

Site Improvement Plan

Exmoor Heaths

Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) have been developed for each Natura 2000 site in England as part of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS). Natura 2000 sites is the combined term for sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Areas (SPA). This work has been financially supported by LIFE, a financial instrument of the European Community.

The plan provides a high level overview of the issues (both current and predicted) affecting the condition of the Natura 2000 features on the site(s) and outlines the priority measures required to improve the condition of the features. It does not cover issues where remedial actions are already in place or ongoing management activities which are required for maintenance.

The SIP consists of three parts: a Summary table, which sets out the priority Issues and Measures; a detailed Actions table, which sets out who needs to do what, when and how much it is estimated to cost; and a set of tables containing contextual information and links.

Once this current programme ends, it is anticipated that Natural England and others, working with landowners and managers, will all play a role in delivering the priority measures to improve the condition of the features on these sites.

The SIPs are based on Natural England's current evidence and knowledge. The SIPs are not legal documents, they are live documents that will be updated to reflect changes in our evidence/knowledge and as actions get underway. The information in the SIPs will be used to update England's contribution to the UK's Prioritised Action Framework (PAF).

The SIPs are not formal consultation documents, but if you have any comments about the SIP or would like more information please email us at IPENSLIFEProject@naturalengland.org.uk, or contact Natural England's Responsible Officer for the site via our enquiry service 0300 060 3900, or enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

This Site Improvement Plan covers the following Natura 2000 site(s)

UK0030040 Exmoor Heaths SAC

Site description

Exmoor Heaths SAC is primarily designated for its European dry heaths, Northern Atlantic wet heaths, Blanket bogs and Vegetated sea cliffs.

It also has some Old sessile oak woodland and very small areas of Alkaline fen. The wet heath is extremely variable in nature and has in places been modified by management, particularly burning. The Exmoor heaths are also important as the largest stronghold for the heath fritillary butterfly *Mellicta athalia*, associated with sheltered slopes in the transition to woodland.

Plan Summary

This table shows the prioritised issues for the site(s), the features they affect, the proposed measures to address the issues and the delivery bodies whose involvement is required to deliver the measures. The list of delivery bodies will include those who have agreed to the actions as well as those where discussions over their role in delivering the actions is on-going.

Priority & Issue	Pressure or Threat	Feature(s) affected	Measure	Delivery Bodies
1 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Pressure	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs, H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland	Control and reduce the impacts of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Not yet determined
2 Drainage	Pressure/Threat	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H7130 Blanket bogs	Restore more natural hydrological conditions	Local partnership
3 Inappropriate pest control	Pressure/Threat	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths	Investigate and put in place measures to reduce the impact of Heather Beetle	Defra, Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust
4 Agricultural management practices	Pressure/Threat	H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs, H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths	Negotiate and provide advice on grazing regimes to negate undergrazing	Defra, Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, Rural Payments Agency (RPA), The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust
5 Invasive species	Threat	H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs, H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths, H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland	Continue to control invasive species	Natural England
6 Managed rotational burning	Pressure/Threat	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of locally agreed burning guidelines	Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, The Heather Trust

7 Change in land management	Threat	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths, H7130 Blanket bogs	Through negotiation increase the uptake of management agreements so that there is complete coverage of the SAC	Devon and Cornwall Police, Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (South-West), Land manager(s), Land agent(s)
8 Direct impact from 3rd party	Threat	H4010 Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath, H4030 European dry heaths	Investigate, and where necessary develop and implement management plans for illegal vehicle use and pony trekking	Devon and Cornwall Police, Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England

Issues and Actions

This table outlines the prioritised issues that are currently impacting or threatening the condition of the features, and the outstanding actions required to address them. It also shows, where possible, the estimated cost of the action and the delivery bodies whose involvement will be required to implement the action. Lead delivery bodies will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the action, but not necessarily funding it. Delivery partners will need to support the lead delivery body in implementing the action. In the process of developing the SIPs Natural England has approached the delivery bodies to seek agreement on the actions and their roles in delivering them, although in some cases these discussions have not yet been concluded. Other interested parties, including landowners and managers, will be involved as the detailed actions are agreed and delivered. Funding options are indicated as potential (but not necessarily agreed or secured) sources to fund the actions.

