

# **Rufford Recreation Ground Woodland**

## **Five Year Management Plan and Brief**

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**SITE Rufford Recreation Ground (Wood)**

**GRID SD469151**

**Natural area** Lancashire Plains and Valleys (copy attached)  
**Character area** Lancashire and Amounderness Plain (copy attached)  
**Local Authorities** West Lancashire District Council, Lancashire County Council

**1. SITE ASSESSMENT:**

- a Size** 0.9ha (approx.)  
**b Tenure** The site is owned and managed by Rufford Parish Council

**c General Information**

- **Location** The site abuts the western side of the A59, Liverpool Road, in Rufford. Rufford Old Hall is to its east and the mature gardens of Flash Lane are to its west, Rufford Park further west and Mere Sands Wood further west again.
- **Description** The Recreation Ground Woodland is deciduous, of the oak and birch types typical of the light acid soils that dominate the Lancashire Plain.
- **Cultural** The Recreation Ground and its woodland are well used by residents, as an area for quiet recreation and dog walking.

**d Features of importance**

**A) UK Priority Species/habitats**

The following occur regularly at the site and are subject to UK Action Plans. (Their designation as "Priorities" in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) means that special conservation effort is directed towards them. Designation does not necessarily mean they are rare, but indicates a major concern about their status).

**Species:** Breeding: Song Thrush, Bullfinch  
 Using site during breeding season: Starling, House Sparrow  
 Occasionally recorded on site: Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Tit, Reed Bunting  
 Historical (recorded in last ten years but no longer present): Red Squirrel

**Habitats:** Wet woodland (a small compartment, cpl)

**B) County BAP (Lancashire)**

A regional extension to the UK BAP, a local BAP, has been produced for Lancashire. The following species and habitats that occur in the Recreation Ground woodland, are subject to Action Plans in the Lancashire BAP and are in addition to those in the UK Plan.

**Species:** Bats (the county plan considers all species of bat in a single plan)  
**Habitats:** Broadleaved and Mixed Woodland

(In the spirit of the BAP, the woodland's importance should be seen as part of a larger tract of largely deciduous woodland extending from Rufford Old Hall to Mere Sands Wood.)

### C) Wildlife site

All county level sites of wildlife importance that fall outside national importance, and thus statutory protection, are listed as Biological Heritage Sites (BHS). Features leading to a site being BHS listed are considered during development planning procedures. Rufford Recreation Ground does not meet the county criteria but in the contiguous land at Rufford Park is listed (*Site 41NE01*), for its mammals and parkland and scattered trees. The Recreation Ground should be viewed as a buffer to this land.

## 2 Summary Description

Rufford Recreation Ground woodland is a deciduous wood (NVC W10 and 16) with an oak canopy with birch, sycamore and beech, a bush layer of elder, holly, rowan and related saplings and a field layer of bramble, ivy, soft rush and grasses (*Agrostis capillaris* being the most abundant). At the southern end a small compartment of wetter woodland exists, with a willow and oak canopy, elder bush layer and a nettle dominated field layer. West Lancashire is one of the least wooded districts in a sparsely wooded county. The Recreation Ground woodland forms an element of the district's second largest woodland, when it is considered as a part of a tract of broadleaved and mixed woodland that extends east to west from Rufford Old Hall to Mere Sands Wood, and Smithy Wood to the north.

The value of the site for visitors is high. It is accessible, adjacent to a well-used playing field and it abuts the Village Hall and its car park. *Map One* defines the management compartments and is annotated with brief descriptions of these.

## 3 Confirmation of Features

### a. Size

This is a small site, with the most valuable compartment (the Wet Woodland, cp 1) only 0.15ha. This is probably insufficient to support viable populations of many of the specialist plant and animal species associated with habitats. But the site is an important buffer around more expansive wood and parkland and forms a useful green corridor for species moving through the larger woodland unit.

### b. Diversity

The woodland is comprised of two types of woodland. The National Vegetation Classification types these most closely fit are W10 and W16, neither of these types of woodland is associated with diverse flora and the small size of the wood limits the diversity of fauna.

### c. Naturalness

The woodland represents an essentially artificial habitat. The occurrence of mature beech, sycamore and rhododendron, with a specimen yew, indicate planting of species not native to this area. Several of the oak trees are hybrids with the alien Turkey oak and there are some pure Turkey oaks. The small wet woodland compartment however appears to be a natural community.

**d. Rarity**

Wet woodland is UK BAP Priority Habitat. Woodland is uncommon in West Lancashire. Several Red listed, UK Priority bird species occur on site (see Section 1.d.A).

**e. Fragility**

The woodland understorey in compartment three is mostly species poor due in part to the spread of the non-native and invasive rhododendron. Without intervention, the spread of rhododendron is likely to spread and seriously deplete the native flora throughout the areas of drier woodland. The site is well equipped to cope with visitor pressure by the provision of car parking facilities, footpaths and a durable habitat.

