



**Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Kent Downs
AONB Management Plan 3rd Revision.**

January 2021

Appropriate Assessment of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan Revision.

May 2020

Introduction

The European Habitat regulations require that the revised AONB management plan is assessed to ensure that the objectives and the principals of the plan do not have a significant negative effect sites which have European importance for their wildlife – Natura 2000 sites. This is an 'Appropriate Assessment'.

Where there are significant positive effects anticipated these are noted but there is clearly no need to mitigate against these.

In the assessment each principals of the revised plan has been considered to determine, on a precautionary basis, whether they are likely to have a significant negative effect or not. This assessment has been carried out by the Kent Downs AONB Unit on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee or 'competent authority'. To verify the assessment of the AONB Unit, Natural England has been involved at all stages and has confirmed the assessments made.

An Appropriate Assessment is required before the management plan can be adopted by each local authority.

The conclusions of this Appropriate Assessment are that there are no significant negative effects to sites of European importance for wildlife and therefore no mitigation plans are required.

Background.

The need for Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA), or 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) is set out within Article 6 of the EC Habitats Directive 1992, and interpreted into British law by Regulation 48 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 (as amended in 2007). The ultimate aim of Appropriate Assessment is to "maintain or restore, at favourable conservation status, natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora of Community interest" (Habitats Directive, Article 2(2)).

The Habitat Regulations require plans or projects to be assessed before they can be adopted. The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that the plan or project has no significant (negative) environmental effect on sites of European Interest, so called Natura 2000 sites.

Natural England considers that AONB Management Plans are plans which may well have significant effects (both positive and negative) on sites covered by the Habitats Regulations - Natura 2000 sites. Thus, they need to be assessed before they can be adopted.

The Habitats Directive applies the precautionary principle to protected areas; plans and projects can only be permitted having ascertained that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the sites in question.

The precautionary principle is embedded into the approach of this assessment so adverse effects are assumed if there is uncertainty, imperfect or incomplete information to make a judgment.

Natura 2000 sites

Natura 2000 sites include Special Protection Areas (SPAs): Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar sites;

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs):**

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC), known as the Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds, listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive, and for regularly occurring migratory species.

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs):**

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are strictly protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive. Article 3 of the Habitats Directive requires the establishment of a European network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the 189 habitat types and 788 species identified in Annexes I and II of the Directive (as amended). The listed habitat types and species are those considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level (excluding birds).

- **Ramsar sites in the UK:**

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention, signed in the town of Ramsar in Iran in 1971.

It has been recommended that the appropriate assessment of an AONB management plan considers not only the Natura 2000 sites within the AONB but those within a 15km buffer zone. The affected sites are set out below.

Steps in Appropriate Assessment.

The **first stage** of any Habitat Regulations Assessment is to establish which European sites are potentially affected by the Revised Management Plan

The **second stage**, described as 'task 1' is a screening or likely significant effect test the essential question of this test is:

"Is the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other relevant projects and plans, likely to result in a significant adverse effect upon European sites?"

Individual principals/measures within the Plan are evaluated in detail against the site's conservation objectives, considering the environmental conditions necessary to maintain the integrity of the site.

If it can be demonstrated that significant effects on these sites are unlikely, **no further assessment is required**. The screening or likely significant effect test is the primary purpose of this report.

All of the strategic AONB Management Plan principals and any detailed plan proposals especially in the action plan are covered by.

If likely significant negative effects are identified, or there is uncertainty then a more detailed assessment of the effects of the plan and what mitigation efforts or alternatives should be adopted.

Summary of key steps in Appropriate Assessment

Evidence Gathering – collecting information on relevant European sites, their conservation objectives and characteristics and other plans or projects.

AA Task 1: Likely significant effects ('screening') – identifying whether a plan is 'likely to have a significant effect' on a European site.

AA Task 2: Ascertaining the effect on site integrity – assessing the effects of the plan on the conservation objectives of any European sites 'screened in' during AA Task 1

AA Task 3: Mitigation measures and alternative solutions– where adverse effects are identified at AA Task 2, the plan should be altered until adverse effects are cancelled out fully

'In combination' effects.

