



Ashcombe Wood

Management Plan 2013-2018

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Ashcombe Wood
Location:	Swainswick
Grid reference:	ST750699, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 172
Area:	15.60 hectares (38.55 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

A predominantly ash wood alongside maple, elm, oak and hazel, interspersed with natural springs and a grassland hollow towards the bottom of the wood. The springs allow for localised wet areas within the wood.

2.2 Extended Description

The wood lies approximately 3 miles north of Bath at the southern edge of the Cotswolds AONB and occupies a prominent position on a west facing slope overlooking Woolley Valley. It is one of the largest discrete woodland blocks in that area. The wood is typically ash - field maple with oak, elm and scattered remnant areas of neglected hazel coppice with a rich ground flora, however past management has led to fewer old trees in some parts of the wood and suppression of the ground flora. Within the site the bottom of the combe is grassland and comprises a peaceful hollow sloping up to meet the wood. There are a couple of natural springs resulting in localised wet areas within the wood.

The wood was acquired with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a successful local fundraising campaign.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Parking

There is no official Woodland Trust parking at the site however there is a lay-by on the A46 near the entrance with enough space for 2 cars which can be used. Management access is gained from the lay-by via a short management access over neighbouring land.

Paths

Access to a circular path within the wood is via a set of steps. There are two access points into the meadow, both stiles, which offer the opportunity to detour from the circular path. The woodland is situated on a steep slope and therefore the path follows these contours, making it steep in places. The path is unsurfaced and uneven in places, with some points being prone to seasonal water-logging.

Transport.

The nearest train station is located within the city of Bath, approximately 8 kilometres from the woodland along a busy A46 which has poor provision for pedestrians. The nearest bus stop is for Charmy Down; but only 2 buses per day stop there. There is a more frequent bus route (Service 76A operated by Coach Style) which runs from Bath to the Cold Ashton roundabout, approximately 3 kilometres north of the woodland on the A46.

Facilities

The nearest public facilities are located in Bath at the Morrison's supermarket on the London Road, approx 4 km from the site.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The wood will be a predominantly native broadleaf high forest with a diverse age and species structure continuing to provide a sustainable habitat for wildlife and attractive wood for visitors to enjoy. The wood is already diverse in both species and structure and will be allowed to develop naturally. All large old trees will be maintained to senescence where they pose no threat to safety. Further diversity will be achieved by retaining the meadow which will be managed as a mosaic of unimproved grassland and scrub. The wood's position in the landscape will be retained.

Public access will be encouraged through both the wood and meadow by the maintenance of the path network.

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 wood is mostly ancient woodland conforming to NVC type W8 [*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Acer campestre*- *Mercurialis perennis* woodland], with a rich, typical ground flora including *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, *Arum maculatum* and rarities including *Paris quadrifolia* and *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*. Tree species include ash, oak, elm, field maple, hornbeam, sycamore and horse chestnut and scattered remnant areas of neglected hazel coppice. The woodland had little management for decades after substantial felling in the 1960's. Areas of felling and gaps left by dead trees have been colonised with a mixture of dense regeneration which is mostly of sycamore, hawthorn and bramble. Parts of the site are more recent woodland.

Negotiations with the Highway Agency have highlighted the roadside safety benefits of retaining a tall barrier along the road, the visual effects of which can help to slow traffic on the bend and reduce accidents in an area known to be dangerous.

Prior to acquisition there was no public access to the wood but publicity surrounding fundraising and acquisition led to some people using the site. A permissive footpath and a circular route were cleared from the A46 entrance to the grassland at the bottom of the combe, but have mostly fallen into disuse with limited signs of access. Much of the rest of the wood is difficult to access due to dense regeneration and hawthorn scrub and steep slopes. The soil is very boggy in many places.

Significance

The Woodland Trust believes that there should be no further loss of ancient woodland across the UK and what remains should be protected. Through managing Ashcombe we provide an example of this and deliver our aim of protecting native wood, trees and their wildlife for the future.

Additionally the Ashcombe is a quiet, unspoilt area managed for wildlife by the Trust. The mix of habitats is diverse adds to the local biodiversity. The wood has been identified as important regionally for wildlife, particularly for its rich flora and as such designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Value

Opportunities & Constraints

Diffuse pollution from the road, especially salt in the winter and the direct spraying of the road side verge are both a threat to the habitat.

