

Site Improvement Plan

Fontmell & Melbury 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, 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)

UK0012550 Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC

Site description

Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC is a large site, comprising of the edge of the north-east Dorset chalk escarpment. It supports a variety of scrub communities and dry calcareous grasslands.

The variety of slope, soil and aspect provide habitats for a range of notable plant species such as Early gentian, Bastard toadflax and species of Orchids including Frog orchid, Fragrant orchid and Lesser butterfly orchid. Mosaics of grassland and scrub and a herb-rich sward provide the ideal conditions for rare and declining butterflies including; Duke of Burgundy, Silver Spotted Skipper, Adonis Blue and Marsh Fritillary.

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	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1654 Early gentian	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts	Not yet determined
2 Inappropriate scrub control	Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1654 Early gentian	Secure increased resources for scrub management from ERDP	Dorset Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England
3 Agriculture: agricultural operations	Pressure/Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1654 Early gentian	Raise awareness amongst land managers and farmers, and offer advice on adjacent land management practices	National Trust, Natural England
4 Change in land management	Threat	H6210 Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites), S1654 Early gentian	Seek funding and secure planning permission for additional agricultural buildings	National Trust, Natural England, Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF)

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 site-relevant critical loads which require further investigation. Whilst the north facing slopes were identified as being herb-rich at notification, the balance between herbs and vigorous grasses (such as upright brome and false oat grass) in some areas appear to be shifting, as recorded during the recent condition assessment.

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	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	Not yet determined

2 Inappropriate scrub control

Areas are progressing towards secondary woodland rather than being managed effectively as scrub. A constraint is that current HLS agreements have low value capital payments in comparison to the actual costs of scrub removal work. The income forgone calculations that underpin HLS do not adequately take account of the balance required involving low grassland stocking rates for conservation management which can then mean in some places there is a lack of browsing pressure to control scrub regeneration. Under present 10 year HLS agreements capital project payments (eg scrub removal) are restricted to the first three years and this restricts necessary scrub control being supported.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2A	Negotiate increased expenditure on scrub management in existing and renewed agreements.	£3,500/ha	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Dorset Wildlife Trust, 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>
2B	Remove the restriction on capital works in agri-environment schemes.	£3,000	2014-20	Mechanism not identified / develop mechanism		Natural England	National Trust

3 Agriculture: agricultural operations

Field parcels adjacent to the site with arable operations are subject to nutrient enrichment from fertilisers and spray-drift of herbicides, therefore leading to species-poor areas dominated by nettles and loss of priority habitat.

<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	Monitor the application of fertiliser on adjacent land and look for evidence of spraydrift.	Staff time	2015 onwards	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Not yet determined	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>
3B	Increase awareness amongst land managers and farmers of the issues and implications of spray drift adjacent to protected sites.	Not yet determined	2014 onwards	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>
3C	If voluntary action fails, consider regulation to reduce third-party impacts.	Staff time	2015 onwards	Regulation: SSSI Regulation	Not yet determined	Natural England	n/a

4 Change in land management

The high incidence of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in grazing stock may lead to movement restrictions which could limit the ability of graziers to graze at suitable times of the year. Winter livestock housing is required to offset the consequences of bTB and make the site more resilient to bTB through increasing the flexibility and resilience of grazing management.

<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>
4A	Increase flexibility and resilience of grazing management by supporting (where appropriate) additional agricultural buildings. Agree their location and identify suitable funding.	£40,000	2015 onwards	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	EU Life, Rural Development Programme (RDPE), Capital payments	Natural England	Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF)

<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>
4B	Secure planning permission for additional agricultural buildings that support improved grazing management of the site.	Not yet determined	2015 onwards	Regulation: Grant Appropriate Planning Permission	Other stakeholder(s) contributions	Not yet determined	National Trust

Site details

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

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC	H6210# Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) S1654 <i>Gentianella anglica</i> : Early gentian
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Site location and links

Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC

Area (ha)	260.75	Grid reference	ST900193	Map link
Local Authorities			Dorset	
Site Conservation Objectives				European Site Conservation Objectives for Fontmell & Melbury 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.

Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC

<i>River basin</i>	South West RBMP
<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)	
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC	Fontmell & Melbury Downs SSSI

National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC	n/a

Ramsar	
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC	n/a

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	17/04/2015	

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