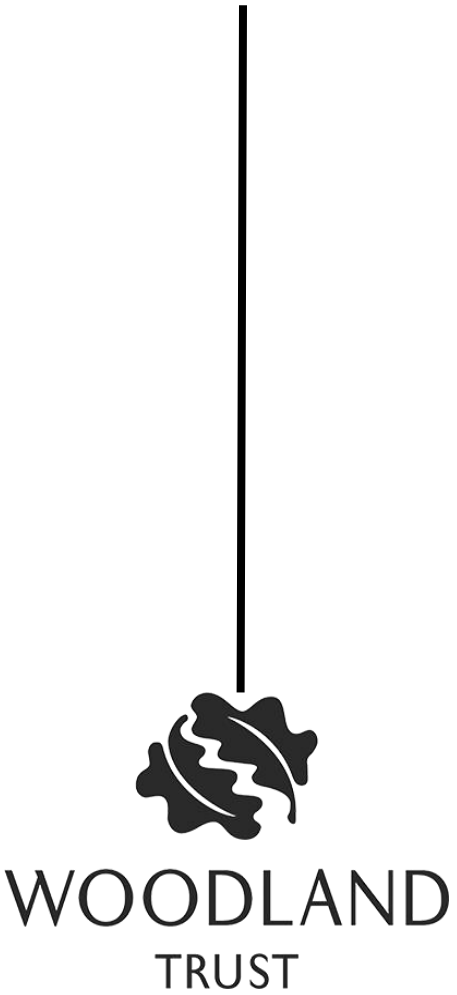
Victory Wood

(Plan period – 2021 to 2026)



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

Victory Wood

Location:	Yorkletts Grid reference: TR093619 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 179
Area:	140.40 hectares (346.94 acres)
External Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Candidate Special Area of Conservation, Tree Preservation Order
Internal Designations:	Trafalgar Wood commemorative site, Tree For All Site, Welcoming Sites Programme

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Victory Wood is a 140.26 ha (347 acre) site located between the boundary of the hamlet of Dargate and the settlement of Yorkletts, around 4 miles from the coastal town of Whitstable and 6 miles from Canterbury. The land was acquired by the Woodland Trust following a public appeal in 2004, with a view to it becoming the flagship site for the Trafalgar Woods project which commemorated the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. At the time of purchase, Victory Wood consisted of 133.04 ha (329 acres) of arable farmland, 0.39ha (1 acre) of secondary woodland, and a 7.07 ha (18 acre) pocket of ancient woodland close to a public highway to the south west of the site. During 2005-2008, 86 ha (213 acres) of secondary woodland was established through community planting along the main ridge towards the southern area of the site, which itself provides spectacular views over the north Kent coastline. Between 2011-2014 a further 17.6ha (44 acres) of secondary woodland was created. In total, 5% of the site is ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW), 73.5% is secondary woodland, with the remaining 21.5% of land totalling 30.72ha (76 acres) managed as grassland, featuring a number of trees outside woodlands, established in fenced exclosures during 2014.

Victory Wood is located just north of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It lies on the northern border of the North Kent Plain National Character Area (NCA) and in very close proximity to the transitional Greater Thames Estuary NCA, being situated just 2km from the North Kent coastline. Victory Wood is also found at the north west end of the 'The Blean', one of the largest and most distinctive remaining areas of ancient woodland in England, and the largest area of continuous woodland in Kent, covering over 3000 ha (7413 acres). The newly planted woodland at Victory Wood helps to reconnect adjacent Blean Wood and Ellenden Wood, both of which fall within the Blean complex and were separated between the late 1940's and early 1970's when the woodland was fragmented to support agricultural conversion. The Blean encompasses a variety of wildlife and habitats, many of national importance. It has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), with much of the woodland having SSSI status, and one designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The ancient woodland (sub cpt 2a) found at Victory has a composition of oak, hornbeam, beech, sweet chestnut and a small number of wild service trees, and was historically managed by coppicing. Much of the planting in the small area of secondary woodland known as Bushy Close (sub cpt.1b) dates from around 130 years ago, and as such it has a ground flora similar in composition to the ancient woodland compartment. It also features a number of interesting mature hornbeam specimens. The creation of the secondary woodland areas date from 2005-2008, and 2011-14 and these were planted up with oak, hornbeam, ash, field maple, birch and grey and goat willow. Natural regeneration of oak, hornbeam, hawthorn, goat willow, dog rose and ash has also established. Shrubby areas dominated by blackthorn, hawthorn dogwood, Guelder rose and occasional wild service specimens are also present. Approximately 13ha of the secondary woodland is maintained as a wide ride habitat, managed through an annual cutting programme.

The underlying geology at Victory Wood is comprised from clay soil, overlaying a thick deposit of London Clay. As a result, the soils can impede good drainage, meaning the site can become waterlogged during the winter months. The soils are slightly acidic becoming more neutral towards the north of the site, although some chalky deposits can be found. Victory also features an undulating terrain, with the ground rising up to the long ridge at the southern end of the site. At the base of the ridge is a deep ditch called the Hawkins Hill Ditch, and this runs southwest-northeast draining the land towards Ellenden Wood. There is a small pond situated on the ditch line at the edge of Ellenden Wood, and a second ephemeral pond further along the southern area of the ditch.

Ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) is present on site, and has impacted a number of the young ash trees. Ash makes up around 20% of the composition, a high proportion of which will be lost within the next management plan cycle.

Victory Wood is fast developing as an important haven for wildlife, particularly for a number of bird and invertebrate species. Bees, butterflies and moths are in plentiful numbers and in early 2021 the heath fritillary butterfly was confirmed as breeding at the site, due to the presence of common cow-wheat its larval food plant. A number of bird species utilise the scrub, hedgerows and open ground areas, including skylarks, linnets and meadow pipits throughout the year, and grasshopper warblers, nightingales, swifts, willow warblers and house martins during the late spring and summer months. Buzzards, kestrels, ravens and barn owls are also regularly sighted.

With no public access prior to Woodland Trust ownership, in 2005 infrastructure was put in place at Victory Wood for 4 pedestrian access points located around the perimeter of site, and a car park with space for up to 16 vehicles. In line with the theme of the Trafalgar Woods Project, a number of interpretive structures were installed at key locations, including a statue of Lord Admiral Nelson, the footprint of HMS Victory, a sculptural viewing platform, and the layout of the Trafalgar battle plan using trees to represent the placement of ships in the fleet. 27 sponsored groves are also present, named after the ships in the English Fleet and are situated at the extreme southern part of sub cpt. 2a. An area named ‘Victory Copse’ was created near the main entrance to the site, featuring examples of all the trees used in the construction of HMS Victory. Victory Wood is also home to a Royal Observer Corps Underground Monitoring Bunker dating from the Cold War era. This is situated on top of the main ridge and provides another interesting link to local military history.

