WOODLAND TRUST

Hurst Wood

Management Plan 2014-2019

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MAPS

THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.
Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
10. Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Hurst Wood
Location:	Tunbridge Wells
Grid reference:	TQ569404, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 188
Area:	17.12 hectares (42.30 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Planted Ancient Woodland Site, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Nestled in a valley between Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall this woodland has a meandering stream criss-crossed by many bridges. The wood features predominantly deciduous trees including oak, birch, and chestnut along with many large beech trees.

2.2 Extended Description

Hurst Wood lies on the northern edge of the High Weald AONB, characterised by an attractive, small-scale landscape containing a mosaic of small farms and woodlands, historic parks, sunken lanes and ridge-top villages.

Hurst Wood is situated in a steep-sided valley on the north-west outskirts of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. A small stream flows south to north through the western half of the site, with the main part of the wood being on the west-facing valley side and a level area above it. The site was acquired by The Woodland Trust in 1983. The eastern part (now Cpt 2) was previously owned by the Forestry Commission and was extensively planted with non-native species such as hybrid larch, Scots pine and American red oak, all of which are still present on the site. Other major tree species include oak (pedunculate and sessile), birch, beech, sycamore and sweet chestnut.

The site is mostly ancient woodland, and contains many vascular plants associated with ancient woodland in the SE of England. These include bluebells, wood spurge, wood anemones, wood sorrel, yellow archangel and yellow pimpernel. The site is very species-rich, particularly for a base-poor, heathy woodland type.

The site is heavily used by the public (WT access category A) and has a good network of rides and smaller paths with appropriate infrastructure including steps, footbridges and stiles. Most access is via one main entrance on the public footpath from Coniston Avenue to the south. The main track running through the centre of the wood along the public footpath is not owned by WT. The wood is also occasionally used by the 3 schools that adjoin the site on the SE boundary.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

General location:
Hurst Wood is located on the north-western fringe of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. It is approximately 1 mile from the town centre in a predominantly residential area. The wood is reached from the south by a public footpath (WB5) from the western end of Coniston Avenue. It is approximately 500m from Coniston Avenue. The wood can also be reached by the same footpath from Broomhill Road to the north. The surface of this path is frequently very muddy.

General overview of paths & entrances:
The entrance to the southern end of the wood is a kissing gate, with a stile entrance at the northern end. The public footpath between these 2 points is surfaced but all other paths and rides have natural surfaces which can be slippery after wet weather. The wood is situated in a valley and is mostly on sloping ground. Some paths have steep gradients with occasional flights of steps. There are footbridges and culverts at various places crossing the stream which runs south to north through the site. Some paths close to the stream can be flooded after heavy rain.

Parking:
There is on-street parking available on Coniston Avenue approximately 500m from the wood.

Public Transport:
Nearest train station: Tunbridge Wells, approximately 1 mile from the wood.
Nearest bus stop: Coniston Avenue at the junction with Rydal Drive, approximately 800m from the wood. There are several services per day between the town centre/railway station and Coniston Avenue but none on Sundays.
Information obtained from Traveline website on 22/11/2006. (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or tel: 0870 608 2 608).

Public Toilets:
The nearest public toilets are at Linden Park Road, The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells, approximately 2 miles away. There are disabled toilets accessible with a RADAR key, available from the tourist office in The Pantiles. Opening hours: 7am-7pm. Parking available within 100m.
Information correct as at 22/11/2006. Further information available from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Environmental Services (www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk)

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

At Hurst Wood the Woodland Trusts' aims can be met in the following way:

Protection and restoration
Hurst Wood is a good example of ASNW with a good variety of native trees and woodland plants. This variety of structure and vegetation is best maintained throughout the majority of the site by a policy of minimum intervention, allowing the processes of natural succession to take place.
The area of PAWS (mixed broadleaves and Hybrid larch) in cpt 2b has been selectively thinned and is now classified as ‘secure’ - the larch doesn't pose any threat to the woodland specialist plants. The canopy trees (conifer & broadleaved) will be allowed to close the canopy resulting in a reduction in light levels which should reduce bracken and bramble cover, which will further secure the remnant ancient woodland components within the stand. The natural regeneration of broadleaf trees will aid this process and once the canopy is sufficient to control the coarse vegetation further thinning of the larch will be undertaken until it comprises less than 20% of the canopy.
Deadwood, standing and fallen, will be retained wherever safe to do so. The invasive Himalayan balsam will be controlled and where possible, eradicated. Work will be carried out along main rides and paths, where some intervention such as ride-widening will benefit public access as well as creating a changing mosaic of habitats.

Enhancing the publics enjoyment of woodland
To maintain and, through selective ride side coppicing, improve the network of paths and rides. The wood will continue to be made welcoming and safe for visitors and its use will be monitored regularly.

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

5.1 Informal Public Access

Description

Hurst Wood is an urban fringe site with a well-used public footpath giving access to a large, local population in excess of 22 thousand people living within 2km of the site. The site has a good network of well-maintained paths and rides. Infrastructure such as steps, footbridges and boardwalks have been installed by the Woodland Trust to improve access to all parts of the site.

