Peak District National Park - Photographs taken at Milldale

Plate 3.4.1 View south from near Alstonefield across improved grassland enclosures with trees (mainly ash) along the boundaries.

Plate 3.4.2 View into Sunny Bank dry dale from near Hopedale.

Plate 3.4.3 View across larger enclosure fields near Stanshope towards Milldale.

Plate 3.4.1

Plate 3.4.2

Plate 3.4.3

Table 3.4.1 Distribution of land by ITE land cover types in the Milldale study area

Land Cover	Area (ha)	Proportion %
Improved/Semi-improved grass	176	66.5
Rough Pasture	51	19.4
Mixed Woodland	2	1.1
Deciduous Woodland	9	3.6
Scrub	12	4.7
Scree/Rock	4	1.4
Built-up areas	9	3.3
Total	264	

dale, leading into the much larger Milldale through which flows the River Dove. The plateau land is almost all improved grass (66.5% of the total study area), with dairy and beef cattle, and to a lesser extent sheep being the main farming enterprises. Much of the land is divided up by enclosure walls into a geometrical pattern of mostly small (<5ha) fields (Plate 3.4.1). There are many trees alongside these walls, most of which are ash, but with some sycamore, beech and oak. The calcareous grassland (rough pasture in Figure 3.4.8 and Table 3.4.1) on the steep sides of Sunny Bank and Milldale is interspersed with small areas of open scrub and broadleaved woodland (Plate 3.4.2), the former becoming the latter with the passage of time in the absence of controlling levels of grazing or active removal by man. To the south of Sunny Bank the pasture land is more open with larger enclosures leading off the plateau and down into Milldale and Dove Dale (Plate 3.4.3).

Table 3.4.2 Distribution of possible woodland expansion area by land cover types in the Milldale study area

Land Cover	Area (ha)	Proportion of land cover types (%)
Improved/Semi-improved grass	32	18.1
Rough Pasture	28	54.9
Scrub	5	45.5
Total	64	24.2

The suggestions for possible areas for woodland expansion involve 24% of the current land cover in the area, most of it calcareous rough pasture and scrub (Table 3.4.2). Some of the areas are within either the Dove Valley Woodlands SSSI and/or the PDNP Section 3 heath

and moor protection area (Figure 3.4.9). However, it is not suggested that all of these areas be planted, merely that they are the most sutable areas for woodland expansion in terms of achieving appropriate woodland communities most easily. Thus the intention in Sunny Bank dale would be to increase the area of woodland while maintaining an appropriate mix of woodland, scrub and open grassland. In practical terms this might be most easily achieved by maintaining the south side (north-facing bank) as largely open calcareous grassland as it is at present while increasing woodland cover on the north side. There are also suggestions for linking up woodland which has become fragmented by agricultural improvement in recent times. It should be possible to achieve this in most areas by allowing areas of scrub to develop into woodland, supplementing by planting only where desirable species are absent or scarce. Local knowledge and careful survey and planning are essential to ensure that the best possible disposition of the new woodland is achieved with maximum habitat gain and minimum loss. Three possible areas for establishment of substantial new semi-natural woodlands are suggested for the improved/semi-improved grassland, amounting to a total of 32 ha (18.1% of that land cover type)(Table 3.4.2). In terms of nature conservation cost-benefits, major areas of new woodland should be placed in these areas where the current conservation value is generally low. However, it must be appreciated that it will take much longer for characteristic woodland ground flora and associated fauna to develop in these areas than adjacent to existing woodland and it is for this reason that all of them have at least one boundary which abuts woodland or scrub.

3.4.3.4 Conclusions

The Milldale study area provides a good example of the mix of woodland situations and types found in the White Peak. There is no shortage of opportunities for woodland expansion but except on improved/semi-improved grassland there are conflicts with other wildlife conservation objectives. The economic analysis (Section 4) suggests that there will need to be additional (but perhaps quite small) financial incentives to those currently available under the various woodland grant schemes if farmers are to be persuaded to plant on improved plateau grasslands. The alternative, if any appreciable woodland expansion is to be achieved is a softening in attitude to scrub among conservationists, since conversion of scrub is generally the cheapest, simplest and ecologically most appropriate means of achieving more semi-natural woodland. Deciding where and when scrub is acceptable, and additional woodland desirable, and what should be the balance in area terms between these and open ground habitat types, and how such balances can be maintained is a key policy issue in the PDNP which is addressed by the individual bodies for getting it right informed by and informing each other through the Wildlife Executive Group which has representation from EN, the county Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and LA ecolgists.

3.5 SHROPSHIRE HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

The Shropshire Hills AONB occupies an area of approximately 81,054 ha of land, much of which is of predominantly upland character lying either side of the A49 trunk road from Shrewsbury to Ludlow and demarcating geographically if not administratively the boundary between the lowlands of the English Midlands to the east and the hills and mountains of Wales to the west (Figure 3.5.1, Table 3.1). The topography of the AONB is very variable with substantial areas in the Clee Hills, Clun Forest and Stiperstones areas above the 350 m contour and providing as wild and remote a recreational experience as can be found in the South of England, but with much land between of lower elevation and more lowland character. The long high ridges of the Long Mynd and to a lesser extent Wenlock Edge are notable landmarks, rising as they do very sharply out of the Border countryside. The chief agricultural enterprises in the AONB are livestock farming, with sheep and sheep/beef cattle predominating on the higher ground, dairying and to a lesser extent arable farming in the valleys. Forestry is an important industry, also quarrying and mineral working while tourism and recreation are also important sources of employment and income in the area. Shropshire in general and the AONB in particular are extremely rich in archaeological sites. Many have been lost in the lowlands but in the upland areas there are numerous signs of man's habitation of the area since prehistoric times. Hill forts crown many of the higher hills while tumuli and other human artefacts pepper the countryside. It would clearly be essential to take full account of archaeological sites before planning woodland expansion in any area.

