

10. Horton Wood (Queens Copse) NEW 209

10.1 Location *(See Location Map)*

Queens Copse covers an area of 77 hectares and is located to the west of Horton Heath approximately one and a half kilometres east of Horton village. The minor Ringwood to Horton road runs along the north eastern boundary and Holt wood is located the south of the wood adjacent to its southern boundary.

10.2 Landscape Context

Topography within the woodland is gentle with the whole wood lying between 30 and 40 metres above sea level. A stream running east west bisects the wood and a shallow valley formation affords some variation to the predominantly flat character of the woodland. External views of the woodland are limited to glimpses from the Ringwood to Horton road and more extensive views from the area surrounding Horton Tower to the west where the ground rises to approximately 60 metres above sea level.

10.3 Current Woodland Structure *(See Habitat Structure and Age Structure Charts)*

Much of the woodland comprises conifer plantations established from the late 1950s through to the early 1970s. Douglas Fir and Larch has grown particularly well on the fertile clay soils and have produced high quality conifer stands. Interventions in recent years have focused on removing conifer by thinning to restore PAWS woodland and as a result the area of Class 1 (Semi-Natural Woodland) and Class 2 (Reasserting Semi-Natural Woodland) has been steadily increasing.

There are also some relic areas of semi natural woodland within Queens Copse including an impressive stand of native Small Leaved Lime. Areas of reasserting semi natural woodland are present particularly along the margins of the stream corridor and evidence of native woodland regeneration is present as an understorey across a large proportion of the woodland. There is a small area of worked Sweet Chestnut Coppice in the north of the woodland.

Open space has increased as a result of recent work to open up rides and tracks throughout the woodland and past work involving clearance of conifers along the stream corridor although this area is now freely regenerating with native broadleaves.

10.4 Conservation *(See Site Designation Map)*

Queens Copse is ancient in origin and is recorded as a Planted Ancient Woodland Site in the Dorset Ancient Woodland Inventory. Planted Ancient Woodland Sites have been surveyed across the forest district to identify priorities for restoration to native woodland. Queens Copse is classified as being a high priority site for ancient woodland restoration and the Forest Design Plan has been developed to support this aim. Holt Wood which lies to the south and is contiguous with Queens Copse is classified as an Ancient Semi Natural Woodland and a National Nature Reserve.

Plant species of interest within the woodland include the white helleborine. Butterfly populations are generally under recorded but the wood is noted for holding good numbers of White Admiral. Evidence of nests and feeding signs indicate that the site holds a population of dormice.

10.5 Recreation

Public access is gained at the eastern point of the woodland where informal car parking by the barrier occurs. Some people use the gravel road within the woodland as a circular walk but the woodland is not heavily used by the public. A recent residential development lies adjacent to the south west and public access is increasing from this source. A bridleway runs through the northern section of the woodland.

10.6 Archaeology *(See Site Designation Map)*

There are no scheduled archaeological sites within Queens Copse but there are a number of ancient boundary banks within the woodland. Additionally there are a number of earthworks in the eastern portion of the woods, which are believed to be ancient but are of uncertain origin. Medieval fishponds in this area are also a notable feature worthy of protection. All of these sites will be afforded protection as work arising from the Forest Design Plan progresses.