

Cowcroft Wood

(Plan period – 2023 to 2028)



WOODLAND
TRUST

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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

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GLOSSARY

1. SITE DETAILS

Cowcroft Wood

Location:	Chesham Grid reference: SP982014 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 165
Area:	7.37 hectares (18.21 acres)
External Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc), Green Belt
Internal Designations:	N/A

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Cowcroft Wood is a 7.37ha/18 acre site situated just outside the village of Botley (1.2km / 0.75 miles) and close to the town of Chesham (2.9km / 1.8 miles). The site was acquired by the Woodland Trust in 1987 and forms part of a complex of woodland known as Tylers Hill, with privately owned woodland to the north. Surrounding the wood elsewhere, there is a farm and a mixture of arable and pasture land. The wood is situated on soils described as slightly acid loamy and clayey with impeded drainage. The site sits within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is also designated as a County Wildlife Site.

'The extensively wooded and farmed Chilterns AONB landscape is underlain by chalk bedrock that rises up from the London Basin to form a north-west facing escarpment offering long views over the adjacent vales. The countryside is a patchwork of mixed agriculture with woodland, set within hedged boundaries. Furthest from London, the natural and built features of the countryside are recognised as special and attractive in approximately half the National Character Area (NCA) by the designation of the Chilterns AONB. Outside the AONB there are major settlements that incorporate extensive urban fringe and growth areas, that including High Wycombe.' Natural England 2013, NCA Profile:110 Chilterns (NE406)

The wood is diverse in species and in structure, with the main tree species being oak and beech with ash, hornbeam, silver birch and cherry. It is classified as ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW) and has numerous specialist woodland plants including bluebell, wood sorrel, yellow pimpernel, primrose, enchanter's nightshade and dog's mercury.

The birch and cherry dominated stands in the wood are starting to senesce and collapse with beech, silver birch and rowan regenerating below. There are areas of hornbeam dominated woodland especially to the south, containing large hornbeam standards. On the south western boundary is a wide wood bank and on this there are very old and impressive beech and hornbeam coppice stools. In lighter parts of the wood, bramble and bracken thickets tend to dominate. Other plants include honeysuckle, wild currant and ferns.

Historically there has been extensive mineral working in the wood, for local tile and brick works, and this has left many pits and steep slopes. The terrain in the western half of the wood is now very uneven because of this, making access difficult in parts. Some of the pits now form seasonal ponds.

Cowcroft Wood is well connected to surrounding public rights of way, whilst several permissive paths around the site offer peaceful walks amongst mature woodland. A privately owned farm track runs north to south through the wood, splitting it into two sections. The Woodland Trust has given the site a category C for access (low usage site where we do maintain paths).

3. LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intentions for Cowcroft Wood are focused on retaining and where possible improving woodland biodiversity and increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Natural processes will continue to shape the woodland, ensuring a range of different species and ages of trees with gaps in the canopy where natural regeneration can thrive. As the woodland matures, trees will decline naturally, contributing to important deadwood habitat both standing and fallen, particularly for invertebrate and fungal communities, apart from where it poses a significant tree safety risk.

Naturally regenerating species include beech, silver birch, rowan, holly and hazel. The colonisation by ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) will affect the species composition of the wood over time, and so beech is likely to be the dominant tree species in the woodland as it grows and develops.

On-going monitoring will ensure access remains easy and safe. This will be achieved through a managed path and entrance network and regular safety inspections of site infrastructure and of higher risk tree zones. Archaeological features e.g. pits and woodbank will be monitored and protected for future generations of visitor to enjoy.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 F1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

The semi-natural woodland has a diverse, mixed structure including mature oak, beech, cherry, hornbeam and silver birch. Some of these mature trees are in stages of decline and collapse, opening up gaps in the canopy which are being colonised by natural regeneration, mainly beech, silver birch and rowan. Holly and hazel form an occasional shrub understory. Levels of natural regeneration are good and not overly suppressed by the presence of deer, rabbit and grey squirrel.

The wood is situated on soils described as slightly acid loamy and clayey with impeded drainage. Flora comprises several species listed as ancient woodland indicators including bluebells, enchanter's nightshade, yellow pimpernel and dog's mercury. Where larger gaps have opened up, bramble and bracken dominates.

Cowcroft forms part of the wider Tyler's Hill Woodland which borders to the north east but is otherwise surrounded by arable and pasture farmland with Cowcroft Farm to the north.

The site was formally worked for clay deposits, creating large pits which have shaped the wood, particularly in the west. Whilst these pits now represent archaeological features, they have also formed seasonal ponds which provide an important habitat.

Significance

The amount of ASNW left in Britain has been drastically reduced over the last century and ancient woodland is irreplaceable. Approximately 40% of England's ASNW is found in the South East. ASNW is very important due to the continuity of woodland cover over hundreds of years which allows for a diverse range of wildlife and vegetation to develop over time that cannot be found in new woodland creation sites. A key aim of the Woodland Trust is to prevent any further loss of ancient woodland.

