

# Site Improvement Plan

## Simonside Hills

Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) have been developed for each Natura 2000 site in England as part of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS). Natura 2000 sites is the combined term for sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Areas (SPA). This work has been financially supported by LIFE, a financial instrument of the European Community.

The plan provides a high level overview of the issues (both current and predicted) affecting the condition of the Natura 2000 features on the site(s) and outlines the priority measures required to improve the condition of the features. It does not cover issues where remedial actions are already in place or ongoing management activities which are required for maintenance.

The SIP consists of three parts: a Summary table, which sets out the priority Issues and Measures; a detailed Actions table, which sets out who needs to do what, when and how much it is estimated to cost; and a set of tables containing contextual information and links.

Once this current programme ends, it is anticipated that Natural England and others, working with landowners and managers, will all play a role in delivering the priority measures to improve the condition of the features on these sites.

The SIPs are based on Natural England's current evidence and knowledge. The SIPs are not legal documents, they are live documents that will be updated to reflect changes in our evidence/knowledge and as actions get underway. The information in the SIPs will be used to update England's contribution to the UK's Prioritised Action Framework (PAF).

The SIPs are not formal consultation documents, but if you have any comments about the SIP or would like more information please email us at [IPENSLIFEProject@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:IPENSLIFEProject@naturalengland.org.uk), or contact Natural England's Responsible Officer for the site via our enquiry service 0300 060 3900, or [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

**This Site Improvement Plan covers the following Natura 2000 site(s)**

**UK0030336 Simonside Hills SAC**

## Site description

The Simonside Hills SAC lies on a sandstone-ridge in central Northumberland, and form an iconic part of the landscape of Northumberland National Park. The site is particularly important for the extent of heather moorland forming a mosaic of dry and wet heath, with valley and raised mires on wetter and flatter ground. There are frequent rocky outcrops and it is a popular spot for walking being near to the small town of Rothbury.

Whilst a large proportion of the dry heath is managed by rotational burning for red grouse, there are still substantial areas not under active management. Bracken is widely distributed and forms dense stands along certain stream courses, invariably in association with small areas of grassland.

## Plan Summary

*This table shows the prioritised issues for the site(s), the features they affect, the proposed measures to address the issues and the delivery bodies whose involvement is required to deliver the measures. The list of delivery bodies will include those who have agreed to the actions as well as those where discussions over their role in delivering the actions is on-going.*

Priority & Issue	Pressure or Threat	Feature(s) affected	Measure	Delivery Bodies
1 Change in land management	Threat	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Review land management, bracken control, grip blocking, and erosion repair	Natural England, Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)
2 Managed rotational burning	Pressure/Threat	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Review burning plans	Natural England, Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)
3 Invasive species	Pressure/Threat	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Rhododendron mapping and clearance, and Sitka assessment and removal	Natural England, Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)
4 Wildfire/ arson	Threat	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Develop and implement a wildfire plan	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)
5 Public Access/Disturbance	Threat	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Footpath improvements where required to protect habitats, and a review of routes	Forestry Commission, Northumberland National Park Authority
6 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Develop and implement a Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Not yet determined

## Issues and Actions

*This table outlines the prioritised issues that are currently impacting or threatening the condition of the features, and the outstanding actions required to address them. It also shows, where possible, the estimated cost of the action and the delivery bodies whose involvement will be required to implement the action. Lead delivery bodies will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the action, but not necessarily funding it. Delivery partners will need to support the lead delivery body in implementing the action. In the process of developing the SIPs Natural England has approached the delivery bodies to seek agreement on the actions and their roles in delivering them, although in some cases these discussions have not yet been concluded. Other interested parties, including landowners and managers, will be involved as the detailed actions are agreed and delivered. Funding options are indicated as potential (but not necessarily agreed or secured) sources to fund the actions.*

### 1 Change in land management

There have been changes in grouse moor management; intensification at the eastern end and less intensive at the western end of the site. Along with changes in shepherding practices, this has resulted in some localised areas of under and over grazing. The spread of bracken is an issue that needs active controlling, made more difficult by the rockiness of the terrain (cutting is not an option) and limits to chemical availability, and organic status of some of the land. A lot of grip blocking work has been done but there may be a few extra areas that would benefit from having work done. Historic burning near to Grain Sike on Caudhole Moss has left some peat damaged areas and erosion along the sike is further influencing peat loss from the site.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
<b>1A</b>	All of the Environmental Stewardship agreements on the site should be reviewed. The review should look at the Indicators of Success and Management Prescriptions for the moorland management options to ensure these are reflecting the site objectives.	Not yet determined	2014-16	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Not yet determined	Natural England	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)
<b>1B</b>	Bracken management needs to be carried out on Lordenshaws, Blueburn, Hepple Whitefield, Grasslees and Whiskershiel. This is subject to chemical availability as most of the sites cannot be accessed via mechanical means.	£100,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Not yet determined	Natural England	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>1C</b>	A future solution to dealing with bracken is needed if Asulox is not re-approved for use next year. In addition a solution needs to be found at Blueburn which is currently under organic management.	Not yet determined	2014-16	Mechanism not identified / develop mechanism	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	n/a
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>1D</b>	A review of further grip blocking requirements has been carried out by Northumberland National Park (NNPA), so any further works recommended need to be implemented subject to funding availability. This will focus on Hepple Whitefield. There is an additional need to do a full survey of the grips on Boddle Moss as this was not fully included in NNPA survey due to funding.	£10,000	2014-16	Major Landowner Group land ownership activities : Undertake Specific Management Works	Not yet determined	Northumberland National Park Authority	Natural England, Landowner(s)
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>1E</b>	The erosion along and adjacent to Grain Sike on Caudhole Moss should be addressed. Heather seed or brash scattering would help address the larger exposed areas. Small stone dams in the sike may help act as sediment traps.	£15,000	2014-16	Major Landowner Group land ownership activities : Undertake Specific Management Works	Not yet determined	Northumberland National Park Authority	Natural England, Landowner(s)

