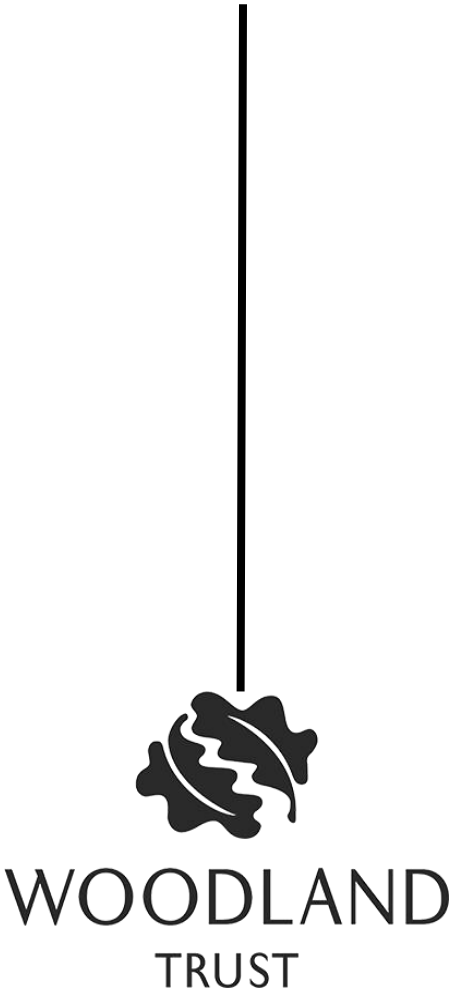
Stratfield Brake

(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

Stratfield Brake

Location:	Kidlington Grid reference: SP494119 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 164
Area:	18.32 hectares (45.27 acres)
External Designations:	Green Belt
Internal Designations:	N/A

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Stratfield Brake is an 18 Ha / 45 acre site located 1.6km / 1 mile to the south of Kidlington village and 5km / 3 miles to the north of Oxford. It is immediately adjacent to Stratfield Brake Sports Ground, off the A4260, which is very well sign posted. The Woodland Trust leases the site from Oxfordshire County Council on a 250-year term, which began in 1997. The Oxford Canal runs along the western boundary, and there is a footbridge over the canal which provides access between the canal towpath and the site.

Woodland cover in Oxfordshire is 7%, lower than the national average, and around half is scheduled as ancient woodland. Only 10% of Oxfordshire's woodland provides any public access, compared to 30% average for the South East Region, and Oxfordshire rates poorly (lower quartile) against the Natural England Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard. (Source: 'County Council Forestry Statement – Oxfordshire's Trees and Woodland, Today & Tomorrow'). Therefore Stratfield Brake provides an important contribution to publicly accessible woodland in the county.

The site was acquired by The Woodland Trust in 1997 during the "Woods on your Doorstep" (WOYD) millennium campaign, and shortly afterwards the first tree planting was undertaken by The Trust (approximately 6 hectares / 15 acres). A further 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) of the site was planted in 2012 during the Trust's Jubilee Woods campaign, which celebrated the Queen's 60th year on the throne. All the planting was undertaken with the help of local volunteers and corporate partners and is composed of native broadleaves including oak, ash, birch and hazel.

Stratfield Brake has a good mixture of habitats including mature and young woodland, scrub which provides an intermediate community between the grassland and high forest, open water, reed bed and wet grassland. Overall it is around 10% mature woodland, 50% young woodland and scrub, and 40% wetland habitats. The wetland areas were created in 2001 and are managed in part by grazing cattle. The wetlands are increasingly rich in wildlife, with a good diversity of plant and particularly bird life, where over 90 species were recorded in a 2015 survey.

The 2.5 hectare / 6 acre block of mature deciduous woodland is designated under the Priority Habitat Inventory (habitats of principal importance) and is dominated by oak but also contains ash, field maple, silver birch and elm. The ground flora in this area of woodland contains some specialist woodland plants including bluebell and dog's mercury. Here the oak is suffering from a condition called 'Acute oak decline' (AOD) and access for the public is currently excluded under advice from Forest Research. This exclusion limits possible spread of the condition, but it also permits the mature oaks to be used as part of a wider study area by scientists carrying out important research into AOD on a national level.

