

MARTINSHAW, BURROUGHS AND PEAR TREES WOODS

Draft interpretation proposals

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read this summary of draft interpretation proposals. I'm a consultant working with the Woodland Trust on planning interpretation and information for visitors at Martinshaw, Burroughs and Pear Tree Woods.

What do we mean by 'interpretation'?

Interpretation is a special form of communication that helps people to understand the world around them. It is most commonly used in parks, nature reserves, historic sites, museums and zoos where it is used to explain what visitors are seeing, and to increase understanding and appreciation. Interpretation takes various forms, including signs, panels, leaflets, exhibitions, web pages, talks, guided walks and activities.

I would really like to get your input, as a regular site user, on our ideas for interpretation at these woodlands. Once you have had a chance to read the information below, please get back to me with any comments, ideas or thoughts via email: willhirstle@gmail.com

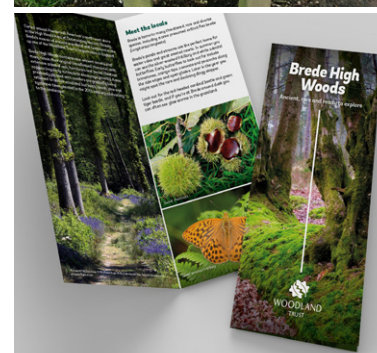
About me

I have been working professionally in interpretation for 25 years, and established my business in 2000. My work over this period has been very varied: production of interpretive panels and publications, online content, educational materials and running community engagement programmes. I have produced interpretive plans for a range of clients – local authorities, countryside management partnerships and other public and charitable sector bodies.

Please go to my website for more information about my services.
www.clarityinterpretation.com

Will Hirstle

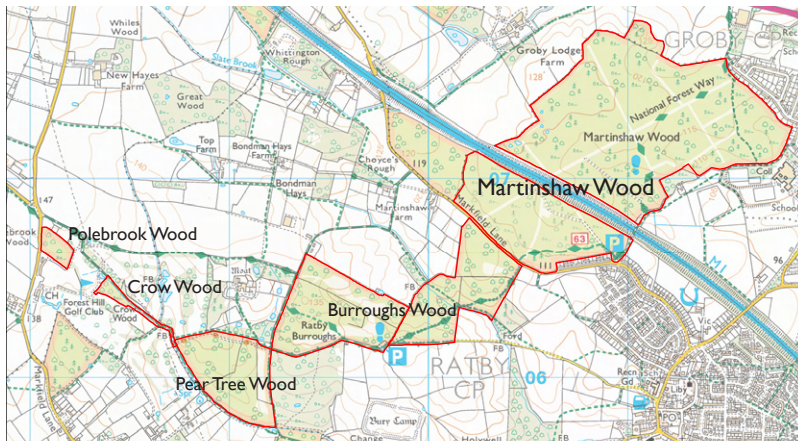
Clarity Interpretation



ABOUT THESE WOODLANDS

The 'Martinshaw Complex'

Martinshaw, Burroughs and Pear Trees Woods are all owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, (as are two very small woods nearby, called Crow Wood and Polebrook Wood). Together we call these woods the Martinshaw Complex.



Martinshaw Wood is what is known as a 'planted ancient woodland site'. It was once ancient woodland but was planted with non-native conifers in the 20th century. The Woodland Trust are gradually removing most of these conifers to allow ancient woodland to regenerate. This wood has a long and fascinating history and some interesting archaeological features.

Burroughs Wood is an ancient woodland that has been expanded by the planting of new woodland during the 1990s. It also encompasses a number of old flower rich pastures, which were not planted with trees and are now managed as meadows.

Pear Tree Wood is a completely new woodland, planted in the late 1990s, as part of the Woodland Trust's millennium 'Woods On Your Doorstep' initiative. A small valley with a stream running through it has been left as open habitat.

The National Forest

The Martinshaw Complex lies on the southern edge of the National Forest, an ambitious regeneration project, started in the late 1990s, to create a new forest for England across a 200 square mile area of north Leicestershire, south Derbyshire and southeast Staffordshire. It encourages and enables landowners to plant new woodland, with the aim of regenerating both the landscape and communities.

Charnwood Forest

The Complex is also part of the Charnwood Forest. This is an ancient and special landscape, once heavily wooded and with a unique, internationally important geology, but shaped by quarrying, development and other human activity that has put it at risk. The Forest is now the subject of a 'Landscape Partnership Scheme' that will restore and protect important features, connect local people to this environment and encourage small-scale tourism. The map on the right shows the area this scheme covers.