Victory Wood also has growing importance as a creative and contemplative environment. In 2007-8, following a partnership with artist Will Glanfield and funding from Arts Council England and Canterbury and Swale district councils, the Heart of Oak project was planted on site with the support of two local primary schools. Situated on the ridge top within sub cpt. 2a, Heart of Oak consists of two living, growing sculptures, ‘Avenue and Ring’ and ‘Pollard Ring’, which feature a number of planted oak trees still tended and cared for by the artist.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

In fifty years' time, Victory Wood will contain a resilient and diverse woodland structure providing a range of important habitats, retaining both its ancient woodland element (5%) and secondary woodland (75%), which will further develop into a structure and composition typical of native semi natural broadleaved woodland. The grassland habitat will continue to be managed alongside preservation of features of both historical and ecological interest (approx. 20%). Victory Wood will act as a key conservation space within the local landscape.

The secondary woodland areas at Victory Wood will be managed through minimum silvicultural intervention and will be developing into high forest, aided by the natural regeneration of tree and shrub species continuing to spread out to the unplanted buffer zones. The main paths will feature short rotation coppicing cycles along the woodland edges to support the development of a zoned wide ride and glade habitats with structural diversity, including key areas of acid grassland in the south east of the site. These open areas will provide an important habitat for diverse pollinators, birds, flora and other wildlife, especially those that rely on temporary open space. In addition to maximising benefits for wildlife, this work will also ensure good views over the landscape are maintained, particularly along the main ridge.

The ancient woodland compartment will also be predominantly managed through minimal silvicultural intervention to allow natural processes to occur and lead to the development of diverse habitat structures, with occasional selective thinning to take place to aid diversity and regeneration of ground flora in the wood. There will be an increase in the age of the trees and coppice stools splitting and falling apart, generating an accumulation of decaying and dead wood, which will in turn help to support a large range of invertebrates and fungi. These natural processes will also allow the regeneration of an understory through increasing light levels. The edge beside the public highway will require periodic intervention to remove dangerous trees, but also to promote individual trees so that they produce well balanced crowns to aid their stability.

Ash dieback will not have a significant impact on the woodland component at Victory Wood, however its effects will promote the development of a valuable deadwood habitat. Young trees and shrubs will continue to regenerate where there are losses, and where natural gaps are appearing in the canopy. The veteran pedunculate oak tree with its hollow trunk (ATI ID: 14839), located in the small paddock opposite the car park (sub cpt.3a), will continue to be an important tree at Victory Wood.

The grassland habitat in the north of the site will develop into unimproved neutral grassland containing a scattering of maturing open grown trees. Regeneration of shrub species like dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn will be well established having extended out from hedgerows by no more than 10% into the grassland, also providing shelter for ground nesting birds. Sympathetic, rotational mechanical cutting and collecting of arisings will ensure that the open ground habitat develops a mosaic of grassland of varying sward heights, with a diversity of flowering herb species and rank vegetation kept to a minimum. This habitat type will support a number of invertebrates associated with lowland, unimproved neutral grassland including a number of true bugs, leaf beetles and the ruderal bumblebee. Wetter areas of the site will also be monitored and maintained, including Hawkins Ditch which provides an important sheltering habitat for a number of species.

The provision of safe and informal public access will remain across this site. The Woodland Trust will continue to work in partnership with surrounding landowners, to develop a landscape scale approach to the protection,

restoration and enhancement of an ancient woodland landscape and its associated wildlife interest. The aim is to improve woodland biodiversity and increase people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland, to help create a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife. Although the site will retain its tranquil character, it will be visited by a moderate to high number of visitors each year who appreciate and respect walking in a wooded landscape with diverse habitats, along a well-maintained network of paths. The origins of Victory Wood and the link to the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar will still be promoted on site. Victory Wood will continue to act as an important heritage, conservation and recreational space in the local landscape. Stunning views, a diverse mix of habitats and special wildlife along with ease of access from nearby towns and good connectivity with neighbouring conservation sites all help to contribute to the sites popularity.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 f1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description
A small compartment of ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) can be found in the south west corner of Victory Wood (sub cpt. 1a). This 7.07ha area is a remnant of the much larger North Blean Wood, which once stretched across Clay Hill- the current location of Victory Wood, through to Ellenden and Coombe Wood in the east. The National Vegetation Community (NVC) is W10A; oak woodland with bramble and bracken. It contains a mixture of mainly sessile oak with some birch, beech, hornbeam, sweet chestnut and a localised understory of wild service. Ground flora is absent over much of the woodland area, however where present it contains some ancient woodland flora species such as butcher's broom, bluebell, wood sage, hairy wood-rush, the more local great wood-rush. Common cow-wheat is also now establishing near the path and roadside edge. This is the larval foodplant of the heath fritillary butterfly, which has a stronghold population across The Blean and has colonised the buffer and woodland creation areas at Victory, bordering Ellenden Wood. Historically managed by coppicing (last cut in the 1950's), the wood is unusual in having examples of beech coppice. There are no old standard trees, but the ancient woodland compartment is subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) - Order no.s (a) No2 1980 (b) No1 2003. This area of woodland also preserves several hollow ways and a wood access track of historical interest. The area of woodland formerly known as Bushy Close (subcpt. 1b) used to stand at the northern fringe of North Blean Wood and is probably secondary woodland following map evidence of a field located in 1876 in the same area. This compact woodland (0.39ha/ 0.96 acres) is the most mature secondary woodland habitat on site, and is at least 100 years old and also subject to the TPO. It contains oak and ash high forest, resembling NVC 8a, with ground flora sub-community of primrose and ground ivy. The wood has been extensively disturbed in the past through the use of pheasant rearing cages, and is not species-rich. However, a number of ancient woodland indicator species still thrive, including bluebell, wood anemone, midland hawthorn and native primrose.
Significance
Ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) is a dwindling habitat and as such all remnants of ancient woodland must be protected from further loss. Victory Wood is set within a historically significant, interconnected landscape which is being managed sympathetically for the benefit of biodiversity. The Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, and the wildlife and habitats found here are of international importance. The small area of ASNW at Victory Wood is all that remains of the former North Blean Wood east of Dargate Road and is part of 'The Blean' woodland complex. It likely survived due to the steep terrain which would have made agricultural cultivation difficult had woodland clearance occurred.

The Blean complex is one of two localities in the United Kingdom of sub-Atlantic and Medio-European oak or oak/hornbeam woodland, and has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), with much of the woodland having SSSI status, and one being a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
As an important part of both The Blean, and near coastal landscape, Victory Wood offers the opportunity to work closely with other local conservation organisations that also care for ASNW, historic coppice and significant trees.

Landscape scale management also offers the opportunity to work with other partners when carrying out important species studies associated with the interconnected ASNW. These will help to identify population changes to key species already recorded, and the existence of new species.

Managing the ASNW through minimal intervention, the general public will be able to compare the areas of secondary woodland created from 2005-2014 and visualise what the secondary woodland will become in the future.

Constraints:
The ASNW woodland is small in area and is situated on a slope making management access difficult. The clay soils also become very waterlogged over the winter months.

Dargate Road presents a physical barrier in relation to the natural movement of species, by separating the remnant ASNW from the main part of Blean Wood situated west of Dargate road.

Factors Causing Change

The effects of ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) in Bushy Close (subcpt. 1b) will result in the loss of the majority of ash found here- although it only makes up a small percentage of the canopy. The dying ash will naturally thin the woodland, increase and promote regeneration of an understorey.

