

Application for inclusion of Selsdon Wood (Old Farleigh Road, CR2 8QF)
in the Surrey Hills extended AONB
submitted January 2022 by
Heather Govier, Chair and Linda Morris, Secretary, Friends of Selsdon Wood (FSW)

Introduction

Selsdon Wood Nature Reserve occupies a site which originally was part of the hunting grounds attached to the Addington Palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was also an important coppice and charcoal making area. It has changed little over the centuries as it has never been developed - unlike its immediate neighbours, Selsdon Vale and Forestdale, two large housing estates built on market gardens and allotment areas on the outskirts of Croydon in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1920s, it was purchased by a group of local philanthropists to save it from spreading suburbia and given to the National Trust. It has been leased, for about 50 years, to Croydon Council who are now responsible for its management.

Selsdon Wood is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) with sections of it being classed as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW). It has a rich natural diversity which has been recorded in detail, starting with the publication in 1978 of "*Selsdon Wood Nature Reserve - Its history and Management: Some records of Flora and Fauna*" written by Jack Penry-Jones on behalf of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. This contains species lists for that year. More recent observations began in 2010, after the formation of the Friends of Selsdon Wood (FSW) in 2007. Most of the hundreds of photographs recorded on their website <http://www.friendsofselsdonwood.co.uk> have been taken since 2010.

We maintain that any of these can be taken as evidence of the landscape beauty and ecological value of the Wood and the reasons why it should be included in the enlarged AONB. It has not been possible or practical for us to extract any particular photograph to support this application. However, we are aware that you are also receiving applications from individual lovers of the wood which will give you photographs of their favourite spots. We are sure these will ably support this application too.

Diversity of the Wood - Flora

There are 43 different species of trees and shrubs, some hundreds of years old. Many wildflowers are found in the woods and meadows/chalk grasslands, including spectacular displays of anemones and bluebells in springtime which are greatly loved by the visitors. Amongst the flora are a number of rare plants, including Herb Paris which is classified as an important biodiversity species by The London Biodiversity Audit and an accepted indicator of ancient woodland. There are also the uncommon Yellow Birdsnest, Toothwort, Helleborines, Early Purple and Common Spotted Orchids as well as Pyramidal Orchids, some of which are the rarer white form. There is a wide range of mosses, lichens and fungi - including nine species of Waxcaps. People love to search for these.

Diversity of the Wood - Fauna

Badgers, Foxes and Deer make their homes in the woods and Grey Squirrels are ubiquitous, with our famous white Squirrels occasionally being sighted too.

9 species of Bats have been detected - Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, Leisler, Brandt's, Bechstein's, Long- and Mouse-eared bats, Nocyule and a Serotene, indicating a rich and well-managed ecosystem. FSW have put up bat boxes and there is great interest in the bats.

Diversity of the Wood - Birds

The area is historically and fondly known as The Bird Sanctuary and its purchase, to enable it to be conserved, was supported by the RSPB. We know that 48 species of birds have been observed and noted. Photographs of most are available on the aforementioned FSW website. There are no rare

breeding birds but, on passage, we have recorded Great Grey Shrike, Golden Oriole, Hawfinch, Crossbill, Hobby Falcon, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Honey Buzzard. Red Kite and Buzzards are becoming regular sightings, which give much pleasure to the ornithologists, photographers and others watching their aerial antics. Owls have been provided with some nesting boxes by FSW.

Recreation and facilities

Even for those who are not particularly knowledgeable about, or interested in, the ecology, the area is an invaluable and well-loved retreat for rest and relaxation, especially in these Covid times. It is well used by the public who, for the most part, fully respect the wildlife around them and feel its value as an AONB should be recognised.

The Vanguard Way (part of the London Loop) runs through the wood.

FSW has provided two waymarked routes around the Wood. Walking these is most enjoyable in any season. The walks can be enhanced by using information (spotters' guides etc) from the website or through FSW's descriptions via QR codes on the guide posts or in their free information leaflet which is available from dispensers at the main entrances to the site.

FSW now manages the seats and benches in the wood on behalf of the council and deals with those that need attention. They repair or replace them as they fail with new ones largely financed by donations from well-wishers who wish to mark happy memories of their times in the wood.

FSW provides about 10 guided walks during the year (Covid regulations permitting). Each focuses on a different aspect of the wood's diversity and there is one especially for children – an afternoon 'mini-beast hunt' in August. This is regularly attended by 15-30 children, accompanied by their guardians. They all say how enjoyable they find their experiences in the wood. FSW also try to encourage and assist local schools to use the wood as an outdoor classroom and as locations for DoE community work projects etc. Being part of AONB would, no doubt, add a further dimension to the students' work.

Conclusion

We strongly believe Selsdon Wood (with those areas such as Puplet Wood and the local golf courses on its flanks) is of incalculable value both to the local populace and to its visitors from further afield. It is not only beloved for its bio-diversity and opportunity for exercise and meditation, but also as the 'green lung' at the southern extremity of the Greater London area. There seems no reason to us why it should not be included in the Surrey Hills AONB. That area already reaches close enough to Selsdon Wood to be included in a longer circuit by those who enjoy a full day's walk through the green spaces we have on or near our doorsteps.

FSW would welcome the benefits to be gained by being part of the AONB and would be pleased to work, as far as practical for us and for you and as our own abilities allow, within the AONB plans and to be able to learn from the experiences this would offer.