



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Wood-pasture and Parkland

Updated June 2008

Woburn Park
Photo by Chris Smallwood



**Bedfordshire
Woodland
Forum**



Wood-pasture and Parkland

National lead organisation(s):
Natural England

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire Woodland Forum

Working lowland wood pastures and parklands are those where grazing is still practised at a level that sustains the special features associated with open ground. They are products of historical land management systems and are characterised by vegetation structure rather than a particular plant community.

Current status

National status

This habitat type typically consists of large spreading trees, often pollarded, at various densities in a matrix of grassland, heathland and woodland. It is estimated that less than 10,000 to 20,000 ha of working wood pasture or parkland remains. A larger area of relict wood pasture and parkland exists either unmanaged or as scattered trees in arable or improved pasture. This habitat is believed to have been widespread in lowland landscapes through the medieval age and up to the early 19th century. Enclosure, conversion to forestry or intensive agriculture has led to a decline in quantity and quality of sites. The greatest extent of this habitat in Western Europe probably survives in southern England

Wood pastures and parklands contain large numbers of veteran trees. They can be internationally important for invertebrates of dead wood habitat such as the violet click beetle and for a range of fungi and lichens dependent on ancient trees.

Local status

At least 95 parkland sites can be identified in Bedfordshire but only remnants of most sites remain. A recent study suggested that the current resource is comprised of 21 sites (Leach 1997). The study included several parks that are probably not in fact good enough to be considered part of the resource, and neglected to include several that should be. Perhaps fewer than ten sites contain ancient trees. The two largest parks at Woburn and Woodbury at one time occupied perhaps 3200 ha. Luton Hoo, Wrest Park, Southill Park and Chicksands Priory probably all exceeded 200 ha. Woburn Park is the only example of working wood pasture with large herbivores grazing acid/neutral grassland beneath trees of mixed ages including some veterans. Cattle used to graze in Ampt Hill Park annually but were withdrawn from the site in the mid 1990s. Attempts to return grazing to Ampt Hill, Moggerhanger and Flitwick manor have not been successful but many sheep do now graze the parkland of the lodge at Sandy. The Lodge Sandy and Southill include Sites of Special Scientific Interest





(SSSI) and parts of others are County Wildlife Sites but this status is related to areas of habitat such as heath, wet woodland or ancient woodland rather than parkland as a habitat in its own right.

Current factors affecting wood pasture and parkland

- Conversion to other land uses through clearance for localised developments including roads, housing and golf courses
- Withdrawal of grazing, leading to rapid scrub encroachment, or intensive agricultural management
- Soil compaction and erosion from car parks and/or overgrazing
- Surgery to ancient trees in the interests of public safety resulting in the loss of dead and fallen timber, lack of expertise in tree management, removal of dead wood from parks
- Lack of young trees, which are needed to replace decaying trees
- Lack of specific protective designation for veteran trees
- Large-scale harvesting and other insensitive changes in management regimes, such as removal of large old trees
- Acid deposition, which can threaten individual trees and their associated fungi, lichens and bryophytes

Current action

Management, research and guidance

Many of the major trees in the remaining remnants of wood pasture and parkland are covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) administered by local authorities. TPO can afford protection from damage but if not flexibly applied can also inhibit proper management of woods.

Natural England has created WAPIS, the Wood-pasture and Parkland Information System: www.wapis.org.uk. This online database provides a single source of information on wood-pasture and parkland management and planning.





Action plan objectives and targets

Objective

Maintain and where possible restore Bedfordshire's wood pasture and parkland sites

