The future of Horse Close Wood.

Dr D.G. Dawson, January 2026

Introduction

As a contribution to the revision of the management plan for Horse Close Wood, this background report reviews options for the future and recommends actions. Those recommendations are drawn together into a separate draft text for the revised plan, which depends upon this report for details and references.

Horse Close Wood is an old planted,1.7-hectare wood on the northern edge of the public Wimbledon Park. It is owned and managed by the London Borough of Merton. The planning authority is LB Wandsworth. The centre of the wood is National Grid Reference TQ24677285. It is mapped as lying on silty "Head Deposits" derived from the hillslopes to the west in glacial times. It dates back to at least 1700 and remains much the same shape now as then.

It is now 10 years since LB Merton adopted the existing management plan for Horse Close Wood[1]. This is the second background paper for the revised plan, the first was published in February 2025: "The History of Horse Close Wood, Wimbledon Park". A further background paper will describe the composition and woodland type, and an appendix will list species recorded in the wood.

There was an extensive consultation on the management of the wood undertaken in 2015[2] to inform the policies of the 2016 management plan and the results from that have been taken into account here.

We should protect, improve and increase the wood

London's trees and woodlands contribute to its "Green Infrastructure", with benefits for biodiversity and wildlife habitat, healthier living, climate change adaptation, carbon storage, and air and water quality[3].

Native broadleaved woodlands are reliable carbon sinks that continue to take up carbon over centuries with benefits for biodiversity and other ecosystem services. Sequestration rates are the greatest of all UK habitats, but they decline over time[4]. Old woodlands are substantial and important carbon stores (Gregg et al. 2021).

Horse Close Wood is an Ash-Oak-Elm wood, "W8d" in the National Vegetation Classification (NVC)[5], one of several types of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, making it a UK National Priority Habitat[6]. In England, this priority was carried forward in section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006[7], and, in turn, in national, London, Wandsworth and Merton planning policies[8].

Following extensive survey across London and public consultation, the wood was identified as part of a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (Grade I) in 1998[9]. The designation was confirmed in 1999 and remains today. It is shown as a designated

nature conservation site on Figure 8.2 of the London Plan and in the Wandsworth Habitat Survey findings from 1999[10]. Being freely accessible it fulfils policies for access to nature[11].

The Friends of Wimbledon Park began a programme of tree planting in 2016, which has increased the area of the wood by some 0.1 ha (about 5%). In 2023, Government adopted a target to increase the tree canopy and woodland cover of England to at least 16.5% of England's land area[12] and the Mayor of London has a target in his Environment Strategy to "increase London's tree canopy cover 10% by 2050[13]. The Wandsworth Tree and Woodland Delivery Framework encourages planting to enlarge small woodlands and the retention of veteran tree features[14]. Trees, and especially veteran trees, are protected in the Wandsworth Local Plan[15]. Horse Close Wood is included within the Wimbledon North Conservation Area where all trees are protected[16]. Clearly, these policies require that there should be no depletion of the wood and there should be further increases in its area.

At just 1.7 ha, Horse Close Wood is very small, and there is limited scope for enlargement, probably not achieving a total area of 5 ha as recommended by Whycock et al. (2018), nevertheless it already has Ancient Woodland Species, that studies show are poor colonists of new woodland[17]. Being in a well-wooded heritage landscape, enlargement can only help to retain, enhance and increase its woodland specialist species.

The traditional, site-based approach to biodiversity conservation was examined critically in the Lawton Report, "Making Space for Nature" (Lawton et al. 2010) where it was acknowledged that the old emphasis on the conservation of individual important sites was failing to reverse biodiversity decline. Lawton called for more emphasis on non-statutory sites (like Horse Close Wood), and for sites to be bigger, better and more joined up. Following that emphasis here will help maintain biodiversity. That bigger sites are generally better is well accepted, but the jury is still out on whether fragmented sites are better or worse than joined up ones (Riva *et al*. 2025). At around the same time as the Lawton report, the old emphasis on nature "restoration" was challenged by enthusiasts for "rewilding". Unlike Lawton, sadly, this led to much naïve enthusiasm and a loss of clarity (Pettroelli & Bullock 2025) to the extent that the label "rewilding" has been applied to give credibility to nature recovery initiatives of any kind. Horse Close Wood is so small and so intensively used that rewilding in the strict sense is barely relevant. We avoid this pitfall by referring to the initiatives themselves, so avoiding the non-concept of rewilding.

There is no single, simple template to guide the future management of Horse Close Wood. As an old wood, advice on ancient woodland management might be helpful[18] and four Woodland Trust publications are applicable[19]. Apart from their material on light levels and problem species, these publications deal with halting other adverse effects,

which don't apply locally and they do not cover the restoration of historic losses such as the car park in our wood. Oliver Rackham (2008) identified the spread of pathogens as the most serious threat to old woods, followed by excessive shade. Other important features of Horse Close Wood include two invasive species, Cherry Laurel and Himalayan Cotoneaster, ancient woodland indicators, Bluebell, Pendulous sedge and Dog's Mercury, the recent colonisation by Bay Laurel, the dominance of Bramble where Ash Trees were cut back drastically, and the lack of evidence of past coppicing.

Whilst the values of old woodland must be emphasised, Horse Close Wood is now part of a much-used public park and so subject to intensive use, which must be accommodated in its future. Also, disease threats to native plants, and climate change adaptation require consideration of introducing near native and honorary native species, so extending priority beyond native species[20]. Management will also have to consider the future role of pests and diseases, fire risk and the effects of air pollution. Planning will also be needed in anticipation of Ash dieback, Oak processionary moth and other novel diseases. So, the 2015 consultation recommendation to "plant locally native species only" needs to be more nuanced.

A management plan should also deal with the appropriate treatment of particular important species such as the main canopy trees, Ivy and Bramble.

Enlargement

In the late 1980s, a few trees were planted around the newly-made paths and in 1991 the first management plan for the wood[21] suggested planting to restore the woodland lost to the construction of the car park, but this was not done. Replacement planting was undertaken after various disturbances, mainly at the eastern end of the wood, as described in the history, but the only documented addition to the area of the wood was tiny: a short row of English Oaks on the southern margin of the wood planted around 2000. This all changed in 2016 when, following the policies of a new management plan, the Friends of Wimbledon Park, in conjunction with Tree Wardens Group Merton, and many local volunteers began planting areas on the periphery of the wood[22]. This ten-year programme has added some 1500 m^2 (10%) to the area of the wood[23]. Clearly, however, the Lawton Report (Lawton 2010) and recent policy on tree and woodland planting urges much more.

Detailed guidance on tree planting is available from the Woodland Trust (Herbert et al. 2022), the relevant parts of which inform the considerations below.

The obvious first choice, and a priority of the revised management plan, should be the implementation of the 1991 proposal to return the car park to woodland. The car park occupies approximately 0.13 ha and was originally wooded[24]. Returning it to woodland

would add a further 7% to the present woodland area, bringing the wood back to a total of 2 ha. The existing car park has a hard-core surface, unfriendly to planting. Nevertheless, such substrates can be colonised naturally by Birch and Oak, so we recommend a simple mix of these two and Hawthorn to begin the recovery process. Clearly the main path will need to be extended west to traverse the new planted area.

The second priority would be woodland planting on the nearby Great Field, across the perimeter path on the southern edge of the wood, which is another proposal in the previous management plan that was not implemented. There is scope here to introduce elements of a Capability Brown design. The increase would be limited only by the requirements of other users of the existing open grassland (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Indicative new planting on the car park and Great Field

Blakesley & Buckley (2010) recommend scalloping the edges of woodland to maximise the landscape and biodiversity gain from a graduated edge. Within these limitations we could plant around 1 ha more woodland, some of which could accommodate a pond, allowing the restoration of a small area of wet woodland Priority Habitat, reflecting the history of Horse Close Wood[25], new wet woodland would provide habitat for other species, such as bats.

Following Lawton *et al.* (2010) there has been increased concern for ensuring that the landscapes surrounding wildlife sites are well connected to promote biodiversity, however this is most important where the site is isolated in a sea of non-habitat (Dawson 1994; Cunningham *et al.* 2025, Gelber *et al.* 2025). This is not the case here, as

the wood is set in a wider, well-treed heritage landscape. This is well-wooded, at least before the damaging proposals of AELTC for the golf course and so it is more important to increase the area of woodland than to ensure any particular configuration.

Should Horse Close Wood be coppiced?

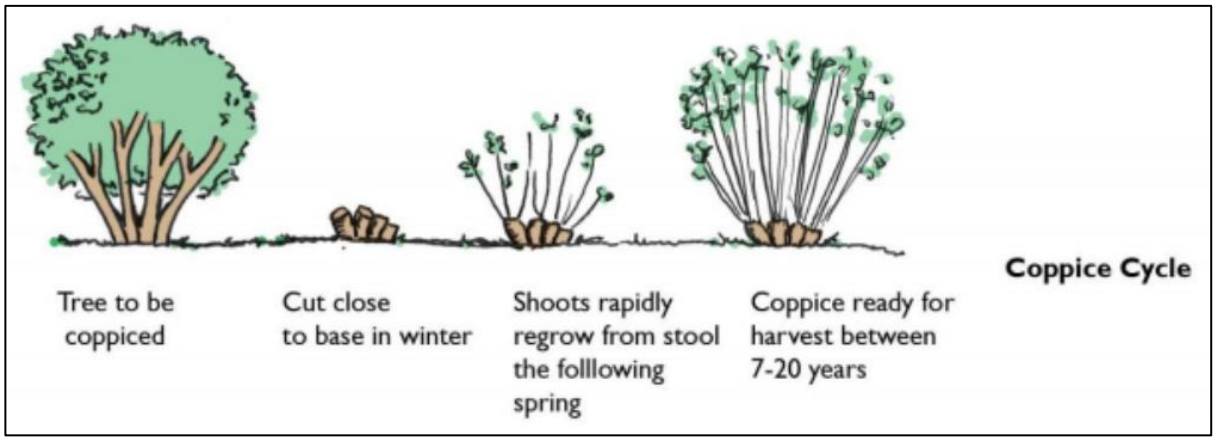


Figure 2. The coppice cycle[26].

In south-east England, it is believed that most woodlands were once managed by coppicing (Peterken 1981, Rackham 1986 & 2008, Bartlett 2015) to provide small diameter roundwood for building, furniture, household and farm utensils, and fuel for heating and cooking. Indeed, woodlands are believed to have been retained over many centuries, rather than converted for other uses only because these uses were economically important (Rackham 1986). Coppicing involved cutting trees or shrubs down to ground level, the stumps ("stools") then growing new shoots vigorously for some 7-20 years before these were cut in turn. The stools survived many coppicing rotations and so were long lived. Each wood was divided into "coupes" of 0.5 to 1 hectare in area, and one of these was coppiced each year, in rotation. To support this coupe size and rotation, the wood would need to be at least 4 hectares in area, so some adjustment would be needed for our tiny 1.7 ha. Sometimes, coppice management was mixed with timber production, with the addition of a few "standard" trees which were harvested at around 100-years-of-age.

