Woodland Survey and Management Advice

ER-8140-01



Gipton Woods



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Introduction

Brooks Ecological Ltd was commissioned by the Friends of Gipton Woods to provide a woodland survey overview and ideas for management projects within the woodland to better target the group's conservation efforts.

Purpose of this Document

This document is meant to provide a broad overview of the ecology of the Site - as apparent from walkover survey in March and April 2025.

Detail is sufficient to inform the discussion of management options which forms the latter part of the report.

This document is set out to be an easy to navigate and visually focussed document to understand the potential improvements that could be implemented - should resources be available.



Baseline

Setting and Background

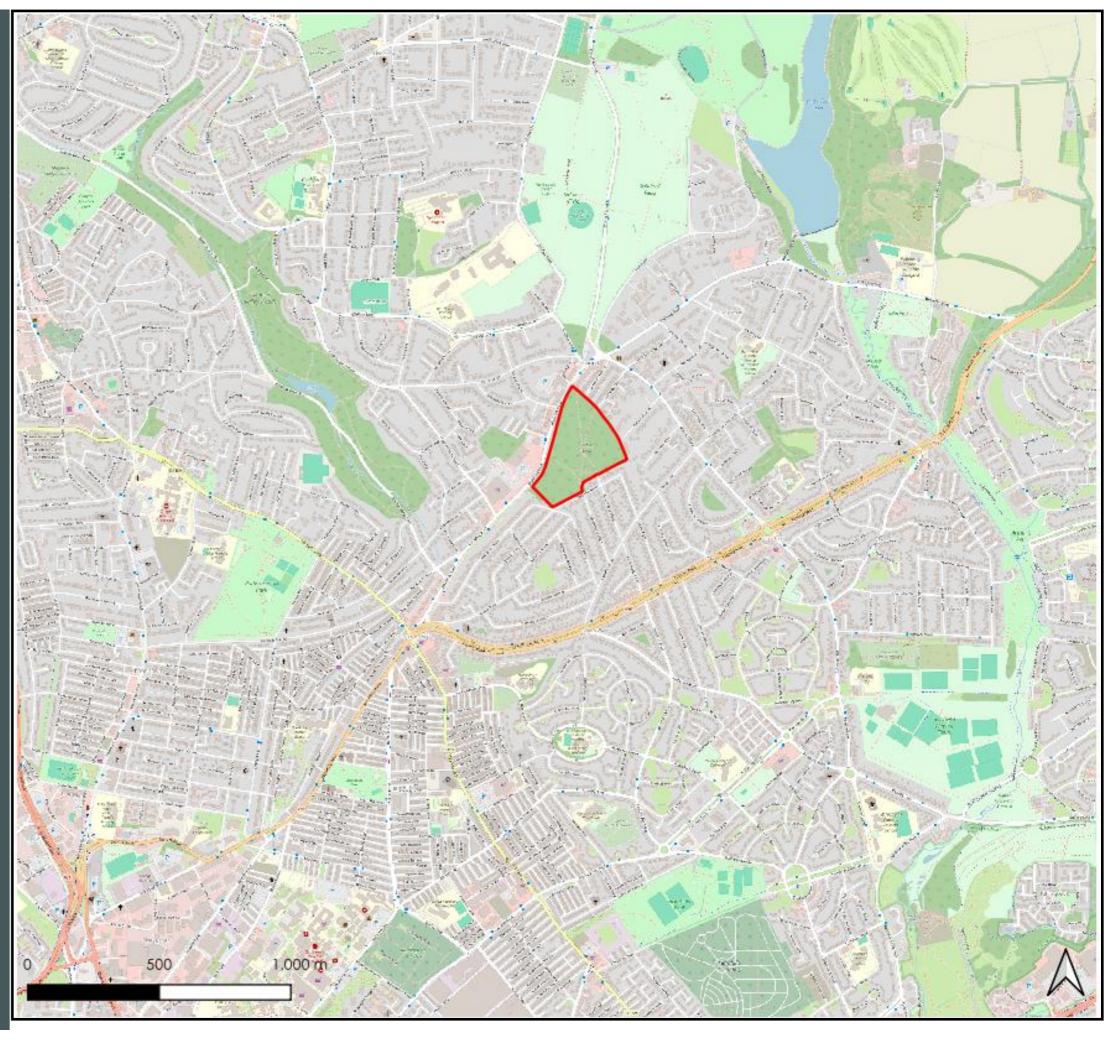
The Site is mapped as 'Plantation on an Ancient Woodland Site' (PAWS), which suggests that the woodland here has been cleared and replanted since 1600. Mapping suggests that the current woodland has been here for at least the last 130 years. The current even age structure of trees suggests the planting or secondary colonisation of the Site in the past, whilst its ground flora suggests that woodland has occupied the Site for a much longer time.

