Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS)

Planning for the Future

Site Improvement Plan

Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods

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)

UK0030148 Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC

Site description

The SAC is nearly 1900 ha and has some of the largest woodlands in lowland England, including Horner Woods and Watersmeet, in seven blocks separated by semi-natural habits or farmland and in the case of The Quantocks by Taunton Vale.

The woodland is mainly ancient, semi-natural sessile oak woodland with rich lichen and bryophyte communities, occupying steep sided valleys. In some places, there are long transitions to other semi-natural habitats; small areas of heaths/scrub, grassland/bracken and small areas of sea cliffs, conifer or mixed woodland are included in the SAC.

The European interest features represented include: Old sessile oak woods with holly and hard fern, Alluvial forests with alder and ash, Barbastelle and Bechstein's bat, otter.

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 Invasive species	Pressure/ Threat	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland, H91E0 Alder woodland on floodplains	Control invasive species such as rhododendron and strengthen the existing Exmoor Knotweed Control Partnership	Devon County Council, Environment Agency, Exmoor National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Natural England, Quantock Hills AONB, Somerset County Council
2 Forestry and woodland management	Pressure	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland, H91E0 Alder woodland on floodplains	Enhance woodland management through existing agreements and by bringing in new woodland owners into new agri-environment agreements	Forestry Commission, Natural England
3 Disease	Threat	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland, H91E0 Alder woodland on floodplains, S1308 Barbastelle bat	Encourage adaptation to possible Chalara impacts and investigate the possible impacts of other pests and diseases by initiating research	Exmoor National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Natural England

4 Air Pollution: risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Threat	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland, S1308 Barbastelle bat	Investigate potential atmospheric nitrogen impacts on the site	Natural England
5 Change in land management	Threat	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland, H91E0 Alder woodland on floodplains	Improve habitat quality in and adjacent to existing wood pasture habitat important for lichens by re-introducing grazing and associated canopy management	Exmoor National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Natural England
6 Deer	Threat	H91A0 Western acidic oak woodland	Promote deer control in targeted areas	Forestry Commission, Natural England, Exmoor & District Deer Management Society

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 Invasive species

Rhododendron and invasive knotweeds are well known issues in the SAC and are mainly being addressed. New threats include Montbretia, Himalayan balsam and fringecups (Tellima grandiflora). They are becoming recognised as problems locally and more widely. The wider catchment may be a source of new infestations for the SAC and so needs to be considered. Continued effort on existing invasive species and upcoming threats are vital with enhanced and secure funds needed to support these activities, as well as a partnership approach and appropriate staff resources.

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
1A	Strengthen the Exmoor Knotweed Control Partnership, working to control invasives in the floodplains of the SAC and elsewhere, by securing greater and longer term funding to implement control measures including for Montbretia and Himalayan balsam.	£100,000	2015-20	Partnership agreement	Environment Agency, Natural England, National Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority, Flood Risk Capital Programme	Environment Agency	Devon County Council, Exmoor National Park Authority, National Trust, Natural England, Somerset County Council

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
1B	Widen and extend the Exmoor Knotweed Control Partnership, working to control invasives in the floodplains of the SAC and elsewhere, by securing greater and longer term funding to implement control measures including for Montbretia.	£80,000	2016-20	Flood Risk Maintenance Programme: Flood Risk Management - Capital/ Improvement Schemes	Environment Agency, Natural England, National Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority, Flood Risk Capital Programme	Local partnership	Devon County Council, Exmoor National Park Authority, National Trust, Natural England, Somerset County Council

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
1C	Continue to implement rhododendron control within woodlands subject to EWGS where capital works are not prescribed (funds not allocated).	£200,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Forestry Commission	Exmoor National Park Authority, National Trust, Natural England, Quantock Hills AONB

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
1D	Continue to implement rhododendron control within woodlands subject to HLS where capital works are not prescribed (funds not allocated).	£100,000	2016-20	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, Forestry Commission, Quantock Hills AONB

2 Forestry and woodland management

The lack of an appropriate structure due to limited understorey development/ overdominant canopy (lack of light and younger age classes) and the composition not meeting targets due to an excessive abundance of beech or other invasives such as rhododendron are problems. There is a need for a positive management input to address the composition issue and/or to create a better structure via clearings etc, as well as influencing the management of adjacent woodlands to buffer and extend suitable habitat outside the SAC.

