



WOODLAND

Introduction

This action plan covers all woodlands over 0.5 hectares in extent found in Bristol. This includes newly planted, secondary and ancient woodland, whether broad-leaved or coniferous (although in practice the extent of the latter is very small). The woodlands within Ashton Court, which are outside Bristol but managed by the city council, are also covered.

Bristol contains three UK priority woodland habitat types – lowland mixed deciduous woodland, lowland beech and yew woodland and wet woodland – and some woodlands have characteristics of a fourth type – upland mixed ashwood. The woods in Ashton Court include an important example of lowland wood-pasture and parkland. Bristol woodlands are home to three UK BAP priority species – Killarney fern, bullfinch and song thrush.

Bristol contains large areas of woodland, mostly on ridges and valley sides where the topography has precluded development and, historically, clearance for agriculture. They provide a resource that is extremely important in amenity and landscape, as well as ecological terms.

Bristol City Council owns and manages the majority of woodlands in the city.

Current Status

The current extent, distribution and quality of woodlands in Bristol are well understood. The Avon Gorge woodlands are included within the Avon Gorge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), although only Cook's Folly Wood is designated specifically for its woodland interest. Parts of Ashton Court, including Clarkencombe Wood, are an SSSI (for dead wood invertebrates associated with veteran trees). Virtually all other woodlands in Bristol are Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI).

Most woodlands in Bristol grow on shallow soils over Carboniferous limestone. In many woodlands the canopy is generally dominated by ash and sycamore, which tends to be even aged. Other widespread tree species include wych elm, pedunculate oak and field maple. In many woods the understorey is rather sparse due to a lack of active management. Where present, however, the understorey is usually dominated by hazel, or by hawthorn in younger woods.

Regeneration – like the canopy – is usually dominated by ash and sycamore. Where a scrubby edge to woodland has developed it is often diverse, with species such as wild privet and purging buckthorn. The ground flora is generally dominated by either ivy or dog's mercury, but other species including ramsons, bluebell and wood anemone may be locally abundant. Important examples of these woodland types are found at Blaise Castle, where there are significant stands of both yew and beech, and at Cook's Folly Wood, where small-leaved lime is present. Both sites have a diverse ground flora. A small wood by the River Avon at Shirehampton supports two nationally rare whitebeam species.

The valleys of the Rivers Frome and Avon in eastern Bristol have important woodlands on acid soils derived from sandstone. These woods are generally dominated by oak species, with significant quantities of wild cherry and silver birch. Other trees present include wild service tree and small-leaved lime. As with other woods, the understorey is usually sparse, but holly can be frequent and locally dominant. Ivy can dominate the ground flora also, but great wood-rush and wood spurge are locally frequent.

Wet woodland is generally present in small pockets only, within woodland of other types and often along stream sides. Most are dominated by thickets of willow species, with alder occurring less frequently. The ground flora is often dominated by tall herbs such as comfrey, great willowherb and the introduced Himalayan balsam, for example at Oldbury Court.

Widespread bird species in Bristol's woods include great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker, sparrowhawk, treecreeper and chiffchaff. Purple hairstreak butterfly is present in several woods, and white-letter hairstreak at rather fewer.

Lack of management in many woods has led to dense growth of saplings and absence of a shrubby understorey, which limits value for groups such as birds. Spread of non-native plants, especially evergreen species such as holm oak and laurel, has damaged the ground flora locally and there are specific threats, such as hybrid bluebell out-competing native bluebell. Some non-native plants, however, either do not pose a significant threat or are too widespread for control to be practical. An example of the latter class of plants is sycamore, which should now be accepted as an integral part of Bristol's woodland vegetation.

Several woodlands have good public access provision, but elsewhere there is inadequate access, and unplanned access can damage ground flora and other interests.



Photography: Bluebells: BLRP. Greater spotted woodpecker: Darin Smith

Some management work has been carried out, much of it funded by Woodland Grant Schemes and supported by the Forest of Avon. This has included measures to diversify structure and to control non-natives. Amenity and educational value has been enhanced by measures to regulate access and by running 'Wood Schools'.

However, many woodlands are currently in unfavourable conservation status due to problems such as those highlighted above. A more extensive management programme should aim to bring these woods into favourable status, in particular so that a dense under-storey is favoured where appropriate, invasive species are controlled where they are damaging to the wood's interest, features of special interest are protected and public access is facilitated where appropriate: eg it does not lead to damage to ground flora.

Many have fallen into neglect because of a lack of resources for management. The potential for use of wood products – eg for biomass energy production – should be investigated as a way to encourage positive management of woodlands.

Current Threats

- | Lack of structural diversity
- | Pressure to remove standing dead wood for health and safety reasons
- | Development pressures on adjacent land
- | Lack of connectivity
- | Invasion by non-native species such as Spanish bluebell and winter heliotrope
- | Trampling of ground flora and other damage
- | Lack of management leading to deterioration of habitat and deterrent to public access

Photography: Badock's wood, wild garlic: Friends of Badock's Wood/BCC



Objective 1: Maintain and enhance the quality and extent of the existing resource

Target:

- Ensure that all of Bristol woodlands are in favourable conservation management by 2020.
- Seek to ensure that damage to woodland does not occur as a consequence of development, either directly or indirectly
- Develop sustainable woodland management through production and use of wood products

Objective 2: Enhance and create opportunities for plants and animals to move between woodlands

Target:

- Strengthen strategic woodland corridors through planting

Objective 3: Increase awareness of the special interest of Bristol's woodlands

Target:

- Make interpretive material available to visitors to four woodlands by 2012
- Publicise Bristol's woodlands via the Council website
- Improve access to woodland sites
- Run two annual events aimed at increasing appreciation of Bristol's woodlands

WOODLAND HABITAT ACTIONS	OBJECTIVE	DATE	IMPLEMENTORS
Identify priority sites to bring into favourable conservation status and implement improvement programme	1	2010 – ongoing	BCC
Protect integrity of woodland habitat through planning system and ensure ecological input into planning applications within 500m of woodland	1	2008 – 2013	BCC, FC
Ensure that an adequate buffer zone is retained between woodland and any new development	1	2008 – 2013	BCC
Investigate potential for sustainable management of woodland habitat through production of wood products and implement as appropriate	1	2010 – ongoing	BCC

CHAPTER 5

WOODLAND

WOODLAND HABITAT ACTIONS	OBJECTIVE	DATE	IMPLEMENTORS
Identify strategic woodland corridors and opportunities to strengthen by planting; consider use of available areas of public open space and street trees, using species with value for wildlife	2	2011 – 2013	BCC, FoA
Ensure that developments in strategic corridors include landscaping that helps strengthen links between woodlands, using targeted planting	2	2008 – 2012	BCC
Provide interpretive material at four woodlands	3	2009 – 2012	BCC, FoA
Provide material publicising Bristol's woods on Council website	3	2009	BCC
Expand programme of Wood Schools	3	2009 – 2013	FoA
Run two public events per year to increase people's appreciation of Bristol's woodlands	3	2009 – 2013	BCC, FoA, AWT
Identify woodlands with poor access and develop programme to improve access where appropriate	3	2009 – 2013	BCC, FoA

Photography: Ashton Court Estate: FOA: Bluebell: Darin Smith

