

# Southampton Airport's Woodland Management Plan for Marlhill Copse



## About Marlhill Copse

Marlhill Copse is an impressive and much-loved part of Southampton's historic and natural environment. The 8.31-hectare copse is an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, a Registered Park and Garden, and a valued habitat site.

### Recent History

After decades of neglect, in August 2018 Southampton Airport purchased Marlhill Copse, in order to undertake tree management work required under European aviation legislation.

Specifically, the airport has an obligation to manage and minimise obstacles that breach a set of 3D safeguarded surfaces around the airfield. These are designed to protect aircraft operating in the area.

In October 2019, the airport was advised that five specific trees presented a risk of damaging neighbouring properties or injuring members of the public walking through the Copse. **As a responsible owner with a duty of care to the community, we secured permission from the City Council in June 2020 to fell these dangerous trees, ensuring that Marlhill Copse remained a safe place for all to enjoy.**

## Responsible management for the future

As stewards of this local treasure, we want to protect and enhance the Copse so that it flourishes in the years to come.

However, woodlands do not retain their special character without careful forestry management. Equally, they do not remain safe and accessible places without suitable care and attention.

**Like any responsible owner of a woodland, Southampton Airport has to manage the trees in its care.**

## Woodland Management Plan

Following extensive consultation with residents, community groups, councillors, and statutory bodies, we have prepared a **Woodland Management Plan** for Marlhill Copse.

**This newsletter provides you with more information on our Plan, which sets out how we propose to manage and enhance the special character, biodiversity, safety, and accessibility of the Copse over the next 10 years.**



## Current Management

### Recent Improvements

Our vision for Marlhill Copse is to deliver a place of extraordinary biodiversity that provides a safe, sustainable, and accessible space which educates, inspires, and is prized by all.

Our Woodland Management Plan sets out how this will be achieved but, in the meantime, we have been taking steps to make Marlhill Copse a better place for all. Recent work has included:

- Installing an accessible kissing gate at the main entrance, with radar key access
- Placing new natural seating throughout the Copse
- Raising a new signpost at the entrance to the Copse, designed and fabricated locally, that will connect to the footpath network envisaged by our Management Plan
- Delivering three information boards to explain Marlhill's history, wildlife, and plant life
- Registering a previously undesignated ancient oak with the Woodland Trust
- Clearing routes within the Copse of storm damage
- Planting 20 new trees to celebrate 2019 Tree Week
- Creating new habitat with new log piles and fracture pruning



The new signpost at the main entrance to Marlhill Copse



Unmanaged woodlands present a risk to neighbouring properties.










Some of the trees planted at the Copse to celebrate Tree Week 2019.

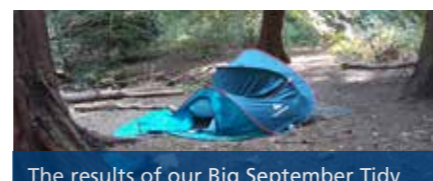


The newly registered ancient oak

### Our Big September Tidy

In September 2020 we undertook a significant clean-up of the Copse and removed the following:

-  94 tyres
-  Seven bags of rubbish
-  Two motorbike frames
-  One shopping trolley
-  One car seat
-  One tent
-  One construction barrier



The results of our Big September Tidy

## Woodland Management Plan

Our Woodland Management Plan is a long-term programme to enhance Marlhill Copse, ensuring that it is healthier, more resilient, and more sustainable by 2030. Our Plan has **eight objectives**:



Enhance and maintain habitat diversity



Promote sustainable woodland management and regeneration



Embrace the woodland's landscape contribution



Remove and control invasive exotic species



Restore and improve derelict land



Conserve heritage features



Convert pine dominated southern and eastern edges to a natural shrub interface



Adopt a safe and accessible community woodland ethos

## Key Features

### Safety

- Monitor and make safe damaged trees after storms, especially those near homes and footpaths
- Monitor for tree diseases, replacing dead trees where necessary with native species
- Where possible, reduce crowns, rather than fell trees that enter protected airspace

