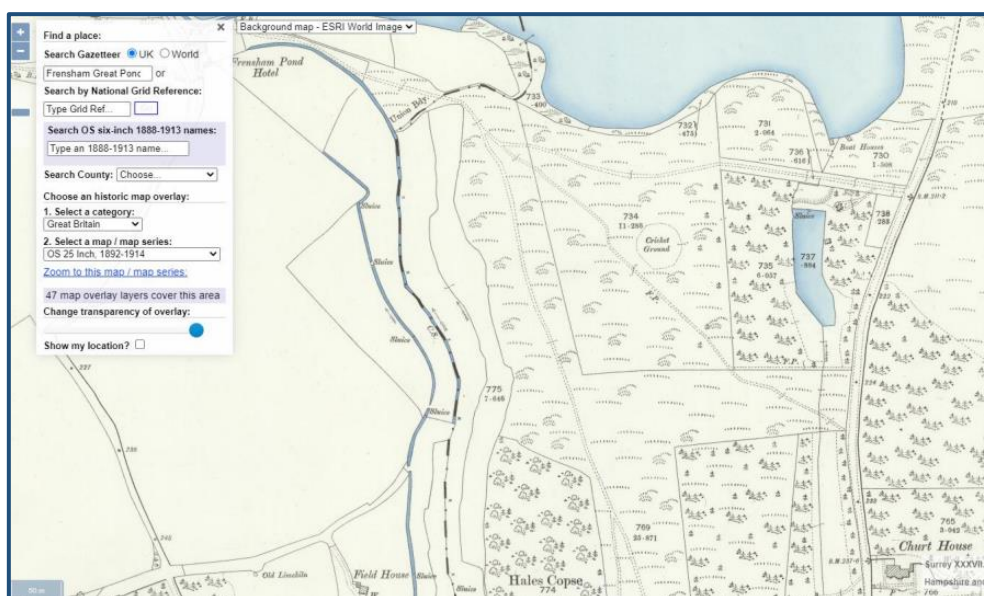


Outline Management Plan for Churt's Pond Lane Woodland

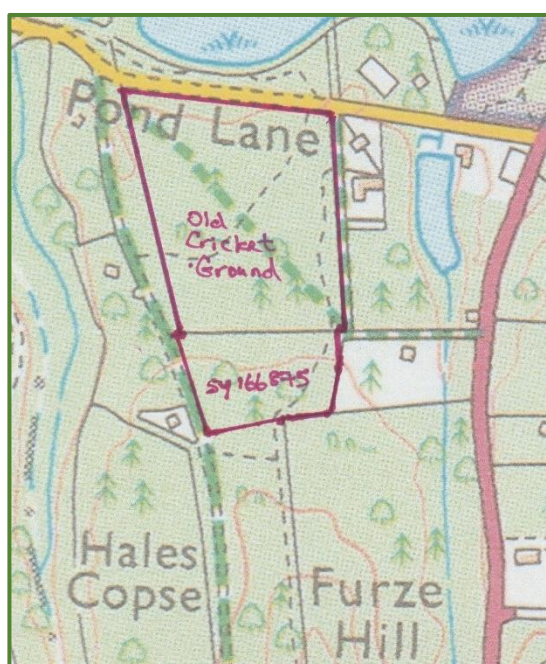
Introduction

As part of the Frensham Enclosure Act of 1855, Churt received two areas awarded for exercise and recreation - Redhearne Green and an area beside Frensham Great Pond which became known as the Old Cricket Ground.



Extract from the OS 24 Inch 1892-1914 map showing the Old Cricket Ground

In 1921 Churt acquired the present Recreation Ground, as a memorial to the fallen of the First World War and cricket transferred to this location, more central to the village. The Minute Books of the Parish Council and of the Recreation Ground show continual clearing of the Pond Recreation area which fast became overgrown. This area was extended in 1956 when Lady Lennard of Woodcote presented to the council, land (SY 166875) adjoining the Pond Recreation Ground (Old Cricket Ground) in order to preserve this beauty spot.



Extracts from OS 1:25 000 133 and from SU83 NW with the two areas edged in red

The current woodland site is some 12 acres around grid reference SU 84618 39725 and there is one public right of way (public footpath 30a) through the site which runs from the north-west down to the south east. There is also a public bridleway (bridleway 29) which is located nearby just beyond the boundary on the western edge of the site.

