



Damage and misuse



Urban Woodland Management series

This guide is one of a series produced by the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, as a resource for managers creating or managing urban woods. These *Urban Woodland Management Guides* are based on the Trust's many years' experience of managing such sites across the UK and have been written by experienced urban woodland site managers.

From a management perspective, 'urban' woods are probably best defined as those that suffer a high level of public use and misuse. These pressures are often no different to those in any other wood with public access. However the key difference between urban sites and those in a more rural situation is both the sheer scale of pressure and public's expectations of site management.

Woods can be used not only for informal recreation but also as children's playgrounds and through routes to shops, work or school. Due to their proximity to housing, minor encroachments, garden dumping, vandalism and complaints about weeds can become commonplace. This can result in high workloads and loss of motivation for site managers and high management costs merely to maintain the *status quo*. These guides outline strategies that the Woodland Trust has implemented to deal with such problems with both proactive and reactive approaches.

The Trust welcomes feedback on these guides, including different tactics you or your organisation may have tried, so that the contents remain as relevant and up to date as possible. Please e-mail the Trust at:

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Copies of this guide and others in the series can be downloaded from the Trust's website: **www.woodland-trust.org.uk**

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Introduction

The areas of damage and misuse covered are as follows:

- Vandalism both premeditated and opportunistic – from single trees to whole plantations, from one sign to all fixtures within a wood
- Fire damage
- Litter and fly-tipping (dealt with in *Urban Woodland Management Guide 2: Litter and fly-tipping*)
- Dumping of cars and motorbikes
- Use of unauthorised vehicles (motorbikes and cars)
- Antisocial behaviour (including lager parties/drug abuse)
- Activities contravening the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (NI Wildlife and Countryside Order 1985) and subsequent wildlife conservation Acts (including damage to badger setts and other protected species, eg birds, bats, great-crested newts and bluebells)
- Collection and over-exploitation of the woodland resource, such as fungi and fire wood
- Uncontrolled dogs and dog fouling
- Unmanaged public access, such as downhill cycling and horse riding
- Damage to Scheduled Ancient Monuments or other archaeological features
- Impact of development

This is not a complete list of potentially damaging activities found in urban woodland, however many of the mitigation principles overlap and have wider relevance than to just one isolated issue. Successful control mechanisms often rely on strong local partnerships that can take time to cement.

Ideas on possible methods of disseminating information, standard letters, entrance furniture specifications, advice on effective methods of communicating with local communities and the police, are also given.

Cause of damage or misuse

1. Vandalism



◁ Persistent damage to entrances and fences is usually premeditated vandalism.

Damage caused by vandalism can range from graffiti on entrance signs to the complete destruction of gates, fences, seats and even the trees themselves. The act of vandalism can be opportunistic (unplanned) or premeditated (planned), and it is important to try and establish which type is occurring on the site.

Opportunistic vandalism is likely to be the main type of damage caused by children and young teenagers, either through boredom, bravado or activities such as building camps. Such damage will probably be erratic in nature, waxing and waning as the youths grow up, move away or simply lose interest in the wood. If parts of the wood are places where young people 'hang out' levels of damage can be persistently high, especially cosmetic vandalism such as graffiti, nails in trees or tree houses. If the woodland also provides a through route, either by a designated public footpath or a well used desire line, damage to trees and site furniture is likely to be an ongoing problem. In instances like this you may need to reassess the need for fixtures that are persistently damaged.

Premeditated vandalism can often result in persistent damage to the same feature, particularly entrances and fences, and can be a serious drain on resources. It is frequently caused by people being resentful about the loss of a perceived right of access or a previous use of the site. Because it is premeditated, the level of damage can often be more serious, with the perpetrators using tools to carry out the abuse. In some cases theft is the motive (especially field gates), in others even a desire to get better television reception! Premeditated vandalism can also be nothing more than a wilful act of destruction focused on a prominent object, such as a seat, sculpture or planted area that is readily noticeable or new in its surroundings. It can often be a reaction to change in the landscape; in particular where people feel as though change has been imposed without discussion or they feel powerless to resolve an ongoing grievance.

It is fundamental to try to establish the type of vandalism as this often dictates what can and cannot be done in a particular area.

