WOODLAND TRUST

Church Covert

Management Plan 2017-2022

MANAGEMENT PLAN - CONTENTS PAGE

ITEM **Page No.**

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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Church Covert
Location:	Slaugham
Grid reference:	TQ258279, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 187
Area:	5.60 hectares (13.84 acres)
Designations:	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

This site holds rich habitats for plant and invertebrates, with a marshy meadow, hedgerows, and riparian woodland. Adjacent to the wood is a mill pond, and a one thousand year old yew tree in the neighbouring churchyard, surviving from the times of William the Conqueror.

2.2 Extended Description

Church Covert is situated in the village of Slaugham, West Sussex, in the High Weald AONB. It lies between the ancient parish church of St Mary's and the ruins of Slaugham Place, home to the Covert family for 240 years. The landscape surrounding the wood consists of a rural patchwork of fields interspersed with hedgerows and small woodlands, with occasional properties dotted here and there. The hedgerows and woodlands are well connected to larger swathes of woodland to the south and to the High Weald treescape to the north.

The wood was planted in the winter of 1997/98 as part of the Trust's Woods on Your Doorstep (WOYD) project, and local residents chose Church Covert as its name. Funding for the project came from various sources including The Millennium Commission, Forestry Commission, the Sainsbury Family Trust and The Manifold Trust. There was also some tremendous fundraising from enthusiastic local people who helped plant trees on the site.

The planting scheme was designed in conjunction with local people, working around the constraints of overhead and underground services. The open aspect of the site, with just over half of the land planted, was chosen to maintain views both within the site and beyond to Slaugham Place.

The site was previously used for turf production and slopes gently from the north-west to the south-east. Around the edge of the site to the west and the north are established hedgerows with many larger hedgerow trees. In the north west corner is the churchyard of St Mary's, which includes some notable trees, including a one thousand year old yew. On the south eastern corner are the remains of the 400 year old Slaugham Place. The immediate surrounds are rural, with improved grassland to the west, a marshy meadow giving way to scrub and woodland to the east and a riverside woodland and a large mill pond to the south.

The planted trees are now well established, natural colonisation by native trees is supplementing the original planting, and the developing grassland areas and rides provide complementary open habitat.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

General location:
Church Covert is situated south-east of the village of Slaugham, near Haywards Heath. The site can be accessed from the centre of the village via the churchyard.

General overview of paths & entrances:
There are various entrances into the wood: Two from the churchyard; two on the southern side of the site on public footpaths and one off Staplefield Road to the east of the village. Two public footpaths cross the site, one of which forms part of the High Weald Trail. There are no surfaced paths. The site is level or gently sloping and at least half of the site is open ground, all of which is accessible to the public.

Parking:
There is no Woodland Trust car park at the site, however, there is parking space for a few cars by the church off Staplefield Road.

Public Transport:
Nearest train station: Haywards Heath, approx 6 miles away.
Nearest bus stop: Slaugham Church, adjacent to the site. Information obtained from Traveline website on 27/3/2007. Further information on public transport can be obtained from Traveline: www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or tel: 0870 608 2 608).

Public Toilets:
Nearest public toilets: Pease Pottage Services, approx 4 miles north, off Junction 11, M23/A23. Disabled and baby-changing facilities available. Information obtained from website: www.moto-way.com.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

In the long-term (50 years+) the site will be developing a high forest structure with significant open space and views to surrounding land.

Due to the small scale of the site, the site functions as one component in its rural setting and management here will not significantly influence the ecology of the wider landscape. The site is beneficial for local use, and management to maintain public access and the existing features of the site should be sufficient to maintain the sites integrity as an ecological link to the wider landscape.

Native broadleaves such as oak and alder will dominate the canopy of some stands, with natural colonisation of trees such as birch and willow supplementing the planted trees. A diverse understorey of field maple, hazel, hawthorn, cherry and holly will complement some areas of woodland, with the occasional scots pine and yew tree adding further interest. The composition of existing tree stands will change with the onset of diseases such as ash dieback, and some trees will be coppiced or felled where they begin to significantly encroach on existing open space. Where possible, a small number of trees will be retained as open grown specimens to develop into veteran trees and to enhance the aesthetic of the more open areas of the wood.

The network of public and permissive paths and rides will be kept open with annual mowing and ride-side coppicing to allow access throughout the whole site and provide visitors with a varied walk through woodland, wildflower rich rides and meadow. The meadow will also be mown annually, with a margin of diverse ground flora and scrub left to develop. Entrances, boundary fences, and infrastructure will be maintained to support this access.

