



# RUGBY DIAMOND WOOD COUNTRY PARK,

OFF ASHLAWN ROAD,  
RUGBY

# MANAGEMENT PLAN

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

DIAMOND JUBILEE WOOD COUNTRY PARK, ASHLAWN ROAD, RUGBY

### **SECTION ONE:**

#### **Introduction**

**Name of Wood:**

**DIAMOND JUBILEE WOOD COUNTRY PARK,  
ASHLAWN ROAD, RUGBY, WARWICKSHIRE, CV22 5ET**

**Ref:**

EWGS ref 29272.

**Date of Plan Production:**

Version 3: October 2012:

Drafted by Rugby Borough Council, in partnership with The Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission.

**Contract Name and Address:**

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#### **Summary**

The woodland / country park is a new significant woodland creation project. It has been created as a living lasting legacy by the people and communities of Rugby to mark the celebration of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee. The project is one of only 60 national marquee projects in partnership with the Woodland Trust that have the designation of "Diamond Woods". The woodland has been created using grant support from the Forestry Commissions English Woodland Grant Scheme.

The woodland is new scheme on previous arable agricultural land. It is located to the south of Rugby outside the built up area of the town below the Ashlawn Road (B4429) and to the east off Onley Lane. Ashlawn Road forms the southern boundary of the urban edge of Rugby and the Hillmorton Paddox residential areas lie to the North, with Rugby town centre approximately 1 mile to the north.

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The woodland is adjacent to the recently approved plans for the Rugby and Daventry Crematorium and Cemetery, from which expansive views over, into and through the woodland are possible. The woodland complements the extensive grounds of this facility. The cemetery and crematorium is separate and distinct from the woodland / country park.

The site is surrounded by open countryside with the Rainsbrook valley extending across to the south east. The site is the south facing valley slope of the Dunsmore Plateau Fringe which is has been identified as having scope for significant woodland planting with large scale planting targeted on rising ground.

The woodland is a new native broad leaved woodland mixture, with 40% open space incorporated in to its layout. The open spaces and rides are designed so as to maintain and frame views and vista across and along the valley.

This management plan is primarily focussed on the initial creation, planting and first years of management. It is intended that whilst this plan extends to around a ten year period (from planting, as per requirements of the EWGS), it will need to be revised with a longer horizon after approximately 3 years. At this stage it is intended to seek a greater extent of public involvement in the management and aspirations for the woodland.

#### **Scope**

This management plan deals with the initial establishment phase of this project and set out the work and monitoring that will be undertaken to ensure the successful establishment of the new native woodland

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### SECTION TWO:

#### Description

**Area:**

47ha (116.1ac) Approx

**Woodland type:**

Native Broad Leaf woodland mixture

**Altitudinal limits:**

The site is a south facing valley side, which rises from approximately 85m ASL at the Rains Brook to approximately 115 ASL at its Northerly extreme. This means that over the approximate 800m depth of the site it drops by around 30m.

**Status:**

Publicly owned currently with permissive access permissions, which over the life of this management plan are intended to be formalised.

**Legal Details:**

Owned by Rugby Borough Council

**General Description:**

The woodland is made of significant blocks of planting with approximately 40% of the area being managed open spaces.

The managed open spaces are a mixture of wide rides (10m width), small paths and glades / meadows within the blocks. These rides and paths will maintain and frame sight lines in both the north/south direction up and across the valley, as well as maintaining an east/west sight line along the valley side.

The glades, open spaces and rides will have a range of wildflowers planted which will provide interest and a range of habitats to support biodiversity in the area.

Fringe planting to the blocks of shrubs will give softer edges and remove "sharp corners" from the principle planting blocks. These areas of fringe planting will also substantially support a greater range of habitats for improving the biodiversity in the area.

The planted blocks of trees will have feathered and scalloped edges to reduce the occurrence of unnatural straight lines and angular features.

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A seasonal pond situated in the north eastern area of the site will be retained and over time improved to try to maintain a wetland habitat in the area, with appropriate tree planting / or tree removal to prevent excessive shading. Such work would be undertaken with advice from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

The woodland blocks will include a wide range of mainly native broad leaved species, with a greater presence of wetland trees being located towards the southern (lower) areas closest to the Rains Brook.

It is hoped that some areas of open space will, over time, benefit from the installation of public art or other features, such as living willow features, bench's or seating areas (perhaps using large fallen tree trunks, picnic areas or other features to suit the needs and desires of wider community of users.

