



Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Kings and Bakers Woods and Heaths 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

Woodland

There may be several different ways in which the woods can be managed to best conserve their value for wildlife - by promoting an appropriate woodland structure, by ensuring regeneration and by looking after the things that make these woods special. The attached notes give broad views on a range of regimes that may be appropriate on your site.

A diverse woodland structure with some open space, some areas of dense understorey, and an over-storey of more mature trees (which may be the standard trees under a coppice-with-standards regime) is important. A range of ages and species within and between stands is desirable.

Some dead and decaying wood such as fallen logs, old hollow trees or old coppice stools is essential for providing habitats for fungi and dead wood invertebrates. Work may, however, be needed to make safe dangerous trees where they occur in areas of high public access.

Open spaces, either temporary gaps created by felling or coppicing or more permanent areas such as rides and glades, benefit other groups of invertebrates such as butterflies. They should be of sufficient size to ensure that sunny conditions prevail for most of the day. Rides and glades may require cutting to keep them open.

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. Wet woodland by streams and other waterbodies is often best left undisturbed. Normally, successive felling, thinning or coppicing operations should be spread through the wood to avoid too much disturbance in one area. However, where there is open space interest (e.g. rich butterfly populations) adjacent plots may be worked to encourage the spread of species that are only weakly mobile.

Natural regeneration from seed or stump re-growth (as in coppice) is preferred to planting because it helps maintain the local patterns of species and the inherent genetic character of the site. Sympathetic removal of planted exotic trees will help restore the native woodland vegetation.

There are benefits to leaving parts of the woods unmanaged for species that do best under low disturbance. This also allows for the operation of natural processes such as windblow. Within these areas some trees will eventually die naturally and dead wood accumulate.

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.

Where they are a threat to the interest of the wood, invasive introductions such as *Rhododendron ponticum* or Himalayan Balsam should, where practical, be controlled.

Lowland dry dwarf shrub heath

Heathlands have been managed for centuries by traditional methods such as extensive grazing and cutting. This management should, in most cases, be continued so that the special nature conservation interest of the habitat can be maintained. Management that provides open areas of heath, with a varied structure of uneven-aged stands of native heathers and other characteristic native plants will achieve the greatest heathland diversity.

Grazing helps to maintain dry heathland vegetation in favourable condition. Sheep grazing is an acceptable method, but other stock such as cattle or hardy ponies may also be used providing care is taken to avoid damage to the heather by trampling. An appropriate stocking rate should take into account local conditions and the timing and length of grazing. Removal by grazing of between 30-40% of the annual vegetation growth is desirable.

Alternatively, cutting or mowing is useful if the original stand is not too mature. The cut material needs to be removed to avoid nutrient accumulation on site and to allow the cut plants to re-sprout successfully.

In some instances, prescribed burning can also be a useful tool for heathland management, but special care is required when some sensitive species are present, with special consideration being given to timing and to providing the necessary manpower to control the burn.

The open nature of heathland needs to be maintained and this may require periodic clearance of invasive scrub or bracken where they are encroaching. This may be achieved either by mechanical control or manual cutting, and the careful application of a suitable herbicide where necessary. However, there is some benefit in maintaining small areas of bare ground, scrub, woodland, wet areas and grassland, where they are present in conjunction with heathland, to increase the structural variety and to support a wide variety of wildlife – such as some plants, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and birds.

Grassland

Neutral grassland requires active management if it is to retain its conservation interest. In order to maintain a species-rich sward, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise the sward becomes progressively dominated by tall and vigorous grasses which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical diversity of the site.

The above objective is achieved either by grazing the sward as pasture or cutting it. At this site, both of these management regimes are used. Fields with a history of management as pasture should continue to be managed as pasture. The same applies to fields managed by cutting. Switching from one form of management to another can have significant effects on the composition of the sward.

Pastures are traditionally managed by grazing. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (such as, for example, type or availability of stock or the needs of individual plants or animals of conservation concern) but should aim to keep a relatively open sward without causing excessive poaching. Light trampling can be of benefit by breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination. No other management should be routinely required.

The majority of the grassland that is managed by cutting should continue to be flailed or mown from spring to first frosts in order to maintain a short sward height. It would be beneficial to remove cuttings to avoid unnecessary nutrient enrichment.

The application of pesticides including herbicides, lime or fertilizers (including slurry) would be damaging.

Any surrounding, well-managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates. For both the damper pastures and meadows, regular and careful maintenance of surface drainage including ditches and drains can

be essential to prevent adverse changes in the plant species composition of the sward. Deepening of surface drainage would be damaging.