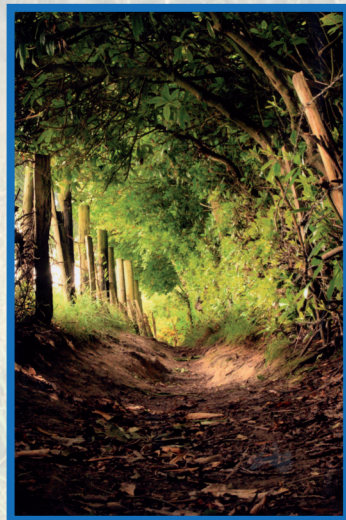




Bluebell Wood



Pine Heath



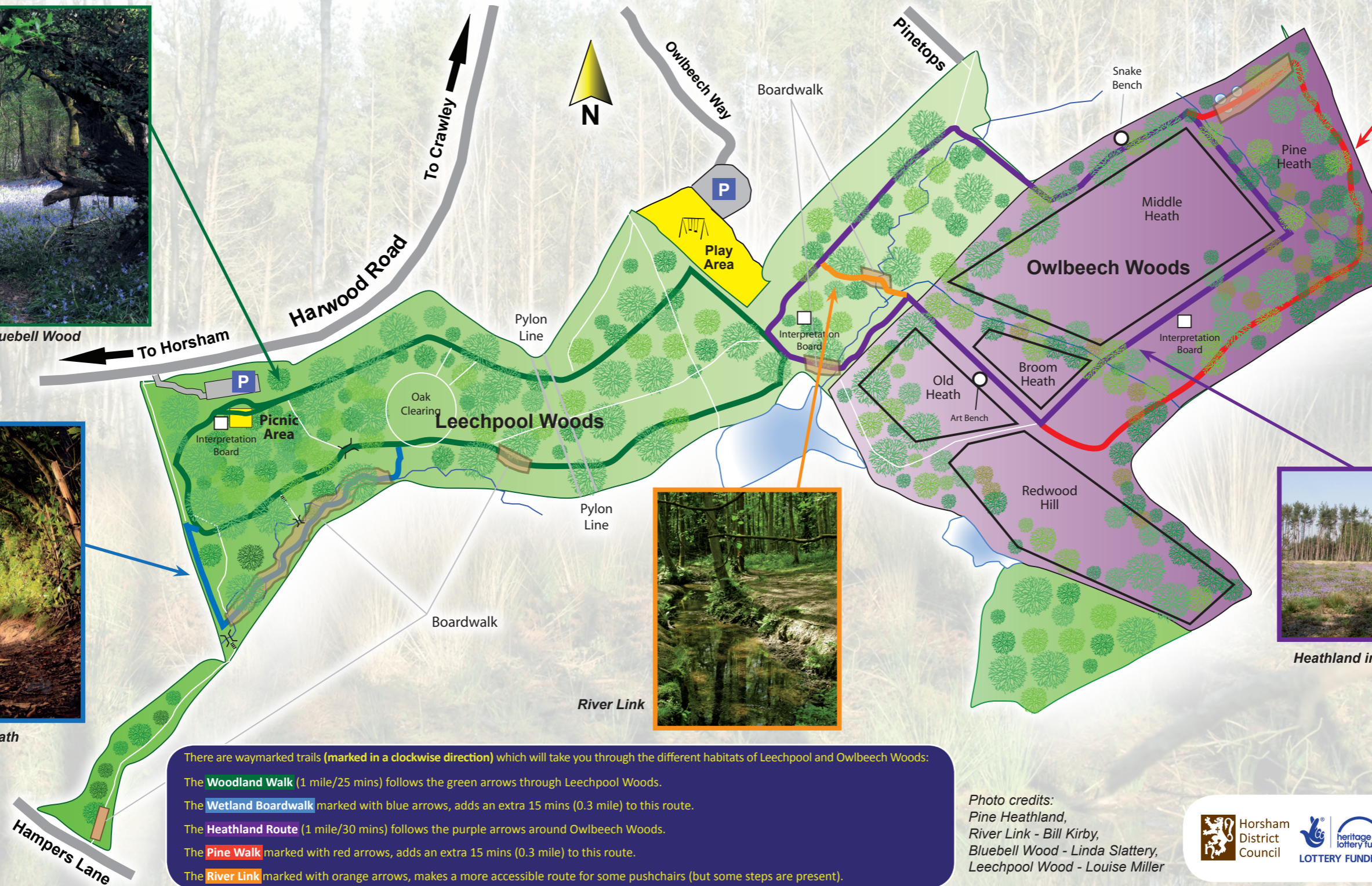
Forest Path



River Link



Heathland in Middle Heath enclosure



There are waymarked trails (marked in a clockwise direction) which will take you through the different habitats of Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods:

- The **Woodland Walk** (1 mile/25 mins) follows the green arrows through Leechpool Woods.
- The **Wetland Boardwalk** marked with blue arrows, adds an extra 15 mins (0.3 mile) to this route.
- The **Heathland Route** (1 mile/30 mins) follows the purple arrows around Owlbeech Woods.
- The **Pine Walk** marked with red arrows, adds an extra 15 mins (0.3 mile) to this route.
- The **River Link** marked with orange arrows, makes a more accessible route for some pushchairs (but some steps are present).

