

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



Name: Medway and Low Weald Wetlands and Grasslands

Description: The opportunity area includes long stretches of several of Kent's rivers and this is reflected in the presence of several designated sites such as the River Eden, River Medway and River Sherway LWSs. To the west is the Bough Beech reservoir, particularly important for wildfowl, and to the east is the LWS at Dering Wood, near Pluckley.

National Character Area(s): The Low Weald

Kent Landscape Character Area(s): Western Wooded Farmlands; Eden Valley; Western Low Weald: the Low Weald; Penshurst; Central High Weald; Kent Water: Upper Medway; Medway Valley; Greensand Ridge – Plaxtol; Low Weald Fruit Belt; Teise Valley; Beult Valley; Biddenden – High Halden Wooded Farmlands.

Landscape Character: Dominated by the floodplains of the River Medway and its complex network of small streams and tributaries. An undulating landscape of clay vales, fields within the floodplain are of a medium scale and more regular in form having been amalgamated through loss of field boundaries, and riparian vegetation. Small woodlands, historic hop gardens and orchards are common land uses. Few roads and settlements exist within the floodplain; small ponds are typical close to field boundaries.

Geology: Weald clay with deposits of alluvium, head gravel, river brickearth and river gravel along the river valleys.

Biodiversity:

- 1 The most significant features are the courses, tributaries and floodplains of the Medway, Beult and Teise. The floodplains support species rich meadows or floodplain grassland and grazing is a significant landscape feature and management practice.
- 2 Associated habitats include ponds, small areas of woodland, including mature ancient woodland, and fen.
- 3 Key species include otter, depressed river mussel, white clawed crayfish and river lamprey.

Targets:

- 1 Achieve a quantifiable improvement in ecological status of all water bodies, as judged by Water Framework Directive indicators.
- 2 Pursue opportunities for creation of wider river floodplains with riparian corridors around natural drainage channels.
- 3 Pursue opportunities for the delivery of catchment improvement work, including enhancing, restoring and creating fen, wet woodland, reedbed and wet grassland and action for key species such as otter.
- 4 Secure the appropriate conservation management of all existing Lowland Meadows. Enhance at least 50ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 5 Pursue opportunities to create new species-rich neutral grassland, particularly close the Marden Meadows SSSI and south of Sevenoaks, in blocks of 2ha or more, where this will contribute to meeting the county target of creating 37ha by 2020.
- 6 Enhance or reinstate woodland management, and extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement.
- 7 Continue to encourage the positive management, restoration and re-creation of hedgerows, particularly where this would reconnect other habitats or enhance the landscape, in particular where these have been removed due to agricultural intensification.
- 8 Improve the management of invasive species in and alongside water courses.
- 9 Maintain, restore, recreate and buffer ponds, particularly to establish networks of sites to support great crested newt.
- 10 Action for naturally widely dispersed habitats (ponds, traditional orchards), wildlife associated with arable

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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.