

Target 2010 – Greater London

The condition of the region's Sites of Special Scientific Interest in 2005



working towards *Natural England*
for people, places and nature



Fallen trees, Richmond Park SSSI. Paul Glendell/English Nature 24,959

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the very best wildlife and geological sites in England. The Government has signed a Public Service Agreement (PSA) to ensure that, by area, 95 per cent of these sites are in the best possible condition (target condition) by 2010.

This publication is one of nine regional documents produced as sister publications to the national report *Target 2010 – the condition of England’s Sites of Special Scientific Interest in 2005* (English Nature, 2006). It reviews the current situation in London and details the progress that has been made towards the 2010 target since September 2003. It summarises the major factors affecting SSSI condition and some of the key actions that need to be carried out over the next five years if the target is to be achieved in Greater London. The report should be read in conjunction with the Target 2010 report mentioned above, which sets the national context and also contains useful definitions of the Government’s PSA for SSSIs, and what is meant by target condition.

The London picture

Greater London is one of the nine regions of England. The administrative area of Greater London covers the large conurbation that comprises the City of London, the City of Westminster and 31 other London Boroughs. It is a large and dynamic city with a surprising variety of wildlife habitats and numerous green spaces. Londoners have access to a varied natural environment that includes everything from extensive heath, woodland, wetlands and marshes to the more formal landscapes of the city's squares and parks. Together with the wide variety of public open spaces and the huge extent of private gardens, these make London one of the greenest cities in the world.

There are 36 SSSIs in London covering roughly 3,800 hectares. Unsurprisingly, this represents the smallest area of SSSI land of the nine English regions. There are five regions which have a higher percentage of SSSI land in target condition than London's 64.9 per cent.

