WOODLAND TRUST

Old Copse

Management Plan 2019-2024

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Old Copse
Location:	Sonning Common
Grid reference:	SU702809, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 175
Area:	12.43 hectares (30.72 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Woodland Site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Old Copse lies on the edge of Sonning Copse in the Chiltern Hills area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Believed to be an ancient, semi-natural woodland, it is easily accessible from Sonning Common.

2.2 Extended Description

Old Copse is a 13.7 hectare / 34 acre ancient woodland site on the edge of Sonning Common in Oxfordshire, within the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and was acquired by the Woodland Trust in 1995.

The woodland is currently characterised by mature beech trees which were originally planted for the local furniture industry and to supply the handles for a brush factory nearby at Stoke Row. The understorey is made up mostly of holly which can tolerate the high amounts of shade under beech trees, except where mature trees have fallen to create glades and helped to promote natural regeneration (mostly beech and rowan).

NVC woodland type is W14 Beech-oak woodland with bramble, and the underlying ecology is slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage, with moderate to high fertility suitable to a wide range of woodland types. It has been managed as high forest for many years, and has had successive periods of felling and replanting, and was last thinned in the late 1980's.

The woodland archaeology present in Old Copse is of some interest, and includes a very prominent old woodbank on parts of the boundary and a small enclosure (thought to date back to the Romano-British period). A four-sided enclosure was found in the south of the wood in 2001 measuring 84 by 100 metres. Formed by a large ditch 8-10 metres wide and about a metre deep, and with internal and external bank in places, the nature of which is unknown.

More recent archaeology is also present on edge of the wood, including the remains of Bishopwood Camp, used by Polish refugees during the Second World War.

The woodland is easily accessible from Sonning Common and there are several entrances to the woodland, from Woodlands Road and Shiplake Bottom and several paths including four public footpaths which cross the site.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Getting there: Old Copse is near to Sonning Common (approx. 1/2 mile) and buses run there from Reading, Wallingford and Henley on Thames. Limited vehicular parking is possible on many of the roads to the south and east of the wood (please park considerately).

There are four public footpaths crossing the wood as well as numerous permissive paths. The site is level with no surfaced paths and there are kissing gates at some of the entrances to the wood.

Public conveniences: Sonning Common village hall has public toilets that are normally open to the public. The village hall is at the other end of Woodlands road, at its junction with Wood Lane.

Further information about public transport is available from Traveline - www.traveline.org.uk or phone 0871 200 22 33 .

All distances are approximate.

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The long term policy for Old Copse is focused on one of the Woodland Trusts key aims;
- to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife

Management focus will be on retaining and improving woodland biodiversity and resilience, with all major ancient woodland components in a secure and improving condition including old growth trees, ground flora, archaeological features, and a diverse deadwood component. Management will also focus on increasing peoples understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

The woodland is a prominent feature in the landscape and has therefore been an important component of the local area for many decades, and as such any required silvicultural intervention must ensure the mature woodland appearance is largely unchanged through a considered continuous cover management approach.

Natural regeneration has brought in many ‘new’ tree species into the wood and the wood is now more diverse than for the last 50 years. This process will continue and any intervention will therefore aim to diversify the overall age and stand species structure through small scale continuous cover thinning works, mostly achieved through addressing tree safety requirements and path / access improvements. This will help increase light levels and improve overall health of retained trees, and encourage natural regeneration of species such as beech, birch, cherry and rowan to facilitate a more varied structure and composition. Dense stands of holly within the site will continue to be managed in order to reduce impact on natural regeneration.

Beech is likely to remain the dominant tree species in the wood as it progresses. Some broadleaved trees will be identified as future old growth trees and left to reach old age and decline naturally. Deadwood volume will increase as trees mature and senesce 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. Felling will take place where tree safety dictates, and the operations will open gaps in the canopy to facilitate regeneration.

Observations will be carried out to record any factors causing change that may be detrimental to the vitality and structure of the woodland. For example there should be no damaging invasive species present on the site, and the likely colonisation by ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) and other pests and diseases monitored and managed where necessary. Ash is a very minor component of the woodland canopy, currently comprising <5%.