1 Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Increasing Molinia abundance may reflect increasing eutrophication in line with the findings of recent Dutch research on this matter.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
1A	Control, reduce and ameliorate atmospheric nitrogen impacts.	Not yet determined	2014-20	Site Nitrogen Action Plan	Not yet determined	Not yet determined	

2 Drainage

The natural hydrology of substantial areas of wet heath and valley mires are affected by ditching and peat cutting. The drainage is extensive and capital grants to fund hydrological restoration under HLS are restricted in 2014/15 and possibly beyond and may not be available as additions for current agreements.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
2A	Continue to implement a program of blocking drainage channels to improve the wetland habitats of the SAC.	£200,000	2015-20	Partnership agreement	Environment Agency, Natural England, Water company	Local partnership	

3 Inappropriate pest control

There is extensive and severe Heather Beetle damage caused to heather stands within the last two to three years. It is not currently known whether these stands will recover adequately especially given the abundance of Molinia in southern and western Exmoor sites.

Action	Action description	Cost estimate	Timescale	Mechanism	Funding option	Delivery lead body	Delivery partner(s)
3A	Work with landowners and agreement holders to offer advice and management tools to reduce the negative impacts of recent heather beetle outbreaks.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
3B	Work with landowners to offer advice and management tools to reduce the negative impacts of recent heather beetle outbreaks.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
3C	Investigate the negative impacts of recent heather beetle outbreaks and to fill in any gaps missing in Heather Beetle research.	£5,000	2015-17	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Defra, Natural England, The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority	Natural England	Defra, Exmoor National Park Authority, The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust

4 Agricultural management practices

Purple moor grass is over abundant in certain locations. This appears to be at least partly the result of the seasonality of current grazing regimes or livestock type, rather than undergrazing per se. In a few circumstances tree and scrub invasion is a problem on steep or difficult to graze sites (such as where the A39 passes through). TB has contributed to the under utilisation on the moors to a small degree, and may do so to a greater degree in the future.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
4A	Incentivise and encourage landowners to graze the moorlands with appropriate animals, numbers and at the correct time of the year, with the use of regulation being a last resort.	£30,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
4B	Investigate suitable and sustainable grazing regimes for South West Moorlands.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Defra, Natural England, The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority	Local partnership	Defra, Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England, The Moorland Association, The Heather Trust
<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
4C	Regulation will be used if all avenues of negotiation has been exhausted.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Regulation: Other - obtain appropriate permissions	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, Rural Payments Agency (RPA)

5 Invasive species

Rhododendron, invasive knotweeds and Montbretia are recognised as problems with considerable effort expended in recent years to manage these.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
5A	Continue to implement rhododendron, knotweed and Montbretia control on moorland subject to HLS where capital works are not prescribed (funds not allocated) and within areas of moorland that require future scheme implementation.	£50,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, n/a

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
5B	Continue to implement rhododendron, Knotweed and Montbretia control on moorland subject to HLS where capital works are not prescribed (funds not allocated) and within areas of moorland that require future scheme implementation.	£25,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, n/a

6 Managed rotational burning

Locally agreed burning guidelines that accept larger sized burns in order to catch up with rotational burning plans may lead to a failure to achieve favourable condition (i.e. Common Standards Monitoring dry heath growth stage attribute). Illegal burns including those that exceed the legal limit or agreed burn plan area are a concern. These vary from year to year and result in varying degrees of damage.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
6A	Investigate the effect of locally agreed burning guidance and its implementation to determine if it is compatible with moorland achieving favourable condition as defined by current Common Standards Monitoring protocols.	£20,000	2015-18	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Defra, Natural England, The Heather Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, The Heather Trust

