WOODLAND TRUST

St Benedicts Wood

Management Plan 2016-2021

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	St Benedicts Wood
Location:	St Helens, Merseyside
Grid reference:	SJ489929, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 108
Area:	13.18 hectares (32.57 acres)
Designations:	Community Forest, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

This native broadleaf woodland has some wonderful mature specimen trees including oak, horse chestnut, lime, ash, sycamore, alder and Norway maple. There is a large meadow area (previously a cricket pitch) along with an area of new native planting of oak and ash that is establishing well. The site is popular with local people particularly dog walkers and families.

2.2 Extended Description

This secondary woodland/open space is located on the remains of St Benedict's Clinic, Rainhill Road, Rainhill, St Helens. This was demolished during the late 1990's. Consequently much of the northern part of the site (Cmpt 1B) has a underlying rubble and pipe/culvert network. A roadway runs through Cmpt 1A and this is lined either side with poplar trees which have TPO status. Natural regeneration of oak is occurring in the adjoining grassland area.

Cmpt 2 contains what was once the cricket pitch and pavilion (which has now been demolished). The compartment contains a number of mature trees including some large leaved Lime, Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Scots Pine, Sweet Chestnut and a large Turkey Oak.

Cmpt 3 - contains Ash, Alder, Sycamore, Norway Maple, Horse Chestnut, Elm, Lime, Poplar (including some large standing dead wood) and Sweet chestnut. Ash is very common in this compartment with profuse regeneration into Cmpt 4. Alder regeneration is also high on the edge of compartment 3 and 4. Sycamore, Norway Maple and Horse Chestnut are common through Cmpt 3A from seedling to mature trees. The Elm is predominantly between 20 to 40 years of age with some individuals estimated to be ranging from 10 to 100 years. Elm regeneration is not profuse. Under storey is predominantly Elder that forms a solid woodland edge.

Compartment 4 is open grassland with some natural regeneration. It is split east to west by a large earth mound which has some scrub and a rabbit population.

The soils on site are free draining where they have been affected by building and the cricket pitch. The mature woodland in Cmpt 3A is prone to flooding during the winter

The woods cover an area 12.89ha. It is a significant part of a large block of green space with a similar sized area, Council owned on the other side of Rainhill Road. These woods provide opportunities for informal recreation and are well used by the local community.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

St Benedicts Wood is a 13.16ha urban woodland on the site of the old Rainhill Hospital in Rainhill, near St Helens. The main entrance is from Wedgwood Gardens, just off Rainhill Road. Additionally there are several pedestrian entrances via footpaths leading from the surrounding housing estates and open spaces.

There is a network of paths most of which are un-surfaced except for the path around the old cricket pitch from the main entrance and a footpath running southwards towards the golf club access road. The site is flat with no notable gradients.

There is no public toilet in the vicinity.

There is limited car parking along the roadside by the main access gate near Wedgewood Gardens.

The nearest bus stop is on Rainhill Road just north of the Wedgwood Close turning and about 5 minutes walk from the main entrance. Go south from the bus stop, take the first right onto Wedgwood Close and the main entrance is on the next right turning on the left hand side of the road. For more information on bus stop locations, routes and timetables visit the Traveline website http://www.traveline.org.uk/index.htm

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

It is the Woodland Trust's long term intention to manage the existing woodland resource for the benefit of wildlife, the local landscape and for recreational use. Existing specimen trees will be retained for as long as it is considered safe to do so. Where practicable, open spaces, along with new and mature woodland will be managed using low intervention. This will allow a naturally paced sustainable progression to create a structurally and species diverse but integrated mosaic of habitats. Woodland operations will be primarily for public access and tree safety work, but where safe to do so the volume of standing dead wood habitat will be increased through the retention of moribund and dead trees. The existing mature elm trees will be allowed to grow and enter senescence.

Public access will be encouraged and the footpath network will be maintained along with entrance points and other public access infrastructure.

Cmpt 1A - The poplar avenue which has not responded well to pollarding has many trees that appear to be nearing the end of their life expectancy and may need to be removed on safety grounds. Where possible natural regeneration will be used to replace them and the development of a more informal amenity tree-scape. The open area to the avenues east will be allowed to scrub over and natural regeneration will be encouraged, and supplementary stock established where appropriate.

Cmpt 3 - will be managed primarily through the tree safety programme which over time will create canopy gaps and opportunities for canopy structure and species change. Japanese Knotweed will continue to be controlled within this wooded area.

Cmpt 4 - Planted as part of T4A (trees for all) planting. This has become well established with natural regeneration occurring and will be left to develop naturally with minimum intervention.

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

A shelterbelt of secondary woodland covering 2.06ha and made up predominately of mature and over mature mixed broadleaf species including Ash, Elm, Sycamore, Horse Chestnut, Beech and Hawthorn, with a shrub layer dominated by elder and a sparse ground flora. Prior to the Trusts ownership the compartment shows no history of constructive management and contains a substantial amount of fallen deadwood and some leaning/windblown trees.

