# Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Phase 1: 2009 – 2014

## HAP 7: Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

# Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Action Plan

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## Description

1.1 Lowland mixed deciduous woodland includes woodland growing on the full range of soil conditions, from very acidic to base-rich soil and for the purpose of this action plan does not include woodland classified as Wood-Pasture and Parkland, Wet Woodland and Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland habitat.

1.2 The woods tend to be small, less than 20 ha.

1.3 It is generally agreed that the most important woodlands for wildlife are those on what are termed Ancient Woodland Sites, or primary woodland. These woods are believed to have been in existence since at least AD1600. However, there are many biodiversity-rich woodland which are not ancient.

1.4 In terms of the National Vegetation Classification the bulk of this type falls into W8 (mainly sub-communities A to C in ancient or recent woods; in the lowlands W8d mostly occurs in secondary woodland) and W10 (sub-communities A to D) with lesser amounts of W16 (mainly W16a). Locally, it may form a mosaic with other types, including patches of beech woodland, small wet areas, and types more commonly found in western Britain. Rides and edges may grade into grassland and scrub types.

Main NVC types (not exhaustive):

W8 *Fraxinus excelsior - Acer campestre - Mercurialis perennis* woodland
(a) *Primula vulgaris - Glechoma hederacea* sub-community
(b) *Anemone nemorosa* sub-community
(c) *Deschampsia cespitosa* sub-community.
(d) *Hedera helix* sub-community.

W10 *Quercus robur - Pteridium aquilinum - Rubus fruticosus* woodland
(a) Typical sub-community
(b) *Anemone nemorosa* sub-community
(c) *Hedera helix* sub-community
(d) *Holcus lanatus* sub-community

W16 *Quercus* spp. - *Betula* spp. - *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland

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(a) *Quercus robur* sub-community

The canopy variations as represented by the Stand Type system include most of the field

(b) maple (2), lime (4, 5), suckering elm (10) and hornbeam (9) Stand Groups, and substantial
(c) proportions of the wych elm (1), ash (3) and oak (6) Stand Groups. More rarely, birch
(d) (12) and some alder stands (7C) may also occur. These may require separate management treatments.

Main Stand Types (not exhaustive):

1B Wet ash-wych elm woods
2A Wet ash-maple woods
2B Ash-maple woods on light soils
2C Dry ash-maple woods
3A Acid pedunculate oak-hazel-ash woods
3B Southern calcareous hazel-ash woods
4A Acid birch-ash-lime woods
4B Maple-ash-lime woods
5A Acid pedunculate oak-lime woods
5B Acid sessile oak-lime woods
6C Lowland sessile oak woods
6D Lowland pedunculate oak woods
7C Plateau alder woods
9A Pedunculate oak-hornbeam woods
9B Sessile oak-hornbeam woods
10 Suckering elm woodland

1.5 Lowland mixed deciduous woodland is among the richest habitats for wildlife in the lowlands and in many eastern counties, such as Kent, forms the main reservoir of semi-natural habitat in the agricultural matrix. The type includes the best examples of bluebell woods for which the UK has particular responsibility. The habitat is important for birds such as turtle dove, nightjar, song thrush, bullfinch, nightingale, firecrest, willow tit and hawfinch, butterflies such as *Mellicta athalia*, *Boloria euphrosyne*, mammals such as the dormouse and various moths, such as the drab looper and waved carpet moths. Decaying timber in woodlands provides a rich habitat for invertebrates.

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## National status

2.1 No precise data are available for the total extent of lowland mixed deciduous woodland in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, the Nature Conservancy Council estimated the total extent of this type to be 250,000 ha. It is believed to have declined in extent by 30-40% over the last 50 years. These losses are attributed to clearance, overgrazing and replanting with non-native species.

## Local status

3.1 Data from the Ancient Woodland Inventory were compiled by Forest Research; the research agency of the Forestry Commission, in partnership with English Nature indicates that there is 2296 ha of this habitat.

3.2 Of the 2259 ha deciduous woodland in the Borough approximately only 1% (30 ha) is notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); however 59% (1344 ha) is within Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). This means that in total 30% of this resource in borough is not currently designated.

3.3 Approximately 84% (25 ha) of deciduous woodland within SSSI in the borough is currently on target to be in a favourable condition by 2010.

