



# **Avoncliff 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 Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.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](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) or contact the Woodland Trust ([wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto: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](http://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

<b>Site name:</b>	Avoncliff Wood
<b>Location:</b>	Avoncliff, Upper Westwood
<b>Grid reference:</b>	ST 800 597, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. N/A
<b>Area:</b>	30.13 hectares (74.45 acres)
<b>Designations:</b>	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Summary Description

Avoncliff Wood stands in between the villages of Avoncliff and Freshford, just north of Upper Westwood. It is just within the southern range of the Cotswolds AONB in the National Character Area 107 - Cotswolds. It is located 4 miles as the crow flies from Bath City Centre and World Heritage Site to the west, and is 7 miles walk or cycle along the Kennet & Avon canal and Sustrans cycle path. Less than 2 miles to the east of Avoncliff lies the historic town of Bradford-on-Avon, also on the canal and cycle path route.

The wood totals 30Ha (74 acres) of which approximately 65% is designated as ancient, 25% is part newly planted broadleaf woodland (2019), natural regeneration and orchard and the remaining 10% is river meadow. The ancient Avoncliff Wood currently has no public access, with no footpaths and a high presence of ash dieback disease. It is classified as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) and amounts to around 19Ha/49 acres. The wood is NVC community W8 ash - dogs mercury woodland (*Fraxinus excelsior* - *Mercurialis perennis*) with derelict ash coppice, oak standards, Wych elm, and derelict hazel coppice understorey. It has been unmanaged since approx 1940's and contains an enormous carpet of wild garlic, with Hart's-tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*. 13 species of bat have been recorded in the ancient woodland.

The mixed habitat mosaic of Avoncliff Wood is 10Ha/26 acres and consists of 4ha of broadleaf woodland with wide grassy rides planted in 2019; 1ha community orchard stocked with local apple and pear species, 2ha of woodland colonising naturally by regeneration from the ancient woodland; and 3ha of riverside

floodplain meadow and grassland. This area borders the ancient wood to the north, east and south east and slopes in a northerly direction. Although the ancient woodland has no public access, the whole of the mixed mosaic area is crossed by footpaths open to the public. All paths can be slippery and muddy during wet weather and some potentially submerged when the River Avon floods. There are good public transport, pedestrian and sustainable access links to the wood, with no parking facilities at the wood and only very limited parking in the adjacent villages.

## 2.2 Extended Description

Avoncliff Wood stands in between the villages of Avoncliff and Freshford, just north of Upper Westwood. It is just within the southern range of the Cotswolds AONB in the National Character Area 107 - Cotswolds. It is located 4 miles as the crow flies from Bath City Centre and World Heritage Site to the west, and is 7 miles walk or cycle along the Kennet & Avon canal and Sustrans cycle path. Less than 2 miles to the east of Avoncliff lies the historic town of Bradford-on-Avon, also on the canal and cycle path route.

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## 3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

### 3.1 Getting there

The wood is well served by public transport and all visitors are encouraged to visit the wood using public transport, rather than driving. There are railway stations in both Freshford and Avoncliff, which are a short walk to the wood through the villages to the entrances of the wood (approx. 15 mins and 5 mins respectively). Trains run from Bath Spa (12 mins train journey), and Bradford on Avon (3 mins train journey) train stations.

Buses run from Bath and Bradford on Avon, to Westwood or Limpley Stoke Villages, The 96 bus runs via Freshford to Westwood and passes within a 10 minute walk of the southern entrance to the site. See timetable: <https://bustimes.org/services/94-trowbridge-wingfield-westwood-freshford-bath> or <https://www.traveline.info/>

Public footpaths link the wood to Avoncliff immediately to the east; Freshford village 5 minutes walk to the west; and the village of Upper and Lower Westwood up a steep hill to the south east.

The Kennet and Avon Canal path runs to the historic Avoncliff Aqueduct in the village of Avoncliff, with a short walk along the river to wood entrance from the Avoncliff Aqueduct. Canoes, row boats, paddle-boards and canal boats can be hired from various boat hires on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The canal path is also open to walkers and cyclists from Bradford on Avon (30mins walk or 11 min cycle), and from Bath (2hour walk or 45 min cycle).

