

**LONDON  
URBAN FOREST  
COMMUNITY  
VOLUNTEERS**



**WOODLAND VOLUNTEER  
TOOLKIT**

# THE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

# WOODLAND VOLUNTEER TOOLKIT



The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Woodland Volunteer Toolkit has been created for woodland volunteer/community groups in London as part of our work with the [London Urban Forest Partnership \(LUFP\)](#).

This project is funded by the Trees Call to Action Fund. The fund was developed by [Defra](#) in partnership with the [Forestry Commission](#) and is being delivered by [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#).

The Woodland Volunteer Toolkit is designed to offer practical advice, guidance and solutions to the [Woodland Condition Self-Assessment](#) developed with the [London Wildlife Trust \(LWT\)](#), [Trees for Cities](#) and [TCV](#).

The Woodland Volunteer Toolkit provides links to a variety of publicly available resources, in **Appendix 1: Additional Resources**. It also includes useful links to TCV's Handbooks & free resources for members of their community network.

**Appendix 2 provides a Management Plan Template** where you can list everything you aim to do over the next year and beyond.

We welcome all of London's community to learn about the importance of woodlands and how their improved management will help create a healthier environment for everyone.

March 2025



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

Heritage  
Fund



Forestry Commission



# WOODLAND CONDITION SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Woodland Condition Self-Assessment (WCS) was developed by London Wildlife Trust (LWT) with support from TCV & Trees for Cities. The WCS is part of the London Urban Forest Plan, funded by the Trees Call to Action Fund as detailed on page 2.

There are other assessment tools available, but they are designed for specialists. This tool has been designed and tested with volunteer groups in London that are involved with the management of their local woodlands. The group would use a simple form to self-assess a woodland. This form provides an assessment of the conditions for various aspects of the woodland, offering an indication on health and improvements that can be made.

Volunteer groups should use this tool to self-assess their woodland space and get an indication of its health by going through each section. Any size of woodland in London is relevant for this project if there are volunteer/community groups who would like to get involved. The self-assessment is for volunteer/community groups.

The WCS documents are currently hosted with LWT and are available to download with the links below:



[Woodland Condition Self-assessment Guidance - landscape](#)

[Woodland Condition Self-assessment Guidance - phone](#)

[Woodland Condition Self-assessment scores](#)

[Woodland Condition Self-assessment Form A4](#)

[Woodland Condition Self-assessment Form A3](#)



# IMPROVING WOODLAND MANAGEMENT IN LONDON

An 'Urban Forest' is about more than the trees and shrubs spread around the city, it's about how we interact with them and how we allow them to thrive. The management in gardens, on the streets, along the railway tracks, in parks and woodlands of all sizes is our choice. We can't leave them to look after themselves.

It is estimated there are around 8 million trees in Greater London. With the population at a similar level that is pretty much a tree for everyone! There could be so many more simply by improving woodland management. We need to look after the elderly trees but also give opportunity for new growth and new life.

Canopy cover for Greater London is around 20%. From borough to borough the range is 8% -28% canopy cover and wards can range from less than 2% up to 58%.

It is estimated that around 75% of London's Woodlands are not managed well. Volunteer groups have expressed a desire to do more but to also do the right thing. We would like to encourage all of London's community to help look after our Urban Forest.



## USING THE WOODLAND VOLUNTEER TOOLKIT

The Woodland Volunteer Toolkit is designed to be used as a response to the Woodland Condition Self-Assessment (WCS) and goes through each section in the same format.

**You will need to complete the WCS prior to using the toolkit** and will have assessed all the following aspects of your woodland.

- Trees
- Native Shrubs
- Ground Layer
- Problem Species
- Wildlife Features
- Access & Interpretation
- Use of Site

Enter the score from your WCS in every subsection and check the recommendations to see how scores can be improved.

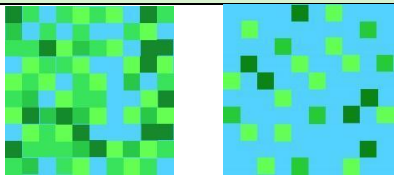
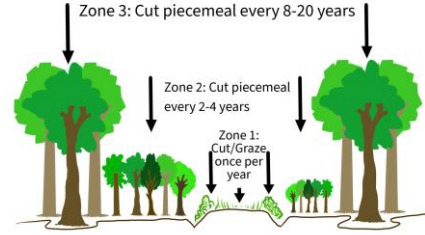
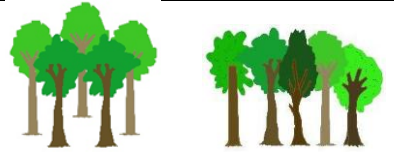

You will see there are colour coded letters to indicate which seasons of the year are most suitable to complete recommendations.




