

Forestry Management and Planning



In 2012 Center Parcs wrote the latest ten year Forest Management Plan for each of its Villages. They are written to help us:

- Plan sustainable Forest Management and set Biodiversity Action Targets
- Keep our records of our current forest assets up to date

The plans were written following engagement with local volunteer groups and Center Parcs employees, as well as consultation with key stakeholders through workshops. Although each Village has its own plan, many of the core principles are common to all.

Having selected and developed the ideal forest location for a Center Parcs Village, there are clearly defined management principles which are adopted for the long term management of the forest, not only for biodiversity and the development of the forest, but also for our guests' experience.

The principle components are made up of:

Trees and Woodland:

The main objective is for an age-phased composition of the forest in pursuit of a sustainable plantation which will be thinned and will regenerate over time. During the development of the woodland the following three phases and solitary tree management approaches are essential:

1. Young/shrub phase – there is demonstrable woodland development providing framing and species accentuation, and where an overwhelming tree layer is not desired. Management is directed towards good development and monitoring competition between pioneer wood types and main wood types
2. Closed phase/middle wood – characterised by vertical closing and the presence of an open tree layer where trees that vary in age and height gradually achieve a closed bush layer giving durability and privacy. Management focuses on the release of tree formers and regular rejuvenation of the shrub layer
3. Rising wood – comprises a ground cover and a tree layer. Ground cover is not excessive under the tree layer (up to 30% coverage) and views are not obscured
4. Solitary trees – defined as veteran or specimen planted trees. Veteran trees have been preserved during Village construction, whereas specimens have largely been planted post development. Both groups include deciduous and coniferous trees. These provide character which determines the immediate atmosphere and should be safeguarded and retained

The cycle schedule for the management type is dependent upon the predominate species; for deciduous woodland this is an 80 year cycle and for coniferous woodland a 60 year cycle. Management operations are also directed at retaining progressive undergrowth to achieve visual screening, whilst thinning to maintain a healthy forest structure on a rotational basis forms an annual forestry operation followed by rejuvenation with species selected from native subjects, complementary subjects and/or those with a long history of planting in this location.

Hedgerows & Woodland Scrub:

The planting of hedgerows within the Village supports:

- Provision of nesting sites and valuable food source for wildlife
- Screening of unsightly areas
- Impenetrable screening to boundaries (for security purposes)

Hedgerows are useful to screen unwanted views as well as to indicate boundaries. Native species are used in preference to non-native subjects, which are only planted where essential.

Woodland scrub allows the creation of framing for spaces and patio planting where a dominating tree canopy is not present. This management type allows visual softening of waterway edges, the establishment of private areas around patios and additional screening (sometimes linked to hedgerows) of essential utility areas, such as container set up areas, hard building lines and service areas. Additionally woodland scrub provides a mechanism for active forest fire management by creating breaks within the canopy.

Management of this type is carried out by selective pruning, shaping and rejuvenation as needed.

Grass & Herb Layers:

This includes ground cover, grass, herbaceous annuals and perennials, wild flowers and meadow planting across the Village.

Total cover of ground vegetation is sought, and grass seed/flower mixes indigenous to the Village location are specified. Areas are maintained at about 15–20cm, and cut periodically to maintain species mix. Other than periodic cutting, cultivation is generally not required unless invasive weeds are present. Where bare areas appear due to intensive use, or over shading occurs, remediation options include crown thinning or selective tree removals to allow light to the forest floor and localised cultivation of the forest floor to encourage pioneer species to establish. In most instances, where over shading is not the cause of bare areas, natural regeneration is preferred.

There are other components such as ornamental planting areas around the main buildings which is mixed with hard landscaping features. The lodge landscape is designed to create forest views from the lodges and the aim continues to be one of the facilities naturally sitting in the forest environment.

Each Village has its own unique characteristics which are described below:

Sherwood Forest Overview

Center Parcs Sherwood Forest is situated within Sherwood Forest, near to Rufford, Nottinghamshire, and is accessed by the B6034. Sherwood Forest was the first of Center Parcs' UK Villages and covers around 400 acres of predominantly coniferous woodland.

The site is screened by bunding planted with a diverse native mix of understorey and woodland plantings, including native Scots and Corsican pine. Since Center Parcs Sherwood Forest opened 27 years ago, over 500,000 trees have been planted, some of which are maturing with careful stewardship and continued selective thinning of non-native stock.

The Village opened in 1987 within a once dark commercial coniferous plantation that was planted upon a remnant of the famous Sherwood Forest. From the 13th to 17th century, the site was part of the old Royal Hunting Forest of Sherwood and was an intricate mixture of woodland pasture containing mature oaks, heath and acid grassland. During construction of the Village, the action of earth moving equipment together with significant storms that occurred simultaneously led to large areas of windblown trees and created opportunities for biodiversity. As most of the wind blow was centred on the lodge landscapes - the areas of the Village which were thinned to make way for the residential accommodation - it created the opportunity for these ancient habitats to recover and regenerate. They did this in abundance and within a few years the Village boasted a wide array of wildlife, including sun loving species such as reptiles, bees and wasps that are associated with heathland, a very rare habitat in the county as a whole.

In developing Center Parcs Sherwood Forest, a water system was also created. These water bodies and associated wetlands are now important, with scrub, semi-natural neutral grassland and lowland dry acid grassland all making a contribution amongst semi-natural habitats.

