

## PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF WOODNOOK VALE - a summary of the Management Plan for 2012-16

Woodnook Vale, on the southeastern edge of Accrington in East Lancashire, is a 51 hectare site owned by Hyndburn Borough Council and Lancashire County Council. The site is accessible from Accrington Train Station (on the Blackpool-Preston-Colne line) and Bus Station. It is also close to, and easily accessible from, the A680.

The site supports woodland, heathland and grassland either side of the steep-sided river valley of Woodnook Water and includes a former mill lodge interwoven with an industrial legacy of cloth, coal and rail.



Aerial photo of Woodnook Vale in the wider landscape (c/o [www.mario.gov.uk/lancashire](http://www.mario.gov.uk/lancashire)).

Woodnook Vale is a key environmental asset for Hyndburn and its people. It is an area of natural greenspace that provides opportunities for people to live a happier, healthier and longer life. Just as the Haworth Museum with its Tiffany collection is a jewel in Accrington's Crown, Woodnook Vale is a jewel for its flora and fauna.

If the 51 ha site is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) it will be the largest LNR in Lancashire.

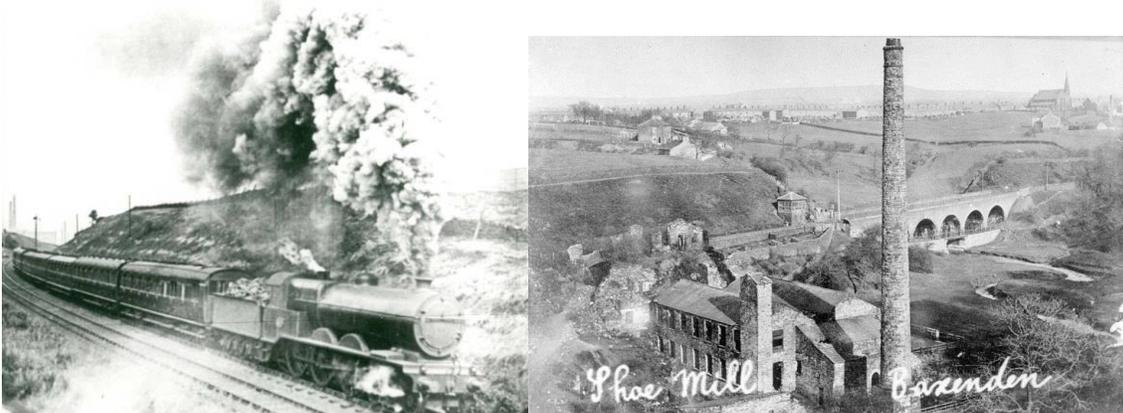
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## Archaeology, geology and history

There are 16 key features of archaeological and historical interest within the site, of which one is nationally significant, i.e. the Accrington to Ramsbottom railway, the rest being of County importance, including Platts Lodge as part of the Broad Oak Printworks, the weir on Woodnook Water as part of Woodnook Mill and a former Smallpox Hospital.

Shoe Mill was initially a cotton mill, driven by water from Woodnook Water, thought to have been built in 1790. It closed after a serious fire in 1860 but part of the mill was used for manufacturing rubber until 1880. A drained reservoir, waterwheel pit and base of a stone chimney are still visible. A filled circular depression south-west of chimney is probably an old colliery shaft.

Rothwell Mill was one of Accrington's oldest industrial sites. In 1790 it was a water-powered fulling mill and dye-house but by the 1820's it had been converted to a bleachworks. Bleaching ceased around 1856 and the buildings were used for a number of purposes including chemical manufacture. The chemical works closed in 1913 and the mill has since been demolished.



Express team train on Baxenden Bank (1960's). Postcard from 1906 showing Shoe Mill and the viaduct.

The Accrington to Ramsbottom railway was opened in 1848 and closed in 1966. An unusual feature of this line is that it crossed Platts Lodge, which was originally the millpond for the Broad Oak Printworks.

A small pox hospital is shown on the first edition 1:2500 map of 1893 with the addition of the hand-written words 'Smallpox Hospital (Accrington Corporation)' but there does not appear to be any visible remains on the ground today.

