



Local Wildlife Sites Project: Citation for Rough Close

Site Name: Rough Close	Site Ref: SP27U3	Grid Ref: SP267787
Local Authority Area: Solihull MBC	Date Selected: 14/2/17	
Ownership: Private	Area:	Management: B
1. Summary of importance. A medium-sized ancient woodland with a great diversity of species situated just beyond the western outskirts of the city of Coventry. Since 1946 the wood has been used as a camp site by the Coventry Scout Group.		
2. Position in the landscape and access. Rough Close is situated off Tanner's Lane in the parish of Berkswell, 2km east-south-east of the village and on the border with the Coventry suburb of Tile Hill. The wood was formerly surrounded by a network of small pasture fields and hay meadows, but most of these have now been ploughed up and enlarged for arable farming. Arable fields now border the wood to the north (Hawkhurst Moor), west (Victoria Farm) and south (Glebe Farm). To the east a narrow fringe of part-managed grassland, Banner Lane Meadows LWS, separates the wood from extensive new housing estates which now cover the site of the old Banner Lane car plant. The site is one of a scatter of ancient woodlands which formerly existed between Meriden and Kenilworth, but since the last war many have either been cleared for agriculture or replanted with commercial trees, while others have been engulfed by the spreading suburbs of Coventry. Many of the survivors are now also Local Wildlife Sites, with the nearest to Rough Close being a small group containing Millison's, Crow and Spring Woods 2.25km to the north-north-west, Tile Hill Wood SSSI 0.75km to the east, and Pig, Limbrick, Plants Hill and Park Woods LNRs 1-1.5km to the south-east. Those situated within Tile Hill are now isolated by housing estates. To the south the nearest LWSs are the Kenilworth Greenway and Black Waste Wood 2.5km in distance, while to the west there is a considerable mosaic of woodland (mostly replanted) and grassland sites on the Berkswell estate 3km away, but most of these remain as pLWSs. There is no general public access to the site, although a public footpath follows the northern outside edge of the wood and there is a much-used permissive path through the adjoining Banner Lane Meadows to the east. The wood is heavily used for camping and other activities by the Coventry Scout Group as well as for hosting events for Scout groups from across the midlands.		
3. Land Use History. Rough Close has a long history as a woodland and probably originated in the medieval period as an enclosure within the surrounding wood pasture; and prominent boundary banks are still visible. It is known that in 1277 the Manor of Berkswell had been sold to the Earl of Warwick, whose wife had granted the right to remove underwood for fuel to the monks of Kenilworth Priory. It thus may have originated at this time as a rough acid pasture that was enclosed by the monks and planted up as a coppice wood. It was first listed in documents in 1316 as ' <i>le rooclos</i> ' (Place Names of Warwickshire, EPNS, 1936). By 1609 it was listed as 'Roughclose' and by then had become part of the Berkswell Hall Estate. It would have been managed for its timber and coppice products and by the 19 th century also for game and fox-hunting. The size (16.6 ha) and shape of the wood		



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probably didn't change until around 1950, with the western wood boundary following the former green lane running between Reeves Green and Hawkhurst Moor, which is now over 100m west of the present boundary. In 1946 Mrs Christabel Wheatley, the widow of Colonel Charles Wheatley the last owner of Berkswell Hall, sold the wood to the Coventry Scout Group for £1000 to help provide a rural camping experience for the children of the city and camps were held here from 1947. Before the war the Wheatleys had hosted scout camps in Berkswell Park. It was during the early days of the camp that the western section of the wood was cleared to provide a parade ground for jamborees, while small clearings were made elsewhere within the wood as camp grounds. The small amphitheatre bordered by spruces also dates to this time. In recent years facilities have greatly expanded and larger buildings have been constructed to provide new activity and training facilities. It is now regarded as one of the biggest and best scout camps in the midlands. Despite often heavy disturbance to parts of the site when large events are held, much of the wood remains undisturbed and unmanaged, apart from occasional felling to enlarge existing clearings and some limited conifer planting, the latter probably before 1970. A corridor of land through the south-east of the wood was also felled a few years ago when a new power line was put through, and this has been left to regenerate naturally. There has been some screening along the eastern boundary using (not always native) shrubs and occasional alien trees and shrubs are found in previously cleared areas around the southern and western sections of the wood. Access around the wood is via a network of dirt roads and paths.

4. Topography and Geology.

The wood is situated on a very gentle south-east facing slope, with the altitude dropping from 135m ASL on the western boundary down to 125m ASL in the south-eastern corner. It is naturally damp in places, particularly in the north-eastern sector and there are several seasonal drains across the site emptying into the eastern boundary ditch.

The underlying geology consists of moderately acidic clays belonging to the Warwickshire Group of the Upper Carboniferous, located on the edge of the Warwickshire Coalfield.

