



Billinge Plantation

Management Plan 2019-2024

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Billinge Plantation
Location:	Billinge
Grid reference:	SD526017, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 108
Area:	9.38 hectares (23.18 acres)
Designations:	Area of Landscape Value, Community Forest, Green Belt, Other, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

An isolated patch of secondary mature broadleaf woodland planted in the late 19th century. Woodland flora, though patchy, includes bluebells, wood sorrel, red and white campion. The three formal public rights of way are well-used by the public.

2.2 Extended Description

Billinge Plantation can be found on the Greater Manchester/Merseyside border, approximately 3 miles south west of Wigan. It is a prominent sky line feature and is consequently rather exposed. The site is currently bounded to the west and east by arable farmland, to the south there is a quarry which is currently been used as a landfill site and to the north a large housing estate can be found. The southern boundary actually runs into the active landfill site. This area once restored will be passed to the Woodland Trust by Mersey Waste Holdings. To the south of the site is Billinge Hill, this is the highest point in the Metropolitan Borough of St Helens and is well visited by local people who enjoy the prominent vistas.

The site is mostly flat and the terrain in the wood consists of hummocks and dips, which is believed to be the result of small scale stone quarrying in the past.

The woodland is made up of mature broadleaved species such as sycamore, beech, oak, ash and birch. Ground flora includes bluebells, wood sorrel, red campion and white campion. The ground flora and understory has been damaged in isolated pockets by frequent illegal use by motor and mountain bikes and this is an on-going issue which we continue to tackle.

Poor management access and areas of permanently wet ground can make any management operations challenging.

It's believed that the woodland was planted in the late 19th century after quarrying had taken place. The site was purchased by The Woodland Trust from Joseph Pickervance Ltd in 1990.

The woodland has two key features Informal Public Access and Natural Secondary Woodland.

The site contains 3 formal public rights of way, and is well used by local people for informal recreational opportunities.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Billinge Plantation is located on the Greater Manchester/Merseyside border, close to the village of Upholland which is approximately 8 miles north of the town of St Helens. The wood has four pedestrian access points. 2 pedestrian access points are located on the northern boundary of the site to the rear of Upholland Road and Downham Walk. One pedestrian access point is located on the western boundary on the public footpath leading from Plane Tree farm and the fourth pedestrian access point is located on the south western corner of the site adjacent to Beacon Hill. All the pedestrian access points are kissing gates. On site there is a circular footpath which is approximately 1200 metres in length. The paths are not surfaced and consist of unmodified earth, they can get muddy and slippery when it is wet.

Parking is available on nearby local roads such as Upholland Road and Downham Walk but may be limited.

Nearest public toilet: Located approximately 5 miles away at Asda Superstores, Kirkham Street, St Helens. Toilets are suitable for disabled users.

Nearest bus stop: Located on Upholland Road, which is approximately 300 metres away from the wood. Upholland Road is a suburban road with a pavement. Further information about public transport is available from Traveline- www.traveline.org.uk or phone 0870 608 2608

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

Billinge Plantation will be allowed to grow and develop naturally, as a refuge for wildlife. The wood will be managed as high forest of mixed broadleaves, including non-native trees common to the local area. It will be managed predominantly as a landscape and conservation feature, through minimal intervention. Gaps will be created in the canopy due to trees naturally reaching senescence and tree safety operations.

Public Access will continue to be maintained with four pedestrian access points and approximately 1000 metres of footpath.

Mountain and motorbikes will be deterred by signage, robust boundaries and entrances and working with relevant partners such as the Police and Local Authority.

Low key public access will continue to be provided at a level which is appropriate for a small urban woodland.

Statutory obligations will continue to be met with respect to managing tree safety and ensuring public access via the permissive path.

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 woodland has four main access points and 3 public footpaths run through the site providing approximately 1000 metres of unsurfaced footpath for informal recreational use.

Significance

Greater Manchester and Merseyside contain few wooded areas. The woodland provides an area for people to enjoy quiet informal recreational activities in an area which on the whole is very urban.

Opportunities & Constraints

The Public Right of Way footpath network links the site to the wider countryside including Billinge Hill.

