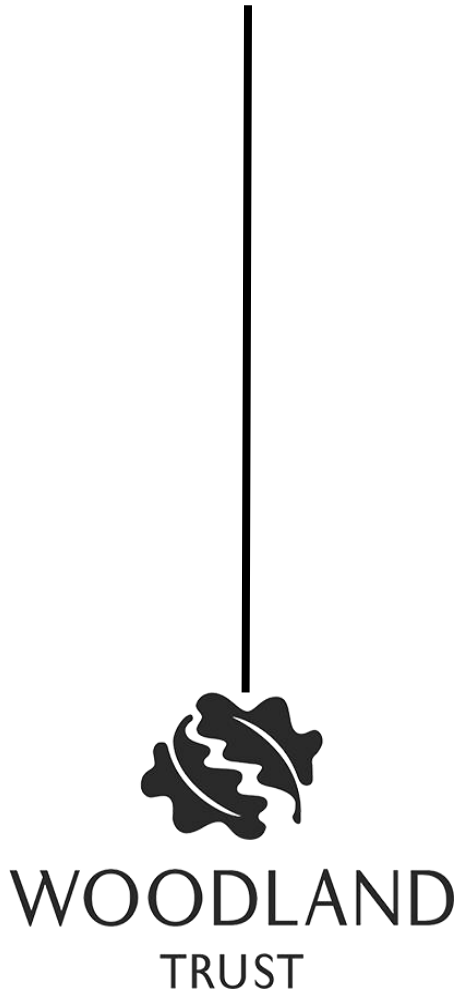
Valley Park Woods

(Plan period – 2020 to 2025)



Management Plan Content Page

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

The Woodland Trust owns and cares for well over 1,250 sites covering almost 30,000 hectares (ha) across the UK. This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created over 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Our Vision is:

"A UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife."

To realise all the environmental, social and economic benefits woods and trees bring to society, we:

- **Create Woodland** – championing the need to hugely increase the UK's native woodland and trees.
- **Protect Woodland** – fighting to defend native woodland, especially irreplaceable ancient woodland and veteran trees; there should be no loss of ancient woodland
- **Restore Woodland** – ensuring the sensitive restoration of all damaged ancient woodland and the re-creation of native wooded landscapes.

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

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.

The following principles provide an overarching framework to guide the management of all our sites but we recognise that all woods are different and that their management also needs to reflect their local landscape, history and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene in our woods when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity, safety and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.

2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, 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. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.

4. The long term vision for all our 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 natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.

7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities 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 encourage our woods to be used for 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. We maintain a network of sites for long-term monitoring and trials leading to reductions in plastics and pesticides.

10. Any activities we undertake are in line with our wider Conservation Principles, conform to sustainable forest management practices, are appropriate for the site and balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

The Public Management Plan

This public management plan describes the site and sets out the long term aims for our management and lists the Key Features which drive our management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with our long, 50 years and beyond, and our short, the next 5 years, term objectives for the management and enhancement of these features. The short term objectives are complemented by an outline Work Programme for the period of this management plan aimed at delivering our management aims.

Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and we continually monitor our sites to assess the success of our management, therefore this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme.

Please either consult The Woodland Trust website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

or contact the Woodland Trust

operations@woodlandtrust.org.uk

to confirm details of the current management programme.

A short glossary of technical terms can be found at the end of the plan.

Location and Access

Location maps and directions for how to find and access our woods, including this site, can be found by using the following link to the Woodland Trust web-site which contains information on accessible woodlands across the UK

https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods/

In Scotland access to our sites is in accordance with the Land Reform Act (of Scotland) 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In England, Wales and NI, with the exception of designated Public Rights of Ways, all routes across our sites are permissive in nature and where we have specific access provision for horse riders and/or cyclists this will be noted in the management plan.

The Management Plan

1. SITE DETAILS

Valley Park Woods

Location:	Chandler's Ford Grid reference: Clothier's Copse:SU41972154, Knight Wood:SU42412104, Small Profits:SU42302031, Titlark Copse:SU42331996. OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 185
Area:	29.54 hectares (72.99 acres)
External Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Tree Preservation Order
Internal Designations:	Welcoming Sites Programme

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Valley Park Woods is a complex of four woodlands totaling 29.54 hectares (73 acres) in Chandler's Ford, Hampshire, approximately three miles from the South Downs National Park to the east, and seven miles from the New Forest National Park to the west. It is situated on what was part of Baddesley Common, a mosaic of habitats which along with broadleaved woodland also included dry heath, unimproved grassland and cattle-grazed pastures in the valley of Monk's Brook, a small stream still located only 50m east of the site at its closest point.

