WOODLAND TRUST

Valley Park Woods

Management Plan 2014-2019

MANAGEMENT PLAN - CONTENTS PAGE

ITEM Page No.

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Valley Park Woods
Location:	Chandler's Ford
Grid reference:	SU424210, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 185
Area:	29.54 hectares (72.99 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Valley Park Woods is a complex of four woodlands totalling 29.54 hectares in Chandler's Ford, Hampshire. It is situated on what was part of Baddesley Common, a mosaic of habitats which along with broadleaved woodland also included dry heath, unimproved grassland and cattle-grazed pastures in the valley of Monk's Brook, a small stream still located only 50m east of the site at its closest point.

The Woodland Trust acquired the four woodlands – Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood, Small Profits and Titlark Copse - in 1988 following the expansion of Chandler's Ford, which saw the nearby agricultural land developed into roads, housing, industrial estates and associated infrastructure that now surround the complex.

There is a considerable variety of tree, shrub and ground flora species within each of the woodlands as the soils vary significantly from seasonally waterlogged clays to well drained alluviums, with the majority comprising heavy clay. However, oak is the dominant tree throughout the complex, with ash, birch and beech well-represented and hazel and holly appearing consistently in the understorey.

Approximately half of the complex is ancient semi-natural woodland, with the main proportion located in Knight Wood, the largest of the four woodlands at 18.03 hectares. Alongside the mature oak, ash, beech and birch, typical of the complex, Knight Wood also has many veteran trees including characterful yews and Scots pines and the ground flora includes a number of ancient woodland indicator species, including bluebell, wood anemone and butchers broom.

The two southern woodlands in the complex – Small Profits and Titlark Copse – are secondary woodlands, with the much smaller Clothier's Copse being a mixture of both ancient and secondary.

In 2009 Forest Research investigated the decline and death of mature oak trees in Small Profits and Titlark Copse and although the results proved inconclusive the symptoms have been attributed to Chronic Oak Decline - a complex combination of factors which contributes to the decline and death of the trees. As a result approximately 60 oaks have been felled across the complex between 2010-2013 with works ongoing, along with works to manage the recent addition of ash dieback disease which is also present in Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood, and Small Profits. However, although significant, these diseases do not diminish the overall value of these long-established woodlands, which is reflected in their Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) designation.

They are also important in the local landscape for their provision of public access to woodland, and their connectivity to surrounding areas of woodland owned by Test Valley Borough Council.

2.2 Extended Description

Valley Park Woods is a complex of four woodlands totalling 29.54 hectares in Chandler's Ford, Hampshire. It is situated on what was part of Baddesley Common, a mosaic of habitats which along with broadleaved woodland also included dry heath, unimproved grassland and cattle-grazed pastures in the valley of Monk's Brook, a small stream still located only 50m east of the site at its closest point.

The Woodland Trust acquired the four woodlands – Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood, Small Profits and Titlark Copse - in 1988 following the expansion of Chandler's Ford, which saw the nearby agricultural land developed into roads, housing, industrial estates and associated infrastructure that now surround the complex.

There is a considerable variety of tree, shrub and ground flora species within each of the woodlands as the soils vary significantly from seasonally waterlogged clays to well drained alluviums, with the majority comprising heavy clay. However, oak is the dominant tree throughout the complex, with ash, birch and beech well-represented and hazel and holly appearing consistently in the understorey.

Approximately half of the complex is ancient semi-natural woodland, with the main proportion located in Knight Wood, the largest of the four woodlands at 18.03 hectares. Alongside the mature oak, ash, beech and birch, typical of the complex, Knight Wood also has many veteran trees including characterful yews and Scots pines and the ground flora includes a number of ancient woodland indicator species, including bluebell, wood anemone and butchers broom.

The two southern woodlands in the complex – Small Profits and Titlark Copse – are secondary woodlands, with the much smaller Clothier's Copse being a mixture of both ancient and secondary.

In 2009 Forest Research investigated the decline and death of mature oak trees in Small Profits and Titlark Copse and although the results proved inconclusive the symptoms have been attributed to Chronic Oak Decline - a complex combination of factors which contributes to the decline and death of the trees. As a result approximately 60 oaks have been felled across the complex between 2010-2013 with works ongoing, along with works to manage the recent addition of ash dieback disease which is also present in Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood, and Small Profits. However, although significant, these diseases do not diminish the overall value of these long-established woodlands, which is reflected in their Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) designation.

