



Pitts Heath Wood

Management Plan 2016-2021

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Pitts Heath Wood
Location:	Runcorn
Grid reference:	SJ568840, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 108
Area:	4.11 hectares (10.16 acres)
Designations:	Community Forest, Local Wildlife Site

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Pitts Heath wood is part of the 'Moore Meadows' nature reserve and public open space that was formerly farmland. Wet alder dominated woodland with occasional mature oak fronted by recent planting of hazel, willow, birch, blackthorn, alder, viburnum, rowan, oak, ash, cherry and hawthorn. Moss, fern and willowherb in wetter areas and some Himalayan balsam. Outside the woodland there are large wildflower areas. There is no public access into the woodland however a footpath/ cycleway called The Greenway passes close to the edge of the wood.

2.2 Extended Description

Pitts Heath Wood is located in the Sandymoor Valley in the borough of Halton in north Cheshire, about half a mile to the south-west of the small village of Moore and about 3 miles to the east of Runcorn town centre. It is part of Halton Moss, an area of former low lying mossland and farmland which has been drained with an extensive network of drainage ditches and subsequently has seen significant change in the past 20 years with the development of new housing and associated facilities as well as business and industrial estates.

To the west of the wood is a large distribution warehouse on the other side of a drainage ditch, the Daresbury Expressway borders the southern boundary, whilst the northern and eastern boundaries are adjacent to Moore Meadows Nature Reserve (owned by Halton Borough Council). In 2001/2 the council planted mixed broadleaf trees along the eastern edge of the wood which have subsequently grown and provides a buffer to the woodland owned by the Trust.

Pitts Heath Wood is 4.11ha of wet woodland, which forms the site's key feature. The site contains a range of habitats from carr woodland, open water ponds, seasonal pools and is cross-crossed by a network of open drains. The southern compartment contains mature trees (oak, birch, alder, willow, sycamore) and the northern half has more recent plantings of mixed broadleaves, from the late 1980's and early 1990's. The understorey is poorly developed throughout and is dominated in the southern half by rhododendron with more coarse vegetation (including bramble, bracken and Himalayan balsam) in the northern compartment. There are occasional patches of woodland flowers, including residual populations of bluebell. In the wetter areas and particularly along drainage channels there are also wetland plants including phragmites, yellow flag iris and reed mace.

There is no public access or footpaths within the wood, although the public can view the woodland from the "Greenway" footpath/cycleway which passes by the eastern side of the wood through Moore Meadows Nature Reserve. Vehicle access for management work is available via a locked gate along the Greenway path.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Pitts Heath Wood has no public access due to dense vegetation and waterlogged ground conditions. Although the wood has no footpaths in it visitors can walk or cycle along the eastern boundary to the wood through Moore Meadows Nature Reserve (owned by Halton Council) in the Sandymoor Valley area to the east of Runcorn. The nearest road is Six Acre Gardens off Runcorn Road in the village of Moore.

The nearest bus stop can be found on Runcorn Road approximately 500 yards from the wood. For more information go to www2.halton.gov.uk/publictransport/pdfs/runcornbusmap
There are no public toilets near to the wood.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term policy for Pitts Heath Wood is to maintain it as a mixed broadleaf wet woodland, managed as a landscape feature and woodland habitat. The woodland forms part of Moore Meadows Nature Reserve and the wider ecological network of semi-natural habitats in the Sandymoor Valley including wet carr woodland, mixed broadleaf woodland, scrub, ponds, streams, ditches and wildflower meadows.

Guided by the Woodland Trust's woodland management approach, long term management will be through minimal intervention to allow the wood to develop through natural processes, apart from the removal of non-native invasive rhododendron from the understorey.

The site currently has no public access and this will continue in the long term to minimise any damaging impacts on the wood and wildlife from public access.

The woodland will be regularly monitored for long term threats from tree diseases, pests, non-native species, human impacts and the long term sustainability of the woodland.

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 Wet Woodland

Description

Pitts Heath lies in the flood plain of the Keckwick Brook on Halton Moss in the Sandymoor Valley. It is an example of wet woodland and contains a range of wetland habitat from open water ponds and seasonal pools to ditches. There are series of land drains running alongside and crossing the site which can hold water throughout the year. The area is low-lying and subject to seasonal flooding with a high water table close to the surface. Recent alterations to land drainage in the area has had an adverse impact of the mature trees in the wood, in particular the mature oak has suffered from dieback. The understorey of compartment 1b is dominated by rhododendron with sparse ground flora. Elsewhere the ground layer is dominated by grasses, nettles, with some bramble and willowherb. There are a few patches of bluebells and other woodland flowers. In the mid 1980's most of compartment 1a was planted with mixed broadleaves. Additional buffer planting of mixed native broadleaves along the eastern edge of the wood was carried out by Halton BC in 2001/2.

