

Herne Hill County Wildlife Site

Revised Management Plan for 2016 - 2026

Site History & Description.

The Herne Hill County Wildlife Site (OS Grid: ST351140) is currently owned and managed by Ilminster Town Council, following being gifted to the town in 1931 by Major Sir George Davies MP and Walter Trivett. The covenant agreement with which the site was handed over to Ilminster town includes the following elements:

1. That the land should be a public natural park and an public open space.
2. That it should be kept in its natural state, as so far as this can be done.
3. That it should be open and free to the public, at all times.
4. That it should be open to the sky, except for the natural growth of tree, shrubs or the like.
5. That the maintenance regime continues as it had been for many years prior to the conveyance.
6. That there shall not be any construction or erection of walls, buildings or other type of structure.
7. That it shall not be used for exhibiting advertisements, burning, brick making, digging or turf removal.
8. That public fairs must not be held, but the hunting of foxes, game and rabbits can continue.
9. That the preservation of wild birds and animals should continue.

There is a proviso that trees and shrubs may be felled, pruned and thinned with the view and intent to preserve and maintain the natural amenity value of the land.

Although Herne Hill has a long history, even appearing in the Domesday book of 1086, it is not classed as an ancient woodland as it has not been continuously wooded since prior to c.1600. Many of the trees within the woodland are however ancient/veteran, and future surveys should include any ancient woodland indicator species that may be present.

In 1982 a five year tree planting program was carried out, in which 5000 young trees were planted. In the years following this, to present, a further 2000 new trees have been planted. The initial planting program introduced new non-native species, including a large number of american red oak.

The site is now managed as an amenity woodland for members of the public to enjoy, while maintaining the areas valuable wildlife resource, which is reflected in the management objectives.

Site Evaluation.

The Herne Hill site covers an area of 8.25 hectares and consists of a broad range of natural vegetation species, along with a number of introduced species.

The species composition of the woodland varies throughout, with the most prevalent tree and shrub species being: Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*).

The field layer within the woodland includes: Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Red campion (*Silene dioica*), Dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*).

The ground layer within the woodland is dominated by Common ivy (*Hedera helix*), Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) along with substantial moss, liverwort, lichen and fungi communities.

The area at the hills summit is known as the fir-pound and is a plantation which consists of Scots pine, sweet chestnut and beech trees. Even though these species are not local to this habitat, they should remain as a significant part of the sites history and ecology.

Many parts of the woodlands shrub layer is currently sparse, consisting of mostly bramble and bracken. It is proposed a selection of these areas be managed to allow for other species, which require more light, to germinate and thrive.

The site provides a habitat for many species of animal, including a large population of Badger, a substantial range of invertebrates and wild birds.

There are currently 5 entrances to Herne Hill which connect to a network of footpaths crossing the site. In places they provide poor access during the winter months due to the poor drainage of the clay-rich soils. Improving the sites footpaths should be considered. This could be achieved by improving drainage of the footpaths or by laying wood chipping's onto areas are susceptible to flooding.

The woodland does not currently possess any National Vegetation Classification (NVC) descriptions or hold any conservation designations. Classifying the varied habitats found on the hill inline with the NVC could be investigated in the future. Gaining a local nature reserve (LNR) designation should be the long term objective of this management plan.

The importance of Herne Hill to the town of Ilminster can not be understated. It provides a valuable wildlife resource to the local area, any work that is carried out should first be considered against the following objectives:

Management Objectives.

1. Ensure that the sites natural vegetation continues to develop, in respect of its ancient woodland character.
2. To conserve the site and enhance the local native landscape.
3. To conserve and enhance the local ecology, including managing the habitat for species of conservational importance.
4. To assist the stabilisation of the sites slopes, establishing and maintaining tree cover at vulnerable points.
5. To control pests and invasive species, preventing excessive damage.
6. Maintain reasonable safety margins for site users and neighbouring landowners.
7. To enhance access to the site for visitors and educate site users on the history and ecology of Herne Hill.

Management Prescriptions.

Reduce areas of dense bramble and bracken on the northern slopes and site boundaries.

1. Large areas of the woodland floor on the northern slope have become covered with dense thickets of bramble and bracken, this deprives other species of the light and space needed to germinate.