Under the habitats regulations the assessment should consider the likely effects of the plan, in combination with other relevant plans, however, it is Natural England's view that if the Management plan does not have a significant environmental effect then it is not necessary to carry out an 'in combination' assessment. The integrating nature of the AONB Management Plan should assist the "in combination", rather than separate assessment of principals and proposals.

The 'Competent Authority'

The 'competent authority' as prescribed by the Habitats Regulations is the AONB partnership on behalf of, or as sanctioned by, the local planning authority (ies). This has parallels to the arrangements to the production of the management plan to fulfil the requirements of S89 of CRoW Act **The "competent authority (ies)" has to be satisfied that, in adopting the plan, there will be no significant effect on European Sites.**

Natural England's formal role is as an 'authority with environmental responsibility' referred to as a "consultation body" in guidance. Natural England, taking account of the conclusions of the appropriate assessment of the implications of plans or

projects for the site concerned, in the light of the sites conservation objectives, can authorise activity only if it has made certain that it will not adversely affect the integrity of that site. That is the case where no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of such effects.

Audit of the process

An auditable trail must be established to ascertain if there is a significant effect on the habitat or species for which a SAC, SPA or Ramsar site is designated. Referral to this document and the process in arriving at its conclusions as recorded on the Kent Downs AONB Web Site establishes a clear and auditable trail for all interested parties.

The First Stage; Establishing which European sites are potentially affected by the Revised Management Plan.

Each site is described in more detail below, with a summary of the conservation objectives, features and condition

The Natura 2000 sites in and within a 15km buffer of the Kent Downs AONB are;

Medway Estuary and Marshes (RAMSAR and SPA)

Special Protection Area EC Directive, SSSI. The site is a complex of rain-fed, brackish, floodplain grazing marsh with ditches and intertidal marsh and mudflat. It is of international importance for its diverse assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates (12 British Red Data Book species). Over the winter it provides habitat for Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) (2.1% of the population), Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) (2% of the population), and Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*) (1.9% of the population). The area is used for recreation, fishing, grazing, and hunting.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition, with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Improved Grassland
Fen, Marsh and Swamp
Littoral Sediment
Coastal Lagoon
Condition 99% favourable

Thames Estuary and Marshes (RAMSAR and SPA)

Special Protection Area/ EC Birds Directive; SSSI. The site comprises a complex of brackish, floodplain grazing marsh ditches, saline lagoons and intertidal saltmarsh and mudflat along the River Thames between Gravesend and Sheerness in Essex and Kent. The habitats support internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl, and the saltmarsh and grazing marsh are of international importance for their diverse assemblages of wetland plants and invertebrates. The site performs important hydrological functions, including shoreline stabilization, sediment trapping, flood water storage and desynchronization of flood peaks, and maintenance of water quality by removal of nutrients. Human uses include yachting, angling, wildfowling (seasonal), jet skiing, water-skiing, and bird watching; disturbance from some of these is a current issue but is being addressed through negotiation and awareness-raising.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Supralittoral Sediment
Littoral Sediment
Fen, Marsh and Swamp
Neutral Grassland – Lowland
Standing Open Water and Canals
Coastal Lagoon
Condition 95% favourable

The Swale (RAMSAR and SPA)

Special Protection Area EC Directive; Nature Reserve, SSSI, Environmentally Sensitive Area, Local Nature Reserve. An extensive complex of mudflats, saltmarsh and freshwater grazing marsh, an estuarine channel, and areas of shingle, shell and sand beaches and mussel beds. The saltmarshes and mudflats

support a high species diversity of plants and invertebrates, including several nationally rare species. The area is of national importance for various breeding, passage and wintering ducks and waders, and regularly supports internationally important numbers of numerous species of wintering waterbirds.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Neutral grassland
Fen, marsh and swamp
Standing open water and canals
Littoral sediment
Condition 98% favourable

Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay (RAMSAR, SPA and SAC)

Special Area for Conservation, Special Protection Area, SSSI. A coastal site, consisting of a long rocky shore, adjoining estuary, dune, maritime grassland, saltmarsh, and grazing marsh. The site supports internationally important numbers of wintering turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, nationally important numbers of a breeding seabird, and four waders: ringed plover, golden plover, grey plover, and sanderling. Large numbers of migratory birds use the site for staging. Large numbers of nationally scarce invertebrate species occur at the site. Human activities include recreation, bait collection, agriculture, livestock grazing, fishing, and hunting.

