



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

Updated June 2008

Marston Thrift
Photo by John Comont





Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

National lead organisation(s):
Forestry Commission

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire Woodland Forum

Native woodland is considered to exist where at least 80% of the canopy comprises species that are suited to the site and are within their natural range, taking into account both history and future climate change (Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2006). In England, native woodland consists of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW), non-ancient semi-natural woodland (>80% broadleaved), and broadleaved or restored plantations in ancient woodland (PAWS).

Scope

This action plan covers woodland matching the above definition, including: lowland beech and yew woodland (national priority habitat), scrub habitats and coniferous or exotic broadleaved plantations on ancient woodland sites. Scrub may be associated with either broadleaved or coniferous woodland. As a transitional stage towards woodland it has been included within this action plan but it is also addressed in other habitat action plans for a variety of grassland habitats where it may invade when management intensity is relaxed and where it can variously be regarded as a threat or a valuable diversification of habitat.

Excluded from this action plan are wet woodland (national priority habitat), wood-pasture and parkland (national priority habitat) and coniferous woodland *not* on ancient woodland sites. Wet woodland and wood-pasture and parkland are subject to their own specific action plans.

Hedgerows (national priority habitat) and hedgerow trees are an important resource which can help link woodlands. They will be addressed in a hedgerow action plan.





Current status

National status

The total area of native woodland in the UK is approximately 1,055,000 ha (400,000 ha of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW)).

The total area of existing native woodland in England is approximately 535,000 ha (area of broadleaved woodland given in National Inventory of Woodland and Trees). This comprises the following categories (Table 1):

Table 1 Area of woodland types in England

Native woodland (535,000 ha)	Ancient woodland (251,000 ha)	Ancient semi-natural woodland	200,000 ha
		Broadleaved or restored plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)	51,000 ha
	Modern (post 17 th century) woodland	Non-ancient semi-natural woodland (>80% broadleaved)	284,000 ha

In addition it is estimated that there are a further 90,000 ha of conifer or exotic broadleaved plantations on ancient woodland sites.

Local status

Woodland areas have been calculated and recalculated over the last 30 years and no two figures exactly match. Nevertheless the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees indicates a total area of woodland in Bedfordshire of 6629 ha (Table 2).

Table 2 Area of woodland types in Bedfordshire and Luton

Total woodland area 7656 ha (Including Woodland Trust estimated 1106 ha of PAWS split in unknown manner between broadleaved and conifer)	Broadleaved and mixed woodland including coppice with standards 5216 ha	Ancient semi-natural woodland (Woodland Trust) 1468 ha
		PAWS and modern (post 17 th century) broadleaved woodland 3748 ha
	Conifer woodland 1983 ha	PAWS and modern conifer woodland
	Open space 457 ha	

There are 1856 woods of 0.1 – 2 ha in size, with a total area of over 1000 ha. Table 3 presents the size class distribution of these small woodlands.





Table 3 Size class distribution of woodlands in Bedfordshire

Size class (ha)	Number of woods
1-10	342
10-20	58
20-50	41
50-100	14
100-500	12
>500	0
All woods	467

Between 1980 and 1998 woodland cover in the County increased by over 1300 ha. Post 1998 Forestry Commission annual grant aided tree planting has fluctuated widely with the average over the 9 year period being approximately 30 ha per year.

Many of Bedfordshire's ancient woodlands have some form of protection. Thirteen of the best sites such as Kings Wood Heath and Reach, Odell Great Wood and Marston Thrift have SSSI status. In 2006 94.1% of SSSI woodland in the county was in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. Over 150, mainly ancient, woodlands have been identified as County Wildlife Sites (CWS) with a total area estimated at 4182.3 ha. In 2006 of 996.4 ha monitored 87% of woodland CWS were in favourable condition.

Current factors affecting wet woodland

- Climatic changes resulting in some species of vegetation and associated fauna expanding range and populations whilst others may decline
- Atmospheric deposition of nitrogen resulting in nutrient enrichment and changes in ground flora with vigorous, ubiquitous species succeeding at the expense of species characteristic of systems with low nutrient availability
- Addition of nutrients and other chemicals from nearby intensively farmed land
- Lack of management on some large and many of the smaller sites brought about by changes in farming and forestry economics and the reduction in traditional markets for hardwood products
- Conversion to other land uses through clearance for localised developments including roads, housing and mineral extraction
- Large scale harvesting and other insensitive changes in management regimes, such as the removal of large old trees
- Unsympathetic management of areas bordering woods creating abrupt edges and causing pollution, drainage problems and other drainage
- Uncontrolled grazing and browsing of deer and rabbits and damage by grey squirrels leading to reduced structural diversity, reduced natural regeneration, destruction of coppice regrowth and reduced vigour and diversity of ground flora





- Small fragmented woods with small populations of key species very vulnerable to local extinction
- Surgery to ancient trees in the interests of public safety resulting in the loss of dead and fallen timber
- Cessation of pollarding in wood edge and wood pasture locations
- Lack of varied age structure amongst trees in any one location
- Owners' fear of loss of 'control' if outside parties become involved and owners may not be convinced of a clear benefit to them of appropriate management
- Many woods managed predominantly for pheasant shooting
- Active management inhibited by public pressure particularly when reinstated after no years of intervention
- Abuse of access including rubbish dumping, litter, excavations and damage to trees and fences particularly where woods are adjacent to urban areas and overuse of some woodlands by the public with a damaged ground flora
- Planting of trees and shrubs of unknown provenance and uncertain identity

Current action

Management, research and guidance

- A regional woodland strategy has been developed and is being implemented as part of a suite of regional development plans.
- Policies to protect and expand woodland area have been incorporated into the Regional Spatial Strategy and are gradually being incorporated into all Local Development Frameworks.
- Promotion of the new England Woodland Grant Scheme to both support woodland management and woodland expansion
- Collaboration and improved advisory services via the Bedfordshire Woodland Forum, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and other local trusts
- Major expansion of woodland in the Forest of Marston Vale area through innovative partnerships with government and the private sector and associated with growth in housing and employment developments
- Restoration of major areas of PAWS sites by the Forestry Commission, conservation organisations and private landowners
- Significant new woodland and scrub by cessation of crop production, for example at Strawberry Hill Farm, Knotting or invasion of other habitats such as chalk downland and heathland
- National consideration of woodfuel and other timber uses





Action plan objectives and targets

Objectives

To conserve and enhance all ancient semi-natural woodland

To encourage the creation of new woodland with due attention to local distinctiveness, landscape, history, soil types and existing habitats of biodiversity value and the objectives of the landowners

To conserve and enhance other existing woodland with due attention to local distinctiveness, landscape, history, soil types etc. and the objectives of landowners

To encourage the implementation of management strategies that include economic viability and improved biodiversity as key aims

To encourage broader public understanding and awareness of the value of woodlands to the community and the importance of the processes of management strategies that lead to the conservation and enhancement of woodland biodiversity

To develop and implement robust systems to monitor the condition of the woodland resource