As coal replaced wood as fuel, and there was a perception of timber shortage, many coppices were abandoned or replaced by single-aged plantations of high forest, but a small number of coppiced woodlands survived as part of a mixed farming regime (Bartlett 2015).

Coppicing opened out the canopy, allowing a significant amount of light to reach the woodland floor in the few years following the cut, so benefitting the ground flora. The dense, low coppice growth also provided habitat suitable for woodland animals, including some species of butterflies, birds and dormice.

Following centuries of decline there was a resurgence in coppice management, beginning in the 1980s, with a new focus on value for woodland biodiversity, recreation and amenity (Peterken 1981, Forestry Commission 1985, Fuller & Warren 1995). It became an orthodoxy that woodlands would be greatly enhanced by coppice management.

Coppicing in Horse Close Wood

In the public consultation on the previous management plan for the wood, in April 2015, the responses were decidedly against (85%) coppicing the wood[27]. The reason for this was that coppicing would involve felling many, valued mature trees, that the increased light could lead to a great increase in Bramble cover, and that there was no assurance that the soil had a sufficient seed bank to deliver the promise of woodland wildflowers.

The subsequent management plan reflected this, in that it has a policy not to coppice the wood, but subsequent events led to coppicing. The woody vegetation in the area now given over to the Dave Lofthouse Glade (see the History of the Wood and a separate detailed account of the establishment of the glade) was cleared. Maintenance of the underground National Grid cable facilities led to clearance in 2006, and this had re-vegetated with bramble and young trees nine years later, in 2015. Then, further maintenance work cleared the area in the winter of 2015-16. In the following spring, I was surprised to find some wetland wild flowers there, not previously seen: Great Willowherb, Trifid Bur-marigold, Pendulous Sedge, Yellow-flag Iris, Toad Rush, Watercress, and Gypsywort. Those who knew the wood some 50-years earlier told me that it once had much standing water. So, although not designed as coppicing, the clearance had revealed a wetland soil seed bank, which had germinated in the sunlight and disturbed soil. In the following few years five more wetland species appeared (Grey Willow, Marsh Foxtail, Soft Rush, Tufted Hair-grass and Figwort), but the works did not reveal any typical woodland ground flora. Consequently, the Friends of Wimbledon Park agreed with L.B. Merton, the owners, to manage the area as a glade, applying traditional hay meadow management and hoping to retain some of its wetland character.

This happenstance suggested that coppice management elsewhere in the wood might be productive in allowing wildflowers to manifest themselves.

Coppicing Ash

The second event was extensive cutting of trees across the northern and eastern edges of the wood in December 2018. This was done because one or two Ash trees there had fallen, threatening the adjacent properties. Table 1 gives the trees identified then for coppicing or thinning. The main focus of this work was to cut back some 30 mature Ash trees to leave a one metre stump, which was expected to re-grow as a tall coppice stool (a “coppard”) and be managed on a rotation of some 20-years or so thereafter[28].

'Serotina' poplar, *Populus x canadensis Serotina*	3
Ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*	31
Crack willow, *Salix x fragilis*	1
English elm, *Ulmus procera*	2
English oak, *Quercus robur*	5
Hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna*	7
Hazel, *Corylus avellana*	2
Horse chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*	1
Large-leaved lime, *Tilia platyphyllos*	1
Lime, *Tilia x europaea*	1
Total	**54**

Table 1. Trees identified for works, December 2018[29].

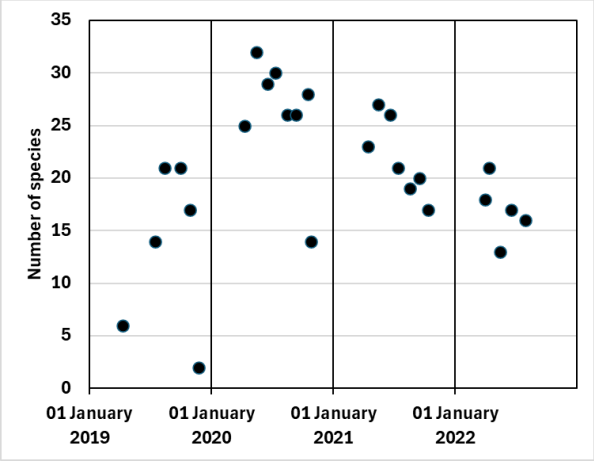


Figure 3. The arrival of plant species in the Ash coppice: the number of species found on each of 26 visits[30].

I monitored the arrival of plant species in this area over the following four years (Figure 3), after which the re-growth of Bramble prevented me from accessing much of the area. Figure 3 shows that, as expected following coppicing, there was a rapid increase in the species found, an apparent effect of the disturbance and extra light. After a peak in the second year after coppicing, numbers declined somewhat. However, most of the new species were a few individuals: transitory occurrences of annual species. We saw no new woodland ground flora species. Pre-existing species that increased (with approximate number in brackets) were Sycamore (10), Cow parsley (100), Great willowherb (10), Wood avens (5), native Bluebell (3), Holly (1), Firethorn (1), Bramble (4,000), Elder (1), English elm (15), Ivy-leaved speedwell (5) and two wetland species, Figwort (10) and Lesser celandine (30). The native Bluebells were welcome, but in small number, so hardly affecting the existing population in the wood. The two wetland species appeared in good number. However, these small benefits were outweighed by the increases in pre-existing Cow Parsley and Bramble. Also, the pre-existing Ivy, although not affected by the coppicing, remained abundant. So, again this coppicing

yielded an increase of wetland species, but did not benefit classical woodland ground flora[31]. Ivy and Bramble have considerable habitat value (see the evaluation of individual species), however there seems to be enough of these two species in the wood already.

See the section on safety for the need to re-coppice this area when needed. Otherwise, the existing policy not to coppice should be carried forward.

Should we create a wetland in the wood?

That several wetland species were found in the changes wrought by coppicing, suggests that the wood was more open to light and more wet in the past. So, in addition to coppicing the Ash for safety reasons, it might be worth considering making the wood wetter, or creating a woodland pond. Sayer et al. (2022) described farm ponds in East Anglia that were invaded by woodland, or filled in, over the last 100 years or so, where restoration is possible simply by digging them out and countering the woodland shade. Whilst our wood seems to have been wetter in the past, there is no trace of a pond on any of the old maps dating back at least 250 years (see the Montreal Map reproduced in the History of the Wood). So, it is not just a matter of restoring a known lost pond.

The topography of Horse Close Wood drains towards a long, low area running west-east within the area coppiced in 2018, parallel to the northern boundary of the wood. Water commonly lies there in the winter and it is near there that the Figwort and Lesser Celandine are found. After rain, there has been a trickle of water running east at the western end of this low area. The western edge of the Lofthouse Glade also ponds in the winter, but no wetland species came to the glade after National Grid completed the removal of their equipment there. This area was greatly disturbed by recreational pressure over COVID lockdowns and subsequently by dogs. It is also shaded by the adjacent woodland, and these two factors doubtless account for this poverty. These observations suggest that creation of a new pond would be better not done at the expense of part of Horse Close Wood, a tiny, valuable wood, but rather out in the Great Field where the gain in habitat would be easier and not at the expense of great existing value.

In the Great Field, or in the wood, any new pond would need to be fenced to prevent disturbance by dogs and should not be shaded to the south so that the plants and animals can benefit from sunlight. An exclosure similar to that around the veteran oak would be required to prevent the disturbance. If a new pond were to be in the wood, much felling would be needed to allow sunlight from the south, so destroying a large part of Horse Close Wood. For these reasons, the creation of a pond within the wood is not recommended, but perhaps one could be created across the perimeter path, within the Great Field just south of the wood.

The Dave Lofthouse Glade

Oliver Rackham (2008) and George Peterken (2017) established that meadows were integral to traditional woodland, having a distinctive flora greatly extending that found in the shadier parts of a woodland. Guidance on woodland glades is available from Herbert et al. (2022)[32]. The companion report to this one, on the history, describes the establishment of the glade.

At first, and again after the disturbance in the winter of 2020 to 2021, many short-lived annual plants arrived only to disappear as they were displaced by a grassland with predominantly perennial wild flowers. About 50 species are now seen each year and the glade is dominated by a neutral grassland[33] of Rough-stalked meadowgrass, Cock's-foot and Yorkshire fog, with flowers of Creeping buttercup, Creeping thistle, Dandelion, Hedge Woundwort and White clover. These species indicate a lack of heavy shade, there being few plants more typical of shady, wet woodland, such as Cuckoo pint, Lesser celandine, Pendulous sedge, Wood avens, Wood dock and Yellow-flag Iris, and some surviving colonists that have yet to give way to the grasses, such as Bristly Ox-tongue, Broad-leaved Dock, Cleavers, Hogweed, Hybrid Hedge-bindweed and Nettle[34]. The meadow management prevents invasion of the meadow by woody species, such as Bramble and Ivy[35]. The detail of the development of the glade will be the subject of a separate report, here we look to its future.

