

London Borough of Croydon

Habitat Action Plan

Woodlands and Hedgerows



**“One impulse from a vernal wood
may teach you more of man, of moral, evil and of good,
than all the sagas can. (William Wordsworth)**

1. Aims

- To conserve and enhance Croydon’s Woodlands and hedgerows for the benefit of biodiversity and for both current and future generations of people.
- To promote, maintain and improve the active involvement by all sections of the community in the enjoyment, use and conservation of Croydon’s woodlands and hedgerows

2. Introduction

Woodlands and hedgerows are an important element in the natural environment of the Borough. They provide opportunities for recreation, health and well being, are a valued component of the landscape, an essential habitat for wildlife, provide employment, contribute to the supply of timber and are an effective means of absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Much woodland is identified as being 'ancient woodland' (that which has been in existence since at least 1600); they are described as 'semi-natural' because the woodlands have received past management. They represent the most important woodland habitats for wildlife, sometimes containing species of national rarity. The majority of woods are comprised of broad-leaved species, although some coniferous plantations exist. The Great Storm of 1987 had a widespread impact on trees and woodlands throughout the Borough; it also brought many benefits, including a profusion of deadwood habitats, the rebirth of woodland management and an increase in public involvement and interest to better manage Croydon's woods for now and for future generations.

3. Current status

Woodland is the second most extensive natural habitat found in London. 4.5% (7,300ha) of London's land area is covered by woods and trees. LBC has one of the highest densities of trees per hectare of any of the London boroughs and hold 12 % of the London resource. The tree resource managed by LBC largely comprises some 35,000 street trees, woodlands, which cover eight per cent of the borough and the trees in 120 parks and open spaces. Since 1999 trees managed by LBC have been Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified, the first time internationally that street trees have been included within the scope of an FSC certificate.

The majority of Croydon's woods are native broadleaves and includes some of the finest examples of ancient woodland in London. In 1986 the Nature Conservancy Council produced an Inventory of Ancient Woodland for London. This covered all woods above 2 hectares and identified nineteen ancient woods in Croydon. Fifteen of these are included as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest as defined by the London Ecology Unit in "Conservation in Croydon". Two of these sites, Croham Hurst and Devilsden Wood in Happy Valley are of national importance and are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and seven other woodlands are deemed Sites of Metropolitan Importance.

The woodlands of the north of the borough are fragmented and generally much smaller than those in the south of the borough. This does not mean that they are of any less importance in the local context than those in the south. Some of these small woods, like Convent Woods and Biggin Woods are remnants of the Great North Wood, a series of sessile oak woods which once stretched from Selhurst to Deptford.

In addition to their wildlife value many of Croydon's woodlands provide invaluable leisure and recreation potential. The quiet enjoyment of woodlands is actively promoted by the Council.

Hedgerows are a distinctive feature of the countryside. Many date back hundreds of years and may incorporate other historic features such as ancient earthworks, parish or old property boundaries. They also provide a haven for wildlife and a green link between semi-natural habitats. Examples of ancient hedgerows in Croydon are Mitchley Wood, Riddlesdown and the Addington Court Golf Course. However there is only limited information currently available on other hedgerows in the borough.

3.1 Woodlands in Croydon

See Appendix 1

4. Specific Factors affecting the Habitat

4.1 Management

4.1.1 Woodlands

Many of Croydon's woods were traditionally managed as coppice with standards, where single trees are left to mature, surrounded by trees that were cut on a rotation to provide thinner wood.

However after World War II, woodland resources across the country had greatly diminished and the market for small woods fell away. This left woods without any management, resulting in a loss of understorey, tree regeneration, ground flora and old coppice.

At the Leisure Services Committee 18th of June 1998, the London Borough of Croydon made a commitment to the sustainable management of Croydon's Trees as well as a commitment to the principles and criteria of the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC). The London Borough of Croydon is also applying annually for FSC certification of its woodlands "formalising its commitment to the sustainable management of its timber resource and further ensuring the future of its trees and woodlands in the ecosystems they support" (Councilor Paul Mee). The FSC certification states that all timber products resulting from tree and woodland management in the borough are coming from sustainably managed sites. Croydon is the first and only London borough that has achieved FSC certification for all its woodlands and street trees.

Croydon Council actively manages many of Croydon's woods with the aim of restoring the habitat diversity represented by traditional management as well as promoting public access.

