



The Lynch and Freedown Woods, Ringwould / Kingsdown, Kent

Five Year Management Plan



[Kent Wildlife Trust Land Management Advisory Services](#)

Report compiled by Neil Coombs CEnv MCIEEM Land Management Advisor



Introduction

Kent Wildlife Trust has been commissioned by Ringwould with Kingsdown Parish Council to provide a five year management plan for the area known as The Lynch and Freedown.

The Lynch and Freedown Woods, Ringwould / Kingsdown, Kent.

Summary

The Lynch and Freedown Woods are part of a complex of mixed native broadleaved woodland, part of Local Wildlife Site DO02 The Lynch and Oxney Court Woods, Ringwould. The main part of the local wildlife site is Oxneybottom Wood, which is described as 19th century plantation on the Historic Environment record¹. This is joined to a narrow woodland shaw with beeches of some antiquity, which is further joined to an area of mostly yew and sycamore woodland with some open areas to the north west. This area is known as The Lynch, presumably derived from the term Lynchet, defined as an earth terrace, a feature of ancient field systems in the British Isles. Freedown is a roughly square area of some 15.42 hectares which in the past seems to have been open parkland with scattered trees. Possibly it was once more downland in character hence its name. It is now an area of tall trees mostly of ash and sycamore. Some substantial ash coppice stools remain and there are a few pollarded oaks towards the northern boundary.

There are a number of public rights of way through the site and this is supported by general open access.

Vision

The site is important as a Local Wildlife Site. The Lynch is sheltered, warm, sunlit chalk grassland and scrub rich in wildflowers, butterflies and other wildlife. The vision is to retain as much open chalk grassland as resources allow.

Freedown is a small but complex woodland over former open habitat. It has some fine trees scattered throughout. There are elements of fine beech and yew woodland over chalk. These features are to be retained whilst encouraging more variety through natural regeneration, with

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<http://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.HeritageMaps.Web.Sites.Public/Default.aspx?entity=monument&recid=MKE6690>



increased structural diversity through management of the canopy and managing diseased and potentially hazardous trees to create a more open structure.

A more open structure may encourage a more diverse ground flora and a more varied woodland structure of shrubs and canopy trees.

Methodology

The site has been visited and “field walked” on three occasions by Neil Coombs CEnv, MIEEM. Land Management Advisor, Kent Wildlife Trust. Observations as to habitats present according to standard survey techniques such as Phase One habitat survey and Natural England Farm Environment Plan survey methods have been used as appropriate. National Vegetation Classification surveys are not at this stage considered necessary. Species noted during the survey have been recorded. Readily available information has been studied in a “desktop survey”.

The information collected has then been assessed in terms of the habitats, species and natural and semi-natural features present, and their significance and condition is evaluated. Advice and recommendations are then provided following suggested objectives and projects. Finally some broad indicators of success are provided.

Outline site description

Location Size and Tenure

A location map is provide at Fig 1

Size 15.42 hectares

Owners Ringwould with Kingsdown Parish Council

Designations

The Lynch and Freedown Woods are part of Local Wildlife Site DO02: The Lynch and Oxney Court Woods, Ringwould.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are areas which are important for the conservation of wildlife in the administrative areas of Kent and Medway. They may support threatened habitats, such as chalk grassland or ancient woodland, or may be important for the wild plants or animals which are present.



In Kent, there are over 460 Local Wildlife Sites, covering a total area of over 27,500 hectares, (roughly 7% of the county). They range from a 0.13 hectares churchyard important for orchids, to grazing marsh sites of over 1,000 hectares.

The Lynch and Oxney Court Woods, Ringwould (DO02) are continuous to the east with the Walmer and Kingsdown Golf Course (DO31) Local Wildlife Site. The only other Local Wildlife Site within 5 kilometres is Kingsdown and Walmer Beach (DO01)

The Importance of Local Wildlife Sites

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) protect the very best wildlife areas in the UK, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protect areas which are important on a European scale. However, these designations do not protect wildlife at a local level, and cannot ensure that the countryside as a whole is rich in wild life.

