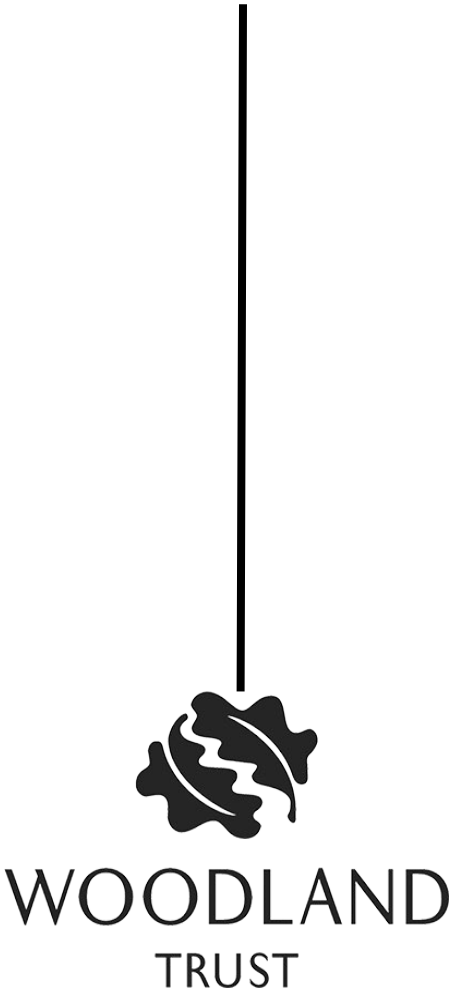
Ruffett & Big Wood

(Plan period – 2023 to 2028)



Management Plan Content Page

Introduction to the Woodland Trust Estate

The Woodland Trust owns and cares for well over 1,250 sites covering almost 30,000 hectares (ha) across the UK. This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and almost 4,000ha of non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites and we have created over 5,000ha of new native woodland. We also manage other valuable habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, heaths, ponds/lakes and moorland.

Our Vision is:

"A UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife."

To realise all the environmental, social and economic benefits woods and trees bring to society, we:

- **Create Woodland** – championing the need to hugely increase the UK's native woodland and trees.
- **Protect Woodland** – fighting to defend native woodland, especially irreplaceable ancient woodland and veteran trees; there should be no loss of ancient woodland
- **Restore Woodland** – ensuring the sensitive restoration of all damaged ancient woodland and the re-creation of native wooded landscapes.

Management of the Woodland Trust Estate

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

The following principles provide an overarching framework to guide the management of all our sites but we recognise that all woods are different and that their management also needs to reflect their local landscape, history and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives.

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene in our woods when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity, safety and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.

2. We establish new native woodland for all the positive reasons set out in our Conservation Principles, preferably using natural regeneration but often by planting trees, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.

3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe. Where possible, we pro-actively engage with people to help them appreciate the value of woods and trees.

4. The long term vision for all our ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.

5. Existing semi-natural open ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.

6. The natural and cultural heritage value of sites is taken into account in our management and in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.

7. Land and woods can generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We therefore consider the appropriateness of opportunities to generate income from our Estate to help support our aims.

8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we encourage our woods to be used for local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.

9. We use and offer the Estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. We maintain a network of sites for long-term monitoring and trials leading to reductions in plastics and pesticides.

10. Any activities we undertake are in line with our wider Conservation Principles, conform to sustainable forest management practices, are appropriate for the site and balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

The Public Management Plan

This public management plan describes the site and sets out the long term aims for our management and lists the Key Features which drive our management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with our long, 50 years and beyond, and our short, the next 5 years, term objectives for the management and enhancement of these features. The short term objectives are complemented by an outline Work Programme for the period of this management plan aimed at delivering our management aims.

Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and we continually monitor our sites to assess the success of our management, therefore this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme.

Please either consult The Woodland Trust website

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

or contact the Woodland Trust

operations@woodlandtrust.org.uk

to confirm details of the current management programme.

A short glossary of technical terms can be found at the end of the plan.

Location and Access

Location maps and directions for how to find and access our woods, including this site, can be found by using the following link to the Woodland Trust web-site which contains information on accessible woodlands across the UK

https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/find-woods/

In Scotland access to our sites is in accordance with the Land Reform Act (of Scotland) 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

In England, Wales and NI, with the exception of designated Public Rights of Ways, all routes across our sites are permissive in nature and where we have specific access provision for horse riders and/or cyclists this will be noted in the management plan.

The Management Plan

1. SITE DETAILS

Ruffett & Big Wood

Location:	Coulsdon, Sutton Grid reference: TQ281604 OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 176
Area:	7.01 hectares (17.32 acres)
External Designations:	Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve, Tree Preservation Order
Internal Designations:	N/A

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Ruffett & Big Wood is situated on the north-west outskirts of Coulsdon, Sutton, within the town's Greenbelt, surrounded on four sides by open space. The site was acquired by the Woodland Trust in 1995 with funding from Sutton Borough Council.