Natural succession of the ASNW to oak and beech high forest.

Very occasional evidence of deer has been recorded at the site. Deer impact assessments will be carried out and culling may be required if ancient woodland compartments are under threat from excessive browsing

Flytipping of garden waste along Dargate Road could result in invasive species establishing. Monitoring will ensure they are absent or minor with containment and eradication work carried out if necessary.

Increased visitor numbers and pressure has seen a rise in antisocial behaviour, including the establishment of significant bike trails which have impacted ground flora and tree establishment. Staff presence, regular volunteer warden checks and police involvement have all helped to reduce these problems, but the area remains vulnerable.

Climate change is likely to bring changes and negative impacts to the woodland habitat.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) habitat will continue to occupy around 5% of the site, and will predominantly be managed by minimum silvicultural intervention allowing natural processes to create a species-rich, structurally diverse, high forest woodland habitat. There will be an increasing age of trees within the stands, associated decaying and deadwood habitat from collapsing and splitting coppice stools, and evidence of a range of important ground flora species indicative of ancient woodland. Small scale selective thinning works and singling of coppice in areas of the ASNW compartment off Dargate Road at occasional intervals will help to promote the development of an understorey and woody shrub layer, and more diverse woodland flora can continue to colonise the area. This work will also aid future veteran trees, with successive interventions of selective thinning to continue over a long cycle, maintaining identified trees in suitable conditions for continued growth through the ageing process.

Any disease tolerant ash trees in the ASNW compartments will be retained where possible, however ash will become a minor species within the next 50 years due to the impacts of ash dieback. Natural regeneration of other native broadleaves such as oak, hornbeam, field maple and birch will establish in the areas where ash has died, and eventually close up any gaps in the canopy and increase woodland resiliency.

A healthy and diverse ground flora associated with the ancient woodland will be maintained throughout, and this in turn will be hugely beneficial to native woodland invertebrates, mammals and birds. Invasive, non-native species will be appropriately monitored and managed if there are risks of colonisation, and the presence of deer will be monitored at regular intervals.

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

The short term objective is to contribute towards the maintenance of a structurally diverse woodland, aiming to continue to maximise biodiversity potential and woodland resilience.

During 2023, up to 0.4ha of ride edge coppice to be cut along the main ride in the ASNW, with identified standards and single coppice stems left. A shallow coppiced scallop will be cut in running along the inside edge of the secondary woodland boundary.

Annual zone A surveys to take place alongside Dargate Road which will highlight hazardous trees where necessary. These will alternate between summer and fungal surveys carried out every other autumn, alongside biennial zone B (path network) summer surveys in the ancient woodland compartment

Following the proposed ride edge coppicing works in 2023, to annually survey distribution and abundance of common cow-wheat, the larval food plant of the heath fritillary butterfly in the ASNW habitat. This survey will also extend to the secondary woodland wide ride edge and buffer zones adjacent to neighbouring ancient woodland.

A woodland condition assessment will be carried out in 2024.

4.2 f2 Secondary Woodland

Description

The design to create Victory Wood from an arable farmed landscape enabled a different approach to both woodland creation and interpretation, owing to the substantial size of the site and both its near coastal position and location

within the Blean complex

Tree planting took place in two main phases. From 2005-2008, 86ha (sub cpt 2a) were established through community planting days along the main ridge towards the southern area of the site. Originally, ancient woodland would have extended across this area, the new planting once again providing this wooded link, with trees and shrubs planted in randomly spaced groups and at variable spacing. Approximately 13ha was left to be colonised through natural regeneration in buffer areas adjacent to Blean and Ellenden Woods. In 2005 within the planting in sub cpt.2a, an oak provenance trial plot was also planted with trees supplied by the Earth Trust as part of a wider UK project. There are 10 provenances from three countries (four French, four from the UK and two Dutch) planted in blocks of 100 each and replicated three times (3000 trees) and positioned in a distinct block within sub cpt.2a. These are periodically checked by the Earth Trust.

From 2011-2014, a further 17.76ha was created north and north west of the main ridge in sub cpts. 2b, 3b, 3c, 3d, in addition to the inclusion of small groups of trees around the car park area. In sub cpt 2b, trees were again planted in irregular spaced and sized clumps to form blocks of woodland of variable sizes, interspersed by open ground, with those in sub cpt 3c and 3d planted in the more traditional sinuous rows. Sub cpt.3b (0.14ha) was fenced off to allow the development of scrub natural regeneration. The remaining 30.72ha of land at Victory Wood has been managed as semi natural open ground habitat, and features a number of trees outside woodlands, established in fenced exclosures during 2014.

The majority of the secondary woodland established contained clumps of species which resembled W10 woodland, with some smaller areas of W8 woodland species. Woody shrubs including broom, gorse and field rose were concentrated along the ride edges. Due to ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) first recorded on site in 2013, the species choice for the latter planting efforts was changed to exclude the 25% of ash originally included in the mixture. Other replacement native species were selected, including common alder. Stocking density was no less than 1600 stems per ha for tree species and 2250 stems per ha for woody shrubs planted along the ride edges, and all the trees were protected from rabbit damage by fencing off whole areas around their perimeter. A key aim of the planting was to reduce our use of pesticides during the maintenance phase by using a straw mulch mat around each tree position for 65% of those planted for the first two years. Following this, spot herbicide treatment was used once annually, applied to a meter radius around each tree for the following two years, alongside mowing rank vegetation and noxious weeds once during the summer months. Any dead trees were replaced within the first three years, namely holly and areas of hazel.

A veteran oak tree is situated in the small paddock opposite the car park, and provides an important, undisturbed habitat for a range of species. This tree is the oldest on site, and contains significant decaying wood and has a large hollowing in the trunk. New species rich hedges planted in 2005, 2010 and 2014 have been established along the boundaries of this habitat totalling 2.7kms to help improve the connectivity between the different habitats at Victory Wood. Scrub is beginning to spread out from the mature hedge along the boundary with Dargate Road, and all is well utilised by a wide range of species for shelter and forage.

The rate of establishment of the woodland creation areas at Victory Wood has been slow compared to other sites in the south east, due to a combination of heavy clay soils, coastal conditions, exposure levels and low summer rainfall in east Kent. As such, the maintenance period for these newly planted trees was extended from 3 to 4-5years. As of 2020, 15 years since the first planting occurred, the site is establishing well and has a diverse vegetation structure. Willow species (including one almond willow specimen) are dominant along the deep drainage ditch called Hawkins Hill Ditch,

and along with oak, poplar, birch and hornbeam, these species are naturally spreading out in the woodland creation blocks, and where the ash is failing. Shrubby species including Guelder rose, hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood and spindle are found in abundance throughout the woodland creation edges and hedgerows.

Oak seedlings have established in the ancient woodland buffer zones, and diverse ancient woodland ground flora is also readily colonising these areas. A number of common orchid species can be seen from late spring, and common cow-wheat, the larval food plant of the heath fritillary.

Significance

Native woodland cover has increased on a previous ancient woodland site, in an area of the country with intense developmental pressures.