Limited parking is available in a small private pay and display car park in Avoncliff village down a steep road, but there is no through road in Avoncliff. There is a car park at The Inn at Freshford for customers only.

### 3.2 Access / Walks

Several public footpaths cross the land, and the fields at Avoncliff have many paths and rights of way. However there is currently no public access into the ancient woodland.

The most popular public footpath runs through the river bank meadow alongside the River Avon from Freshford to Avoncliff. It links The Inn at Freshford, with The Cross Guns in Avoncliff. The floodplain meadow paths follows from/to The Inn at Freshford, through the fields to the public footpath along a narrow woodland path adjacent to the river bank, and back out into wide river meadows, with a hedge-lined path from/to the Avoncliff side and the aqueduct and The Cross Guns Pub.

Two public footpaths also run through the south east Cuffley Field in a north/south direction on the steep hill to Upper Westwood. Entering or exiting either through neighbouring woodland or onto the country lanes in Upper Westwood.

## 4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

In fifty years-

**Ancient Woodland Site:** A diverse and continuous predominantly native woodland canopy will exist across all of the ancient woodland. Oak and hazel will continue to provide a canopy across the wood, broken occasionally by natural glades providing additional transitory habitat, and a small proportion of ash with some resilience to Ash Dieback will remain as part of the canopy. Deer populations will be managed at levels enabling natural regeneration processes to occur unimpeded by browsing. Existing and future veteran trees will be retained providing an important habitat for protected species. Ancient woodland species will be spreading into the surrounding woodland areas by natural colonisation. The woodland will provide a significant scientific resource to study and monitor the flora and fauna in ancient woodland over time.

**Mixed Habitat Mosaic:** A mosaic of open, semi-natural grassland, successional scrub woodland and open canopy woodland will have integrated with the adjacent ancient woodland. A varied species and age structure of native broadleaved trees and shrubs will be present throughout the key feature as both copses and standards offering a diverse and open canopy with wide rides providing a grassland habitat. Scrub and tree regeneration will be a natural part of the varied habitat buffering the ancient woodland. Standing and fallen deadwood will provide valuable habitat. The River meadow will be open grassland with a few standard open grown native specimen trees. The Community Orchard will provide a continued resource for local people. All this will ensure a continuous diversity of habitats throughout the key feature, supporting a broad range of wildlife.

**Informal Public Access:** The site will be valued by local users and occasional visitors from further afield. Access will be maintained to a high level of quality and safety and will provide a number of clear recreational walks. It will be welcoming and easily accessible. Interpretation will be available on site detailing the woods history and importance in terms of biodiversity. A programme of events will be run to engage the local community to help maintain appreciation of the site's importance and value in line with WT core policies.

## 5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

### 5.1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

#### Description

Avoncliff Wood is classified as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) and is 48 acres/19Ha - NVC community W8 ash - dogs mercury woodland (*Fraxinus excelsior* - *Mercurialis perennis*). The wood has no public access and has no footpaths or PROW, with a locked management gate and fence around the perimeter, although signs of an old internal track for timber extraction exist.

The wood is prominent in the local landscape, and contains a large proportion of ash, with oak, Wild cherry, birch, sycamore and Wych elm. Hazel coppice with some hawthorn and field maple dominates the understorey. Numerous ancient stored coppiced ash stools, veteran ash and oak trees are present, the ash coppice stools may be approx. 300-400 years old, but were last coppiced approx. 1940's, and are now succumbing heavily to ash dieback threatening severe losses. The maiden mature oaks look to perhaps be from either oak planting in the 19th century or deliberate favouring of oak high forest over ash/hazel coppice.

The wood is on a steep slope overlooking the River Avon and was acquired by the Woodland Trust in Nov 2018. The wood is registered as ancient, although the uneven rocky upper part (south) looks as if it has been quarried. However this does not show up on the 1:2500 1880's map, so if quarrying did occur it must be earlier than this. However the map does show a dense network of tracks at the eastern end which suggests extraction of stone or timber.

