SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Suffolk Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

1 Definition of habitat

This type includes all broadleaved stands and mixed broadleaved and coniferous stands which have more than 80% of the cover made up of broadleaved tree species. It also includes patches of scrub of above 0.25ha which form a continuous canopy. Areas of recently felled broadleaved woodland and other successional stages are also included in this type, along with other integral features of woodland such as glades and rides.

These woods have been managed historically as coppice, coppice with standards, wood-pasture, high forest and minimum intervention. They are often found as intricate mosaics with other woodland communities. The wood-pasture and parkland element is dealt with in another Habitat Action Plan, although some of the issues apply to this plan also.
Ancient semi-natural woodland contains some of the most important assemblages of wildlife of any habitat. A significant proportion of the Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland in the county falls into this category. Mixed deciduous woodland may be found on both Ancient Woodland and Recent sites. Some Recent Woodland sites may be of significant conservation importance.

Ancient Woodland – Land that has had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 and may be:
Ancient Semi-natural Woodland – Ancient Semi-natural Sites that have retained the original native tree and shrub cover that has not been planted, although it may have been managed by coppicing or felling and allowed to regenerate naturally.
Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) – Ancient woodland sites where the original tree cover has been felled and replaced by planting, usually with conifers and during the last century.

Recent Woodland - Land that has become woodland since 1600 and may be:
Recent Semi-natural Woodland – Recent Semi-natural Sites that have native tree and shrub cover that has not been planted. It may have been managed by coppicing or felling and allowed to regenerate naturally.
Planted Recent Woodland Sites – Recent woodland sites which have been planted, often with cricket bat willow, poplars, or with mixed woodlands.

This Habitat Action Plan covers woodland growing on a full range of soil conditions, from acidic to base-rich, and includes most of the semi-natural ancient woodland sites in Suffolk. However it does not include wet woodlands which have their own BAP plan. Most woodlands were traditionally managed coppice with standards, particularly those on moderately acid to base-rich soils. Coppicing ceased gradually with the discovery of coal as a fuel source as new materials were introduced and labour became more expensive.

Lowland Mixed Broadleaved Woodland has been classified by the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) (Rodwell 1991); in Suffolk the following stand types have been identified: W8 *Fraxinus excelsior - Acer campestre - Mercurialis perennis* woodland; W10 *Quercus robur - Pteridium aquilinum - Rubus fruticosus* woodland and lesser amounts of W16 *Quercus* spp. - *Betula* spp. - *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland. Locally, these may form a mosaic with other types, including patches of beech woodland, and small areas of wet woodland. Rides and edges may grade into grassland and scrub types. *Quercus robur* is most frequent although *Quercus petraea* may be locally abundant.

Woodlands that have developed on the Suffolk Boulder Clay are typically, dominated by ash-maple (the NVC W8 stands). Free-draining sandy soils are often defined by oak-birch woodland (W10).

2 Current status

UK SMART targets BAP review recent estimates of native woodland in England are:

Of the 535 000ha of native broadleaved woodland (given in National Inventory of Woodland and Trees NIWT) 200 000ha are ancient semi-natural woodland, 284 000ha recent semi-natural woodland (>80% broadleaved), and 51 000ha of planted broadleaved or restored (PAWS) sites.

The Forestry Commission's NIWT (2002) estimates lowland mixed deciduous woodland in Suffolk at 15,466 ha, of which 4,250 ha is on ancient woodland sites although this figure does not include stands where deciduous is mixed with conifer woodland.

Woodland in the East of England (hectares)			
Total woodland area	*Ancient semi-natural woodland*	*Plantation on ancient woodland sites*	*Recent Plantation*
113,300 ha	18800 ha	8200 ha	86300 ha

Source: Forestry Commission (2002)

The bulk of deforestation in Suffolk took place during the Neolithic times. The Domesday Book suggests that Suffolk as a whole was not a well-wooded county, it has been estimated that only 9% of the county was wooded at that time. Ancient woodland cover in Suffolk is now just over 1% of the land area. In more recent times there has been an increase in woodland area in Suffolk as large conifer forestry plantations and new broadleaf woodland have been developed.