Figure 1 Distribution and condition of SSSI units in Greater London

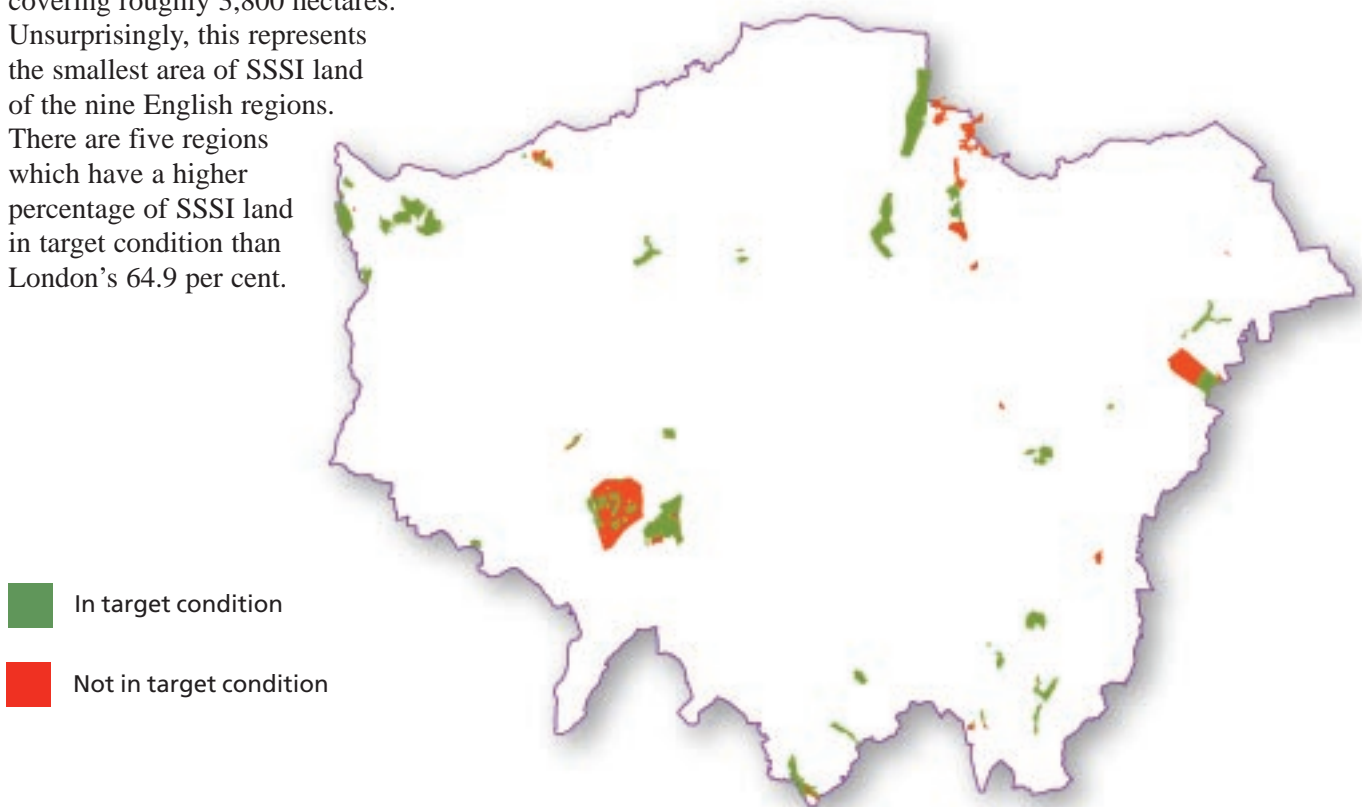
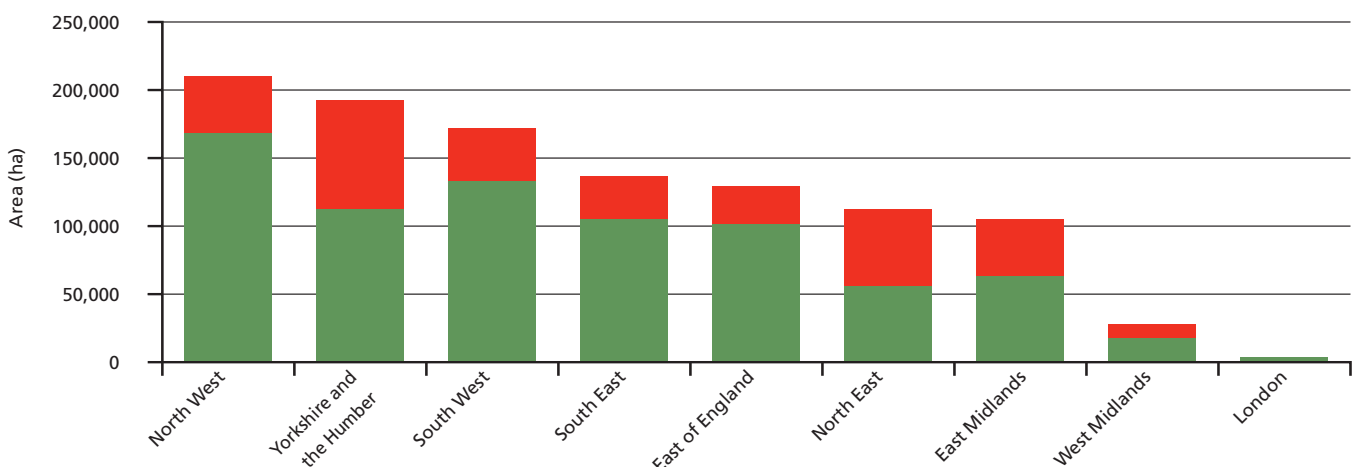


Figure 2 Percentage of SSSIs in target condition in England's nine government regions



Progress towards the 2010 target

In the past two years, excellent progress has been made towards the 2010 PSA target in England. However, London is the only region that has less SSSI land in target condition than it did two years ago. In September 2003, 68.3 per cent of SSSI land in the region was in target condition - at 31 December 2005, this had dropped to 64.9 per cent (Figure 3). This decrease, which represents an area of just over 140 hectares, is explained by a recent re-assessment of the extensive grasslands of Richmond Park using a more rigorous set of guidelines, which has shown this habitat to be in a poorer state than previously thought. Without doubt, this decrease highlights the huge effort required between now and 2010 if the PSA target is to be met.