Factors Causing Change

Invasive Sycamore

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The wood is maintained as a predominantly native species broadleaved high forest of varied age and size structure which is alive with wildlife. Public access will be maintained for people to enjoy the woodland

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

The wood is allowed to develop naturally with minimal intervention. Biannual checks of the woodland to ensure no non-native species are becoming established will be undertaken and appropriate action to remove them if found.

The creation of a dense thicket of regeneration along the roadside boundary will help to catch any pollutants before they can filter into the main block of woodland. This will be done by regularly cutting a 2metre width roadside strip as coppice/hedge encouraging multi-stem regrowth. Beyond this initial low dense strip we will retain a taller barrier as a benefit to road safety. This will be allowed to grow up as maiden trees as long as they do not pose a threat to road safety.

Litter picks will be undertaken annually to remove the rubbish deposited from vehicles along the road side.

Tree safety inspections to be carried out as per site Risk Assessment.

The circular path will be cut annually to keep it open for visitors.

5.2 Semi Natural Open Ground Habitat

Description

The grassland is a mosaic of unimproved calcicolous Upright Brome grassland (NVC type CG3) and unimproved mesotrophic Crested Dogtail- Black Knapweed grassland (NVC type MG5) and damp flushes lower down.

The grassland is very closely linked with the neighbouring farm which has similar grassland and is currently in HLS scheme.

Significance

The field is part of a larger site that has been identified as important regionally for wildlife, particularly for its unimproved grassland and ancient woodlands, and as such designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Value

Opportunities & Constraints

Due to difficulties with access a grazier has not been found for the site and it has been managed by cutting, even this is proving difficult and unsustainably expensive.

Factors Causing Change

Rabbit Grazing, natural succession to scrub

Long term Objective (50 years+)

If sustainable method is identified then the long term goal is to maintain the grassland for the range of flora and fauna typical of unimproved calcicolous grassland (NVC type CG3) and unimproved mesotrophic grassland (NVC type MG5). This should remain a healthy and viable habitat linked with surrounding areas of semi-natural habitat.

If a sustainable method of management is not identified then consideration of allowing this part of the site to convert to native woodland will be given.

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

The quality of the grassland habitat is to be maintained and the sward does not become dominated by coarse species with significant areas of noxious weeds. This will be achieved by:

Cutting the grassland where accessible annually in mid to late July.

Check levels of ragwort each year and pull if found to prevent build up of noxious weeds and prevent spread into neighbouring grassland.

To check if the existing management techniques are suitable for the site a resurvey 20 years after the 1995 original will be conducted. This will be undertaken in 2015 and will need to advise on the management which may change as a result. The survey will check for ground flora and associated invertebrates.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	9.80	Ash	1960	High forest	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance
<p>Mostly even aged ash, with some sycamore and oak c 20-50 years. The understorey is leggy hazel coppice with patches of dense hawthorn scrub. There is a scattering of mature trees of various species throughout the compartments and some significant trees line a section of the boundary with the A46. There is a small area of scrub with mature conifer including Scots Pine and Larch planted as a landscape feature at the head of the coombe. Ground flora is mixed with some interesting ancient woodland indicators and rarities including Bath Asparagus.</p>							
1b	1.30	Ash	1900	High forest	No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance
<p>Even aged ash and sycamore c100 years with very little understorey due to previous grazing in the wood. There are a few older feature trees, mostly sycamore</p>							
1c	0.90	Ash	1980	High forest	No/poor vehicular access within the site		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance
<p>A former field with mixed rough grassland and naturally regenerating wood edge and scrub running up to the roadside boundary.</p>							

2a	3.60	NULL		Non-wood habitat	No/poor vehicular access to the site		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance
<p>A steep sided area of grassland at the base of the coombe. A mosaic, of high conservation value, unimproved calcicolous grassland (NVC type CG3) and unimproved mesotrophic grassland (NVC type MG5) with areas of scrub on the upper slope and damp flushes lower down. See WGS and botanical survey information in Reference File for further details.</p>							

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.