

Oxenhill Woods Management Plan 2011-2031

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	26/04/2011		25/04/2031
Date of last review			
Owner / tenant	Sevenoaks District Council (freehold owner)		
Agent / contact	Oxenhill Joint Management Committee		
Signed declaration of tenure rights and agreement to public availability of the plan ¹			

1. Background information

1.1 Location

Nearest town, village or feature	Otford and Kemsing
Grid reference	TQ 53377 59227 (Tudor Drive)
Total area (ha)	24.6 ha (60.7 acres)

1.2 Description of the woodland(s) in the landscape

Oxenhill Woods comprise areas of young, naturally-regenerated woodland and transitional scrub, grassy glades & wide rides and an area of more mature secondary woodland (Oxenhill Shaw), located in the Holmesdale Valley between the North Downs and the Greensand Ridge. Situated at the junction of the North Downs and the Gault clay vale near the foot of the chalk escarpment, the woodland is located between the residential areas of Otford to the North & West and Kemsing to the East. The Bat and Ball to Otford railway line adjoins its western side and the southern edge of the site runs close to the M26 motorway, though the road is in a cutting at this point so the woods are not very evident to motorway users. Railway passengers are much more likely to appreciate the woodland since the trains run on an embankment past the woods.

Oxenhill Woods do not occupy a particularly elevated position and are not a prominent feature in the wider landscape, but are of local landscape significance. The woods are particularly valuable as a green space between Otford and Kemsing. The young regenerating woodland forms an increasingly valuable screen to the M26 motorway as the trees fill out and gain height.

¹ As owner, tenant or manager, you have the right to manage the wood in accordance with this plan. At least a summary of the management plan must be made publicly available on request.

1.3 History of management

The land was acquired in 1997 in two lots. Oxenhill Shaw and the former Keddies Meadow (23.7 ha) was purchased from a private owner. In 1996 the Parish Councils of Otford and Kemsing had taken the option to buy the land. This option was transferred to Sevenoaks District Council for purchasing. The two Parish Councils contributed towards the purchase. The remaining 0.9 hectares of land situated to the southwest of Oxenhill Shaw (the motorway bank) was acquired from Otford Parish Council, the transfer to the District Council forming part of Otford Parish Council's contribution to the acquisition.

Sevenoaks District Council acquired the Shaw and former Meadow with the support of Otford and Kemsing Parish Councils for amenity purposes, to enable it to be managed to encourage greater public access whilst creating varied habitats for flora and fauna. The District Council recognises the value of the area for informal public recreation, for nature conservation and for its position in the landscape. In this respect its objective is to balance the demands of public recreation and amenity with the conservation of the land's wildlife interest and landscape value.

Oxenhill Woods are managed by a Joint Management Committee comprising members and representatives from the Parish Councils of Otford and Kemsing, and representatives from Sevenoaks District Council, the latter providing both financial and practical management support through its Countryside Section. The Sevenoaks District Council Ranger Service regularly visits Oxenhill and oversees the mowing and maintenance of the rides and open areas, clears litter and rubbish and any other obstructions from the paths, and undertakes regular tree safety inspections. Members of the Joint Management Committee, along with others from the local community, take an active interest in the site's management and feed-back information and observations to the Committee. The communities of both Otford and Kemsing are very proud of their villages' character and amenities, the former having previously won the title of Kent Village of the Year.

In the early days management of the site was focused upon keeping paths open and accessible, and maintaining areas of grassland by regular mowing. At the beginning of 2003 the Forestry Commission trialed a pilot grant scheme in South-east England called the "Woodland Welcome" initiative, which provided funds to develop public access to woodlands located in close proximity to residential areas. A limited number of woodland sites were selected for this scheme and Oxenhill Woods was chosen for a share of the available funds partly on account of the unique nature of the site and the comprehensive plan submitted for its enhancement. Funding from the grant scheme was used to identify and plan a ride network based upon the layout of existing paths (mostly created by regular use) and then to significantly widen (to varying widths) these routes to establish and subsequently maintain a network of wide rides and glades, thereby making the developing woodland more attractive to walk through. A new bridge and access was provided to the motorway bank (south meadow) thereby creating a circular walking route into the Shaw from the south, a new map and information board was designed and installed at strategic locations, and a site leaflet was produced.

A management policy was also adopted for the Shaw, which was then suffering from years of neglect and consisted of derelict secondary scrub woodland and long over-aged coppice. A coppicing plan was instigated to cut approximately one acre per year on rotation. An initial area was coppiced in 2006, and has since produced strong and successful re-growth. Exceptionally wet weather in the late summer and early autumn of 2007 & 2008 resulted in unsuitable ground conditions for working and so two years of the proposed coppicing programme were missed. Coppicing was resumed in 2009, and in an attempt to catch up on the programme a little over 2 acres were cut in one go, facilitated by the long dry autumn of that year. The significantly larger cutting area produced an adverse public reaction, to some extent justified in view of the lack of prior information and consultation about the proposed work.

