



**Report on woodland at Three Houses
Lane, Codicote, Hertfordshire**

June 2025

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REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Formal Details

- 1.1.1 My name is Jonathan Charles Terry. I am a Director of Sylvan Resources Limited, a company which is involved in professional forestry and environmental consultancy. Its address is Dog Field House, Abcott, Clungunford, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 0PX.
- 1.1.2 My specialist fields are Forestry and Arboriculture.
- 1.1.3 I have been instructed by a neighbour of Church Wood, Three Houses Lane Codicote, Hertfordshire SG4 8TB.

1.2 Circumstances leading to this report

- 1.2.1 Church Wood is to the south of Three Houses Lane, Codicote, Hertfordshire. It is owned by D & A Architectural and Structural Designs Ltd. At the same site the Company also owns an area of rough grazing land and another wood known as Crouchgreen Wood.
- 1.2.2 The owners extended and improved agricultural buildings on the site. This work included alterations to drainage, the removal of trees, the grubbing out of tree stumps and root plates, changes to ground levels, provision of parking, provision of and improvement to vehicular access and other associated works.
- 1.2.3 None of the work had been approved by North Hertfordshire District Council's planning authority. The owners subsequently submitted a retrospective planning application to the Council which was refused. The site's owners are currently appealing the Council's decision. In addition, they have made a second application for the construction of an equestrian centre on the area of land currently used as rough pasture. The relevant planning applications are 24/02343/FP and 24/01042/FP. Both applications, supporting documents and consultee comments are on the Councils planning website. Site plans showing the locations of the woodlands are also on the Council's website.

1.3 Instructions

1.3.1 My instructions can be summarised as follows:

- a) To inspect the site at Church Wood
- b) To comment on the status of the site
- c) To consider what work may be done to reinstate and damage caused to its woodland.

2 INVESTIGATION

2.1 Inspection of the site

2.1.1 I inspected the site on the 12th and 13th of June 2025. I did not have access to it. My comments are therefore based on observations I made from Three Houses Lane and adjoining properties.

2.1.2 I saw that Church Wood is stocked with Hornbeam, Oak and some Ash. Most of the Hornbeam, had been managed as coppice. I describe the woodland as being coppice with standard trees. This structure is derived from a traditional form of woodland management which coppices most of the trees and retains others (standards) as an overstorey. Crouchgreen Wood was similarly stocked and had also been managed as coppice with standards. The management and species composition of both woods is consistent with Winter Wood to the north of Three Houses Lane.

2.1.3 I formed the opinion that Crouchgreen and Church Woods were likely to be Ancient Woodland sites.

2.1.4 From Three Houses Lane it was evident that many trees had been felled and grubbed out of Church Wood. I estimate the canopy reduction in Church Wood to be in the order of 30%.

2.1.5 I am informed that the canopy reduction I observed is the result of trees being felled over the last year by the site's owners. I understand that trees were felled without the consent of the Planning Authority or the Forestry Commission. I could see cordwood stacked on site, but without access to it I could not estimate its volume.

2.1.6 I photographed and videoed a mini excavator and dumper moving soil around the wood. Both machines were being used to screef off surface vegetation and move it to other locations within the wood.

Close to the wood's south boundary on land belonging to a neighbouring property, are several veteran oak trees. I saw an area of screefed ground within twenty metres of one of these trees.

2.1.7 Screefing had removed about 60% of all ground flora. That which remained and was visible to me largely comprised wild bluebell.

2.1.8 I saw drains which had earlier been excavated within the woodland. A culvert possibly fed by these drains discharges into a sump adjacent to Three Houses Lane and outside the site's boundary.

2.1.9 Along the wood's south boundary, a line of conifers has been planted. Other trees have been planted within the wood. From my location I could not identify their species.

3.0 Status of the site

3.1.1 Natural England's MAGIC website indicates that Winter Wood is an Ancient Woodland Site. I am informed that North Hertfordshire District Council's Records Office has recently reviewed the status of Church Wood and Crouchgreen Woods. Both are not designated Ancient Woodland sites, but it is recognised that both have ground flora and species composition common to Ancient Woodland sites. The first edition OS maps show Winter, Church and Crouchgreen Woods'. The recording of woodland on these plans is usually indicative of Ancient Woodland Sites. In my opinion all the evidence points to the woodland on this site as being Ancient.

3.1.2 The MAGIC website also records the site's woodland as being on the Priority Habitat Deciduous Woodland Inventory. This designation also extends to the Japanese Garden on the site's south boundary and to other woodland further east and west. It is therefore part of a mosaic of broadleaf woodland providing habitat and ecosystem services extending well beyond the site's physical boundaries.

4.0 Site restoration.

4.1.1 The document at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>

identifies various strategies for restoring Ancient Woodland and compensating for its loss. Restoration work on this site must be informed by this guidance. In my opinion, the work is likely to entail.

- 1) Enrichment planting with native species, specifically oak, hornbeam and lime sourced from trees of local provenance.
- 2) Restoration of the sites original ground water levels by blocking drains and culverts.
- 3) Removal of all planted trees which are alien to the site (non-native or native but wrong provenance).
- 4) Decompaction of damaged root protection areas as defined in BS 5837 "Trees in relation to Design, Demolition and Construction" (2012) with the maximum root protection area increased from 25m radius to 20m for veteran trees or those with veteran potential
- 5) Addition of leaf mould and composted bark mulch to damaged soils.
- 6) New planting on open ground to compensate for habit lost by removal of any woodland and its replacement with hardstanding or buildings. New planting to accord with condition 1 above.
- 7) Protection and maintenance of the restored woodland for a period of ten years after restoration.
- 8) All restoration to comply with a management plan approved by the District Council and monitored by an ecologist or other competent person.

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