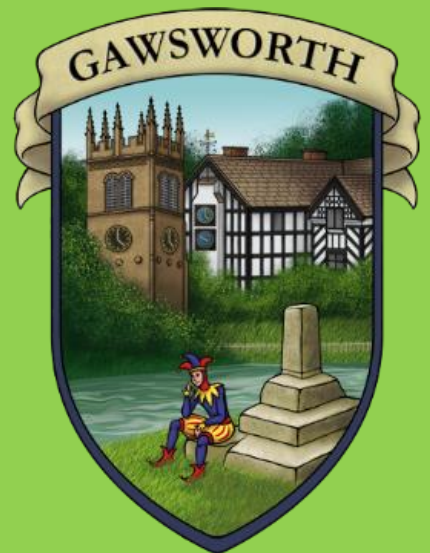




Nancy's Wood

Management Plan 2021-2031





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Where we are now

Introduction

Gawsworth is a rural parish close to Macclesfield in the north of Cheshire East. Nancy's Wood is one of five open spaces within the parish and is owned and managed by Gawsworth Parish Council. Under the Gawsworth Neighbourhood Plan it is designated as a Local Green Space.

Nancy's Wood was purchased by the parish council in 2013 and is a relatively new woodland having been established during the mid-20th century (Cheshire County Council, 2009; Geoinformation Group, 2020). The Parish Council bid to purchase the adjacent section of the wood along Maggoty Lane but was unsuccessful; it then explored the option of obtaining the Cheshire East Council owned space further along the lane and exchanging it for this section but at this point determined it would not deliver sufficient public benefit.

This is the first management plan for Nancy's Wood and follows a commitment made in Gawsworth Parish Council's first Strategic Plan (2016-2020) to set out a management plan for a ten-year period (GPC, 2016). This plan has been instigated in recognition that the woodland will be best managed proactively.

Parks and Open Spaces are hugely important to a community. 90% of households with children under five visit their local park at least once a month (HLG, 2016) with the most common reasons for visiting including going for independent walks, seeing nature, enjoying peace and quiet and taking children for play (CLG, 2017). CLG research also highlighted the importance of parks to both physical and mental health (2017). This highlights how important spaces such as Nancy's Wood are for our community and is the reason the council places such high importance on its continued preservation and good management.

Site Description

Nancy's Wood (approx. 0.85 acres) sits on the corner of Church Lane and Maggoty Lane, opposite the larger Maggoty Wood. It is bounded by the roads, a private section of woodland and farmland.

The boundary alongside Maggoty Lane and Church Lane is a post and rail timber fence which was installed by the parish council in 2013. The boundary to the surrounding land is wooden post and wire.

There are two gate-free access points both from Church Lane and two connecting circular paths which run around the site and over the Ben brook which flows through the centre of the woodland; there are two crossings over the brook, a footbridge and stepping stones. Inside the northern access point there is a sign and an iron Cheshire County Council finger post; just outside the site is a litter bin.

The lower section (closest to Maggoty Lane) is step free and includes a picnic area (three picnic tables) and recently installed noticeboard which contains information on things visitors might see in the woodland.

Crossing the brook the site climbs; a stepped path leads to a viewing area with a bench and picnic table and the path follows the back of the site and then back down to the brook. The stepping stones are not easily identifiable but connect back to a path leading up steps to the level circular path.

Overall, the paths are in an OK condition. A number of boards require replacement and the path by the footbridge is extremely boggy which impedes access.

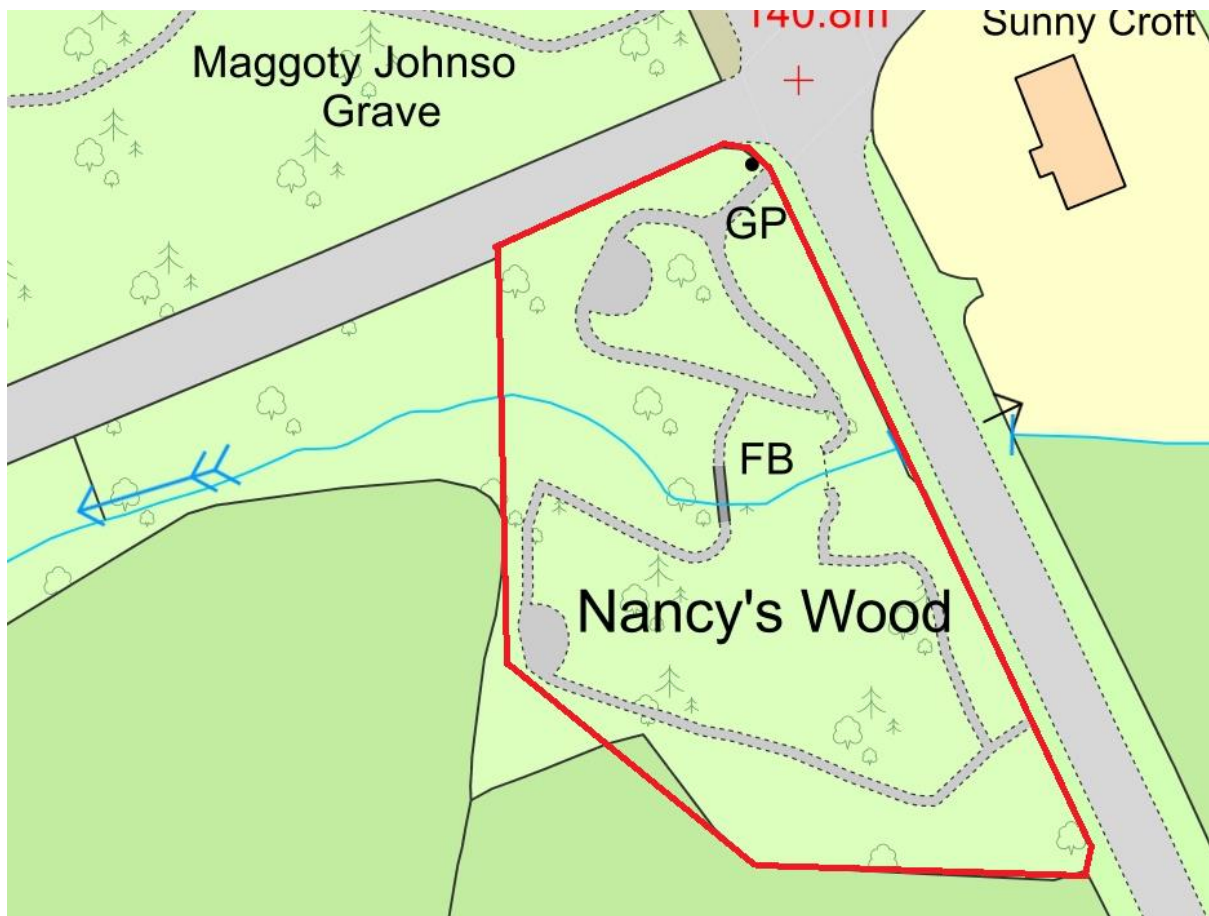


Figure One: Nancy's Wood Plan showing Paths

The council's parish maintenance contract includes the following maintenance at the woodland: level and spreading sand across the main paths annually, strimming the paths monthly, removal of weeds/leaves from paths monthly and cleaning and treating the benches annually.

The council obtains a regular survey of the condition of the trees on site and undertakes any identified works both in the interests of safety and tree health.

Ecology

The parish council commissioned Cheshire Ecological Services to undertake an ecological survey of the woodland in autumn 2020 as the first stage of preparing a management plan. The survey highlighted that

- The canopy is dominated by sycamore with the occasional lime, alder and beech
- A late maturity English oak is a significant ecologic feature in the woodland
- Ground flora was difficult to identify given the time of year at which the survey was undertaken, however, notable species included broad-buckler fern and wood sorrel but native bluebell and wood anemone are also understood to be present
- Invasive pendulous sedge was recorded and several non-native laurel and Leyland cypress are present along the boundary to the road
- No badger setts were identified. Great crested newts could be present due to the proximity of pools. Many trees would be suitable for bat roosting.

