



■ David Armstrong, project officer with the group seeking to open up the wonderful wooded valley at Woodchester Park to local people.

Trust reveals plans for the mystery wood

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THE National Trust has finally unveiled its plans for the future of a mysterious, hidden wooded valley near Stroud.

Woodchester Park has remained largely untouched by civilisation for centuries and contains just two small buildings.

Plans to open the wood to the public have already brought protests from some quarters over fears that hordes of visitors will ruin the unspoilt magic of the area.

Historical

But the Trust, which bought the 500-acre Woodchester Park in April for around £500,000, has now decided the valley will remain closed to the public for at least another two years.

For the next 12 months it will undertake a detailed historical landscape survey to discover what is

by Andy Read

left of the original landscaped park while consulting with local residents and organisations.

The Trust has already bought an area of land outside the valley for car parking.

However no plans for new access or footpaths will be put forward until an open meeting sometime next year.

The body will then draw up a management plan for the wood before spending a further year creating new paths, improving the wildlife habitat, felling timber and creating a new access.

"There are no plans to turn the valley into a theme park and apart from access there will be no other facilities," said project officer David Armstrong.

"We may return some areas to open pasture but we do want to retain its

atmosphere of a unique wooded valley."

"It will be a very slow process," he added. "I don't think anyone will notice any dramatic changes."

The steep-sided wooded valley was once part of a 2,000 acre estate belonging to Woodchester Park Mansion, a mysterious Gothic masterpiece currently being restored by a special trust.

Interest

The area is designated a site of special scientific interest for its wildlife which includes Britain's largest concentration of badgers and the rare horseshoe bat.

"There will be plenty of time to experience the magic of Woodchester Park in the future but we must ensure that we can protect it first," said Trust spokeswoman Alison Preddle.