Chapter 15
Woodland Improvement Scheme

15.1 Scope

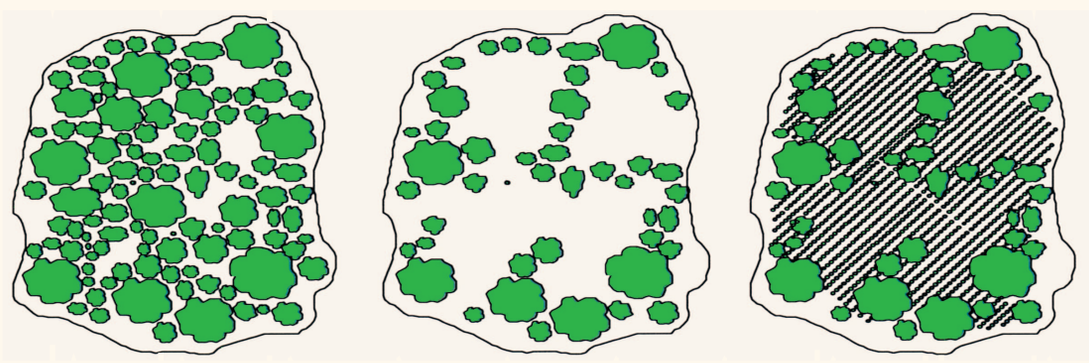
This scheme applies to areas of existing woodland which have the potential to be improved from a lower to a higher state of productivity. The scheme is mainly, but not exclusively, directed towards broadleaf woodlands.

15.2 Silviculture

The same silvicultural and environmental standards as for afforestation are applicable. The elements below refer to activities that may be carried out that are unique to the Woodland Improvement Scheme.

- improvement felling of malformed and over mature trees.
- felling of additional trees if necessary to create planting gaps (see Figure 11).
- pruning to improve stem quality.
- enrichment planting (2m x 2m spacing for conifers, 2m x 1.5m for broadleaves) to improve species composition and crop quality.
- thinning or respacing to promote growth.
- removal of invasive species that threaten regeneration (such as rhododendron or laurel).
- management and respacing of natural regeneration.

A woodland improvement project may involve any or all of these operations, and some may overlap over the same ground. In any case each operation will relate to its own area of influence, the precise area over which the actual operation applies. For instance, improvement felling may benefit growth beyond the crown area of the individual trees felled. It is the aggregate of such areas of influence, or treatment areas, which is to be taken as the total area to which the project refers. Where the totality of treated areas consists of a mosaic or network intimately scattered over a larger woodland area, then the total woodland area, (if the Inspector is satisfied that it will be generally improved), should be assessed as the project area. Discrete areas not requiring treatment should be identified, mapped and excluded.



A. **B.** **C.**

Figure 11. The three stages of improving a neglected Woodland. 'A' shows a schematic of a crown map of a wood that has been neglected where the majority of the trees are malformed, over mature, in poor health or dead. 'B' shows how the wood looks after trees are removed. Note that tree removal has concentrated on creating large gaps to allow light to the forest floor and the newly planted trees. As a rule of thumb the gaps in the canopy should be as wide as 1.5 times the neighbouring tree heights. 'C' shows the wood after enrichment planting.