



Cowcroft Wood

Management Plan 2017-2022

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Cowcroft Wood
Location:	Chesham
Grid reference:	SP982014, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 165
Area:	7.37 hectares (18.21 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Part of a bigger area of woodland known as Tylers Hill. The wider area is well serviced by public footpaths so it is highly accessible and is an interesting example of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Some steep slopes within the wood to the west but there are more gentle slopes to the south. There are some old mineral workings within the wood that provide interesting aquatic habitats.

2.2 Extended Description

Cowcroft Wood is a 7.5Ha site situated just outside the village of Botley (1.2km / 0.75 miles) and close to the town of Chesham (2.9km / 1.8 miles). The site was acquired by the Woodland Trust in 1987 and forms part of a complex of woodland known as Tylers Hill, with privately owned woodland to the north. Surrounding the wood elsewhere, there is a farm and a mixture of arable and pasture land. The site sits within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is also designated as a County Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve.

Soils are described as slightly acid loamy and clayey with impeded drainage. Indeed, paths around site can become boggy after wet periods of weather.

The wood is diverse in species and in structure, with the main tree species being oak and beech with ash, hornbeam, silver birch and cherry. It is classified as ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) and has numerous specialist woodland plants including bluebell, wood sorrel, yellow pimpernel, primrose, enchanter's nightshade and dog's mercury.

The birch and cherry dominated stands in the wood are starting to senesce and collapse with beech, silver birch and rowan regenerating below. There are areas of hornbeam dominated woodland especially to the south, containing large hornbeam standards. On the south western boundary is a wide woodbank and on this there are very old and impressive beech and hornbeam coppice stools. In lighter parts of the wood, bramble and bracken thickets tend to dominate. Other plants include honeysuckle, wild currant and ferns.

Historically there has been extensive mineral working in the wood, for local tile and brickwork's, and this has left many pits and steep slopes. The terrain in the western half of the wood is now very uneven because of this, making access difficult in parts. Some of the pits now form seasonal ponds.

Cowcroft Wood is well connected to surrounding public rights of way, whilst several permissive paths around the site offer peaceful walks amongst mature woodland. A privately owned farm track runs north to south through the wood, splitting it into two sections. The Woodland Trust has given the site a category C for access (low usage site where we do maintain paths).

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Getting there: Cowcroft Wood lies near Tyler's Hill at Botley about 1.5 miles east of Chesham. Chesham has a railway station on the Metropolitan Line to London. A bus service runs from Chesham to Botley and stops at Botley Stores. From this stop, the wood can be reached via public rights of way and roads and is about a mile away to the south. Car parking is possible in Botley.

There are public rights of way through and around the wood as well as permissive paths. There is no path furniture to negotiate in the wood and the ground within the wood is undulating with some slopes and hollows. Paths can become muddy during wet spells of weather.

All distances are approximate.

Public conveniences: There are public conveniences in Chesham (Star Yard and The Moor) - for further details see www.chiltern.gov.uk or call 01494 729000.

For further information about public transport, contact Traveline - www.traveline.org.uk or phone 0871 200 22 33 .

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intentions for Cowcroft Wood 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 beech, silver birch, rowan, holly and hazel. The likely colonisation by ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) will affect the species composition of the wood over time, and so beech is likely to be the dominant tree species in the woodland as it grows and develops.

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. Archaeological features e.g. pits and woodbank will be monitored and protected for future generations of visitor to enjoy.

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 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The semi-natural woodland has a diverse, mixed structure including mature oak, beech, cherry, hornbeam and silver birch. Some of these mature trees are in stages of decline and collapse, opening up gaps in the canopy which are being colonised by natural regeneration, mainly beech, silver birch and rowan. Holly and hazel form an occasional shrub understory. Levels of natural regeneration are good and not overly suppressed by the presence of deer, rabbit and grey squirrel.

The wood is situated on soils described as slightly acid loamy and clayey with impeded drainage. Flora comprises several species listed as ancient woodland indicators including bluebells, enchanter's nightshade, yellow pimpernel and dog's mercury. Where larger gaps have opened up, bramble and bracken dominates.

Cowcroft forms part of the wider Tyler's Hill Woodland which borders to the north east but is otherwise surrounded by arable and pasture farmland with Cowcroft Farm to the north.

The site was formally worked for clay deposits, creating large pits which have shaped the wood, particularly in the west. Whilst these pits now represent archaeological features, they have also formed seasonal ponds which provide an important habitat.

