

# Site Improvement Plan

## Cerne & Sydling Downs

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)**

**UK0030115    Cerne & Sydling Downs SAC**

## Site description

Cerne & Sydling Downs SAC consists of a large area of semi-natural dry grassland on the west Dorset chalk. Dry valley slopes with a variety of aspects support extensive examples of CG2 *Festuca ovina* – *Avenula pratensis* grassland in the south-west of its UK range. A particular feature of this site is the presence of the *Succisa pratensis* – *Leucanthemum vulgare* sub-community, especially on south- and west-facing slopes. This type of calcareous grassland is almost entirely restricted to parts of Wiltshire and Dorset. On south-west-facing slopes, the nationally scarce dwarf sedge *Carex humilis* can be abundant in this sub-community.

This site supports a large marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* metapopulation composed of two large and one smaller sub-populations which regularly expand into other nearby areas in favourable years. These colonies occupy calcareous downland situations and complement the wet grassland habitats of the other Dorset strongholds.

## 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 Habitat fragmentation	Pressure	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Improve connectivity between grassland areas	Natural England
2 Overgrazing	Pressure/Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Establish appropriate grazing regimes across the whole SAC area, control and reverse the effects of overgrazing	Natural England
3 Undergrazing	Pressure/Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Monitor grazing intensity, and ensure appropriate grazing management	Natural England
4 Inappropriate weed control	Pressure	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Clarify appropriate weed control with landowners and carry out enforcement action where necessary	Natural England
5 Fertiliser use	Pressure/Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Look for opportunities to revert adjacent land to low-input grassland, and promote agri-environment agreements	Natural England

6 Direct impact from third party	Pressure/ Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Raise awareness of protected sites, monitor practice and if appropriate, use enforcement	Environment Agency, Natural England
7 Inappropriate scrub control	Pressure	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Develop and implement a scrub management plan	Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Landowner(s), Gamekeepers/ managers
8 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Develop 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 Habitat fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation due to land use change over a period of 200 years has resulted in an unconnected landscape through arable monoculture and hedgerow removal. Intensification of grassland management has resulted in an 'island' population of marsh fritillary and its supporting SAC grassland at this site, potentially causing problems with genetic diversity.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
1A	Identify candidate areas for species-rich grassland restoration through desk-based GIS and walkover surveys.	Staff time	2015-16	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Staff time	Natural England	n/a

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
1B	Encourage the uptake of Countryside Stewardship by landowners, to connect the landscape grassland SAC features.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	n/a

## 2 Overgrazing

A certain amount of positive micromanagement takes place on the NNR, and has proven beneficial, however overgrazing is evident on other areas, resulting in damage to the SAC features. Overgrazing is removing the marsh fritillary's food plants, and meadow plants are not able to set seed.

<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>	Walkover survey of the whole site to identify overgrazed areas and establish a baseline.	Staff time	2015	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	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>2B</b>	Enforcement action and/ or negotiation with the landowner to adjust grazing regimes.	Staff time	2015-16	Advice: Negotiation	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	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>2C</b>	Where SAC land is not under agreement, promote and set up agri-environment agreements.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	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>2D</b>	Seek a management agreement where necessary, and in combination with enforcement procedure.	Not yet determined	2015-17	Enforcement: Overgrazing Regs	Not yet determined	Natural England	n/a

### 3 Undergrazing

A certain amount of positive micromanagement takes place on the NNR, and has proved beneficial, however undergrazing is evident on other areas resulting in damage to the SAC features by rank swards.

<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>	Walkover survey of the whole site to identify overgrazed areas and establish a baseline.	Staff time	2015	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	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>3B</b>	Enforcement action and or negotiation with the landowner to adjust grazing regimes.	Staff time	2015-16	Advice: Negotiation	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	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>3C</b>	Where SAC land is not under agreement, promote and set up agri-environment agreements.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	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>3D</b>	Seek a management agreement where necessary, and in combination with enforcement procedure.	Not yet determined	2015-17	Regulation: Compulsory Management Scheme/Notice	Not yet determined	Natural England	n/a

#### 4 Inappropriate weed control

The SAC feature is prone to the usual grassland invasives (Spear thistle, ragwort and nettles) which could be detrimental to the sward if left unmanaged.

<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>	Walkover survey of the whole site to identify overgrazed areas and establish a baseline.	Staff time	2015	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	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>4B</b>	Reminder to landowners of their obligations under GAEC11-Control of Weeds Act 1959.	Staff time	2015-16	Advice	Natural England, Staff time, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)	Natural England	n/a

## 5 Fertiliser use

Lack of, or insufficient buffer strips have led to third party damage to the SAC grassland feature through fertiliser application on adjacent intensive arable land.

<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>	Soil testing in affected areas adjacent to intensively farmed land in order to collect baseline evidence.	£500	2015	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Not yet determined	Natural England	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>5B</b>	Negotiate agri-environment agreements on land adjacent to the site.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	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>5C</b>	If there is robust evidence of damage, take enforcement action.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Enforcement	Not yet determined	Natural England	n/a

## 6 Direct impact from third party

Pumped slurry from the adjacent pig farm unintentionally affected the site via run-off from an adjacent field where it was being spread. There is a risk this could happen again in the future.

<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>	Monitor adjacent slurry application in spells of wet weather, and use regulatory powers against any unconsented activity where there is evidence of damage.	£10,000	2014 onwards	Enforcement	Not yet determined	Natural England	Environment Agency

## 7 Inappropriate scrub control

Management and monitoring of scrub across the discrete parts of the site is very difficult, in part due to the multiple owners' differing grazing regimes.

<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>7A</b>	Develop a scrub management plan, negotiate with landowners and gamekeepers.	£100,000	2015	Advice: Education & awareness raising	Not yet determined	Natural England	Dorset Wildlife Trust, Landowner(s), Gamekeepers/managers

<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>7B</b>	Phased removal of trees and scrub with follow-up management to maintain cleared areas in an open state.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Mechanism not identified / develop mechanism	Not yet determined	Natural England	Dorset Wildlife Trust, Landowner(s), Gamekeepers/managers

## 8 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site-relevant critical loads for ecosystem protection and hence there is a risk of harmful effects but most of the sensitive features are generally considered to be in favourable condition, except some areas affected by the presence of an intensive pig unit (finishing 1050 pigs per week) nearby. This requires further investigation.

<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>8A</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

#### Cerne & Sydling Downs SAC

S1065 *Euphydryas* (*Eurodryas*, *Hypodryas*) *aurinia*: Marsh fritillary butterfly

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

### Site location and links

#### Cerne & Sydling Downs SAC

Area (ha) **369.08**      Grid reference **ST670021**      [Map link](#)

Local Authorities      Dorset

Site Conservation Objectives      [European Site Conservation Objectives for Cerne & Sydling Downs 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.*

### **Cerne & Sydling Downs SAC**

<i>River basin</i>	<a href="#">South West RBMP</a>
<i>WFD Management catchment</i>	Dorset
<i>WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)</i>	n/a

## Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
<b>Cerne &amp; Sydling Downs SAC</b>	Court Farm, Sydling SSSI Giant Hill SSSI Black Hill Down SSSI Hog Cliff SSSI Sydling Valley Downs SSSI
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
<b>Cerne &amp; Sydling Downs SAC</b>	Hog Cliff NNR
Ramsar	
<b>Cerne &amp; Sydling Downs SAC</b>	n/a
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
<b>Cerne &amp; Sydling Downs SAC</b>	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	28/04/2015	

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