The undulating nature of the site has made it attractive to mountain bike users. This has caused erosion and a certain degree of animosity between mountain bikers and pedestrians.

Factors Causing Change

Damage to paths by mountain bikers/motorbikes.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Public Access will be maintained at its current level at least, with four entrances and a network of paths throughout the wood.

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

Signs or plaques welcoming the general public to make use of the site will be maintained at the entrance point. Vegetation encroaching onto paths will be cut back and annual maintenance of all woodland fixtures; including, signs, gates, and fences will be undertaken. The site will be kept clear of litter and fly tipping. We will continue to attempt to manage unauthorised access from mountain/motor bikes. This will be achieved by keeping boundaries and entrances as secure as possible, removing unauthorised bike ramps, signage and liaising with partners such as the Police and Local Authority when necessary.

5.2 Natural Secondary Woodland

Description

Billinge Plantation is a mature mainly broadleaved even aged block of woodland, planted in the late 19th century. It contains a range of canopy species, the most dominant of which are sycamore and beech. Oak, ash, and birch can also be found in much lesser numbers. There is an uneven understorey of beech, sycamore, elder where sufficient light reaches the woodland floor. The woodland also has a surprisingly high number of bluebells for a secondary woodland which add colour and interest to the site in late spring. However, the ground flora is dominated by variegated yellow archangel, which is a garden escapee.

The terrain in the wood consists of hummock and dip, which is thought to be the result of small scale stone quarrying in the past. The wood is a prominent sky line feature on a hillside (top of hill is south west) and is consequently rather exposed.

The woodland is protected by a Tree Preservation Order, it is also designated as part of the Community Forest's (Red Rose and Mersey), Site of Biological Importance and an Area of Landscape Value.

Significance

The woods main value is as open woodland, visible and available to many hundreds of local people on a daily basis. Its wildlife value has not been investigated, the ground flora is sparse, and animals likely to be restricted to common, robust, urban species such as grey squirrels and various birds. However, these are visible and appreciated by people living locally.

Opportunities & Constraints

Billinge Plantation is a small isolated wood, and opportunities to extend the size of the wood are limited to an area of the landfill site which is due to be reclaimed shortly (see below). The woodland suffers from intense recreational use mountain biking. This acts to trample, compact soils and generally suppress natural regeneration. Where suitable conditions exist however natural regeneration of beech, sycamore and the occasional oak thrives. The woodland also suffers from vandalism in the form of fires and physical damage to fences, walls and trees.

Part of the site (approx 2 acres) is currently leased to Mersey Waste Holdings and is undergoing a restoration programme from landfill use. This area of land is due to be handed back to once restoration works are complete and will provide an opportunity to extend the area of broadleaved woodland. Overall the woodland is mature and stable enough to provide a habitat for urban wildlife, along with similar pockets of woodland within the area.

Factors Causing Change

Damage to understorey by mountain/motor bikes.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To develop the wood as predominately native high forest, with a mixed range of ages and species. It is anticipated that as trees gradually senesce or are removed for safety reasons natural regeneration will fill the gaps. Hence the wood will require little active management, beyond ensuring that regeneration is sufficient. Throughout the wood, older trees of any species will be retained as long as safety allows.

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

Tree safety inspections will be undertaken on a regular basis and work carried out if necessary for public safety. The site will be checked once during this plan period to assess whether there is sufficient regeneration to ensure the long term future of the canopy.

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	9.38	Sycamore	1900	High forest	No/poor vehicular access to the site, No/poor vehicular access within the site, People issues (+tve & -tve)	Informal Public Access, Natural Secondary Woodland	Area of Landscape Value, Community Forest, Green Belt, Other, Tree Preservation Order

8.66 hectares (21.4acres) of secondary woodland situated on the Greater Manchester/Merseyside border approximately 3 miles South West of Wigan. The woodland sits on relatively flat ground on the site of a former quarry. The canopy is dominated by sycamore and beech with occasional oak, ash and silver birch. Ground flora includes species such as bluebell, wood sorrel, white campion and red campion. The woodland has 3 Public Rights Of Way running through and is well used by local people.

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.