

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Hesketh Golf Links 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

Sand-dunes

Sand-dune habitats support a diverse range of species and communities. Sand-dunes develop where sand is blown landwards from the intertidal beach plain and is deposited above the high water mark. This is then colonised by dune building grasses which can continue to grow up as new layers of sand are deposited. A process of succession takes place as sand-dunes develop first into embryo dunes which can be ephemeral, then into semi-fixed dunes dominated by marram grass, and eventually into fixed dunes. Depending on the location of the dune in the system, different types of specialist vegetation occur. For example, the key features of the early-successional dunes are marram and lyme grass, with areas of bare sand. These more open communities can be important for amphibians and reptiles and some breeding birds including several species of terns. The fixed dunes tend to be characterised by a more continuous sward of vegetation which may include dune grassland, low scrub, heath and lichen-dominated communities, which are often important for a variety of breeding and passage birds. Low-lying areas within dune systems are referred to as slacks, which can be either wet or dry and may be created by blowouts. These slacks can also be important for amphibians, including rare species such as the natterjack toad.

The management of dune systems should take into account the need to maintain the range of habitats and associated species reflecting the different stages of succession, by maintaining (or restoring where necessary) the natural processes and dynamics of dune development and succession.

Dune systems exhibit a degree of dynamism, for example change from blowouts or newly deposited sand, which helps to retain a variety of successional stages within the site. Without management intervention, a mix of dune scrub and woodland may eventually replace the habitats on stable areas of the dune. Selective scrub management and grazing or mowing may be necessary. Where light grazing has traditionally been practised, this prevents the invasion of scrub and it should be continued. The effects of non-domestic grazing animals, such as rabbits, should also be taken into account. Other management options that might be appropriate include mowing to remove rank vegetation and in extreme situations can include turf stripping, which is useful for recreating the younger stages of slack formation.

Many of the vegetation types supported by sand dunes are fragile and vulnerable to erosion from heavy trampling. Where recreational pressures are significant enough to result in the loss of vegetation cover and prevent recovery, it may be necessary to take steps to manage access by putting boardwalks in or controlling activities in vulnerable areas such as the foredunes. It may also be necessary to manage access to limit the impacts of disturbance on breeding birds. Where recreation pressure is not severe, the impact of trampling can help to retain diversity on some sites – sandy tracks break up the vegetation sward and provide areas of bare sand thus increasing the diversity of habitats available.

Sand lizards (coastal dune habitats)

Sand lizards require unshaded areas of sand dunes with thick tangled tussocks of dune grasses scattered amongst open patches of well drained bare sand on which to bask and lay eggs. The provision and maintenance of areas of south-facing open sand is essential. Where sand lizards are known to be present, any grazing should be of very low density (to minimise the impact of trampling on the lizards and their eggs and causing changes to habitat structure) or excluded entirely where high population densities of the lizards are known to occur. Encroaching scrub and trees should be controlled to avoid shading-out suitable habitat, though some scattered scrub can be of benefit. Most management operations should be restricted to early spring, late autumn and winter to minimise the risk of disturbance to the lizards.