

BIG WOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2027

Draft prepared by the Friend of Big Wood 1/8/21



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1 Introduction and background

This document is an update to the Big Wood management plan of 2016-21 and sets out the policy and programme of works envisaged for the next five years.

Previous plans had focused primarily on nature conservation. The flexible sensitive management plan that has been introduced has been successful as shown by the Bird, Bat, Fungi and Floral surveys carried out over the last five years. Big Wood currently provides a very good structure for birds according to the Bird specialist. The fungi survey showed that the wood is suitable for many fungi especially the areas with old uncut hazel. The plant survey produced a long list of species and confirms the rare large number of wild service trees and an unexpected number of true crab apple trees. Whilst nature conservation remains a key consideration, the 2016-21 5 year plan took into account that a major change had been recognised nationally in the value of urban woodlands as recreational green space and as an aid to public health and well-being. As well as a well-used local amenity, Big Wood promotes easy and constant access to nature, and furthermore the Friends of Big Wood add to the community value by regularly organising events such as activity mornings, nature talks, guided nature walks, bio-diversity survey reports and special forest school educational events. Access to a LNR such as Big Wood also provides significant NHS-recognised social prescribing benefits. The simple method of being calm and quiet amongst the trees, observing nature around you whilst breathing deeply can help both adults and children de-stress and boost wellbeing. Therefore, preserving this ancient wood's public amenity can only be achieved by managing it as an intact LNR.

The latest plan builds on the foundations of the 2016-21 plan which aimed to enhance the valuable resources within Big Wood in a clear and timed manner for the future benefit for all and takes account of the factors set out above.

1.1 Site description

Big Wood is a 6.2 hectare woodland situated within the Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation Area and within the London Borough of Barnet in North West London.

Big Wood is a site with high public use for recreation including dog walkers and joggers. It is also an established pedestrian route through the woodland to adjoining roads, local shops and schools. However, the area is restricted to pedestrian use only and is not open to cyclists. No Cycling signs are displayed at every entrance to the wood.

1.2 Location & Access

Big Wood is situated in the triangular area created by Oakwood Road, Northway and

Denman Drive South. Falloden Way (A1) is 50 metres from the Northern boundary of Big Wood. The national grid reference is TQ255 887. Ordnance survey details are E525427 N188659 and the postcode for the Temple Fortune Hill Memorial Gate entrance is NW11 7XR.

The wood is open to the public at all times. There are points of access to and from Oakwood Road, Denman Drive South, two along Northway and the main entrance in Temple Fortune Hill. All these entrances are accessible without steps and the main path is a metalled footpath for wheelchairs and children's pushchairs.

1.3 Status & Management Responsibilities

The wood is ancient woodland and is a designated Local Nature Reserve recognised by English Nature in 1999. The wood is owned by the London Borough of Barnet and managed by the Council in partnership with the Friends of Big Wood Organisation. This organisation also liaises with representatives from the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association Trees & Open Spaces Committee. These groups make up the community management element of the woodland.

Big Wood has been designated a Woods for People' site. Woods for People is a partnership between the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust to create and maintain a UK-wide inventory of accessible woodland. Bigwood is managed primarily as amenity woodland but with emphasis on habitat management and biodiversity. Managing the wood as a LNR necessitates both monitoring and partially controlling public access in order to protect and enhance its delicate biodiversity value.

1.4 Physical description

1.4.1 Geology & Soils

The wood is situated over London Clay. The overlying soils derived from this stratum are typically fairly neutral, heavy clays. It is suggested that in Big Wood residual sandy deposits may overlie these clays, giving rise to more acidic conditions locally.

1.4.2 Topography & Drainage

The wood is situated on a gentle north facing slope with a maximum height of 80m and drains into Mutton Brook which itself drains into Dollis Brook near Hendon, becoming the river Brent and drains into Brent Reservoir at the Welsh Harp.

The perimeter and perimeter ditches lines have the potential to be colonised by invasive species and become dumping grounds for garden waste from adjacent gardens. This will compromise their effectiveness, increasing the risk of localised flooding to adjacent properties. (Strategies to manage these risks are covered later in this plan).