### Special Character

- Identify and sky-light ancient trees
- Fell non-native pines and conifers, as well as sycamores, on the southern bank, in order to protect the special character of the ancient woodland
- Replant holly, hazel, and hawthorn to create rising but low-profile shrubby woodland edges
- Thin parts of the Copse and reduce the crowns of certain trees, to protect ancient trees and encourage woodland regeneration

### Accessibility

- Work with schools and community groups on educational and environmental initiatives
- Re-open old footpaths in the Copse
- Formalise a circular route through the Copse to Cutbush Lane, and incorporate the SO18 Mosaic Trail

### Biodiversity

- Install bat boxes and create habitat piles
- Control invasive and exotic species to protect valued biodiversity and ancient woodland
- Retain ivy on tree stems to protect habitats for birds and bats, but clear it from tree canopies
- Undertake initial thinning of certain tree crowns to encourage woodland regeneration



Natural seating recently placed throughout Marlhill Copse



An information board explaining the wildlife at Marlhill Copse



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Is this connected to the airport's runway extension?

No. We are responsible for the management of the woodland, regardless of our plans for the airport itself. We have always needed a Woodland Management Plan. Our airfield safeguarding obligations to protect aircraft relate to **current flight operations**. One benefit of this Plan is that we can achieve these obligations in a sensitive and sustainable way.

### Will this lead to the Copse being developed?

No. The woodland is protected by virtue of its location within the Itchen Valley Conservation Area and by various Tree Preservation Orders. By removing invasive species and encouraging woodland regeneration, our Plan will deliver a healthier, more sustainable, and more resilient Copse.

### Will these plans improve public access?

Yes. We will improve public access to Marlhill Copse. We will formalise a circular route through the Copse to Cutbush Lane and support the SO18 Mosaic Trail.

### Does the plan involve the felling of trees?

Yes, but only in limited and identified areas necessary to maintain and enhance the Copse.

- A narrow area of felling along the southern side of the main path, which will be replanted with holly, hazel, and hawthorn to create rising but low-profile shrubby woodland edges
- Selective removal of sycamores, to protect biodiversity, as their saplings are cutting off light to ground flora and their spread is putting ancient trees at risk
- Felling a number of non-native pine and conifer trees on the southern and eastern woodland edges, as these are dominating the ancient trees and suppressing native growth
- Proactively managing high-risk areas next to paths and property, to protect health and safety
- Thinning parts of the Copse and reducing the crowns of certain trees, to protect ancient trees and encourage woodland regeneration.

### Are you going to replant the trees felled?

Yes. Over the course of the Plan, and where appropriate, we will replant trees.



### Why can't the woodland be left to mature naturally?

Sensitive woodland management is necessary to protect the special character of the Copse, including the ancient woodland and the Registered Park and Garden features. If Marlhill was left to mature on its own, non-native species would dominate the Copse, damaging biodiversity. Without careful management, the safety of footpaths and neighbouring homes would also be undermined.

### Why did the airport buy Marlhill Copse?

We are legally required to manage the height of trees to protect planes flying overhead. This is something all airports do. To carry this out with the least disturbance, we purchased the site in August 2018.

### Who have you consulted on these plans?

Local residents, community groups, councillors, Natural England, Historic England, the Forestry Commission, and the Hampshire Gardens Trust. We also conducted a 30-day period of public consultation over the summer.

### Who will approve these plans?

We have submitted the plan to both the Forestry Commission and the City Council for their approval and granting of necessary licences and consents.

## Let the council know your feedback

Local support will be a key factor when councillors consider our Woodland Management Plan, so it is vital that you take this opportunity to formally register your support with Southampton City Council. To do this you can either:

- Email your supportive comments to [planning@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:planning@southampton.gov.uk), quoting the reference number **20/00340/TPO**
- Submit your feedback on the Council's website: [planningpublicaccess.southampton.gov.uk/online-applications/](https://planningpublicaccess.southampton.gov.uk/online-applications/)

If you do not have access to the internet, explain why you back our plans on the enclosed postcard and return it via the freepost envelope.

To find out more about Marlhill Copse and Southampton Airport's Woodland Management Plan, visit our website: [southamptonairport.com/marlhillcopse](https://southamptonairport.com/marlhillcopse)

If you have any questions, please contact us via [marlhill@southamptonairport.com](mailto:marlhill@southamptonairport.com)