The Site was gifted to Leeds City Council in the 1920's and has been managed by them and the local community as public open space since this time.

The Woods provide an important 'stepping stone' of woodland habitat between Roundhay Park and the less urbanised areas to its north, providing links to other local green-spaces such as Gledhow Valley Woods, Killingbeck Fields and Harehills Cemetery and Park. It is undoubtedly an important reserve for woodland species in an otherwise urbanised environment.

The Woods contain several gravel surfaced paths providing well-used links between local housing and amenities. Less used desire lines are also present throughout.

The Site benefits from an active and knowledgeable 'friends of ' group and has the air of being well-looked after and valued.



Baseline

Topography, drainage and soils

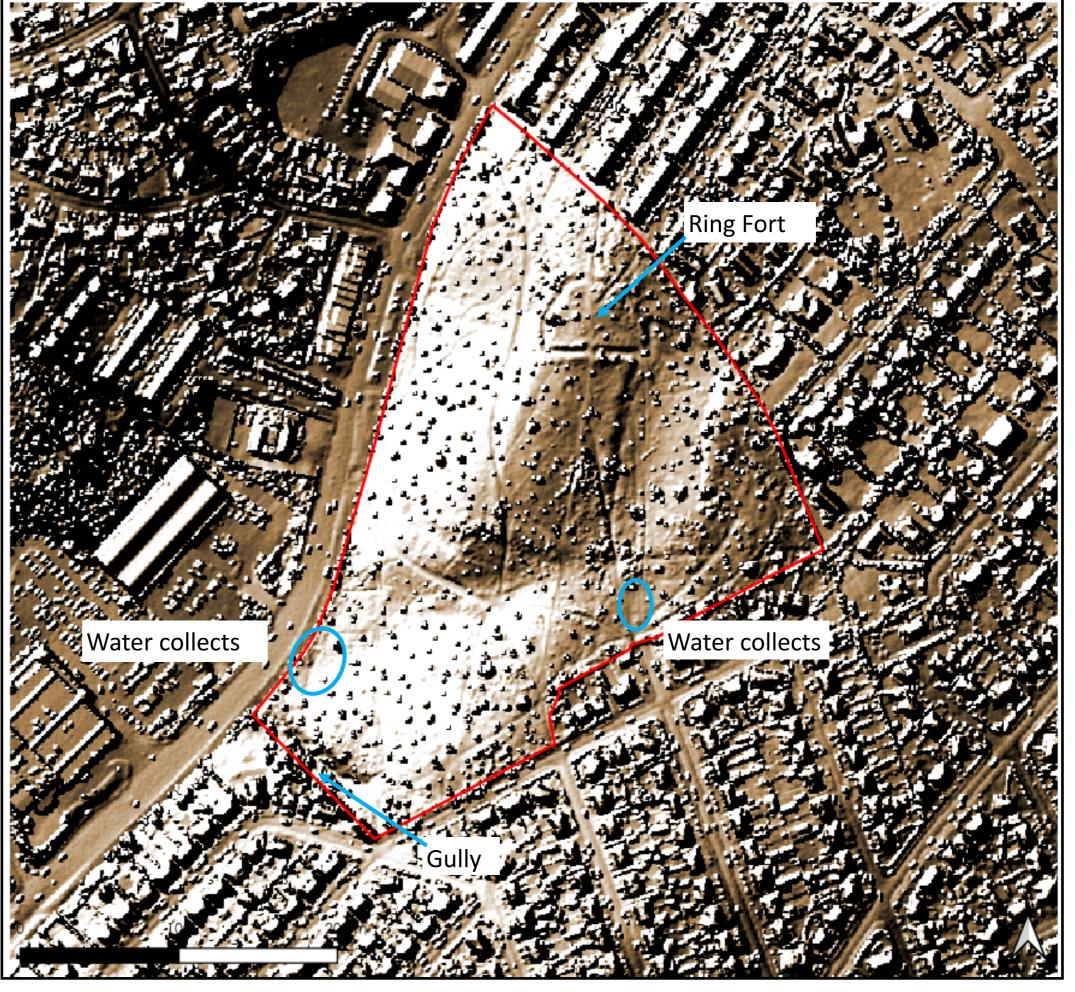
The lidar image right illustrates the topography on the site.

