

Biodiversity Opportunity Area Statement



Name: Thames-side Green Corridors

Description: The Thames-side Green Corridors area presents very varied but fragmented wildlife sites, including Darenth Woods (an exceptional example of ancient semi-natural woodland SSSI), Shorne Wood Country Park SSSI, several LWS such as Dartford Marshes, Ebbsfleet Marshes, Sutton at Hone Lakes and Dartford Heath, and a number of brownfield sites of known importance for invertebrates. It includes part of the Thames Estuary recommended Marine Conservation Zone, which provides critical spawning and nursery grounds for fish.

National Character Area(s): Greater Thames Estuary and North Kent Plain

Kent Landscape Character Area(s): Western Thames Marshes, Lower Darent Valley, Dartford and Gravesend Fringes, Swanley Fringe, Darenth Downs, Southfleet Arable Lands and Shorne.

Landscape Character: Characterised by its landform, this BOA includes river valley, rounded chalk downs and flat estuarine topography. It is a fragmented landscape of grazing marsh, woodland, heathland and former chalk quarries against an urban backdrop. Ditches and dykes are locally prevalent boundary features and historic patterns of drainage still survive in places. Many sites have been fragmented by new development but some still retain a strong and coherent history. Water-filled gravel pits are found within the Darent Valley. Further inland the BOA includes woodland and farmland; fields are bound by hedgerows creating regular field patterns of medium scale. ,

Geology: Thanet Beds, Woolwich and Blackheath Beds, London Clay, Upper Chalk with alluvial deposits. Occasional deposits of Boyn Hill Gravel (Dartford Heath).

Biodiversity:

- 1 Intertidal habitats and coastal grazing marsh, forming a significant part of the wildlife corridor formed by the River Thames.
- 2 Dover sole, salmon, flounder, cod, herring, sprat, twait shad and both river and sea lampreys are all important inhabitants of the estuary, which is also home to the short-snouted seahorse and the tentacled lagoon worm. The bed of the estuary is known to support ross worms which construct jumbles of sandy tubes, forming a habitat structure used by other species.
- 3 One of the most extensive heathland and acid grassland sites in Kent, at Dartford Heath.
- 4 Nationally important, though not extensive ancient woodland.
- 5 Some chalk grassland, and important brownfield sites.
- 6 Key species include brown hare, water vole, reed bunting, adder, shrill carder bumblebee *Bombus sylvarum*, the brown-banded carder bee *Bombus humilis*, the picture-winged fly *Dorycera graminum*, and the weevil-hunting wasp *Cerceris quinquefasciata*.

Targets:

- 1 Protect, restore and enhance grazing marsh and coastal habitats, including saltmarsh. Restore or recreate 50ha of grazing marsh at Dartford Marshes, within the Dartford Marshes Local Wildlife Site.
- 2 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.
- 3 Improve woodland management, and reconnect important woodlands.
- 4 Restore, enhance and recreate heathland and grassland both in and around built-up areas, including enhancing at least 15 ha species rich grassland on acid soils, and newly created acid grassland, to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality. Opportunities should be pursued for creation of acid grassland and heathland, e.g. at Dartford Heath and adjacent to Darenth Woods, where this would contribute to the county-wide target of creating up to 28ha by 2020.

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- 5 Protect and manage the most significant brownfield sites, and ensure the long-term survival of their important wildlife, including UK BAP Priority invertebrates. Where development occurs on brownfield sites, seek on-site solutions to mitigation and ensure populations of species of conservation importance are maintained in the area.
- 6 By 2020, create 50ha of species-rich grassland, in blocks of 2ha or more adjacent to existing species-rich grassland or other semi-natural habitat. Enhance at least 15ha of species-rich grassland to bring it to UK BAP priority habitat quality.
- 7 Use biodiversity projects to improve the engagement of local people with the natural environment.
- 8 Ensure that development contributes to delivery of biodiversity targets.
- 9 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.

Kent Nature Partnership – <http://www.kentnature.org.uk/>

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre – www.kmbrc.org.uk