Figure 3 Progress towards PSA target in Greater London since September 2003

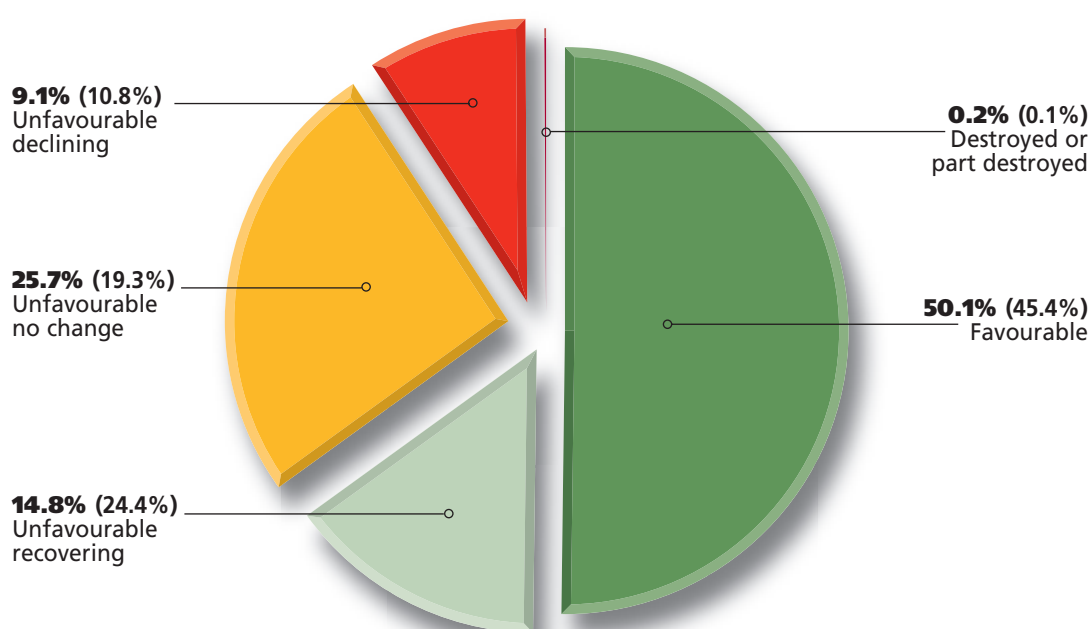
	In target condition		Not in target condition	
	%	Area (ha)	%	Area (ha)
September 2003	68.3	2,615	31.7	1,213
December 2005	64.9	2,469	35.1	1,333

All land designated as SSSI in England is part of the Government's 2010 PSA target. English Nature uses five categories to assess the condition of SSSIs. These categories (described in the national Target 2010 report) are

shown in Figure 4, which also compares the current regional and national positions. For the purposes of this report, however, we concentrate on the two main categories – SSSI land in target condition (made up of SSSIs in

favourable and unfavourable recovering condition) and SSSI land which does not meet the target (made up of SSSIs in unfavourable no change, unfavourable declining, part-destroyed or destroyed condition).

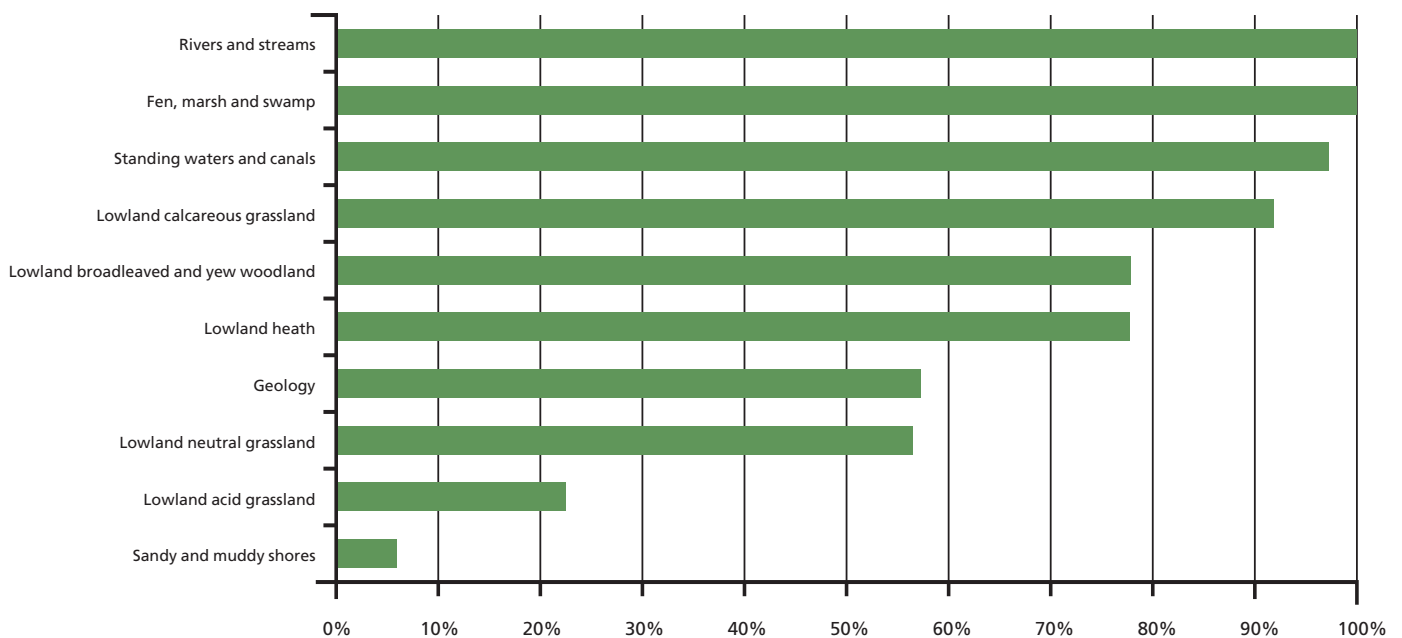
Figure 4 Condition of SSSIs in Greater London at 31 December 2005 (national status in brackets)



