

Habitat Action Plan

Woodland



oak leaves © Mathew Frith

“What is it that we value? What are the special qualities of trees that we cherish and appreciate? There is no doubt that the primary quality is that they are alive and growing, that they change with the seasons, that they show us when it is spring and when it is autumn, and they show and remind us of the nature which ultimately supports us.” (Bradshaw *et al.*, 1995)

1. Aims

- To conserve and enhance London’s woodland for the benefit of biodiversity and for both current and future generations of people.
- To maintain, improve and promote the enjoyment and use of London’s woodlands.
- To increase significantly the area of woodland in London, particularly in areas where there is little accessible woodland.
- To increase the sustainable economic use of woodland in London.

2. Introduction

London contains wonderful woodlands that spread from the Green Belt almost to the centre of London. It is the natural habitat of much of London, and both woodland and scrub make a vital contribution to the biodiversity of the region. Many woods have public access, affording London's residents a retreat from the urban environment. London's woods also have fascinating historical connections.

This Action Plan covers plant communities dominated by trees and/or shrubs; it includes woodland regardless of origin or species, but excludes street trees. It also excludes hedgerows, as well as woodlands that are covered by other Audits, such as Open Landscapes with Ancient/Old Trees, Railway Linesides, and in the Action Plan for Churchyard and Cemeteries.

No lower limit has been put on how small a 'wood' can be. In inner London boroughs, just a few trees might be considered a wood. Mature scrub is included, but not developing scrub found, for example, on some land where management has recently ceased.

3. Current Status

Every London borough except the City of London contains woodland and scrub. There are particular concentrations in the outer boroughs such as Bromley, Croydon, Hillingdon and Barnet and many of these woods have a very rich biodiversity. In stark contrast however, boroughs on the north bank of the Thames from central London eastwards to Essex contain few woods, as do areas running northwards along the Lee Valley. A number of woodland creation schemes are in progress, particularly in these areas. The London Biodiversity Audit contains further information on London's wooded areas.

Woodland covers about 7,300 hectares or 4.5% of London (this includes all types of woodland, including those not covered in this Plan) and there are about 1,600 hectares of scrub. About 3,700 hectares of woodland lie within Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. One of our largest woodlands, Ruislip Woods, is a National Nature Reserve and London's other National Nature Reserve, Richmond Park, also contains important woodland. There are 20 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in London containing woodland.

Generally, woodland is better protected by the planning system than most other habitats, particularly ancient woodland. However, trees and scrub on operational land are prone to removal or reduction, especially those on railside land; railside land will be covered in a separate Habitat Action Plan and is therefore not considered further here.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Habitat

1.0 Management

Lack of appropriate management for biodiversity and for people is a major factor currently affecting woodland in London. Many factors need to be considered to determine suitable management, including size, history, existing woodland structure and nature conservation importance, management costs, extent of amenity use, public concern, extent of local involvement, location and setting, use of timber and production of woodland products, and the extent and value of scrub. Woodland should not be planted or allowed to develop on other habitat of value to nature conservation.

Much of the woodland covered by this Action Plan was traditionally managed as coppice with standards (where single trees were left to mature, surrounded by trees that were cut on a rotation to provide thinner wood). However, when markets for small wood fell away, woods were left unmanaged, and this has often resulted in the loss of understorey, tree regeneration, ground flora and the death of old coppice. Cessation of coppicing has caused particularly dramatic changes in hornbeam woods due to the dense canopy and early leafing of this species. Management may be required to recreate a varied structure for the flora and fauna adapted to this type of woodland. Suitable management may include restoration of a coppice regime, but other techniques can be appropriate and it may be preferable not to manage all or parts of the woodland.

More recently established woodland has usually not been managed as coppice. However, management for wildlife is still often required, including, for example, the thinning of closely-spaced even-aged trees to increase the species and age diversity of trees and shrubs present.

4.2 Public enjoyment and use

Woodland is greatly enjoyed by both adults and children, especially for walking, playing and for education. Woodland also possesses immense cultural, historical and landscape value, and its popularity with the public is evident whenever trees and woodlands are perceived to be threatened.

However, the value of woods for amenity use can lead to problems. Woodlands can absorb many more people than an open landscape without seeming crowded, and may be used very heavily, particularly when few alternative accessible areas are available locally. This can result in erosion, damage to vegetation and disturbance to wildlife. Measures may have to be taken to contain damage while still allowing the public to enjoy the woodland.

Danger to the public in woodlands is relatively low. However, rising concerns about falling trees and branches, obscured sight lines and hidden corners could lead to sanitised woodlands and lost ecological value. The increasing costs of insurance following recent accidents may place a huge burden on managers of woods with public access, and require frequent and well documented safety inspections. Public information about the relative safety of woods and other open spaces, the presence

of wardens, clear sight lines and keeping any shrub layer low alongside paths are some of the ways which may help allay public concern.

Although the full effect of climate change is unknown, there is a general consensus that London and the south of England will experience drier longer summers, milder wetter winters and an increase in disruptive weather patterns, such as storms and droughts. It is estimated that a 1°C rise in temperature will mean that species ranges will need to move 120-150km north or 130-150m up hill. Woodland, particularly ancient woodland, is especially vulnerable to rapid change, as many characteristic species are unable to migrate in response, due to their poor powers of dispersal.

Differences in the timing of leafing and flowering are already being observed; some tree species, such as sycamore, are coming into leaf progressively earlier than others, such as ash and beech. This may cause changes in woodland communities. Fauna may be affected; for example, the dates when insects emerge seems to mirror the response of food plants to small changes in temperature, but it is unclear whether this synchrony will survive larger increases in temperature.

The key factor in conserving biodiversity is that semi-natural habitats need to be part of ecologically functional landscapes so that they have the space they, and their wildlife, need to adapt and evolve in the face of environmental change. The constraints of the urban environment make large-scale enlargement of woodlands, or the creation of new links between them, impractical. This means that providing support for less mobile species in a period of climate change will be difficult, although sympathetic management of woodland and its adjacent land will help.

4.3 Dumping and vandalism

Vandalism and dumping (including garden refuse, cars and motor bikes) can be a problem. Dumping is unsightly, detracting from the amenity value of woodlands and making the wood appear neglected. It is normally small-scale, but can be particularly significant in small woods. Fires can cause severe localised damage. Joyriding in cars can also cause substantial damage, exacerbated when the cars are burnt.

4.4 Encroaching plants

In certain conditions some plants may become so abundant that they can damage other aspects of woodland biodiversity. These problem species need to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

There are several positive aspects of sycamore; for example it provides abundant nectar for bees. However, sycamore may grow quickly and densely and can be damaging to species-rich woodlands. Extensive Turkey oak can also be a problem; it is less valuable to invertebrates than native oaks and its timber is almost worthless. The income which can be generated from a wood to fund management can be substantially reduced when turkey oak takes the place of native trees in the canopy. Rhododendron is attractive, but can shade out other species, whilst holly, though desirable in relatively small amounts, can become abundant, forming an almost uninterrupted sub-canopy, shading out ground flora and limiting tree regeneration. Cherry laurel, Portuguese laurel and bracken can also occasionally cause localised problems, similarly reducing natural regeneration. Some exotic plants, such as Spanish bluebell, hybridise with native species.

4.5 Damage by animals

Grey squirrels now strip the bark of many tree species, including beech, sycamore, hornbeam and oak, causing stunting and sometimes death of the tree. The balance of tree species in woodlands will change in the long term unless new methods of controlling grey squirrels become available. Browsing by rabbits and by deer, principally roe and muntjac, can also damage trees and ground flora. Muntjac are likely to become more common and widespread. Damage by animals may reduce the potential to manage woods for economic gain.