#### **Physical Aspects:**

The soil is generally believed to be classified as Grade 2 agricultural land, although no actual assessment has been undertaken to confirm this classification. The topsoil stratum is a slightly sandy slightly gravely clay up to 0.6m in depth

Generally the geology of the site is a charmouth mudstone formation (formally known as Lias Clay) which is thought to extend up to 200m across the site. To the northern extremities of the site it is possible that there may be some lenses of Dunsmore Gravel, potentially of around 3m depth, these are likely to be superficial deposits that are poorly sorted and clay rich.

Adjacent to the Rains Brook there is a narrow strip of Alluvium. The water quality in the Rains brook has not been assessed as part of the Environment Agency River Basin Management Plan, but has been classified as chemically 'fair' (D).

#### **Key Features:**

There are no known historic or archaeological features of importance on the site. A large area of space has been included in the woodland design which encompasses the site of a demolished 18<sup>th</sup> Century Farmhouse (Heritage Record reference HWA 17994).

This area of 'reserved' space is situated roughly centrally in the site and supports the provision of a large focal point at the heart of the site. This area will be well suited over time for the installation of some form of key feature such as potentially public art, natural play area or other congregation focus for the community and site users.

The adjacent local nature reserve is known to have a significant level of interesting species of butterflies and moths. The Ashlawn Cutting LNR is a steep-sided disused railway cutting consisting of limestone grassland with scrub. Broomrape, grass pea; common blue and green hairstreak butterflies.

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The design of the woodland/country park, particularly in areas adjacent to this area, have taken account of the wishes of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and should complement and provide opportunities for habitat extensions to enhance the biodiversity in the LNR.

#### **Land Use:**

The land has been used for many decades for intensive arable agricultural use.

#### **Evaluation:**

The site has a high value for sections of the local community. It is currently well used by sections of the local community for informal recreation especially for dog walking. This use is currently on a 'tolerated' permissive access basis.

The proposals for the woodland / country park aim to significantly enhance this community value, build upon existing uses and expand these over time.

#### **Compartments:**

A detailed plan for individual plantation blocks will be developed. The areas adjacent to the Ashlawn cutting LNR will provide particular habitats to support and complement the LNR. Areas adjacent to the Rains Brook will be more suited for wetland planting.

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### **SECTION THREE:**

#### **Management Aim**

The long term aim for this area is to create an area of publically accessible open space (a Country Park), where biodiversity and informal recreation use is maximised.

It is the long-term aspiration that after the successful establishment of the tree planting, the woodland will become an asset for the local and wider community and that over time communities that enjoy use of the facility will adopt it as their "own" engaging with the Council to steer and drive its future management and use, rather than it being a municipal facility managed at the Council discretion.

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### **SECTION FOUR:**

#### **Management Objectives**

##### **Primary Objectives:**

- To create an area of natural tranquil public open space centred around a large native broad leaf woodland setting
- To fulfil all legal or contractual obligations committed to within the plan period, especially in relation to the EWGS.

##### **Secondary Objectives:**

- To establish a living lasting legacy for the community to mark H.M. Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee
- To protect and preserve this area of the Rainsbrook Valley from any further development
- To support the maintenance and extension of an interconnecting green infrastructure corridor particularly for wildlife and recreation.



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### **SECTION FIVE:**

#### **Constraints:**

There are no known constraints such as under or over ground services. The immediate area adjacent to the Rains Brook is an identified flood zone and as such will be primarily kept clear of planting and the planting that does occur nearest to these areas will be suited for a wetland environment.

There are no recorded protected flora or fauna species on the site.

#### **Constraints to tree establishment:**

Deer they are a major constraint on tree establishment for much of the country. However at this site deer are not considered to be a constraint: the immediate landscape is not well wooded and the site is frequently used by people, often to walk their dogs which will deter deer from the site.

Rabbits / voles and mice pose a threat to woodland establishment and may be a problem issue at this site. To safeguard against any adverse impact these animals may have tree guards will be used and raptors will be encouraged into the site with nest boxes and if necessary raptor posts.

Weeds will be a main constraint to tree establishment; ideally prior to planting the land will be sown with seed of a benign plant, such as clover and/or low vigour grass mix, in order to limit the growth of agricultural weeds such as docks etc. However this may not be practicable and therefore any weed growth will be managed by maintaining weed free spots around planted trees for the first three years after planting.

The emergence of the fungal disease chalarra fraxinea in the UK will prevent the planting and establishment of any Ash trees for the immediate future. It is hoped that replacement planting in future years will be able to see the integration of Ash trees with assured bio security.

#### **Obligations:**

None

#### **Resources:**

The initial works and resources required to create and establish the woodland area will be in the form of a grant from the Forestry Commission through the EWGS application.

This funding will allow the initial creation and maintenance work envisaged for the short and medium term (5 -10 years).

The majority of the physical works will be undertaken by the Councils own direct labour resources and specialist arboriculture team.

