Views About Management

ENGLISH NATURE

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Overstrand Cliffs 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

Maritime slope and soft cliffs

Soft maritime cliffs and slopes are formed through the exposure of weak rock types (e.g. shale, sandstone and chalk), or unconsolidated superficial deposits (e.g. glacial till). They range from steep, rapidly eroding cliffs supporting pioneer species only, to less steep slopes supporting a wide range of vegetation, ranging from pioneer communities on freshly exposed substrate, through to grassland, heathland, scrub and even woodland where there has been limited recent movement. They can support a rich assemblage of invertebrate species, including many rare species that are confined to this habitat. Some soft cliffs, primarily steep chalk, are important for seabird colonies, and some substrates may be used by species such as sand martins, which can burrow into soft sandy material. Soft cliffs are also important for their geological and geomorphological interest.

The key management principle for soft cliffs and slopes is to allow natural geomorphological coastal processes, such as cliff recession and slumping, to proceed freely. Although the cliff may erode, colonisation and succession ensures that vegetation communities can adjust to changing cliff morphology. Active geomorphological and coastal processes are essential for the constant renewal of geological exposures and for maintaining the range of habitats and associated species

that reflect the different stages of cliff formation and succession. Erosion also provides a source of beach sediment and hence helps to maintain a variety of other coastal landforms.

The introduction of (or any increase in) physical constraints such as coast protection and drainage works that reduce the mobility of the cliff (and thus the range of plant and animal communities present) will damage the interest features. Management of cliff top habitats such as grassland and heathland is an important factor to consider, as where these are present, they will provide a source of seed and propagules for colonisation of the cliff slopes. These habitats may be prone to localised erosion from recreational pressure.

Maritime cliff grassland

Maritime cliff grasslands 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 an open sward characteristic of maritime grassland vegetation.

Where there has not been a history of grazing, on exposed sites the maritime grassland can be sustained as part of a successional cycle. Where grazing-sensitive species are present, grazing should not be introduced.

Management of adjacent land on the cliff top which may be outside the SSSI should take into account the indirect impact arising from the application of herbicides, pesticides and artificial fertilisers.

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.