Therefore Local Wildlife Sites fill an important gap not covered by other designations and are vital in building a Living Landscape. The importance of international, national and locally designated sites is recognised in government policy. The 2012 National Planning Policy Framework says protection should be “commensurate with their status and give[s] appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.”

The “Making Space for Nature” report to Defra (Lawton et al September 2010) stated that: ‘Local Wildlife Sites are important to future ecological networks, because they not only provide wildlife refuges in their own right but can act as stepping stones and corridors to link and protect nationally and internationally designated sites’²

Local Wildlife Site Description

LWS DO02: The Lynch and Oxney Court Woods, Ringwould is designated for the following features:

Grassland

An area of chalk grassland is situated on a sheltered, steep, west-facing slope backed by dense scrub of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* with ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. This scrub is beginning to intrude into the grassland, especially at the southern end.

² <http://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/local-wildlife-sites>



The grassland is dominated by upright brome *Bromopsis erecta* but tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* also occurs. Finer sward is present, with sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratense*. A rich assemblage of herbs includes horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, thyme *Thymus spp*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* and several common orchids. The uncommon wood vetch *Vicia sylvatica* occurs in the scrubby edges at the southern end.

A range of chalk bryophytes, including *Ctenidium molluscum* and *Seligeria panciflora*, probably mean the area has never been ploughed.

Woodland

The broadleaved woodland has mature beech, yew, and many exotic species such as sycamore and pine which have been planted into woodland in the past. The original structure can be seen in parts, with hazel, ash and hornbeam coppice. The ground flora includes sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium* and common-spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* are widespread.

The whole area is likely to be rich in bird life and invertebrates but a survey has not been undertaken.³

A search of the Government Multi Agency Geographical Information website www.magic.gov.uk on 18/04/2018 shows the designations that apply to the site.

AONB The site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty⁴

Priority Habitat Inventory- Deciduous Woodland (England)⁵

³ Kent Wildlife Trust LWS DO02 The Lynch and Oxney Court Woods, Ringwould citation

⁴ AONBs are designated areas where protection is afforded to protect and manage the areas for visitors and local residents.

<https://data.gov.uk/dataset/8e3ae3b9-a827-47f1-b025-f08527a4e84e/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-england>

⁵ This is a spatial dataset that describes the geographic extent and location of Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) Section 41 habitats of principal importance.

The standalone Deciduous Woodland Inventory has been extracted from Natural England's Priority Habitats Inventory <http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/MagicMap.aspx>



The majority of Freedown is described by MAGIC as being Coniferous Woodland. Neither the field survey nor the Local Wildlife Site Survey found any significant conifers apart from occasional yew on site.

The rest of the site is described as Broad-leaved or deciduous darker green woodland.

The site is not recorded as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) or as a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS).

Desktop scoping

Further scoping studies are as follows:

The Kent County Council Heritage Map website was consulted on 18/04/2018. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps various show Freedown as “open country” or as furze and scattered trees both deciduous and coniferous⁶

The 1929-1952 map is copied here although the detail is not very clear. The maps can be viewed on the website here:

<http://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.HeritageMaps.Web.Sites.Public/Default.aspx>