4.6 Disease and pests

Dutch elm disease has caused structural and species changes in sections of woodlands containing elms. Other diseases such as alder and oak die-back may be serious problems in the future, along with the Asian longhorn beetle pest. Although diseases and pests may harm forestry interests, much of this damage is natural and not necessarily harmful to biodiversity.

5. Current Action

5.1 Legal status

London's woodlands are among the most protected of habitats, although single trees can be less well protected. A number of designations cover London's woodland and offer different degrees of protection. These include: National Nature Reserves (e.g. Ruislip Woods); Sites of Special Scientific Interest (e.g. Bentley Priory, Harrow; Downe Bank and High Elms, Bromley; Ken Wood, Camden; Oxleas Wood, Greenwich); Local Nature Reserves (e.g. Sydenham Hill Wood, Southwark; Queen's Wood, Haringey; Oak Hill Woods, Barnet). Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common are candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) under European legislation for their stag beetle interest. Epping Forest is a cSAC for its beech woodland and stag beetle interest among other features.

Protection for many of London's woodlands is also afforded through the London Plan and the Borough Unitary Development Plans. The majority of London's woodlands, including those established alongside the city's railways, have been classified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, and/or Green Corridors.

Key species closely associated with London's woodland that receive special national protection include common dormouse, badger, all species of bat, hobby and firecrest. These may pose legal restraints on management, for example affecting the time of year that operations may be carried out.

5.2 Mechanisms targeting the habitat

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

Strategic policy initiatives

A number of initiatives are targeted at planting new woodland or protecting, managing or encouraging use of existing woodland. These include:

- The London Woodland Advisory Group, which represents tree and woodland interests in London, will act as a working group for the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum. Regional Advisory Committees are set up on a regional basis under the 1967 Forestry Act with the remit to advise on the implementation of national issues on forestry and woodland policy. The London Regional Advisory Committee was formed in 2003.
- The London Parks and Green Spaces Forum, a wide partnership of organisations aiming to promote a network of accessible quality green space as a major contribution towards a healthier and more sustainable world city.
- The Green Arc, a partnership of organisations aimed at linking and expanding the green islands of north and east London through the creation of a mosaic of woodlands and other habitats and the sensitive management of other open land.
- The development of a Green Grid Network strategically linking and improving green spaces in the Thames Gateway.
- The Green Gateway seeks to support and influence greening of the Thames Gateway through use of trees especially along Green Grid lines and in areas of social deprivation.
- Thames Chase is a Community Forest covering 40 square miles of East London and South Essex. The Thames Chase Partnership has planted 451 hectares of new woods since 1990, increasing woodland cover from 8% originally to 13% in 2003, with a target of 30% by 2033. It has also created large areas of wetland and meadows.

5.2.1 Management advice and incentives

It is valuable to share knowledge and experience among woodland managers. Local Authority staff and voluntary groups such as the London Wildlife Trust are able to provide management advice. Advice may also be available from the Forestry Commission, Thames Chase Community Forest, Lower Mole and North Downs Countryside Management Projects, Greater London Authority, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, London Bat Group and others. English Nature prepares Site Management Statements for owners and managers of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

The Forestry Commission grant system within London is currently under review. At the time of writing, woodland grants for new planting, existing woodland management and conservation, and recreation related woodland work are available to landowners, but a new scheme of block grant aid through a regional or sub-regional organisation is being considered. Finance may also be available through programmes not specifically targeted only to woodland, such as Lottery funding.

5.2.2 Tree planting and Community Forests

Some parts of London are poorly served for woodland and these should be targeted for woodland planting. However, it is important not to destroy other habitat by

planting trees or allowing natural regeneration on land that already has value for nature conservation, including brownfield (wasteland) sites.

There may be opportunities for providing new woodland or enhancing or extending existing woodland in or near proposed development and the London Boroughs have a particular role here through the planning process. Wherever possible, use should be made of local seed stock or natural regeneration.

