

Hole Farm Interpretation Strategy



1 Purpose

This Interpretation Strategy has been produced to support the development of plans for the Hole Farm site. It sets out the background to the site, and how it is intended to be developed and operated to maximise opportunities for public interpretation across four key themes. These themes are: environment, recreation, heritage and wellbeing.

2 Background

National Highways purchased the 95ha arable farm site, known as Hole Farm, in April 2021 with the intention of creating an all-purpose community woodland on the site in partnership with Forestry England.

At the time of purchase, 9ha of the site was already in the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) development consent order plans to accommodate replacement open space and potential utility diversions required to build LTC. Further ancient woodland compensation was then moved to the Hole Farm site to minimise the impact of the wider LTC proposals on another local landowner situated the opposite side of the M25.

Further work was then undertaken by LTC to assess the impact of nitrogen deposition on local SSSIs during operation of the new road. Mitigation of these impacts required the creation of additional species-rich habitat, predominantly woodland, at key sites across the proposed scheme. All habitat creation planned for the Hole Farm site in National Highways' ownership was therefore brought into the DCO order limits accordingly, and creation and management is secured through the DCO Environmental Masterplan and Landscape Environmental Management Plan.

Alongside these requirements, the objectives of the site remain to increase biodiversity, increase public access to the landscape for informal recreation, and ensure that the site is financially sustainable to support long-term management as a community woodland by Forestry England.

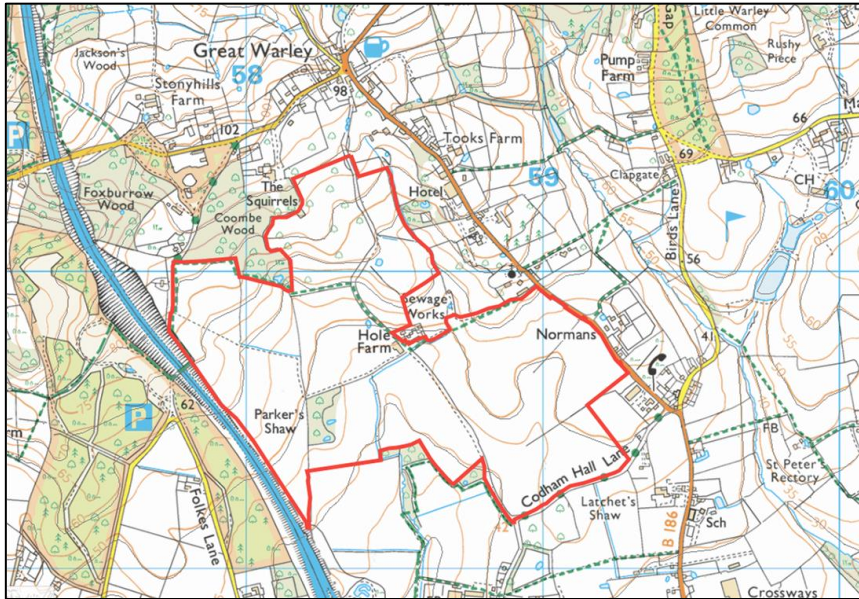


Figure 1 Location of Hole Farm, south of Great Warley

3 Interpretation Strategy objectives

The objectives of the Interpretation Strategy are:

- To enhance the landscape and heritage setting, enabling improved access to the widest range of people
- To deliver and increase awareness of the value to society of access to green space
- To increase awareness of the positive impact of the new and existing habitats on the climate and biodiversity
- To promote and signpost connectivity to the wider network of green spaces
- To create a sense of place and convey cultural authenticity by responding to the heritage and knowledge of the local area
- To support the financial sustainability of the site.

4 Proposed development of Hole Farm

A Masterplan for the Hole Farm site has been developed by National Highways and Forestry England through an extensive programme of community engagement and consultation.

4.1 Habitat creation

Hole Farm will become a new community woodland with a mosaic of habitats comprising of woodland with rides and glades, wildflower meadows, ponds, and wet woodland areas. In addition to these new habitats the site has also been designed to include a mix of surfaced and unsurfaced paths for use by visitors and the local community. The site will increase connectivity across the landscape for both people and wildlife and extend the Thames Chase Community Forest, providing a link between sites in London and Essex.

