WOODLAND TRUST

Ruffett & Big Wood

Management Plan 2017-2022

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MAPS

THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.
Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
10. Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Ruffett & Big Wood
Location:	Coulsdon, Sutton
Grid reference:	TQ281604, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 176
Area:	7.01 hectares (17.32 acres)
Designations:	Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Designated as a Local Nature Reserve, these two woods are a fantastic addition to a countryside walk out from the city. On a clear day it provides fantastic views over London.

2.2 Extended Description

Ruffett & Big Wood is situated on the north-west outskirts of Coulsdon, Sutton, within the town's Greenbelt, surrounded on four sides by open space.

The wood comprises of two blocks, Ruffett Wood to the northeast and Big Wood to the southwest, joined at one corner. The wood's total area of 7.02 hectares means it is one of the largest accessible areas of woodland within the London Borough of Sutton. This value has been recognised by its designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and parts of the site is covered by a tree preservation order (TPO). The woodland is situated on the chalk plateau of the North Downs which gives rise to free draining loamy, slightly acidic soils.

Big Wood, the larger of the two blocks, has a relatively dense canopy of even-aged sycamore and ash while Ruffett Wood, a long established secondary woodland, has a more diverse canopy in structure and species composition e.g. veteran horse chestnut, oak, field maple and beech with a relatively young secondary canopy of hazel, sycamore and ash. A large area of Ruffett Wood suffered storm damage in 1987, which has further diversified the structure and enhanced the deadwood component of the woodland. Ground flora is generally sparse in Big Wood, dominated by ground ivy; while in Ruffett, the flora is more diverse with several ancient woodland indicator species including bluebells and dog's mercury.

A simple but popular permissive path network provides good visitor access. The wood is very well used by the local population including school children who use it as a shortcut walking to and from the adjacent school to the west. There have been a number of anti-social behaviour problems in the wood, especially during the summer holidays. This has included fly-tipping, bike ramps and camp fires.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

General location:
Ruffett & Big Wood is located on the northwest outskirts of Coulsdon off the A23, inside the M25. The wood is surrounded by open areas, Clockhouse Recreation Ground to the south, playing fields of Woodmansterne Primary school, Purley Walcountians Hockey Club and Walcountians to the west and low grade pasture/farmland to the north and east

Parking:
There is some parking available on Richland Avenue, to the south of the site. This is a public road with limited street parking.

Public transport:
The nearest train station is Woodmansterne Rail Station, a 15 minute walk away.

3.2 Access / Walks

General overview of paths and entrances:
There are four entrances into the wood. Three of these are from the public footpath that runs along the southern boundary from Clockhouse Recreation Ground and the fourth is on the north-western corner of Big Wood. There are several footpaths that run through the site, including a circular path around Ruffet Wood.

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intentions for Ruffett and Big are focused on retaining and where possible improving woodland biodiversity and increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Natural processes will continue to shape the woodland, ensuring a range of different species and ages of trees with gaps in the canopy where natural regeneration can thrive. As the woodland matures, trees will decline naturally, contributing to important deadwood habitat both standing and fallen, particularly for invertebrate and fungal communities, apart from where it poses a significant tree safety risk.

Naturally regenerating species include ash, sycamore, hazel and field maple. The impact of ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) will affect the species composition of the wood over time, and so sycamore is likely to be the dominant tree species in the future.

On-going monitoring will ensure access remains easy and safe. This will be achieved through a managed path and entrance network and regular safety inspections of site infrastructure and of higher risk tree zones.

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 Secondary Woodland

Description

Parts of Ruffett and Big Wood are long established secondary woodland, indicated by mature horse chestnut, beech, field maple and oak trees found predominately along the eastern edge of the wood. The majority of the wood is dominated by ash and sycamore established in the 1950s which, in patches, create a dense canopy. Understory species include hazel and field maple (which are coppiced in places along footpaths), elder, holly, yew, hawthorn, Norway maple and false acacia (Robinia pseudoacacia). Regenerating species are dominated by ash and sycamore but are suppressed by the patches of dense shade.

The wood is situated on chalk bedrock with clay-with-flint soils and while this gives rise to loamy and relatively free draining soils, small stretches of the footpaths become boggy in winter. Ground flora is sparse in Big Wood under the sycamore canopy but in Ruffett the flora is more diverse with several ancient woodland indicator species. Woodland flora includes bluebells, violets, lords and ladies, sancile, herb Robert, speedwell spp., and ground ivy. Nettles and bramble dominate in areas of disturbance.

Significance

Ruffett and Big Wood is the largest block of woodland in the London Borough of Sutton and as such features in Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan which aims to maintain and improve the current areas of semi-natural woodland.