The Site slopes upwards from Roundhay Road to its west, achieving relatively flat plateau in the east. This elevated part of the Site contains the remains of an Iron Age / Romano British ring fort.

Based on vegetation the soils here are likely to provide neutral to slightly acidic conditions typical of the area, although these are likely to be more leached and acidic on the steeper slopes.

Hydrologically the Site held little to no water during surveys but apparently holds some surface water at wetter time of the year in the locations indicated opposite.

In the far south-west of the Site there is a steep-sided gully which provides intermittent drainage of an adit from old mine workings nearby. This water leaves the Site through a culvert at the northern end of the gully.



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Part 1 - Habitats Overview

Habitats

The Site's habitats are shown in UK Habitats classification opposite. This is mapped at a scale useful to the context of the report.

The site is relatively uniform over its extent - all falling into the UK Habs classification of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland - a High Distinctiveness habitat in this classification and a Habitat of Principal Importance in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

A full condition survey has not been carried out at this stage, however it appears likely that the woodland achieves *moderate* to *good* condition (Defra Biodiversity Metric) over its entire extent in large part due to its effective management.



Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

The Woodland's canopy is characterised by even aged pedunculate and hybrid oaks, although in parts beech and sycamore are also conspicuous and ash, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, lime and cherry are occasional components.

The woodland has a distinct understorey comprising holly, hazel, occasional honeysuckle, gorse and yew, and regenerating canopy species.

Regeneration is good, with young trees, saplings and seedlings all evident, but is dominated in parts by sycamore and particularly by beech.





Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

The shrub layer is perhaps less well established and is dominated by bramble with occasional honeysuckle and young holly or yew. A small stand of field rose was also found in the west of the Site.

Ground flora is very well expressed and indicative of ancient woodland soils with species such as bluebell, wood anemone, ramsons, wood millet, wood sorrel and dogs mercury all present to varying degrees.

There is a bank supporting a dense stand of field garlic on the northern boundary. This is a plant more associated with hedge-banks and more lime rich soils so is somewhat of an interesting outlier here – probably benefitting from localised conditions.

