

GUNTON WOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN

2003 - 2008

Prepared by the Gunton Woodland Community Project



Site Details

Name	Gunton Wood, North Lowestoft
Grid Reference	TM 543 958
Local Planning Authority	Waveney District Council
Area	3.5 ha
Owner	Waveney District Council own 2.5 ha (subject of this LNR submission) Gunton St Peters Church PCC own 1.0 ha (this is not part of this LNR submission)
Protection Status	WDC owned land is classified as Open Space, within which development is not normally permitted
Access	The site has free, open access from all sides for pedestrians. Gates prevent unauthorised vehicular access at the main entrance in Gunton Church Lane

Historical Background

The area known as Gunton Wood once formed part of the grounds of Gunton Old Hall. The latter part of the 19th Century was the most prosperous time for the Fowler family who occupied the Hall and some of the specimen trees that were planted then still survive today.

After Ernest Fowler J.P. died in 1922, a steady decline set in and eventually the estate was dissolved and the Old Hall was pulled down in 1963. Waveney District Council assumed ownership of that part of the Wood lying to the West of the Public Footpath while the land to the East continued to be owned by Gunton St Peters Church. Very few management operations were carried out in the Wood for many years, other than the minimum required on safety grounds, and it was the neglected state of the Wood in 1997 that prompted action by local residents.

Working to a Management Plan drawn up by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, and with the help and support of Waveney District Council, GWCP work parties commenced work in April 1998 and, since then, have succeeded in completing all of the Plan objectives.

Site Description

Gunton Wood is now a fully accessible woodland with a wide variety of habitat. Although Sycamores still dominate in some areas they have been thinned to allow better development of ground flora. Species of canopy trees, particularly at the Northern end, include Oak, Beech, Copper Beech, Ash, Black Poplar and Scots Pine together with some very large, mature Hawthorn. Among the species present in the Southern end of the wood are the Ash, Horse Chestnut, Oak, Yew, Holly and three avenues of 150 year-old Common Limes.

The understory is mainly a mixture of Hawthorn, Elder, suckering Elm, Holly, Hazel and Willow, while some large areas of Brambles, Nettles, and Cleavers together with the entire Western corner of the Wood have been deliberately left unmanaged. In Spring the ground flora is a spectacular show of Snowdrops, Daffodils, Primroses and Bluebells. Several members of the Orchid species proliferate on the Northern edge.

Frequently seen wildlife include the Squirrel, Muntjac and Fox, and habitat piles have been provided for invertebrates and small mammals. A pond has been constructed for bog-loving marginal plants and it should provide a useful home for the Great-crested Newts which have been found in the Wood. Many nesting boxes have been installed for the large and various bird population. Owls and Bats are regular visitors.

All footpaths are covered with wood chips permitting year-round access for walkers and wheelchair users, together with several seats on the way-marked circular walk. Three full colour Interpretation Boards have been installed which describe both the wildlife and the historical associations of the Wood with the origins of Lowestoft porcelain.

Objectives of the Management Plan

- 1 To continue to enhance the diversity of trees, shrubs and wild flowers by controlling Sycamore and Bramble and by appropriate in-fill planting with native species.
- 2 To provide aftercare for newly planted trees and shrubs and to maintain the state of the footpaths to ensure easy public access.
- 3 To make sure that the wood is a safe environment by dealing with “hanging” branches above footpaths following storm damage although standing deadwood will be left if it presents no danger to the public.
- 4 To encourage the use of the wood as a source of information and enjoyment by groups of schoolchildren and “special needs” students.
- 5 To follow the overriding principle of causing minimum disturbance to wildlife by continuing to leave two large areas in an “unmanaged” state.

Management Operations

The Wood is moving into the “care and maintenance” phase as most of the main structural and clearing tasks have already been completed.

The following operations are planned over the next five year period. After this, it is intended to review the status of the woodland habitat and wildlife population and vary the plan accordingly.

