

# Site Improvement Plan

## Downton Gorge

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)**

**UK0012735 Downton Gorge SAC**

## Site description

Downton Gorge was formed by the River Teme cutting through a ridge of limestones, siltstones and sandstones. With its rocky cliffs and steep dingles the Gorge supports an area of ancient semi-natural woodland of varying types including Tilio-Acerion forest. The Large Leaved Lime is an example of a nationally rare tree which is prevalent on the site.

## 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 Deer	Pressure	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Reduce the impacts of deer	Forestry Commission, Natural England
2 Game management: pheasant rearing	Pressure/Threat	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Reduce the impacts from pheasant rearing	Natural England
3 Forestry and woodland management	Pressure	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Improve woodland management	Forestry Commission, Natural England
4 Disease	Pressure/Threat	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Monitor tree diseases and develop a mitigation and adaptation plan	Forestry Commission, Natural England
5 Invasive species	Pressure/Threat	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Manage and reduce invasive species	Environment Agency, Natural England
6 Habitat fragmentation	Threat	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Maintain and improve the connectivity with woodland habitat abutting and nearby the site	Forestry Commission, Natural England
7 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H9180 Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Reduce the impacts of air pollution	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 Deer

Deer are having an adverse impact on woodland vegetation and are affecting the vertical woodland structure by selectively browsing on herbs, shrubs and young trees. Without improvements in their management (enhanced cull at the local and landscape level and selective fencing), the deer population will impose long-term changes on the composition of the site's woodland. The undisturbed and secluded nature of the site appears to make it attractive as a local refuge for deer in the area.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
1A	Reduce deer numbers and reduce their impact through the installation of strategic deer fencing	£76,000	2014-2024	Partnership agreement	Grant in aid	Natural England	Forestry Commission

### 2 Game management: pheasant rearing

A large number of pheasants are reared and released each year on land immediately surrounding the Gorge. Many of these remain within the site all year round and there is evidence that they are causing some damage to the ground flora. There are also some issues relating to the shoot such as the cutting of vegetation to allow beating and unsympathetic woodland track management.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2A	Reduce the impact of game management on the SAC by negotiations with the shoot owner	£10,000	2015-2024	Advice: Negotiation	Conservation Enhancement Scheme (CES)	Natural England	n/a

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2B	Investigate regulatory and enforcement options for preventing pheasants affecting the site	No cost	2015-16	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	No funding required	Natural England	n/a

### 3 Forestry and woodland management

Most woodland management on the site is carried out as part of NNR management and therefore generally this is done sympathetically within the SAC itself. There are however a few relatively small scale issues such as the removal of deadwood and issues with cutting vegetation, as well as less sympathetic woodland management immediately adjacent to the site.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
3A	Maintain sustainable woodland management including by retaining deadwood and appropriate vegetation cutting	£5,000	2015-2020	National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan	Grant in aid	Natural England	Forestry Commission

### 4 Disease

*Phytophthora* disease affects some riparian alders present in the site and can lead to the death of trees. Ash-die back disease, *Chalara*, whilst not known to be present at this time, has the potential to affect the health and abundance of the ash component of the site's woodlands. Monitoring for the presence and extent of these diseases is required. In addition planning should be undertaken to consider how to mitigate for and adapt to this increasing threat.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
4A	Routinely monitor for the presence of Ash-die and other diseases. If appropriate develop a mitigation and adaptation plan for the woodland.	Not yet determined	2015-2020	National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan	Grant in aid	Natural England	Forestry Commission

### 5 Invasive species

Several invasive species, including Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and rhododendron are present and these need to be contained and reduced. Himalayan balsam is present along the riverside and long-term effective control of it requires catchment-wide approach.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
5A	Control, reduce and where possible eradicate the extent of Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and Rhododendron.	£10,000	2015-2020	National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan	Water Framework Directive funds (NE), flood defence funds (EA) Some actions - funding not yet secured, Grant in aid	Natural England	

<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>	With partners, develop and introduce a River Teme catchment-based control strategy for Himalayan balsam.	Not yet determined	2015-2020	Invasive Control Plan: Invasive Species Control Programme	Water Framework Directive (WFD)	Not yet determined	Environment Agency, Local partnership, National specialist

## 6 Habitat fragmentation

The site is a small isolated remnant of the once much larger Bringewood Chase, of which there are very few other remaining parts, however in remnant areas adjoining the SAC many of the oak trees were felled in the mid twentieth century and re-planted with conifers. These conifers influence the SAC through shade, microclimate, hydrology etc. Many of these plantations are reaching maturity. Although the existing plantations influence the site, were they to be clear felled it would have an even more drastic influence on the SAC through changing the above parameters and potentially increasing the isolation of the site from other mature woodlands. The isolation of the site increases the vulnerability of the site to the extinction of species through disease or climate change. The threat would be partly addressed by a continuous cover woodland plan, which looks to convert the existing conifers to sympathetic broadleaf woodland. The new tree cover would be supportive of the wildlife interests of the SAC, notably the woodland flora, the lichens and mosses of deciduous trees and the birds of western valley deciduous woodlands.

<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>	Negotiate a continuous cover woodland management and felling plan, which includes conversion of the existing conifers to sympathetic broadleaf woodland.	£2,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Not yet determined	Forestry Commission, Natural England

<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>6B</b>	Develop a wider woodland landscape plan for Downton Gorge, to include improvements to linkages and stepping stones to other broadleaf woodland habitats within the area, as well as the reinstatement of the wood pasture to the south of the SAC.	£2,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Forestry Commission

## 7 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads

<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>	Control reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts	Not yet determined	2015-2020	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

#### Downton Gorge SAC

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

### Site location and links

#### Downton Gorge SAC

Area (ha) **69.3**

Grid reference **SO443743** [Map link](#)

Local Authorities

Herefordshire

Site Conservation Objectives

[European Site Conservation Objectives for Downton Gorge 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.*

### **Downton Gorge SAC**

River basin

[Severn RBMP](#)

WFD Management catchment

Teme

WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)

GB109054044500



## Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Downton Gorge SAC	River Teme SSSI Downton Gorge SSSI
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Downton Gorge SAC	Downton Gorge NNR
Ramsar	
Downton Gorge SAC	n/a
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Downton Gorge SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
0.5	18/12/2014	

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