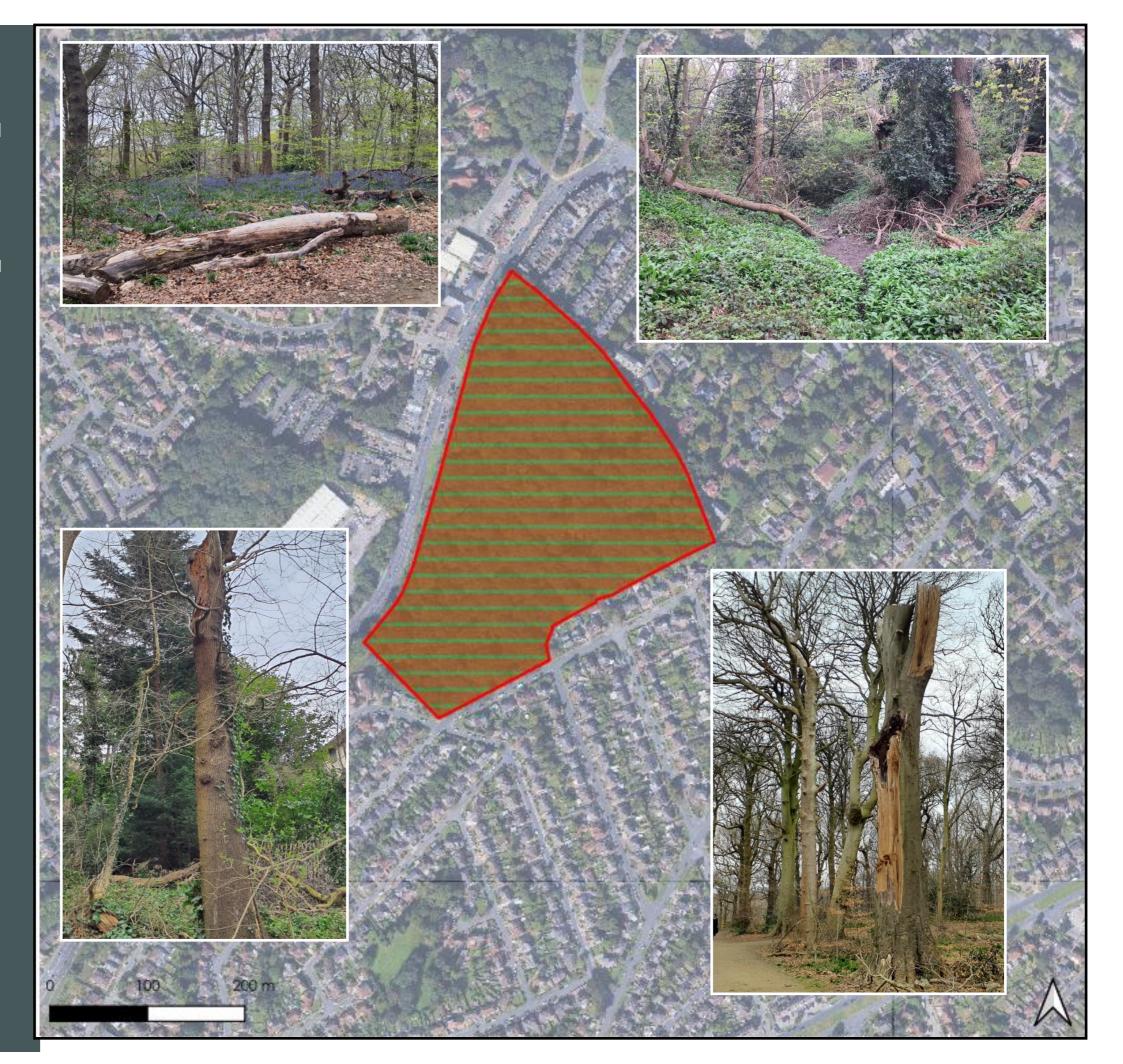




Deadwood

The woodland has an excellent deadwood resource with all of the following present:

- Large fallen or felled stems and branches;
- Standing dead-wood and monolithed trees;
- Large veterans with significant rot and hollowing;
- Trees with multiple cavities and holes;
- Created brash and habitat piles.



Invasive species

INNS which are listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act found on site were limited to a single specimen:

• Cotoneaster sp.

This having been planted as part of the making good works around a compound created off Roundhay Road.

Survey was carried outside of the optimum period and other INNS could be present but undetected.

Species which are not listed on Sch. 9 but are not native and displaying invasive behaviour are:

- Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerassus*)
- Snowberry (Syphoricarpos albus)

There is also some evidence that Spanish bluebell is hybridising with native bluebells at the Site.

UK native but not locally native and behaving in an invasive and deleterious way:

• Beech (Fagus sylvatica)



Recreational Damage

A feature of this, and most publicly accessible woodlands, is the impact of concentrated footfall, and where dogs run free and their activity is concentrated.

