

Heartwood Forest

Car park security and maintenance



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1.0 Purpose of the document

The purpose of this document is to outline the Woodland Trust's approach to addressing ongoing security and management issues associated with the proposed Heartwood Forest car park. Concerns raised by locals from Sandridge village, St Albans City & District Council and Sandridge Parish Council led to a planning condition stating:

"11. Prior to the use of the access road and car park, a Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority providing details of and expanding upon the site security / protection, management and maintenance strategy set out in Section 7 of the approved Design & Access Statement. The Plan shall include details of access points, control of the site to prevent overnight use, control of the use of the overspill car park, and the use of wardens to monitor the site. The management of the site shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved Plan."

Mitigation of the issues raised and addressed in this plan is based on wide consultation and discussion with industry experts during the car park planning phase as well as experience drawn from management of the Woodland Trust estate.

2.0 Background

2.1 Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust was established in 1972 and is now the largest woodland conservation charity in the UK, dedicated to the protection and conservation of our native woodland heritage. We currently own and care for over 1100 woods across the UK covering in excess of 20000 Ha (49000 acres), including 6000 Ha (15000 acres) of ancient woodland and 110 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's).

In 2010 we launched our new vision to build on our past success and shape our future direction.

Our vision is

A UK rich in native woods and trees enjoyed and valued by everyone.

We believe

There should be at least twice as much native tree cover in the UK.

There should be no further loss of any ancient woodland.

Every child should have a chance to plant a tree.

There should be a wood with open access close to everyone's home.

Everyone should recognise that trees and woods are an essential part of a healthy environment.

Our purpose is

To champion native woods and trees

Our core Aims are

To enable the creation of more native woods and places rich in trees

To protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future

To inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

2.2 Heartwood Forest

The Woodland Trust had been searching for a large scale woodland creation project for a number of years that was close to a large centre of population, so as to have a significant impact in terms of biodiversity and engaging with people. We completed the purchase of Heartwood Forest on the 30th September 2008.

The acquisition of Heartwood forest is the Woodland Trust's most ambitious woodland creation project to date in England. The total land area extends to 345 Ha (858 acres) and is predominantly arable land. The site also contains approximately 18 Ha (44 acres) of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW).

Heartwood Forest occupies an area of land situated in between the villages of Sandridge, Wheathampstead and Harpenden, and within close proximity to large towns of St Albans, Welwyn Hatfield, Stevenage and Luton. The site is also within easy reach of London. Prior to acquisition access was limited to the bridleway which runs through the site and permissive paths within Langley ASNW.

Through this project we aim to create 'England's largest continuous new native forest' and we propose to plant 600,000 trees in the process involving large numbers of people in its creation.

Our People Engagement Plan for Heartwood Forest set out four key objectives:

- 1 Establishing Sandridge as Heartwood's visitor centre. We want lots of people to visit Heartwood on a regular basis and for the community of Sandridge and surrounding businesses to be our 'visitor centre'.
- 2 Making the site inspirational – wow factors. We want Heartwood to have a "wow factor" beyond simply the scale. It will inspire, surprise and engage those who visit.
- 3 Broadening user groups. We want Heartwood to be a hub for active recreation in the area e.g. for walking, running, cycling, horse riding, linking to surrounding settlements, landscape, facilities and existing routes.
- 4 Every tree should be planted by a volunteer. All 600,000 trees to be planted by volunteers, in particular children.

The Environmental Impact Assessment carried out in 2009 identified several issues associated with potential visitor numbers. Through consultation events, local discussions and meetings with Sandridge Parish Council, St Albans City & District Council and Herts CC Highways, the need for a car park was identified to:

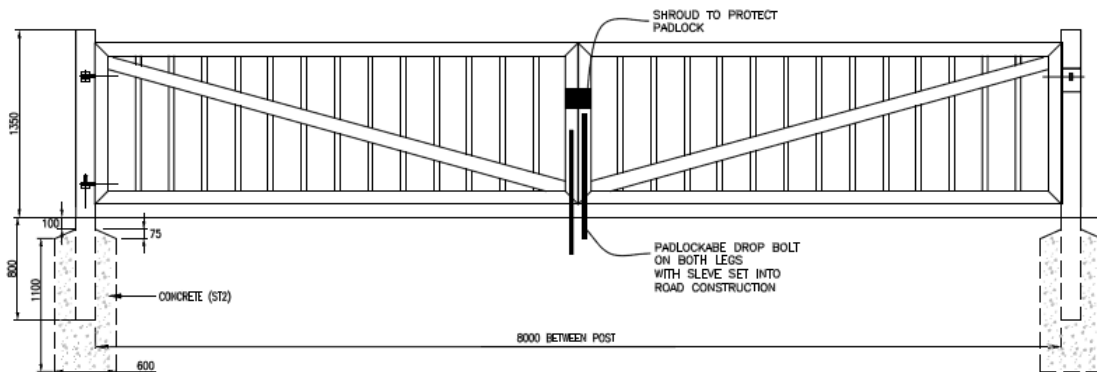
- Ensure villages' car parking spaces are not significantly encroached.
- To provide a single visitor access point, helping to control impacts on narrow roads.
- Reduce current pressure on Nomansland Common car park in peak times.
- To have capacity to service organised events.
- To provide a welcoming experience and a sense of arrival.
- As a focal point for information.

