Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS)

Planning for the Future

# Site Improvement Plan

# The Stiperstones and The Hollies

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)**

**UK0012810 The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC**

## Site description

The Stiperstones and Hollies is an example, situated in central England, of dry heath that contains features transitional between lowland heathland and upland heather moorland. The most extensive vegetation type present is H12 *Calluna vulgaris – Vaccinium myrtillus* dry heath, which is characteristic of the uplands. South-facing slopes support stands of H8 *Calluna vulgaris – Ulex gallii* heath, a predominantly lowland vegetation community of south-west Britain. The site also includes some elements of old sessile oak woods with holly and hard fern.

## 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 | Incentivise grazing through agreements; or alternatively Natural England to introduce direct grazing management | Natural England |
| 2 Habitat connectivity | Threat | H4030 European dry heaths, H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland | Increase the resilience of the site by seeking to enhance related habitats in the surrounding landscape where opportunities for their restoration arise | National Trust, Natural England, Shropshire Hills AONB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Landscape Partnership Scheme |
| 3 Disease | Threat | H4030 European dry heaths | Monitor the status of Phytophthora ramorum on Bilberry, and ensure that the heathland habitat is in a healthy and resilient condition | Natural England, Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) |
| 4 Invasive species | Pressure | H4030 European dry heaths | Control and reduce bracken, brambles and Japanese knotweed | Natural England |
| 5 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition | Pressure | H4030 European dry heaths, H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland | Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts | Not yet determined |
| 6 Wildfire/ arson | Threat | H4030 European dry heaths | Adapt site management in response to changing fire risks | West Midlands Fire Service |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Deer | Threat | H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland | Monitor, and if required control deer | Forestry Commission, 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 Change in land management

The dwarf shrub, acid grassland and wet flush communities are heavily dependent upon sensative grazing by sheep and cattle. Much of this site is registered commonland featuring multiple grazing rights holders, mostly farmers whose activities have a direct influence on site condition. The viability of producing lamb and beef from a challenging upland grazing unit could impact upon the ideal grazing practice where habitat management is an objective.

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1A** | Engage with current Commoners (HLS agreement holders) and negotiate an improved grazing regime. | £150,000 | 2015-20 | Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme) | Rural Development Programme (RDPE) | Natural England | n/a |

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1B** | Ensure appropriate grazing of non-Common land areas by improving grazing licences. | £50,000 | 2015-20 | Regulation: Grazing Licence | Natural England, Grant in aid | Natural England | n/a |

## 2 Habitat connectivity

Historically the heathland and related habitats in the Shropshire Hills were more extensive and inter-connected. Landscape initatives such as the Back to Purple Project at Stipertones has resulted in the restoration of significant areas of dry heath on former conifer plantations. This approach should be continued and widened to improve the resilence of the site's features by improving habitat linkages including to other heathand/upland areas such as the Long Mynd. Much of the importance of this Stiperstones relates to it being on the interface between typical upland communities and those more common with the lowland. The resilience of rare upland habitats and species found here could be especially vulnerable to climate change should warmer weather favour better adapted lowland species. Equally there is a possibility that other changes such as drought (increasing fire risk, reducing the viability of grazing livestock and weakening some species so that they are more vulnerable to pests and diseases) could have dire consequences.

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2A** | Develop and implement landscape scale project with partners to expand, buffer and join habitats | £250,000 | 2015-25 | Existing Local Project | LIFE, Natural England, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Voluntary conservation organisation | Local partnership | National Trust, Natural England, Shropshire Hills AONB, Shropshire Wildlife Trust |

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2B** | Secure long term conservation management of the land in and abutting the site to achieve heathland habitat restoration and improve the resilience/connectivity of the heathland habitat | Not yet determined | 2015-25 | Mechanism not identified / develop mechanism | LIFE, Natural England, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Voluntary conservation organisation | National Trust | Natural England, Shropshire Wildlife Trust |

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2C** | Promote the uptake of Countryside Stewardship owners/ managers of land surrounding the SAC to maintain existing habitat links/buffers and where appropriate seek opportunities to expand them | Not yet determined | 2015-20 | Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme) | Rural Development Programme (RDPE) | Natural England | Shropshire Hills AONB |

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2D** | Increase the extent, quality and connectivity of the heathland habitat mosaic area including restoring wetland flushes; and managing species on the edge of their range | £78,000 | 2015-25 | National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan | Natural England, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Grant in aid, Landfill tax | Natural England | Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Landscape Partnership Scheme |

## 3 Disease

Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* is an important component of the dwarf shrub habitat found on site, with a range of dependent species (such as the Bilberry Bumblebee *Bombus monticola*). This particular plant is highly susceptible to the disease *Phytophthora ramorum*. As its occurrence at the site is relatively new the consequences are not yet certain and requires monitoring. *Phytophthora pseudosyringae* is already present and also represents a significant threat, so close monitoring by Natural England and FERA is needed to indicate any change in status.