Significance

The amount of ASNW left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century and ancient woodland is irreplaceable. Approximately 40% of England's ASNW is found in the South East. ASNW is very important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years which allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop over time that cannot be found in new woodland creation sites. A key aim of the Woodland Trust is to prevent any further loss of ancient woodland. Cowcroft Wood has a good representation of ancient woodland vascular plant indicators. The site is listed as a County Wildlife Site (includes SINC), Green Belt and a Local Nature Reserve, highlighting its value to local biodiversity. In addition, the presence of seasonal ponds is an important habitat that plays a significant part in the wider biodiversity of the site.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

- Many of the paths and tracks can become boggy due to the underlying clay soils. Any management work should be carefully timed with drier site conditions
- Woodland archaeology is present and damage must be avoided during any management
- Potential for incursions from mountain bikers exploiting site topography

Opportunities:

- Chiltern's Society interest in buying adjacent land

Factors Causing Change

- Death of ash due to colonisation of 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)

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain and improve the habitat as part of Local Nature Reserve/County Wildlife Site, ensuring a diverse and mixed woodland that is resilient to pests and diseases.

The likely colonisation by ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) will affect the species composition of the wood over time with the likely dominant species in the future being beech. 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. Deer and rabbit damage to the broadleaf trees will be monitored and action taken if the damage becomes unacceptable.

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

As natural processes will be allowed to shape the wood there are no planned interventions over the course of this management cycle apart from those deemed necessary for the safety of visitors. Inspections and informal site visits will monitor the progress of the wood within the plan period.

- Deer impact surveys will be carried out every 3 years to assess any increase in levels of damage. The next survey is due in 2020
- A woodland condition assessment will inform management decisions in the next management plan. Due 2021.

5.2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Cowcroft Wood is located 1.2km / 0.75 miles outside the village of Botley (population 680 - 2011 census) and 2.9km / 1.8 miles from the town of Chesham (population 22,356 - 2011 census). The site is well connected to nearby populations of Botley, Chesham, and Amersham by public rights of way which border the north and east boundary as well as connecting through the middle of the site from north to south. Ley Hill School is located 1.2km from the site using public footpaths.

Permissive paths offer routes into the woodland off the public rights of way at various points with a route connecting the north east corner to a short circular path around the western block of the wood, taking in the old pits. Permissive footpaths comprise approximately 1km of managed paths but these can be boggy throughout the year and are also steep and uneven in places.

Significance

One of the Woodland Trust's main objectives is the promotion of public access to, and enjoyment of, woodlands. Cowcroft Wood provides a quiet area amongst diverse and mature woodland for walking and recreation for many local residents and visitors to the area. Archaeological remains provide a link to local history.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

- Many of the paths can be extremely wet for most of the year round due to the underlying clay soils
- Vehicular parking is not available
- Undulating and steep ground may prove challenging to some walkers

Opportunities:

- Chiltern's Societies interest in buying adjacent land
- Recruitment of an 'eyes and ears' volunteer warden for several local sites
- One off educational visits from nearby Lay Hill School

Factors Causing Change

- Potential for increase in housing / infrastructure nearby

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 (category C: low usage sites where we do maintain paths)

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

A programme of maintenance and tree inspections will ensure the wood remains open and safe to visitors.

- Routine safety inspections of the trees in higher risk zones, such as alongside footpaths and tracks, will be carried out formally every two years. The next survey is due in summer 2018.
- Entrance infrastructure will be inspected annually with any remedial work undertaken as and when appropriate
- An annual path cut will be undertaken in June
- Restore Cowcroft Farm entrance by cutting back hedge and installing small welcome sign. Due 2018
- Restore north east entrance by installing new posts for welcome sign and removing redundant signage. Due 2018
- Restore east entrance by installing a new welcome. Due 2018

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	4.88	Oak (pedunculate)	1901	High forest	Archaeological features, Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
<p>Ancient semi-natural woodland comprising mainly oak and beech with small patches of hazel coppice. Other species include ash, wild cherry, holly, rowan, silver birch and hazel. This compartment is divided into two blocks by a farm track; the larger block to the north features the main area of former mining activity with the pits now hosting seasonal ponds. The block to the south has features mature beech and hornbeam coppice stools along the western boundary.</p>							
1b	2.50	Oak (pedunculate)	1901	High forest	Archaeological features, Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Ancient semi-natural woodland, similar in diversity and structure to compartment 1a although not covered by the County Wildlife Site designation. Natural regeneration of birch, rowan and beech as well as thick areas of bramble and bracken where gaps have appeared in the canopy.</p>							

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.