The ground flora is dominated in spring with a vast carpet of wild garlic *Allium ursinum*, some bluebells *Hyacinthoedus non-scripta*, and damper areas of mosses, lichens and ferns dominated by Hart's-tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium*. Herb paris *Paris quadrifolia* and Spiked star of Bethlehem or Bath asparagus *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* have both been recorded.

Bat surveys in summer 2019 found a total of 13 species recorded using the wood: Greater horseshoe, Lesser horseshoe, Daubenton's bat, Natterer's bat, Whiskered bat, Bechstein's bat, *Myotis* sp., Noctule bat, Leisler's bat, *Nyctalus* sp., Serotine bat, Common pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle, Brown long-eared bat, *Plecotus* sp, and Barbastelle bat. Avoncliff Wood offers suitable roosting habitat for a range of woodland bat species, including rarer species such as Bechstein's bat (in cavities and crevices) and Barbastelle bat (behind flaking bark plates, within splits and cracks). The deterioration and senescence of ash, and in particular the mature oaks, offers potential for excellent provision of roosting sites for woodland bats. The woodland will also comprise a key part of the roost sustenance zone of the Greater Horseshoes roosts at the nearby Iford Manor SSSI, and the Bath and River Avon SAC. The adjacent pastures to the north and south of Avoncliff Wood will provide important foraging areas for adult and juvenile greater horseshoes, particularly if managed with grazing livestock.

The presence of ash dieback in the wood is widespread with significant mortality and severe crown dieback (recorded in 2017, 2018 and 2019). There has been no public access into the ancient woodland, nor has there been active management for several decades. Given the presence of ash dieback in the wood, creating new paths and making them safe to walk would require drastic intervention, disrupting Avoncliff's unique untouched nature and precious ecosystem. It was decided following community consultation in 2019 that the ancient woodland will remain closed to public access and instead be used to monitor the effect of ash dieback on the flora and fauna of the wood by periodic surveys.

In 2019 the Woodland Trust started a long-term monitoring survey by commissioning a team of ecological consultants to produce a baseline report of the species currently found at the site, including NVC surveys, tree and shrub species, ground flora including mosses, lichens and liverworts, fungi, bat species, invertebrates, dormice and molluscs. It is hoped this will be repeated every 2-5 years depending on funding throughout the effects of ash dieback and eventually taken over by local wildlife interest groups and volunteers.

Management access is via Avoncliff hamlet to the east into Cuffley Field, or via a gate in the south into the nursery field. The Zone B river boundary ash to the north by the Public Right of Way (PROW) will need to be annually surveyed as part of site risk assessment. Areas of natural regeneration rather than planting are being encouraged around the north, east and south-east woodland perimeter, with fencing and no management of the grassland allowing bramble and woodland to naturally colonise and spread, and to buffer the ancient woodland edge and provide a natural safety zone.

### Significance

- The Woodland Trust is committed to the protection and restoration of ancient woodland sites and believes that semi natural ancient woodlands are irreplaceable.
- Mixed broadleaved woodland (Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland) is a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP).
- The woodland forms an important Biodiversity Action Plan(BAP) habitat within the Cotswold area providing not only a refuge for wildlife but also facilitating wider ecologically functioning and connectivity within the landscape.
- The woodland hosts a number of important European Protected Species (EPS), notably Bechsteins bat, and Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats.

### Opportunities & Constraints

- Opportunity to monitor the effects of ash dieback on ancient woodland flora and fauna overtime with minimum management interventions needed for health and safety or silvicultural reasons.
- Investigate significance of bat population and protected species throughout wood and surrounding area
- Opportunities to engage woodland ecologists and volunteers in monitoring programme

### Factors Causing Change

- Ash dieback is likely to have a major impact across the region. This is likely to create an opportunity for alternative species to regenerate and create structural diversity, as long as the local deer population can be kept low enough to ensure natural regeneration opportunities can develop unhindered.
- There will likely be a major impact on species obligate to ash, although this process will occur over time.
- Deer browsing remains a threat to successful natural regeneration
- Squirrels damage on some regenerating trees such as sycamore and beech will continue to be a threat for

young pole stage trees, becoming increasingly significant if the proportion of ash reduces over time due to ash dieback.