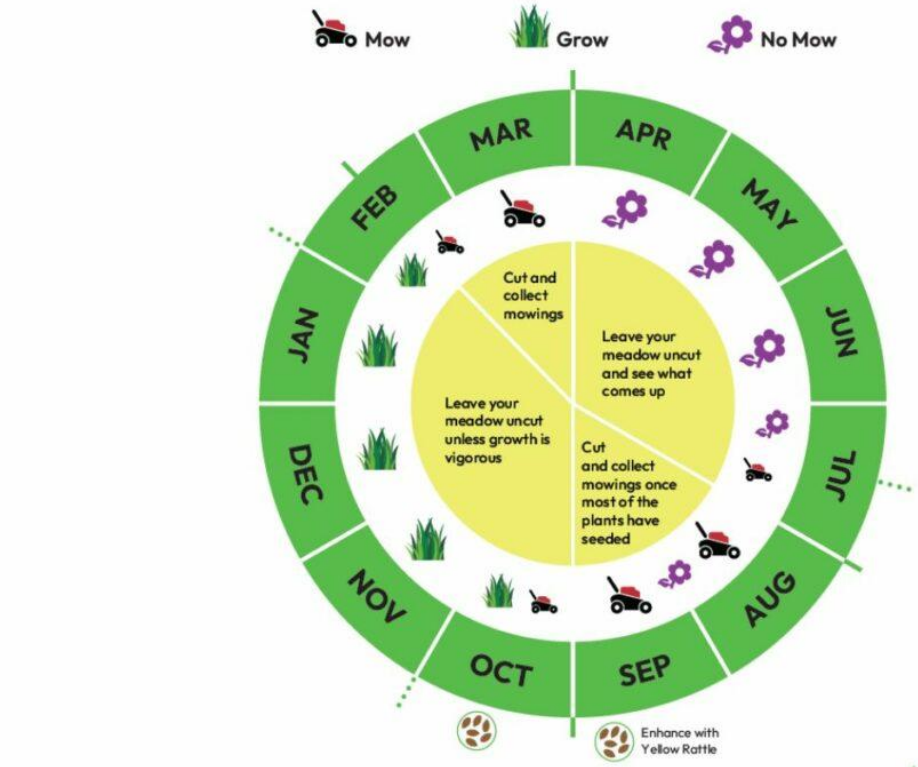
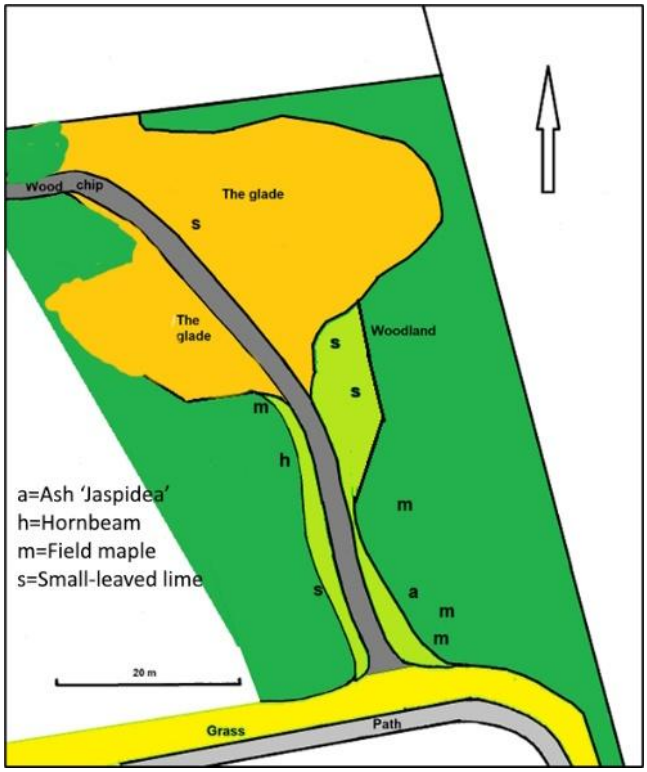


Figure 4. Small-scale meadow management (Plantlife 2021).



The glade has been subject to meadow management (Figure 4) over the last 10 years, which has successfully seen off species like Bramble and Ivy that otherwise would invade. A woodland meadow has been created. The recommended management and maintenance of this is summarised in Figure 4 and this should be the way forward. With the increasing incidence of summer droughts there is a risk of fire damage (see below). The establishment of the Glade requires a change to the previous policy from the 2015 consultation, to encourage Oak regeneration there. That policy should be dropped.

There have been three problems here over those 10 years.

1. Failure of LB Merton Greenspaces Team to add the glade to the maintenance contract, so leading to inefficiencies from sole reliance on voluntary management.
2. Failure of the Greenspaces Team to consult the local community and heed the management plan. This has led to excessive widening of the access pathway, the deposit of tree trunks, and planting in conflict with the existing policies[36].
3. During and after COVID lockdown, the glade has been used much more for informal recreation, predominantly dog walking and forest school activity. This has trampled the soil in a few places around the edges of the glade, damaging the vegetation. There is also an unfortunate conflict between the irresponsible deposit of dog faeces and the enjoyment of the glade by other users.

The Glade is just big enough to allow a good range of meadow species to thrive, but suffers shade from a Small-leaved Lime tree beside the path and several trees on its southern boundary. Should increasing shade threaten the survival of the meadow, work will be needed to cut back the canopy of those trees.

There are many species that may thrive in the glade, so providing much potential for enhancement. The Appendix gives a list of species suitable for such enhancement.

Boundaries

Despite its age, the wood hasn't ancient boundary features, such as banks and ditches. Sixteen of the older English Oak trees are on the southern boundary of the wood, mostly planted over 100-years ago, but none date back the 200-years when the Lords Spencer rented out the land. These need to be conserved regardless of their precise historic value[37].

The edge between woodland and grassland on this southern boundary of the wood has potential as a rich "ecotone"[38].

Figure 5. A graduated woodland edge (Blakesley & Buckley 2010**).**

Where there is room, it is recommended that this southern edge is managed as a graduated edge. Ferris & Carter (2000) have much detailed advice on managing woodland edges. Blakesley & Buckley (2010) recommend three zones:

1. An outer edge of turf mown at least twice a year.
2. Tall herbs and grasses in the middle band, cut back in rotation over a 4-year cycle.
3. An inner zone of scrub, allowed to develop into dense thickets in places, cut right back in rotation every 8-10 years, and grading into the high wood.

There will be few places where there is room for all this, but a graduation inspired by Figure 5 would be better than none. It is also necessary to respond to the rapid invasion of adjacent grassland, such as can occur where Brambles arch out and root at their tips. This can require action every year. All arisings from the management would be removed.

Other species that may invade the adjacent grassland on the southern boundary of the wood include Blackthorn and Elm. These may be controlled by mowing.

Where there is room, new plantings should also have graduated edges developed where they border grassland. The Lofthouse Glade, however, is already smaller than desirable, so its edges should not be graduated.

There was once an entrance to the wood and public park from the southern end of Gartmoor Gardens, but this has been locked shut, at least as far back as 1983 and become clad in climbing Ivy. In common with other entrances to the park, a few people have climbed into the park there at night, beside the northern edge of the Lofthouse

Glade. Larger numbers entered on the night of November fireworks events in the park. People climbed onto the roof of an adjacent garage at the rear end of 66 Southdean Gardens to jump down into the wood, so gaining free access to the fireworks display. This presented LB Merton with a security problem, as the existing defences on the park boundary here were shown to be inadequate. The old entrance is clearly redundant, so there is a need to upgrade the integrity of the boundary defences in conjunction with the neighbouring properties. This should be done.

Soil compaction

Generally, woodlands are believed to relieve soil compaction, so enhancing the soil as a habitat (Hodge, 1991). However, significant traffic in the root zone of woodland trees can compact the soil, so harming the habitat and compromising tree roots (UK Government 2022; The Royal Parks 2023). The risk of compaction is a reason for avoiding the use of heavy machinery for management operations, and the routing of paths away from sensitive trees is advised. Unfortunately, there are several large oaks right beside the main path. We choose to favour public access at a possible cost of some compaction and so it is particularly important that the path is kept well mulched and the adjacent trees monitored for harm.

Clearing Bramble to encourage woodland variety and continuity.

Bramble is of great value for wildlife, providing nectar, fruit and shelter. It is the food plant of 61 moths such as buff arches, peach blossom and fox moth and three butterflies; but its overriding importance is as a source of nectar provided by the flowers for butterflies, moths, hoverflies, bees, wasps, lacewings and flies (Blakesley & Buckley 2010). However, the vigorous growth of Bramble where light reaches the woodland floor competes with other species that might enhance the wood in other ways, so there is a potential to enhance dense stands of Bramble by planting other species. Unfortunately, to suppress the Bramble requires much work every year, both cutting it back and digging up seedlings (Blakesley & Buckley 2010), so any programme to benefit other species in this way needs to have secured this effort. Should this be done, one could plant appropriate woodland species in such areas, including wet woodlands species, given the evidence of a wetland history and the shortage of wet woodland in London[39]. The appendix gives a recommended list of species. Bramble is also a problem in the graduated edge of the wood, where it can displace the grass and herb zones by the arching stems rooting at their tips. The solution there is more hard graft, cutting back.

Path network

Figure 3 of the existing management plan illustrated the path network in 2015 and this will be updated in the forthcoming report on the present state of the wood. Suffice it to say that few of the paths have changed since then. The main path dates back to the 1990s. It runs from the north-east corner of the car park through centre of the wood to the northern edge of the Lofthouse Glade, where it turns south to join the perimeter path of the public park. All the other paths are more recent in origin, reflecting "desire lines" which come and go.

The main path, and a few others, have been kept clear of fallen trees and branches and surfaced with wood chip, supposedly to 1.3 metre width[40]. The main path has no steep parts, is free of overhanging branches, and of rough ground, but inevitably can be damp after rain. The aim is for this path alone to be wheelchair accessible. It would be continued west when the car park is planted back to woodland. The 2015 consultation agreed to "maintain main path as is, and few other paths". This has worked and should be carried forward.

Traditional woodland products

The Woodland Trust (Herbert et al. 2022) encourages a re-establishment of traditional woodland harvesting of small wood from coppice management, for such products as firewood, handcrafts and construction, and use of fodder, berries and flowers. However, we have a very small wood, far too small for an agroforestry enterprise, and with a large suburban population living nearby, and so a potentially intense demand for such produce. Also, Horse Close Wood is valued for its habitat provided by veteran trees and dead wood on the ground. Harvesting could greatly reduce this habitat value. The use of firewood from any source also leads to significant air pollution, exacerbating London's already excessive pollution problem[41]. We don't recommend a traditional harvest.

Fire risk

Rackham (1986, page 72) famously pronounced that "British woodlands (except pine) burn like wet asbestos", and this remains true today. In our area, summer temperatures are projected to increase by some 4-7° C this century and rainfall to decrease by some 25-50% (Arnell et al. 2021), leading to drier vegetation. Currently, in England, there are serious fires in heathlands, moorlands, pine forest and agriculture but not in broadleaved woodland (Belcher et al. 2021, Tasker & Wentworth 2024). Some people worry about an increased risk to broadleaved woodland, but we do not expect the current very low risk of a significant wildfire to change appreciably.

Exceptions for Horse Close Wood are the meadow in the Lofthouse Glade and the long grass beside the southern edge of the wood. Here, it may be sensible to cut and remove

long grass as soon as it dries off in a hot summer, so refining the schedule of Figure 4. Another exception is the risk imposed by the thoughtless disposal of barbeque coals, which have led to local charring of the bases of trees. The plantings on the southern edge of the wood by the Friends of Wimbledon Park, with others, have been partly to protect the bases of old English Oaks from senseless disposal of barbeque coals.

Barbeques and other fires are banned in the public park, and hence in the wood, as is clear in the byelaws displayed in the park.

Safety

The National Tree Safety Group (2024) advises that risk to life and limb from trees is extremely low, so that there is generally no need for precaution, especially if that should compromise value such as biodiversity. However, our wood is well-used by people, and the Woodland Trust (Herbert et al. 2022) advises risk assessments in such places, recording the regular inspection of main routes and any work undertaken, as well as any accidents or incidents. This should be undertaken by LB Merton as the owners of the wood acting as a reasonable and prudent landowner to manage risks as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP)[42].