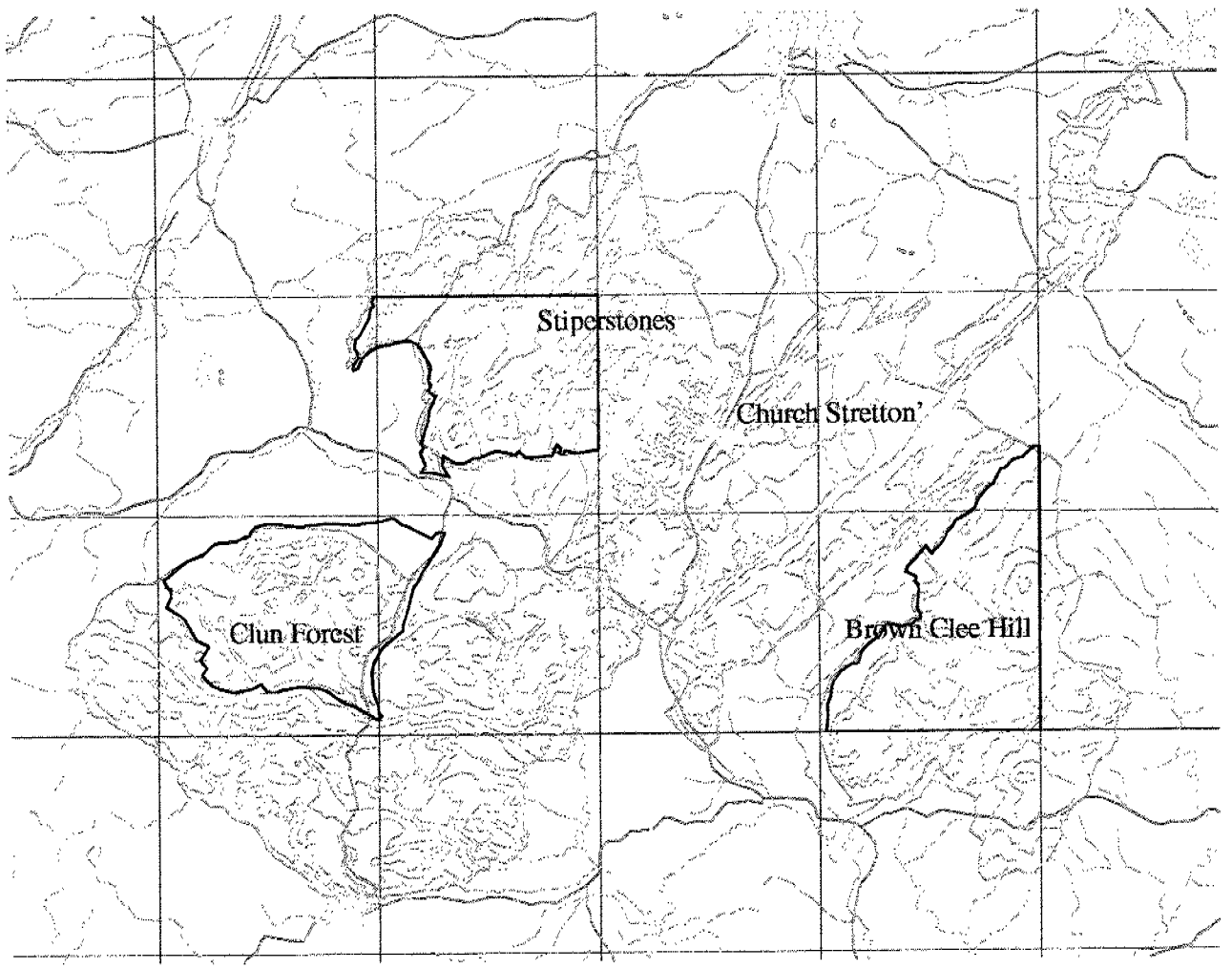
The geology of the AONB is complicated with the Clee Hills, Clun Forest hills, Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge consisting of igneous rocks of various kinds - dolerite, basalt and Ordovician shales in the stiperstones area, Precambrian (Longmyndian) sedimentary complexes in the Long Mynd and Clun Forest areas and Precambrian (Uriconian) igneous complexes in the Clee hills. This geological complexity, confounded by drift, is reflected in a wide range of soil types. The hill tops throughout the area have moderately acidic brown podzolic soils which are generally freely to moderately freely drained (e.g. Malvern, Manod, Withnell series).- there are no areas of deep peat accumulation. On lower, flatter ground in the Stiperstones/Long Mynd area heavy stagnogley soils have developed in Palaeozoic till. Lower elevation soils in the Clun Forest area are better drained brown earths, although sometimes shallow over rocks of Ordovician and Silurian origin. In the Clee Hills area the soils at lower elevations are almost exclusively moderately heavy, reddish-coloured argillaceous brown earths developed from material of Devonian age (mainly Bromyard series).

The area within the AONB has a very variable climate. A marked precipitation gradient exists from above 1200 mm on the westernmost hills to about 650 mm in the lower areas to the east. The Clee Hills, although isolated from the hills to the west receive comparable rainfall, attesting to the significance of altitudinal controls on precipitation. Monthly mean air temperatures exhibit a fairly large variation with an average annual range of 13°C (January 3°C - July 16°C). Lower stations experience slightly higher temperatures and less frequent snow falls.

It has not been possible to obtain a list of SSSI's within the AONB in time to include in this report but clearly attention would need to be paid to these and other designations when developing any woodland expansion proposals. The Clee Hills, Clun Forest and Stiperstones areas are all within ESA's which have conservation of existing native woodland as a target objective under tier two agreements. Clearly the ESA and the Countryside Stewardship

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Location map



National Park / AONB Boundary

'10 x 10 km' Study areas

Main Roads

100 metre contours

Main rivers

Urban Areas

Lakes

Mapscale 1 : 330000

schemes offer opportunities for preventing damage to such woodlands and promoting more positive approaches to woodland management among farmers and landowners.

The Shropshire Hills provide important habitat for upland birds, the moorland areas supporting small but significant populations of breeding birds such as red grouse, curlew, wheatear and ring ouzel (the latter breeding towards the southern edge of its world population range). Because the area of moorland is relatively small and isolated from any large similar area nearby, it is considered important that as far as possible, all open habitats of wildlife value are maintained. The priority is to continue to extend the range and quality of heather through reducing grazing pressure (ESA arrangements) and to improve the quality of fringing farmland habitats through creating wet features and promoting the continuing management and/or establishment of hay meadows (RSPB, pers. comm.).

3.5.1 Native woodland in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Shropshire Hills AONB is relatively well wooded compared with other upland areas in England. The ITE Land Cover Map reveals 8519 ha of deciduous/mixed woodland (10.1% of land area) and 1703 ha of conifers (2.1%)(Table 3.1). The amount and proportion of deciduous woodland and conifer woodland cover is similar in the Clun Forest and Stiperstones areas (Table 3.1) but there is much less woodland of either kind (hardly any conifers) in the Clee Hills. The spatial distribution of woodland cover can be seen in Figure 3.5.2. Broadleaved woodland is particularly abundant on the lower ground where the River Teme flows through the Clun Forest area, on the scarp slope of Wenlock Edge and in the western part of the Stiperstones area. In the Clee Hills area which has a good deal of arable land and intensive livestock rearing broadleaved woodland is restricted to the steep slopes of the higher hills and the lower ground around the edges towards Ludlow. Conifer plantations are concentrated in the area to the north of the River Teme and in the western stiperstones.