2. Woodland information

2.1 Areas and features

2.1.1 Designated areas	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Other designations e.g. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)			
Details : The only current designations covering this site relate to planning and landscape (Metropolitan Green Belt and the North Downs Special Landscape Area) – see 2.1.5 below.			
2.1.2 Rare and important species	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Red Data Book or BAP species	√	√	
Rare, threatened, EPS or SAP species	√	√	
Details : Colonies of Bee Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid and Common Spotted Orchid have been noted in more open areas of the transitional scrub in the former meadow. A number of anthills have developed in the open areas and green woodpeckers (UKBAP long list, RSPB amber list) can be seen feeding on them. Bats (EPS) may occasionally use crevices and holes in some of the larger trees within the Shaw as roost sites.			
2.1.3 Habitats	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW)			
Other semi-natural woodland	√		2
Woodland margins and hedges	√	√	2
Veteran and other notable trees			
Habitats of notable species or subject to HAPs	√	√	
Unimproved grassland	√	√	
Rides and open ground	√	√	2
Valuable wildlife communities	√	√	
Others			
Details : None of the woodland at this site has been identified as being of ancient origin. The young regenerating woodland on the former meadow should however be classified as semi-natural woodland because it has developed entirely naturally without any planting or human intervention. Although most of the Shaw is also semi-natural in character, there are still some remnants of the late C19th & early C20 th non-native conifer planting remaining. There are no veteran trees. The dense shrubby re-growth resulting from the first phase of coppicing in 2006 is now providing a wonderful habitat for a variety of at risk woodland bird species. Partly as a result of the former meadow areas having been free from any nitrogenous or other chemical inputs for over 30 years and being allowed to regenerate naturally, an interesting and varied ecology is slowly establishing.			

2.1.4 Water	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Watercourses	√		2
Details : A small stream runs down the entire western edge of the Shaw. This damper woodland zone gives rise to a more varied woodland structure and ground flora. This is almost certainly the oldest part of the wood.			

2.1.5 Landscape	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Landscape designated areas	√	√	1
Areas of the woodland prominent from (railways)	√		1
Areas of the woodland prominent from settlements	√		1
<p>Details: Oxenhill Woods do come just within the North Downs Special Landscape Area, though fall outside of the AONB. The woodland is a prominent feature from the Maidstone to London railway line which is carried on an embankment immediately to the west of the site, but it is not prominent from the M26 motorway which runs in a shallow cutting to the south.</p>			
2.1.6 Cultural features	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Public rights of way	√	√	
Permissive footpaths	√	√	
Areas managed with traditional management systems	√		
<p>Details : Public Bridlepath SR49A linking Kemsing with Otford follows the northern boundary of the site. Public Footpath SR66 lies just outside the southern boundary. There is an established network of permissive paths crossing the site, and a circular permitted horse route. A traditional coppice-with-standards management system is being re-introduced to Oxenhill Shaw.</p>			
2.1.7 Archaeological features	In woodland	Adjacent to woodland	Map
Scheduled monument			
Historical features	√		
<p>Details: There are no scheduled monuments or any other listed features on the site. Unrecorded historical features revealed following recent coppicing operations in Oxenhill Shaw included close ridge and furrow typically found in hop-gardens, together with remnants of the original wire anchoring system on the woodland edge, thus proving that sections of the Shaw were still in agricultural use during the last century. Early map evidence supports this, indicating that most of the present Shaw was not wooded during the 19th century.</p>			

2.2 Woodland resource characteristics

The majority of this woodland site consists of the former Oxenhill Meadow, which now comprises 19.9 ha (approximately 49.5 acres) of naturally regenerating woodland, interspersed with wide rides, glades and open grassy clearings. Tree ages range from around 12 to 25 years, with the oldest and tallest trees to be found growing close to Oxenhill Shaw, with the areas furthest away from the Shaw being dominated by native woody shrub species such as dogwood, hawthorn & blackthorn. With the exception of one or two 'garden escapes', all of the trees are native, indigenous species. Nearer the Shaw the dominant tree is Ash, which is for the most part growing extremely densely, with many stems less than 20cm apart. Near to the Shaw there is also a scattering of young oak within the ash matrix, and some clumps of wild cherry. Field maple and goat willow (sallow) are also present. Other shrub species include dog rose and hazel. The development and spread of the woodland provides a fascinating insight into the process of natural woodland colonisation.

Oxenhill Shaw, which is an area of maturing, predominantly broadleaved woodland located to the south-east of the former meadow, accounts for approximately 15% of the site. It currently extends to 3.8 ha (9.3 acres), though was at one time larger, an area on

the south-eastern edge being removed in the 1970's to make way for the motorway. A number of larger trees were brought down in the October 1987 storm, though the Shaw escaped the level of damage which many woods in more exposed positions suffered.

