



## **Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement**

**Name:** East Kent Woodlands & Downs

**Description:** A complex of woodland and grassland habitats, including a number of nationally and locally important sites, which includes some large blocks of woodland of importance for threatened butterflies. Acid grassland and more heathy habitats occur on the gravel exposures.

**National Character Area(s):** North Downs/Wealden Greensand

**Kent Character Area(s):** Challock Mid Kent Downs; Chilham Stour Valley; Wye Stour Valley; Petham East Kent Downs; Elham East Kent Downs; Stowting Postling Vale.

**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB):** Kent Downs

**Landscape Character :** This area grades from an intimate, remote landscape of long, rolling valleys to the east of the Stour Valley towards a larger scale, openlandscape further east. Blocks of deciduous woodland cover the ridge and plateaux providing a wooded skyline to many views. Fields are typically regular in pattern and hedgerows remain a common feature of field boundaries, with many hedgerow trees.. Settlements are scattered, with some areas very sparse, roads are often narrow and bounded by hedgerows.

**Geology:** Chalk, capped with clay-with-flints and gravel head on the ridges and plateaux.

### **Biodiversity:**

- 1 A complex of fragmented woodland and chalk grassland, including nationally important sites for both these habitats, and internationally important chalk grassland.
- 2 Important woodland includes wood pasture and beech and yew woodland, as well as much ancient woodland.
- 3 Key species include woodland butterflies including Duke of Burgundy, as well as black-veined moth, adder and lady orchid.

### **Targets:**

- 1 At least 20ha of chalk grassland should be restored in the Wye/Crundale area by 2015, and opportunities pursued for:
  - Chalk grassland creation where this would contribute to the county-wide target of 250ha by 2015; and
  - Additional chalk grassland restoration to meet the county-wide target of 150ha by 2015.
  - Enhance at least 60ha of chalk grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality.
- 2 Enhance or reinstate woodland management, and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland, particularly where this would contribute to conservation of woodland butterflies. Extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement.
- 3 Pursue opportunities for creation of species-rich neutral grassland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating 50ha on new lowland meadow in blocks of at least 2ha by 2015. Enhance at least 40ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 4 Pursue opportunities for creation of acid grassland where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating, by 2015, up to 145ha in blocks of at least 1ha and no more than 500m from other existing or new semi-natural habitat. Enhance at least 10ha of species-rich acid grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Acid Grassland quality.
- 5 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.