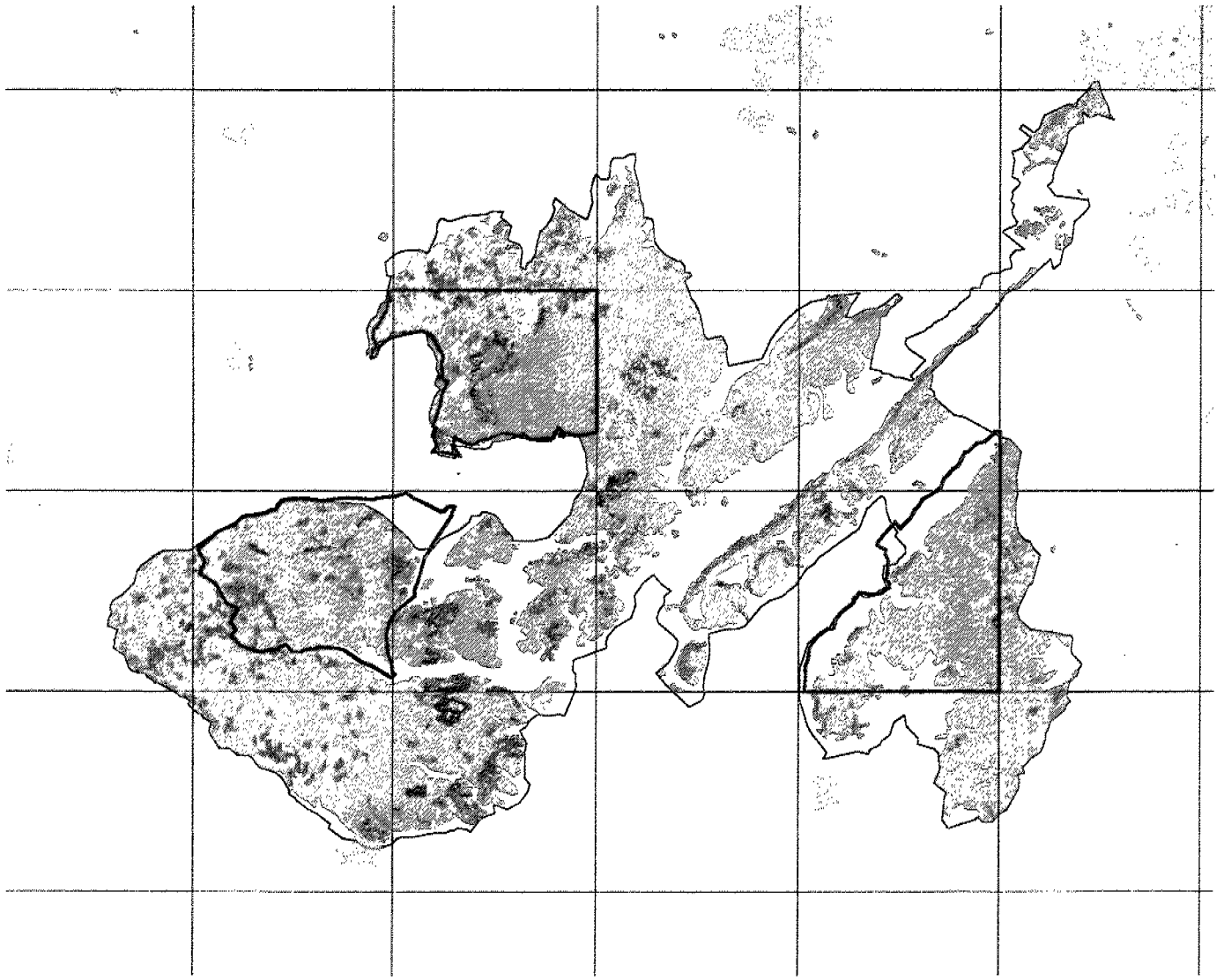
There is considerable interest in woodland expansion within English Nature locally, south Shropshire County Council and among AONB staff, also as would be expected on the part of the Forestry Authority and Forest Enterprise. Draft Woodland Guidelines for the AONB have been drawn up by the AONB Officer in consultation with these and other organisations. The Guidelines are based on a 1993 study of AONB's by Land Use Consultants which identified 21 Landscape Character Areas and are based on landscape character only. Each Regional Character Area (e.g. The Clee Hills) is subdivided into Landscape Character Types (e.g. Clee Hills Plateau, Brown Clee and Titterstone Clee, Clee Hills Flanks). For each type the landscape character is described and the landscape guidelines provided by Land Use Consultants used as a background for suggestions for new planting. These come under five headings:

- points to consider when new planting planned
- capacity/location for new planting
- scale of new planting
- shape of new planting
- species type

More detail of this approach will be given under the descriptions of the 10 x 10 km study areas and the smaller study area.

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Provisional possible areas for upland woodland expansion



Possible Areas
Possible Additional Areas
Urban Areas
Lakes/Marsh Areas
Coniferous
Deciduous
Scrub/Orchard
National Park / AONB Boundary
'10 x 10 km' Study areas'

Forestry is also given full attention in Section 3 - Landscape and Nature Conservation of the *South shropshire Local Plan* (1994). This draws attention to the need to discourage further afforestation (presumably this refers primarily to conifer plantations?) in the Long Mynd/Stretton Hills, the Stiperstones and the Clee Hills. English Nature locally are more specific in wishing to avoid woodland expansion on areas of open shrub moor and heath but in seeing many opportunities for expansion in other areas, particularly on improved/semi-improved pasture (EN, pers. comm.). Both the Forestry Authority and the AONB Officer consider that there is a huge potential for extra woodland and agree that much of the land is suitable for growing excellent hardwoods, but pressure from the timber industry for soft- rather than hardwood timber often results in the compromise of mixtures being planted. There is a good deal less enthusiasm for woodland expansion among farmers, most of whom when consulted by their local representative saw no scope for any increase because of the high cost of establishment and the long period before any sensible return could be anticipated (NFU, pers. comm.). This was in spite of the grant aid available under the various woodland grants which was generally considered insufficient to persuade individual land occupiers to switch production from farming crops into woodland other than in exceptional cases. These issues and the others mentioned above are well understood by those within the Shropshire County Council who are currently working on producing an Indicative Forestry Strategy for the County.

3.5.2 **The 10 x 10 km study areas**

3.5.2.1 Criteria for selection

Four possible study areas were initially selected by the EN West Midlands Team using the map of the AONB provided by ITE showing 'potential areas' for woodland expansion derived as explained in the Methods section (2.1)(Figure 3.5.2).

i Relatively well-wooded - **The Clun Valley and Hills**
Mostly scattered small remnants of ASNW and replanted.

ii Well-wooded - **Southern Clun/Bucknell area**
Predominantly large coniferous forest blocks.

iii With little woodland - **Western slopes of the Clee Hills**

iv With little woodland - **Land between the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones**

Following further discussions with EN and AONB staff three of these areas, Clun Valley and Hills (Clun Forest); Western slopes of the Clee Hills (Brown Clee Hill) and Stiperstones were selected as providing a good contrast between one relatively well wooded and a sparsely wooded area.

