



Scottish Natural Heritage

RAVENSHALL WOOD Site of Special Scientific Interest

Holmpark Industrial Estate
New Galloway Road
NEWTON STEWART
DG8 6BF

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1334

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Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

| Natural features of Ravenshall Wood SSSI | Condition of feature (and date monitored) |
|--|---|
| Upland oak woodland | Unfavourable Declining (June 2010) |
| Upland mixed ash woodland | Not yet assessed |
| Lichen assemblage | Unfavourable Declining (February 2009) |
| Vascular Plant Assemblage | Unfavourable Recovering (July 2010) |

Description of the site

Ravenshall Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies five kilometres south-east of Creetown. It is one of the best examples of maritime-influenced mixed broadleaf woodland in Dumfries & Galloway.

This maritime oak wood is heavily influenced by strong winds and salt spray. This results in the trees nearest the coast showing the classic appearance of being wind-pruned and stunted. Ash, wych elm and sycamore occur on the free draining slopes, and gean and bird cherry are important elements of the understorey. Hazel is typically found as the main shrub under the oak canopy, with honeysuckle and bramble adding further to the structural diversity. The woodland feature is in unfavourable due in part to the lack of regenerating native tree species, lack of dead wood and the high proportion of regenerating sycamore. The maritime influence, the range of woodland types and the occurrence of caves and cliffs allow the development of a diverse range of lichens for which the site is notified and invertebrates. The lichen interest is in unfavourable declining condition due to encroachment of ivy and brambles on

substrates utilised by lichens.

At least 113 species of beetle have been recorded from the site. Notable invertebrates include the Scotch argus and purple hairstreak butterflies, two species of unusual grasshopper and a rare cave-dwelling wood louse. Small areas of saltmarsh and base-rich maritime grassland, the strandline, springs, reed beds and wet willow woodland add further features of interest.

Rare plants include holy-grass, which is found at only four sites in the region and seaside centauray. Habitats are suitable and management is appropriate, but the populations are small.

The lichen interest is exceptional in the woodland with around 130 species recorded, of which ten are nationally scarce. On the trees, for example, lungwort communities are particularly well developed. Ivy is dominating and out-competing what remains of the *Lobarion* community and rubbish is accumulating along the eastern section of the site. This is not causing a problem at the moment, but if much more rubbish accumulates it is likely to have a negative impact on the *Lobarion* community on rocks nearby. The surveyor noted that careful clearance of the ivy from trees and rocks may be required to ensure that new opportunities for colonisation arise. However, this should only be carried out after careful consideration of the benefits this may have against the potential wider negative impacts of removal of vegetation from trees and rocks and may be located at small scale and specific locations.

| Woodland flora on coastal cliff base Ravenshall Wood | Woodland management and lichen interest on mature ash Ravenshall Wood |
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Past and present management

There is no documented evidence of woodland management, although the felling of some mature oaks followed by the planting of sycamore and other species around 100 years ago is suggested from cut stumps visible on the site. Given the steep, exposed nature of the area, it is unlikely that the site has been used agriculturally for anything other than occasional grazing by sheep or goats.

The woodlands are managed by limited harvesting of mature sycamores in clearly

identified areas, with any subsequent sycamore regeneration being controlled. The open areas created by sycamore removal are restocked with oak, ash, elm, wych elm and cherry. Care is taken to ensure the retention of a fringe of trees on the coast edge to provide wind and salt spray protection for the site. In this respect sycamore is likely to be favoured and should be retained. Some cutting and removal of scrub is carried out to allow access for shooting parties and along power and telephone wayleaves, drains and vehicle access tracks. A limited amount of shingle extraction takes place, and sea defences at Kirkdale Port are maintained.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management agreements.

1. To maintain the extent of the woodland habitats

Oak, ash, elm, alder and willow should be retained as they are favoured by both invertebrates and lichens. Management to increase the structural diversity within the woodland by encouraging regeneration of native species, notably oak, ash and elm should be continued with care to ensure that the sensitive lichen-rich areas retain mature tree cover. Prior to any trees being felled, a lichen survey of those selected must be carried out for lichen interests. Increasing the structural diversity of the woodland is desirable by restocking using natural regeneration, regrowth from cut stumps of hazel and, if necessary, the planting of local provenance native stock should be the priority. Fencing and dyking should be maintained in order to exclude grazing livestock. Rabbits and deer should be managed to allow the establishment of young trees to take place.

2. To maintain populations of lichens within the woodland

Lichens are one of the main interests in the woodlands. One of the key features required for their continued survival is the maintenance of the current high humidity regime. Significant breaks in the canopy would increase air flow within the wood resulting in dramatic changes in humidity which would adversely affect the range of lichens present.

3. To maintain the lichen habitat in the long term

The maintenance of suitable mature trees such as old oak, ash and hazel is required. By developing a diverse age structure, the supply of suitable trees should be safeguarded. The natural regeneration of trees can be reduced or eliminated by grazing and browsing by domestic stock, rabbits and deer. Selective encouragement of oak, ash, elm and hazel is desirable. Sycamore regeneration may be important in future if the predicted losses of ash through ash dieback changes the species diversity of the woodland.

4. To maintain populations of invertebrates

Oak tends to dominate the majority of the canopy, with smaller areas of elm, ash, and hazel. These species should be retained as they are favoured by both lichens and invertebrates. Sycamore, whilst making a productive timber tree with some lichen interest, is of a lower interest for the range of invertebrates it supports. In addition, sycamore can regenerate more quickly and has the potential to dominate areas. When opportunities arise, it should be removed in preference to the other species provided it does not support important lichen communities. Dead wood provides a habitat which is uncommon in many types of woodland. Many of the more uncommon invertebrates found within the woodland rely on a supply of both standing and fallen dead wood. Retention of a continuous supply of both standing and fallen dead wood to provide the habitat required by the rare invertebrates is desirable.

5. To maintain areas of coastal habitats

At the lower levels of this site, there are areas of saltmarsh, base-rich maritime grassland, the strandline, springs, reed beds and wet willow woodland in an unimproved, undisturbed condition. The water supply to the saltmarsh, strandline, springs, reed beds and wet willow woodland should be maintained in the current condition. An increase in nutrients would favour more vigorous and less interesting species. The small scale of these areas, including base-rich maritime grassland, effectively prevents grazing by livestock. Grazing by non-domestic animals, such as deer, can be tolerated provided that they do not adversely affect the regeneration within the woodland.

Date last reviewed: 1 March 2016.