Condition of SSSI habitats in Greater London

Nationally, SSSIs are broadly divided into 21 habitat types. These range from the extensive bogs and moorlands of the uplands, through grassland and woodland habitats to geological sites and the specialised habitats of the coast – 10 of these habitat types can be found in the London region. Figure 5 lists the habitat categories in the region and shows their condition at the end of 2005.

Figure 5 SSSI habitats in Greater London (percentage in target condition)



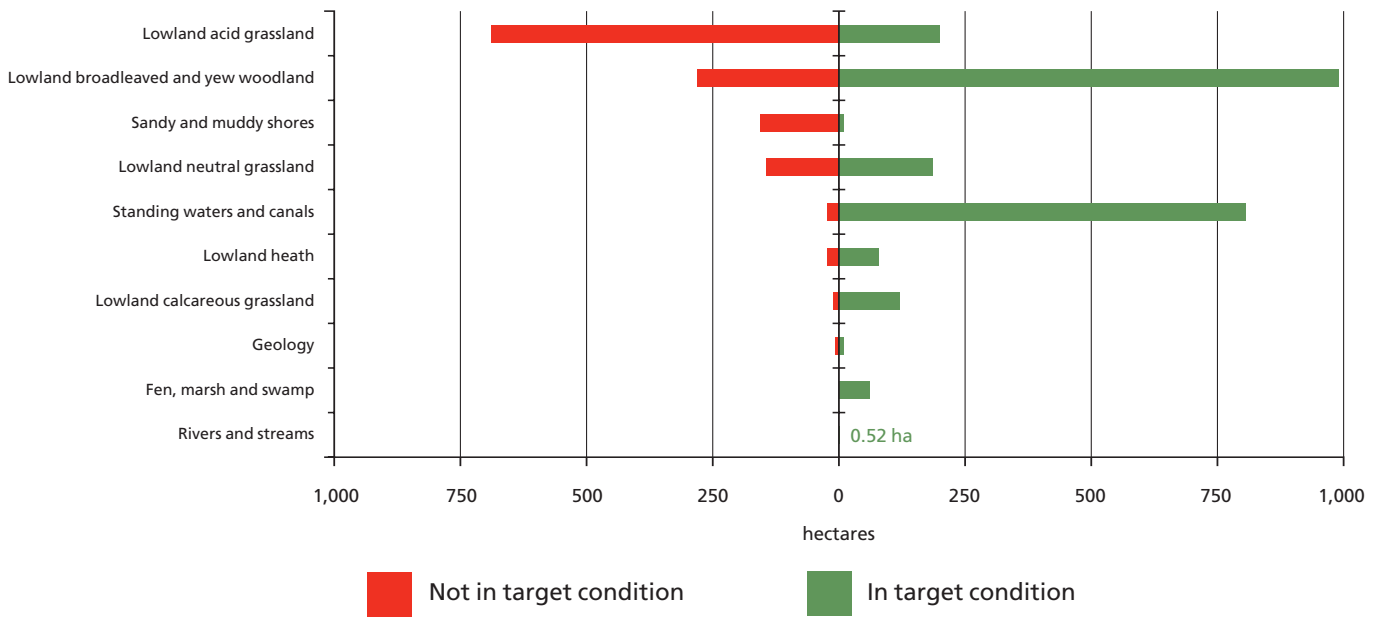
Rainham Marshes. Chris Gibson/English Nature