3.5.2.2 Current land cover and potential for woodland expansion

The location of the study areas are shown in Figure 3.5.1. Figures 3.5.3-3.5.5 show the land cover in each study area derived from the ITE Land Cover Map. Figures 3.5.6-3.5.8 show the existing areas of coniferous woodland, broadleaved/mixed woodland (including ancient semi-natural and secondary woodland digitised from the maps in the provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory for Shropshire) and scrub, and the areas with potential for woodland expansion. The Brown Clee Hill area is very different from the other two in its geology and soils as already described above (Section 3.5). This is reflected in its different land cover (Figure 3.5.3). Improved pastures and arable land predominate except on the summit of

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

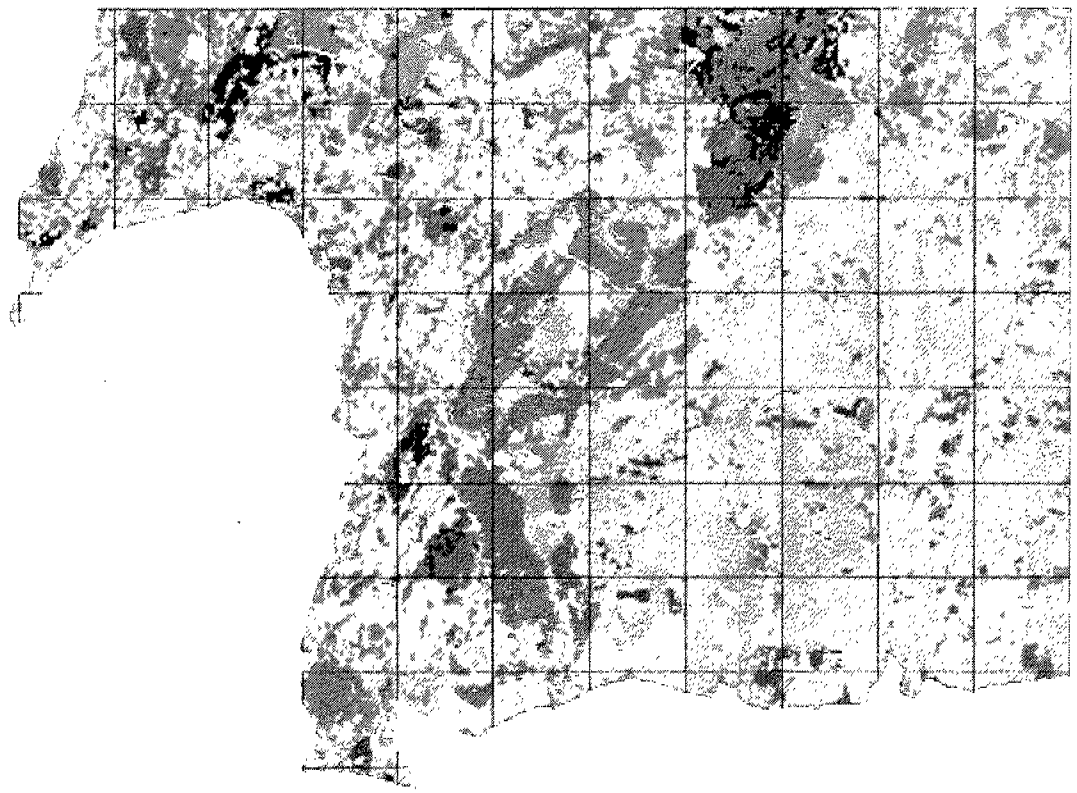
10 x 10 km Study area –ITE Land Cover Map – Brown Clee Hill

Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Inland Water
- Beach/Tidal Flats/Cliff
- Salt Marsh
- Dune/Lowland Heath
- Pasture/Amenity Grass, Mown
- Meadow/Verge/Unimproved Grass
- Marsh/Rough Grass
- Upland Grass/Moor
- Upland Grass/Shrub
- Upland Dwarf Shrub
- Bracken
- Lowland Shrub/Heath
- Shrub/Orchard
- Deciduous Trees
- Evergreen Coniferous Trees
- Upland Bog
- Arable
- Suburban/Rural Development
- Industrial/Urban
- Bare Ground
- Lowland Peat Bog
- Lowland Grass/Shrub Heath
- Unclassified

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

10 x 10 km Study area ITE Land Cover Map – Stiperstones



Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Inland Water
- Beach/Tidal Flats/Cliff
- Salt Marsh
- Dune/Lowland Heath
- Pasture/Amenity Grass, Mown
- Meadow/Verge/Unimproved Grass
- Marsh/Rough Grass
- Upland Grass/Moor
- Upland Grass/Shrub
- Upland Dwarf Shrub
- Bracken
- Lowland Shrub/Heath
- Shrub/Orchard
- Deciduous Trees
- Evergreen Coniferous Trees
- Upland Bog
- Arable
- Suburban/Rural Development
- Industrial/Urban
- Bare Ground
- Lowland Peat Bog
- Lowland Grass/Shrub Heath
- Unclassified

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

10 x 10 km Study area ITE Land Cover Map – Clun Forest

Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Inland Water
- Beach/Tidal Flats/Cliff
- Salt Marsh
- Dune/Lowland Heath
- Pasture/Amenity Grass, Mown
- Meadow/Verge/Unimproved Grass
- Marsh/Rough Grass
- Upland Grass/Moor
- Upland Grass/Shrub
- Upland Dwarf Shrub
- Bracken
- Lowland Shrub/Heath
- Shrub/Orchard
- Deciduous Trees
- Evergreen Coniferous Trees
- Upland Bog
- Arable
- Suburban/Rural Development
- Industrial/Urban
- Bare Ground
- Lowland Peat Bog
- Lowland Grass/Shrub Heath
- Unclassified