1.5 Biological information

1.5.1 Vegetation

The wood is classified as ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and the earliest map dates to 1746 though much earlier references from the 16th century and in the Domesday book are documented.

A number of ancient woodland indicator species are present within Big Wood, including wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, and yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*. Recently greater celandine *Chelidonium majus* has appeared near the memorial gate

The wood is most likely to have been originally managed in the Middle Ages, and the two following centuries, as mixed coppice with standards, but from the end of the 18th century access restrictions were imposed by the landlord prohibiting tenants from entering the wood to cut coppice. The full coppice had not been cut for at least 150 years.

The oaks of the present canopy appear to have been planted as a high forest crop following clear-felling in the late 18th and early 19th century. The oaks are closely planted suggesting limited silvicultural management since their original planting.

The woodland canopy is dominated by English oak (*Quercus robur*), with frequent Wild service (*Sorbus torminalis*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)- a few remain despite ash dieback and Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*). Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulas*) occurs sporadically and also forms a grove in compartment 6.

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata* and *Crataegus monogyna*) with Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) dominate the understory with Yew (*Taxus baccata*), Field maple (*Acer campestre*), Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and an exceptional number of true wild crab (*Malus sylvestris*).

Shrub layer species present in the woodland include guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), dog rose and field rose. Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) and ivy (*Hedera helix*) dominate the field layer species in most compartments especially towards the woodland edges and control of these two species will feature significantly in any future management of the wood.

There also a number of exotics present throughout the compartments including; Rhododendron ponticum, Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos alba*), privet (*Ligustrum*

ovalifolium), horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). These will also require monitoring and control to limit their spread.

Three-cornered Leek was introduced in Compartment 2 in the 1980s and 90s by local gardeners and other species have been similarly introduced, mainly along the boundaries.

The ground flora is sparse in some central compartments but abundant in others. They include ancient woodland indicator species such as bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), dogs mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and yellow archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*). Other ground flora species present include creeping soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*) cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) and Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) as well as figwort, hedge woundwort, enchanter, nightshade, wood avens and hedge garlic.

A little bulb planting of native provenance Bluebells has taken place in the last few years, and more recently wild daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*). This is one of the tasks carried out by Friends of Big Wood volunteers and has enhanced the ground flora in several compartments. Some native shrubs have been planted at the memorial gate entrance, notably guelder rose ,

When coppicing in compartment 3 was reinstated in 1994, the ground flora there was boosted with foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), Soft-Rush (*Juncus effusus*), raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*), common figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*) and enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*). A small number of additional ancient woodland indicator species or regionally scarce ground flora are also present throughout the wood. These include; ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), remote sedge (*Carex remota*) and Wood-Millet (*Milium effusum*). Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) also occurs but is probably naturalised.

1.5.2 Fauna

Surveys to monitor mammals, birds and other fauna have been carried out in the previous 5 year period and it is planned to update these surveys during the 2022- 2027 period. Evidence from the 2016 bird survey indicates that the woodland supports at least 28 nesting species and has various visiting birds including cuckoo (on the red list). Residents include great spotted and green woodpeckers, robin, nuthatch, tree creeper, bluetit, long tailed tit and great tit, goldcrest, wren, blackcap, tawny owl, song and mistle thrush, blackbird, bullfinch, carrion crow, wood pigeon, and large numbers of jays, magpies and parakeets.

Grey squirrels are common and there are foxes and some evidence of hedgehogs. The

latest bat survey has shown that bat activity takes place throughout Bigwood, the vast majority of which are common and soprano pipistrelles. Newts have been observed aestivating in the wood and wood mice are known to be present. Butterflies include the speckled wood frequently with brimstone, red admiral, holly blue, peacock and orange tip in small numbers.

1.6 Past management and land use history

The wood was originally part of a larger woodland shown on maps dating from c1746 and mentioned in 16th century texts. There is evidence of a Saxon boundary near the Temple Fortune Hill Memorial Gate entrance. A significant part of the woodland was lost when Hampstead Garden suburb was built in the early nineteenth century though the woodland was key to the design of the Suburb.

