



Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement

Name: Medway Gap and North Kent Downs

Description: This area stretches from the Ash Downs near Meopham, across the lower Medway Valley, to the downland between Medway and Maidstone as far as Queendown Warren. It includes extensive patches of woodland such as Whitehorse Wood, Great Wood (both SSSIs), Walderslade and Bredhurst Woods (LWSs), various historic parklands including Cobham, and chalk grassland sites such as Burham Down, Boxley Warren, Queendown Warren and Wouldham.

National Character Area(s): North Downs

Kent Landscape Character Area(s): Ash Downs, Luddesdown: West Kent Downs; Cobham: West Kent Downs; Medway Valley Lower; Nashenden Valley: Mid Kent Downs; Chatham Outskirts: Mid Kent Downs.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): Kent Downs

Landscape Character: The topography is dominated by steep chalk scarps creating dry valleys and well-wooded ridgelines. The river itself is tidal with well-developed meanders, riverside marshes and reedbeds. Chalk soils on the scarp, at the base and in the dry valleys, support areas of high-quality unimproved chalk grassland. Medium to large scale fields of regular pattern bounded by hedges characterise the Medway floodplain. The plateau is typically large regular fields under arable cultivation; some mixed woodland and historic parkland and some small pastures and scrub.

Geology: mainly Upper Chalk capped with clay-with-flints or deposits of Head gravel; some areas of Thanet Beds; alluvial deposits along the Medway.

Biodiversity:

- 1 The area includes some very significant blocks of nationally and internationally important woodlands on a range of geologies from gravel to chalk, including areas of Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland.
- 2 The tidal Medway includes areas of saltmarsh and intertidal mudflat, and there are associated areas of grazing marsh, reedbed and fen.
- 3 Chalk grassland exists as isolated fragments
- 4 There are a number of important brownfield sites, including disused quarries
- 5 This target area includes the county's most important site for arable weeds.
- 6 Key species include a number of important arable weed species, including corncockle, rough mallow and broad-leaved cudweed; chalk downland species including groundpine, man orchid, Kentish milkwort, meadow clary, and adonis blue butterfly; and wetland species, including otters.

Targets:

1. Maintain and enhance existing and recently created chalk grassland. Enhance at least 40ha of chalk grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality. Pursue opportunities for:
 - Additional chalk grassland creation where this would contribute to the county-wide target of 232ha by 2020; and
 - Additional chalk grassland restoration to meet the county-wide target of 464ha by 2020.
2. Enhance or reinstate woodland management, 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. Pursue opportunities for the restoration and enhancement of grazing marsh, fen and reedbed habitats within the floodplain of the River Medway, including restoration of at least 50ha of grazing marsh in the Medway Valley between Rochester and New Hythe, to contribute to county-wide targets of 500ha.
4. Secure and maintain appropriate management of key brownfield sites, particularly where these support UK BAP priority species .
5. Continue to conserve and enhance key populations of arable weeds, and maintain, enhance and extend

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



the area of cereal field margins being positively managed for arable weeds.

6. Pursue opportunities for creation of species-rich neutral grassland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating 37ha on new lowland meadow in blocks of at least 2ha by 2020. Enhance at least 15ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
7. Where appropriate, encourage and enhance public access, particularly from the Medway Towns.
8. 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.