Woodlands and trees on highway, housing sites and parks are managed by the Trees and Woodland Section. The section is responsible for the planting and maintenance contracts, carried out tree safety inspections and act as the council's

experts on tree matters advising other council departments. The Woodland Advisor of the section oversees and implements woodland management plans for all Croydon's woods, secures funding and maintains the FSC status. He liaises with 'Friends of' groups who are actively involved in the management in Croydon's woodlands.

The Nature Conservation and Countryside Manager advises on the management of woodlands with regards to the effect on flora and fauna. In conjunction with the Forestry Manager and Woodland Advisor he draws up woodland management plans giving expert advice on conservation matters, provides advice regarding wildlife legislation and monitors woodland sites with regards to conservation.

4.1.2 Hedgerows

Many of the hedgerows in Croydon have been unmanaged for a number of years. Those that have been managed have in recent years been managed by flail, which can be of detriment to the wildlife value.

Many hedges have been subject to neglect and so slow decline, a number of new hedges have been planted in such areas as Whitehorse Lane Allotments and Mayfield's.

A base line audit of all hedges in Croydon needs to be carried out to establish their location, quality and biodiversity value. This will enable better protection and management of these important green corridors.

4.2 Public enjoyment and use

Woodland is greatly enjoyed by both adults and children, especially for walking, playing and for education. Schools currently do not make full use of this resource at their doorstep, but an increasing number is taking up offers from site wardens and Friends of groups to use woodlands for education. Woodlands and hedgerows also possess immense cultural, historical and landscape value, and its popularity with the public is evident whenever trees, woodlands and hedges are perceived to be threatened. Both the London Loop and the Capital Ring walking trails around London link many of Croydon's woods and most are easily accessible by public transport.

4.3 Dumping and vandalism

Vandalism and dumping (including garden refuse, cars and motor bikes) are an ever present problem. Dumping of any rubbish is not only unsightly, detracting from the amenity value of woodlands and making the wood appear neglected, it is also illegal under the 19 Environment Act. Green waste dumped in woods bears the risk of introducing undesirable garden plants which can alter the natural flora of the wood. The problem of fly tipping and dumping is common throughout Croydon's woods. Fires have caused severe localised damage and are usually a problem during the long dry summer months. The joyriding in cars and the use of motorbikes is an increasing problem in many woods an open spaces, causing substantial damage, exacerbated when the cars are burnt. They also prevent and stop other users from using and enjoying the site.

Croydon Council spends a significant amount of money every year on removing burnt out cars and motorbikes as well as fly tipped green and household rubbish dumped in local woods. Local police and the Parks Bylaws Enforcement Team are working hard to clamp down on motorbikes in woods and now have the power to seize and destroy bikes if caught on site. This has resulted in positive changes on some sites, including Birch and Rowdown Woods. Here the partnership working between Friends of group and Park Services has resulted in the clear up of over 50 cars and motorbikes, and the introduction of the Community Police force, which is patrolling the woods, has decreased the number of motorbikes passing through the woods.

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.

One of these problem species is sycamore, which has many positive aspects; for example it provides abundant nectar for bees and can act as a buffer against squirrel damage to other species, as squirrels like to strip the bark of it. However, sycamore may grow quickly and densely and can be damaging to species-rich woodlands. Its ability to produce large amounts of viable seed every year and its rapid growth gives it an advantage over native species. 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, bracken and Japanese Knotweed occasionally cause localised problems, similarly reducing natural regeneration. Some exotic plants, such as Spanish bluebell, hybridise with native species, thus reducing native biodiversity.

4.5 Damage by animals

Damage by animals is an increasing problem throughout Croydon's woods, threatening biodiversity.

Grey squirrels strip the bark of many tree species, including beech, sycamore, hornbeam and oak, causing stunting and sometimes death of the tree, which result in Health and Safety issues. 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, roe deer and muntjac, also damages trees and ground flora. They are a particular problem in re-coppiced areas where they feed on the new shoots, which results in higher management costs as these areas need to be fenced off.

4.6 Disease and pests

During the 70's and 80's 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.

4.7 Climate Change

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. Habitat fragmentation caused by urban expansion, roads, railways and agricultural land use makes migration difficult or impossible, especially for less mobile species. This will result in local extinctions of those that are unable or unwilling to cross unsuitable or inhospitable habitats. The increasingly unpredictable nature of our climate will also adversely affect species that are unable to cope with extreme events such as severe drought and freak storms. A need exists for monitoring systems that will alert us to declines occurring as a result of climate change.