(Lawton, 2020)

The report stated that the wood is “too small and not of sufficient quality to support particularly rare woodland species that would warrant the exclusion of the public” and that the aim of habitat management should be to “improve the quality and maintain the woodland habitat in the long-term, whilst balancing the recreational needs of the community” (Lawton, 2020:10)

The report made a number of recommendations to improve the ecology of the woodland:

1. Plant a range of species to improve the structural and botanical diversity of the woodland (rowan, hazel, hawthorn, alder, goat willow, crab apple, brome and English oak)
2. Avoid planting in areas where bluebell and wood anemone are present
3. Remove the laurel and leylandii shrubs within the woodland
4. Remove the beech saplings to the north of the brook
5. Install additional bird and bat boxes for a range of species and replace the existing owl box

Where do we want to get to?

Vision

In 2031 Nancy's Wood will be a natural community space for general recreation, picnicking and dog walking. It will feature an increased botanical biodiversity and be under good silvicultural management with a number of new trees having been planted. The woodland will be a space for engaging visitors with wildlife and include a woodland learning trail.

Aims and Objectives

Aim: Nancy's Wood is well maintained and accessible

To meet this aim the council will:

- a) Undertake regular maintenance of the paths to ensure they remain usable year round
- b) Undertake regular maintenance of the seating, signage and notices on site
- c) Undertake regular maintenance of the two crossing points over the Ben brook.

The existing parish maintenance contract already provides for annual maintenance of seating and regular maintenance of the paths to ensure they are usable. This requires routine inspection to identify any missed areas as a November 2020 inspection noted that two benches had not been treated and some sections of the paths were beginning to be overgrown.



Figure Two: The lower (left) and upper (right) seating areas. The upper area does not appear to have been treated in 2020.

Regular additional maintenance is required to ensure the stepping stones and footbridge are usable. The stepping stones need resetting or replacing and any excess timber/stone which has created a dam effect removed to make the path distinguishable. Immediately the path leading to the footbridge requires MOT (or woodchip) laying to make it more passable but may require an additional raised section of path to be created as a long term solution.



Figure Three: The path too the footbridge is extremely muddy and the stepping stones are unrecognisable

Timber boards require replacement along a small section of the upper path. This path is natural ground and will require occasional maintenance. The lower path is programmed for re-sanding each year to ensure it remains wheelchair accessible.



Figure Four: Sections of the path in the upper section of the woodland where boards require replacement

A felled/fallen tree has created a dam effect at the brook. This should be cleared to allow the brook to freely flow through the wood and prevent a build up of sediment/water which will impinge on the ground around the brook.



Figure Five: Sections of the path in the upper section of the woodland where boards require replacement

To ensure the woodland is proactively maintained this management plan includes a proactive maintenance schedule which sets out the activity the council will undertake regularly to keep the woodland well maintained.

Aim: Nancy's Wood is under good silvicultural management and has increased botanical biodiversity

To meet this aim the council will:

- a) Continue to commission regular tree surveys which focus both on safety of visitors and the continued health of individual trees

- b) Plant at least one new tree for each tree that is required to be felled
- c) Undertake a programme of planting to increase tree cover across the woodland
- d) Remove invasive species and increase the range of native trees/shrubs growing in the woodland
- e) Plant additional native wildflower perennials/bulbs

Regular tree surveys are already undertaken by a qualified arboriculturist and programmes of work undertaken based on the recommendations arising. The council has felled some trees in the woodland but has not yet undertaken any replanting.