- Climate change.
- Coarse vegetation - species such as bramble, bracken, nettle etc. may colonise and have an impact on ancient woodland ground flora regeneration.
- Spread of Dutch elm disease into Wych elm may have an additional tree loss effect.
- Himalayan balsam grows along the river banks of the Avon, this could spread into the woodland.

### **Long term Objective (50 years+)**

In fifty years-

Ancient Woodland Site: A diverse and continuous predominantly native woodland canopy will exist across all of the ancient woodland. Oak and hazel will continue to provide a canopy across the wood, broken occasionally by natural glades providing additional transitory habitat, and a small proportion of ash with some resilience to Ash Dieback will remain as part of the canopy. Deer populations will be managed at levels enabling natural regeneration processes to occur unimpeded by browsing. Existing and future veteran trees will be retained providing an important habitat for protected species. Ancient woodland species will be spreading into the surrounding woodland areas by natural colonisation. The woodland will provide a significant scientific resource to study and monitor the flora and fauna in ancient woodland over time.

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

- Limited intervention woodland with no public access
- Undertake baseline monitoring of selected flora and fauna at Avoncliff Wood every 2 years.
- Ash dieback tree safety assessments and subsequent felling of dead or dangerous ash along B areas (none in Zone A) as per WT ash dieback guidance on managing ash dieback on the estate. Annual inspections, and safety works.
- To carry out a deer impact assessment and maintain programme of deer control accordingly.
- Control of Himalayan balsam growing along River Avon: annual summer pull along riverbank

## 5.2 Mixed Habitat Mosaic

### Description

Avoncliff Wood contains a mosaic of habitats outside the ancient woodland totalling 10Ha/26 acres that are all open to the public. These include 4Ha newly planted broadleaf woodland with wide rides and prominent landscape views, 2Ha of natural regeneration areas which buffer the ancient woodland, a 1Ha community orchard, and 3Ha a grassland river meadow running along the River Avon. They adjoin the north, east and south east of the ancient wood, sloping in a northerly direction in-between Freshford village and the hamlet of Avoncliff just to the west of Bradford-on-Avon. All were formerly intensively grazed pasture with low biodiversity interest.

4Ha of new native broadleaf woodland were planted with wide grassland rides, new footpaths, benches and viewpoints in winter 2019/20, in Cuffley Field (east), and the Nursery Field (south east). A 40% tree, to 60% shrub mix was planted including trees: - Pedunculate Oak, Wild Cherry, Hornbeam, Silver birch, Small Leaved Lime, Wych Elm, Field Maple, Beech, Common Whitebeam, Aspen, Wild Service tree, Alder, and Rowan; plus shrubs - Hazel, Hawthorn, Crab apple, Spindle, Holly, Guelder Rose, Dogwood, Wayfaring tree, Dog Rose, and Alder buckthorn respectively. All were planted and fitted with a combination of 3000 biodegradable tree shelters and 2000 recycled plastic tree guards by schools and volunteers.

2Ha around the ancient woodland edges to the north and east have been left to naturally regenerate. The areas have either been stock fenced in Cuffley Field (east) due to grazing pre-planting in 2019, or left unmowed in the River Meadow (north). As trees naturally fall, die or succumb to ash dieback this will also allow them to fall away from footpaths, and decay in situ so bramble and naturally regenerating trees can grow to increase the size of the wood and buffer the ancient woodland.

