

Woodland Ways access plan

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1 Organisational policy, practice and procedures relating to access

Woodland Ways' policy is that all four woods managed by Woodland Ways are open to all members of the public at all times for informal recreation on foot.

Practice is the creation and maintenance of pathways into the woods, using restrictions such as fences and natural vegetation to reduce motorbike or 4WD vehicle use. Kissing gates are installed at the main entrances to two of the woods. Simple signs are installed to welcome people into the woods.

Current procedures are to replace the signs as soon as possible after they are vandalised, to cover the paths with woodchip when they become muddy in winter, and to use local newspapers to publicise the woods.

2 Statutory and other requirements relating to access

The four woods are the majority of Moreton Hall Community Woodlands Local Nature Reserve. This LNR declaration by St Edmundsbury Borough Council, that the land is to be managed as a nature reserve, implies that access must be compatible with the nature conservation interest of the land.

For example, access that damages large areas of vegetation would be incompatible. The use of lights at Natterer's Wood would deter bats using the nationally important hibernation caves of The Glen Chalk Caves site of Special Scientific Interest, whose entrances are close to Natterer's Wood and whose tunnels are underneath part of Natterer's Wood.

A children's play area will be constructed by others next to Natterer's Wood and so access arrangements should be suitable for both wood and play area users.

The Disability Discrimination Act gives disabled people important rights of access to everyday services that others take for granted. Since October 1999, service providers have had to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. Service providers should consider making permanent physical adjustments to their premises. Although this Act is primarily aimed at commercial and public sector providers, Woodland Ways considers that they wish to act within the spirit of the law as well as compliance. In terms of reasonableness, Woodland Ways considers it reasonable to provide access for disabled people but without causing permanent significant harm to the woods.

3 Description of the Woodland Ways sites

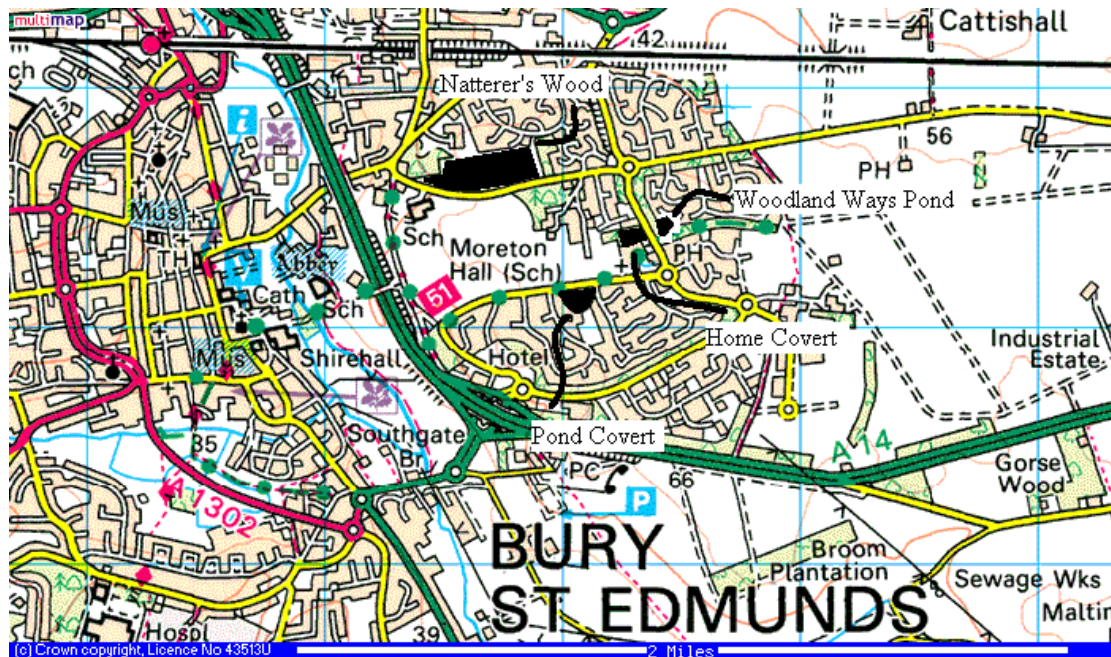
Woodland Ways manages four woods within the Moreton Hall area of Bury St Edmunds. The area is characterised by 1980's and 1990's housing and light industrial estates, with 'out-of-town' retail parks.

The four sites are mapped below and briefly described in table 1.

The woods appeal primarily to local residents as

- Interesting places to pass by/through during local journeys on foot or bicycle
- Somewhere for walking the dog
- places for recreation and play
- places to observe wildlife
- a countryside experience within the housing estates

There is on-street car parking and bus stops near the woods but almost all journeys to the woods are made on foot or bicycle.



