

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



Name: Greensand Heaths and Commons

Description: A concentration of woodlands, some of significant extent, run along the Greensand Ridge from Maidstone to Westerham and the county boundary. A number have developed on old commons and wood pastures, and areas of heathy vegetation and acid grassland are a significant feature, particularly at Knole Park.

National Character Area(s): Wealden greensand

Kent Character Area(s): Mereworth Woodlands; Ightham Greensand-Sevenoaks Ridge; Westerham Greensand-Sevenoaks Ridge; Eastern Low Weald – the Low Weald; Western Low Weald – the Low Weald; Wotham Heath – Ryarsh Gap.

Landscape Character: The Greensand Ridge rises steeply from the clay vale of the Low Weald, and are characterised by dense woodland on the scarp and heathy commons, within which are small pockets of farmland. Fields are irregular in patterns and often small, and many are turned to pasture – some acid grassland remains on the poor soils. The woodland edge dominates views. This target area includes the ridge-top and the steep, south-facing scarp slope around Sevenoaks, as well as the enclosed, wooded landscape around Mereworth to the east. A historically coherent landscape; lanes are typically characterised by their narrow size, sometimes sunken and heavily enclosed by hedgerows. The scattered settlements are characterised by vernacular buildings and associated with designed landscapes such as a wood pasture and parkland.

Geology: Lower greensand.

Biodiversity:

- 1 Large and important blocks of woodland and wood pasture on acid soils.
- 2 Important acid grassland sites.
- 3 Important for species of acid woodland and heathland which are otherwise scarce in Kent. Woodlands and woodpasture are noted for their veteran trees, fungus flora and invertebrate assemblages. The area is important for bats, adder and RDB bird species, and could be important in the future for woodlark.

Targets:

- 1 Pursue opportunities for creation of acid grassland and heathland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating, by 2020, up to 28ha in blocks of at least 1ha and no more than 500m from other existing or new semi-natural habitat. Enhance at least 45ha of species-rich acid grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Acid Grassland quality.
- 2 Enhance or reinstate woodland management – including wood pasture management where appropriate – and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland; extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement.
- 3 Enhance at least 12ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 4 Pursue opportunities for quarries to be restored to maximize their biodiversity potential. Where appropriate, seek restoration to heathland and/or acid grassland as a condition of permissions for aggregates extraction.
- 5 Engage communities within target areas by raising awareness of biodiversity and encouraging them to get involved in biodiversity action.
- 6 Action for naturally widely dispersed habitats (ponds, traditional orchards), wildlife associated with arable farmland, and widely dispersed species such as great crested newt will need to focus across the whole of the area and not just within the Biodiversity Opportunity Area boundary.

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



How should Biodiversity Opportunity Area maps and statements be used?

1. The BOA maps can be seen as a spatial reflection of the Kent Biodiversity Strategy. They indicate where the delivery of Kent Biodiversity Strategy targets should be focused in order to secure the maximum biodiversity benefits. The BOA maps also show where the greatest gains can be made from habitat enhancement, restoration and recreation, as these areas offer the best opportunities for establishing large habitat areas and/or networks of wildlife habitats. As such, they will be useful to local planning authorities in the development and delivery of Green Infrastructure and resilient ecological networks. The BOA statement documents will provide guidance on the conservation priorities which should be adopted in each area.
2. Information provided on the habitats and species associated with each BOA is not definitive. Rather, it identifies those priority habitats for which the area is known to be most important, and provides a range of examples of priority species for which the area is known to be important. It is likely that each BOA will support additional habitats and species of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity, and reference should be made to the Kent Habitat Survey and the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre to support decision-making.
3. Biodiversity targets identified in the statement documents incorporate, where appropriate, targets in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy. However, not all targets in the Strategy are easily spatially defined, and the BOA maps and statements should be read alongside relevant Action Plans in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy.
4. The BOA maps should not be seen as planning constraint maps. It is not intended or proposed that nature conservation becomes the primary land-use within the target areas, so long as the targets and objectives for each area can be met, and development of any kind is not precluded. However, consideration might in some cases need to be given to ensuring that development within a BOA did not significantly increase the fragmentation of wildlife habitats within target areas or neutralize significant opportunities for habitat restoration or recreation.
5. BOA boundaries are not absolute. They have been drawn to follow mapped boundaries wherever possible in order to facilitate spatial planning and decision-making. However, a project immediately outside the mapped boundary should not be immediately dismissed if it would help to deliver the targets identified for the BOA concerned. It is also not the case that all land within a BOA offers the same opportunities for habitat restoration or recreation, and reference should be made to the Habitat Opportunity maps on the Kent Landscape Information System, when this becomes available, to support detailed decision-making.
6. The areas outside the identified BOAs still have substantial biodiversity interest, and include a number of nature reserves, Local Wildlife Sites, ancient woodlands and other areas of habitats. Although the focus of any biodiversity action should be on the BOAs, it will still be necessary to maintain, enhance, buffer and extend areas of wildlife habitat outside the mapped areas in order to maintain the wildlife interest and richness of the wider countryside.
7. Some biodiversity interest is not well served by the BOA mapping process, and action for ponds, traditional orchards, wildlife associated with arable farmland, and widely dispersed species such as great crested newt will need to focus across the whole of Kent and Medway and not just within identified Opportunity Areas.
8. While the primary purpose of the BOAs is to direct positive action for nature conservation, information on landscape has been included in the target documents. Reference should be made to AONB management plans or other landscape policy documents in drawing up proposals for habitat restoration or recreation in order to maximize the positive benefits for landscape and avoid conflict with features of landscape importance.

Kent Nature Partnership – <http://www.kentnature.org.uk/>

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre – www.kmbrc.org.uk/