

MANAGEMENT POLICY – THE GREEN: WOODLAND & MEADOW

Adopted 15 October 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The origin of the town or village green often lies in customary rights. They were open spaces in towns and villages for communal activities. Though technically originally a trespass, or carried out with the permission of the Lord of the manor, these rights became customary and enforceable through the courts. Many greens would have been subject to rights of common, particularly of pasture. Rocque's 1768 map of Surrey depicts the area now known as The Green (Figure 1):



Ripley Green covers an area of around 68 acres in the Surrey countryside. The Green today is owned by Surrey County Council and managed by Ripley Parish Council under the terms of a 99-year lease signed in 1974.

This Policy statement sets out objectives for management of part of The Green and details what the council wants to achieve, why it wants to achieve those aims, and how it is going to achieve them. This document should be considered to remain a work in progress. As new information and knowledge is gained from appropriate partner organisations, this Policy will be updated to encompass scientific, ecological, and social objectives.

2. BIODIVERSITY & POLICY CONSIDERATION

Under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, a parish council has a duty to conserve biodiversity. Ripley Parish Council is committed to enhancing and increasing biodiversity at sites it owns or manages. The area which this Policy relates to is a designated Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and neither herbicides nor pesticides are permitted for carrying out management objectives.

Just 2% of the UK's ancient woodland survives (and much is under threat from ongoing projects). The European average for tree cover is 37%, the UK's is just 13%. Following the retreat of the last ice age, pioneer species recolonised the land and there would have been a time when almost all of the UK was covered in forest. Surrey is the country's most wooded county and Surrey County Council currently has a 10-year plan to plant 1.2m new trees. A well-managed woodland will support a greater amount of biodiversity.

In addition to statute and land designation, Ripley Parish Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has a Climate Change Action Plan. These objectives are considered within this Policy.

3. MEADOW & WOODLAND

Areas of meadow and woodland make up around 50% of The Green. These areas need careful management in order to limit natural succession occurring in a way that would be detrimental to biodiversity.

Natural succession occurs on unmanaged land when pioneer species begin to take root. If left unmanaged, an area of land will be gradually populated by colonisers such as herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees. This threatens biodiversity as some species will be more successful than others, crowding out them out and causing a monoculture to develop. Both the woodland and meadow areas are in a state of secondary succession.

Surrey Wildlife Trust's 2014 SNCI report states that:

Neutral grassland requires active management in order to retain its conservation interest. Without management, tall vigorous grasses will dominate and dead plant matter will accumulate. This will suppress the less vigorous species and the botanical diversity of the grassland will decrease. The key to managing grasslands is to remove each year's growth of vegetation. This can be achieved by grazing (as in traditional pastureland), cutting or a combination of the two (as in traditional hay meadows).

As grazing is probably not feasible on this site, it is recommended that the areas of longer grassland are cut annually with the cuttings removed. Hay meadows are cut traditionally in early July after ground nesting birds have fledged and most plants have set seed.

Some trees and scrub are an important component of grassland habitats. They should however be confined to small scattered groups.

It is important that scrub is not allowed to take over the grassland areas. Some scrub control may be required to prevent losing the unimproved acid grassland here. In addition, it will be important to ensure that the scrub does not spread further into neutral grassland area.

It may be possible to increase the value of the amenity grassland areas by allowing some longer less regularly cut strips along the edges.

In order to maximise the biodiversity of a woodland, it is important to create a diverse structure. This will include a canopy of mature trees, a shrub layer and a proportion of open space. Trees should be of a range of ages and species.

In order to maintain this diverse structure, it is likely that some felling, thinning or coppicing will need to take place. Felling and coppicing will create temporary areas of open space. In addition, permanent rides and glades are of benefit to a range of invertebrates and flora. These may require management in order to keep them open. Areas of open space should be of a sufficient size so that sunny conditions prevail for most of the day.

Note that any thinning or felling operations greater than 5m³ will require a felling licence from the Forestry Commission.

The presence of deadwood within woodland is very important for a range of species, particularly fungi, invertebrates and mammals such as bats. A mixture of standing and fallen deadwood is important as they provide different conditions and support different species. Only fell dead trees where necessary for health and safety reasons and if possible only remove the dangerous branches rather than the whole tree.



