



Views About Management

A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Willingford Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

This statement represents English Nature's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. English Nature has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation. English Nature's written consent is still required before carrying out any operation likely to damage the features of special interest (see your SSSI notification papers for a list of these operations). English Nature welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Management Principles

Neutral grassland requires active management if it is to retain its conservation interest. In order to maintain a species-rich sward, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise the sward becomes progressively dominated by tall and vigorous grasses which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical diversity of the site.

The above objective is achieved by either grazing the sward as pasture or cutting it for hay. Most of this site is managed as pasture, while part of it has an established history of using both of these management regimes within the same individual field, this some years being managed for hay and other years for pasture.

On pasture land this management is achieved by grazing. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (such as, for example, type or availability of stock or the needs of individual plants or animals of conservation concern) but should aim to keep

a relatively open sward without causing excessive poaching. Light trampling can be of benefit by breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination.

When managed as hay meadow, the field is closed to stock in the autumn and the resultant growth cut as hay, usually in August. The precise timing of the cut depends on local factors, including past management and current weather conditions, but should be after ground-nesting birds have fledged their young and any short-lived, characteristic plants have set seed. The aftermath is then grazed in late summer/autumn.

No other management should be routinely required. Any surrounding, well-managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates. The application of pesticides including herbicides or fertilizer (including manure or slurry) would be damaging and should be avoided.

For damper meadows and pastures, regular and careful maintenance of surface drainage including ditches and drains can be essential to prevent adverse changes in the plant species composition of the sward. Deepening of surface drainage should be avoided.