A proliferation of paths can develop in any woodland where large numbers of people can choose their own paths and easily make new ones, and there is evidence of several such desire lines within the woodland, and areas where short-cuts on corners have been created.













Part 2 - Management Project Suggestions

Enhancing Woodland Structure and Diversity

The woodland at Gipton has pretty good structure and diversity already, and this includes some valuable dead-wood resources, however management which continues to build on these themes is still going to be really useful.

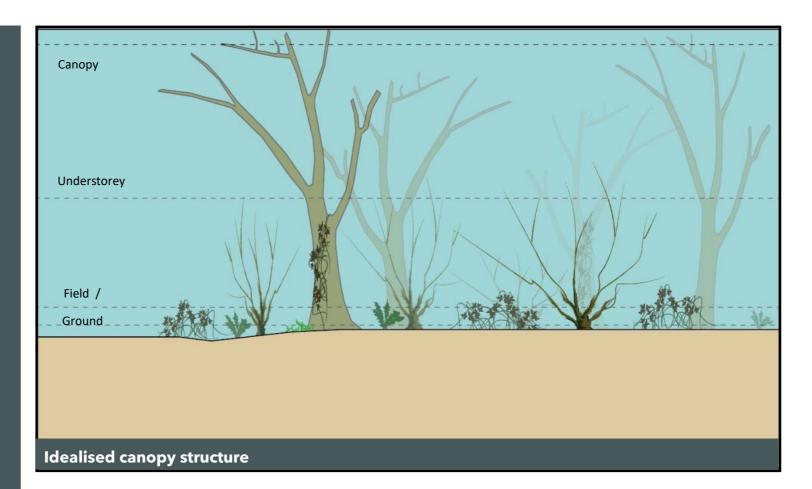
Working with the plants already present and trying to affect their spread to other locations would be an interesting and worthwhile project. This could be achieved through propagation of existing species - those particularly suited to propagation and beneficial to increase their extent could be:

- Wood sorrel *
- Wood anemone*
- Woodrush
- Wood millet
- Field rose
- Hazel
- Honeysuckle
- Greater stitchwort

Ferns are not well represented in the field layer at the Site so introducing these in the form of individuals of Broad-buckler fern (Dryopteris dilatata) would compliment the existing field layer here. If not present on the Site these could be propagated from plants in other local woodlands.

Propagation is not detailed here but researching and planning the best methods for the Site would be part of any future funded project.

* Some species would require propagation from rhizomes, meaning that any project would need to have regard to exclusions to the unearthing or digging up of wild plants in the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). This is likely to involve demonstrating the aims of the project and securing land-owner permission for any removal of plant material.









Enhancing Woodland Structure and Diversity - Thinning.

Removal of selected trees at the Site could be used to enhance woodland structure and diversity.

Thinning can also provide benefits which overlap with other outcomes, such as removing species which are behaving invasively and providing materials for projects such as access improvements.

Specific thinning could be targeted at areas where ground flora such as wood sorrel or field garlic could benefit from increased light and a reduction in leaf litter build up.

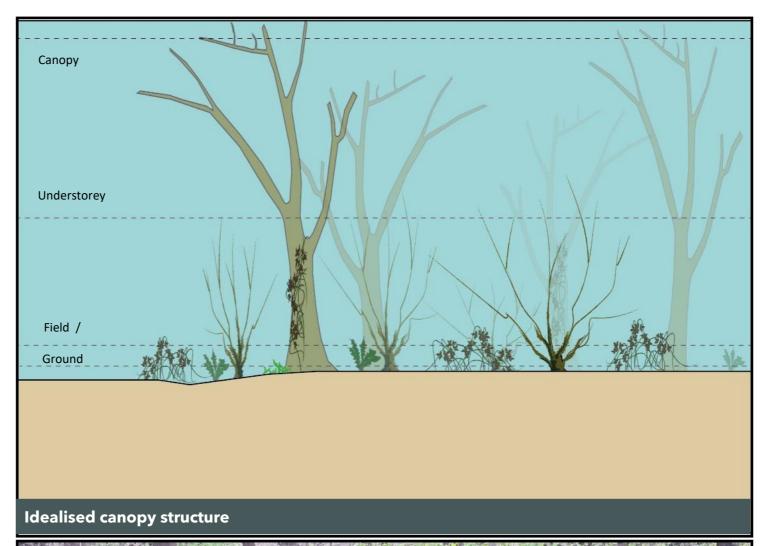
Tree species which cause most shading and leaf litter build up, and are considered least 'natural' in this situation would be:

- Beech
- Sycamore
- Horse chestnut

These species should be targeted in any thinning, but removal of other species could also be considered where appropriate.