Opportunities & Constraints

Decline of ash due to ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus)
Potential for colonisation of other pests and diseases such as acute oak decline and oak processionary moth
Mammal damage (deer, rabbits, grey squirrels)
Invasive non-native species (false acacia)

Factors Causing Change

Decline of ash due to ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus)
Potential for colonisation of other pests and diseases such as acute oak decline and oak processionary moth
Mammal damage (deer, rabbits, grey squirrels)
Invasive non-native species (false acacia)

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain and improve the woodland, ensuring a diverse and mixed woodland that is resilient to pests and diseases.

The impact of ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) will affect the species composition of the wood over time with the likely dominant species in the future being sycamore . Long term management will allow natural processes to shape the wood ensuring a range of different species and ages of trees with gaps in the canopy where natural regeneration can thrive. Squirrel damage to broadleaf trees will be monitored and action taken if the damage becomes unacceptable.

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

During the plan period, management will be undertaken to remove non-native species e.g. false acacia and ride-edge coppicing will continue to maintain structural diversity of the wood.

Non-native false acacia will be eradicated by uprooting saplings starting in winter 2017.

In Ruffett, (Subcpt 1a) the coppicing of small patches of hazel (<0.1 ha) will continue biennially with the arisings used to create dead hedges along paths prone to path creep and living hedges along the wood's boundary to mask neighbours fencing and rubbish.

The dieback of ash will be monitored annually as part of tree safety inspection to ensure that canopy gaps do not exceed 20% of the total woodland area and that natural regeneration of native tree species is not compromised by squirrel damage.

5.2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Ruffett and Big Wood has an access category B (regular usage, 5 – 15 people using one entrance per day). There are several access points from the Clockhouse Recreation Ground and sport fields and from Richland Avenue.

Its proximity to the village of Woodmansterne (population of c.3,000) and Coulsdon (population of c.25,500) within 1km of the site, neighbouring recreation ground and sports field, and multiple access points result in the wood having a relatively high footfall. Permissive paths give easy access to all parts of the wood and includes a circular walk around Ruffett Wood with fine views of London from the northern edge of the wood.

The wood is highly prone to anti-social behaviour including camps, fires and rubbish.

Significance

Ruffett and Big Wood is the largest patch of woodland in the Borough of Sutton. Management works such as coppicing are carried out by Sutton Conservation volunteers who visit the wood annually.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Areas of paths can be extremely wet over the winter mostly due to the underlying clay soils.
Antisocial behaviour and rubbish.

Opportunities
Recruitment of a site warden to report incidents of antisocial behaviour.

Factors Causing Change

Rubbish and antisocial behaviour leading to the wood feeling unsafe.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Informal public access will be provided at the wood in perpetuity. An on-going programme of maintenance will ensure safe and easy access along clearly defined routes for quiet recreation. Provision of infrastructure will be kept low key as appropriate for the grading of this site.

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

During this plan period, management will improve and maintain infrastructure and paths to ensure the wood remains open and safe to visitors.

- Approx 2500m of paths will be cut annually to allow continued access across the whole site. This will include
strimming/coppicing ride edges and appropriate tree safety work, identified by Zone B tree safety inspections every year.

- Infrastructure at every entrance will be reviewed and restored with post and rail fencing and welcome signage.

- Rubbish currently in the wood will be cleared (remain of 2 camps) and the wood routinely checked for camps and rubbish whenever visited.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By

APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	2.50	Ash	1950	Min-intervention		Connecting People with woods & trees	Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve, Tree Preservation Order
This compartment is commonly known as 'Ruffett Wood' and long established secondary woodland. It suffered severe storm damage in the 1987 gales in which the central area was blown, although the site is now regenerating profusely. Mature broadleaves from the 1900s of beech, sycamore, field maple, oak and cherry can be found along the western boundary; sycamore and ash dominate the rest of the compartment. The regeneration component is mixed but predominantly ash and hazel dominating in coppiced areas. The ground flora consists of bluebell, sanicle, lords and ladies, cow parsley, cleavers, herb Robert, speedwell spp, stitchwort, dogs mercury, and patches of nettles and bramble where there has been disturbance. A circular path is maintained for visitors.							
1b	4.50	Sycamore	1950	Min-intervention		Connecting People with woods & trees	Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve, Tree Preservation Order
This compartment is known as 'Big Wood'. It is secondary woodland dominated by sycamore from the 1950s forming a continuous, closed canopy. Secondary species include ash, wych elm, hawthorn, oak, elder, beech, field maple, hazel, holly, yew, false acacia, Norway maple and mature horse chestnut also the eastern edge of the wood. There is natural regeneration of sycamore and to a lesser extent ash. The ground flora is sparse due to the dense shade but includes low density bramble, cow parsley, dogs mercury, ferns, martagon lily, clematis and extensive ground ivy. Main paths are maintained for visitors, however, several informal paths have been created within the block and the wood is prone to vandalism e.g. camps.							

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.

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