Figure 2: Areas covered by Management Policy – The Green: Woodland & Meadow

4. SPECIES PRESENT & MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The woodland is classed as a broadleaf closed canopy, with a variety of species at various stages of maturity including veteran trees, young trees and seedlings. The meadow was identified as being 'semi-improved neutral grassland' in Surrey Wildlife Trust's 2010 Ecological Assessment of The Green. Classification of whether a species is native or non-native follows the accepted standard of whether the variety was present before the land bridge connecting England to mainland Europe was overcome by water (circa 6,500 BC). The main plant species to be found in the woodland & meadow areas include:

4.1 Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)

Native species which can grow to 28m over its 60-year lifespan. Dark green leathery racquet shaped leaves and both male and female catkins are produced. The foodplant of several caterpillars and an early source of nectar and pollen for bees. Seeds benefit siskins and goldfinches amongst others. The bark also supports a number of lichens, mosses, and fungi.

Management: Alder likes wet environments and is found near to the stream in the woodland. No management required except to keep footpaths clear.

4.2 Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

Native species growing up to 35m in single or multi-stems. Flowers of both male and female specimens are purple, appearing ahead of winged keys once pollinated. Ash creates an airy canopy which supports wild flowers and associated insects in the understorey, whilst also supporting fungi, lichens, mosses and a range of bird species.

Management: Ash dieback threatens to wipe out the species in the UK. All efforts will be made to preserve ash specimens until such a time as a need to fell is identified.

4.3 Aspen (*Populus tremula*)

Native species which can grow up to 25m. Leaves are round with large irregular teeth, turning shades of yellow and red in autumn. Aspen are dioecious, and can propagate themselves either by catkin spread or via suckers. It attracts a wide variety of insects and deadwood cavities provide nesting opportunities for birds. Conditions in the woodland & meadow are ideal for Aspen, and it has the potential to become a nuisance.

Management: Aspen are present in isolated specific areas of the woodland & meadow. Annual management is required to halt the spread of Aspen into the meadow. Felling should be carried out in autumn or winter.

4.4 Beech, Common (*Fagus sylvatica*)

Native species which can grow up to 40m. Leaves are lime green when young, maturing up to 90mm long, stalked, oval with a point at the top. Beech leaves give a stunning autumn display of yellows, reds and browns. It is propagated by wind fallen beech nuts. It tends to clear the understorey beneath of any but the hardiest shade-tolerant plants. The tree supports a variety of insect, caterpillar, and mammal species.

Management: Beech is present within the woodland only. No management is required and any young specimens should be afforded a degree of protection.

4.5 Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*)

Classed as a native species, bracken is thought to be the most common plant on earth and is found across all continents except Antarctica. Bracken is prevalent in the woodland and at the edges of the meadow, eliminating chances for a more diverse mix of undergrowth species. It does, however, provide excellent habitat for nesting birds and fritillary butterflies and is the foodplant for a variety of caterpillars.

Management: Little required except to limit any encroachment into the meadow.

4.6 Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*)

Thorny fruiting shrub of the rose family, growing in dense thickets with arching stems. Bramble provides food and cover for a large array of native wildlife including grass snakes.

Management: Bramble is prevalent in the woodland area and has the potential to spread into the meadow. Its properties providing cover for small mammals and birds is acknowledged, although the spread of bramble can be detrimental to other plant species, impacting biodiversity. Light-touch management required.

4.5 Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)

Native species growing to 15m. Its pinnate leaves have 5–7 toothed leaflets which smell unpleasant when bruised. Its flowers are highly scented, however, and mature into small purple-black sour elderberries following pollination by insects. Flowers provide nectar for a variety of insects and the berries are a food source for birds and mammals. The presence of elder means that there are flowers and berries for foragers to gather.

Management: Elder is prolific in certain areas of the woodland. No management is required other than removal of any encroaching specimens in the meadow.

4.6 Elm (*Ulmus procera*)

Classed as non-native due to its apparent introduction around the time of the Bronze Age. It is often found in hedgerows where growth from suckers can create a dense barrier. Oval, asymmetrical leaves have a hairy feel and its tasselled flowers develop into samaras once pollinated. Birds and small mammals eat the seeds, whilst the leaves provide food for moth and butterfly caterpillars.

Management: Elm grows prolifically in areas on The Green but is not present in great numbers within the woodland or meadow. No management required except if identified as becoming a nuisance.

4.7 Gorse, Common (*Ulex europaeus*)

Native species reaching up to 2.5m in height. Flowering bright yellow between January and June, the fragrant flowers can be added to tea or salads. Gorse bushes provide excellent cover for small birds and mammals.

Management: Gorse is present at the edges of the woodland and in isolated locations in the meadow. No management of gorse is required except to limit its encroachment in the meadow, although management of species choking the existing specimens would be welcome.

