

Warwickshire Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation: Wildlife Site Evaluation Form
(Refer to guidelines for completion)

Site Name: Brandon Wood

Site Ref: SP37Y3

Grid Ref: SP 395 765

Local Authority Area: Rugby Borough Council

Date Selected: 18/03/08

Site description:

Area: 73 ha

Brandon Wood is a large area of replanted ancient woodland situated about 6 km east of Coventry. It is part of a larger SINC complex containing both woodland and grassland including Piles Coppice, which form an unbroken area of about 115 ha of semi-natural habitats open to the public. The woodland is extremely diverse in species, with at least 350 vascular plants recorded in recent years and the ride flora is one of the best in the county.

Woodland

Much of the ancient woodland has been replanted in the past with blocks of conifers, mainly Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Corsican Pine (*Pinus nigra ssp. laricio*), but there is also abundant Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) throughout the wood, often forming pure stands. Some compartments and also frequently along the ride edges have old deciduous plantation woodland dominated by Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), but with locally frequent Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Aspen (*Populus tremula*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). In some conifer plantations where trees have been thinned there has also been much deciduous regeneration.

In total about 50 tree species have been recorded in the wood, including rare Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*).

The shrub layer is patchy and is often confined to sparse Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) in some coniferous plantations. In more natural woodland the shrub layer is dominated by locally abundant Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), together with frequent Elder and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), as well as regenerating birch, oak and other tree species. A good variety of other shrubs are present, including rare Wild Service Tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) and Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*) on the boundary banks. Introduced shrubs are confined mainly to an area of very locally frequent Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) present under conifers in the south-west part of the wood.

The field layer over much of the wood varies from compartment to compartment, but is generally dominated by Creeping Soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), along with frequent Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Red Campion (*Silene dioica*) and Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemerosa*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) are locally frequent, the last two mainly on the north side.

The ride flora is outstanding, with many species characteristic of ancient woodland and wet semi-improved grassland present, particularly along the main east-west ride, and along the ride which connects this with Brandon Wood Farm. At the west end of the main ride there are also limited areas very locally dominated by Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia*

flexuosa), with small boggy hollows nearby containing rare Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*) and Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*). This sub-heathland habitat is very rare in Warwickshire.

Species of frequent occurrence along the rides and to a lesser extent elsewhere include Hairy-brome (*Bromopsis ramosus*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), Wood Meadow-grass (*Poa nemoralis*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*), Pendulous Sedge (*C. pendula*), Remote Sedge (*C. remota*), Spiked Sedge (*C. spicata*), Wood Sedge (*C. sylvestris*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*), Hard Rush (*J. inflexus*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Three-nerved Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*), Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*), Common Figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), Greater Stitchwort (*S. holostea*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*).

Rare-occasional species of note along the rides include Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Welled Thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Common Sedge (*C. nigra*), Oval Sedge (*C. ovalis*), Pale Sedge (*C. pallescens*), Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris affinis*), Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*), Soft Shield-fern (*P. setiferum*), Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Heath Bedstraw (*G. saxatile*), Lady's Bedstraw (*G. verum*), Slender St. John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Marsh Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*), Heath Woodrush (*Luzula multiflora*), Hairy Woodrush (*L. pilosa*), Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), Hart's-tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Common Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*), Hoary Ragwort (*Senecio erucifolius*), Heath Groundsel (*S. sylvaticus*), Early Golden-rod (*Solidago gigantea*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), two species of violet (*Viola odorata* and *V. riviniana*), Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*). Ferns are most numerous along the internal drain banks and along the stream on the northern boundary. Many other species, including several which are scarce in the county, have been reported in recent years.

There are at least five small ponds within the wood, with the two at the eastern end of the wood having the best flora. The largest of these have emergent beds of Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), floating sheets of Common Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*), and submerged Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and Curled Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*). Other aquatic species which occur either here or at the other ponds include Common Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Small Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Water Forgetmenot (*Myosotis scorpioides*), Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*) and Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*).

There is a good diversity of breeding birds including Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, all three woodpeckers, Garden Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Jay. Long-eared Owl, a county rarity, has bred at least once recently and Woodcock may still breed. Mammals present include Badger, Roe Deer and Muntjac, while Dormouse, a county rarity, is reported to be present.

The ponds hold a wealth of amphibians including reported Great Crested Newt.

Woodland butterflies present include White Admiral and both Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks, while the ponds have a good range of common Odonata. Other insects include several nationally or locally rare species of hoverfly, sawfly and beetle.

There is a significant Fungal flora, with almost 500 species listed to present.

Phase 1 Habitats present:
Semi-natural and plantation woodland. Semi-improved grassland rides. Tall herb. Bracken. Ponds. Stream.