5. Habitat Description.

The LWS comprises mature and locally damp ancient woodland, characteristic of the W10 Pedunculate Oak-Bracken-Bramble NVC community⁴, the typical climax woodland of the more acid soils across northern, central and western Warwickshire.

The canopy is rather variable in tree height, age and density and is composed mainly of frequent to locally abundant Pedunculate Oak together with abundant Downy Birch, the latter often arising from old coppice. A varied number of other tree species are present, some probably arising from past estate planting, and among these are frequent Beech, Ash, Rowan and Small-leaved Lime, many of the latter also arising from old coppice stools. Alder is locally frequent (and very locally dominant) on wetter soils in the north-east of the wood, while more occasional species include Sycamore, Silver Birch, Copper Beech, Scots Pine and Aspen, with rare Horse Chestnut and Hornbeam. A belt of planted mature conifers present in the northern half of the wood comprises mainly Norway Spruce, but with small numbers of Larch, Scots Pine and Western Red Cedar. Small patches of mature Norway Spruce also exist around the amphitheatre and in one place in the south-western part of the wood. The shrub layer is rather variable, but still locally dense in places; and consists mainly of frequent to locally abundant Holly and frequent Hazel, arising from past coppice stools. Aspen and Blackthorn are also both locally frequent in the damper areas, while shrubs of rare to occasional occurrence include Field Maple, Hawthorn, Alder Buckthorn, Crab



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Apple, Wild Cherry, Dog and Field Roses, Goat and Grey Sallows, Elder, Yew and Guelder-rose, together with scattered young tree saplings from the canopy such as Sycamore, Alder, Birch, Ash, Pedunculate Oak and Rowan. There has been some rather recent planting of unsuitable species on the western and southern edges of the wood, including locally frequent Cherry Laurel and occasional Firethorn, Rhododendron and others. The ancient wood bank which forms the perimeter to the woodland is still topped by a rather fragmented and mostly defunct hedge, which is mainly composed of Hawthorn, Hazel and Holly, together with frequent oak and Ash standards. There are also locally frequent Small-leaved Limes, mostly arising from old coppice stools. The ground flora is very characteristic of W10⁴ woodland, with locally abundant Creeping Soft-grass, Bluebell, Yellow Archangel, Wood-sorrel, Bramble and Greater Stitchwort, although it becomes sparse or absent in some of the more disturbed areas. Bracken is more localised but is very locally dominant, particularly in the north of the wood. Also frequent throughout the site are Wood Sedge, Tufted Hair-grass, Broad Buckler and Common Male-ferns, Cleavers, Herb Robert, Herb Bennet, Ivy, Wood Millet, Rough Meadow-grass and Wood Dock, with more locally frequent Wood Melick and Common Dog-violet, particularly on the perimeter wood bank. Species recorded at a lower frequency include Cuckoo Pint, Lady Fern, False Brome, Hairy Brome, Foxglove, Giant Fescue, Slender St.John's-wort, Honeysuckle, Three-nerved Sandwort, Primrose, Common Figwort, Red Champion, Black Bryony, Upright Hedge-parsley and Bush Vetch. In the numerous damp flushes and ditches floral diversity is greater, with frequent to locally abundant Wood Anemone, Enchanter's Nightshade, Marsh Thistle (mostly in cleared areas as along the course of the power line), Common Marsh-bedstraw, Floating Sweet-grass, Yellow Pimpernel, Tufted Forgetmenot, Selfheal, Creeping Buttercup and Wood Speedwell. Large Bindweed is also locally abundant in some of these flushes and along the southern wood border. Also locally frequent are Bugle, *Callitriche* sp., Remote Sedge, Square-stalked St.John's-wort, Soft Rush, Common Water-pepper, Raspberry and Thyme-leaved Speedwell, while more occasional plants include Marsh Foxtail, Wild Angelica, Wavy Bittercress, Hairy Sedge, Narrow Buckler-fern, Hoary and Square-stemmed Willowherbs, Field Horsetail, Common Hemp-nettle, Jointed, Toad and Compact Rushes, Soft Shield-fern, Redcurrant, Clustered Dock, Bittersweet and Devilsbit Scabious. Two rarer species found were Fen Bedstraw, very locally frequent in a small flushed marsh in the north-east corner, and Bristle Club-rush on a wet track in the cleared section through which the power lines run. The several campground clearings were formerly described as being dominated by Common Bent, but are now improved and close-mown and have been reseeded with Perennial Ryegrass and Annual Meadow-grass. They contain typical lawn herbs such as Common Daisy, Great Plantain, Creeping Buttercup and White Clover. The large one in the north-east corner has slightly more diversity with occasional Common Bent and Red Fescue surviving, as well as one or two specimens of the county notable Trailing St.John's-wort. Since the last botanical survey in 1988 many plants, mostly connected with acid grassland and wet flushes, seem to have been lost from the wood. This appears to be partly due to the reseeded and regular mowing of the various campground clearings and partly due to the drying up and shading out of several previously wet areas. Amongst those recorded then but not found during the present survey were Scaly Male-fern, Heath-grass, Wavy Hair-grass, Wood Meadow-grass, Meadow Fescue, Oval Sedge, Pale Sedge (known to be still present in 1995), Midland Hawthorn, Woodruff, Heath Bedstraw, Marsh Birdsfoot-trefoil, Hairy and Heath Woodrushes, Ragged Robin, Common Tormentil, Sheep's Sorrel, Bog Stitchwort, Heath Speedwell, Zigzag Clover and Common Valerian (WBRC). Others such as Pignut and Lesser Celandine are almost certainly still present but were missed due to the late date of the visit. Additionally, in 1988 a small patch of bog-moss (*Sphagnum* sp.) was found in a flush at the centre of the wood.