4.8 Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)

Native species which can reach 15m when mature. The Hawthorn can produce a rich thorny habitat or may grow into a single-stemmed tree. Highly scented flowers develop into haws once pollinated. Leaves are comprised of toothed lobes and turn yellow in autumn before dropping. Hawthorn supports over 300 insect

species and is the foodplant for a variety of moths. Flowers produce pollen and nectar for bees and insects, and the haws are eaten by native and migrating bird species.

Management: Little management required except to encourage growth.

4.9 Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)

Native species which grows up to 12m and can live for several hundred years if coppiced. Oval leaves are soft to the touch and turn yellow before dropping. Hazel is monoecious but must be pollinated by wind-blown pollen from adjacent trees. Hazelwood has been used traditionally for hurdle making, pegging thatch roofs, making coracle gunwales, and for furniture making. Leaves are good food source for caterpillars, supporting the food chain. Hazel flowers provide early pollen and nuts are stored and eaten by small mammals and a variety of native and migratory birds. Hazel also supports mosses, liverworts, lichens, and fungi. Coppiced Hazel provides shelter for ground-nesting birds.

Management: Hazel is present in the woodland although not in large numbers. Areas within the woodland will be cleared in order to create coppiced hazel stands for future management (see Sycamore management objectives).

4.10 Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Native evergreen species growing up to 15m. Leaves are oval shaped with spikes, glossy dark green in colour. Female specimens' flowers develop into fruits once pollinated. Holly provides good shelter and nesting opportunities for birds. Flowers provide nectar and pollen for bees and pollinating insects, and fruits are a source of winter food for birds and mammals.

Management: Holly is prevalent within the woodland, needing little management except some cutting back in order to keep footpaths clear.

4.11 Hop (*Humulus lupulus*)

Native climber common in woodland. Hop helps to create dense habitat and provides refuge for insects and nesting or roosting birds.

Management: No management required.

4.12 Ivy, Common (*Hedera helix ssp. helix*)

Native evergreen climbing species which produces black, berry-like fruits when mature. Ivy does not harm the trees it uses to climb up and provides an essential food source for insects and birds during autumn and winter months. A naturally-occurring chemical anti-freeze compound within the species keeps the plant healthy and vibrant throughout the bleakest months. It also provides valuable shelter for insects, birds, bats and small mammals.

Management: No management required.

4.13 Lime, Common (*Tilia x europaea*)

Native species growing to become amongst the tallest trees in the woodland areas nearest the playground. Heart-shaped leaves have white-cream hairs on the underside. When in flower, a sweet aroma is produced. The flowers develop into round-oval slightly ribbed fruits with a pointed tip. Small-leaved and Large-leaved Lime varieties may also be present.

Management: Little management required except that which is suggested within the parish council's 18-month schedule of tree surveys.

4.14 Nettle, Common (*Urtica dioica*)

Very common plant which can have a presence wherever local conditions suit, such as on damp, fertile or disturbed ground. Extremely good for biodiversity, it hosts a wide range of insects and provides food for seed-eating birds. It has been used by humans as a food plant and for herbal remedies, dyes, and fibres.

Management: No management required

4.15 Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*)

Supporting a greater amount of biodiversity than any other tree species, this 'keystone plant' holds an iconic place in British culture and history. Oak will grow according to the local conditions, and both tall woodland oak and 'pasture oak' are present on The Green. Pasture oak is characterised by its wide spread rather than height, which occurs due to not having to compete for light. Leaf burst occurs in mid-May when bunches of 10cm deep-lobed leaves appear. Long yellow catkins distribute pollen before acorns develop. Oak supports a huge array of other lifeforms including birds, insects, mammals, invertebrates and fungi. It can provide a home to upwards of a thousand species and Oak deadwood continues to support over 300 further species. It is estimated that an oak spends 300 years growing, 300 years maturing, and 300 years declining. A declining oak may noticeably retrench as it seeks to conserve its energies.

Management: Oak is the predominant species within the woodland and is encroaching into the meadow. In order to maintain the meadow's integrity as semi-improved neutral grassland, active management needs to take place on an annual basis. This includes the removal of any specimens with less than 8cm diameter at 1.3m above the ground, and the felling of 30% of specimens with greater than 8cm diameter, for which a Felling Licence will be sought from the Forestry Commission. Management will be carried out in autumn and winter. Standing deadwood within the woodland will be kept as it stands and any arisings will be utilised in habitat piles. Oak Processionary Moth Caterpillar is addressed in a separate Ripley Parish Council Policy.

4.16 Poplar, White (*Populus alba*)

Non-native species which prospers in the woodland area due to its tolerance of sandy soil. Separate trees host male and female catkins, although the leaves on both have white undersides, making the species noticeable within the landscape. The species hosts a number of moth caterpillars and catkins are an early source of pollen and nectar.

