



Hurst Wood

Management Plan 2020-2025

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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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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:	Hurst Wood
Location:	Tunbridge Wells
Grid reference:	TQ569404, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 188
Area:	17.12 hectares (42.30 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Planted Ancient Woodland Site, Tree Preservation Order

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

Hurst Wood lies on the northern edge of the High Weald AONB, characterised by an attractive, small-scale landscape containing a mosaic of small farms and woodlands, historic parks, sunken lanes and ridge-top villages.

The woodland sits in a steep-sided valley on the north-west outskirts of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. A small stream flows south to north through the western half of the site, with the main part of the wood being on the west-facing valley side and a level area above it. The site was acquired by The Woodland Trust in 1983. The eastern part (now Cpt 2) was previously owned by the Forestry Commission and was extensively planted in 1963 for timber production with species such as hybrid larch, Scots pine and American red oak, all of which are still present on the site. Other major tree species include oak (pedunculate and sessile), birch, beech, sycamore, sweet chestnut and holly. Prioritising native woods and trees is one of the Woodland Trust's key principles, and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) pose particular problems. The shade cast by non-native conifers and the change in species composition does not support the long-established native woodland fauna and flora.

The site is mostly ancient woodland, and contains many vascular plants associated with ancient woodland in the south east of England. These include bluebells, wood spurge, wood anemones, wood sorrel, yellow archangel and yellow pimpernel. The site is very species-rich, particularly considering its substrate of base-poor brown earth and podzolic soil over Cretaceous Tunbridge Wells Sand bedrock.

The site is heavily used by the public (WT access category A) and has a good network of rides and smaller paths with appropriate infrastructure including steps, footbridges and stiles. Most access is via one main entrance on the public footpath from Coniston Avenue to the south, this main track running through the centre of the wood along the public footpath is not owned by the WT. The wood is also occasionally used by the 3 schools that adjoin the site on the south eastern boundary.

2.2 Extended Description

Hurst Wood lies on the northern edge of the High Weald AONB, characterised by an attractive, small-scale landscape containing a mosaic of small farms and woodlands, historic parks, sunken lanes and ridge-top villages.

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3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

General location:

Hurst Wood is located on the north-western fringe of Tunbridge Wells, Kent. It is approximately 1 mile from the town centre in a predominantly residential area. The wood is reached from the south by a public footpath (WB5) from the western end of Coniston Avenue. It is approximately 500m from Coniston Avenue. The wood can also be reached by the same footpath from Broomhill Road to the north. The surface of this path is frequently very muddy.

General overview of paths & entrances:

The entrance to the southern end of the wood is a kissing gate, with a stile entrance at the northern end. The public footpath between these 2 points is surfaced but all other paths and rides have natural surfaces which can be slippery after wet weather. The wood is situated in a valley and is mostly on sloping ground. Some paths have steep gradients with occasional flights of steps. There are footbridges and culverts at various places crossing the stream which runs south to north through the site. Some paths close to the stream can be flooded after heavy rain.

Parking:

There is on-street parking available on Coniston Avenue approximately 500m from the wood.

Public Transport:

Nearest train station: Tunbridge Wells, approximately 1 mile from the wood.

Nearest bus stop: Coniston Avenue at the junction with Rydal Drive, approximately 800m from the wood. There are several services per day between the town centre/railway station and Coniston Avenue but none on Sundays.

Information obtained from Traveline website on 22/11/2006. (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk or tel: 0870 608 2 608).

Public Toilets:

The nearest public toilets are at Linden Park Road, The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells, approximately 2 miles away. There are disabled toilets accessible with a RADAR key, available from the tourist office in The Pantiles. Opening hours: 7am-7pm. Parking available within 100m.

Information correct as at 22/11/2006. Further information available from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Environmental Services (www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk)

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

Hurst Wood is a good example of ancient semi natural woodland with a variety of native trees and woodland plants. This variety of structure and vegetation means most of the site lends itself to a policy of minimum intervention in the long term, allowing the processes of natural succession to take place. Dead and decaying wood, standing and fallen, will be retained wherever it is safe to do so, for its biodiversity value.

The area of planting on ancient woodland (PAWS) stocked with mixed broadleaves and hybrid larch in cpt 2b has been heavily thinned in the past and as a result the larch now only poses a limited threat to the woodland specialist plants. The canopy trees (coniferous & broadleaved) will be allowed to mature and senesce with some selective thinning of larch, where native broadleaf regeneration is sufficient to reduce bracken and bramble cover, which will further secure the remnant ancient woodland components within the stand. The larch will continue to be thinned until it comprises less than 20% of the canopy. The regeneration of holly understory will be monitored and holly may be thinned if extensive areas begin to shade ground flora.