During 2010 there was further consultation and discussion with industry experts regarding access points, traffic flow and parking areas. Subsequently, plans were drawn up and planning permission sought for a suitable car parking area.

3.0 Site security - entrance / exit gates

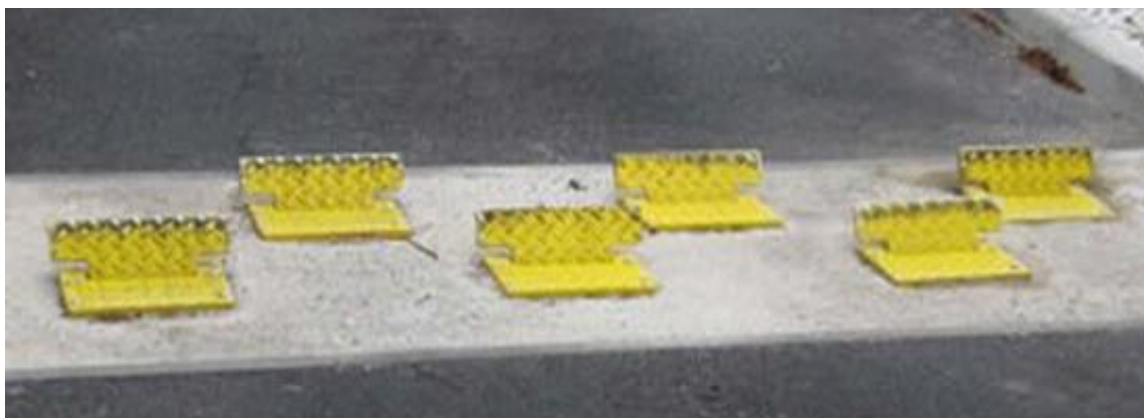
During the planning stage considerable thought went into how to manage potential antisocial behaviour. There was a strong realisation that vehicular access at night needed to be controlled. The most suitable safe option was a lockable gate arrangement but with flow control plates on the exit (plates 1&2). This arrangement would enable the entrance gate to be locked at dusk to prevent further access but would allow remaining vehicles in the car park to exit having finished their woodland visit. This setup is typical at woodland car parks and is utilised by the Forestry Commission at several sites. A pair of gates would cover the entire entrance/exit and would be manufactured using heavy duty steel with a shroud-covered padlock. It is proposed that the entrance gate would be opened at dawn each day and closed at dusk. This operation would be carried out by a local party under contract to the Trust. Similar arrangements are in operation at two other Trust properties in south east England and have operated successfully for years without major problem.

