



Lassington Wood and John's Wood: Woodland Management Plan (2021-2025)

1. Plan summary

This woodland management plan has been produced by Highnam Parish Council's Environment Working Group (EWG). It is a key action of the recently adopted Environment Management Plan for Highnam parish¹.

The remit of this document is to provide the framework and plan to help improve these woodlands for both wildlife and the community. All other aspects of wood management, such as health and safety work, will continue to be planned and undertaken by Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC).

Management Plan agreed with Highnam Parish Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council and supported by Wild Highnam and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust:

14/06/2021

Environment Working Group members: Lucy Grove (Conservation Ecologist, BSc(Hons), MRes), Adele Beaumont, Jo Storey & Bill Badham

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¹ HPC environment management plan_final.PDF accessible from <https://highnampc.org.uk/hpc-environment-plan-2020-2025/>

² All photographs in this document are attributed to Lucy Grove

2. Vision, Aims and Legislation

2.1 Vision

The last time any formal management of Lassington Wood occurred was via the historic 1985-1991 Management Plan³, produced by the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation (the former name of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust). There has been no management of John's Wood since it was planted in the early 1990s. The intention is to re-establish a management strategy to cover both woodlands with the goals of enhancing biodiversity and encouraging local community participation in the enjoyment and protection of their natural environment.

This plan was formulated through combining the highlighted local needs and desires for woodland management, alongside higher level national strategies and frameworks. These include:

- The Natural Environment White Paper (Defra, 2011)
- The UK State of Nature report 2019
- Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
- England Tree Strategy (Defra, currently under consultation)

2.2 Aims

Biodiversity - To conserve and enhance the woodland habitat for biodiversity.

Through targeted habitat management we aim to increase the mosaic of habitat types across the woodlands from high canopy to open woodland glades. This in turn will provide more homes and foraging opportunities for a diverse range of species. We aim to encourage and support greater monitoring of wildlife across the woodlands to help us tailor future habitat management works and monitor changes across time.

Community – To create a woodland which allows wildlife to flourish alongside human enjoyment of the woods. Through engagement activities, such as reintroducing a nature trail, community surveying events and creation of a community code of conduct (following consultation on issues such as dog fouling, den making, wildlife rest areas) and sensitive management (for example protecting the woodlands from the increased encroachment of new paths), we aim to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the woods so that the area can provide for both wildlife and the community simultaneously.

Future Resilience – To act now to help maintain the structural diversity of the woods and so ensure the long-term resilience and health of the woodlands. This will include monitoring current threats, such as Ash dieback and human trampling, but also future threats from the changing climate, such as induced stress to the flora and fauna, and the changing impact of pests on natural regeneration.

³ 1985-1991 Management Plan Doc 1.PDF

2.3 Legislation

There are two main pieces of legislation⁴ that anyone involved in managing woodland should comply with:

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) and
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017)

This legislation offers protection for a number of plants and animals, including European protected species (EPS), making it an offence to deliberately disturb or kill any of the listed species, or cause disturbance, damage or destruction to any structure or place used for shelter. What this means in practice is that habitat works will be timed to avoid breeding and nesting season and prior to any habitat management works commencing, a visual inspection should be made to ensure that there are no nesting birds or animals present, and if any are found these areas should be left until such a time as the animals have moved on.

The woodland and its use is covered by other legislation which includes, but is not limited to:

- Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Occupiers Liability Acts of 1957 and 1984
- Provision and use of work equipment regulations 1998 (PUMER)

3. General Information

3.1 Lassington Wood

Site name: Lassington Wood

Site size: 6.904ha

Location: District: Tewkesbury, Parish: Highnam. The woodland lies in the Severn Vale, approximately 1 mile NW of Gloucester City.

Grid Ref: SO803203

Tenure: Owned by Gloucester City Council and leased to Tewkesbury Borough Council (from 01.06.1982) Sporting rights held by TBC and Boundary maintenance assigned to TBC

Designations:

Local Wildlife Site - Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust⁵

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-and-protect-woodland-wildlife>

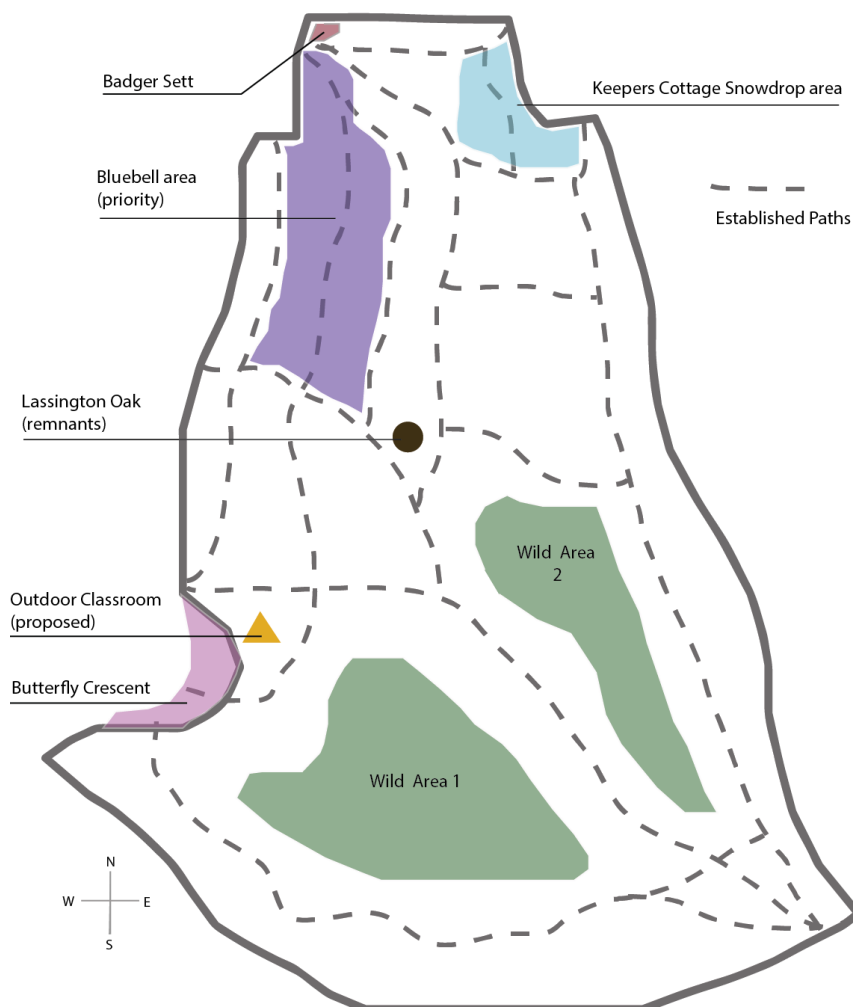
⁵ Local Wildlife Site From 2017 – SSP Report Lassington Wood SO82_007.pdf

Historic titling of the wood as a ‘Nature Reserve’⁶ however no formal statutory designation remains.

Access: Public rights of way are present through the wood, including the Three Choirs Way and the Wysis Way (see appendix 1)

Lassington Wood Features Map (2021)

MAP 1 Lassington Woods
Established paths, Main features & Priority Nature areas



3.2 John's Wood

Site name: Johns Wood

Site size: 1 ha

Location: District: Tewkesbury, Parish: Highnam.

The wood is located in the North west of village of Highnam.

Grid Ref: SO796206

⁶ 1984 Reserve Leaflet Doc 7.pff & present official sign at woodland entrances (see appendix 2)

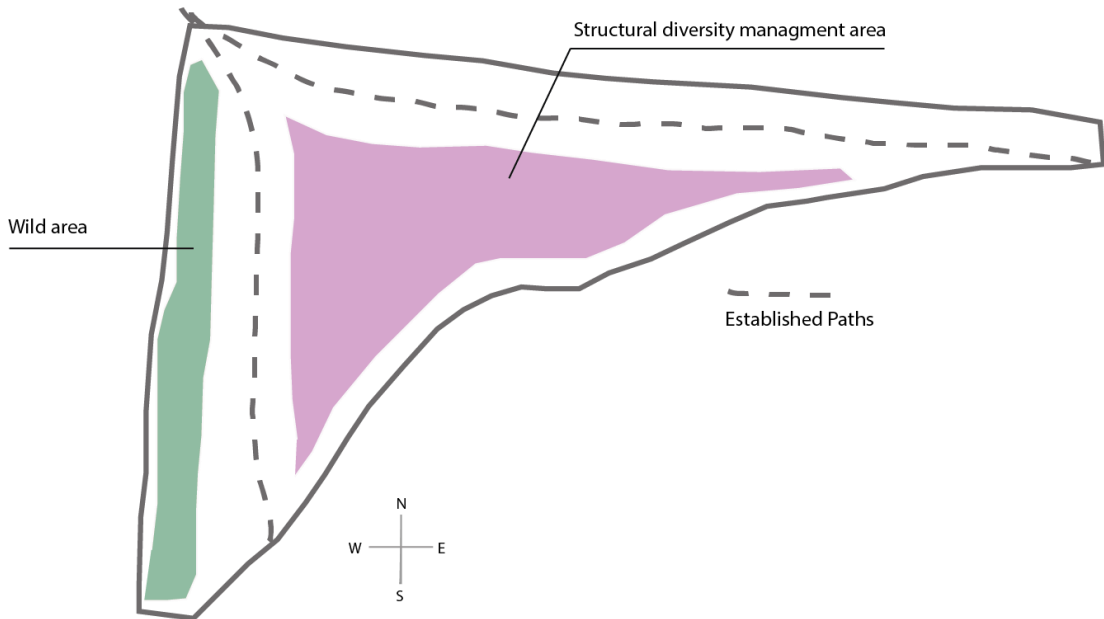
Tenure: Owned by Tewkesbury Borough Council

Designations: No designations

Access: Public rights of way are present through the wood, including the long distance national trail 'Wysis Way'.

John's Wood Features Map (2021)

MAP 2 John's Wood
Established paths & Priority Nature areas



4. Environmental Information

4.1 Lassington Wood

Lassington Wood is the most visited and cherished natural area of the Parish. It is a mixed, predominantly deciduous woodland, with areas of varying shrub and ground flora cover. A number of birds of conservation concern 'Red' and 'Amber' listed species are present including marsh tit, song thrush, mistle thrush, stock dove and dunnock⁷. There are also a number of declining butterfly species present including gatekeeper and red admiral. Mammals, including roe deer, rabbits, badgers and a number of bat species use the habitat in the wood. Other groups of wildlife are poorly understood and recorded. The southern end of the wood is denser than the north, with more dominant ground cover, providing an important wind buffer to the 'Butterfly

⁷ Detailed species lists are available from Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental Records (GCER) or from Highnam Parish Council's Environment Working Group (Local Wildlife Sites Form 2017 – SSP Report Lassington Wood S082_007.pdf)

Crescent', and habitat for caterpillars and overwintering butterflies and ground nesting birds. It is quite an isolated block of woodland and therefore has associated vulnerabilities, such as species dispersal issues and high footfall pressures.

Geology/Topography: Lassington Wood slopes down towards the River Leadon to the east and lies on a river terrace in the Severn Vale. The lower part of the wood is on poorly drained Lower Lias Clay, with a Rhaetic bone layer present to the east. The upper parts of the wood are Lower Lias clay with Pleistocene river gravels – therefore the NW section is dry and free draining. The highest point is 52 metres.

Woodland structure: The canopy of the woods is predominantly ash and pedunculate oak with some horse chestnut and small leaved lime. Sycamore and wild cherry are also present. A varied shrub layer dominated by hawthorn, field maple, wild privet, bramble and wych elm. The ground layer is dominated by bluebell and dogs mercury in the higher north-west section of the wood, and dogs mercury dominates throughout the rest of the wood, with the presence of ivy, celandine and several fern species.

Historical: Lassington Wood was originally planted as a landscape feature in the 19th century, with additional planting on the western boundary in 1980. For some years there was an arrangement whereby Highnam Parish Council (HPC), Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC) and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) cooperated in the management of the woods, but neglect set in and the GWT withdrew. Historically there has been some felling of trees for disease and safety reasons, but here has been little management of the woods in recent times.

The large remnants of the 'Lassington Oak' can be found in the woodland and the ruins of the old gamekeeper's cottage can still be found in the bottom corner of the wood.

A well-used nature trail with way-markers and an associated trail booklet was initiated in 1971 by the Gloucestershire Nature Conservation Trust, but over recent years was not maintained.

People: Well-loved and used by members of the local parish, but also by visitors from nearby villages and the city of Gloucester. The woods are used occasionally by the local nursery, school and local Scout group, and recent permission has been granted by TBC for a new Forest School to be homed in the woodland.

Current priority nature areas: (see map above)

- **Bluebell area** - An important remnant area of spring bluebell 'carpet' in deciduous woodland.

Specific threats: human trampling and potential for hybridisation with Spanish bluebells if introduced.

- **Keepers Cottage Snowdrop area** – A Spring display of snowdrops and important built heritage of the Keeper Cottage remains.

Specific threats: human trampling

- **Wild area 1 & 2** – a ‘quiet’ area for resting, foraging and breeding for mammals such as roe deer and ground nesting birds such as chaffinch.

Specific threats: human and dog disturbance

- **Butterfly Crescent** – an important area for many nationally declining butterfly species.

Specific threats: human trampling and lack of management

- **Badger Setts** – badgers and their setts are protected by law

Specific threat: badger culling operations/badger baiting, dog disturbance

- **Lassington Oak (remains)** Veteran dead wood habitat and an important cultural heritage feature

Specific threats: erosion/vandalism

4.2 John's Wood

John's Wood is a more recently planted copse (1994) with a range of native species planted including English oak, common ash, wild cherry, silver birch, field maple, alder and rowan. This wood provides valuable habitat for a range of wildlife. Species of conservation concern, such as bullfinches, are present in this woodland. It is well-walked by the local community. It is currently lacking management and would benefit from some targeted habitat improvement work to provide structural diversity, as currently a singular age class of trees is present with little dead wood habitat, or gaps in the canopy to allow a ground flora and shrub layer to develop.



5. Current pressures and threats needing to be addressed in this management plan

1. Lack of management

Due to the lack of an active management plan for the woodland and likely resource constraints by TBC, the woodland has had little in the way of care, monitoring and active stewardship. For small blocks of woodland such as Lassington Wood, there is a pressure to provide a range of habitat types which otherwise would be naturally found across larger woodlands. Lack of management can mean certain habitat features dwindle, which can be an issue if priority species are reliant on those areas.

2. Increased human pressure and disturbance

Due to an increased awareness of the need for time in nature for human health, and the increased use of the woods due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, Lassington Wood has had greater use by the community. Compared to the 3 or 4 paths marked on the historic maps, the paths in the woodland have at least doubled, with new paths being formed to avoid the muddy areas during the particularly wet winter of 2020/21. Key areas such as the 'Bluebell area' are under increased threat and also the 'Wild areas' (as designated in this plan) where deer were frequently seen 'laying up' in the day and are now crisscrossed with new paths. To ensure the long-term sustainability and regeneration of biodiversity in the woods, this pressure will need to be effectively managed.



Path size and routes increasing



Trampling of the bluebells

3. Encouraging use for all members of the community

Use and enjoyment of the woods by wheelchair users and children in pushchairs is restricted by the kissing gate as the main 'entrance', encroachment of some paths by brambles/nettles in summer and some extremely muddy areas in wet winters. The natural, sloping terrain of the wood makes full accessibility unfeasible, however improvements to the entrance and smoothing of the path along the top western edge

would provide a visitable circuit to the bluebell area and to the outdoor classroom area.

4. Tree damage and disease

Reflecting national trends, we have sustained tree damage caused by Grey squirrels, which is of serious concern to the long-term health of woodlands. Ash dieback disease is also of considerable concern, with many younger saplings exhibiting symptoms and succumbing to the disease.



Grey Squirrel damage



Ash Dieback disease

5. Climate change

With projected increases in temperature, changes in seasonality of rainfall, increased risks of pests and pathogens and incidences of extreme weather events, climate change could threaten the health and resilience of Lassington Wood, and will need to be considered in any future management actions.

6. Management Group

The Environment Working Group of Highnam Parish Council will oversee the implementation of this plan. This group, in partnership with Tewkesbury Borough Council, will ensure compliance with all legal requirements and maintain suitable insurance. The EWG will, as required, seek input from organisations such as the local RSPB, Gloucestershire Naturalists (GN), Butterfly Conservation (BC) and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT). Actions arising from this period of the plan will be funded by the Section 106 monies secured by the Environment Working Group, as detailed in the HPC management plan¹. The local community will be invited to play a key role in delivering the aims of this plan. In particular, members of the community nature group ‘Wild Highnam’, who are affiliated to Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, will undertake the majority of volunteer work.

The EWG will arrange species recording and monitor any increased wildlife activity and community impact as a consequence of our habitat improvements and will provide a detailed report to TBC at the end of the management plan period.

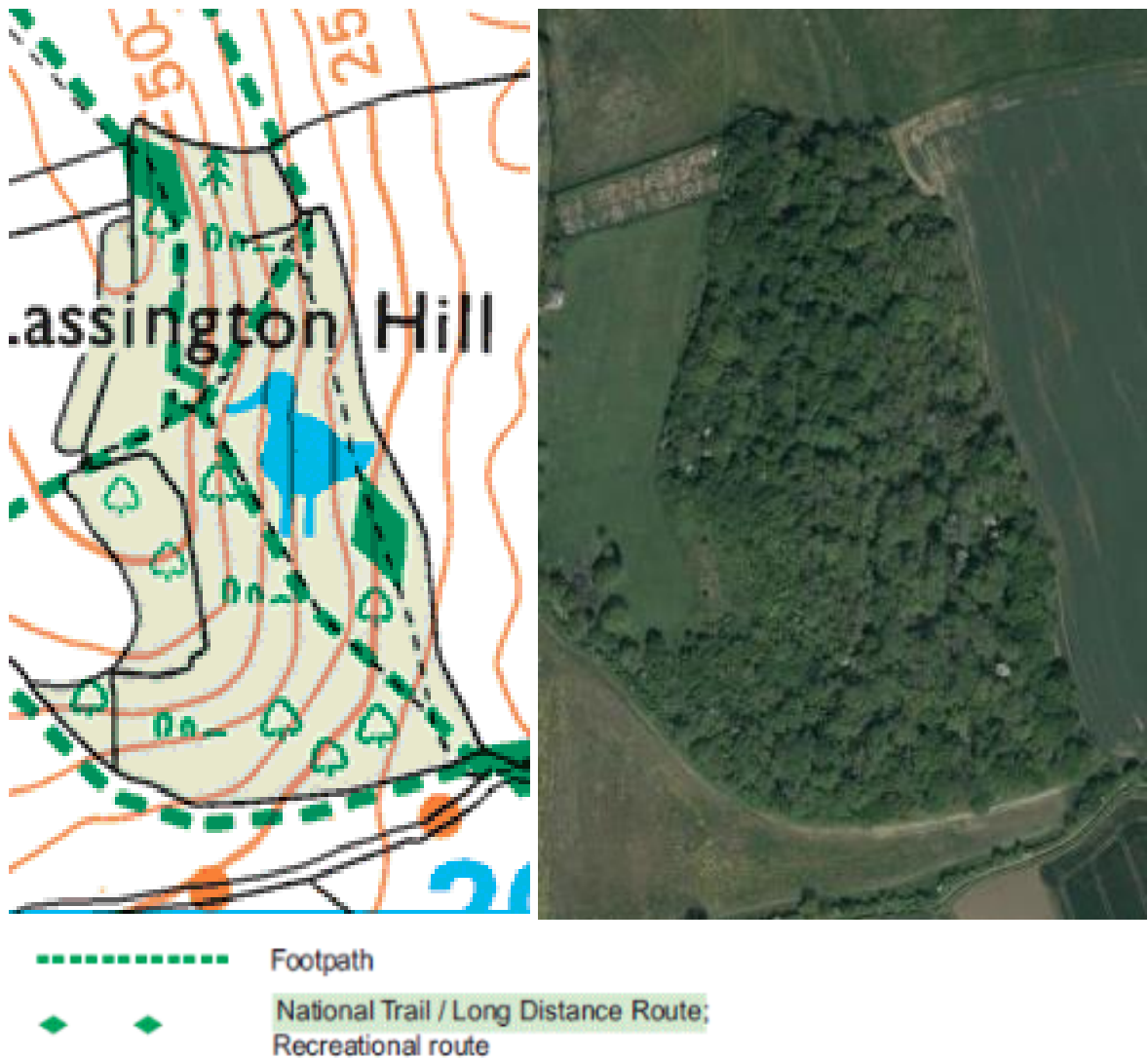
TBC will continue to undertake the 5 yearly tree safety inspections and carry out all safety remedial work; maintaining frequent communication of activities to the EWG.



Appendix 1

Lassington Wood

Official Footpaths/National Trail (Three Choirs Way and Wysis Way) and Aerial map (*Google Maps*)



Sign at main entrance to Lassington Wood

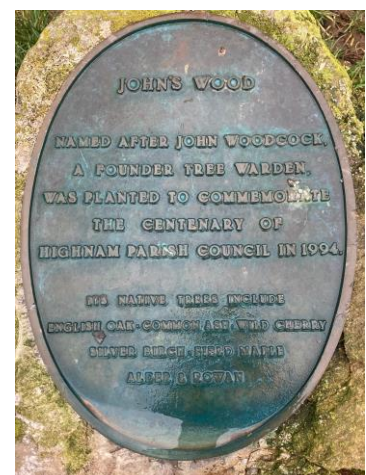
Appendix 2: John's Wood

Aerial map and Footpaths/National Trail (Wysis Way) (*Google Maps*)



..... Footpath

◆ ◆ National Trail, European Long Distance Route, Long Distance Route, selected Recreational Routes



Sign at entrance to John's Wood

Specific Management activities (2021-2025) [a=survey; b=write; c=planning; d=installation]

Issue/ Threat	Priority	Description of task	Who	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Lack of management resulting in reduced habitat types and biodiversity	HIGH	Baseline botanical survey (to include survey of standing dead wood; an important and rare habitat type which will be left standing if safe)	EWG led community experts			'21				'21					
	HIGH	A long overdue thinning of the trees in John's Wood to provide more light and space for existing trees to develop. Less healthy specimens will be removed	Professional contractor hired by EWG as use of chainsaw required											'21	
	MED	Continuation of monitoring and maintenance tasks specific to the Butterfly Crescent area (tasks are outlined in the report presented to TBC*)	EWG, Wild Highnam	'21 '23 '25											
	MED	Laying of the native hedgerow that runs along the western perimeter of Lassington Wood. To be done in small sections each winter. Thin hedging to be laid using hand tools by EWG community work party. Larger hedging to be carried out by professional contractor hired by EWG.	EWG, Wild Highnam and professional contractor hired by EWG if use of chainsaw required.												'21 '22 '23 '24 '25
	LOW	Regular winter work parties to create small glades in Lassington Wood (if appropriate) by removal of small saplings and scrub using hand tools	EWG, Wild Highnam following consultation with RSPB, BC, GN		'22 '24										
	LOW	Dead wood piles to be created when any necessary trees are cut	EWG, Wild Highnam												
	LOW	Targeted work to improve habitat for priority species (e.g. nightingales, if deemed appropriate)	EWG, Wild Highnam		'24										

Issue/ Threat	Priority	Description of task	Who	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Increased human pressure and disturbance, particularly to the designated priority nature areas in Lassington Wood and destruction of bluebells (a UK protected species) by human trampling	HIGH	Consultation with community to create a community code of conduct to guide our relationship with the woods	EWG steering group						'21 a					'21 b	
	HIGH	Create temporary dead hedges (brash from woodland management work) to delineate main paths and block any new paths that cross into the priority nature areas	EWG, Wild Highnam				'21								
	HIGH	Reinstate a nature trail within Lassington Wood to include the installation of 5-10 permanent wooden waymarkers in key locations along main footpaths. To include one for the Butterfly Crescent and other priority nature areas					'21 c						'21 d		
	HIGH	Installation of small, temporary information signs to raise awareness of the issues			'21										
	HIGH	Installation of an outdoor classroom area to reduce footfall in the bluebell area. To be sited at Grid Ref SO 80276 20245. To include cut logs to sit on, a low level table and a removable canopy with anchor connections on trees (see map for location). For use by the general community and organisations such as Wild Highnam, Highnam Primary Academy, local cub and scout groups and 'Into the Woods' Forest School	Professional contractor hired by EWG will be brought in to cut (chainsaw) logs and install anchor points.			'21									

[a=survey; b=write; c=planning; d=installation]

Lack of visibility (particularly for wheelchair users and pushchairs)	HIGH	Clearance of fallen trees from footpaths	Small trees to be cleared using hand tools by EWG community work party. Large trees to be promptly reported to TBC for Ubico to clear.												
	MED	Cutting back of brambles/nettles where necessary to maintain an adequate width of footpath. Filling in significant holes with bundles of brushwood and earth													
	HIGH	Removal of kissing gate to allow wheelchair and pushchair access								'21					
Tree damage from pests	MED	Tree survey to assess current extent of pest damage.	EWG, Wild Highnam						'21						
	LOW	Ongoing annual tree survey to assess pest damage (mainly grey squirrels, but also deer browsing, other insects, pathogens) to inform whether a mitigation strategy (pest control) is required							'22 '23 '24 '25						
Ash dieback disease	MED	Tree survey to estimate number and location of ash trees and assess current extent of disease. Findings to be reported to TBC	EWG, Wild Highnam								'21				
	MED	Ongoing annual survey of ash tree condition to monitor change over time. Results reported to TBC to enable mitigation work	EWG, Wild Highnam								'22 '23 '24 '25				
Climate change impact on tree health and habitat resilience	MED	Ongoing annual tree/botanical/invertebrate/mammal/bird surveys to provide data to GCER	EWG led community experts					'22 '23 '24 '25							
	MED	Replacement/enrichment tree planting of native species suited to the geology/topography) to future-proof the woodland	EWG led community experts		'23 '25										