They are also important in the local landscape for their provision of public access to woodland, and their connectivity to surrounding areas of woodland owned by Test Valley Borough Council.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Valley Park Woods consist of 4 woods in Chandler's Ford:
Clothier's Copse is at the junction of Flexford Road and Knightwood Road.
Knight Wood is east of Knightwood Road and accessed at the north end by a car park at the end of Glendowan Road.
Small Profits is south off Wicklow Road.
Titlark Copse is accessible from the end of Eden Walk.
There are many entrances to the woods from surrounding paths and residential roads.

Knight Wood (the largest block) has an extensive permissive footpath network and there are also three public footpaths. The other three blocks are also accessible via maintained permissive footpaths. Paths are unsurface and hard when dry and liable to muddy patches when wet. Access points are either kissing gates or squeeze gaps.

Nearest Bus Stop : Chandler's Ford Precinct. Accessible from Winchester and Southampton on Solent Blue Line No. 1. Also from Eastleigh on Solent Blue Line Service No. C (Information from Traveline May 2007 www.traveline.org.uk 0871 200 2233). From there cross rail bridge, turn right down School Lane and the woods are to the west
Nearest Station : Eastleigh 2.5 miles

Nearest Public Toilet : The Hub, Bishopstoke Recreation Ground, Bishopstoke Road, Eastleigh SO50 6LA (4 miles). Information from Eastleigh BC 023 8064 7090.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

In the long-term (50 years plus) Valley Park Woods will continue to provide the landscape with compartments of both ancient and mature secondary high forest, with well-defined characteristic structural components of that habitat - canopy, understorey, shrub, field and ground layers.

The exact composition and structure of the woods will be reflective of significant impacts at the complex in recent years – namely chronic oak decline and ash dieback. However, the effects will not have diminished the ecological or recreational value of these long-established woodlands, with the diversity of the woods providing ongoing resilience.

The canopy will remain a mixed broadleaf composition of oak, beech, and birch, with sycamore stands replacing much of the ash lost to dieback, supplemented by the occasional conifers such as yew and Scots pine (where they are already present and naturally sustained). The understorey will include a mix of native trees and shrubs including hazel, rowan, holly and hawthorn. Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be managed and will not be threatening the woodland ecosystem.

A veteran and ancient tree population will be sustained or increased where possible, owing to it's particular value in this context where there is a potentially high mortality of mature trees due to disease.

A minimum of 10% open space will be present in each wood - a level sufficient to sustain diversity within the high-forest structure, with more significant open space and other habitats present elsewhere in the surrounding area (e.g. Upper & Lower Flexford LNRs). A significant proportion of open space will constitute rides and paths throughout the complex . Levels of temporary open space are likely to fluctuate according to the management of tree diseases and this may include anything from small canopy gaps from the loss of individual trees or selective tree removal, to larger openings and glades created by silvicultural works. The combined open space will encourage and support diversity in the field and ground layers from swathes of ancient semi-natural woodland ground flora such as bluebell and anemone, open space and secondary woodland flora such as herb robert and red campion, to patches of coarse vegetation and scrub such as bramble and bracken. It will also provide opportunities for natural regeneration of tree species which will replace trees lost to disease, and will allow room for a proportion of mature trees to develop into open-grown characterful veterans of high ecological value.

A proportion of dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk and will be plentiful following the natural aging of trees, ongoing chronic oak decline and the resultant tree works operations which allow the retention of some large stem sections and habitat piles.

Access facilities will be sufficient to support the high numbers of visitors, with multiple entrances to accommodate varying access needs and bridges to facilitate access across streams and ditches where required to maintain a circular or connective route. However, paths will remain natural and unsurfaced to preserve the ancient woodland soil and aesthetic. An orientation panel at the main entrance to Knight Wood will define the entrances and network of permissive paths throughout the complex, and welcome signs will name each individual wood at key access points.

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 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The Hampshire Ancient Woodland Inventory indicates that the southern two-thirds of Clothiers Copse (cpt 1a) and the majority of Knight Wood (cpt 2a) are ancient in origin. This is most evident in Knight Wood, particularly in spring, when large assemblages of ancient semi-natural woodland ground flora such as bluebell, lesser celandine and Solomon's seal can be seen.

