

A review of the revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory in the South East

Natural England considers that ancient woodlands are irreplaceable, and should therefore be protected and managed so as to maintain and enhance their special character. Knowing where ancient woods are is therefore a key nature conservation need.

Ancient woodland is defined as woodland that has been in continuous existence since at least 1600 AD (Spencer and Kirby 1992). An inventory of ancient woodland was first initiated in 1981 by the Nature Conservancy Council, but only included woodlands greater than two hectares.

In 2004, a pilot project was set up to revise the Ancient Woodland Inventory in Wealden district in East Sussex. The project utilised computer mapping technology and targeted field surveys to produce a complete revision of the inventory, including, for the first time, woodlands less than two hectares. The success of the project led to this approach being undertaken across much of the South East (Westaway 2006), England's most wooded region (Natural England 2008). At the time of publication, the project is undertaking surveys in Surrey, the Chilterns, Kent, and Hampshire.

What was done

This report summarises the project from 2004-2010. As well as providing the background to the survey and its methodology, the report discusses the benefits of the work, with particular reference to how the ancient woodland inventory is now being used, and considers whether these benefits justify applying similar revisions across the country.

the historic map evidence and mapping to a smaller size threshold, there were also sites removed from the inventory, either because the evidence showed that they were not ancient, or because sites were lost.

The areas covered by the survey to date are shown in figure 1, and the project is ongoing.

Results and Conclusions

The project resulted in a net gain of ancient woodland in the region, both in the new category of under two hectares, but also a significant amount of woodland in the 2-5 hectare size class. While gains were made from re-examining

A review of the revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory in the south east

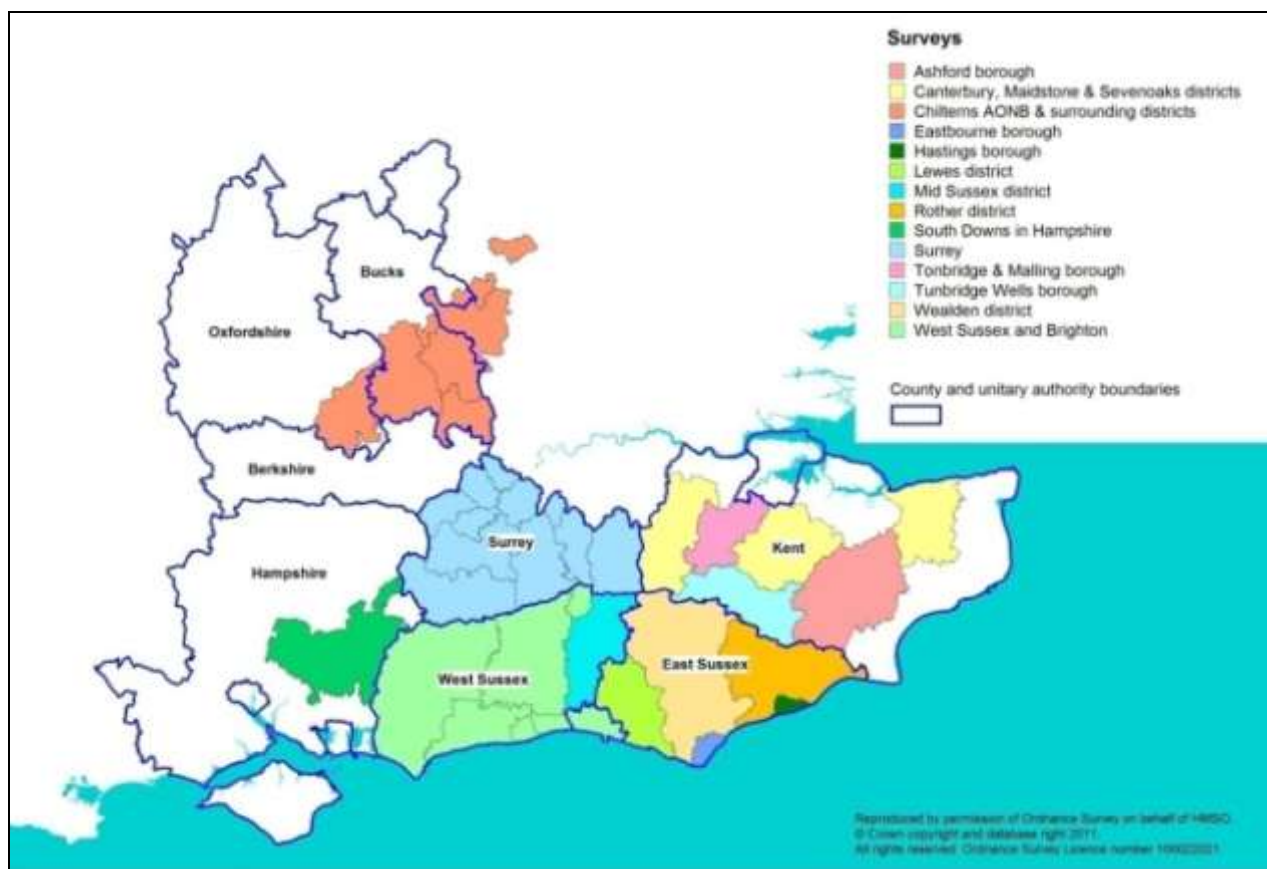


Figure 1 Survey progress in the South East up to January 2011

Natural England's viewpoint

Ancient woods are one of our richest wildlife habitats and are an irreplaceable biological and cultural asset. They are highly valued by people as places of tranquillity and inspiration. The overall success of the project has been its wide partnership engagement, and the high degree of accuracy with which it has identified and mapped ancient woodlands.

In the rest of the country, projects of this nature and at this standard would be welcomed by Natural England, especially where smaller areas of woodland make an important contribution to the landscape.

Selected references

GOLDBERG, E., KIRBY, K.J., HALL, J., LATHAM, J. 2007. The Ancient Woodland concept as a practical conservation tool in Great Britain. *Journal for Nature Conservation* 15, 109-119.

HUME, V., GROSE, M., SANSUM, P., WESTAWAY, S., MCKERNAN, P. 2010. A revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for West Sussex. Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, Henfield, West Sussex.

NATURAL ENGLAND. 2011. Standing Advice for Ancient Woodlands. Version 2. URL: www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south_east/ourwork/standingadvice/ancientwoodland [Accessed July 2011].

WESTAWAY, S., GROSE, M. & MCKERNAN, P. 2007. A revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Mid Sussex. Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey, High Weald AONB Unit, Flimwell, Sussex.

WESTAWAY, S. 2006. A revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Wealden District, East Sussex. Weald Ancient Woodland Survey, High Weald AONB Unit, Flimwell, Sussex.

A review of the revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory in the south east

SANSUM, P., MCKERNAN, P., WESTAWAY, S., & GROSE, M. 2009. A revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Ashford Borough, Kent. Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey, High Weald AONB Unit, Flimwell, Sussex.

Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR042 – *A review of the revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory in the South East*.

Natural England Research Reports and other technical publications are available to download from the Natural England website:
www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Report authors

Patrick McKernan and Emma Goldberg.

Keywords

Ancient Woodland, Ancient Woodland Inventory, South East, mapping, revision.

You may reproduce as many individual copies of this report as you like, provided this is not for commercial purposes, and such copies stipulate that copyright remains with Natural England, 1 East Parade, Sheffield, S1 2ET.

© Natural England 2011