**Bullet point summary of Dr J A Webb's Survey of Plants, Invertebrates and Fungi on Stratfield Brake East Woodland, south of The Triangle.**

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**Version 2, Updated to March 2024**

- Stratfield Brake East is a strip of mature Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, **a Priority UK BAP Habitat (Habitat of Principal Importance, NERC Act 2006).**
- It should be treated as Ancient Woodland which is **'Irreplaceable Habitat' in the NPPF.**
- These are the key features that are indicative of its antiquity:
    - Contains old tree pollards and large diameter old coppice stools
    - On a parish boundary
    - Enclosed by earthen banks and ditches
    - 16 Ancient Woodland Vascular Plant species so far found
    - Excellent diversity and abundance of woodland fungi
    - A growing list of saproxylic (deadwood) invertebrates.
- There is sufficient evidence (coppice and pollard tree structure, flora, fungi, wood banks) to conclude this is Ancient Woodland, despite the lack of map evidence before 1600.
- **Natural England** has indicated the woodland will be mapped as 'Long Established Woodland' which means it is therefore confirmed to have been present since the 1700-1800. This timeframe does not preclude existence before 1600.
- An extraordinary variety of fungi and a start of a good invertebrate list feeding deadwood-breeding species has been achieved.
- Many of the standing dead and dying trees provide ample bat roosting opportunities.
- This strip of woodland is included in the proposed **Nature Recovery Network for Oxfordshire** by Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre as part of a 'Core Zone' ie of the 'highest nature value', existing wildlife areas.
- Areas next to this Core Zone ie the Triangle have '**Strategic Significance'** in the network for future Nature Recovery as they can allow natural colonisation from the rich core or 'hub' areas as planned in the forthcoming **Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy** (LNRS) which addresses the requirements of the Environment Act 2021.
- A list of the 17 plants of Ancient Woodland Vascular Plant (AWVP) species present in Stratfield Brake (East section plus West section) and which are indicative of Ancient Woodland in the south area of the UK. Almost all of them are to be found in the smaller East section of 1.42ha.
- Altogether the floral assemblage is good evidence that this woodland strip is Ancient Woodland.
- In any natural valuable biodiverse woodland 50% of the trees should be dead and 90% of the biodiversity will be associated with the deadwood.
- This woodland is notable for the amount of standing dying trees, deadwood, dead stumps and rotting coppice stools which mean a lot of habitat for fungi and saproxylic (deadwood-breeding) insects.
- For maximum diversity none of the deadwood should be removed in any woodland ecosystem.

- An extraordinarily high total of 147 species of fungi were recognised in this woodland area of only 1.42ha, including one rare one. Such a high diversity of fungi as found here is typical of Ancient Woodland.
- 74 invertebrate species are *so far* recorded, mostly flies and beetles.
- Deadwood-breeding (saproxylic) insects, mostly beetles and flies, will travel out from their breeding site to the margins and to nearby open areas in May to find flowers for pollen and nectar to build up reserves to complete their life cycles. They will therefore depend on flowering plants outside this woodland, showing how the woodland species are connected to surrounding green diverse habitat of flowering hedgerows and willow coppice. Such a flowery '**sustenance zone'** is abundantly available in the adjacent Triangle area (see separate report on the Triangle wildlife) at least three deadwood-breeding (saproxylic) longhorn beetles are recorded on flowers there; these must have travelled out from Stratfield Brake East deadwood for food.
- Purple Hairstreak butterflies were seen in summer 2023 in the oak canopy that overhangs out from the wood to the margin of the Triangle area.
- Ancient woodlands are still disappearing despite recognition of their value and that they are irreplaceable.
- Apart from building on an Ancient Woodland, destruction can occur by development near or immediately adjacent to an Ancient Woodland. Damage can occur then by hydrology change, light pollution, noise pollution, too much public access and trampling of flora (bluebells die from trampling, this also eliminates fungal fruiting) litter, flower-picking/digging, fires destroying trees or deadwood.
- To survive in the current pressurised countryside in the south an Ancient Woodland needs a wide undeveloped green unlit buffer and absolutely minimal strictly controlled public access, in some cases access only for essential woodland management.
- In their '**Planners' Manual for Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees'** (2019) the Woodland Trust state in relation to providing adequate buffers: '*… As a precautionary principle, a **minimum 50 metre buffer** should be maintained between a development and the ancient woodland, including through the construction phase, unless the applicant can demonstrate very clearly how a smaller buffer would suffice*.'
- The government is expected to update [has now updated] the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021 so that local planning authorities must consult the Secretary of State if they want to grant planning permission for developments affecting ancient woodland.
- This northern edge of this woodland is adjacent to the Triangle, the proposed site for Oxford United's new stadium.