3.4 Of the 1344 ha deciduous woodland within LWS approximately 58% is under positive management or has been under positive management in the last 5 years via an environmental stewardship specifically for woodland.

3.5 Approximately 20 ha of deciduous woodland occurs on MBC owned land with main sites being Four Oaks Wood, Five Acres/Wents Wood, Vinters Crematorium (Lower Fullingpits Wood), Upper Fullingpits Wood, River Len Nature Reserve, Mote Park and Dove Hill Wood, however smaller areas exist in Hudson Quarry, Weavering Heath and Penenden Heath.

3.6 Currently 1323 ha (58%) of lowland mixed deciduous woodland identified within the Ancient Woodland Inventory data (2008) is in a favourable condition.

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## Factors causing decline in biodiversity

4.1 Overgrazing by livestock and through expansion of populations of deer, leading to change in the woodland structure, ground flora impoverishment and difficulties for regeneration. Palatable tree species such as native lime and elm have been particularly hard hit by over-grazing and often survive only in the most inaccessible locations In some sites formerly managed as wood-pastures there is the contrasting issue of too little grazing by domestic stock.

4.2 Development including urban growth, quarrying, and golf-course creation has destroyed and continues to threaten woodland sites in Maidstone Borough (including ancient woodland), both directly and indirectly where it occurs next to sites, leading to increased trampling, disturbance, pollution etc.

4.3 Replacement of native trees with planted conifers was a major threat until the early 1980s. While this threat has receded large-scale felling and modification of the composition of the woodland by intensive planting of even native broadleaved species may reduce the diversity of the woodland. However on the positive side extensive areas of plantation on ancient sites are being restored to native broadleaves. Maidstone Borough supports many ancient coppice woodland sites which have been replanted in the past with introduced Spanish chestnut.

4.4 Agricultural practices may lead to simplification of the landscape and greater ecological isolation of these woods through the removal of hedgerow trees and small patches of scrub in fields. Locally nutrient enrichment leading to changes in soils and ground flora may occur from spray drift or runoff from adjacent agricultural land.

4.5 Cessation of traditional management practices such as coppicing has in some areas lead to a reduction in structural diversity within the woods, in particular the loss of open space. Butterflies such as the fritillaries have been particularly affected by this process.

4.6 Climate change is likely to affect the distribution of various species that are components of this type and may lead to changes in composition of this and other types. However its broad appearance is likely to stay the same.

4.7 Invasion by sycamore, evergreen oak, Spanish chestnut and other species which are ~~generally~~ not native to these woods, leading to changes in the composition of the woods. Replanting of ancient woodland with native species, such as beech, can also radically change the species composition of a site.

4.8 Dutch elm disease has changed the structure and composition of many woods since the early 1970s, and recurrences may still be affecting them. Canopies opened by disease may be subject to higher rates of wind-throw, and invasion of the gaps by unrepresentative species becomes more

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likely. Recently there has been increasing concern about the loss of oak , although it is not clear whether this is an ongoing trend or a temporary response to a series of dry summers.

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## Current national action

5.1 National forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and in particular seeks to maintain the special interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences from the Forestry Commission (FC) are normally required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by them.

5.2 Deciduous woodland is currently targeted by the Forestry Commission English Woodland Grant Scheme to assist with management and enhancement.

5.3 Within the South-East Plan Policy NRM5 sets to protect and enhance ancient woodland[18].

## Funding

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

## National plan objectives and actions

7.1 As this is a new priority habitat there is currently no national plan or targets, however the Forestry Commission produced a Action Plan[21] for this habitat in 2002, which is actively used as the current UK action plan for this habitat.

## Local plan objectives and actions

7.3 Currently the Kent BAP does not have an Action Plan for this specific habitat, however it does contain an action plan for a similar habitat, Mixed Broadleaved and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites. The 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 broadleaved and plantations on ancient woodland sites 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 re-establishment of 80% of ancient woodland sites to be composed of native species only by 2050.