Photo credits:
 Pine Heathland,
 River Link - Bill Kirby,
 Bluebell Wood - Linda Slattery,
 Leechpool Wood - Louise Miller

HISTORY

Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods were once connected with the larger St Leonard's Forest to the east. St Leonard's was one of four former medieval hunting forests spread between Horsham and Tunbridge Wells, in an area known as the Weald Forest Ridge. This is the highest ridge of the High Weald, itself recognised as one of England's finest landscapes and designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Leechpool Woods is a mixed woodland of ancient origin covering 30 acres. It lies on the northern slope of the valley with the southern boundary marked by a stream (the start of the River Arun). Almost half of the wood was destroyed by the '87 storm but most of the wooded areas have now re-established. The name 'Leechpool' dates back to the 1770's when Dame Railey used to collect leeches from a pond in the woods known as Middle Park Pond. These she sold to doctors, chemists and apothecaries for blood letting - a common practice at the time.

Owlbeech Woods in contrast, consists of 55 acres of restored heathland. The majority of the site was planted with Scot's Pine in early 1970's as a commercial crop by the Forestry Commission. Since Horsham District Council took over ownership in 1989 the site has changed dramatically and is now an established lowland heath with vast areas of heather. It lies on the south side of the valley and is linked to Leechpool by a section of land called 'Severals Bottom'.

Grazing Project at Owlbeech Woods

Since Owlbeech Woods was restored to heathland in 2006, the site has been managed using a variety of livestock. Grazing is widely recognised as the most effective way of managing heathland due to its low impact on the sensitive habitat. It is very important that such fragile habitats are grazed with wildlife conservation in mind. By using a mixture of cattle, sheep and llamas. It has been possible to keep on top of invasive species which are associated with heathland restoration, particularly birch.



Hebridean Sheep

The type of grazing carried out at Owlbeech is predominantly by our flock of Hebridean Sheep. They are fantastic conservation workers as they love to eat the rough herbage, such as bramble and birch, which can often out-compete the delicate heathland fauna. The enclosures are also seasonally grazed with cattle and llamas to prevent acid grasses from taking over open areas of the heath.

Areas of the heathland have been fenced and are closed off at certain times of year to contain grazing cattle but also to protect rare ground-nesting heathland birds.

WILDLIFE

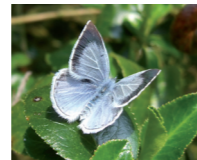
The range of habitats at Leechpool and Owlbeech Woods attract a variety of species to the site.

Birds

In the spring and summer the beautiful song of the rare Woodlark can often be heard across the heathland. Crossbills, Yellowhammer and Siskin add colour throughout the year. In late June a visit at dusk could produce the eerie call of the Nightjar which breed on the heathland.



Crossbill



Holly Blue

Butterflies

Holly Blues are frequent visitors to the wooded rides around Leechpool Car Park whilst on the heath Green Hairstreak and Silver-washed Fritillary can be found.

Dragonflies

The heathland streams are patrolled by the huge Golden-ringed Dragonfly in late June whilst Common and Ruddy Darter add some autumn colour. Southern Hawker and Brilliant Emerald are also regulars around the damp areas.



Golden-ringed Dragonfly



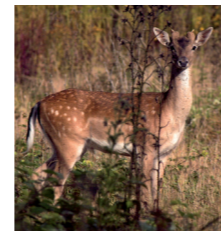
Common Lizard

Reptiles and Amphibians

Common Lizard and Adder can be seen basking on any bare area throughout the site. Grass Snake, Common Frog and Toad can also be seen around the heathland pools.

Mammals

A large herd of Fallow Deer can be seen in any of the enclosures on the heath, whilst several Roe Deer favour the shaded woody areas of Leechpool Wood.



Fallow Deer

Photo credits: Crossbill: Mick Davis, Holly Blue: Alec McIntyre, Hebridean Sheep, Golden-ringed Dragonfly and Common Lizard: Jake Everitt

This leaflet has been funded with Heritage Lottery Funding through the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Enjoyed your visit?

Why not visit some of Horsham's other countryside sites?

Chesworth Farm (Horsham) for wildflower meadows and riverside walks for all the family.

Warnham Local Nature Reserve (Horsham) for wildlife walks with boardwalks and bird hides.

Southwater Country Park (Southwater) for watersports, adventure play area and picnics around the lake and visitor centre.

Opportunities for volunteers

We organise regular practical conservation tasks on parks and countryside sites in partnership with Horsham Green Gym. Full details at www.horshamgreengym.org.uk

Your Views Count

We actively encourage feedback from all our customers to help us improve our service. Comments, suggestions and complaints can be given to the contact details below.

For more details about the sites or wildlife recording please contact us below.

Contact Us

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Leechpool & Owlbeech Woods



Adder - J Everitt



www.horsham.gov.uk