## 2 Managed rotational burning

There is strong evidence that managed rotational burning results in changes to plant species composition, peat properties, Dissolved Organic Carbon, peat chemistry, peat water table and peat flow-paths of blanket bog and upland wet heath habitats. Although managed burning is acceptable on upland dry heath, burn rotation length needs to be appropriate to avoid deterioration.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>2A</b>	Informed by the Uplands Evidence Review, improve blanket bog and dry heath habitat so that it increasingly contributes to favourable condition status of these interest features by reviewing all the burning plans on the site.	No cost	2014-16	Advice: Negotiation	Not yet determined	Natural England	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)

## 3 Invasive species

Within the designated area Rhododendron is a very localised problem and work has previously been done to control it but needs continuing. Currently the main source of recolonisation is on the lower ground adjacent to Hepple Whitefield. Sitka spruce regeneration is an issue on blanket bog areas near to the surrounding forestry.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>3A</b>	Rhododendron needs to be cleared when it is found on on the site, and a continued plan to control the source of recolonisation adjacent to the site.	£50,000	2014-20	Invasive Control Plan: Invasive Species Control Programme	SSSI funding	Northumberland National Park Authority	Natural England
<b>3B</b>	The monitoring visit completed by contractors in 2014 identified Sitka spruce regeneration at Whiskershiel. This needs to be assessed and plans agreed to remove it at the appropriate time. Other sites surrounding the forest boundary need to be monitored regularly to ensure other regeneration areas are captured and can be dealt with.	£10,000	2014-20	Major Landowner Group land ownership activities : Undertake Specific Management Works	Not yet determined	Natural England	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)

#### 4 Wildfire/ arson

As a large tract of moorland with lots of public access, there is always a risk of wildfire. Some concerns have been voiced over the impact this would have on large areas of long unmanaged heather. There is also the risk of controlled burning getting out of control and causing a wildfire.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>4A</b>	A plan needs to be drawn together for the whole site highlighting the main risk areas for wildfire and identifying solutions (advice, firebreaks). Details of how to access the site and deal with any wildfire outbreaks should also be considered. Controlled burning should be done following the burning code to avoid these becoming uncontrolled burns, which have also occurred on the site.	Not yet determined	2014-16	Advice	Local fire group	Local partnership	Northumberland National Park Authority, Landowner(s)

#### 5 Public Access/Disturbance

There are some popular walking routes across the site, in particular across the Beacon summit, and the footpaths can get quite eroded and widened, destroying valuable habitat as a result. In addition, some rights of way travel through sensitive habitats and can be damaged by people using these.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>5A</b>	Footpath improvements should be carried out to the area around Old Stell Crag to reduce impact on the surrounding features. This would need to involve a helicopter lift of stone. Heather seed scattering and brash spreading to be carried out along other footpaths as a need is identified.	£10,000	2014-18	Non-Natural England funded site management plan	Not yet determined	Northumberland National Park Authority	Forestry Commission
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>5B</b>	Review of access arrangements across the site to avoid sensitive habitats where feasible.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Non-Natural England funded site management plan	Not yet determined	Northumberland National Park Authority	n/a

## 6 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
<b>6A</b>	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts.	Not yet determined	2014-20	Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	Not yet determined

## Site details

The tables in this section contain site-relevant contextual information and links

### Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

<b>Simonside Hills SAC</b>	H7130# Blanket bogs
	H4030 European dry heaths

### Site location and links

#### Simonside Hills SAC

Area (ha)	<b>2082.6</b>	Grid reference	<b>NY982970</b>	<a href="#">Map link</a>
Local Authorities				Northumberland
Site Conservation Objectives				<a href="#">European Site Conservation Objectives for Simonside Hills SAC</a>
European Marine Site conservation advice				<a href="#">n/a</a>
Regulation 33/35 Package				<a href="#">n/a</a>
Marine Management Organisation site plan				<a href="#">n/a</a>

## Water Framework Directive (WFD)

*The Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides the main framework for managing the water environment throughout Europe. Under the WFD a management plan must be developed for each river basin district. The River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) include a summary of the measures needed for water dependent Natura 2000 sites to meet their conservation objectives. For the second round of RBMPs, SIPs are being used to capture the priorities and new measures required for water dependent habitats on Natura 2000 sites. SIP actions for non-water dependent sites/habitats do not form part of the RBMPs and associated consultation.*

### **Simonside Hills SAC**

*River basin*

[Northumbria RBMP](#)

*WFD Management catchment*

Northumberland Rivers

*WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)*

GB103022076540, GB103022076560

## Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Simonside Hills SAC	Simonside Hills SSSI

National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Simonside Hills SAC	n/a

Ramsar	
Simonside Hills SAC	n/a

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Simonside Hills SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	25/11/2014	

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000)