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6. Other Faunal and Floral groups.

Despite the lack of woodland management and deer browsing which has led to the decline in the thickness of the shrub layer, a good variety of woodland birds still breed in the wood. Amongst those recorded during the survey (with some breeding territory counts in brackets) were Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Song Thrush (seven), Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Chiffchaff (12), Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher (two), Long-tailed Tit, Marsh Tit (one), Coal Tit, Nuthatch (two), Treecreeper (six), Jay and Bullfinch. Tawny Owls are frequently heard here according to a local resident and presumably breed, while a pair of Ravens were also seen. Breeding birds recorded during the 1980's also included Kestrel, Woodcock, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Garden and Willow Warblers, Willow Tit, Starling and Lesser Redpoll, most of which have probably now gone (WBRC/WMBC).

There appear to be few records for other groups, but the wood is likely to have some importance for various invertebrate groups.

7. Phase 1 Habitats present (with Phase 1 codes in brackets)*

Broad-leaved semi-natural woodland (A111), Coniferous plantation (A122), Dense scrub (A21), Scattered scrub/tall herb (A22/C31), Marsh (B5), Poor semi-improved grassland (B6), Continuous Bracken (C11), Amenity grassland (J12), Defunct hedge (J22).

*Please refer to Appendix I Habitat Map

8. Evaluation against the criteria³

Habitat criteria applied: Woodland and scrub.

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site						COMMUNITY CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site				
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5
Diversity	√	√	√	√	√		Physical & Visual Access				√	
Rarity	√	√					Educational Value	√				
Size	√						Community & Amenity Value					
Naturalness	√	√	√	√	√	√	Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape	√	√	√	√	
Fragility	√						Geographical Position		√			
Typicalness	√	√	√				Recorded History					
Ecological Position	√	√					Continuity of Land Use	√		√		
Significant Populations												
Potential Value	√											



9. Why this site qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site: summary of assessment

Rough Close qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site with 21 scientific and nine community criteria applying, of which the following are considered most important.

Diversity

Rough Close is an ancient oak-birch-hazel woodland with a high diversity of vascular plants. 151 species were recorded during the present survey, but a more exhaustive survey including spring visits would probably add another 50 species or more. The majority of these are characteristic of W10 woodland or acid grassland, although the latter group has declined in recent years, and include about 12 species considered to be ancient woodland indicators in the sub-region. These include Wood Anemone, Remote Sedge, Hazel coppice, Yellow Archangel, Crab Apple, Alder Buckthorn, Wood Melick, Wood Millet, Wood-sorrel, Small-leaved Lime, Yellow Pimpernel and Wood Speedwell, while Woodruff, Heath Woodrush, Hairy Woodrush and Wood Meadow-grass were recorded in 1988 and might still be present. The wood possesses a variety of sub-habitats including groups of mature conifers, regenerating scrub in clear-fell, wet flushes and drains, open Bracken and grassy glades. The wood has a good bird population, but other groups are largely unstudied.

Rarity

Ancient W10 deciduous woodland is a declining and threatened habitat within Warwickshire as it is across the UK. It contains at least one species that is scarce in the Warwickshire sub-region (Bristle Club-rush) and the following county notables: Remote Sedge, Narrow Buckler-fern, Alder Buckthorn, Fen Bedstraw, Trailing, Slender and Square-stalked St. John's-worts, Yellow Archangel, Wood Melick, Wood Millet, Soft Shield-fern, Devilsbit Scabious, Small-leaved Lime and Wood Speedwell. At least 14 more were found in 1988 here and some of them could still be present, albeit in very small numbers.