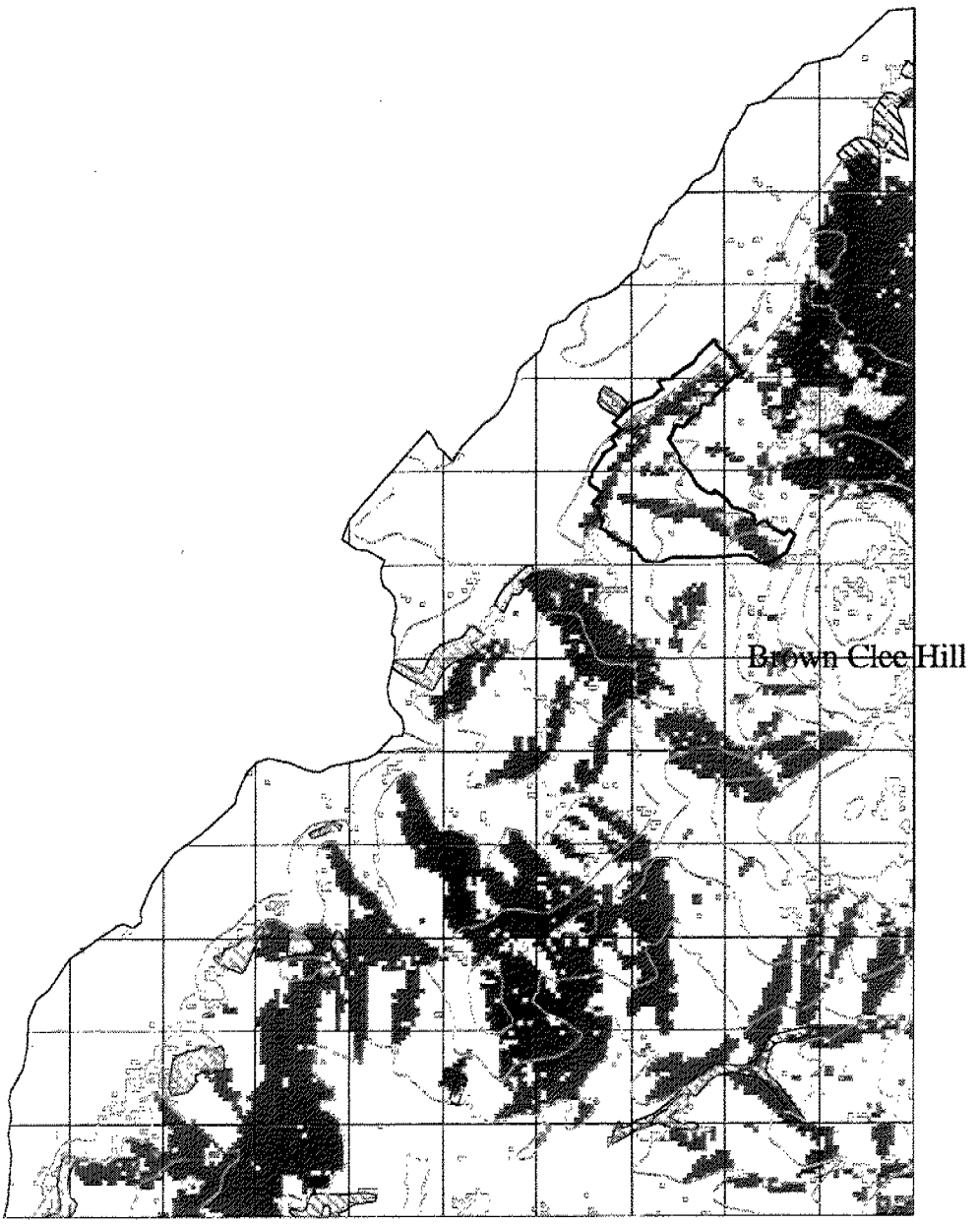
Brown Clee Hill itself where the vegetation is mainly upland grass/moor and upland grass/shrub (the latter shaded dark blue and heather dominated), with areas of bracken on the more steeply sloping ground. The Stiperstones area is divided into two parts (Figure 3.5.4), the lower area in the south east between the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd is predominantly improved/semi-improved pasture with scattered areas of lowland (because of altitude parameters in the classification) heath on ridges and hill tops. There is very little woodland in this area. The remainder of the Stiperstones area is much more upland in character with substantial amounts of ground dominated by dry heathland communities, notably on The Stiperstones themselves. There is little improved pasture, its place being taken by unimproved grass. woodland (both coniferous and deciduous) is a much more common land cover although most conifer plantations are quite small and much of the broadleaves occur as scattered fragments along steep valley sides and on the slopes of hills as along the River West Onny and the streams feeding it. The Clun Forest study area lies between the rivers Onny Clun and Unk and to the west of the A488 road from Bishop's Castle to Clun. This area has a very varied mix of land cover types (Figure 3.5.5) reflecting the very dissected landscape with many hills, some rounded some ridges separated from each other by steep-sided valleys. The hill tops and ridges often carry lowland shrub/heath vegetation but there are no substantial areas of heather moorland. Because the hills are relatively low and the soil quite fertile there is little rough grass and very little bracken-dominated land, most of the grassland having been improved to varying degrees. The brown earth soils are ideal for broadleaved woodland but also for conifers as shown by the plantations established throughout the area. area is ideally suited.

Existing woodland cover, as well as the potential for woodland expansion is shown more clearly in Figures 3.5.6-3.5.8. The scarcity of woodland in the Brown Clee Hill area is clear from Figure 3.5.6. There are only three fragments of ASNW, plus several other woods where woodland has been re-established on ASNW sites at some time in the past. Most of this deciduous/mixed woodland is located along the minor scarp slope to the south-east of Corve Dale. There are also patches of scrubby broadleaved woodland on the slopes of Brown Clee Hill. The potential for woodland expansion, only taking into account land having similar characteristics to that already wooded is substantial (1872 ha, 25% of the study area)(Table 3.2). It is notable that most of the area is in large blocks picking out the higher ground and steeper slopes, including the considerable area on the north slopes of Brown Clee Hill, an area around Cold Weston and another in the south-west corner near Hopton Cangerford. The flatter areas of largely improved grassland are mainly excluded (see Figure 3.5.3). It is unlikely, of course that such large areas of new woodland will be achieved on the ground because of a range of constraints, some of which are itemised in the Draft Woodland Guidelines for the Shropshire Hills referred to above. In particular, the 'patchwork quilt' character of the landscape is picked out in defining the landscape character type of the area and maintaining this pattern and the hedgerows and hedgerow trees which create it are singled out for preservation in the landscape guidelines for the area.

Woodland in the Stiperstones study area is largely restricted to the higher areas to the north and west. There is a concentration of deciduous/mixed woodland on steeply sloping ground around the River West Onny, as already noted, elsewhere woodland is mostly scattered in small fragments. Perhaps surprisingly there is no recorded ASNW in the study area, only four small fragments which were once ASNW but have been replanted. The potential for woodland expansion is very large (2278 ha, 36% of land area) (Table 3.2), reflecting the suitability of

