

Landscape

To the east of Swale Borough one landscape character area, Blean Woods West, forms part of a wider band of woodland which extends eastwards into the adjoining Canterbury District. The Blean, situated on London clay and gravel drift deposits, supports one of the largest areas of continuous woodland in the UK, with ancient trees found amongst the enclosed pasture and arable fields providing variety and contrast within the wider agricultural landscape. As a whole this area represents a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodland with mixed coppice with oak standards, sweet chestnut coppice and conifer plantation. The diverse ground flora includes some species indicative of a long history of woodland cover and on the most acidic, gravelly soils heather is present. The unusual close proximity of these large woodlands to the sea creates a distinctive sense of place, unique within the context of the Kent landscape.

Biodiversity

The Blean Woodlands complex, most of which falls within the Canterbury District, supports three SSSIs, a SAC and a National Nature Reserve. The area is noted for birds with over 50 species of breeding bird having been recorded, and for its invertebrate interest with nationally rare species of butterflies such as the heath fritillary. The Blean's western-most extent falls within Swale Borough and contains part of the Church Woods SSSI as well as three woodland LWSs: Blean Woods South, Blean Woods Harbledown to Dunkirk, and Blean Wood West and Holly Hill. These sites form the largest blocks of ancient woodland habitat in the Borough and are thus a very important part of the strategic habitat network.

Climate Change

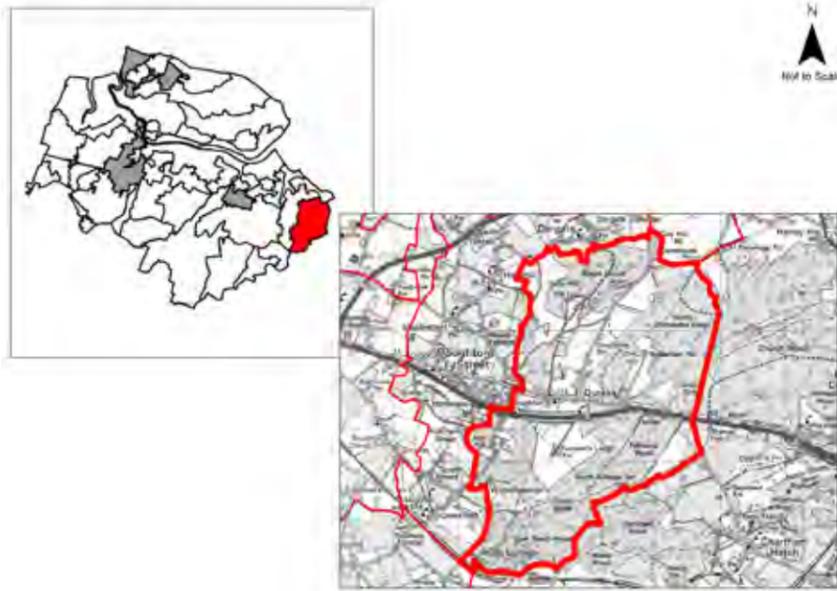
It is difficult to predict how this area's woodland habitat will respond to climate change, but the most likely effect is that species composition within woodlands will alter. Some species may benefit. For example, small leaved lime reproduction may increase in response to warmer temperatures. Non-native species of warmer, drier climates such as holm oak may also become more prevalent. With increased storminess, wind-felled trees will create more natural gaps in woodland which normally increase habitat diversity and benefit species such as the rare heath fritillary butterfly and dormice. However, ecologically valuable veteran trees and the species they support may be lost to wind-throw. Dormice, a woodland species of European importance, may suffer from predicted milder winters which interfere with their hibernation, causing unseasonal energy expenditure at a time when their food is very scarce. The maintenance of woodland habitat quality in terms of native tree and shrub diversity is therefore a prime consideration in this landscape.

It is also likely that woodlands will become more of a focal point for informal recreation as people seek shelter from hotter summer temperatures. This may lead to greater human disturbance and therefore there is a need to extend woodlands and create habitat buffers, particularly around settlements.

Woodland Landscapes Guidelines

- Conserve the landscape character and biodiversity through continued sensitive woodland management practice such as coppicing small areas within each woodland on a rotational basis over a 12 – 15 year cycle.
- Important woodland and trees within the landscape, especially ancient semi-natural woodland should be protected, appropriately managed and, where possible, expanded at their margins. Veteran trees should be protected and appropriately managed.
- Areas of conifer plantation and the more extensive areas of sweet chestnut re-planting should be gradually and sensitively replaced by native broadleaf woodland planting.
- Conserve the woodland fringe which provides the unique interface between open and wooded areas.





Landscape Description

This area is part of the larger Blean woodland complex. The land rises steeply on its western boundary from 40 to 124m. Similarly steep slopes are found at the southern and northern boundaries; elsewhere the ground is gently sloping and rounded. An outcrop of London clay defines the area. The soils found here are slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged. On the steeper peripheral slopes small areas of more fertile loamy soils overlay the clayey base soils.

