

Site Improvement Plan

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy

Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) have been developed for each Natura 2000 site in England and for most sites which straddle the border between England and Wales. This plan has been drawn up as part of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS) in conjunction with the LIFE Natura 2000 Programme for Wales. 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 whole site (in both England and Wales), 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 SIP for this cross-border site between England and Wales is based on Natural England and Natural Resources Wales's current evidence and knowledge, and are live, and not legal documents; they will be updated to reflect changes in our evidence/knowledge and as Actions get underway. The information in the SIP will be used to update both England and Wales's contributions to the UK's Prioritised Action Framework (PAF).

The SIPs are not formal consultation documents, but if you have any comments (relating to areas within England and/or Wales) about the SIP or would like more information please email us at 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

To contact Natural Resources Wales telephone 0300 065 3000, or email enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

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

UK0012727 Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC

Site description

The woodlands of the lower Wye Valley form one of the most important areas for woodland conservation in Britain (comparable with the Caledonian pinewoods, the oceanic oakwoods of Western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia).

Semi-natural woodland is extensive and virtually continuous along the Wye gorge and overlies a variety of geological strata and soils. Most woods are a rich mixture of stand-types, which are believed to be similar in composition to the original natural woods of the valley, with some of them rare and very localised eg the Lime-Sessile Oak stands on limestone, Beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which Lime (*Tilia spp*), Elm (*Ulmus spp*), Oak (*Quercus spp*) and other species share dominance. *Tilio-Acerion* (Lime and Ash) and *Taxus* (Yew) woodland types are also features of the site.

In addition many rare and local plant species are present, including some of the rarest native tree species, e.g. Large-leaved lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*), Whitebeams (*Sorbus spp*) and trees close to the edge of their European range, eg Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Furthermore, these woods sit in a matrix of unimproved grassland and other semi-natural habitats which support a number of other notable plant species. The Wye Valley Woodlands also provide an important foraging resource for the local population of lesser horseshoe bats which are known to hibernate in various disused mines and structures throughout the woodlands.

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/ Threat	Feature(s) affected	Measure	Delivery Bodies
1 Deer	Pressure/ Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland	Coordinated and sustained deer management	Forestry Commission, Natural England, Woodland Trust, Wye Valley AONB, Natural Resources Wales
2 Forestry and woodland management	Pressure/ Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland, S1303 Lesser horseshoe bat	Woodland management to produce greater structural diversity	Forestry Commission, Natural England, Wye Valley AONB, Natural Resources Wales
3 Invasive species	Pressure/ Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland	Control and reduce invasive species	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales

4	Habitat connectivity	Pressure/ Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland, S1303 Lesser horseshoe bat	Improve functional connectivity through a landscape-scale approach to site protection	Forestry Commission, Natural England, Wye Valley AONB, Natural Resources Wales
5	Species decline	Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland	Update survey information on the status of uncommon Sorbus species and other plants	Natural England, Natural Resources Wales
6	Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure/ Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland	Control and reduce impacts of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Not yet determined
7	Disease	Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland	Monitor the national spread and any local occurrence of tree disease and aim for mixed stand recruitment to mitigate for impacts of disease	Forest Enterprise, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales
8	Public Access/Disturbance	Threat	H9130 Beech forests on neutral to rich soils, H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes, H91J0 Yew-dominated woodland, S1303 Lesser horseshoe bat	Manage access to sensitive sites and cliff faces. Prevent and reduce access to sensitive caves by repairing and replacing damaged grills and working positively to educate cavers	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales

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 Deer

There is an increasing population of deer within the gorge woodlands and also within the wider area of the Forest of Dean. Due to the excessive levels of browsing on a range of woodland plants, the natural regeneration of many species is being affected adversely. The formation of the Deer Initiative in an attempt to cull deer and to reduce numbers has proved ineffective to date. There are a small number of fenced enclosures in some woodland which demonstrate the dramatic effect on the vegetation when deer are excluded.

