

Almondell Woodland Management – Autumn 2019



Path through Larch Wood

Background

After initial consultation a few years ago, a woodland management plan and grant application have now been approved by Scottish Forestry for the woods at Almondell. The purpose of the planned management is to ensure the ongoing health of the woods within the country park and to secure their long-term future for generations to come.

The work will inevitably cause some disruption in the park and will look messy for a while but once restored will breathe new life into the woods.

A reference copy of the full Urban Woodland Management Plan is available from the Reception at Almondell & Calderwood Country Park Visitor Centre.

The woods along the River Almond are semi-natural, with native woodland flowers, fungi, insects and animals as well as the trees. In the 1790s Almondell House was built for John Erskine and at around that time “policy” type woods were planted, introducing species such as beech, lime and horse chestnut trees and the large conifer specimens around the visitor centre. Exotic shrubs, including rhododendrons, were also extensively planted. In the late 1800s early 1900s more woodland was planted on each side of the South Drive.

Today the large mature trees planted to landscape the estate around Almondell House, and which now form such a feature of the country park, are over 200 years old and are in decline. Over the past decade several trees have had to be felled due to disease or storm damage. To ensure that we do not lose the woods due to gradual loss of trees with no proper replacement, pro-active management is required.

Planned Woodland Management

The planned woodland management works are shown on the attached map and are as follows:-

1) Larch Wood

The area where most change will be noticed is in the Larch Wood (the long, narrow wood running along the boundary of the country park and the new Calderwood Development). Here it is proposed to fell all the larch trees. Most of the broadleaves will remain, although many of the ash trees and some of the other, suppressed broadleaves will be thinned out. A belt of smaller trees will be left along the boundary and most of the more ornamental trees will be left along the South Drive to maintain some screening between the paths in the country park and the new residential area.

The felled areas will be replanted with native broadleaves on the slope above the river, to return this to a semi-natural condition. A mixture of broadleaves with some Scots pine, to provide all year round colour, adjacent to the South Drive. In addition, some more ornamental species will be added to those already present along the drive.

This woodland along the steep banks of the River Almond would originally have been covered with native broadleaved woodland of mainly ash and elm. Much of this was replaced with larch and sycamore, first about 100 years ago and at around this time new woodland was also planted each side of the South Drive. The larch trees grow much taller than broadleaves, such as oak and birch, and have now reached a height where they are vulnerable to storm damage, on this exposed ridge top. Groups of trees have already blown down in strong gales.

The original plan had been to fell and replant the wood in sections but, over the past two years, there have been a couple of outbreaks of a fungal disease, *Phytophthora ramorum*, which kills larch, not far away in Livingston. It is now felt that the pragmatic decision is to fell all the larch on the ridge above the River Almond and to the west of the South Drive in one operation. There is a significant number of other broadleaves, such as beech and sycamore, scattered through the woods and these will be left.



Larch to be felled retaining most of the broadleaves

2) Forestry Operations

There will be disruption in the park while work is underway and paths will need to be closed or diverted for a short time to keep visitors safe. More information will be posted nearer the time.



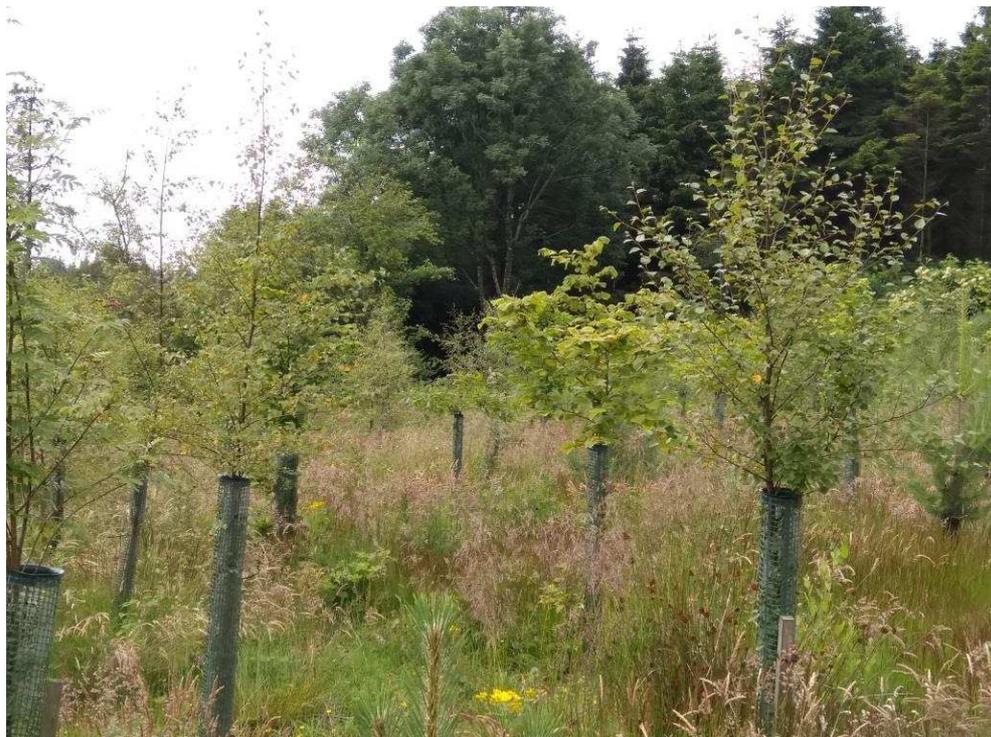
Please follow all signage and do not enter the work area while tree felling is underway.