Overall the wood approximates to a National Vegetation Classification (NVC) of W8-W10, a lowland mixed broadleaved woodland, and the soil is slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loam and clay. The soil type is moderately fertile and supports seasonally wet pastures and woodland habitats and local water logging is common, and consequently parts of the site can be boggy for much of the year. The underlying geology comprises Kellaways formation and Oxford Clay formation.

The Woodland Trust has given Stratfield Brake a Category A for public access which is the highest category, and this translates to a wood used at all times of year, with more than 15 - 20 people using one entrance every day. It also has been part of the Trusts' Welcome Sites Programme (WSP), meaning tailored work has been on-going to improve

the site for visitors. The site is well used and enjoyed by local people. The site has a good network of footpaths (2.4km / 1.5 miles), some of which are raised and surfaced (1.4km / 0.85 miles) and these allow all-weather access for less-abled visitors and pushchairs. There is a small car-park next the wood that can accommodate around 10 cars, it is owned by Kidlington Parish Council and is part of the Sports Ground facilities. Visitors to the wood are welcome to use this car-park.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intentions for Stratfield Brake will seek to realise two of the Woodland Trust's three key aims:

- to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife
- to restore damaged ancient woodland

The young planted woodland areas will be managed to ensure there is good diversity of tree species and to improve conditions for selected retained specimens to enable them to be resilient to change. Silvicultural intervention will be necessary to achieve this. Small scale silvicultural management such as ride-side coppicing will be incorporated into the on-going management of the wood. Colonisation by ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) will affect the species composition of the wood in the short-medium term, and so oak and field maple will naturally become the dominant tree species within these planted woodland areas, with hawthorn, blackthorn and birch most likely to initially colonise areas of open space created by the declining ash. The deadwood habitat will increase over time, as some trees die through competition for space and through impact of disease. The individual woodland blocks will be broken up with open managed paths / rides and small glades, and these will link to the larger area of open ground (wetland habitat) on the site.

The older secondary woodland on the site will progress with the minimum of silvicultural intervention. The main reason for this is the presence of 'Acute Oak Decline' (AOD) affecting the dominant component of oak, and the use of this stand of oak as a 'control area' for research into the disease. Some, but not all of the oak trees in this area are likely to die from the disease which will change the woodland structure and advance deadwood habitat. This management approach will continue until more is known about AOD and there is further guidance in managing affected woodlands. Public access to this block of mature woodland will also be excluded until further guidance is available.

Observations will be carried out to record and respond to any threats to the woodland, for example from deer browsing, diseases such as ash dieback, or anti-social behaviour, and will be managed where necessary.

The wetland area, on the west side of the site, is closely positioned (within 2km / 1.2 miles) to other wetlands and areas of open water in the landscape. To fit into this habitat network it will continue to be managed so that it provides a mixture of open water, grassland, scrub and reed bed. Open water will occupy approximately 30% of the wetland area. The rest of the area will be mainly grassland but with a scrub component (no more than 25%), managed by grazing cattle. Reed bed habitat will be present on the margins of the open water, especially towards the western boundary of the site. The two lakes will contain small islands providing nesting opportunities for wading birds and the islands will be largely free of scrub and woody growth.

In line with Stratfield Brake's Category A status, the public's enjoyment of the woodland will be enhanced by improving and maintaining an accessible and safe network of paths and rides. Entrances, boundary fences, and benches will be maintained as necessary and the access provision will be monitored and provided to a high standard, and management will ensure visitors can enjoy good views over the wetland area. On and off-site interpretative material will be available to the public and the two easy to follow trails will be maintained to help visitors navigate around the wood. The wood will be made as safe as practical for visitors through regular safety inspections. Community involvement will continue to be encouraged at the site.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 f1 Secondary Woodland