5. Current Action

Woodlands under Croydon Council's management have a management plan and all sites receive funding under the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. An annual audited inspection for the FSC status is carried out by independent assessors who look at track records of sound woodland/tree management. The certification provides a meaningful standard of sustainable management. Coppicing has been reintroduced on some sites such as Selsdon Wood Nature Reserve, Threehalfpenny Woods, King's Wood and Littleheath Woods. Tree planting and felling is becoming more common place and people's perception is slowly getting accustomed to seeing practical woodland management work being carried out on a regular basis.

5.1 Woodland Products

It is becoming increasingly recognised that the timber resulting from forestry operations is a valuable resource. Currently a large percentage of timber arising from the various London Borough forestry operations is disposed of as landfill. This is both expensive and a waste of resource. Various projects and ideas are now being realized, making best use of this resource.

Croydon has sought to address this situation by establishing a tree station which seeks to produce marketable items from the residues of grounds maintenance and tree care. Here, small diameter green waste is turned into mulch and compost. All larger material other than that left for dead wood does not enter the waste stream as it is sold as logs and firewood. The focus is now on producing woodchip for fuel with an initial market at the BedZED combined heat and power plant in Sutton and Slough Heat & Power plant.

The operation of the timber station, established in 1996, is a partnership between the Council's forestry contractor and Bioregional Development Group. This scheme seeks to be an example of sustainability for other London Boroughs and exemplifies the Borough's aim of using the timber they produce in an appropriate sustainable manner providing a local product for local needs.

Coppicing in Croydon is carried out by commercial contractors and volunteers from BTCV's Sustainable Woodland Project. Larger materials are sold as firewood and saw logs, usable stakes are sold to local allotment sites and used in local conservation projects like hedge laying and hurdle making.

5.2 Local Action/ Voluntary involvement

Many local volunteers are involved in helping Croydon to manage and look after Croydon's woods. They are part of a one of the many 'Friends of' groups, who works in partnership with Croydon. Friends groups carry out a large variety of works, ranging from control of invasive species, installing seats, planting trees, coppicing, removing scrub, keeping paths open, clear litter, monitor wildlife to leading public walks and giving talks to schools and other groups. Their support in assisting with the practical management and their enthusiasm and ideas are invaluable.

The recent survey of all open spaces in Croydon as part of a quality audit for the development of an Open Spaces Strategy, involved all the Friends groups assessing their sites.

BTCV Croydon runs the Sustainable Woodland project which maintains a tree nursery on Park Hill allotments, producing trees and shrubs from locally collected seeds. A team of volunteers manage the nursery and get involved in woodland management projects.

Guided walks and talks, schools visits and use by any other group is greatly encouraged by the Council. Activities are advertised through the Into the Great Green Yonder programme of free guided walks and the council web site.

6. Flagship Species

These plants and animals are characteristic of woodlands in Croydon. They have been chosen because they are easy to identify and monitor by the general public.

Common Name	Latin	Brief Description
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Our well-loved 'national flower' and a British speciality that provides a wonderful spring spectacle in woodlands.
Common Dormouse	<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>	Secretive, nocturnal and rarely seen rodent, legally protected, rare in London, with specific habitat requirements. Found in several locations in Croydon
Bats	<i>Fam. Vespertilionidae</i>	Pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats are among the species commonly found in Croydon.
Greater spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	An attractive and appealing bird, often seen and heard drumming for insects.
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	One of our most well-loved mammals, protected and relatively common in Croydon's woodlands.
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i> <i>Crataegus laevigata</i>	Valuable hedgerow species, providing early nectar, shelter and fruit
Ivy	<i>Hedra helix</i>	A familiar evergreen woody climber which can either carpet a woodland floor or entwine itself around trees. The dense foliage provides nesting and hibernation sites for wildlife and it is an important nectar source.
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	A conspicuous feature of hedgerows and woodlands when in bloom. The scented flowers are enjoyed by long-tongued moths and Dormice, who also strip its bark for nest building.

7. Objectives, Actions, Targets

Objective 1

Maximise biodiversity and ensure best practice in long term management throughout Croydon's Woodlands and hedgerows.