Judging by historic map evidence, the Shaw appears to have grown to its present size in several stages. The relative age of the wood thus seems to range from around 75 up to around 150 years old (to qualify as ancient woodland, a wood must have been in continuous existence since at least 1600). For a more detailed historical overview please see section 4.7.1. The dominant tree is ash, with sweet chestnut (non-native, though naturalised) also strongly represented. Both of these species are mostly growing with multiple stems (and hence previously coppiced) up to 80ft in height over an understorey of hazel, elder and wayfaring tree. There is a scattering of oak standards (maiden stems) of varying ages, and the occasional tall larch, a remnant of once more extensive late C19th & early C20th planting, most of which has long since died and collapsed, or succumbed to the 1987 storm.

Up until 2006, it was obvious that the Shaw had remained virtually unmanaged since the 1940's, and probably then only to remove timber of any value. Judging by the age of the coppice stems, this was the last time that the wood was coppiced. Since a typical coppice rotation for these trees would be in the range of 16-30 years (depending upon end use of the wood product which determines the size - and hence age - of cutting), the coppice stems in the Shaw can be described as well past their coppicing cycle, and hence to be 'over-stood'. Over-aged chestnut has a tendency to develop 'shake' - internal longitudinal cracking of the heartwood, and ash coppice is prone to internal rot setting in from the stool, so both of these factors mean that over-stood coppice stems are rarely suitable for milling into timber - firewood is the main end use. The demand for firewood has increased substantially over the last couple of years, something that seems likely to be sustained into the foreseeable future with soaring energy prices.

2.3 Site description

Whilst Oxenhill Woods carries no formal nature conservation designations, it is regarded as of considerable local interest for wildlife. The various habitats contain a range of native plants which in turn support a range of associated fauna.

The more mature woodland of Oxenhill Shaw is located at the southern end of the site. This features a ground flora typical of lowland broadleaved woodland on neutral to slightly alkaline soils. Perennial plants noted include: bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon ssp. montanum*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, ivy *Hedera helix*, lord's-and-ladies *Arum maculatum*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, town hall clock *Adoxa moschatellina*, red campion *Silene dioica*, together with, in the damper areas in the vicinity of the small stream which flows in a south-westerly direction along the western side of the wood, cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*, and various mosses and ferns.

In the most recently coppiced area, there is now a profusion of vegetative growth, including naturalised garden escapes such as Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*) and foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea* - and varieties). This provides further evidence of previous non-woodland use, as these plants will have been in the seed bed for a long time.

As recently as 1979 the young woodland to the north and east was in arable production. This has developed into a valuable, varied mixture of self-sown trees and shrubs, chalk grassland glades and wide grassy rides. The extensive network of paths that cross the woodland originally developed unofficially as a result of pedestrian use, and these are now being managed as wide rides which create important variation of habitat between the dense areas of scrub and young woodland. These provide open, sunny conditions for a

range of wildflowers. There are very good colonies of bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. Also twayblade *Listera ovata*, grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*, red bartsia *Odontites verna*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and ox-eye daisy *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*. Broomrape grows on the southern edge of the field.

The area provides excellent habitat for seed eating birds, small mammals and insects such as butterflies, moths, bees and hoverflies. A number of anthills have developed in the open areas and green woodpeckers can be seen feeding on them.

The south-western corner still retains rough grassland with scattered hawthorn scrub. Compartment 3 (0.9 hectares), consists of a grassy area with scattered trees to the south-west of the Shaw on a bank north of the M26 motorway. It was formed from spoil from motorway construction. These two areas of ostensibly open ground make up around 15% of the site: the total area of open ground, taking into account the widened grassy rides through the former Meadow is nearer 25%.

Main access to the site is through a gate at the southern end of Tudor Drive, Otford, and from the western end of Dynes Road, Kemsing. There is only limited on street parking at these two entrances, and no parking provision within the site. There is another way of reaching the site by way of Nightingale Road, Kemsing. There is a small parking area by the children's playground at the Kemsing recreation ground, from where the woods can be accessed by a short walk across part of the recreation field. This is also the only practical timber extraction route from the woods, as the two aforementioned access routes are unsuitable for lorries. There are no vehicular access rights along the farm track to the south of the site.

2.4 Significant hazards, constraints and threats

Hazards

- The condition of many of the over-aged trees within the Shaw is a potential hazard both to members of the public and to the staff and contractors called upon to work there. Written tree reports and full risk assessments are essential requirements.
- There is a policy of open access at all times across the whole site, and this is a potential hazard when any tree work is being undertaken or machinery is being used. Ample warning signs should be in place and working areas taped off. If necessary a banksman should be used to prevent members of the public from wandering into danger zones.

