



Fountains Wood

Management Plan 2018-2023

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Fountains Wood
Location:	Runcorn
Grid reference:	SJ548826, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 108
Area:	1.08 hectares (2.67 acres)
Designations:	Community Forest

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

This small urban woodland contains mature sycamore with occasional oak and birch within the Windmill Hill housing estate to the east of Runcorn. It provides a habitat for wildlife in an urban location and once formed part of the estate belonging to the nearby Augustinian monastery of Norton Priory and later the Brooke family. It is one of a cluster of Woodland Trust-owned sites in the area, including the nearby Big Wood and Windmill Hill Wood.

2.2 Extended Description

Fountains Wood is a small (1.08ha) urban woodland in the Windmill Hill area of Runcorn, about 2 miles to the east of the town centre. It is situated alongside the Bridgewater Canal to the north, two storey flats and bungalows to the east and south, and Phoenix Park (owned by Halton Council) lies to the west of the wood. The surrounding landscape is urban with housing estates, business parks as well as significant areas of green space including several other woodlands owned by the Woodland Trust nearby including Windmill Hill Wood, Big Wood and Haddocks Wood.

The wood is a small fragment of broadleaved woodland that once formed part of the Brooke Estate centred on Norton Priory. Much of the surrounding land including the woodland was bought by the Commission for New Towns in the late 1970's as part of the Runcorn New Town development which saw the building of the Windmill Hill estate.

The site is low lying and has a slight gradient running from south to north, with soils varying from sandy loam to clay which can lead to some areas of waterlogged ground particularly in winter.

Secondary broadleaved woodland is a key feature for the site. It contains a mixture of broadleaved trees, dominated by even aged (multi-stemmed) mature sycamore with occasional oak and birch. The under storey contains rowan, hawthorn, elder, holly, hazel and dog rose and the ground layer contains bramble, ground ivy with pockets of bluebell. There is a natural spring that rises in the wood and flows as a small stream towards the canal towpath where it is channelled in a culvert.

Informal Public access is another key feature with an unsurfaced footpath through the wood that links the canal towpath with a tarmac footpath along the southern boundary of the wood. The wood is connected to the wider recreational footpath network through Phoenix Park and other green space areas as well as the Bridgewater Canal towpath. The path through the wood is not well used, but the footpaths around the edge of the wood are well used on a daily basis by local people going between housing areas, schools and shops.

As with many urban woodlands and green spaces the site suffers from issues such as littering, fly tipping, vandalism and fires.

In the past it has been badly affected by fly tipping (rubble, garden waste and household rubbish), although the problem has improved in recent years.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

There are three access points into the wood: one from the canal towpath, another from near to Phoenix Park on the southern boundary, and a third opposite houses on Lockgate West on the eastern side of the site. There is an unsurfaced footpath that meanders through the wood which can become wet and muddy in places especially in the winter. Surfaced footpaths skirt the western, eastern and southern boundaries of the wood, with the Bridgewater Canal towpath on the northern boundary.

By bus: The nearest bus stops are on the bus lane where it meets Windmill Avenue West, about a five-minute walk through the housing estate.

For up-to-date information on public transport, visit traveline.org.uk; or telephone 0871 200 22 33.

By car: From Runcorn, head east along the A558, and take the exit towards Windmill Hill. At the roundabout take the first exit onto Manor Park Avenue, then at the second roundabout take the second exit onto Windmill Hill Avenue North. At the next roundabout take the third exit onto Windmill Hill Avenue West. There is no car park at the site but it's possible to park in the housing estate. Alternatively park at Norton Priory car park and follow the signs towards the Bridgewater Canal. Fountains Wood is immediately on the left after crossing over the canal at Green Bridge.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

Fountains Wood will be managed as a woodland landscape feature in perpetuity, whilst also providing an on-going amenity to the local population and ensuring the continuity of woodland habit as an integral part of the local area's wider ecological landscape. It will be managed to maintain a high forest canopy of mixed broadleaves with diverse understorey, shrub and ground layers.