Condition 6% favourable/92% Unfavourable recovering
SSSI condition 78% favourable

Stodmarsh (RAMSAR, SPA and SAC)

National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area EC Directive, SSSI. This is a complex site comprising inland, marine and coastal wetlands. It is important because it supports a number of uncommon wetland invertebrates and plants, and it provides breeding and wintering habitat for several wetland bird species, particularly waterfowl such as Gadwall (*Anas strepera*). The main activities include nature conservation, recreation, research, and fishing.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Fen, Marsh and Swamp
Lowland Neutral Grassland
Standing open water & canals
Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland
Condition 79% favourable

Peter's Pit (SAC)

Peter's Pit is an old chalk quarry situated in the North Downs in north Kent, with large ponds situated amongst grassland, scrub and woodland. The ponds have widely fluctuating water levels and large Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus* populations have been recorded breeding here.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Standing open water and canals

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland
 Lowland calcareous grassland
 Inland Rock
 Condition 100% favourable

Queendown Warren (SAC)

Queendown Warren consists of CG3 *Bromus erectus* grassland. It contains an important assemblage of rare and scarce species, including early spider-orchid *Ophrys sphegodes*, burnt orchid *Orchis ustulata* and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition, with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Lowland Calcareous Grassland

Condition 100% favourable

North Downs Woodlands (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland
 Lowland calcareous grassland

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	17	18.26	Favourable	Very dense impenetrable woodland & chalk scrub. The only way through is on the access track which is deeply rutted. Spp include silver birch, hawthorn, elder, old hornbeam coppice, beech, some sycamore, wayfaring tree. Lots of young scrubby birch around the wayleaves.
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	18	29.75	Favourable	High forest, of mature pedunculate & sessile oak, hornbeam, sweet chestnut, beech, mature + young ash, some sycamore regeneration & silver birch, with a mature hazel coppice, elder, hawthorn, field maple understorey & occasional yew. Lots of standing and lying deadwood with good fungal cover

Calcareous grassland - lowland	19	12.63	Unfavourable - Declining	Unit is two distinct compartments with adjacent pheasant pens. Knee-high scrub throughout sward, but chalk species still present amongst scrub. Failing on scrub cover (17%)
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	20	10.96	Favourable	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	21	3.28	Unfavourable recovering	Proposals under Valley of Visions project underway
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	22	9.92	Unfavourable - Recovering	Currently less scrub than in previous years, but regeneration is high and further control is necessary. Unit does not currently meet positive indicator species targets. Also fails on proportion of herbs to grass, scrub cover, sward height.
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	23	9.53	Favourable	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	24	18.77	Favourable	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	25	9.89	Favourable	Area of confers being cleared.
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	26	6.39	Favourable	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	27	21.96	Favourable	Woodland is meeting assessment criteria. Forestry work to prevent ingress by off-road vehicles on adjacent byway has recently been undertaken and appears to be working and the woodland is much improved from previous assessment.

Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Lowland Calcareous Grassland
Maritime Cliff & Slope
Littoral Rock

Supralittoral Sediment
Geological features (Geological Site Types)
 EC Coastal and River Cliffs
 IA Coastal Geomorphology

Condition 61% favourable

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment	Reason for adverse condition
Calcareous grassland - lowland	1	10.07	Unfavourable recovering	Sward height is a little on the shorter end of what is desired at many of the recording points due to rabbit grazing. Good species diversity present.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	2	9.85	Unfavourable no change		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	3	29.27	Unfavourable recovering	This unit has seen a lot of scrub removal in recent years. The chalk grassland is species-rich and meets assessment criteria. Areas that were under scrub are still recovering	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	4	4.59	Unfavourable recovering	This unit currently fails on a number of criteria, particularly scrub cover, sward height, species composition and presence of negative indicator species	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	5	8.97	Favourable	The varied mowing regime in place over the National trust land continues to maintain the chalk grassland in favourable condition.	