The wood was previously managed as mixed coppice with oak standards. This management has lapsed in the last 150 years leading to many old mature coppice stools and stored coppice, which is self coppicing and whose old stems support many important species. There is minimal evidence of any silvicultural operations such as thinning and restocking apparent amongst the high forest tree species, although it is evident that a significant number of the oak stock were planted in the nineteenth century. The previous lack of wood management has allowed natural regeneration of hazel which is thriving as the dominant broadleaved understorey.

Since coming into public ownership, the wood has been managed for recreational use resulting in paths being created and the main ones metalled. Bins, benches, signs, dog bins and interpretation boards have been installed for public use and information.

1.7 Coppice woodland.

Coppice with Standards was an established and ancient type of woodland management. This form of management has declined in the past 150 years and a resultant decline in woodland insects and birds and wild flowers has been documented.

A substantial number of birds in the UK require open areas of scrub in woodland, and are reliant on different structures of woodland: they are likely to respond well to a limited and controlled re-coppicing in certain areas of the wood. The plan envisages maintaining and coppicing the existing nine glades and rides in the outer compartments of the wood but leaving the two central compartments to nature

Small mammals such as the Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) depend on actively coppiced woodland. Shrews and voles are likely to reappear after 2-3 years. An increase in small mammals leads to the presence of more raptors and other predators such as owls.

Insect activity increases with active coppice and some 300 species of moth can be found 2-3 years after coppicing. There has been a decline in woodland butterflies in neglected coppiced woodland as the majority of woodland butterfly species feed on herbaceous plants which occur in rides and glades.

Wild flowers are highly increased in areas which are opened after 2-3 years and the seed bank, which is reliant on sunlight, will germinate. Only a handful of wild flower species, such as Dog's Mercury can survive in shade and again it is documented that some invertebrates and plants have become locally extinct due to the decline of coppice management.

Individual sites should be managed to their merits and areas of stored coppice and leaving dead wood in situ hold significant ecological benefits in their own rights, providing refuge for a variety of organisms including rare lichens and mosses and minimising ground disturbance.

Bigwood exhibits important characteristics which may be attributed to the benign neglect from a lack of active management over the last 150 years. It is important to ensure a balance is met between maintaining undisturbed areas and niche habitats provided by this lack of management, and maintaining the nine areas of coppiced glades to further enhance the future biodiversity of the woodland.

2 Site Analysis

2.1 Site evaluation

This is a small but diverse ancient woodland situated within 6 miles of Westminster within the North Circular road,

Several plant species are present which are regionally rare or uncommon. The high density of wild service trees, which are freely suckering and of various ages; is a particular feature of the wood. Another rare feature is the unusually large number of true crab apple.

Understorey and ground flora has been poorly developed in one or two compartments, as is the oak regeneration. This is due to the shading attributed to the density of canopy and may be exacerbated by grey squirrel and jay activity. However activity over the last seven years has created nine new glades and work is on-going in these areas.

The creation of natural gaps in the hazel canopy through the introduction of coppicing glades in some compartments is beginning to enhance the structural and species diversity locally and improve the conservation value of the woodland.

However, a notable feature of the woodland is the frequency of wild service trees.

This species has been regenerating very successfully in a number of compartments and favours the dappled shade and minimal ground disturbance created by reduced woodland management. In addition to this wild cherry also appears to be a significant presence in many compartments with regeneration through suckering being evident throughout the woodland. Approximately 80 individual plants have been counted.

The future of the woodland is dependent on a balance continuing to be struck to accommodate the requirements of all species present so a flexible approach to its management should be continued.

3 Constraints (SWOT Analysis)

3.1 Strengths

Friends of Big Wood Association.

The Friends organisation, with the approval of Barnet, now carries out the majority of the management of the wood. There are over 150 local members and the Association is run by a management committee. It liaises both with the Residents Association and Local Councillors as well as working closely with Council Officers.

Public use.

The woods are extremely popular with the public and the use exceeds most of the other local open spaces in Barnet. This dimension must continue to be taken into account in the updated Management Plan.

Rarity of resource.