Constraints

- The whole of Oxenhill Woods, and especially the area around the Shaw, can become extremely wet in the winter months and after periods of prolonged rainfall. Using any machinery, or even driving across the site at such times can result in major ground damage. Timing of any woodland operations is therefore critical, and effectively prevents the use of any machinery during the winter months (November to April).
- The woodlands are known to hold breeding populations of birds on the 'at risk' list. Any woodland work must therefore be undertaken outside of the nesting season (March to end of July). This, coupled with the above point, means that any woodland work has to be undertaken during a short 'window': August to October (or even shorter if there is a wet summer/autumn).
- There is very restricted access for removing any coppice produce. The only practical timber stacking and lorry loading area is around the turning circle at the end of Nightingale Road. This is on land owned by Kemsing Parish Council, and is

close to children's play area. It also entails driving timber extraction machinery across part of the recreation ground. Prior consent needs to be obtained from the Parish Council before the commencement of operations.

- Any coppicing operation is by nature going to result in excess material in terms of small branch-wood/lop and top which is not marketable and would be very costly to extract and dispose of. Standard forestry practice is to burn this on site on carefully controlled fires. This raises issues when working close to a residential area – burning must not take place when the wind direction will blow smoke towards houses, or onto the motorway. Burning must not take place during exceptionally dry weather when there is a risk of uncontrolled fire spread.
- Public antipathy towards tree-felling. Opposition was expressed by some members of the local community to the last phase of coppicing undertaken in 2009. From discussions and meetings held with users of the site it transpired that there is a lack of understanding about the coppicing process generally and what it is designed to achieve, and in particular a lack of information about the proposed operations. Clearly there is a need for more public consultation before any further work is implemented.
- Oxenhill Shaw is covered by a Tree Preservation Order : TPO70/04. All tree felling above certain limits is controlled by the Forestry Commission under the provisions of the Forestry Act 1967. The correct procedure is to apply to the Forestry Commission, who will then consult with Sevenoaks District Council over the conditions attached to the TPO, before granting a Felling Licence.

Threats

- There have been a number of incidents recently of people setting fire to over-mature coppice trees retained within the area coppiced in 2009. This has been of most concern where the trees were rotten in the lower section of the trunk, and the hollowed out section acted like a chimney, drawing the fire up the trunk at an alarming rate. Local residents had to call the fire brigade to deal with the fires. Some trees have been felled as a result. There have also been incidents of fires being deliberately started in 'habitat piles', and larger trunks left for deadwood habitat. The local PCSO needs to be informed about these incidents, and site users to call the police to deal with anyone deliberately starting fires.
- In addition to fires, there are occasionally other acts of criminal damage, for example to signs/information boards, benches and trees.
- Although the site is fenced and vehicle access is strictly controlled, there are frequent incidents of rubbish dumping on the site, both fly-tipping and the dumping of garden rubbish.
- There are occasionally problems encountered with the illegal riding of motorbikes through the woods.
- Lack of resources – if at any time in the future funding was withdrawn, glades, paths and rides would become overgrown and quickly scrub over, which could seriously threaten the special character of the site.

3. Long term vision, management objectives and strategy

3.1 Long term vision

Oxenhill Woods presents a rare and dynamic area of regenerating woodlands and open space where careful management coupled with natural processes can act to create and maintain habitats and wildlife, for present and future generations of Otford, Kemsing and beyond to value and enjoy.

3.2 Management objectives

No.	Objective
1	To comply with the provisions of the UK Forestry Standard, the law in respect to tree felling, and the EU Habitats Directive, and to meet Sevenoaks District Council's sustainability targets.
2	To manage the former meadow by allowing the natural regeneration to grow and develop into natural broadleaved high forest woodland
3	To manage open wide rides and open space to allow extensive access for the public throughout the area.
4	To ensure public safety by undertaking written tree inspections to an established criteria, and undertake any identified remedial work as soon as practically possible.
5	To interpret the woodland and management of the area to the public and to develop an environmental education remit for the land.
6	To maintain the woodlands in a safe clean condition and to encourage public recreation sympathetic with the location and other objectives of the strategy. This includes keeping the land free of rubbish and litter and to discourage illegal, inappropriate and anti-social activities.
7	To manage and maintain the balance of woodland, scrub and grassland so as to maintain and enhance the nature conservation value of the site, along with the landscape consistent with its location as part of the North Downs Special Landscape Area.

3.3 Strategy

The management strategy and plan for Oxenhill Woods has been prepared in consultation with the Parish Councils of Otford and Kemsing. It is the District Council's objective to consult with the two Parish Councils and other interested parties on any proposed changes to the strategy.

Regenerating Woodland (formerly Oxenhill Meadow)

This is an almost unique example of an entirely naturally regenerated woodland in a managed community setting. The aim is to maintain a balance between open grassland, young scrub woodland and maturing high forest woodland. This mosaic will provide a diverse habitat of benefit to a greater range of species than if a more uniform habitat was allowed to develop.

The naturally developing woodland should be left largely unmanaged and the focus put on the management of existing open ground, glades and the ride network to make them more interesting and attractive for visitors. The trees in the dense areas will gradually thin themselves. This is an exciting experiment in natural woodland creation. In the long term the plan should be to create high forest woodland; there is no justification to impose a coppice management regime on this woodland area. A linear coppice management system should be established on a 5-8 year cycle along the ride edges. This will be part of the long-term ride management policy, which is designed to maintain the open nature of the rides and prevent them from becoming shaded by tall trees along the ride edges.