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A significant amount of public and community involvement is being planned for the planting phase in partnership with the Woodland Trust.

The enhancement of the biodiversity benefits that can be achieved will be achieved in partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust who currently manage the adjacent local nature reserve.

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### **SECTION SIX:**

#### **Prescriptions**

These relate to the delivery of the objectives mentioned above and will be changed and developed over time and as this management plan is revised.

After 5 years the status of the land will be reviewed in order to provide an enhanced level of protection the site as open space and to protect it from development.

The planting will be monitored regularly in order to ensure that it is developing in line with the overall aspiration to create an area of natural tranquil public open space and that all legal or contractual obligations committed to within the plan period, especially in relation to the EWGS are delivered.

To plant a number of focal point special trees that will allow the immediate visible establishment of a living lasting legacy for the community to mark H.M. Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee, these trees will be planted in the initial planting season and marked.

The flora and fauna of the area will be monitored and assessed regularly to ensure that the maximum benefit for biodiversity can be achieved and to allow movement of appropriate species through an interconnecting green infrastructure corridor.

To engage with the communities of users to ensure that as the site develops it is able to best meet the longer term aspirations for recreation and enjoyment.

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### **SECTION SEVEN:**

#### **Plan Review**

The management plan will initially be reviewed annually, around September, in order to inform development works, restocking etc through the principle planting seasons. Initially those involved in the review will be the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and a selection of members of the public from the communities of users.

After 3 years it is proposed to undertake a larger review with a larger cross section from the varied communities of users, as well as other stakeholders, to facilitate establishing a longer term management direction for the site.

Thereafter it would be appropriate to have formal reviews of the management plan every 2 to 3 years in order to evaluate progress and effectiveness of previous actions to meet the desired outcomes within the plan.

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### SECTION EIGHT:

#### Work Plan

##### Initial Phase

The land will be given a deep “sub soil” treatment to prepare the ground for planting.

NOTE: After the sub-soiling treatment has been carried out Warwickshire Archaeology Services will be advised that they should they wish to undertake a walk over of the site for identification and recording of any exposed finds they will have an opportunity to do so.

After sub-soiling the land will be rolled and prepared for planting.

Plantations will be created using bare root, native transplants, interspersed with 8/10 up to 12/14 standard trees along with any appropriate under story planting as required.

The initial planting of bare rooted stock should be at the same depth as they were in the nursery soil – up to the root collar, and these should be heeled in firmly afterwards.

Approximately 2 weeks from initial planting the plantations will be rechecked and any that have fallen over will be firmed up or replanted.

Initial planting of whips will have rabbit or strimmer guards and some may have cane supports.

The EWGS requires a minimum planting density of 1,600 trees per hectare, in the areas of the site that are to be planted. This would equate to around 45,500 trees being planted to establish the woodland / country park. With around 40% of the site being maintained as open space the overall stocking density of the site across the whole site will be below 1,000 trees per hectare. ,

This approximately equates to planting at roughly 2.5m to 3m centres, in the planted blocks. It is not intended that this will be too regimented as it is intended to create a “natural” feel and therefore irregular spacing throughout the some or all areas of the plantations is encouraged.

The edges to the woodland blocks will be scalloped or feathered to minimise the appearance of unnatural straight edges. The corners to planting blocks will be well rounded.

It is likely that the initial planting density may be slightly higher, allowing for a 10% buffer to compensate for future loses either through natural die back, pest damage or vandalism.

Single specimen trees or trees used for avenues or focal points will be containerised & of a size relevant to the planting site. A number of these “commemorative” large specimen trees will be scattered over the site and used to mark areas of community or VIP planting.

Appropriate staking of the trees will need to be considered, in general this will be single short stakes, though double staking & 8ft stakes will possibly be required for larger specimen trees.

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The vegetation will be allowed to grow within the planting area – to discourage intrusion in to the site by potential vandals due to the tall & generally rank vegetation. The rabbit or strimmer guards will however provide protection from voles. Raptor posts will be considered for the site as a method to naturally manage populations around the site.

Until the position regarding Chalara dieback caused by the Chalara Fraxinea fungal infection is clarified and bio security can be assured, it is NOT proposed to plant any Ash trees on the site. There is likely to be some degree of self seeding from established trees in the area and these will be monitored.

### **Non-forestry works**

At the time of planting nest boxes will be installed on existing trees within the site. This is to help support local raptor populations whose presence will help to manage mice and vole populations which might constrain the trees establishment

Occasional scrapes will be created within the woodland's margin along the Rains brook to provide seasonal ponds and increased wetland habitats.

### **First Year Inspection & Maintenance**

Any losses &/or broken tree stock will be removed from site at the earliest convenience in order to keep the appearance that site is cared for & tidy.