The public’s enjoyment of the woodlands will be enhanced by maintaining an accessible and safe network of paths and rides, in line with the recommendations for category B for access (which implies regular usage, with 5 – 15 people using one entrance per day). On-going monitoring will ensure access and boundaries remain as safe as possible. 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 such as pits will be monitored and protected for future generations of visitor to enjoy. Entrances, boundary fences, and benches will be maintained as necessary and the appropriate access provision will be monitored and delivered.

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 Woodland Site

Description

The whole of Old Copse (13.76ha / 34 acres) is designated as ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW), though it is categorised as an Ancient Woodland Site (AWS) due to the planted beech. However, semi-natural characteristics are becoming more prevalent over time with natural processes such as wind-throw and regeneration, and periodic silvicultural intervention.

The wood is situated on the clay topped plateau of the Chilterns and its soils are therefore mildly acidic. Overall the wood approximates to a National vegetation classification (NVC) of W14: beech-bramble woodland. The main tree species is beech, which dominates the canopy as a result of extensive planting for the furniture industry in the early 20th century. Other minor tree species include oak, rowan, field maple, hazel, ash (<5%) and wild cherry. The understorey is dominated by dense holly thickets, and bramble is also abundant in the canopy openings. The herb layer contains dog's mercury, foxglove and various sedges and ferns.

The wood has mainly been managed as high forest and there have been successive periods of felling and replanting. Some large multi-stemmed trees exist on the wood boundary banks and this may indicate coppice management in the longer past.

There is some interesting woodland archaeology present. A very prominent woodbank is present close to the woodland boundary on 3 sides of the wood and there is a small rectangular enclosure (thought to date back to the Romano-British period) in the south western quadrant of the wood. The enclosure is beneath the canopy of the woodland and is not scheduled. There are also several pits originating from quarrying and timber sawing.

The site borders a young (P.83) mixed species plantation to the north-east containing larch, Scot's pine, western hemlock, beech and wild cherry. Elsewhere to the east is a housing estate, to the south playing fields and to the west Gallowstree Road.

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.
The Chilterns AONB is one of most heavily wooded areas of the UK with a very high concentration of ancient woodland (over 13% of the land area).

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
- Woodland archaeology is present and damage must be avoided during any management operations
- The woodland has limited infrastructure for timber harvesting – no surfaced tracks and unsuitable entrance points for forest machinery. Access can become boggy in wetter weather. Any management work should be carefully timed with drier site conditions if possible
- There is evidence of deer on site but impact is being minimised via regular public access
- There has been garden rubbish dumping at the site in the past, some dumped garden exotics have previously rooted within the woodland area and been cleared

Opportunities:
- Selecting and promoting old growth trees well into the future to enable them to become veteran and ancient trees; this will require some control of competing trees
- Improvement of tree age range, structure and species diversity through silvicultural management and natural processes such as wind-throw, which will serve to increase the semi-natural characteristics over time

Factors Causing Change

- Mammal damage (deer, squirrel) - currently low risk; monitoring scheduled
- Increasing shade and loss of structure in minimum intervention stands, the spread and development of holly in the understory - Medium risk medium impact - monitoring and management scheduled
- Changes in structure and gaps in canopy due to wind-blow and disease/dieback e.g. Hymenoscyphus fraxineus in ash - High risk, low impact due to ash comprising <5% composition
- Anti-social behaviour problems: fly tipping/litter; vandalism; uncontrolled dogs

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Old Copse will continue to develop largely through natural processes, where the deadwood habitat is likely to increase over time through trees being left to age and collapse, and subsequent natural regeneration succeeding within canopy gaps. Intervention will take place to reduce threats to this natural development where required.

The composition will remain predominantly broadleaved, with all major ancient woodland components in a secure and improving condition including old growth trees, ground flora, archaeological features, and a diverse deadwood component. The mixed stands (beech, cherry, rowan, birch, and oak being the most common species) of high forest will be self-regenerating and of high conservation and amenity value.

Holly will continue to dominate the understory and will be reduced in area if it is proven to be preventing adequate natural regeneration of native trees. Trees felled for safety reasons will be left on site to decay.

