



Woodlands

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Associated Species Action Plans:

- Bluebell
- Dormouse



What is a Woodland

In Cheshire, woodland includes the following BAP habitats:

- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Wet woodland
- Upland oakwood

Some woodlands are 'ancient' which have persisted since the Middle Ages without ever being cleared for uses other than wood or timber production. 1600AD is an indicator because it marks the time when map evidence became more widespread and planting of new woodlands became more frequent. Ancient woodlands have had a long time to acquire species and form stable floral and faunal communities and their soils have remained largely undisturbed. Some are classified as ancient semi-natural woodlands (ASNW) if they do not obviously originate from planting and if the habitat reflects what would be expected to occur naturally on the site with the distribution of species generally reflecting the natural variations in site and soil. Where trees are obviously the result of more recent planting, frequently of non native species, but are on ancient woodland sites they are classified as plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) and with the right management they could re-develop ASNW characteristics.

Secondary woodlands have regrown on abandoned or neglected ground previously used for



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agriculture, grazing or development. Some secondary woodlands have been planted, but the majority have arisen through the natural processes of colonisation and succession. Secondary woodlands can have a rich flora and fauna but many are without the specialist woodland plants and animals characteristic of ancient woodland. Secondary woodlands can develop a diverse flora and fauna with time. They can also directly link, or act as a stepping stone between, previously isolated areas of ASNW. Where they are adjacent to ASNW, they can also buffer the ancient woodland from the negative impacts of intensive agriculture (fertiliser and pesticide spray drift) or built developments (road run-off, noise and light pollution).

Cheshire is one of the least wooded counties in the country with only 4.4% of land area covered. The main areas of ASNW in Cheshire are Peckforton, Dutton and Frodsham.

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

This habitat includes woodland growing on a full range of soil conditions, from very acidic to base-rich. These woodlands occur largely within enclosed landscapes, usually on sites with well-defined boundaries, at relatively low altitudes, although altitude is not a defining feature. Some are ancient woodlands which tend to be less than 20ha. Often there is evidence of past coppicing, particularly on moderately acid to base-rich soils. On very acid sands the type maybe represented by former wood-pastures of oak and birch.

Wet woodland

Wet woodland occurs on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils. Alder, birch and willows are usually the predominant tree species, but sometimes ash, oak, pine and beech occur on the drier riparian areas. This habitat is found on floodplains, on successional habitats of fens, mires and bogs, along streams, along hill-side flushes, and in peaty hollows. These woodlands occur on a range of soil types including nutrient rich mineral and nutrient-poor organic soil. The boundaries with dryer woodland can be sharp or gradual and may change with time through succession, depending on the hydrological conditions and the treatment of the wood and it's surrounding land. Therefore wet woodlands frequently occur in mosaic with other key woodland habitat types and with open habitats such as fens. Management of individual sites needs to consider the requirements of both habitats.

Wet woodlands may have developed through natural succession on open wetland (sometimes following management cessation) and are influenced little by direct forestry treatments. Notable concentrations of wet woodland on fens occurs in Cheshire.

Wet woodland tends to be managed rather than created in Cheshire. It's ability to expand is limited due to other peatland habitats such as fen, lowland raised bog and blanket bog. There tends to be more opportunity for wet woodland along river corridors such as the River Dane and the River Bollin.



Upland Oakwood

Upland oakwoods are characterised by a predominance of oak (mostly sessile, but locally pedunculate) and birch in the canopy, with varying amounts of holly, rowan and hazel in the understory. Plants found in the ground layer vary according to the underlying soil type and degree of grazing, from bluebell-bramble-fern dominated to grass and bracken dominated to moss dominated communities. Most oakwoods also contain areas of more alkaline soils, often along streams or towards the base of slopes where much richer communities occur, with ash and elm in the canopy, more hazel in the understory and ground plants such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Enchanters nightshade *Circaea lutetina* and tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Also small alder stands may occur together with peaty hollows covered by *Sphagnum* spp. These habitats are an important part of the upland oakwood system.

Upland oakwoods are limited to the Pennine fringe and uniquely the Peckforton Ridge. Many of them will be ancient woodlands and with the exception of the Peckforton Ridge, the majority will be clough woodlands.

Threats

- Insufficient knowledge of the location and extent of woodland sites can lead to sites being lost to development or converted to agricultural uses.
 - * Planning decisions have often been made without considering the potential impacts on adjacent woodland sites. Until recently 'buffer zones' were not encouraged between developments and woodlands, leading to damage to the woodland edge and the tree roots that radiate for a considerable distance.
 - * Allowing fragmentation to occur can have a detrimental effect and does not allow for natural species distribution and continuity of the habitat.
 - * Senescence of woodland sites, although natural, can cause a decline in site 'quality', especially in small areas where senescent trees make up a large percentage of overall tree cover, especially if regeneration is restricted under current management regimes.
 - * Woodland sites maybe inappropriately managed; many have been felled and replanted with non-native conifer species, for commercial timber production.
 - * Intentional damage and vandalism.
 - * Activities such as fly tipping can pose a major threat to woodlands, especially of harmful materials or garden refuse. Garden waste can lead to the introduction of non-native plants into sensitive woodland areas, This activity often occurs at sites adjacent to roads and buildings.
 - * Woodlands frequently used by people can sometimes suffer damage as a result of their activities, whether intentional or not.
 - * Lack of deer management on woodland sites.
 - * Invasive non-native species such as *Rhododendron ponticum* and *Phytophthora* species.
 - * Adjacent agricultural land-use i.e. nitrogen run-off and herbicide spray-drift.
 - * Access levels i.e. soil compaction, health and safety induced management of 'conservation value' trees,



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dog faeces etc.

* Climate change i.e. intensity of weather events - water-logging, drought and high winds

How are we helping to conserve woodlands in the Cheshire region?

- * Providing general support and advice about grant aid and other sources of practical help for landowners seeking to manage woodlands.
- * Continue the development and support of tree nurseries of local origin stock, such as those at Marbury Country Park and Norley.
- * Promoting and advising on the purchase of appropriate land for creating extensions and links with existing woodland sites.
- * Support for local volunteer groups managing woodlands and supporting events and activities, such as National Tree Week and BTCV Woodland Action Week.
- * Providing training days and talks to interested landowners and groups, to raise awareness of woodlands and the need for its conservation and management.
- * Biosecurity measures being implemented to stop the spread of invasive non-native species.

Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve woodland in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about woodlands

UK BAP for upland Oakwood - www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=1

UK BAP for Wet Woodland - www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=4

Woodland Trust 5 year Ancient Tree Hunt - www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk

Contact details

LBAP Chair: Ian Aldred,
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National Lead Partners: Forestry Commission



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References and Glossary^c

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