At least four nationally red-listed birds⁵ (Song and Mistle Thrushes, Spotted Flycatcher and Marsh Tit) still breed, the latter two now found at very few sites in Solihull.

Naturalness

Most of the wood is still in a very natural condition, with plenty of old timber, dead wood, a good shrub layer and natural regeneration. Planting of non-native trees and shrubs has occurred but is still very localised. There are many ancient woodland indicator plants present.

Typicalness

This is a good local example of a W10 oak-birch-hazel wood, with many similar ones in the corridor between Meriden and Kenilworth now either cleared or replanted with unsuitable commercial trees. It still includes a medieval wood bank and a number of old boundary pollards and coppice stools, the latter including frequent Small-leaved Lime.

Ecological Position

The wood is the western member of a group of seven ancient woodlands situated in the Tile Hill area, but only this one has not been engulfed by the Coventry suburbs. It is partly connected still to the nearest (Tile Hill Wood SSSI) by a network of well-timbered old hedgerows, though this is severed by Banner Lane. The wood is closely associated with five fields of semi-improved grassland at the adjoining Banner Lane Meadows LWS



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Physical and Visual Access

Although there is no general public access, public and permissive paths run along the outside of the wood on the north and east sides from where the site is very visible.

Aesthetic Appeal and Landscape Character

An attractive wood, typical of the local Arden landscape, but which forms a prominent landscape feature in the open farming landscape between Meriden, Berkswell and Reeves Green, where woodland is generally small and isolated.

Geographical Position

The site is very close to large residential communities in the Banner Lane area of Tile Hill as well as more scattered development in the Hockley-Reeves Green area.

Continuity of Land Use

The site has probably been woodland for at least 700 years, with a good flora representing both ancient woodland and its acid grassland predecessor.

Sources of information:

Ecosite No: 14/27

Survey Details:

Date:	Survey Type:	Surveyors:	Location of records
04/07/2017	Phase 2	J J Bowley	HBA
21/09/2012	Phase 1	M Fyfe	HBA
1988	Botanical survey	Coventry Wildlife Survey	WBRC
1972-	Misc. records Birds	Various Various	WBRC WMBC

Any Other Information: The site was formerly included within an old 1998 Coventry SINC which also contained the adjoining Banner Lane and Conway Farm Meadows, although the wood appears not to have been recognised as such within Solihull.

It is listed as ancient woodland in the Inventory of Ancient Woodland, Warwickshire section (English Nature, 1989).

Management

<u>Category</u>	<u>Current management</u>	<u>Management recommendation</u>
A	Good	Maintain current regime
B	Medium	Enhance current regime
C	Minimal	Enhance as necessary
D	Inappropriate	Change management regime



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Recommendations:

It is important to retain a good biodiversity in the wood and there are signs that this has declined in recent years, particularly with the loss of acid grassland. This could be rectified by:

- 1) Widening the rides by removing trees and shrubs and creating sunny herb-rich grass borders. These should be strimmed in late autumn every two-three years, but otherwise left unmanaged.
- 2) Opening up the ground in places by selectively coppicing some of the denser patches of Holly. This will benefit the ground flora.
- 3) Reducing mowing in some of the clearings where feasible, and preferably leaving a rough border.
- 4) Remove alien shrubs from wood and prevent further planting of alien plants, particularly invasive garden herbs such as the variegated form of Yellow Archangel.
- 5) Protect the current woodland boundary from further clearances and where possible replant any unwanted corners with a mix of oak and Hazel.
- 6) Replant and protect the old western wood bank where necessary and connect it up to the rest of the wood.
- 7) Protect existing wetland areas and perhaps put in one or two small drinking ponds for birds.
- 8) Introduce a monitored nest box scheme for birds (including open-fronted ones for Spotted Flycatcher) and bats and perhaps install a winter feeding station for birds. The latter would benefit the now (in Solihull) scarce Marsh Tit. These could be run by the scout group.

Completed by: J J Bowley

Date: 10/11/2017

Passed by Sites Selection Panel: Yes / No / Deferred (Further survey required).

Signed by the Chair:

Date:

On behalf of the LWS panel.

References

1. Falk S. J. (2009). *Warwickshire's Wildflowers*. Studley.
2. JNCC. (1993 repr.). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: a technique for environmental audit*. Peterborough: JNCC.



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3. Local Wildlife Sites Project. (2015). *The Green Book: Guidance for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull*. Warwick: Habitat Biodiversity Audit office.
4. Rodwell J. S. et al (2003 repr.) *British Plant Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. RSPB/BTO. (2015). *BoCC4: Birds of Conservation Concern*. RSPB/BTO.
6. Stroh et al. (2014). *Red Data List of Vascular Plants in England*. Peterborough: JNCC.



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Appendix 1