**W Winter; SP Spring; SM Summer; A Autumn;**




Add the tasks to **Appendix 2 -Management Plan Template** with details of the responsible person(s), tools/resources required and indicate when the task has been completed.

**Appendix 1 – Additional Resources** offers a wide range of additional reading around specific subject areas. There are also some useful free information/forms that can be used if you join TCV's Community Network and details of paid subscription to the Volunteer Handbooks. Resources are embedded as hyperlinks ([click the blue!](#))





Assessment by layer	Score from WCS	<b>Recommendations</b> Season when the work is completed: <b>W</b> Winter; <b>SP</b> Spring; <b>SM</b> Summer; <b>A</b> Autumn (In brackets there are references, go to ‘Additional Resources’ to see the full list)	Visual examples
<b>1.1</b>  <b>Canopy cover</b>		<p>Scores 0-1 need improvement  <b>Target: Some gaps in canopy</b>, so light is scattered on ground (canopy cover of 30-60% ideally, maximum 75% of canopy).</p> <p>For any tree works, the landowner should be contacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thin younger trees if growing close together (diameter up to 10 cm at the height of 1.3m) <b>W</b></li> <li>● Redo underwood/existing coppice (diameter of 15cm or less) <b>W</b></li> <li>● Trees with larger diameter, or the total amount of cut wood exceeds the 5 cubic metres per quarter limit, Forestry Commission licence needed (see reference 1.1A) (can take up to 6 months) <b>SM-W</b></li> <li>● The three-zone system of ride management brings significant light into a woodland.</li> </ul> <p>Leave tree trunks on the ground with some partially dug or standing (standing dead wood). Smaller branches can be used for hibernacula or dead hedges along paths to regulate access. <b>W SP SM A</b></p>	 <p><b>Canopy cover of 75%</b>      <b>Canopy cover of 25%</b></p>  <p>THREE-ZONE SYSTEM OF RIDE MANAGEMENT</p>
<b>1.2</b>  <b>Dominant (most common) tree species</b>		<p>Score 1 may need improvement (unless the dominant tree species is beech, pine, etc. then it may be a monotypic woodland and it won't need any addition).  <b>Target:</b> a canopy of a mix of more than 3 dominant species, if possible (see references 1.2A and 1.2B)</p> <p>Planting is recommended after the hottest moment of the year/droughts have passed <b>A-W</b> (reference 1.2C)</p>	 <p><b>2 dominant species</b>      <b>5 dominant species</b></p>
<b>1.3</b>  <b>Age variation of dominant trees</b>		<p>Scores 0-3 need improvement  <b>Target:</b> even mix of ages (sizes) within the same species &amp; plentiful saplings from different species</p> <p>If the canopy and/or shrub layer are very dense, the woodland may need thinning (see section 1.1) and shrub management to make space and create light for saplings <b>W</b>.</p> <p>If most of the trees are of a similar age, the canopy is already open, and there is no shrub or ground layer present, there may be other problems like deer overgrazing. Any planting will need protection: exclusion fence of more than 1.5m of height.</p> <p>It is recommended to start by securing younger generations of trees. (references 1.3A, 1.3B &amp; 1.3C)</p>	 <p><b>Exclusion fence (1.5m)</b></p>