A 1Ha community orchard of local variety Westcountry apples and pears were planted in winter 2019/20 in the south east Upper Westwood field. These include Apple varieties: Ashmead's Kernel, Beauty of Bath, Black Dabinett (Cider), Bramley, Christmas Pippin, Dons Delight, Dunkertons Late, Golden Bittersweet (Cider), Harry M Jersey(Cider), Kingston Black, Morgans Sweet (Cider), Nine Square, Oaken Pin, Prince William (Cider), Spotted Dick (Cider), Sweet Alford (Cider), Tidcombe Seedling, and Tom Putt. Plus pear varieties: - Concorde, Conference and Green Horse (Perry). All trees are individually protected in parkland style post and wire mesh shelters, and the field will be managed as a grassland orchard with occasional mowing and/or grazing.

A large 3Ha grassland river meadow dissected by footpaths will remain as grassland along the northern side of the wood adjacent to the River Avon. Except for 5 open grown native specimen trees in parkland guards, the grassland will be retained as floodplain river meadow to preserve the landscape character of the River Avon valley and Cotswold AONB and to maintain excellent views. Except for the natural regeneration woodland areas, the field will be managed by grazing and/or mowing annually.

A wet flush runs down the east margin of Cuffley Field to the east of the wood. This provides a wet area for invertebrates, plants and birds. Duck and wading birds have been spotted in this area in the past.

### Significance

Avoncliff Wood is within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and connects and links into the wider wooded landscape. The woodland creation via planting and natural regeneration will help expand the ancient woodland and provide a wider area for biodiversity to flourish.

### **Opportunities & Constraints**

#### Opportunities:

- To expand the ancient woodland and buffer it.
- To provide a wider mosaic of habitats across the site.
- To demonstrate and trial biodegradable tree guards.

#### Constraints:

- Limited vehicular management access.
- Frequently wet ground.
- Views and sledging are both important to locals and are accommodated in the planting plans.
- Deer browsing remains a threat to successful natural regeneration and shrub planting
- Squirrel damage on both planted and naturally regenerating trees such as sycamore, hornbeam, oak, field maple and beech will be a threat to young trees.

### **Factors Causing Change**

- Ash dieback and reconfiguration of permissive path routes.
- Deer browsing and rabbit grazing.
- Climate change.
- Himalayan balsam grows along the River Avon, this could spread into the woodland and grassland areas.

### **Long term Objective (50 years+)**

Mixed Habitat Mosaic: A mosaic of open, semi-natural grassland, successional scrub woodland and open canopy woodland will have integrated with the adjacent ancient woodland. A varied species and age structure of native broadleaved trees and shrubs will be present throughout the key feature as both copses and standards offering a diverse and open canopy with wide rides providing a grassland habitat. Scrub and tree regeneration will be a natural part of the varied habitat buffering the ancient woodland. Standing and fallen deadwood will provide valuable habitat. The River meadow will be open grassland with a few standard open grown native specimen trees. The Community Orchard will provide a continued resource for local people. All this will ensure a continuous diversity of habitats throughout the key feature, supporting a broad range of wildlife.

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

- Maintain, protect and ensure tree planting areas grow unhindered from browsing and damage. Gapping up, removing guards as necessary, and hand-weeding saplings.
- Manage grassland habitat through a combination of grazing and mechanical management.
- Protection of selected areas of developing natural regeneration to ensure continuity of woodland habitat.
- Improve the entrance configuration by installing new orientation boards and associated threshold signage that brings the sites together and promotes the interest and key features and in context with the wider local landscape.

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## 5.3 Informal Public Access

### Description

Avoncliff Wood stands in between the villages of Avoncliff and Freshford just within the southern range of the Cotswolds AONB in the National Character Area 107 – Cotswolds. It is located 4 miles as the crow flies from Bath City Centre and World Heritage Site to the west, and is 7 miles along the popular Kennet & Avon canal and Sustrans cycle path. Less than 2 miles to the east of Avoncliff lies the historic town of Bradford-on-Avon, also on the canal and cycle path route. Trowbridge, the county town of Wiltshire, is only 3 miles distant. Cotswolds AONB guide <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Explore-Booklet-2018-web.pdf>

Avoncliff lies in an attractive rural location alongside the River Avon, with the historic 18th Century Avoncliff Aqueduct of the Kennet and Avon Canal close to the east in the tiny tourist hamlet of Avoncliff. Most of the site falls within Wiltshire Council, but the most westerly section of woodland lies within Bath & North East Somerset Council. The immediate local community is made up of the adjoining hamlet of Avoncliff to the east, Freshford to the west, and the villages of Upper and Lower Westwood to the south east. All are linked to the site via the public footpath network.