Plate 1 – Heavy duty steel entrance gates



HEAVY DUTY STEEL GATE
(JACKSONS OR SIMILAR APPROVED)
SEE JACKSON DWG JG52691
1:25

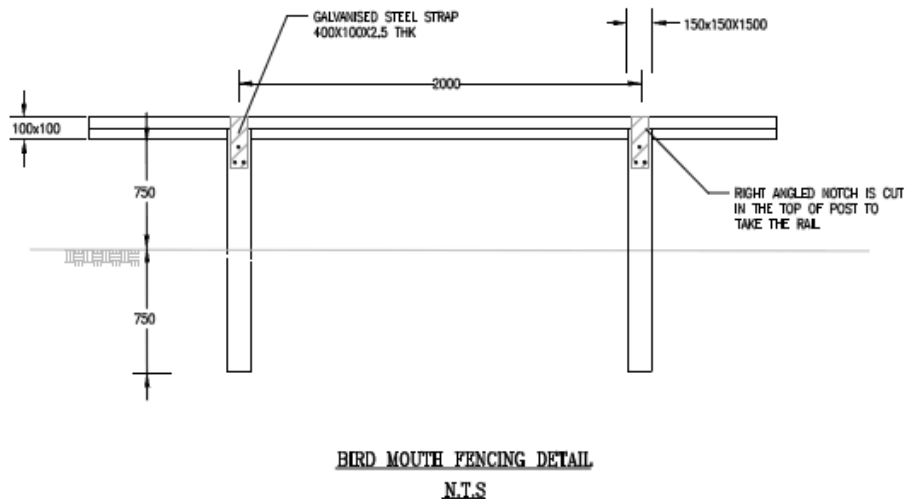
Plate 2 – Typical flow control plates



4.0 Swales and fences

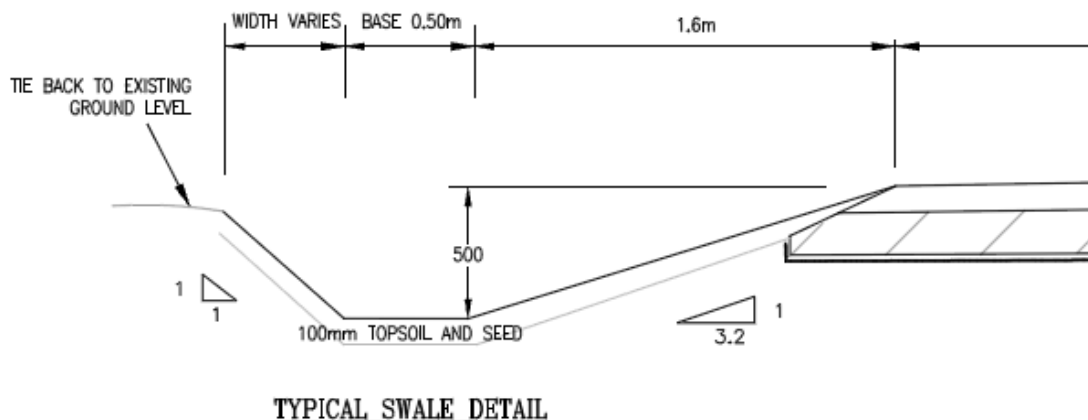
To prevent vehicles accessing Woodland Trust land from other points along the B651 approx 200m of bird mouth fencing will be used as a formal barrier along the roadside (plate 3). As part of the landscaping a new hedge will be planted behind the fence and will act as a more permanent long-lasting natural physical barrier.

Plate 3 – Bird mouth fencing specification



Internally, all but the most determined vehicles will be prevented from leaving the access track and car park by a series of swales (ditches) and bunds. The swales will run directly parallel to the track, be 2m wide and 0.5m deep (plate 4). The bunding will surround the car park and some of the access track. It will be 1.2m - 1.5m high and 3 – 6m wide, easily preventing vehicles crossing. In addition these bunds will be covered with grass and planted with trees and shrubs.

Plate 4 – Swale specification drawing



5.0 Litter and fly tipping

Such issues are addressed with frequently at many Trust properties and we have a great deal of experience in mitigating and dealing with this problem. At Heartwood we already have an established volunteer network with wide ranging roles, one of which is regular litter collection. Six volunteers are currently recruited to litter pick on a regular basis. If this proves insufficient then litter picking operations can be added to our Estates Management Contract (EMC) undertaken by specialist forest contractors on all our sites in Hertfordshire including Heartwood. We are not proposing to install litter bins. Visitors will be expected and advised to take their litter home with them.

Fly tipping is dealt with either by our EMC contractors if on Trust property or reported to Herts County Council for removal if outside Trust property (eg at the site entrance). Similarly, abandoned cars will be taken to the roadside for removal by Herts CC.

6.0 Access points

At all non-car access points (plate 5), wooden kissing gates will be installed to BS5701:2001 offering a 1m opening to allow wheelchair and pushchair access. Horse step-over sleepers will be installed where appropriate to allow bicycle and equestrian access but to deter potential abuse by motorcycles and quad bikes (plate 6).