Guided by the Woodland Trust's woodland management approach, long term management will continue to seek a balance between conservation and public enjoyment; and where safe to do so the development of stand structure and species mix will be allowed to develop naturally. Mature trees will be retained for as long as safe to do so and natural regeneration will be promoted. Public safety and long term stand stability will be the key drivers for woodland operations, particularly focussing on areas bordering buildings and footpaths.

The present levels of public access will be maintained, and management will ensure that the wood remains a pleasant place to visit and pass through, whilst continuing to deliver further community benefits such as softening the built landscape and filtering out pollution. The Trust's duty of care to neighbours and visitors will continue to be addressed through on-going tree safety and site risk assessment inspections.

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 Informal Public Access

Description

There is approximately 220m of unsurfaced permissive footpath that meanders through Fountains Wood with three pedestrian access points connecting this path to footpaths that run around the outside of the wood: there is a tarmac surfaced paths run along the western, southern and eastern boundaries and the Bridgewater Canal towpath skirts the northern boundary. The wood is well connected to the wider recreational footpath network in this part of Runcorn including Phoenix Park, the Bridgewater Canal and Sandymoor Valley. The footpath through the wood is not well used and mostly by local people walking dogs.

Significance

Increasing access to and enjoyment of woodland is one of the Woodland Trust's key outcomes and Fountains Wood provides local people with the opportunity to access and enjoy woodland and nature close to where they live. Fountains Wood provides a range of amenity benefits including helping to "soften" the surrounding urban landscape, absorption of pollution and as a barrier against noise from nearby roads, and provides physical and mental health benefits for people in the local area. The wood is part of the Mersey Forest which aims to promote public access to woodland in the region. The woodland forms part of the wider recreational and essential use footpath network.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities: The woodland serves as a natural setting for people to enjoy a quiet informal recreation experience on their doorstep.

Constraints: The urban setting of the wood means that the site is subject to misuse with recurring fly tipping around the eastern and southern fringes to the site.

The small size of the wood is a constraint to developing new access routes which would cause damage and disturbance to the ground flora and wildlife.

Factors Causing Change

Misuse of the site including fly tipping, fires, vandalism.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The long-term intention is to maintain the present levels of public access to Fountains Wood. Guided by the parameters set out in the Woodland Trust's woodland management principles and access policy, management will continue to seek a balance between conservation and public enjoyment. The site will be made as safe as practicable for visitors and neighbours through regular safety inspections of trees in high risk zones, site hazards and access furniture. Any threats to the wood arising from public misuse will be monitored and appropriate measures taken if necessary.

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

During the plan period the aim is to maintain the current level of public access to the site. To achieve this the short term objectives are to:

1. carry out annual maintenance of all entrances, signage and footpath to ensure they remain easy to use. Any vegetation encroaching on the footpath will be cut back and litter/ fly tipping removed as necessary.
2. undertake regular safety inspections of trees in high risk zones (i.e. next to houses and footpaths) and site hazards (as per the Trust's safety inspection regimes) to ensure safety of visitors and neighbours, and undertaking any remedial safety work identified.
3. carry out monitoring at least once during the plan period to assess whether the current access provision is adequate for the level of public use, to identify if there are any people issues/ threats to the wood, and taking appropriate action to address them if necessary.
4. carry out coppicing alongside paths, entrances and boundaries to create more open sight lines in the wood in 2018.

5.2 Secondary Woodland

Description

Fountains Wood is a small secondary broadleaved woodland. It is surrounded on two sides by housing, with the Bridgewater Canal wildlife corridor adjacent to it. The woodland is relatively low lying and can be quite waterlogged at times. There is a natural spring that is drained under the canal into the nearby Norton Priory Museum grounds. The woodland consists of even aged multi stemmed sycamore with occasional silver birch and oak. The oak is focused primarily in the southern part of the wood. The understorey is relatively sparse and contains hawthorn, elder, dog rose, holly. The ground layer contains bramble, ground ivy and pockets of bluebell, lesser celandine and a number of garden escapees. The eastern and southern boundaries are blighted by fly tipping.