The wood comprises of two blocks - Ruffett (Cpt 1a) to the northeast and Big Wood (Cpt 2a) to the southwest, joined at one corner. The wood's total area of 7 hectares (17 acres) means it is one of the largest accessible areas of woodland within the London Borough of Sutton. This value has been recognised by its designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) with parts of the site covered by a woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and a number of individual trees also covered by TPOs. The woodland is situated on the chalk plateau of the North Downs which gives rise to free draining loamy, slightly acidic soils.

Big Wood, the larger of the two blocks (4.59ha), has a relatively dense canopy of even-aged sycamore and ash while Ruffett (2.43ha), a long-established secondary woodland, has a more diverse canopy in structure and species composition with veteran horse chestnut, oak, field maple and beech with a relatively young understorey of hazel, sycamore and ash. A large area of Ruffett suffered storm damage in 1987, which has further diversified the structure and enhanced the deadwood component of the woodland. During the management plan period 2017-22 work was undertaken to fell diseased ash and open ride edges which added another age class of tree regeneration and added to the deadwood component of the wood. Ground flora is generally sparse in Big Wood, dominated by ground ivy, while in Ruffett, the flora is more diverse with several ancient woodland indicator species including bluebells and dog's mercury.

A simple but popular permissive path network provides good visitor access. The wood is very well used by the local population including school children who use it as a shortcut walking to and from the adjacent school to the west. There have been a number of anti-social behaviour problems in the wood, especially during the summer holidays. This has included fly-tipping, bike ramps and camp fires.

3. LONG TERM POLICY

The long term intentions for Ruffett and Big are focused on maintaining woodland biodiversity and increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Natural processes rather than silvicultural management will continue to shape the woodland, ensuring a range of different species and ages of trees, with gaps in the canopy where natural regeneration can thrive. The impact and management of ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) will affect the species composition and further diversify the structure of the wood over time, with sycamore likely to be the dominant canopy tree species in the future. As the woodland matures, trees will decline naturally, contributing to important deadwood habitat both standing and fallen, particularly for invertebrate and fungal communities, apart from where it poses a significant tree safety risk. Naturally regenerating species will include ash, sycamore, hazel and field maple.

On-going monitoring will ensure public access remains easy and safe. This will be achieved through a managed path and entrance network and regular safety inspections of site infrastructure and of higher risk tree zones.

4. KEY FEATURES

4.1 F1 Secondary Woodland

Description
Parts of Ruffett and Big Wood are long established secondary woodland, indicated by mature horse chestnut, beech, field maple and oak trees found predominately along the eastern edge of the wood. The majority of the wood is dominated by ash and sycamore established in the 1950s which, in patches, create a dense canopy. Understory species include hazel and field maple (which are coppiced in places along footpaths), elder, holly, yew, hawthorn, Norway maple and false acacia (Robinia pseudoacacia). Regenerating species are dominated by ash and sycamore but are suppressed by the patches of dense shade. The wood is situated on chalk bedrock with clay-with-flint soils and while this gives rise to loamy and relatively free draining soils, small stretches of the footpaths become boggy in winter. Ground flora is sparse in Big Wood under the sycamore canopy but in Ruffett the flora is more diverse with several ancient woodland indicator species. Woodland flora includes bluebells, violets, lords and ladies, sancile, herb Robert, speedwell spp., and ground ivy. Nettles and bramble dominate in areas of disturbance.
Significance
Ruffett and Big Wood is the largest block of woodland in the London Borough of Sutton and as such features in Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan which aims to maintain and improve the current areas of semi-natural woodland. Ruffett is covered under a woodland TPO, while a number of individual trees in Big Wood are also individually covered by TPO's.
Opportunities & Constraints
Constraints:- Small site accessed via a suburban residential area make silvicultural management impractical.
Factors Causing Change
Decline of ash due to ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus). Potential for colonisation by other pests and diseases such as acute oak decline and oak processionary moth. Mammal damage to regeneration: deer; rabbits; grey squirrels. Invasive non-native species: false acacia; snowberry.
Long term Objective (50 years+)

To maintain the woodland with an appropriately mixed species composition and structural diversity, largely through a policy of minimum intervention except for the management of tree diseases that impact visitor safety such as ash dieback. The impact of ash dieback will affect the species composition of the wood over time with the likely replacement canopy species in the future being sycamore. Other species such as hazel and field maple are also likely to regenerate in canopy gaps created by disease, windblow and safety management. Herbivore damage to broadleaf trees will be monitored to ensure regeneration is not significantly impacted.

The biodiversity of the wood will not be threatened by damaging invasive non-native species. However some non-native and naturalised tree species will be present such as sycamore, horst chestnut, Norway maple and false acacia.

