Habitat Action Plan: Scrub and Habitat Mosaics on Previously Developed Land

Current status and Importance

An example of scrub habitat in Kirklees

- Scrub is a transitional habitat which is in the process of changing from open ground to woodland.
- It is an important and complementary component of the woodland mosaic, along with heath and grassland.
- Habitat Mosaics on Previously Developed Land often have a similar vegetation structure to scrub except that they relate exclusively to previously developed sites. They are often referred to as brownfield sites but also include gardens.
- Although there can be similarities in species communities, brownfield sites often have a greater mix of exotic and non-native plants.
- Brownfield sites may also include some derelict buildings, hard standing surfaces and substrates very different from those occurring naturally. Hence it provides many differing habitat niches.
- In this context scrub is used to describe all of the above habitats unless otherwise stated.

Species Use

- The habitat supports many BAP priority species, especially birds.
- As the habitat is very variable in terms of tree cover, species can range from those more typical of open habitats to those of the woodland edge.
- Given the variability of the habitat a whole range of plants may be found, especially on brownfield sites, including lower plants which are the first to colonise hard surfaces.
- As with plants the range of habitat niches can mean sites are rich in invertebrate species.
- Bats will also forage over these habitats and hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) also will make use of them, especially where the habitat has woodland characteristics including gardens. Where buildings exist at sites, these offer opportunities for bat roosting.

Conservation Issues

- Scrub and brownfield sites are often regarded as being untidy and neglected and having little value. This may lead to losses through development or even transformation into some other habitat.
- As these are transitional and dynamic habitats, without management they naturally revert to high canopy woodland.
- In some cases (but not all), scrub takes some time to develop naturally. Often there are pressures to circumvent the natural cycle of habitat succession, for example by planting trees. This can remove the intermediate habitat components and reduce the overall site value.
- Government guidance for Local Planning Authorities is that brownfield sites should be developed in preference to other sites in urban areas. However, it is also recognised that

they may also have inherent value for wildlife/community use in other guidance relating to open space.

Objectives

- Maintain areas of scrub within a wider habitat mosaic, i.e. not necessarily at one location (which requires intensive management) but within an wider area of a managed site.
- Protect sites against loss, especially those where there is little scope for developing other nearby areas as scrub habitat. Sites known to be important for BAP species should be prioritised.
- For all site management, consideration should be given to incorporating this transitional habitat if it does not already exist.
- Create the conditions for scrub habitat to develop as a strategy to allow wildlife to adapt to climate change.

Target areas for habitat management and creation

- All zones especially where species associated with scrub are present, the site is within their natural range or, where the habitat will help reinforce ecological networks (because of its importance to many species, scrub is likely to have a key role in species migration in response to climate change.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity

Targets

- To be decided.

Key Links and Organisations

- Site protection: Kirklees Council, Natural England, Forestry Commission.
- Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.
- Management through Woodland Grant Scheme: Forestry Commission.
- Management and restoration: Kirklees Council (especially related to planning and development through Planning Policy statement 9 on Biological and Geological Conservation), River Calder Project (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust), Coalfield Heathland Project, White Rose Forest, Colne Valley Tree Society, River Colne Project, Routes to the River Project (Environmental Alliance).
- Survey: Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum, West Yorkshire Ecology.

See Also

- UKBAP: Lowland Deciduous Woodland
- UKBAP: Upland Oak Woodland
- UKBAP: Wet Woodland
- UK BAP Lowland Heath Habitat Action Plan
- UKBAP: Upland Heathland Habitat Action Plan
- UKBAP: Lowland Dry Acid Grassland
- UK BAP Reedbeds Habitat Action Plan
- UK BAP Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land
- Kirklees BAP: Rivers and Riverine Corridors and Associated Habitats
- Kirklees BAP: Marsh Helleborine
  (the above two documents available at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)