Deciduous woodlands are dominant on the higher ground and these include many areas of managed hornbeam and chestnut coppice. More recent conifer plantations also feature but are less extensive. The domed high ground is dominated by ancient woodland or ancient replanted woodland. The coppice woodlands harbour the few remaining colonies of the rare heath fritillary butterfly.

This remains one of the most extensive semi-natural woodlands in the south east of England containing many varied habitats of national and international importance reflected in their designations. However, significant areas have been cleared to make way for horse related activities, grazing livestock and dairy farming. Mature standard oaks are commonly seen scattered across these open grazing fields. Many field boundaries are defined by post and wire fencing, with fragmented mature hedgerows found along the narrow lanes and minor roads.

This is an area largely enclosed by topography and woodland but views are present from the higher domed open



Key Characteristics

- Gently to steeply sloping landscape supporting ancient woodland
- Heavy clay soils and fertile loams
- Ancient woodland designated as SSSI, SAC and NNR
- Part of the most extensive semi-natural woodlands in the south east of England
- Areas of woodland cleared for grazing, with extensive views
- Fragmented mature hedgerows along lanes
- A and B roads and narrow winding lanes with few passing places
- Enclosed landscape
- Occasional long views from higher ground of Whitstable, the sea and wind turbines
- Linear village, scattered isolated cottages and farms
- 20th century residential dwellings, flint church. Victorian red brick cottages and farm buildings
- Sense of remoteness and quiet rural lanes

grazing land. Where available, these long panoramic views extend over the northern marshes to the Isle of Sheppey, Whitstable, and the sea and wind turbines.

The A2 divides the area north-south and immediately north of this major trunk road lays the main settlement of Dunkirk. This is a linear village located on the high ground east of Boughton under Blean. Many of the residential dwellings of Dunkirk are of mixed style, date from the mid 20th century and bear no relation to local vernacular character. Otherwise the area possesses a sense of remoteness, accessible only by quiet lanes. Settlement is limited to isolated farms and cottages, many dating from the 1800s are, built in brick and of a vernacular style.

At Dunkirk there are a number of structures that were part of a chain of radar stations that played an important role in the Battle of Britain. These are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Condition: Good

The landscape of the Blean Woods West is in good condition. Whilst there are some detracting features, including the highly prominent telephone mast at Dunkirk village and the post and wire fencing of stock fields, the scene is generally unified. Woodland encloses and screens visually detracting features so that their impact is lessened.

Overall ecological integrity is extremely strong, with areas designated for their nature conservation value. The vast array of woodland types and features are considered exceptional and are the result of centuries of varied management practices. At various times areas have been managed as coppice with standards, pure coppice, high forest, and with areas containing woodland pasture. Recently, conifer plantation has become a feature. As a result the ground and under stories are diverse and rich in flora and fauna. Outside the woodlands, majestic specimen oaks are commonly seen scattered across the open pastures. However, whilst mature hedgerows are generally in good condition along lanes, many internal field boundaries have been formed from post and wire fencing.

Although many of the buildings found within this character zone are of mixed 20th century styles, adjacent woodland screening means that they have only a moderate impact on the surrounding landscape. Numerous historic farm buildings do exist and are in vernacular style. Unfortunately some are declining in condition and require work.

Guidelines: Conserve and Reinforce

The Western Blean woodland character should be conserved and reinforced.

- Consider generic guidelines for woodland landscapes.
- Conserve the largely undeveloped and heavily wooded character of the landscape which forms part of the wider Blean Woods complex.
- Resist further woodland clearance - eg for horse related activities and grazing livestock.
- Create stronger ecological networks by linking ancient woodlands through new woodland planting and hedgerow restoration in appropriate areas, whilst conserving key views over the northern marshes to Whitstable and the sea.
- Conserve the distinct and tranquil landscape character of ancient and semi-ancient woodland complex (including ditches, streams and ponds, scrub, dry and wet heath), together with its setting of wood pasture, open slopes (inc. views) and the rural character of the area's network of narrow winding lanes, enclosed by mature hedgerows. Additionally look for opportunities that would enable woodland to be created.
- Use local and vernacular materials appropriate: for boundaries - red or yellow stock brick or brick and flint, iron railings, timber paling or picket fences or hedgerows, for roofs - Kent-peg tiles and occasional slate for roofs and for building walls - weatherboarding, red or occasional yellow stock brick or occasional

Sensitivity: Moderate

This is a moderately sensitive landscape. The extensive woodland area is a distinct feature and historic in origin. Visibility is low due to the degree of enclosure afforded by the extensive woodland cover. However, where woodland clearance has occurred on high ground, these areas are more visually sensitive. The area's ecological sensitivity is high.

The area possesses a strong sense of place, with a feeling of remoteness partly created by limited vehicular access along quiet rural lanes.

brick and flint. For new hedges and hedgerow trees - hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn, dog rose, field maple and dogwood, for mixed-woodland or other planting - pedunculate oak, alder, holly, beech, sweet chestnut, hornbeam, beech, hazel, ash and birch. Mature oak across open farmland. Additionally, within developed areas - beech for hedging. Other – isolated orchards.