Calcareous grassland - lowland	6	2.26	Unfavourable no change		Undergrazing
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	7	3.00	Favourable		
Supralittoral rock	8	8.27	Favourable		
Supralittoral rock	9	33.69	Favourable		
Supralittoral rock	10	55.25	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	11	7.63	Unfavourable recovering	Cover of trees and scrub needs to be reduced.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	12	2.75	Favourable	Scrub close to 5% target but confined to small area on western end of the unit	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	13	6.93	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	14	15.53	Unfavourable recovering	Good progress has been made with scrub clearance, and more is planned.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	15	1.08	Unfavourable no change		Inappropriate scrub control, Undergrazing
Earth heritage	16	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	
Earth heritage	17	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	
Earth heritage	18	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	
Earth heritage	19	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	
Earth heritage	20	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	

Earth heritage	21	0.00	Favourable	Assessment made without reference to specialist survey	
Supralittoral rock	22	3.52	Favourable		
Supralittoral rock	23	5.01	Favourable		

Parkgate Down (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Lowland Calcareous Grassland

Condition 100% favourable

Wye and Crundale Downs (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland

Lowland calcareous grassland

Lowland neutral grassland

Fen, marsh and swamp

Geological features (Geological SiteTypes)

IS Static (fossil) geomorphological

FB Finite buried interest

Condition 76% favourable

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment	Reason for adverse condition
Calcareous grassland - lowland	1	31.02	Favourable		
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	2	45.39	Favourable		
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	3	2.94	Favourable		
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	4	10.00	Favourable	The wood meets targets for composition and regeneration;	Forestry and woodland management

				although there is little structural diversity and open space in this part this target is met in the woodland in other parts of the SSSI	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	5	4.47	Favourable	Woodland in good condition. Is meeting the conservation objectives.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	6	2.67	Unfavourable recovering	The woodland in this part of the site is currently considered to be in unfavourable condition because there is lower than target level of open space and lower than desirable structural diversity. There is also concern about the high frequency of sycamore in parts, which appears to be having adverse impacts on the ground flora. Measures are now in place to increase open space provision and reduce the abundance of sycamore through coppicing of selected areas of sycamore. Work will also be carried out to control sycamore seedlings. Targets for all other attributes for habitat condition are met. A characteristic ground flora is present through	Forestry and woodland management

				<p>most of the unit, and the composition of the canopy is typical of the community type. There are adequate levels of tree regeneration to maintain canopy cover</p>	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	7	16.75	Unfavourable recovering	<p>The woodland in this part of the site is currently considered to be in unfavourable condition because there is lower than target level of open space and lower than desirable structural diversity. Measures are now in place to increase open space provision and to increase structural diversity through creation of a glade in part of the wood. Targets for all other attributes for habitat condition are met. A characteristic ground flora is present through most of the unit, and the composition of the canopy is typical of the community type. There are adequate levels of tree regeneration to maintain canopy cover.</p>	Forestry and woodland management
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	8	6.07	Unfavourable recovering	<p>The woodland in this unit is considered to be in unfavourable</p>	Forestry and woodland management

				<p>condition because of the abundance of sycamore in parts, which appears to be having adverse impacts on the ground flora. There is also concern about the abundance of the non-native plant giant hogweed in parts, as this is out-competing native plants in the ground layer. Measures are now in place to address these issues. A programme of selective removal of sycamore is planned and work to remove and control further spread of giant hogweed will also be carried out. Other targets for habitat condition are met. A characteristic ground flora is present through most of the wood and there are adequate levels of tree regeneration to maintain canopy cover.</p>	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	9	13.22	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	10	7.35	Unfavourable recovering	Unit is now included within an HLS agreement which facilitates refencing, scrub clearance and restoring grazing on the Crown Field in 2013.	