By percentage of area, the habitat in the worst condition is sandy and muddy shores – a slightly misleading category as this habitat

mostly consists of a series of man-made silt lagoons at Rainham Marshes. These will eventually be brought into sympathetic

management in a partnership project between RSPB and the Port of London Authority. By 2010, we would want to see all habitats in the region in good condition. However, as Figure 6 shows, the area of SSSI in each habitat varies widely and, inevitably, a sharper focus is brought to those habitats where the biggest areas of land can be brought into target condition. In London this means prioritising efforts on the acid grassland and woodland habitats, which can make the biggest contribution to the 2010 target. Of the 1,500 hectares of SSSI land still not in target condition in the region, almost 1,000 hectares can be accounted for by just these two habitats.

Figure 6 SSSI habitats in Greater London - top ten in order of greatest area that is not in target condition

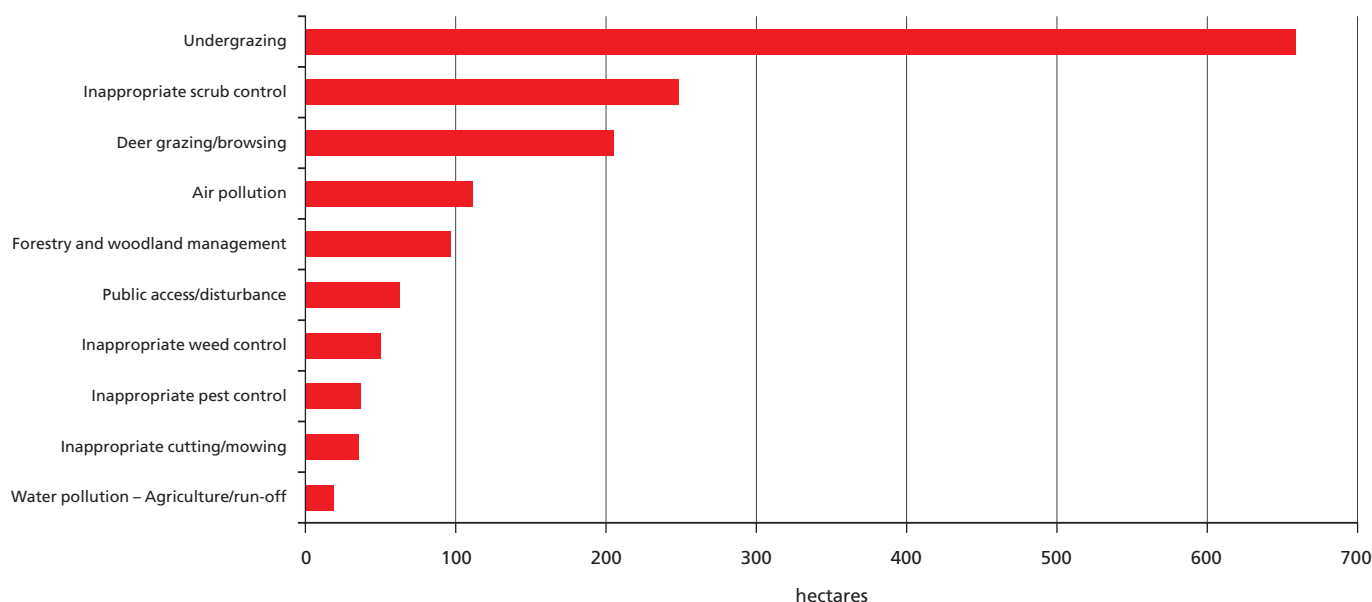


Hornbeam pollards, Ruislip Woods SSSI, Greater London. Peter Wakely/English Nature 21,748A

Why some habitats in Greater London are not in target condition

The main reasons why some SSSIs are not in target condition are well understood, as are the types of habitat on which they impact. Nationally, English Nature has identified 42 different causes – a comprehensive description of which is provided in an earlier publication (*England's best wildlife and geological sites – The condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England in 2003* - English Nature 2003). Figure 7 shows, the main causes for Greater London by area.