The majority of the canopy of Knight Wood is dominated by mature oak, which is significantly affected by Chronic Oak Decline, first recorded at the wood in 2010. Many dead or declining oaks have been removed in the past to manage the effect of the disease on the wood and reduce the risk that these present to visitors. However, there are ongoing symptoms of the disease still evident, from minor dieback to standing dead trees, requiring further tree works to manage the impact of the disease. The combined effect of the disease and its management has resulted in small scallops on ride egdes and many canopy gaps and semi-open areas where birch tends to dominate, having quickly colonised the newly created space along with the occasional sycamore. The ground flora in these areas is typically dominated by bracken or bramble, with patches of this coarse vegetation present elsewhere in the wood.

Significant ash stands are also present within Knight Wood on the south and west boundaries and particularly in the central area of the northern half. Ash dieback disease is present and is affecting ash of all age classes present, however, the management of the disease in these areas will be centred around visitor safety and is unlikely to require habitat management works (see 'Connecting People with Woods and Trees' Key Feature for more detail). Occasional beech, yew and Scots pine are interspersed between the ash and oak with some specimen mature and veteran trees among them. In places small groups of yew form shady groves in contrast to the remainder of the wood. A significant proportion of the understorey is comprised of hazel with patches of holly, along with rowan, hawthorn, elder and goat willow, with honeysuckle and ivy also present.

The ancient origin of Clothier's Copse is less evident as the Trusts ownership is restricted to a sliver of land that was separated from the main body of the copse by the construction of Knightwood Road. The main body of the copse (still also retaining the name Clothier's Copse) is still present to the west of the road, and is owned by Test Valley Borough Council. The result is that the Trusts Clothier's Copse contains only a few mature oak and ash trees with an understory of hazel, hawthorn and blackthorn within the ancient section. There are some remnants of ancient woodland ground flora communities, however, the majority of the woodland floor is dominated by dense bramble following recent coppicing of hazel and the thinning of oaks which removed suppressed trees or those significantly affected by chronic oak decline. Ash dieback is also evident within the copse, affecting ash of all age classes present and requiring ongoing management.

Both sections of woodland contain the occasional cherry laurel and/or rhododendron shrub with occasional garden escapees migrating from the surrounding properties.

As with Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood was also partly divided by the construction of Knightwood Road, with a fragment of the original wood left detached to the west of the road. The separated fragment (still also retaining the name Knight Wood) is owned by Test Valley Borough Council and extends in a 'C' shape north joining the main body of the council owned section of Clothier's Copse.

Significance

The amount of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century, with approximately 40% of England's ASNW found in the south east. Although Hampshire is a well wooded county, it is has undergone rapidly increasing development in recent years, threatening further loss and pressure on ancient habitats. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and its protection and enhancement is one of the main aims of the Trust. Therefore, this key feature forms a locally important tract of ancient habitat, benefiting the local community and wildlife whilst maintaining resilience and connectivity in the wider landscape.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Chronic oak decline: COD may limit/exclude extraction of timber due to biosecurity requirements.
Vigorous bramble and bracken growth: Following tree works within recent years, the response of bramble and/or bracken growth is prolific across all woods in the complex and therefore, works should be planned to avoid large-scale clearance and rapid light level changes where possible.

Factors Causing Change

Chronic Oak Decline and ash dieback: The woodland structure is significantly influenced by the effects of these diseases and it is anticipated that COD at least will be an ongoing factor for the foreseeable future, resulting in sustained losses of mature oak. The management of the diseases is governed by the spread and rate of decline, with tree safety works required to remove individual or small groups of trees worst affected that present a hazard to visitors or neighbours. Larger scale impacts may require silvicultural operations and/or path diversions or closures. There are both positive and negative effects from this situation. In the case of ash dieback it is anticipated that the majority if not all ash will be lost from the canopy, removing a significant component of the wood and the habitat niches that ash provide. In contrast the potential increase of space and light levels from removed trees may be beneficial in allowing opportunities for natural regeneration of other tree species, particularly rapid colonisers such as birch and sycamore, and also oak to compensate for losses from COD. If the rate of succession continues to outweigh the rate of decline and mortality, this will remain a sustainable situation, and it is the Trusts preference to allow natural regeneration to sustain ancient woodland, which will be the aim in this instance.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain a mature high forest structure of canopy, understorey, shrub, field layers with swathes of ancient woodland ground flora.
The mixed species composition of the key feature will be encouraged to provide resilience to pests and diseases, however, oak will be sustained as the main canopy component where possible due to its value as a keystone species.
Ongoing tree diseases will be managed sympathetically, resulting in niches that will sustain the diversity of structure and a viable ecosystem.
Opportunities to recruit more trees into the veteran and ancient population or protect existing trees should be incorporated into operations where possible.
A proportion of dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk.
Open space should total a minimum of 10% across the whole compartments that the key feature is situated in, including rides and paths with a diversity of edge habitat.
Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be managed so that they are not threatening the ecosystem.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)
To safeguard the high forest structure of the existing habitat. This will be achieved through the following: • Detailed assessments to quantify the the extent and impact of chronic oak decline and the succession of the habitat in 2020 and 2024 with the Trusts Tree Safety Estate Manager. • The scheduling of a long-term COD management work programme if necessary to protect or enhance the woodland's ecology and structure. • Removal of significant non-native invasive species growth in 2020 and annual management for the remainder of the plan period. • An assessment of the key feature as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment in 2024.