Mature and ancient woodlands are unusual this close to central London: it is far more common to find open space provision for public recreation. The ancient woodland must continue to be protected

3.2 Weaknesses

Continuing implementation of Management Plans

It is vital the Friends of Big Wood Association continues to develop and expands so that management of the wood continues to be active. It is also important to inform everyone in the surrounding area, especially new householders, who know little of the area, of the importance of the remnant of ancient woodland in their midst and the need to preserve it. These challenges must be a key consideration in this updated plan.

Funding

Over the past twelve years Barnet, in conjunction with the Friends of Big Wood, has obtained funding from the Forestry Commission which has enabled a leaflet to be produced and new interpretation boards to be erected. However, the plan needs to address the need for ongoing funding in the future. Currently Barnet only carries out routine maintenance to the infrastructure of these woodlands with no funds available to enhance and improve, All tree work by Barnet is limited to Public Safety considerations.

Dispute

Though an agreed Management Plan exists, there is sometimes conflict when householders with gardens backing onto the wood extend their fences into the wood and/or leave rubbish or plant invasive species in the wood.

3.3 Opportunities

Friends of Big Wood.

Although it may be possible to apply for a further grant from the Forestry Commission or other organisations over the next 5 years, a recent Heritage report on the future of public spaces has highlighted the need for increased local community involvement. Now that the Friends of Big Wood Association is established, it is important to ensure that there is a succession plan so that the Association continues to flourish and be effective.

Ongoing Management Plan

The regular updating of the management plan with specific, achievable and realistic objectives will provide information relating to the objectives behind any proposed works, likely timescales for implementation and the vision for the future of the woodlands. The management plan will be reviewed annually to ensure the document's relevance and to implement changes and ideas from consultation and survey work undertaken during the period.

3.4 Threats

Non-acceptance or non-implementation of Management Plan.

Lines of communication, either from LBB website, Suburb News and local press as well as the leaflets in the holders at two entrances to the wood and notices in the wood should be used to publicise the plan including a brief summary detailing the background of the objectives. The Friends website sets out all the objectives including a copy of the current management plan. It is important to educate the public to stay on the designated paths and not trample over glades and protected areas and to leave deadwood in situ

4. Management Objectives

1. To ensure the future conservation value of the woodland by improving the woodland habitat, biodiversity, age and structure
2. To promote natural tree regeneration and improve ground flora in glades
3. To control identified invasive species
4. To maintain the trees with due regard to public safety close to the footpaths.
5. To minimise the risk of flooding by maintaining the drainage ditches
6. To create access for all and recognise the educational, health and well-being benefits of the wood
7. To generate and disseminate knowledge about the wood and its ecology
8. To foster the partnership between The Friends of Big Wood and the Council and other bodies such as the Residents' Association
9. To plan and work according to best practice including sourcing external funding to supplement the annual subscription income of the Association in order to improve the woodlands
10. Maintain good relations with the owners of neighbouring houses while preventing them encroaching on or dumping garden refuse in the wood.

5. Management Strategies

The strategies below are the method by which the objectives will be achieved:

1. *To ensure the future conservation value of the woodland by improving the woodland habitat, biodiversity, age and structure*

By selectively coppicing hazel to promote ground flora and attract butterflies, invertebrates and birds enhancing biodiversity, nine glades have been created in the last seven years. Re-coppicing of the present 9 glades will take place every 3/4 years. Compartments 4 and 5 will be left to nature to permit an environment of dappled shade to develop, as this is the ideal habitat for the natural regeneration of wild service trees. Areas of mature hazel will be left to permit the important habitats it creates for many fungi species, mosses and lichens. The existing glades will be protected by erecting small barriers such as hazel interwoven fences or pile of brambles of dead hedging.

2. *To promote natural tree regeneration and improve ground flora in glades*

Regeneration of trees or ground flora on the coppiced compartments (1, 3, 6 and 7) will need a programme of weed/bramble/ground ivy control. Emerging trees may need protection from uprooting by small mammals or disturbance by dogs and walkers. Therefore, dead hedging or interwoven hazel barriers will be erected/maintained to protect the nine glades and the central compartments together with small signs to explain the reasons for this policy.

3. *To control identified invasive species*

Identified species including sycamore, Rhododendron sp. and snowberry are being monitored throughout the entire woodland and will to be controlled on an ongoing basis. Waste from indigenous species can remain on site and be stacked in piles to contribute to the habitat resource.

