

Site Improvement Plan

Culm 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)

UK0012679 Culm Grasslands SAC

Site description

Culm Grasslands represents *Molinia* meadows in south-west England. This site contains extremely diverse examples of the heathy type of M24 *Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum*; fen-meadow, ranging from short, grazed swards through to stands that are transitional to scrub. Structural diversity accounts for the conservation of a wide range of flora and fauna, particularly of species characteristic of south-western Europe, such as meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*.

Culm Grasslands contains the largest cluster of sites for Marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* in the south-west peninsula. It is judged to be the most important location for the species in its major south-west stronghold.

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 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Reduce nitrogen deposition levels and ameliorate impacts	Natural England
2 Agricultural management practices	Pressure/Threat	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Support land managers to ensure appropriate grazing	Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England
3 Hydrological changes	Pressure/Threat	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Reduce the impacts from field drainage	Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Other
4 Change in land management	Pressure/Threat	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Review existing agreements, and increase uptake to improve grazing regimes	Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England
5 Changes in species distributions	Pressure/Threat	S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Manage habitat areas supporting the Marsh fritillary meta-population	Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Butterfly Conservation
6 Invasive species	Pressure	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Manage and reduce invasive species	Environment Agency, Natural England, North Devon catchment: host and partners

7 Inappropriate scrub control	Pressure/ Threat	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Determine the most appropriate means of scrub control under an agri-environment scheme	Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England
8 Agricultural management practices	Pressure/ Threat	S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Provide guidance and advice to land managers on appropriate grazing management	Rural Payments Agency (RPA)
9 Direct impact from 3rd party	Pressure/ Threat	H6410 Purple moor-grass meadows, S1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly	Reduce the incidence of damaging third party fires	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 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds the site relevant critical loads. High nitrogen desposition can lead to an increase in tall grass species, a decrease in vegetation diversity, and a decrease of bryophytes.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
1A	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts.	Not yet determined	2014-20	Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Research project	Natural England	Not yet determined

2 Agricultural management practices

Areas outside agri-environment schemes are more vulnerable to lack of management (undergrazing). This is a localised problem.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2A	Advice to SAC owner/occupiers.	£10,000	2014-20	Advice: Negotiation	Rural Development Programme (RDPE), Conservation Enhancement Scheme (CES)	Natural England	Devon Wildlife Trust

3 Hydrological changes

Land drainage (field drainage from adjoining farmland) is impacting the SAC. Drier conditions affect *Molinia* meadows by changing the abundance and distribution of plant species.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
3A	Investigate to determine whether field drainage and other activities are impacting the the SAC.	£10,000	2016	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Research project	Natural England	Devon Wildlife Trust, Other

4 Change in land management

Maintaining *Molinia* meadows requires a combination of extensive summer grazing, combined with routine scrub management and rotational burning.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
4A	Increase the extent of land in the SAC under NELMS/ HLS grazing related options, and review existing HLS agreements and negotiated required improvements in order to secure appropriate grazing levels.	£50,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Devon Wildlife Trust

5 Changes in species distributions

The Marsh fritillary is a dynamic species and requires a sizable network of suitable habitat to sustain a healthy meta-population.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
5A	Investigate the management to maintain a healthy Marsh fritillary meta-population on the SAC and associated areas.	£10,000	2014-16	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Research project	Natural England	Devon Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation

6 Invasive species

Himalayan balsam is an issue on some parts of the SAC where main watercourses bring in seed. Highly invasive species can quickly colonise *Molinia*-dominated habitats to the detriment of native flora.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
6A	Implement a control plan.	£50,000	2014-20	Invasive Control Plan: Invasive Species Control Programme	Not yet determined	Natural England	North Devon catchment: host and partners

<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>
6B	Advice to SAC owner/occupiers. Environment Agency to provide latest advice on controlling the spread of Himalayan Balsam to landowners within the SAC and associated tributaries.	Not yet determined	2014-20	Advice	Not yet determined	Natural England	Environment Agency
<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>
6C	Natural England to develop a partnership agreement with the North Devon Catchment Partnership (NDCP) to advise and provide support to control the spread of Himalayan Balsam via the organisations that make up the NDCP and that actively engage with landowners in the catchment.	£2,000	2014-20	Partnership agreement	Not yet determined	Natural England	North Devon catchment: host and partners

7 Inappropriate scrub control

To maintain the interest features of Culm grassland sites very low levels of grazing by cattle are required. Cattle will browse scrub but the grazing levels of conservation grazing are not high enough to control scrub and maintain open areas of Culm grassland. Alternative means of managing scrub, other than grazing, need to be adopted and funding secured to allow this scrub management to occur thus maintaining Marsh fritillary populations and retaining areas of open Culm grassland.

<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	Increase the extent of land in the SAC under NELMS/ HLS and review existing HLS agreements and negotiate new capital works to manage scrub.	£76,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Devon Wildlife Trust

8 Agricultural management practices

Grazing of Culm grassland sites with Marsh Fritillary butterfly should be at very light levels. Too many cattle being grazed can result in a Marsh Fritillary population being lost from a site. Landowners under a HLS agreement should be advised of the requirements of conservation grazing to ensure that grazing is very light and monitored throughout the term of the agreement so adjustments in stock numbers can be made.

<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	Natural England to advise agreement holders on grazing levels through an aftercare visit programme for land under agri-environment schemes. Devon Wildlife Trust will provide advice on appropriate grazing of sites when visiting landowners in the SAC and feedback to Natural England via staff employed in the Working Wetlands Project and North Devon NIA.	£10,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Devon Wildlife 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	Enforcement of cross compliance Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 9 (which aims to prevent overgrazing and unsuitable supplementary feeding on land receiving the Single Payment Scheme / Basic Payment Scheme). Natural England are responsible for the assessment of overgrazing and supplementary feeding controls under Cross Compliance Regulation, and will carry out this work on behalf of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).	£5,000	2014-20	Enforcement	Single Payment Scheme (SPS) BPS cross-compliance	Rural Payments Agency (RPA)	n/a

9 Direct impact from 3rd party

Large scale burning by third parties is a problem impacting on *Molinia* dominated habitats (cycle of graminoid dominance) and the Marsh fritillary.

<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>
9A	Natural England (under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) will carry out enforcement and/or take legal action on anyone intentionally or recklessly destroying or disturbing any of the interest features.	£1,000	2014-20	Enforcement	Staff time	Natural England	n/a

Site details

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

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Culm Grasslands SAC

H4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*

H6410 Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*)

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

Site location and links

Culm Grasslands SAC

Area (ha) **768.69** Grid reference **SS843214** [Map link](#)

Local Authorities Devon

Site Conservation Objectives [European Site Conservation Objectives for Culm 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.

Culm Grasslands SAC

River basin

South West

[South West RBMP](#)

WFD Management catchment

North Devon

WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)

GB108050008210, GB108050013980, GB108050013990, GB108050014290, GB108050014390

Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Culm Grasslands SAC	Bradworthy Common SSSI Mambury & Stowford Moors SSSI Hare's Down, Knowstone & Rackenford Moors SSSI Thorne & Doves Moors SSSI Bursdon Moor SSSI Dunsdon Farm SSSI Hollow Moor & Odham Moor SSSI Kismeldon Meadows SSSI
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Culm Grasslands SAC	Dunsdon NNR
Ramsar	
Culm Grasslands SAC	n/a
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Culm Grasslands SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	10/10/2014	

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