The natural cycle of woodland regeneration will result in the replacement of thinned trees over time. This process should be managed to remove regeneration of the species listed above and through the planting of:

- Hazel seedlings / young trees*
- Oak seedlings / young trees*
- Acorns collected from the wood





Holly and Hazel establishing in a canopy gap

^{*} planting should be of trees of local provenance, ideally those propagated from this or nearby woodlands.

Controlling access in woodland

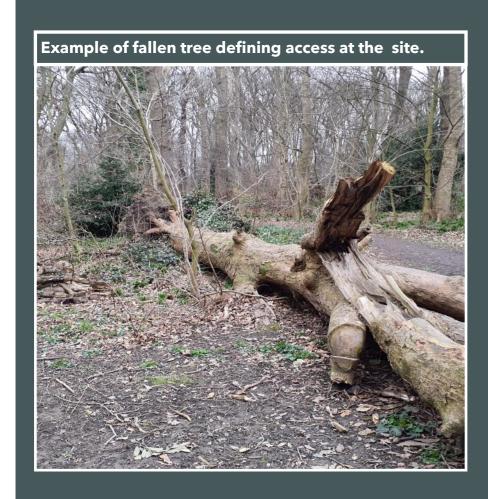
Undirected access for dog-walkers and bikes is a potential problem in the wood.

The use of felled large timber and windrowed brash is a potentially effective way of controlling access in the woodland.

The woodland has some well surfaced access and using the above measures alongside those outlined on the next page could be useful in limiting access to a more defined footpath network.

Targeted trees could be dropped and left in situ as these are extremely difficult to traverse or remove.

This process does not need to be as dramatic as that pictured opposite—but it illustrates the principle.



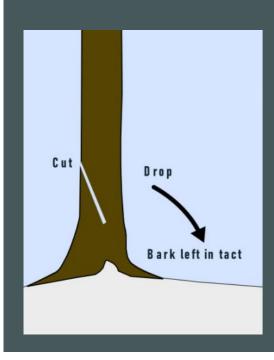


Drop and leave

Leaving wood where it falls has many advantages. It can be used to restrict access, helps new tree regeneration where it impedes deer grazing or trampling, make new niches for mosses and liverworts which grow on fallen timber. It is also useful on steep slopes for its ability to hold back soils that would otherwise wash off the ground. The pictures on this page are examples of woodland that Brooks Ecological has been working on over the last 3 years.

Laying trees

An alternate approach that can be trialled is to lay trees by cutting a notch on one side by retaining bark on the falling side. This will have the same effect of blocking access and opening light gaps but will allow the tree to grow on and stay un-rotted for years. Where machinery can be brought into a wood it is also possible to simply push a tree over exposing the root plate but also allowing the tree to grow on.











Newly dropped trees blocking damaging paths

Path repair

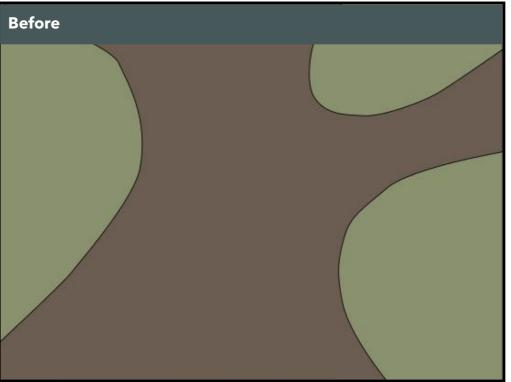
In many places paths are spreading and proliferating due to lack of clear definition. The more damaged a path gets the more people will walk off the path and widen the damaged zone. Over-wide paths can lead to increased runoff, erosion and silt pollution to local rivers.