4.2 Site access and car park

A new access to the site for visitors arriving by car is proposed from Great Warley Street (B186). This would provide access, from dawn to dusk, to a payable car park for up to 94 vehicles. It will include electric vehicles charging points and an undercover cycle storage facility. This dedicated entrance would separate road-users from an existing access track and public right of way at the perimeter of the site that leads to an Anglian Water management site.

Two further new accesses will be provided for pedestrians and cyclists from Great Warley Street, linking to a pre-existing footpath and bus stop respectively.

Access to the site would also be available from the M25 overbridge that connects the site to Folkes Lane Woodland, which is also managed by Forestry Commission. Access to an existing public right of way will be provided from Beredens Lane in the North-West of the site, and from Codham Hall Lane in the South.

Horse step-overs will be provided at access points to the M25 overbridge and Codham Hall Lane, providing horse-riders with connections to existing bridleways.

These access points would be linked by a series of trails across the site.

4.3 Community facilities

The car park would include a modular-design refreshment kiosk including accessible toilet facilities for visitors. A multi-purpose outdoor shelter, located close to the car park, will also provide a focal point and meeting place for communities to gather at the entrance to an all-abilities access loop on the site.

The existing farm buildings will be rebuilt to provide a multi-function, indoor space for community groups and schools situated at the heart of the community woodland. It will provide facilities to host presentations and workshops, toilet facilities and a dedicated parking bay for coaches.

The buildings will also provide facilities for a new community tree nursery, including raised beds, storage and volunteer welfare facilities. In partnership with Thames Chase Trust, this will provide a facility for local volunteers to collect and propagate local seeds on-site, while offering new skills and learning opportunities.

The following sections detail how the operation of the site will maximise opportunities for public interpretation.

5 Signage plan

5.1 Signage locations


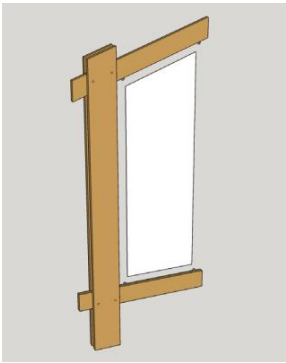
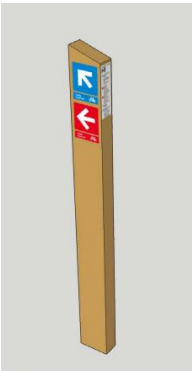
The below map shows the location of proposed signage for Hole Farm Community Woodland. These locations have taken into account the landscape and existing view points on the site.

QR codes will be included to allow access to further information online, covering the four themes of environment, recreation, heritage and wellbeing.

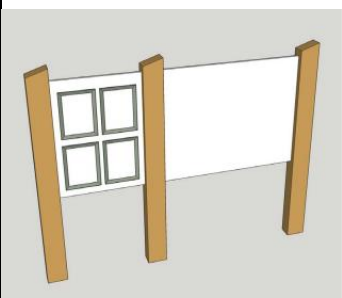

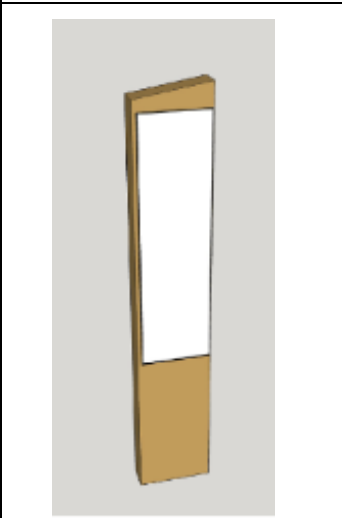
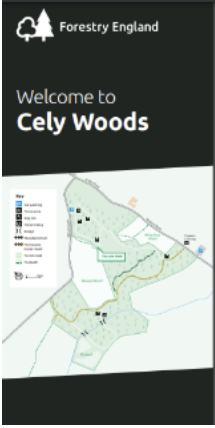


