Sable Wood, Lower Bourne

Management Plan

Date	16 Jan 2014
Version number	2
Owner:	Bruce Callander
Contact:	Bruce Callander
Signed declaration of tenure rights and agreement to public availability of the plan (UKWAS 1.1.3/1.1.5/2.1.2):	Bruce Callander

Version history

Version	Date	Notes
1	31-Dec-13	Restricted circulation to Sean Harrison (Surrey Hills), Frances Halstead (SWT), Rob Davies (Good Woods) and Noel Moss (BCG) for review.
2	16-Jan-14	Incorporates review comments and amendments to boundaries of sub-compartments.

Acknowledgements

Sean Harrison, woodland advisor, provided much of the technical advice underpinning this plan. Frances Halstead of Surrey Wildlife Trust provided many leads to sources of advice, and Noel Moss of the Bourne Conservation Group provided a continuous supply of encouragement and introductions to relevant experts. For all their help I am very grateful.

The support of the *Good Woods* project in funding Sean Harrison's professional input to this management plan is gratefully acknowledged. *Good Woods* is sponsored by B&Q, in partnership with the Sylva Foundation and the sustainability charity BioRegional.

The structure of the plan follows the Forestry Commission template provided on the Sylva Foundation's *MyForest* website.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1. Location

Nearest town	Farnham, Surrey
Nearest postcode	GU10 3PS
Grid reference	SU 851 444
Total area	2.62ha
Altitude	100m

1.2. Description of the woodland in the landscape

The woodland is on free-draining sandy soil on the edge of the Forestry Commission's Bourne Wood, which forms the southeast boundary It is surrounded on the remaining three sides by the gardens of neighbouring private houses. The wood is on a slope, rising approximately 20m in elevation from west to east (see Map 1).

It was originally plantation forest planted with Scots pine. The storm of October 1987 brought down many specimens and their rotting trunks can be found at various places in the woodland floor.

There is a broad distinction between the western and eastern halves. The eastern portion has by far the larger number of mature Scots pine that survived the 1987 storm. Traces of the original heathland plants that covered this sandy area are present: heather, gorse and broom. The western portion, with a few mature oak and beech and remaining mature Scots pine, is mainly a mixture of densely packed young, self-seeded Scots pine and birch interspersed with a few struggling oaks.

1.3. History of management

Originally this was Forestry Commission land. There is no evidence of active management since the destruction of many trees by the storm of October 1987.

2. WOODLAND INFORMATION

2.1. Areas and features

2.1.1. Designated areas

	Map	In wood	Adjacent
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)		√	√
TPO/Conservation Area (CA)		✗	√
Access (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000)	2	✗	√

The wood is in the Surrey Hills, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.1.2. Rare and important species

No audit has been carried out of the flora and fauna in the wood.

2.1.3. Habitats

	Map	In wood	Adjacent
Other semi-natural woodland		√	√
Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)		✗	✗
Woodland margins and hedges		✗	√
Lowland heathland	3	✗	√

There are remnants of lowland heathland ecosystem present in the wood, with associated fauna.

2.1.4. Water

	In wood	Adjacent
Watercourses	✗	√

The Frensham Vale Stream runs near the western boundary of the wood.

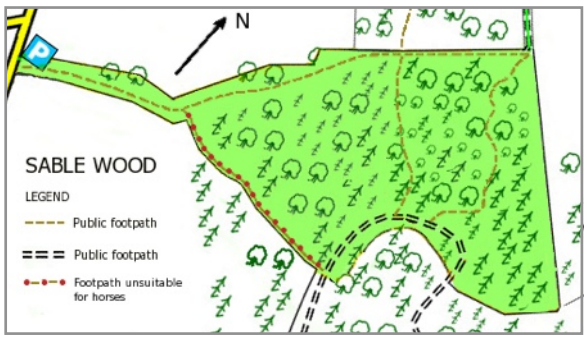
2.1.5. Landscape

The landscape is Wealden Greensand with slightly acidic, free-draining sandy soils.

2.1.6. Cultural features

	In wood	Adjacent
Public rights of way	√	√
Prominent viewing points	√	

There are two footpaths along the western and southern boundaries of the wood, and two official footpaths intersecting the wood. Walkers have created one or two unofficial trails.