Significance

It has been proven that access to woodland provides an improved quality of life with benefits to both mental and physical health. Hurst Wood provides a safe, well-maintained amenity for a large local urban population. It is easily accessible to a large number of people on foot and the wood also provides an amenity for the 3 adjoining schools.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: unsuitable for less-abled visitors due to terrain
Opportunities: to maintain existing access network to a high standard. To encourage neighbouring schools to further utilise the site

Factors Causing Change

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The wood will have a well used and maintained network of rides and paths consistent with its Access Category A usage. Opening up of targeted rides will improve the visitor experience/allow the paths to dry out etc.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

During this plan period, the short term objective is to continue to provide public access at Hurst Wood which is safe and enjoyable. This will be achieved by:
Annual path cutting (July/August)
Annual inspection of footbridges, steps, stile and boardwalk.
Regular tree safety survey & remedial work.
Rideside coppicing on a 3-5 year rotation on approximately 1/4 of the rides (aprox 600m).

5.2 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The site contains a variety of woodland types associated with base-poor brown earths and podzolic soils (NVC W10a, W15b and W16a) with a narrow strip of alder woodland (W7a) on alluvial soil along the stream. Birch is the most abundant tree with sessile oak, rowan, beech, holly, sweet chestnut, alder buckthorn and aspen. Ground flora is mostly bracken with some heather and wavy hair-grass. In the less acidic parts of the site hazel coppice and pedunculate oak are more common with carpets of bluebells in the spring.

Cpt 2b contains approx 2.5ha of P63 hybrid larch and Scots pine (PAWS). Due to the light shading effect of these species and previous heavy thinning the ancient woodland components have largely survived and there is a significant broadleaved element to the area. Restoration work in 1998 (thinning and clear-felling) has increased the growth of bracken to the detriment of other ground flora species but ride-side strimming has increased species such as bluebell, wood anemone and wood sorrel by controlling the competition with bracken..

The site contains well over 100 species of vascular plants with more than 20 species being woodland specialists. The stream and valley bottom provide another habitat type. The stream is subject to occasional permitted sewage discharge during periods of heavy rain and the bankside vegetation includes the very invasive Himalayan balsam (Impatiens glandulifera) which can threaten native ground flora.

Significance

The site is species-rich despite poor soil types and previous episodes of unsuitable management. The site is a valuable semi-natural habitat on the edge of a large urban area. The amount of ASNW left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century. Ancient woodland is now restricted to 2% of the Uk with approximately 40% of Englands ASNW found in the South East. ASNW is very important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years. This allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop over time that cannot be found in new woodland creation sites. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and the prevention of its loss is one of the main aims of the Trust.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints to silvicultural management: terrain; long extraction route; heavy public usage.
Opportunities: to fully restore the ancient woodland and increase biodiversity.

Factors Causing Change

Invasive Himalayan balsam, Natural regeneration of birch, oak, rowan etc

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To allow the mixed woodland types (W7a, W10a, W15b,W16a) to senesce and develop largely by the processes of natural succession, thereby resulting in a long term increase in the amount of woodland specialst plants, deadwood & veteran trees. The ride widening will provide a further mosaic of habitats favouring early successional species. The area of PAWS will be restored to native broadleaved woodland by the gradual removal of conifers comprise less than 20% of the canopy and no longer pose a threat to the remnant ancient woodland components.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

To encourage the process of natural succession and create a diverse age structure no silvicultural intervention will take place within the body of the wood, other than along rides and paths, during this plan period. Annual control of Himalayan balsam will be achieved by strimming (July). The area of PAWS will be reassessed in 2018 to ascertain when further removal of conifers can be undertaken.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By

APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	8.68	Mixed broadleaves	1950	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/ Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Informal Public Access	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Tree Preservation Order
Mixed native broadleaves of mixed age along small stream in valley running north-south. Canopy of oak, beech, birch etc. Understorey of holly, hazel, sweet chestnut etc. Some planting along stream including oak, alder etc. Includes an area of open ground managed as lowland heath until 2008. Since mowing was stopped this area has regenerated with scattered oak and birch over heather and bracken.							
2a	4.74	Mixed broadleaves	1950	Min-intervention		Informal Public Access	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Tree Preservation Order
Mixed broadleaves including oak, beech, sweet chestnut coppice, birch and sycamore. Abundant bluebells in some areas. The cpt is mainly on sloping ground except for a level area of approx 1ha, formerly a meadow. This area now has naturally regenerated oak of approx 50 years old with one small open area. The bank and ditch defining the meadow can be seen on the E and N boundaries.							
2b	3.71	Hybrid larch	1963	PAWS restoration	No/poor vehicular access to the site, People issues (+tve & -tve), Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/ mine shafts/sink holes etc	Informal Public Access	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Planted Ancient Woodland Site, Tree Preservation Order

P63 Hybrid larch with mixed broadleaves (oak, sweet chestnut, birch, rowan etc). Heavily thinned in 1998. Ground flora contains adundant bluebells where not swamped by bracken. Also wood sorrel, wood anemone and other ancient woodland indicators. The W part of the cpt slopes steeply down to a central ride through the wood. Along the ride there are some Scots pine. The S edge of the cpt has a broadleaved fringe containing birch, oak, ash, holly and hazel. It also comprises a small area in the S (0.3ha) that was previously P63 HL clear felled in 1998 restocked with P99 oak and natural regeneration of oak, birch, rowan etc.

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.