

## Heartwood Forest – the future

**Heartwood's purchase was announced by the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, in July 2008 – prompting an ongoing £8.5m fund-raising campaign to buy, plant and manage the site.**

Wide ranging consultations helped to develop an Environmental Statement submitted to the Forestry Commission, the UK forestry monitoring body, in August 2009, covering the major areas of:

- **Flora and Fauna**
- **Population & Access**
- **Archaeology**
- **Landscape**
- **Education and People Engagement**

The site covers 850 acres in the heart of London's greenbelt and contains pockets of ancient woodland – the UK's equivalent of rainforest – resplendent with bluebells in spring.

The 41 acres of ancient woodland have Hertfordshire County Wildlife status and is already within the county Biodiversity Action Plan.

Heartwood will be the Trust's largest site in England, joining 1,000-plus accessible woods across the UK and encapsulating the Trust's key aims of:

- **Protecting ancient woodland**
- **Creating new native woodland**
- **Spreading awareness of the benefits of woods and trees**

### ***Why do we need new woodland?***

England is one of the least wooded countries in Europe (just 5.8% native woodland).

Flora and fauna are increasingly under threat.

Woods and trees help reduce pollution, encourage exercise and clean our air.

### **Heartwood will provide:**

- Publicly accessible greenspace (more than 250K people live within 10 kilometres)
- Links with schools and colleges (1,011 primary and 400 secondary schools lie within 15 miles )
- Huge tree planting opportunities for children and community groups

**Trees** will include oak, hornbeam, field maple, wild cherry and silver birch.

**Shrubs** will include hazel, blackthorn, Guelder rose and spindle.

**Open meadows** will include **wildflowers** – and there will be an **orchard**  
*... all visible as a flourishing new forest within 12 years.*

## 1. Flora and Fauna

The site for Heartwood Forest currently supports some highly valuable wildlife habitats including 17 hectares (43 acres) of ancient woodland, the UK's equivalent of the rainforest.

There are 16.8 km of hedgerows, including older species-rich sections offering valuable habitat and wildlife linkages.

The site is adjacent to Nomansland Common, a Local Nature Reserve.

The new Heartwood Forest project will create a significant wildlife resource through the provision of new habitat in the form of woodland, grass meadows, including wild flower meadows and additional hedgerows and scrub.

The newly created mosaic of different habitats will become home to a large numbers of species, also allowing species migration from and habitat extension to Nomansland Common and other nearby sites.

Use of herbicides/pesticides will be negligible – particularly compared to previous agricultural usage.

### Beneficiaries:

- **Butterflies** – silver-washed fritillary, white admiral, white-letter hairstreak and purple emperor are all found in neighbouring woods, with a total of 20 butterfly species recorded.
- **Birds** – woodland specialists such as the blue tit, bullfinch, chiff chaff, song thrush and woodpecker are likely to benefit as the woodland matures. It will also be important for existing species, such as skylarks, which nest in ground vegetation. 36 different birds have been recorded in the area. Five are 'red list' category – skylark, yellowhammer, song thrush, linnet and bullfinch.
- **Mammals** – Important species of bat are known to be close by on Nomansland Common and within surrounding woodlands. Beneficiaries could include Natterer's and long-eared bats.

## 2. Population & Access

Heartwood Forest will provide 345 hectares of new public access land and be a significant resource locally.

Within St Albans District, 44,195 people have access to woodland over 20 hectares within 4km. Thanks to Heartwood, this will eventually rise to 106,895 hectares, giving an additional 62,700 people access to large areas of woodland.

Local population strengths:

- 1km 4,082 people residing
- 3km 39,625
- 5 km 109,585
- 10 km 269,417

### **Access Links:**

**Pedestrian access** will be provided with both surfaced and unsurfaced routes for walkers – some pedestrian only – with an all-ability route for the less able and wheelchair users.

**Cycle access** will be available through permissive surfaced and unsurfaced paths, and cycle racks will be installed. Links will be promoted with surrounding towns and villages to encourage non-car visitors.

**Equestrian access** will link across the forest between existing routes, namely between the Hertfordshire Way and the surfaced bridleway with the possibility of other unsurfaced routes through to Nomansland Common.