Tackling the problem

- Before ordering any repair work, particularly to entrances and boundary fences, check that the maintenance obligation rests with your organisation and not a neighbouring landowner, local council or highways department.
- Before erecting any entrances or fences consider whether they are strictly necessary. If they are required, look at their function and check that the specification is appropriate. Try to assess the expected level and type of vandalism that may occur. If in the past damage has been high, consider using metal fixtures and fittings rather than wood. The initial cost may be higher, but the extended life, compared to wood, may make it cost effective in the long-term. Although metal barriers may be less attractive than wood, they are not necessarily out of keeping in an urban environment. Branding fixtures such as gates makes their resale more difficult and increases the chances of recovery.
- Involve schools and the local community in the management of a wood where possible, this gives people a sense of ownership and often reduces the level of vandalism.
- When vandalism occurs, carry out repairs as soon as possible. A neglected wood tends to attract vandalism and other forms of misuse.
- A good system of footpaths and access points encourages people to use the wood and helps maintain a regular presence, which discourages vandalism especially by children.
- Make greater use of natural barriers, such as thorny hedges, scrub thickets and brambles, in woods that suffer from vandalism. Fences may have to be erected in the short-term but, once established, natural barriers are more effective, less prone to vandalism and of greater value to wildlife.
- Protecting nursery stock with tree shelters on urban sites inevitably leads to vandalism, theft and repeated replacement costs. Avoid their use wherever possible and consider less conspicuous spiral guards for protection from rabbits and livestock. Woodland managers should, where feasible, use natural regeneration for restocking or gapping-up. This method, unlike planted stock, does not attract unwanted attention; also when successful it can be very dense and, even if some seedlings are damaged, your objectives are usually achieved. Where natural regeneration is impossible, try planting dense groups of whips to imitate nature.
- The general rule when working in urban woods is 'keep it low key'. Use structures and working methods that do not attract attention. Make use of natural features, such as allowing brambles to spread in an area to restrict access and protect new plantings.

2. Fires



◁ Fires blight the appearance of a wood and can lead to further damage such as fly-tipping.

Like other forms of malicious damage, fires pose their own particular problems. Not the least of these is the potential hazard not only to the woodland itself but also to the safety of people in and around the wood and to adjoining properties.

Fires can result by accident – dropped cigarettes and matches, neglected camp fires, etc – particularly in heavily used woods. Most however are started on purpose, usually by children or teenagers and often in more than one place in the wood. It is also common to find regular fire sites linked to bonfire celebrations or close to a sheltered area where people meet.

At its worst, a fire can result in destruction of the wood, surrounding properties and even loss of life. In most cases the damage is localised, ground vegetation is burnt off and the lower part of mature tree trunks blacken. Sometimes the actual tree damage is superficial and the majority will continue to grow, however persistent fire attacks can lead to instability and eventual death of fine veteran trees and the destruction of ground flora (including any seed bank within the soil).

The site manager's main problem is often the negative response people have to the visual appearance of a wood after a fire. This may last only a few months until new vegetation grows but, if the vandalism is persistent, it can blight the appearance of the wood and create a spiral of decline leading to fly-tipping and other damage.

On a site management level invasive species, particularly brambles and bracken, can rapidly colonise fire-damaged areas and suppress the growth of other more valuable plants. The extent of this problem largely depends on soil type and conditions and the surrounding stand type. Limited fire can help the renewal process allowing birch and other robust colonisers to compete for newly created gaps.

Fires in hollow trees can destroy valuable conservation habitats, such as bird nest-sites and bat roosts, and result in the reduction of a wood's biodiversity.

The materials used to start fires, such as petrol, oils and aerosols, must not be forgotten. These chemicals can cause site contamination (particularly near watercourses) and possible health hazards to other users of the wood.

Tackling the problem

- Compile and maintain a fire plan. This should include a plan of action in the event of a fire being reported. Information should include:
 - Phone and fax numbers of local fire stations
 - Location of the wood and access points with grid references (especially vehicular access)
 - Water sources on or near the site
 - Terrain details and any hazards on site
 - Site manager's name and phone number
 - Keep these details summarised on an A4 sheet of paper that can be faxed (together with site location map) to the emergency services if required. Contact your local fire brigade to find out how they prefer to operate and the information they require. Keep this in your plan of action.
- Note potential fire hazards – litter, piles of garden waste – within the wood. The natural composition of the woodland can also present a potential fire hazard. Species such as bracken, bramble, gorse and grasses when dry can be set alight easily, while conifers, especially pine, are more flammable than broadleaves. If the former occur near housing or other vulnerable areas, they may need to be cleared or fire breaks created. Seek specialist advice from local fire prevention officers before taking any drastic action.
- February to May, when the previous year's dry grass and bracken is still present, is a high-risk period. Be particularly observant during school holidays when young people are likely to be in the woods. Quickly repair any fire sites that do occur to reduce the chance of a behaviour pattern being established.
- Remove brash and other susceptible material from a site if the wood is liable to arson. Chip the waste, if this is not practical, or at least scatter the brash evenly across the site rather than creating piles. Where appropriate, whole tree harvesting may be feasible.
- Leave deadwood standing if it is not a safety hazard. Not only does this have a greater conservation value, it is less of a fire hazard than lying on the ground.

