



Railway Plantation

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Railway Plantation
Location:	Runcorn
Grid reference:	SJ556812, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 108
Area:	1.85 hectares (4.57 acres)
Designations:	Community Forest

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

This small narrow strip of broadleaved woodland is a hidden gem on the outskirts of Runcorn. It's a great place to have a wander amongst mature oak, sycamore, Norway maple and silver birch trees. The woodland floor is carpeted with wildflowers (particularly bluebells and ramsons) in spring, and its varied tree species create some stunning autumn colour.

2.2 Extended Description

Railway Plantation is a small (1.85ha) urban woodland located in the Murdishaw district, approximately 3 miles to the east of Runcorn town centre. The wood is bordered by housing, a main road (Barnfield Avenue), railway line and station car park. The site is on the eastern slope of a plateau that slopes gradually down towards the east. There is a deep cut drainage ditch running from south-west to north-east linking a number of seasonal ponds. The soils are predominantly sandy over areas of pure sand, capped with well decayed humus and leaf litter.

The wood was formerly managed by the Commission for the New Towns (CNT) from the late 1970's as part of the development of Runcorn New Town and it was gifted to the Woodland Trust along with several other urban woodlands in Runcorn in 1995. The Woodland Trust owns twenty one woods in the Runcorn area covering a total of over 100ha.

It is secondary broadleaved woodland with a mature canopy dominated by sycamore with oak, birch, Norway maple, alder, hybrid black poplar, horse chestnut and elm. The wood has areas of dense under storey comprising mainly of elder, hawthorn, rowan, wild cherry, hazel, holly, and Norway maple, with some natural regeneration of oak on the western high ground. A survey taken for the Halton Biodiversity Audit in 1999 identified 73 flowering plants, 13 tree species and 65 species of invertebrates present in the wood and surrounding area. Secondary Woodland is a key feature of the site.

There is public access into the wood with a surfaced footpath running the length of the site and the wood is quite well used by local people on a daily basis. Due to the urban location of the site it also suffers from occasional fly-tipping, fires and vandalism. Informal Public Access is a second Key Feature of the site.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

There is approximately 560m of permissive footpaths through the wood with the main route running close to the top of the ridge near to the railway embankment. There are three public access points into the wood, with all entrances having kissing gates. The paths are surfaced with stone, but due to the wood being located on a slope the path has some quite steep gradients in places and there is a set of steps and footbridge near to the southern entrance from Juniper Grove.

There is no official parking for the wood, although there is limited on street parking on nearby residential roads and the site is next to the Runcorn East Railway station although this is normally very busy.

The nearest bus stops are on Barnfield Avenue that runs along the eastern boundary of the site. It is then a short walk along the pavement to the wood.

The wood is located next to Runcorn East Station on Barnfield Avenue.

For more information visit the traveline website www.traveline.org.uk

There are no known public toilets within the locality. The nearest ones would be at the Halton Lea Shopping Centre, for more information visit www.halton-lea.co.uk

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intention for Railway Plantation is to secure the regeneration and continuity of mixed broadleaved high forest and associated woodland edge habitat. It will be managed predominantly as a landscape and conservation feature to ensure the continuity of woodland habit and will continue to provide an amenity to the local population. Guided by the Woodland Trust's woodland management approach, the long term management will continue to seek a balance between conservation and public enjoyment. The woodland will be left to develop largely through natural processes, with mature and veteran trees retained and standing deadwood left on site where safe to do so.

Public safety and access will be the key drivers for woodland management operations with tree safety being a high priority in areas near to houses, roads and footpaths. Tree safety work to reduce long term safety risks will create gaps in the canopy for natural regeneration to develop and help to restructure the woodland. Regeneration of both natives and non-native species will be accepted. Coppicing along paths and boundaries will be undertaken periodically to maintain path sight lines and create a more graduated woodland edge.

Existing levels of public access provision will be maintained and 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, invasive non-native species, and human impacts (particularly fly tipping and vandalism) to ensure 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

The wood has approximately 560m of permissive surfaced footpath allowing the public access for quiet informal pedestrian activities. There are three access points on the northern, southern and eastern boundaries. The wood is sandwiched between a housing estate, railway line and main road and is quite well used daily by local people.

Significance

The prominent position of Railway plantation on the skyline of east Runcorn is an significant local landmark. It provides an easily accessible woodland near to a large residential population in this area of Runcorn and serves as an important green space for public amenity and recreation. It's location in a transport corridor means that it delivers a range of amenity benefits, including helping to "soften" the surrounding urban landscape, absorption of pollution and acts as a barrier against noise from nearby roads.

Opportunities & Constraints

The woodland is small and surrounded on all sides by transport infrastructure and buildings with only limited management access within the site which constrains management operations. The woodland is on sloping ground and some areas are difficult to access.

The close proximity of a large population means that the site is subject to intense use and sometimes misuse. Wear and tear on paths, litter and fly tipping, fires, and vandalism are perennial problems that need to be taken into consideration when carrying out any new management operations.

