

Site Improvement Plan

Mendip Limestone Grasslands

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, or contact Natural England's Responsible Officer for the site via our enquiry service 0300 060 3900, or enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

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

UK0030203 Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC

Site description

The Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC is comprised of three areas: Brean Down, Uphill Cliff, and Crook Peak to Shute Shelve Hill. Brean Down and Uphill Cliff are coastal while Crook Peak to Shute Shelve Hill extends to some 15km inland. The sites are located on the Carboniferous Limestone which forms much of the Mendip Hills. The SAC supports the largest area of CG1 *Festuca ovina* - *Carlina vulgaris* grassland in the British Isles. Also present is CG2 *Festuca ovina* - *Avenula pratensis* grassland which often occurs as a mosaic with the CG1. The site is exceptional in that it supports a number of rare and scarce vascular plants typical of the oceanic southern temperate and Mediterranean elements of the British flora. These include white rock-rose *Helianthemum appeninum*, Somerset hair-grass *Koeleria vallesiana* and honewort *Trinia glauca*. Transitions to limestone heath occur on Crook Peak to Shute Shelve Hill. Also present are caves and *Tilio-acerion* woodland, the caves being hibernacula for Greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*.

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 Inappropriate scrub control	Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites)	Control scrub through funding or supporting existing local partnership	National Trust, Natural England
2 Change in land management	Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites)	Ensure stocking levels are maintained	National Trust, Natural England
3 Disease	Threat	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Monitor for disease outbreak and mitigate effects	Forestry Commission, National Trust, Natural England
4 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H4030 European dry heaths, H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Control and reduce the impacts of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Natural England

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 Inappropriate scrub control

Scrub growth is a major problem on the Mendip Limestone Grasslands. It is possible that the resources available to counter this threat will be insufficient to deal with the problem. There is the potential to lose a significant area of the limestone grassland and heathland features to advancing scrub.

<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	Clear scrub from limestone grassland and heath and manage any further scrub encroachment.	£60,000	2014-18	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	National 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>
1B	Source alternative funding to help control scrub, to bridge funding gaps.	Included in costs for action 1A	2014-15	Mechanism not identified / develop mechanism	Not yet determined	Natural England	National Trust

2 Change in land management

All three areas are difficult to manage due to both terrain and vegetation. Difficulties have arisen in the past in both getting and retaining graziers. They are currently in agri-environment schemes which provide support for the management of the SAC.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2A	Ensure adequate grazing by supporting the National Trust who will provide graziers, funded through Rural Development schemes.	£5,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	National Trust

3 Disease

The *Tilio-acerion* woodland components of the site are dominated by ash. If *Chalara* continues to spread these woodlands will be very vulnerable to attack.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
3A	Monitor for presence of <i>Chalara</i> on the site.	£500	2014-20	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Not yet determined	Natural England	Forestry Commission, National Trust
3B	Design and implement a biosecurity plan to reduce the likelihood of disease.	£500	2014-15	Bio-security plan	Not yet determined	Forestry Commission	Natural England

4 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Impacts of exceedance could include: changes in ground vegetation; decline in lichens; decline in diversity; increased mineralisation; N leaching; surface acidification, and increased sensitivity to abiotic stress.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
4A	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts.	Not yet determined	2014-20	Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Not yet determined	Natural England	Not yet determined

Site details

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

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC

S1304 *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*: Greater horseshoe bat

H4030 European dry heaths

H6210# Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*)

H8310 Caves not open to the public

H9180# *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines

Site location and links

Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC

Area (ha) **417.47** Grid reference **ST401557** [Map link](#)

Local Authorities North Somerset; Somerset

Site Conservation Objectives [European Site Conservation Objectives for Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC](#)

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.

Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC

River basin

[Severn RBMP](#)

WFD Management catchment

Bristol Avon & North Somerset Streams

WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)

n/a

Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	Brean Down SSSI Crook Peak to Shute Shelve Hill SSSI Uphill Cliff SSSI
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	n/a
Ramsar	
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	n/a
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	13/03/2015	

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000

