



## **Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement**

**Name:** Mid Kent Downs, Woods and Scarp

**Description:** The Mid Kent Downs Woods and Scarp opportunity area stretches from Detling Hill through to Sheldwich and Charing. The area is within the Kent Downs AONB and contains over a high number of LWSs such as Gorham Woods and Wichling Wood and several SSSIs.

**National Character Area(s):** North Downs

**Kent Landscape Character Area(s):** Bicknor: Mid Kent Downs Landscape Character Area; Hollingbourne Vale; Challock: Mid Kent Downs.

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

**Landscape Character:** This landscape has a pattern of fields contained by dense belts of woodland, which follow the alignment of the upper slopes of steep-sided dry valleys. Settlement is dispersed and narrow sunken lanes produce a strong character and are bound by hedges. The continual down-wash of soil from the scarp, combined with the sheltered aspect of the resulting fields, produces a belt of very productive agricultural land at the foot of the scarp typified by larger and more regular field pattern.

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

### **Biodiversity:**

- 1 Important chalk grassland sites on the scarp and on the sides of dip slope valleys.
- 2 Important woodlands occur both on the chalk soils of the scarp and the deeper clay soils of the dip slope and there are some wood pasture sites.
- 3 The dip slope woodlands support important bryophyte assemblages and remain important for woodland birds, including hawfinch. This is the only part of Kent known to support Bechstein's bat, a species closely associated with woodland. The area supports a large population of brown hares and is a stronghold for Roman snail.

### **Targets:**

1. Protect, manage and enhance existing habitats.
2. Restore and recreate chalk grassland to create large, continuous blocks on the scarp and on suitable soils in dip slope valleys. Enhance at least 90ha of chalk grassland by 2020, working towards achieving UK BAP priority habitat quality. Pursue opportunities for:
  - Chalk grassland creation where this would contribute to the county-wide target of 232ha by 2020;
  - Additional chalk grassland restoration to meet the county-wide target of 464ha by 2020.
3. Enhance at least 15ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
4. Enhance or reinstate woodland management, and restore plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland; extend and reconnect fragmented, dip-slope woodlands where this would not conflict with grassland conservation and enhancement. Ensure woodland management takes account of the needs of woodland bats.
5. Complement dip-slope woodlands by buffering with semi-natural habitats (e.g. woodland edge, semi-natural grassland). Management which would maintain or expand the population of brown hares will also be supported.
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.