### **New car park:**

Consultation events, discussions and meetings agreed the need for a car park, to:

- Ensure existing village car-park spaces are not significantly encroached
- To provide a single visitor access point
- Provide a welcoming experience
- Reduce current pressure on Nomansland Common
- Discourage roadside parking
- Have capacity to service organised events
- Act as a focal point for information
- Close to the village to easily integrate local business and facilities
- Located in high footfall area to help discourage car-park related crime and anti- social behaviour.

### **Road Infrastructure:**

Work carried out by EAS Transport Planning Ltd shows that estimated visitor numbers are not expected to have significant effects on the district as a whole. Tourist signs will mitigate impacts by directing visitors along preferred routes.

## **3. Education/People Engagement**

### **Key objectives are:**

- Repeat visits and close involvement with local communities and businesses
- Heartwood to have a 'wow' factor beyond simply the scale – inspiring, surprising and engaging those who visit
- Heartwood to be a hub for active recreation
- For every tree to be planted by a volunteer

### **We will support local education by:**

- Offering tree planting and education events to local schools
- Providing educational materials for use by schools
- Managing an on-going volunteer involvement

## 4. Archaeology

The Roman town Verulamium, nearby Devil's Dyke and the Wars of the Roses have all contributed to a colourful history for the Heartwood Forest site. As a result of that chequered past, extensive archaeological research has been undertaken.

### Research comprised:

- Desk based research
- Auger survey
- Magnetic susceptibility
- Trial trenching
- Trenches: 94 excavated in total – 2 metres wide and 50 metres long, on a grid pattern
- Plough soil from end of each trench was sieved to retrieve artefacts
- 35 of the trenches yielded archaeological features

### Findings:

- Neo-bronze age artefacts, flints and pottery shards
- Findings include crop marks, round barrows, enclosures (probably later prehistoric) with a Roman road believed to have crossed the site

### Specific past finds:

- Roman coins and metal
- Iron Age settlement
- Roman buildings
- Post medieval workhouse and wells, shop, malthouse, pest house, school, windmills and brick kilns
- Cannon balls
- Neolithic axe, Neolithic/Paleolith flints

Key areas of archaeological significance will be avoided when planting trees.

These will be left to scrub, grass, wildflowers, tracks and landscaping.

## 5. Landscape

Tree planting is scheduled over 10 years, roughly 85K trees for the first four years and more than 40K for the following six years. This avoids the risk from drought and increases opportunities for people involvement.

### Trees to be planted:

**Major species:** oak, ash and hornbeam

**Minor species:** field maple, wild cherry, silver birch, mountain ash, small leaved lime and goat willow

**Shrub species:** hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn, guelder rose, dog rose, spindle, holly and crab apple

Weed control is likely to consist of locally sourced straw mulch; this cuts the need for chemical control, holds soil moisture and helps reduce root exposure to drought. (as opposed to chemical control or inter-row mowing).

Natural regeneration is most likely to occur within 40m of existing woodland.

A significant orchard will be planted to grow local varieties (trees @ 10m spacing).

Planting will include roundels and small copses. Grass sown will include wildflowers.

The site - comprising main ridge and plateau, dry valleys with slopes rising from Sandridge village and flatter, lower areas at the site edges - lies within the designated London green belt in a landscape already characterised by broadleaved trees and woods.

Large scale tree planting would serve as reinforcement of that status rather than weakening it, while respecting the landscape's character and history.

In ancient times the proposed forest site would have been wooded. At some point the land was cleared for agricultural use through to the present day.

The site's high visibility requires high quality design to keep impact to a minimum, particularly from roads and adjacent houses.

A chartered landscape architect has assessed both the current landscape character and the potential impact of proposals in the plans.

Most planting is scheduled for the main ridge and site plateau. The dry valley to the north west will remain reasonably open.

The excellent view from the ridge (previously off limits) will be retained at key points thanks to large amounts of open space amid the woodland. Externally, graded woodland edges (photo top right) using shrubs and open spaces will lessen the impact from local roads and prevent a 'wall effect' for when the forest matures in 70 years. Planting on the lower slopes is designed as patches of woodland with glades – to allow views and create a 'wood pasture' character.

The slopes rising from Sandridge village will have a number of trees with rides and open spaces, representing minimal effect on the village conservation area.

**November 2009.**