In the dense woodland it may at some point become desirable in the long term to undertake some tree thinning, but this will be a case of watching what happens with the young woodland and intervening if it appears to be necessary, but not otherwise.

Summary of strategy for the former Meadow area

1	To maintain existing grassland areas as grassland
2	To maintain the existing network of paths to form broad, grassy rides through the regenerating woodland.
3	To target known areas where the most desirable grassland plants occur and to maintain these as open grassland.
4	To cut sections of ride edge on rotation in order to break up the currently rather too regular ride-sides, as part of the long-term ride management policy.
5	To allow scrub to develop in marginal areas where a screening effect is required.
6	To control invasive alien species such as rhododendron, laurel, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam, should any of these arrive at the site. Golden-rod (<i>Solidago canadensis</i>) is spreading along some of the rides and needs to be controlled as it is a highly invasive garden species.

Oxenhill Shaw

The policy adopted several years ago was to coppice sections of the Shaw on rotation. Two areas have been cut in 2006 and 2009 respectively. Two years of coppicing (2007 & 2008) were missed due to poor weather conditions and the wet nature of the site. In retrospect this should be seen positively as it allowed time for the first area of coppice re-growth to attain sufficient height so as to adequately meet one of the general requirements of the Felling Licence conditions which states that "adjacent coppice coupes will not be cut until the re-growth has reached at least 2.0 metres in height" (this is from the UK Forestry Standard 1998). The area cut in 2009 was larger than would normally be cut in one go in a wood of this size. However, this larger area was cut for very sound operational reasons, namely the unusually dry autumn weather conditions prevailing at the time, which meant that the coppicing and timber extraction operation could be fully completed at the correct time of year with minimal ground damage since the ground was so dry (it is extremely rare that the weather stays dry into late October).

As previously stated, the last phase of coppicing did produce some significant adverse public reaction. This should not however change the long-term policy of re-establishing a coppice rotation in this wood. Two years will have elapsed since the previous area of coppice was cut, and at a recent inspection by the Forestry Commission it was reported that the coppice had re-grown well and was now of a sufficient size for the adjoining area to be cut. The Forestry Commission's viewpoint was that the Shaw is entirely surrounded by a larger area of dense regenerating woodland, and that continued coppicing of the over-aged coppice woodland in the Shaw is entirely appropriate. Some trees (including some left in the area most recently coppiced) will in any case need to be felled for health and safety reasons. A comprehensive tree safety report needs to be undertaken at an early juncture, and consent to implement the highlighted work obtained from the Sevenoaks District Council's arboricultural officer, in line with the Tree Preservation Order in force on the whole of the Shaw. The need for greater public consultation on proposed works will partly be achieved by making this plan available for public comment.

The management approach for the Shaw just outlined will retain some mature trees and shady areas containing dead wood important for invertebrate fauna and fungi, but will also provide open areas to encourage light-dependent ground flora and its associated fauna.

Summary of strategy for the Shaw area

1	To continue to re-establish a coppice rotation.
2	To carry out a full H&S inspection and fell unsafe trees.
3	To carry out public consultation.

4	To retain an area of standing woodland along ditch from South West Comer.
5	To apply for appropriate grants towards the cost of works.

The summary strategy for the whole site is as follows:

1	Continue regular consultation with Otford and Kemsing Parish Councils.
2	Keep the site clear of all rubbish, old tyres, etc and any dangerous items.
3	Secure the site boundaries and erect and maintain suitable fencing and gates at access points. Continue to confer with Network Rail for the continued maintenance of the fence along the boundary with the railway line.
4	Regularise encroachments onto the woodland either by disposal or licence.
5	Monitor and act on the garden compost heaps and the inappropriate dumping of garden and household waste.
6	Establish and plot locations of conglomerate stones, together with other historical features across the site.
7	Undertake essential tree safety work.
8	Maintain the network of established footpaths and the bridlepath. Maintain the footpaths by regular mowing. Monitor condition of surfaces and consider upgrading where necessary. Monitor the widening of paths and where necessary clear overhanging trees and encroaching scrub. Look at scalloping and creating pinch points along the rides.
9	Assess potential footpath and bridleway connections with other sites and footpaths.
10	Continue the provision of appropriate signs, information and detailed interpretive boards at access points. Leaflets to be made available at the Otford and Kemsing Heritage Centres and libraries. Provide fingerpost waymarking where necessary.
11	Continue to assess suitable locations and provide rustic benches. It has been considered, but not thought appropriate to provide picnic benches or litter bins. The cost and maintenance of both could become expensive. Maintain the benches and their surroundings.
12	Continue to bring the over-aged coppice woodland of the Shaw into a coppice management cycle, and henceforth manage as coppice-with-standards on a 20-25 year coppice rotation.
13	Enter Oxenhill Woods as a whole into the English Woodland Grant Scheme.
14	Continue the established grassland cutting and ride cutting regime.
15	Regularly monitor habitat management work for its effect on flora and fauna

3.4 Woodfuel initiative

Would you be interested in receiving information on funding opportunities for the purchase of harvesting machinery or wood fuel boilers?