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
1.1 Promote habitat and structural diversity within woodlands through appropriate management practices such as coppicing, thinning, ride widening, dead wood retention etc.	Annual	TWS	BDG, FoG, LWT, CoL, BTCV
1.2 Carry out detailed hedgerow audit for borough to record species rich hedges and their wildlife value	24 months	TWS, NCCM	ACCS, BTCV, GIGL, CNHSS, FoG
1.3 Continue to support and promote practical work of BTCV Sustainable Woodland Project in producing native trees from seed and involving volunteers in coppicing/woodland management work	Annual	BTCV, NCCM	FoG
1.4 Carry out flora and fauna audit of Croydon owned woods		NCCM	FoG, GIGL, ACCS, CNHSS
1.5 Promote best practices habitat management guidelines to woodland managers and volunteer groups		TWS, NCCM	LWT, FoG, CoL, FC

Objective 2

Promote public involvement and awareness about biodiversity of woodlands and hedgerows

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.1 Involve 3 schools in maintaining, monitoring and enhancing local woods and hedges as part of their citizenship education	annual	NCCM	EAST, Curriculum advisor?
2.2 Organise 10 walks and talks, to increase public understanding for woodland and hedgerow management	annual	NCCM	FoG, ACCS

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.4 Raise awareness for sustainable woodland management and its benefit for biodiversity through 1 workshop for Friends of, private woodland owners and other groups	annually	NCCM	EAST, FoG, ACCS

Objective 3

Secure appropriate resources for sustainable woodland management work in Croydon owned woods

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
3.1 Pursue contract/delivery of woodchip to BedZED and other organisation	From 06 annually	TWS	BDG, C&S
3.2 To search for markets/niches for locally produced timber and forest products, like fire wood, saw logs, charcoal and coppice stakes	annually	TWS	BDG, BTCV
3.3 Apply for woodland grant scheme funds for all Croydon owned woods	annually	TWS	

Abbreviations

ACCS	Association of Croydon Conservation Societies
BDG	Bioregional Development Group
C&S	City and Suburban Tree Surgeons
CoL	City of London
EAST	Environment & Sustainability Team
FC	Forestry Commission
FoG	Friends of Groups
GIGL	Green Space Information for Greater London
LWT	London Wildlife Trust
NCCM	Nature Conservation and Countryside Management Section
TWS	Tree & Woodland Section

Appendix 1

Woodlands in Croydon

Site name	Location	Area	Owner ship	SINC Status	Grid Ref.
Addington Hills	Shirley	52.6	LBC	M	353 645
Ansley Berry Shaw	Sanderstead	6	LBC	CrBI	341 599
Ashen Grove	Forestdale	1.5	Private (closed)	CrBII	360 624
Ballard Plantation (Royal Russel School)	Shirley	40	Private (closed)	CrBII	346 640
Barnfield Shaw	Sanderstead	1	Private	CrBI	341 602
Bear's Wood (Scout Camp)	Selsdon	4.2	Private (closed)	CrBI	370 617
Beaulieu Heights	Upper Norwood	7.1	LBC	CrBII	334 695
Betts Mead	Kenley	1.7	LBC	CrBI	322 585
Biggin Wood	Upper Norwood	5.5	LBC	CrBII	317 702
Birchwoods & Castle Hill Ruffs	New Addington	15.2	LBC	CrBI	385 639
Boundary Woods	New Addington	1.7	LBC		393 620
Bramley Bank	Shirley	9.7	LBC	CrBI (LWT)	352 634
Colescroft Wood/ Shaw (Old Lodge Lane/Higher Drive Shaw)	Kenley	6	LBC		316 595
Combes Woods/Riddlesdown	Purley	2.4	CoL	M/SSSI?	325 605
Convent Wood	Norwood	4	Private (closed)	CrBI	324 707
Coombe Wood	South Croydon	5.7	LBC	CrBII?	346 644
Copse Hill Spinney	Purley	0.4	LBC (closed)		307 602
Coulsdon Common Wood Pasture	Coulsdon	18	CoL	CrBI	322 570
Coulsdon Coppice (Bleakfield & Stoneyfield Shaw)	Coulsdon	1.5	LBC	CrBII (LWT)	307 589
Coulsdon Court Wood (Dollypers Hill)	Coulsdon	12	LBC	CrBI (SWT)	312 592
Coulsdon Quarry & Wood	Coulsdon	5	Private	CrBI	302 592
Crab Wood	Kenley	0.8	CoL	CrBI	327 574
Croham Hurst	South Croydon	34.3	LBC	M/SSSI	342 629