Establishing secondary woodland next to ancient woodland can help to buffer irreplaceable ancient woodland habitats, helping them to become more robust in the face of climate change. Isolated blocks of woodland can also be joined up with new planting, to provide a more connected landscape, also enhancing historical and cultural significance.

Increased woodland cover provides increased shelter, forage, nesting sites and hunting grounds for a number of common and rare species of fauna, flora and fungi, by creating new environments and habitats in which they can exist.

Important native ancient woodland species are able to readily colonise adjacent secondary woodland, through wildlife corridors and natural stepping stones. This helps to support vulnerable and BAP priority species which may rely on the creation of suitable habitat in order to enhance or revive populations.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
Victory Wood can be used to demonstrate woodland creation, and newly established woodland habitat on previous arable land especially in relation to maximising biodiversity potential.

The impacts of ash dieback will result in a greater diversity of tree species regenerating in any areas where ash has failed. The creation of more mixed stands will also increase the biodiversity potential of the site and will encourage a wider range of birds, invertebrates and key pollinators.

To support conservation organisations that carry out important work in the local area to support BAP priority species, including Butterfly Conservation and Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Victory Wood could continue to be utilised for staff and volunteer training opportunities and species research. Monitoring of 1-2km transects and ad hoc survey efforts conducted by wildlife monitoring volunteers, Butterfly Conservation, Kent Moth Group and Bumblebee Conservation Trust could focus on presence and populations of BAP listed species including the heath fritillary and shrill carder bee.

Constraints:
Secondary woodlands are less viable habitats for specialist species that benefit from old growth characteristics and structural diversity of ancient woodland sites.

The steep terrain can make some operations challenging. Trees are also very exposed to strong coastal winds. The ditch network and northern part of the site can lie wet due to the heavy clay soils.

Factors Causing Change

Squirrel and rabbit damage has an ongoing influence and is likely to be a more significant threat as secondary woodland ground flora establishes and to natural regeneration as the stands mature. Young birch are particularly vulnerable.

The long dry summer period, typical of east Kent can impact on young tree growth and survival rate. This can also encourage the establishment of hardy, coarse vegetation.

Potential for a monoculture of quick growing willow species to readily colonise the woodland creation areas close to the ditch network, especially in place of failed ash.

Ash dieback is present. Due to the effects of Hymenoscyphus fraxineus, the majority of remaining ash on site will be lost.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

In 50 years the secondary woodland areas at Victory Wood will be evolving and maturing, developing characteristics of semi natural woodland with a range of structural diversity, increasing signs of regeneration and a developing woody shrub layer. As an important, connecting woodland, this habitat will allow species migration through it, and the growing accumulation of decaying wood from dying trees will also provide an important habitat for invertebrates and fungi, which will in turn support the development of a healthy woodland ecosystem. This area will be managed through minimal silvicultural intervention; however periodic work may be necessary to encourage the development of an understory.

Although any disease tolerant ash trees will be retained where possible, ash will become a very minor species within the next 50 years due to the impacts of ash dieback. Natural regeneration of other native broadleaves such as oak, hornbeam, hawthorn, willow and birch will establish in the areas where ash has died, to close up any gaps in the canopy and achieve greater structural diversity within the planted areas.

Ride edge management will continue to enhance the areas of secondary woodland for biodiversity, creating a mosaic of microhabitats which support key species found in the local landscape, including those that are reliant on temporary open space. Short-rotation coppicing will occur around the woodland creation edge, and a network of wide conservation rides and glades will be in place managed by a sympathetic cutting regime.

The presence or absence of deer will be monitored. The site will be free of invasive non-native species.

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

The short term objective is to contribute towards the maintenance of a developing, structurally diverse woodland, aiming to maximise biodiversity potential and woodland resilience.

Development and maintenance of conservation rides:
During the plan period, a three zone wide ride habitat with short rotation coppiced edges will be established along approximately 2.6km of the woodland edge, cut in a piecemeal fashion and maintaining pinch points throughout. Zone

1 areas will be cut annually, Zone 2 will be cut and collected on a 3-5 year rotation with around a third cut each year, and zone 3 cut on a rotation of 8-10 years.

Two areas around the bunker and to the north of the links viewing platform (totalling 1.3ha) will continue to be cut on a biennial rotation to ensure adequate access and open views. Due 2021, 2023, 2025

Up to four scallops (15m depth) will be established along key rides in compartment 2a that have not previously been subject to a cutting regime, in order to improve biodiversity potential of at least one identified north-south ride (east 2a), and up to three east-west rides/ ride junctions. Monitoring of flora will support this work and help to identify the most suitable locations. Due 2022 and 2024

Surveying and monitoring:
Woodland condition assessments in the secondary woodland and buffer zones (2024) to inform management plan review in 2025. This includes deer presence and impact.

During the management plan period, to annually survey distribution and abundance of common cow-wheat, the larval food plant of the heath fritillary butterfly. This will also extend to the ASNW habitat following proposed ride edge coppicing works in 2023.

4.3 f3 Semi Natural Open Ground Habitat

Description

The semi-natural open ground habitat at Victory Wood (sub cpt.3a) currently extends across a large 30.72ha, forming 21.5% of the site area, and is composed of neutral grassland with a scattering of developing open-grown trees. The maintenance of the open ground habitat retains the scenic views across the north Kent coastline, of noted importance to local residents and with new visitors.

As previous arable farmland, the open areas were sown with a neutral grass mixture in the autumn of 2006, comprising of four variants of perennial rye grass, in addition to timothy, cock's-foot and wild red clover. Wild flowers were also sown in five inoculation patches throughout sub cpt 2a, each being approximately 0.75ha in size. However the wild flowers struggled to establish with only a few species such as common bird's-foot trefoil, meadow buttercup, common knapweed, meadow vetchling, self-heal, oxeye daisy, cowslip and white clover taking hold.

During late summer and early autumn, common fleabane and wild carrot can be found in abundance in large clumps across the grassy sward, with clover and trefoils, spear thistle, hoary ragwort and bristly ox-tongue as occasional to frequent species scattered throughout. The spring and early summer months see a much more diverse range of flora, with vetches, trefoils, and a good display of cowslips around the wider boundary of Victory Footprint. Late flowering Red bartsia has colonised well along the ride edges along with red and white clovers, which will help to reduce the dense grassy coverage and support the establishment of more wildflower species.

The open ground habitat was rotationally grazed by sheep between 2007 and 2017, helping to keep dominant, coarse vegetation under control. The grazed areas of the site were put into Countryside Stewardship in 2017 with the aim of creating a biodiverse grassland area with low inputs, managed through grazing and supplementary cutting where appropriate. As a popular site with dog walkers, the number and severity of attacks led to the sheep being permanently removed. The open ground habitat is now mown annually in September, with no more than 50% of each land parcel cut

to ensure a varied sward height. Arisings are collected to promote wildflower diversity and to reduce the impact of coarse grasses and other potentially dominant vegetation.

Seventy five oak trees, including a number of Holm oaks have been established across the open ground habitat during 2006 to develop as open grown future veteran trees. In 2014 all were fenced within corrals for protection from livestock. Hawthorn and blackthorn were also planted within the same corrals to help establish these scrub species further into the site.