2.1.7. Archaeological features

There are no known archaeological features in the wood.

2.2. Woodland resource characteristics

The woods are primarily a local amenity for relaxation, exercise and dog-walking. Mountain bikers and horse-riders are occasional users of the footpaths. Users generally stay on the official footpaths but one corner shows evidence of greater intrusion by walkers and bikers.

An adjacent property reports a wide range of resident or transiting wildlife including owl, fox, deer, bat, badger and dormice. No wildlife audits have been carried out in Sable Wood to confirm these claims, but the wood is almost certainly an important corridor for wildlife. Deer have been photographed passing through the wood using a trail camera.

The mature Scots Pine could be harvested to yield timber. A desirable by-product of this would be more light reaching the woodland floor and an improved age distribution of the trees. The amount of harvested timber is unlikely to give a commercial return.

The predominant ground cover plan is bilberry, providing excellent habitat for spiders. Old, rotting tree trunks also provide habitat for many insects. The sandy soil is likely to be attractive to lizards and snakes; slowworm and adders are known to inhabit the site. This implies an adequate population of prey species. There is no free water in the woods in the form of ponds, though there are one or two low points where a pond could be created to provide habitat for amphibians.

2.3. Site description

The wood is in a semi-urban environment adjacent to public highways. Large private homes and gardens are on three sides of the wood; the fourth side merges into Forestry Commission woodland. The site slopes upwards from west to east.

Right of access is via two separate tracks. One is in principle 5m wide, though vegetation would have to be cleared to allow this clearance.

2.4. Significant hazards, constraints and threats

Hazards: The large trees are in a generally good state of health. There are two large trees that are leaning on others and should be felled; one is relatively close to a public highway. Litter is a relatively minor problem; the major hazard is the occasional broken bottle. Not all dog walkers remove faeces left by their pet.

Constraints: Sable Wood has been a part of the local scene for locals for many years. Adults remember playing in it as children and many locals are unaware that it is privately owned. Any intervention that was seen as heavy-handed, such as fencing off large areas, would almost inevitably generate local resentment. Walkers, bikers and children sometimes stray from the public footpath, to the extent that some new trails have been worn in the wood.

Threat: The adjacent Bourne Wood owned by the Forestry Commission (FC) has been used quite intensively for filming for about ten years although the registered use was only for forestry. In 2013 the FC applied to Waverley Borough Council (WBC) to rationalize the situation by re-registration for forestry and filming. This was controversial because annoyance was caused by noise, increased traffic, disturbance of wildlife and closure of footpaths. At the time of drafting this plan WBC has recommended approval of FCs submission with a long list of conditions to protect the interests of local residents and wildlife. The possible impact on Sable Wood is unclear, but levels of noise, footfall and litter are very likely to increase as a result of more frequent filming.

3. LONG TERM VISION, MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

3.1. Long term vision

To develop Sable Wood primarily as a nature reserve with a mix of native habitats supporting a wide and sustainable range of flora, insects, animals and birds.

3.2. Management objectives

(a) Conduct audits of flora and fauna in order to establish a baseline picture of the wood in its unmanaged state.

(b) Remove or bring under control invasive species - rhododendron, gaultheria, laurel and, to a lesser extent, holly.

(c) Restore footpaths to repair the effects of erosion, and protect against future erosion.

(d) Encourage the re-establishment of a heathland in those parts of the wood where traces of this ecosystem remain. In its application for change of land use to allow filming, the FC proposed to create additional habitat for sand lizards and other heathland species. This would connect with the adjacent RSPB reserve named Farnham Heath. It is proposed to monitor this situation as it evolves to see whether there is scope for further connectivity to Sable Wood.

(e) Establish a pond and boggy area in a suitable place to provide a habitat for amphibians.

(f) Selectively remove trees in order to create clearings and edges that allow ground flora to re-emerge.

(g) Plant or allow natural regeneration of trees

and shrubs to produce a more varied height and age structure within the wood.

3.3. Strategy

(a) Identify a long term (5 year) objectives for the wood, then set short term (coming year) objectives as key waypoints to achieving the long term objectives.

