



Chris Lewis

Industry Safety Accord (FISA) website has safety guides covering forestry activities, so there's no excuse for unsafe practice. Agricultural and local colleges provide woodland management and chainsaw training, as do many independent teachers and small contracting firms. Look for recommendations via social media or owners' websites. Do you plan to add value to your timber by making products to sell or through non-timber activities like forest schools, mushroom growing, hunting? What are the pros and cons and what is the market?

Make a Management Plan.

How you look after your wood is entirely up to you. Subject to gaining the correct permissions, you have the freedom to do whatever you want. Be mindful that the wood will be there long after you've gone, and your decisions will have an effect on the future. As a forester and an advocate for Britain's woodlands, my opinion is that woodlands should be managed and that growing trees should be at the heart of any management plan. Nearly half of the UK's 13% woodland cover is not in active management, which means more than 6% of our country's limited land is not used to capture carbon, provide rural jobs, contribute to the economy, have resilience against disease and climate change, and shelter diverse wildlife.

But it really is up to you. What do you want from your wood? Enjoyment? Income? How do you want the wood to look in 5, 10, 20 and 50 years? What improvements would you make to the woodland's structure and infrastructure to achieve your aims? Your objectives may include managing rides and glades for butterflies and flowers, improving access or growing high quality timber. Get advice and other views on your plan and ambitions. If you apply for felling permission from the Forestry Commission, they will probably insist on a visit, a perfect opportunity to mine the agent for information. Remember that you can always change your mind about how to manage your wood, but it is important to work toward a set of objectives.

If you choose to actively manage your woodland, start with the end goal and work backwards to where you are now. You will need all the information you gleaned



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previously to get this right. You have taken a snapshot of the volume and quality of timber in the wood, you have noted down the wildlife considerations, where the previous access points are, you have watched the woodland change through the seasons, where the wet and dry places are, you've found out what has worked or failed locally, you have seen other woodlands at work and met with others doing similar work. There are grants available to help you create a management plan for your woods (see the Forestry Commission website). The Sylva Foundation's myForest website has excellent free resources to help assess, record and draw up a management plan for your woodland. If you decide to harvest trees, you need a good idea of the volume you wish to remove. Can you handle this or is it a job for a professional? (See the sidebar.) Be honest about your capabilities, especially if you are managing the wood on a part-time basis.

Once you have a management plan, it's time to think about the practicalities of bringing this to life. Operational planning will save time and money in the long run. It's better to find the glitches in your plan before you begin!

You may discover that there are costs involved in woodland ownership. You will have identified any need for pest control measures in your survey. Do you need to pay for squirrel control or will someone be paying you to stalk deer? Do you have the liability of roadside trees? If you are bringing in outside parties for activities in your wood, do you need to pay to have any potentially dangerous trees made safe? Insurance? Will you have to buy any tools or hire in labour? Are the rides and access points in need of repair (they probably will be if you choose to harvest timber)? Armed with the cost implications of different projects, you can start to make informed decisions about your woodland management.

I am hoping you now realise why taking a year out before commencing work is a good idea. In fact, the longer you are able to observe, to learn, to plan and to enjoy your exciting new venture, the better it will be in the long term. With knowledge you can make the dream a reality.



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Harvesting Timber and Hiring Professionals

If your woodland is of sufficient size – or if you are able to join forces with neighbouring woodland owners – you may decide to harvest timber from your land. And that brings a host of new considerations.

Applying for felling permission from the Forestry Commission is only the beginning. Because of your previous work taking an inventory, you should now have a good idea of the species, quality and volume growing within the woodland and can make an educated guess about the value of the standing trees. A quick call to a local firewood merchant, sawmill or similar will tell you the prices they will pay. Then calculate backwards and take into consideration harvesting costs, haulage, and any costs to improve access.

The timber will need to be stacked where it can be collected for transport, such as a loading bay accessible by lorry. Is there a clear set of extraction routes (tracks and rides) through the wood to limit compaction and damage to the soil and other trees? What machinery, if any, is needed to harvest the trees? Even if your wood is small, it is still important to have a plan.

You might want to employ the services of a horse logger. Horse loggers are best used by owners wishing to extract trees a short distance over inaccessible terrain, and can work well as a link in the chain with other forms of extraction.

There is a lot of professional help available for woodland owners who require it. Be sure to ask for recommendations from owners' groups or fellow owners before you hire in services.

Forestry agents and management companies manage all aspects of woodlands generally. They will know how to access appropriate grants and have contacts with timber buyers and contractors. They can be involved as little as coming for a visit to give you advice or taking over the full management of your forest, arranging the work and marketing your timber. Just be aware that forestry is full of 'middlemen' and they all make a living from taking a cut of the timber pie.

Contractors will carry out the practical work in your woods, and will often be able to give you advice about the work

Toby Allen and his wife **Aly May** are the founder/owners of Say It With Wood, sustainably offering chestnut fencing, garden furniture and structures, forestry services and firewood supply, among many other services. www.sayitwithwood.co.uk



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involved. Most carry out work in a professional manner, though poor communication or a mismatch of contractor to job can be a source of frustration. For example, if you sell your trees to the highest bidder they will want to bring the timber out for the lowest cost possible. Clearly discuss how you want the site left before work begins so the job can be priced accordingly.

Craftspeople or smallscale operators may carry out work in exchange for timber for their businesses. Having someone on site making products has many benefits. They can provide security and manage the wood in a sympathetic way, though they are unlikely to have the equipment or experience to handle large volume extraction or be economic in a commercial harvest.

Most contractors will work cooperatively with others so the customer can get the right people with the right kit for the job. A machine of the appropriate size for the task can be in and out swiftly, leaving your wood to recover sooner than something too small for the job. A pre-work contract makes your goals clear to people working in your wood so they can tailor the job to suit what you are hoping to achieve.

Be aware that under the guidelines set out by the Forest Industry Safety Accord you have a duty as a landowner towards anyone carrying out works in your wood. Their website will give you details of this and other safety information.

Useful websites:

Forestry Commission: www.forestry.gov.uk
 Sylva Foundation: www.sylva.org.uk/myforest
 SWOG: www.swog.org.uk
 Woodlands.co.uk
 Small Woods Association: www.smallwoods.org.uk
 RFS: www.rfs.org.uk
 Arb Association www.trees.org.uk (to search for contactors)
 National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: www.landscapesforlife.org.uk
 FISA: www.ukfisa.com