Wide conservation rides are a feature of the main secondary woodland area in sub cpt.2a and 2b, totalling approximately 13ha and managed through a cutting programme, where the area is cut in a piecemeal fashion, with approximately half the rides cut on an alternating annual basis between 2012 and 2020. From 2021, these areas will form part of a three zone habitat edge, with vegetation in zone 2 cut in a piecemeal fashion on a rotation of 3-5 years, and zone 3 areas cut on a rotation of 8-10 years . The areas in 2a were sown in the autumn of 2006 with a neutral grass mixture suitable for wet clay soils, comprising of two types of rye variants plus timothy, cocksfoot, crested dog's tail, red fescue, common birds-foot trefoil trefoil and wild red clover, with a slightly different composition sown in the more acidic areas in the south east corner of the site. These rides not only support biodiversity, but also help to maintain the views out towards the North Sea- of noted importance to the local community. The development of scalloped areas over the next management plan period will also support the establishment of more diverse flora and associated fauna, including a number of butterfly and moth species.

The open ground habitat, as part of a wider mosaic, is fast developing as an important haven for wildlife, particularly for bird and invertebrate species who rely on the area for forage, shelter and nesting opportunities. A range of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority invertebrates can be found in the open ground habitat in significant numbers, including the rare shrill carder bee, brown-banded carder bee and red-shanked carder bee, and solitary bee species including the long-horned bee (Section 41) and the nationally notable red bartsia bee. Butterflies can be found in abundance during the late spring and summer months, including common blue, brown argus, meadow brown, ringlet, gatekeeper and occasional sightings of purple emperors, dependent on the surrounding oak-dominated woodland. The site also sees an interesting diversity of moths, including day flying cinnabar who rely on ragwort, and emperor moths who utilise the bramble and blackthorn found bordering the open area habitat.

A number of red and amber list Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) readily utilise the scrub, hedgerows and open ground areas, including skylarks, linnets and meadow pipits throughout the year, and grasshopper warblers, nightingales, swifts, willow warblers and house martins during the late spring and summer months. There have also been historical sightings of Dartford Warblers. This area has also been a useful hunting ground for a number of birds, including kestrels, ravens, buzzards and barn owls. Recently disused nests of rodents including the harvest mouse have been found in the long tussocky grass, and common lizards can frequently be seen basking in sunny spots and using cracks in the dried out clay soils for shelter.

Significance

Unimproved neutral grassland (NVC: MG5) is a dwindling habitat largely due to agricultural improvement works and intensification since 1960. It is one of three component unimproved grassland types of the UK BAP priority habitat known as Lowland Meadows (UK Biodiversity Group 1998), which is listed as a habitat of principal importance under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Unimproved neutral grassland covers less than 6,000ha in England and 0.06% of non-urban land area of England.

Intensively managed arable farmland comprises the majority of the open habitat in this local landscape, highlighting the importance of the creation and maintenance of areas of grassland for a range of beneficial ecosystem services

This developing open ground habitat has been important for a number of BAP priority species, and this area of the site sees robust numbers of nationally scarce bumblebees and birds in particular, providing them with foraging, shelter and nesting opportunities. There are an abundance of nectar and pollen sources throughout the year, as well as providing for species that feed on the vegetative parts of the plants.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
To work with conservation organisations and groups, including the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation and Kent Moth Group, the RSPB and the Barn Owl Trust, to support a number of locally important rare and scarce species.

To actively manage one of the existing ponds on site for biodiversity, or to create a new pond along Hawkins Ditch. This work will include fencing installation to deter dogs from disturbing aquatic wildlife and sediment, alongside appropriate management of surrounding vegetation in line with great crested newt European Protected Species guidelines.

To liaise and work with adjoining/nearby landowners (including the RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, Canterbury City Council) as part of the Blean Partnership Project and look at connectivity/landscape scale work

The potential to purchase adjoining land to extend and buffer Victory Wood

Possible research opportunities to monitor woodland/scrub establishment on a site without any deer presence

Constraints:
Challenges presented in finding a suitable, local conservation grazier and stock to graze the semi-natural open ground habitat. Grazing is not currently a suitable management option with numerous dog walkers and out of control dogs chasing sheep/ worrying cattle in the grazed area.

Coarse vegetation could be an issue without low intesntisty grazing, or if long, dry summers continue.

Machine cutting of the open ground habitat is less sympathetic and costly. The operations are also confined to key times of year due to CSS prescription, when there is less availability of contractors and machinery due to busy farming practices.

The heavy clay soil is vulnerable to waterlogging in wetter months, and becoming very dry and cracked in summer months. Activities must be timed to avoid using unnecessary machinery in wet conditions

Factors Causing Change

Natural regeneration of scrub and tree habitat

Without intervention by grazing or mechanical methods there would be a natural succession of open areas to secondary woodland

Mechanical methods of cutting and the timing of these will not have the same desired effect on the sward and surrounding vegetation compared to selective grazing.

Colonisation of the open ground by dominant grasses and coarse vegetation including spear thistle, bristly and hawkweed ox-tongue and hoary ragwort.

The number of dog walkers and out of control dogs is causing disturbance to ground nesting bird species and wildlife that relies on this habitat.

Climate change- lack of rainfall and longer, hotter summer months can cause more delicate flora to go over early, and allow more dominant coarse vegetation to take hold. This may be limited to a biennial cycle concerning species such as hoary ragwort .

Long term Objective (50 years+)

The mosaic of open and scrub habitats found at Victory Wood will continue to act as important refuge for wildlife, including a number of rare and scarce species. Management will ensure presence of an abundance of suitable forage plants throughout the seasons to support a number of priority invertebrates. The northern areas of this habitat will be species-rich neutral grassland with scattered trees, and the south-eastern area will see further establishment of natural regeneration and scrub succession where it borders the ditch network and shares a boundary with Ellenden Wood. It will provide valuable habitat and create a more natural mosaic edge. The long term objective will be that this habitat matures and forms part of the resilient woodscape at Victory Wood.

Features of this habitat will be:
- a significant scrub element over no more than 10% of the area in the northern part
- no less than 70-75 broadleaved trees developing as specimen trees in open grown conditions across the whole area
- a grassy sward which is diverse and not dominated by coarse weed species in the northern half of the habitat, also so that the Trafalgar interpretation structures are kept visible.

Many of the internal hedges will be allowed to mature to form small shaws so linking key areas across the habitat, with other areas of hedgerow laid to encourage new growth and promote the longevity of a dense habitat for wildlife.

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

The short-term objective is to enhance the diversity of the sward of the semi-natural open ground habitat (cpt.3a) and continue to promote abundance of suitable forage plants for identified priority species:

Annual mechanical cutting and collecting of arisings in identified areas of the four land parcels under Countryside Stewardship in sub cpt 3a. No more than 50% of each land parcel will be cut annually during September, and cutting will be rotated between identified sections of each land parcel in 2021 and 2022 as per EMC maps.

During 2023-25, the south western areas of sub cpt 3a bordering the ditch and Ellenden Wood will be left uncut, to allow for natural colonisation from the woodland edge. The autumn cutting regime will continue in the northern part of sub cpt 3a at a rate of no more than 50% of the total area. Species diversity will be monitored in order to inform changes to cut and collect work, to ensure that both a varied sward height is retained in key areas, and both shelter and early, mid and late seasonal forage is available for pollinators and birds.