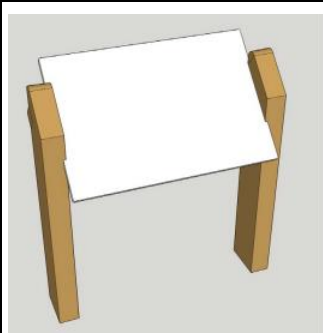
Figure 2 Map of proposed sign locations

5.2 Signage specification

Sign	Purpose and key messages	Copy	Number, location and specification
	<p>What this sign is for: Entrances to small and medium-sized visitor centres.</p>	<p>New name for site: e.g. Hole Forest Forestry England</p> <p>Symbols: Parking, refreshments, play, picnic benches (up to 5 symbols)</p> <p>Include: Thames Chase Community Forest</p>	<p>RD-20: Medium entrance sign x 2</p> <p>Location: At road entrance to car park. Size: 2.2m wide, 2m tall. Install: 1m into ground.</p>
	<p>What this sign is for: Promotion of main site partners (cafes, bike hire or Go Ape) or events.</p>	<p>Content: Car park pricing (if information structure is not suitable).</p>	<p>BAN-2: Medium banner structure x 3</p> <p>Location: visitor centre driveways. Size: 1.5m wide, 3.6m tall (banner: 800 x 2460 mm). Install: 1.2m into ground.</p>
	<p>What this sign is for: Trail waymarking (waymarker arrows can be placed on front or back of post only).</p>	<p>Options: Emergency info panel with location number.</p>	<p>WAY-1: Pedestrian waymarker post x circa 14</p> <p>Location: along forest trails across the site Size: 1.5m high (post: 150 x 75 mm). Install: 0.8m into ground.</p>



	<p>What this sign is for: Site information or map. Displaying temporary information.</p>	<p>Options: Use with or without clip frames.</p>	<p>INF-3 Pedestrian sign: Combined info structure x 3</p> <p>Locations: car park, centre of site, and Folkes Lane bridge Size: 2.2 m wide, 1.7 m tall (panels: 700 x 900 mm & 1150 x 900 mm) Install: 0.8m into ground</p> <p><i>Example</i></p> 
	<p>What this sign is for: Trail starts, info panel or low-level wayfinding.</p>	<p>Options: Single or double-sided, with or without clip frames.</p>	<p>INF-5: Thin info structure x7</p> <p>Locations: at pedestrian entrance points to the site Size: 0.3 m wide, 1.7 m tall (panel: 275 x 1000 mm) Install: 0.8m into ground.</p> <p><i>Example</i></p> 



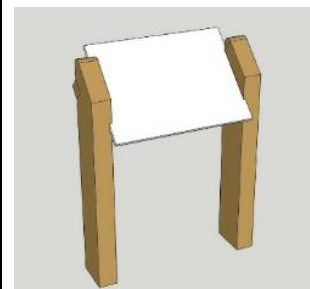
What this sign is for: Interpretation or information in visually sensitive locations.

Content: Text (word count: up to 200), images and illustrations, infographics, logos.

INF-4 Pedestrian sign: Lectern structure x 3

Locations:
Size: 1.1 m wide, 1.1 m tall (panel: 900 x 600 mm).
Install: 0.6m into ground.

Example



What this sign is for: Interpretation or information in visually sensitive locations.

Content: Text (word count: up to 150), images and illustrations, infographic, logos.

INF-41: Small lectern structure x 3

Locations:
Size: 0.9m wide, 1.1 m tall (panel: 700 x 500 mm).
Install: 0.6m into ground.

Example



5.3 Interpretation content

The below text provides some examples of what the interpretation boards could include, covering the four overarching themes:

1) Hole Farm and historical views

- The historic landscape character of the former Hole Farm and views of historic buildings in Great Warley have been incorporated in our woodland design.

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin

- Ahead of you are views to the Grade I listed Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Great Warley. The present church was built in 1902 and features a spectacular Art Nouveau style interior. Locally, it is popularly known as the “Pearl Church”, because of the widely used mother-of-pearl decoration. Today it continues as a ‘living’ Church of England place of worship.