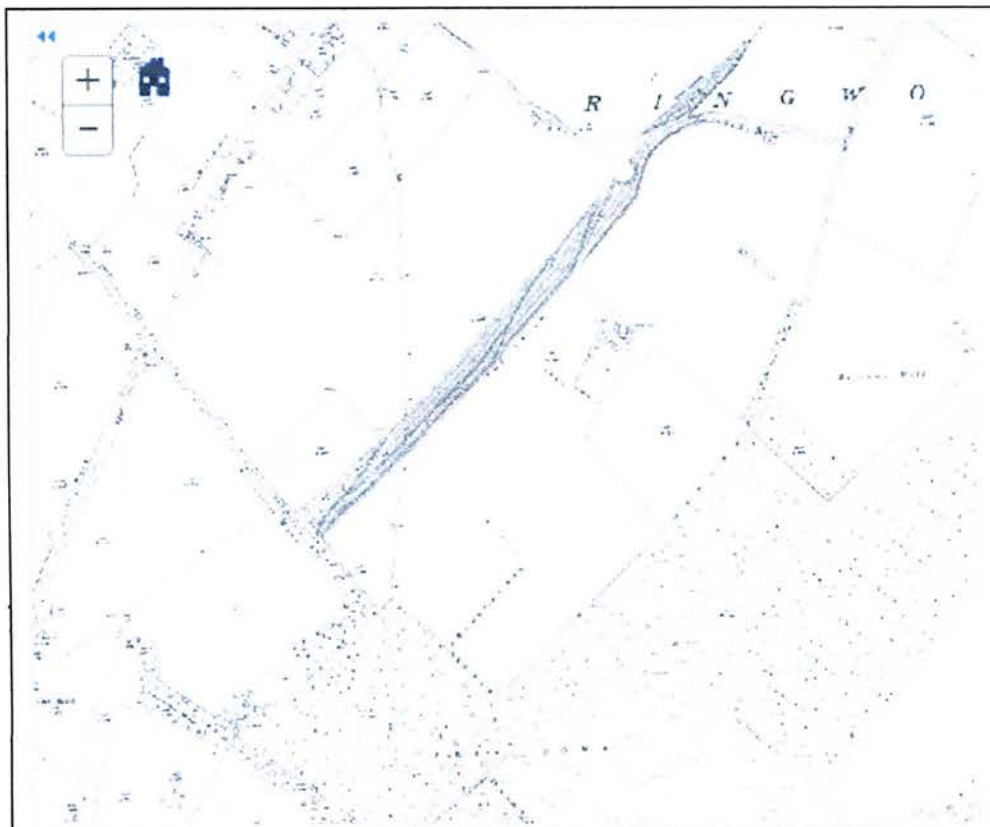




Fig 2 The Lynch and Freedown 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map.

Google Earth imagery shows both The Lynch and Freedown as mostly open, probably grassland, with small areas of woodland in 1940 with woodland becoming dominant by the 1990's

Field Survey Site description

The Lynch and Freedown site is owned by Ringwould with Kingsdown Parish Council. The Lynch is a narrow sloping feature, some 5.18 hectares, of mature woodland and open chalk grassland with encroaching scrub. There is a formal public right of way and a number of informal desire line paths.

The woodland consists of small sections of lowland beech and yew woodland, which is a section 41 habitat and some mixed deciduous woodland of predominantly ash and sycamore.

The grassland is characteristic of lowland chalk grassland which is also a section 41 habitat.⁷ The scrub is encroaching upon the chalk grassland habitat and is characteristic of scrub on calcareous soils in its composition, with species such as hawthorn, wayfaring tree and dogwood present.

Freedown of some 9.70 hectares consists of mostly mature high canopy woodland. As already discussed, at one time this would have been an open site of perhaps bushes and occasional trees. It is now dominated by sycamore and ash with a sparse ground flora.

The site in wider context

⁷ NERC section 41 Habitats of Principle Importance



A search of MAGIC⁸ shows the following:

Freedown and adjoining areas is registered common land

Freedown is an area designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

Calcareous Grassland located 1.5 kilometres east

Designated areas:

Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest within 2 kilometres

Dover to Kingsdown Special Area of Conservation within 2 kilometres

The site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Soils

Shallow lime-rich soils over chalk or limestone Habitats:

Herb-rich Downland and limestone pastures; limestone pavements in the uplands; Beech hangers and other lime-rich woodlands⁹

Protected Species

Biological Records have not been consulted for this management plan.

Species

Reptiles / amphibians

Great Crested Newt. This European protected Species is found in woodlands but there are no ponds within 500 metres of the site and so the potential for a breeding population to exist is low. In any event works proposed in this management are considered to have very

⁸ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁹ Soilscape
https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=soilscape+viewer&rlz=1C1CHZL_enGB743GB743&oq=Soilscapewww&aq=s=chrome.2.69i57j0l4.6137j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

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little potential to cause harm or disturbance although caution is recommended with wood and log piles that could serve as hibernacula.

Adder. The Lynch is considered as potentially good habitat for this species although the surrounding arable farmland may be a barrier to species migration and dispersal.

Grass Snake. The Lynch does have the potential to support this species.

Slow Worms. The Lynch does have the potential to support this species.

The above species of reptiles are most likely to be disturbed or harmed during grass and scrub management. Such activities should take place on warm days providing opportunities for these cold blooded creatures to warm up and get out of the way.

Caution should be exercised in Autumn, Winter and Spring when low vegetation and habitat piles may contain hibernating animals.

Mammals

European Dormouse.

This European Protected Species inhabits woodland, scrub and hedgerows and is largely associated with hazel. Although no field signs were found on survey it should be assumed that it is present on site. Usually it is possible to minimise the potential for harm and disturbance by following best practice in terms of season, timing and the avoidance of using vehicles in areas where Dormouse may be hibernating. The most up to date guidance should be consulted before any works are considered.¹⁰ In any event all works should stop if Dormouse are observed.

Bats.

All species of Bats are European Protected Species and individuals and their habitats, whether in use or not are fully protected from harm or disturbance. The potential for this site to support bats is considered to be very high. Numerous trees have features considered to be bat roost potential. Any felling must consider the potential to disturb roosting bats and their habitat. Ground Surveys for potential bat roost habitat should be completed before tree works, and where necessary climbing inspections considered. The latest Best

¹⁰[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/england-protectedspecies-dormouse.pdf/\\$FILE/england-protectedspecies-dormouse.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/england-protectedspecies-dormouse.pdf/$FILE/england-protectedspecies-dormouse.pdf)



practice should be incorporated into a works methodology prior to any works.¹¹ In any event all works should stop if bats are observed and a suitably qualified ecologist consulted.

Badgers.

Badgers are present on site and there is considerable activity. It was not established whether there are any main sets on site. In any event no management works are considered likely to involve disturbance.

Birds

Typical woodland birds are present on site and it is considered that tree nesting species may benefit in particular. No works should take place in the bird nesting season 1st March to 31st August.

Habitat Resilience, Climate Change and Tree Disease

Ash is present throughout the woodland and advice needs to be updated in accordance with the latest guidance regarding ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)

Given that ash is widely present throughout the site the principles outlined here should apply throughout the site. There is a high possibility that the symptoms noticed on the field visit are ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). Ash is present in the following forms, saplings, establishing, established and older coppice stools. All of these should be retained for their ecological importance and for the fact that they may potentially have resistance to the disease. Some felling works may be necessary as the site is largely open access and some trees particularly infected ash may become hazardous.

The felling of such trees would provide a more open canopy which may allow natural regeneration. This may encourage more species diversity and a more structurally diverse woodland. As such, opportunities to encourage a more open woodland structure may present themselves.

The potential for ash to provide more standing and fallen decaying wood should also be considered and as much of this feature should be retained.

¹¹ [https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/england-protectedspecies-bats.pdf/\\$FILE/england-protectedspecies-bats.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/england-protectedspecies-bats.pdf/$FILE/england-protectedspecies-bats.pdf)



The role of sycamore needs to be considered as although sycamore is potentially important in replacing ash and achieving more resilient woodland on this site it is particularly dominant. Leaf fall may be problematic in suppressing both ground flora and seedlings of other shrub and tree species.

It may be necessary where sycamore is overly dominant that it is controlled with some selective felling, perhaps around important coppice stools and significant trees such as mature beech and pollards throughout the site. This would have the effect of creating more glades and open spaces where the increase of light may encourage any relict ground flora and natural regeneration of trees and shrubs.

Discussion and Suggested Management Options

The site can be divided into four compartments based on the various habitats. A map of these compartments is provided at fig 1.

Compartment One - The Lynch

As previously discussed The Lynch may well have been a historic landscape feature. Now it is in part a narrow woodland shaw that joins Freedown. Here mixed broadleaved woodland and yew dominate with ash and sycamore, one or two of which are mature specimens. In places there is extensive badger activity. On the higher ground mature sycamore and ash are dominant in the canopy. The compartment narrows and broadly follows the footpath. In places the under-storey becomes more abundant with wild clematis, wild privet, sycamore, elder, holly, ivy and blackthorn as typical. Hart's tongue fern, black bryony, lady's bedstraw are also present. The presence of yew may be due to underlying calcareous soils. To the arable field the compartment boundary is a thick hedgerow of native broadleaved species.