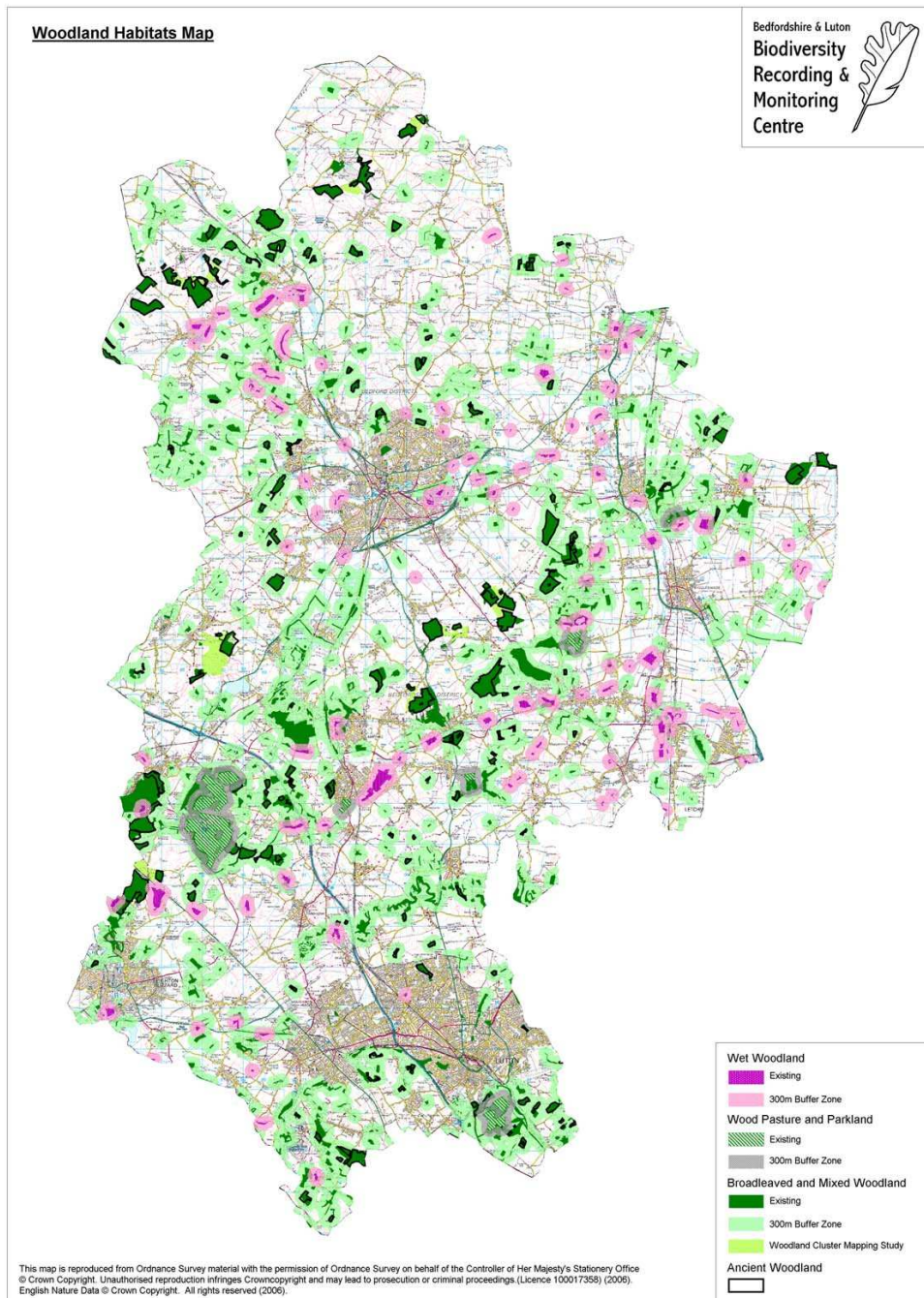
Targets

- A. Maintain the 1998 extent (5216 ha) and condition of native woodland in Bedfordshire and Luton (Fig. 1)
- B. Maintain at 1998 levels the extent of ancient semi-natural woodland and PAWS sites in Bedfordshire and Luton
- C. Achieve favourable or unfavourable recovering condition of all 160+ SSSI and CWS woodlands by 2020 (40% (64 woods) by 2010, 70% (112 woods) by 2015)
- D. Restore by 2010 75 ha of non-native PAWS to native woodland in Bedfordshire, and restore a further 250 ha by 2020
- E. Expand the 2006 area of native woodland by 150 ha by 2010, and 3000 ha by 2030
- F. Establish improved and managed public access to 10 woods by 2020