3 Current factors affecting the species or habitats

- Under-management and neglect are major causes of loss and decline of woodland biodiversity. Cessation of traditional management practices (particularly coppicing) has caused a reduction in the structural and species diversity within many woods, particularly through the loss of temporary open space.
- Fragmentation of woodlands, reduced the ecological value of sites
- Intensification of management between woodland fragments reduces the ecological value of edge habitats and the connectivity between woodland blocks in the landscape.
- Overgrazing through expansion of deer populations is leading to change in woodland structure, impoverishment of ground flora and low rates of regeneration, especially in coppice. Over-grazing by rabbits and hares, and damage to trees by squirrels is also a problem in woodlands.
- Invasion by sycamore and other species that are generally not native to mixed deciduous woods, leads to changes in their composition. Although the perceived target composition of woodlands will change in response to climate change effects on woodlands.
- Dutch elm disease has changed the structure and composition of many woods since the early 1970s, and recurrences are still affecting them. Canopies opened by disease may be subject to higher rates of wind throw, and invasion of gaps by elder that can form climax scrub.
- Direct and indirect losses of woodland through development, and trunk road improvements have destroyed or caused deterioration of many woods, and continues to threaten others.
- Replacement of native trees with planted conifers occurred extensively in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of these woodlands are now being restored.
- Agricultural practices have led to simplification of landscapes and ecological isolation of woods. These include major losses of woodland in the past, removal of hedgerows, isolated trees and small patches of scrub in fields, deep drainage of adjacent arable fields, and cultivation hard up to woodland boundaries.

- Impact of air pollution and other environmental influences originating from distant sources. Locally sourced pollution from agriculture, industry and traffic – nutrient enrichment and chemical run-off or spray drift from adjoining agriculture – can impact on soil conditions, flora and fauna.
- Management of woodlands for pheasant rearing and shooting, and other game species can sometimes conflict with the biodiversity value of woodlands, however there is often compatibility between game management and managing the biodiversity of woodland where management is undertaken well.
- Climate change will result in changes to vegetation composition of woodland and the other species that use them.
- Economic factors have caused a decline in woodland management; competition from imported woodland products, poor quality timber and lack of knowledge of local hardwood markets has all contributed.

4 Current action

- National forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved woodland for conversion to other land uses.
- Felling licences from the Forestry Commission (FC) are normally required for tree felling.
- Tree Preservation Orders can be applied to individual trees, or in rare cases, cluster of trees or woodland by the Local Authority.
- Further protection may be afforded by presence of species designated under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). This act covers species such as bats and dormice.
- The Regional Woodland Strategy recognises the importance of semi-natural woodland and contains a number of specific actions, including targeting restoration and expansion activity to specific cluster areas. This information can be downloaded from: www.woodlandforlife.net
- Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) On biodiversity and geological conservation makes specific recommendations on the protection of woodlands when considering planning applications.
- PPS 9 makes specific recommendations to aim for landscape scale management and refers to the use of hedgerows etc to link areas, this is highly relevant to woodland habitats.
- Around 40% of the Ancient Woodland Sites in Suffolk are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Beardall & Casey, 1995). One lowland mixed deciduous woodland in Suffolk includes habitats identified under Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive, old acidophilous oakwoods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains.
- There are around 4950 ha mixed deciduous woodlands recognised as County Wildlife Sites in Suffolk. This designation protects from development but not from neglect, agricultural improvement or mis-management.
- Significant areas of Suffolk are included within agri-environmental schemes that target the isolation, fragmentation and neglect of natural habitats in the county.

- Significant areas of Suffolk woodlands are currently within forestry schemes which will aim to address isolation, neglect and deer browsing issues.

5 Targets

The targets established in this plan aim to maintain, restore and where possible expand the extent of lowland mixed native broadleaf woodland:

- Maintain the 2007 current extent and distribution of mixed deciduous woodland.
- Restore 7 hectares of mixed deciduous woodland on PAWS sites by 2010, 17 by 2015 and 27 by 2020.
- Achieve favourable condition or favourable recovering of 95% of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest mixed deciduous woodlands by 2010.
- Link existing woodlands by expansion or joining to other biodiversity habitat wherever possible and where this will not be detrimental to other habitats of biodiversity value.

6 Actions

Action (apply SMART approach and include locations where relevant).	**Achieve by date**	**Delivery partners (identify lead and support partners)**
Policy & Legislation		
Ensure regional and local strategies make provision for lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Local Authorities (LA) should be encouraged to prepare Tree & Woodland Supplementary Planning Guidance. This will require consultation and adoption to carry weight.	2008	**Mid Suffolk**, LAs, SLOG, FC, SCC, NT and SWT.
Safeguard deciduous woodland from direct and indirect impact of development though development control processes (500m from Ancient Woodland). Ensure no loss of deciduous woodland to development except in cases of over-riding public need and in such cases losses should be compensated.	2007 and annually	**Mid Suffolk**, LAs, SCC, SWT, NE
Woodlands are threatened by fragmentation and permitted development, esnure that robust woodland policies are identified in LDF policies	2007 and annually	**Mid Suffolk**, LAs, SCC, SWT, NE
Site safeguard and management		
Promote management solutions to reduce the impact of arable farming on woodland	2007 and	**NE**, FWAG, SWT, NT, landowners/managers.