<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>
1A	Collect appropriate survey data to improve and inform a more effective deer management strategy. Estimate the total deer population in the area and the carrying capacity of the woodlands, which would allow small numbers of deer to exist without harm being done to the features of the SAC	£50,000	2015-2020	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	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>
1B	Review current initiatives and develop a more effective and coordinated deer management strategy across the wider regional landscape including sustained and coordinated deer stalking	£10,000	2015-2020	Existing Local Project	Natural England, Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forestry Commission, Wye Valley AONB

<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>
1C	Implement the coordinated deer management strategy.	£500,000	2015-2020	Direct management: NRW	Natural Resources Wales, Woodland Trust(s)	Natural Resources Wales	Woodland Trust

2 Forestry and woodland management

The woodlands along the gorge have been managed as coppice for centuries to support the local mining and quarrying industries. This form of management has been abandoned to any great extent and many stands are reverting to closed canopy high forest. It is possible that the rich species mix was, in part, a result of this form of management preventing any one species from dominating. In addition, some areas were probably also managed as a form of wood-pasture. Open space and associated species also need to be considered. Woodland management practices undertaken as part of Forest Design Plans and woodland management plans need to better reflect the requirements needed to sustain the SAC features, namely the rich diversity of stand-types and species including bats. In particular, much traditional coppicing has been abandoned with a gradual change to high forest and loss of open space.

<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>
2A	Develop and agree a woodland habitat and restoration strategy	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Habitat restoration	Natural England, Forest Enterprise, Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean, Forestry Commission, Wye Valley AONB

<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>
2B	Ensure Forest Design Plans and woodland management plans incorporate the desired structural woodland management and are implemented operationally through direct management and woodland grants	£100,000	2015-2020	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Habitat restoration	Rural Development Programme (RDPE), Forest Enterprise, Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	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>
2C	Undertake restorative management including coppicing, selective thinning and conifer removal. This should also include open space management particularly of cliff faces and edges to encourage <i>Sorbus</i> species to regenerate	£120,000	2015-2020	Direct management: NRW	Natural Resources Wales	Natural Resources Wales	Natural England

3 Invasive species

A variety of invasive species are present including Himilayan balsam, Perwinkle, Japanese knotweed and Cherry laurel. In some places regeneration from planted conifers occurs. Mature Sycamore trees may require control in some instances.

<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>
3A	Develop a strategy in England and Wales to manage and control non-native invasive species	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Invasive Control Plan: Invasive Species Control Programme	Natural England, Forest Enterprise, Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean

<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>
3B	Control and seek to eliminate non-native invasive species in England and Wales	£230,000	2015-2020	Direct management: NRW	Natural England, New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS), Natural Resources Wales	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean

4 Habitat connectivity

The SAC (and its component woodland SSSIs) are a mere selection of the semi-natural woodlands in the area on both sides of the Wye gorge and on the Dean plateau. The addition of other areas of semi-natural woodland or restoration of PAWS (plantations on ancient woodland sites) to the SSSI series would allow linkages to be made to assist migration of species especially in the light of climate change and allow improved ecosystem functioning. Additional information is required on the extent and distribution of woodland types and associated vegetation communities in the area.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
4A	Review opportunities to improve ecological connectivity and functionality between fragmented components of the SAC. This should include, amongst other things, designation of more woodland, more sympathetic management and PAWS restoration.	£0	2015-2018	Designation strategy (SSSI)		Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forestry Commission
Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
4B	Update the original woodland surveys in England of the existing designated site series done in late 1980s	£30,000	2015-2018	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England	Natural England	Forestry Commission, Wye Valley AONB

5 Species decline

The SAC's *Tilio-Acerion* forest feature includes a number of locally uncommon plants and several uncommon *Sorbus* species. Data on these plant species from the time of initial designation are now considered insufficient, especially with regard to their distribution and location. It is considered that habitat loss, due to inappropriate management, has resulted in declines or losses of some of these species. Survey is needed to identify and to locate these species in order to inform management. With regard to the *Sorbus* species, there has been extensive revision of existing species with many new species having been identified recently, indicating that this area is an important site for *Sorbus* diversity and evolution.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
5A	Update survey data on the notable vascular plants which are a component of the <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forest SAC feature, to include rare ground-flora species and also <i>Sorbus</i> species, in order to allow the current status and distribution to be detailed.	£20,000	2015-2018	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England	Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Natural Resources Wales

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>
6A	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	Not yet determined

7 Disease

Tree diseases such as ash dieback and sudden oak death, in particular, pose a serious threat to the species structure of the Wye Valley woodlands.