Evaluation against the criteria

Habitat criteria applied: Woodland and scrub.

| SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA | Elements of the criteria applying to the site | | | | | | COMMUNITY CRITERIA | Elements of the criteria applying to the site | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Diversity | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | | Physical & Visual Access | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Rarity | √ | √ | | | | | Educational Value | | √ | | √ | √ |
| Size | √ | | | | | | Community & Amenity Value | √ | √ | | | |
| Naturalness | | √ | | | √ | √ | Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| Fragility | | | | | | | Geographical Position | | √ | | | |
| Typicalness | | √ | √ | | | | Recorded History | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Ecological Position | √ | √ | √ | | | | Continuity of Landuse | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Significant Populations | √ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Potential Value | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Why this site qualifies as a Wildlife Site: Summary of assessment

Brandon Wood qualifies for at least 17 scientific and 20 community criteria, of which the most important are considered to be Diversity, Rarity, Size, Ecological Position, Significant Populations, Physical Access, Community Value, Aesthetic Appeal and Continuity of Landscape.

Diversity

Although much of the ancient woodland was replanted with coniferous and deciduous plantations, a very high diversity of animal and plant species has survived, of which at least ten plant species are ancient woodland indicators. Natural regeneration of native deciduous species is good throughout the wood.

Rarity

A number of plant species known to occur are rare or very local within Warwickshire. A small area of sandy woodland at the west end has characteristics of wooded heathland, including small tracts of Heather. This is a very rare habitat now in the county.

Dormouse is a nationally endangered mammal species.

Size

Compared with woodlands elsewhere in the county, Brandon is of considerable size. Together with the adjacent Piles Coppice and grassland the wood forms a significant tract (115 ha) of good wildlife habitats. Such a large extent of public open space is unusual anywhere in the county.

Naturalness

Although much of the ancient woodland was lost to plantations, recent management is allowing widespread natural regeneration of deciduous native trees. These are gradually breaking up the formality of the old plantations and creating a more semi-natural woodland. Much of the old flora has remained intact along the rides and ancient woodland indicators are now becoming more widespread.

Typicalness

Brandon Wood makes a valuable contribution to the range of Warwickshire woodlands, and contains particularly good examples of woodland rides. The wood retains an ancient wood bank along the north side, marking the boundary of a medieval deer park, Brandon Old Park.

Ecological Position

Brandon Wood forms an important link in the chain of woodlands present to the east of Coventry, including Coombe Abbey, Birchley and New Close Woods, Piles Coppice and Willenhall Wood. It is also close to other semi-natural habitats in the area, including Brandon Marsh NR close by to the south. The Avon Valley is an important wildlife corridor which lies at its closest just 300m to the south-east.

Significant Populations

The site is one of only two or three in the county to hold Dormice.

Physical and Visual Access

The whole wood is open to the general public and wheelchair access is possible along the main rides. The woodland is visible to local roads, particularly from Brandon Lane to the south.

Community and Amenity Value

The wood is very popular with local people for its peacefulness and its extensive network of rides and footpaths. The ride and woodland flora attract much attention from the general public as does the wildfowl on the main pond.

Aesthetic Appeal

The wood makes a very significant contribution to the local landscape character. Many people come to admire the spring and summer flowers.

Geographical Position

The wood lies adjacent to the Binley Woods estate, who's residents own and manage the site.

Recorded History

The wood has been long recorded by local naturalists.

Continuity of Landuse

There has been woodland on this site since probably before 1086 when it was listed as such in the Domesday Book. The northern wood bank with double ditches was formerly the boundary of a medieval deer park, which in those days largely consisted of woodland. Although extensively replanted in the 20th century, much of the ancient flora managed to survive along the main rides.

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|---|---------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Sources of Information : WSP, WBRC, HBA | | Recorder Site No: | Ecosite No: 1/37 |
| Survey Details: | | | |
| Date: | Survey Type & Area: | Surveyors: | Location of records |
| 5-6/6/07 | Phase II | Jon Bowley | Wildlife Sites Project |
| 15/10/96 | Phase I | D,Ottley, J.Clark, S.Garnett, M.Whyte | HBA |
| | Records | J.Sells et al | Friends of Brandon Wood, WBRC. |
| <p>Any Other Information:</p> <p>Brandon Wood is listed in the Ancient Woodland Inventory as a replanted ancient woodland.</p> <p>The Brandon Wood SINC should include the contiguous area of Piles Coppice and the grassland in between.</p> | | | |
| Completed By: J.J.Bowley Date: 12/3/08 | | Map attached: yes Species list attached: yes | |
| <p>Passed by Sites Selection Panel: Yes / No / Further survey required: pSINC (<i>circle as appropriate</i>)</p> <p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p> | | | |