As a result of the past 27 years of excellence in forest management by Center Parcs, the increasingly diverse forest supports a rich abundance of bird species, mammals, locally or nationally rare plants and insects which thrive on the Village today.

Elveden Forest Overview

Center Parcs Elveden Forest is located close to Brandon in Suffolk and is accessed by the B1106 road between Brandon and Bury St Edmunds. The Village opened in 1989 and lies within Thetford Forest, covering around 400 acres of predominantly coniferous woodland and lakes.

Thetford Forest is the largest lowland pine forest in Britain and was created after the First World War to provide a strategic reserve of timber. Thirty-two acres of lakes, streams and ponds have been created within the Village boundary, as well as a mosaic of woodland clearings containing breck, wildflower and grassland meadows.

The Village lies within the Brecks, an area described as being of national importance as a landscape and spanning 370 square miles across Norfolk and Suffolk. The area has had a history of changing land treatments and the practice of planting up open habitats for commercial forestry was common within this area during the last century. When Center Parcs Elveden Forest was built, it was placed in a site almost wholly dominated by conifer plantations, with the exception of the area near the site entrance which was a pig farm.

The open habitats of Breckland have long been recognised as unusual and outstanding within the British Isles for their mixture of climate (the most continental in Britain), geology (giving rise to mosaics of calcareous and acid conditions) and traditional land use (extensive uses combined with shifting cultivation patterns). This allowed a special mixture of species to develop and survive, many scarce or absent from other parts of Britain. The Breckland open ground mosaic sits uneasily within the national and local Biodiversity Action Plan framework of Key and Broad habitats. This is because the important features are intimate mixtures of species normally of lowland heathland, lowland calcareous grassland, dry acid grassland and arable habitats.

Beginning in the 18th century and accelerating through the 19th and 20th centuries, there was a concerted effort to reclaim the Breck for plantation forestry and intensive agriculture. Some of the animals and plants associated with the forests are of value in their own right, but the main effect was a great reduction in the abundance of the characteristic Breck wildlife including extinctions which began in the early 19th century, such as the great bustard, and continue today, such as the Viper's Bugloss moth.

Center Parcs Elveden Forest has provided great opportunities for conserving the biodiversity of open Breck as well as retaining any special features of the conifer woodland that prevailed before the Village was built.

Before construction of the Village there were no wetlands and the woodland was dominated by dense conifer plantations. The Breck open lands were not represented as habitats, merely pockets of characteristic species surviving in scattered locations. With the exception of older trees preserved and small areas of older woodland, the richness of the forest today reflects the implementation of 23 years of protection and habitat management which, since 1999, has been formalised into a Biodiversity Action Plan.

Longleat Forest Overview

Center Parcs Longleat Forest is located near Warminster in Wiltshire and is accessed by the A362 via Horningsham Road. It opened in 1994 and covers approximately 400 acres within the Longleat Estate woodland. The Village includes compartments of mature continuous canopy forest, which is diverse in terms of species, age, land type and form.

The Village accommodates 799 lodges, together with a range of leisure facilities. The Village also hosts a network of water bodies including the Watersports Lake, which covers over 20 acres and is fed to maintain water levels in dryer periods by an abstraction license. In addition to a range of bird species, the Village is home to populations of reptiles and bats and contains 150 year old giant redwoods, large areas of natural grassland and a nature reserve at Nockatt Coppice.

The past 20 years of ecological monitoring at Center Parcs Longleat Forest has clearly highlighted the outstanding importance of broadleaved woodland habitats. This is a significant feature of the Village and the forest includes a range of veteran trees typical of lowland wood - pasture and parklands. This forest structure is also characterised by rides and glades which, within Center Parcs Longleat Forest include the openings around lodges. Lowland heathland, the second most important distinctive habitat type within the forest, comprises a significant proportion of the site including restored heathland within the Nockatt Coppice nature reserve.

Whinfell Forest Overview

Center Parcs Whinfell Forest is located near Penrith in Cumbria and is accessed by the A66. It opened in 1997 as Oasis Holiday Village and was acquired by Center Parcs in 2002. It covers approximately 400 acres within the Lowther Estates woodland. The Village includes compartments of mature forest, which is diverse in terms of species, age, land type and form. The Village accommodates 864 lodges, together with a range of leisure facilities. In addition to a range of bird species, the Village provides for nationally important populations of red squirrels and great crested newts as well as supporting a strong bat population. The Village comprises predominantly forest but also includes open ground habitats of mire and heathland.

Center Parcs Whinfell Forest is unique amongst Center Parcs Villages in that populations of some important species were already present before construction. There are notable opportunities, especially for red squirrels, to make a significant contribution to national biodiversity conservation. Conversely, the requirements of this and other species do constrain to some extent the range of opportunities for habitat management when compared to the other Villages.

Whinfell Forest lies in a part of the Eden Valley Natural Area where the land is rising towards the Lake District. There are no good examples of the semi-natural habitats highlighted in the Eden Valley Natural Area profile: instead the area is dominated by conifer plantation, which is specifically highlighted in English Nature's Natural Area profile.

In addition to small blocks, there are several large plantations of conifers within the Natural Area, for example Whinfell Forest, High Stand Plantation and Broomrigg Plantation. Most of these are long established, planted on heathland or mire habitats. Some of them retain elements of the original open ground habitats. Some of the plantations with mature conifers are now a haven for red squirrels, particularly if Scots pine is present. The structure and species composition of these plantations means they are less likely to be favoured by grey squirrels and therefore provide a valuable refuge for red squirrels.