In our case there was a particular concern over risks to neighbouring properties (see the history of the wood), leading to the coppicing of many trees in the western and northern parts of the wood. These areas will need to be re-coppiced should the trees re-grow, perhaps in some 30-years' time.

There is also a concern over exposing the public to Oak Processionary Moth and to falling wood from Ash trees suffering Dieback, see under Oak and Ash below. The 2015 consultation agreed to inspect trees regularly and remedy only genuine hazards, and this is a policy to carry forward. A further reason to minimize the need for safety works is that access for heavy equipment can result in much damage to the vegetation of the wood. For this reason, the 2015 consultation choice, to avoid using heavy machinery, should be carried forward.

The bright-red berries of Lords-and-Ladies, which are common on the floor of the wood in the summer, are poisonous.

Pesticides

The existing policy is to use pesticides solely where necessary to control injurious or invasive species[43], as is consistent with the criteria for a Green Flag Award: pesticide use should be minimised and justified[44]. Safe use of pesticides requires proper storage and containment and operatives with appropriate training, as outlined in Government's

National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides. The policy is to use solely where there is no alternative to control injurious or invasive species.

Dogs[45]

Many users of the wood are dog walkers. These walkers benefit from the values of the wood but, unfortunately, dogs, especially off the leash, can harm bird species that nest low down. They can cause dislike or alarm to other users, especially small children, and faeces not picked up are unpleasant to come across and increase soil fertility (De Frenne *et al*. 2022), so harming wildflowers. For these reasons, the existing management plan followed consultation responses in proposing notices requesting dog owners to keep their animals on a leash and to pick up dog faeces[46]. Unfortunately, most dog owners are reported to ignore such notices, however, the reasons for the policy have not changed and it is recommended that the policy be taken forward.

Planning for climate change

The national policies to increase woodland cover are partly to sequester carbon and hence avoid climate change. Here we address the other side of the coin: adaptation to existing and expected future climate (sometimes termed amelioration). Warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers are projected by the end of the 21st century[47]. Short-lived heavy summer rainfall will become more common. Climate change may already contribute to the national decline in woodland bird species[48]. People already benefit from the cool shade of the wood[49].

There has been concern that climate change may change the range of plant species that can thrive locally, although dissenting voices consider that our native species thrive over a wide range of climates[50]. The Woodland Trust (Herbert et al. 2022) advises spreading the risk by using a good range of species and planting densities, and by using natural colonisation where possible[51]. The Forestry Commission has a contrary view, considering that only about half of the native species will remain suitable for projected climate in 50 years' time[52]: these include Ash, Aspen, English Oak, Silver birch and Wild cherry, although they list also two near-native species: Norway maple and Sweet chestnut. Without unanimity, the Woodland Trust advice should suffice and the appended lists of species suitable for planting have not been adjusted for projected climate change.

Monitoring

The intent of management is to optimise the future state of the wood, and this should be monitored, so that we can be sure operations have been successful and can make

adjustments if not. Unfortunately, there is no standard survey method that can be applied efficiently to the wood, especially one as small as ours[53]. This will be covered in the third report in this series on the present state of Horse Close Wood.

Pests and diseases

The Woodland Trust would source all trees using the UK and Ireland Sourced-and-Grown-Assurance (UKISG-A) scheme to minimise the risk of importing new pests and diseases. Existing problems are listed in the following section.

Managing individual species

There are various factors that may influence the future role of individual species in the wood. Neighbours and users of the wood can find fault and seek remedy. There may also be preferences for features based upon an idealised view of a productive woodland or one that has attractive species. Many of the species that are known from Ash-Oak-Elm Woodland (Appendix I) are rare or missing in Horse Close Wood, perhaps because it has been isolated from other woodlands for 100 years or more. Some species suffer from pests or diseases, which can influence their future role. There is a short list of native plants that may dominate at the expense of the richness of others (native "thugs" Mars et al. 2013). We may need to deal with those. The ecology of species may limit, or enhance, the role that they can play[54]. Here, we review some of the main existing concerns with individual species as we go forward. Other issues will arise, where the principle should be to take full account of existing knowledge of ecology, hazard and opportunity, so as to avoid misguided action. A selection of woodland species has factsheets available from the online Woodland Wildlife Toolkit[55].

Bats. Bats come to feed in and around the wood on insects found there[56]. Trees and woodland are important to all 18 UK bat species[57]. Many of our bats make use of natural features in trees for roosting. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly destroy a breeding or resting place (roost) of a bat[58]. Any tree has potential for a bat roost – especially if it has cavities in the trunk or branches, woodpecker holes, loose bark, cracks, splits and thick ivy. These same features are markers of "veteran trees" (Blakesley & Buckley 2010), specially protected in planning, but also regarded by some as signs of poor tree health or of risk to users of the wood. Details of the bats of the heritage landscape were documented in surveys by the Friends of Wimbledon Park (Fure 2017) and confirmed in the Environmental Statement by AELTC for their proposed intensive lawn tennis development (LUC 2021).

The Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*) was found in the wood in 2008. This is a National Priority Species and a specialist woodland feeder. It prefers deciduous

woodland with well-developed shrub layers, veteran trees, dead wood, closed canopy and wet woodland, where it roosts, breeds and hibernates. Its calls are quiet, so it is difficult to detect.

The seven others recorded recently nearby are Common, Soprano (also a Priority) and Nathusius' Pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus, P. pygmaeus* & *P. nathusii*), Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*), Leisler's (*Nyctalus leisleri*) and Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), all may roost in trees. This list shows the heritage landscape to be regionally important for bats, requiring close attention to positive measures for their conservation in the wood. The Noctule is listed as a woodland specialist for breeding, roosting and hibernating in tree cavities.

The older trees and those clad in ivy are most important to bats, but are also those that are most likely to present a risk, or perceived risk, requiring safety works. Inspecting trees to the accepted standard (British Standards Institution 2015) before any works can avoid harming bat habitats but some can be missed, because some features are very difficult to discover and valuable habitat may not be occupied on the date of inspection. So, we need a policy that balances the risk to users with the harm to bats. Public use is predominantly along the perimeter path of the public park, which runs beside the southern edge of the wood and secondly along the main pathways within the wood. Here it would be appropriate to control climbing ivy to enable easier visual inspection of the trees, so as to allow safety work where inspection shows it is needed. Further than 7 metres away from these main paths the priority should rather be to retain climbing ivy and for safety work to trees to be exceptional.

All-too-commonly, those proposing developments that destroy valuable habitat propose redress by erecting a few bat boxes, as if this is all that is needed. It is obviously preferable that the management of an old woodland, like ours, conserves all the veteran tree features that bats use naturally, so there is no need for artificial provision[59]. This policy is contrary to the 2015 consultation response. The exception to this may be for any new, larger areas of tree planting, where a few boxes might be a stop gap.

Birds[60]. The wood supports many Birds of Conservation Concern (Stanbury *et al*. 2021), which are distinguished in italics below. Some of the wood's species are common also in the surrounding suburbia, such as Blackbird, *Wood pigeon*, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Robin, *Dunnock*, Goldfinch, *Greenfinch*, Great and Blue Tits, but others prefer well-wooded places for breeding (Great-spotted Woodpecker, *Stock dove*, Jay, Coal Tit, Goldcrest, Green Woodpecker, *Song Thrush*, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, *Tawny Owl*, *Starling, Mistle Thrush, Wren*, Chaffinch and *Greenfinch*) or wintering (*Redwing* and Siskin). A few species have declined so much nationally that they no longer occur (*Kestrel*, *Bullfinch*, *Lesser-spotted Woodpecker*, *Redpoll*, *House Martin* and *Spotted Flycatcher*) and others (Jackdaw, *House Sparrow*, Long-tailed Tit, *Swift*, Brambling, Collared Dove, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Nuthatch, Tree Creeper and *Sparrowhawk*) pass through. The

diversity of birds depends upon the amount and diversity of food and shelter that the woodland provides, so conserving these habitats helps to keep the birds.

The Ring-necked Parakeet arrived in 2004 and soon increased to become one of the commonest breeding species. Although the parakeet breeds in tree holes and may take the same food as do other birds, there is no evidence of an adverse effect on any other species. Although it can be controlled under licence when it harms birds of conservation concern significantly, this reason does not apply here[61].

The risk of inadvertent harm to species that breed in low vegetation or on the ground (Wren, Blackbird, Robin, Blackcap, Dunnock and Chiffchaff) is a reason for keeping dogs on the lead when in the wood at least between February and August[62] and is also a reason for retaining substantial areas of dense bramble. As with bats, the provision of nest boxes is unnecessary in a wood which is rich in the veteran tree features used naturally by birds for nesting and roosting, but could be a useful stop-gap measure for any newly planted areas. As with bats above, this is contrary to the 2015 consultation response.

Unlike bats, it is only active bird nests that receive legal protection.

Deer. Horse Close Wood appears to be free of deer, making it most unusual in the spectrum of English woodland. The most likely species to colonise is the Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*), which is so cryptic it may already have visited the wood unnoticed. This species is included in the list of invasive non-native (alien) animals in England[63]. In the absence of deer browse, palatable plants, including Bramble and Ivy are expected to thrive in the wood. If the Muntjac should establish in the wood, no lethal control is recommended because of the heavy public use of the wood and its surrounds. It is unlikely to thrive locally, even if it should arrive, as the wood is so disturbed.

Grey Squirrel[64]

Grey Squirrels were introduced to the UK in 1876 and are now widely established and popular with the public. Although they can harm productive forestry, our wood is not productive and instead any dead wood from squirrel damage is valued as habitat for other wildlife. They predate bird nests, but there is no evidence that this is a significant effect. The harm they cause to Red Squirrels is significant, but this occurs in places so far distant that our squirrels have no such effect[65]. Control of Grey Squirrel populations with current methods is onerous and would be inappropriate in a well-used wood.

Ivy. The ground cover of the more heavily-shaded parts of the wood is provided by Ivy, as is typical of this woodland type. It is here that one finds also the greatest concentration of native Bluebells, Cuckoo-pint, Lesser celandine and Dog's mercury. So, Ivy is compatible with other ground layer plants and not here acting as a native "thug". However, this ground cover provides limited habitat for animals. It is where the ivy

climbs trees that it provides valuable cover for bats and birds and seasonally important sources of nectar and fruit, supporting birds and invertebrates[66]. It is not a parasite, depending upon the tree for support only, but it can impede visual safety inspection. So, there is a priority to conserve climbing ivy where safety considerations allow (see "bats" above)[67]. Ivy invades the Lofthouse Glade from its edges and this invasion should be prevented. The 2015 consultation agreed to "retain climbing Ivy, except where a threat to trees or for safety inspections and, in a few places, for amenity": a policy to carry forward.