2. By allowing more plant species to grow within the field layer, the sites biodiversity increases making it more desirable to rarer wildlife species.
3. Use hand tools and mechanical brush cutters to cut and clear down to the ground layer, taking care to only remove bramble and bracken and not damage other species that have growth within the gaps in the field layer.
4. The section shown on the map (Appendix A) between areas J and N, should also be cleared of bracken and bramble so as to allow it to return to a glade habitat.
5. The work is to be carried out in sections, so as to create a field layer of varying stages of development. Work should not strip back extensive areas of the woodland floor all at once, which some wildlife species depend on.
6. Work should be carried out after bird nesting season in October and before the start of spring in March.
7. Springtime surveys to record the species within the new field layer, special attention should be paid to identifying ancient woodland indicators (AWI's).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bracken/Bramble clearance.												



A dense thicket of bramble on the boundary of Herne Hill.

Carrying out restorative coppicing of the hazel band.

1. The hazel band which runs through the woodland at Herne hill should be coppiced on a 14 year rotation, so as to allow the hazel enough time to produce nuts, which provide a food source to Dormice and other creatures.
2. This coppicing regime will prolong the life of the hazel, encouraging new growth from the stools and allowing more light to reach the ground for field layer species to thrive.
3. Chainsaws or hand tools should be used to carry out the work, ensuring that PPE is worn and that signs are displayed to inform site visitors of the work being carried out.
4. Prior to making any cut, the stool must first be checked to ensure that it is not being used by hibernating Dormice.
5. Cuts are to be made as low to the ground as practical. All cuts should be angled away from the centre to assist water to run off, this will help prevent infection to the stool.
6. The remaining brash is to be laid to cover the stool, as to prevent browsing from herbivores.
7. Work should only be carried out between the start of November and the end of February, to avoid unnecessary disturbance to wildlife and to ensure the ongoing health of the stool by only cutting during the dormant season.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Hazel coppicing												



A hazel coppice stool, showing cuts angled away from the centre.

Improving and maintaining the woodland boundaries.

1. The boundary earth bank and ditch which runs around the site has important historical value and should remain in place indefinitely.
2. Bramble and bracken is to be cleared from the boundaries to encourage new growth. Ideally 2m in from the boundary and to the enclosing fence on the opposite side. Brush cutters and hand tools will be required for this task.
3. Dead hedging is to be laid along the boundary line, using the arisings gathered from the restorative coppicing and other thinning tasks.
4. The hedging should be laid 1m high and 1m tall to provide a useful habitat for wildlife without impeding the view from the hill.
5. Areas of coppice within the hedge are to be cut, inline with the coppicing strategy. Hawthorn planted along the Northern, Western and Southern enclosures, when mature enough, should be laid down as per traditional methods, using a billhook.
6. Established standards should remain along the enclosures edge. Many are classified as veteran or ancient specimens and are vital to ensuring a species rich woodland habitat.
7. Boundary work should be carried out between the months of October and March to avoid bird nesting season.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Boundary maintenance												



An example of how a dead hedging boundary should be laid.

Tree thinning.

1. The ash that has been planted within areas the areas marked on the map (Appendix 1) as O, P and S require thinning. Many have developed into tall poles due to the close proximity between specimens.
2. Initially spacing should be no less that 3m between trees, this will allow for improved development for the remaining standards and increase ground stability, as their roots are able to spread across a larger area.
3. Any work involving climbing and felling should be carried out by arborists with the appropriate credentials. Any ground work should be carried out by the open spaces team.
4. Arisings remaining from this work should be used to create dead hedging or for larger pieces, stacked onto the woodland floor to create habitat for wildlife.
5. Dead standing trees should remain as to increase the habitat for wildlife. Except where they pose an increased risk to the public or have been confirmed to have died through contagious disease.
6. Thinning work should be carried out between the months of August and March to avoid bird nesting season. Visual checks must be carried out prior to work commencing to ensure no nests exist within the felling zone.
7. It may be necessary to removed diseased trees outside of these months to avoid further infection, however advice must first be sought.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Tree thinning												

Maintaining and improving access for site users.

1. Footpaths should be 2m in width and level where possible. Regular maintenance is required to keep them clear of obstacles and overhanging limbs, so as not to impede less mobile members of the public.
2. An area of 2m either side of main footpaths should be kept clear of scrub and saplings to create open rides, increasing the structure of the vegetation to improve habitat for wildlife.
3. In areas which are susceptible to subsidence, wooden beams or sleepers are to be set into the ground on the downhill edge of the footpath. This will increase its integrity and help prevent further erosion.
4. In areas where landfall has created obstacles along footpaths, barriers should be constructed from natural materials and fixed in the ground to hold back the soil.
5. All steps, handrails, benches and other similar infrastructure must be checked regularly for signs of wear or damage and replaced or repaired where necessary.
6. Access maintenance work should continue all year round, providing the work will not pose an undue threat to the sites wildlife.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Access maintenance												

Northern foot of the hill (Cleaves close).