Description
The woodland present on the site is a mixture of ages, ranging from oak of around 120 years old in Cpt. 1a to the most recent mixed planting in 2012 in Cpt. 1c. There are no conifer and no non-native tree or shrub species present at this time. In total there is approximately 10ha of woodland at Stratfield Brake, broken up and interspersed with grassy paths, rides and glades. There is 2.5ha of mature woodland (compartment 1a) and this block is dominated by oak with smaller components of ash, silver birch and wych elm. The understorey is largely composed of hazel, blackthorn, elm and field maple. The mature oak is suffering from a condition called 'acute oak decline' (AOD) which has resulted in some of the trees dying. The ground flora in this area of woodland contains some specialist woodland plants including bluebell and dog's mercury. Field layer plants indicative of 'rich' or 'very rich' fertility and 'moist' or 'very moist' water regime. Field layer plants include ivy, enchanter's nightshade, herb Robert, stinging nettle, bramble, hedge woundwort, cleavers, wood avens and broadleaved buckler fern. The remaining 7.5ha of woodland are more recent in origin. The majority of it, 6ha, was planted in 1997 as a millennium wood, and as part of The Woodland Trust's 'Woods On Your Doorstep' campaign. Approximately 1.5ha was planted as a Jubilee wood in 2012 to celebrate the Queen's 60 year reign. The 1997 planting contains a high proportion of oak with minor components of ash, hazel and field maple. The 2012 planting is mostly oak and birch with minor components of hazel, field maple and guelder rose. Wide sunny rides are present, with the 2 most significant ones being between 1b & 1c and through the middle of 1b (both being of an east-west orientation).
Significance
The woodland habitat at Stratfield Brake adds diversity to a landscape which contains very low woodland cover; woodland cover in Oxfordshire is 7%, lower than the national average. The mature area of secondary woodland is starting to develop some of the characteristics of ancient woodland, for example specialist woodland plants. Additionally around 93% of Oxfordshire's 3,600 or so woodlands are very small, less than 2 hectares / 5 acres in area, and therefore Stratfield Brake provides an important contribution to publicly accessible woodland in the county. Locally the mature and developing woodland is important as a resource for wildlife, especially when considered alongside the other habitats on site which include open ground, open water, reed bed, and successional scrub. The establishment of this woodland has helped increase the amount of new native woodland cover in an area where woodland cover is low, as well as establishing a freely accessible woodland near to where people live; the new woodland is an important amenity for Kidlington and the surrounding area, located very close to the village and well used by local visitors.

New woodlands help absorb CO2 from the atmosphere, protect soils from erosion, create future wood fuel supplies, improve health and well-being, encourage wildlife and build resilience against pests and diseases while improving biodiversity.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
- Improvement of tree age range, structure and species diversity over time through silvicultural management and natural processes such as wind-throw
- To use the site to demonstrate the Trust's approach to woodland establishment and to influence neighbouring landowners and other key stakeholders where possible
- Selecting and promoting old growth trees well into the future to enable them to become veteran and ancient trees; this will require some control of competing trees
- The close proximity of the local community presents an opportunity to help manage and enhance the woodland

Constraints:
- The woodland is wet most of the year which presents challenges for management, which should be carefully timed with drier site conditions
- Low timber volumes make thinning works & coppicing uneconomical
- Presence of Acute Oak Decline (AOD) and subsequent agreement of closure of compartment 1a for research purposes currently prevents management intervention

Factors Causing Change

- Mammal damage (deer, squirrel) - currently low risk; monitoring scheduled and impact evidence is low
- Increasing shade and loss of structure in minimum intervention stands - Low risk medium impact – further loss of oak likely, monitoring and management scheduled
- Changes in structure and gaps in canopy due to wind-blow and disease/dieback e.g. Hymenoscyphus fraxineus in ash - High risk, medium impact due to ash comprising circa 25% planted stock and 20% naturally regenerating composition. Natural regeneration of other species (blackthorn, birch, oak) is strong and will replace ash over time. Observations are scheduled to assess whether enrichment planting will be required within ash groups
- Open areas succeeding to scrub and woodland thickets, dominated by blackthorn and birch – High risk, low impact due to permitted succession of other species to replace failing ash

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The woodland at Stratfield Brake will contain a diverse mixture of species and tree ages so it is resilient to future changes and threats imposed on it (for example tree diseases). It is likely that oak will continue to be the major tree species present, even though there will some loss through acute oak decline (AOD). Loss of oak through AOD is also likely to reduce the potential for oaks to develop into veteran trees. Changes in oak suitability are already occurring on this site, and extreme events of wet winters and drier summers will become more frequent and lead to increased seasonal fluctuations in water availability on the surface water gley soils (increased winter-waterlogging – increased summer drought). Oak trees are likely to become increasingly stressed in the coming decades (e.g. canopy loss, die-back and bleeding lesions).

