

Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Oldbury and Seal Chart Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

This statement represents English Nature's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. English Nature has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation. English Nature's written consent is still required before carrying out any operation likely to damage the features of special interest (see your SSSI notification papers for a list of these operations). English Nature welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Management Principles

Broadleaved semi-natural woodland

There are many different ways in which broadleaved woodland can be managed to conserve its value for wildlife. The following gives broad views on a range of regimes that may be appropriate on your site.

A diverse woodland structure, with open space, a dense understorey, and a more mature overstorey is important. A range of ages and species within and between stands is desirable. Some dead and decaying wood, including standing and fallen timber, provides important habitats for fungi and invertebrates. However, work may be needed to make safe dangerous trees in areas of high public access. Both temporary and permanent open spaces benefit invertebrates such as butterflies. They may require cutting to keep them open, and should be of sufficient size to ensure that sunny conditions prevail for most of the day.

Felling, thinning or coppicing may be used to create or maintain variations in the structure of the wood, and non-native trees and shrubs can be removed at this time. To avoid disturbance to breeding birds the work is normally best done between the beginning of August and the end of February. Work should be avoided when the ground is soft, to prevent disturbing the soil and ground flora. Normally successive

felling, thinning or coppicing operations should be spread through the wood to promote diversity, but where there is open space adjacent plots should be worked to encourage the spread of species that are only weakly mobile. Natural regeneration from seed or stump regrowth is preferred to planting because it helps maintain the local patterns of species and the inherent genetic character of the site.

Deer management and protection from rabbits or livestock are often necessary. Whilst light or intermittent grazing may increase woodland diversity, heavy browsing can damage the ground flora and prevent successful regeneration. Invasive species, such as *Rhododendron ponticum* or Himalayan balsam, should be controlled.

Parts of a wood should be left unmanaged to benefit species that do best under low disturbance or in response to natural processes. Within these areas some trees will eventually die naturally and dead wood will accumulate, providing a rich resource for certain invertebrates.

Dry lowland heath

Heathland supports the greatest diversity of plants and animals (including a diverse invertebrate fauna and a number of characteristic bird species) where management maintains the open nature of the heath, and promotes a varied structure of uneven-aged stands of native heathers and other characteristic plants. It is generally beneficial if all stages of the heather life cycle are present. Without such management heathland becomes progressively dominated by bracken, gorse and/or scrub and trees.

Low intensity grazing is a suitable means of managing dry heath. By feeding selectively in different areas and on different plants, free-roaming livestock help to maintain variation in the vegetation composition and structure. They can also suppress scrub encroachment and provide some light poaching to create small pockets of bare peat and sandy ground that are of benefit to a variety of specialised plants, invertebrates and reptiles. Sheep, cattle or hardy ponies can be used. An appropriate stocking rate should take into account local conditions and the timing and length of grazing, but an off-take of between 30-40% of the current growth increment is desirable. Care must be taken to avoid damage to the heather by trampling.

Alternatively, cutting or mowing may be useful options where a mosaic of patches of heather of different ages is desired, or where grazing is not practical. The cut material should be removed to avoid nutrient accumulation on site and to allow the cut plants to re-sprout successfully.

There is some benefit in retaining a few scattered individual trees some small patches of scrub. For example, the maintenance of scattered mature Scots pine in undisturbed locations will provide suitable nest sites for hobbies. However, this should not impact upon the open nature of the heath. Mechanical control or manual cutting may be necessary to avoid this, followed by the careful application of a suitable herbicide. The same treatment may be required to control dense bracken invasion, and it may also be appropriate to remove the decomposed bracken litter layer in some areas by scraping of the humus layer

Although careful maintenance of existing ditches and drains is acceptable, the abandonment or deepening of ditches or drains should be avoided. In some instances it may be appropriate to restore natural drainage where this is possible.

All habitats

The habitats within this site are highly sensitive to inorganic fertilisers and pesticides, applications of which should be avoided both within the site itself and in adjacent surrounding areas. Herbicides may be useful in targeting certain invasive species, but should be used with extreme care. Access to this site, and any recreational activities within, may also need to be controlled when chemicals are being used.