

Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Treen Cliff 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

Maritime cliff grassland and heathland

Maritime cliff grasslands and heathlands on slopes or on cliff tops are maintained by a combination of grazing and natural factors such as erosion and exposure to salt-spray and wind. Together these maintain the characteristic open nature of maritime grassland and heathland vegetation. Maritime grassland and 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 habitats and by promoting a varied structure of uneven-aged stands of native heathers and other characteristic plants.

Changes in agricultural practices have led to the abandonment of grazing on many of these maritime cliff grasslands and heathlands and subsequently scrub encroachment can occur, especially where exposure is less extreme. Where grazing is still practised, it should continue, and, where appropriate, the reintroduction of grazing that has lapsed should be given careful consideration. 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. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary between sites according to local conditions and requirements, such as, for example, type or availability of stock and the need to take into account the practicalities of grazing often inaccessible areas on sloping cliffs. Where there has not been a history of grazing, on exposed sites the maritime grassland and heathland can be sustained as part of a successional cycle. Where grazing-sensitive species are present, grazing should not be introduced.

Gorse requires active management to retain its heathland conservation value. Scattered stands with a bushy structure rather than large continuous blocks are of greater benefit to the characteristic bird and invertebrate species associated with gorse scrub. For example, Dartford warbler require areas of open heath (with less than 25 trees per hectare) with over 50% cover of mature heather (preferably over 30 cm tall) and patches of dense, compact, mature gorse bushes (0.5-3 m tall) to be maintained. Winter cutting of 'leggy' stands of gorse and the removal of cut material will maintain gorse at different stages of re-growth and avoid nutrient accumulation in the soil.

Prescribed burning can also be a useful tool for maintaining the structural diversity of some dry heathlands and for re-establishing areas of pioneer heath required by certain species, but special care is required when sensitive species are present. Burning must be used with caution, as inappropriate burning can be very damaging to both plant and animal communities and careful consideration should be given to the timing of the burn.

Cultivation and the application of pesticides (including the use of persistent veterinary products on livestock), fertilisers (including manures) and lime are usually damaging and should be avoided. Herbicides should also generally be avoided, although some types can be useful for the targeted control of certain invasive species.

The cliff top communities of vegetated maritime cliffs and slopes often form part of (or are adjacent to) land managed for agricultural purposes, which may be outside the SSSI boundary. Where possible the management of this land should take into account the indirect impact arising from the application or run-off into the SSSI of herbicides, pesticides and artificial fertilisers, directly or indirectly, to the maritime heathland communities present. Cliff-top vegetation can also be destroyed where it is squeezed between a receding cliff face and cultivated land and the management of land adjacent to cliff-top habitats should seek to limit this where possible.