The majority of ash present at the site is likely to die from ash dieback disease in the next 5-15 years. The effect of both

these diseases (AOD & ash dieback) means that gaps in the tree canopy will be naturally created and this will add some structural diversity to the woodland and significantly increase the deadwood habitat in the short-medium term. The loss of some mature ash trees from the overstorey may also help to reduce water stress in oak trees which may develop during extreme drought periods, particularly on surface water gley soils. It is unlikely that restocking via planting will be needed following tree disease loss, as the woodland is already composed of a good mixture of species and strong natural regeneration is evident. However woodland condition monitoring, using Woodland Trust methodology, will take place every 5 years to ensure that the composition of the woodland long term and any possible threats to tree survival (e.g. deer) are monitored and any resulting action taken. The presence of saplings, shrubs and young trees in the understorey will be maintained to support the biodiversity using these habitats and so that future overstorey trees can become established.

The mature oak woodland will continue to be made available for the purposes of research into AOD for as long as is required. A management approach of minimum intervention will continued to be applied to the mature woodland (Cpt. 1a) for the purposes of this research and public access will be excluded to reduce disease transfer. This approach will remain in place until there is further guidance about AOD or an alteration to research requirements.

The more recent secondary woodland (Cpts. 1b & 1c) will be allowed to mature into high forest, accepting the loss of ash. The high forest structure will be being managed on a small scale continuous cover silvicultural system to produce uneven-aged, self-regenerating stands of high conservation and amenity value.

Wide grassy rides will be present and managed through the more recent secondary woodland (Cpts. 1b & 1c). The two most significant rides will be between 1b and 1c and through the middle of 1b, and these rides will have a structured lower-growing woodland edge to them. Small glades will be present where the woodland meets the wetland area and towards the entry point into the site, on the east side. These will also preserve views into the site and across the wetland area.

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

During this plan period the short term objective is to enhance the woodland edge habitat, monitor changes and threats to the woodland and ensure all young trees are well established. This will be achieved by the following specific actions:

- The mature oak woodland Cpt. 1a will receive no silvicultural intervention during this plan period but will continue to be made available for research into AOD, and subsequently the public will be excluded from this area. Some tree felling for safety reasons is likely to be required alongside the main road, following surveys - Annual

- The establishment of the young trees in compartment Cpt. 1c was completed in 2016 by carrying out weed control operations up until this time. No further control operations are planned but monitoring is scheduled to assess the success of this planting and implement further measures if required – 2022 / 2024

- Wide grassy rides will be maintained within the woodland: through Cpt. 1b, and between 1b and 1c. The total length of these will be approximately 1000m and their width will vary between 5-10m. Mowing of the rides will take place to ensure they remain grassy and herb-rich. Three small glades totaling 0.5ha will be maintained by annual mowing and these will be located at the entry point into the site and close to the wetland area - Annual

- Approx. 500 metres of ride development will be carried out to improve edge habitat between Cpts. 1a and 1b – 2020

- Approx. 400 metres of ride development and scallop creation will be carried out to improve edge habitat within Cpt. 1b and between Cpts. 1b and 1c – 2023

- Observations to reassess vitality of developing trees / assessment of impact of ADB on ash groups and if enrichment planting required / deer impact / ride edge vegetation in line with guidance and best practice - 2021 / 2023

- A full woodland condition assessment (WCA) will be carried out at the end of this plan period to inform the next management plan review - 2024

4.2 f2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Stratfield Brake is an 18 hectare mixed woodland and part of the Welcoming Sites Programme (WSP). The WSP is 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 will likely 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. 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 well as sustainable path and track surfaces across the variable ground conditions where appropriate. Improved access will better facilitate use by a wider range of visitors. An engagement plan will set out a plan for engagement activities, further enhancing public visits to the site.