Historic landscape features

- For centuries, the arable Hole Farm landscape produced crops like wheat and barley. The woodland planting design today, with its mosaic of open habitat and tree planting, has been informed by the existing and historic field boundaries and landform.
- Existing hedgerows have been either retained as features or allowed to naturally regenerate into shrubby wildlife corridors.

Surrounding woodland character

- The new woodland will be visually consistent and in character with the adjoining areas of woodland and the predominantly wooded ridge to the north, including nearby Coombe Wood.

2) Orchard and features trees

- The adjoining areas of woodland to the north of Hole Forest, feature some interesting parkland estate and specimen trees, such as the distinctive monkey *puzzle* (*Araucaria araucana*). Today our newly planted ‘feature’ trees and a community orchard area reflect this diverse character of the surrounding woodland.

Community orchard

- A variety of apple and pear trees feature in the community orchard. X number of varieties have been chosen reflecting local provenance. The orchard has been created with the community and local volunteers. Each year the trees will require pruning and once established, fruit will be produced to enjoy.

Feature trees

- Specific tree species have been selected to add colour and structural diversity. Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a fast-growing species with tulip shaped flower and buttery-yellow leaves in autumn. Sweetgum (*Liquidambar*) is a decorative deciduous tree and provides stunning fiery autumn colour.

3) Coppicing

- Coppicing is a traditional woodland management method. By cutting trees at the base, regrow occurs providing vital habitat for different species and a sustainable timber supply.

Habitat creation

- Long continuity of the coppice system has enabled many species to adapt to this system, including nightingales and dormice.

A renewal source of wood

- Tree species, such as Hazel and Sweet Chestnut, grow quickly and make great choices for coppicing. The coppiced stumps called 'stools' can produce a large number of small diameter stems that can be cut using simple hand tools. Coppicing is clean, quiet and environmentally friendly.

4) Natural regeneration and Meadows and grassland

- As part of the woodland design, specific areas, like this one, have been identified as sites for natural regeneration. These areas are fenced to prevent damage by human and animals, enabling the seed from established nearby trees to spread and grow naturally.

Natural colonisation

- This regenerative process can be called natural colonisation. It happens through seed which has been dispersed by birds, mammals, wind or gravity, or by vegetative colonisation where new growth sprouts from the stem or roots of adjacent trees.

Wildflower meadows

- Due to farming methods, the soil at Hole Forest contained a large amount of nutrients. By establishing grass and cutting this, we are able to 'grow out' these nutrients and reduce their impact.
- Wildflower seed can then be sown to create meadow areas and species rich rides and glades. Meadows, rides and glades provide vital habitat for a range of flora and fauna and give our woodland important open space for people and wildlife to enjoy
- A species rich grassland can provide pollen and nectar resources, and bird seed mixes.

5) Waterbodies

- Due to the heavy clay soil and geology at Hole Forest, the site is seasonally wet and prone to waterlogging in the winter. A series of open field drainage channels and mole drains were introduced in the site's farm history.

Ponds and wet woodland

- Five existing ponds have been retained and enhanced. Ten new seasonal wildlife ponds have been created, with four pools forming a wetland complex at the centre of Hole Forest. The creation of new wetland areas extends the range of habitats available to species such as water vole. One pond is available for dogs to enjoy.

6) Views across the landscape

Image of the current view across the estuary indicating the locations of features seen on the horizon such as Chalk Park (LTC) and other Thames Chase Community Woodlands.

5.4 Community room interpretation

The Community room will be a multi-functional space that will be able to host a number of different events and activities, in addition to small-scale displays relating to the history and features of the site. External to the community room building, there will be further interpretation relating to the farmstead setting and the Grade II listed farmhouse.

6 Trails and activities

The new community woodland at Hole Farm will provide a place to seek adventure, make memories and find escape. [Research shows](#) that spending just 2 hours a week in nature significantly improves our health and wellbeing. Forestry England seek to connect everyone with the nation's forests. A range of activities are proposed for Hole Farm, from facilitating self-led exploration, to guided walks, physical activity sessions such as yoga, and more. All activities will be linked to our 4 key themes of the recreation, environment, heritage/archaeology, and wellbeing. Activities will be designed with local community groups and will target a wide range of audiences, from adventurous young families, to those seeking relaxed days out.

