

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



Name: Mid Kent Greensand and Gault

Description: The Mid Kent Greensand and Gault opportunity area contains a very high number of LWSs, including Honeyhills and Horish Woods. There are also several SSSIs including Burham Marsh, Lympe Escarpment and Hothfield Common, which is one of the last remaining heathland sites in Kent.

National Character Area(s): Predominantly Wealden Greensand with North Downs at the northern boundary.
Kent Landscape Character Area(s): Predominantly - Boxley Vale: Medway; Hollingbourne Vale West; Leeds-Lenham Farmlands; Coxheath Plateau Farmlands; Greensand Fruit Belt – Egerton; Hothfield Heathy Farmlands; Upper Stour Valley; Biddenden-High Halden Wooded Farmlands; Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmlands; Sellindge Plateau Farmlands; Hythe Escarpment Lympe; Saltwood: Postling Vale; Stowting: Postling Vale;

Landscape Character: A predominantly farmed landscape following the scarp foot of the Downs taking in rivers and their tributaries. Its undulating topography and mostly clay geology leads to infrequent scattered settlement, typically farmsteads. Fields are irregular in pattern and typically of medium scale, bounded by hedgerows. Lanes are narrow and sometimes winding, with strong enclosure, and display a characteristic alignment of drove roads running NE-SW. Heathland and parkland dot this landscape providing it with a strong and readable historic character. Woodlands typically in the form of blocks or copses and the historic character associated with waterways, such as mills and pollarded willows can still be seen.

Geology: Mainly Lower Greensand, Gault and Weald Clay, with some deposits of alluvium and head gravel around the Medway near Burham and head gravel around Langley and Fairbourne heaths.

Biodiversity:

- 1 Includes the River Len, the River Great Stour, The River East Stour and a number of their tributaries (including a series of small springs arising at the foot of the Downs). Associated habitats include lakes, areas of wet woodland, and some very small areas of fen.
- 2 There are nationally important acid grassland and heathland sites, as well as many smaller acid grassland fragments.
- 3 Blocks of wood pasture are scattered through this area, and there are small, isolated woodlands on the Gault clay and on the Greensand.
- 4 Key species include water vole, white-clawed crayfish and Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*, associated with river corridors, as well as wintering bittern along the Medway. The shrill carder bee *Bombus sylvarum* has been recorded at Leybourne Lakes Country Park, together with other important invertebrate species. Few nationally important species are associated with acid grassland and heath habitats, though many species of these habitats are scarce or unknown elsewhere in Kent, such as the keeled skimmer dragonfly at Hothfield or the assemblages of scarce invertebrates recorded from around Maidstone.

Targets:

- 1 Major opportunities exist to recreate and restore acid grassland and heath. This should include restoration, by 2020, of at least 4ha at Ashford Warren; and creation of at least 10ha of acid grassland and heath in the heathland corridor from Lenham to Brabourne Lees, plus at least 10ha of acid grassland around the northern edge of Maidstone. Habitat blocks should be no smaller than 1 ha if no more than 500m from other existing or new acid grassland, and no smaller than 6ha if more isolated. Additional opportunities should be pursued for creation of acid grassland and heathland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating 28ha by 2020.
- 2 Enhance at least 10 ha of species rich grassland on acid soils, including newly created habitats, to bring them to UK BAP priority habitat quality.
- 3 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.
- 4 Achieve a quantifiable improvement in ecological status of all water bodies, as judged by Water Framework

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Directive indicators.



- 5 Pursue opportunities to restore or recreate wetland habitats along the Rivers Medway, Stour and Len and their tributaries, particularly where this may
 - Provide opportunities for flood risk management and for recreation;
 - Contribute to the conservation of priority species; or
 - Extend and buffer Local Wildlife Sites.
 - Enhance at least 20ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 6 Secure and maintain appropriate management of key brownfield sites, particularly where these support UK BAP priority species.
- 7 Infrastructure and other development should avoid further fragmentation, particularly of wetland habitats and woodlands.
- 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.

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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.