Bramble. Bramble occurs throughout the wood but, unlike Ivy, it does not thrive in shady parts. Brambles belong to an extremely complex group with some 334 microspecies. One of these, the Giant Blackberry, is an introduced, invasive weed, problematic to control[68], but it has not been confirmed in the wood.

The success of Bramble, at the expense of other species is illustrated by the analysis of its response to coppicing in the wood. Here it appears to be a native "thug", so Bramble control might benefit other plant species, and also neighbours who dislike it making its way into their back gardens. However, Bramble readily grows back, so controlling it requires regular, labour-intensive grubbing up of the roots. Bramble invades the Lofthouse Glade from its edges and this invasion should be prevented as part of the meadow management.

Bramble, however, is valuable habitat for animals. It can provide dense cover, inaccessible even to dogs off the leash, so protecting bird species that breed in low vegetation or on the ground (Wren, Blackbird, Robin, Blackcap and Chiffchaff). Both the flowers and fruit provide food for wildlife and people often gather blackberries to eat. So, any grubbing up bramble should be limited, leaving other areas scattered through the wood as dense cover for animal habitat.

Bramble encroachment beyond the northern and western edges of the wood has concerned some neighbours but the remedy is in the hands of those neighbours and no action is needed within the wood[69].

The 2015 consultation agreed to "cut back bramble to maintain agreed access, open space and wildflowers only", a policy to be carried forward.

Nettle. Nettles prefer damp, fertile soil and are found where the ground has been disturbed, as in the east where the National Grid works repeatedly disturbed the soil. Although sometimes regarded as a native "thug", nettles dominate only a few small areas of the wood and appear to be no threat here. Whilst Nettles are the food plant of Vanessid butterflies (Peacock, Comma and Small tortoiseshell), breeding hasn't been confirmed in the wood. Nettles are among the tall herbaceous species that are controlled by meadow management in the Lofthouse Glade.

English Oak. English Oak is the second most abundant canopy tree in the wood, with over 50 individuals, all bar one of which had a girth of over 80cm (estimated age over 50 years), with the biggest trees over 300cm (estimated age over 300 years). It casts a dense shade and so tends to have Ivy below. It was notable that there were no seedling Oaks even in the area where Ash was cut back, confirming that this is a pioneer species, able to establish readily only in conditions of full light, usually outside established woodland[70].

English Oak should be part of the mix in any plantings to enlarge the wood, but the risk of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) means that this should not be in places right by busy paths.

In recent years OPM has invaded London and it is a new hazard to Oak health and to the public and dogs. Guidance is available from The Tree Council (2025). The moth is established in this part of London and responsibility for its control is with the landowner (LB Merton). There is little evidence that OPM has a serious impact on human health, and the Woodland Condition Assessment[71] classes it as a "low risk" pest, however, public perception of risk to children and pets, bad publicity or the avoidance of the wood may influence local policy. Proactive spraying was undertaken in Horse Close Wood in 2025. Unfortunately, spraying to control of OPM will greatly harm the spring peak of other caterpillar species that are the main food of nestlings of several bird species[72]. Proactive spraying is therefore not advised, rather, caterpillar nests should be removed from known infected oaks and their immediate surrounds. Apart from the precautions recommended to the public, the likelihood of OPM is another reason for keeping dogs on the lead in the wood.

Ash. Ash is the commonest tree in the wood, although all the oldest trees are English Oaks, and these probably provide the majority of the canopy. Many Ash trees near to the western and northern boundaries were coppiced in December 2019 to eliminate the risk of damage to adjacent properties (see coppicing above), so reducing the canopy area there. At the time, the plan was to coppice these again in some 20-years or so to maintain the low stature. The policy should be to re-coppice when regrowth needs controlling.

However, 2019 corresponded with the time that the new disease, Ash dieback, was confirmed to be spreading out-of-control in London. Current advice[73] is that up to 80% of Ash trees will succumb to the disease, that only a tiny proportion of trees is tolerant, and there is no cure. The future of Ash in the long run remains uncertain. Metheringham et al. (2025) show that there is rapid selection for Ash strains that are resistant to the disease and that rapid evolution may be expected, but there will be at least a decades-long setback to the amount of Ash in our area and a consequential harm to species that depend upon Ash for food and shelter. Some of the dead trees will be a hazard to the public and will have to be felled for safety reasons, but a large number of saplings and

those larger trees not near to well-used paths should be left to contribute valuable dead wood habitat. It is vital that surviving Ash be retained so that the evolution may progress. Ash leaf litter decomposes rapidly, leading to fast nutrient cycling and the Ash canopy lets much light through, so the role of Ash is difficult to replace.

Elm. The wood had several large Elm trees before the new virulent species of Dutch Elm Disease devastated the trees in the 1970s, setting up a 20-year cycle of death and regeneration by suckers from the surviving root plates[74]. The initial deaths were synchronous, but each later die-off has been less synchronous. This cycle means that there is much dead and dying wood, providing excellent habitat for a range of animals, such as Woodpeckers and Stag beetles. So, whilst no longer providing the tallest trees in the wood, Elms continue to play a valuable role as wildlife habitat.

Attempts to breed resistance into English Elms have yet to confirm any that can replace the statuesque originals lost in the 1970s[75]. It would be inappropriate to plant these new hybrids locally until we have that confirmation and, meanwhile, the existing suckers provide valuable habitat.

Elms are the food plant of a national priority species of butterfly, the White-letter hairsteak[76], which has been spotted in the wood and on the golf course in recent years[77]. As the habitat on the golf course is planned to be destroyed by the AELTC development, it is particularly important to retain Elm in Horse Close Wood.

The 2015 consultation agreed to leave Elm to the natural cycle of death and regeneration, and this should be carried forward.

Other native trees: Hornbeam, Wild Cherry.

Although they can occur in NVC type W8, the few Hornbeams in the wood appear to be young and planted in origin. It is an appropriate species to plant. There were just three Wild Cherries in the wood before the planted areas of the last 10 years, which are now dominated by fast growing cherries.

Non-native colonists: Sycamore[78], Norway Maple, Buddleja and Himalayan Honeysuckle.

Supposed to be a Medieval introduction, Sycamore is an honorary native in that it grows in similar situations in countries as near as Belgium and might have made its way to here unaided, if not deliberately introduced. It has colonised many woodlands to the detriment of native species. However, its ecology is similar to Ash and so it could well take over its role, at least until Ash is able to recover from dieback. Whilst not supporting the variety of other species as Oak or Ash, the biomass of Sycamore aphid feeds many birds in Spring. As there are many young Sycamores in the wood there is no need to plant it.

Another honorary native is Norway Maple, which occurs naturally in continental Europe, but is widely naturalised in the European western seaboard and here in the UK. It has colonised the wood in small numbers, the seed coming from nearby planted trees. Like sycamore, its ecology is similar to Ash and it could be a stopgap species.

Buddleja and Himalayan Honeysuckle have invaded disturbed areas in the wood and grown quickly to dominate until overtopped by more slow growing trees. They are not invasive under a woodland canopy.

Planted non-native poplars: Railway Poplar, Balm of Gilead, Hybrid Black-poplar.

There are a few of these, predominantly planted, near to the eastern and western edges of the wood.

Bay laurel[79], Evergreen[80] and Turkey[81] Oaks, and Horse Chestnut:

These four non-natives have been cultivated in England since the 18th century, or before, but have not begun to spread significantly until the last few decades. The Turkey Oak prefers acid soils and so is absent from most of the wood[82]. The Evergreen Oak has been colonising hedgerows and woodland nearby for 30 years or so, and a few individuals have been found throughout the wood, but particularly in recently-planted areas. Conversely, the other Mediterranean plant, the Bay Laurel Tree, was first found in the middle of the wood only 20 years ago and there are now dozens of young Bays throughout. It doubtless arrived as bird dispersed seeds. I speculate that a warmer climate may have promoted seed set, or the survival of seedling colonists. Clearly, the Bay will continue to spread, and our wood will be a place to study the effect of this rapid colonisation on woodland ecology. It may come to be seen as an undesirable invader, but time will tell. The 2015 consultation agreed to leave the Bay to natural processes: a policy to carry forward. The Evergreen Oak is less likely to become widespread, as it has been establishing away from cultivation for very much longer and not increased greatly. Given their origin in the Mediterranean, there could be concern over flammability of these two, but there is no evidence that either is particularly flammable (Dimitrakopoulos 2001). The Horse Chestnut has long been widely planted, but two diseases now make it unsuitable as a specimen tree[83]. There is a scattering of young trees in the wood, most, or all, of which originated as chestnuts buried by squirrels or birds. It hasn't any much contribution to the ecology of the wood, positive or negative.

Woodland edge species: Cow Parsley, Hybrid Bindweed, Hogweed, Sweet Violet and Dog Rose. Cow Parsley and Hogweed are abundant mainly near the edges of the wood where light penetrates. They are not normally widespread in NVC type W8, being more typical of shrub communities. Hybrid Bindweed occurs solely at disturbed edges and is not generally considered a woodland plant. There were few Dog Roses before they were added to the mix for new plantings over the last 10 years. The few patches of Sweet Violet on the southern edge could well be garden discards.

Lords and Ladies. This aroid, as a natural component of NVC type W8, is widespread in the wood. The bright-red berries are poisonous.

Dog's Mercury. This ancient woodland species (Jefferson 2008) spreads mainly through its perennial rhizomes, so being potentially immortal. Although it can dominate other native plants, it can tolerate shade and low nutrients and is most abundant in our vegetation type (NVC type W8). In Horse Close Wood it is rare, possibly because of acid rain in the past, its sensitivity to trampling or a high water-table. It prefers a clay-rich, well-drained soil, which is neutral or basic. It has been found to suffer from the increased light conditions of coppiced woodland. I have counted only some 100 flowering stems in the small area where it is found. Unlike many woodland ground layer plants these may remain vigorous through summer, autumn and winter, until replaced by a new generation of shoots produced between January and March. It was found also in the rear garden of 367 Wimbledon Park Road before this was landscaped some 20 years ago. It is best reproduced by taking a few plants from the existing patch and multiplying them up in cultivation before introduction in suitable places.

Pendulous Sedge. An ancient woodland indicator, this sedge was uncommon in the wood, but has seeded into disturbed and newly-planted areas, so becoming more widespread.

Invasive non-native plants (INP): Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Cotoneaster, Virginia Creeper, Cherry Laurel.

