

Horse Close Wood draft revised management plan.

Dr D.G. Dawson, March 2026



Introduction

The existing management plan was drafted in 2015 and adopted by LB Merton in 2016. This updates that plan and is for consultation. Background to the plan is in the February 2026 report, *The future of Horse Close Wood*. This provides much detail, which should be referred to if there are questions over the content of this draft. It also gives reference to sources. The history of the wood is described in the February 2025 report, *The History of Horse Close Wood, Wimbledon Park*. A forthcoming report will document the geography and composition of the wood in detail and there will be a separate detailed report on the Dave Lofthouse Glade.

The value of the wood

Horse Close Wood is an old planted, 1.7 hectare wood of English Oak, Ash and Elm, on the northern edge of the public Wimbledon Park. It is owned and managed by the London Borough of Merton, and provides access to nature for a large residential area of Southfields and Wimbledon Park. The planning authority is LB Wandsworth.

It is valued as an historic landscape feature and for its biodiversity, the best such woodland in a wide surrounding area. It is in a “Site of Importance for Nature Conservation” (Borough Grade I). It is a national Priority Habitat, “Broadleaved Lowland Wood”, and policy is to protect, improve and increase such woodlands, so securing benefits for nature recovery, healthier

living, climate change adaptation, and air and water quality. Also, woodlands sequester carbon rapidly, and old woodlands store much carbon. Its veteran trees and dead wood provide habitat for specialist woodland species.

Enlargement



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

National and local policy is that the wood should be enlarged. A range of species suitable for this is appended, and these will be supplemented by natural colonisation. As a precaution against changing climate, such colonisation is encouraged. Any planting stock should be UK and Ireland Sourced-and-Grown-Assurance (UKISG-A) to minimise the risk of importing new pests and diseases.

1. The first priority for enlargement is to restore the 0.13 ha car park back to woodland, by planting with Hawthorn, Birch and Oak.
2. Further enlargement of up to 1 ha is proposed on nearby parts of the Great Field, which lie over the perimeter path to the south.

Because the surrounding landscape is well-wooded, “connectivity” is not important for the additional area.

Coppicing and harvesting

No new coppicing will be done. Although coppicing in the past has yielded a small increase of wetland species, it has not given a classical woodland ground flora. It has increased Bramble and Cow Parsley and has not reduced Ivy. The existing coppiced area should be cut again, when necessary, perhaps around 2040. There will be no harvesting of wood products as this would deplete the valuable dead wood habitat.

Pond

Although the wood has long been wet in the winter, there was never a permanent pond here, and any new pond would require extensive clearance of woodland to expose it to sunlight from the south. So, no pond will be created within the wood, but one could be created within the Great Field across the perimeter path just south of the wood.

Graduated edges



A graduated edge provides excellent wildlife habitat. Where the wood borders on frequently-mown grassland, and there is enough room, the edge will be graduated in three zones:

1. An outer edge of meadow mown 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.

Woody species, such as Bramble, may invade zones 1 and 2 so rapidly as to require cutting back more frequently. With a predicted increase in drought, zones 1 and 2 may be a fire hazard, requiring cutting back out-of-schedule should a risk arise.

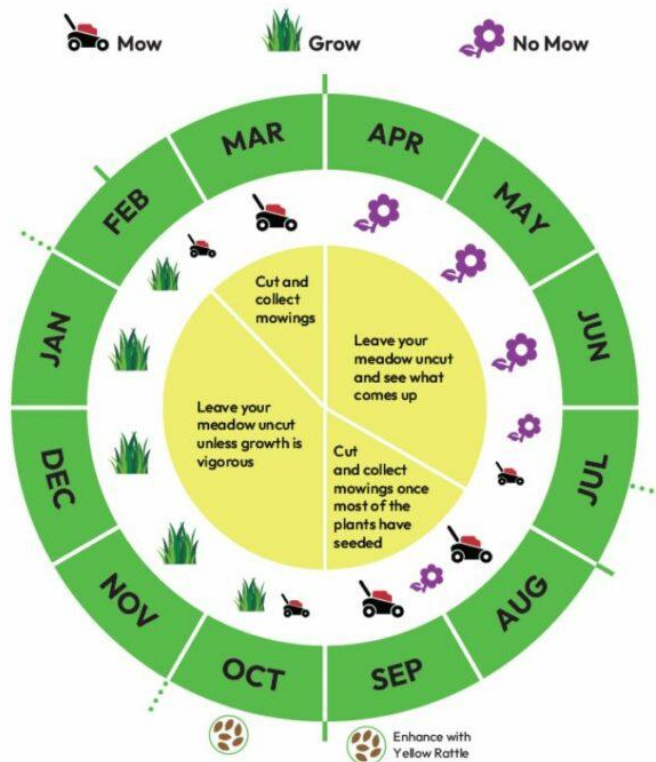
Paths

Only the main path through the wood will be maintained with a wood chip surface, cleared above and to 1.3 metres width, for disabled access. Safety inspections will be focussed on that path, and on the southern edge of the wood, with more freedom for natural processes elsewhere.