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## Maidstone's objectives

8.1 Maidstone's objectives are;

1. **Maintain the current extent and quality of lowland deciduous woodland.**
2. **Ensure positive management of deciduous woodland.**
3. **Identify priority areas for restoration of this habitat through restocking, ensuring that differing age structure remains and that species composition is native.**
4. **Seek to re-naturalise ancient woodlands within MBC Control re-planted as Spanish chestnut plantations or invaded by sycamore through phased removal of exotics and favouring of regeneration by native tree and shrub species. (Upper and Lower Fullingpits Woods, Wents Wood and Five Acre Wood should be priority for such an intervention because their sandy substrates will particularly benefit from the creation of a more open heath-woodland structure).**
5. **Educate and increase awareness of woodland management techniques**
6. **Uncommon native tree and shrub species could be propagated from cuttings and seed derived from relic populations and re-introduced into their former range – as has successfully been achieved with native box at Boxley and Detling. Potential target species could include small-leaved lime, large-leaved lime, wild service, crab apple and aspen.**

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## Objectives and targets

**Objective 1: Maintain the current extent and quality of lowland mixed deciduous woodland habitat**

**Target 1: Maintain 2259 ha (as identified by Ancient Woodland Inventory) by 2026**

| LMD | ACTION | TARGET START DATE | TARGET END DATE | KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS | PROGRESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Ensure that Maidstone's Local Development Framework contains policies to protect Lowland Deciduous woodland. | 2009 | 2010 | ALL | |
| 2. | Ensure that significant lowland deciduous woodland sites not designated SSSI are made Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) | 2009 | 2014 | KWT | |
| 3. | Target woodland environmental management schemes at all deciduous woodland sites | 2009 | 2014 | FC | |

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**Objective 2: Ensure positive management of lowland deciduous woodland habitat**

**Target 2: Ensure the positive management of 1207 ha by 2014, 1279 ha by 2020 and 1317 ha by 2026**

| LMD | ACTION | TARGET START DATE | TARGET END DATE | KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS | PROGRESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | Ensure that all deciduous woodland sites as identified in the Ancient Woodland Inventory are under an environmental stewardship, or have been under an environmental stewardship in the last 10 years, or actively managed for the enhancement of biodiversity. | 2009 | 2026 | ALL | |
| 5. | Ensure appropriate management plans are formed and implemented at key MBC deciduous woodland sites to develop community woodlands<br>Seek appropriate funding for the management of these sites. | 2009 | 2014 | FC<br>MVCP | Five acres/Wents wood management plan has been written by external consultants needs checking for biodiversity enhancement effectiveness. |
| 6. | Seek appropriate biodiversity designation status for MBC woodland sites. | 2008 | 2015 | KWT | |
| 7. | Investigate and write a scoping report on the feasibility of using MBC wood as fuel, thus ensuring the financial and environmental sustainability of our woodlands. Circulate the report to relevant internal contacts involved in sourcing current wood for the wood burner at MBC main offices. | 2010 | 2015 | ALL | Tunbridge Wells District Council currently working on developing a sustainable wood for fuel scheme in the area. |

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**Objectives 3 , 4 & 6: Identify priority areas for restoration of this habitat through restocking, ensuring that differing age structure remains and that species composition is native**

**Target 3: Ensure that 287 ha of lowland mixed deciduous woodland are of native composition by 2014, 347 ha by 2020, and 352 ha by 2026 (Total Area: 352 ha by 2026)**

| LMD | ACTION | TARGET START DATE | TARGET END DATE | KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS | PROGRESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | Encourage a gradual process of removal of non-native species from ancient woodland. | 2009 | 2026 | ALL | |

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**Objective 5: Educate and increase awareness on the biodiversity values of appropriately managed woodland and the application of woodland management techniques.**

**Target 4: Create woodland friends groups and arrange woodland activity days**

| LMD | ACTION | TARGET START DATE | TARGET END DATE | KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS | PROGRESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | Seek community involvement by arranging volunteer days at community woodland sites | 2009 | 2026 | MVCP<br>BTCV | |
| 10. | Arrange an opening woodland wildlife walk and teddy bear picnic educational day at one of the new community woodland sites. | 2009 | 2014 | MVCP<br>BTCV | |
| 11. | Ensure appropriate signage is placed at managed woodland sites and that local residents are contacted prior to woodland works to explain the management techniques used and the benefits to biodiversity. | 2009 | 2026 | | |
| 12. | Aim to create woodland friends groups for the new community woodland sites. | 2009 | 2026 | | |