Significance

The woodland is prominent in the landscape and well used by local people.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Japanese Knotweed suppressing regeneration in parts of the woodland. Rabbit damage. Vandalism to mature trees and regeneration (trampling, fires), Fly tipping
Opportunities:
Opening up canopy gaps for natural regeneration
The retention of standing and some fallen deadwood will help diversify the sites habitat potential.
Some of the fallen dead wood will have to be removed to reduce fire risk.

Factors Causing Change

Over mature trees - tree safety issues.
Closed canopy is reducing the amount of natural regeneration developing.
Fires and vandalism.
Japanese Knotweed.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

St Benedicts Wood will continue to form an intrinsic part of the local landscape for perpetuity. The Trust takes a holistic and long-term view to habitat survival and evolution, and where it is safe and practicable to do so intends to allow natural processes to dictate the development of this wood. Over the long-term the wood will develop a range of naturally paced vegetation cycles that will include periods of regeneration and decline. In terms of the complex and dynamic cycles between the larger flora and fauna and the micro world of invertebrates, fungi and other lower plants this process will allow the progression of the widest possible species abundance and diversity.

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

1) Japanese Knotweed will be controlled with glyphosate annually until eradicated
2) Pollarded black poplars will be monitored and appropriate follow up work carried out during plan period, either to fell dead/ dying trees or re pollard.
3) Removal of TPO is being explored with local TPO officer

5.2 Informal Public Access

Description

The site is permanently open to the general public for informal recreational use. There is a circular network of footpaths (some of which have been surfaced for all year around use). There is also a permissive bridle path running along the line of the old Tramway footpath. Cycling is not permitted in the main body of the site.

Significance

One of the Woodland Trusts corporate goals is to "Increase the enjoyment of Woodland". By insuring the wood is open to the general public this goal is likely to be achieved as people will visit the wood and appreciate the many benefits the wood brings.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: history of vandalism and gathering of large gangs of youths across the site.

Factors Causing Change

Other - flooding problems

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Continue to encourage visitors to the site by keeping the path networks open and well maintained.

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

The footpath network, entrances and site infrastructure will be maintained annually as part of the EMC including cutting of all grass paths 3 times per year.
Footpaths will be monitored and any repairs of poorly necessary incorporated into the future maintenance of the site when necessary.

5.3 New Native Woodland

Description

1.5ha of compartment 4 is a woodland creation scheme planted in 2007 as part of Trees for All. Planting consisted of a native tree species oak, ash, rowan, silver birch, alder and wild cherry. A shrub layer includes hazel, hawthorn and elder. 40/60cm bare root stock was planted without guards in 2m wide rows on varying 50cm to 3m centres and unguarded. The planting cover was 80% trees & shrubs 20% open ground. . There is a small amount of natural regenerating ash and alder along the north western edge of this compartment and a large strip along the north western edge has been left to allow natural regeneration to continue.

Significance

The creation of new native broadleaved woodland is an aim of the Woodland Trust. Merseyside has less than 4.9% woodland cover, which is particularly low in national terms, Rainhill Hospital Wood (St Benedict's Wood) is part of The Mersey Forest initiative, which in part was created to help address this short fall. The juxtaposition of this wood within a landscape regionally poor in woodland, and near an area of high population means that the wood helps deliver national and regional forestry strategy goals, and the Woodland Trusts own core objectives of "restoring and improving biodiversity - increasing public awareness in woodland" and "creating new native woodland".

Opportunities & Constraints

Through the integrated management of the of new and mature woodland blocks, rides, scrub and transitional zones, the opportunity exists to create and maintain a mosaic of habitats that merge and complement each other.

Planting without guards was thought less likely to attract vandalism but has necessitated dense planting and a number of beat-up operations to offset vandal and rabbit damage.

Increased recreational usage may manifest itself as misuse, and could become a constraint to habitat management in future years. In particular this applies to the retention of areas of grassland and dead wood where a balance between habitat and fire risk must be found.

Factors Causing Change

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The Trust intends to create an environment in which the woodland can move towards a naturally balanced structure. The woodland will be the core in a mosaic of different inter-relating habitats. It is hoped that in time (a hundred years & more) important native ground flora/ invertebrates and other fauna will colonise the site from adjacent existing colonies and wildlife corridors.

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

The extent of rabbit and vandal damage will be monitored by the site manager and follow up action undertaken if necessary.
Areas of Japanese Knotweed will continue to be subject to a control programme in order to prevent spread across the site.

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	1.52	Mixed broadleaves	1960	High forest	People issues (+tve & -tve), Services & wayleaves	Informal Public Access	Community Forest
Area of predominately open improved grassland rectangular in shape (1.52ha) bordered by a 6-8ft sandstone wall along its east boundary and by an avenue of pollarded poplars on its west boundary. A number of mature mixed broadleaved trees border the wall boundary these include Beech, Oak, Scots Pine and Sycamore. This area has been allowed to scrub over and there are early signs of natural regeneration occurring and large areas of bramble. The remains of the old access road have been covered over by chippings from the first poplar pollarding in 2003. The avenue of poplar is in a TPO. Beneath the poplar David Wilson Homes planted landscape amenity planting of Mahonia, cotoneaster etc in 2002. Natural regeneration of Ash and Oak is occurring in the grassland/scrub area.							
1b	1.20	Hazel	2002	Non-wood habitat	Legal issues	Informal Public Access	Community Forest
Separated from Cmpt 1A by the access road to the golf course. This area used to contain the remains of the hospital workshops. These were demolished in 2002. An edge tree and shrub planting was completed by David Wilson Homes in 2002. The centre of the site is an open sown grassland. This grassland must be kept open as a wayleave for the pylon that runs North to South across this compartment. The site is bordered by an 8ft high sandstone wall to the east, wooden fence to the north and metal fencing to the west. A coppiced hedgerow runs along the southern border.							
2a	3.53	Open ground	2006	Non-wood habitat	Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site	Informal Public Access	Community Forest

A predominantly open circular expanse of mown improved grassland previously managed as a cricket pitch. This has a surfaced path running around its entire circumference apart from one small 30 metre section. The area is then ringed by a raised bank planted with clumps of trees such as beech, pine, lime, sweet chestnut, turkey oak giving an "amphitheatre" like feel and appearance to the area. Surface water drainage pipes run underground across the compartments north west boundary. A small car park was installed by the housing development company. This and the access road have a tarmac surface. A vehicle barrier is kept locked and parking access is only allowed for events and for ease of site management. The remains of the cricket pavilion were demolished in 2003 and the area was seeded with wildflowers in 2004.							
3a	2.06	Mixed broadleaves	1900	High forest	Legal issues, People issues (+tve & -tve)	Informal Public Access	Community Forest
This compartment is a shelterbelt of predominately mature and over-mature broadleaves including ash, elm, sycamore, Norway maple, horse chestnut, beech, lime, sweet chestnut, oak with elder, hawthorn and ash, sycamore and elm regen in the understorey. There is a substantial amount of dead wood on the ground and some leaning/windblown trees. There are some large standing dead poplar trees which provide excellent nesting sites for woodpeckers. The site is secondary woodland in nature with species poor ground flora. This compartment had been used extensively for tipping of building and waste materials from the old hospital. A large amount of waste and brick material was removed in 2002. A surfaced footpath was completed through the woodland in 2005 to link with an existing tarmac path in compartment 2. There are several desire line paths used by walkers around the north eastern edge of this compartment which link to the newly surfaced path. The boundary with the railway line to the north west is formed by a sandstone wall of some 10-12ft height and has been breached in a number of places with metal fencing in the gaps. Tree safety on fire/wind damaged trees was completed in 2003 and 2005. A metal fence was installed between the woodland and Eccleston Golf Course in 2004 to increase security at the golf course. The cost was met jointly by the Woodland Trust and Eccleston Golf Course. This metal fencing was an extension to the already existing metal palisade fencing.							
4a	4.57	Birch (downy/silver)	2007	Wood establishment	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/ Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Informal Public Access	Community Forest

Consisting of two fields separated by a raised banking which contains a small rabbit warren. This area is predominantly rough unmanaged and improved rank grassland with a few scattered clumps of Japanese Knotweed and bramble. The area provides the link between the existing housing on its north eastern boundary and the shelterbelt woodland on its south western and north western boundaries. A post and rail fence installed in 2004 denotes the WT boundary along the north eastern boundary. The boundary with compartment 3 is denoted by a marginal desire line path. There is a small amount of natural regeneration of ash, willow and alder along the north western edge of this compartment.
In 2007, 1.5ha of this compartment became a woodland creation scheme as part of Trees for All funded by Ibstock Cory. Grass path rides have been incorporated into the planting plan which link into existing paths. Planting consisted of a native tree species oak, ash, rowan, silver birch, alder and wild cherry. A shrub layer includes hazel, hawthorn and elder. 40/60cm bare root stock was planted without guards in 2m wide rows on varying 50cm to 3m centres and unguarded. The planting cover was 80% trees & shrubs 20% open ground. A large strip along the north western edge was left to allow natural regeneration to continue. Planting without guards was thought less likely to attract vandalism, but has necessitated a number of beat-up operations using volunteers.

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2017	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.20	10	2
2021	4a	Ride edge Coppice	0.20	10	2
2025	4a	Ride edge Coppice	0.20	10	2
2026	4a	Thin	2.00	5	10

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.