To remove fencing around Victory footprint in 2021 and other identified sections of stock fencing in the open ground habitat from 2022 onwards

Surveying and monitoring:

Monthly seasonal 1-2km transects and ad hoc survey efforts conducted by wildlife monitoring volunteers, Kent Moth Group and Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BeeWalk), focusing on presence and populations of protected and BAP listed species including the shrill carder bee.

Weekly seasonal transects conducted by Woodland Trust and Butterfly Conservation volunteers focusing on presence and diversity of butterfly species throughout the grassland and developing secondary woodland areas, to include sightings of heath fritillary (Section 41).

In 2021, to assess the growth and potential laying of the internal hedges, and plan removal of remaining spiral guards

In 2022, to set up and establish photo monitoring points to monitor the natural regeneration.

In 2022, and years onward, trained volunteers to undertake early, mid and late wildflower surveys in the grassland habitat in order to monitor presence and abundance of key forage plant species and sward diversity.

in 2023 following year 5 of Countryside Stewardship, to undertake photo monitoring of the grassland habitat from the canon ball back towards Footprint, alongside photo monitoring of spread of natural regeneration at boundary of ditch and sub-cpt. 3a

4.4 f4 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

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

Victory Wood is a 140.26 ha site located between the boundary of the hamlet of Dargate and the settlement of Yorkletts, around 4 miles from the coastal town of Whitstable (pop.32,100 in 2011 census), and 6 miles from Canterbury city centre (pop.55,240 in 2011 census). Despite its location close to the busy Thanet Way A299, the site remains relatively serene, offering informal recreation for local and travelling visitors, ramblers, dog walkers and wildlife enthusiasts. It remains a popular destination in the local landscape, particularly noted for the good views from the ridge at the southern end of the site, looking north towards the Thames Estuary and south towards Blean Woods

National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Victory Wood is accessible to the public, and there are four main access points allowing visitors to freely explore this diverse and mixed habitat site. The access points are found at the Woodland Trust car park off Dargate Road, a small pedestrian entrance off Dargate Road near the north east boundary, kissing gate access off Denstroude Lane to the south eastern corner of the site, and a squeeze gap point into the ancient woodland area in the south west of the site off Dargate Road. The site has a good network of maintained permissive paths which total 8.7 km (5.4 miles) and take in the key features of Victory Wood, including the interpretive sculptures, trees outside woodlands, open ground habitat and secondary and ancient woodland areas. This includes a multi user path of 3.1 km (1.9 miles) suitable for horses during the drier months, pedestrians and mountain bikes, found near to the western boundary of the site. A short surfaced route is available for wheel chair users and buggies (0.3km) from the car park to the Victory Footprint. The rest of the route is composed from grassy rides and includes steep terrain in places. Areas of the path network can become waterlogged in the winter due to the heavy clay soils present.

The Big Blean Walk, a 40km (25 mile) waymarked, circular route links the surrounding wooded landscape, and passes through the southern end of Victory Wood, taking in the key views across the coastline from the main ridge. There is currently no public footpath leading directly into Victory Wood. However, there are links from public footpaths via existing roads to Victory Wood. Footpath 0077/ZR528/2 (0.69km) begins at the junction of Dargate Road and Denstroude Lane, a short walk from the south west access point by the ancient woodland compartment. There is also a second footpath 0239/CB3A/1 (1.06km) located further east along Denstroude Lane, which leads to the northern end of Blean National Nature Reserve (at Church Wood). A bridleway (0314/CW5/5) also passes through Ellenden Wood, the entrance to which is located adjacent to the access point off Denstroude Lane in the south east corner of the site. This access point does not have suitable public parking facilities, and should remain vehicle free to ensure adequate access to the bridleway and safe emergency and contractor access to Victory Wood which is required at all times.

There is a good level of interpretation found at the site, namely focusing on the military links to HMS Victory and the Battle of Trafalgar. Additional future interpretation will focus on the developing habitats found at the site, and the rare and scarce species that are found at Victory Wood. A large welcome board with key information and a site map is situated beside the car park, and a site leaflet is available from a dispenser. This describes the main features of the site, which include interpretation structures linked to the Battle of Trafalgar; Nelson's Statue, Victory Copse, Victory Footprint which marks out the full scale of HMS Victory, the Canon Ball Trail to the battle line of trees marked out by Holm oaks in corrals, and the panoramic viewing platform atop the main ridge. These structures also provide the link between the use of trees and the importance of woodland as a timber resource and for wildlife.

27 sponsored groves known as "Victory Groves" can be found in the southern end of sub-cpt. 2a, named after the ships in the English fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar. There is a small information board at the eastern end of the groves showing the layout and highlighting their significance. Near to the groves, and situated on the main ridge at the south end of the site is a redundant Royal Observer Corps Underground Monitoring Bunker, a relic from the Cold War era. This was built in 1966 and operational for 10 years before it was de-commissioned in 1976. This remains a popular feature of the site, and a series of successful National Heritage Day events have been held in conjunction with Timescapes Kent, allowing visitors the opportunity to enter the bunker, to see historical artefacts and learn about the work undertaken at the time. A permanent information board is located adjacent to the bunker, and gives visitors an artist's impression of what the interior of the bunker would have looked like.

Two living sculptures titled the 'Heart of Oak' project were planted on site during 2007-8, following a partnership with

artist Will Glanfield and with funding from Arts Council England and Canterbury and Swale district councils. These works were installed with the support of two local primary schools; Blean Primary School and the Endowed School, and are situated on the ridge top within sub cpt. 2a. These two growing sculptures, 'Avenue and Ring' and 'Pollard Ring', feature a number of planted oak trees still tended and cared for by the artist. Their connection with the community will continue over the decades as they grow and evolve, providing an important example of human connection to the natural environment.

Since 2018, Victory Wood has hosted an annual 'bee bioblitz' event in conjunction with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, where local wildlife enthusiasts and conservation volunteers can build on pollinator and wildflower training, survey methods and develop an understanding of the importance of mosaic habitats for rare and scarce pollinators in this north Kent stronghold. These events have been popular and very promising numbers of BAP priority species have been identified and recorded.

Due to its close proximity to Whitstable, Canterbury and the motorway network, the local area is vulnerable to further residential development. As such, Victory Wood forms an important open, recreational and ecological space within this part of Kent. Other nearby outdoor recreational sites include Wraik Hill and Foxes Cross Reserve (managed by Kent Wildlife Trust), Ellenden Wood and Farm (private ownership) which all lie directly to the north and east of Victory Wood, Blean Wood (private ownership) to the west, and Blean NNR to the south which includes two sections owned by the Woodland Trust (partnership consortium, managed by RSPB). A number of wider sites within the Blean complex offer public access and are linked by the Big Blean Walk, a 25 mile (40km) waymarked, circular route encompassing many of the key habitats and points of interest found within The Blean.

The closest Woodland Trust sites to Victory Wood are; Park Wood, near Challock (10.5 miles), Denge and Pennypot Wood, near Chartham (11 miles) and Earley Wood, near Petham (12.5 miles).

