Woodland
Habitat Action Plan

1. Introduction

The total woodland cover in the UK is 3.17 million hectares or 13% of the total land area (Forestry Commission, 2018). Around 2% of this is ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW). The following woodland habitats included within this Action Plan were listed as priority habitats within the UK BAP and subsequently in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006: Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland and Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland.

2. Current Status

2.1 Description of habitat

The woodlands of Worcestershire reflect the relicts of the wildwood that developed over much of Britain after the last ice age. Much of this habitat was

Kidderminster and in the west of the county small ash beds grown for hop poles can frequently be found: a remnant of the hop growing industry from the 18th to the 20th century. In the post war period there was also a desire for planting poplar (*Populus* sp*)*. on wet ground to produce timber for the match industry and, whilst this would not now be recommended because of the risk of destroying existing areas of valuable habitat, a plantation will occasionally develop an interesting flora as poplar casts only a very light shade. The last few decades have also seen a large number of small farm woodlands planted as part of various initiatives by forestry and conservation organisations.

Mixed deciduous/coniferous woodland

Mixed woodlands in Worcestershire can comprise a broad range of species including pedunculate oak *(Quercus rober)*, ash, beech *(Fagus sylvatica)*, poplar, Scots ra a P 903 (o)-5.99812 ( )-138.003 (ra5.4.49(Pi)4.002 (cu)4.002 s

hundreds and sometimes thousands of years to develop. The species composition of new woodlands is determined in part by the habitat into which the woodland has developed or been planted and will slowly change as species that cannot tolerate the new conditions (such as reduced light levels) are lost and other species favoured by the new conditions become established. The timescale in which this occurs is dictated by species recruitment from the surrounding area (from hedgerows, old copses and other woodlands).

In Worcestershire the following lowland woodland vegetation types occur:

Beech and Yew woodland
Beech is probably not native to Worcestershire although long established plantations of high biodiversity value are found in the south east of the county: Bredon Hill has a number of beech stands of considerable age that contribute to the importance of the site as a wood pasture habitat with a range of tree species.

Beech is often planted either amongst existing woodland, usually of the ash-field maple *(Acer campestre)* type, or as new plantations. The dense shade created by a beech canopy and the dense and decay-resistant leaf litter creates a *(Mercurialis perennis)*
and bramble *(Rubus fruiticosus)* are often frequent. There are a number of variants of beech woodland in the country, but the most important type in Worcestershire is NVC W12 *Fagus sylvatica-Mercurialis perennis* woodland.

Worcestershire has a single example of yew wood (W13 *Taxus baccata* woodland).

Calcareous to neutral soils: Ash-field maple woodland (NVC W8).
NVC W8: *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis.*
This type of woodland is extremely variable in terms of species composition. Ancient semi-natural stands of ash-field maple woodland often support a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The canopy is usually characterised by ash, field maple, hazel *(Corylus avellana)*, pedunculate oak and wych elm *(Ulmus glabra)*. Small-leaved lime *(Tilia cordata)*, wild service *(Sorbus torminalis)*, hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus)* and yew are other components that can be prominent in certain stands. This community is also the stronghold for large-leaved lime *(Tilia platyphyllos)*, which has a restricted distribution in Britain. The ground flora is often rich in herbs such as bluebell *(Hyacinthoides non-scripta)*
wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa)* and violets *(Viola* sp.).

Historically, ash-field maple woodland was frequently managed as coppice although high forest stands became more common during the twentieth century. Replanting and the selection of particular species through management, for example hazel coppice with oak standards, has also been common practice within this woodland type in the past.

Neutral soils: Pedunculate oak woodland (NVC W10).
NVC W10: *Quercus robur – Pteridium aquilinum – Rubus fruticosus.*
Both pedunculate and sessile oak (*Quercus petraea)* and their hybrids occur in this woodland type in Worcestershire. Pedunculate oak is dominant in the south and east with sessile oak becoming m993 (i)3.002 (i)3.0.002 (.)-2.005 c7993 (m)-m9.75991oai.n ty

the non-natives sycamore and sweet chestnut are also commonly associated species. This woodland type includes most o -leaved lime woods, such as the nationally important Shrawley Wood. The ground flora is generally not as rich as W8 woodlands, characterised by bluebell, bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum)* and bramble.

Acid soils: Oak-birch woodland (NVC W16).
NVC W 16: *Quercus spp- Betula spp-deschampsia flexuosa*
This woodland is characterised by a canopy dominated by either downy or silver birch with pedunculate or sessile oak (mostly the latter in Worcestershire, where it occurs largely in the north of the county). Other canopy species are uncommon although holly *(Ilex aquifolium)*, rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia)* and hazel occur. The ground flora is typically species poor, dominated by grasses, bracken and other ferns, and mosses. Heather (*Calluna vulgaris)* and bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus)* are often prominent. Oak and birch woodlands located around the Wyre Forest are similar to the oak-birch woodlands of the uplands (W11, W17).

Wet soils: Alder-willow woodland (NVC W1, W6 and W7).
A separate Habitat Action Plan within the Worcestershire BAP covers wet woodland.

The dominant woodland communities in Worcestershire show highest affinity with W8 and W10 woodland types.