Plate 5 – Non-car access points

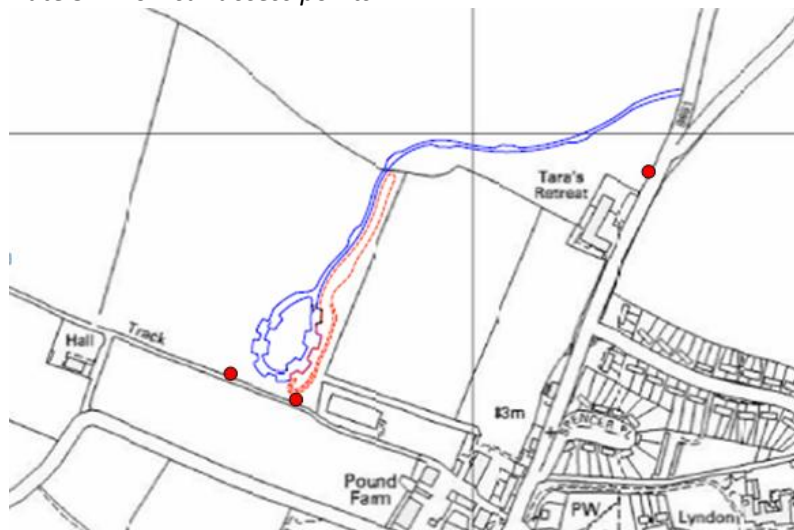
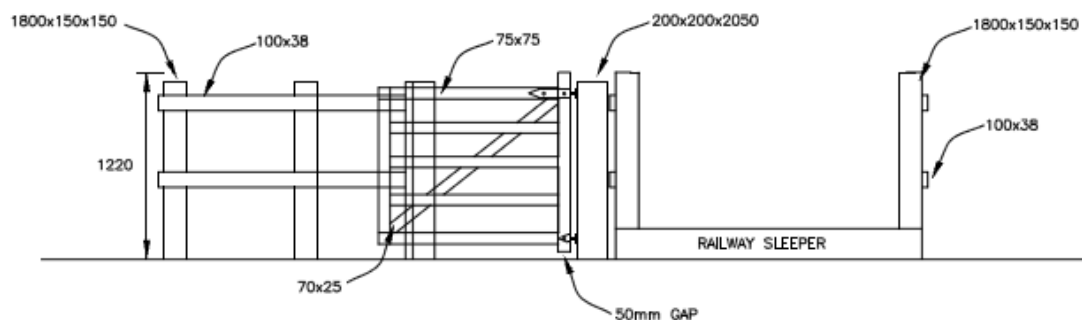


Plate 6 – Kissing gate and sleeper arrangement



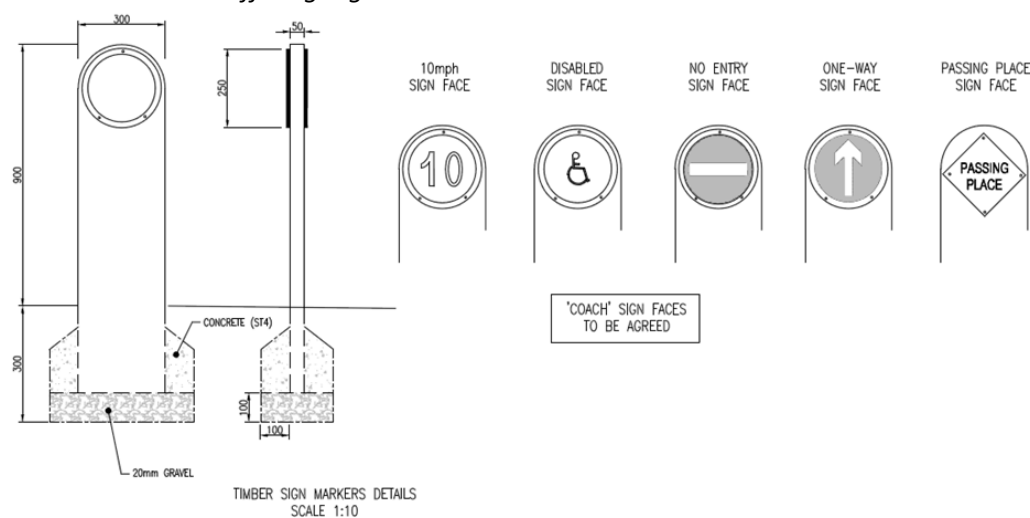
7.0 Infrastructure and signage

Brown tourist signs will guide visitors arriving by car to the Heartwood car park. Newly positioned village 'Gateway' signs will be installed on the B651 at either end of the village. The one nearest the car park access will include a reference to Heartwood Forest and help inform through-traffic and visitors.

To help avoid misuse of the car park and surrounding woodland appropriate infrastructure and signage will be in place to offer guidance and advice.

Vehicle information signs will be installed along the access track and parking area; these will include speed limits, passing places, directional flow of traffic, no-entry, disabled parking and coach drop-off point signs (plate 7).

