

# Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland



## Description

The term Mixed Deciduous Woodland is used for woods on base-rich soils in the north and west, in most of which Ash is the major species, although locally Oak, Birch, Elm, Small-leaved Lime and even Hazel may be the most abundant species. Alder may occur where there are transitions to wet woodland. Despite variations in canopy composition, the ground flora remains broadly similar.

The type is also found on more acid poorly-drained soils where there is flushing of nutrients. Often these are just small fragments with irregular margins or narrow strips along flushes, riparian tracts, outcrops and steep banks. Most Mixed Deciduous Woodlands are probably ancient, but Ash is a vigorous colonist of open ground. Many woods have been treated as coppice in the past, others have been wood-pastures, but most now have a high forest structure.

Mixed Ash Woodlands are amongst the richest habitats for wildlife in the uplands, notable for bright displays of flowers such as Bluebell, Wood Cranesbill and Wild Garlic. Some rare native trees are found in these woods, notably Large-leaved Lime and various Whitebeams. Deadwood, and Ancient and Veteran Trees, such as old Elm trees, provide habitat for rare beetles, flies and other invertebrates. Cavities in Ash trees are probably the most common roosting site for Noctule Bat. The type is also of value for the locally-rare White-letter Hairstreak Butterfly, which feeds on Elm and for bird species including Song Thrush and Willow Tit. This habitat is also valuable for Badger setts.

## National Status

In the late 1980s the Nature Conservancy Council estimated the total extent of ancient semi-natural woodland of this type to be 40,000–50,000ha. It has declined in area by clearance, overgrazing and replanting with non-native species, by about 30–40% over the last 50 years. A crude estimate places the total area of Mixed Deciduous Woodland at 67,500ha.

## Local Status

This type is well represented locally by 28 woods (or parts of woods) and nine of these are included in the Natural Heritage Site (NHS) register by being of high local value. All but two are west of the M1.

## Legal Status

National forestry policies include a presumption against clearance of any broadleaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and seek to maintain the special interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences will normally be required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by the Forestry Authority. Management of semi-natural woodlands, including Mixed Deciduous Woodland, has to be in accordance with guidelines published by the Forestry Authority to receive felling licences or grant-aid.

The sites in Barnsley identified as Natural Heritage Sites have a presumption against planning permission for change of use. Individual or groups of trees may be protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) or if they fall within a Conservation Area.

## Links with other Action Plans

SAP2 Bats  
SAP20 Bluebell

## **Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline**

- Overgrazing by Deer and Rabbit, leading to change in the woodland structure, ground flora impoverishment and difficulties for regeneration.
- Invasion by Sycamore, Beech and other species which are generally not native to these woods in most of Britain, leading to changes in the composition of the woods.
- Replacement of native trees with planted conifers was a major threat until the early 1980s. Large-scale felling and modification of the composition of the woodland by intensive planting of inappropriate broadleaved species may reduce the diversity of the woodland.

- Cessation of traditional management practices such as coppicing may, in some areas, lead to a reduction in structural diversity within the woods.
- Climate change, potentially resulting in changes in the vegetation communities.

## **Current Local Action**

- A number of sites have been listed in the Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as Natural Heritage Sites, recognizing them as locally important sites with a presumption against development. The South Yorkshire Forest project covers part of the borough and includes woods of this type.

### **Proposed Local Action**

- Review Ancient Woodland Inventory.
- Identify ownership of woodlands.
- Carry out survey of known and potential White-letter Hairstreak sites.
- Survey and complete a register of all Ancient and Veteran Trees.
- Encourage landowners to leave deadwood within woods where appropriate.
- South Yorkshire Badger Group to continue to survey, record and monitor Badger setts.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Cuckoo, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush, Tree Pipit, Dunnock, Willow Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Redpoll and Bullfinch.
- Extract any past records, survey and monitor for Adder.

### **BMBC Planning Policy Actions**

- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.
- Ensure that Local Development Framework (LDF) policies are in place to protect native woodlands.
- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

### **BMBC Development Control Actions**

- Consider the impact on native woodlands when assessing planning applications.
- Enforce Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) as appropriate.
- Take opportunities through the planning system to restore or create Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland habitat.
- Explore possibilities of long-term management agreements.
- Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, that loss or damage is avoided and that opportunities for enhancement or creation are considered in relevant planning decisions.
- Encourage a review of Permitted Development Rights that currently allow potentially damaging recreational activities for 14 days per year – such as 4-wheel drive trials.
- Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.
- Encourage development control teams to use planning conditions and Section 106 agreements to secure improved woodland management related to new development.

### **BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions**

- Barnsley MBC countryside sites to be managed so as to contribute to Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets on Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland.