



## Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement

**Name:** Lower Stour wetlands

**Description:** The Lower Stour wetlands opportunity area contains some of Kent's most extensive water and wetland habitats. The area includes a very high number of designated sites such as Stodmarsh, Westbere Marshes, the Lydden Valley and Hacklinge Marshes. Along the coast, the mudflats and sand dunes which lie between the marshes and the sea form part of the Sandwich & Pegwell Bay SSSI, a site of international importance for bird life.

**National Character Area(s):** North Kent Plain

**Kent Landscape Character Area(s):** The Stour Valley; Wantsum & Lower Stour Marshes; East Kent

**Horticultural Belt;** North Kent Fruit Belt.

**Seascape Character Area(s):** C5A Sandwich & Pegwell Bays

**Landscape Character:** Fields are typically small and regular in their pattern, created by ditches, dykes and flood control banks. Settlements here have a strong relationship with the marsh – none within but many developing around the edges of the fluvial marshland. Settlements are typically linear on the valley sides. Old drove roads are a feature of the marshland landscape and may support typical grazing marsh vegetation. Wetlands and open water are characteristic and the history of exploiting these wetlands is still readable in the landscape as mills and their associated ponds and races.

**Geology:** Thanet beds with deposits of marine and estuarine alluvium; small amounts of London clay with deposits of head gravel and head brickearth are found around Upstreet and Upper chalk with alluvium around St Nicolas at Wade.

### Biodiversity:

- 1 Internationally important coastal habitats, including cliffs and intertidal habitats.
- 2 Important dunes and grazing marsh.
- 3 Internationally important freshwater wetlands and reedbed associated with the tidal Great Stour.
- 4 Upstream from Chilham, the River Great Stour is a chalk-influenced river, supporting a number of species associated with chalk river habitat.
- 5 Close to Canterbury, there are important acid woodland and grassland habitats at Old Park and Trenley Park Wood, with a localized population of adder.
- 6 Key species include breeding and wintering birds associated with wetland habitats, including intertidal habitats; areas of scrub support nightingale and Cetti's warbler. Farmland birds include corn bunting, grey partridge and tree sparrow, and brown hare is widespread. Wetland, dune and cliff habitats support a number of rare plant species. This is an extremely important area for water voles, and provides important foraging areas for declining bat species including serotine and noctule; another key wetland species is the shining ram's-horn snail *Segmentina nitida*. The cliffs at Pegwell Bay support an important assemblage of bees and wasps, including one of the UK's largest populations of *Cerceris quadricincta*.

### Targets:

- 1 Protect and enhance existing UK BAP priority habitats and designated sites. There should be no net loss of intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh, and no net loss of sand dunes, in line with England Biodiversity Strategy targets.
- 2 Existing natural coastal processes should be maintained, and opportunities taken for managed realignment to maintain/enhance intertidal habitats.
- 3 Pursue opportunities to restore and/or recreate intertidal habitats, grazing marsh, fen and reedbed (including for bittern) as part of a matrix of natural wetland and coastal habitats. Further upstream, there are opportunities to enhance the floodplain of the Great Stour. At least 200ha of grazing marsh should be restored and enhanced around Sandwich and in the Lower Stour Valley, adjoining the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI and/or within the Ash Level and South Richborough Pasture Local Wildlife Site.
- 4 Pursue opportunities for the establishment, by 2020, of a new, landscape-scale, freshwater wetland complex, including fen, reedbed and grazing marsh, in which successional processes are allowed to proceed. In this context, a 'landscape-scale' complex should be considered as extending over at least 1000

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hectares.



- 5 Pursue opportunities for creation of acid grassland and heathland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating, by 2020, up to 21ha in blocks of at least 1ha and no more than 500m from other existing or new semi-natural habitat.
- 6 Enhance at least 15ha of species-rich grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality.
- 7 Achieve a quantifiable improvement in ecological status of the Nailbourne and the chalk river stretch of the River Stour (upstream of Chilham), as judged by Water Framework Directive indicators.
- 8 Enhance or reinstate management of Local Wildlife Site woodlands.
- 9 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.

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## **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.