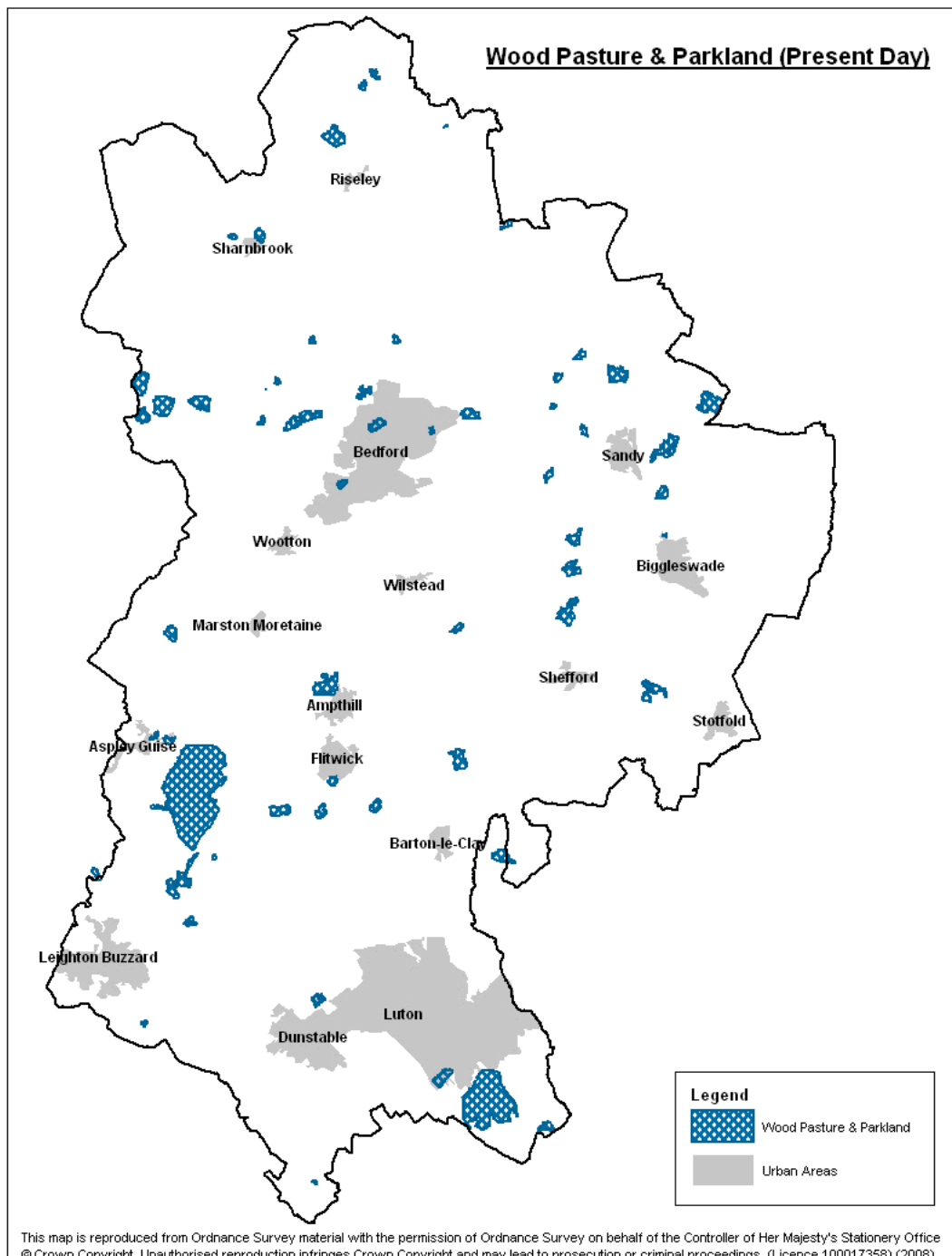
Targets

- A. Determine and then maintain the current baseline of parkland sites in Bedfordshire and Luton (Fig. 1)
- B. Achieve by 2010 favourable or recovering condition of 13 (65%) parkland sites in the county. Achieve favourable condition of all sites by 2030.
- C. Restore by 2020 two sites of relict or poorly managed wood pasture or parkland to a favourable ecological condition
- D. By 2015 begin creation of 40 ha of new wood-pasture and/or parkland





Fig. 1 Location of extant and relict parkland in Bedfordshire, based on the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record



Proposed action

Abbreviations

BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	LBAP	LBAP Coordinator
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	LBC	Luton Borough Council
FMV	Forest of Marston Vale	NE	Natural England
FC	Forestry Commission	WT	Wildlife Trust
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	WoT	Woodland Trust
GST	The Greensand Trust		

Action	Implemented by
Site safeguard and management	
1. Identify and review management of key wood-pasture and parkland sites by 2010	FWAG, WT, LBAP
2. By 2015 create 40 ha of wood-pasture at Holcot Wood and begin restoration of wood-pasture in Reynolds Wood (20 ha)	WoT
3. Continue restoration of Clapham Park Wood (15 ha) through continued grazing and progressive thinning of the tree blocks	BCC
4. Work with site owners to restore grazing at Woodbury, Hazells Hall, Moggerhanger Park	FWAG, WT
5. By 2010 enter two parks into HLS with both historic and biodiversity benefits	FWAG
6. Bring Stockwood Park into favourable condition by 20XX	LBC
7. Prepare by 2012 a parkland restoration scheme for Stockgrove Country Park	BCC, GST
Advisory	
8. Provide advice and support as needed to ensure continued positive management at Wrest Park, Flitwick Manor, Amphill Park and other important parkland sites in the county	WT, GST, FWAG



9. Conduct every 3 years a tree safety course for landowners, to increase their awareness of veteran tree safety and direct them to sources of advice	WoT? FWAG
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Future research and monitoring

10. By 2010 determine the condition and produce a digitised map of historic and current parkland sites in Bedfordshire and Luton	WT, BRMC
11. By 2010 conduct a desk-based survey of species and veteran trees in extant parkland sites in the county	BRMC
12. By 2010 develop a standard monitoring method for and record sheet for wood-pasture and parkland	WT, GST, BRCC
13. By 2020 conduct a full ecological baseline survey of all key parkland sites for which access permission can be obtained	WT, GST, BRCC
14. Monitor County Wildlife Site parklands every 5 years for loss and significant damage	WT
15. By 2015 initiate a programme of invertebrate sampling at key parkland sites in Bedfordshire and Luton	

Communication and publicity

16. By 2012 conduct a publicity campaign – perhaps tied to the publication of the Champion Trees of Bedfordshire book – on the importance of veteran trees and parkland	GST, LBAP
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Monitoring the Action Plan

The wood pasture and parkland action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for lowland wood pasture and parkland.

Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for wood pasture and parkland. This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton action plans, in particular those for woodland, lowland meadow, traditional orchards and bats.

Acknowledgements

This plan was compiled by Heather Webb under the guidance of the Bedfordshire Woodland Forum. For more information please contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator. Members of the Bedfordshire Woodland Forum include Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Forest of Marston Vale, Forestry Commission, The Greensand Trust, Natural England, Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough and the Woodland Trust.

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