(b) Set an annual budget for achieving the objectives.

(c) Engage all relevant experts and stakeholders.

(d) Establish a two-way communication plan that will ensure buy-in and cooperation from stakeholders, especially local residents and users of the wood.

(e) Explore all routes to engaging volunteer support for work that leads to achievement of the long term objectives.

4. MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS / OPERATIONS

4.1. Silvicultural systems

4.1.1. Harvesting

Around one-third of the existing mature Scots pine (about 30 trees) should be felled over the next 1-5 years to allow other Scots pine to grow on, and to make room for planting of deciduous species.

4.1.2. Phased felling and restructuring of plantations

Further harvesting of mature Scots pine should take place every 7 or so years. This will be part of the long-term strategy of de-coniferisation, with the pines being replaced by native deciduous species.

4.1.3. Establishment, restocking and regeneration

New planting will generally take place in the autumn, with protection measures for young plants against deer, rabbits and squirrels.

4.2. New planting

Varieties will be selected that are resilient to expected future climate change and as far as possible resistant to known pathogens.

4.3. Protection and maintenance

4.3.1. Pest and disease management

Eradication of rhododendron, laurel and gaultheria by physical removal and application of herbicide.

4.3.2. Fire plan

No fire plan is in place.

4.3.3. Waste disposal and pollution

Activities in the wood do not produce significant quantities of waste or pollution. Herbicides use will be minimal and applied manually.

4.3.4. Protection from unauthorized activities

Levels of unauthorized activity are currently very low. The wood has public footpaths running through it and the majority of users respect the wood and exercise personal responsibility. By their regular presence they provide a degree of policing and are able to report any significant events to the owner via the website.

4.3.5. Protection of other identified services and values

None.

4.4. Game management

Not applicable.

4.5. Protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and special features

4.5.1. Management of designated areas

Where necessary, dead hedging will be used to protect designated areas from intrusion, particularly by dogs. The impact of deer may be assessed by fencing off small areas to compare new growth in protected and unprotected areas.

4.5.2. Measures to enhance biodiversity and other special features

(a) Thinning of pine and birch saplings that have grown up in dense numbers in the last 20 or so years.

(b) Creation of open spaces within the wood (but separated from footpaths) and edge areas next to footpaths to encourage wild flowers.

(c) Creation of a pond and boggy area.

(d) Clearing of young pine and birch from areas of heather to promote re-establishment of a heathland ecosystem.

(e) Provision of some rock habitats particularly in full sunlight to encourage basking reptiles.

(f) Creation of small areas of bare earth to encourage insects such as burrowing bees.

(g) As far as possible leaving all fallen branches and rotting wood in situ.

(h) Planting a hedge or small area of hazel to encourage the dormice that may be present.

4.5.3. Special measures for ASNW and SNW

Not applicable

4.5.4. Special measures for PAWS

Not applicable

4.5.5. Measures to mitigate impacts on landscape and neighbouring land (3.1.2)

Selective clearing of pines and birch near footpaths and replacement by a more varied range of shrub, hedge and tree will create greater visual interest around the footpaths.

4.6. Management of social and cultural values

4.6.1. Archaeology and sites of cultural interest

Not applicable.

4.6.2.Public access and impacts on local people

Public access will be unaffected except when major activities such as tree felling take place. Local users of the wood will be consulted over the long term objectives for the wood. Any major management activities will be publicized well in advance. A website, already established, enables plans to be publicized and explained. It also allows users to communicate their views to the owner.

5. CONSULTATION

An earlier draft of this plan was reviewed by representatives of Surrey Hills, Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Bourne Conservation Group. Their suggestions have been incorporated in this document.

6. MONITORING PLAN SUMMARY

To be completed in a future version of this management plan.

7. WORK PROGRAMMES

7.1. Outline long-term work programme

The definition of sub-compartments Com 1, 2 and 3 is given in Annex 1.