Figure 7 Why SSSIs in Greater London are not in target condition



Undergrazing – 659 hectares

Grazing at an appropriate level and with the right stock is by far the best form of management for most grassland habitats.

Inevitably, in London the ability to implement effective grazing regimes is limited by the dearth of livestock and the reluctance of land-managers to graze sites with high levels of public access.

Scrub control – 248 hectares

Many grassland SSSIs in London have been affected by a steep decline in the number of people farming within the Greater London boundary and an almost complete absence of the livestock farming and traditional grassland

management that once provided an important scrub control function for many SSSIs. Consequently, scrub is now controlled by more costly methods, which are either labour intensive or require use of specialist machinery.

Deer grazing – 205 hectares

Richmond Park is grazed by deer and it is thought that this may result in large areas of acid grassland having a uniform structure and lack of species diversity. English Nature and the Royal Parks Agency are looking at the grazing regime to see what changes would result in a more diverse sward structure.

Air pollution – 111 hectares

Although most potential point-sources of pollution (factories, power plants, etc.) are strictly regulated, the huge volume of traffic on London's roads and the vast drainage and sewerage network needed to service a large city results in widespread low-level pollution of the city's air and water. Air pollution is likely to have an impact on the integrity of many sites and is known to adversely impact on the sensitive lichen communities of parts of Epping Forest. Other diffuse background pollution is likely to adversely affect sensitive habitats, such as heathland and some wetlands.

Forestry and woodland management – 97 hectares

The majority of London's SSSI woodlands are in target condition. However, a significant part of Epping Forest is not in target condition for a variety of reasons, including lack of grazing (the forest is a mosaic of woodland with grassland and heathland glades and was traditionally grazed by cattle) and air pollution. Climate change, which is thought to be affecting the survival of beech pollards and beech seedlings, may also be a factor. English Nature is working with the Corporation of London to address these issues.

As well as the above causes there are other factors that affect the condition of SSSIs in London. The majority of SSSIs in the city are owned by local authorities and have open access. Those that are not have controlled public access or are used for organised recreation, such as sailing or fishing. The high level of public usage of these sites can result in disturbance and physical damage to wildlife or geology. Raising people's awareness of the value of the site and how they can limit their impact (by keeping dogs under control or keeping to marked paths, for example) is the only viable option for mitigating these impacts.

London's world city status and cosmopolitan mix is reflected in the diversity of wild plants and animals which inhabit the metropolis, including naturalised populations of plants and animals from around the world - the legacy of London's long history of global trade and commerce. Most of these species are benign, or have come to play an important role in the ecology of London, but a few (New Zealand pygmy-weed, and Chinese mitten crab, for example) have become invasive and, where they become dominant, can significantly modify existing and valuable habitats. Management of invasive species is often difficult and expensive, requiring either labour-intensive physical control or repeat applications of targeted herbicides.



Red deer stag, Richmond Park SSSI, Greater London. Paul Glendell/English Nature 24,947

The road to 2010

At the end of 2005, we know that 64.9 per cent of London's SSSIs are in target condition. We also have a good understanding why the remaining 35.1 per cent are not. Over the next five years, the challenge is to ensure that this remaining area meets the 2010 target, and that SSSIs already in target condition stay that way. To achieve this, we need to be absolutely clear about what needs to be done, and by whom.

To tackle this critical step, English Nature established a Remedies Project in 2004 which has drawn together detailed information on every SSSI in the region. Each SSSI may be sub-divided into separate units, depending on habitat type and management of the site. For each unit not in target condition, the project:

- defines the action needed to address the causes;
- details the mechanisms to enable the necessary action to be carried out;
- identifies the organisations and individuals best placed to implement those actions and mechanisms, and
- enables and secures the agreement of land managers to ensure the actions are carried through.

Figure 8 lists the five most important remedies identified in London, in terms of the area of SSSI that can be brought into target condition.

