

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes 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

Coastal Cliffs and Foreshore (EC and EF sites)

Coastal geological sites form a very important part of England's geological resource for two reasons. Firstly, in many areas the only natural rock exposures are on the coast. Secondly, coastal cliffs often provide much better exposure of geological features than comparable inland sites.

The key management principle for coastal geological sites is to maintain exposure of the geological interest by allowing natural processes to proceed freely. Inappropriate construction of coastal defences can completely conceal rock exposures and result in the effective loss of the geological interest. In addition, any development which prevents or slows natural erosion can have a damaging effect. Erosion is necessary to maintain fresh geological outcrops. Reducing the rate of erosion usually results in rock exposures becoming obscured by vegetation and rock debris.

Coastal processes are complex and no section of coastline exists in isolation. This means that coastal protection has indirect effects on other parts of the coast. Developments do not necessarily have to take place within the boundary of a site to cause damage. For example, cliff protection in one area may starve other beaches of sediment, accelerating cliff retreat elsewhere. As processes within a site can be

affected by developments beyond the site boundary, it is important to take a broad and integrated approach to coastal management. This can provide significant benefits to the conservation of coastal geological sites.

Active management of coastal geological sites is often only necessary when human activity has interfered with natural rates of erosion. Clearance of vegetation or rock debris may be necessary to re-expose geological features where they have become obscured.

Collecting of geological specimens may be acceptable if undertaken in a responsible manner. However, there are some sites where the geological interest is very finite in nature and over-collecting can result in damage or destruction of the interest. Collecting of specimens requires very careful management to ensure that the geological resource is conserved.

Certain activities can cause direct damage to geological sites located on the foreshore and management should aim to avoid or, if necessary, minimise any harmful effects. Such activities include dredging, construction of pipes, heavy machinery crossing the geological features and, in some instances, the introduction of large quantities of beach feed material.

Unique or Finite Mineral, Fossil and Other Geological Interests (IM sites)

The geological interests at this site are finite and irreplaceable. The main management principles are to conserve the resource in the long-term, while permitting scientific usage, which often involves collecting specimens. Balancing these two opposing principles is the key to long-term positive management.

Comment [BB1]: Will this term mean anything to an SSSI owner (IM?)

Judgment of how much collecting can be permitted, while sustaining the resource, must be made on a site-by-site basis. Collecting of specimens requires very careful management to ensure that the geological resource is conserved. Where there is any doubt, caution should be applied before removing or allowing any material to be removed.

Sites with a unique or finite geological resource are particularly sensitive because they are often small and the important interest features are typically restricted in volume. In addition to specimen collecting, any activity which conceals or requires removal of part or all of the geological interest features can cause irreparable damage or destruction.

Vegetation management, involving removal of large trees and scrub, may be required to recreate or maintain exposure of the geological features. In some cases, removal of rock debris and loose material from faces may be required.

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 are also 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 management should aim to allow for all stages of the succession to be present on the site. Management of amenity beaches can affect the early stages of dune formation by removing the strandline that helps to trap blown sand and helps to develop new dune ridges. 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.

Coastal saltmarsh

Saltmarshes form the upper vegetated portions of intertidal mudflats in sheltered coastal locations, such as estuaries, lagoons and beach plains. There is typically a zonation of vegetation, from plants adapted to regular immersion by the tides (halophytes), through to more widespread plant species in the areas less frequently covered by the sea. The halophyte plant species are confined to this type of habitat, and areas of structurally diverse vegetation provide good invertebrate habitat.

Saltmarshes are also important nursery sites for several fish species, and important refuge, feeding and breeding grounds for wading birds and wildfowl.

Where saltmarshes require management this has traditionally been achieved by grazing, and previously used regimes should be continued. Grazing provides a variety of different habitats, particularly for wintering bird species, and if grazing were to cease there may be a loss of botanical diversity. The precise timing and intensity will vary according to local conditions and requirements, for example the type or availability of stock, or the need to avoid trampling ground nesting birds. However on many sites, the aim will be to create a short turf that can be attractive to over-wintering wildfowl, with a reduction in stock density in the early summer for the benefit of ground-nesting birds. Indeed, careful reduction of grazing can increase the number of breeding birds, without significantly altering the plant species composition. Care should be taken not to overgraze the site, as this may reduce the diversity of animal and plant species that the saltmarsh is able to support, as well as potentially impact the sediments supporting the saltmarsh.

Not all saltmarsh habitats require active management to retain their conservation interest. Where there has not been a history of grazing, the saltmarsh will be able to maintain itself and grazing-sensitive species are likely to be present, therefore grazing should not be introduced.

There are a number of factors that are contributing to saltmarsh change that management may need to take into consideration. These include coastal erosion as a result of coastal flood-defence works, rising sea-levels, variations in sediment deposition, and land claim for development.

Wet grassland with breeding and wintering bird interest

Wet grasslands occur on land that is subject to periodic flooding or has a seasonally high water table and is waterlogged for much of the year. Wet grassland often supports a wide variety of plants and animals, in particular birds and invertebrates, and is an important habitat for breeding waders and wintering wildfowl.

Wet grassland requires active management if it is to retain its conservation interest. Generally, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise the sward becomes dominated by tall, vigorous grasses and rushes which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and lower the botanical richness of the sward. Traditionally, this management is achieved by grazing. 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. Agricultural operations in general should be avoided before mid-June to minimise disturbance to breeding birds or the destruction of nests. An element of managed scrub, both within

and fringing a field can be of importance to birds and invertebrates, as can a surrounding hedge.

Partial winter flooding is important in maintaining suitable habitat conditions for wintering birds. A mosaic of winter flooded grassland and permanently un-flooded grassland is desirable, with both temporary and permanent pools present. The maintenance of a mosaic of shallow surface pools and un-flooded areas during the winter will provide roosting and feeding habitat for wintering wildfowl and waders. From April onwards, the area of standing surface water should be reduced to increase the area available for nesting waders and also by concentrating aquatic invertebrates in small pools to provide suitable feeding areas for their young. Some shallow areas of flooding should be maintained until late June to provide patches of bare muddy ground on which the birds and their young can feed as raised sward height makes feeding on the drier areas more difficult. The birds using these features are directly vulnerable to disturbance, which can cause them to lose time spent feeding or drive them to areas with a poorer supply of food. Management should seek to minimise any harmful disturbance, especially at times when bird populations are under stress, such as severely cold conditions. Predators, especially crows and related species, should be controlled and this may be best achieved by limiting their nesting sites.

Careful maintenance of existing ditches and drains is usually acceptable practice, but abandonment or deepening of ditches can be harmful.

All habitats

The habitats within this site are highly sensitive to inorganic fertilisers and pesticides, applications of which should be avoided both within the site itself and in adjacent surrounding areas. Herbicides may be useful in targeting certain invasive species, but should be used with extreme care. Access to this site, and any recreational activities within, may also need to be managed.