Significance

Wetland and woodland habitat is fragmented and under threat from development within the Sandymoor Valley. Pitts Heath wood is a significant area of wet woodland and mosaic of wetland habitat with ponds, ditches and seasonal pools/ wet ground. It lies along an ecological corridor centred upon the Keckwick Brook and the site is a stepping stone along this corridor in the wider landscape and offers a local refuge for wildlife. Water voles have been found in the ditches and it has one of the largest heronries locally with a significant number of grey heron nests. It is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and is adjacent to Moore Meadows Nature Reserve, which is owned and managed by Halton BC.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: The high water table and seasonal flooding are undermining mature canopy trees (particularly oak).

Management access is poor and vehicle access only available with permission from Halton BC through the adjacent nature reserve.

The management of the ditch lines requires extreme sensitivity due to the possible presence of water voles.

Opportunities:

This diverse range of wetland features offers the potential for significant biodiversity enhancement and conservation in this area.

Factors Causing Change

Natural Succession to woodland.

Silting up of ditch lines.

Encroachment by willow scrub along ditch lines affecting water flow in ditches.

Development of nearby land at Halton Moss affecting the local water table level and drainage network could result in increased flooding in the wood.

Invasive Rhododendron spreading in the wood and suppressing natural regeneration and the development of shrub layer and ground flora.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

This wet woodland will be left to grow and develop naturally as a refuge for wildlife, through minimum management intervention. It should contain a range of wetland habitat from open water ponds, seasonal pools, ditches, swamp to wet woodland /carr containing alder, willow, birch and occasional oak, ash, rowan in drier areas. Rhododendron will be eradicated to allow the development of a diverse understorey and ground layer.

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

During the plan period there will be no silvicultural management work and the ponds and ditches will be managed through minimum intervention.

The dense stands of rhododendron will be cleared and any regrowth treated so that by the end of the plan period there is no mature rhododendron left on site and any regen. makes up less than 1% of the shrub layer.

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	1.12	Birch (downy/silver)	1980	Min-intervention	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, No/poor vehicular access within the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site	Wet Woodland	Community Forest, Local Wildlife Site
<p>This compartment lies to the north of Pitts Heath. The site is bounded to the west by an open drain, to the north by a post and wire fence, to the east by wooden marker posts and to the south by a metallised access track. It contains one wetland area (wetland 1) that in past winters has flooded into a large water body, a network of open ditches and some young wet woodland. The water table in this area has been affected in the past by blocked drains and by development on Halton Moss. The woodland areas vary from a sparse canopy of mature and over mature willows with alder to younger trees of oak, alder, ash, birch, rowan, hazel, hawthorn planted in 1986. The site also has some patches of rhododendron.</p> <p>In 2000 Halton BC created a new linear park/ Greenway to the east of this compartment, and they incorporated a significant amount of edge planting to buffer the woodland.</p> <p>There is no public access into Pitts Heath Wood and no formal paths within the wood (largely due to the wet nature of the site).</p>							
1b	2.99	Oak (pedunculate)	1997	Min-intervention	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, No/poor vehicular access within the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site	Wet Woodland	Community Forest, Local Wildlife Site

This compartment lies to the south of Pitts Heath. It contains three wetland areas (that in past winters have merged into one large water body), a network of open ditches and some wet woodland. The water table in this area has been affected in the past by blocked drains and more recently by development on Halton Moss. The woodland areas vary from a sparse canopy of mature and over-mature oaks with alder, sycamore and willow to 1997 plantings of oak, alder, birch, ash, rowan. The understory is dominated by rhododendron which is beginning to suppress regeneration of the woodland. There is no public access into Pitts Heath Wood and no footpaths within the wood (largely due to the wet nature of the site).

In 2000 the land to the east of the wood was planted/ landscaped by Halton Borough Council to create a linear park and greenway (for walking, cycling and horse riding). This is known as Moore Meadows Local Nature Reserve.

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.