5.2 Natural Secondary Woodland

Description

Approximately 45% (13.5ha) of Valley Park Wood constitutes secondary woodland. The majority of this (10.75ha) includes Small Profits and Titlark Copse in their entirety. Both of these woods appear to have established from natural succession, however, the occasional larch in Small Profits indicates the likelihood of some overplanting with conifers after the first world war.

Small Profits has a canopy of oak and occasional ash, with an understorey of hazel, holly and birch. A stream runs in a north-easterly direction roughly parallel with the eastern boundary, and due to issues with riverbank erosion undermining neighbouring properties planning consent was gained in 2009 to re-align the stream in 3 places. The Trust re-aligned the first section in 2009, with the second and third completed with Test Valley Council in September 2014. Following these modifications there is now a significant amount of temporary open space adjacent to the stream with prolific bramble and bracken growth along with regenerating hazel and birch under a well-spaced stand of oaks. On the stream banks themselves there is prolific coppice regeneration mainly consisting of alder and goat willow. The whole canopy of the wood was lightly thinned in 1995 with further selective felling of oaks to manage COD in subsequent years. As a result of the significant disturbance across the site ground flora is dominated by bramble and bracken and other coarse vegetation with only occasional general woodland plants evident.

Titlark Copse also has an oak canopy with notable gaps from past oak removal as a result of COD, over an understorey of hazel and mixed shrubbery. The ground flora flora is similar to Small Profits, though with less coarse vegetation and more patches of seemingly bare ground with leaf litter only. A stream runs along the southern boundary alongside a cycle path owned by Test Valley Borough Council.

The overall aesthetic of both of these woods is of semi-natural mature high forest stands, with a well-developed understorey, which with the exception of the absence of indicative ground flora, has the appearance of ancient woodland. This is reflected in their inclusion in the SINCs designation which also demonstrates their high ecological value.

There is also a small section of secondary woodland in the northern half of Knight Wood. This is visible on the 1872 OS 6 inch series map and ancient woodland inventory which indicates a rectangular area of just under two and a half hectares that was not wooded. It is thought to have been a field or an area of wood-pasture. The perimeter of this area is still defined by wood banks, but it is now well integrated with the rest of the wood following natural colonisation and establishment of oak, beech, birch and a hazel and bracken understorey. It has a lower density of trees than other areas of the wood, with some large individual specimen trees, notably beech, which indicate the historic openness of the area.

Clothiers Copse contributes the smallest area of secondary woodland of just .2ha at the northern end. This area is distinguishable as it narrows into a 'corridor' flanked by a diverse variety of trees and shrubs including whitebeam, cherry, birch, dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn, many of which appear planted and was likely to have been carried out to provide screening between the neighbouring properties and road that flank the copse.

Significance

Although secondary woodland does not have the longevity that ancient woodland does, the majority of the secondary woodland in the complex is of a semi-natural origin, is well-established into maturity and has a high biodiversity value. Therefore, although Hampshire is a well-wooded county, this area has been extensively developed, making this key feature a valuable natural resource, benefiting the local community and wildlife whilst maintaining resilience and connectivity in the wider landscape.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Chronic oak decline: COD may limit/exclude extraction of timber due to biosecurity requirements.
Vigorous bramble and bracken growth: Following tree works within recent years, the response of bramble and/or bracken growth is prolific across all woods in the complex and therefore, works should be planned to avoid large-scale clearance and rapid light level changes where possible.