Periodic tree safety work will be necessary on mature trees surrounding the site and as the sites own trees reach maturity, however, both standing and fallen dead wood will be retained wherever it is safe to do so to benefit invertebrates and other wildlife that depend on dead wood.

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

The site was planted in December 1997 with help from local residents who also assisted with the planting design. Pedunculate oak was the main canopy species planted, supplemented with ash and an understorey of wild cherry, common alder, goat willow, field maple, hazel, hawthorn and holly. A small number of the native conifers - yew and Scots pine - were also planted to add diversity.

Most trees were well established after 5 years and today many of the species have reached a height of ten metres or more, with areas of understorey beginning spread, giving the site a wooded aesthetic and atmosphere even at this early stage in the sites development. Deer (fallow and roe) and rabbits continue to browse in some areas, however, as the majority of trees are through the establishment period this will have an inconsequential impact on the main structure of the developing woodland. The impact on developing ground flora, understorey species and tree regeneration may be more significant and will be monitored.

A significant and ongoing influence on the wood is ash dieback, a disease which has already begun to adversely affect many of the young ash at the site and will continue to do so over the plan period. The outcome is likely to result in ash no longer featuring as a canopy tree species, as was originally intended at the time of planting. Conversely, the original composition and quantity of planted trees has also been supplemented with natural colonisation of birch, oak, ash, alder and goat willow from surrounding trees and hedgerows. In fact some trees both naturally regenerating and planted, are doing so well, that the rides are beginning to close over in some areas, meaning that management will be necessary to keep these valuable wildlife corridors and access routes open.

Significance

Before the planting of Church Covert, Church Field as it was known, had been used for the production of turf, and before that for hay and grazing. There are, however, some old accounts that the Covert family used to walk through woods to Slaugham church from Slaugham Place. Therefore, as the newly planted trees become established, an historic landscape may in part be reinstated.

The local people of Slaugham chose new native woodland as the best use for the site and as a way of commemorating the millennium.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Coppice will need to be cut above the browsing height of rabbits, but may still be browsed by deer.

Opportunities:
To retain natural colonisation of native trees to supplement planting and increase diversity and structure.
To promote some trees on ride edges for establishment as open grown trees (future veterans).

Factors Causing Change

Deer, squirrel, and rabbit damage may have an impact on developing ground flora and understorey.
Natural regeneration of trees (e.g. oak, birch, alder and willow) will alter species composition and site layout.
Ash dieback will affect the ash present within the wood and surrounding landscape. This will alter the structure of the woodland that was envisaged at the time of planting, creating open areas where ash diminishes, giving opportunity for other species to establish in their place. There is likely to be an increase in dead wood as a result of the disease and this will be retained on site where possible, in places where it does not present a hazard to neighbours or visitors to the wood.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Native broadleaved woodland with high forest structure, including a diverse understorey. Oak will be the main canopy species, interspersed with stands of birch and occasional Scots pine, with alder dominating the wetter areas. Areas of denser tree cover will be present, particularly on woodland margins where natural regeneration will be most prevalent. Wild cherry, goat willow, field maple, hazel, hawthorn and holly will be plentiful in the understorey, and a mosaic of more open woodland and scrubby coppice are likely to be present where tree disease and/or animal browsing have affected species regeneration.
Open views will be present between woodland blocks, with only the occasional individual open-grown, large-crowned tree retained as features.
Dead wood will be plentiful on the woodland floor, with some standing dead wood present where it does not present any health and risk to neighbours or visitors to the site.

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

To enhance the structure of existing woodland blocks. This will be achieved in the plan period with the following:
• Annual ride widening and selective felling of trees along approximately 600m (120m per year) of the main path network and adjacent plantation block edges. Where possible, individual trees will be retained as individual open grown feature trees for the long-term.
• Retention of cut material on site to increase dead wood habitat.

5.2 Semi Natural Open Ground Habitat

Description

Almost half of the site is open ground in the form of unimproved grassland. There is a central meadow area between the church in the northwest and Slaugham Place in the southeast. There are several wide rides of up to 20 metres in width and narrower rides along the boundaries. The design of the planting and open ground was carried out in conjunction with local people who requested that the site should have an open aspect with views across it maintained.

The grassland contains several species of fine, slow growing grasses as well as an increasing number of flower species including birds-foot trefoil, self-heal, clover, fleabane, thistle spp, ragwort and common spotted orchid.

Significance

Unimproved grassland has declined hugely during the 20th century due to changes in agricultural practices and subsidies. Remaining areas of habitat are often fragmented and unmanaged. This habitat can include rare species of wildflowers and invertebrates. The High Weald is a stronghold for this habitat although areas are often small such as at this site.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Regular management is needed to maintain the open ground. Grazing is impractical. Removal of cut material is very expensive and not viable on such a small scale.