In places the woodland gives way to grassland with generally encroaching scrub. The grassland is valuable as it is lowland chalk grassland, a rare and declining habitat both in the UK and throughout Europe. Kent holds a significant percentage of this habitat and its management is considered a priority. On the survey visit the number of butterflies was significant and the site has a high potential for supporting reptiles such as adder.



As the historical imagery shows¹² The Lynch has been a far more open habitat with trees gradually encroaching from both ends.

Management Objectives

Compartment 1 - The Lynch (5.18 hectares)

Ideally the narrow section of The Lynch, would be restored to chalk grassland habitat with retention of the hedgerow to the arable field to the north east and some important patches of scrub. The rationale for this is that chalk grassland habitat is a rare and declining section 41¹³ habitat affected by factors such as loss of area and biodiversity through lack of management. Retention of this compartment as chalk grassland with scrub would provide a mosaic of grassland and scrub habitats together with hedgerow.

Management Objectives Compartment 1 –The Lynch

1.1 There should be no further loss of chalk grassland habitat and areas of scrub habitat should be pushed back wherever possible.

1.2. Wherever possible, and on rotation, dense scrub i.e. where tree species are less than 5metres in height, should be brought into a coppice rotation on a 5-10 year rotation with as much as possible being coppiced in blocks as soon as possible.

1.3. The existing and any restored grassland should be routinely cut late in the season after flowering i.e. late July, August through to September, as grazing is not a practical option. Cutting by scything, brush cutting or reciprocating bar cutter are all acceptable, and cuttings must be raked up and ideally removed from site or at least composted in small piles at the edge of grassland clearings. These piles would provide additional habitat for reptiles, particularly slow worm that may be present on site.

1.4. The mature woodland, particularly to the higher ground, should be retained as largely non-intervention woodland.

1.5 Ash should be maintained in accordance with the latest Forestry Commission guidance and for the present with the above section on Ash dieback.

¹² Google Earth consulted 17/08/2018

¹³ NERC Act section 41 Habitats of principle importance



1.6 Retain mature woodland high canopy structure, intervening only where necessary to manage hazardous trees.

1.7 Retain all fallen or felled wood in situ in as large pieces as possible consistent with safety on sloping ground.

1.8 Carry out regular tree safety inspections and act on any advice given by a competent person.

1.9 Where gaps in the canopy occur promote natural regeneration of oak etc.

1.10 The potential for sycamore to become overly dominant is possible and the control of saplings and semi-established trees should be considered to promote a wider range of species and so provide greater resilience to climate change and disease within the woodland.

Compartment 2 - Beech Shaw (0.54 hectares)

This is a small block of woodland that links The Lynch with Freedown. Principally this compartment is beech woodland over ivy. Some ash, beech and yew are present and there are many sycamore, including semi-established trees and saplings. There is also some sweet chestnut coming through. In places the more mature sycamore may be competing with the beech. This compartment slopes towards higher ground of the arable fields. There is some under-storey where hawthorn, holly and yew are trying to establish, together with some elder and occasional hornbeam and wild privet saplings, although mostly high canopy woodland dominates. The age structure in places suggests that the woodland is not particularly old. A sparse ground flora of primroses exists together with wood false brome.

The overall objective could be to maintain the high canopy woodland. Potentially it would be anticipated that yew, beech, together with ash with an under-storey of perhaps hazel and hawthorn would dominate. The possibility of ash die back being present is high and it is likely to affect the ash trees at some point.

Management Objectives Compartment 2- Beech Shaw

2.1 Maintain the high canopy woodland whilst at the same time encouraging the diverse under-storey and ground flora.



2.2 The necessity to occasionally fell ash or other species should allow a more diverse woodland structure of standard trees with under-storey.

2.3 In this particular compartment sycamore should not make up a high percentage of the canopy or the under-storey. Some felling and sapling control may be necessary to encourage beech, yew, hazel, hawthorn and hornbeam.

2.4 Ash should be maintained in accordance with the latest Forestry Commission guidance and for the present with the above section on Ash dieback.