Opportunities:
The recruitment of trees into a veteran and ancient population or protection of existing specimen trees should be incorporated into operations where possible.
The watercourse in Small Profits should be integrated into the woodland by influencing the management of vegetation alongside it, into maturity.

Factors Causing Change

Chronic Oak Decline (across the whole key feature) and ash dieback (in Clothiers Copse, Knight Wood and Small Profits only): The woodland structure is significantly influenced by the effects of these diseases and it is anticipated that COD at least will be an ongoing factor for the foreseeable future, resulting in sustained losses of mature oak. The management of the diseases is governed by the spread and rate of decline, with tree safety works required to remove individual or small groups of trees worst affected that present a hazard to visitors or neighbours. Larger scale impacts may require silvicultural operations and/or path diversions or closures. There are both positive and negative effects from this situation. In the case of ash dieback it is anticipated that the majority if not all ash will be lost from the canopy, removing a significant component of the wood and the habitat niches that ash provide. In contrast the potential increase of space and light levels from removed trees may be beneficial in allowing opportunities for natural regeneration of other tree species, particularly rapid colonisers such as birch and sycamore, and also oak to compensate for losses from COD. If the rate of succession continues to outweigh the rate of decline and mortality, this will remain a sustainable situation, and it is the Trusts preference to allow natural regeneration to sustain mature semi-natural woodland, which will be the aim in this instance.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain a mature high forest structure of canopy, understorey, shrub, and field layers with a mixed ground flora.
The mixed species composition of the key feature will be encouraged to provide resilience to pests and diseases, however, oak will be sustained as the main canopy component where possible due to its value as a keystone species.
Ongoing tree diseases will be managed sympathetically, resulting in niches that will sustain the diversity of structure and a viable ecosystem.
Opportunities to recruit trees into a veteran and ancient population or protect existing specimen trees should be incorporated into operations where possible.
A proportion of dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk.
Open space should total a minimum of 10% across the whole compartments that the key feature is situated in, including rides and paths with a diversity of edge habitat.
Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be managed so that they are not threatening the ecosystem.
The stream in Small Profits will be a thriving riparian habitat which enhances the biodiversity of the woodland.

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

To safeguard the high forest structure of the existing habitat and influence the development of establishing habitats. This will be achieved through the following:
• Detailed assessments to quantify the the extent and impact of chronic oak decline and the succession of the habitat in 2020 and 2024 with the Trusts Tree Safety Estate Manager.
• The scheduling of a long-term COD management work programme if necessary to protect or enhance the woodland's ecology and structure.
• Removal of significant non-native invasive species growth in 2020 and annual management for the remainder of the plan period.
• Coppicing and singling of suitable trees for retention of stream side tree regeneration in Small Profits to maintain access for maintenance of the banks and to prevent trees that may become unstable from developing in inappropriate places on the steep slopes.
• Reduction of the top and cut-back of interior sides of the mixed shrubbery by one-third, on both sides of the northern 'corridor' in Clothiers Copse (approximately 150m total length).
• An assessment of the key feature as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment in 2024.

5.3 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Valley Park Woods is a category A access site (high usage, regularly used at all times of the year, with more than approximately 15-20 visitors using one entrance every day) and is part of the Welcoming Sites Programme (WSP), a Woodland Trust initiative which aims to improve recreation and access provision at our key sites. The WSP will lead to a series of lasting upgrades that will improve the visitor experience and aims to increase the number and range of visitors to this site. An attractive and serviceable network of tracks and paths will further encourage the appreciation of the woodland, both on the site and in the locality. The site will be managed to meet the required high standards of WSP and will provide a clear welcome: well-maintained entrances, furniture, signs and other infrastructure as appropriate. Improved access will better facilitate use by a wider range of visitors.

Valley Park Woods is situated within the residential suburbs of Chandlers Ford, a town with a population of over 21000 people which immediately abuts Eastleigh, south Hampshire.

The site is comprised of a complex of four separate blocks of woodland divided by roads, residential housing and industry. However, each block is accessible via the network of roads or footpaths between and throughout the woods themselves as follows:
Clothier's Copse: This is the northern-most and smallest wood in the complex. There are entrances at the north and south ends which are connected via an unsurfaced permissive footpath of just over 300m running through the centre of the copse. The most accessible entrance for visitors is off of Katrine Crescent.
There are only single figures of semi-mature and mature ash in this copse, and it is anticipated that declining trees affected by ash dieback disease that pose a significant hazard in high risk zones in future will need to be removed throughout the plan period.

