of the landscape, Sir Edward wanted to ensure the longevity of the woodland through active management whilst also creating favourable conditions to help wildlife thrive. The management plan sets out how these objectives can be achieved."*

David Hunt

Wessex Woodland Management

# History and management of the West Wycombe Estate woodlands

West Wycombe Estate sits within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the house, gardens and village are owned and managed by the National Trust. The estate woodlands remain in private ownership but are accessible from West Wycombe by public footpath. The woodlands comprise a high proportion of mixed broadleaves but with pockets of conifer plantation. The owner, Sir Edward Dashwood, has a vision to gradually replace the non-native conifers with native broadleaves to restore healthier habitats for wildlife. To do this, he applied to the HS2 Woodland Fund to restore the degraded ancient woodland plantations back to being a thriving haven for wildlife that could be enjoyed by future generations.

Sir Edward's land lies 10 miles from the HS2 Phase One route, which made him eligible to apply (although you can apply up to 25 miles away). One of the conditions of the fund to restore PAWS is that land managers must have a Woodland Management Plan approved in principle by the Forestry Commission before applying, and no grant offer will be made until a Woodland Management Plan and all associated Felling Licences have been formally approved by the Forestry Commission.

Sir Edward already had an existing woodland management plan in place for the estate, prepared with the help of Forestry Agent David Hunt of Wessex Woodland Management.

## Restoring an ancient woodland

Sir Edward and David identified four woodland compartments for PAWS restoration totalling just over 9.5 hectares and submitted an application to the HS2 Woodland Fund. A Woodland Officer from the Forestry Commission (FC) was assigned to the case to support and guide Sir Edward and David through the application process. The Woodland Officer carried out a site visit and completed a woodland condition survey to inform an appropriate management regime for the site. This supported funding for deer high seats and the use of deer fencing to protect the newly planted trees, as well as deer impact assessments to monitor deer across the newly planted compartments. Once the grant had been approved, the non-native conifers were clear-felled over the course of two years and the timber sold locally. Both Sir Edward and David were pleased with the application process and support available from the Forestry Commission.

Sir Edward explained; 'The woodland on the estate serves a number of purposes, it is visually extremely important being in the AONB and the extension of the landscape design which began in the 18th Century. The balance between the woodland areas, grass and arable fields is integral to the landscape picture we wish to achieve here in the Chilterns.

I see myself as a custodian of the estate, preserving it for nature, wildlife, and future generations. Whilst also ensuring the land continues to deliver for the wider community to enjoy, access and contribute to the local economy. I believe tree planting and restoring ancient woodland sites plays a vital part in the future survival of the estate and I'd encourage any other woodland managers to consider restoring PAWS through the HS2 Woodland Fund'.

## Progress

Planting work at West Wycombe was completed in early 2020. Over 15,300 broadleaf trees and shrubs have been planted, with a mixture of species predominantly made up of Oak, Beech and Hazel, which are typical of ancient woodlands in the wider area. This means these restored ancient woodlands will blend into the wider landscape.

This diversity means that if any one species is subject to climate change or disease pressure, then the others can ensure the long-term presence of woodland in the landscape. By including a range of hardwood species such as Oak and Beech, this should also ensure the sustainability of timber production in the future.



The long-term vision of the estate is to continue to remove poor quality conifer species and replace them with native broadleaves, with future thinning of broadleaf crops, to allow light onto the forest floor and encourage trees to naturally regenerate.

For more information about the HS2 Woodland Fund PAWS Restoration visit: [www.gov.uk/guidance/hs2-woodland-fund](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/hs2-woodland-fund)