Cowcroft Wood has a good representation of ancient woodland vascular plant indicators. The part of the site is listed as a County Wildlife Site (includes SSCI, SIN), Green Belt and a Local Nature Reserve, highlighting its value to local biodiversity. In addition, the presence of seasonal ponds is an important habitat that plays a significant part in the wider biodiversity of the site.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

- Many of the paths and tracks can become boggy due to the underlying clay soils. Any management work should be carefully timed with drier site conditions

- Woodland archaeology is present and damage must be avoided during any management
- Death of ash due to colonisation of ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)

Opportunities:

- Chiltern's Society interest in buying adjacent land
- Designation as a County Wildlife Site affirms the site's importance and value for wildlife in its county context and possible ecological survey interest

Factors Causing Change

- Death of ash due to colonisation of ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)
- Potential for colonisation of other pests and diseases such as acute oak decline and oak processionary moth
- Herbivore impact (deer, rabbits, grey squirrels)
- Climate change - notable drought or flooding putting trees under more stress

Long term Objective (50 years+)

- To maintain and improve the habitat as part of Local Nature Reserve/County Wildlife Site, ensuring a diverse and mixed woodland that is resilient to pests and diseases.
- The colonisation by ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) will affect the species composition of the wood over time with the dominant species in the future being beech and oak.
- Long term management will assess the natural processes of the wood ensuring a range of different species and ages of trees with gaps in the canopy where natural regeneration can thrive. Steps will be taken to create gaps in the canopy and to improve age structure if findings suggest this is needed.
- Deer and rabbit damage to the broadleaf trees will be monitored and action taken if the damage becomes unacceptable.

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

- With the advent of ash die back changing the composition of the wood, natural processes will be allowed to shape the wood and there are no planned interventions during the management plan
- Tree safety Zone A annual survey, alternating summer crown condition assessments and autumn fungal inspections, for the safety of operatives and neighbouring property
- Tree safety zone B will be inspected biennially for the safety of visitors, during the plan period, next inspection due July 2024
- Deer assessments surveys will be carried out every 5 years, through an HIA to assess levels of damage. The next survey is due in 2027
- A woodland condition assessment will inform management decisions on the next management plan. The next

assessment due 2027.

4.2 F2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Cowcroft Wood is located 1.2km / 0.75 miles outside the village of Botley (population 680 – 2011 census) and 2.9km / 1.8 miles from the town of Chesham (population 22,356 – 2011 census). The site is well connected to nearby populations of Botley, Chesham, and Amersham by public rights of way which border the north and east boundary as well as connecting through the middle of the site from north to south. Ley Hill School is located 1.2km from the site using public footpaths.

Permissive paths offer routes into the woodland off the public rights of way at various points with a route connecting the north east corner to a short circular path around the western block of the wood, taking in the old pits. Permissive footpaths comprise approximately 1km of managed paths but these can be boggy throughout the year and are also steep and uneven in places.

Significance

One of the Woodland Trust's main objectives is the promotion of public access to, and enjoyment of, woodlands. Cowcroft Wood provides a quiet area amongst diverse and mature woodland for walking and recreation for many local residents and visitors to the area. Archaeological remains provide a link to local history.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:

- Many of the paths can be extremely wet for most of the year round due to the underlying clay soils
- Vehicular parking is not available
- Undulating and steep ground may prove challenging to some walkers

Opportunities:

- Recruitment of an 'eyes and ears' volunteer warden for several local sites
- One off educational visits from nearby Lay Hill School

Factors Causing Change

- Potential for increase in housing / infrastructure nearby

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Informal public access will be provided at the wood in perpetuity. An on-going programme of maintenance will ensure safe and easy access along clearly defined routes for quiet recreation. Provision of infrastructure will be kept low key as appropriate for the grading of this site (category C: low usage sites where we do maintain paths)

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

A programme of maintenance and tree inspections will ensure the wood remains open and safe to visitors.

- Routine safety inspections of the trees in Zone B, such as alongside footpaths and tracks, will be carried out biennially. The next survey is due in July 2024 .

- Entrance infrastructure and signage will be inspected at the mid-point of the plan (2025) with any remedial work undertaken as necessary.

- An annual path cut will be undertaken in June.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2023	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone B	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside routes such as paths and rides within the woodland	February
2023	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	June
2023	AW - Visitor Access Infrastructure	Works associated with the construction of a new or extension to existing car parking facilities.	July

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	4.88	Oak (pedunculate)	1901	High forest	Archaeological features, Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, County Wildlife Site (includes SNCI, SINC etc)
<p>Ancient semi-natural woodland comprising mainly oak and beech with small patches of hazel coppice. Other species include ash, wild cherry, holly, rowan, silver birch and hazel. This compartment is divided into two blocks by a farm track; the larger block to the north features the main area of former mining activity with the pits now hosting seasonal ponds. The block to the south has features mature beech and hornbeam coppice stools along the western boundary.</p>						
1b	2.5	Oak (pedunculate)	1901	High forest	Archaeological features, Gullies/Deep Valleys/Uneven/Rocky ground, No/poor vehicular access to the site, Site structure, location, natural features & vegetation	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
<p>Ancient semi-natural woodland, similar in diversity and structure to compartment 1a although not covered by the County Wildlife Site designation. Natural regeneration of birch, rowan and beech as well as thick areas of bramble and bracken where gaps have appeared in the canopy.</p>						

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.

Registered Office:

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