Knight Wood: This is the largest wood in the complex and is situated just over 400m south of Clothier's Copse. There is a small hard-surfaced car park at the Test Valley Borough Council recreation ground on the north boundary of the wood, at the east end of Glendowan Road, allowing direct pedestrian access into Knight Wood via a kissing gate. There are a further six formal entrances distributed around the perimeter of the wood allowing access to the wood from every direction. Within the wood is a circular path of approximately 1.8km (1.2 miles) which gives access to the majority of the periphery of the wood. There are also two public footpaths and offshoots running loosely north west to south east enabling a more direct route through the wood of approximately 800 metres. The paths are mainly flat however; they are unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods. The maintained peripheral paths allow a central area of the northern half of Knight Wood to be left largely natural for wildlife habitat. Ash is also an abundant tree in this area and with ash dieback disease now affecting ash of all age classes present, this increases the unsuitability of formal access through the area. Ash stands are also present on the south and west boundaries and a few individual ash with significant decline symptoms were removed in 2018 on boundaries with roads, with works ongoing to remove further declining trees that pose a significant hazard in high risk zones throughout the plan period.

Small Profits: This section of the complex is approximately 600m south of Knight Wood and can be accessed via two entrances off of Wicklow Drive on the north boundary of the wood. A circular permissive path of approximately 600m provides a route around the wood or access to a further

entrance at the southern end which allows the most direct route to Titlark Copse, the southern-most block in the complex. The path is mainly flat however; it is unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods, with small wooden bridges with hand-rails at the northern and southern entrances.
There is a relatively small amount of ash in this wood, however, ash dieback disease is affecting ash of all age classes present, and a few individual ash with significant decline symptoms were removed in 2018 and 2019 on the north boundary adjacent to Wicklow Drive, with works ongoing to remove further declining trees that pose a significant hazard in high risk zones throughout the plan period.

Titlark Copse: The main entrance to Titlark Copse is in the centre of the north boundary and is accessible via a footpath heading south from the southern entrance of Small Profits (approximately 160m). Alternatively there are is a small amount of parking at the southern end of Eden Walk with a footpath of approximately 280m also leading to the entrance in the centre of the north boundary. The entrance is identifiable by a wooden bridge that spans a stream on the north boundary of the wood.

A circular permissive path of approximately 900m provides a route around the wood, connecting with a further four entrances which allow access or egress from most directions. The path is mainly flat however; it is unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods.

Two other Woodland Trust woods are situated within driving distance, east of Valley Park Woods:
Otterbourne Park Wood, Otterbourne, SO21 2HY - a 23ha ancient woodland, approximately 5km away.
Upper Barn & Crowdhill Copse, Fisher's Pond, SO50 7GD - two copses of ancient woodland totalling 28ha, approximately 10km away.

Significance

Valley Park Woods' urban setting and high local demand for public access is reflective of the increasing development increase in south east England and the need for accessible open space as a whole. The woods close proximity to each other make them ideal and very popular with local residents situated within walking distance. The car park adjacent to Knight Wood also caters for visitors from further afield. Therefore, the complex provides an important ecological and recreational resource, providing benefits to both mental and physical health.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
To collaborate with borough and county councils to improve infrastructure including access and rights of way provision.
To engage volunteers to become Woodland Wardens.

Constraints:
Clothiers Copse, Small Profits and Titlark Copse have residential roadside parking only.
All four woods are surrounded by or are directly abutting densely developed residential areas, schools and industrial estates. This may bring positive and negative effects including potential support for the woods and the Trust and/or anti-social behaviour.

Factors Causing Change

Tree diseases (ash dieback and chronic oak decline) may continue to affect public access, requiring path diversions or closures.
Visitor numbers are likely to increase further following increased residential development in the area.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The site will provide a safe and enjoyable woodland experience for visitors, with a good network of accessible footpaths, entrances, infrastructure and signage, in line with the site's Welcoming Programme designation. The site will be well used and much appreciated by both the local population and visitors from further afield.