The Woodland Trust acquired the four woodlands – Clothier's Copse (cpt 1a), Knight Wood (cpt 2a), Small Profits (cpt 3a) and Titlark Copse (cpt 4a) - in 1988 following the expansion of Chandler's Ford, which saw the nearby agricultural land developed into roads, housing, industrial estates and associated infrastructure that now surround the complex. A fragmented patchwork of other woodlands loosely link Valley Park Woods to the wider landscape, most immediately Test Valley Borough Council's Zions Hill Copse, Tredgoulds Copse and Sky's Wood to the west. To the north is a larger swathe of woodland with notable Forestry Commission sites including Ampfield Woods (a 381 hectare mixed woodland) and Windmill Copse on the southern edge of the Hampshire Downs. Another swathe of woodland buffers Valley Park from the edge of Southampton just one and a half miles to the south which incorporates 295 hectares of Forestry Commission land including Lords Wood, Hut Wood and Home Wood.

There is a considerable variety of tree, shrub and ground flora species across Valley Park Woods as the soils vary significantly from seasonally waterlogged clays to well drained alluviums, with the majority comprising heavy clay. However, oak is the dominant tree throughout, with ash, birch and beech well-represented and hazel, holly, rowan and hawthorn appearing abundantly in the understorey.

Approximately half of the complex is ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) with the main proportion located in Knight Wood, the largest of the four woodlands at 18.03 hectares. Alongside the mature oak, ash, beech and birch, typical of the complex, Knight Wood also has many veteran trees including characterful yews and Scots pines. The ground flora includes a number of ancient woodland indicator species including bluebell, wood anemone and butchers broom.

The two most southerly woodlands in the complex – Small Profits and Titlark Copse – are long-established secondary woodlands, while the much smaller Clothier's Copse is a mixture of both ancient and secondary.

In 2009 Forest Research investigated the decline and death of mature oak trees in Small Profits and Titlark Copse and although the results proved inconclusive, the symptoms have been attributed to Chronic Oak Decline (COD) - a complex combination of factors which contribute to the decline and death of trees affected. As a result approximately 60 oaks were felled across the complex between 2010-2013. Works are ongoing along with works to manage the recent addition of ash dieback (ADB) disease which is affecting ash trees in Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood, and Small Profits. However, although significant, these diseases do not diminish the overall value of these long-established woodlands, which is reflected in their Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) designation.

Valley Park Woods are also important in the local landscape for their provision of public access to woodland, and their connectivity to the surrounding areas of woodland owned by Test Valley Borough Council.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

In the long-term (50 years plus) Valley Park Woods will consist of long-established secondary and ancient woodland, with well-defined characteristic structural components of those habitats - canopy, understorey, shrub, field and ground layers.

The composition and structure of the woods will be reflective of significant impacts on the woodlands in recent and current years – namely chronic oak decline (COD) and ash dieback (ADB). However, the effect of these diseases will not have diminished the ecological or recreational value of these long-established woodlands, with the diversity of the woods providing ongoing resilience.

The canopy will remain a mixed broadleaf composition of oak, beech, and birch, with sycamore more prevalent following the loss of ash to ADB, supplemented by the occasional conifers such as yew and Scots pine (where they are already present and naturally sustained). The understorey will include a mix of native trees and shrubs including hazel, rowan, holly and hawthorn. Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be eradicated.

A veteran and ancient tree population will be promoted where possible, with species unaffected by disease such as beech and yew recruited to offset the high mortality rate of mature oak trees succumbing to COD. Oaks showing resistance to COD or not posing any health and safety concern will be retained.

A minimum of 10% open space will be present in each wood, a level sufficient to sustain diversity within the high-forest structure, which will be made up of managed rides and paths throughout the woodlands. Open space will fluctuate according to the management of tree diseases and this may include anything from small canopy gaps from the loss of individual trees or selective tree removal, to larger openings and glades created by silvicultural works such as selective felling and thinning of ash and oak. The combined open space will encourage and support diversity in the field and ground layers, from swathes of ancient semi-natural woodland ground flora such as bluebell and anemone, open space and secondary woodland flora such as herb robert and red campion, to patches of coarse vegetation and scrub such as bramble and bracken. It will also provide opportunities for natural regeneration to replace trees lost to disease, and will allow room for a proportion of mature trees to develop into open-grown characterful veterans of high ecological value.

