**Is any more significant tree felling or other activity planned in the vicinity of the village in the next 5 years?**

Plans are in place to put up deer fencing in Rail Copse to protect the newly planted tree saplings. We will continue to remove conifers from the ancient woodland areas of the Estate and we plan to remove the remaining conifers from Rail Copse in around four years’ time. This is part of the ancient woodland restoration work that we’re carrying out and will improve the woodland environment for wildlife.

We have just had a survey carried out on 1,261 of our most notable and ancient trees across the Estate. This has given us a prioritised management plan for 460 of the most important and most vulnerable trees to be carried out over the next 10 years. Some of these are on Aldbury Common and works will involve ‘halo thinning’ – removing vigorous young trees that are casting shade over vulnerable old trees – and tree surgery aimed at reducing the likelihood that trees tear themselves apart as they age and decay.

We are also looking to restore elements of the historic designed landscape between Old Copse Lodge and Thunderdell Cottages, where we’ve removed laurel in recent years. This was once one of the grand historic approaches to Ashridge House.

**Is there a plan to create more open grassland from the woodland?**

There are five different Commons within the main block of woodland, each of which has a distinctive vegetation type that indicates a similar, but subtly different usage by local people over hundreds of years. The Commons are now largely wooded and are interspersed amongst the patches of Ancient Woodland across the Estate. They were once grazed by domestic animals, and firewood and bracken were harvested for fuel and animal bedding.

This historic management led to a landscape that had an intimate mix of grassland, trees and shrubs. Most of the ancient trees are on the Commons, and their wide, spreading shapes tell a story how they once grew in a more open landscape where they could access lots of light from all directions.

So, yes, we do have plans to re-create more open glades on the Commons, but we do not plan to create great swathes of grassland. This is not some nostalgic whim - the distinctive wildlife that we aim to protect has developed as a result of hundreds of years of use by man and it includes an element of open space, young shrubs and trees, ancient trees, and trees of all sizes in between.

What sort of wildlife are we talking about? The blossom of small shrubs – hawthorns, wild plums and willows – which are full of bees and other pollinating insects in spring; the blackthorn thickets that are home to nesting birds; lizards which sun themselves on the edges of grassy clearings in summer; grass snakes hunting for frogs and newts under damp rotting logs; cracks and splits in ancient trees where bats roost in daytime, and the open clearings where they hunt insects at night; and the new tree saplings which are growing up protected by curtains of bramble. All these features are precious.

**The woodland used to be kept tidy with fallen trees and branches cleared up. Now it looks really messy with piles of wood left in heaps. Why is clearing-up no longer being done?**

Dead and decaying wood is a vitally important part of the living woodland system. Decaying wood is broken down by numerous species of insects, fungi and microbes. In fact, Ashridge is currently ranked as the 15th most important site in Britain for rare beetles associated with decaying wood, largely thanks to the number of ancient trees and the pieces of them that slowly decay once they have fallen to the ground.

We use brash to build ‘dead hedges’ in the woodland to protect the roots of vulnerable trees from the many trampling feet that pass over them. The compaction caused by trampling feet squashes the air out of the soil and is particularly damaging to ancient trees. These dead hedges also provide cover for small mammals, hibernation sites for amphibians, nesting sites for birds, and protection for young tree and shrub seedlings.

**Do you have any further comments that you’d like to make about woodland management at Ashridge?**

All of us who work at Ashridge are incredibly passionate about what we do. We are here because we have fallen in love with the place, its wildlife, its history, and its atmosphere, as we know very many of our visitors also have. Our first priority is to protect the Estate and the special features for which it is nationally and internationally protected, and to facilitate the enjoyment of the site by those who wish to visit.

**Do you have any other documents that we can read about your work at Ashridge?**

You can see the executive summary of our draft Woodland Management Plan that went out for consultation in 2019 on our website by following one of these links:

[https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ashridge-estate/features/woodland-management-plan-consultation-at-ashridge](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nationaltrust.org.uk%2Fashridge-estate%2Ffeatures%2Fwoodland-management-plan-consultation-at-ashridge&data=04%7C01%7CEmily.Smith1%40nationaltrust.org.uk%7C49bccde4765b41853a4908d8c928eb9f%7C0fba79b96423460d88eff9c3d4ca2e9f%7C0%7C0%7C637480527580180378%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=mJBwqWOjiIR4EgWgOAOBozY805jMixLP1ILeuglb5Cs%3D&reserved=0)

<https://bit.ly/3tQ42hz>

More information about deer management can also be seen on our website:

<https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/ashridge-estate/documents/ashridge-deer-management-oct-2020.pdf>