

# WOODLAND PLOTS

## Friend or Foe?

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# Introduction

- existing for many years.
- Kent has significant areas of woodland, many that are relatively small
- plotting more acute than in other areas of the UK?
- economy of forestry has decline - need to maximising income from assets that have no apparent long-term economic potential
- factors such as a buoyant economy; increased levels of disposable income; a desire to “own” a woodland for reasons such as quiet recreation, sporting rights, and/or planning and investment “hope” value

# Examples of Potential Impacts?

- plots may be divided up with barriers, that detract from the appearance of countryside
- difficulties in managing nationally and locally important wildlife sites
- can lead to neglect that is difficult to put right if owners cannot be traced
- Lack of or diverse management practices that conflict with the woodland character

# Examples of Potential Impacts?

- gives rise to local concern and a false impression that development of the land is bound to occur, regardless of planning status
- inappropriate and damaging management practices that impact on visual amenity, biodiversity and heritage resources
- Complex and difficult communication with multiple landowners
- Low uptake of grants/incentives for positive management and improvement

# Examples of Potential Impacts?

- No collective responsibility for managing features that cross landowners
- Degradation of amenity may result from the creation of hard standing or the stationing of caravans
- The erection of inappropriate structures in a rural setting, as well as unlawful development
- Loss of informal public access
- Neglect, attracting unsociable and illegal behaviour

# Examples of Potential Benefits?

- Community Ownership
- Increased amenity usage and increased informal public access
- Management of unsociable and illegal behaviour
- long term security of ownership
- sympathetic & positive management practices of biodiversity and heritage resources
- diverse management practices that are consistent with the woodland character
- maximises (short-term) economic return

# Examples of Controls

- Article 4 directions issued by district councils to prevent specific types of development
- Felling licenses issues by the Forestry Commission to controlled removal of trees
- Section 102 and 215 Town and Country Planning Act
- Compulsory Purchase Orders/Land Leasing
- Enforcement against unlawful change of land use.
- Use of Highways regulations to limit/stop access

# Examples of Advice

Forestry Commission

Local Authorities

Countryside Management Projects

AONB Units e.g. Kent Downs

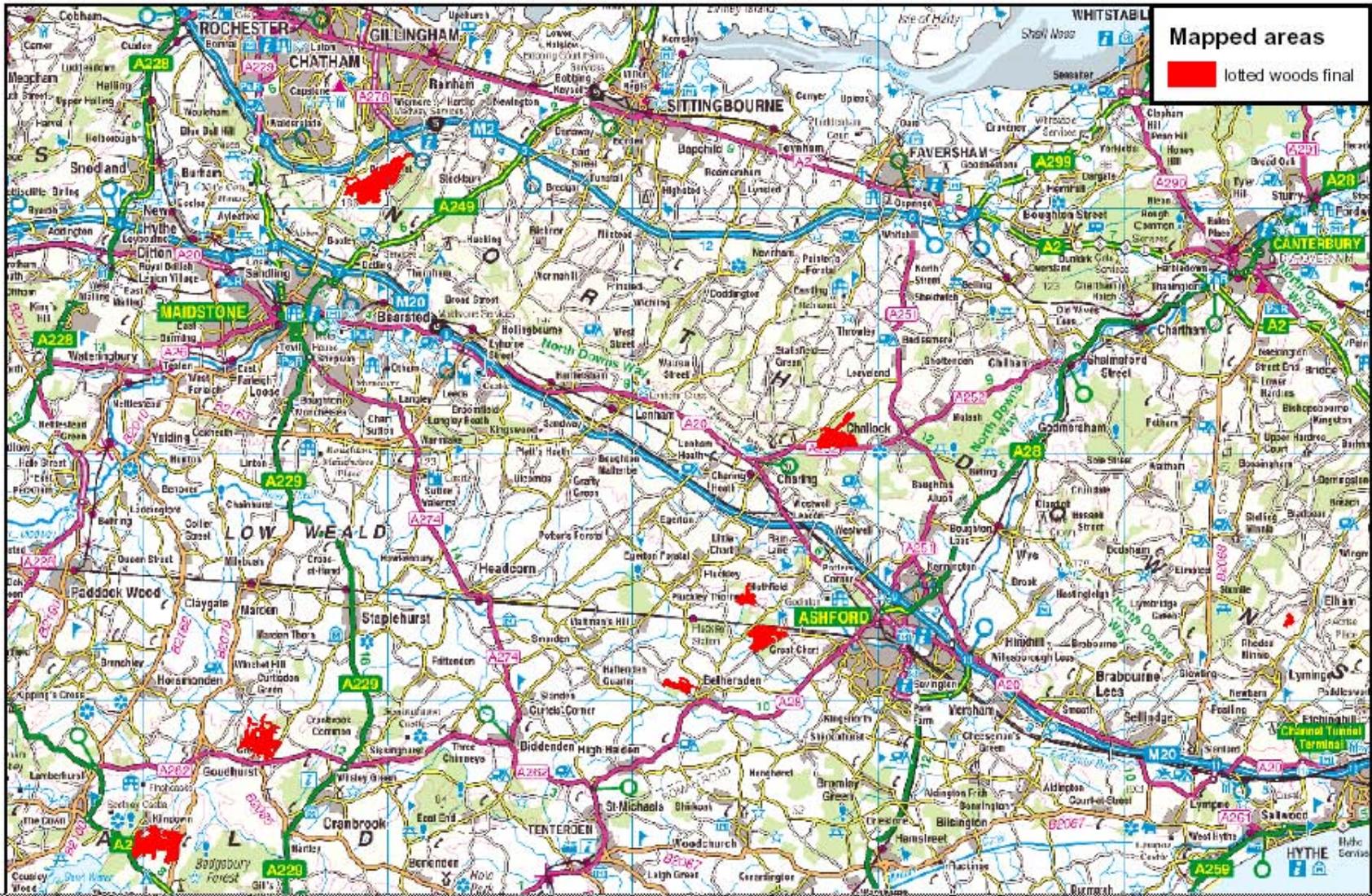
Small Woods Association

# Kent Study

- Kent is a highly wooded county (approx. 15% landcover)
- The total extent of woodland (both historical and currently on the market) divided into plots appears relatively small



# Lotted woodlands in Kent



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# Kent Study - Impact on PROW

- web search identified 5 woodlands marketed as 17 sub-lots - only possible to map sites with precise location details,
- Area PROW teams to identify access issues.
- no PROW issues have been noted on identified sites attributable to plotting.
- 8 sites were identified in total as having been recently plotted, 2 woodlands are believed to be subject to article 4 directives
- Sub-plotting appears not seem to be having a significant impact on PROW access

# Case Study 1

- West Blean and Thornden Woods. Canterbury.
- extensive area (500ha) of European importance.
- previously owned by HSBC came on the market in 2002.
- purchased by the Kent wildlife Trust with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Nature, Kent County Council, Canterbury City Council and the Forestry Commission.
- supported the purchase as there was a significant risk the woodland would be sold and subsequently divided into plots

# Case Study 2

- Seasalter Marshes. Canterbury
- Area of agricultural low-lying wet grassland was divided into leisure plots
- physically deteriorated and a number of illegal developments and activities occur on the site
- Area is designated as Special Protection Area for its European wildlife interests
- Canterbury City Council, with support from a range of partners organisations is Compulsory Purchase the site
- The land will be managed consistent with the nature conservation objectives

# Conclusions/Discussion

- Chronic but relatively small scale issue
- Negative Impacts can be acute
- Does an accurate evidence bases exist to prove the case of need for action? (existing and new)
- Do the negatives outweigh the positives?
- What additional action is required?
- What are the solutions for historically divided woodland and those currently being plotted?