Yes (delete as appropriate)

4. Management prescriptions/operations

4.1 Silvicultural systems

4.1.1 Harvesting

For the next 5 to 10 years, the only planned harvesting will be the cutting of coppice (for re-growth) in Oxenhill Shaw, as outlined in the strategy. The long-term objective will be to manage the majority of the Shaw on a coppice-with-standards system. The remainder of the woodland should be managed as broadleaved high forest with minimal intervention.

4.1.2 Phased felling and restructuring of plantations

There are no plantations at Oxenhill Woods, though there is the possibility that the regenerated woodland could become too even aged, so this needs to be assessed at each plan revision, to help determine if any intervention is required. The long-term plan needs to be flexible enough to allow this to happen, should it be deemed necessary.

4.1.3 Establishment, restocking and regeneration

A phased programme of coppicing is being re-introduced in the Shaw, and restocking will be adequately achieved through a combination of coppice re-growth and natural regeneration. No planting will be necessary, nor would it be in keeping with the nature of the site. The Shaw will ideally be managed in the long term as coppice with standards woodland. Recruitment of future standards should be possible by selecting naturally regenerated trees and allowing them to grow on.

By allowing the natural regeneration to grow and develop, the former Meadow will eventually turn into natural broadleaved high forest woodland. Again, there is absolutely no need for any tree planting to be undertaken anywhere on the site.

4.2 New planting

The majority of the site is comprised of young naturally regenerated woodland of up to 30 years of age. One of the exciting things about this site is that most of the woodland has been created by natural processes alone, and in keeping with this there is no intention to plant any trees on the site

4.3 Other operations

The only other works planned are those required to make the site more accessible and attractive for walkers and other user groups, as outlined in the Strategy (section 3.3).

4.4 Protection and maintenance

4.4.1 Pest and disease management

Synthetic chemical pesticides or herbicides are not used within the woodland, the only possible exception being if they were required for the control of alien and invasive species such as rhododendron, laurel, Japanese knotweed or Himalayan balsam. None of these species are currently present on the site, though intervention would be considered should they appear. Golden-rod is present and spreading along the rides, and will probably require a targeted herbicide application to control it.

The presence of deer would be very unlikely (the site is surrounded by urban development, a motorway and a mainline railway), and grey squirrels and rabbits do not seem to be present in sufficient numbers to cause a problem.

4.4.2 Fire plan

Broadleaved woodlands tend not to be at the highest risk from wildfire, and the young regenerating woodland on the former meadow, comprised of young trees full of green sapwood, is at low risk of burning, as is the younger aged coppice re-growth in the Shaw. The presence of conifers, and a high volume of dry deadwood, tends to increase the risk. Hence, as recent incidents have shown, the highest fire risk at this site is amongst the dead and dying trees and fallen deadwood remaining in Oxenhill Shaw.

To reduce the risk of uncontrolled fire, the lighting of fires and barbeques is not permitted at Oxenhill. Recent fires have all been started deliberately, and the police are now dealing with these incidents. Constant vigilance is requested on the part of all users and the local community, and any uncontrolled fire on the site should in the first instance be reported to the fire brigade by dialling 999. All such incidents should also be reported to the Senior Countryside Ranger on 07970-046908 or 01959-534802. Alternatively, call Sevenoaks District Council on 01732-227000.

The nearest access point to the Shaw for fire appliances is from the recreation ground car park at Nightingale Road. If fire crews require access to the north of the site from Tudor Drive, local residents are key holders (details to be supplied to the fire brigade).

4.4.3 Waste disposal and pollution

All non-biodegradable wastes are disposed of responsibly at the nearest registered waste site. Coppicing contractors are encouraged to use biodegradable chain oil when working at this site, and machinery operators will be required to carry spill kits to minimise the risk of contamination resulting from accidental fuel spills or oil leaks. Safe use of pesticide guidelines will be strictly adhered to.

'Lop and top' (brush) cannot be safely retained in the wood as deadwood habitat due to the fire risk. This will therefore have to be removed from site or disposed of by either chipping or closely controlled burning, as soon as possible after cutting.

4.4.4 Protection from unauthorised activities

Restrictions

Due to the character of the vegetation, the lighting of fires including portable barbeques and picnic stoves will not be permitted.

In order to maintain the quiet integrity of Oxenhill Woods, access by motorised vehicles including motorcycles will be prevented at all times. Activities such as shooting, model aircraft flying and metal detecting will also not be permitted. The main restrictions are displayed on the information/map boards, and in the Oxenhill leaflet.

To reduce the risk of unauthorised vehicle access, perimeter fencing will be maintained and vehicle access gates will be kept locked at all times.