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

10 x 10 km Study area –Woodland –Brown Clee Hill

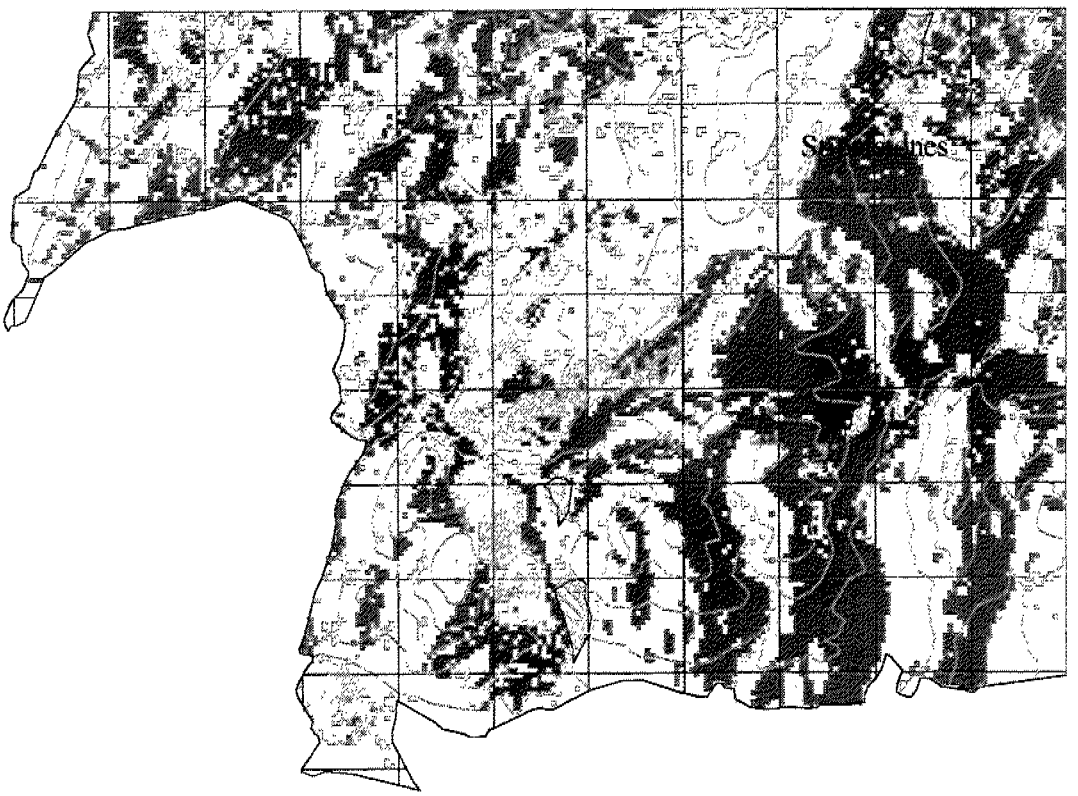


Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Potential areas
- Non –potential areas
- Existing Deciduous/Mixed Woodland
- Existing Coniferous Woodland
- Scrub
- Ancient semi –natural
- Ancient Replanted
- Cleared 1901 –1925
- 'Smaller' Study Area

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

10 x 10 km Study area –Woodland –Stiperstones

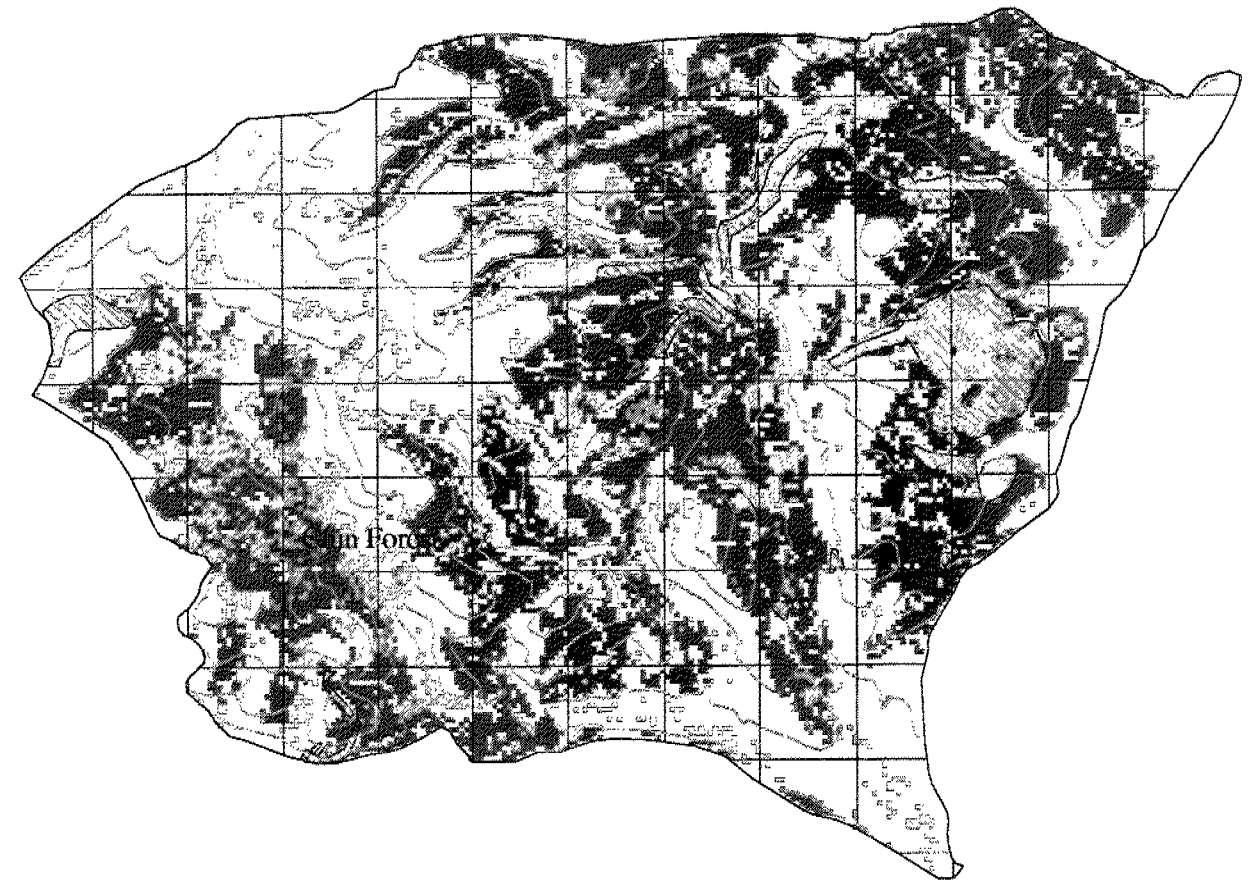


Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Potential areas
- Non –potential areas
- Existing Deciduous/Mixed Woodland
- Existing Coniferous Woodland
- Scrub
- Ancient semi –natural
- Ancient Replanted
- Cleared 1901 –1925

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

10 x 10 km Study area –Woodland –Clun Forest



Mapscale 1 : 80000

- Potential areas
- Non –potential areas
- Existing Deciduous/Mixed Woodland
- Existing Coniferous Woodland
- Scrub
- Ancient semi –natural
- Ancient Replanted
- Cleared 1901 –1925

soils over much of the area for native broadleaves. Most of the potential woodland area is in the area between the Stiperstones ridge and the Long Mynd, predominantly on improved grassland. As in the case of the Clee Hills, this land is most unlikely to become available on anything like this scale. Other opportunities are identified on the steep slopes of the more hilly ground to the north and west which are more likely to be a practical proposition in that heir existing land value is much lower. These areas are also preferable with regard to ease of establishment and likely ecological quality of the resultant woodland, at least in the short term, because they would be building around existing woodland fragments rather than planting on 'sterile' improved pastures with few trees nearby to act as seed sources and no woodland ground flora in the vicinity to colonize.

