



Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement

Name: Central North Downs

Description: The Central North Downs encompass the rolling downlands from Knockholt to Stansted, and stretch up to Farningham. There are several notable sites in the area, including the KWT reserves at Kemsing, Fackenden and Polhill Bank, and SSSI woodland at Farningham Wood and along the Pilgrims way near Wrotham Hill Park. LWSs include the Chevening Estate, Knatts Valley, Wrotham Downs and Lullingstone Park.

National Character Area(s): North Downs

Kent Character Area(s): Knockholt: Darent Valley; Knockholt Downs; North Darent: Darent Valley; Kingsdown: West Kent Downs; Ash Downs.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): Kent Downs

Landscape Character: This landscape consists of numerous character areas with varied features contributing to this character. Undulating landscapes of ridges and dry valleys are common within this BOA. Where ridgetop woodland remains this contributes to more intimate landscapes and is often associated with smaller irregular pastures in the valleys. In other areas distinctive chalk downland with steep wooded scarps gives extensive views across Kent. Larger field systems can be typically found on the plateaus or scarp foot. Hedges and shaws are typical field boundaries. Settlements here are scattered, roads are often narrowing cross-contour. Brick and flint are characteristic materials.

Geology: Upper Chalk capped with clay-with-flints.

Biodiversity:

- 1 Important chalk grassland sites on the scarp on the North Downs and on the sides of the Darent Gap.
- 2 Nationally important woodland and wood pasture, as well as many small ancient woodlands, and veteran trees in a variety of habitats across the landscape.
- 3 The River Darent and its floodplain form an important landscape element.
- 4 Key species include otter, crayfish, adder, dark green fritillary, chalk hill blue, early gentian, Deptford pink and juniper.

Targets:

1. Restore, extend and reconnect chalk grassland. By 2020, restore at least 30ha of chalk grassland in the Darent Valley area to help meet the county-wide target of 464ha, and pursue opportunities for chalk grassland creation, aiming to create at least 15 ha to contribute to the county-wide target of 232ha. Enhance at least 35ha 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; extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement.
3. Restore natural floodplain habitats, and restore/create flower-rich neutral grassland on suitable soils. 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 20ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality.
4. Achieve a quantifiable improvement in ecological status of the River Darent, as judged by Water Framework Directive indicators.
5. Implement conservation grazing management on grassland and wood pasture habitats.
6. Encourage appropriate physical and intellectual access to the landscape and wildlife of the area.
7. 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.