



## **Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement**

**Name:** The Blean

Description: The Blean is one of the biggest complexes of ancient semi-natural woodland in England, with much of it designated as NNR, SSSI and LWS. It is of particular importance for birds and several threatened butterfly species, and harbours Kent's last few colonies of the rare Heath Fritillary. Much of this interest has been created and maintained by a long history of coppice management.

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

**If using BOAs to support local decisions, please refer to the Local Landscape Character Assessments of an appropriate scale to inform your decisions.**

**Kent Landscape Character Area(s):** The Blean, Eastern Fruit Belt, East Kent Horticultural Belt.

Local Landscape Character: Canterbury Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal (2012).

**Features contributing to character:** The area known as 'The Blean' is dominated by ancient woodland or ancient replanted woodland. The most densely wooded landscapes correspond to poorer soil, although the perimeter areas have been cleared for agriculture. The acid soil conditions support a significant area of dense heathy woodland, much of which is managed as hornbeam and chestnut coppice. Other landscape features include small pastures within the woodland, wet-fenced pastures on the coastal strip and hedged farmland on the lower slopes.

**Geology:** Thanet beds and London Clay; some overlying drift deposits of Head gravel and Head brickearth.

### **Biodiversity:**

- 1 One of Kent's most significant woodland areas, with substantial blocks of national and international importance.
- 2 Within the woodland matrix are important areas of heathland, acid grassland and bog, as well as small areas of neutral grassland.
- 3 The best known species is the heath fritillary butterfly, but the woods support a large assemblage of rare invertebrates, and are well known for their woodland bird populations. Bat populations are also important.

### **Targets:**

- 1 No loss of ancient semi-natural woodland and its mosaic of associated habitats.
- 2 Enhance and reconnect woodland to create a very extensive block of habitat, particularly through the maintenance and restoration of coppice management.
- 3 Restore conifer plantations on ancient woodland sites to suitable, wooded habitat including up to 25% early successional stages.
- 4 By 2020, at least 50ha of heath and acid grassland (including grazed wooded heath) should be restored or enhanced as part of the woodland matrix, in blocks of at least 2ha in extent. Additional opportunities should be pursued for creation of acid grassland and heathland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating up to 37ha.
- 5 Pursue opportunities for creation of species-rich neutral grassland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating 37ha of new lowland meadow in blocks of at least 2ha by 2020. Enhance at least 13ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 6 Action for naturally widely dispersed habitats and species 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.