Sub-compartment	Activity	Year
Com 1	Restoration of heathland ecosystem. Creation of pond.	2016
Com 2	Reduction of numbers of Scots pine by 50% and commensurate increase of deciduous broadleaf species.	2018
Com 3	De-coniferisation leading to more complex and age-diverse canopy of deciduous species, including glades.	2017

7.2. Short-term work programme

Sub-compartment	Activity	Year
Com 1	Encouragement of native heather by control of young trees and invasive species, and by selective pruning of existing heather.	2014
Com 2	Harvesting of a small proportion of mature Scots pine. Control of invasive species.	2014
Com 3	Repair of eroded footpaths. Control of invasive species.	2014

8. COSTINGS

A budget will be set each year for management activities in that year and an outline budget for the following two years.

9. MAPS

The following maps are at Annex 3.

Map number	Description
1	Topography of site
2	Areas covered by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
3	Designated lowland heath areas near Sable Wood

10. THINNING, FELLING AND RE-STOCKING PROPOSALS

Thinning of existing trees to improve age distribution, increase biodiversity and improve light penetration to the woodland floor will be carried out in small incremental steps. See Annex 2 for details.

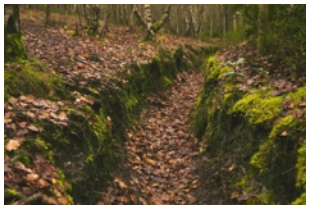
11. FOOTPATHS

Public rights of ways run round the edges of the wood, and two through the body of the wood. Footpath signs are maintained by Surrey County Council.

11.1.Current usage

The footpaths are regularly used by local people as transit routes, for exercise and for dog-walking. Horse-riders use the paths though none of the paths is a recognised bridleway. There is some evidence of off-path cycling and occasional reports of motorbikes transiting the footpaths.

11.2.Condition of the footpaths

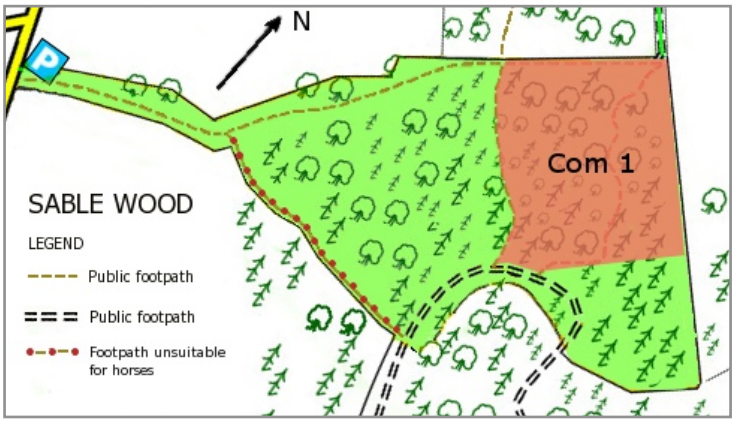


Some sections of footpath have been heavily eroded by rain. This is particularly severe on the footpath by the fence on the southern boundary (illustrated), where users have created new paths running within the wood.

Repair of the footpaths will be among the earliest tasks to complete, both to provide safe routes for users and to avoid unnecessary ingress and damage to the rest of the wood.

Sub-compartment 1 (Com 1)

Area: 0.93 ha



Management history

Originally commercial pine forestry, many of the Scots Pine were probably brought down in the storm of October 1987. Since then it appears to have been unmanaged and the existing mixture of birch, conifer, beech, holly are mostly self-seeded.

Inventory

Species	Composition	Planting year	dbh (cm)	Height (m)	Basal area (m^2 per ha)
Scots pine (mature)	25%	1950s?	60	30	25
Scots pine (young)	25%	Self-seeded	10	8	1.5
Holly	20%	Self-seeded	8	5	2.0
Birch	30%	Self-seeded	8	6	2.0

Planned management

This sub-compartment contains the most marked evidence of an original heathland ecosystem and is known to contain heathland fauna including adders. The heather will be encouraged by removing self-seeded conifers that are encroaching on this area, and by regular cutting back of sections of the heather to develop a more balanced age distribution.

Invasive species gaultheria, rhododendron and laurel will continue to be controlled.