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The underlying solid geology is Lower Westphalian barren coal measures of the Carboniferous era formed around 345 Million years ago. The coal measures were a major contribution to the early industrial exploitation of the area.

### **Access, landscape and recreation**

The disused railway line is a footpath, a permitted bridleway and part of National Cycle Network Route 6 and is part of a nationally important access route. It runs from Platts Lodge in Accrington to the lodges near Holland's pie factory at Baxenden and serves as a 2.8km multi-user trackway along which people can cycle, ride horseback, push prams and wheelchairs, walk, run, stop and enjoy the peace, tranquility and wildlife. The route also forms part of the Hyndburn Greenway and is used as part of a Walking the Way to Health Initiative based in Accrington called 'Stepping Out'. The West Pennine Feeder Route to the Pennine Bridleway passes through the site.



The disused railway line provides access for all.

In 2010 a questionnaire was distributed and 442 responses were received. The main uses of the site were walking (26.5%), relaxation (15.4%), to see wildlife (14.8%), walking the dog and cycling (both 10.5%). The most popular activities for what people want from the site are guided/health walks (12.3%), wildlife information (11.8%) and improved footpaths (10.2%).

Platts Lodge is leased by Hyndburn & Blackburn Angling Association and **XX** fishing 'pegs' are provided including two with access for disabled people.

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Platts Lodge with the two disabled access fishing pegs, by John Lamb, April 2009. [Change photo?](#)

Woodnook Vale is a dominant feature to the people in the houses and farms or work in any of the buildings that overlook the site. The plantation at Miller Fold is a man-made feature that is becoming a prominent feature in the landscape. Good views across the site are afforded from various locations within the site, including from the end of Miller Fold Avenue, the layby below Rothwell Mill Farm and Woodnook allotments.

The former viaduct support pillars that carried the railway across Platts Lodge are a highly distinctive local feature, especially since they were painted red.

### **Flora and fauna**

The site is a haven for wildlife and can offer the visitor a wilderness experience just a few minutes away from the edge of town. The site is of County importance for its mosaic of vegetation types as well as for mammals, including the Water Vole or "Ratty" of Wind in the Willows fame. Visitors who stand quietly and watch can see a variety of birds, from Blackbird and Blackcap to Woodpecker and Wren.

Each season offers the visitor something new, from the first blossoms of spring and the sounds of migratory birds singing their hearts out in the woodland courtyards, to summer wildflowers blossoming in the meadows and pastures followed by a riot of colour and bountiful harvest of fruits and berries in autumn, which feed the wintering Redwing and Fieldfare. If you are lucky you may see a family of Roe Deer or catch a glimpse of a Fox.

The number of flowering plants and ferns recorded on the site is over 290, of which nearly 250 are native to Britain. In addition, 108 invertebrates, 85 fungi, 67

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birds, 13 fish, 12 mammals and 4 amphibians have been found on the site so far but there are many more, especially invertebrates, yet to be discovered.

Six of the species are important at the European level, i.e. three fish (Brown Trout, Bullhead and Stone Loach) and three bats (Daubenton's Bat, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle Bats). Many of the birds are Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK and/or are specially protected by law. Of the 85 species of fungi recorded, six are notable nationally.

### Wildlife habitats

Sixteen different types of habitat have been recorded on the site, including broadleaved and coniferous plantation, semi-natural woodland including oak woodland, dense and scattered scrub, acidic, neutral and marshy grasslands, flushes, standing and running water, heathland and bare ground.

Heathland and upland oak woodland are habitats of European importance. Areas of woodland alongside Woodnook Water, including Priestley Clough, have been identified as being Ancient Woodland, i.e. having been woodland since AD1600. However, some will be descended from the original woodland that recolonised the land after the retreat of the ice age some 10,000 years ago!



Woodnook Water, by ?? and date.

Oak woodland, by John Lamb April 2009.

Small patches of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) are present on the banks of the railway line. Several of the other habitat types are nationally important even though the site itself isn't.

Parts of Priestley Clough were first identified as a Local Wildlife Site (called Biological Heritage Sites in Lancashire) in September 1993.