1. The northern slope of the hill should be cleared of bramble and willow herb to create an open grassland/meadow habitat.

2. A tractor powered flail, brush cutters and hand tools should be used for this task. Extra care must be taken initially due to the varying ground level.
3. Trees and shrubs currently growing within this area should remain, but new saplings and suckers should be removed.
4. Care should be taken when cutting around trees to avoid damaging plaques that have been left in remembrance.
5. With regular clearance of the scrub it is hoped this area can return to grassland. Clearance should take place annually. With a third of the slope being cleared each year to create a mosaic of growth which will provide richer biodiversity.
6. This area is currently used for the burning of arisings and it is planned that this will continue, providing the burn area is checked for wildlife beforehand.
7. Clearance of the bramble and willowherb should only be carried out between the months of October and March, to avoid bird nesting season.

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Northern slope												

Maintenance of the ridge path.

1. The ridge path should be maintained and kept to a high standard as it serves as the main entrance onto the site for many users.
2. The hedges which run adjacent to the ridge path should be cut back using hand tools and mechanical hedge cutters to a width that does not impede access at the beginning of October.
3. The hazel which grows to the northern edge of the ridge path should be coppiced during its dormant period on a 7 year rotation, so as not to become neglected and to prolong its life.
4. Any overhanging deadwood should be cut back and removed so as not to present a risk to site users.
5. During the summer months the ridge path should be mowed regularly to improve access.

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Ridge path												

Public engagement.

1. The site is management primarily to provide an amenity wildlife area to the public, therefore their inclusion wherever possible is important.
2. Volunteer groups should be organised to assist with woodland management tasks wherever possible. Ensuring that risk assessments, PPE and tools are provided by the Open Spaces team.
3. Guided walks to groups should be carried out by the open spaces team, town councillors or qualified volunteers, to educate site users on the valuable wildlife that Herne Hill provides. Wherever possible these should include hands on activities to improve the quality of the session and promote active learning.
4. Interpretation boards should be installed to inform site users. These are to include: the key species, a summary of Herne Hills history, a map of the site and a list of the relevant bylaws.
5. A nature trail should be established within the woodland to direct users around a number of key routes. Routes should be decided upon following further consultation and access to less mobile site users must be taken into account.

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Public engagement												

Conflicting Requirements.

The management of certain areas for ecological requirements, such as coppicing and scrub clearance will leave some areas open. This may cause concern for members of the public, if they are unaware of why certain tasks are being carried out.

Informing site users by implementing signage is recommended, this should include the type of work being carried out, why it is necessary and what the duration shall be.

In accordance with the covenant agreement, the hill should be managed in its natural state. However, there are a number of introduced species present within the woodland. These include a number of planted Red oak standards on the northern slope and a small number of Cypress trees at the summit. It is recommended that these remain as they provide additional structure to the hill and work to prevent erosion. New growth and suckers should be removed though to ensure that native species are allowed to thrive.

Ecological Disposal of Arisings.

Arisings and brash from the coppicing regime are to be used as dead hedging to improve the site boundaries.

Infectious diseased trees should be removed from the woodland to the Cleaves Close area and burnt to reduce risk of infection spreading to healthy trees.

Wood from felled trees is to be stacked on the woodland floor to create deadwood microhabitats for wildlife species.

The possibility of using arisings from coppicing to produce charcoal could be considered as a public engagement activity.

Larger fallen or felled trees may be used to produce additional seating for site users.

Fire Plan.