Any threats to the biodiversity or historic features of the wood will be monitored and resulting action taken, i.e. deer 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)

Management intervention to reduce threat from holly to natural regeneration:
- Cutting back of holly within existing open areas (C.0.5ha) and along path edges (approx. 150m) where presence is suppressing naturally regenerating tree species - 2020

Inspections and informal site visits will monitor the development of the wood within the plan period, specifically:
- Deer impact surveys will be carried out every 3 years to assess any increase in levels of damage - Surveys due 2020 / 2023
- A woodland condition assessment will inform the next management plan - 2023

5.2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Old Copse is located to the north-west and within easy walking distance from Sonning Common (population 3784). Woodcote lies 5km (3 miles) to the west (population 2715), and Rothersfield Peppard (population 1649) is located 1.6km (1 mile) to the north-east.

The area is well wooded to the east and north, and Peppard Wood, another open access site and owned by the Trust, lies under 1km to the north. There are also a number of Forestry Commission sites in the area, some of which allow public access. The Warburg Nature Reserve near Henley-on-Thames provides a visitor experience for families with visitor facilities.

Old Copse is classified as access category 'B', or "regular usage, 5 – 15 people using one entrance per day". The wood has 5 main entrances and four public footpaths and several permissive paths crossing the wood, totalling approximately 2km (1.2 miles) in length.

The site is flat, but un-surfaced paths can be waterlogged. There is no formal car parking at the wood, but roadside parking in Sonning Common is possible.

Significance

Old Copse is located on the doorstep of Sonning Common and the wood provides a convenient informal natural recreational resource for this local community.
The fact that the woodland is within easy walking distance of this settlement means it has the potential for routine use by many people. The impressive trees, undulating terrain and historic features create an interesting experience for visitors.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
- Old Copse has no car parking facility
- Paths can be muddy and waterlogged during the winter

Opportunities:
- Due to the close proximity to Sonning Common, there is an opportunity for increased community involvement in management of the wood through volunteering activities
- Old Copse is within 1km of two primary schools (Peppard C of E Primary School, and Sonning Common Primary School) and could provide a location for 'one-off' educational visits or forest school activities

Factors Causing Change

- Antisocial activities, e.g. fly tipping, fires, cycling off permitted routes
- Holly thickets closing in some of the paths

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Public access for informal and quiet recreation will be maintained in perpetuity. The woodland will be kept as safe as practical for visitors and there will be a managed network of paths, together with visible and clearly signed entrances.

An on-going programme of maintenance will ensure as much as possible safe and uninhibited 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 'B' (moderate usage 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 as safe as practical to visitors.

- Routine safety inspections of the trees in the higher risk zones, such as alongside footpaths, roads and boundaries with buildings. Inspections of footpaths will be carried out formally every 2 years with the next inspection due summer 2020. Inspection of boundaries with roads and buildings will be carried out on an annual basis alternating between summer and autumn. The next inspection is due autumn 2019
- Entrance infrastructure will be cleaned and inspected on the 5 main entrances annually with any remedial work undertaken as and when appropriate
- A path maintenance programme (approx. 2km in length) will be undertaken in September each year
- Litter will be collected and removed annually from entrances and paths
- Cutting back of holly along path edges - 2020
- 3 x new breadboard site signs, fencing repairs, and vegetation management to improve welcome for visitors - 2019

Inspections and informal site visits will monitor the development of the wood within the plan period, specifically:
- Access and entrance audit - due 2023

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	12.49	Beech	1920	High forest	Archaeological features, No/poor vehicular access to the site, People issues (+tve & -tve)	Ancient Woodland Site, Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Woodland Site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Mature high forest dominated by beech, which occupies over 90% of the canopy. Other minor species include oak, cherry and rowan (especially towards the boundaries). The understorey contains abundant holly with beech, birch and rowan natural regeneration. Where trees have failed bramble and beech with occasional birch present. There are good examples of wood banks on three sides with the forth side to the north-east bounded by a young mixed species plantation (1984) containing larch, S.pine, beech and wild cherry. Ground flora is rare under the dense beech canopy - occasional Carex spp. dog's mercury & foxglove.							

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.