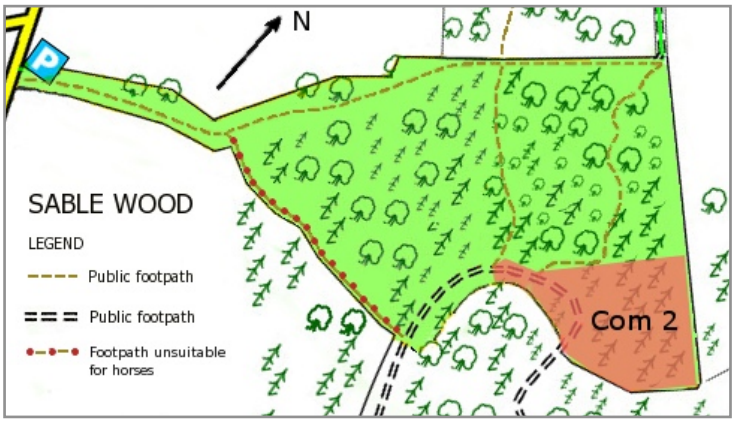
A pond will be constructed at a natural low point of *Com 1* to provide habitat for a wider range of insects and amphibians.

Sub-compartment 2 (Com 2)

Area:0.28 ha

Management history

This section of the wood contains the greatest proportion of the original commercial planting of Scots pine. Most of the trees, generally planted in groups of three, survived the 1987 storm and are now mature. All species other than Scots pine are self-seeded.



Inventory

Species	Composition	Planting year	dbh (cm)	Height (m)	Basal area (m² per ha)
Scots pine (mature)	80%	1950s?	60	30	60

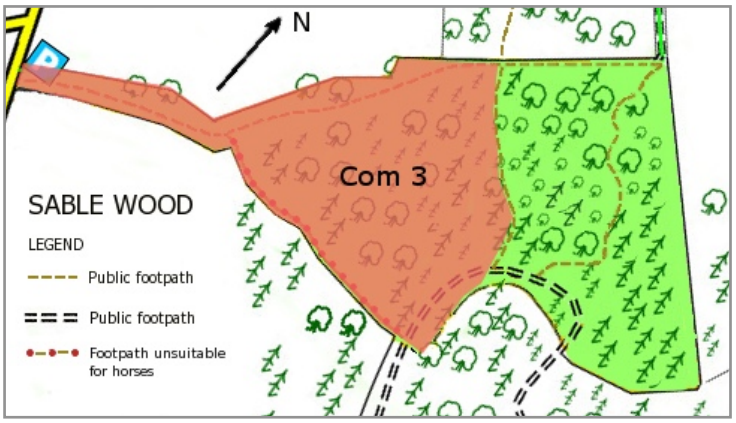
Planned management

Some Scots pine will be felled to harvest the mature wood, to remove 'leaners' and to maintain a healthier age distribution among the trees. Gaps will be either filled with broadleaf deciduous, selected to be adapted to future climatic change, or left open to allow the natural growth of flowers on the woodland floor.

Invasive species rhododendron and laurel will continue to be controlled.

Sub-compartment 3 (Com 3)

Area: 1.44 ha



Management history

Of the three sub-compartments, this area probably experienced the greatest destruction of Scots pine in the 1987 storm. No subsequent clearance of deadwood or re-planting appears to have taken place. The natural regrowth consists of densely packed, thin Scots pine and birch, with the occasional oak and sweet chestnut. Little light reaches the woodland floor. The north-western edge is dominated by invasive holly.

The footpath on the southern edge has been allowed to deteriorate through rain erosion to the point that it was unusable and walkers have created an alternative path within the wood.

Inventory

Species	Composition	Planting year	dbh (cm)	Height (m)	Basal area (m² per ha)
Scots pine (mature)	10%	1950s?	60	30	8
Scots pine (young)	30%	Self-seeded	8	8	2
Holly	30%	Self-seeded	8	5	2
Birch	30%	Self-seeded	8	6	2

Planned management

A policy of de-coniferisation will be implemented with the ultimate aim of achieving a canopy and vertical structure that supports a wider range of wildlife. This will be achieved through a greater mix of broadleaf deciduous vegetation with a wide spread of ages, and the creation of glades where light can reach the woodland floor.