Several organisations and schemes promote tree and woodland planting, including BTCV, the Forestry Commission, the Green Gateway, local authorities, the London Wildlife Trust, Thames Chase Community Forest, Trees for London, Trees of Time and Place, and the Woodland Trust. A range of other organisations provide grants or advice for projects which may include tree planting.

Trees for London is co-ordinating a campaign, in association with The Evening Standard, to plant another million trees in London by 2010. The campaign was launched in July 2002 and in the first year over 100,000 trees had already been planted. The campaign is being supported by a wide range of planting partners (e.g. Thames Chase Community Forest, Green Gateway, LTOA), business sponsors (e.g. Thames Water, Barclays Bank) and individual Londoners both as volunteers and as tree sponsors. Trees for London is planning to plant around 20% of the target itself, and each year the charity will produce a report detailing total tree planting activities across Greater London.

Tree planting and tree nurseries are excellent mechanisms for encouraging community involvement. The Community Forests and others engage communities in woodland management and conservation through outreach projects such as reminiscence exercises and art.

5.2.3 Woodland products

Although gathering food such as blackberries and fungi has remained popular, historically the demand for formal woodland products was the major influence on the nature and management of woodlands. Whilst markets have changed, there is still a demand for goods ranging from firewood to bespoke furniture and signposts which can be produced to the benefit of local economies, societies and biodiversity. Urban woodland products may not always cover costs, but they can attract significant subsidies and promote long-term management. Revenues from sales and the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grants are making most management work in LB Croydon cost-neutral. The products form a link between people and woodlands, generating employment and strengthening local communities as well as being a useful educational tool.

Considerable progress has been made in London recently towards the production of sustainable woodland products such as charcoal and firewood, particularly through BioRegional Development Group, the London borough of Croydon and the Royal Parks. Peabody Trust's BedZed housing development, which used Croydon oak in its construction, is also using green waste wood chip from the London borough of Croydon's tree station in its combined heat and power plant. Both the London borough of Croydon and Richmond Park are producing charcoal firewood and saw logs, much of which goes into local mainstream outlets. Whilst markets are

expanding, most of these activities are in southwest London, and it is hoped planned development in the Thames Gateway will further these initiatives.

6. Flagship Species

These special plants and animals are characteristic of woodland in London.

Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Our well-loved 'national flower' and a British speciality that provides a wonderful spring spectacle in woodlands.
Wild service tree	<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>	The London Basin is important for this rare tree, which has edible berries called 'chequers' or 'chokers'. It has thick white blossom in May and striking red-copper leaves in autumn.
Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	London has very important populations of this beautiful tree. It has a grey, sinewy trunk, toothed leaves and very hard wood.
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	One of our most well-loved mammals, protected and relatively common in south London woodlands.
Stag beetle	<i>Lucanus cervus</i>	A very large beetle which gets its name from the male's 'antlers'. London holds nationally important populations, most visible on warm summer evenings.
Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	An attractive and appealing bird, often seen and heard drumming for insects.
Speckled wood butterfly	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	A common butterfly, well camouflaged for its life in woodland clearings.
Common dormouse	<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>	Lewis Carroll's famous mammal, legally protected, rare in London, with specific habitat requirements.
Bats		Many bats such as noctules and Natterer's roost in trees. 12 of Britain's 16 species have been recorded in London.

7. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Most of these actions are specific to this habitat. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate 'Generic Action' section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1 Increase public benefit, understanding and community involvement in London's woodlands

Target: An agreed Tree and Woodland Framework for London to be published by 2004. Six woodlands to be in use to demonstrate best practice by 2007. New opportunities for training in woodland skills to be in place by 2007

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
1.1 Produce a Tree and Woodland Framework setting out a vision for London and priorities for action	2004	FC, GLA	CA, EN, GG, GG, TCCF
1.2 Improve public access, enjoyment and community involvement in six flagship woodlands	2007	GLA,	LA, LWT, PT, FC, EN, WT
1.3 Improve public enjoyment and understanding of London's woodlands generally, and strengthen links between communities and woodlands	2007	TFL, LWT	LA, FC, EN, WT, GLA,