The well-wooded character of the Clun Forest area has already been noted. This is shown clearly in Figure 3.5.8. Sadly little of the ASNW which would once have covered most of the area remains, although there are some substantial areas of secondary/replanted woodland on ancient sites. However, most of these including the large Blakeridge Wood (>200 ha) are now mixed woods with a substantial, sometimes dominant coniferous component. Returning these woodlands to a semi-natural state, including removal of conifers, should be the top conservation objective. Joining up scattered remnants of woodland such as occur throughout the study area by judicious corridor planting (or natural regeneration if time and owner predilections allow) should be next in order of priority. Such additions can be achieved within the requirements for the Clun Forest in the Draft Woodland Guidelines which are much more sympathetic to additional woodland than those for the Clee Hills or the Stiperstones. To quote: "There is scope for more planting on the valley sides and limited areas on the valley floors" and "Where a forest character already dominates, integrate new planting into this, to unify existing woods with the surrounding land". As Figure 3.5.8 shows, most of the potential woodland sites are in the same areas as the existing woodland cover and while this map may be seen as greatly exaggerating the potential it certainly shows where the most appropriate areas for woodland expansion are. It is also necessary to remember, as has been said in relation to woodland expansion in the other National Parks, that in seeking to expand woodland cover an attempt is being made to increase the naturalness of the countryside, not reduce it, since most of the areas concerned would have been wooded in the past.

3.5.2.3 Conclusions

The three study areas between them offer a very good example of the varying terrain, landscape character, existing land cover and potential for woodland expansion within the Shropshire AONB. The Brown Clee Hill area has the typical Clee Hills mix of high rounded summits with heathery tops and brackeny slopes, falling away to small fields of rough or semi-improved pasture on the moorland edge, descending onto a rolling plateau of intensively farmed land with a substantial improved grass/arable component. Woodland cover is sparse and largely limited to the steeper slopes along the scarp edge above the valley of the River Corve and the rougher land on the steeper hill slopes. Our analysis suggests that there is plenty of potential for additional planting without making major inroads into the better farmland. The Stiperstones study area is one of two halves, the relatively intensively farmed area between the Stiperstones themselves and the Long Mynd, with large areas of improved grassland on heavy clay soils and little woodland, and the much-dissected high plateau to the north and west with its areas of heather moorland, highly valued for nature conservation on the hill tops and ridges, and mostly unimproved/semi-improved grass fields separated by hedges with hedgerow trees and occasional areas of deciduous woodland or small conifer

plantations. Again, there is lots of potential for woodland expansion, the largest areas being on the improved pasture land west of the Long Mynd, but perhaps the more appropriate areas are further north on the steeply sloping hillsides along the river valleys. Care will be neede there, however, to ensure that good wet flush vegetation or herb-rich grasslands are not lost in the process. The Clun Forest is already well-wooded by English standards but even so there is a good deal of potential for expansion, especially linking up and expanding out from existing woodland. It is a paradox here as elsewhere that there is least opposition to woodland expansion where there is already good woodland cover and most where woodland is sparse. There is no good ecological reason for this - woodland generally survives primarily because the land is difficult to use for other purposes, not because it is especially good for woodland - but conditioning and reverence for the *status quo* among planners and wildlife conservationists act strongly to limit woodland expansion in areas which have been cleared of their woodland in the (often distant) past and are now valued primarily for their open-ground habitats and species. On the better land where woodland would thrive and could produce high quality timber, there is a resistance to planting by landholders who doubt the economics of switching land from intensive arable/livestock production with its annual returns and potential for rapid change of use depending on the markets for particular commodities, to something so different as native woodland with its perceived long lead-in times, uncertain returns and inflexibility in response to markets.

3.5.3 **The smaller study area - Brown Clee Hill**

3.5.3.1 Criteria for selection

Following discussions with EN and AONB staff the Brown Clee Hill area was chosen within the larger Brown Clee hill 10 x 10 km study area. Its location is shown in Figure 3.2.1. The reasons for choosing this area were as follows:

- this is the area with least existing woodland in the three 10 x 10 km study areas.
- it was considered that there was potential for limited woodland expansion without compromising the 'patchwork quilt' landscape character referred to in the Landscape Guidelines within the Draft Woodland Guidelines. An outside opinion was welcomed on how this might be achieved.

3.5.3.2 Characteristics in relation to the 10 x 10 km study area and the AONB

The three main areas within the AONB are so distinctive that it is not possible to choose one representative area. Ideally a smaller study area would have been chosen in the Clun Forest and Stiperstones areas as well as the Clee Hills, but resources for this project were not sufficient for this. The smaller study area is representative of the Brown Clee Hill 10 x 10 km study area, stretching from just below the summit of Brown Clee Hill to the scarp edge above Corve Dale.

3.5.3.3 Current land use and potential for woodland expansion

The current land use of the study area as recorded by the ITE land cover map (LCM) is shown in Figure 3.5.10 with our suggested opportunities for woodland expansion shown in the overlay (Figure 3.2.9), annotated to show the target woodland types and the preferred means of establishment. There are no SSSI's or other designated areas within the study area.

Table 3.5.1 Distribution of land by ITE land cover types in the Brown Clee Hill study area

Land Cover	Area (ha)	Proportion %
Improved/Semi-improved grass	215	81.3
Scrub	13	5.5
Bracken	1	0.4
Built-up areas	1	0.4
Total	229	

The whole of the area with the exception of the existing areas of scrub (actually linear broadleaved woodland of insufficient width and density to register as woodland on the satellite image) is improved/semi-improved grassland (Plates 3.5.1-3.5.3) (Table 3.5.1). Much of the grassland on the higher ground has only been fertilised and limed, not reseeded, and some fields have a rich flora. Most of the area is on the plateau land, however, and here the fields have often been amalgamated by removing hedgerows (the patches in the quilt are getting larger!) and the pastures improved by ploughing and reseeding. This is often repeated on a regular basis to maintain sward quality, with occasional cereal or other break crops. Tree cover is very limited, mostly consisting of hedgerow trees with a few free-standing trees remaining in the less improved fields. Ash and oak are the commonest species with sycamore and birch less abundant. Many of the hedgerows are of almost pure holly, an unusual feature and one worth preserving should hedgerow planting be planned. Our suggestions for possible woodland expansion are modest amounting to 32 ha (14% of the study area), almost all on improved/semi-improved grassland (Table 3.5.2).

Table 3.5.2 Distribution of possible woodland expansion area by land cover types in the Milldale study area

Land Cover	Area (ha)	Proportion of land cover types (%)
Improved/Semi-improved grass	31	14.4
Bracken	1	100.0
Total	32	14.0

The aim is to develop continuous woodland cover from the scrub on the hillside below the summit of Brown Clee Hill (just out of the study area to the south-east), through the scrubby woodland along either side of the small stream/ditch running across the site from east to west, and out onto the scarp slope above Corve Dale, with a spur linking down the slope to Birchen Coppice SSSI which is currently separated from other woodland by arable fields. In the upper part of the site the need is to expand along the stream filling in areas such as that shown in

Figure 3.5.10

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Smaller Study area –Land cover – Brown Clee Hill

Mapscale 1 : 15000
Contour interval 50 m

Plate 3.5.1

Plate 3.5.2

Plate 3.5.3

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty -
Photogaphs taken at Brown Clee Hill

Plate 3.5.1 Looking across the scarp slope towards Birchen Coppice SSSI (ASNW) in the middle distance in Corve Dale.