A proportion of dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk and will be plentiful following the natural aging of trees, ongoing COD and ADB and the resultant tree works operations which allow the retention of some large stem sections and habitat piles.

Access facilities will be maintained to support the high numbers of visitors, with multiple entrances which accommodate varying access needs. Bridges will facilitate access across streams and ditches where required to maintain a circular or connective route. However, paths will remain natural and unsurfaced to preserve the ancient woodland soil and aesthetic. An orientation panel at the main entrance to Knight Wood will display the entrances and network of permissive paths throughout the complex, and welcome signs will name each individual wood at key access points.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 f1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The Hampshire Ancient Woodland Inventory indicates that approximately 16ha of Valley Park Woods is ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW), comprising the majority of Clothier's Copse (cpt 1a) and Knight Wood (cpt 2a). The ancient origins are most evident in Knight Wood, particularly in spring, when large assemblages of ancient semi-natural woodland ground flora such as bluebell, lesser celandine and Solomon's seal can be seen.

The majority of the canopy of Knight Wood is dominated by mature oak, with ongoing symptoms of chronic oak decline (COD) still evident, from minor dieback to occasional standing dead trees (where they do not present a risk to visitors) and some large lengths of dead wood retained from fallen or felled trees. The effect of the disease and its management, combined with past ride-side coppicing along some path sections, has resulted in a varied mosaic of temporary open-space with small scallops on ride edges and many canopy gaps, particularly on the periphery of the wood where the management of the disease has focused on visitor safety along footpaths. Birch is more prevalent in these areas, along with the occasional self-seeding sycamore, between some larger more open-grown oaks, with ground flora typically dominated by bracken or bramble.

The central areas of the north and south ends of Knight Wood have seen less intervention, due to undulating ground and generally poor access. In addition, much of the central area of the northern half is also dominated by ash, which in contrast to oak on the site, has been free of disease until 2018. These central areas of low-intervention have provided a contrasting habitat to the more intensively managed and frequented periphery. However, ash dieback disease (ADB) is now present and is affecting ash of all age classes present in the northern half along with ash stands on the south and west boundaries. A few individual ash with significant decline symptoms were removed in 2018 on boundaries with roads, with works ongoing to remove further declining trees that pose a significant hazard in high risk zones throughout the plan period.

Occasional beech, yew and Scots pine are interspersed between the oak and ash with some specimen mature and veteran trees among them. In places small groups of yew form shady groves in contrast to the majority of the wood. A significant proportion of the understorey is comprised of hazel with patches of holly, along with rowan, hawthorn, elder and goat willow, with honeysuckle also present.

The ancient origin of Clothier's Copse is less evident as the Trusts ownership is limited to a sliver of land that was separated from the main body of the original copse by the construction of Knightwood Road. The main body of the copse (also retaining the name Clothier's Copse) is still present to the west of the road, and is owned by Test Valley Borough Council. The result is that the Trusts Clothier's Copse contains only a few mature oak, ash and birch trees with an understory of hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn and young ash (mainly on the periphery) within the ancient section. There are some remnants of ancient woodland ground flora communities, however, the majority of the woodland floor is currently dominated by dense bramble following the coppicing of hazel and the thinning of oaks which removed

suppressed trees or those significantly affected by COD. ADB is also evident within the copse, affecting ash of all age classes present, requiring ongoing tree safety works to selectively fell ash trees that present a risk to visitors, neighbours or adjacent roads.

As with Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood was also partly divided by the construction of Knightwood Road, with a fragment of the original wood left detached to the west of the road. The separated fragment (also retaining the name Knight Wood) is owned by Test Valley Borough Council and extends north in a 'C' shape, joining the main body of the council owned section of Clothier's Copse.

Cherry laurel and/or rhododendron and garden plants arising from the surrounding properties are present in very low numbers within the key feature.

Significance

The amount of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century, with approximately 40% of England's ASNW found in the south east. Although Hampshire is a well wooded county, it is has undergone rapidly increasing development in recent years, threatening further loss and pressure on ancient habitats. Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and its protection and enhancement is one of the main aims of the Trust. Therefore, this key feature forms a locally important tract of ancient habitat, benefiting the local community and wildlife whilst maintaining resilience and connectivity in the wider landscape.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
Link with Forest Research or colleges/universities to undertake research on the COD.

