

Sustainable Woodstock - Community Woodland

Management Plan

Ownership and Location

The site is owned by Vanbrugh Unit Trust (aka Blenheim Estates) and is on an eighty year lease free of all charges to the Woodstock Town Council. The site is managed for the Town Council by Sustainable Woodstock www.sustainablewoodstock.co.uk

The name of the woodland is Woodstock Community Woodland and is located at OS Grid Ref: SP 44402178 and is approx. 100m above sea level. The area is approx. 1.4 Ha

Description

The woodland was planted on rough grassland between the A44 leading north out of Woodstock and the Blenheim Palace parkland wall to the west. Native broadleaved tree species were planted on a 2.1m spacing giving around 2250 stems per planted hectare and were selected for their ability to coppice well. The planting has been designed for the development of a rotational coppice with standards system. Straddling the ride in the centre of the woodland is a modest closely planted avenue of oak trees supplied by Nicholsons trees and planted in the presence of the late Duke of Marlborough. There is a pre-existing maturing section of woodland containing beech and sycamore at the southern end. Sustainable Woodstock has recently established an orchard containing fruiting species and their varieties traditional to the area, and the management plan for this is set out separately.

Objectives

The woodland has broad people-centred objectives aligned to the main aims of Sustainable Woodstock. The objectives are to:

- grow wood products to provide carbon-neutral materials, for example firewood, bean poles, pea sticks. Where the opportunity arises a small percentage of trees will be allowed to grow on into standards, ultimately to be harvested for sawlog or cleaving timber. We expect to use the traditional management style known as 'coppice-with-standards', employing a number of compartments or coupes to be cut in succession.
- Provide an environment in which woodland wildlife may thrive. Although the assumption is that woodland flora will be promoted, management need not be restricted to promoting authentic native woodland species. A pragmatic approach is currently favoured in which the aim is to maximise the wildlife benefit consistent with other objectives.
- Provide free access. Provide recreational opportunities such as walking, nature-watching and participating in woodland management and harvesting tasks.
- Promote a better understanding of the concept of sustainability and how to reduce our environmental footprint. Use the concepts employed in the management of the woodland to promote understanding of wider resource management.

Management Policies

General Policies

- Bonfires should not usually be used for the disposal of waste and cut vegetation. If there is no easy alternative, a full risk assessment must be made and in particular, account taken of the proximity of the A44. Where possible consideration should be given to cut materials being left in situ to form habitat piles
- Any materials found in the woodland or deposited there that might give rise to a significant fire risk must be removed at the earliest opportunity and, where necessary, the authorities advised as well as the town council and Blenheim Estates.
- The use of chemicals, pesticides and herbicides is to be discouraged. Only in exceptional circumstances should such materials be used e.g. in the clearance of noxious weeds, identified as such under the Weeds Act, such as Japanese Knotweed. In such circumstances the matter should be subject to a risk assessment.
- Volunteers should always be instructed on safe procedures and required to use safety clothing and equipment as necessary. Children under the age of 12 will not be allowed to carry out volunteer work unless supervised by an adult.
- All management and operations in the woodland should consider the risks and benefits to wildlife and wildlife habitats and everything reasonable should be done in such a way as to enhance the bio-diversity of the area.
- Consideration should be given within the management and operations of the woodland for the training of volunteers in the management, organisation & practice of coppicing in the woodland.

Coppicing - commence coppicing on a medium-term cycle of around 15 years, commencing approximately 2022.

Grass Cutting - cut grass regularly within rides at a frequency that enhances the public enjoyment of the woodland, usually about three times annually. During the early years of the woodland, until a full tree canopy has developed, some grass and undergrowth between trees might usefully be cleared but this should only be undertaken after careful discussion.

Brambles and Woody undergrowth – Annual inspection in June and record findings. Where necessary clear brambles and heavy undergrowth by hand or by strimmer.

Clematis - Annual inspection in June and record findings. Where necessary clear clematis by hand that might otherwise overwhelm young trees.

Ragwort - Annual inspection in June and record findings. Where there is significant infestation, Ragwort should be pulled by hand at a time before the flowers have seeded but late enough to allow the entire plant to be pulled up including the root. Gloves and skin protection is essential for those undertaking this work. Disposal is to be to a licensed tip or by careful burning or composting

Self-seeded trees and suckers - The future of self-seeded trees and suckers should also be considered annually, probably in June, along with other inspections. However, as a general rule self-seeded trees should be left to either thrive or be overwhelmed naturally by more vigorous neighbours, except where a particular tree standard is to be protected.

Planted trees - Annual safety and tree health inspection in October and record findings. Action to be taken as determined on the basis of inspection

Hedgerow and walls – These are the responsibility of Blenheim Estates but Sustainable Woodstock should conduct an annual inspection in parallel with that of the planted trees and report any concerns to Blenheim Estates. A margin of 5 metres from the Park wall is to be kept clear of all self-

seeded and heavy woody undergrowth to ensure access to the wall for Blenheim Estates maintenance work. Maintaining this margin is Sustainable Woodstock's responsibility.

Mature trees in southern area - Annual safety and tree health inspection in October and record findings. Action to be taken should follow arboricultural advice and/or advice from Blenheim Estates.

Central oak 'avenue' – inspect annually along with the other planted trees and ensure such protection as is required. Action to be taken as determined on the basis of inspection.

David Rees and Colin Carritt – January 2019