Figure 8 Remedies for bringing SSSIs into target condition in Greater London – the top four (by area)

Remedy	Organisations who can help deliver the remedy	SSSI habitats that will benefit most from the remedy	Area of SSSI that would benefit from the remedy (ha)
Direct management Forestry Commission	Voluntary Conservation Organisation, local authorities	Sandy and muddy shores, lowland neutral grassland, lowland broadleaved and yew woodland	813
Issue of appropriate notices and consents under Section 28e of the Wildlife and countryside act	English Nature	Sandy and muddy shores, lowland neutral grassland	244
Interpretation	Public bodies	Lowland acid grassland	195
Existing local project	Voluntary Conservation Organisation	Lowland broadleaved and yew woodland	111

Remedies in action

Bentley Priory, in north-west London, comprises a mosaic of 55 hectares of unimproved neutral and acid grassland, ancient woodland and wetland areas. Following the national outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001, the then grazier removed livestock from the site and, consequently, the grasslands deteriorated, with scrub encroachment and changes to the structural diversity of the sward. English Nature worked closely with the London Borough of Harrow, the owners of the SSSI, to secure a Countryside Stewardship agreement to undertake scrub clearance and new fencing. Grazing at the site is now more targeted and, with the support of the grazier, the nature conservation interest of the grassland is being restored.

With support and advice from English Nature, the local conservation volunteer group secured funds from Living Spaces (a grant scheme from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and managed by Groundwork) to provide new visitor access and interpretation.

Further enhancement was provided by woodland management undertaken by the Environment Agency as mitigation for flood defence works on the impounded lake that lies within the SSSI.



Bentley Priory SSSI, Greater London. English Nature

Working together

As is clear from the preceding examples, an enormous amount of credit is due to the partner organisations and individuals whose efforts have led to the significant advance towards the 2010 target in the last two years. Without such close partnership working, we would be well behind the current position. The continuation of this approach is essential if the target is to be achieved.

Why the PSA target is so important

The protection and management of SSSIs is essential for the conservation of London's rarest and best habitats and scientifically important geological exposures. This statutory designation ensures that London's last remaining marshes, heaths, flower-rich grasslands and best woodlands are protected for future generations. They also perform a vital role in the conservation of many species including nationally-important populations of water vole, wintering birds and rare insects. Not least, they are the core areas of land that bolster the more extensive network of wildlife sites, greenspaces, parks and gardens that harbour the majority of London's wildlife.

In addition, London's SSSIs can perform, or contribute to, many important 'ecosystem services' providing social and economic benefits. Extensive reedbeds and blocks of woodland reduce the amount of pollutants in our air and water, and natural floodplains buffer and mitigate flood events. Ancient woodlands and flower-rich chalk grasslands provide opportunities for the simple enjoyment of a quiet walk in a natural environment, and sites such as Richmond Park, the London Wetland Centre and Rainham Marshes attract visitors from far and wide, making significant contributions to the local economy.

Achieving the PSA target will ensure that these benefits can be secured for the future. English Nature believes the target is both realistic and achievable if everybody co-operates and adequate resources are dedicated to addressing the outstanding issues. It is clear that the biggest challenge ahead is to ensure that there is a continuing partnership approach.

The responsibility for overseeing this process passes from English Nature to *Natural England* later this year. The creation of the new organisation has already begun, with English Nature, the

Landscape, Access and Recreation remit of the Countryside Agency, and the environment activities of the Rural Development Service working together as partners. Since April 2005, this natural partnership has been working together to deliver joint outcomes and pave the way for *Natural England*, whilst continuing to deliver their separate and respective statutory duties. Achieving the PSA target will remain a vital area of work for the new organisation.



English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency. Working in partnership to conserve and enhance our landscapes and natural environment, to promote countryside access and recreation as well as public well-being, now and for future generations.

This is one of a range of publications published by:
External Relations Team
English Nature
Northminster House
Peterborough PE1 1UA

www.english-nature.org.uk

© English Nature 2006

Printed on Evolution Satin,
75% recycled post-consumer waste
paper, elemental chlorine free.

ISBN 1 85716 917 4

Catalogue code ST12.9

Designed and printed by
statusdesign.co.uk, 0.5M

Front cover photographs:

Top left: Walking in Ruislip Woods SSSI, Greater London.

Peter Wakely/English Nature 21,751

Middle left: Hampstead Heath Woods SSSI, Greater London.

Peter Wakely/English Nature 12,198

Bottom left: Ancient oak pollard, Richmond Park SSSI,

Greater London. Peter Wakely/English Nature 21,832

Main: Mushroom on beech log, Epping Forest SSSI, Essex.

Peter Wakely/English Nature 18,687



Awarded for excellence