- Deadwood or any other felled timber left in the wood should be in large pieces that cannot easily be moved or set fire to. In some situations urban woodland managers have wired large pieces of deadwood together with steel cables and eyes to prevent them from being moved.
- Ensure that the fire brigade is informed whenever material needs to be burnt on site. Many urban sites are in smoke-free areas, so permission may be needed from the local authority. Try to avoid lighting fires on the ground, use a container such as a metal drum or place a sheet of metal on the ground. If this is impossible, conceal any evidence of the fire by scattering the ashes and raking material over the burnt area. Under no circumstances should a fire be left unattended; when leaving the site all fires must be completely extinguished. Before giving permission to contractors, ensure current Health and Safety guidelines are met, such as no fires within 30 metres of a road. Woodland managers should try to establish where fires may be appropriate and where they are not.

3. Litter and fly-tipping

This serious and ubiquitous problem in urban woods is dealt with comprehensively in *Urban Woodland Management Guide 2: Litter and fly-tipping*.

4. Dumping of cars and motorbikes



△ Arrangements can usually be made with the relevant local authority to remove burnt out, dumped vehicles from private land.

In recent years the cost of disposing of vehicles has risen significantly leading to an increase in the number of abandoned cars throughout the UK. As well as abandoned cars, woodland often provides a quiet place where thieves can dismantle cars. Stolen cars used for robberies or joyriding are often set on fire in woods to remove any incriminating evidence.

Tackling the problem

- On public land it is the duty of the police and local authority, once notified, to place a seven-day notice on an abandoned vehicle. As soon as this time has expired, it can be legally removed and disposed of. On private land the Woodland Trust has usually come to arrangements with the relevant local authority to remove vehicles if brought to the roadside – a small charge is sometimes levied.

5. Use of unauthorised vehicles

Unauthorised access by motorbikes (along with horses and bicycles) to urban sites is a persistent problem for many site managers. The damage caused is often two-fold. Firstly, entrances and boundary fences are damaged in order to gain access. Secondly, once in the wood, the surfaces of tracks and paths suffer erosion and water can collect in the ruts and potholes turning to mud. Off tracks and paths motorbikes can cause severe erosion on banks and, in other parts of the wood, loss of regeneration and damage to ground flora.

Noise pollution caused by motorbikes destroys the peace and tranquillity of a wood for others and can frighten wildlife leading to loss of biodiversity.

The greatest concern with motorbikes within woodland is, however, the threat they represent to the safety of other woodland users. Although engine noise may act as a warning, the enclosed conditions can make it difficult to ascertain from which direction the bike is coming. Coupled with the fact that vision is often limited in a wood, the potential for serious accidents is high.

Tackling the problem

- Put up 'No motorbikes' signs. Although these are likely to be ignored and vandalised, it stops motorcyclists pleading ignorance if stopped and challenged. It also encourages the police to take action.
- Install entrance barriers specifically designed to restrict motorbike access, if they are getting into the wood via existing entrances. Where possible try using designs approved by other bodies, such as the British Horse Society's motorbike barrier. Existing entrances may be made more secure by adding backing posts or reducing their width, thus making it harder for bikes to gain access. However, these alterations should not restrict access for disabled people or those with pushchairs.
- Breaching of existing boundaries is more difficult to prevent. If there is no fence or other barrier where the trouble is occurring, consider erecting

one. If fences are being broken or cut to gain access, then other defences should be considered such as thorny brash or other material found on site (be careful not to create a fire hazard) or a trench (remember the safety of other woodland users). Another option, frequently used by farmers, is to block any breach with large boulders or felled tree trunks. Rocks cannot be set alight and, if large enough, are unlikely to be moved, however, transporting them to the site can be a problem.