<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>
7A	Monitor national spread and any local occurrence of disease	Not yet determined	2015-2021	Investigation / Research / Monitoring		Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean
7B	Plan for tree disease by enabling natural regeneration and speciation to occur, encouraging mixed species structure where PAWs conversion is undertaken	Staff time only	2015-2021	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Other		Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forest Enterprise: Forest of Dean

8 Public Access/Disturbance

Visitor use can result in erosion and damage to ground flora, recreation activities such as climbing can damage delicate cliff face communities and in particular the cliff face *Sorbus* species. Lesser horseshoe bats sometime breed in underground sites. Bats are particularly vulnerable to disturbance whilst breeding; they have only a single young every year, and so disturbing a maternity colony can have a significant adverse impact on the area's bat population. They are also vulnerable during hibernation, as frequent disturbance from torpor leads to a reduced chance of surviving the winter. Most of the entrances have grills to deter access. If these become damaged, unauthorised access by cavers can occur. By ensuring grills are in place and efficiently repaired when damaged and by educating caving groups this problem can be minimised.

<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>
8A	Replace grills where necessary following vandalism/damage to prevent access to shafts/caves	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Direct management: NRW		Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Forestry Commission, Bat Conservation Trust
<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>
8B	Restrict climbing on Severn Sisters and other sensitive cliff faces	Staff time only	2015-2020	Enforcement: Other		Natural England	Natural Resources Wales
<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>
8C	Monitor visitor use	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Investigation / Research / Monitoring		Natural England/ Natural Resources Wales	Wye Valley AONB

Site details

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

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC	S1303 <i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i> : Lesser horseshoe bat
	H9130 <i>Asperulo-Fagetum</i> beech forests
	H9180# <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines
	H91J0# <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles

Site location and links

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC

Area (ha) **916.24** Grid reference **ST530957** [Map link](#)

Local Authorities Fynwy/ Monmouthshire; Gloucestershire; Herefordshire

Site Conservation Objectives

Site Conservation Objectives (covers area in England) [European Site Conservation Objectives for Wye Valley Woodlands SAC](#)

Site Conservation Objectives (covers area in Wales) <http://www.ccg.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-sites-project/wye-to-yerbeston-sac-list/wye-valley-woods-sac.aspx>

European Marine Site conservation advice [n/a](#)

Regulation 33/35 Package [n/a](#)

Marine Management Organisation site plan [n/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.

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC

<i>River basin</i>	Severn RBMP
<i>WFD Management catchment</i>	Wye
<i>WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)</i>	n/a

Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC

Pierce, Alcove & Piercefield Woods SSSI

Swanpool Wood & Furnace Grove SSSI

The Hudnalls SSSI

Shorn Cliff & Caswell Woods SSSI

Upper Wye Gorge SSSI

Lower Wye Gorge SSSI

Astridge Wood SSSI

Highbury Wood SSSI

River Wye SSSI

River Wye (Lower Wye)/ Afon Gwy (Gwy Isaf) SSSI

Blackcliff/Wyndcliff SSSI

Cleddon Shoots Woodlands SSSI

Lower Hael Woods SSSI

Graig Wood SSSI

Livox Woods SSSI

Harper's Grove Lord's Grove SSSI

Fiddler's Elbow SSSI

Bigswear Woods SSSI

National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC

Fiddler's Elbow NNR

Highbury Wood NNR

Lady Park Wood NNR

The Hudnalls NNR

Ramsar

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy SAC n/a

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Wye Valley Woodlands/ Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy S River Wye/ Afon Gwy SAC

Version Date

Comment

V0.3 14/01/2015



www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000