Views About Management

ENGLISH NATURE

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Tean 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

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.

Maritime cliff grassland and heathland

Maritime cliff grasslands and heathlands on slopes or 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 an open nature of the habitats, and by promoting a varied structure of uneven-aged stands of native heathers and other plants.

Changes in agricultural practices have led to the abandonment of grazing on many of these habitats and subsequently scrub encroachment can occur, especially where exposure is less extreme. Where grazing is still practised, it should continue. 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 the type or availability of stock, and the practicalities of grazing on often inaccessible areas of cliffs.

Where grazing has lapsed, reintroduction should be given careful consideration. However, 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.

Prescribed burning can be useful for maintaining the structural diversity of the heathland, 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.

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. 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.

Breeding birds on sea cliffs

England's sea cliffs provide breeding grounds for internationally important populations of birds. The steep cliff faces and the summits of stacks and pinnacles are used by fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots and razorbills, whilst shags and storm petrels tend to occupy exposed boulder beaches and less steeply sloping cliffs. Gentle slopes and cliff top grasslands may support nesting gulls and puffins whilst gulls and terns tend to dominate the summits of offshore islands.

It is important to retain the current extent and condition of the habitat whilst allowing natural coastal processes to operate along the length of the rocky coast. The cliffs should remain as steep slopes with many patches of bare rock. Natural erosion is vital to maintain this, and as such, cliffs should not be deliberately stabilised. If this occurs it will result in the bare ground and pioneer vegetation becoming progressively overgrown, creating a much less suitable nesting habitat. The importance of grasslands at the cliff top should not be overlooked, as these provide the starting point for the cliff plant communities. They should certainly not be converted to other habitat types, and should remain grazed to prevent scrub encroachment of the cliffs below.

Seabird colonies attract large numbers of visitors during the breeding season, and whilst this should not be discouraged, it is important that access is managed appropriately so that the birds, and indeed the cliffs themselves, are not unduly disturbed.