Habitat Investigation

In August 2021, as an integral part of its 'Net Zero for Churt' programme which responds to the climate emergency, Churt Parish Council invited Surrey Wildlife Trust to survey the site and to make management recommendations which would preserve it as a quiet woodland recreational area but which would enhance its biodiversity and wildlife habitat value. Surrey Wildlife Trust reported that the woodland here is mixed semi-natural woodland with abundant scots pine, locally frequent pedunculate oak and silver birch. Other species recorded include rowan, beech, hazel, holly, sycamore, yew, common gorse, locally abundant bracken, an abundant feather moss species, areas of ling and bell heather, common nettle, ground ivy, occasional herb robert, false brome, cock's-foot (along Pond Lane) and locally frequent bilberry. There are a few lighter areas of woodland indicating where the habitat was more open historically. One of these is on the area of the Old Cricket Ground where the scots pine are less dense. An area to the south of the site, at grid reference SU84633 39623, supports remnants of lowland heath where ling and bell heather are locally frequent on the woodland floor. Google Earth's photographic records indicate that in 1999 this area was a small patch of open heathland within the woodland very close to another patch of heath just beyond the boundary to the south of the site. Small broad-leaved trees are more frequent at the northern edge of the site by Pond Lane. The southern edge of the site, south of the remnant heathland mentioned above, supports younger scots pine trees which have a higher density, some of which are standing dead wood. A non-native laurel species was recorded occasionally across the site.

The full report and recommendations from Surrey Wildlife Trust can be downloaded [here](#).

Outline Proposed Management Plan

In line with the recommendations made by Surrey Wildlife Trust, the outline management plan developed by the Churt Environmental Working Group (CHEWG) addresses the following areas.

- 1. Health and Safety:** The larger hung-up trees need to be felled to reduce risks. CHEWG volunteers inspected the woodland and felled hung-up trees adjacent to public footpaths and at the same time, removed branches overhanging footpaths. Small stumps posing a trip risk on public footpaths were also sawn off. There are some hung-up trees still remaining and these will need to be felled over time if they are deemed to pose a risk. Waverley's 'Tree and Woodland Policy 2021' includes a section on 'Woodland Management' as well as an appendix on their 'Tree Risk Management Framework'. Our management plan for the Pond Lane Woodland will adhere to this policy and risk management framework. As well as specific inspection in the event of severe weather, an annual inspection will be carried out to identify any risks in the vicinity of public footpaths and remedial action will be taken. Churt Parish Council will make a small budget allocation to cover from 2023 onwards.
- 2. Standing Deadwood:** There are a number of standing monolith deadwood trees across the site which will be retained if possible because of their value as refuge and over-wintering opportunities provided for a range of wildlife. However, some of these taller monoliths are rotted and pose a safety risk, as they could fall over in windy conditions. These will be felled or at least well reduced in height, especially those near to public footpaths. The arisings will be stacked, creating safe habitat piles away from areas of footfall.

3. **Continuing survey work and monitoring:**

- a. CHEWG members will maintain a photographic record of the woodland through time and documentation of woodland management actions.
- b. We will invite local species interest groups such as the Surrey Botanical Society, Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG), Surrey Bat Group, Surrey Mammal Group to visit and record site data. Given the proximity to other sites of special interest to SARG, we will invite them to place reptile refugia at a few locations along linear habitat features if they wish.

4. **Glades and Lowland Heath:** Lowland heath, a globally restricted habitat, has diminished by approximately 80% since 1800 and Surrey supports a substantial 13% of the remainder. Some of the restorable heath in Surrey is present beneath coniferous tree plantations and areas close to protected sites like the neighbouring Frensham Common SSSI/SAC. These heathland habitats are rich with many specialist birds, reptiles and invertebrates. Ordnance survey maps from the early twentieth century indicate that much of the area around the Old Cricket Ground was open and likely lowland heathland habitat.

We will lightly thin some of the smaller or unhealthy trees in the glade habitat previously mentioned to the south of the site and in the area of the Old Cricket Ground with a view to improving the structural diversity of the wood and restoring some areas of lowland heath. This work will be done over an extended period of time and will possibly depend on the availability of grants for such work. Any felling or thinning will be undertaken in the winter months between November and February (inclusive) and outside of the bird nesting season. Due attention will be paid to Forestry Commission regulations, which allow felling of a maximum of 5 cubic metres in any calendar quarter, in excess of which, a felling licence would be required.

5. **Non-native and other Invasive Species:** There are a number of laurel and rhododendron species which, if left unmanaged, will spread and subsequently become even more difficult to eradicate. In time, they would form dense stands and degrade biodiversity. Where appropriate, we will remove these species, especially close to existing corridors and glades to encourage a more diverse shrub and field layer.