Invasive species will be removed, and the council will use the recommendations from the ecology report to undertake a programme of replanting to increase the range of plants growing in the woodland. This will focus on planting the following species:

- Rowan
- Hazel
- Hawthorn
- Alder
- Goat Willow
- Crab Apple
- Brome
- Oak

The planting will commence in autumn 2021 so that the council has had opportunity to note where the existing bluebell and anemone is growing to avoid disruption. The council will primarily plant bareroot trees but will plant whips where this is more appropriate (e.g. hedging, large areas). A feature Oak will be included in the planting plans.

In addition, the council will increase the range of wildflowers by planting additional English bluebells and wood anemone as well as wild garlic, winter aconite and red campion.

The boggy area adjacent to the brook will be planted with native bog plants such as native flag iris; propagation from those growing in the Church Lane pools will be attempted.

Aim: Nancy's Wood engages visitors with wildlife and conservation

To meet this aim the council will:

- a) Involve the community in planting and woodland maintenance
- b) Install additional bird and bat boxes and ensure they are regularly cleared out
- c) Install a bug hotel
- d) Create an interpretive woodland trail along the paths

The parish council will look for opportunities to engage the community in the management of Nancy's Wood, this will include events such as tree planting, or seeking volunteers to maintain bird/bat boxes and undertake routine maintenance.

A number of new nest/roost boxes will be installed on suitable trees and will be specifically chosen to appeal to different birds and bats. They will be cleared out annually (as appropriate) to ensure they continue to appeal to birds.

A bug hotel will be created using recycled materials. A sign will be installed to encourage children to interact with the hotel and add to it and replace materials over time.

A woodland trail will be created which encourages visitors to reflect on their surroundings, examples could be pointing out nest boxes, identifying trees/flowers or explaining natural events in the woodland (such as decomposing logs). It will be created once additional planting and wildlife infrastructure has been created so it can be included as part of the trail.

Sources of funding

The council is not anticipating major expenditure in the woodland over the next ten years and as such expects to be able to fully fund its commitments under this plan through the precept.

However, it will actively look for alternative sources of funding such as grants where possible.

Monitoring and Review

This management plan is a living document. It does not set in stone the council's plans for the woodland and these may evolve as further community input is gathered and as the results of research help inform what is right for the woodland.

As a minimum, this plan will be reviewed annually in May at the council's annual meeting.

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Action Plan

Ref	Action	Estimated Cost	Target Date
1	Undertake repairs to paths	£500	Spring 2021
2	Reset / upgrade stepping stones	£250	Spring 2021
3	Clear dam along the brook	£100	Spring 2021
4	Remove all laurel and leylandii from woodland	£500	Spring 2021
5	Remove beech saplings from woodland	Nil	Spring 2021
6	Plant new hedge along north fence	£200	Spring 2021
7	Cost and consider raised path to footbridge to resolve ongoing flooding issue	TBC	Summer 2021
8	Undertake programmes of tree and shrub planting	£2,000	Spring 2021/22/23/24
9	Install additional bird and bat boxes	£400	Spring 2021
10	Create Bug Hotel	Nil	Summer 2021
11	Plant additional woodland flowering bulbs	£200	Autumn 2021
12	Clean and repaint iron finger post	Nil	Autumn 2021
13	Create a woodland trail	£1,000	Summer 2023

Proactive Maintenance Plan

Month	Maintenance Undertaken	By whom?
January	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
February	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
March	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
March	Sand spread and levelled across lower paths	Parish Maintenance Contractor
April	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
April	Nancy's Wood Sign and Noticeboard cleaned	Volunteers
May	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
May	Benches cleaned and treated	Parish Maintenance Contractor
June	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
July	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
August	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
August	Tree Survey undertaken (alternate years)	Arboriculturist
September	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
October	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
October	Nest boxes cleaned out	Volunteers
October	MOT/Woodchip applies to path before footbridge	Volunteers
October	Any blockages in brook cleared	Volunteers
October	Tree works undertaken (alternate years)	Contractor
November	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor
December	Paths – overgrowth trimmed and weeds/leaves removed	Parish Maintenance Contractor