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	11	32.63	Unfavourable recovering	This wood is being managed under Environmental Stewardship (Higher Level Scheme), with a reinstatement of regular coppicing	Forestry and woodland management
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	12	13.46	Unfavourable recovering	The woodland in this part of the site is currently considered to be in unfavourable condition because there is lower than target level of open space and lower than desirable structural diversity.	Forestry and woodland management
Calcareous grassland - lowland	13	2.75	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	14	24.47	Favourable		
Earth heritage	15	91.12	Favourable		
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	16	2.72	Favourable	Mix of alder and ash (W7a) with <i>Carex paniculata</i> and <i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i> in field layer. <i>Paris quadrifolia</i> also recorded in drier area with <i>Mercurialis perennis</i> and hazel understorey. Possible signs of ash die-back noted. Woodland is not managed and grown coppice ash and alder dominates canopy. There are some naturally formed open areas, likely to increase if ash-die back is present	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	17	6.59	Favourable		
Calcareous	18	6.97	Unfavourable	Site condition	

grassland - lowland			recovering	appears to be very similar to previous assessment in 2008; there is 5% scrub in the northern section of the unit and the sward height is frequently 15 cm. (HLS prescription indicates that 70% of sward should be 10 cm) However species diversity is high, with lots of devil's bit scabious in evidence, and abundant butterflies.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	19	28.47	Favourable	This unit only just passes the condition assessment and requires more grazing and scrub control to prevent it becoming unfavourable in the next year or two.	
Neutral grassland - lowland	20	4.72	Favourable	Fen habitat grazed and in good condition. Rather late in the season to assess botany but water mint and meadowsweet abundant, with a range of rushes and sedges. A survey earlier in year by local botanists failed to find Carex lepidocarpa or Anagallis tenella but reported that the habitat looked quite suitable and that there was a good scattering of Samolus	

				valerandi and a single plant of Juncus subnodulosus next to one of the streams that feeds the fen.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	21	4.61	Favourable		

Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland

Lowland calcareous grassland

Geological features (Geological SiteTypes)

FB Finite buried interest

FM Finite mineral, fossil or other geological

Condition 70% favourable

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment	Reason for adverse condition
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	1	69.00	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	2	30.80	Unfavourable recovering	Cattle grazing in place and grassland is recovering.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	3	52.12	Favourable	MoD have cleared more scrub this year on the slope; the development of scrub needs to be monitored as grazing is uneven on this extensive site and could move towards unfavourable condition. Late spider orchid colony okay.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	4	7.17	Unfavourable declining	unmanaged	Undergrazing
Calcareous grassland - lowland	5	15.86	Favourable	Good range of species present within the sward. Cover of litter and bare ground both within target range as	

				is cover of trees and scrub.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	6	7.59	Unfavourable recovering	Small pockets of chalk grassland are found in amongst scrub. Other grassy areas are dominated by ruderal plant species	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	7	36.15	Favourable	The unit is meeting all targets in objectives. There are still large discrete bands of scrub on the very steep slopes of castle hill but they have been discounted from the assessed area since they are probably too difficult to clear and graze.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	8	21.59	Unfavourable recovering	The unit requires a major programme of mechanical scrub clearance and increased grazing	
Earth heritage	9	7.38	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	10	5.16	Unfavourable no change	This unit is not currently grazed because of problems with connecting a water supply. Sward height and composition is not meeting objectives.	
Calcareous grassland - lowland	11	4.10	Favourable		
Calcareous grassland - lowland	12	7.41	Unfavourable recovering	The unit meets most of the targets but the grass to herb ratio is still quite high in many areas.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	13	3.13	Favourable		

Lydden and Temple Ewell Downs (SAC)

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, cSAC, SPA, Ramsar) as individually listed in Table 1.

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Lowland Calcareous Grassland

Condition 86% favourable

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment
Calcareous grassland lowland -	1	8.81	Unfavourable recovering	This unit has now been brought into an HLS agreement and grazing levels have been changed. Livestock are excluded between April and the end of July which has enabled the sward to recover.
Calcareous grassland lowland -	2	15.44	Favourable	Well managed cattle grazed unit, and sward in good condition and good variety of species.
Calcareous grassland lowland -	3	20.54	Favourable	Scrub clearance in 2012/13 has restored grassland area in lower part of the unit.
Calcareous grassland lowland -	4	10.44	Favourable	Scrub and secondary woodland maintained as a component of the chalk grassland mosaic within this unit.
Calcareous grassland lowland -	5	7.54	Favourable	Good range of indicator species - well managed with local cattle grazier grazing autumn-winter. Compartment has been fenced to allow grazing corridor restoration of grassland in neighbouring ex set-aside land.

Dungeness (SAC and SPA)

Dungeness is the UK's largest shingle structure and represents the habitat type on the south-east coast of England. The total area of exposed shingle covers some 1,600 ha, though the extent of the buried shingle ridges is much greater. Despite considerable disturbance and destruction of the surface shingle, the site retains very large areas of intact parallel ridges with characteristic zonation of vegetation. It still has the most diverse and most extensive examples of stable vegetated shingle in Europe, including the best representation of scrub on shingle, notably prostrate forms of broom *Cytisus scoparius* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. A feature of the site, thought to be unique in the UK, is the small depressions formed within the shingle structure, which support fen and open-water communities

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Littoral sediment - Saltmarsh

Supralittoral sediment - Sand dune and vegetated shingle

Inshore sub-littoral sediment - saline lagoons

Fen Marsh and Swamp - Basin Fen

Standing open water and canals – Ditches and Canals

Geological features (Geological SiteTypes)

Active Process Geomorphological Sites (IA)

Static (Fossil) Geomorphological Sites (IS)

Condition 67% favourable

Blean Complex (SAC)

At Blean in south-east England, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* coppice occurs interspersed with pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* stands and introduced sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*. Great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* is locally dominant in the woodland, and the characteristic greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea* is found in more open patches. The stands have traditionally been managed as coppice, and are one of the British strongholds for the heath fritillary butterfly *Mellicta athalea*.

The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats and geological features in favourable condition (*), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Habitat Types represented (Biodiversity Action Plan categories)

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.

Condition 82% favourable

East Blean Woods

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment	Reason for adverse condition
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	1	88.34	Favourable	Conifer has now been removed from this unit under a Woodland Grant Scheme.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	2	11.95	Favourable	This area is considered to meet the key targets for the habitat and management is supported by a Woodland Grant Scheme..	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	3	21.86	Favourable		
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	4	3.01	Favourable	This is even-aged hornbeam coppice with oak standards and holly and young yew in the understorey	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	5	2.58	Favourable	This is high forest dominated by mature oak standards and hornbeam coppice with hazel and holly in understorey. Has a	

				typical W10 type ground flora with some dog's mercury.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	6	1.07	Unfavourable recovering	No coppicing being undertaken	Forestry and woodland management
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	7	4.37	Favourable		Forestry and woodland management
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	8	12.42	Favourable		Forestry and woodland management
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	9	5.64	Favourable	The management of this area is supported through a Woodland Grant Scheme and there is an agreed NNR management plan in place which should ensure maintenance of the habitat in favourable condition	

Church Woods, Blean

Main habitat	Unit number	Unit area (ha)	Assessment description	Condition assessment comment	Reason for adverse condition
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	1	91.22	Favourable	Good structural diversity throughout the wood. % cover of oak within the canopy within target range.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	2	3.79	Favourable	This unit is high forest of oak, young and mature beech, even aged sweet chestnut	