OBJECTIVES

What do we want to achieve?

“Through interpretation,
understanding;
through understanding,
appreciation;
through appreciation,
protection.”

The quote on the left sums up the principle that interpretation works on – that through learning about a place, visitors come to change their feelings and attitudes, and this leads to a change in behaviour.

Therefore when we define objectives for interpretation, we think in terms of what we want visitors to learn, feel and do/not do.

These are some of the things we want visitors to the Martinshaw Complex to learn about:

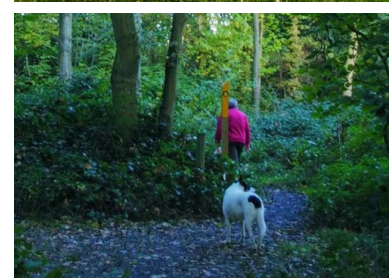
- The restoration work at Martinshaw and why it's happening
- The value of new woodland habitat at Pear Tree and Burroughs
- Significant historical stories and important heritage features
- The history of Martinshaw as a productive, working woodland
- The impact of roads and development
- Seasonal events and changes in the woods
- The geology and landscape of the wider Charnwood Forest
- The importance of the National Forest
- The work of the Woodland Trust as a charity

We want visitors to feel..

- Welcome at the woods and confident in exploring them
- A sense of enjoyment and connection to woodlands, trees and meadows
- Relaxed and tranquil
- Protective of ancient woodland and other habitats, and that the site should be treasured
- Awe and wonder at the great span of history here
- That Woodland Trust are looking after these woods for people and wildlife

We want visitors to...

- Explore all parts of the complex
- Take litter home
- Protect the woods by not starting fires
- Visit again
- Get involved with volunteering
- Support the Woodland Trust and engage with their cause



SITE FEATURES

What is important at the Martinshaw Complex?

These are some of the significant features of the Complex that we want visitors to discover and understand better.

For each one we have listed some of the topics and issues connected to those features.

Planted ancient woodland

The history of replanting at Martinshaw

How the restoration process works – conifer removal

Ancient characteristics of the wood and how they regenerate

Ancient woodland

Seasonal events – bluebells, autumn colour

The history of ancient woodland

How it is managed for wildlife

New native woodland

Its importance as a wildlife habitat

Its role in fighting climate change

New woodland and regeneration in the National Forest

Bluebells and other woodland plants

How plants can tell you a woodland is ancient

Their vulnerability to trampling and fires

Their folklore and traditional uses

Meadows and meadow plants

History - old pastures conserved as open habitat

Reasons for losses of meadows in the UK

Folklore and traditional uses of meadow plants

Value of meadows for insects

Marl pits/ponds

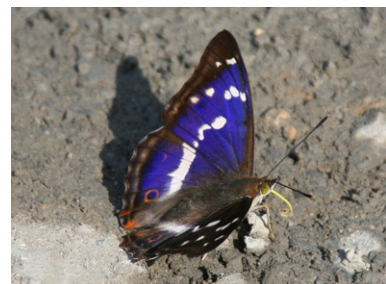
History of quarrying

Wildlife value of ponds especially for amphibians

Butterflies

Importance of some species (e.g. purple emperor)

Their relationship with plants and other species



SITE FEATURES continued



Woodland birds

How the varied woodland leads to varied bird life
Species of mature woodland (e.g. woodpeckers)

Granite outcrops – Toothhills

Importance of the local geology
Fossils and ancient volcanoes
History of quarrying

Viewpoints

Past landscapes - Groby Manor and Bradgate Estate
The wider Charnwood Forest landscape

Archaeological features in Martinshaw

Woodland use in the past
Links to deer park and medieval estate

Ownership history

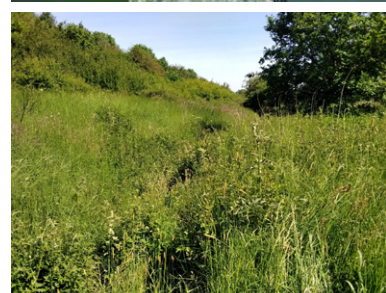
Links to Earls of Stamford and Lady Jane Grey

Other features we would highlight include:

Wide rides at Martinshaw
The streams and their dragonflies and damselflies
Deer
Fungi
Slow-worms

Other nearby places of interest :

Bury Camp
Old Hays
Groby Park
Barden Hill (can be seen from viewpoint)



VISITORS

Who is the audience?