		Planting is recommended after the hottest moment of the year/droughts have passed <b>A-W</b> (reference 1.2C)	
<b>2.1</b>  <b>Native shrub composition</b>		<p>Scores 0-2 need improvement</p> <p><b>Target:</b> 4 or more species. Increase diversity of species: hawthorn, field maple, elder, buckthorn, alder buckthorn, dogwood, spindle, wild privet, dog rose, guelder rose. Some species may need specific ground conditions, like the wayfaring tree. Holly, blackthorn, willows &amp; yew - use in moderation and strategically. All have potential as <b>competitive species</b> that can be difficult to manage (they could overshadow)</p> <p>Some species used as shrubs, with optimal conditions and if left unmanaged, can reach the canopy layer: rowan, hornbeam, beech, hazel, hawthorn, aspen, silver birch. (reference 2.1)</p> <p>Planting is recommended after the hottest moment of the year/droughts have passed <b>A-W</b> and may need protection from deer.</p>	 <p><b>Mix of native shrubs</b></p>
<b>2.2</b>  <b>Native shrub density</b>		<p>Score 1 needs improvement</p> <p><b>Target:</b> a combination of dense covering of shrubs in places (more shaded and moist), with scattered shrubs elsewhere (where light penetrates and reaches the ground).</p> <p><b>(Woodland Management Activities - reference 2.2)</b></p>	 <p><b>Example of an area with a very dense cover of scrub</b></p>
<b>2.3</b>  <b>Native shrub age variation</b>		<p>Scores 2-3 need improvement</p> <p><b>Target:</b> even mix of ages (sizes) within the same species and plentiful young shrubs from different species</p> <p>If the shrub layer is very dense, the woodland may need thinning and shrub management to make space and create light for saplings (see section 1.1 about permissions and licenses). <b>A-W</b></p>	 <p><b>Age variation of native shrubs</b></p>



		If the tree canopy is open, the canopy is not birch or pine, and there is no shrub or ground layer present, there may be additional problems present, like deer overgrazing. Any planting/coppicing will need protection: exclusion fence of more than 1.5m of height.	
<b>3.1</b>  <b>Bare ground</b> (not including designated/official paths)		Scores 0-1 need improvement <b>Target:</b> small areas of bare ground (1sq m) scattered between the vegetation on the ground layer, to maximise the chances of growth for seeds, seedlings and saplings <b>A-W</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose areas of the woodland where the light reaches the ground, there is no compaction or erosion, there is a layer of organic matter present, etc</li> <li>Clear of vegetation and superficial roots</li> <li>If close to an area of footfall, protect with dead hedging (reference 3.1), big logs, fencing, boundary's, etc to avoid users stepping on those areas. (See notes about deer in section 2.1)</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Dead hedge on the left side of a designated path</b></p>
<b>3.2</b>  <b>Erosion and compaction</b> (Not including designated/official paths)		Scores 0-1 need improvement <b>Target:</b> ideally, none, and footfall and dogs are restricted to designated paths. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate the users about the problem and encourage them to stick to designated paths and keep dogs on leads <b>W SP SM A</b></li> <li>Add dead hedges (3.1), big logs, fencing, etc along the sides of designated paths <b>A-W</b></li> <li>Try to keep the designated paths in good condition, so users are not tempted to use alternative ways. For instance, woodchip could be used in the muddy zones as a temporary solution but a preferable option would be to improve drainage. Contact the site manager/landowner if considerable work is required</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Erosion and compaction starts when users go off designated paths</b></p>
<b>3.3</b>  <b>Ground cover vegetation</b> (herbs, wildflowers, bulbs, bramble... from the floor till		Scores 0-2 need improvement <b>Target:</b> dominated by more than 2 typical woodland species, other than ivy, bramble, nettles and grasses (see species list in the WCS guidance) <p>To facilitate the regeneration or adding species to the ground cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the area has been heavily eroded or compacted, creating a layer of organic matter is needed. Access to the area needs to be restricted (e.g. dead hedges) and leaf litter should be left to accumulate and decompose <b>A-W</b></li> <li>Decrease the competition from species like nettles, bramble or ivy by repeated pulling, several times per year, for several years. Or by covering the area with biodegradable weed mats or carton sheets <b>W SP SM A</b></li> <li>Make sure there is enough light reaching the ground (see sections 1.1, 2.2)</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Regeneration zone with signage</b></p>