- Greater use of natural barriers, created using quick-growing, thorny species, may provide a longer-term solution. This will not address the immediate problem, and it may be difficult to establish shrubs if the site is being damaged constantly by motorbikes. Forward planning is the key – establishing suitable barriers where such problems are likely to occur.
- Where it is impossible to stop motorbikes entering a wood, try to reduce the danger they present to other users. Staggered barriers across paths and tracks, particularly along straight stretches will slow down the bikes. These could be big blocks of stone or large tree trunks, which allow walkers and wheelchair-users to pass but forcing bikers to slow down or dismount. Remember, however, that legitimate vehicular access may be needed for management purposes and such barriers must be removable.
- Contact the police if there is a persistent motorbike problem. Also encourage local people, who contact you with their complaints, to do likewise. The police are much more likely to take action on an issue if a large number of calls have been logged. Some local constabularies use officers on trail bikes to combat motorbike problems. Different constabularies have different policies; meet with your local officers to discuss their approach to these matters.
- Ask your local contacts or volunteer wardens to record sightings and provide as much detail as possible. Many motorbikes are stolen, some may be distinctly marked and riders may be known to locals. The importance of community involvement cannot be over emphasised.

6. Antisocial behaviour

Even with the new legislation covering antisocial behaviour, such as Antisocial Behaviour Orders, this continues to be a problem. Woods are often seen as places to carry out antisocial (and sometimes illegal) activities, as they are often not over looked and can provide a feeling of isolation even within a busy urban environment.

Some activities not only damage the fabric of a wood but also, more importantly, perpetuate a sense of danger even in daylight hours. Drug-taking, lager parties and overnight camping with associated late-night, threatening behaviour to neighbours and passers-by can make woods extremely unpleasant places to visit and to live near. Even when young people are simply 'hanging out' in large groups and doing nothing illegal or antisocial, lone visitors can feel vulnerable and threatened, especially if there has been a history of trouble in the area.

Tackling the problem

- Some local authorities and police forces operate special youth teams whose sole aim is to discourage gatherings of adolescents. This often only moves the problem elsewhere but can leave certain locations undisturbed for some months; the activity may well begin again later. Where illegal acts are being committed, it is vital that the neighbourhood network of visitors to the wood has a direct line to the local police. This may mean direct contact numbers of community beat officers or youth offending teams. If the response is poor and the problems have been recorded and well-documented the neighbourhood group should seek the support of their elected representative. Local youth organisations could also be involved and projects developed offering alternative activities for young people.
- Make favourite gathering spots for drinking or antisocial behaviour less attractive by clearing trees and shrubbery so the area is more visible from nearby paths or houses, or by removing a bench where young people may tend to gather.
- Establish a more regular presence on the site with a local authority ranger if funds permit or, in exceptional circumstances, a private security company.

7. Contravention of wildlife conservation legislation

There are a number of environmental Acts of Parliament, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, aimed at protecting threatened species and habitats, but these are routinely breached in some urban woods. Badger-digging, while not confined to the urban fringe, appears to be more common here. Egg-collecting or 'bird-nesting' poses a significant threat to urban bird populations. Damage to bluebell sites can be a problem both in terms of commercial exploitation and through trampling and severe erosion. Pollution of watercourses is also more common in the urban context.

Tackling the problem

- Strong networks of local contacts or volunteer wardens can have an impact on these types of illegal activities as the woods are visited regularly and anything untoward can be reported and acted on quickly and effectively. If

badger setts are being damaged links should be established between the local badger group and the owners of the wood. These groups, which are affiliated to the National Federation of Badger Groups, are experienced in dealing with badger persecution and have a wide network of volunteers. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is the best organisation to deal with offences relating to birds, while the RSPCA (SSPCA in Scotland and USPCA in Northern Ireland) deal with other wildlife.

- Statutory agencies, such as the Environment Agency, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland, can also be contacted directly in the event of pollution incidents. Local contacts and wardens need to have direct dial numbers at their fingertips; these should be periodically reviewed and updated.
- Many police services have wildlife liaison officers who deal with threats to protected species.

8. Collection and over-exploitation of woodland resources

Woodland fungi in urban and urban-fringe woods can be over-collected simply due to the number of people within walking distance of a site and the proximity of local markets. Even the gathering of firewood can be a problem where insufficient deadwood is left on the woodland floor, as this is one of the single most significant ways of conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of urban sites.

