

Upland Oakwood



Description

Upland Oakwoods are characterised by a predominance of Oak (most commonly Sessile Oak, but locally Pedunculate Oak) and Birch in the canopy, with varying amounts of Holly, Rowan and Hazel as the main understorey species. The range of plants found in the ground layer varies (according to the underlying soil type and degree of grazing) from Bluebell-Bramble-Fern communities through Grass-Bracken dominated ones.

Most Oakwoods also contain areas, often along streams or towards the base of slopes, where much richer communities occur. In such areas, Ash and Elm occur in the canopy, and there is more Hazel in the understorey. Ground plants include Dog's Mercury, Ramsons and Tufted Hair Grass. Many Oakwoods also hold a distinctive breeding bird assemblage – Redstart, Wood Warbler and Pied Flycatcher being associated with them throughout much of their range. The invertebrate communities are not particularly well-studied compared to those in some other woodland types, but Oakwoods can support a range of notable species, including the locally-rare Purple Hairstreak Butterfly.

The age of many of these woodlands means that they are important for Ancient and Veteran Trees and deadwood. They are also valuable Badger sites.

National Status

There are no precise figures for the total extent of this woodland type, but it is believed to be between about 70,000 and 100,000ha, mainly in the north and west of the UK. For some of the distinctive species present, Britain and Ireland hold a substantial part of the World/European population.

Upland semi-natural woods have declined by about 30–40% in area over the last 60 years as a result of replanting, mainly with introduced conifers, clearance for quarries or other developments in some areas, and from conversion to rough grazing.

South Yorkshire has more than 300ha of this woodland, a figure which underestimates the actual extent. The region undoubtedly has a significant proportion of the national total.

Local Status

This type is well represented in Barnsley by 30 woodlands. Eight of these are included in the Natural Heritage Site (NHS) register by being of high local value. Mainly found in the west and south-west of the borough, these include: Hollin and Spring Woods at Langsett; Wharnccliffe Wood and Chase; West Wood at Hoyland; Wombwell Wood (the biggest single wood in the area); Sunny Bank; Horse Carr; Storrs Mill and West Haigh Woods in the Dearne Valley; and Hoyland Bank to the north.

Legal Status

Habitat protection is provided by the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and the resulting SSSI network. Oak woodland is also listed on Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive. National forestry policies include a presumption against the clearance of any broadleaved woodland for conversion to other land uses and seek to maintain the ecological 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 Upland Oakwoods, has to be in accordance with guidelines published by the Forestry Authority in order 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 land use.

Links with other Action Plans

SAP2 Bats
SAP20 Bluebell

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Over-grazing by sheep and deer throughout much of the range of the woods.
- Invasion by species such as rhododendron, which shades out the ground layers and eliminates much of the conservation interest.
- Development pressures such as new roads and quarrying.
- Effects of air pollution, especially on lichen and bryophyte communities.
- In some cases, unsympathetic forest management, where felling rates, choice of broadleaf species planted, or methods of working do not yet reflect published guidelines.

Current Local Action

- A number of sites have been listed in the Council's Unitary Development Plan as locally important sites with a presumption against development.
- West Haigh Wood, owned by Barnsley MBC, has a Management Plan.
- 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.
- Survey and complete a register of all Ancient and Veteran Trees.
- Encourage landowners to leave deadwood within woods where appropriate.
- Local Badger Group to continue to survey and monitor the Badger population.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Tree Pipit, Lesser Redpoll, Spotted Flycatcher and Wood Warbler.

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.
- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Upland Oakwood 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 woodlands and explore possibilities of long-term management agreements.
- Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on Upland Oakwood, 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 Upland Oakwood 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) Upland Oakwood targets.