2.2 Distribution and extent
Historical influences on woodland cover
The pattern of woodland today is very much a reflection of the evolution of the landscape, a process subject to physical, economic and cultural influences. Worcestershire is a county of contrasting landscape evolution: much of it retains a wooded character and strong associations with the ancient wooded land cover, most notably in the west, north and north east. Even where woodland has since

woodland remnants, providing a vital reservoir of species for colonisation and expansion should new planting link together and expand these fragments. Worcestershire was once also the focus of a large concentration of royal hunting forests: by the 13th century, seven such forests were known in the county Wyre, Feckenham, Ombersley, Horewell and Malvern, together with Kinver and Arden that extended from neighbouring counties.

In contrast, the south east of the county has long lost its ancient woodland and remains largely un-wooded today. The Vale of Evesham in particular, with its easily cultivated soils, was cleared of its ancient woodland cover at a very early stage in the deforestation of England and by Roman times was an important corn growing area: it has been an area notable for cultivation ever since. Elsewhere more recent designed woodland planting, associated with estates and parkland such as Croome, provides an additional range of woodland character.

Woodland Extent
The Worcestershire Habitat Inventory (WHI) records 16,800 ha of woodland ***outside of urban areas*** (excluding wet woodland), about 9.5% of the county area. This figure is slightly higher than some of the surrounding counties, for example Warwickshire has around 6.6% woodland cover and Shropshire 9.3%

(Woodland Trust, 2016), and just slightly below the England average of 10% (Forestry Commission, 2018).

The national Ancient Woodland Inventory records 5336ha of ancient semi-natural woodland within Worcestershire (3% of the county area, slightly higher than the UK figure of 2%), of which 2167ha is PAWS (1.2% of county area). According to these data ancient semi-natural woodland represents 31.7% of all the woodland in the county.

Current distribution of woodland types

Of the woodland types described in section 2.1, ash-field maple woodland is the predominant woodland type on the more base-rich and calcareous soils in the county, occurring most commonly in the south and west.

Pedunculate oak woodland is the predominant semi-natural woodland on neutral

2.3 Protection of the habitat

During the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio the UK Government signed

bluebell. Wood anemone and primrose *(Primula vulgaris)* are abundant in places, and a number of locally uncommon species occur, such as meadow saffron *(Colchicum autumnale)*, -nest orchid *(Neottia nidus-avis)*, herb-paris, broad-leaved helleborine and violet helleborine *(Epipactis purpurata)*. The site is also notable for its butterflies and dragonflies and noble chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis)* beetle is found in the orchard adjacent to the wood.

3. Current factors affecting the habitat

Deer have increased significantly in the English countryside and populations of fallow deer *(Dama dama)*, roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus)* and muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi)* all affect the woodlands of Worcestershire to varying degrees. Deer browsing results in bark stripping, prevention of woodland regeneration, damage to ground zone plants and damage to young t7 (o)4.002 ( )-158.()]TJ/TT1 n(t)-2.005 (7 (o)4.002jT1 n(t)-)-4-1

The growth of the woodfuel market should have a positive impact on the management of both existing AWS and woodlands that are currently unmanaged or under-managed.

The use of heavy machinery in some forestry operations can cause damage through soil compaction etc and this must be addressed if currently neglected or under-managed woodlands are to be brought back into management.

Skewed age class distribution and structural diversity of trees in managed and production woodlands. The biodiversity value of a single-age, monoculture woodland is greatly reduced.

Excessive recreational use of woodlands, for example paint-ball, all-terrain vehicles or excessive visitor disturbance including dog walking.

Use of woodlands for intensive game rearing, hunting and shooting has been a reason to retain woodland. However, some operations (g)4.002 (,)-2.005 ( )-1 (u)3

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In 2017 Forestry Commission and Natural England signed a Memorandum of Understanding

conifers have been removed. An annual update of this work is published in the Wyre Forest Study Group Review.

Lepidoptera
Butterfly Conservation volunteers carry out timed counts and transect monitoring at over 50 sites within the Wyre Forest on an annual basis.
Annual transects are carried out within several Worcestershire Wildlife Trust / Butterfly Conservation woodlands to monitor the butterfly populations. There is also an annual programme of egg counts to monitor the population of brown hairstreak within and around Grafton Wood.

5. Associated Plans

Wet Woodland, Ancient and Veteran Trees, Dormouse, Bats, Brown Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Drab Looper, Common Fan-foot, Wood White, Nightingale, True Service Tree.

6. Conservation Aim

The native semi-natural woodland character of Worcestershire is protected, maintained and where possible enhanced, reflecting the characteristic variations in composition and pattern across the county.

7. Conservation Objectives

Delivery of the Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve and Forest Plan 2016-2026

Maintain extent of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland in the county

Restoration of PAWS woodland to a more semi-natural vegetative cover

Promote the diversification of woodland age structure and vegetation structure for ecological benefit

Promote the addition of shrub and ground flora layers characteristic of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to new plantations

Increase overall woodland cover through sensitive and appropriate planting

Take opportunities to re-link fragmented PAWS and ancient woodland sites

Buffer existing high value sites from deleterious impacts arising from surrounding land use

Monitor the emergence and progress of tree diseases within the county, in particular ash dieback (Chalara), and put in place action plans to manage resulting impacts

Woodland Trust (2017). *Planning for Ancient Woodland: Planners' Manual for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees Practical Guidance.* The Woodland Trust