Tackling the problem

- The over-collection of woodland resources is usually caused by lack of knowledge and understanding, but it can be simply for commercial gain. Mitigation strategies need to reflect these differences. Where fungi is being harvested for personal use or valuable deadwood habitats removed for firewood, it may be effective to highlight the conservation problems in a news release, poster or local newsletter. If there is clear evidence of commercial exploitation, a code of practice needs to be produced targeted at those involved. English Nature has produced a useful booklet, *The Conservation of Wild Mushrooms and The Wild Mushroom Pickers Code of Conduct*, which focuses on sustainable management of edible fungi. A poster giving simple guidelines can be circulated to local restaurants and shops.

9. Poaching and uncontrolled angling

The market for coarse fish (particularly large carp) is lucrative. Over recent years the amount of commercial netting and theft from fisheries has increased. The Woodland Trust has had a number of ponds (leased to local angling clubs)

completely 'netted-out' in overnight raids. Those involved can be aggressive and sometimes violent. Night lines on elasticated bungees to catch carp for sale are left hidden in undergrowth. This can damage the fish and cause them unnecessary stress.

Small woodland ponds are often subject to intense angling pressure by those unwilling or unable to join local angling clubs. This often brings with it antisocial behaviour (see page 12), problems of litter (page 9), fire damage (page 7) and concerns for the well-being of the fish and other wildlife.

Ferreting, lamping and the use of birds of prey to catch rabbits is a problem in some urban-fringe woods. These activities can not only undermine efforts to conserve habitats and species, but also bring landowners into conflict with their neighbours and visitors.

Tackling the problem

- Where uncontrolled angling becomes a threat to wildlife and a major site management issue, the most cost-effective and long-lasting solution is to remove the fish from the pond or water body. This may not be possible in all situations. Local fisheries officers (from the Environment Agency and its equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland) will be best placed to advise you on the suitability of this measure. The Woodland Trust has found that the netting and/or electro-fishing (focusing primarily on the larger species such as carp, tench, pike and bream) can dramatically reduce angling pressure on a pond particularly if accompanied by prior publicity and posters. Local angling clubs are always on the look out for stock fish, and the statutory agencies are sometimes willing to act as 'agents' between pond-owners and clubs to ensure that netting and transportation is carried out safely and humanely. Reducing stocking densities and removing the more aggressive fish species



△ Removing fish may be the best way of reducing the pressure of unauthorised angling.

can have a positive impact on the pond ecology leading to better breeding conditions for amphibians, dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates.

- A formal arrangement for the angling activity is an option, if netting is out of the question. Many small local angling clubs are willing to lease ponds for a low rental. Care must be taken however to draw up a lease that safeguards the ecological balance of the pond. Issues such as stocking density and introduced species need careful consideration, as does the use of keepnets, barbless hooks, management of bankside/marginal vegetation and ground bait. The statutory agencies can offer advice to pond-owners considering leasing angling rights to local clubs and may also be able advise on the better-run organisations.
- The use of ferrets, night lamping (often with dogs) and falconry can only take place with the permission of the landowner. If these unauthorised activities regularly occur, evidence should be recorded, patterns of activity monitored and information passed to the police wildlife liaison officer. Where possible enlist the help of neighbours to record movements and vehicle sightings, as these activities tend to take place at weekends and evenings. Information posters can also help to make the site less appealing as there can be no ambiguity as to who owns the land and what activities are allowed.

10. Use of firearms

The use of firearms to control vermin or for game is something taken for granted in the wider countryside, but it becomes a major safety issue in urban woodland where large numbers of people visit the area. In this context 'firearms' can include shotguns, high-powered air rifles, crossbows and catapults. Uncontrolled use of weapons can pose a serious risk to public safety as well as threaten woodland bird and mammal populations.

Tackling the problem

- Firearms are sometimes used on woodland reserves for the control of animals such as deer, rabbits and grey squirrels. Strict codes of conduct, public liability insurance, suitable certification/qualifications, operational risk assessments and active recording of kills should be the minimum requirements for this practice to take place in a public place. Where firearms are being carried through woods along public rights of way to access legal shooting on neighbouring land, they must be unloaded and in their carrying cases.

Where there is evidence of firearms being discharged illegally on private or publicly owned land, it is a matter for the police. Under no circumstances should volunteers be encouraged to approach individuals carrying out this illegal activity. Local wardens should record evidence of illegal shooting. This should include

mapping where used cartridges were found (along with dates); recording vehicle registrations, make and colour; and descriptions of those involved (if seen). All this information should be passed to either the local community police officer or ideally to the police wildlife liaison officer (if there is one).

11. Dogs and dog fouling



< Free-roaming dogs can be a threat to public safety as well as the wildlife within the wood.

Many dog-owners see their local wood as a place to allow pets to relieve themselves after a day confined to the house. Dog fouling has become a serious concern to many woodland managers and visitors (particularly those with young children). Some local authorities are taking the matter equally seriously employing dog wardens, who are allowed to impose fines, and installing more waste bins or 'poop scoop' schemes.

Fouling, however, is not the only issue. Dogs that are allowed to roam free can be a threat to public safety and reduce the wildlife conservation value of a wood; they will seek out and worry deer and deter ground-nesting birds, such as mallard or skylark, from nesting.

Tackling the problem

- Where dog fouling has become a major local issue, seek the support of the local authority and elected representatives. Most have a dog warden who can offer advice and, in some cases, take legal action against persistent offenders. Often by highlighting the extent and implications of the problem local dog walkers can be persuaded to change their attitudes. One way to raise the profile of the issue is to place small flags next to dog faeces, at the entrance of the wood. Once people are aware of the sheer scale of the problem, they can be shocked into changing their stance, particularly if this is reinforced with information on the health hazard and improved facilities for disposal of dog waste near car parks. Some local authorities are more willing to impose fines than others; find out the local policy in your area.

- Create a separate ‘dog run’ or enclosure near to the car park or entrance to the wood, where dogs are allowed to foul.
- Dog bins may be installed particularly if the local authority can be persuaded to maintain them.
- Dog walkers also have a tendency to allow their dogs run freely as soon as they get to woodland. This is acceptable during certain times of the year, however, during spring and early summer this can be disastrous for ground-nesting birds and pregnant deer or fawns. If roaming dogs are disrupting the nesting and breeding of wildlife, efforts should be made to control them. This may mean keeping dogs out of part or the whole of a wood for a specified period. Alternatively it may mean drawing up a code of practice for dog walkers that can be promoted by local volunteer wardens (ideally those who also walk their dogs in the wood). Temporary posters can be used to outline the code of practice, as well as fliers distributed by volunteers.

12. Unmanaged public access



< The illicit building of steep ramps and ditches for mountain-bike courses can jeopardise public safety.

In some woods uncontrolled and unmanaged public access can lead to severe erosion, risk to public safety, conflict between users and reduction in the quality of the woodland.

A recent phenomenon has been the increase in the number of downhill, mountain-bike courses being built in woodland settings. This involves the construction of steep ramps and ditches often in areas with important ground flora or even on badger setts. There is not only the potential danger to those involved in racing to consider but also the public’s safety while the tracks are in use and even when not.

Organised cross-country or orienteering events can also have an impact on the woodland habitat if routes are poorly chosen or the events happen at sensitive times of the year. Horse riding and cycling can be accommodated in many woods but these activities are not welcome if the routes are dangerous or woodland paths become eroded and damaged. Unauthorised and uncontrolled access of this kind can lead to conflict between walkers and riders.

Tackling the problem

- Where possible try to work closely with umbrella organisations that speak for the reasonable majority. With horse riding it may be the British Horse Society, local riding club or owners of the riding establishment; orienteering has many well-organised local clubs. These groups have their own codes of practice and may be willing to sign joint accords or enter into agreements at particular sites.
- The increased use of woodland for downhill mountain biking is a less regulated and controlled sport. Part of its attraction comes from the 'underground' image that it currently has. If there is land suitable for mogul ramps and jumps, it may be sensible to allow regulated use. It is unlikely, however, that those involved will want any formalised arrangement. Try to tap into these groups by talking to staff in the local mountain-bike shop. The Woodland Trust has found it best to repair the damage quickly and comprehensively, and to go back again and again if necessary until the problem moves on.
- It is important that site managers have a good understanding of any access legislation. This will vary particularly between Scotland and the rest of the UK. When the Land Reform Act is passed in Scotland, it may be illegal to 'close' access to certain users (depending on a code of 'Responsible Access') altogether. This may mean that access will have to be 'discouraged' rather than denied outright.

13. Damage to Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other features

Landowners have a duty of care not to damage Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) on their land. Activities that can erode the fabric of a SAM, such as mountain biking or horse riding, may need to be controlled or stopped completely. In addition the use of metal detectors and treasure hunting around or within a SAM is illegal.



