Assessing and addressing the impacts of ash dieback on UK woodlands and species of conservation importance

Case study 15 : Hang Wood

Case study key facts

Total area of woodland: **20 ha**

Proportion of ash in canopy overall: **70%**

Woodland structure: **neglected coppice with standards**

NVC: **W8**

Vulnerable ash-associated species: **6**

Alternative trees and shrubs: **present on site**

Management: **Reduce overstorey cover and prevent deer browsing**

Site and Location

Name	Hang Wood
Country	England
Local Authority	Wiltshire
National Character Area	Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour
Landscape context	Occupies the gentle / moderately sloping sides of a valley through which a small stream flows. A short length of the site's boundary abuts woodland but a majority of surrounding land is pasture some of which includes small areas of established new farm woodland.

Moribund hazel coppice stools beneath a dense overstorey provided by stored coppice and large standards (photo R Harmer).

Site Characteristics

Woodland area
20 ha but some regarded as oak wood although it does include ash.

Woodland type
A majority of the site is NVC W8 and but about 25% of the woodland which has more overstorey oak has been recorded as NVC W10.

Soil type
Heavy moisture retaining clay soil.

Lithology
Kimmeridge clay.

Stand structure
Neglected coppice with standards. The overstorey mainly comprises large ash and oak standards, and ash stems originating from coppice stools. Ash is the predominant canopy species accounting for *c.* 70% of the canopy overall, but in the area recorded as NVC W10 the canopy is *c.* 80% oak. Other overstorey species include birch which is scattered throughout, other tree species such as beech, sycamore, field maple and alder are much less common. The understorey is dominated by moribund hazel which is present throughout, hawthorn and holly are frequent but little else occurs. Conditions which favour natural regeneration of seedlings have not been created due to lack of suitable management. Juvenile hawthorn regeneration is frequent, but heavily browsed. There are very few saplings of any species. The effects of deer browsing are obvious everywhere. Browsed bramble and patches of pendulous sedge are common throughout the stand.

Biodiversity interest

Designations
Botanically rich woodland SSSI within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB.

Vulnerable species likely to be affected
The six species identified within the database at this site are all bryophytes partially associated with ash.

Other species of conservation interest
Species records for this site are poor for most taxa and a survey of lichens and bryophytes found nothing of great rarity although there were species of interest such as *Parmelia laevigata* and *Frulliana tamarisci*.

Management

Historical
Coppice with standards but there has been no cutting for many decades. Some beech, sycamore and possibly also oak were planted.

Current
There has been no recent management but some ride widening, glade creation and thinning are planned

Long-term vision for site
There is no long-term vision for the site and the aim of forthcoming management is to return the site to favourable condition by creating more open space.

Factors limiting delivery of management currently planned
Access to and within the site to allow harvesting and extraction. Poorly drained soils. Deer may be of concern if temporary open space is required.

Future methods of management

Potential response of ash associated species to ash dieback
All of the species are only partially associated with ash and adverse effects are unlikely to be severe as all can use 2-4 of the most common, and 3 or more of the less common trees and shrubs as alternatives.

Continuation of existing management with loss of ash occurring
The interventions planned will affect only a small area of the wood with much of the stand remaining untouched and none of the ash associated species are likely to be lost in the short to medium term.

Management allowing for loss of ash but maximising persistence of ash associated species
The wide range of alternative trees used by the ash associated species indicates that active woodland management to ensure long-term survival of the current range of tree and shrub species should be sufficient to ensure survival of the ash associated species. This should be possible using standard forestry practices such as: thinning or group felling to promote growth and provide conditions suitable for restocking and revival of moribund coppice; vegetation management to allow new plants to establish; and protection of new plants and growing coppice from browsing by deer.

Factors likely to constrain delivery of future management to maximise persistence of ash associated species
Deer browsing. Access to and within the site for harvesting and extraction. Poorly drained soils. Development of an unfavourable competitive ground flora.

Potential for use of generic methods to establish alternative species
In the short to medium term any of the options could probably be used, but in the longer term options 4 and 6 are likely to be most effective as there is active management to promote development of overstorey species.