				and mature hornbeam coppice and holly	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	3	33.50	Favourable	Well managed according to the NNR management plan prescriptions	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	4	60.89	Favourable	Still some removal of conifer and recovery to occur before favourable condition achieved.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	5	65.51	Favourable	This unit is a mix of high forest and coppice with some wide rides. Signs of recent coppice management with good regrowth. Good dead wood in places and fairly diverse species mix of trees/shrubs.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	6	32.13	Favourable	More than half the unit is coppice. In places the oak density is a little low and parts of the site have been diversified from chestnut coppice into birch oak coppice. Some scots pine still present but not at a level affecting condition. Good signs of recent coppicing.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	7	4.94	Favourable	Some larch is present but not at levels where it is adversely affecting the ground flora.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	8	3.44	Favourable	Essential non-intervention small area of sycamore, manages woodland edge.	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	9	5.10	Favourable	Good over-mature coppice, lots of dead wood, could be recut or left as non-intervention	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	10	1.44	Favourable	Lots of dead wood, managed as non intervention, one conifer and one cherry laurel will be removed	
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	11	1.24	Favourable	Previous owners have mown area modifying ground flora, also some rubbish on site. High forest OK	Inappropriate cutting/mowing
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	12	68.08	Favourable	Good mixture of high forest and coppice	

Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	13	40.16	Favourable	Current high forest canopy lacks sufficient oak and is still developing. Management is in place to address these issues as the high forest develops
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	14	24.54	Favourable	Developing canopy and currently low density of oak in canopy results in this unit not being favourable but management is in place to restore this unit.
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	15	49.05	Favourable	Current cover of pine in these areas is approximately 90% which over the entire unit equates to a percentage cover just within the 5% target range. Thinning will continue throughout the life of the current management plan (2009-13) to reduce this cover further.
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland - lowland	16	41.05	Unfavourable recovering	Large block of conifer present within this unit (more than 5%) which is currently being removed through thinning as part of the current Management Plan (2009-13).

The Second Stage – the screening Matrix

For each site we have drawn a screening matrix of AONB principals and provided an assessment of any likely significant effect along with a narrative.

See attached spreadsheet/pdf

Discussion of findings.

Recreational causes

All types of terrestrial European site, including woodlands, can be affected by trampling, which in turn causes soil compaction and erosion. Walkers with dogs contribute to pressure on sites through nutrient enrichment via dog fouling and also have potential to cause greater disturbance to fauna as dogs are less likely to keep to marked footpaths. Motorcycle scrambling and off-road vehicle use can cause more serious erosion, as well as disturbance to sensitive species.

All of the estuaries are extensively used for recreational activity by people from a wide-ranging catchment that includes the whole of Kent and also draw visitors from further afield. Activities of walkers (particularly dog walkers) and water-borne recreation can, if carried out in winter, have a significant disturbing effect upon wintering waterfowl thus increasing energetic expenditure (as birds have to take flight more frequently) and competition on the less disturbed mudflats**(vi)**.

The latest England Day Visits Survey**(vii)** indicates that people typically travel: 10.8 miles (17.2 km) to visit a countryside site for the day; 11.3 miles (18.1 km) to visit a woodland site for the day; and 16 miles (25.5 km) to visit a coastal site for the day.

In all cases, more journeys were made by car than on foot. It should be noted that these are generalised figures; individual European sites may draw the majority of their visitors from a much smaller catchment (e.g. Thames Basin Heaths SPA, which draws 96% of its visitors from within 5 km**(viii)**) or a much larger one (e.g. the New Forest SAC, for which 55% of visitors are holidaymakers rather than locals**(ix)**).

There is currently an absence of accurate visitor information for specific European protected sites in the vicinity of Dover. The Kent Downs AONB is currently rated as having a 'high' level of visitors, but accurate figures are not known. However, if we take the England Day Visits data (which was based on a phone poll with 23,500 respondents) as broadly 'typical' of the distances that residents of Dover District may travel to visit European sites, this means that all of those sites within these distances could be affected by trampling or (in the case of Special Protection Areas) disturbance of sensitive wildlife as a result of the population increase in Dover District from the 14,000 new homes that is part of the Core Strategy preferred option. Therefore, LDF policies should seek to avoid loss of open space currently available for recreational use, and also provide access to sufficient open space to cope with the increase in residential capacity within the district.