Management: The woodland hosts a number of both mature and sapling White Poplar. Little management is required other than to stop encroachment into grassed areas.

4.17 Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

Whilst ragwort is classed as an 'injurious weed' under the Weeds Act 1959, it is also a native species and the food plant of the cinnabar moth, which itself is a Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. The Code of Practice on How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort, produced by the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs states that "in many situations ragwort poses no threat to horses and other livestock." The Code of Practice aims to limit the spread of ragwort to neighbouring land where grazing animals may be present. Prevailing winds and the natural woodland barrier at the edges of the meadow suggest that The Green is classed as 'low risk'.

Management: In accordance with the Code of Practice, the council will review the risk of spread to land used for grazing or conserved foraging on a six-monthly basis (December & June); remove stems from within 50m of the parish council's managed land; organise working parties to address the spread of ragwort within the 50m buffer.

4.18 Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*)

Native species reaching 30m in some conditions. Triangular leaves turn yellow in autumn, whilst the bark remains white year-round. Female catkins are pollinated by wind before releasing masses of seeds in autumn. Silver birch is well suited to the woodland and can provide excellent conditions in the understorey for grasses, mosses, and wildflowers. Over 300 insect species use silver birch as habitat and it provides food for birds, moths and a variety of fungi.

Management: The woodland hosts a number of veteran silver birch, which add colour and variety to the area. The tree itself needs no management, but areas where it is present will be cleared to provide an uplift in suitable habitat.

4.19 Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)

Non-native species possibly introduced by Roman occupiers. Living up to 400 years, it has dark pink-grey bark, smooth when young developing cracks and plates with age. Flowers hang in racemes, developing into samaras after pollination by wind or insects. As with oak, sycamore can develop a large spread when not competing for light. Sycamore is attractive to aphids and, therefore, their predators. Leaves are a food source for caterpillars and moths, and the nectar attracts bees and other insects. Tolerant of pollution, sycamore can be useful adjacent to highways. Sycamore can cause issues in woodlands, however, as it comes into leaf early, possibly depriving spring-flowering plants of light. Its leaf litter is slow to decompose.

Management: Sycamore is present in large numbers in areas of the woodland. If left unchecked, it can become straggly as it competes for light. Whilst the timber of mature sycamore can be useful for furniture and utensil making, conditions in the woodland do not encourage specimens to reach veteran status and it is more likely to fail in inclement weather conditions. Sycamore will be managed with a view to replanting areas with native species such as hazel.

4.20 Willow, Goat (*Salix caprea*)

Also known as 'Pussy Willow' due to the male catkins resembling a cat's paw. Native species reaching up to 10m over a 300-year lifespan. Leaves are oval rather than thin. Female catkins develop into woolly seeds once pollinated by wind. Willow can also propagate when branches touch the ground. Catkins provide an important source of pollen for insects and bees and the species supports a large number of caterpillars. It is also the main food plant for the purple emperor butterfly. It is present in small numbers in scattered locations around the meadow and woodland.

Management: Little management required except to limit further spread.

4.21 Yew (*Taxus baccata*)

Mature yew can grow up to 20m and live for centuries. Whilst, as a general rule of thumb, trees are rarely as old as they appear, the opposite is true of yew specimens. It has evergreen needle-like leaves growing in two rows along the twig, and specialises in capturing light even in the understory. Yew is dioecious, with male and female specimens producing different flowers. The red arils spread the protected seed by digestion through birds and mammals. Bird species use yew to make nests and as a food source.

Management: Little management required except to protect saplings and encourage growth.

4.22 Other Species

Other species known or suspected to be present include:

Pine, Corsican and / or Scots. Present in small numbers, no management required although further propagation is discouraged.

Field Maple. Scattered specimens across The Green. No management required except where identified in tree survey reports.

Lombardy poplar. Single specimen at northernmost end of woodland, no management required.

Rowan. Present in various areas near to amenity sites, no management required.

Wild cherry. One specimen present in meadow, although more could be present around The Green. No management required.

It is anticipated that the clearance of some areas of woodland will lead to dormant species being able to re-establish, particularly at the margins where woodland meets meadow. In some instances, it may be appropriate to aid the regeneration of marginal areas by carrying out planting or sowing of wildflower species that would generally be found in similar circumstances.

5. CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Notes for management of the various plants and trees present in the woodland & meadow are given in Chapter 4: Species Present & Management Objectives. Hand tools and traditional working methods are preferred, with petrol driven machinery acceptable for tasks which require extra power.

