

Harmers Wood – Woodland Management Plan

Revision	Date	Comments/amendments	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
00	11/03/2026	Draft	IN02	EC22	EC22
01	06/05/2026	Update following the updated condition assessment	IN02	WH09	WH09

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Where field investigations have been carried out, these have been restricted to a level of detail required to achieve the stated objectives of the work.

This work has been undertaken in accordance with the quality management system of RSK Biocensus.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Woodland overview

- 1.1.1 Harmers Wood is a small 3.62 ha woodland located on the south of Helsby Hill at the edge of Hill Road North, Helsby, Frodsham WA6 9AQ (Figure 1). The woodland is also a Local Wildlife Site (Appendix A), which is bounded by agricultural fields but is connected to the Helsby Hill woods and Helsby Quarry Nature Reserve by small strips of woodland and lines of trees. The woodland is understood to be under public ownership and managed by The Friends of Harmers Wood Trust (registered charity) for biodiversity, landscape value and recreational use.
- 1.1.2 Harmers Wood is a broadleaved woodland with canopy structure varying across the site, with some areas comprising relatively uniform stands and others displaying greater variability in age and structure. It is primarily dominated by *Betula pendula* (Birch), *Quercus robur* (Pedunculate Oak), *Sorbus aucuparia* (Rowan) and *Ilex aquifolium* (Holly), with the occasional *Crataegus monogyna* (Hawthorn), *Fagus sylvatica* (Beech) and *Castanea sativa* (Sweet Chestnut). Invasive non-native species *Rhododendron* sp. (Rhododendron), *Prunus laurocerasus* (Cherry Laurel) and *Cupressus* sp. (Leyland Cypress species) are also present within the woodland. The understorey primarily comprises *Pteridium aquilinum* (Bracken), *Dryopteris dilatata* (Broad Buckler Fern) and *Vaccinium myrtillus* (Bilberry). The soil is thin and acidic on top of red sandstone which was once extracted from quarries within the woodland and used for buildings in Helsby.
- 1.1.3 Harmers Wood provides suitable habitat for a range of animal species including nesting birds, foraging and roosting bats, small mammals and various invertebrates. Bat and bird boxes are present on some trees in the woodland.
- 1.1.4 An initial woodland condition assessment was carried out in December 2025, followed by an updated assessment in May 2026, following the methods set out by Field Studies Council¹ and using the App developed by the Forestry Commission and Sylva Foundation². The assessment results indicate that the woodland is in moderate condition, and the results are provided Table 1 below.

Table 1. Woodland condition assessment results.

Condition Assessment Criteria		Score
Age distribution of trees	Only 2 age classes are present in your broadleaf woodland, woodland with a wider age distribution of trees will score higher.	2
Wild, domestic and feral herbivore damage	No significant browsing damage evident in your woodland.	3
Invasive plant species	Rhododendron and/or Cherry Laurel are present, or other invasive species occupy more than 10% cover.	1
Number of native tree and shrub species	Five or more native tree or shrub species found across broadleaf woodland.	3

¹ <https://sylva.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/WCA5.pdf>

² <https://www.field-studies-council.org/woodland-condition-assessments/>

Condition Assessment Criteria		Score
Cover of native tree and shrub species	More than 80% of canopy trees and more than 80% of understorey shrubs are native in broadleaf woodland.	3
Open space within woodland	10 to 20% of woodland has areas of temporary open space (or your woodland area is <10ha and has <10% open space).	3
Proportion of favourable land cover	<10% of land cover within a 5.6 km radius of the woodland comprises favourable habitats, including grassland, heathland, wetland, limestone pavement and qualifying deciduous woodland/orchard/wood pasture habitats.	1
Woodland regeneration	All three classes present in broadleaf woodland; Trees 4-7cm dbh, saplings and seedlings or coppice regrowth.	3
Tree health	Tree mortality is less than 10%, no pests or diseases and no crown dieback.	3
Vegetation and ground flora	Recognisable woodland NVC plant community at ground layer present.	2
Woodland and vertical structure	Three or more storeys across all survey plots or a complex woodland.	3
Veteran trees	Less than one veteran tree per hectare present in broadleaf woodland.	1
Amount of deadwood	50% or more of all survey plots within the woodland have deadwood, such as standing and fallen deadwood, large dead branches and or stems, branch stubs and stumps, or an abundance of small cavities.	3
Size of woodland	Less than 5 hectares.	1
Woodland disturbance	No nutrient enrichment or damaged ground evident.	3
Condition score		35
Condition results		Moderate

1.2 Management objectives

1.2.1 The aim of this management plan is to enhance the ecological features of Harmers Wood. The objectives of this management plan are:

- Create a diverse age and species structure throughout the woodland;
- Enhance typical components of native ground flora;
- Enhance the amount of deadwood habitat within the woodland;
- Control invasive non-native species Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel and Leyland Cypress;
- Enhance the roosting opportunities for bats; and
- Promote public engagement and species record submission.