4.4.5 Protection of other identified services and values

Safety of visitors and the public is paramount. The SDC Countryside Ranger regularly patrols the site and reports on anything posing an H&S risk, including dangerous trees, which Sevenoaks District Council has a legal obligation to deal with.

4.5 Game management

There is no intention to undertake any form of game management at this site, the primary purpose of which is to provide quiet, informal public recreation.

4.6 Protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and special features

4.6.1 Management of designated areas

The maintenance of the grassland is subject to a number of considerations. Grazing of livestock will not be possible. Use of mowing machinery has to be carefully considered, due to the density of the established scrub and the need to conserve the many anthills that have developed. However, grass cutting, clearing and scrub removal must be undertaken in order to prevent the former Meadow's succession to uniform stands of scrub. This work will have to be undertaken at cost. Consequently, the proposed management regime has been designed to enable maintenance work to be carried out more cost effectively. Whilst most work will be undertaken by contractors, volunteer conservation groups could be used for some tasks e.g. pulling Ragwort.

4.6.2 Measures to enhance biodiversity and other special features

Whilst the site carries no formal nature conservation designations, it is regarded as of considerable local interest for wildlife.

These habitats contain a variety of native plants which support a range of associated fauna. Whilst full detailed records of flora and fauna do not exist, a report prepared for Kemsing Parish Council in 1997 illustrates the value of the habitats for wildlife. The range of plants recorded indicates that the site is relatively diverse and species rich and is of great potential as an example of the regenerative powers of nature.

This diversity and species richness could be lost without continued appropriate management. Maintaining the balance between grassland, scrub and woodland is the priority. It will also be important to control invasive alien species, should these start invading the site.

The coppicing programme will provide favourable conditions for the development of woodland ground flora leaving some standing and fallen timber in order to provide diversity of habitat.

4.6.3 Special measures for ASNW and SNW

There is no ancient woodland at Oxenhill, all of the woodland (including the Shaw) being of comparatively recent origin. Although mostly planted, Oxenhill Shaw has developed some semi-natural characteristics, and removal of the last of the remaining conifer element, together with cutting of the over-stood coppice (especially the over-aged sweet chestnut stems) will further enhance the semi-natural character. The young developing woodland on the former meadow, being entirely self-sown, can more accurately be described as recent semi-natural woodland. Maintaining a generally 'hands-off' approach (apart from ride management) will allow this semi-natural woodland to establish and develop in its own way.

4.6.4 Special measures for PAWS

N/A (None of the woodland is of ancient origin)

4.6.5 Measures to mitigate impacts on landscape and neighbouring land

Consultation with the public to advise and inform as regards the coppicing programme. Information Boards about the coppicing to be placed in the relevant areas of Oxenhill Woods. Avoid burning lop and top when smoke is likely to drift in the direction of neighbouring properties and cause a nuisance.

Maintenance of the open area alongside the railway line and behind the properties at the southern end of Tudor Drive, to maintain site-lines and views. Control invasive species (including ragwort) to guard against the risk of these spreading on to neighbouring land.

4.7 Management of social and cultural values

4.7.1 Archaeology and sites of cultural interest

There are no scheduled monuments or any other listed features on the site. Unrecorded historical features revealed following recent coppicing operations in Oxenhill Shaw included close ridge and furrow typically found in hop-gardens, together with remnants of the original wire anchoring system on the woodland edge, thus proving that sections of the Shaw were still in agricultural use during the last century. Early map evidence supports this, indicating that most of the present Shaw was not wooded during the 19th century.

There are one or two conglomerate boulders around the area of the Shaw. These are not composed of locally occurring stone and the likely explanation is that they were transported to the site and deposited by the melting ice sheet at the end of the last ice age.

4.7.2 Public access and impacts on local people

Oxenhill Woods provide a valuable open space between the residential areas of Otford and Kemsing, which is easily accessible and used regularly by local people for walking, especially dog walking. Anecdotal evidence suggests this access has been enjoyed for many years. Similar evidence suggests that the land has been unofficially used as a children's play space for many years. Bridleway SR49A is part of an ancient trackway known as the Greenway.

The site is considered unsuitable for providing formal recreational facilities such as playing pitches or children's play equipment. The aim of management continues to facilitate quiet informal recreational access.

The site has some potential for attracting visitors from outside the local area. Footpath SR66 which runs adjacent to the southern boundary of the site connect with Sevenoaks and is a potential link for those walking from the town. Otford Railway Station is situated some 500 metres from Oxenhill Woods, easily accessible via a public footpath.

Car parking near the site is very limited. Tudor Drive, Otford and Dynes Road, Kemsing, abut the site, but there is no parking provision within the site. There is no proposal to provide a car park on the land. There is a car park within the adjacent Kemsing Parish Council Recreation Ground off Nightingale Road, and Otford Parish Council has a car park for its community woodland to the west of the site, approximately 600 metres along public footpath SR66.