Recent visitor surveys at the Martinshaw Complex have told us a great deal about who is coming to these woodlands, what they are doing and what they value about them. These are some key findings...

What is important to visitors?

The survey indicated that the beauty and peacefulness of the woodlands in the Complex is the most important thing to visitors. A massive 98% of visitors said that site views and beauty are important or extremely important, while 96% said the same of tranquillity, peace and quiet. Biodiversity and wildlife were seen as important or extremely important by 91% of people. However, there doesn't seem to be as much awareness of the rich heritage of the woodlands – 58% viewed site history as important or extremely important. While this is still more than half of all visitors, this is quite a contrast to the previous figures. We think this is because the heritage of the woodlands is somewhat hidden, while beauty and nature are there for all to see. We want to reveal the fascinating story of these woodlands through time, by helping visitors look at them in a new way, giving them a window into the past.

What are people's reasons for visiting?

Dog walking is the most popular activity at the Complex, with 53% of visitors naming it as a main reason for visit. Leisure walking and getting some fresh air came in second and third, with 39% and 38% respectively. Tranquillity/peace and quiet and enjoying scenery or landscape also scored highly, which is not surprising given what visitors say is important about the sites. About one in ten visitors come to look at trees or wild flowers. (Note: visitors could name more than one reason.)

Additions and improvements to the woodlands

In another part of the survey, suggestions for things to add to the woodlands were made to visitors, and their responses revealed what activities they might enjoy if given the opportunity. An encouraging 18% of visitors thought opportunities to learn about woodland management, the history of the site and flora & fauna were a good idea. Wildlife observation points were even more popular, approved by 22% of visitors. The most popular addition was more benches, with 36% of visitors saying this was needed (looking just at Martinshaw Wood, the figure was 56%). When visitors were asked to make their own suggestions for improvements, more benches and seating areas was the third most popular suggestion.

Lots of visitors come regularly

The Martinshaw Complex has a lot of frequent visitors: 83% of visitors are visiting at least once a month; 58% at least once a week. Since so many people come frequently, we need to make sure at least some of the on-site interpretation changes quite regularly so that visitors are not seeing the same content over and over again.

VISITORS continued

What are the main visitor group types?

Mature people are the most common visitor group

Individuals, couples or non-family groups aged 35 to 64 make up 30% of visitor parties at the Complex and are the largest visitor group. They are more likely to be frequent visitors and live very locally. Wider Woodland Trust visitor research tells us that this group want quiet time in natural surroundings to relax, enjoy guided walks and talks, and like to discover more about sites – wildlife, historical or cultural significance.

Retired people are also a large group

Individuals, couples or non-family groups aged 65 or over make up 24% of visitor parties and are the second largest visitor group at the Complex. Woodland Trust visitor research tells us that this group are looking for a gentle, relaxing experience, enjoying beautiful scenery. Bird watching and wildlife are also of interest, and they like to have plenty of information, way-marked trails to follow, and seating so they can watch the world go by.

Younger people visit more than we expected

Individuals, couples or non-family groups aged 18 to 34 make up 20% of visitor parties. This is perhaps the most notable thing the visitor survey told us about visitor groups, as it is unusual to have this group, known as 'young independents' visiting in these numbers. The figure is significantly higher than the UK average of 13%. This seems to be a recent trend: further analysis of the data shows that more than half of young independents visiting have been doing so for less than a year. Take these recent arrivals out of the equation and you would be much closer to the numbers we would usually expect.

We think this trend may be connected to lockdown. It is possible that young people in this age group adopted local greenspaces as places to socialise outdoors while indoor gatherings were restricted.

The question is, will this group go back to more usual social venues and stop coming to the Complex now that restrictions have been lifted? We can't answer that at the moment, so our approach will be to provide something at the woodlands that would appeal to this group but would also be something other, longer established groups would also make use of.

Older families are smaller in number

Older families are those with teenage children; they make up 17% of visitor parties and are the fourth largest group. This group want quality family time outside, enjoying nature; the children want something fun, and entertaining to do that is not childish. We see some cross-over between this group and young independents in what they want to get out of a visit, so want to provide something that both would use.

SELF-GUIDED TRAILS

Exploring and connecting with the forest



We would like to create a new circular walking trail through the Martinshaw Complex, that links up the different woods and takes in many of the important features listed above. It would be marked out using timber waymarker posts with coloured arrows to follow.