Constraints:
Limited access may impact on the extraction of timber and the value of ash may diminish if the market becomes saturated with an abundance of ash as a result of trees removed due to ash dieback. These factors may increase operational costs to the Trust.

Factors Causing Change

Chronic Oak Decline and ash dieback: The woodland structure is significantly influenced by the effects of these diseases and it is anticipated that both diseases will be an ongoing factor for the foreseeable future, resulting in sustained losses of mature oak and ash of all age classes across the site.

Vigorous bramble and bracken growth: Following tree works and natural loss of trees from disease within recent years, the response of bramble and/or bracken growth is prolific across all woods in the complex.

Climate change: Wetter winters may result in significant changes to the water table, saturation of soil and watercourses in and around the woods. Conversely longer drought periods and increased temperatures are also anticipated through spring and summer. This increases the likelihood of knock-on effects such as drying or waterlogging of soils, increased vulnerability to tree diseases and changes in species composition to those that are best adapted to the changing conditions.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain a mature high forest structure of canopy, understorey, shrub and field layers with ancient woodland ground flora. The mixed species composition of the key feature will be encouraged to provide resilience to pests and diseases, however, oak will be sustained as the main canopy component where possible due to its value as a long-lived keystone species.

Ongoing tree diseases will be managed through proactive felling operations, with the aim of creating niches that will sustain the diversity of structure and a viable ecosystem. Opportunities to recruit more trees into the veteran and ancient population or protect existing trees will be incorporated into operations where possible. Dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk.

Open space will total a minimum of 10% across the whole compartments that the key feature is situated in, including rides and paths with a diversity of edge habitat.

Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be eradicated.

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

To increase the wood's resilience to pests and diseases, to improve the structure and species composition of the woodland so it is more diverse. This will be achieved through the following:-

• Annual summer assessment of the progress of ADB and the recruitment of suitable natural regeneration of future canopy trees.

• Thinning and coppicing of ash showing signs of moderate to advanced ash dieback decline symptoms within falling distance of footpaths, roads or properties in approximately 3.38ha of cpts 1a and 2a within the plan period.

• Annual summer assessment and autumn inspection of oak in cpts 1a and 2a to monitor and record the progression of COD and to identify any tree safety works required.

• 2020 and 2024 assessments with the Trusts' Tree Safety UK Estate Manager to review the extent and impact of COD and to agree a programme of proactive felling operations if required to ensure the protection of the woodland's ecology and structure within the plan period (up to a maximum of approximately 10% of oak across 11ha of cpts 1a and 2a).

• Removal of single figures of non-native invasive species shrubs (cherry laurel, Portuguese laurel and rhododendron) in 2020 and annual control for the remainder of the plan period in cpts 1a and 2a.

• An assessment of the key feature as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment in 2024 to inform the next management plan review.

4.2 f2 Natural Secondary Woodland

Description

Approximately 14ha of Valley Park Woods is long-established secondary woodland. The majority of this (10.75ha) includes Small Profits (cpt 3a) and Titlark Copse (cpt 4a) in their entirety, with small fragments in Clothier's Copse (cpt

1a) and Knight Wood (cpt 2b) making up the remainder.

Small Profits appears to have established through natural succession to woodland, with the occasional larch indicating the likelihood of some over-planting of conifers after the first world war. The canopy of the wood is dominated by mature oak, with occasional mature ash present throughout the wood and along the north boundary, with only one significant stand in the south west. The understorey is comprised mainly of hazel, holly and birch.

The canopy of the wood was lightly thinned in 1995 with further selective felling of oaks to manage chronic oak decline (COD) in subsequent years. Ash dieback (ADB) disease is also present and is now affecting ash of all age classes present, with some trees with significant decline symptoms within falling distance of roads, properties and footpaths removed in 2018 and 2019, with works ongoing.

A stream runs in a north-easterly direction roughly parallel with the eastern boundary, and due to issues with riverbank erosion planning consent was gained in 2009 to re-align the stream in 3 places. The Trust re-aligned the first section in 2009, with the second and third completed with Test Valley Council in September 2014. Following these modifications there is now a significant amount of temporary open space adjacent to the stream with prolific bramble and bracken growth along with regenerating hazel and birch under a well-spaced stand of oaks. On the stream banks themselves there is prolific coppice regeneration mainly consisting of alder and goat willow mainly at the northern end.

As a result of the significant disturbance across the site, much of the ground flora is dominated by bramble and bracken with only occasional woodland ground flora plants evident. There is occasional dead wood retained from fallen or felled trees.