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

During the plan period 2023-28, management will focus on the visitor and neigbour safety issues caused by ash dieback.

- Tree safety Zone A: annual inspection alternating between a summer canopy and autumn fungal survey. Remedial work to be carried out in an appropriate timeframe. Work planned for Q1 2024.
- Tree safety Zone B: biennial summer inspection 2025/2026/2028. Remedial work to be carried out in an appropriate timeframe.
- Formal woodland condition assessment carried out to inform next management plan review (spring 2027).

4.2 F2 Connecting People with woods & trees

Description

Ruffett and Big Wood has a Woodland Trust access category B: regular usage, 5 – 15 people using one entrance per day. There are several access points from the Clockhouse Recreation Ground and sport fields and from Richland Avenue.

The site is within close proximity (1km) to the village of Woodmansterne (population of c.3,000) and Coulsdon (population of c.25,500). This, along with the neighbouring recreation ground and sports field and multiple access points, results in the wood having a relatively high but sporadic footfall.

Approximately 2500m of permissive paths give easy access on flat terrain to all parts of the wood and includes a circular walk around Ruffett with fine views of London from the northern edge of the wood.

The wood is highly prone to anti-social behaviour including camps, fires and rubbish.

Significance

Ruffett and Big Wood is the largest patch of woodland in the Borough of Sutton.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints:
Areas of paths can be extremely wet over the winter mostly due to the clay soils.
Antisocial behaviour and rubbish.

Factors Causing Change
Rubbish and antisocial behaviour leading to the wood feeling unsafe.
Long term Objective (50 years+)
Informal public access will be provided at the wood in perpetuity. An on-going programme of maintenance will ensure safe and easy access along clearly defined routes for quiet recreation. Provision of infrastructure will be kept low key as appropriate for the grading of this site.
Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)
During the plan period 2023-28, management will maintain infrastructure and paths to ensure the wood remains open and safe to visitors. - Approx 2500m of paths will be cut annually to allow continued access across the whole site. This will include strimming ride edges and appropriate tree safety work, identified by Zone A and B tree safety inspections (see Secondary Woodland KF). - All site infrastructure and entrances will be inspected annually and maintained/replaced as necessary. - Litter will be cleared as necessary as part of the annual maintenance regime.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type Of Work	Description	Due Date
2024	SL - Tree Safety Works - Zone A	Work associated with planned tree safety works alongside areas such as car parks, roadsides and boundaries	February
2024	AW - Visitor Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of existing visitor access infrastructure and paths. Work could include items such as repairing pot-holes and path surfaces, mowing grass paths, path widening, maintaining footbridges and steps, cleaning signage etc,	August
2025	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	August
2026	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	August
2027	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	August
2028	AW - Management Access Maintenance	Works associated with the maintenance of management access infrastructure and tracks Such as repairs to vehicle entrance points, maintaining vehicle bridges and repairing / reinstating surfaced management access routes.	August

APPENDIX 1 : COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Designations
1a	2.43	Ash	1900	Min-intervention		Green Belt, Local Nature Reserve, Tree Preservation Order
This compartment is commonly known as 'Ruffett Wood' and long established secondary woodland. It suffered severe storm damage in the 1987 gales in which the central area was blown, although the site is now regenerating profusely. Mature broadleaves from the 1900s of beech, sycamore, field maple, oak and cherry can be found along the western boundary; sycamore and ash dominate the rest of the compartment. The regeneration component is mixed but predominantly ash and hazel dominating in coppiced areas. The ground flora consists of bluebell, sanicle, lords and ladies, cow parsley, cleavers, herb Robert, speedwell spp, stitchwort, dogs mercury, and patches of nettles and bramble where there has been disturbance. A circular path is maintained for visitors.						
2a	4.59	Sycamore	1950	Min-intervention		
This compartment is known as 'Big Wood'. It is secondary woodland dominated by sycamore from the 1950s forming a continuous, closed canopy. Secondary species include ash, wych elm, hawthorn, oak, elder, beech, field maple, hazel, holly, yew, false acacia, Norway maple and mature horse chestnut also the eastern edge of the wood. There is natural regeneration of sycamore and to a lesser extent ash. The ground flora is sparse due to the dense shade but includes low density bramble, cow parsley, dogs mercury, ferns, martagon lily, clematis and extensive ground ivy. Main paths are maintained for visitors, however, several informal paths have been created within the block and the wood is prone to vandalism e.g. camps.						

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland
Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland
Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site
Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up
Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf
A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy
The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell
Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment
Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer
A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry
A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice
Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species
Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer
Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell
The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention
Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention
Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland
Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)
A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species
Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration
Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance
The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking
Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer
Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand
Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment
Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning
The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes
Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding
The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established.

Windblow/Windthrow
Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.