

## **Barle Valley Woodlands Vision Statement**

Woodland will cover virtually the entire site and it will be maintained through a combination of natural processes where possible and active intervention where not. A changing or dynamic patchwork of small temporary gaps will ensure that up to one fifth of the woodland canopy is open at any time. Meadows in the valley bottoms, existing and developing wood pasture habitats and sections of the ride network and stream channels will remain as permanently open habitat contributing to the 20% open canopy.

The trees and shrubs will be mainly locally native broadleaved species, such as sessile or hybrid oak, downy birch, ash, rowan, holly, elm, and hazel. Individual and discrete groups of beech, sycamore and conifer species will not become dominant in the canopy or the understory. The abundance of individual species and tree density will vary throughout the woodland. There may be dense stands of one species or mixtures of several species occupying a given area at any one time.

The woodland will contain trees and shrubs of all ages and sizes, as mixtures or in single aged groups. Plentiful tree seedlings throughout the site will develop into saplings in the gaps and temporary open space. There will be abundant dead and dying trees with holes and hollows, rot columns, torn off limbs and rotten branches, while some will be partially or completely hollow. This will provide a variety of habitats for dead wood-dependent species of moss, liverwort and fungi, and for specialised invertebrates that depend upon dead wood at some stage of their lifecycle.

Periodic light grazing by deer and sheep will take place throughout the site. However, grazing will not inhibit long term tree regeneration.

The field and ground layers will be a patchwork of the characteristic vegetation communities developed in response to local soil conditions. These will include areas dominated by heather, or bilberry, or a mixture of the two, patches of woodrush, stands of ferns, bramble and honeysuckle on the richer soils with drifts of bluebells locally. The field layer will be generally fairly rank and well developed, and this, together with the canopy, will help to maintain high humidity levels, which are crucial to survival of many mosses and liverworts. On rocky areas or areas of thin acidic soil, the ground layer will form an extensive, thick carpet of mosses and liverworts with few other plant species present.

Steep rock faces and boulder sides will be adorned with mosses, liverworts and filmy ferns. Patches of bare rock, where wefts of mosses or liverworts have peeled away naturally, will provide opportunities for re-colonisation. Similar processes will occur on living tree trunks and large branches, and on fallen or felled timber in the more humid areas.

The lichen flora will vary naturally depending upon the chemical properties of the rock and tree trunks within the woodland. Trees with lungwort, *Usnea* and associated species will be fairly common, especially on the well-lit woodland margins.

The varied structure of the woodland will improve the diversity of lower plant flora (i.e. mosses, liverworts, lichens and fungi), which will benefit from the range of habitats and niches provided. This varied structure will also provide the diversity of shelter and food to support populations of birds, including pied flycatchers, redstart and wood warblers, and mammals including several bat species, dormice and otter. Small and larger temporary gaps will provide opportunities for woodland invertebrates to thrive.