

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



Name: Low Weald Woodlands

Description: A concentration of often extensive woodlands, including some nationally important sites, on a relatively flat, clay landscape. Hedgerows bound the small fields, and the clay soils support a high concentration of ponds.

National Character Area(s): Low Weald and Pevensey

Kent Character Area(s): Old Romney Shoreline Wooded Farmlands; Bethersden Farmlands; Biddenden-High Halden Wooded Farmlands.

Landscape Character: The land is gently undulating, rising towards the south and south east, where it begins to divide into a distinct pattern of ridges and valleys which eventually open out at the top of the old sea cliff which forms the landward edge of Romney Marsh. This area is characterised by extensive coppiced broadleaf and mixed plantation woodlands. Veteran oaks, hornbeam coppice and wood bank vegetation make these woodlands distinctive. Between these woods is small scale, typically pastoral fields.

Geology: Weald clay, giving slowly permeable and seasonally wet, acid loamy and clayey soils.

Biodiversity:

- 1 Extensive areas of woodland, some of national importance.
- 2 Associated habitats include neutral grassland and numerous small ponds, which support an important population of great crested newt.
- 3 The woods are well-known for their important invertebrate assemblages, particularly moths and beetles, including rare water beetles associated with woodland ponds. The area is also important for woodland birds, including nightingale.

Targets:

- 1 Enhance or reinstate woodland management, including restoration of rides and glades, and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland.
- 2 Extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement.
- 3 Pursue opportunities to create new species-rich neutral grassland where this will contribute to meeting the county-wide target of 37ha, in blocks of 2ha or more, by 2020. Enhance at least 30ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 4 Maintain, restore, recreate and buffer ponds, particularly to establish networks of sites to support great crested newt, and to create new woodland ponds.
- 5 Recreational opportunities (particularly in association with Ashford's regeneration) should be exploited where they will not conflict with nature conservation objectives.
- 6 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.