A small clump of Japanese Knotweed was controlled in 2010 and has not returned[84]. A single plant of Himalayan Cotoneaster colonised the planted area south of the car park and will be removed. A Virginia Creeper clothes a Hawthorn near the northern boundary. The wood currently has no INP, but the cotoneaster and creeper are listed in Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The latter species are not to be moved or released in the wild. A single plant of Cherry Laurel at grid reference TQ24717287 was cut out in 2025. Whilst regarded as invasive in woodland, the laurel is not listed.

Beech. Beech doesn't occur in the wood and is the species most often cited as susceptible to future droughts, so is not recommended for planting.

Field Maple. Although this species is characteristic of NVC type W8, the few individuals present in the wood are all young and could have been planted. It is a species recommended for further planting (see Appendix), especially in the damper parts of the wood.

Limes. The few lime trees in the wood may well all have been planted. Most are the hybrid Common Lime, but there are also some Small-leaved Limes.

Native shrubs: Hazel, Hawthorn, Holly, Blackthorn, Elder, Yew, Wayfaring Tree, Guelder Rose.

These species form a sub-canopy layer of NVC woodland type W8. The few Blackthorns may well have been planted, as perhaps were the two old Hazels present in the 1980s, one midway along the northern edge and the other in the near part of the garden of 367 Wimbledon Park Road. Several more have been planted since, most recently as part of the species mix for the areas planted in the last 10 years. Hawthorn, Yew and Elder occur across much of the wood. There was a single hybrid between Common Hawthorn and Midland Hawthorn in the area where Ash was coppiced in 2019, which was coppiced, but has been lost in the flourishing of Bramble since. Hollies are scattered throughout the wood, predominantly young bushes.

Primrose. Characteristic of W8 and recommended for planting.

Wood Anemone. Recommended for planting. A difficult species to introduce, as it reproduces largely by slow-growing rhizomes and many of those in the trade are horticultural varieties. It is illegal to take it from the wild. A specialist supplier is necessary. It should do well in the same places as Bluebell.

Bluebell. The native Bluebell is widespread in the wood, more so than garden bluebells and the white colour form, which also occur. There are only a few places where there is a "carpet" of flowers, mainly in stands of Elm suckers on the drier, higher ground, where the synchronous death of the suckers allows light through at times. Bluebells suffered from trampling during the COVID lockdowns when use of the wood increased greatly. The long-term prospect is dim, because the hybrid and horticultural varieties are very difficult to control and further hybridisation will dilute the native genes. Trampling continues, with "desire-line" paths created every so often in new places, and the continuing popularity of walking in the wood. The best concentration, not far west of the Lofthouse Glade, could be protected with judicious "dead hedges" dividing the desire-line paths from the Bluebells.

Other native ground flora: Enchanter's Nightshade, Lesser Celandine, Cleavers, Herb Robert, Wood Avens, Wood Dock and Stinking Iris.

Enchanter's Nightshade is typical of NVC type W8. It is found scattered through the wood. Lesser Celandine is found in the wetter areas of the wood. Cleavers, Herb Robert, Wood Dock and Wood avens are found across a wide range of NVC woodland types and are common here, especially around the edges of the wood. They flourish in newly-planted areas, as does Stinking Iris which tolerates dry shade.

Non-native ground flora: Cyclamen (Sowbread), Large-flowered Daffodil, Snowdrop, Garden Grape-hyacinth and Spanish Dagger (Yucca).

A few garden cast-out plants are scattered in the wood and of no great consequence.

Appendix. Lists of plant species that might be introduced to the wood.

These lists are largely of species that are widespread and so likely to be robust in their ecological requirements. This may not be so for uncommon species. No species should be introduced at the expense of the donor site, so requiring traceability or certification (Herbert *et al.* 2022, section 2.6.1). Natural colonisation, or utilisation of material from close by, is preferable to commercial sourcing as many commercial mixes are inappropriate.

Species
Ash, Fraxinus excelsior
Hazel, Corylus avellana
Sallow, Salix cinerea
English Oak, Quercus robur
Field maple, Acer campestre
Downy birch, Betula pubescens
Sycamore, Acer pseudoplatanus
Alder, Alnus glutinosa
Silver birch, Betula pendula
Holly, Ilex aquifolium
Wych elm, Ulmus glabra
Hornbeam, Carpinus betulus
Sweet chestnut, Castanea sativa
Alder buckthorn, Frangula alnus
Crab apple, Malus sylverstis
Aspen, Populus tremula
Wild cherry, Prunus avium
Goat willow, Salix caprea
Purple willow, Salix purpurea
Osier, Salix viminalis
Elder, Sambucus nigra
Wild pear, Pyrus communis
Rowan, Sorbus acuparia
Wild Service Tree, Sorbus torminalis
Yew, Taxus baccata
Small-leaved lime, Tilia cordata
Elm, Ulmus procera
Wych Elm, Ulmus glabra
Dogwood, Cornus sanguinea
Midland hawthorn, Crataegus laevigata
Spindle, Euonymus europaeus
Blackthorn, Prunus spinosa
Buckthorn, Rhamnus catharticus
Wayfaring tree, Viburnum lantana
Guelder rose, Viburnum opulus
Bramble, Rubus fruitcusus
Ivy, Hedera helix
Dog's mercury, Mercurialis perennis
Bluebell, Hyacinthoides non-scripta
Marsh bedstraw, Galium palustre
Water mint, Mentha aquatica
Wood anemone, Anemone nemorosa
Tufted hairgrass, Deschampsia cespitosa
Ground ivy, Glechoma hederacea
Wood false-brome, Brachypodium sylvaticum
Meadowsweet, Filipendula ulmaria
Soft rush, Juncus effusus
Yellow pimpernel, Lysimachia nemorum
Barren strawberry, Potentilla sterilis
Yellow archangel, Lamiastrum galeobdolon
Primrose, Primula vulgaris
Lesser celandine, Ficaria verna
Wood dock, Rumex sanguineus
Dog-violet, Viola riviniana
Early dog-violet,Viola reichenbachiana
Bugle, Ajuga reptans
Rough meadow-grass, Poa trivialis
Thin-spiked wood-sedge, Carex strigosa
Pendulous sedge, Carex pendula
Remote sedge, Carex remota
Lesser pond-sedge, Carex acutiformis
Compact rush, Juncus conglomeratus
Male fern, Dryopteris filix-mas
Broad bucker-fern, Dryopteris dilatata
Lady fern, Athyrium filix-femina
Enchanter's-nightshade,Circaea lutetiana
False-brome, Brachypodium sylvaticum
Wood avens, Geum urbanum

Appendix Table 1. Species of tree, shrub (shaded yellow) **and ground layer** (shaded green) **recommended for planting under the woodland canopy where light permits[85].** Seven species highlighted in purple are not recommended for planting, as they are already recruiting in good numbers naturally, are susceptible to disease, or both.

English oak requires good light levels to establish, so there are no seedling, sapling or young oaks away from the woodland edge. Other species that might be desirable, and benefit from less competition from Bramble, include trees that grow naturally in woodlands in southern England on fertile, damp, alkaline soils, such as we have here. The National Vegetation Classification should be consulted for a longer list of species.

Cock's-foot	*Dactylus glomerata*	Hairy sedge	*Carex hirta*
Common bent	*Agrostis capillaris*	Knapweed	*Centaurea nigra agg.*
Crested dog's-tail	*Cynosurus cristatus*	Lady's bedstraw	*Galium verum*
Quaking grass	*Briza media*	Marsh foxtail	*Alopecurus geniculatus*
Red fescue	*Festuca rubra*	Meadow buttercup	*Ranunculus acris*
Smooth meadow-grass	*Poa pratensis*	Meadow foxtail	*Alopecurus pratensis*
Sweet vernal grass	*Anthoxanthum odoratum*	Meadow vetchling	*Lathyrus pratensis*
Yellow oat-grass	*Trisetum flavescens*	Mouse-ear	*Cerastium fontanum*
Autumn hawkbit	*Scorzoneroides autumnalis*	Oxeye daisy	*Leucanthemum vulgare*
Bird's-foot trefoil	*Lotus corniculatus*	Ragwort	*Jacobea vulgaris*
Bulbous buttercup	*Ranunculus bulbosus*	Red clover	*Trifolium pratense*
Cat's-ear	*Hypochaeris radicata*	Rough hawkbit	*Leontodon hispidus*
Cowslip	*Primula veris*	Selfheal	*Prunella vulgaris*
Creeping bent	*Agrostis stolonifera*	Sorrel	*Rumex acetosa*
Creeping cinquefoil	*Potentilla reptans*	Tufted hair-grass	*Deschampsia cespitosa*
Daisy	*Bellis perennis*	Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*
Field woodrush	*Luzula campestris*	Yellow-rattle	*Rhinanthus minor*

Appendix Table 2. Species recommended for establishing in the Dave Lofthouse Glade[86].

References

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[1] Horse Close Wood Management Plan 2015, adopted by LB Merton, 2016.

[2] Consultation results on the future of Horse Close Wood, Wimbledon Park. April 2015, D.G. Dawson.

[3] This is outlined in the policies of the London Plan and reflected in the Wandsworth Tree and Woodland Framework. Unfortunately, much of this is focussed on tree planting, rather than the conservation of existing trees, despite the fact that the benefits of trees correlate well with canopy volume, which is greater the older and larger the tree. A single large tree is thus worth much more than a newly planted one.

[4] Figure 2.1 of Gregg *et al.* (2021) illustrates the woodland carbon cycle of Wytham Woods, which should be similar to our wood. Here some 140 t C ha^{-1} is stored in the soil, 100 t C ha^{-1} in trunks and branches, 4 t C ha^{-1} in woody debris and only 2 t C ha^{-1} in the foliage. Comparing with other UK habitats, these figures are second only to the storage in peatland habitats, which have some 2 to 5 times the amount of carbon. Although the carbon sequestration rate of Wytham Wood is 22 tC ha^{-1} yr^{-1}, respiration is around 20 tC ha^{-1} yr^{-1}, giving a net sequestration rate of only about 2 tC ha^{-1} yr^{-1}. The net rate is considerably larger for a young (30-year-old) wood because respiration is much less, and the converse is so for an old wood.

[5] This will be covered in the third report in this series on the composition and type of Horse Close Wood. The same type of woodland occurs elsewhere in the Wimbledon Park Heritage Landscape. Readers should not be misled by the treatment of local woodlands in the extensive material produced by AELTC in their proposals for intensive lawn tennis development, as that is erroneous.

[6] First identified in work for a national "Local Agenda 21" programme following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The description of the Priority Habitat estimates its UK area as 250,000 ha and states that ancient woodlands in this type have declined around 35% in the last 50 years. It identifies National Vegetation Classification type W8 as the commonest component. Using a much stricter definition of the habitat type, the UK Countryside Survey estimated just 1/10th of the Local Agenda 21 estimate: 20, 000 ha (Carey *et al.* 2009).