**f. Typicalness**

The development of birch and oak woodland is typical of that on acid soils in West Lancashire, including the canopy sycamore and understorey rhododendron, which are common introductions to many woodlands in the region. The wet woodland in compartment one is also typical of the regenerating damp copses on the mosslands in the district.

**g. Recorded History**

Unknown.

**h. Position in the Ecological/Geographical Unit**

As previously ascertained (Section 2), the Recreation Ground woodland forms an element of the district's second largest woodland that extends east to west from Rufford Old Hall to Mere Sands Wood, and Smithy Wood to the north.

**i. Potential**

The quality and structure of the woodland can be improved by continual removal of sycamore saplings and whips and of rhododendron.

The site has potential for increased use by residents and by visitors to Village Hall functions. The flat and generally well-drained path through the woodland could be up graded to allow wheelchair use. The open areas in compartment 3 may be an appropriate spot for benches or similar countryside furniture.

**j. Intrinsic Appeal**

The woodland is small, but in places quite dense. This can give an impression of being in the wild without ever being far from facilities. This makes it an ideal excursion for those not wishing to venture far, but wanting a taste of a typical West Lancashire wood.

**4 Factors Which Influence Or May Influence The Features Of The Site****a. Internal Natural Factors**

1. The spread of non-native rhododendron will prevent the development of a more natural wildlife-rich understorey.

2. The development of sycamore saplings to maturation will lead to the closing of the canopy and eventual impoverishment of bush and field layers.
  3. The long-term, natural succession of the wet woodland could lead to a drying out and development into similar type of woodland in compartment 2 and 3.
- b. **Man induced Factors**
1. The site has great potential for attracting small numbers of visitors.
  2. Lack of resources is likely to be a limiting factor in equipping, managing and interpreting the site.
- c. **External Factors**
1. Impact of litter and vandalism will detract from the intrinsic appeal.
  2. Unauthorised lighting of fires could endanger wildlife.
  3. Grey squirrel have spread in West Lancashire and have been present in Rufford since 1993.
  4. Seed sources of non-native plants (sycamore, rhododendron, horse chestnut) from surrounding land.
  5. Dumping of vegetative waste and inadvertent spread of rampant garden escapes (e.g. *Lamium album* in compartment 4).
- d. **Management Constraints**
1. Any conditions laid down in the conveyance of the land to the Parish Council.
  2. A felling licence from the Forestry Commission will be necessary for any woodland operation involving the felling of more than 5 cubic metres in any one calendar quarter
  3. The following species relevant to the site are specifically protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended): all species of bat (Schedules 5 and 6).
  4. Under the Owner's Liability Act, the landowner must ensure that every reasonable care is taken to remove any risks to both legitimate visitors and to trespassers on the site. This includes ensuring that all footpaths or other constructions are safe, removing any hazardous objects and conducting a safety audit in order to identify any further hazards
  5. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974, all operations on the site must be undertaken by trained personnel, using methods and equipment approved by the Health and Safety Executive. A safety audit is also required.

## 5 Management Objectives

### 5.1 Objectives

1. Monitor and maintain the populations and diversity of notable breeding and wintering bird species.
2. Monitor and maintain any bat species.
3. Enhance the structure and wildlife value of the woodland.

4. Increase community awareness of the value site and encourage quiet enjoyment and appreciation.
5. Develop community involvement with the site
6. Fulfil all legal and other obligations.

## 5.2 Rationale

### Birds

The notable bird species should benefit from good management of the woodland, particularly the wet woodland (compartment 1) and the largest compartment of birch woodland (compartment 4).

### Bats

Neighbouring Rufford Park and nearby Mere Sands Wood are arguably the top bat sites in West Lancashire. It follows that the woodland at the Recreation Ground will be used by bats for foraging and that some of the older trees may host roosts. Monitoring will be required to confirm this.

### Woodland

The woodland should principally be managed by control of sycamore and rhododendron and other non-native species and the encouragement of the regeneration of natural birch-oak woodland/wet woodland. Where safe to do so, dead wood should be left *in situ* for breeding birds, fungi and invertebrates of dead wood habitats. Photographic monitoring should undertaken in each compartment, to record the development of the woodland structure.

### Community awareness and involvement

The Recreation Ground and Village Hall are well-used community facilities for Rufford residents. The woodland provides a useful extension to this and an opportunity to interpret the wider wildlife importance that Rufford boasts. The proximity of the site to the local primary school adds further potential for involvement. Community wildlife tasks and events such as making and checking nest boxes, litter picks, fungal forays, dawn chorus walks would help engage locals; some of these could be done in association with other sites.

## 5.3 Action Plan

### 1. Habitat Management (see Habitat Management Map, *Map Two*)

(The habitat management actions alone have been assigned timescales/appropriate periods and priorities, the other actions will require more funding/decision making or their priorities are less scientific and more subjective).

- Remove all sycamore saplings and whips in bush layer, (compartments 1, 2, 4).  
*Priority 1: best done in autumn when easy to identify. Roots will need removing.*

- Remove all Turkey oak and Turkey oak hybrids from field and bush layer (compartment 3).