Stratfield Brake offers a quality visitor experience in line with its Woodland Trust category A access designation (high usage with more than 20 people using one entrance per day). The site is open to the public for quiet informal recreation. There are four entrances to the site. The main entrance is next to the car park at Stratfield Brake Sports Ground, where a surfaced path leads into the wood. Two entrances to the site lead from the sports pitches. The Oxford Canal forms its western boundary and a footbridge links with the canal towpath. There is a network of 2.5km / 1.5 miles surfaced and unsurfaced paths in Stratfield Brake, which are level and have no width restrictions. 1.4km / 0.9 miles of hard-surfaced paths which provide all-weather access for wheelchairs and buggies throughout the year. There is welcome signage at all entrances.

Stratfield Brake is an oasis for wildlife, especially birds, due to its extensive wetlands. 96 different bird species have been recorded here. The site is leased from Oxfordshire County Council.

The wood was acquired in 1997 as part of our ‘Woods on your Doorstep’ (WOYD) campaign, which marked the new millennium.
At the time, trees were planted with the help of local volunteers across around 6ha / 15 acres of land. Another 1.5ha / 3.7 acres were planted in 2012 during our Jubilee Woods campaign which celebrated the Queen’s 60th year on the throne.

Stratfield Brake is located in the Cherwell District Council area of Oxfordshire. Much of the surrounding area is agricultural with large residential developments. The adjacent Stratfield Brake sports ground is well-used. The nearest town is Kidlington, approximately 1.6km / 1 mile north of the site with a population of around 15,000. The city of Oxford is just 5km / 3 miles south, with a population of around 155,000, plus a significant tourist population. There are four primary schools within a 3 km radius of the site, in Kidlington, Wolvercote and Sunnymead, plus nurseries, private schools and secondary schools.

With the A4260 road next to the site, most visitors will travel to site by vehicle. The Woodland Trust has permission to use approx. 10 car parking spaces in the sports centre's overspill parking area, agreed with Kidlington Parish Council. Oxford Parkway railway station is less than 1 mile's walk away. The walking route from this here to the entrance to the woods is not paved and the road is busy with fast moving cars. Buses are available from Magdalen Street (Stop C4), Magdalen Street, Oxford City Centre. From there take S5 bus to Bicester Road (N-Bound), Bicester Road, Garden City. Stratfield Brake is an approx. 10 minute walk to the south.

Stratfield Brake is a popular site with local dog walkers, families with baby strollers and bird spotters, due to its surfaced paths, peaceful and varied habitats and parking facilities. The site has volunteer cattle watchers, and a Forest School teacher has started using part of the site as of November 2019.

Significance

Stratfield Brake provides open access to accessible, natural greenspace in a landscape with little accessible woodland. Just a few kilometres from the centre of Oxford, Stratfield Brake is a peaceful oasis. The current high level of site usage mean that Stratfield Brake is a very important site for local people to become involved and understand about habitat, threats facing our trees such as acute oak decline / ash dieback, and conservation.

The diversity of habitat types (young woodland, small amount of mature woodland, large wetland habitat) makes Stratfield Brake a particularly valuable site for people to enjoy a varied experience whilst on site, and be used to engage the public, including children, in appreciating woodland and the landscape on a wider scale.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
- Potential to continue to host legacy events at Stratfield Brake, first trialled in 2019
- Opportunity to engage less-abled groups (i.e. those using wheelchairs) who wish to access the countryside
- Links could be made with the local schools, encouraging visits as part of geography or environmental studies
- Potential for small guided walks due to good surfaced paths and car park
- Potential for bird specific guided small events due to the large wetland area
- Potential for bird hide to increase visits by bird watchers
- Larger events could be considered if arrangement to use some of sports centre car park is made
- Higher usage of the site during weekends could present a seasonal opportunity for the membership development team
- There is a possibility of formalising the current warden role plus recruit a guided walk volunteer

Constraints:
- Some paths can be very wet during the winter and early spring
- Enhanced signage/ information and activities at the site need to be balanced against preserving its natural qualities

Factors Causing Change

- Anti-social activities such as fly-tipping and fires could increase with more visitors, as the site becomes more widely used
- Footpath creep due to wet, muddy conditions
- Desire lines altering paths and creating new routes

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Stratfield Brake will continue to offer a quality visitor experience in line with a WT category A and Welcoming Site Programme access designation. Free and open access will continue to provide the local communities and surrounding area with a well-maintained site with walking paths and entrance infrastructure. Information boards and suitably placed benches will provide a welcoming atmosphere to visitors.

The Woodland Trust will continue to support local community engagement including volunteer opportunities to help care for the wood.