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
2A	Bring new woodlands into positive management by actively engaging landowners, and agreeing and implementing woodland plans.	£100,000	2014-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Forestry Commission	Natural England

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
2B	Where it is not possible to bring new woodlands into positive management by voluntary agreement, use SSSI powers to achieve implementation of woodland plans.	Not yet determined	2014-16	Regulation: SSSI Regulation	Natural England	Natural England	n/a

3 Disease

Adaptation to climate change will be necessary, including to pests and diseases. Ash dieback (Chalara) is present locally on Exmoor. Ash trees are particularly valuable lichen hosts at younger ages than other species such as oak. Oak woodland on slightly richer soils with areas of mature ash, particularly along river valleys, support the most important lichen communities of international importance. Dieback threatens this interest in the medium to long term and the future potential of the wood if whole generations of younger trees are affected. Oak processionary moth and acute oak decline are advancing westward and could have a greater impact than ash dieback.

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
3A	Encourage adaptation to possible *Chalara* impacts by predicting where ash is crucial to the SAC feature and drawing up possible management interventions to ameliorate ash dieback.	Not yet determined	2015-16	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Natural England, Forestry Commission	Forestry Commission	Exmoor National Park Authority, National Trust, Natural England

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
3B	Encourage adaptation to possible *Chalara* impacts by predicting where ash is crucial to the SAC feature and drawing up possible management interventions to ameliorate ash dieback.	Not yet determined	2016-20	Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE): Common Agricultural Policy 2014-20 (New Environmental Land Management Scheme)	Rural Development Programme (RDPE)	Forestry Commission	Natural England

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
3C	Encourage adaptation to possible pests associated with climate change by investigating the likely impacts of oak processionary moth and acute oak decline on SAC woodlands as part of the Forestry Commission's Science and Innovation Research Strategy.	Not yet determined	2015-20	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Forestry Commission	Forestry Commission	n/a

4 Air Pollution: risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition

Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Further evidence is required however the condition assessment for lichens (a notified SSSI feature) on component SSSIs concludes that the lichen flora is growing in very clean air, with no signs of current acidification or nitrogen deposition and is in favourable condition for this particular lichen attribute (Negative indicators: pollution). No local evidence is currently available either way for other possible effects on the woodland flora (bryophytes or ground flora).

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
4A	Further investigate potential atmospheric nitrogen impacts on the site, based on the application of guidance from Chief Scientist's Group Nitrogen Task and Finish Group.	Not yet determined	2014-17	Investigation / Research / Monitoring	Not yet determined	Natural England	n/a

5 Change in land management

The lichen interest of woodlands on Exmoor is a key feature within areas of current or previous wood pasture. It is threatened by abandonment of /or changes in grazing, but is currently mitigated by moderate to high red deer numbers.

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
5A	Improve habitat quality in and adjacent to existing wood pasture habitat important for lichens by re-introducing grazing and associated canopy management.	£75,000	2015-20	Habitat creation / restoration strategy: Habitat restoration	EU Life, Natural England, Rural Development Programme (RDPE), Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)	Natural England	Exmoor National Park Authority, Forestry Commission

6 Deer

In a few locations, high deer numbers coincide with closed canopy woodland to limit severely any woody regeneration and the ground flora.

Action	*Action description*	*Cost estimate*	*Timescale*	*Mechanism*	*Funding option*	*Delivery lead body*	*Delivery partner(s)*
6A	After securing more open conditions to allow regeneration where necessary, improve woodland management by encouraging deer control in selected areas.	£5,000	2015-17	Existing Local Project	Defra, Natural England, Forestry Commission	Exmoor & District Deer Management Society	Forestry Commission, Natural England

Site details

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

Qualifying features

#UK Special responsibility

Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC	H91A0 Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles
	H91E0# Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)*
	S1308 *Barbastella barbastellus*: Barbastelle bat
	S1323 *Myotis bechsteinii*: Bechstein`s bat
	S1355 *Lutra lutra*: Otter

Site location and links

Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC

Area (ha) **1895.17** *Grid reference* **SS894440**	Map link
Local Authorities	Devon; Somerset
Site Conservation Objectives	European Site Conservation Objectives for Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods 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 (RMBP) 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 & Quantock Oakwoods SAC

River basin	South West South West RBMP
WFD Management catchment	East Devon, North Devon, South & West Somerset
WFD Waterbody ID (Cycle 2 draft)	GB108045015100, GB108045020850, GB108045020870, GB108051020220, GB108051020300, GB108051020350, GB108051020500, GB108051020510, GB108051020590, GB108051020611

Overlapping or adjacent protected sites

Site(s) of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	
Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC	River Barle SSSI
	North Exmoor SSSI
	West Exmoor Coast & Woods SSSI
	Watersmeet SSSI
	Barle Valley SSSI
	The Quantocks SSSI

National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC	Dunkery & Horner Wood NNR
	Hawkcombe Woods NNR
	Tarr Steps Woodland NNR

Ramsar	
Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC	n/a

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)	
Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods SAC	n/a

Version	*Date*	*Comment*
1.0	09/10/2014	