Significance

Victory Wood is an important space for quiet, informal recreation within the Yorkletts area, especially given its close proximity to the busy Thanet Way (A299). The site provides extensive access to an area which had no public access across it prior to Woodland Trust ownership. Unlike neighbouring conservation sites with public access, Victory Wood offers visitors free parking facilities.

Victory Wood is found at the north west end of the 'The Blean', one of the largest and most distinctive remaining areas of ancient woodland in England, and the largest area of continuous woodland in Kent, covering over 3000ha (7413 acres). Public access at the site therefore enables and encourages wider access within the Blean complex, and a number of national and local trails and walks run through the area. Victory Wood is also unusual as a woodland close to the coast, with extensive views to the north across the Thames Estuary.

Access to this developing mosaic habitat of ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW), secondary woodland and semi natural open ground with open grown trees gives an opportunity for the Woodland Trust to promote key messages; that of ancient woodland protection along with the importance of linking/buffering through woodland creation. The site also allows for important discussions and research around habitat creation and restoration to support locally and nationally rare and scarce species.

The on-site interpretation provides the opportunity for learning and understanding about significant local military and historical links, site management, and the special wildlife found here.

Public access to Victory Wood helps fulfil one of the Woodland Trust's key objectives; to inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees.

Opportunities & Constraints

Opportunities:
This is a large Woodland Trust site with the potential to build on the types of user groups who currently visit, greatly helped by the extensive coastal views and those across The Blean, the military links and interpretation features, and the establishment of rare and interesting wildlife; all of which could help attract more visitors to the site.

The high level of regular visitors to this wood offers opportunity for positive community engagement through a range of events. There is a fantastic display of spring and summer flora and autumn colours from fruit baring trees and shrubs, and throughout the year the site sees a range of interesting and rare species, including locally and nationally important butterflies, moths, bees and birds.

Victory Wood is a key site for volunteer engagement, through wardening opportunities and a developing woodland working group, to wildlife monitoring, training days and annual bioblitz survey events. Organisations such as Butterfly Conservation and Bumblebee Trust are able to offer training and support to Woodland Trust volunteers in identifying and recording key species and their foodplants, whilst working to establish surveying methodology that can be undertaken by site wildlife monitors.

The site is in close proximity to a number of local schools, universities, community groups and organisations. Victory Wood could be used as an important resource for education, research and public engagement.

Victory Wood can be seen as a ‘gateway’ to the wider Blean complex, encouraging visitors to explore this diverse and significant wooded area.

There is the potential to develop a local landscape level partnership group within the wider Yorkletts area, to share best practice, and take a landscape level approach to both conservation work and public access and engagement. There is the opportunity to create a ‘Yorkletts’, or shared wildlife focused trail across Victory Wood, Wraik Hill and Foxes Cross Reserve, and Ellenden Wood and Farm.

Constraints:
Aside from the path leading to the footprint, there are unsurfaced paths and steep terrain in the southern area of the site mean access is challenging for visitors with prams and wheelchairs

The heavy clay soils can mean the site becomes readily waterlogged in the wetter months.

The ancient semi natural woodland is at the opposite end to the car park, making for a long walk before visitors reach the mature woodland.

The close proximity of residential areas can mean that the expansion or development of further public access facilities or increased visitor numbers would be problematic. It could impact on the important habitats and wildlife found at the site.

The popularity of the site with local dog walkers and businesses means that it is vulnerable to misuse and antisocial behaviour. This level of activity can also be off-putting for potential visitors.

Factors Causing Change

Litter and dog mess- these are a significant problem at the site, and there is limited opportunity to work with the local councils to enforce fines and encourage positive behaviours. There is a bin in the main car park, with a second installed by the pedestrian entrance off Dargate Road

Increased visitor numbers and dog walkers has brought conflicts with wildlife and dogs

Out of control dogs- grazing activity has now ceased due to poor control of dogs by owners

Increased visitor numbers could damage and widen unsurfaced paths and cause the trampling of specialist ground flora.

Antisocial behaviour- The site has been vulnerable to illegal camping, fires and occasional drug use in the car park area. The height barrier in the car park has helped to deter some issues.

Fly Tipping- this has been occasionally problematic in the car park and along areas of Dargate Road

Horse riders- there have been multiple occurrences of horse riders straying off the designated multi-user path, despite additional signage in place

Bike use- Significant mountain bike trails have been found in the ancient woodland compartment and infrastructure has been damaged to enable bikes and mopeds to gain access to the secondary woodland and open ground habitat. Cyclists also often stray off the multiuser path despite signage and staff/ volunteer advice

Fly grazing- there have been regular occurrences of local fly grazed ponies near to the car park area and in the small paddock off Lamberhurst track, often during times of reduced surveillance

Long term Objective (50 years+)

There will be a well maintained and safe network of paths for informal public access in Victory Wood where responsible visitors can appreciate and enjoy the site, utilising it for local walks to take in the views, the different habitats and the abundance of wildlife.

The visitor numbers will be in line with the sites category A status, with parking and adequate access points available. The provision in the future of way marked routes, interpretation structures linked to the Trafalgar Woods Project, and information boards regarding the site history, wildlife and developing habitats will continue to be available on site where appropriate. Victory Wood will be available for people engagement activities including work with volunteers, local schools and community groups as appropriate.

Victory Wood will continue to be valued by the local community, particularly for its ease of use and recognised importance as one of a number of recreational green spaces in this near coastal area.

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

During this plan period, the short term objective is to continue to provide public access at Victory Wood which is both safe and enjoyable.

Path mowing and maintenance
10.4 km (6.4 miles) of paths will be maintained to allow continued access across the whole site for pedestrians by mowing as appropriate during the summer months including through the Victory Groves area. Horse access along the multi user route 3.1 km (1.9 miles) will also be maintained by mowing and cutting back tree growth interfering with the route as necessary during the plan period. The multi user path will only be open to horse riders between the drier months from April to October. The 330m long surfaced wheelchair route to be kept weed free and the surface to be regraded at regular intervals to fill in water run-off channels.

Entrance maintenance works to four access points, including:
Removal of overhanging/encroaching branches along paths.
Strimming of all entrances/laybys and along the track boundary and highlighted areas of the car park.
Strimming a 1m radius around all info boards, benches, way marker posts, and pedestrian/vehicle gates.
Maintenance works to resurface areas of the car park and our section of Lamberhurst Track when required

Monitoring of antisocial behaviour
Staff and volunteer wardens to monitor the car park and surrounding woodland for signs of antisocial use, on at least a weekly basis during the summer months when camping and fires are more common. Any concerns/ incidents to be reported to site staff who will liaise directly with the local residents committee and Kent Police to raise awareness and deter repeat issues.

Tree safety and site boundary management
Annual zone A (housing and roadside boundaries) surveys to take place alternating between summer and fungal surveys carried out every other autumn. Biennial zone B (path network) summer surveys in the ancient woodland compartment highlighting hazardous trees that require remedial work.

The 330m of hedges along Dargate Road will be flailed in November/December each year to ensure sightlines are kept clear; where applicable that there is a minimum height clearance above the full width of the highway to 5.1m.

