

Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Wembury Point 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

Littoral rock (rocky shores)

Rocky shores occur where rugged or relatively resistant terrestrial geology (bedrock and boulders) directly abuts the sea, forming a distinct transition between land and sea. A variety of different habitats and communities are associated with the area of rock between the highest and lowest tide levels - known as the foreshore or littoral zone - including rock pools, bedrock ledges and platforms, gullies, crevices and boulder fields. This wide variety of habitats supports a diverse range of different seaweeds and marine animal species, most of which are specially adapted to spending periods of time out of seawater.

There is typically a zonation of rocky shore communities, from the supralittoral marine lichens, to the upper, mid and lower shore, which are dominated by different species of brown seaweeds, to the sublittoral fringe with kelps. The greater the energy from wave action hitting the foreshore, the greater the dominance of animals such as barnacles, limpets and mussels, over seaweeds.

The key management principle for rocky shores is to allow natural processes, such as erosion and cliff collapse, to proceed freely. It is also important that management aims to maintain good water quality.

Certain activities, for example dredging and pipe construction, can cause direct damage to rocky habitats located on the foreshore, and management should aim to avoid or minimise any harmful effects. Management should also take into account the impacts of any anthropogenic structures which may deflect wave energy away from the foreshore. The turning of boulders for bait collection of peeler crabs can damage the delicate communities found on the underside of the rocks if they are not replaced in their original positions.

Scrub

Scrub habitats are low-growing communities where the main woody components are bushes or small trees, such as hawthorn, rowan and juniper. Scrub supports a wide variety of species and ecological communities. In particular, the transitional zone between scrub and other habitats can be important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

Often, scrub is a transitional stage that will develop into woodland if unmanaged. Maintaining structural diversity and a mosaic of age classes within areas of scrub is important for maintaining the diversity of species the scrub is able to support. For example, hawthorn scrub supports the greatest variety of bird and insect species in the early and middle stages of growth.

Scrub can be managed using rotational cutting, which should aim to maintain a mosaic of patches at different stages of growth. Scrub can also be cut in small patches to create an intimate mixture of scrub and grass and/or heath.

Grazing is another method for managing scrub and on some sites may be a more suitable management tool than cutting. By its nature, grazing can help to create a patchy mosaic of scrub and other upland habitats. As with cutting, it can also help to maintain a range of age classes. However, stock levels do need to be carefully controlled. If grazing pressure is too high the structure of the scrub vegetation may become impoverished. Also, the scrub may not be able to regenerate naturally, leading to a loss of cover over time. Where the objective is to increase the area of scrub an initial period of fencing to control grazing may be required.

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. Recently, changes in agricultural practices have led to the abandonment of grazing and subsequently scrub encroachment can occur.

Where grazing is still practised, it should continue. The precise timing and intensity will vary between sites according to local conditions and requirements, such as the type or availability of stock, and the practicalities of grazing in 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 can be sustained as part of a successional cycle. Where grazing-sensitive species are present, grazing should not be introduced.

The cliff top communities of vegetated maritime cliffs and slopes often form part of (or are adjacent to) land managed for agricultural purposes, which may be outside the SSSI boundary. Management of this land should take into account the indirect impact arising from the application of herbicides, pesticides and artificial fertilisers. Cliff-top vegetation can also be destroyed where it is squeezed between a receding cliff face and cultivated land, therefore the management of adjacent land should seek to limit this where possible.

Bird interest

The site is important for sea birds, waders, migrants and gull buntings. These species are found in the littoral, scrub and maritime grassland habitats and in general the management described above will meet their needs. There may however be circumstances when specific management measures are needed to ensure the well-being of these species. In these situations the management will be discussed and agreed on a case by case basis.

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.