Plate 7 – Internal traffic signage



Information boards and signposts will highlight location, direction and distance to village facilities (plate 8). Included on information boards and specific locations around the car park will be notices and signs regarding issues such as gate closing time, litter removal, no overnight parking, no camping/fires and no dog walking businesses. In addition to catering for a wide range of different user groups, appropriate signage should help alleviate user-conflicts (eg help keep horses and bicycles off the easy access trail). Negotiations are under way with the relevant authorities regarding installation and management of dog bins. We are proposing to install two bins in the vicinity of the car park which will be emptied weekly.

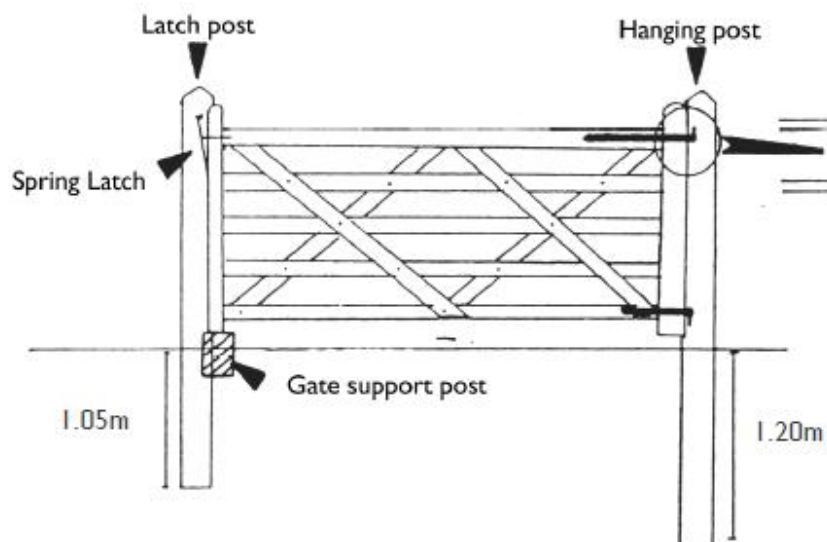
Plate 8 – Typical Woodland Trust information board



8.0 Overspill parking area

An area of open grassland surrounded by trees and woody shrubs will be located to the north of the car park loop to act as an overspill area for use during seasonal events. It is envisaged that the overspill will be used approximately five times during the winter months for community and corporate planting events and three times during the summer months for the HeARTwood Festival and specific Trust events. It will be used no more than once a month on average and generally on a weekend. Access to the overspill will be controlled – padlocked 12ft 5-bar wooden gates (plate 9) will be positioned at the entrance and exit points and these will only be opened by Woodland Trust staff for the specific events mentioned above. Parking during these events will be controlled by a mix of staff and volunteers who will remain onsite until the final vehicles have left the overspill area.

Plate 9 – 12ft wooden gate



9.0 Ongoing maintenance

General management of the car park will typically be undertaken by our EMC contractors, who will cut the grass in and around the car park and overspill at least four times a year, maintain the trees annually, replace worn out infrastructure and repair any damage to the hard surfacing as necessary. All such work has been budgeted in the project plan and funding will continue to be sought to make ongoing visitor improvements such as the easy access trail. Volunteers may undertake minor works as part of our organised work party days and we also have a pool of professional contractors available who could carry out more specialist operations such as highways or tree surgery works.

In the car park itself the planting will not be allowed to become too dense in order that cars can remain visible from some nearby areas of the woodland whilst retaining appropriate screening from the village.

10.0 Monitoring and evaluation

To date we have recruited 83 volunteers at Heartwood who each have specific roles such as litter picking, tree checking, fixed point photography, bird surveying, guided walk leaders, fence checkers, event helpers and volunteer speaking. All these volunteers carry out their work regularly and act as our eyes and ears on the ground. Their job descriptions can be tailored to include an aspect of car park monitoring.

To date we have employed the services of 5 different individuals who live and/or work in Sandridge. These contractors combined with Sandridge resident contacts and our volunteer resource mean we have a pool of reliable informants who can keep us informed of day to day activity at the site. In addition, Trust staff visit the site several times a week for ongoing woodland management issues. Vehicle counters will be installed near the access gates to monitor vehicle numbers and timings. CCTV is also an option should it become necessary.

We will have at least annual meetings with Herts CC Highways to review traffic and visitor access and ongoing safety issues. We are also in regular contact with the Sandridge Community Police Officer who will make periodic patrols of the car park and partake in necessary review meetings in order to ensure continued site security and visitor improvements. Ongoing consultation with local residents and user groups will help to highlight potential concerns and address any issues arising.