The trail would have a topic - woodland heritage - and would help visitors learn more about the historical, archaeological and natural features along it. It would tell the story of these woodlands as they have changed through time. We think a trail like this would appeal particularly to two important audience groups - mature people and retired people - but we hope that it would also be well used by other visitor groups.

There are two ways the trail could work:

Leaflet-based

A leaflet accompanying the trail would contain text and images explaining the important features and telling the heritage story of the Complex. Waymarker posts next to features in the woods would have numbers corresponding to sections in the leaflet. The leaflet would be available from dispensers at entrances from the two car parks and online as a PDF.

QR code-based

Instead of having numbers corresponding to sections in a leaflet, waymarker posts would feature QR codes linking to online content about that feature. This content could include audio, video and interactive content as well as images and text.

We would be interested to know which of these methods you think would work better.

With either method there is scope in future to create trails on new themes but following the same route. We could create a trail that encourages people to use their senses and connect to the woodland environment. Mindfulness and meditation could also be the basis of a trail in the future.

Other routes

A number of public rights of way pass through the Complex, as well as the National Forest Way and the 'Coal Tips to Country Parks' circular trail, so we would make sure that waymarking of our new trail would be clear and not confused with these routes.

There may be scope to work on this with the Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme, as they are looking at creating a series of 'Charnwood Trails'.



INTERPRETATION PANELS

Helping people to experience nature



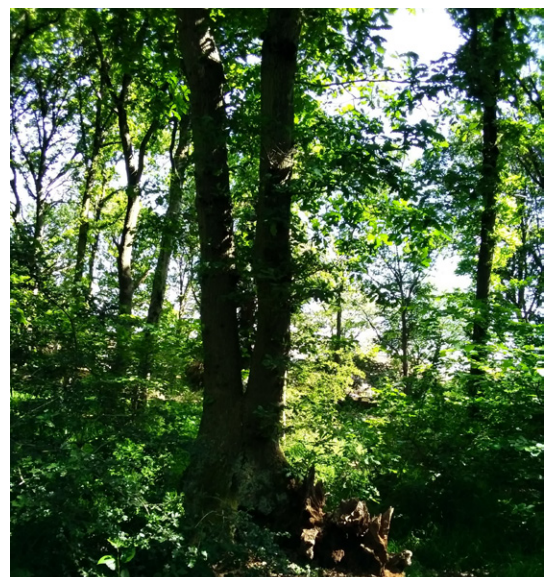
We would like to install three interpretation panels in the Martinshaw Complex woods that meet some of our objectives, as outlined above, by helping people understand some key habitats here - planted ancient woodland, ancient woodland, wild flower meadow, and new native woodland. Maps on panels will help visitors to find their way around the Complex.

These panels would particularly target two key audience groups - mature people and retired people – but we hope their important messages would be communicated to many other visitors too. Because many visitors come to the woods frequently, and there are so many interesting things to learn about, the panels will be designed so that their content can be changed regularly.

It's important for us to explain to visitors the restoration work we are doing in the planted ancient woodland at Martinshaw Wood, as we know sometimes it can be misunderstood; so management will be the focus of the interpretation panel here. The felling of trees might seem to go against the aims of a woodland charity, so we want to make it clear that the conifers were planted to the detriment of the natural woodland and by gradually removing them we are repairing the damage done to a valuable ancient woodland habitat. Changing content will reflect the progress of this restoration and highlight different species that benefit.

In Burroughs Wood lies the largest area of unspoilt ancient woodland in the complex, and one of the few in this area. We will help visitors understand how valuable this woodland is, not least for its bluebells and other woodland wild flowers. Also to be found here are a number of large wild flower meadows, that are a feast for the senses in summer. And large parts of Burroughs wood are new native woodland with the variety of species here displaying lovely autumn colour. Changing content will reflect these seasonal shifts and the different things to look for and enjoy.

Pear Tree Wood is a completely new woodland so the panel here we will emphasise the benefits of planting new woodland, in providing habitats for wildlife, combating climate change, and providing natural spaces for people to enjoy. Changing content will highlight different species to look out for, particularly new arrivals as the habitat matures.



Panels will be located at entrance points, so as not to impact on the natural landscape of the woodlands. They will be in keeping with the site and designed to Woodland Trust standards.

SEATING

Seats for socialising or taking time out



Adding more benches/seating areas was one of the top three suggestions to improve the site made by visitors surveyed at the Martinshaw Complex. We want to respond to this suggestion but install something more than just a few ordinary benches.