Across Hole Farm there will be walks of varied length to enhance enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape. Trails will be signposted by information panels, maps, and waymarkers.

An all-abilities access track has been designed to form a 1km loop in the south-eastern section of the site, linking to the car park and visitor facilities. On this loop a **play trail** and **sensory trail** will be created:

- The provision of a dedicated play trail on an all-abilities access loop is designed with young families in mind.
- A sensory sculptural trail will speak to older audiences, featuring thought provoking objects and materials sensitive to the landscape.



Figure 3 Map of proposed locations of play features, sculptures and benches

6.1 Play trail

Forestry England aims to provide positive, memorable experiences through play that connect people with the extensive forest in our care in a way that promotes active, healthy lifestyles and sparks a life-long interest in the outdoors and natural environment. Play features enable families to connect with the wider forest landscape. We are suggesting a mix of natural and wild play features:

Natural play

- Natural forest environments offer an interesting and engaging play experience. The different natural and sensory play opportunities offered by a site should be identified and used as a stage for play, rather than clearing away areas to create a blank sheet on which to build a play area. Natural play should encourage exploration and adventure into the wider forest.

Wild play

- Wild play opportunities can be made tangible through subtle interventions to encourage a playful response and provide a 'bridge' to exploration of the wider forest. Simple play opportunities can be created in the natural environment to

encourage children and parents to perceive the whole forest as a place without boundaries to explore, and as a venue for adventures.

We are proposing three points of play around the all abilities access loop, including a small formal play area located away from the car park to draw families onto site plus another two located further around the loop. These will be a compilation of natural play features like the examples below to create a dedicated areas for children to play in within the forest.



6.2 Sensory sculpture trail

Hole Farm provides a perfect example of how our landscapes are constantly changing and evolving based on human influences. The utilisation of the land and natural resources over thousands of years has resulted in our site supporting a variety of different communities. With past activities including hunter gathering, animals grazing and arable farming, the site will now play host to a thriving community forest that benefits locals, wildlife and climate change. Our historic environment provides an intangible setting and sense of place upon which we attribute value and appreciation to the spaces we visit. Yet, unlike the natural environment which can be grown, reintroduced or fostered, our historic environment can become lost and forgotten, slowly melting into the composition of the present landscape and its use.

It is the perishable, ruinous and decaying nature of our historic environment, and our past utilisation of natural resources, which we anticipate drawing upon when developing a sensory sculpture trail within Hole Farm. By allowing users of the all-abilities trail to engage with and leave their mark on sculptures that, like the historic environment, utilise natural resources and that become ruinous and decay, it is anticipated that visitors will be able to better conceptualise how our environments change over time and how we, as humans, can influence this.

Three sculptural installations will be commissioned along the all-abilities loop. Each will be made from different materials to evoke a response, whilst promoting wellbeing. Using different materials such as stone, wood and metal, we would hope to create areas where visitors could reflect on the aural, tactile and visual sense aspects along the trail.

Further information about the installations along the sensory trail will be available via access to the Lower Thames Crossing digital hub

(1) Wood

A wooden bench with inscriptions or carvings could encourage reflection and appreciation of the surrounding environment.



(2) Stone

A shaped stone, possibly with a hole or focus point to encourage views across the site.



(3) Metal

A metal sculpture that would encourage visitors to focus on sound either through interaction or from the wind.



7 Guided walks and events

Guided walks and events will enable facilitated access and could cover themes such as wildlife, tree identification and management techniques, local history, archaeology (subject to any finds), and wellbeing. For example, Forestry England's nearby community woodlands offer activities such as walks, wellbeing walks, bio-blitz events, and family activity trails. On other sites Forestry England have successfully engaged with national initiatives such as the annual Festival of British Archaeology, to promote activities relating to finds of interest at woodland sites.

The community tree nursery will be managed in partnership with the Thames Chase Trust (TCT). Located at the heart of the site this will provide an opportunity to engage with the local community, develop a new volunteer team, and host education events to promote forest skills.