

Penhill Cross

You may be aware that Forestry England has recently removed a number of trees at Penhill Cross. A few people living and working locally have asked questions about the reasons for this and future plans for the site, so our forestry team has compiled a short Q&A.

Why have the trees been cut down at Penhill Cross?

The trees on the corner at Penhill Cross were a mixture of pine, fir and ash trees. They had reached timber maturity and some were declining due to a disease called red band needle blight. The trees have historically been under-managed because of their exposed and windy position between two roads. This meant that the mature trees were collectively secure against the wind but, if we removed only selected trees, the remaining individuals would be unstable. In total, 750 trees were felled and have been sent for sawing into construction timbers, chipping for biomass boilers and paper pulp, and the small hardwood for firewood, all within the UK market.

Why are there branches and stumps sticking up?

During and after a felling operation, we keep some deadwood on site, both on the ground and standing. Dead and decaying trees and branches support the proper function of the forest ecosystem by providing habitat, maintaining soil fertility, and supporting energy flows such as hydrological processes in streams and rivers. Deadwood also helps to mitigate the effects of climate change because of the carbon locked inside it. The branches and needle litter will be raked into piles next summer to provide clear space for replanting. Tree stumps are all left in situ as good carbon and nutrient stores that also stabilise the soil.

What happened to the birds and animals?

Before we start any tree felling, our ecologists carry out extensive surveys for rare and protected species, as well as those which are more common. The area at Penhill Cross is part of a wider woodland ecosystem that provides habitat for a variety of flora and fauna. Areas valued for dormice, badgers and nesting birds were protected before and during the operation. These habitats have been maintained - such as a coppice hedge along the top edge of the site - as well as transformed for other species which benefit from transient open space, such as reptiles, birds of prey, and ground nesting birds.

Are you going to plant more trees?

Next winter, we will plant around 7,000 small trees that will be raised from seed at the Forestry England nursery at Delamere, in Cheshire. The planting will all be done by hand. The site is rich and well drained, so we will plant a mixture of firs and pines, with some naturally regenerating native broadleaf species. There will also be scrubby open edges for biodiversity and landscape purposes. A number of historic features, such as hedge banks and sunken lanes, run through the area and these will be protected when preparing and planting the site. We will plant nearly ten times the number of trees that were removed so, as the trees grow up, they will be periodically thinned out to make space for the strongest ones to grow.

Will you be cutting down any more trees in this area?

We normally thin the woods on a five year cycle so we do not anticipate working in Webberton and School Wood for another couple of years. This does not account for any minor tree works related to safety, access, or trees blown over by the wind. In 2023, we will thin all the tree crops, leaving most of the trees to grow bigger. More information for our long term plans for the woods can be found here: <https://www.forestryengland.uk/forest-planning/haldon-forest-plan>