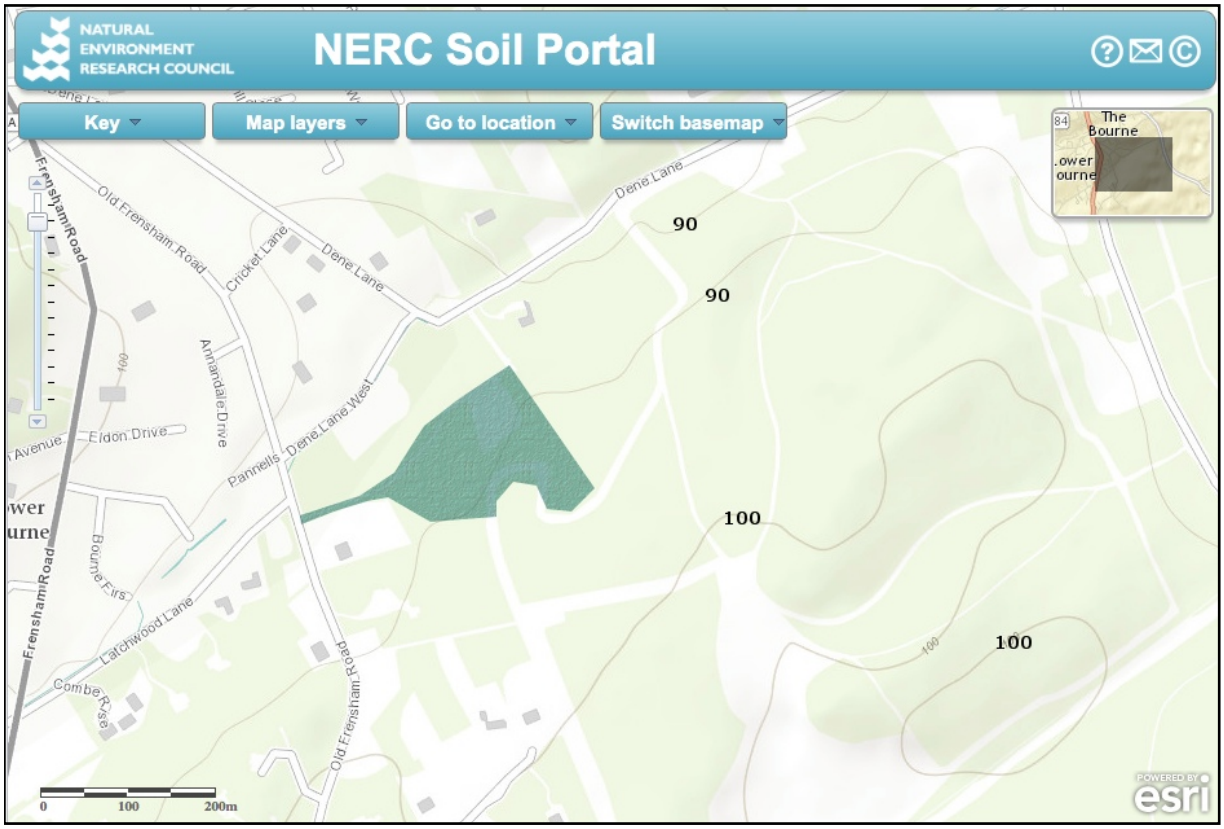
Invasive species rhododendron, gaultheria and laurel will continue to be controlled. In due course the holly will be thinned.

Work is already in progress to repair the footpath, using the self-seeded Scots pine for construction material (illustrated).

ANNEX 2: THINNING, FELLING AND RE-STOCKING PROPOSALS

Sub-compartment	Area (ha)	Process	Felled area	Felling licence type	Change in woodland type	Natural regeneration
Com 1	0.68	Removal of invasive species	8%	Not required	Encouragement of existing heathland ecosystem	100%
Com 2	0.55	Thinning of mature Scots pine; removal of invasive species.	20%	tbd	None	100%
Com 3	1.39	Removal of young Scots pine and birch	20%	Not required	De-coniferisation to permit growth of broadleaf deciduous and woodland flora.	75%