Plate 3.5.3 Looking south east towards Brown Clee Hill up a shallow gully suitable for infill woodland expansion by natural regeneration.

Plate 3.5.4 View across enlarged and improved grassland fields on the plateau below Brown Clee Hill and above Corve Dale.

Shropshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Smaller Study area - Possible woodland expansion - Brown Clee Hill

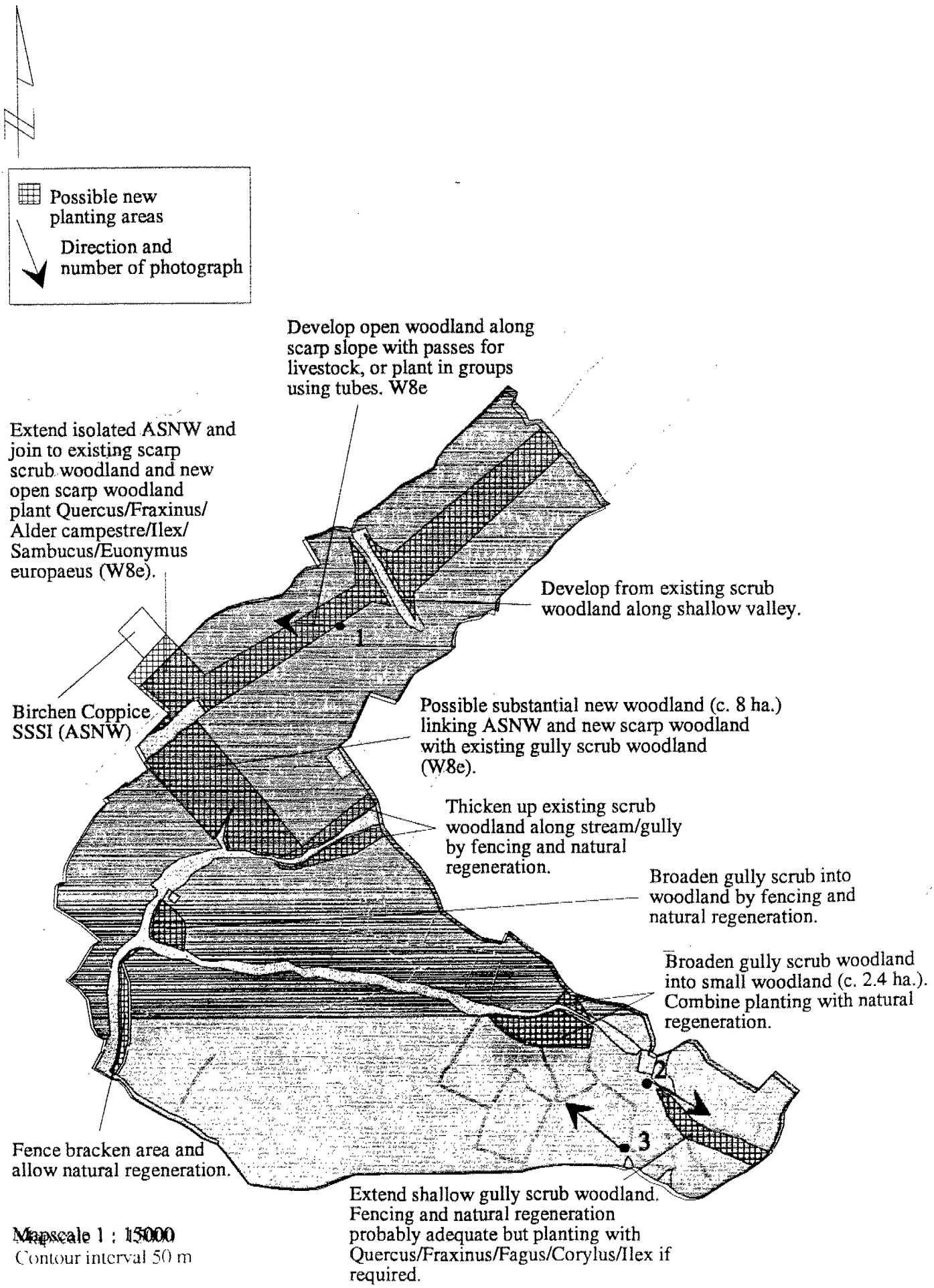


Plate 3.5.2 on the way. There are also possibilities for filling in damp field corners and in one case widening out an area of woodland along a gully by enclosing a small area of bracken. Because of the good number of mature hedgerow trees, also shrubs such as holly, hazel, crab apple, sloe in the hedges and gully scrub woodland it is considered that natural regeneration would generally be sufficient. It is only where substantial areas of new woodland are sought on in open areas (Plates 3.5.1, 3.5.3) that planting would be necessary. It is important to realise that what is suggested for the larger areas, particularly along the scarp slope, is not solid woodland at commercial forestry spacings (although that would be satisfactory from the nature conservation standpoint if required) but open woodland with spaces to provide views out across Corve Dale to Wenlock Edge beyond. This sort of woodland could be established either by planting in enclosures or by the use of individual tree shelters. Appropriate species are mentioned in the notes on the overlay (Figure 3.5.9).

These suggested new areas of woodland, especially that along the scarp slope, would greatly enhance the wildlife conservation value of the area. Areas of existing woodland too small to harbour a full array of appropriate plants and animals would be expanded and linked with each other so that in time they would be able to do so. Less mobile species probably limited to the Birchen Coppice SSSI by its current isolation and hence vulnerable to local extinction, would have an opportunity to move out into the new woodland thus reducing this risk, while at the same time enriching the new plantations. Visually the new woodlands would be unobtrusive, although attention would need to be given here as elsewhere to their landscaping (the 'fence-lines' shown in Figure 3.5.9 merely indicate the places where woodland might be established not the shapes or sizes of individual areas). The scarp woodland would in any case merely extend that found further along the slope to the south-west (out of the study area).

3.5.3.4 Conclusions

The Brown Clee Hill study area offers interesting possibilities for expanding semi-natural woodland without compromising either the open nature of the upper hillside or the 'patchwork quilt' landscape character of small fields and hedges on the plateau above Corve Dale. The proposed new woodland area on the scarp slope is appropriate and in keeping with the kind of woodland cover found in such areas (including on a much bigger scale that on Wenlock Edge). To get the most wildlife conservation benefit is necessary to link this new woodland (albeit not necessarily as solid unbroken trees) to existing woodland and this has been done while taking up the smallest possible effective areas of improved pasture. The opportunity has also been taken to end the isolation of a valuable ASNW woodland SSSI by linking it to the new woodland and to develop continuous 'woodland' (really tree) cover throughout the site. Similar opportunities will be found in many places within this sort of countryside in the Shropshire Hills AONB.