Name	Area	Description
Natterer's Wood	7ha	An ex-arable field being planted into a woodland and will contain ponds, glades, wildflower meadow,
Woodland Ways Pond	0.5ha	Half is 1980's planted broadleaved woodland (oak, ash, maple) and half is long grassland with a pond, designed as a flood storage area. Common newts and frogs are common.
Home Covert	1ha	A 200 year old planted wood now with sycamore, hornbeam and ash. Dog's mercury and wood avens in the ground flora.
Pond Covert	1ha	A 200 year old planted wood now with sycamore, hornbeam and ash. Much box from Victorian pheasant cover. Dog's mercury and wood avens in the ground flora. A large pond is used for fishing and duck feeding.

4 Description of current access arrangements and barriers to access

Name	Current Access arrangements	Barriers to access
Natterer's Wood	One main path from the north-east corner to the western tip, with a circular optional loop near the middle. The main path is partially surfaced with woodchip each winter when it gets muddy. A kissing gate access at the north-east corner is unpopular and people pull down adjacent fencing to bypass the kissing gate. Other access points (unrestricted) are at the western point and south-east corner. Named by Woodland Ways members after one of the bats hibernating underneath the wood.	<p>Generic barriers</p> <p>Physical access into the wood is difficult for infirm people and wheelchair users due to unsurfaced nature of path on clay soil, surfaced with woodchip in winter on the worst bits.</p> <p>Kissing gate entrance is unpopular even with walkers and will restrict less mobile people.</p>
Woodland Ways Pond	A cycle path and footpath border one edge and there are no fences or other physical restrictions to entry.	<p>Generic barriers</p> <p>The slope down to the pond edge is fairly steep alongside the cyclepath / footpath boundary, so children are the main visitors to the pond edge.</p> <p>The entrance into the wooded part is a narrow gap between prickly shrubs and used only by children and Woodland Ways members.</p> <p>There is no obvious path into the meadow or to the pond.</p>
Home Covert	One main path from south-east to north-west made by Woodland Ways crosses the wood and is surfaced with woodchip each winter when it gets muddy. Old desire lines are going out of use as most people now use main path	<p>Generic barriers</p> <p>The kissing gate entrance is respected by walkers but will restrict less mobile users. Cyclists lift bicycles over the gate to gain access.</p> <p>Physical access into the wood is difficult for infirm people and wheelchair users</p>

		due to unsurfaced nature of path on clay soil, surfaced with woodchip in winter on the worst bits.
Pond Covert	One main path from south to north created by Woodland Ways from a desire line crosses the wood and is surfaced with woodchip each winter when it gets muddy. Other desire lines, for example around the pond are widened to provide paths but are not surfaced. There are some fishing platforms provided to improve access to the pond bank for anglers. Logs were arranged in a clearing in 2004 to provide outdoor classroom facilities for the adjacent primary school.	<p>Generic barriers</p> <p>Physical access into the wood is difficult for infirm people and wheelchair users due to unsurfaced nature of path on clay soil, surfaced with woodchip in winter on the worst bits.</p> <p>The duck pond may be seen as a hazard by some parents of young children</p>

Generic barriers to access include

- litter, making the woods unattractive
- information about the woods might not be available to all
- unfamiliarity creating uncertainty about entering the woods for the first time

5 analysis of barriers to access and possible improvements

Woodland	barrier	Possible improvement
Natterer's Wood	Muddy path	Construction of firm surface e.g. tarmac
	Kissing gate	Removal of swinging gate but retention of gate posts to restrict vehicles
Woodland Ways Pond	Steep slope to pond	Construction of steps down
	No obvious path into meadow or pond	Mow a route into and through the grassland to the rear of the pond
	Restricted entrance into wooded part	Enlarge the entrance by removing two bushes
Home Covert	Kissing gate entrance	Removal of swinging gate but retention of gate posts to restrict vehicles
	Muddy path	Construction of firm surface e.g.

		tarmac
Pond Covert	Muddy path	Construction of firm surface e.g. tarmac
	Duck pond seen as hazard to young children	Widen path around pond for better parental visibility and access to loose toddlers <i>*in progress</i>
All	Litter	Regular litter picks <i>*in progress</i>
	Lack of information	Create a website for the woods <i>*in progress</i>
		Develop entrance signage to provide information about the woods e.g. their wildlife, opportunities for public use
		Produce a free leaflet available widely in the local area and elsewhere e.g. at the Tourist Information Centre
	Unfamiliarity with the woods	Use of local media to promote knowledge <i>* in progress</i>
		All other improvements will cause word-of-mouth promotion
		A major public event to attract people who may have never been before
		Widen schools programme from one school at present to four schools, so that many more local children know about and understand the woods.
		Research, design and procure a display that will be taken to local public buildings (e.g. church, supermarkets, schools, community centre, pub, other retail businesses) to promote access to the woods

