

Example: 1.2.1 Site Management Policy

Mixed Woodland

The most important woodland type of the NNR (Natural Nature Reserves in England) is the ash woodland (NVC W8) which forms the basis of the candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). Most of this resource on the NNR is, and can continue to be, managed by enclosure and subsequent non-intervention, which will continue the good levels of regeneration experienced in this currently deer-free zone and which will, in time, create natural levels of deadwood, windblow and glades. Amenity use, particularly where this requires the removal of dead trees along access routes, is a constraint on our deadwood management.

Alien species will need to be addressed. Kirby (pers. comm.) suggests that the status of a site as an NNR in addition to its other designations makes it desirable to aim, perhaps in the long term, for a totally natural tree composition. Some semi-natural areas will require the removal of sycamore but other aliens, including horse chestnut and conifers, can be left to extinguish themselves in the course of time as there is little or no regeneration of these species and isolated conifers provide raptor nesting sites (Kirby et al 2001). Beech should be considered as a 'future-natural' component due to climate change (Wesche 2002). Although it might still be considered an alien for the lifespan of this plan, the trees present are often over-mature and provide excellent rot holes, sap runs and the like. The absence of browsing and grazing herbivores will limit the 'naturalness' of the woodlands but cattle grazing is currently untenable.

The fauna of some woods may be restricted by shooting where a third party holds the sporting rights; this is particularly true in White Dale. In the long term, a cessation of the letting of sporting rights is desirable but for the foreseeable future liaison with the sporting tenants should continue to ensure that their operations are conducted in as wildlife-friendly manner as possible.

Limestone grassland

Maintenance of a particular grassland community requires repeated removal of growing vegetation to prevent alteration to its structure and succession to scrub or woodland. This may be done by grazing, mowing or by burning. Burning has a detrimental effect on invertebrates and some plants and vertebrates (Crofts and Jefferson 1999), whilst mowing is only practical on level ground with reasonable access; it also requires special equipment and is labour intensive and less economically sustainable. Grazing with hard-mouthed breeds of sheep and cattle is therefore the favoured technique for management.

Grazing is fairly compatible with local farming systems, though our grazing periods, stocking rates and sometimes type of stock are not what farmers themselves would choose. It is also compatible with the popular image that many visitors have of the area: traditional breeds on flower-rich pastures. Though grazing by sheep and cattle is the chosen option over large areas, on its own it is often not able to achieve the scrub mosaics required, and may have to be supplemented by direct management.

Grazing every year is preferred but rest years can be beneficial and a gap of at least 3 years may be sustainable.

Individual grazing compartments should be managed for the dominant (in terms of area cover) desirable vegetation community. Where important communities require very different management regimes the creation of enclosures may be necessary. The priority for management should be the continued presence of extensive examples of the characteristic limestone grassland communities, in particular the NVC community CG2d (*Festuca-Avenula-Dicranum* community) which forms the core of the cSAC. Tor grass communities (NVC CG4a *Brachipodium pinnatum* grassland) should be maintained but monitored given the problem nature of the species in southern England.

Historic Features

The two Scheduled Monuments on the NNR should be managed in the spirit of English Nature's joint Statement of Intent with English Heritage. This implies consultation and co-operation in maintaining the features, the latter including the removal of encroaching woody vegetation from the mine buildings and minor structural repairs. Consultation with English Heritage will also be necessary where nature conservation objectives to increase river flows may have an effect on the archaeology.

Other, non-scheduled archaeological features should be managed to prevent damage, though 'natural' deterioration may often be unavoidable. Conservation of archaeological features of lower value than Scheduled Monuments should as far as possible never compromise nature conservation management.

Some of the archaeological features, particularly those associated with lead mining, are of sufficient interest to attract visitors in their own right. The interests of these features are best served by managing these sites for public access, subject to safety provisions. This may include concessionary paths, signs, interpretive leaflets, information boards and guided walks.

Public Access

The current access policy for the reserve is to provide a range of wildlife and countryside experiences to visitors. To cater for different needs, a tiered access policy facilitates access to parts of the site whilst leaving other parts relatively undisturbed.

White Dale's robustness, beauty, innate visitor pressure and ease of access to and on the site lend it weight as being the focal point of access on the Reserve. All-ability access is feasible in part of the Dale, elsewhere the visitor should find access as easy as the terrain allows, with kissing gates, steps and waymarking to help.

Middle Dale has a good footpath network and should be considered as the next level down in terms of access, whilst Small Dale is relatively unfrequented by visitors and should remain so, to provide a site for the purist visitor who wants to view wildlife in a wilder context.

Reserve signing should cover all entry points and should provide some direction-finding facility as well as some dos and don'ts.

The safety of visitors is of great importance and risk assessments and regular auditing of the facilities we provide should be carried out. Reserve policy is to grille all dangerous mine shafts, to remove dangerous trees or branches where these could fall onto an access route and to warn all visitors of the presence of mine shafts.

References

Crofts, A. and Jefferson, R. 1999. The Lowland Grassland Management Handbook 2nd edition.

Kirby K. et al. 2001. Objective Setting and Condition Monitoring within Woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Wesche S. 2002. The Implications of Climate Change for the Conservation of Beech Woodlands and Associated Flora in the UK. Report Summary for English Nature.