Site upgrades and other annual inspections
During 2021, upgrading of key post and rail fencing works and wooden kissing gate structure along the car park perimeter and Lamberhurst track (84 bays), Denstroude entrance (6-8 bays) and roadside boundary by the ancient woodland compartment which includes renewal of squeeze gap posts and an extension of 3 bays either side of existing fence (18 bays total).

During 2022-23, upgrading of car park area, including a renewal of surface material, installation of bike locking facilities and the removal of at least two earthen bunds to maximise car parking allocation.

During 2021, the breadboard signage at the squeeze gap entrance off Lamberhurst track near the car park will be renewed

Annual inspections of site access points, signage, furniture and general infrastructure to ensure that all are in good condition and adequate for visitor numbers and all user groups. Constant monitoring of path and car park surfaces.

Carrying out annual site hazard checks where appropriate

The Cold War Bunker
To factor in any necessary renovation of the above ground structures for the bunker in 2021 to ensure it continues to be secure and dog proof. To hold a National Heritage open day event where the site engagement plan will set out for this type of activity, which may be every other year. This will allow members of the public to enter the bunker and learn about its history

Links viewing platform
in 2022, to review the structural design and longevity of the sculpture over the next management plan period, and implement remedial/ redesigning works by 2023

Interpretation:

In 2021, to install the new A1 bumblebee focused interpretation panel and oak lectern in the open ground habitat, as funded by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust , and a new oak lectern in Victory Copse to house a new interpretation panel.

In early 2021, to install more permanent ground nesting bird signage, to ensure dogs are kept on leads in the open ground habitat during bird nesting season, which typically runs from the end of February to September each year.

In spring 2022, to renew the main on site orientation board and leaflet following any amendments and updates to information

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	7.07	Oak (sessile)	1700	Min-intervention	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Tree Preservation Order
Area of ancient semi-natural woodland containing Sessile oak and beech coppice with localised understory of wild service tree.						
1b	0.39	Oak (sessile)	1898	Min-intervention	Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Tree Preservation Order
A small triangular shaped woodland historically kown as as Bushy Close. It is actually secondary woodland with trees dating from 1898 growing there. Its name of "Bushy Close" comes from the 1876 map of Lamberhurst Farm and suggests that it was always a rough unproductive field. It sits on the northern side of a ditch which formed the parish boundary between 2 civil parishes. Along the ditch edge of the wood are some interesting old hornbeam specimens which once formed part of the boundary hedge and it contains ground flora which is similar to that of ancient woodland.						
2a	86.19	Mixed native broadleaves	2005	Min-intervention	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
Secondary woodland planted between 2005 and 2008 to a "new native woodland" design. Species were planted to represent as close to an NVC type as possible, mainly W10 woodland (oak, hornbeam) with a small area of W8 woodland (ash, field maple) along the north east edge. Average density of the planted areas is 2500 trees per hectare in the middle of the sub compartment with spacing widening to reduce the density to approximately 1600 trees per hectare near the edges of Ellenden and Blean Wood to allow additional space for natural regeneration to develop. Unplanted areas were left immediately adjacent to the ancient woodland edges of varying distance in width to be stocked by natural regeneration. Natural regeneration of oak, hornbeam, hawthorn, goat willow, dog rose and ash is becoming established. A Royal Observer Corps Underground Monitoring Bunker from the cold war era is situated on top of the main ridge through this sub-compartment. The 2 Heart of Oak living sculptures are situated on the ridge top within this sub-compartment. 27no sponsored groves named after the ships in the English Fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar are situated at the extreme southern part of cpt.2a.						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
2b	13.41	Mixed native broadleaves	2013	Wood establishment	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
Area of woodland creation planted in 2013. Wide conservation rides circulate through this area. The design of the planting was to produce large irregular shaped and sized clumps of woodland with semi-natuiral open space between them.						
3a	30.72	Open ground	2006	Wood pasture	Management factors (eg grazing etc), Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
The semi-natural open ground habitat at Victory Wood (sub cpt.3a) currently extends across a large 30.72ha, forming 21.5% of the site area, and is composed of neutral grassland with a scattering of developing open-grown trees. As previous arable farmland, the open areas were sown with a neutral grass mixture in the autumn of 2006, comprising of four variants of perennial rye grass, in addition to timothy, cock's-foot and wild red clover. Wild flowers were also sown in five inoculation patches throughout sub cpt 2a, each being approximately 0.75ha in size. However the wild flowers struggled to establish with only a few species such as common bird's-foot trefoil, meadow buttercup, common knapweed, meadow vetchling, self-heal, oxeye daisy, cowslip and white clover taking hold. The open ground habitat is mown annually in September, with no more than 50% of each land parcel cut to ensure a varied sward height. Arisings are collected to promote wildflower diversity and to reduce the impact of coarse grasses and other potentially dominant vegetation. Near to the southern boundary of this sub-compartment runs a deep drainage ditch called Hawkins Hill Ditch which is up to 1.5-2.0 metres deep and flows (from north to south) after significant rainfall in the winter and spring months, but for most of the summer it is dry. The ditch is covered by bramble, trees and shrubs and provides a wooded connection across the site between Blean Wood and Ellenden Wood. The ditch exits from our land into Ellenden Wood, and near this point is a small pond formed by a basic dam across the ditch. Within this pond is a specimen of Almond Willow (Salix triandra), which is very scarce in Kent.						
3b	0.14	Hawthorn species	2014	Wood establishment	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
Small area fenced off for natural regeneration to colonise, mostly hawthorn and blackthorn.						
3c	2.05	Mixed native broadleaves	2014	Wood establishment	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
Planting took place in November 2013- early 2014. The tree mixture in this sub compartment includes sessile oak, hornbeam, downy birch, common alder, field maple and wild service, all planted in sinuous, wavy lines at 2.5x2.5m spacing. Trees were planted in single species groups of 15-20, aside from wild service which was planted in smaller						

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
groups of 5-7 and scattered throughout the blocks. Woody shrubs were planted along the perimeter edging at 2x2m spacing, in 4 staggered rows. Species were again planted in groups across the rows, producing blocks of hawthorn, blackthorn, wild service and dogwood, with field rose planted in smaller clumps along the edge of the sub compartment. The area was fenced off with stock fencing to prevent any browsing by sheep grazing the open ground habitat at the time.						
3d	2.16	Mixed native broadleaves	2014	Wood establishment	Mostly wet ground/exposed site	
Planting took place in November 2013- early 2014. The tree mixture in this sub compartment includes sessile oak, hornbeam, downy birch, common alder, field maple and wild service, all planted in sinuous, wavy lines at 2.5x2.5m spacing. Trees were planted in single species groups of 15-20, aside from wild service which was planted in smaller groups of 5-7 and scattered throughout the blocks. Woody shrubs were planted along the perimeter edging at 2x2m spacing, in 4 staggered rows. Species were again planted in groups across the rows, producing blocks of hawthorn, blackthorn, wild service and dogwood, with field rose planted in smaller clumps along the edge of the sub compartment. The area was fenced off with stock fencing to prevent any browsing by sheep grazing the open ground habitat at the time.						

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.