Opportunities:
To enhance the open aspect of the site by adjusting open space management.

Factors Causing Change

Natural succession of trees, scrub and dominating ground flora such as ragwort and thistle.
Damage from browsing of ground flora, shrubs and trees by rabbits.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Approximately 40% of the site will be open ground. The main meadow areas will remain as semi-natural neutral to acid grassland with key indicator species such as birds-foot trefoil, red clover, green-winged orchid, crested dog's tail and black knapweed. A variety of grasses, wildflowers, coarse vegetation and scrub (e.g. bracken and bramble) should be present on the margins of rides and open areas and between trees, providing beneficial transition zones between habitats.

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

Existing open ground (currently approximately 35% of the site) will be enhanced with the following annual operations in this plan period:
•Meadow management will be adjusted to include only the cutting of paths through the meadow to connect with footpaths through the site in spring. The full meadow will then be cut in autumn with the exception of a 1-2 metre margin which will be left to promote coarse vegetation and its retention over winter. (The margin can also be mown periodically to prevent excessive encroachment of coarse vegetation onto the meadow as and when required).
•Ragwort will be controlled using organic herbicide in spring and autumn, as required, to prevent it from dominating other plant species and from spreading to neighbouring land.
•Ride management will be adjusted to include mowing narrow rides to full width, but leaving a 1 - 2m unevenly scalloped margin unmown on larger (approx 20m width) rides in spring. All paths will then be cut to full width in autumn.
•The diversity of species present will be assessed at least once in the plan period as part of the condition assessment of the site every five years.

5.3 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Church Covert is a developing woodland, planted in the late 1990s. It is a regular walking destination for local residents of Slaugham, a small village seven miles south of Crawley, with a population of just over two thousand people. The site can be accessed by two public right of way footpaths, one of which is part of the High Weald Landscape Trail, leading to the expansive treescape to the north. Access for people of all abilities is available through St.Mary's churchyard in the northwest corner of the site, and there is also access from the Staplefield Road via a wide kissing gate.

A series of wide rides leads through the rapidly establishing trees, leading to open areas including a central meadow which gives good views across the site to Slaugham Place, a picturesque set of ruins over four hundred years old. For a rest stop or picnic there are benches dotted at viewpoints, including the millennium feature for the site - a group of large concrete mushrooms made by local craftsman Arthur Shopland.

There are occasional mature trees dotted around the perimeter of the site, notably in St Mary's churchyard, which includes a one thousand year old yew tree that is well worth a visit. Exiting the site via the public footpath in the southwest corner leads to a riverside woodland with impressive views across a large mill pond, home to a variety of waterfowl such as grebes, ducks and geese.

Significance

It has been proven that access to woodland provides an improved quality of life with benefits to both mental and physical health. Church Covert is well used and treasured by the local community. It provides safe and easy access close to the village centre without the need for travel by car, and is also linked to the wider countryside by the two public footpaths.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Parking is limited to a few spaces by the church, and there are no opportunities to provide additional parking.

Opportunities:
To enhance the open aspect of the site and create pleasant and interesting routes through the wood for visitors.

Factors Causing Change

Tree growth and colonisation encroaching on paths may limit or influence accessibility. This will be monitored throughout the plan period.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

A well-maintained network of rides and paths throughout the site with a variety of rideside habitats will be present. Visitor numbers should be at similar levels to current usage. The open nature of the site will be maintained to keep views open and provide a welcoming experience for all visitors.

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

To provide public access which is safe and enjoyable. This will be achieved in the plan period with the following:
•Annual ride, meadow, and entrance maintenance.
•Annual ride-side coppicing of trees along approximately 600m (120m per year) of the main path network to maintain open rides and promote diversity of habitats.
•Tree safety inspections and remedial work in line with the Woodland Trust Tree Risk Management Policy.
•Annual inspection of all site infrastructure.
•An assessment of the condition of rides and open spaces at least once in the plan period as part of the condition assessment of the site every five years.

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	5.95	Oak (pedunculate)	1998	High forest	Services & wayleaves	Connecting People with woods & trees, Secondary Woodland, Semi Natural Open Ground Habitat	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
3.06 ha of P98 mixed native broadleaves. 2.89 ha of open ground. Species: 50% pedunculate oak; 17% ash; 10% wild cherry; 4% common alder; 4% goat willow, 13% other native broadleaves (field maple, hazel, hawthorn and holly) 1% yew and 1% Scots pine. Planted at 1100 trees/ha (3m spacing). 3800 trees, originally protected by 1.5m tree shelters. Shelters replaced by rabbit spirals in 2005.							

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.