Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Phase 1: 2009 – 2014

HAP 6: Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland

Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland Action Plan

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Description

1.1 Lowland wood-pastures and parkland are the products of historic land management systems, and represent a vegetation structure rather than being a particular plant community. Typically this structure consists of large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities, in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland and/or woodland floras.

1.2 Large open-grown or veteran trees - often hundreds of years old and varying in their size and density - would have been traditionally pollarded on a regular cycle to create an annual harvest and endless wood supply for use on the farm. These pollards, as they are often termed, are significant features in their own right. It is believed that the UK has a higher density of pollards than most other European countries.

1.3 Traditionally livestock would graze between these scattered pollards and/or stands of trees in open-grassy areas or heathland, creating areas of distinctive wood-pasture.

1.4 In terms of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) of plant communities lowland wood-pastures and parkland are most commonly associated with;

- W10 *Quercus robur - Pteridium aquilinum - Rubus fruticosus* woodland
- W14 *Fagus sylvatica - Rubus fruticosus* woodland
- W15 *Fagus sylvatica - Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland
- W16 *Quercus* spp. - *Betula* spp.- *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland
- In addition the more open wood-pastures and parkland may include various scrub, heathland, improved and unimproved grassland NVC communities.

1.5 The priority for this type of habitat is to conserve the mature and ancient trees and the associated dead-wood niches that support the rare saproxylic fauna which includes some of the most threatened British invertebrates, including BAP species such as, the stag beetle *Lucanus cervus* and the heart moth *Dicycla oohich*.

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National status

2.1 There are no reliable statistics on the extent of the overall resource, or on historical and current rates of loss or degradation of this type of habitat. The figure of 10-20,000 ha 'currently in a working condition' given in the 'habitat statement' of the UK Biodiversity Steering Group report is the current best estimate.

Local status

3.1 The south east of England has one of the highest proportions of wood pasture and veteran trees in Western Europe.

3.3 The Kent Habitat Survey 2003 estimates an area of 651 ha lowland wood pasture and parkland in the Maidstone Borough.

3.3 Of the 1250 ha of wood pasture and parkland in the Borough none is notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, 31% (392 ha) is found within Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). This means that in total 31% of this resource in borough is currently designated.

3.4 Maidstone Borough Council owns 124 ha of wood pasture and parkland identified in the Kent Habitat Survey 2003, which is located within Mote Park.

3.5 Currently 106 ha of lowland wood pasture and parkland in Maidstone identified within Kent County Council Parkland Inventory (2008) and Kent Habitat Survey (2003) is in a favourable condition.

Factors causing decline in biodiversity

4.1 Lack of appropriate and inappropriate management (e.g. pollarding and grazing) has led to a decline in the quality of traditional wood-pasture.

4.2 Lack of people trained in pollarding management.

4.3 Lack of younger trees to replace the veteran trees as they die.

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4.4 Damage to the trees and roots of veteran trees from soil being eroded and compacted by livestock, mowing machinery, people and cars.

4.5 The spread of non-native plant species (e.g. rhododendron and sycamore) meaning that veteran trees have to compete for light to survive.

4.6 Conversely, letting in too much light too quickly to pollards that have previously been heavily shaded can stress the trees. All changes in management should be undertaken relatively slowly to allow veteran trees sufficient time to adjust.

4.7 Pollution caused by the drift of fertiliser and herbicide has a detrimental effect on soils and all animals and plants that depend on these for their survival.

4.8 Reseeding and deep ploughing carried out to improve the quality of pasture can damage a tree's roots while also removing existing grassland and heathland.

4.9 Over-tidiness, for example, where unsafe trees are felled completely rather than made safe.

4.10 New developments can lead to the loss of valued wood-pasture (parkland sites are often classified as previously developed sites ancillary to a house and can thus be very vulnerable to housing development).

Current national action

5.1 The Forestry Commission supports the conservation of wood-pasture through the England Woodland Grant Scheme.

Funding resources

6.1 The Environmental Stewardship Scheme provides funding the maintenance, restoration and creation of woodland.

6.2 Landfill operators such as SITA, Biffa and Wren often have awards available to enhance biodiversity.

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National plan objectives and actions

7.1 The UK-BAP Wood Pasture and Parkland Habitat action plan objectives and targets cover habitat conservation, restoration and expansion. The action plan aims to maintain the current extent and distribution of Wood Pasture and Parkland (UK: 10,000-20,000 ha).

7.2 Initiate in areas where examples of derelict Wood Pasture and Parkland occur a programme to restore 65% to favourable ecological condition by 2015.

7.3 By 2020 initiate the re-stocking and expansion of 21% of Wood-pasture or Parkland, in appropriate areas, to help reverse fragmentation and reduce the generation gap between veteran trees.

Local Plan objectives and actions

8.1 The Kent LBAP parkland and wood pasture habitat action plan objectives and targets concentrate on the improvement of designated sites and creation of the habitat. Within SSSIs it seeks wherever feasible, favourable status for 95% of wood pasture and parkland by 2010 and 100% of SSSIs by 2020. Within LWS the plan seeks favourable status for 25% of this habitat by 2020, increasing to 50% by 2026. The plan also targets the restoration and expansion of 28 sites by 2026.