*Priority 2: may need expertise to identify these, can be marked in summer and removed in winter*

- Remove rhododendron (compartment 3 and 4).

*Priority 1: a long on going winter task. Best to up root and remove all material off site. Repeated visits to previous winter's sites are required to keep a check on unwanted regeneration.*

- Remove Bamboo (compartment 3).  
*Priority 3: can be done anytime, only one specimen.*
- Remove escaped *Lamium argenteum* (Compartment 4).  
*Priority 1: asap, and once uprooted any regeneration needs to be removed immediately.*
- Encourage natural regeneration of oak-birch-wavy hair grass woodland (compartment 4).  
*Priority 2: reduce trampling off-path and consider protecting regenerating saplings if rabbit or deer damage is evident.*
- Leave standing dead wood, where safe (all compartments).  
*Priority 1: but if death was by disease and spread is likely removal and specialist advice should be sought.*
- Prevent spread of beech saplings from compartments 3 and 4.  
*Priority 2: may need identifying in summer, but removal in autumn/winter (less disturbance to field layer).*
- Prevent nutrient build up caused by dumping of grass cuttings and garden refuse (all compartments).  
*Priority 1: A common problem in residential areas, but needs keeping on top of*
- Prevent nutrient build up by restricting fire sites to one in compartment 2 and one in compartment 4.  
*Priority 1: fire sites (which should only be active in autumn/winter) will need marking out: unauthorised fires should be removed asap.*
- Plant Hawthorn in the drier areas of the Wet Woodland, to encourage Bullfinches (compartment 1).  
*Priority 2: a UK Priority species, planting in winter, with rabbit protection, a good community task.*
- Plant Gorse for Bullfinches in the corridor between the woodland and stone wall which runs parallel to A59 (if this does not interfere with safety/legal considerations) (compartments 1, 2).  
*Priority 2: a UK Priority species; gorse petals are an important food source in early spring.*
- Source any planting from local genetic stock.  
*Priority 1: permission could be granted to collect saplings from local sites.*
- Maintain a feeding station for small birds (target species: Bullfinch, House Sparrow, Starling, Reed Bunting).  
*Priority 2: As much a community exercise as a conservation one. Feeding could be restricted to Oct-Mar period. Would need to be topped up daily.*
- Erect five small-hole nest boxes and clear out each year in February (four in compartment 4, one in Compartment 1).  
*Priority 2: As much a community exercise as a conservation one. These compartments have the best-structured bush layers.*
- Liaise with local bat group.  
*Priority 2: A basic survey, perhaps done as an event (May to Aug best).*
- Monitor populations of UK BAP species listed in Section 1, above.  
*Priority 1: Encourage informed visitors to report interesting sightings and keep a log.*

- Take regular photographs of the site to inform monitoring and future management. *Priority 1: Pictures taken from a fixed point, during different seasons and every five years are usually the most useful.*

## 2. Community Involvement

- Incorporate the woodland into events and activities at the Recreation Ground and Village Hall.
- Encourage links with local school through activities such as nest box monitoring.
- Erect entrance sign to welcome visitors to wood (Compartment 1).
- Erect guideposts/waymarkers to channel access through main path.
- Maintain a feeding station for small birds.
- Involve community in woodland tasks, such as clean ups, access improvements and clearing jobs.
- Disseminate information about any changes to the woodland to community through press, newsletters, leaflet drops etc.
- Consider a display about the wildlife value of Rufford's woodlands.

## 3. Estate Services and Access

- Monitor condition of boundary structures.
- Upgrade main path to BT Countryside For All "Urban fringe and managed landscapes" standard. \* This will enable wheelchair access.
- Prune back trees to ensure clear walking tunnels (path should be at least 1200mm wide and 2100mm high at all times). This is an issue for all compartments but of particular relevance presently to Compartment 1.
- Consider benches and/or picnic tables in the open areas (Compartment 3).
- Maintain any new signs, posts and countryside furniture.
- Monitor and maintain path condition.
- Collect visitor statistics for sample periods.

## 4. Legal and Administration

- Review and revise management plan according to results of monitoring and survey work.
- Undertake a tree safety audit on an appropriate timescale.
- Carry out monthly inspections of footpaths and structures, to identify risks and take appropriate actions to prevent exposure to these risks.
- Carry out annual safety audit of activities and procedures on the site.
- Keep a log of all management activities and monitoring results.
- Ensure that a licence is obtained from the Forestry Commission for operations involving the felling of more than 5 cubic metres of timber in any one-calendar quarter.

\* BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards – Urban Fringe and Managed Landscapes:

Path surface: Hard and firm, with very few loose stones and none bigger than 10mm.

Path Width: 1200mm

Width restrictions allowed: At least 815mm for no more than 300mm along path; 1000mm for no more than 1600mm along path.

Max. distance between passing places: 100m (passing places should be 1500mm wide and 2000mm long).

Max. distance between rest areas (e.g. bench): 200m

Gradients: 1:20

Max. slope across path: 1:45

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