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

During this plan period, the objective is to provide a quality experience for visitors in line with internal access category grading and WSP requirements, which is safe and enjoyable.

- Install new orientation panel at main entrance. The board will interpret the special biodiversity of the site for visitors, especially the grazed wetland areas, and include space for temporary notices and information - 2020

- Design and supply new site leaflet and, also to be available digitally via website - 2021

- Approximately 2.5km (1.5 miles) of surfaced and unsurfaced paths and entrance points will be maintained to allow continued access across the site. This will include stimming of paths and ride edges and cleaning/repairing entrance signage and infrastructure as required at the four external entrances - Annual

- Safety inspections of trees in high risk zones, to ensure the wood is as safe as possible for visitors, neighbours and road users - Annual

- Monitoring will take place during this plan period to assess any threats occurring as a result of public access, e.g. antisocial activities. Monitoring will also assess the need for any improvements or maintenance to access infrastructure at the site, e.g. any deterioration in condition of the surfaced path. Observations scheduled to check access provision at the site is in good condition and in line with category standards – 2022 / 2024

- Recruit a volunteer warden – 2020

- Approx. 500 metres of ride development will be carried out to improve path condition, biodiversity interest and create a more open, sunnier route between Cpts. 1a and 1b (See also 'Secondary Woodland' Key Feature) – 2020

- Approx. 400 metres of ride development and scallop creation will be carried out to improve path condition, biodiversity interest and create a more open, sunnier route between Cpts. 1b and 1c (See also 'Secondary Woodland' Key Feature) – 2023

4.3 f3 Semi Natural Open Ground Habitat

Description

A mixed open and wet habitat covering over 8.5ha on the west side of the site (compartment 2a). It is made up of approximately 30% open water, 25% scrub, 5% reed bed and 40% grassland. The open water is mainly in the form of 2

small lakes with associated ditches and lagoons, and there are several islands on the lakes.

The lakes were dug and created in 2001 and since this time the habitat has acquired substantial wildlife interest. The grassland contains traditional meadow plants like ragged robin and yellow rattle and uncommon plants such as early marsh orchid. The birdlife using the open wet habitat is especially diverse and includes cuckoo, sedge warbler, willow warbler, linnet and reed bunting. A variety of duck species use the open water and there is a heronry in the trees behind the largest lake.

The neutral or mesotrophic grassland has been maintained in recent years as pasture with low-intensity cattle grazing. The National Vegetation Classification (NVC) most closely approximates to 'MG5 crested dog's-tail – common knapweed grassland'.

Water levels in the lakes can be controlled by a sluice which connects to the ditch on the western boundary. The public are excluded (by a fence) from this area of the site.

Significance

The wetland at Stratfield Brake fits within a local network of wetland sites, and the nearest of these is less than 2km away to the south. The wetlands across the landscape are joined by the Oxford canal and The river Thames, and this allows species to move between sites.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
- Continued management of the wetland area to achieve a mixed mosaic of open water, grassland, scrub and reed bed is likely to attract more wildlife species as time goes on, and there is the possibility of water vole using the site in the future.
- Manipulation of water levels in the lakes and control of scrub on the islands could increase the diversity of wildlife, by creating nesting opportunities for bird species such as the little ringed plover.

Constraints:
- An infestation of ragwort in the wet grassland has occurred during 2010-2012, and this has required extra resources to combat its spread.

Factors Causing Change

- The pond in the southwest corner of the site is choked with an invasive species called Australian stonecrop (Crassula helmsii). Advice about the plant at this site has been taken from Pond Conservation, and they have recommended allowing this pond to gradually scrub over and dry out as it is no longer practical to control the stonecrop in water when it so well established.

- Scrub is gradually increasing over some of the grassland areas, and intervention may be periodically required in the future to maintain the balance of habitats.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The open wetland area will continue to contain a balance of habitats in the following approximate proportions: 40% grassland, 30% open water, 25% scrub and 5% reed bed.

It is intended that cattle grazing will be used as a management tool to help achieve this balance, though mechanical intervention will also periodically be required. Invasive species such as ragwort and creeping thistle will be kept at a very low level in the grassland (no more than 5%).