- Areas around newly planted trees require regular weeding, the trees need pruning and restaking where necessary. Where there is overcrowding, appropriate thinning will be carried out, by transplanting where possible.
- A limited amount of Sycamore felling or topping is still required, mainly of diseased or damaged trees. Sycamore regeneration is to be controlled by pulling seedlings.
- Selective coppicing of Hazel, Elder and Willow will be done in the Winter.
- Chip spreading is a regular requirement, particularly in Winter months. Arrangements have been made for a supply of suitable woodchips from the Council.
- The wild flower meadow, on the Northern edge of the Wood needs weeding, grass-cutting and raking off at the appropriate time.
- During the months of January and February, all 70 nesting boxes need to be inspected, cleaned, logged and repaired where necessary.
- A close watch will be kept for signs of a resurgence of Japanese Knotweed.
- In November 2003, it is planned to renew the pond liner as the existing one is unsatisfactory. Regular pond maintenance includes removal of vegetation and silt.
- Path edging, rustic fencing and seats all require periodic maintenance and/or replacement.
- There is still scope, at present, for an annual tree planting (although this is expected to taper off). This event has attracted, in the past, up to 70 participants, many of whom are children. It is usually combined with a barbeque.
- The majority of dog owners do act responsibly by cleaning up behind their pets. But there are a few exceptions and so the regular litter picking rounds take care of this problem too.
- The adjacent Gunton Primary School has its own Nature Reserve (which is also part of Gunton Wood) within its own grounds. But other local schools are not so fortunate and they will be encouraged to use the Wood for environmental education. Work participation activities by “special needs” students from Great Yarmouth College and visits by groups such as the Gunton Brownies will also continue.
- Nature rambles and plant identification trails will be organised for the public by qualified members of GWCP.

Organization

Clearly, successful implementation of this programme will depend on the continued health of the GWCP organization. It has a strong membership which continues to grow. A bi-monthly Newsletter delivered to 160 homes keeps everyone in touch with progress and forthcoming events. The Group is financially sound, being well supported by donations and by its own fund-raising activities. Social events such as Summer fetes, Christmas parties and coach trips to country gardens are over-subscribed and there is no reason why it should not continue to flourish as a focal point in the community life of Gunton.

Attachment A

List of Operations already completed by GWCP between 1998 and 2002 under the first SWT Management Plan, dated 1997

- Sycamores were felled to open up the canopy allowing new growth to regenerate. Most of this work was done by GWCP using only hand tools but large trees and difficult jobs were executed by Council tree gangs. Stumping with chainsaws and application of herbicide was also Council work.
- Cleared brambles, nettles and rank vegetation (while taking care to leave sufficient areas for supporting wildlife).
- Planted cleared areas with a variety of native trees and shrubs. Although the 1997 Plan envisaged some 820 trees, in fact nearly 2500 have been planted. This was to allow for failures and to use a closer spacing so that appropriate thinning can be done later. Events have shown this policy to be valid, since it has proved difficult to establish a new shrub layer in some areas under heavy canopy. Hazel has given best results in these conditions.
- Laid a network of paths to open up previously inaccessible parts of the wood to the public. The paths were edged with sycamore logs and covered with chips to enable access by wheelchairs for almost the entire year. A circular walk has been waymarked.
- Constructed habitat piles from cut and fallen timber.
- Erected rustic style seats at appropriate places for use by the public.
- Established a tree nursery for growing-on seedlings and a special grassy area for the introduction of selected species of native wild flowers, using both seeds and plugs.
- Installed 70 nesting boxes for birds, bats and owls.
- Removed a large patch of Japanese Knotweed by hand digging each root.
- Designed, purchased and installed three high quality Information Boards describing wildlife features and the history of the wood.
- Erected a pair of country-style 5-bar timber security gates, with pedestrian and wheelchair access, at the entrance to the wood.
- Created a wildlife pond (in the Church-owned wood) by building a dam wall with oak piles and gravity feeding the pond from a nearby ditch through buried pipelines.
- Carried out pruning, coppicing, weeding, tree staking, ditch clearing and litter picking.

Close liaison has been maintained with Waveney District Council and Suffolk Wildlife Trust throughout the period.

To date, 325 work parties totalling 9250 hours have been completed, without accident. The Group is insured with Zurich Municipal under a policy approved by WDC.

During the 5 year period 1998 – 2002 inclusive funding from various organisations and local businesses has totalled some £7500.

Group generated funds from donations, events, merchandise sales etc, has totalled £7000. Expenditure on trees, tubes, tools, insurance, newsletters etc is £8000.

The total cost of the Information Boards was £4000, of which half was met by sponsorship. GWCP's current bank balance is approximately £2500.

Attachment B

Cost Estimate for the 5 year period 2003-2008 (average per year)

The following **expenditure** is envisaged:

	£
Tools, additional and replacement	200
Consumables	100
Insurance	300
Trees, shrubs, flowers	300 (decreasing)
Administration (stationery, newsletters etc)	300
Meeting costs (room hire, speaker)	80
Abnormal working expenditure eg repairs to pond	<u>200</u>
Total	1480
Say,	<u>£1500 per year</u>

Note: This assumes that the services of WDC tree gangs are supplied at no cost.

The following **income** can be expected, based on past experience:

Donations from members	200
Profit from Summer fete, raffles etc	800
Profit from GWCP merchandise sales, sponsorship*	200
Funding from Third Parties, (as required to meet shortfall)	<u>300</u>
Say,	<u>£1500 per year</u>

Note: This includes clothing, tea towels, calendars, cards, notelets, preserves, videos, bird tables, nesting boxes etc