Public Access on Foot

Oxenhill Woods have an extensive network of pathways established through years of unofficial use by local people. Many of these pathways have since been widened into rides, and will be maintained in favourable condition for their continued use by walkers. It is not proposed to undertake any widespread surfacing of paths, although this policy will be subject to review if heavy use causes excessive puddling and erosion of natural path surfaces. A wide wooden bridge has been erected to link Meadow area 1 and 4, enabling better access for both management purposes and for visitors.

The main access ways to the site shall be via:

- A gateway from southern end of Tudor Drive, Otford
- A gateway off footpath SR66 close to the railway bridge.
- Two stiles off footpath SR66 near the motorway bridge.
- From the Nightingale Road Recreation Ground, Kemsing.
- From bridleway SR49A, an all-ability access which has a hard surface suitable for wheelchairs and cyclists.

Facilities

A limited number of rustic-style benches have been provided. A dog bin has been provided by the Tudor Drive entrance. Name boards and essential notices have been provided at the main access points. Three detailed interpretive map boards have been installed. There is a leaflet dispenser attached to the Board near the Tudor Drive entrance.

Horse riding

A waymarked circular horse-riding route has been provided around the site. The route avoids areas used most regularly by visitors on foot. Riders are instructed to keep only to the permitted bridle route. It is not proposed to undertake surfacing of this route, although this will be subject to review if there is excessive poaching of the route during wet weather. The right to temporarily close this route if surface conditions become very poor will be retained. The ground is very wet for probably six months of the year due to the geology of the site being in the main Gault clay. It is not therefore considered to be a satisfactory area for horse riding.

Cycling

The site is accessible for cyclists, although due to the predominately clay nature of the soil and limited size of the site, it is not considered appropriate or necessary to develop and promote a designated cycle route.

Cyclists may ride by right along the surfaced Bridleway SR49A

5. Consultation

Organisation/individual	Date received	Comment	Response/action
Oxenhill Joint Management Committee			
Otford Parish Council (& local residents)			
Kemsing Parish Council (& local residents)			
Les Jones (Sevenoaks District Council Arboricultural Officer)			
Kent County Council Public Rights of Way			
Kent Wildlife Trust			
Network Rail (outside party engineers)			
Southern Water (underground services)			

6. Monitoring plan summary

Objective number, issue or UKWAS Requirement	Indicator	Method of assessment	Monitoring period	Responsibility	How will information be used?
1	Compliance with standards & targets	Desk / paperwork check	On-going assessment	Senior Parking & Amenity Officer/ Forestry Agent	Adjust policy/ management planning
2	Woodland growth on former meadow	Fixed point photography	Annual	Forestry Agent	Management & compartment records
3	Quality of rides & glades	Annual walkover/ fixed point photography	Annual	Forestry Agent	Ride management strategy/regime
4	Tree safety	Tree safety inspections	Annual	Senior Countryside Ranger	Tree risk strategy & management
6	Quality and amenity of the site	Walkover assessment / feedback from visitors	On-going assessment	Senior Countryside Ranger / Committee	Site management
7	Habitat quality & ecological value	Ecological monitoring & assessment	Annual	Management Committee / volunteers	Management planning / policy

7. Work programmes

7.1 Outline long-term work programme (2016 to 2031)

Compartment or area	Activity	Year		
		6-10	11-15	16-20
1 a-f	Establish and maintain rides	√	√	√
1 a-f	Undertake tree safety inspections	√	√	√
2	Annual cutting of rides & glades	√	√	√
2	Coppice short sections of ride edges on alternating basis	√	√	√
3	Annual cutting of meadow	√	√	√

7.2 Short-term work programme (2011 to 2016)

Compartment or area	Activity	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
1 d/e	Coppicing	√				
1 a-f	Establish and maintain rides	√	√	√	√	√
1 a-f	Undertake tree safety inspections	√	√	√	√	√
2	Annual cutting of rides & glades	√	√	√	√	√
3	Annual cutting of meadow	√	√	√	√	√

8. Costings (2.2.1)

Sevenoaks District Council funds the management of Oxenhill Woods from an annual budget allocation. It is anticipated that an annual Woodland Management Grant payment of £738 will contribute approximately 20% of the annual budget. There will be timber income from the final phases of the coppicing in Oxenhill Shaw. This should cover the majority of the cost of undertaking the work.

9. Maps

List all maps here and append to plan.

Map No./Title	Description
1	Ownership, designations, constraints map
2	Historical, ecological and cultural features map
3	5 year work proposals map
4	Long-term (20 year) vision map

10. Thinning, felling and restocking proposals

Applicants seeking funding through the wood fuel initiative for harvesting machinery or wood fuel boilers must indicate the total volume that is to be thinned and felled during the period of this plan, **by completing Table A.**

This section **should not be completed** for any other applications.

Table A.

Species	Total estimated volume to be harvested during plan period (m ³)
Broadleaves	
Conifers	