Titlark Copse originated as an oak plantation and oak still dominates today, with occasional birch and yew, but no ash. There are notable gaps from past oak removal and fallen and standing dead trees (where they do not present a risk to visitors) as a result of COD. The gaps have resulted in some significant patches of oak regeneration, most evidently near the east boundary. The understorey is comprised mainly of hazel, holly and hawthorn and the ground flora is similar to Small Profits, though with less coarse vegetation and more patches of seemingly bare ground covered with leaf litter. There are no formally maintained footpaths through the centre of the wood, to minimise management of COD for visitor safety and to allow a contrasting habitat to the more intensively managed and frequented periphery. A stream runs adjacent to the southern boundary through Test Valley Borough Council land.

The overall aesthetic of both of these woods is of semi-natural mature high forest stands, with a well-developed understorey, which with the exception of the occasional larch and absence of indicative ground flora, has the appearance of the ancient woodland within the complex. This is reflected in their inclusion in the SINC designation which demonstrates their high ecological value.

The majority of the secondary woodland in Knight Wood is visible on the 1872 OS 6 inch series map and ancient woodland inventory which indicate a rectangular area of just under 2.5ha that was not wooded. It is thought to have been a field or an area of wood-pasture. The perimeter of this area is still defined by wood banks, but it is now well integrated with the rest of the wood following natural colonisation and establishment of mainly ash with oak, beech, birch and a hazel and a bracken understorey on the periphery. There are some large individual specimen trees, notably beech, which indicate the historic openness of the area. The remaining secondary woodland in Knight Wood comprises slivers of land on the west and south boundaries totaling approximately 1ha which are barely discernible at the site, but are visible on the ancient woodland inventory map. These are semi-open areas of oak and birch with hazel, rowan and

holly understorey with bracken and bramble ground flora, typical of many parts of the periphery of the wood.

Clothier's Copse contributes the smallest area of secondary woodland of just 0.2ha at the northern end. This area is distinguishable as it narrows into a 'corridor' flanked by a diverse variety of trees and shrubs including whitebeam, cherry, birch, dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn, many of which appear planted to provide screening between the neighbouring properties and road that flank the copse.

Cherry laurel and/or rhododendron and garden plants arising from the surrounding properties are present in very low numbers within the key feature.

Significance

Although secondary woodland does not have the longevity that ancient woodland does, the majority of the secondary woodland in the complex is well-established into maturity, with a high biodiversity value. Therefore, although Hampshire is a well-wooded county, this area has been extensively developed, making this key feature a valuable natural resource, benefiting the local community and wildlife whilst maintaining resilience and connectivity in the wider landscape.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:-
Access is difficult which may impact on the extraction of diseased ash and oak trees affected by COD.

Opportunities:-
The recruitment of trees into a veteran and ancient population or protection of existing specimen trees should be incorporated into operations where possible.
Link with Forest Research or colleges/universities to undertake research on the COD.

Factors Causing Change

Chronic Oak Decline (across the whole key feature) and ash dieback (in Clothier's Copse, Knight Wood and Small Profits only): The woodland structure is significantly influenced by the effects of these diseases and it is anticipated that both diseases will be an ongoing factor for the foreseeable future, resulting in sustained losses of mature oak and ash of all age classes.

Vigorous bramble and bracken growth: following tree works within recent years, the response of bramble and/or bracken growth is prolific across all woods in the complex.

Climate change: Wetter winters may result in significant changes to the water table, saturation of soil and watercourses in and around the woods. Conversely longer drought periods and increased temperatures are also anticipated through spring and summer. This increases the likelihood of knock-on effects such as drying or waterlogging of soils, increased vulnerability to tree diseases and changes in species composition to those that are best adapted to the changing conditions.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain a mature high forest structure of canopy, understorey, shrub, and field layers with a mixed ground flora. The mixed species composition of the key feature will provide resilience to pests and diseases, however, oak will be

sustained as the main canopy component where possible due to its value as a keystone species.

Ongoing tree diseases will be managed through proactive felling operations, resulting in niches that will sustain the diversity of structure and a viable ecosystem. Opportunities to recruit trees into a veteran and ancient population or protect existing specimen trees will be incorporated into operations where possible. Dead wood will be retained on the ground or left standing where it does not pose a safety risk.

Open space will total a minimum of 10% across the whole compartments that the key feature is situated in, including rides and paths with a diversity of edge habitat.