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
6B	Investigate and act upon any illegal burns.	Staff time	2015-20	Enforcement: Burning Regs	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Devon and Cornwall Police

7 Change in land management

There is a lack of agreed and appropriate management in some locations with no agri-environment agreement and/or consent being in place. Having agreed management in place is important in trying to achieve Favourable Conservation Status of the site's SAC features.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
7A	Increase efforts to secure better land management. Due to the lack of agri-environment scheme agreements or consent being in place, favourable condition cannot be achieved.	Not yet determined	2015	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority
7B	Increase efforts to secure better land management. Due to the lack of agri-environment scheme agreements or consent being in place, favourable condition cannot be achieved.	Not yet determined	2015	Advice: Negotiation	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (South-West), Land manager(s), Land agent(s)
7C	Regulation will be used if all avenues of negotiation has been exhausted.	Not yet determined	2016-18	Regulation: SSSI Regulation	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	n/a

8 Direct impact from 3rd party

Vegetation damage from illegal vehicle use and pony trekking is a concern.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Action description</i>	<i>Cost estimate</i>	<i>Timescale</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Funding option</i>	<i>Delivery lead body</i>	<i>Delivery partner(s)</i>
8A	To work closely with partners and landowners to establish and implement a plan to solve the issue of illegal vehicle use and pony trekking that is damaging to the moorland vegetation.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Partnership agreement	Not yet determined	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority
8B	To work closely with partners and landowners to establish and implement a plan to solve the issue of illegal vehicle use and pony trekking that is damaging to the moorland vegetation.	£60,000	2015-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	n/a
8C	Seek to enforce against parties that blatantly damage the sites's designated features.	Staff time	2015-20	Regulation: SSSI Regulation	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Natural England	Devon and Cornwall Police

Site details

The tables in this section contain site-relevant contextual information and links

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Exmoor Heaths SAC

H4030 European dry heaths

H91A0 Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

H7130# Blanket bogs

H7230 Alkaline fens

H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

H4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*

Site location and links

Exmoor Heaths SAC

Area (ha) **10705.87** Grid reference **SS864419** [Map link](#)

Local Authorities Devon; Somerset

Site Conservation Objectives [European Site Conservation Objectives for Exmoor Heaths SAC](#)

European Marine Site conservation advice [n/a](#)

Regulation 33/35 Package [n/a](#)

Marine Management Organisation site plan [n/a](#)

Water Framework Directive (WFD)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides the main framework for managing the water environment throughout Europe. Under the WFD a management plan must be developed for each river basin district. The River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) include a summary of the measures needed for water dependent Natura 2000 sites to meet their conservation objectives. For the second round of RBMPs, SIPs are being used to capture the priorities and new measures required for water dependent habitats on Natura 2000 sites. SIP actions for non-water dependent sites/habitats do not form part of the RBMPs and associated consultation.

Exmoor Heaths SAC

<i>River basin</i>	South West	South West RBMP
<i>WFD Management catchment</i>	East Devon, North Devon, South & West Somerset	
<i>WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)</i>	GB108045020850, GB108045020860, GB108045020870, GB108045020880, GB108045020920, GB108050014140, GB108050019950, GB108050019970, GB108051020210, GB108051020220, GB108051020300, GB108051020500, GB108051020570, GB108051020580, GB108051020590, GB108051020600, GB108051020611, GB30843867	

Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Exmoor Heaths SAC	River Barle SSSI
	North Exmoor SSSI
	West Exmoor Coast & Woods SSSI
	Exmoor Coastal Heaths SSSI
	South Exmoor SSSI
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Exmoor Heaths SAC	Dunkery & Horner Wood NNR
	Hawkcombe Woods NNR
Ramsar	
Exmoor Heaths SAC	n/a
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Exmoor Heaths SAC	n/a

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1.0	08/10/2014	

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ipens2000