Factors Causing Change

Fly tipping, fires, vandalism.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The long-term objective is to maintain the current level of public access to the site to ensure it is welcoming and accessible for visitors all year round. Access infrastructure including 560m of surfaced footpath, 3 entrances, signage, fencing, gates and steps will be maintained in good condition. The wood 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 infrastructure. Threats to the wood arising from public recreation or misuse will be monitored and appropriate measures taken to deal with them where it is practical and achievable.

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

Maintain entrances and footpaths by cutting back encroaching vegetation and trees; inspect signs, fences, entrance gates, culverts and footbridge; remove accumulations of litter & fly tipping as necessary- to be done annually via the EMC.

Coppicing along path edge and roadside boundaries to be carried out to improve sight lines and visibility by the end of the current plan period.

Carry out regular safety inspections of trees in high risk zones (i.e. next to buildings, roads and footpaths) and site hazards as per the Trust's safety inspection regime to ensure safety of visitors and neighbours, and undertaking any remedial safety work identified.

5.2 Natural Secondary Woodland

Description

The woodland canopy contains a mix of native and non-native broadleaves with areas of dense understorey dominated by elder, wild cherry, rowan, hawthorn, and hazel with Norway maple, elm, ash (only a few young trees), and blackthorn. The eastern and central belt of the plantation is dominated by sycamore and Norway maple, this is typically multiple stemmed suggesting a previous history of at least one coppice rotation. Stands of English oak and birch have a higher presence along the west and south-western boundaries, and a mixed stand of horse chestnut, black poplar (hybrid), wild cherry and elm is located on the eastern boundary just north of the Cadet Force hut. A drainage ditch and string of seasonal ponds run through the centre of the plantation draining out of its north-eastern corner.

Significance

This area to the east Runcorn is under considerable development pressure which is affecting the quality and existence of a number of natural and semi-natural habitats. Railway Plantation is a significant landscape and amenity feature within a very urban area (with housing and transport infrastructure all around). It provides a valuable habitat for a range of urban wildlife, and along with other nearby Woodland Trust owned woodlands (Murdishaw Wood and Stockham Wood) it is part of the local ecological landscape in the area. The wood is part of a cluster of Woodland Trust owned sites in Runcorn with a local estate of 101.3 ha of woodland, and consequently these sites together form a significant feature within the landscape creating a wooded feel to the local area.

Opportunities & Constraints

The close proximity of the woodland to housing, roads and railway lines gives rise to tree safety and other boundary related issues which need to be managed and has significant cost implications. Due to high levels of regeneration and dense understorey the opportunity exists to manipulate the structure of the sycamore stands in terms of both age/size class distribution and the composition of species in the canopy and understorey. Tree safety work will create opportunistic gaps in the canopy to promote natural regeneration in favour of oak/ birch.

The woodland is on sloping ground and some areas are difficult to access to carry out management operations.

Factors Causing Change

Dense canopy and shading by mature sycamore is suppressing development of other broadleaves into future canopy trees.

Fly tipping, vandalism and fires on site.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The long term objective is to maintain the continuity of broadleaved high forest as a landscape and conservation feature. The wood will be largely managed by a minimal intervention approach with mature trees retained into senescence and standing columns of dead wood kept as important deadwood habitat where there is no compromise to public safety. The main reason for management intervention is likely to be for tree safety which will create opportunistic gaps in the canopy promoting natural regeneration and enabling the understorey to be more diverse. Threats to the wood from pests, tree disease and invasive species will be monitored and appropriate action taken to control them where it is practical and achievable.

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

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 roads) and carry out any remedial work identified. Carry out a Woodland Condition Assessment towards the end of the current plan period to assess the health and resilience of the woodland including the mix of species and natural regeneration, to monitor threats from tree disease, pests, non-native invasive species and to take appropriate action where necessary.

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	1.85	Sycamore	1945	High forest	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, People issues (+tve & -tve), Services & wayleaves, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Informal Public Access, Natural Secondary Woodland	Community Forest

To the west and north-west the compartment runs along the top of the railway embankment and is defined by an old fence line. The site is approximately 280m long and 90m across at its widest point, it runs from south-west to north-east with a slight eastern aspect. The northern boundary is the car park for Runcorn East railway station. The eastern boundary follows the road edge alongside Barnfield Avenue. The southern boundary is defined by chain link fence and abuts the Army Cadet Force grounds and an area of new housing. The wood is mature secondary woodland with 97% tree cover, 63% of which is sycamore and Norway maple (7%), with English oak (14%), hybrid black poplar (5%), birch - downy & silver (5%), and alder / horse chestnut and elm at 2% each. Areas of dense understorey are dominated by elder, wild cherry, rowan, hawthorn, and hazel with Norway maple, ash, and blackthorn. The dense canopy and understorey in the sycamore stands has restricted the diversity and spread of the ground flora, however under the oak and birch stands to the west there is greater ground flora diversity. There are two ponds linked by a ditch within the wood a network of permissive paths.

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2018	1a	Selective Fell	0.20	25	5
2022	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.10	20	2
2026	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.10	20	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.