

## Northumberland Wildlife Trust Comment to Doddington Woodland Creation

7 February 2017

Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) was invited by Pennine Biomass to review the proposal for the Doddington Woodland Creation and submit comments to influence the design and use of the mixed use woodland.

Whilst we are concerned about the potential loss of lowland heath BAP-priority habitat, as well as habitat for upland birds, it is considered the threat from lack of management of encroaching bracken and rhododendron is likely to cause a more significant negative impact on these habitats.

Where lowland heath is lost, it is proposed that the management and care of the remaining habitat will be of a higher standard than what is there currently, to which NWT are favourable. It is noted that whilst targets for creation of broadleaf woodland has so far been positive, targets for conifer woodland creation is below that which has been expected for 2017. In most cases of conifer afforestation, concerns are often focussed on the percentage of sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) as a non-native and fairly invasive species (especially when adjacent to bogs).

In this instance, whilst the percentage of sitka spruce (40%) is still higher than NWT would prefer, we are grateful that the percentage is much lower than that of most commercial forestry operations and respect that industry stakeholders have requested a higher percentage. As such, NWT is content with this proportion of sitka and the use of buffer zones of broadleaf species where adjacent to BAP-priority habitats.

Red Squirrels Northern England, a project of NWT, have also voiced support for the scheme as it increases available foraging habitat for red squirrels whilst deterring the presence of greys. In an area where red squirrels are frequent, we are encouraged by the reverence given to this species. Finally, NWT have maintained an open line of dialogue with Pennine Biomass to provide advice, assistance and involvement where requested.

Overall this scheme is a positive step to conserve the areas of highest quality lowland heath and bog habitat, which would otherwise be lost by encroachment, and to introduce further woodland habitat for the benefit of wildlife and people.



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