Condition	good	REINFORCE	CONSERVE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE
	moderate	CREATE & REINFORCE	CONSERVE & CREATE	CONSERVE & RESTORE
	poor	CREATE	RESTORE & CREATE	RESTORE
		low	moderate	high
		Sensitivity		

33. Blean Woods West

Biodiversity Network Opportunity

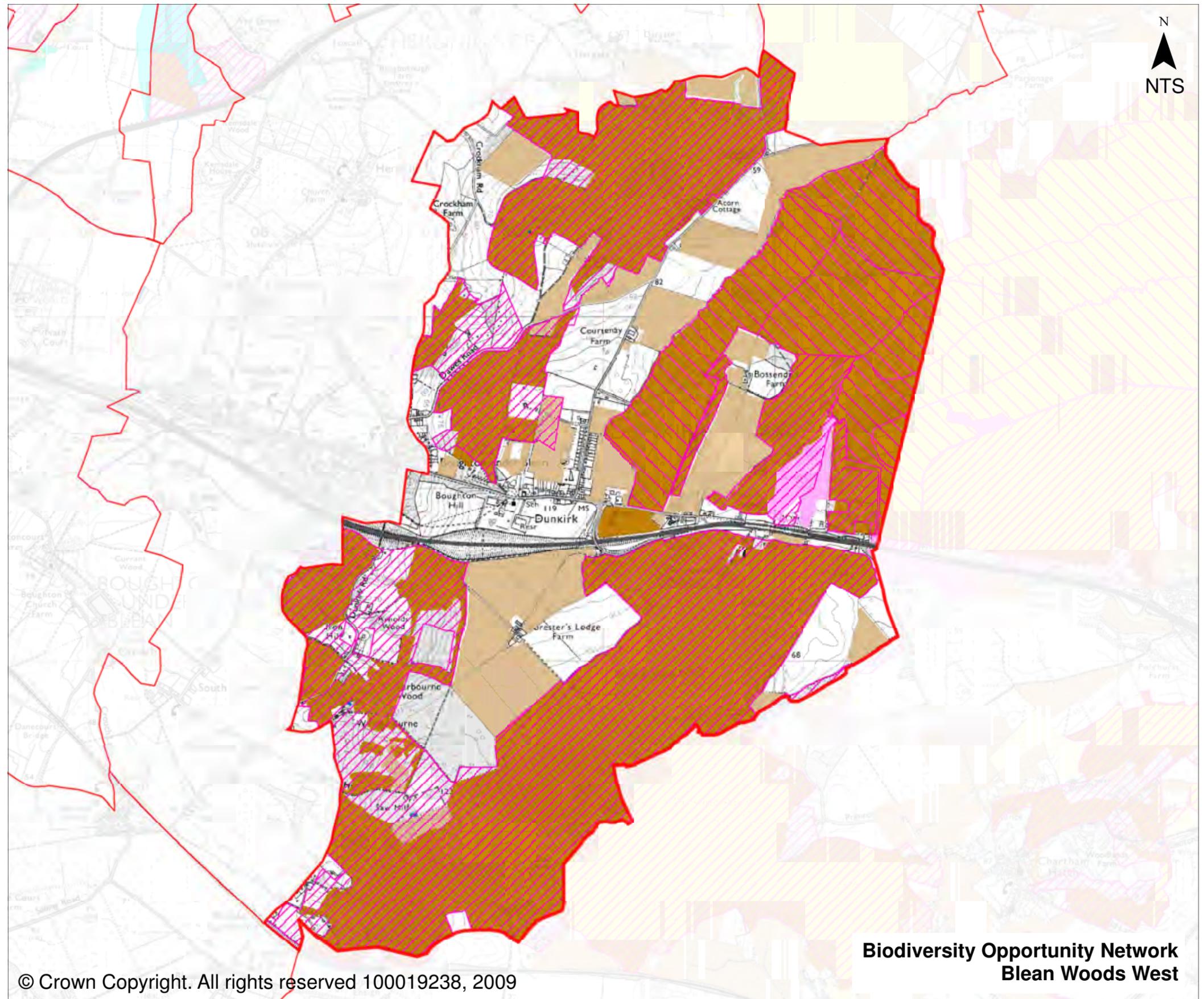
The dominant feature of Blean Woods West is existing ancient woodland where the priority is conservation and appropriate management such as coppicing and gradual removal of planted conifers. There is ample opportunity to link and extend this woodland habitat throughout central and northern parts of the area. As with the rest of the Blean, there is also opportunity to develop the acid grassland and heath network between and amongst the areas of woodland.



Legend: Biodiversity Opportunity Network

Note: Habitats (existing and potential) are only shown where they occur within the strategic network identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust's BOA mapping (see Figure 10 and Appendix C)

- Open water (inland) - existing
- Wetland - existing
- Wetland - potential
- Intertidal habitat - existing
- Grazing marsh - existing
- Grazing marsh & intertidal habitat- potential
- Species-rich neutral grassland - existing
- Species-rich neutral grassland - potential
- Acid grassland & heathland - existing
- Acid grassland & heathland - potential
- Chalk grassland - existing
- Chalk grassland - potential
- Ancient Woodland - existing
- Woodland - potential
- Character Areas
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Local Wildlife Sites



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Blean Woods West**