edges through agri-environrment schemes	annually	
Ensure that 95% of SSSIs are in a favourable and/or recovering condition by 2010.	2010	**NE,** Landowners/managers, FC & DI
Reduce damage by deer and other pests through co-ordinated management programmes.	2007 and annually	**DI**, NE, FC, AWP, FWAG, SWT, NT, & Landowners/managers
Implement relevant legally protected species and woodland BAP species plans through the integration of management requirements and advice.	2007 and annually	**FC,** NE, LAs, SCC, FWAG, SWT,Suffolk Bat Group, PTES, NT.
Promote the use of long term aims in management plans (25yr +) by woodland owners.	2007 and annually	**FC**, FWAG, NT
Ensure woodland in Local Authority ownership is FSC certified and all woodlands have management plans that take account of local biodiversity.	2008 and annually	**SCC**, LAs, FC.
Create at least three new woodland LNRs by 2010.	2010	**LAs**, SCC, NE, Greenlight Trust.
Create 200 ha of new mixed deciduous woodlands by 2010 use the ecological network maps and woodland mapping work (SBRC) to target creation.	2010	**LAs**, GLT, FC, SCC, WT, Landowners, NE
Research and monitoring		
Set up recording system to monitor progress of restoration on private PAWS sites.	2007	**FC**, NE, FC, LAs, SCC, SWT.
Update map of all ancient semi-natural woodland in Suffolk and prioritise areas for restoring with native species.	2007	**SBRC,** FC, LAs, SCC, NE, NT, SWT.
Establish extent and condition of lowland mixed broadleaf woodland (including PAWS) in Suffolk to feed into State of Nature Report for Suffolk.	2007	**SBRC**, FC, NE,
Action	**Achieve by date**	**Delivery partners**
Hold 3 woodland working group meetings each year with Suffolk Lowland Mixed	2007 and annually	**SCC,** FC, LAs, SWT, NE NT.

Deciduous Woodland on each agenda.		
Advisory		
Hold Woodland HAP events at woodland sites where management techniques and species monitoring are undertaken and examples of good practice can be demonstrated to woodland owners.	2007 and annually	**AWP**, FC, NE, SCC, LAs, GLT, SWT, NT, landowners/managers.
Communications and publicity		
Produce an annual Woodland Working Group report that's formatted to provide appropriate monitoring information for BARS.	2007 and annually	**SCC**, FC, LAs, SWT, NE.
Consolidate, refresh and develop literature to fill any significant gaps in advisory materials.	2007	**SCC**, FC, LAs, SWT, NE.
Promote the creation of at least three new woodland LNRs by 2010.	2010	**LAs**, GLT, SCC**.**
Raise awareness amongst planners of the value of BAP woodland habitats – engage with Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership Planning sub-group to achieve.	2007	**Mid Suffolk**, LAs, SCC, SWT, NE
Increase public understanding and awareness of the value of deciduous woodlands by hosting woodland management events. Aim to hold three events each year.	2007 and annually	**SCC**, FC, NE, AWP, DI, LAs, FWAG, NT, GLT.

Objectives currently not achievable by the plan partners:

Expand Ancient Woodland inventory to include those sites between 1-2 ha. This action is currently unachievable by the group.

The following organisations have written this plan and committed to delivering the actions:

Forestry Commission Simon Leatherdale, Rachel Riley and Trevor Wright
Natural England Patrick Robinson
Deer Initiative David Hooton
Suffolk Biological Records Centre Martin Sanford
National Trust Stuart Warrington
Mid Suffolk District Council David Mitchell
Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership officer Mary Norden
Gary Battell Anglia Woodfuel Project

Other consultees:
Suffolk Wildlife Trust Dorothy Casey
Green Light Trust Grenville Clarke
People Trust for Endangered Species
FWAG Tim Schofield
DCs (all except Mid Suffolk)
Suffolk Landscape Officers Group via Peter Holborn
Suffolk County Council Landscape Officer Phil Watson
County Archaeologists Keith Wade and Edward Martin
Local Authorities

References:

Beardall C and Casey D (1995) Suffolk's Changing Countryside, Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Rodwell J S (1991) British Plant Communities Volume 1 Woodlands and Scrub, Cambridge Press.

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