The wood is well served by public transport and all visitors are encouraged to visit the wood using public transport, rather than driving. There are railway stations in both Freshford and Avoncliff, which are a short walk to the wood through the villages to the entrances of the wood (approx. 15 mins and 5 mins respectively). Trains run from Bath Spa (12 mins train journey), and Bradford on Avon (3 mins train journey) train stations. Buses run from Bath and Bradford on Avon, to Westwood or Limpley Stoke Villages, The 96 bus runs via Freshford to Westwood and passes within a 10 minute walk of the southern entrance to the site. See timetable: <https://bustimes.org/services/94-trowbridge-wingfield-westwood-freshford-bath> or <https://www.traveline.info/>. Public footpaths link the wood to Avoncliff immediately to the east; Freshford village 5 minutes walk to the west; and the village of Upper and Lower Westwood up a steep hill to the south east. The Kennet and Avon Canal path runs to the historic Avoncliff Aqueduct in the village of Avoncliff, with a short walk along the river to wood entrance from the Avoncliff Aqueduct. Canoes, row boats, paddle-boards and canal boats can be hired from various boat hires on the Kennet and Avon Canal. The canal path is also open to walkers and cyclists from Bradford on Avon (30mins walk or 11 min cycle), and from Bath (2hour walk or 45 min cycle). Limited parking is available in a small private pay and display car park in Avoncliff village down a steep road, but there is no through road in Avoncliff. There is a car park at The Inn at Freshford for customers only. At either end of Avoncliff Wood are the two popular sister pubs - The Inn at Freshford (west), and The Cross Guns, Avoncliff (east). There is a popular walk along the River Avon that links the two.

Several public footpaths cross the land, and the fields at Avoncliff have many paths and rights of way. However there is currently no public access into the ancient woodland. The most popular public footpath runs through the river bank meadow alongside the River Avon from Freshford to Avoncliff. It links The Inn at Freshford, with The Cross Guns in Avoncliff. The floodplain meadow paths follows from/to The Inn at Freshford, through the fields to the public footpath along a narrow woodland path adjacent to the river bank, and back out into wide river meadows, with a hedge-lined path from/to the Avoncliff side and the aqueduct and The Cross Guns Pub. Two public footpaths also run through the south east Cuffley Field in a north/south direction on the steep hill to Upper Westwood. Entering or exiting either through neighbouring

woodland or onto the country lanes in Upper Westwood.

There are primary schools in the local area including Freshford Primary and Westwood with Iford Primary School, both of whom helped with the tree planting in Nov 2019.

Woodland Trust Volunteer Wardens help with wildlife monitoring, day to day tasks throughout the site, and help with public Himalayan balsam pulling days in summer, tree planting, and maintenance and weeding of the tree planting areas, alongside a wider network of local community volunteers.

The Woodland Trust carried out a community consultation in Spring 2019 to gather views, ideas and opinions on the Avoncliff Wood acquisition and planting project. Full details can be found in the 'WT Avoncliff Wood Consultation Report – July 2019', available from the Woodland Trust. All entrances and steps were repaired and improved in summer 2019 to facilitate better access to the site for all visitors. Some muddy sections of paths are difficult to walk in wet winter weather and will need work to improve accessibility, particularly on paths close to river and wet flush.

### Significance

Avoncliff Wood is within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and connects and links into the wider wooded landscape. The Wood provides a destination for a diverse visitor base throughout the year and is popular with local people from the surrounding villages and will inspire visitors to connect with their local landscape and woodland and trees in general.

### Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:

- To engage with a number of people across the local area in the importance of woods and trees, and to connect and link into the wider wooded landscape.
- To engage people in the use of public transport and alternative modes of transport to access Woodland Trust woods and the wider countryside in general.
- To improve access to the area for visitors by upgrading paths and entrances.
- Tree planting engagement events with volunteers, schools and community groups

Constraints:

- The steeper slopes across the sites restrict access to some areas by those people with mobility limitations.
- The ancient woodland has no access.
- No visitor parking at the wood limits visitors to public transport only.
- Flooding and seasonal muddy areas alongside the River Avon restricting path accessibility.

### Factors Causing Change

- Ash dieback and reconfiguration of PROW or permissive path routes.
- Increase in high water volume events and waterlogging causing further degradation of access routes.
- Cattle grazing and poaching.

### Long term Objective (50 years+)

Informal Public Access : The site will be valued by local users and occasional visitors from further afield. Access will be maintained to a high level of quality and safety and will provide a number of clear recreational walks. It will be welcoming and easily accessible. Interpretation will be available on site detailing the woods

history and importance in terms of biodiversity. A programme of events will be run to engage the local community to help maintain appreciation of the site's importance and value in line with WT core policies.

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

The short term objective is to maintain the site as easily accessible, attractive, well maintained and safe. The path network and entrances should remain in good condition and appropriate for level and type of use and in accordance with access category A.

- Ensure visitor safety via ongoing tree and infrastructure monitoring regime and remedial works as necessary.
- Managing muddy or difficult paths throughout the site to improve access for use throughout the year by the end of the management plan period through path infrastructure repairs, surfacing and hedge cuts.
- Main paths are to be mown where needed to provide unhindered access to visitors.
- Improve the entrance configuration by installing new orientation boards and associated threshold signage that brings the sites together and promotes the interest and key features and in context with the wider local landscape.

## 6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By
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## APPENDIX I: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	19.00	Ash	1800	High forest	Diseases, No/poor vehicular access within the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc		Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) - NVC community W8 ash - dogs mercury woodland (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> - <i>Mercurialis perennis</i>). Contains a large proportion of ash (canopy circa 60-70%), with oak, Wild cherry, birch, sycamore and Wych elm; hazel coppice with some hawthorn and field maple dominates the shrub layer. Numerous ancient stored coppiced ash stools, veteran ash and standard oak trees. The ground flora is dominated in spring with a vast carpet of wild garlic <i>Allium ursinum</i>, some bluebells <i>Hyacinthoedis non-scripta</i>, and damper areas of mosses, lichens and ferns dominated by Hart's-tongue fern <i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>. Herb paris <i>Paris quadrifolia</i> and Spiked star of Bethlehem or Bath asparagus <i>Ornithogalum pyrenaicum</i> have both been recorded.</p> <p>13 bat species recorded using the wood: Greater horseshoe, Lesser horseshoe, Daubenton's bat, Natterer's bat, Whiskered bat, Bechstein's bat, <i>Myotis</i> sp., Noctule bat, Leisler's bat, <i>Nyctalus</i> sp., Serotine bat, Common pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle, Brown long-eared bat, <i>Plecotus</i> sp, and Barbastelle bat.</p> <p>The compartment has no public access and no PROW, with a locked management gate and fence around the perimeter, although signs of an old internal track for timber extraction exist. 1880 maps show a network of tracks in the SE of the compartment. Management access via south entrance nursery field, or across Cuffley Field to woodland gate.</p>							
2a	11.00	Mixed native broadleaves	2019	Wood establishment	Management factors (eg grazing etc), Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Compartment 2a contains a 11 Ha mosaic of habitats that are all open to the public with a network of PROW and permissive paths. 4Ha planted (2019) native broadleaf woodland and rides, 2Ha of natural regeneration adjoining the ancient woodland, a 1Ha community orchard of local variety Westcountry apples and pears, and a 3Ha grassland meadow along the River Avon.</p>							

Compartment 2a is made up of four fields – the river meadow to the north adjoining the River Avon, Cuffley Field to the east, the orchard to the south east, and the nursery field to the south. Pedestrian access to all fields, but management access gates are restricted by vehicle to only Cuffley Field, the orchard and the nursery field.

## 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.

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