Views About Management

ENGLISH NATURE

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Banwell Caves 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

Caves

Caves represent a very important scientific resource for a number of reasons. Caves themselves provide important information on environment, climate and landscape development over the last several million years. Caves often contain sediments deposited by underground rivers that are also important in the study of environment and climate change in the recent geological past. Some caves contain animal bones where the animals once used the caves for shelter. On the surface, these bones and sediments would not have been preserved but would have been destroyed by weathering and erosion. Bones and artefacts from our early ancestors are also preserved in caves. Cave formations, such as stalactites and stalagmites, are important for a range of studies, including scientific dating, and are also of great aesthetic value. In addition, caves are an important habitat for bats and invertebrates.

Caves are sensitive systems which often suffer significant pressure from human activities, both above and below ground. It is important to manage the overlying land and catchment in a manner which takes account of potential consequences on the caves. Groundwater pollution from fertiliser, spreading of agricultural or industrial waste on land and dumping of rubbish or other waste in swallow holes or cavities are serious problems in some caves. Activities, such as pumping groundwater or

diverting water courses, can affect the groundwater regime through cave systems and have serious effects on the dynamics of the system.

Blocking of cave entrances can also have serious repercussions below ground in altering air flow with consequent effects on underground climate. For example, the growth of stalactites and stalagmites is dependent on water composition, air temperature and humidity. These are easily perturbed so that growth is altered or ceases. Activities that may vary the amount of light available within the cave should also be considered carefully. Quarrying can result in partial or complete destruction of caves, or can disrupt their underground or surface catchment.

Direct pressures underground can arise from irresponsible caving. Problems associated with caving include inadvertent physical damage to cave features such as cave formations (flowstone, stalactites and stalagmites) and cave sediments, destruction of cave sediment deposits through irresponsible cave exploration, pollution and removal of cave formations or other minerals by collectors. The National Caving Association's guidelines on responsible caving are supported by English Nature and provide important information on caving and conservation.

Positive management of caves may require good access management which is often best undertaken by responsible local caving clubs and associations. Gating can be a solution to controlling access to sensitive caves, with access maintained by responsible caving groups.

The disturbance or removal of any geological material from caves can be damaging to the features that make this cave special. A precautionary approach should be adopted before removing or allowing any material to be removed from caves or before permitting any underground activities, such as digging of cave sediments, which could cause permanent loss or damage.

Greater and lesser horseshoe bat maternity and hibernation roosts

Hibernating bats require a range of environmental conditions within the hibernation site, as different species have different temperature requirements, which vary through the winter. The internal conditions within the hibernation site should remain consistently cool (between 6 and 10 °C) and dark away from the entrances with stable ventilation. Emergence points and flight lines should be maintained as unobstructed and free from artificial light, though vegetated cover around the entrance is desirable.

It is equally important to avoid disturbance to the bats while they are at the maternity roost as when they are hibernating. Entrances to the site should be secure to prevent uncontrolled or unauthorised access during the breeding season and winter months, but should remain unobstructed enough to continue to be accessible to bats. Activities of any kind within the site or close to the entrances should be largely avoided during these periods each year to minimise the risk of disturbance to the bats. Building or engineering works taking place within or around the area should be avoided, as should the use of vehicles or machinery that would be likely to produce noise, fumes or heat near roosting sites or access points that may disturb breeding bats.

The maintenance of some woodland and scrub cover in the vicinity of the breeding site will provide sheltered and secured access to commuting routes as well as valuable feeding habitat for the bats. Maintaining hedgerows, uncultivated field margins and extensively managed pasture near the roosting site will also provide appropriate commuting routes and foraging areas to support the bat population.