2 Management Prescriptions

2.1.1 Table 2 presents the proposed management prescriptions and operations at Harmers Wood.

Table 2. Proposed woodland management operations.

Mitigation objective	Outline work prescriptions/ Operations
Create a diverse age and species structure throughout the woodland	Open the canopy selectively by felling individual trees or small groups to allow light to reach the woodland floor and encourage natural regeneration. Oak regeneration will be created through the planting of acorns collected from within Harmers Wood.
Enhance typical components of native ground flora	Increased light from canopy opening will encourage native ground flora.
Control invasive non-native species Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel and Leyland Cypress	Develop and implement an invasive species management plan for Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel. Methods may include mechanical removal and ongoing monitoring to prevent re-establishment. Remove Leyland Cypress trees to prevent spread.
Enhance the amount of deadwood habitat within the woodland	Retain standing dead trees and fallen trees to provide a range of decay stages. Position some deadwood in partially shaded areas to increase habitat diversity. Create a hibernacula to support amphibians and reptiles. Avoid removing deadwood unless it poses a safety risk.
Enhance the roosting opportunities for bats	The existing bat and bird boxes will be checked and replaced if required. Following the check, in 2026 additional bat boxes will be installed on mature trees.
Promote public engagement and species record submission	Encourage public and volunteers to carry out monitoring of plants and animals and submit their records to Harmer Wood website or share through Friends of Harmer Wood Facebook group. Engage with local residents, ward councillors and the Councils about the work programme and any other engagement activities. Engage other local wildlife groups such as Cheshire Bat Group to undertake bat walks and / or bat box checks or other wildlife recording.

3 Monitoring

3.1.1 Table below (Table 3) identifies indicators of progress/ success for each management objective and key management activities proposed within the plan. The woodland management plan will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Table 3. Proposed monitoring plan.

