

Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Broad Fen, Dilham 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

Floodplain fen

Floodplain fens develop on flat areas that have historically been flooded by waters from rivers and streams that meander across these plains when the volume of the water draining through the catchment is high. Floodplain vegetation may also be dependent on seepage from subterranean aquifers or from seepage down or at the base of the constraining slopes. Consequently, there may be parts of any particular floodplain that should be thought of as spring or flush, and it may also contain basin fen, swamp, wet woodland and grazing marsh. Traditional methods of management have produced a species rich sward that supports a rich variety of flowering plants, invertebrates and birds.

Floodplain fen is commonly composed of tall grasses and herbs, such as reed, willowherb, milk parsley, meadowsweet, angelica and nettles. Floodplain fen requires active management if it is to retain its conservation interest. If left unmanaged the sward becomes dominated by tall, vigorous grasses and rushes which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter and the encroachment of scrub, suppress less vigorous species and lower the botanical richness of the sward. Rotational cutting or intermittent grazing is usually required. Cattle are often the preferred stock, being relatively tolerant of wet conditions and able to control tall

grasses and rank vegetation. Cattle also tend to produce a rather uneven, structurally diverse sward. However, ponies, or even hill sheep, can be used if necessary. Grazing usually takes place at times between late spring and early autumn, but the precise timing and intensity will depend on local conditions and requirements, such as the need to avoid trampling ground-nesting birds. Heavy poaching should be avoided but light trampling can be beneficial in breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination.

Floodplain fen is a highly dynamic environment. Management should not necessarily aim to maintain each component of the floodplain fen in exactly the same place, but should ensure that the full range of niches remain available for use by plants and animals over the course of time.

There is often a broad interface between floodplain fen and types of swamp, such as reedbed or saw sedge, in which the main swamp species is interspersed with a proportion of other swamp species. The swamp habitats have often survived where the vegetation has traditionally been cut for a variety of purposes including use as building materials or animal bedding and it may be beneficial to consider re-instating these traditional management practices where they are not in conflict with other nature conservation objectives, such as the specific requirements of certain birds or invertebrates.

Areas of wet woodland such as alder and willow carr usually benefit from minimum intervention and are best left undisturbed.

River water quality is crucially important for floodplain fen and management should ensure the protection of appropriate water quality. It is normal for the lower reaches of rivers to contain more plant nutrients than at source, and most floodplain fens depend on an adequate supply of nutrients being maintained. However, excessive nutrient enrichment may result in the replacement of the characteristic floodplain fen communities with very species-poor vegetation, composed of little but a tall dominant grass such as reed or reed sweet grass with nettles. Management should also ensure that floodplain fens are not exposed to water-borne toxins such as herbicides, insecticides and hydrocarbons.

Winter flooding is an important factor in the management of floodplain habitats and management should ensure the frequency and extent of flooding is appropriate for maintaining the nature conservation interest of the site. For example, river engineering has in many cases reduced the frequency and extent of flooding. Changes in agriculture and the use of floodplains for built development have also often resulted in smaller floodplains and the requirements of floodplain habitats should be considered in the design of such schemes in the future. The balance between groundwater and floodwater influence on the floodplain should be identified and maintained when designing the extent and frequency of controlled flood events.