5.1 Cut & waste

Method of using arisings onsite for other purposes. Cut and waste means that pruned scrub will be used for other management tasks such as soaking up excess water from bridleways or adding surface material to Public Rights of Way.

5.2 Habitat piles

As with cut and waste, arisings will be used to create habitat piles. This means that any insect species present will remain on site and the decomposition of organic matter will encourage further species. Habitat piles will add to the range of habitats already available within the woodland and can be used for practical purposes, such as to delineate Public Rights of Way.

5.3 Tools and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Volunteers for working parties are encouraged to bring their own PPE and tools. It is recommended that, at the very least, volunteers should have sturdy gloves. Tasks will be assigned according to whoever has the most appropriate safety equipment for the job at hand. Further PPE and tools may be provided by Ripley Parish Council.

Suggested PPE includes: hi-vis vest, gloves, hard hat, steel toe capped footwear, goggles, ear plugs or defenders.

Suggested tools include: secateurs, shears, pruning knife, billhook, pruning saw, bow saw, spade, fork, loppers.

5.4 Public Rights of Way

As mentioned in objectives 5.1 and 5.2, other management tasks may include the delineation of existing Public Rights of Way and the clearance of fallen deadwood from existing footpaths.

5.5 Green Flag Award

“Any green space that is freely accessible to the public and has a site-specific management plan is eligible to apply for a Green Flag Award.” (Green Flag Awards, 2016).

Coupled with the close management of The Green as a space for recreation, the commitment to improve the woodland and meadow areas will enable the council to put itself forward for a Green Flag Award. All of the objectives in the published guidance are attainable and the commitment to manage the site for the benefit of biodiversity will be well received.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE OBJECTIVES

Ripley Parish Council declared a Climate Emergency and approved a Climate Change Action Plan at meetings held in March and June 2020 (attached at *Appendix I*).

Management objectives 5.1 and 5.2 support efforts to limit carbon emissions. Dead wood and arisings left to deteriorate onsite will re-sequester much of the trapped carbon back into the ground rather than the atmosphere. Whilst an income stream may be generated by selling arisings for use in biomass energy production, Ripley Parish Council commits to retaining any arisings for use on site.

In addition to conserving biodiversity through clear management objectives, there will be a case for introducing plant species to areas that have been partially felled or cleared. Species such as St John's Wort can thrive in the dappled light beneath an oak tree, for example. Advice on reintroduction of plant species will be sought from appropriate conservation organisations such as Surrey Wildlife Trust's Ecology Services Department. It is possible that the felling and clearing scrub will lead to dormant seeds and bulbs reawakening.

Surrey County Council plans to plant 1.2m new trees over the next ten years. Ripley Parish Council has stated an aim to seek guidance on how it can help to achieve this goal in its Climate Change Action Plan. Surrey Wildlife Trust will be asked to consider this Policy and offer advice on its content and aims. The Woodland Trust has been contacted and is also willing to offer a site visit and 75% funding for new trees.

This Policy will be adapted as advice is received from relevant organisations.

7. YEARLY OBJECTIVES

2020-21

Begin management of margins of meadow areas and sports fields, in line with stated management objectives for each species present.

Arrange volunteer group and working parties.

Seek quotes for heavy duty work such as flail mowing – Tractor with flail £350 per day, digger £300 per day, plus recommendation to chain harrow the meadow in early spring.

Seek advice from Surrey Wildlife Trust on suitability of land for grazing herd.

Seek volunteer help from outside organisations.

2021-22

Arrange Report from Surrey Wildlife Trust Principal Ecologist

Submit Woodland Management Plan

Begin management of larger specimens within Forestry Commission guidelines. The publication *Tree felling: Getting permission*, published by the Forestry Commission (2020), gives detailed advice on the matter.

2022-23

Further management extending to glades and adding plant species back into the woodland in line with Surrey Wildlife Trust advice.

2023-24

2024-25

8. REFERENCES & FURTHER READING (available from Ripley Parish Council office)

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Ash: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/ash/>
Aspen: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/aspen/>
Beech: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/common-beech/>
Bracken: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants/ferns/bracken/>
Elder: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/elder/>
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Gorse: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants/wild-flowers/gorse/>
Hawthorn: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/hawthorn/>
Hazel: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/hazel/>
Holly: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/holly/>
Ivy: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/plants/wild-flowers/ivy/>
Lime: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/common-lime/>
Oak: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/english-oak/>
Oak Processionary Moth: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/oak-processionary-moth/>
Poplar: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/white-poplar/>
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