Although native, holly has a similar effect and young holly plants are becoming prolific across the site. The holly, together with self-seeded scots pine will outcompete self-seeded broadleaved trees and would increasingly dominate the site and reduce biodiversity. We will therefore remove new growth of these species and organise occasional volunteer holly and pine 'pulls' to eradicate their further new growth.

6. **Planting of broadleaf species:** Whilst thinning in the glade areas over time, we will take advantage of sapling donations to increase the diversity of broadleaf species along the periphery of the site, especially on the Pond Lane side where the woodland seems to have originally been fenced and where broadleaf species suitable for hedging could be usefully planted. Churt Scouts have already planted three of the year-old saplings donated by Carbon Footprint and our SCC Councillor has planted a Field Maple. Surrey County Council is granting us a number of broadleaf native species whips and some feathered saplings in 2022 which will also be planted.

7. **Deadwood on the woodland floor:** The area to the south of the wood where the scots pines are younger and more densely packed had a significant volume of deadwood on the ground as well as a number of hung up spindly tree-trunks. This deadwood has been piled by 1st Churt

Scouts to form deadwood piles which will be of benefit for shelter to invertebrates and small mammals.

8. **Bracken Control:** Bracken is dominant in some areas of the wood and if left unchecked it will dominate the field layer and outcompete other native plants. It needs to be controlled especially in the areas close to the glades in order to protect the heather and other species. It can be managed by either cutting / digging the roots out or else by spraying with a selective herbicide, namely Asulox, using a suitably qualified operative. We want to control at least 10-20% of it each year and research indicates that spraying is much more effective when compared to repeated pulling or cutting methods which could incur a risk from carcinogens if done in the month of August (reference [‘Bracken Control – a guide to best practice’](#) published by SEARS, a partnership delivering rural and environmental services on behalf of the Scottish Government.) Churt Scouts did some limited control by cutting/digging in October 2021. We are investigating potential availability of a licensed operator for spraying if funding permits, in summer 2022, during the month or two in the summer when control is most effective.
9. **Other Habitats:** The overall variety of habitats as well as their management methods are both vital in providing a variety of ecological niches. Pockets of gorse as well as any areas of bare ground will be retained.

Alternative Management Plans

Two alternative management plans were evaluated with the input of a local woodland management contractor.

1. As the proposed plan but with 30% thinning of the mature trees:

This option would include all of the features of the proposed management plan but with 30% of mature trees being felled to increase light and increased biodiversity on the woodland floor and in self-seeded or planted broadleaved trees. This option would only be undertaken if the majority of residents in surrounding properties were supportive. There would be no additional cost to the Parish Council.

The implications of this option would be:

- Disruption at the time that the thinning is taking place with relatively heavy equipment on site, though it is recognised that access to the site is not easy. This would be expected to be followed by rapid recovery of the field layer after its disturbance during the work.
- The result would be an increase in biodiversity, permitting some of the self-seeded broadleaf species, which are currently sub-dominant to achieve dominance. Planting of a few additional broadleaf species would also probably be possible.
- The waste branches would be chipped into large trailers using a large chipper, or some might be stacked as ‘dead hedges’ for habitat.
- Short term there would be a decrease in the total carbon store represented by the wood but over time as the thinned scots pine and the broadleaf trees matured, increased carbon storage would result.

2. Clear fell and regenerate lowland heath:

This option is to clear fell the more mature larger section of the wood, with high quality fencing including gates then installed around the entire site by the contractor at no cost to the Parish Council. This radical option then opens up two very different possibilities. One is to replant with broad leaved trees. The other is to allow the area to regenerate as lowland heath, a rare and

valued habitat. This latter option would require management, just as our local commons do to ensure that the site, once regenerated would stay as lowland heath and not continue a natural unmanaged succession back to predominantly pine woodland. This alternative is not recommended because the disruption would be very significant for local people and the parish and its residents would lose the current amenity of the wood with nothing meaningful to replace it for a long period of time. At a time of climate emergency, it would represent loss of a significant carbon store over a long period of time; in the case of regeneration of lowland heath, the loss of a carbon store would be permanent.

Recommendation

The recommendation, which was approved by Churt Parish Council on 12th January 2022, is to continue with the outline management plan as presented and as recommended by Surrey Wildlife Trust. Over time, we will learn a lot about our wood and the management options which work best – for our Churt residents and for the site itself – its trees, plants, wildlife, habitats – and to mitigate the effects of climate change. As we learn more, we can adapt our management of the site.

Neighbouring residents will be advised when any significant woodland management activity (in line with this management plan) is to take place and details of actions planned and implemented will be recorded on the www.churtzero.org website.

Myra Johnson
Churt Parish Council (Environment Portfolio)
January 2022