Non-native invasive species such as cherry laurel and rhododendron will be eradicated.

The stream in Small Profits will be a thriving riparian habitat which enhances the biodiversity of the woodland with bank side trees under a suitable coppicing regime.

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

To increase the wood's resilience to pests and diseases, to improve the structure and species composition of the woodland so it is more diverse. This will be achieved through the following:-

• Annual summer assessment of the progress of ADB and the recruitment of suitable natural regeneration of future canopy trees.

• Thinning of ash showing signs of moderate to advanced ash dieback decline symptoms within falling distance of footpaths, roads or properties in approximately 3.5ha of cpts 1a, 2b and 3a within the plan period. Includes stacking of a proportion of cut material to block off former path entry points on paths which will no longer be maintained through cpt 2b and installation of suitable signage to inform visitors of closed or diverted path routes in 2021.

• Annual summer assessment and autumn inspection of oak in cpts 3a and 4a to monitor and record the progression of COD and to identify any tree safety works required.

• 2020 and 2024 assessments with the Trusts' Tree Safety UK Estate Manager to review the extent and impact of COD and to agree a programme of proactive felling operations if required to ensure the protection of the woodland's ecology and structure within the plan period (up to a maximum of approximately 10% of oak across 8.78ha of cpts 3a and 4a).

• Removal of single figures of non-native invasive species shrubs (cherry laurel) in 2020 and annual control for the remainder of the plan period in cpts 1a, 3a and 4a.

• Coppicing and singling of suitable trees for retention of up to 50% of stream side tree regeneration adjacent to approximately 320m (2ha) in cpt 3a in 2021,2022 and 2023. To maintain access for maintenance of the banks and to prevent trees that may become unstable from developing in inappropriate places on the steep slopes within the plan period.

• Reduction of the top and cut-back by one-third of interior sides of the mixed species boundary vegetation on both sides of the northern 'corridor' in cpt 1a (approximately 150m total length). Twice within the plan period.

• An assessment of the key feature as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment in 2024.

4.3 f3 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Valley Park Woods is a category A access site (high usage, regularly used at all times of the year, with more than approximately 15-20 visitors using one entrance every day) and is part of the Welcoming Sites Programme (WSP), a Woodland Trust initiative which aims to improve recreation and access provision at our key sites. The WSP will lead to a series of lasting upgrades that will improve the visitor experience and aims to increase the number and range of visitors to this site. An attractive and serviceable network of tracks and paths will further encourage the appreciation of the woodland, both on the site and in the locality. The site will be managed to meet the required high standards of WSP and will provide a clear welcome: well-maintained entrances, furniture, signs and other infrastructure as appropriate. Improved access will better facilitate use by a wider range of visitors.

Valley Park Woods is situated within the residential suburbs of Chandlers Ford, a town with a population of over 21000 people which immediately abuts Eastleigh, south Hampshire (pop 31,374).

The site is comprised of a complex of four separate blocks of woodland divided by roads, residential housing and industry. However, each block is accessible via a network of roads or footpaths between and throughout the woods themselves.
Clothier's Copse (cpt 1a): This is the northern-most and smallest wood in the complex. There are entrances at the north and south ends which are connected via an unsurfaced permissive footpath of just over 300m running through the centre of the copse. The entrances are accessible via Katrine Crescent and Flexford Road.

Knight Wood (cpt 2a and 2b): This is the largest wood in the complex and is situated just over 400m south of Clothier's Copse. There is a small hard-surfaced car park at the Test Valley Borough Council recreation ground on the north boundary of the wood, at the east end of Glendowan Road, allowing direct pedestrian access into the wood via a kissing gate. There are a further six formal entrances distributed around the perimeter of the wood allowing access or egress from every direction. Within the wood is a circular path of approximately 1.8km (1.2 miles) which gives access to the majority of the periphery of the wood. There are also two public footpaths and offshoots running loosely north west to south east enabling a more direct route through the wood of approximately 800 metres. The paths are mainly flat, however, they are unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods. The maintained peripheral paths allow a central area of the northern and southern parts of Knight Wood to be left largely natural for wildlife habitat. Ash is also an abundant tree in the central northern area (within and surrounding cpt 2b) and with ash dieback disease (ADB) now detrimentally affecting ash and oaks affected by COD, this further reduces the suitability of some access routes through these areas.

