

# Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



## Name: Romney Marshes and Rye Bay

**Description:** The Romney Marshes and Rye Bay area is one of the biggest opportunity areas in Kent and extends from Hythe through Rye and beyond into Sussex; it also extends up river valleys such as the Rother. The area is mainly highly productive arable land and pasture, but there is an important proportion of designated land, including SSSIs which extend from the internationally rare vegetated shingle at Dungeness through Walland Marsh up towards Appledore. The BOA includes Hythe Bay recommended Marine Conservation Zone, which supports a very diverse assemblage of burrowing species in its subtidal-mud habitat.

**National Character Area(s):** Romney Marshes

**Kent Landscape Area(s):** Oxney Lower Rother Valley, Romney Marsh Settlements, Brookland Farmlands, Highknock Channel and Dowels, Walland Marsh Farmlands, Dungeness Shingle, Romney Marsh Mixed Farmlands.

**Seascape Character Area(s):** Romney Coast, Hythe Flats & Roar Bank

**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB):** High Weald

**Landscape Character:** A historically rich, flat, open landscape of medium to large-scale irregular fields, with distinctive drainage dykes, marshes and open skies. These landscape features support reeds and other riparian vegetation. Low lying fields typically used for agriculture, and sheep grazing. Hedgerows bound the smaller fields, found on higher ground within this landscape. Characterised by its isolation and lack of settlements typically comprising isolated farmsteads – larger settlements are often ancient developed originally around a former inland lagoon. Traditional landscape features, such as pollarded willows are declining.

**Geology:** The geology of the area is principally alluvium, some of it marine, although there are also Wadhurst clay and Ashdown beds on the Isle of Oxney and, of course, the Dungeness shingle point.

### Biodiversity:

- 1 Internationally important wetland and shingle habitats, most notably the vegetated shingle at Dungeness, which is important for biodiversity and geodiversity.
- 2 Grazing marsh, and wet ditches and other water courses.
- 3 Key species include brown hare, water vole, amphibians including great crested newt and common toad, medicinal leech, breeding and wintering wetland birds, rare plants such as greater water parsnip *Sium latifolium*, and invertebrates associated with shingle and wetland habitats. The area is important for bats, particularly serotine and soprano pipistrelle, and holds one of the few remaining tree sparrow populations in Kent.

### Targets:

- 1 Protect, manage and enhance existing habitats and designated sites.
- 2 Identify opportunities to restore, recreate and enhance grazing marsh and to restore or recreate fen, reedbed and other natural wetland habitats, particularly where this would contribute to the establishment of a new, landscape-scale, freshwater wetland complex, including fen, reedbed and grazing marsh, in which successional processes are allowed to proceed. This should include recreation of at least 100ha of grazing marsh. In this context, a 'landscape-scale' complex should be considered as extending over at least 1000 hectares.
- 3 Ensure no net loss of coastal vegetated shingle and restore all coastal vegetated shingle to favourable condition or unfavourable recovering condition (subject to constraints arising from natural coastal changes).
- 4 Conserve and enhance important intertidal and marine habitats: secure the protection of important marine habitats through Marine Conservation Zone designation; implement appropriate management of Marine Protected Areas to allow marine habitats and associated species to recover.
- 5 Pursue opportunities to enhance or recreate acid grassland on suitable soils where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating up to 21ha by 2020.

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- 6 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 10ha of species-rich neutral grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat Lowland Meadow quality.
- 7 Provide guidelines on best practice for managing ditches to maximise biodiversity whilst retaining their effective water management function.
- 8 Work with landowners to restore management of 15% of ditches that are not part of the main drainage system (and therefore not managed by the IDB or EA), to improve connectivity across target area.
- 9 Identify how best to integrate a more natural functioning of the Dungeness coast with existing infrastructure, and restore natural coastal processes, as far as possible, to all areas of the coast.
- 10 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 Action Plan (BAP). They indicate where the delivery of Kent BAP 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 positive nature conservation policy in line with the South East Plan. 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 BAP. However, not all targets in the Kent BAP are easily spatially defined, and the BOA maps and statements should be read alongside relevant Habitat Action Plans in the Kent BAP.
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 (KLIS) 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.

Kent Nature Partnership- [www.kentnature.org.uk/](http://www.kentnature.org.uk/)

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre – [www.kmbrc.org.uk/](http://www.kmbrc.org.uk/)