0.5m)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to the area needs to be restricted (e.g. dead hedges) with signage explaining why so there no users or dogs are stepping on the ground plant species <b>W SP SM A</b></li> </ul>	
<b>3.4</b>  <b>Ancient Woodland Indicator species</b>		<p>Only if the woodland is listed as Ancient Woodland (reference 3.4)</p> <p>Scores 0-3 need improvement  <b>Target:</b> frequent patches of 4 or more AWI species.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect and encourage the expansion of existing patches of AWI species <b>A-W</b></li> <li>Decrease the competition from species like nettles, bramble, ivy, etc around the patch. <b>SP SM</b></li> <li>Protect the area to avoid users or dogs stepping on it. Dead hedges, logs, etc. Appropriate signage is essential <b>W SP SM A</b></li> </ul>	 <p><b>A patch of AWI has been protected and signalled</b></p>
<b>4.1</b> <b>Invasive plant species</b>  +  <b>4.2</b> <b>Management of invasive plant species</b>		<p>Scores 1-3 need improvement  <b>Target:</b> absence of invasive plant species (reference 4.1)</p> <p>If present in less than 5% of the compartment, or present but with control measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep the patch under control so it does not expand, within the site or to other sites, and decrease the cover gradually. <b>A-W</b></li> </ul> <p>If present in more than 5% of the compartment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works need to be done as a yearly priority, so it does not expand, within the site or to other sites. <b>A-W</b></li> </ul> <p>More information about the management of invasive species in reference 4.2</p>	 <p><b>Area after cherry laurel clearance</b></p>



<p><b>4.3</b> <b>Competitive plant species that tend to dominate and exclude other species</b></p> <p>+</p> <p><b>4.4</b> <b>Management of Competitive plant species</b></p>	<p>Including shrubs &amp; ground vegetation (reference 4.3)</p> <p>Scores 0-3 need improvement <b>Target:</b> not present, or present in less than 10% of the total area</p> <p>If present in more than 10% of the compartment: <b>W SP S M A</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If necessary, work in stages, Year 1 &gt;20% à Year 2 10-20% à Year 3 &lt;10%.</li> </ul> <p>In all cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Try to reduce the cover to scattered patches across the woodland, accounting for a total of 10%.</li> <li>● Try to keep the patches in strategic areas: along paths, around areas where planting has been done to restrict access where needed.</li> </ul> <p>Use left over cuttings in other projects, such as dead hedges.</p> <p>IMPORTANT: all nesting birds, their eggs and nests are protected by law. Breeding bird season is mostly between 1st March until 31st July. It is recommended doing any scrub and tree cutting, thinning and removal outside of this window (reference 4.4)</p>	 <p><b>High concentration of evergreen vegetation affects ground layer growth</b></p>  <p><b>Holly competing &amp; reducing light</b></p>
<p><b>5.1</b> <b>Ivy on trees</b></p>	<p>Scores -1-0 need improvement <b>Target:</b> scattered amounts of ivy on trees throughout woodland. <b>A W</b></p> <p>The aim is that light can penetrate and reach the ground, scattered across the woodland (ideally 25-75% of the ground can receive light). In the darker areas of the woodland, reduce the ivy to 1/3 of the perimeter of the tree.</p> <p>Controlling the coverage of ivy on a tree is difficult especially when well established. An alternative is cutting all the ivy on some trees and leaving others until the canopy is threatened or the cut tree's trunk has been recovered. Like a fallow field system. Keep the trees close to paths, buildings and frequently used areas with low amounts of ivy, for health and safety reasons. (reference 5.1)</p>	

		IMPORTANT: ivy can host breeding birds and bat roosts, both protected by law.	Dense Ivy coverage
5.2  Dead wood content on the ground		<p>Scores 0-2 need improvement</p> <p><b>Target:</b> abundant fallen branches &amp; trunks of all sizes, and several standing dead wood* present. <b>A W</b></p> <p>*This does not apply to all species; for instance, it is not recommended to leave cherry laurel or willow stumps on the ground, as they will easily regrow.</p> <p>Reference 5.2</p>	 <p>Monolith (dead wood standing)</p>
5.3  Other biodiversity features		<p>There are other features that, if present, would increase the overall biodiversity of the woodland. Of course, not all these features are relevant for all woodlands, but they may depend on the amount of water, topography etc. The aim is making the best out of what is already present.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Insect banks:</b> in bare sloped soil, often sandy, sunny aspect. Keep them clear of vegetation and shade and avoid compaction <b>W SP SM A</b> (reference 5.3A)</li> <li>● <b>Watercourse (ponds, ditches, brooks, woodland carrs...) in good condition.</b> ideally they hold water for at least part of the year, especially during the amphibian breeding season. In some cases, creation of water features can reduce surface erosion, store water and enable new vegetation growth, but it may need the help of an expert. Keep them free from invasive species, with a dead hedge/fencing and signs to avoid dogs with flea treatments to pollute the water, allow for light to reach the surface, promote aquatic vegetation, create hibernacula's for amphibians, etc. (References 5.3B &amp; 5.3C)</li> <li>● Presence of at least a few <b>veteran trees</b>, that would have features attractive for wildlife (roosting bats, breeding, rare xylophagous invertebrates). (Reference 1.3A)</li> <li>● If <b>badger setts</b> are present, keep them free of shrub and tree cover and protect them from the public. Badgers are not present in every part of London but may move in if the conditions are right for them. (Reference 5.3D)</li> </ul> <p>The management can be adapted to an assemblage or individual species that are especially relevant for that site (reference 5.3E).</p>	 <p>Water course in good condition</p>