◁ Removal of graffiti on a Scheduled Ancient Monument / Listed Building is the responsibility of the landowner.

Tackling the problem

- If you have a SAM on your land, you have a duty of care. English Heritage, Historic Scotland, CADW-Wales, Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland can all offer advice and small grants to conserve and protect SAMs. Where there are suspicions of treasure hunting taking place, the county archaeologist and statutory agencies should be informed. A network of voluntary wardens or local contacts is invaluable at times like these. Posters warning of the consequences of being caught and the damage that can be done, leaflets outlining a code of practice and news releases are all worth considering.

14. Impact of development

Development pressures are immense in urban and urban-fringe locations. This can lead to damaging and inappropriate development close to woodland boundaries. Many local authorities do their utmost to avoid such conflict, however planning permission for poor and ill-thought through developments continues to be granted. When this does happen, the woodland manager is often the last line of defence for the wood and will need to be vigilant throughout the construction of the development.

Tackling the problem

- Request a site meeting with the local authority's development control officer and/or other relevant staff such as the ecologist or forestry officer. Also try to meet the developer to clarify the development boundary and discuss any likely damaging operations. Take photographs of the site at these meetings for later record. One curse of adjacent development is windblown waste – developers must promptly remove this. Other major issues are compaction



◁ Consultation at an early stage can stop damaging and inappropriate development close to woodland boundaries.

of root plates by heavy machinery along with severing of roots by excavators, drainage disruption, encroachments, dumping of spoil or unauthorised access with machinery.

- Plan site visits to coincide with the early stages of development as once the foundations and services are laid much of the damage can be disguised or hidden. Care also needs to be taken when developers offer to carry out tree surgery on boundary trees. This can often be heavy-handed and not always carried out to best arboricultural practice.
- If you are a neighbouring landowner, or represent the landowner, you should receive a neighbour notification of any planning applications. If you have a number of sites where neighbouring development is likely (this information will be in the Local Plans), it is worth considering drafting a 'standard response' letter which highlights all the issues that may impact on the woodland and suggests solutions to the issues; this can then be amended for particular circumstances. If you can persuade the local authority to include these in the planning conditions, you are in a much stronger position should problems arise in the future.
- The approach to consultation varies considerably between local authorities. Discussions with the local planners to exchange boundary plans and other relevant information are advisable.

General principles

It is possible to distil some broad principles when trying to deal with misuse of a wood. The following may help you when faced with issues above and beyond those outlined above.

1. Communication

- Select a method of communication appropriate to the situation. If you wish to address a problem of vandalism, putting up signs or posters on site is unlikely to be effective as they too will be damaged. Consider using local public places such as libraries and community centre noticeboards or local shop windows.
- Standard letters for regularly occurring problems save time and speed up response time.
- Targeted letters can be useful when dealing with certain types of problems. For example, if schoolchildren are known to be causing damage to a wood, letters could be sent to local schools explaining the issue and perhaps school visits by the site manager, arranged.
- Try to establish at least one local contact per wood (ideally a frequent user). If you have several such people, try to get one person to act as your contact, through whom everyone else passes on information.
- Investigate the opportunities for using existing communication networks. Housing associations, Neighbourhood Watch groups, community action groups, mother and toddler groups, residents' associations, credit unions can often provide effective communication channels with local residents. Usually the contact will be with only one person and yet the information will be disseminated to large number of residents, removing the need for individual correspondence. The concept of a 'telephone tree', whereby each contact passes on information to at least two other agreed contacts, can work extremely well.
- Often local residents do not know the name of a wood or use another name. This can lead to identification problems, resulting in time being wasted and frustration for staff and the complainant. Ideally all welcome signs in a wood should include the name of the property and contact details. As much information regarding the location of the wood should be obtained when speaking to callers. For site managers, familiarity with local place, road names and main features is essential. (See *Urban Woodland Management Guide 3: Complaints and queries.*)

- Face-to-face meetings are frequently the most effective way of tackling problems or dealing with complaints. Even if action cannot be taken immediately, or a solution is not readily available, this approach tends to diffuse the situation. However too many such meetings can be a burden on the site manager's time and may not be constructive if the person is likely to be abusive. (See *Urban Woodland Management Guide 3: Complaints and queries*.)
- Confronting offenders in the process of carrying out an illegal activity is not generally recommended.
- Be proactive rather than reactive whenever possible in dealing with problems. Initiate contact with neighbours or community groups rather than expecting them to contact you. This will not only cut down the number of complaints you receive but also provides a positive message to local people.
- Small news items sent to local newspapers can help raise awareness of problems and may even bring in information on perpetrators. Other media, such as local radio and television, may also offer opportunities to highlight problems among the community. New and innovative angles on routine problems are often picked up by local media.