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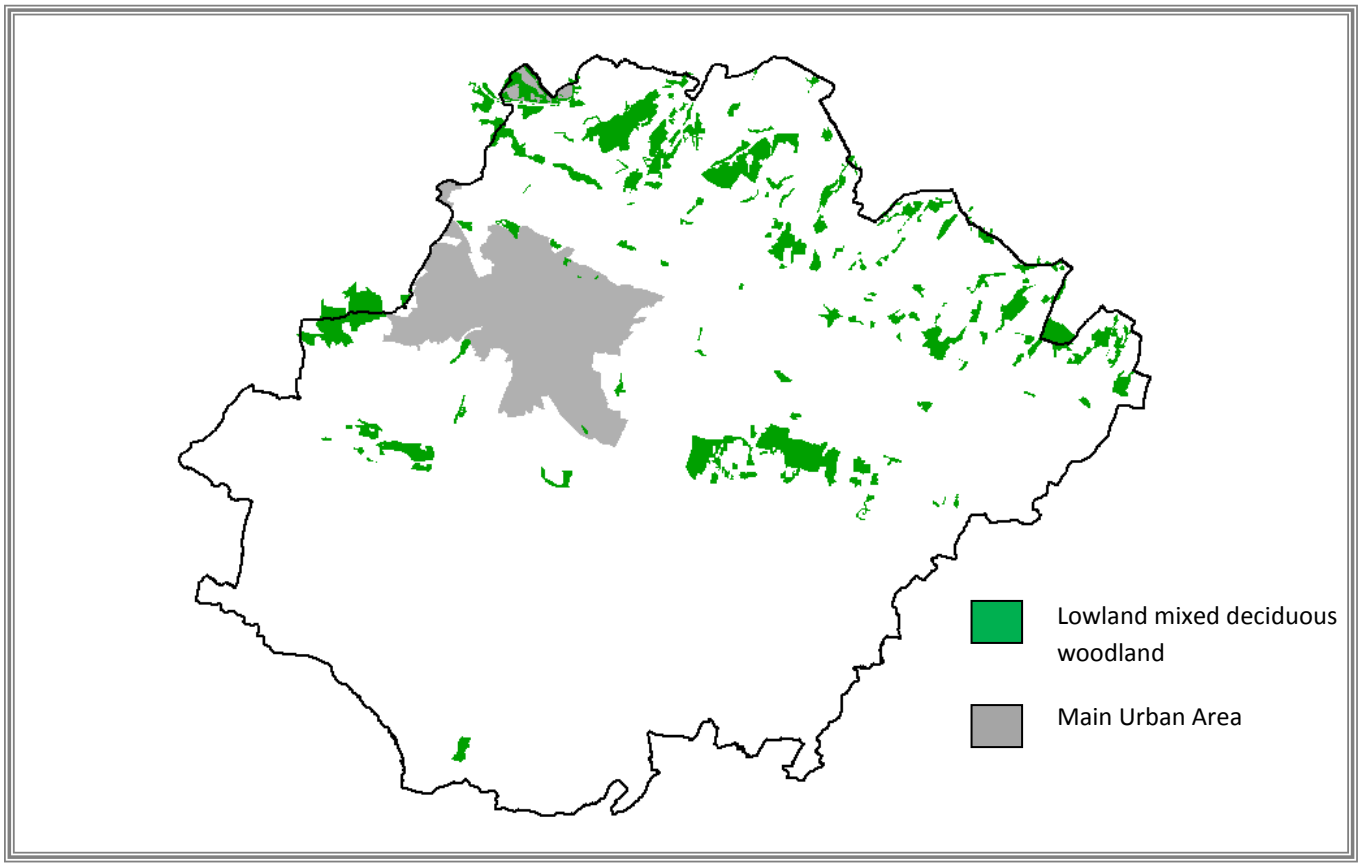
## Lowland mixed deciduous woodland distribution

10.1 The distribution of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland can be seen in figure 1.

**Figure 1 Distribution of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland in Maidstone Borough**




*Data Source: Ancient Woodland Inventory*