Objective 2 Promote knowledge of best practice in woodland management and increase the area of woodland which is managed appropriately

Target: Disseminate knowledge of best practice using examples in six flagship sites by 2007

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.1 Establish a woodland working group to develop advice and exchange ideas	Achieved 2001	GLA	LA, BTCV, LWT, EN, TFL, BDG, FC, TCCF, WCCF, LTOA, TGUFS, LNHS, Others
2.2 Initiate an NVQ programme in woodland management	2006	TFL	LBB
2.3 Carry out a survey of the condition of London's woodlands, including the extent to which they are managed	2006	FC	LA, GLA
2.4 Improve management of six flagship woodlands	2007	GLA	LA, LWT, PT, TFL
2.5 Disseminate advice on woodland management using six flagship sites as examples of best practice	2007	GLA	LA, LWT, PT, TFL
2.6 Provide fora for exchanging ideas and experience on woodland matters through the Woodland Action Plan Group and the London Woodland Advisory Group.	2004	GLA, FC	LA, LWT, TFL, TCCF, GG, LTOA
2.7 Promote the establishment of an accessible database of relevant woodland experience	2008	FC	LA, LWT, TFL, TCCF, GG, LTOA, GLA
2.8 Increase use of the Woodland Grant Scheme or its replacement	2005	FC	LA, LTOA, LWT, GG, TCCF

Objective 3 Increase woodland cover, especially in areas of woodland deficiency

Target: Establish at least 10ha of new woodland a year

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
3.1 Assess areas of woodland deficiency and locate suitable planting sites, especially in the Thames Gateway London	2004	GG	FC, TCCF, GLA
3.2 Establish at least 10 ha of new woodland annually	2005	TFL, GG	TCCF, LA
3.3 Continue to monitor extent of tree and woodland planting in London	Ongoing	TFL	GG, LVRPA, TCCF, LA

Objective 4 Ensure current knowledge is included in London conservation efforts to protect important woodland species

Target: Provide input to other relevant HAPs and SAPs as required

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
4.1 Liaise with leads of other relevant plans and provide input to plans as required e.g. Bats SAP	As required	GLA	As relevant

Objective 5 Increase production, use and markets for sustainable timber and woodland products

Target: 5 Boroughs fully certified by 2007

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
5.1 Promote use of FSC certification in London's woods	2007	FC	LA, LTOA, LWT, GG, TFL, TCCF

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Chalk Grassland; Heathland; Wasteland; Churchyards and Cemeteries; Bats, Stag Beetle, Black Poplar, Mistletoe; Railway Linesides Audit; Farmland Audit; Open Landscapes with Ancient/Old Trees Audit.

National Plans

Wet woodland, Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland.

Key References

- Bradshaw, A, Hunt, B & Walmsley, T (1995). *Trees in the Urban Landscape*. E & FN Spon.
- Rackham, O (1987). *The History of the Countryside*. Dent & Sons.
- Peterken, G (1981). *Woodland Conservation and Management*. Chapman & Hall, London.
- Greater London Council (1986). A Nature Conservation Strategy for London: Woodland, Wasteland, the Tidal Thames and Two London Boroughs; *Ecology Handbook 4*.

Abbreviations

BDG - BioRegional Development Group
CA – Countryside Agency
EN - English Nature
FC - Forestry Commission
FSC - Forestry Stewardship Council
GG – Green Gateway
GLA - Greater London Authority
LA – Local Authorities
LB – London Borough
LBB – London Borough of Bromley
LNHS - London Natural History Society

LTOA - London Tree Officers Association
LVRPA - Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
LWT - London Wildlife Trust
NGOs - Non-governmental organisations
PT – Peabody Trust
RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
TCCF - Thames Chase Community Forest
TFL - Trees for London
WCCF - Watling Chase Community Forest
WT – Woodland Trust

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