2. Working with the police

- Keep the phone numbers of local police stations covering the areas where your woods are situated easily to hand. Use 999 only in an emergency or when an offence is being committed.
- If an incident is reported to the police, keep the name and number of the officer dealing with the case and obtain the crime number (where applicable). This information will help when following up enquiries.
- Keep a note of your local community police officer's direct line number and try to build a constructive relationship with them. They will have plenty of experience on how issues can be 'nipped in the bud' before they become a serious problem. In some areas the Woodland Trust has persuaded the local constabulary to exercise their dogs and horses in its woods – this provides an additional police profile to reassure the locals.
- Neighbourhood Watch groups are excellent ways of establishing contact with local police and can provide the opportunity for face-to-face meetings. Most local authorities have crime prevention strategies and, in some instances, officers in post to implement them.
- Try to get Special Constables involved. These part-time volunteers often work in

the evenings and weekends and, although they do not have the powers of arrest of regular officers, they could provide an effective patrol and on-site presence.

- Creation of new or implementation of existing by-laws in partnership with local authorities can have an impact on activities such as dog fouling and unauthorised motorcycling.
- Encourage local residents to call the police directly as well as calling you. Over-stretched police constabularies are more likely take action over a ‘minor’ issue if they have logged a number of calls.

3. Education

- In the long-term, the misuse and damage to urban woodland will only be overcome through educating people to appreciate them as valuable local assets. Although time consuming, organising opportunities for community involvement within a wood can help in this educational process. Involving local residents can lead to a sense of ownership that will reduced levels of misuse and damage. Staff should encourage partnership opportunities that can be sustained within the level of resources available.

Further reading

Emery, M. 1986. *Promoting nature in cities and towns: a practical guide*. Croom Helm.

The Conservation of Wild Mushrooms and The Wild Mushroom Pickers Code of Conduct. A joint publication by British Mycological Society, Association of British Fungus Groups, Forestry Commission, English Nature, Woodland Trust and National Trust.

Forestry Commission Handbook 5: Urban Forestry Practice. 1989. HMSO.

Forestry Commission Handbook 11: Creating and managing woodlands around towns. 1995. HMSO.

Urban Forestry Practice: Case studies. National Urban Forestry Unit.



Useful contacts

Environment Agency

general enquiries: 0845 9333111

emergency hotline: 0800 807060

e-mail: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment and Heritage Service (Northern Ireland)

telephone: 028 9025 4754

e-mail: ep@doeni.gov.uk

website: www.ehsni.gov.uk

National Urban Forest Unit

The Science Park, Stafford Road, Wolverhampton, WN10 9RT.

telephone: 01902 828600

e-mail: info@nufu.org.uk

website: www.nufu.org.uk

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Corporate Office, Erskine Court, Castle Business Park, Stirling, FK9 4TR.

general enquiries: 01786 457700

emergency hotline: 0800 807060

e-mail: publicrelations@sepa.org.uk

website: www.sepa.org.uk

www.naturenet.net a useful site that includes information and links

Disclaimer

The information included within this publication is based on the experiences of Woodland Trust staff in managing its own woods. While its content is intended to broaden understanding in the management of urban woodland, the Woodland Trust does not accept liability for any errors or omissions, or for any loss arising from use of the information contained herein by other parties. In any circumstances outside the knowledge and competence of a site manager, he or she should always seek advice from an appropriate qualified professional such as a surveyor or solicitor depending on the case. None of the information in this document is to be relied upon as a statement of fact.



WOODLAND TRUST

The Woodland Trust was founded in 1972 and is the UK's leading woodland conservation organisation. The Trust achieves its aims through a combination of acquiring woodland and sites for planting and through advocacy of the importance of protecting ancient woodland, enhancing its biodiversity, expanding native woodland cover and increasing public enjoyment of woodland.

The Trust relies on the generosity of the public, industry, commerce and agencies to carry out its work. To find out how you can help, and about membership details, please contact one of the addresses below.

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This report should be referenced as:

Urban woodland management guide 1: Damage and misuse. The Woodland Trust 2002.
(www.woodland-trust.org.uk/policy/publications.htm)

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Registered in England No. 1982873

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