



# **TIMBERLAND FORESTRY**

## **Forestry Consultancy and Management**

*Dermot Houlihan B.Agr.Sc. (Forestry) MSIF*

27 Bushypark Lawn, Circular Road, Galway

Phone: +353 (0)86-2687476

www.timber-land.com e-mail: [dermot@timber-land.com](mailto:dermot@timber-land.com)

### Report

## Merlin Woods – Proposed Clearfelling

8<sup>th</sup> September 2026

I visited this site 7<sup>th</sup> September 2026, accompanied by Caroline Stanley, Friends of Merlin Woods. We walked the paths and into the woods initially focusing on the area of 3.5 covered by the Beith Tree Consultancy Report. I was very surprised to see that there is so little damage overall, with over 80% of the areas untouched by the storm and certainly not presenting any danger, the damage is confined to a relatively small area. The same conclusion applies to all of the areas of Norway spruce in Merlin Woods overall.

There are two recent reports on this area:

The first is by Beith Tree Consultancy, July 2026, General Condition Tree Survey of Norway spruce prepared for Galway City Council. This study was confined to an area of 3.5 ha.

The Second was by North -West Ecology Ltd, August 2026, for Forestry Services Ltd. Ecological Assessment and Constraints Report (Area c. 35 Ha).

1. A visual assessment was carried out of the 3.5 ha covered by the Beith Tree Consultancy report. There are patches of windblow with trees lying on the ground with others leaning, these patches clearly need attention. However my own conclusion is that at least 80% of the trees remain standing, are not in any particular danger of windblow and that the vast majority of them can safely be left standing.
2. The greatest risk for further windblow following the storm damage was in the following winter (now past), windblow is frequently associated with poor drainage (not the case here). Windblow is most commonly associated with tall closely spaced trees with a narrow tree diameter in relation to tree height (again not the case here).

3. This is an area of mature Norway spruce, originally planted as a commercial crop by the Forest and Wildlife Service in the 1960's. At that time land that wasn't considered to be good enough for farming was given over for afforestation by the State to provide employment and timber for the future. The trees are healthy and have grown well, if this was to be treated as a commercial forestry, it would likely have been felled years ago as it is a valuable crop. Luckily a higher value was appreciated, and it was given over to the City/County as amenity woodland.
4. The trees would have been originally planted at close spacing, c. 4,000 trees per hectare, but because of thinning and trees being shaded out the current stocking is more like 800 trees per hectare. The significance of the trees being more widely spaced is stability.
5. Because the trees are mature there is a substantial cover of ground flora, this includes Natural Regeneration of Ash, Hazel and Oak.
6. The decision to clearfell all of the areas of Norway spruce trees in Merlin Woods was already made prior to July 2026 and the Beith Tree Consultancy Report.
7. The proposed further opening of the area with the extensive clearfelling of c. 17 hectares of trees which are mostly still standing would increase the risk of windblow for anything left, but one must question the need for any such clearfelling of standing trees in the first place.
8. The areas of Norway Spruce are being referred to as a commercial crop in reports, however taking that the focus should be on Ecological and Amenity values. There is no doubt that the standing timber is valuable (with a standing commercial value of €25,000 per hectare). There is no doubt that windblown timber is expensive to clear and reduced in value, but the standing trees must not be sacrificed unnecessarily to finance this.
9. While Norway spruce is a Non-Native species and not so good for Biodiversity as Oak for example. As mature trees the retention of these Norway spruce trees in the

short term (10 – 20 -30 years), is vital to conserve the current woodland setting, allowing Natural Regeneration to develop sheltered by these trees.

10. One option for this woodland is active management allowing for the conversion to Continuous Cover Forestry, focusing on converting the whole area to semi Native Woodland. The sale of selected mature trees would produce a significant revenue stream, but decisions must only be made on the basis of what is good for the Woodland and what the public value about this area.
11. Taking into consideration that there is a limited budget for work on these woods, also that the priorities are Ecology and Safety, there is no real need to clear all of the areas where the trees are on the ground and not blocking pathways. Leaving these areas largely untouched, the fallen trees will decompose adding to the soil, while Natural Regeneration (already evident), in time, could transform these areas well on their way to semi-Natural Woodland within 5-10 years.
12. The more significant areas of blown trees visible from aerial photographs correspond to the to the areas classifies as WS5 (Recently Felled/ Wind Damaged Forest) on the Habitat Map (Page 22) of the August 2026 Ecological Assessment and Constraints Report.
13. This area even in its current is a prime area for funding under the Forest Service Neighbour Wood Scheme, this is a funding program that helps public and private landowners turn local forests and woodlands into safe, accessible recreational spaces for communities.



Dermot Houlihan

08-09-2026