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3A** | Monitor *phytophthora* to identify any change in risk from its current low impact status | Staff time | 2015-20 | National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan | Natural England, Grant in aid | Natural England | Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) |

## 4 Invasive species

Bracken has been controlled on the site to prevent the loss of heathland, however changes in climate seem to be favouring bracken and bramble growth. This is likely to affect the condition of the heathland directly and indirectly through the restriction of grazing. Japanese knotweed is present on site on some of the smaller watercourses and is controlled annually, but persists.

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4A** | Control and manage Japanese knotweed and bracken via physical means eg cattle stocking and chemical treatment. Monitor the distribution and extent of bramble to determine if it requires specific control action. | £20,000 | 2015-20 | National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan | Natural England, Grant in aid | Natural England | n/a |

| Action | Action description | Cost estimate | Timescale | Mechanism | Funding option | Delivery lead body | Delivery partner(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4B** | Control and manage bracken via physical means eg cattle stocking and chemical treatment | £10,000 | 2015-20 | Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) | Rural Development Programme (RDPE) | Natural England | n/a |

## 5 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Surveys indicate that lichen species may be impacted.

| Action | Action description | Cost estimate | Timescale | Mechanism | Funding option | Delivery lead body | Delivery partner(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5A** | Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts | Not yet determined | 2015-20 | Site Nitrogen Action Plan | Not yet determined | Natural England | Not yet determined |

## 6 Wildfire/ arson

With predicted warmer summers the risk of wildfires is increased, and this could be exacerbated by predicted wetter winters which will limit the amount of controlled burning which acts as firebreaks in limiting the amount of combustible material on site.

| Action | Action description | Cost estimate | Timescale | Mechanism | Funding option | Delivery lead body | Delivery partner(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6A** | Monitor outbreaks of fire and adapt the site fire plan if the risks change, including possibly extending the burning season beyond the end of March in some years to allow for enough time to carry out required burning. | No cost | 2015-20 | National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan | Natural England, Grant in aid | West Midlands Fire Service | n/a |

## 7 Deer

Woodland, comprising of Birch Betula sp., Sessile Oak Quercus petraea and Holly Ilex aquifolium is a key habitat especially to the north of the site. Management such as coppicing is important to maintain the structure of these woodlands, but this would become increasingly difficult to continue successfully were deer numbers increase locally. The current deer population is not well recorded, but anecdotal evidence would suggest that it is increasing.

| *Action* | *Action description* | *Cost estimate* | *Timescale* | *Mechanism* | *Funding option* | *Delivery lead body* | *Delivery partner(s)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **7A** | Establish monitoring of deer in the local area and, if appropriate, undertake cull management to prevent impacts on the SAC | Not yet determined | 2015-20 | Invasive Control Plan: Invasive Species Control Programme | Not yet determined | Natural England | Forestry Commission |

# Site details

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

## Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC** | H91A0 Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles |
| | H4030 European dry heaths |

## Site location and links

**The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Area (ha)* **601.46** *Grid reference* **SJ375006** | Map link |
| *Local Authorities* | Shropshire |
| *Site Conservation Objectives* | European Site Conservation Objectives for The Stiperstones & The Hollies 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 (RMBP) 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.*

**The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC**

| | |
|---|---|
| *River basin* | Severn RBMP |
| *WFD Management catchment* | Severn Uplands |
| *WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)* | n/a |

## Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

| Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) | |
|---|---|
| **The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC** | The Stiperstones & The Hollies SSSI |

| National Nature Reserve (NNR) | |
|---|---|
| **The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC** | Stiperstones NNR |

| Ramsar | |
|---|---|
| **The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC** | n/a |

| Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) | |
|---|---|
| **The Stiperstones & The Hollies SAC** | n/a |

| *Version* | *Date* | *Comment* |
|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 22/01/2015 | |