It is noticeable in the woodland that the surfaced and drained paths contribute positively to the condition of the woodland surrounding them.

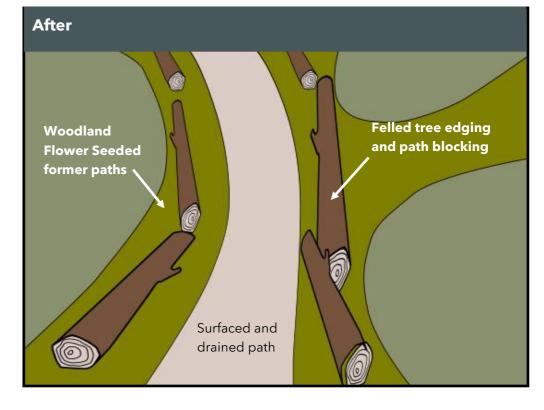
Where any footpath repairs or re-surfacing would be useful core circulation paths could be resurfaced, with coarse sandstone aggregate and blinded off with a fine self binding top dressing. Low points should be cross drained and all continuous slopes have cross drains fitted every c.20m draining out into vegetation.

Where paths are over widened due to intersections etc. they should be 'rationalised' to reduce the foot impacted areas. Using felled timber to close off or edge some paths can be useful in this way, as shown opposite.









Control Invasive Species

The only listed INNS encountered during the survey was a Cotoneaster planted by the telecoms compound in the south of the Site, this should ideally be removed and be replaced with an alternative native shrub –holly or hazel.

Other plants which should be removed ideally would be:

- Snowberry
- Cherry laurel

Given the adjacent sources of new plants this is likely to be an ongoing project.

The other plant behaving invasively here and likely to cause issues in the future is beech. It is likely to be favoured by climate change and is already out-competing some of the more natural vegetation for space and light and reducing space for ground flora through accumulation of dense leaf-litter.

There are some very large and valued beech trees on the Site and removal of this species from the Site is neither possible nor desirable at this time - however the following activities would be advised in respect of beech.

- Target any felling / thinning or deadwood creation at this species.
- Carry out continued removal of saplings, seedlings and young trees especially where gaps in the canopy have been recently opened up.
- Where removal has been carried out plant new oak or hazel if this is not present already.



Beech behaving invasively





Cotoneaster

Snowberry

Slow the movement of water

Increasing the capacity of woodland to retain rainfall can provide an important service to local ecosystems and communities. Opportunities are somewhat limited at the Site but the two following opportunities could be targeted.

- 1. Create log dams in the small valley bisecting the west of the Site. This is a well-defined feature which could easily and naturally be adapted to retain more water / wet ground. One or two dams made from nearby felled / fallen timber would prevent the gully out-flow from leaving the Site immediately. This would in time create additional habitats and microclimates for wildlife. It could be left to colonise naturally or be planted / seeded with some of the species discussed in 2 below.
- 2. Encourage water to pool where it can provide new habitat. The only / best area to achieve this is alongside some footpath improvement in the centre of the Site, west of the entrance of Copgrove Road. Here the footpaths (which flood at times) could be raised using imported porous material (see section on paths above). This would provide a boundary against which to pull back ground within the paths creating a lower central area where water could collect away from the paths. This area is likely to be damp ground rather than a pond and could be planted up with suitable vegetation.

Species present and suited to this habitat would be tufted hair grass, soft rush and wood rush but there could be potential to introduce new species such as marsh marigold or brooklime here if it stays damp enough, or to use a standard woodland edge seed-mix.



Schematic of log dams retaining water

Log dams installed in woodland



Raise wet foot paths with edging boards / stones and porous sandstone infill.

Pull back soils to use as screening to path edges, creating a low point to collect water. Vegetation suggests that soils are fertile in this area so planting / seeding and aftercare will be important here.