Significance

This small woodland is a green lung within the intensively developed Windmill Hill housing estate. It provides a mature landscape setting for housing built in the 1970's by the New Town Development Corporation. Whilst the woodland is only small it provides an important landscape feature and wildlife habitat within an urban environment, and along with other nearby Woodland Trust woodlands (The Trust own 101 ha of woodland within this part of Runcorn) are a valuable part of the local ecological landscape in the area which includes managed/ unmanaged grassland, scrub, ponds, streams, ditches and the canal. It is also part of the Mersey Forest, a project designed to promote the establishment, maintenance and use of woodland in Merseyside. Cheshire has less than 5% woodland cover, consequently this and other local Woodland Trust owned sites within this urban landscape, helps deliver the Trusts core objectives of "restoring and improving biodiversity", and "increasing public awareness and enjoyment of woodland".

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities: The woodland provides a natural setting for the high density housing that borders the eastern and southern boundaries of the wood.

Constraints: Management access is along narrow footpaths and vehicle access is limited to the western and southern boundaries.

The small size of the wood and limited management access are constraints to management operations which will generally be on a small scale.

The proximity of the woodland to housing brings with it greater tree safety risk which needs to be managed and has significant cost implications.

Tree safety work may generate opportunities to create gaps in the canopy to diversify the structure of the wood and promote new canopy trees to flourish.

Factors Causing Change

The urban setting of the site results in regular mis-use and anti-social behaviour including fly tipping and vandalism which can impact on the ecology of the woodland and ability for natural regeneration to develop.

Shading resulting from an over mature canopy and the dominance of sycamore may limit the development of natural regen of species less tolerant to shade (such as oak) and ground flora.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The long term intention for Fountains Wood is to be maintained as a woodland feature in the local area, offering an on-going amenity to the local population, and ensuring the continuity of woodland habit as an integral part of the local area's wider ecological landscape. The wood will be left to develop largely through natural process with mature canopy trees and succession promoted through natural regeneration. Due to its urban location, tree safety work will be required for public safety which will create gaps in the canopy to promote natural regeneration. Threats to the wood from pests, tree disease and invasive species (such as rhododendron & laurel) will be monitored and where necessary appropriate action taken to control them.

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

During the plan period the wood will be managed through minimal silvicultural intervention. The short term objectives will be to:

1. Monitor the health and resilience of the woodland by carrying out a woodland condition assessment during the plan period to monitor levels of natural regeneration, identify any threats from tree disease, pests or non-native invasive species, and take appropriate action where necessary.
2. Undertake tree safety inspections as part of the site risk assessment regime for public safety in high risk zones (i.e. by buildings, footpaths) and carry out any remedial work identified.

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	1.08	Sycamore	1940	Coppice	No/poor vehicular access to the site, People issues (+tve & -tve)	Informal Public Access, Secondary Woodland	Community Forest

Fountains Wood lies next to Windmill Hill housing estate and adjacent to the Bridgewater Canal. It is located in an urban environment with the canal towpath on the northern side of the wood, houses to the east and south and Phoenix Park, a Halton Council owned green space, to the west. The wood contains mostly semi-mature, even aged and multi stemmed sycamore with occasional oak, silver birch, ash and cherry. The understorey contains hawthorn, elder, hazel, dog rose. The ground layer is rather sparse (in part due to pressure from trampling and dense shading) although there are pockets of bluebell and lesser celandine.

There is an unsurfaced footpath through the wood which connects the canal towpath to the network of surfaced paths outside the wood which provide pedestrian links from the housing estate to the woodlands and open spaces in the area. A natural spring issues near the centre of the wood and then flows in a small stream roughly northwards towards the canal where it enters a culvert near the towpath.

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2018	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.15	13	2
2024	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.15	13	2

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.