2.5 Retain all fallen or felled wood in situ in as large pieces as possible consistent with safety on sloping ground.

2.6 Carry out regular tree safety inspections and act on any advice given by a competent person.

Compartment 3 – Freedown Beech and Sycamore (5.19 hectares)

This is the main compartment i.e. Freedown and the immediate impression is of largely high canopy woodland. This may have been derived from more open Downland habit with scattered trees and small areas of woodland. Sycamore, ash, oak and some yew are present and occasional. Mature and establishing sycamore is dominant in places. Bramble, holly, wood false brome and elder are present in the under-storey. Fungi are present on rotting wood.

The woodland has been largely neglected with little if any management. The paths are narrow and there are a number of trees, particularly ash which have been coppiced. Some of these are reasonably large stools. Hawthorn is occasional. Lords-and-lady's is present. There are a number of fallen trees leaning on other canopy trees that need to be cleared. There are occasional clearings with enchanter's nightshade, ragwort, burdock and nettle. Oak and yew are both occasional. There are some pollarded beech and oak especially towards the compartment edge. The woodland edge habitat especially to arable could be valuable. There is plenty of fallen wood. There are also some mature sycamore particularly to the boundary. Holly is present. Within this section many mature trees have been pollarded or coppiced. Ferns are occasional.

Much of this compartment may once have been open Downland with scattered trees and scrub.



Whilst it is probably impractical to restore this site to grassland the importance of diminishing habitats such as permanent grassland and Downland needs to be recognised.

It is also important to provide some diversity of structure within woodlands. This is often achieved by creating or maintaining rides, glades and other open features that provide a wide range of habitat niches. Additionally, whilst we cannot be certain, this varied structure may be similar to natural woodlands where natural events and grazing introduced and maintain a more varied structure.

The principal objective here is likely to be the management of the effects of ash die back and dominance of one species i.e. sycamore. Whilst the role of sycamore is recognised the overall objective is to retain and encourage a more diverse species mix and a varied structure.

On this basis and given the dominance of sycamore and ash, the following management principle may be considered desirable.

This is the creation of holes within the canopy and the haloing of important specimen trees to create a number of glades. This limited intervention would assist in promoting a more varied canopy structure, providing additional habitat diversity and potentially an increase in the overall biodiversity of the site.

Management Objectives Compartment 3 – Freedown

3.1 Maintain existing woodland.

3.2 Encourage natural regeneration and ground flora by creating open space within the canopy as the opportunity arises.

3.2 Maintain coppiced and pollarded trees. Probably cutting is not necessary or desirable within this management plan except where health and safety works are necessary or where coppice stools are weakened by supporting diseased wood.

3.3 Some felling of sycamore should be considered particularly where it is shading coppice stools and competing with beech, oak and pollarded trees.

3.4 Fallen and decaying wood should be retained in situ wherever possible.

3.5 Regular tree safety inspections are necessary



Compartment 4 - Freedown Ash and Sycamore (2.15 hectares)

In this area ash has been dominant together with mature sycamore over blackthorn and bramble. The ash is now thought to have significant ash die back. The boundary to the field is hawthorn with mature ash and the matrix of habitats is attractive to woodland birds with chiff-chaff, blackbird and wren present on survey. The compartment has considerable fallen wood. There are also a number of coppiced beech and much sycamore. Within the compartment there is an open glade with signs of a number of bonfires which are probably the work of visitors to the site.

Management Objectives Compartment 4 -Ash and Sycamore

- 4.1 Manage effects of ash dieback where necessary for public safety.
- 4.2 Consider reducing the dominance of sycamore by selective felling.
- 4.3 Retain fallen wood habitat
- 4.4 Through selective felling maintain hawthorn as a dominant shrub species.

Compartment 5 - Freedown Oak and Hawthorn (2.36 hectares)

In this compartment the overall structure grades to oak as the dominant canopy tree. There is ash with again significant ash die back. There is also a considerable amount of sycamore. In places there is hawthorn scrub/ under-storey together with the oak.

Management Objectives Compartment 5- Oak and Hawthorn

- 5.1 Maintain the existing structure with oak as the dominant canopy tree.
- 5.2 Maintain a diverse shrub layer through selective felling, or as opportunities present themselves.
- 5.1 Manage effects of ash die back where necessary for public safety
- 5.2 Consider reducing the dominance of sycamore by selective felling.
- 5.3 Retain fallen wood habitat.