6 priorities for improving access

Wood	Access improvement	comment	Priority
Natterer's Wood	Construction of firm surface to path	Ideal to facilitate easy-access. Will fit well into woodland design	1
	Remove kissing gate	Can be linked to path work	1
Woodland Ways Pond	Steps down to pond	Little public demand perceived at present.	3
	Mow a route into/through grassland	Little public demand perceived at present. A path would spoil the interest of exploring this small site	3
	Restricted entrance to wooded part	Little public demand perceived at present The small area of trees is not particularly attractive; woodland management is improving it.	3
Home Covert	Remove kissing gate	There is some demand for bicycle access, however there is good cycle access around the wood so the route is not needed for journeys. Bicycle use makes the path more muddy and spoils it for walkers.	x
	Construction of firm surface to path	A hard surfaced path e.g. tarmac, would harm the appearance of this wood so it would be unreasonable to build one. The maintenance requirement of an aggregate path e.g. hoggin would be too high for Woodland Ways volunteers.	x
Pond Covert	Construction of firm surface to path	A hard surfaced path e.g. tarmac, would harm the appearance of	x

		<p>this wood so it would be unreasonable to build one. The maintenance requirement of an aggregate path e.g. hoggin would be too high for Woodland Ways volunteers.</p> <p><i>In progress</i></p>	1
all	Widen path around duck pond	<i>In progress</i>	1
	Litter picks	<i>In progress</i>	1
	Website	<i>In progress</i>	1
	Entrance signs	Interpretative signs will be of great value to many people on-site	2
	Leaflets	Leaflets can use much the same material as on signs reducing the research costs but reaching an off-site audience	2
	Media	In progress	1
	Public event	This will attract many people in to familiarise themselves with the woods; can only be done when easy-access is available.	x ¹
	Widen the schools programme	Will widen the number of families aware of the woods	1
	Research, design and procure a display that will be taken to local public buildings (e.g. church, supermarkets, schools, community centre, pub, other retail businesses) to promote access to the woods	Research on the history of the area and its relation with the woods will widen the interest of the woods, as well as including natural history and recreation. The display will be targeted strongly at local potential users.	1

Priorities

- 1 - priority for implementing in the short term so included in the Development of Natterer's Wood project for action.
- 2 – priority for detailed planning and implementing after priority 1 improvements are complete.
- 3 – low priority, ideas will be kept in case of increase in public demand but otherwise will not be implemented
- x – these are unreasonable due to their impact upon the woods and so will not be implemented
- x¹ – a public event would require professional organisation, and the local audience is too low to justify the costs. There is little parking nearby so a wider audience could not be attracted in large numbers.

7 strategy for access improvements

Woodland Ways will implement physical priority 1 improvements starting in 2005 (physical improvements) and community-based priority 1 improvements in 2005-2007.

Priority 2 improvements will be planned in 2005 and implemented in 2006.

Woodland Ways trustees will manage the access improvements, with contractors employed for professional support e.g. construction of path, research and interpretation design.

Funding will be a combination of Woodland Ways own funds and with money sourced from grant-givers. Woodland Ways volunteers will supply substantial benefit in work hours.

8 consultations

The following consultations have been made

Local residents – a public workshop was held with the assistance of Green Light Trust on 27 January 2002. Over 50 people attended. The workshop resulted in a design brief for Natterer's Wood. This design was drawn up by Woodland Ways and the next three years were spent implementing part of the design (tree planting and path layout) as well as establishing confidence in the operation and longevity of Woodland Ways.

English Nature – were consulted on plans for Natterer's Wood in February 2005 and were very supportive.

County Councillor for the ward, Trevor Beckwith, attends trustees meetings and is supportive.

West Suffolk Disability Resource Centre – supports the project and provides technical advice

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Think Access group (disability responsibility) – supports the project and provides technical advice

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Parks Manager (‘landlord’) – supports the project and provides financial help and technical advice.

9 list of resources needed to put the plan into practice

Items listed as priority 1 in section 6 are listed.

Wood	Access improvement	Resources required
Natterer’s Wood	Construction of firm surface to path Remove kissing gate	Cost of construction Realignment of entrance will be included in path work
all	Litter picks Website Media Research, design and procure a display that will be taken to local public buildings (e.g. church, supermarkets, schools, community centre, pub, other retail businesses) to promote access to the woods Widen the schools programme	<i>In progress by volunteers</i> <i>In progress by volunteers, assisted by EEDA</i> <i>In progress by volunteers</i> A consultant will be required to research the history of the area, procure illustrations and using information from Woodland ways trustees design a set of display boards. Printing and display equipment needed. The design can be modified to provide substantial elements on on-site interpretation and leaflet contents. Will widen the number of families aware of the woods. 2 events per school per year cost £700 per school ie £2100 per year to extend to 3 new schools. £6300 in all.

Other development work outside the scope of this access plan includes wildflower meadow creation, tools storage, trailer procurement, tree planting and pond digging.

10 organisational commitment to putting the access plan into practice

Woodland Ways is committed to implementing the priority actions in table 9 above and envisages further implementing priority 2 actions after physical construction works. Woodland Ways is run by volunteers with professional and managerial skills and would like to divide the work into phases to ensure workload can be managed successfully.

11 description of monitoring and evaluation arrangements

Monitoring – Woodland Ways trustees will monitor all cash spend to ensure its efficient and appropriate use. The schools programme will be evaluated using teacher feedback. Use of the woods will be assessed by consulting user groups as well as informal visitor assessment. We will try to make regular visitor counts, for example by student projects, so we can compare visitor numbers on comparable dates from year to year.

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