4. *To maintain public safety by keeping the main footpaths swept and by checking trees which are close to the footpaths.*

The Council will carry out 3 year surveys to ensure there is public safety on the main paths. The FOBW will notify the Council of any work needed, but will also

organise volunteers to clear fallen trees if this can be done with hand-tools. The FOBW will continue to organise volunteers to keep the main paths clear of leaves (though FOBW cannot guarantee to keep them safe when they become slippery).

5. *To minimise the risk of flooding by maintaining the drainage ditches*

FOBW will continue to keep the two main ditches clear. To protect the adjacent understorey this maintenance will continue to be done by hand. This work forms an important part of the new five year plan. Other ditches running adjacent to the two central paths are also currently maintained by the Friends using hand tools and this will continue under the new management plan. The ditch to the rear of compartment 7 (behind Oakwood Road) will also be cleared once a year using hand tools.

No previous ditch lines through the wood are anticipated to be re dug during the terms of this plan.

6. *To create access for all and recognise the educational, health and well-being benefits*

Maintain and improve entrances and tarmac footpaths to ensure they are in an acceptable condition for wheelchair and pushchair use, while preventing the minor paths from becoming too wide and preventing new minor paths emerging. Deter bicyclists from using the wood by erecting adequate signs and politely challenging offenders. Maintain and preserve the perimeter of the wood by erecting posts to show the boundary and mark Barnet Council's land.

Encourage local schools and other organisations to use the woodland as an educational resource and initiate the 'Forest School and Woodland Classroom' approach by holding monthly forest school educational sessions in the wood for children aged up to 12 years old. The Friends of Big Wood will ensure that all sessions are run and managed in line with current best practices, by qualified or competent individuals and with appropriate risk assessments, plans and insurance in place as required.

7. *To generate and disseminate knowledge about the wood and its ecology*

FOBW will continue to organise and pay for regular surveys of the flora and fauna of the wood, as it has of the trees, flowers, bats, birds, butterflies and moths, fungi, lichens, spiders and mosses over the past five years. FOBW will continue to organise guided walks and talks by the experts doing these surveys

(and others) and post the resulting reports on the FOBW website (www.friendsofbigwood.com). These are other activities such as the monthly Saturday morning work by volunteers will be publicised in Suburb News and on the Suburb and Friend's website.

8. *To foster the partnership between The Friends of Big Wood and Barnet Council, and maintain good relations with other bodies such as the HGS Residents' Association and associations which look after other woods in the area.*

Monitor changes of policy which may have an impact on Big Wood, keep in close touch with the council officers and local elected councillors, and hold bi-annual meetings with representatives of the Big Wood management Group and the Council officers.

9. *To plan and work according to best practice including sourcing external funding to supplement the annual subscription income of the Association in order to improve the woodlands*

Include Big Wood in the overall plan for Barnet's woodlands to be incorporated in the Forestry Stewardship Scheme. Acceptance into this scheme necessitates working to best practice. Apply regularly for grant funding to maintain and enhance the wood.

10. *Maintain good relations with the owners of neighbouring houses while preventing them encroaching on or dumping garden refuse in the wood.*

FOBW will continue to remind those whose gardens border the wood of the legal and other rules which apply. FOBW will notify Barnet Council of any cases which cause concern so that the Council can take appropriate action.

6 APPENDIX A Five Year Plan

<u>Access/Maintenance</u>	Responsibility
Keep main paths in a good condition	Council
Maintain the main ditches annually	Friends
Maintain ditch behind Oakwood Rd	Friends/Council
Provision of Dog & Litter Bins	Council
Weekly removal of Waste from Bins	Council
Marking perimeter of the wood	Friends/Council
<u>Woodland Management</u>	
Carry out updated bird and floral surveys	Friends
Maintenance/Protection of the nine glades	Friends
Planting of wildflower & native bulbs	
Selective removal of invasive species	Friends
	Friends
<u>Administration</u>	
Administer Friends of Bigwood	Friends
Explore links with schools/forest schools	Friends
Cement links between council/friends and keep Trust in the picture & involved	Friends/Council