Small Profits (cpt 3a): This section of the complex is approximately 600m south of Knight Wood and can be accessed via two entrances off of Wicklow Drive on the north boundary of the wood. A circular permissive path of approximately 600m provides a route around the wood and access to a further entrance at the southern end which allows the most direct route to Titlark Copse, the southern-most block in the complex. The path is mainly flat, however, it is unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods, with small wooden bridges with hand-rails at the northern and southern entrances.

Titlark Copse (cpt 4a): The main entrance to Titlark Copse is in the centre of the north boundary and is accessible via a footpath heading south from the southern entrance of Small Profits (approximately 160m). There is residential roadside parking available for a few cars at the southern end of Eden Walk, with a footpath of approximately 280m also leading to the entrance in the centre of the north boundary. The entrance is identifiable by a wooden bridge that spans a stream on the north boundary of the wood. A circular permissive path of approximately 900m provides a route around the periphery of the wood, connecting with a further four entrances which allow access or egress from most directions. The path is mainly flat, however, it is unsurfaced and can be very muddy in winter or wet periods. The maintained peripheral paths allow the central area of the wood to be left largely natural for wildlife, and with COD affecting oak, this further reduces the suitability of some access routes through the area.

Test Valley Borough Council manage six other publically accessible woodlands within walking distance of the Trusts woods, to the north of Chilworth. These are Zionshill Copse, Little Covert, Tredgoulds Copse, Skys Wood, Clothiers Copse and Knightwood which are collectively known as Valley Park Woodlands Local Nature Reserve (LNR) totaling 48.39 hectares. The LNR includes areas of ancient semi natural woodland, alder and willow carr, planted areas, ponds, rides and meadows. The main car parking for the LNR is located at Knightwood Leisure Centre and is accessed off Sky's Wood Road.

Two other Woodland Trust woods are situated to the east of Valley Park Woods within driving distance:
Otterbourne Park Wood, Otterbourne, SO21 2HY - a 23ha ancient woodland, approximately 5km away.
Upper Barn & Crowdhill Copse, Fisher's Pond, SO50 7GD - two copses of ancient woodland totaling 28ha, approximately 10km away.

Significance

Valley Park Woods' urban setting and high local demand for public access and recreation is reflective of the increasing development in south east England and the corresponding need for accessible open space. The woods close proximity to each other make them ideal for local residents situated within walking distance. The car park adjacent to Knight Wood is owned and managed by Test Valley Borough Council also caters for visitors from further afield. Therefore, the complex provides an important ecological and recreational resource, providing benefits to both mental and physical health.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
To collaborate with borough and county councils to improve access and boundary infrastructure adjoining their land, and rights of way provision in Knight Wood.
To engage visitors to become volunteer Woodland Wardens.
To hold family/community events at Knight Wood, utilizing the adjoining car park.
Constraints:
The car park adjacent to Knight Wood is not owned or maintained by the Woodland Trust.
Clothier's Copse, Small Profits and Titlark Copse have residential roadside parking only. There is only no car park which could limit the number of visitors accessing the sites from further afield.
Although there are many public and permissive footpaths through the sites, these are natural and unsurfaced, meaning that many of the paths are muddy during the winter or prolonged periods of rainfall.
All four woods are surrounded by or are directly abutting residential areas, schools and industrial estates. This brings both positive and negative effects including potential support for the woods and the Trust and/or anti-social behaviour.

Factors Causing Change

Chronic Oak Decline and ash dieback: These tree diseases affect public access provision, requiring tree safety works and path diversions or closures to maintain safe access at the complex.
Visitor numbers are likely to increase further due to ongoing residential development in the wider area. This increases the likelihood of positive and negative effects including anti-social behaviour, littering, dog fouling, fires, cycling, new desire lines and trampling of ground flora, volunteering and local support for the copses and the Trust.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The site will provide a safe and enjoyable woodland experience for visitors, with a good network of accessible footpaths, entrances, infrastructure and signage, in line with the site's Welcoming Site Programme designation. The site will continue to offer a high quality visitor experience in line with a WT access category A designation. The woodlands will provide areas for quiet informal recreational activities, be well used and much appreciated by both the local population and visitors from further afield.
Entrances and signage will have a welcoming appearance and there will be a network of paths providing a range of routes suitable for walkers through varied woodland habitat types within the wider landscape. The woods, despite being urban, should retain their rural aesthetic, with sympathetic infrastructure, signage and interpretation.

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

To provide a safe, enjoyable woodland experience for visitors. This will be achieved through the following within the plan period:-

• Path cuts and entrance maintenance twice a year to maintain designated circular and/or through-routes in each wood in the complex.