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Maidstone's objectives

9.1 Maidstone's objectives are;

1. **Maintain the current area of wood-pasture in Maidstone.**
2. **Identify priority areas and increase the area of this habitat through the restoration and expansion of key sites.**
3. **Restore light grazing to at least one wood pasture site.**

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Objectives and targets

Objective 1 & 3: Maintain the current area of wood-pasture in Maidstone

Target 1: Maintain 1250 ha by 2026.

WPP	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
1.	Assess favourably TPO applications for veteran trees of particular importance in wood-pasture and parkland.	2009	2026		
2.	Target Environmental Stewardship to restore expand and enhance areas of wood pasture & parkland.	2009	2026	NE FC	
3.	Ensure the management of the parkland areas within Mote Park, develop a tree planting plan for Mote Park. Maintaining dead wood in certain areas and examine the introduction of grazing animals.	2009	2026	KWT	Mote Park Lottery Bid – Conservation Plan with recommendations from KWT. If not successful with bid seek appropriate funding for management via the English Woodland Grant Scheme or alternative funding.
4.	Ensure all high quality wood pasture and parkland sites are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).	2009	2026	ALL	
5.	Restore light grazing to at least one wood pasture site.	2010	2014		

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Objectives and targets

Objective 2 & 3: Identify priority areas for increasing the area of this habitat through the restoration of key sites

Target 2: Restore by restocking and expanding 1 site of lowland wood-pasture and parkland by 2014 and a further 1 site by 2020 (Total: 2 sites by 2026)

WPP	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
6.	Promote the planting of new trees and management of maiden trees within existing wood pasture sites through the England Woodland Grant	2009	2026	FC	
7.	Restore, re-stock and appropriately manage areas of parkland and wood pasture in Mote Park (including sympathetic grassland management).	2009	2026		

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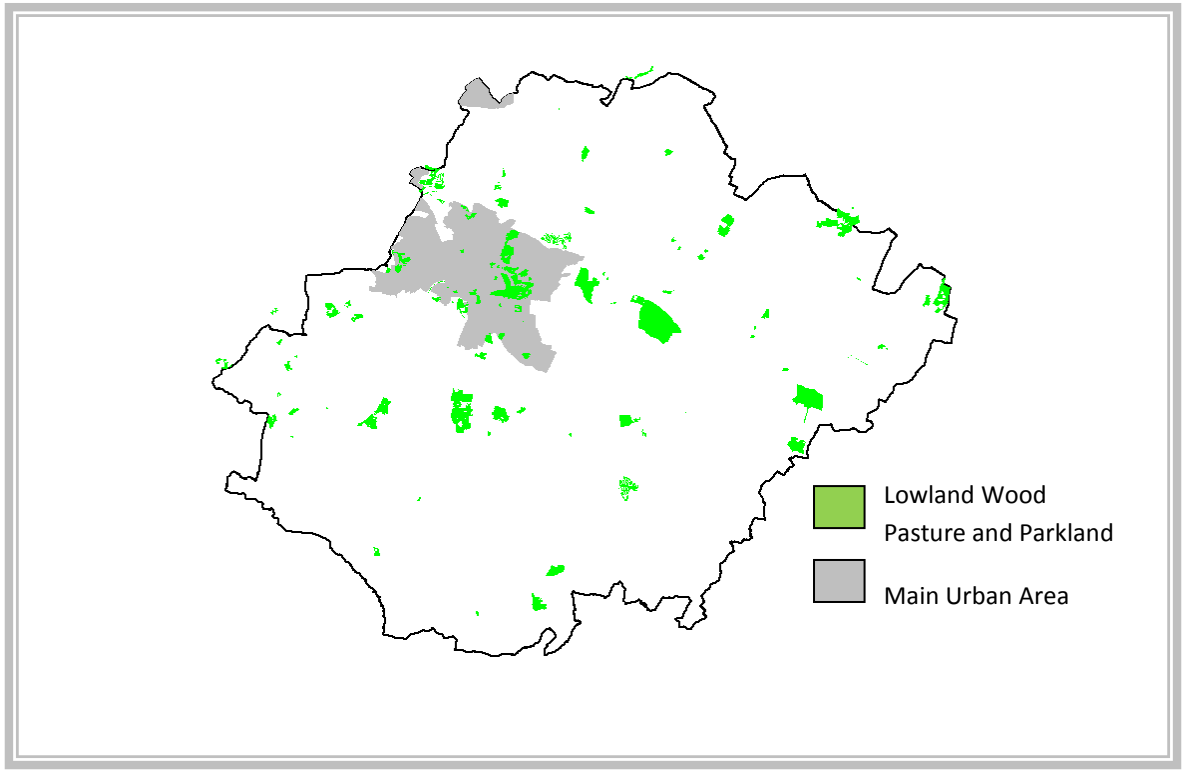
Lowland wood pasture and parkland distribution

10.1 The distribution of wood pasture and parkland can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1 Distribution of Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland in Maidstone Borough



Data Source: Kent Habitat Survey 2003 and Kent County Council Woodland Inventory (2008)