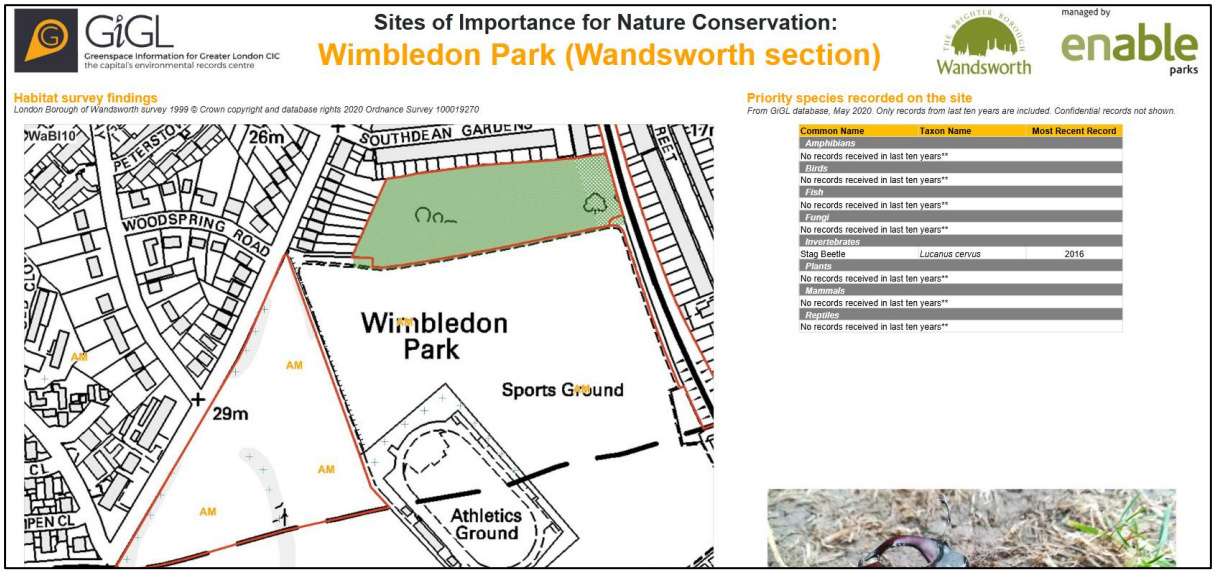
[7] Where they were renamed Habitats of Principal Importance.

[8] Priority Habitats are protected under paragraph 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2023, with veteran trees being afforded particular protection under paragraph 186 c). Woodland is listed as a London Priority Habitat in Appendix 2 of the Mayor's Environment Strategy. Priority Habitats and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation are protected under policy LP55 of the Wandsworth Local Plan. The

Wandsworth Environment Strategy identifies woodlands and scrub, including veteran trees and dead wood, as priorities, and action is required to prioritise the enhancement of their quality and condition.

[9] The original survey was the London-wide habitat survey of London in 1984 (Good 1999). This was employed when selecting sites in the London hierarchy for the 1998 London Ecology Unit Handbook, *Nature Conservation in Merton,* where it was described as one part of a Borough Grade I site: *Wimbledon Park Lake, Woods and Golf Course.* The site was confirmed in the draft LB Wandsworth Local Plan in 2022 and in the public inquiry on the LB Merton Local Plan in 2024 (the correction of the omission of part of Ashen Grove Wood in the latter did not affect Horse Close Wood). The map below is from Wandsworth 2022, which also shows the boundary between Wandsworth and Merton London Boroughs, the Borough Grade II site on the railsides to the east, the rest of the Borough Grade I site on the golf course and lake, and the eastern edge of the Site of Metropolitan Importance on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath to the west.

[10] The LB Wandsworth Habitat Survey was undertaken in 1999 and is referred to as the source of sites protected under the Wandsworth Local Plan. The site is scheduled as an old wood, now described as "Wimbledon Park Wandsworth Section Wa BI 10". The map below is from the 1999 survey, where it is shown bordered in orange, with native broad-leaved woodland and a small area of dense scrub at its eastern end (where disturbed by National Grid cable maintenance work). The map also shows the southern part of the Site of Borough Importance (Grade II) defined on the railsides and hedgerow contiguous with the eastern end of the site, and also bordered in orange.



[11] Many studies have shown people's appreciation of woodland and conclude that there is a case for more to be created, particularly in close proximity to large populations. Horse Close Wood helps to redress what would otherwise be an Area of Deficiency in Access to Nature (Mayor of London 2008) in

areas of Southfields where people live within one-kilometre walking distance. All access can result in some antisocial behaviour, but such problems are readily redressed (Friends of Wimbledon Park 2024).

[12] A statutory target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover to at least 16.5% of England's land area was legislated for in January 2023

[13] Policy G7 of the London Plan seeks to protect, maintain and increase trees and woodlands as London's "Urban Forest", explicitly protecting veteran trees and setting a target to increase London's tree canopy 10% by 2050.

[14] Protection is outlined in paragraph 5.4 and paragraph 5.8 states that "Dead wood can be retained as standing dead wood trees, monoliths (when we remove the dead branches for safety), as fallen trunks and stumps and as log piles." This conservation of natural habitat features is superior to the provision of Stag Beetle loggeries, endorsed in the 2015 public consultation.

[15] Policy LP56.

[16] See paragraph 21.34 of the Wandsworth Local Plan and the map of conservation areas.

[17] Caution is needed interpreting studies such as those of Whytock *et al.* (2018:Figure 2) because those authors studied the colonisation of woodlands created on ex-farmland, where almost all colonists have to come from distant sites. Here, we are enlarging an existing wood which already supports a range of species that are poor colonists in post-agricultural woods. For example, Horse Close Wood already has Stock dove, Great -spotted woodpecker, Starling and Jay, none of which would be expected in a tiny post-agricultural wood. Nuthatch breeds elsewhere nearby in the heritage landscape.

[18] In the February 2025 *History of Horse Close Wood,* it is identified as probably planted, but the information on the date of planting is insufficient to distinguish between it being ancient or old.

[19] The January 2020 Woodland Trust guide, *Ancient Woodland Restoration, Introduction to the Principals of Ancient Woodland Restoration,* outlines five key principles to guide restoration practice:
1. Ancient woods are complex and irreplaceable ecosystems. Where damaged, they require positive restoration management.
2. Without restoration management, damaged ancient woods (e.g. those planted with non-native trees) may become irreversibly degraded over time.
3. Restoration starts from the basic premise that all damaged ancient woodlands are likely to retain some remnants of the rich ecological and archaeological value that previously flourished.
4. Surviving biological remnants are often adapted to the conditions and seasonal shade of native woodland. These remnants respond positively to management of light levels.
5. Restoration management is a long-term process, but there is an urgency to start in many situations where remnant features are in a critical condition, to ensure no further degradation occurs.

[20] Forestry Commission Practice Guide: *Managing ancient and native woodland in England,* 2010.

[21] Lofthouse (1991).

[22] See the detail in The History of Horse Close Wood, Wimbledon Park. The 2015 consultation responses endorsed a proposal to screen the car park with a hedgerow on its south edge and further planting on the southern edge of the wood. This has since been accomplished.

[23] The Friends also planted further hedgerows and a copse beside the Tube Line boundary of the park, with an area of around 1000m^2, making the total area of recent woodland planting in the park around 2500m^2. Also planted were Hornbeams to replace losses in a 100-yer-old Railway poplar avenue along this same edge of the park, ultimately providing a tree canopy larger than that provided by the hedgerows. All these plantings were to a Capability Brown design.

[24] See the detail in The History of Horse Close Wood, Wimbledon Park.

[25] There have been other recent proposals to plant trees in the nearby Great Field: the Friends of Wimbledon Park propose such planting as part of a great new "arena" focussed on athletics sports use, and AELTC seeks opportunities to plant trees as offsite biodiversity net gain to meet government's requirements for planning permission. Neither of these proposals, however, is informed by a detailed consideration of the local woodland typology and ecology, indeed the AELTC proposals for woodlands are poorly informed (see my detailed submissions on the planning application).

[26] Sustainability Kent.

[27] The consultation text was: "The traditional management of the wood until some 150 years ago was probably for Oak standard trees over a coppice of Ash and Hazel, but there is no evidence, nor memory, of that. Restoration of coppice management would entail the phased felling of most of the canopy trees, with the stumps left to re-grow on a 7 to 15 year rotation. This would change the appearance of the wood radically. In the "light phase" of a coppiced wood the ground flora may flower profusely but, apart from Bluebells and Lesser Celandine, we are not sure that the wood has such wild flowers, even in the seed bank. Bramble would also benefit greatly from the increased light, possibly impeding any flowering of other plants. It might be best to investigate whether there's an appropriate seed bank before trying coppicing."

[28] I was consulted at the time and considered that the works went too far from the neighbouring boundaries and that the claimed benefits of coppicing were doubtful, as outlined in the consultation response on coppicing. The work went ahead nevertheless.

[29] 20 of the Ash trees were scheduled for this "copparding", one to be felled and the remainder for a shorter or taller stump. The other species in the table were scheduled for inspection and trimming as necessary to clear the boundary fences and to reduce the risk of failure.

[30] The number of visits varied somewhat between the years, but the core months April to October were almost all visited every year. Given the date of this report, obviously, the 2025 figures are for the months up to May only.

[31] Rackham considered ancient woodland "indicator" species to be either clonal plants (e.g. in England Anemone nemorosa) which do not often reproduce by seed, or ant-dispersed (e.g. Melica uniflora).

[32] They define glades as less than 20% canopy cover. High soil fertility can impede the development of species-rich vegetation in glades (p 90). The presence of isolated trees and of shrubs is considered desirable, however our glade is too small to accommodate this.

[33] The species composition approximates to MG6 and MG7 in the National Vegetation Classification (Rodwell *et al.* 1992).

[34] A separate report will detail the history of the species composition in full detail.

[35] Around 100 young, invading Bramble and Ivy are removed each year.

[36] Excessive amounts of wood chippings have been deposited on and around the access pathway, which need be only 1.3 metres wide, and this has covered over an excessive area of the glade. This was from a failure to supervise the work of the Community Payback Team, exacerbated by tree works leaving arisings on site rather than removing them. A row of Firethorn shrubs was planted beside the northern park boundary, the intent of which could have been achieved using Hawthorns.

[37] Tree ages were estimated using White (1998). The tortuous mathematics were greatly simplified and are used in a spreadsheet available from the author.

[38] An old concept in community ecology, dating back to a pioneer ecologist, Fred Clements, where edges between two kinds of vegetation (biotopes) can be richer in species than is either of the two because it supports species from both kinds.

[39]There is some damaged and neglected wet woodland nearby around the fringes of Wimbledon Park Lake which has been ignored by AELTC in their proposals for intensive lawn tennis development and so is planned to be sacrificed. The loss of this significant area of Alder-Nettle woodland Crack Willow subcommunity (National Vegetation Classification W6b) should be avoided and there is no assurance that any loss could be redressed in this small part of Horse Close Wood.

[40] Unfortunately, the poor supervision of the Community Payback Team has led to wood chips being spread over a substantially greater width, recently, which should not be repeated.

[41] www.london.gov.uk/programmes-and-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/pollution-and-air-quality/guidance-wood-burning-london

[42] National Tree Safety Group: https://ntsgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NTSG-summary.pdf

[43] See Government guidance on "*Wild plants: dangerous, invasive and protected species*" 2014.

[44] www.greenflagaward.org/about-us/about-green-flag-award/guidance-manual Pesticides include insecticides, fungicides and herbicides.

[45] The review by Papworth & Thomas (2025) is the main factual basis for this paragraph.

[46] The "Paws on paths" scheme in Surrey heaths is a recent example. To underpin a policy, a Public Spaces Protection Order would be appropriate in the wood but LB Merton have not yet applied any.

[47] UK Health Security Agency (2023).

[48] **Woodland bird** populations have **declined** by 35% in the UK and 38% in England since 1970. The rate of decline has accelerated in the last decade, declining by 10% in the UK and 12% in England in the 5 years since 2018. The long-term decline of the woodland bird indicator in the UK has been driven mainly by the decline of those species that are restricted to, or highly dependent on, woodland habitats (the 'specialists'). However, the increased rate of decline observed in the last 5 years has been driven by declines in populations of both the generalist and specialist species alike. www.gov.uk/government/statistics/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk-and-england-1970-to-2023#breeding-woodland-bird-populations-in-the-uk-and-england

[49] Many people in the Wimbledon tennis queue decamped into Horse Close Wood in the hot sun of early July 2023.

[50] Rackham (2008) remarks that all native tree species extend southwards into countries with hotter summers than any that can be expected in England in the next few decades.

[51] This assumes that the filter provided by recruitment from local seed sources selects trees that are adapted to local climate, which seems likely. However, climate change is expected to change local climate, possibly leaving the recruits adapted to an increasingly distant climatic regime. Observations on the natural colonisation of areas planted over the last ten years shows that much natural colonisation occurs. This will be detailed in the third report in this series.

[52] These recommendations have reviewed only 11 native species, but find half to be unsuitable. www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/climate-change-impacts/climate-change-impacts-and-adaptation-in-englands-woodlands/regional-changes-in-england-in-tree-species-suitability-resulting-from-climate-change/

[53] For example, the Woodland Trust (Herbert *et al.* 2022) refers to national monitoring schemes, such as the National Forest Inventory and various schemes run by the British Trust for Ornithology. Use of these would be misguided because these schemes are carefully standardised to be applied across a great number and range of sites, chosen to yield a representative average across a very wide area. These schemes do not yield usefully precise measures for a single site. A better alternative for the vegetation is the "Woodland Condition Assessment" method employed in Biodiversity Net Gain: https://woodlandcondition.sylva.org.uk/panel/dashboard Sadly, this method is difficult to apply, because it is very poorly drafted and clearly has not been thoroughly piloted before being rolled out. There is no good method available for bird survey, the old "CBC" being impossibly labour-intensive, and suffering from the small size of the wood, cut-down versions are too superficial and the "BBS" is not intensive enough for an individual site.

[54] For example, both Ivy and Bramble are susceptible to browsing, so the absence of deer in Horse Close Wood could be partly responsible for their success here.

[55] https://woodlandwildlifetoolkit.sylva.org.uk/factsheets

[56] www.bats.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-for-bats/bats-and-woodland/woodland-specialists

[57]The Bat Conservation Trust leaflets *Bats and Woodland* and *How are trees important to bats?* provide guidance. The features of trees that provide bat habitat are the same as those used to recognise "veteran" trees, protected in national planning guidance.

[58] All species of bat found in Britain, and their roosts, receive protection under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

[59] Blakesley & Buckley (2010) consider that retaining the diversity of holes and hollows of old trees obviates any need for provision. Herbert *et al.* (2022), say that All UK bats have been found in or around trees and woods. Some may only use woods to forage, but many are known to roost in tree cavities, including brown long-eared, noctule, barbastelle, Bechstein's and Natterer's. Tree-roosting species require cavities, crevices and splits, loose bark and dense ivy in different parts of the tree at different times of the year to provide the conditions they need. Bat boxes can be fitted to younger trees to provide artificial roosts where these features are lacking.

[60] The status of birds in the wood is well documented from monthly visits over the last 40 years. These data have been deposited with Greenspace Information for Greater London.

[61] www.gov.uk/government/publications/wild-birds-licence-to-kill-or-take-for-conservation-purposes-gl40/gl40-general-licence-to-kill-or-take-certain-species-of-wild-birds-to-conserve-endangered-wild-birds-or-flora-and-fauna#fn:4

[62] Whilst a few species (e.g. Woodpigeon) breed year-round, most woodland species breed between February and August. https://www.trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Public/When-is-the-bird-nest-season

[63] www.gov.uk/guidance/invasive-non-native-alien-animal-species-rules-in-england-and-wales#restrictions-on-invasive-alien-animals

[64] Woodland Trust (2013).

[65] They are listed in schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

[66] Ivy flowers in autumn (September to November) when few other species are in flower and the fruit ripens in winter, providing valuable food right through to spring, again at a later time than the fruit of other species. It adheres to the tree by aerial roots. It is not a parasite, depending upon the host tree solely for support, but the roots would compete to some extent with those of the host.

[67] A radical alternative view of Ivy was put forward by a local resident who cut the stems of many climbing Ivy plants in the winter of 2023-24. He believed that the burden imposed by Ivy was responsible for the demise of several large trees. In fact, the only mature trees to have fallen in the wood recently were free of Ivy. A few Elms from the second generation of suckers had much climbing Ivy, but died of Dutch Elm Disease and one or two of them fell over the main path. These trees were going to fall with or without the Ivy. The local resident remained in disagreement, but has ceased his clearance of Ivy.

[68] *Rubus armeniacus*, like all Brambles, is difficult to identify with confidence and has not been confirmed to occur in the wood. Its invasive status is reviewed by CABI: www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/full/10.1079/cabicompendium.116780 Most other microspecies are native.

[69] The path-making and planting in 1991 caused a protest by neighbours on the northern edge of the wood who did not want public access encouraged there for fear that it would lead to criminal access to their rear gardens. In response, the new northern path was blocked off by extra planting and the area reverted to brambles over the next 30 years. Then, in 2024, two neighbours complained of encroachment by brambles leading to consultation and a policy paper on resolving such matters (Friends of Wimbledon Park 2024).

[70] Oliver Rackham (2003) suggested that the current failure of oak to regenerate in woodland shade was through the weakening of seedlings by oak powdery mildew fungus, which arrived in England some 120 years ago. Oak's ability to colonise sunny locations is shown by seedlings found in recently-planted areas and in the Lofthouse Glade, where the meadow management prevents its establishment.

[71] https://sylva.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/WCA5.pdf

[72] The Tree Council (2025) summerise my concern: "Bacillus thuringiensis var kurstaki (Bt), … has been shown to be effective in reducing populations of OPM caterpillars. Although it is the most selective sprayed control option, Bt can impact other, non-target species of butterflies and moths that feed on oak leaves at a similar time to OPM. This can in turn jeopardise food sources for many species of nesting birds." There are many other moths and butterflies than OPM in the wood. The longstanding research on Great Tits and other caterpillar-feeding species in Wytham Wood shows the vital importance of a spring peak in caterpillar abundance for successful breeding of Tits, and other species that take caterpillars (e.g. Great-spotted woodpecker). I fear that a secondary effect of proactive OPM treatment, which is undertaken when the caterpillars are small and so cannot be surveyed, will be increased starvation of broods of several woodland species that depend crucially upon the spring peak of caterpillars such as Geometridae (mainly the winter moth), Tortricidae (*Tortrix* sp.) and noctuids. Although the White-letter Hairstreak feeds on Elm, those Elms are intermixed with Oaks, so this Priority Species would be at risk. Finally, the Tree Council (2025) fears that control of caterpillars will impede the spread of natural predators of OPM, so forcing an unnecessary addiction to spraying for control. The alternative is to survey the oaks close to the main public use areas and remove any nests there. The rest of the wood should be left alone unless severe infection is reported.

[73] www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/ash-dieback/

[74] *Ophiostoma novo-ulmi* spread in the 1970s, killing most Elms in our area by the mid-1980s, but the roots of most of these trees survived and Elm suckers led to much new growth by the mid-1990s. These were equally susceptible to the disease, so the suckers in turn succumbed to the disease once they were mature enough to attract the disease vector, the Elm bark beetles (mainly the larger elm bark beetle, *Scolytus scolytus*). So began a 20-year cycle of death and regeneration, with few Elm trees surviving beyond 30 years of age. We are now coming to the end of the second wave of Elm suckers and there are many young Elms of the third wave. www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/dutch-elm-disease-ophiostoma-novo-ulmi/dutch-elm-disease-central-and-southern-britain/

[75] www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/dutch-elm-disease/

[76] https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/white-letter-hairstreak

[77] Confirmed by local butterfly specialist Simon Riley.

[78] www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/sycamore/

[79] https://plantatlas2020.org/atlas/2cd4p9h.9ff

[80] https://plantatlas2020.org/atlas/2cd4p9h.vsb

[81] https://plantatlas2020.org/atlas/2cd4p9h.fm2

[82] It is abundant in secondary woodland on the top terrace of Wimbledon Common, but the sole record in Horse Close Wood was a single colonist in the planted strip south of the car park.

[83] www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/horse-chestnut/

[84] There was a rapidly-expanding clump of Japanese Knotweed on the northern boundary of the wood some 60 m west of Gartmoor Gardens which was controlled chemically by Merton Greenspaces in 2010. There are now no known invasive, non-native plants (or non-native plants of special concern www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation/species-of-special-concern#List-plants) in the wood

[85] Based upon the composition of National Vegetation Classification (NVC) wet woodland type W1, which occurs locally and W8, the NVC type of Horse Close Wood. See also the tree species for "Base rich lowland woodland" in Hotchkiss & Herbert (2022).

[86] These are based upon the composition of NVC type MG6, the best fit for the existing vegetation of the glade, with some additions from MG5. This is similar to the list proposed by Herbert *et al.* (2022 Tables 5.5 & 5.6) which were based upon Base-rich and Wet Lowland Broadleaved Woodland glades and a range of NVC types.