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

To provide a safe, enjoyable woodland experience for visitors. This will be achieved through the following within the plan period:
•Path cuts and entrance maintenance twice a year to maintain designated circular and/or through-routes in each wood in the complex.
•Installation of new welcome signs at the main entrances of each of the woods in the complex in 2020.
•Installation of a new orientation panel at Knight Wood in 2020, showing the main path routes and woods in the complex.
•Upgrade of entrance and site infrastructure with particular focus on main entrances and rights of way, in line with the Trusts Welcoming Site Programme,
•Annual infrastructure inspections and maintenance.
•Annual tree safety inspections (including ash dieback and chronic oak decline) and remedial works as required in line with the Trusts Tree Risk Management Policy.
•Works as a result of ash dieback in the centre of the north half half of Knight Wood (cpt 2a) to close or divert former path routes, with installation of suitable signage to inform visitors. This will include coppicing of a minimal quantity of ash with mid to advanced decline symptoms and stacking of the cut material to block off former entry points of paths only which will no longer be maintained.
•An assessment of access infrastructure in 2024 as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment and Welcoming Sites Programme objectives.

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	0.76	Oak (pedunculate)	1880	High forest	No/poor vehicular access within the site	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Tree Preservation Order
Clothiers Copse: Approximately two-thirds of this compartment, at the southern end, is designated ASNW. It is predominantly oak high forest with some ash and silver birch and an understorey of hazel, holly and hawthorn. Other species present include field maple, aspen, sweet chestnut and sycamore. The northern end of the compartment is secondary woodland and contains younger trees and an abundance of shrub species such as dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn. This section narrows to a 'corridor' at the northern end. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with rare patches of ASNW species such as bluebell, and other woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and red campion. Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2010, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected. Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present. One permissive path runs loosely north to south through the centre of the entire length of the copse.							
2a	18.03	Oak (pedunculate)	1800	High forest	Archaeological features, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)

Knight Wood: The majority of this compartment is ancient woodland with mature oak, ash, beech, birch and yew and occasional Scots pine. A significant proportion of the understorey is comprised of hazel with patches of holly, along with rowan, hawthorn, elder and goat willow, with honeysuckle and ivy also plentiful. Ground flora is a mix of bramble, bracken, ferns and large patches of ASNW plants including Solomon's seal, bluebell, wood anemone, butchers broom and yellow pimpernel.

The 1872 OS 6 inch series map and ancient woodland inventory show a rectangular area of just under two and a half hectares in the northern half of the wood that was not wooded. It is thought to have been a field or an area of wood-pasture. This area is now well integrated with the rest of the compartment with secondary woodland of oak and birch with hazel and bracken understorey, although its perimeter is still defined by woodbanks.

Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2010, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected.
Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present.

Permissive paths provide a circular route around the periphery of the wood, while three public right of way footpaths provide access through the wood. There is a small car park in the Test Valley Borough Council recreation ground adjacent to the north boundary of the wood, which gives direct pedestrian access into Knight Wood via a kissing gate.

3a	4.48	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	High forest	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site	Connecting People with woods & trees	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)

Small Profits: This compartment is secondary woodland with an oak, ash, birch, beech and sycamore canopy. The understorey mainly comprises hazel, holly and hawthorn. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with occasional woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and red campion.

There is a stream flowing in a northerly direction along the eastern boundary which has been modified with substantial schemes of work between 2009 and 2016 to contain the stream and reduce erosion to the adjacent banks. Significant vegetation clearance in this area along with sivicultural works have resulted in a swathe of temporary open space along the length of the watercourse with prolific hazel, birch and alder coppice regeneration and bracken and bramble growth beneath a very open stand of oaks.

Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2010, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected.
Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present.

A circular permissive footpath provides access through the wood, with pedestrian entrances in the north and south.

4a	6.27	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	High forest	Diseases, Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site	Connecting People with woods & trees	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)

Titlark Copse: This compartment is a post 1870 plantation of oak in a formerly wet field, with a few trees and shrubs already established at the time. The current species are predominantly oak, birch, sycamore, and the occasional beech with a well developed understorey of hazel, holly, hawthorn and dogwood. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with occasional woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and blue alkanet.

Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2010, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected.

Permissive paths provide a circular route around the periphery of the wood, with five entrances allowing access on every boundary.

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2014	3a	Selective Fell	4.47	4	20
2014	3a	Ride edge Coppice	0.50	20	10
2015	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.25	20	5
2015	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.50	10	5
2016	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.25	40	10
2016	3a	Selective Fell	4.47	13	60
2016	4a	Ride edge Coppice	0.50	20	10

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.