Figure 1 **Location of woodlands in Bedfordshire**



Proposed action

Abbreviations

BBC	Bedford Borough Council	GST	The Greensand Trust
BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	LBC	Luton Borough Council
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	MBDC	Mid Bedfordshire District Council
BRMC	Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre	NE	Natural England
CTT	Community Tree Trust	SBDC	South Bedfordshire District Council
FC	Forestry Commission	WT	Wildlife Trust
FMV	Forest of Maston Vale/Marston Vale Trust	WoT	Woodland Trust
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group		

Action	Implemented by
--------	----------------

Policy and legislation

1. By 2010 all Local Development Framework core strategies contain policies for the conservation of the extent and condition of native woodland	BCC, WT, BBC, LBC, MBDC, NE, SBDC, BRCC
---	---

Site safeguard and management

2. Work with owners with the aim of establishing sound management regimes in 5 woods in each of the 3 woodland clusters for restoration by 2010. At least one in each cluster to include PAWS restoration	FWAG
3. Stimulate establishment of 20 ha of new woodland in each of the 2 woodland clusters for expansion by 2010	FWAG, FC
4. Restore 60 ha of PAWS in Forestry Commission woodland by 2010 with a further 340 ha restored to semi-natural woodland by 2030	FC
5. Promote and encourage the establishment of two deer awareness groups by 2010	FWAG
6. Plant 95 ha of new woodland in the Forest of Marston Vale by 2010	FMV
7. Plant a further 3000 ha of woodland in the Forest of Marston Vale area by 2030	FMV



8. By 2010 200 ha of woodland in the Forest of Marston Vale area will achieve Forest Stewardship Council certification	FMV
--	-----

Advisory

9. Offer management advice to 100 woodland owners by 2010 and write management plans for 50% of their woodlands	FWAG, FC, BRCC, WT, GST
10. Conduct by 2010 6 workshops to help and advise woodland owners on issues to do with woodland management, creation and linkage	FWAG, BCC, WoT

Future research and monitoring

11. By 2008 refine and agree with the Woodland Forum a system for monitoring condition of CWS woodland	BCC, WT, GST
12. Secure funding and implement a monitoring programme at 15 sites each year for a five year period to assess condition to inform future management decisions	BCC, WT
13. Identify and map by 2010 owners of ancient woodland, PAWS and surrounding land	FWAG
14. Ensure that ancient woodlands, PAWS, woodland types, woodland opportunities, woodland condition etc. are digitised and accessible via the Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre	BCC, FWAG, BRMC

Communication and publicity

15. Create permissive access to five currently inaccessible woods by 2010	FWAG
16. Ensure the continued development of projects which aim to involve the public in woodland seed collection, growing on and planting of the resultant trees, shrubs and woodland flowers	BCC, FMV, CTT
17. Establish one Forest School initiative by 2010	WT, BRCC
18. Establish a 'working woodlands centre' at Maulden Wood by 2010	FC, GST





Monitoring the Action Plan

The Bedfordshire Woodland Forum will keep implementation of this plan under review and individuals or organisations signed up to specific actions will report via the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS).

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for lowland mixed deciduous woodland.

Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for woodland.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for wet woodland, wood pasture and parkland, hedgerows and traditional orchards.

Acknowledgements

The Bedfordshire Woodland Forum has compiled this action plan. Members of the Forum include: Forestry Commission, Marston Vale Trust, Woodland Trust, Bedfordshire County Council, Wildlife Trust, The Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Bedfordshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. For more information please contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator.

References

East of England Regional Strategy Group. 2003. Woodland for life: the regional woodland strategy for the East of England. East of England Regional Assembly and Forestry Commission, Santon Downham, Suffolk, 66 pp.

Forestry Commission. 2002. National inventory of woodland and trees England. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 68 pp.

Forestry Commission. 2002. National inventory of woodland and trees England: county report for Bedfordshire. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 59 pp.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee. 2006. Biodiversity Action Reporting System: Targets – lowland mixed deciduous woodland. [ONLINE] <http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/plans/targets.asp?HAP=%7B98130DB1%2D7FB2%2D414C%2DB0C0%2D495DDEA47184%7D&SAP=&M=1>. Accessed 2007 June 6.

