Woodland and Scrub Habitat Statement

Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan
January 2007

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1.1 Britain is one of the least-wooded countries within Europe. The Doncaster Borough has slightly more woodland cover than other parts of South Yorkshire, now having 7.22% cover. The Ancient Woodland inventory suggests that 6% of South Yorkshire is now covered by woodland. This is lower than the national percentage of woodland cover, which was estimated at 8.4% in 2001 . Figures available for Doncaster indicate that the Borough holds 4091 ha of woodlands, which has recently been boosted by woodland planting on restored colliery sites amounting to 126.5 ha. Certain districts, particularly the intensively managed arable farmlands have very limited areas of woodland and it is here that woodland planting should be considered a priority.

1.2 Ancient woodland is defined as those, which have had a continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD and have only been cleared for understorey or timber products. Some of these are relicts of natural tree cover, which developed after the retreat of the last glaciation 10,000 years ago, whilst others may have developed on land, which was open ground or farmland prior to 1600 AD. Other woodlands are planted woodlands on ancient woodland sites. This includes any age of broadleaved, mixed or coniferous woodland replanted woodlands.

1.3 In the UK most 'broad-leaved' woodlands contain a mix of broad-leaved species such as ash, hazel, sessile oak, pedunculate oak and field maple. Woodlands in the south of Britain also tend to include beech, however it is considered to be of planted origin in Doncaster. Sycamore is also abundant in many of Doncaster's Woodlands and often dominates secondary woodlands. This species is often viewed as an introduced species, which requires management to check its spread however; its eradication is unlikely since it now is the most abundant tree in a wide range of habitats throughout the British Isles. Yew, a native conifer is generally associated with broad-leaved woods. Broad-leaved woodlands are noted for the variety of herb layer plants, of which, bluebell is a characteristic of UK woodlands. Many species of butterfly, including the speckled wood, birds and mammals are found in such woods.

1.4 Semi-natural woodland on ancient sites and ancient woodlands have been historically cleared to accommodate increased agricultural activity due the increase in population. Hence, the remaining areas of ancient semi-natural, such as the woodlands of the Don Gorge, Edlington, Hampole Wood, Burghwallis Wood, Owston Wood, Holmes Carr Great Wood, Back Wood, Doncaster Warren, Hatchell Wood, Cock Wood, Park Wood Rossington, King's Wood Bawtry and replanted planted ancient woodland such as Barnsdale Wood, Scabba Wood, Bella Wood, Melton Wood, Howell Wood, Wadworth Wood, Stainton Little Wood, Shaw Wood, Crowther Wood, Great Gate Wood, Hurst Plantation, Old Springs Wood and Swinnow Wood are of great significance to the biodiversity of the Borough.

1.5 Habitat Action Plans have been produced for the three distinct woodland types within the Borough:

- "Lowland Heathy Oak Woodlands" covering acidic heathy woodlands of the Coal Measures and Sandy Lowlands of the Humberhead Levels.
- "Limestone woodlands" of the Magnesian Limestone Natural Area.
- "Wet woodlands" of the Humberhead Levels and of springlines and streams emerging from the Southern Magnesian Limestone.

1.6 Scrub habitats also occur in areas of the Borough. Scrub communities are a natural component of many habitats but are often indicative of a cessation of past management. In Britain there are few examples where scrub represents a true climax community, the exceptions being coastal and montane environments where climatic conditions, salt spray or unstable ground prevent the transition to woodland. Scrub can often be seen as invasive and a threat in some grassland or wetland communities but it is an important habitat in its own right. The presence of scrub in wetlands, heathlands or grassland creates a diversity of habitat structure, which is used by a range of animals, which would otherwise not occur.

1.7 The species composition of scrub also reflects the underlying geology and tends to reflect the understorey of woodlands within the locality. Hawthorn, blackthorn and gorse form an important component of many areas of scrub on neutral and lime-rich soils whilst silver birch, gorse and broom tend to be the main species of scrub on lighter soils and more acidic heathland sites. Wetter conditions encourage the growth of grey willow, and downy birch-dominated scrub. The greatest biodiversity tends to be found where scrub has a diversity of age and physical structure, where there is a mosaic of scrub and its associated habitat and where the scrub species itself supports a wide range of associated fauna.

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