The staking and guarding of trees and plantations will be reviewed to ensure their establishment is not being compromised by vandalism or pest damage.

During autumn/winter, then tree losses should be replaced as damaged stock is removed or during the following planting season.

Plantations (that have not been under planted with woodland flora) will be chemically treated at least once per annum, to reduce any rank vegetation. The timing of any treatments will consider any bulb planting & be organised to take place well after bulb foliage has died back.

A weed-free ring of around 1m diameter around each young tree will be maintained for the first 3 years at least to allow them to become established.

Rides, paths and glades will be mown approximately 3-4 times a year. Where appropriate and economical to do so, cuttings will be removed from the site to minimise the enrichment of the soil. It may be appropriate to encourage localised accumulations of vegetative matter as refuges and habitats for some wildlife.

Regular monitoring for noxious weeds such as ragwort will occur.

The installation of raptor posts will be considered as a means to manage rodent populations on and around the site if they present a threat to the establishment of the woodland.

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### **Second and subsequent Year Inspection**

This will generally be a repeat for Year 1 as detailed above, plus tree ties, stake & protective guards will be checked for security & that they are not damaging the saplings – retying, staking & replacing as necessary.

When suitable supplies of bio-secure Ash trees are again available, it is considered likely that the majority, if not all, replacement stock will be of Ash trees.

### **Grassland Areas – Rides, Paths, Glades & Meadows**

A low vigour grass mix will be seeded in areas intended for the glades, paths and rides. This will include in places wildflower seed mixtures. Advice on an appropriate seed mixture will be taken from the local Wildlife Trust.

Rides, paths and glades will be mown approximately 3-4 times a year. The minimum height (especially during April – early July nesting season) should not be less than 20cm to protect the incumbent wildlife. Where practicable, in order to minimise further enrichment of the site that may comprise development of the seeded wildflowers, grass cuttings may be lifted after some cuts during the year.

Regular monitoring for noxious weeds such as ragwort will occur.

Regular monitoring of the condition of access points and surfaces will occur to ensure public safety is maintained. Replacement and/or repair of damaged or worn areas will occur as required.

As both grass & forbs are allowed to develop, the identification of the flora will be undertaken. To leave the sward as is, though uncut on any regular basis, & with a long term view that an increase of biodiversity will take place over an extended period of time.

Various forbs will be introduced into the sward either via seeding or direct planting of suitable plug plants; these will have been chosen to achieve the best biodiversity and interest benefits.

Where plug plants are used they will be planted as specie groups & around 40-50cm apart. If direct seeding is used it will take many wildflowers up to 3 years to flower & subsequently set seed. It will therefore be essential that developing grassland is regularly checked within this period to ensure a properly established sward, using appropriate 'weed' control to keep vigorous forbs such as thistle and dock in check.

The management of the 'meadow' areas in subsequent years should see the sward left undisturbed from mid February to late August, unless areas require topping to remove intrusive plants as noted above. The cuts in these portions should be achieved with either with a flail or rotary unit & the arising's removed from the surface to allow seed set & germination. Arisings will generally be baled (where appropriate) & left on site where possible as habitat for invertebrates, amphibians & small mammals.

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After the main cut & by mid October, the areas might need a further topping cut using a fail or rotary unit set to minimum height of 25cm, the arisings (if light) can remain on the surface as necessary. This mimics the historical use of livestock within meadows after the hay harvest, keeping the overgrowth in check for the winter period & the sward relatively open for seed germination.

Consideration will be given the pruning or brashing the trees and shrubs along the edges of the main rides to preserve vistas and maximum feeling of security for visitors. However, it is noted that it is unlikely that the plants will be of sufficient size and form to warrant it within the first five years.



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### **SECTION NINE:**

#### **Maps**

A 1:2500 scale drawing of the overall site “master plan” is available. A version of this plan is attached to this management plan as Appendix 1.

Further more detailed larger scale drawings of specific plantation blocks or zones will be developed before any planting commences on the site.

It is likely that during the initial year after establishment that map based action plans will be developed as a useful reference for planning an overall work plan.

These would comprise three maps which would cover:

1. The existing state and important features;
2. The desired state, identifying what will have changed following management;
3. The required management.

This last would be an elaboration of the WGS map which provides more detail on the action to be taken in each zone.

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### **SECTION TEN:**

#### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Plan of the site and broad layout strategy for the site.

Appendix 2 – Consultation Activity Summary (as at October 2012)

Appendix 3 – Landscape Statement

Appendix 4 – Visual Impact Analysis

Appendix 5 – Rugby Borough Council Report on Woodland Creation – Council Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Appendix 6 – Submission for inclusion in the “Official Diamond Jubilee record” presented to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II – To follow