Invasive species including laurel and Himalayan balsam will be continue to be monitored and controlled or eradicated where possible. The ride edges will enter a 5-8yr coppice rotation with work carried out along main track and paths to open up structurally diverse wide rides with scallops and pinch points, cut on rotation to create herb, scrub and coppice edge habitats. This will benefit public access by allowing the tracks to dry as well as creating a diverse mosaic of habitats for wildlife and flora.

The site will be managed for low-key, informal public access with suitable infrastructure and signage. The network of paths and rides will be maintained where necessary and improved, for both people and biodiversity. The wood will continue to be made welcoming and safe for visitors and its use will be monitored regularly.

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 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Hurst Wood sits in the middle of three towns, Tunbridge Wells, Rusthall and Southborough with a combined population of over 78,000. The wood is an urban fringe site backing onto a residential area and three schools. A well-used public footpath, owned by a third party, runs through the centre of the wood giving access to a large local population of over 22,000 people within 2km of the site.

With its meandering stream and slopes of bluebells the wood provides a tranquil rural escape from the urban surroundings. There are also 3 other Woodland Trust woods close by, namely: Friezland, Nellington and Hargate Forest.

The site has a good network of maintained, but predominately unmade, paths and rides which are steep in places and can get very wet in winter. Key access points are from the third party owned public footpath leading from Coniston avenue through the site towards Salomon's House. Infrastructure such as steps and footbridges have been installed by the Woodland Trust to improve access to parts of the site.

Significance

It has been shown that access to woodland can provide an improved quality of life with benefits to both mental and physical health. Hurst Wood provides a safe, well-maintained amenity for a large local urban population. It is easily accessible to a large number of people on foot as well as providing an amenity for 3 neighbouring schools.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: unsuitable for less-abled visitors due to terrain, access track owned by third party
 Opportunities: To improve the path network's accessibility in winter months, to encourage neighbouring schools to further utilise the site

Factors Causing Change

Damage to riparian habitat by dogs

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The wood will have a well-used and well maintained network of rides and paths with appropriate infrastructure consistent with its WT access category A usage. Opening up of targeted rides will improve the visitor experience, increase light levels, allow the paths to dry out and provide benefits for biodiversity.

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

During this plan period, the short term objective is to continue to provide public access at Hurst Wood which is safe and enjoyable. This will be achieved by:

- Annual cutting of the approx. 2.6km of maintained paths and rides (June-August).
- Annual inspection of estate furniture - currently footbridges, steps, stile and boardwalk.
- Regular tree safety survey at a minimum of biannually & subsequent remedial work.
- Ride-side coppicing on a 5-8 year rotation starting in 2020-2022 on approximately 1/3 of the rides (approx. 900m).
- Removal of the failing boardwalk at the northern tip of the site and alterations to the path network. Including closure of part of the path running alongside the stream in summer 2020, to facilitate riparian habitat recovery, with subsequent monitoring and improvements (e.g. steps/ditching) of the remaining paths to allow visitors a safe and suitable circular route.

5.2 Ancient Woodland Site

Description

The site contains a variety of woodland types associated with base-poor brown earths and podzolic soils (NVC W10a oak-bracken-bramble, W15b beech-wavy hair grass and W16a birch-oak-wavy hair grass) with a narrow strip of alder woodland (W7a alder-ash-common nettle) on alluvial soil along the stream.

A history of minimal intervention has left a relatively even age class across compartments 1a and 2a with some coppice stools likely not cut since The Woodland Trust acquired the site in 1983. Mature birch is the most abundant tree with sessile oak, rowan, beech, holly, sweet chestnut, alder buckthorn and aspen. Ground flora is mostly bracken with some heather and wavy hair-grass. In the less acidic parts of the site hazel coppice and pedunculate oak are more common with carpets of bluebells in the spring.

Cpt 2b contains approx. 2.5ha of P63 hybrid larch and Scots pine (PAWS). Due to the light shading effect of these species, and previous heavy thinning, the ancient woodland components have largely survived and there is a significant broadleaved element to the area. Restoration work in 1998 (thinning and clear-felling) has increased the growth of bracken and holly to the detriment of other ground flora species but ride-side strimming has increased species such as bluebell, wood anemone and wood sorrel by controlling the competition with bracken.

The site contains well over 100 species of vascular plants with more than 20 species being woodland specialists. The stream and valley bottom provide another habitat type. The stream is subject to occasional permitted sewage discharge during periods of heavy rain and the bankside vegetation includes the very invasive Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) which can threaten native ground flora. The bankside vegetation is further impacted by heavy dog use on site resulting in a lack of riparian vegetation.