Quiet benches

We want to install individual, sculptural seats at carefully selected locations in the woods. These locations will be peaceful spots for relaxation and contemplation. The benches will feature carvings or small plaques that invite the visitor to use their senses to experience the woodland, to meditate in this tranquil spot or perhaps to lie down on the bench to enjoy a view of the woodland canopy. We could include QR codes to enable visitors to download a guided mindfulness or relaxation audio. We think four to six benches across the whole Complex is appropriate.

Meet-up seating area

We also want to create a more social space, with sculptural seating in a circle. This will be intended for small groups or families to gather and perhaps enjoy a picnic or just hang out. Again seats will be enhanced with carvings or small plaques. These could invite interaction with the environment and other people, prompt activities, suggest exercise challenges, or encourage social media posts under a particular hashtag; potentially QR codes could link to related audio and other content.

We think all audience groups would enjoy and make use of this seating, but in particular, we think: young independents will enjoy the health and well-being benefits of the quiet benches and the social aspect of the meet-up area; older families will gravitate towards the meet-up area and enjoy quality time outdoors there; retired people will appreciate the addition of seating in some lovely tranquil spots.

Materials and design would be in keeping with the site; if possible, we would like to use timber from Martinshaw Wood to make the benches.



VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Tackling the issues of fire and litter



While most visitors respect and look after the woods of the Martinshaw Complex, there are some issues that need managing.

The first of these could be very serious – fire. We don't allow fires at any of our woodlands, but at Martinshaw any fire could be particularly disastrous. The reason is that there are so many conifers in the woodland, and conifers burn very easily and fiercely. All it takes is a spark during a dry spell in summer and the woodland could be devastated. A fire in July 2018 damaged 100 square metres of woodland and could have been much worse.

The other problem is one we unfortunately see everywhere – litter. This can take various forms in the Martinshaw Complex but often it is associated with fires, and consists of bottles, drinks cans and food wrappers. Disposable barbecues have also been found. Fires and litter together are a consequence of gatherings in the woods where people are not respecting the site.

Signage

We would like to install some new signs at entrance points that make it very clear that there is a complete ban on all fires and barbecues in the woods (as is the case at all Woodland Trust woods) and requests that visitors don't leave litter on site. Signage would explain the reasons behind these rules rather than being purely prohibitive.

Involving young people

We want to involve the local secondary school in an initiative to connect students with the woodland environment and understand its value and vulnerability. Engagement with students would educate them about habitats and species and the dangers to people and wildlife caused by visitor mis-use. This should include visits to the woods, with activities such as tracking, foraging and environmental art, and could link with a local Forest School provider already active in the woodlands of the Complex. Students would then produce wording and designs that could be used on signage at the sites. This could be expanded into other activities and media, for example working with a local film maker to make short films about the woodlands and their value, creative writing and making sculpture.



ACTIVITIES & ENGAGEMENT

Engaging people face to face



We would like to see more community involvement in the Martinshaw Complex. These woods are special, and we think there is a lot of love for them in the local area, so we want local people to engage on a deeper level.

Here are a few ideas on how we might do this:

Guided walks

We are looking at holding occasional guided walks at the Complex. We think this will be a great way to help people in key audiences, such as mature people and retired people, to learn about some of the important features we have outlined above. Guided walks are especially well-suited to helping people experience features that are a bit harder to identify, by having an expert on hand. Some of the more obscure heritage and geological features of the site, as well as natural features such as fungi, woodland plants, meadow plants, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians, and birdsong would all make great topics. Walks would be led by local experts/interest groups with knowledge in these areas. We haven't provided guided walks before at these woods so we would start on a trial basis and see if there is enough interest to make them viable. There would be a charge of £5 per person, with all funds going to support the Woodland Trust and its work.

Community heritage activities

Teaming up with the Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme we would like to get local people involved in discovering more about the Martinshaw Complex's fascinating past. This could involve activities such as taking part in an archaeological dig, receiving training in heritage research and other skills, and practical work to enhance and protect geological features.

Volunteer group

We already have a small number of active volunteers and we think there is plenty of interest in nearby communities which could build on this. Volunteers can get involved in practical conservation work to look after the woodlands of the Complex, carrying out tasks like coppicing or helping with wildlife surveys. If you would be interested in volunteering please contact the local site manager David Logan. E-mail: DavidLogan@woodlandtrust.org.uk (note, volunteering enquiries only - to comment on this document email willhirstle@gmail.com).