Soil compaction

Generally, woodlands are believed to relieve soil compaction, so enhancing the soil as a habitat. However, significant traffic in the root zone of woodland trees can compact the soil, so harming the habitat and compromising tree roots. 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, several large oaks are 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.

The Dave Lofthouse Glade



Meadow management (Plantlife)

The Glade provides a valuable adjunct to the rest of the wood and should be continued under meadow management, adding appropriate species (The Appendix lists these). With a predicted increase in drought, and hence risk of fire, it may have to be cut back out-of-schedule.

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.

Fires and barbeques

Whilst most of the wood is not flammable, there is a risk of damage to the base of trees from set fires and from barbeque disposal. Both are banned in and near the wood and the relevant byelaws are displayed in the park.

Public safety

Many people use the adjacent perimeter path of the public park and also the main path through the wood. Within 7 metres of these, trees should be kept clear of Ivy to permit regular inspection, allowing hazards such as dead wood (which might fall) and Oak Processionary Moth to be found, and so made safe. Where at all possible, no heavy machinery should be employed for works in the wood.

Boundary integrity

Recently, people have gained access to the public park by climbing onto the roof of a garage at the southern end of Gartmoor Gardens, beside the northern end of the Lofthouse Glade. This boundary should be made secure.

Pesticides

Pesticides are a last resort, as all problems can be controlled by physical means.

Dogs

As dogs off the leash can alarm people, and harm birds that nest low down, and dog faeces harm the wood and its enjoyment, so notices ask dog owners to keep their animals on a leash and to pick up after them.

Bats

Eight species of bat hunt insects in and around the wood. All of these can breed, roost or hibernate in trees with cavities in the trunk or branches, woodpecker holes, loose bark, cracks, splits and thick ivy. Any tree works or pest control should follow the “Micro guide to surveying for bats in trees and woodland”. As natural shelter for bats is abundant in the wood, there is no need to add artificial shelter. An exception would be any large, new plantings, where a few bat boxes could help whilst the trees mature.

Birds

The wood supports woodland specialist species, including many of Conservation Concern. Conserving and increasing its habitats should keep these birds. As with bats, there is abundant natural shelter, so no bird boxes are required except in new plantings.

English Oak

The oldest trees are Oaks, and they provide much of the canopy of the wood and so they are of great habitat and historic value and hold a large store of sequestered carbon. Oaks do not regenerate naturally inside a woodland, so losses cannot be replaced except in any new woodland planting. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) is newly established in London and could defoliate Oaks, and the irritating hairs of its caterpillars are a minor health risk. Oak trees within 7 metres of the perimeter path and of the main path through the wood will be inspected and any OPM nests removed. Insecticidal spray will not be used because it kills other caterpillars that are a major natural food of several important woodland nesting bird species.

Ash

Ash trees provide almost as much canopy as do Oaks. They are threatened by Ash Dieback, which is established in the area and for which there is no cure. It is predicted that some 80% of Ashes may be lost to the dieback. Inspections to find trees or branches at risk of falling will be done in the same places as the OPM inspections and the hazard removed. As dead wood is valuable wildlife habitat, most other trees will be left. Ash regenerates well here and will replace itself, but the future of this is uncertain and other species will also colonise the gaps, perhaps even some Oak. Many Ash trees along the northern side of the wood have been coppiced to prevent harm to neighbouring properties and these will be coppiced again when necessary.

Sycamore

Being native to the near continent, Sycamore is an honorary native tree, providing similar habitat to Ash. It is regenerating well and might be a good stopgap whilst Ash dieback plays out. It surpasses other tree species in one respect, as it supports huge numbers of Sycamore Aphid in the spring, much used by birds to feed their nestlings.

Elm

The tall English Elm trees were lost to Dutch Elm Disease (DED) in the 1970s, only to be replaced by suckers which grew for 20 years before succumbing and suckering again. So, there are now areas of suckers, ranging up to 20 years of age, much dead wood and a woodland ground flora below. This diversifies the structure of the wood and provides valuable habitat. There is no DED-resistant replacement for the lost statuesque English Elm, and the cycle of sucker growth and death will be left to continue. This will also conserve the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly that depends upon the Elm.

Ivy

Ivy dominates the ground flora in the shady parts of the wood. Despite its reputation, Ivy is not a problem and, where it climbs trees, it provides valuable shelter and food for other species. It does not harm the trees it climbs. However, it can impede visual inspection for Oak Processionary Moth and for tree safety, so it will be kept off trees within 7 metres of the park perimeter path and the main path through the wood.

Bramble

Bramble thrives where the woodland canopy is light and thick stands of it dominate much of the wood, so it is a native “thug”. Areas of dense Bramble prevent the establishment of a wider range of woodland plants and Bramble can invade adjacent grassland and neighbours’ property. However, the natural, dense cover, and its flowers and fruit, benefit invertebrates and provide valuable cover, protecting several bird and small mammal species. Dense bramble also secures some of the boundaries with adjacent properties. Clearing dense Bramble requires much work over many years. Should the resources be found to ensure some clearance to promote other woodland species, a list of suitable replacement species is appended.

Bramble will be cut back to prevent it invading adjacent grassland on the southern boundary and in the Lofthouse Glade.

Bluebell

The native Bluebell is widespread, but it suffers from trampling, and from hybridisation with garden varieties, which is not readily countered. The best Bluebell concentration could be protected with “dead-hedging”.

Candidate problem species:

Oak Processionary Moth and Ash Dieback: See English Oak and Ash, above.

Grey squirrel: Whilst the Grey Squirrel is a pest in some circumstances, these do not apply here. So, no population control is appropriate.

Ring-necked parakeet: this invasive, non-native species came to breed in the early 2000s. Although undesirable, it does not qualify for population control.

References

The accompanying report, *The future of Horse Close Wood*, should be consulted for reference to background material. This should answer many questions about the basis for recommendations and detail of the ecology of the species.

Appendix: Plants suitable for introducing into the wood.

Species
Ash, <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Hazel, <i>Corylus avellana</i>
Sallow, <i>Salix cinerea</i>
English Oak, <i>Quercus robur</i>
Field maple, <i>Acer campestre</i>
Downy birch, <i>Betula pubescens</i>
Sycamore, <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Alder, <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Silver birch, <i>Betula pendula</i>
Holly, <i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Wych elm, <i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Hornbeam, <i>Carpinus betulus</i>
Sweet chestnut, <i>Castanea sativa</i>
Alder buckthorn, <i>Frangula alnus</i>
Crab apple, <i>Malus sylvestris</i>
Aspen, <i>Populus tremula</i>
Wild cherry, <i>Prunus avium</i>
Goat willow, <i>Salix caprea</i>
Purple willow, <i>Salix purpurea</i>

Osier, <i>Salix viminalis</i>
Elder, <i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Wild pear, <i>Pyrus communis</i>
Rowan, <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Wild Service Tree, <i>Sorbus torminalis</i>
Yew, <i>Taxus baccata</i>
Small-leaved lime, <i>Tilia cordata</i>
Elm, <i>Ulmus procera</i>
Wych Elm, <i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Dogwood, <i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
Midland hawthorn, <i>Crataegus laevigata</i>
Spindle, <i>Euonymus europaeus</i>
Blackthorn, <i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Buckthorn, <i>Rhamnus catharticus</i>
Wayfaring tree, <i>Viburnum lantana</i>
Gelder rose, <i>Viburnum opulus</i>
Bramble, <i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
Ivy, <i>Hedera helix</i>
Dog's mercury, <i>Mercurialis perennis</i>
Bluebell, <i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>

Marsh bedstraw, <i>Galium palustre</i>
Water mint, <i>Mentha aquatica</i>
Wood anemone, <i>Anemone nemorosa</i>
Tufted hairgrass, <i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>
Ground ivy, <i>Glechoma hederacea</i>
Wood false-brome, <i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>
Meadowsweet, <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
Soft rush, <i>Juncus effusus</i>
Yellow pimpernel, <i>Lysimachia nemorum</i>
Barren strawberry, <i>Potentilla sterilis</i>
Yellow archangel, <i>Lamiastrum galeobdolon</i>
Primrose, <i>Primula vulgaris</i>
Lesser celandine, <i>Ficaria verna</i>
Wood dock, <i>Rumex sanguineus</i>
Dog-violet, <i>Viola riviniana</i>

Early dog-violet, <i>Viola reichenbachiana</i>
Bugle, <i>Ajuga reptans</i>
Rough meadow-grass, <i>Poa trivialis</i>
Thin-spiked wood-sedge, <i>Carex strigosa</i>
Pendulous sedge, <i>Carex pendula</i>
Remote sedge, <i>Carex remota</i>
Lesser pond-sedge, <i>Carex acutiformis</i>
Compact rush, <i>Juncus conglomeratus</i>
Male fern, <i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Broad buckler-fern, <i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>
Lady fern, <i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>
Enchanter's-nightshade, <i>Circaea lutetiana</i>
False-brome, <i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>
Wood avens, <i>Geum urbanum</i>

Appendix Table 1. Species of tree, shrub (shaded yellow) and ground layer (shaded green) recommended for planting under the woodland canopy where light permits.

Ten species highlighted in purple are not recommended for planting, as they already recruit in good numbers naturally, are susceptible to disease, or both.

No species should be introduced at the expense of the donor site, so requiring traceability or certification. Natural colonisation and utilisation of material from close by are preferable to commercial sourcing, as many commercial mixes are inappropriate.

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

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