Significance

The site is species-rich despite poor soil types and previous episodes of unsuitable management. The site is a valuable semi-natural habitat on the edge of a large urban area. The amount of ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century. Ancient woodland is now restricted to 2% of the UK with approximately 40% of England's ASNW found in the south east. ASNW is important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years. This allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop over time that cannot be found in new woodland creation sites. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and the prevention of its loss, and restoration of planted ancient woodland sites are key aims of the Woodland Trust.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints to silvicultural management: terrain; long extraction route owned by third party; heavy public usage.

Opportunities: to fully restore the planted ancient woodland and increase biodiversity.

Factors Causing Change

Invasive Himalayan balsam,
Natural regeneration of birch, oak, rowan etc.,
Erosion of the riparian vegetation by dogs.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To allow the mixed woodland types (W7a, W10a, W15b, W16a) to senesce and develop largely by the processes of natural succession, thereby resulting in a long term increase in the amount of deadwood & veteran trees. Periodic management of ride edges will provide a further mosaic of habitats favouring early successional species and woodland specialist plants.

The area of PAWS will be restored to native broadleaved woodland by the gradual removal of conifers until they comprise less than 20% of the canopy and no longer pose a threat to the remnant ancient woodland components.

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

To encourage the process of natural succession and create a diverse age structure minimal silvicultural intervention will take place during this plan period within compartments 1a and 2a, other than along rides and paths.

- Annual control of Himalayan balsam will be achieved by strimming (July).
- Hybrid larch in the 2.8ha area of PAWS (compartment 2b) will undergo a 15% thin in 2021 with trees shading well established native broadleaves removed through ring barking and felling to reduce future competition with the developing native broadleaf canopy, decrease the amount of needle litter and increase the amount of standing deadwood habitat, as per recommendations from the 2019 PAWS assessment.
- Scattered laurel patches covering <0.5ha on the eastern boundary will be removed by cutting and spraying regrowth in 2021-2023; and an assessment of the amount of holly colonising areas opened up by larch thinning as well as the effectiveness of laurel control conducted annually.
- Annual ash dieback assessment as per WT protocol will be carried out and actioned accordingly, removing ash trees where necessary for public safety.
- Carry out standard WT woodland condition and PAWS assessments to inform next management plan review. Spring 2024.

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	8.13	Birch (downy/silver)	1950	Min-intervention	Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Tree Preservation Order
<p>Mixed native broadleaves of mixed age along small stream in valley running north-south. Canopy of oak, beech, birch, sweet chestnut etc. Understorey of holly, hazel, etc. Some planting along stream including oak, alder etc. Riparian vegetation is being severely eroded due to dog pressure from the path that runs along the stream edge.</p>							
2a	4.74	Birch (downy/silver)	1950	Min-intervention		Connecting People with woods & trees	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Tree Preservation Order
<p>Mixed broadleaves including oak, beech, sweet chestnut coppice, birch and sycamore. Abundant bluebells in some areas. The cpt is mainly on sloping ground except for a level area of approx. 1ha, formerly a meadow. This area now has naturally regenerated oak of approx. 50 years old with one small open area. The bank and ditch defining the meadow can be seen on the eastern and northern boundaries. Includes an area of open ground managed as lowland heath until 2008. Since mowing was stopped this area has regenerated with scattered oak and birch over heather and bracken.</p>							
2b	3.71	Hybrid larch	1963	PAWS restoration	No/poor vehicular access to the site, People issues (+tve & -tve), Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Connecting People with woods & trees	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt, Planted Ancient Woodland Site, Tree Preservation Order

P63 Hybrid larch with mixed broadleaves (oak, sweet chestnut, holly, birch, rowan etc.). Heavily thinned in 1998. Ground flora contains abundant bluebells where not swamped by bracken or holly. Also wood sorrel, wood anemone and other ancient woodland indicators. The western part of the cpt. slopes steeply down to a central ride through the wood. Along the ride there are some scots pine. The southern edge of the cpt. has a broadleaved fringe containing birch, oak, ash, holly and hazel. It also comprises a small area in the south (0.3ha) that was previously P63 hybrid larch clear felled in 1998 restocked with P99 oak and natural regeneration of oak, birch, rowan etc.

Appendix 2: Harvesting operations (20 years)

Forecast Year	Cpt	Operation Type	Work Area (ha)	Estimated vol/ha	Estimated total vol.
2020	1a	Ride edge Coppice	0.10	100	10
2021	2b	Thin	3.70	27	100
2022	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.45	111	50
2026	2b	Ride edge Coppice	0.60	67	40
2027	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.45	56	25
2031	2b	Ride edge Coppice	0.00		40
2032	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.45	56	25
2036	2b	Ride edge Coppice	0.00		40
2037	2a	Ride edge Coppice	0.45	56	25

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.