Things will look messy during the work



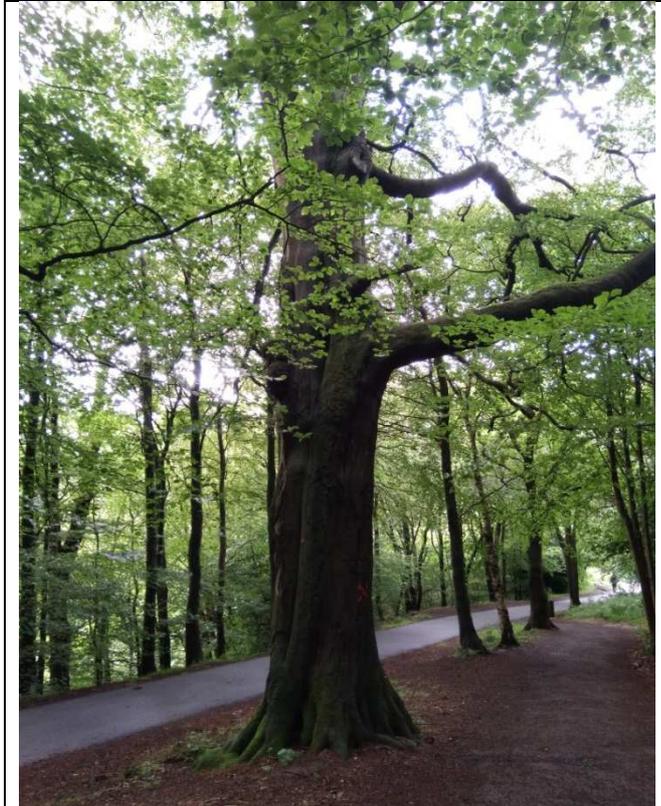
But it will be restored and replanted



The trees in the photo were planted 3 years ago

3) Mixed broadleaved woods either side of the North Drive

The large mature beech trees and other species will be retained wherever possible. They will be inspected for disease and damage and only if they are likely to fail will any be felled. The smaller trees will be thinned to favour those which have the potential to form the large specimens of the future.



Large Beech tree next to North Drive is infected with Honey fungus which causes the tree to rot

4) Mature Beech on Steep bank above Canal Feeder

A number of large beech trees have already been windblown or damaged in recent years and most of them are showing signs of decline. The aim is to retain as many “veteran” trees within the park, where this is safe to do so, but large trees being uprooted on this steep bank is causing erosion and blocks the canal feeder.

It is planned to fell a few of the poorest trees to open up clearings large enough for new trees to be planted without being overshadowed.

5) Other Woods



Semi-mature sycamore woodland

Other woods around the park are to be thinned ie some trees will be removed to allow the best ones more room to grow.

6) Rhododendrons

As with many designed landscapes, parts of the woodland at Almondell have been under-planted with rhododendrons. *Rhododendron ponticum* (the purple flowered one) is highly invasive and prevents other more natural woodland vegetation from surviving under its shade. The areas of this type of rhododendron are to be cleared to allow natural ground vegetation to establish and to create gaps where new young trees and shrubs can be planted



Dense *Rhododendron ponticum* shading out natural vegetation



Species rhododendrons

The species rhododendrons tend to be less invasive and will be kept. Every 5-10 years a few of these bushes could be cut back and then allowed to re-grow and a few new bushes planted would ensure the collection continues in the long term.

7) Chalara or Ash Dieback Disease

This disease is affecting ash trees throughout the country. Sadly it is expected that only about 5% of the ash tree population will be resistant to it and at present there is no proven treatment. So this will drastically alter landscapes where ash is a major species, in a similar way to Dutch elm disease in the 1960s and 70s. Plant scientists are working hard to find resistant trees and the hope is that, in the longer term, young trees will be able to be bred from these.

More information can be found on https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/tree-diseases-and-pests/key-threats/ash-dieback/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIu8O0u4OK4wIV7r3tCh2WxgqWEAAYASAAEgInMPD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds



Ash tree opposite visitor centre severely affected by Ash dieback

Many of the mature ash trees at Almondell are now suffering badly from this disease, as can be seen opposite the visitor centre, and it is expected that others will become infected and die over the next few years. It is felt that the pragmatic approach is to remove most of the ash trees as part of the thinning of the mixed woodland areas within the park while we have machines in doing the work, rather than having to come in and remove each tree individually as they become more badly diseased.

Some ash trees, well away from paths, will be left and they can form important deadwood habitat for fungi, invertebrates and other creatures.

8) Larch disease – *Phytophthora ramorum*

Phytophthora ramorum is a fungal disease which is spread by droplets of water with spores of the fungus and so can easily be spread from one wood to another on muddy boots or cycle tyres. The spread can be reduced if people take care to clean their boots and bike tyres especially if they have been in an infected area. At the moment this disease is mainly affecting the wetter west of the country however there have been 2 outbreaks in Livingston over the past couple of years and the Council has been required to fell all the larch trees within a buffer zone of the affected tree under a Statutory Plant Health Notice issued by Scottish Forestry to help prevent the spread of the disease. The movement of the felled timber is also controlled.

Further information can be found on <https://forestry.gov.scot/sustainable-forestry/tree-health/phytophthora-ramorum>

9) Further Information

For further information contact:-

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