The open water will be present mainly in the shape of 2 lakes, and water levels in the lakes will be manipulated so that there are at least 4 dry islands present on them. The islands, and the reed bed in the southwest corner of 2a, will also be free of scrub and woody growth.

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

During this plan period the short term objective for the wetland area is to continue management which achieves the correct balance of habitats: Circa 40% grassland, 30% open water, 25% scrub and 5% reed bed. This will be achieved by:

- Low intensity all-year-round cattle grazing to manage the grassland and help combat scrub encroachment. The grazing area was sub-divided in 2014 to allow concentrated grazing in the northern half which is less favoured by the cattle - Ongoing

- Monitoring to assess water levels within the lakes and schedule subsequent manipulation via sluice gates if required within plan period – 2021 / 2023

- Monitoring to assess whether further cutting of willow in the reed bed on the southwest boundary is required within this plan period following 2014 / 2016 operations – 2021 / 2023

- Monitoring to determine if there is a need to control ragwort in the grassland other invasive species such as creeping thistle – 2021 / 2023

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2020	WMM - Ride Management	Works associated with the management of existing rides/open areas for biodiversity - ride edge coppicing and thinning programmes, ditch works	March
2020	PE - Interpretation & Signage	Works associated with the provision of visitor signage, waymarking, interpretation features and leaflets	August
2020	AW - Visitor Access Infrastructure	Works associated with the construction of a new or extension to existing car parking facilities.	November
2020	LC - Routine Litter Picks	Planned/routine litter picks using contractors	November
2020	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone A	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside areas such as car parks, roadsides and boundaries	November
2021	WMM - General Site Management	Works associated with maintaining conservation and physical features within the sites such as boundary ditches, fences and walls, hedges,	September
2021	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone B	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside routes such as paths and rides within the woodland	November
2021	LC - Routine Litter Picks	Planned/routine litter picks using contractors	November
2022	NWH - Grazing Work	Works associated with the maintenance of grazing of a non-woodland habitat to protect and enhance its conservation value – grazier costs, fence repairs, water supply costs etc	February
2021	LC - Routine Litter Picks	Planned/routine litter picks using contractors	March
2023	WMM - Wood Pasture Grazing Work	Works associated with the maintenance of grazing regimes to manage wood pasture and parkland sites such as grazier costs, fence repairs, water supply costs	March
2023	LC - Routine Litter Picks	Planned/routine litter picks using contractors	November
2024	LC - Routine Litter Picks	Planned/routine litter picks using contractors	November

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	2.53	Oak (pedunculate)	1900	Min-intervention	Diseases, Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Green Belt
A 2.5ha / 6 acre block of mature woodland, dominated by oak (60%) with smaller components of ash, silver birch and wych elm. The under storey is largely composed of hazel, blackthorn, elm and field maple. The mature oak is suffering from 'acute oak decline' (AOD) which has resulted in some of the trees dying. The ground flora in this area of woodland contains some specialist woodland plants including bluebell and dog's mercury. Field layer plants indicative of Rich or Very Rich fertility and Moist or Very Moist water regime. Field layer plants include ivy, enchanter's nightshade, herb Robert, stinging nettle, bramble, hedge woundwort, cleavers, wood avens and broadleaved buckler fern.						
1b	4.79	Oak (pedunculate)	1998	High forest	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Green Belt
A plantation of oak, ash, birch, field maple and hazel planted in 1998. Oak is the dominant tree (approximately 60%). The east-west ride through the centre has been heavily planted with hazel on the woodland edges.						
1c	2.91	Oak (pedunculate)	2012	Wood establishment	Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access within the site	Green Belt
Plantation of oak, birch, field maple, hazel and other woody shrubs such as spindle and wayfaring tree. Oak is the main species (approximately 40%). Small glades have been left unplanted at the east and west ends and there is a scalloped ride to the south.						
2a	8.63	Hawthorn species	2002	Non-wood habitat	Management factors (eg grazing etc), Mostly wet ground/exposed site, Sensitive habitats/species	Green Belt

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
					on or adjacent to site	
A mainly open mixed habitat containing wet grassland, open water and reed bed. Scrub is a component within the grassland and hawthorn is the most common tree. Public access within the body of this area is excluded to protect sensitive wildlife, and the area is grazed by a herd of Dexter cattle.						

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.