<p>6</p> <p><b>Access &amp; interpretation</b></p>	<p><b>Access:</b> both <b>paths and entrances</b> are massive factors in maintaining and improving the health of a woodland, as they regulate the traffic. In some cases, they could be repaired/maintained by volunteers, but it is always recommended coordinating with the site manager/owner. Ideally, at least part of the site would cater for inclusive accessibility (prams, wheelchairs, elderly). This would also help to redirect the traffic to less sensitive areas of the woodland, or to sacrificial areas (keeping the rest of the woodland more protected from the public impact). <b>W SP SM A</b> (reference 6.1)</p> <p><b>Interpretation:</b> permanent <b>signage</b> is important so visitors can orientate. But it is essential adding signage (including an email address), in every area where woodland management is taking place; ideally, a few weeks before the works start, so the users know what to expect and when. <b>W SP SM A</b> (reference 6.2)</p>	 <p><b>New path &amp; bridge with drainage</b></p>
<p>7</p> <p><b>Site users</b></p>	<p>The use of every site has many challenges and opportunities all year round <b>W SP SM A</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Unsociable behaviour</b> - This should always be reported to the landowner/police</li> <li>• <b>Fly tipping</b> - Identify patterns and seek ways to minimise the opportunity for fly tipping, working with the landowner by reporting any incidents. With garden waste, use signage to educate local residents about the negative impact of garden waste on woodlands (reference 7A) Many local authorities use 'Love Clean Streets' for reporting fly tipping on public land.</li> <li>• <b>Dogs running off path off lead</b> - Dog walkers can make up a high percentage of woodland users, it is important that there is an understanding about the impact this can have on woodlands with an encouragement to stay on paths and on the lead (reference 7B)</li> <li>• <b>Regular light littering</b> - Organise litter picks &amp; encourage all site users to get involved. This is an opportunity to educate woodland users about the issues litter presents and to recruit new members to your woodland volunteer group (reference 7C)</li> <li>• <b>Mismanagement or general misuse</b> - The cutting of Ivy and unauthorised planting is a mystery in many woodlands. Raising awareness about the negative impact will hopefully reduce it taking place (reference 7D)</li> <li>• <b>Responsible usage</b> - This is the ideal we are working towards. Information through notice boards and online can help to enhance responsible site usage (reference 7E)</li> <li>• <b>Positive outdoor usage</b> - There are so many health benefits for us in woodlands and opportunities for more people to access them (reference 7F)</li> <li>• <b>Positive local management</b> - Woodland management by the landowner &amp; woodland volunteers. This toolkit offers lots of suggestions and there are more in reference 7G</li> <li>• <b>Other opportunities to raise awareness &amp; interest in your woodland:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Walks with a focus on trees &amp; shrubs, wildflowers, birds, bats, fungi</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <p><b>Signage explaining what is happening and why with contact details.</b></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Citizen Science, collecting data about the woodlands &amp; observing changes with a plan to action</li></ul> <p>Woodland volunteers play a vital role in the responsible management &amp; future health of our woodlands. The more people get involved in the use of the woodland condition self-assessment and use of the woodland volunteer toolkit the greater the community will understand it's health and be equipped to create positive improvements that will mitigate against the many challenges our woodlands face.</p>	
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This project is funded by the Trees Call to Action Fund. The fund was developed by Defra in partnership with the Forestry Commission and is being delivered by the Heritage Fund.



This has been produced on behalf of the London Urban Forest Partnership  
By The Conservation Volunteers, London Wildlife Trust and Trees for Cities (2025)