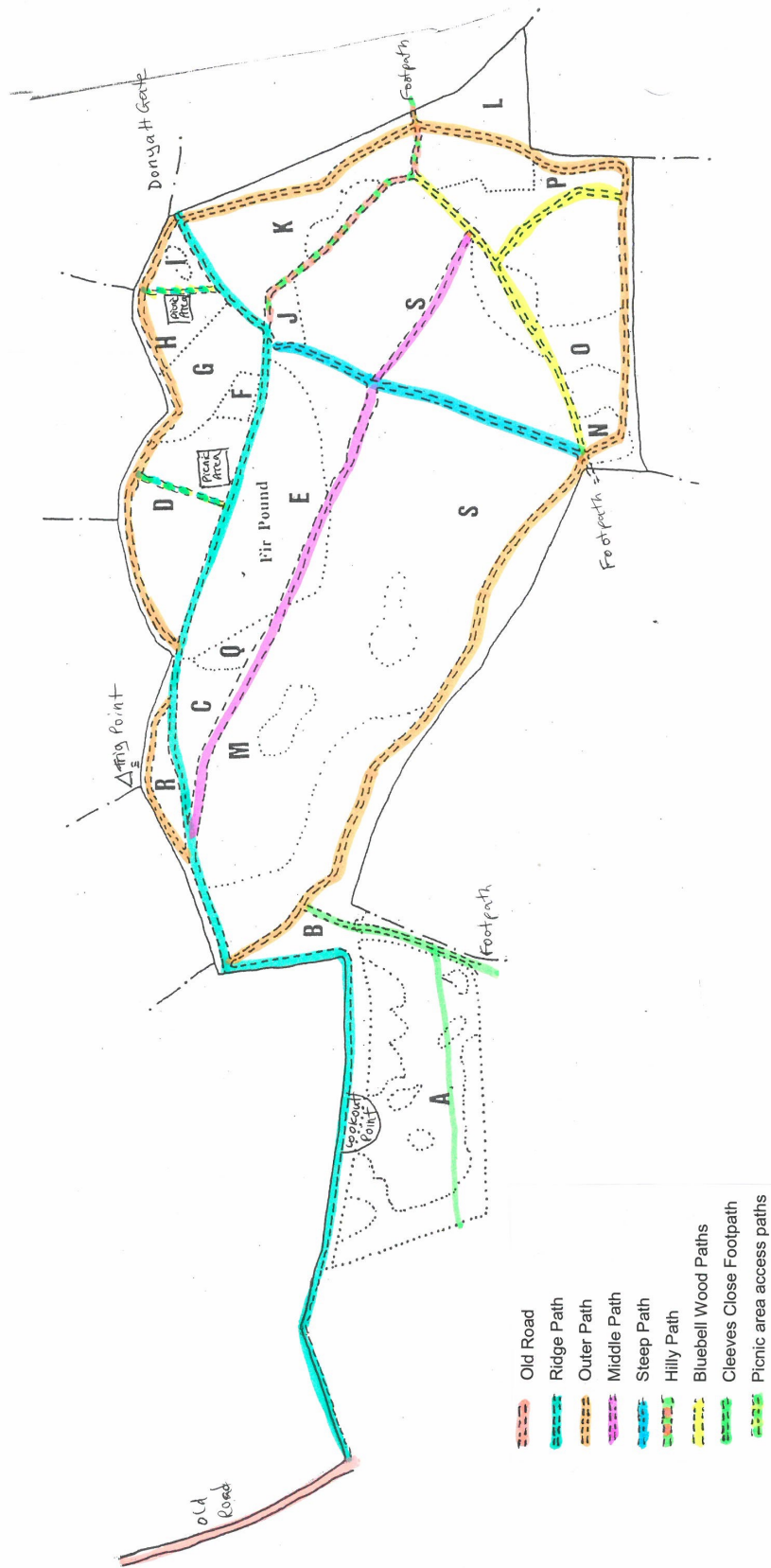
Due to the mainly broadleaved nature of the woodlands, the risk from fire is considered to be low. The lighting of fires on the Herne Hill site is prohibited within the bylaws and also against the covenant agreement.

There is not currently access to fire hydrant water-mains or an emergency water supply (EWS) on the site.

In the event of a fire, the fire brigade are to be called immediately.

The local fire officer has (at their request) a key to the site and practice drills are carried out.

Should any changes take place to the site that should increase the risk of fire, or impede access onto the site by fire crews, the local fire officer must be informed.



Species	Code
Alder Buckthorne	AB
Ash	A
Beech	B
Bird Cherry	BC
Cherry	C
Cherry Plum	CP
Crab Plum	CA
Elder	EL
Elm	E
Field Maple	FM
Guelder Rose	GR
Hazel	H
Hornbeam	HB
Hawthorn	HW
Holly	HL
London Plane	LP
Oak	O
Poplar	P
Pear	PR
Rowan	R
Red Oak	RO
Silver Birch	SB
Sweet Chestnut	SC
Scotts Pine	SP
Spindle	SPI
Service Tree	ST
Sycamore	SY
White Beam	W
Walnut	WA
Wych Elm	WE
Wayfarer Tree	WT