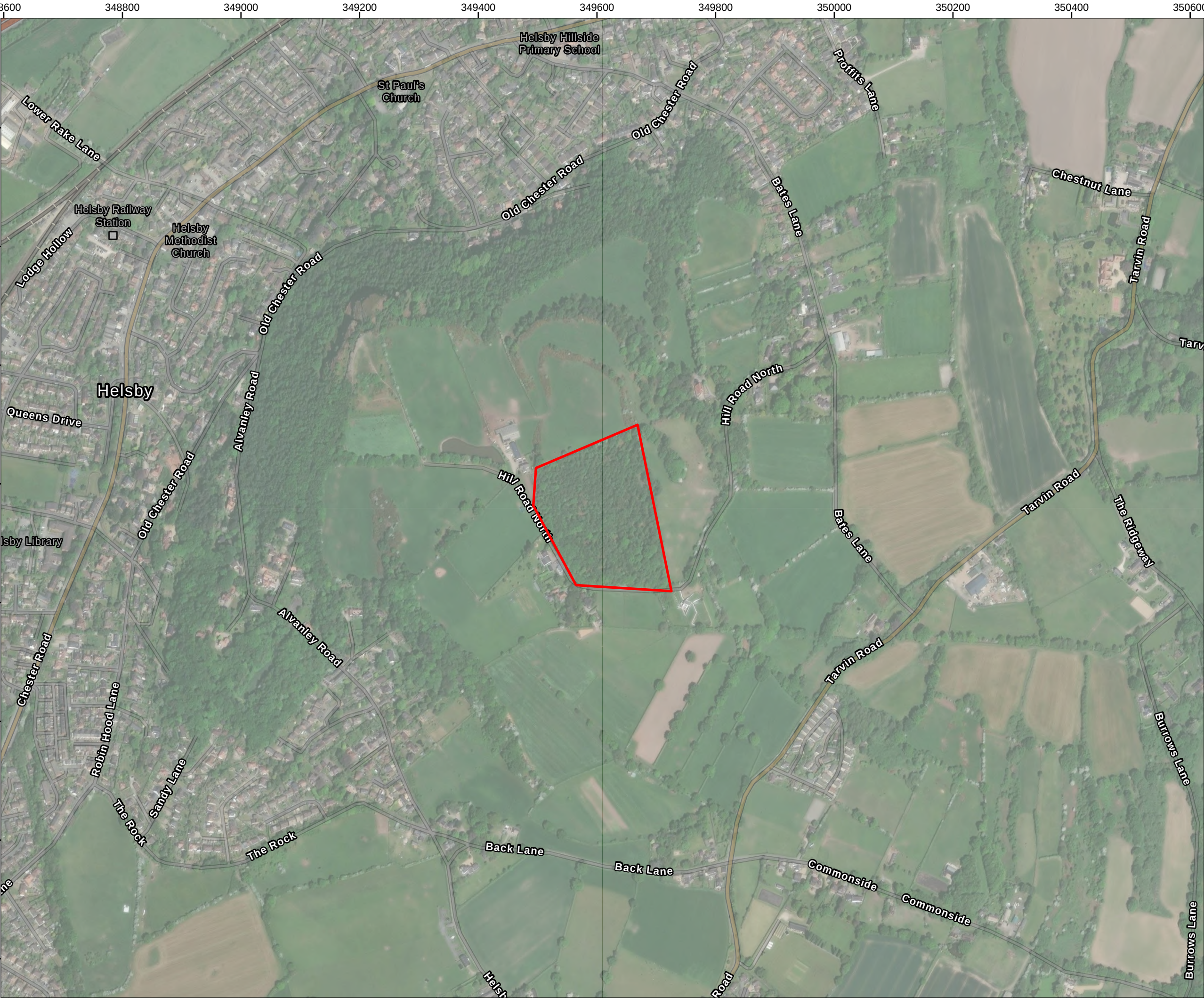
Management objectives	Indicator of progress/ success	Method of assessment	Frequency of assessment	Responsibility	Assessment Results
Create a diverse age and species structure throughout the woodland	Varied age structure and species of trees found throughout woodland.	Visual	Annual	Owner	
Enhance typical components of native ground flora	Greater ground flora species diversity.	Visual	Annual	Owner	
Control invasive non-native species including Rhododendron sp. (Rhododendron), Cherry Laurel and Leyland Cypress species.	Species will not be present within the woodland, reducing the potential to seed. Regeneration will also be controlled.	Visual	Annual	Owner	
Enhance the amount of deadwood habitat within the woodland	Increased invertebrate, amphibian and reptile populations in the woodland.	Baseline survey for species diversity	Annual	Owner	

Enhance the roosting opportunities for bats.	Increased bat populations in the woodland.	Visual bat box checks.	Bat boxes to be checked annually.	Owner	
Promote public engagement and species record submission	Increased number in species records submission. Collation of data showing an increase in community engagement.	Number of species records and number of people taking part in events	Annual	Owner	

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Figure 1. Site location

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Legend:

Site boundary

00	10/03/2026		TG	SP	IN
Rev	Date	Project Code	Drn	Chk	App

Harmers Woods

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EXPERTS IN ECOLOGY

TITLE: Figure 1:

Site Location

075150225

Metres

SCALE: 1:6,000 @ A3

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Appendix A

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Local Wildlife Site Citation

Cheshire West and Chester

Site name	Harmers Wood	Site code	CW570
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Area (ha)	3.53	Grid reference	SJ 49603 75154
Parish / Ward	Helsby CP	Date approved	2015
Ownership	Private	Last survey	2010

Description

Harmers wood is a small area of secondary woodland with several old quarries and steep exposed rock faces. The woodland probably developed on an area of heathland which was grazed in the 19th century. Records show that the site was colonised by pine trees before the trees were burned down in the second world war. The quarries were last worked in the 19th century. The site is currently a nature reserve and used by dog walkers and rock climbers.

The canopy is mainly silver birch and sessile oak with some pedunculate oak. The majority of trees are of a similar age. The understorey is dominated by rowan with occasional holly. The ground layer is fairly sparse although typical of this type of woodland (approximates to NVC community W16). Wavy hair-grass, bracken, broad buckler fern and climbing corydalis are all abundant in the field layer. There is also occasional bilberry.

The site supports a good woodland bird assemblage.

Criteria for selection

H1	<i>Woodland</i>	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
H24	<i>Wildlife corridors</i>	Wildlife corridors / buffers
H26	<i>Other qualifiers</i>	Accessible natural greenspace

Inventories

Broadleaved Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitats' Inventory (Single Habitats' Layer) for England 2015

Comments

Former SNCV

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Site map



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