Map 1: Topographic contours

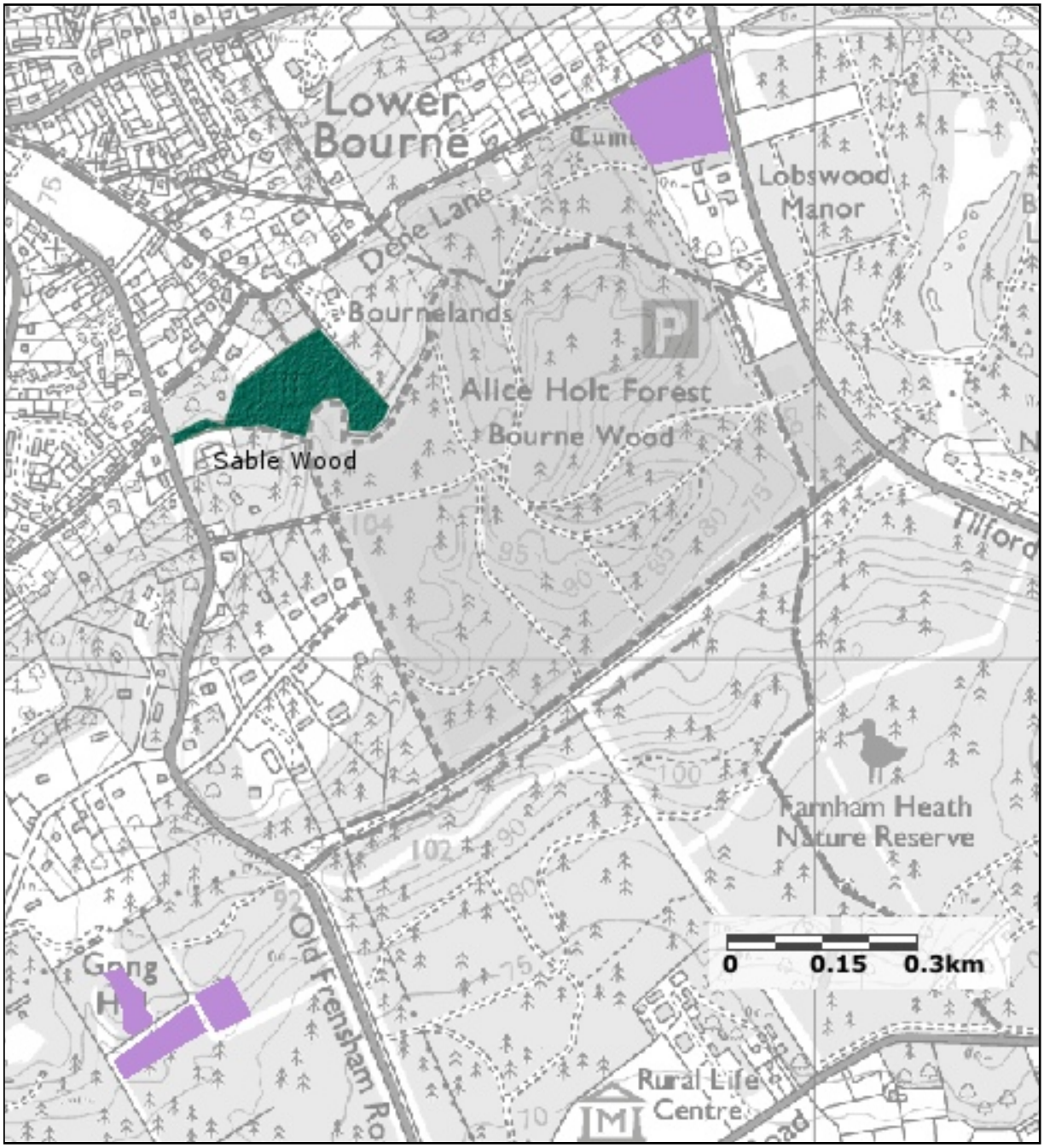


Map 2: Land covered by Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Areas with access under the Act are shown in yellow. Sable Wood is not within the designated area.

From the DEFRA MAGIC website: http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx

Map 3: Designated lowland heath areas (purple) near Sable Wood



From the DEFRA MAGIC website: http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx