

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Southey and Gotleigh Moors 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

Valley mire

Fen often develops within valleys and the origins and movement of the water within the fen give rise to a number of different vegetation zones. The variety of plant and animal life in the valley mire is closely linked to the number and type of zones it contains.

Management should aim to maintain the groundwater quality and quantity, though the quantity is not likely to be naturally constant throughout the seasons or between wet and dry years. The groundwater is often susceptible to contamination by agricultural fertilisers, or by pollution leaking from landfill sites.

Grazing is important in the management of the valley mire. Animals help to break up the tussocks of rank grasses such as purple moor grass, opening the sward up to a greater variety of plants. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary according to local conditions and requirements. Some (but not excessive) trampling is necessary to create open soil, for invertebrates, mosses and seedling establishment. Grazing also limits the spread of willow, alder and birch carr, which naturally tends to develop around the central watercourse and it should be restricted to this area, other than for a few isolated clumps elsewhere for the benefit of birds and invertebrates.

Swamps are also important for invertebrates and birds and the inclusion of some swamp vegetation, such as reedbed, within the mosaic of habitats present will add to the conservation value of the site. However, excessive spread of reed, reed canary grass, or reed sweet grass is likely to be an indication of worsening water quality, the cause of which should be investigated and addressed to maintain the characteristic fen communities.

Stock feeding, or the location of grazing infrastructure, for example stock shelters, should take place downstream of the valley mire. This is to ensure the mire vegetation does not become enriched by nutrients from animal food or dung, or even from carcasses, causing unwanted changes in the composition of the characteristic mire vegetation in favour of tall, species-poor communities.

Drainage schemes should not intercept the sources of ground and surface water to the valley mire. It is important for the watercourses of the valley mire not to receive run-off from fertilised land or surface water from farmyards. The bed of the watercourse should not be lowered, nor should its water level be artificially raised, other than as part of a well thought-out conservation scheme. This will ensure the various vegetation components of the valley mire are maintained in their ideal proportions, and that 'head-ward' erosion is not triggered, in which increased flow gradually erodes the peat and silt on which the valley mire has developed.

Marshy grassland

Marshy 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 or destroy Marsh Fritillary butterfly colonies. Heavy poaching should be avoided but light trampling can be beneficial in breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination. An element of managed scrub, both within and fringing a field can be of importance to birds and invertebrates, as can a surrounding hedge. Careful maintenance of existing ditches and drains is usually acceptable practice, but abandonment or deepening of ditches can be harmful.

Lowland wet woodland

Wet woodland includes a range of different woodland types but usually is dominated by ash, alder and willow species. It often supports important invertebrate species and assemblages.

Areas usually benefit from minimum intervention and are often best left undisturbed to limit damage to their fragile soils. This allows the development of old stands where individual trees reach maturity and die naturally to create gaps in the canopy,

leading to a diverse woodland structure. However, works to remove dangerous trees in areas of public access may be necessary.

Where particularly important light-demanding or glade species interests are present, including where the woodland is spreading on to valuable open wetland habitat, it may be necessary to periodically clear areas of vegetation.

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.