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## Past management and use

- Hollins Wood was planted by the County Council in 1991.
- Consultation on designating Woodnook Vale as a Country Park started in 1996.
- The Woodnook Nature Trail leaflet and Accrington-Baxenden Heritage Trail leaflet were both printed in the 1990s but are long out of print.
- Entrance sculpture created at the bottom of Hill Street and a wooden gateway at Nuttal Street in 1997, with a mosaic at Hurstead Street unveiled in 1998.
- Broadleaved woodlands were planted by Hyndburn Council in the late 1990's.
- Mulch mats removed from bases of trees in Hollins plantation since 2004.
- Bird and bat boxes were erected in 2005.
- Himalayan Balsam has been controlled since 2008.
- Guided natural history walks on specific themes such as archaeology, bats, birds, wildflowers and trees started in 2009.
- Japanese Knotweed in Bullough Park, Priestley Clough and downstream of Shoe Mill have been sprayed with herbicide since 2010.
- Information board and history/wildlife leaflet for Platts Lodge produced in 2010.
- Hollins Technology College produced a documentary called 'Life in Woodnook Vale', which was previewed on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011.
- Scrub, including Rhododendron, removed from heathland on the banks of the disused railway line in 2011.
- Information boards at Shoe Mill, Priestly Clough and railway line in 2012.



Willow sculptures along the disused railway line, by Sheila McVan, *insert dates*.

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Newt sculpture on railway pillar in Platts Lodge. The idea came from pupils at Woodnook Primary School. The sculpture was designed and installed by Clare Bigger, commissioned by the Wildlife Trust and funded by Globe Enterprises in fulfillment of a planning condition for the Waterside development.

### **Plans for the future** (refer to the numbers on the map overleaf for locations)

1. Further access improvements by:
  - surfacing footpaths,
  - improving entrances,
  - providing better signage,
  - cutting back encroaching vegetation and
  - replacing/installing steps and handrails for steep slopes.
2. Organising programmes of guided walks and events each year.
3. Providing information and education by:
  - producing on-site interpretation boards,
  - publishing leaflets, factsheets and identification guides,
  - providing education packs and worksheets for schools and
  - putting information on websites and podcasts as well as using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.
4. Organising Environmental arts and events such as sculptures, lantern processions and outdoor theatre.
5. Designating the Council-owned land as a Local Nature Reserve.
6. Managing the woodlands by:

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- thinning out trees where they are too dense/closely planted and
  - converting coniferous and mixed plantations to semi-natural broadleaved woodland in the longer term (e.g. over the next 20-25 years).
7. Improving the condition of the non-woodland habitats by:
    - keeping areas of heathland open,
    - cutting areas of species-rich grassland and raking up the 'hay', and
    - clearing out excessive vegetation from Platts Lodge.
  8. Maintaining and enhancing the populations of notable plant and animal species that are resident or breed within the site.
  9. Providing bird tables filled with bird food to help our feathered friends from autumn through to spring.
  10. Controlling Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.
  11. Surveying the populations of notable flora and fauna and recording those species groups for which there is a lack of records.
  12. Conserving and enhancing the archaeological features in particular the archaeology and history of the railway line, Shoe Mill and Platts Lodge by:
    - managing the features to stop them deteriorating,
    - including information on interpretation boards and leaflets and
    - progressing opportunities for excavations at Shoe Mill.

Insert A3 plan of site featuring access points, paths, habitats and relevant numbers for 1-12 above

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Each of the plans above need staff time and resources to deliver the necessary works on the ground between 2012 and 2016. £40-50,000 is needed every year to achieve the vision for the site but much can be achieved by volunteers. Your involvement and support would be appreciated.

You can help by joining the Friends of Woodnook Vale (tbc see xxx for further information), carrying out wildlife surveys (contact xxxxxx or by volunteering with Prospects and the Wildlife Trust.

Insert HBC **contact details**.

**Insert logos...**

Footer: This document was produced by Lancashire Wildlife Trust ([www.lancswt.org.uk](http://www.lancswt.org.uk)), funded by Prospects ([www.prospectsfoundation.org.uk](http://www.prospectsfoundation.org.uk)) through an Access to Nature grant from Natural England ([www.natural-england.org.uk](http://www.natural-england.org.uk)) with the support of Hyndburn Borough Council ([www.hyndburnbc.gov.uk](http://www.hyndburnbc.gov.uk)).