• Installation of new welcome signs at the main entrances of each wood in the complex in 2021.

• Installation of a new orientation panel/noticeboard at Knight Wood in 2020, showing the main path routes and woods in the complex, with relevant Trust policies (e.g. dog walking code) displayed.

• Upgrades of entrance and site infrastructure with particular focus on main entrances and rights of way, in line with the Trusts Welcoming Site Programme in 2020 and 2021.

• Recruitment of volunteer woodland wardens to walk the site on a regular basis and to be 'the eyes and ears' noting any rare or notable species, wildlife, maintenance issues or site problems/damaging activities and to have a clear line of communication with the Site Manager.

• Annual infrastructure inspections and maintenance.

• Annual tree safety inspections and remedial works as required in line with the Trusts Tree Risk Management Policy.

• An assessment of access infrastructure and signs in 2024 as part of the whole site woodland condition assessment and Welcoming Sites Programme objectives.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	0.76	Oak (pedunculate)	1880	High forest	Diseases, Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Tree Preservation Order
Clothier's Copse: The majority of this compartment, approximately 0.5ha, is designated ASNW. It is predominantly oak high forest with some ash and silver birch and an understorey of hazel, holly and hawthorn. Other species present include field maple, aspen, sweet chestnut and sycamore. A narrow area of approximately 0.26ha at the northern end of the compartment is secondary woodland and contains younger trees and an abundance of shrub species such as dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with rare patches of ASNW species such as bluebell, and other woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and red campion. Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2009, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected. Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present. One permissive path runs loosely north to south through the centre of the entire length of the copse.						
2a	15.65	Oak (pedunculate)	1800	High forest	Archaeological features, Diseases, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Knight Wood: This compartment is ancient woodland with mature oak, ash, beech, birch and yew and occasional Scots pine. A significant proportion of the understorey is comprised of hazel with patches of holly, along with rowan, hawthorn, elder and goat willow, with honeysuckle and ivy also plentiful. Ground flora is a mix of bramble, bracken, ferns and large patches of ASNW plants including Solomon's seal, bluebell, wood anemone, butchers broom and yellow pimpernel. Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2009, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected. Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present. Permissive paths provide a circular route around the periphery of the wood, while three public right of way						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
footpaths provide access through the wood. There is a small car park in the Test Valley Borough Council recreation ground adjacent to the north boundary of the wood, which gives direct pedestrian access into Knight Wood via a kissing gate.						
2b	2.38	Ash	1872	High forest	Archaeological features, Diseases	
This compartment is an almost rectangular area of secondary woodland edged with wood banks that was historically an open space (field or wood-pasture). It is currently colonised mainly by self-seeded young, semi-nature and mature ash, with prolific natural regeneration. Oak, beech and birch are also present, mainly on the periphery, with some large specimen trees due to the previously open nature of the area. Ash dieback is present affecting ash of all age classes present.						
3a	4.48	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	High forest	Diseases, Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Small Profits: This compartment is secondary woodland with an oak, ash, birch, beech and sycamore canopy. The understorey mainly comprises hazel, holly and hawthorn. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with occasional woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and red campion. There is a stream flowing in a northerly direction along the eastern boundary which has been modified with substantial schemes of work between 2009 and 2016 to contain the stream and reduce erosion to the adjacent banks. Significant vegetation clearance in this area along with sivicultural works have resulted in a swathe of temporary open space along the length of the watercourse with prolific hazel, birch and alder coppice regeneration and bracken and bramble growth beneath a very open stand of oaks. Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2009, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected. Ash dieback is also present and is affecting ash of all age classes present. A circular permissive footpath provides access through the wood, with pedestrian entrances in the north and south.						
4a	6.27	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	High forest	Diseases, Housing/infrastructure, structures & water features on or adjacent to site	County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
Titlark Copse: This compartment is a post 1870 plantation of oak in a formerly wet field, with a few trees and shrubs already established at the time. The current species are predominantly oak, birch, sycamore, and the occasional beech with an understorey of hazel, holly, hawthorn and dogwood. Ground flora is dominated by bramble with						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
occasional woodland and open space species such as herb-robert, cleavers and blue alkanet. Chronic Oak Decline was first recorded in this compartment in 2009, with ongoing decline and death of mature oaks affected. Permissive paths provide a circular route around the periphery of the wood, with five entrances allowing access on every boundary.						

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.

Windblow/Windthrow
Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.