Site name	Location	Area	Owner ship	SINC Status	Grid Ref.
Devilsden Wood	Coulsdon	15	LBC	M/SSSI	302 571
Dipsley Shaw	Sanderstead	0.5	LBC		342 596
Farthing Downs Tree Belt	Coulsdon	2.8	LBC	M?/SSSI	302 575
Figgs Wood (Happy Valley)	Coulsdon	3.5	Private (closed)	M/SSSI	309 565
Fox Shaw	Selsdon	4	LBC	M	360 620
Foxes Wood	Shirley	3.2	LBC		365 650
Foxley Wood	Purley	7	LBC	CrBI	315 605
Glade Wood	Ashburton	1.2	LBC (closed)	CrBII	360 670
Grangewood Park	South Norwood	11.2	LBC	CrL	330 690
Hawkhurst	Kenley	14.4	LBC	M	330 594
Higher Drive Shaw	Purley	1	LBC	CrBI	317 592
Inwood	Coulsdon	2	LBC (closed)	CrBI	315 579
Jacob's Shaw (Selsdon Rec.)	Selsdon	0.3	LBC		356 621
Jewels Wood	New Addington	15.6	LBC		402 607
Kings Wood	Sanderstead	59.7	LBC	M	351 603
Kingswood Shaw, Mossy Hill & Beech Wood Way	Farleigh	20	Private (closed)	CrBI	360 602
Ladygrove	Forestdale	0.1	LBC		362 625
Littleheath Wood	Selsdon	25.9	LBC	CrBI	350 628
Lloyd Park	Croydon	0.5	LBC	CrBII	343 650
Long Lane Woods	Monks Orchard	6.1	LBC (closed)	CrBII	355 675
Mitchely Wood	Purley	9	Private	CrBI	338 604
Mother Kitty's Shaw	Coulsdon	0.5	LBC		286 586
Newland Woods	Sanderstead	0.5	Private	M	353 610
Oakland Wood	Norwood	0.16	LBC	CrL	332 697
Parkfields Rec	Shirley	0.5	LBC		367 662
Piles Wood (Happy Valley)	Coulsdon	7	Private	M?/SSSI?	313 560
Pinewoods	Shirley	4.5	LBC	CrL	360 651
Pitlands Wood (Kenley Common)	Kenley	7	CoL	M	330 587
Postern Wood	Coulsdon	2	Private (closed)		290 589
Purley Beeches	Sanderstead	7.2	LBC	CrBII	329 619
Ragged Grove	Sanderstead	1.2	LBC	CrBI	338 605
Riddlesdown LWT reserve	Purley	1.9	LWT	M/SSSI?	331 600

Site name	Location	Area	Owner ship	SINC Status	Grid Ref.
Rowdown Wood	New Addington	13.8	LBC	CrBI	390 630
Rydons Wood	Coulsdon	3.3	CoL	CrBI	324 573
Sanderstead Plantation	Sanderstead	8.8	LBC	CrBII	344 619
Selsdon Wood (Fox Shaw/Court Wood/Hillocks Wood)	Selsdon	84	NT/LBC	M	364 617
Shirley Heath	Shirley	7	LBC	M	371 649
Shirley Park Estate	Shirley	4.5	LBC		348 647
South Norwood Country Park	South Norwood	1.6	LBC	M	354 686
South Norwood Lake	South Norwood	0.4	LBC		337 696
Spring Park Wood	Shirley	2.8	LBC	CrBII	347 655
Spurgeon College Wood	Upper Norwood	2	Private (closed)		332 692
Stambourne Woodland Walk	Upper Norwood	1.9	LBC		337 700
Temple Avenue Copse	Shirley	0.4	LBC		367 653
The Lawns	Upper Norwood	6.3	LBC	CrBII	328 698
The Ruffet	South Croydon	1	LBC	CrBII	350 633
Three Corner Grove	New Addington	1.6	LBC	M?	385 612
Threehalfpenny Wood	Addington	10.1	LBC	M	378 648
Thrift Wood	South Croydon	0.2	LBC		345 630
Whitgift School Wood	South Croydon	1.4	Private (closed)	CrBII	322 638
Woodhatch Spinney	Coulsdon	0.6	Private	CrBI?	303 594
Yew Tree Wood	Purley	3	CoL	M/SSSI?	323 604

TOTAL **626.46 ha, which accounts for 8.5% of London's Woodland resource**

Abbreviations

LBC	London Borough of Croydon
CoL	City of London
CrBI	Site of Borough Importance, Grade I
CrBII	Site of Borough Importance, Grade II
M	Site of Metropolitan Interest
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest