Proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park

Evidence and Sources used to support the Proposal

Theme: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Introduction

The Dorset and East Devon AONBs and the Dorset heaths represent an area of exceptionally rich and internationally important biodiversity. This richness, significance and variety reflect in turn the area's underlying geological diversity and significance. The area's extraordinarily rich biodiversity and its national and international importance for landscape, geology, and nature conservation, have been reflected in a range of designations.

The designation of a National Park would:

- protect geology, landscapes and habitats
- promote landscape-scale conservation and vital connectivity between designated areas across the South of England, and
- optimise the valuable ecosystem services provided by the NP area and their contribution to national policies for sustainability.

The proposed National Park area encompasses the whole of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, with its unique coastal and marine geology, landscape and habitats, together with internationally important heathland habitats, and the extraordinarily varied and rich rural landscapes of both AONBs.

This note summarises evidence and examples of this extraordinary biodiversity, and refers to some of the continuing work and initiatives which seek to conserve and enhance these natural assets. Though uniquely rich and varied, Dorset's and East Devon's internationally important habitats and biodiversity are under threat and at risk. This note illustrates the challenges and issues, and some of the losses which have already occurred.

This unique and rich natural heritage deserves the recognition and protection of National Park status. Beyond this, the designation of a National Park presents an opportunity – great but time-limited – to do more and do better to conserve, enhance, and promote the appreciation and enjoyment of this natural heritage. A National Park has the potential to act as a catalyst and beacon for sustainability in all its forms, and for joined-up thinking and partnership working.

For all these reasons, it is especially desirable that the area suggested should be designated a National Park.

Sustainability: the Dorset and East Devon National Park as Catalyst and Beacon

- A National Park has the potential to act as a catalyst and beacon for sustainability in all its forms, and as a catalyst and beacon for joined-up thinking and partnership working in a wide range of policy areas and functions. Sustainability is the key to the survival of cherished landscapes and species. More than this, sustainability is increasingly seen as fundamental to the future by communities and governments, consumers and businesses, farmers and retailers, recreation and wildlife enthusiasts. This agenda resonates with key policy concerns and objectives of the government and key stakeholders, national and local, in all sectors of society, statutory, commercial and not-for-profit.

- Through promoting sustainability, a National Park can make a significant contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the environment, biodiversity and natural resources, to the

enjoyment and appreciation of the area and its recreational value, to social and economic well-being, and to climate change mitigation. The Dorset and East Devon landscapes – which include the spectacular World Heritage "Jurassic" Coast as well as the beautiful and unspoilt heaths, chalk ridges, deep valleys, woods, wetlands and traditional farms – with their extraordinary biodiversity and richness, invoke a positive response among visitors and residents alike. They contain dramatic views, spectacular wildlife and historic buildings. Moreover, these areas contain assets of intangible but "priceless" value. Thus the landscapes and biodiversity of Dorset and East Devon are not only important in themselves; they are also of great economic value, as the foundation for a successful tourism industry and thriving businesses. Sustaining this landscape, natural and cultural heritage, and the recreational opportunities it provides, is therefore vital.

- A National Park for Dorset and East Devon offers the prospect of achieving landscape-scale conservation and enhancing vital connectivity across the South Coast of England from East Hampshire, through the New Forest NP and Dorset, into Devon – thus supporting and helping to deliver a key aim of national policy.

- To achieve this, inter-organisational co-operation and good communication are important to ensure a shared understanding in key fields of policy, forward planning, and day-to- day operations. In all these areas, a National Park has the potential to assist the various stakeholders of Dorset and East Devon to do more and do better for this outstanding area.

Selected Key points relating to biodiversity in Dorset and East Devon include the following:

- The area's extraordinarily rich biodiversity and its national and international importance for landscape, geology, and nature conservation, have been reflected in a range of designations such as SAC, SPA, Ramsar site and others. The designation of a National Park would further protect geology, landscapes and habitats, promoting vital increased connectivity between designated areas.

- There is enormous biodiversity in Dorset and East Devon, due largely to the fact that the area is underlain by an extremely varied geology. This has created a varied range of soils, over which numerous habitats have developed, each supporting a range of plants and animals.

- A unique feature of the Dorset and East Devon AONBs is the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, the UK's first and only WHS to be designated for its natural – and internationally recognised – significance. The proposed National Park area encompasses the whole of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, with its unique coastal and marine geology, landscape and habitats, together with internationally important heathland habitats, and the extraordinarily varied and rich rural landscapes of both AONBs.

- Dorset and East Devon's protected sites provide outstanding wildlife conservation, besides acting as habitat strongholds from which wildlife can spread if surrounding land becomes more favourably managed for environmental and wildlife protection. Such reserves also reflect the fact that many wild places have been lost or damaged due to human activity, and that, without protection, other wildlife havens may be lost forever.

- The varied geology of Dorset gives rise to many important habitats such as lowland heath, calcareous grassland and chalk streams, which support a great diversity of wildlife. The county is well-known for its important populations of Smooth Snakes, Sand Lizards, Early Spider Orchids and Lulworth Skipper butterflies, and the 10km grid square which includes Wareham and Corfe Castle has the highest number of recorded plant species in the country.

- Dorset's extraordinary range of high quality habitats include fine chalk downland and valleys, ancient meadows, woodlands, bog habitats, pastures, heathland, wetland, coast and cliffs. Dorset has 80% of British mammal and butterfly species, and 90% of British bird species. RSPB's Arne reserve is home to over 220 bird species; Poole harbour and the Fleet near Abbotsbury are key sites for over-wintering birds; red squirrels thrive on Brownsea Island; Dorset's heathlands support all of Britain's six species of reptiles; the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust has several reserves in Purbeck's heathlands; in Spring, the Jurassic Coast and Dorset's downs and woods display a wide range of orchid species, while in summer, clouds of beautiful butterflies can be seen, some of these found only in Dorset.

- The Dorset Wildlife Trust [DWT] has 42 nature reserves in the county of Dorset, while many others are owned or run by organisations such as the RSPB, National Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, and DCC.

- Working with conservation partners and the local community, Dorset Wildlife Trust's ambitious initiative "Wildlink" aims to link people and wildlife across East Dorset, including the eastern edge of the AONB, creating a landscape rich in wildlife and highly valued, enjoyed and nurtured by people, including those in the nearby conurbations of Poole/Bournemouth. The acquisition of the Canford Estate by a consortium including DWT would contribute to the National Park's potential to achieve landscape-scale conservation and connectivity.

- East Devon AONB has significant areas of internationally important habitat. The East Devon AONB manages ten Nature Reserves, including heathland, grassland, reed-beds, wooded valleys and saline lagoon.

- Its outstanding hedgerows are a feature of the East Devon landscape and vital to wildlife, including bullfinches, dormice, small eggar moths and brown hairstreak butterflies, all of which are in decline.

- East Devon's woodlands support many rare invertebrates, such as the purple emperor butterfly, the waved carpet moth and the white-line snout moth. Lichens provide homes for other species, such as spiders and mites. East Devon has some very rare lichens dependent on trees, particularly on ash. There are also a number of old parklands with ancient trees standing in open grassland such as the grounds of Bicton College and Killerton House.

- The Axe Estuary Wetlands is one of the south-west's premier wetland sites and is rich in varied wildlife, including birds, small mammals, bats, dragonflies, damselflies and other insects, including the recently discovered 13-spot ladybird.

- Both Dorset and East Devon are rich in species of British bats. The Greater Horseshoe Bat, one of the rarest British bats, feeds along hedgerows, woodland edges and streams, important elements of these landscapes. East Devon is rich in the tree species that are particularly valuable to bats, including oak, ash, and beech, and in hedgerows which form a "bat highway".

- In recent initiatives under its policy of spatial prioritisation, Natural England has identified the Dorset Coast and Wild Purbeck as a Focus Area, and Wild Purbeck as a Nature Improvement Area, and has declared its aim to prioritise and focus more of its resources in these two categories.

Dorset Biodiversity Strategy

The Dorset Biodiversity Audit, Strategy and Action Plan, produced under the aegis of the Dorset Biodiversity Partnership [2003] mirrored national and international concern about species loss over a long period and about habitat fragmentation, and identified priority habitats within Dorset which would be the subject of Habitat Action Plans to facilitate species conservation. Habitats at risk included lowland heathland, identified as a topic requiring increased attention, and in recent years the subject of local heathland planning initiatives.

The following is an extract from the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy:

"Is the biodiversity of Dorset threatened?

Dorset is one of the richest counties for wildlife in England. However, in common with the rest of the UK there have been widespread declines in the semi-natural habitats and populations of rare and common species in the last 80 years, mainly as a result of human activity. These declines have accelerated over the last 30 years. National examples include:

- Once common species such as the tree sparrow have declined by over 85%.
- Breeding populations of the marsh fritillary have reduced by 66% in the last 10 years.
- 97% of unimproved lowland meadows have been lost in the last 50 years.

Extensive wildlife habitats have been lost or suffered deterioration, leaving most remaining sites small, fragmented and often in an unfavourable condition. The need to reverse fragmentation and isolation of the natural resource is made more urgent by the effects of climate change. Many species have the potential to adapt to changing climatic conditions by
shifting their normal ranges both northwards and to higher altitudes. However in Dorset, and the UK as a whole, these natural shifts are likely to be hindered or even prevented by habitat fragmentation."

The **Dorset Biodiversity Audit** [Dorset Environment Record Centre] examines the habitat and species "Account" for each Dorset local authority area and for a range of habitat categories, including agricultural, freshwater and coastal habitats [the last being a particularly significant feature of the proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park area since it encompasses the whole of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.] In each case the species known or thought to be lost and those at risk are identified. Maps indicate the locations of the relevant habitat categories. Updated maps are available under the aegis of Biodiversity South West.

The "State of Nature" Report 2013

The State of Nature report is the first of its kind - wildlife organisations across the UK, including Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Buglife and Butterfly Conservation looked at data for over 3,000 of our native species. The findings are clear: nature is in trouble. Nationally, 60% of the species studied have been declining over recent decades and more than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing.

Dorset's heathlands, marine areas, grasslands and coast have experienced instances of serious decline and in some cases, extinction. Though the county remains rich in wildlife, a shocking number of species have faced extinction. In woodland areas, the **pearl-bordered fritillary** and **high brown fritillary** butterflies have become extinct. The coastal areas have only one **wild asparagus** plant remaining and the **large garden bumblebee** has disappeared from gardens. Some historically common species are now rarely seen in Dorset; there is only one recent record of the **Fan Mussel** (Atrina Fragilis) and the **tree sparrow** is nearly extinct, with fewer than 20 pairs remaining.

Dorset's lowland heathland area is much reduced from a historical figure of over 365,000 hectares to less than 6,000 hectares today. Whilst restoring rare and declining species and habitats is not straightforward, targeted conservation has shown that there is hope. Dorset Wildlife Trust has worked to protect and re-

generate areas of declining heathland. DWT Director of Conservation has said: Dorset still has internationally important areas of heathland and a number of initiatives have helped protect, manage and re-connect them over recent years. For example the new Urban Wildlink project will help DWT and its partners acquire and manage major areas of heathland and protect the wildlife habitats now and for future generations.

Dorset Local Nature Partnership [LNP]

The work of the Dorset Biodiversity Partnership is being taken forward, under a new national policy framework, by the Local Nature Partnership, which will represent biodiversity interests on the Dorset AONB Partnership Board. The LNP shares membership with the Local Enterprise Partnership, also to be represented on the AONB Board.

Dorset AONB

An Exceptional Wealth of Wildlife – Issues and Opportunities

The Dorset AONB ranks among the very best for wildlife, with an extremely high proportion of land designated for its wildlife importance. Non-designated areas also contain valuable semi-natural habitats.

A significant part of the AONB is of international importance for wildlife. There are three main designations:

- Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the EC Birds Directive in recognition of their internationally important bird life and their habitat.
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated under the EC Habitats Directive for internationally important habitats and their species.
- Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

SACs include 7 designations, which cover 70 sites, 4.3% of the AONB. They include the Cerne and Sydling Downs, the West Dorset Alderwoods, B r a c k e t ’s Coppice, Chesil and the Fleet, the Dorset Heaths and Dunes, the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs and St. Aldhelm’s Head to Durlston Head.

There are three Special Protection Areas covering 76 sites (5.1% of the AONB): Poole Harbour, Dorset Heathlands and Chesil and the Fleet. Ramsar sites cover 5.3% of the AONB.

Eight National Nature Reserves (NNRs) lie wholly within the AONB - Stoborough Heath, Hartland Moor, Studland Heath, Arne Reedbeds, Durlston, Hambledon Hill, Hog Cliff and the Valley of the Stones. A small part of Holton Heath NNR also falls within the AONB. NNRs cover 1.1% of the AONB.

The AONB contains 70 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which cover 8.6% of the area, or 98.1km2. SSSI’s are of national importance, but may also include features of international significance. They are designated for their wildlife and/or geological interest.

Outside SSSIs there are many other fragments of semi-natural habitat such as ancient woodlands, grasslands and small pockets of heathland which receive no statutory protection. Some of these have been selected as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest or SNCI’s. There are 625 covering 59 km2 or 5.2% of the AONB. There is also one Local Nature Reserve (LNR) within the AONB.

Dorset contains 23 UK BAP Priority habitats (out of a total of 45) - this figure excludes marine habitats, which lie outside the boundary of the AONB.

Current Trends

The state of Dorset's biodiversity is dependent upon a number of factors. Changes may result from local management operations or broader national or international issues such as climate change or agricultural policy.

Over the last decade there have been a number of changes. Some species have colonised the area - little egrets first bred at Brownsea Island in 1996. Other species have increased such as the Adonis blue butterfly, Dartford and Cetti's warblers, nightjar and woodlark and otter. However, many species have declined including arable plants, marsh fritillaries, lapwing, grey partridge and corn bunting - farmland species declined nationally by 36% between 1970 and 1998.

Key Issues

The key issues affecting biodiversity in the Dorset AONB include:

- Protection: only 8.6% of the AONB is protected by SSSI legislation. Therefore most of the semi-natural habitats within the wider countryside are not covered by this legislation.

- Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by agricultural intensification, forestry, mineral extraction and development.

- Lack of management, often due to changing economic climate, leading to loss and degradation of habitats. E.g. poor markets for timber and livestock lead to lack of woodland management and grazing.

- Changes in river and floodplain management have resulted in habitat degradation and flooding in some areas.

- Access and recreation pressure causing damage to fragile habitats and disturbance to key species.

- Awareness: there is a need for more and improved partnership working to make better use of resources, and public involvement in biodiversity initiatives, particularly habitat restoration schemes. Biodiversity needs to be better integrated into environmental, social and economic strategies to ensure they are adopting a sustainable approach from the outset.

- Poor water quality, both fluvial and coastal, resulting from both diffuse and point source pollution, e.g. siltation, nutrients, pesticides etc.

- Global warming may affect the viability of some species and affect river flows and sea levels.

- Species issues: there have been major declines in many species associated with farmland, whilst introduced and invasive species (e.g. mink, grey squirrels, signal crayfish, Himalayan balsam) may damage native species and habitats (e.g. ancient woodlands planted with conifers). Use of seeds / stock not of local provenance may result in loss of genetic integrity.

- Funding: grant schemes are limited and do not always cover real costs incurred by farmers and land managers. Many smaller local authority grant schemes are no longer available.

- Advice: there is a need for improved and more integrated provision of advice and information to landowners and managers on appropriate management and best practice - face to face visits, information / publications and demonstration sites and events.

- Monitoring: because of the importance of the resource more data should be collated to monitor trends and use as indicators of the health of the AONB. This should include SSSI condition monitoring and farmland birds Public Service Agreement targets.

Key Opportunities

The key opportunities for biodiversity in the Dorset AONB include:

- PSA targets for SSSI's and farmland birds provide nationally comparable figures that can be used as indicators for monitoring the health of the AONB. Other organisations such as Butterfly Conservation have developed national monitoring programmes.

- There are opportunities to develop landscape or ecosystem scale initiatives for biodiversity, to buffer and link often highly fragmented semi-natural habitats.

- A number of biodiversity partnerships, including the Dorset Biodiversity Partnership and Purbeck BAP Steering Group have been established to strengthen the co-ordination and targeting of conservation activity in the county. There is a major opportunity to support these partnerships in the delivery of biodiversity targets within the AONB.

- CAP reform and the review of agri-environment schemes with development of the new Entry Level Scheme may offer improved resources for management and conservation of biodiversity.

- Local produce initiatives may offer increased markets making management of grassland and heathland habitats more viable.

- Recent legislation (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) should lead to improved protection and management of nature conservation interest, for example through environmental assessment requirements and targets / protection for statutory sites.

Current Activity

Numerous organisations and individuals are working to deliver biodiversity targets in the Dorset AONB in a number of ways:

- **Co-ordination**. At both the county and local level, biodiversity work is co-ordinated through an officer working to a steering group. There are currently two plans which cover the AONB: - the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy (coordinated by Dorset Wildlife Trust) and the Purbeck Local Biodiversity Action Plan (coordinated by the Purbeck BAP Steering Group). There are also a number of themed working groups such as the Dorset Heathland Forum, Dorset Woodland Forum, Joint Dorset Marine Committee, Dorset Coast Forum, Chesil and the Fleet Advisory Group, Poole Harbour Study Group, Wetland Working Group, Local Nature Reserve Project and the Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) Project. It is important to ensure that the work of these existing groups can contribute to the implementation of this plan.

- **Monitoring and recording**. DEFRA and its agencies e.g. English Nature , Environment Agency, etc are required to carry out specific monitoring as part of their statutory duties e.g. SSSI condition assessments, water quality. English Nature has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to ensure that 95% of SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010. Currently, 80% of SSSIs within the AONB meet the PSA target. The DEFRA agencies fund a variety of organisations to carry out additional monitoring and recording where required. A co-ordinated survey and monitoring programme for Dorset has yet to be established, although this may be developed as part of the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy. The Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) already carries out specialist surveys, manages and stores ecological data, and is in a good position to carry out this role. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) also carry out a wide range of biological monitoring, some of which is in the AONB. In addition, surveys and monitoring are carried out by a wide variety of national and local agencies, organisations, companies, societies and clubs e.g. The River Laboratory at East Stoke, Dorset Bird Club and Butterfly Conservation.

- **Management**. Most national organisations have reserves in the area, and carry out direct conservation management. A variety of other private land managers, companies and public bodies carry out conservation management on their land. Management agreements with land managers through agri-environment and Natural England schemes also significantly contribute to conservation management. Natural England undertakes management work on SSSIs within the Dorset AONB. The Environment Agency also carries out a range of management work including Water Level Management Plan implementation on the Lower Frome and Piddle and fisheries work on the Stour. Land owners and managers are supported by a number of advisors or ecologists from DCC, FWAG, DWT and DAAS or conservation teams that carry out practical management such as the DCC Ranger Service. Species conservation work is also carried out by a variety of organisations such as the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Dorset Bat Group and Dorset Otter Group. Some land managers employ ecologists to advise on estate management, such as the National Trust, Perenco UK and the Lulworth Estate. Mineral sites now have restoration plans under planning law to recreate habitats. Significant areas of the AONB have Heritage Management Plans for Inheritance Tax Exemption. Heritage Lottery funding has been brought into the area for heathland management through the Hardy's Egdon Heath Project (Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage). Significant Dorset businesses which are contributing to the restoration of heathland habitat include Perenco UK and RSRL. Perenco UK have almost completed the restoration to wet and dry heathland of their site at Furzebrook. RSRL are well on the way to restoring the significant Winfrith site to heathland. Marketing the benefits of produce from sensitively managed heritage sites could support their future management.

- **Enjoyment and understanding**. A wide variety of statutory and non-statutory organisations offer young people and adults an opportunity to enjoy and understand more about wildlife.

- **Wider benefits**. Conservation activities play a wider role in the social and economic wellbeing of the AONB, such as health benefits, local employment, wildlife tourism and public participation in environment management. The quality of the environment is a key element of the overall quality of life.

Related Policies and Strategies

The need to protect the variety of life at a global level was recognised at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992, at which over 150 heads of state signed 'The Convention on Biological Diversity'. This recognised the importance of conserving biodiversity, and committed signatory states to developing and implementing action plans. These have been produced at a number of geographical levels, which feed up and down into each other:

- National: ‘Working with the Grain of Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for England’ (DEFRA, 2002)
- National: ‘Space for Nature: Landscape Scale Action for Woodland’ (Woodland Trust, 2002)
- Regional: ‘Action for Biodiversity in the South West: a series of habitat and species plans to guide delivery’ (prepared by a wide partnership, 1997)
- Regional: ‘Rebuilding Biodiversity’ (South West Wildlife Trusts, April 2003)
- Regional: ‘South Central Regional Action Plan for Butterflies and Moths’ (Butterfly Conservation, 2000)
- County: ‘Dorset Biodiversity Strategy’ (Dorset Wildlife Trust working with partners, 2003)
- Local: ‘A Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Purbeck’ (Purbeck Biodiversity Steering Group, 1998)
- 5.3.16 Policies, strategies and legislation relating to biodiversity include:
- ‘EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora’ (92/43/EEC) 1992
- ‘EC Council Directive on Water Frameworks’ (2000/60/EC)
- ‘Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981’ (as amended)
- ‘Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000’, Section 4: greater protection for SSSIs
- ‘England Forestry Strategy’, (Forestry Commission, 1999)
- ‘England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 (South West Region)’ (MAFF, 2000)
- ‘Planning Policy Guidance 9 – Nature Conservation’ (ODPM)
- ‘Dorset Heaths Natural Area Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘Isles of Portland and Purbeck Natural Area Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘Wessex Vales Natural Area Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘The South Dorset Coast Maritime Natural Area Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘South Wessex Downs Natural Area Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘Blackdowns: A Nature Conservation Profile’ (English Nature,1998)
- ‘Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan’ (Poole Harbour Steering Group, 1995)
- ‘Poole Harbour Management Policies’ (Poole Harbour Co-ordinating Group, 1991)
- ‘Dorset Heathland Strategy’ (Dorset Heathland Forum, 1990)

- ‘Dorset Coast Strategy’ (Dorset Coast Forum, 1999)
- ‘Making Purbeck More Special: a Strategy for the Purbeck Heritage Area’ (Purbeck Heritage Committee, 2002)
- ‘Lyme Bay and South Devon Shoreline Management Plan’ (Posford Duviver, 1998)
- ‘Portland Bill to Durlston Head Shoreline Management Plan’ (Mouchel, 1998)

Dorset AONB Policy Framework – Biodiversity

Policy Aims

- The restoration, conservation and sustainable management of habitats and biodiversity in the AONB as guided by national, regional and local biodiversity strategies.
- Reverse the decline of priority species as guided by national biodiversity policy and the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the importance of biodiversity.
- Ensure that biodiversity is recognised within all policy as a cornerstone and key indicator of environmental health and environmental capacity.
- Make best possible provision for likely impacts of climate change due to global warming.

Policy Objectives

- Promote the conservation and viability of key habitats such as heathland, ancient seminatural woodland, grassland, freshwater and coast and associated species in the AONB.
- Ensure healthy and stable populations of species dependent upon general farmed countryside and mixed habitats such as gardens, parklands and urban areas within the AONB.
- Help promote thriving coast and marine ecosystems able to support sustainable harvesting and fisheries.
- Ensure appropriate management of statutorily designated sites and locally important wildlife sites in the AONB.
- Seek opportunities for the good management, conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity with co-operation of landowners and land managers.
- Increase awareness and understanding of wildlife and the importance of integrating biodiversity conservation policy within wider decision making.
- Support and promote measures to manage introduced invasive species where they are causing harm, as identified in Biodiversity Action Plans.
- Monitor and provide information on the status of key habitats and species in the AONB.

- Implement the UK and Purbeck Biodiversity Action Plans and Dorset Biodiversity Strategy in the AONB.

- Create additional coastal and freshwater habitats to take account of the likely losses from coastal erosion and sea level rise.

- Develop integrated initiatives which demonstrate the links between biodiversity, landscape quality and economic potential.

- Understand changes in biodiversity and an ongoing assessment of the likely effects of climate change.

East Devon AONB

East Devon AONB Management Strategy – draft for consultation, 2013 [extracts, with amplification]

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

This sub-theme addresses conserving and enhancing the wildlife, habitat and geological assets of the AONB.

Background and Evidence

East Devon AONB has a rich and varied wildlife resource – ranging from the large expanse of lowland heath habitats in the west to the wilderness woodland , soft cliffs and calcareous grassland of the Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs National Nature Reserve in the east.

Internationally important habitat

The East Devon AONB has a significant area of internationally important habitat. Special Areas for Conservation (SAC) account for 1644ha of the AONB, and Special Protection Areas (SPA) cover some 1118ha which includes a small overlap with the Exe Estuary which is also RAMSAR site.

These include, for example:

• East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SPA /SAC
• Part of River Axe SAC
• Part of the 897 ha Sidmouth to West Bay Coast SAC
• Beer Quarry Caves SAC

The Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site was the first natural site in England inscribed by UNESCO, offering 95 miles of geological exposures with rocks from all periods of the Mesozoic present in East Devon.

Nationally and locally designated areas

There are 14 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the AONB covering some 1811ha, ranging from geological quarry features to fen habitat and accounting for almost 7% of the AONB landscape. (68.6% of these SSSI's are currently in favourable condition in East Devon AONB).

The Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs National Nature Reserve encompasses 334ha of the coastal habitat in the AONB.

The geology that forms the AONB landscape is exposed in dramatic form on the World Heritage Site in a series of cliffs and headlands and is also visible inland in the form of geological exposures at Wilmington and Shapwick Grange Quarries and Beer Quarry caves. These sites are complemented by a number of Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) such as Higher Sweetcombe Wood and Dunscombe Manor Quarry.

In further detail:

- The AONB manages ten Nature Reserves across East Devon, including heathland, grassland, reedbeds and wooded valleys. One of these, Fire Beacon Hill, is an area of lowland heath, which offers a bird's eye view of the surrounding countryside. On a clear day one can almost see from Berry Head to Portland, the entire length of Lyme Bay, with views of soaring buzzards and ravens. Yellowhammer, the nationally scarce Dartford warbler and nightjars breed in the reserve.

- Black Hole Marsh is a new nature reserve on the River Axe. It was bought in 2008 by East Devon District Council and, following a planning approval, the Countryside Service proceeded to create a saline lagoon on what was previously a drained agricultural field, with little wildlife interest.

- Woodland cover in East Devon, around 6% of the area, has a high proportion of broadleaved woodland. The outstanding hedgerows are a feature of the East Devon landscape and vital to wildlife, including bullfinches, dormice, small eggar moths and brown hairstreak butterflies, all of which are in decline. There are also a number of old parklands with ancient trees standing in open grassland such as the grounds of Bicton College and Killerton House.

- The Axe Estuary Wetlands is one of the south-west's premier wetland sites and is rich in varied wildlife, including birds, small mammals, bats, dragonflies, damselflies and other insects, including the recently discovered 13-spot ladybird.

- East Devon's woodlands support many rare invertebrates, such as the purple emperor butterfly, the waved carpet moth and the white-line snout moth. Lichens provide homes for other species, such as spiders and mites. East Devon has some very rare lichens dependent on trees, particularly on ash.

- East Devon has 14 of the 17 species of British bats, including the Greater Horseshoe Bat, one of the rarest British bats which feed along hedgerows, woodland edges and streams, important elements of the East Devon landscape. Greater Horseshoe bats are only found in the South West and South Wales. East Devon is rich in the tree species that are particularly valuable to bats, including oak, ash, and beech, and

in hedgerows which form a “bat highway”.

County Wildlife Sites

County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are further designations which afford both protection and in the case of LNRs, public access to the wildlife and geological resource of the AONB. The AONB occupies some 33% of the East Devon District and there are 135 CWS in the AONB, representing 49% of those within the District. Two LNRs, Fire Beacon Hill and Knapp Copse fall entirely within the AONB with others such as Trinity Hill straddling the boundary.

County Wildlife Sites						
Habitat	AONB		East Devon		% in AONB	
	No Sites	Area (ha)	No Sites	Area (ha)	By Number	By Area
Heathland	12	451.9	35	642.2	34%	70%
Woodland	47	735.2	95	1508	49%	49%
Acidic Grassland	12	277.2	17	312.3	23%	89%
Marshy Grassland	20	161.2	47	530.7	42%	30%
Calcareous Grassland	16	173.8	19	196.9	84%	88%
Neutral Grassland	43	347.5	83	614.4	51%	57%
Springline Mire	4	31.7	32	204.6	12%	15%
Total CWS in AONB	135					
Total CWS in East Devon	276					
Total area of CWS in AONB	1817					
Total area of CWS in East Devon	3351					

[Table from East Devon AONB website]

Biodiversity Action Plans [BAP]

Habitat and wildlife conservation is a key component of AONB management. Future direction for the management of priority species and habitats has been provided by Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and more recently requirements for the favourable management of SSSIs.

The UK BAP has been interpreted at the local level through the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan and a Biodiversity Action Plan for East Devon District Council.

Key habitats and species identified as priorities in the **East Devon BAP** are:

For the whole of the District including the AONB:

• Lowland Heath
• Estuaries
• Urban and garden biodiversity
• Species rich hedgerows
• Bats
• Water voles
• Great crested newts
• Heath Lobelia

Additional habitats in the East Devon AONB:

• Broadleaved woodland
• Unimproved grassland
• Spring-line mires

Trends and Forces for change

• Following the Natural Environment White Paper, the recently formed Devon Local Nature Partnership will influence strategic biodiversity and geodiversity actions across Devon.
• The AONB works with landowners and partners to encourage uptake of the Environmental Stewardship scheme which aims to improve management of key habitats and species – CAP reform will influence how this scheme evolves post 2013.
• The South West Nature Map has been produced which shows the best areas, 'Strategic Nature Areas', to maintain and expand terrestrial wildlife habitats at a landscape scale. The AONB is reviewing areas within its boundaries and developing opportunities for action.
• The potential impacts of climate change on the species and habitats of the AONB are only partly understood and require more coordinated action.
• The Devon CC and the AONB team have demonstrated a proven role for Biodiversity Action Planning at the community/parish level and a greater understanding of the habitat and species resource / condition.
• Habitat and species loss and habitat fragmentation have occurred as a result of agricultural change, forestry, mineral workings and development although increasingly measures are being developed to control this through landscape scale conservation initiatives.
• Government (DEFRA) targets have been set for both SSSI management and farmland birds:
    • covering the area of SSSIs to be in favourable condition
    • Attempting to reverse the long term decline in the number of farmland birds.
• Designation of Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site is serving to develop earth heritage and geological related initiatives.
• There is a continuing need for the sensitive restoration and aftercare arrangements for mineral sites.
• Locally targeted work is being carried out to reduce the spread of invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed together with Holm Oak and Cherry Laurel in the Undercliffs NNR.

Key Policy/programme influences

- Environmental Stewardship Scheme
- The Natural Environment White Paper
- Local Nature Partnerships eg. Devon LNP
- Lawton Review - Making Space for Nature
- Ecosystem services – UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA)

- Biodiversity 2020 – A Strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
- National Planning Policy Framework

Sources include the following:

Dorset Biodiversity Partnership: The Dorset Biodiversity Audit, Strategy and Action Plan, produced under the aegis of the Partnership, 2003

Dorset AONB: website and publications

East Devon AONB: website and publications

Dorset Wildlife Trust: website and publications

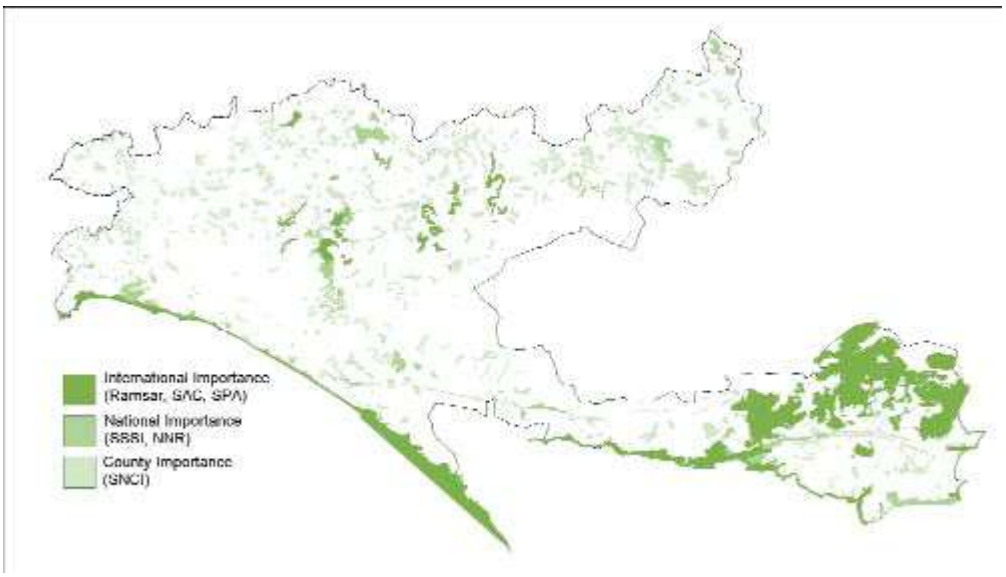
Biodiversity South West: website, mapping and publications

The State of Nature Report, 2013

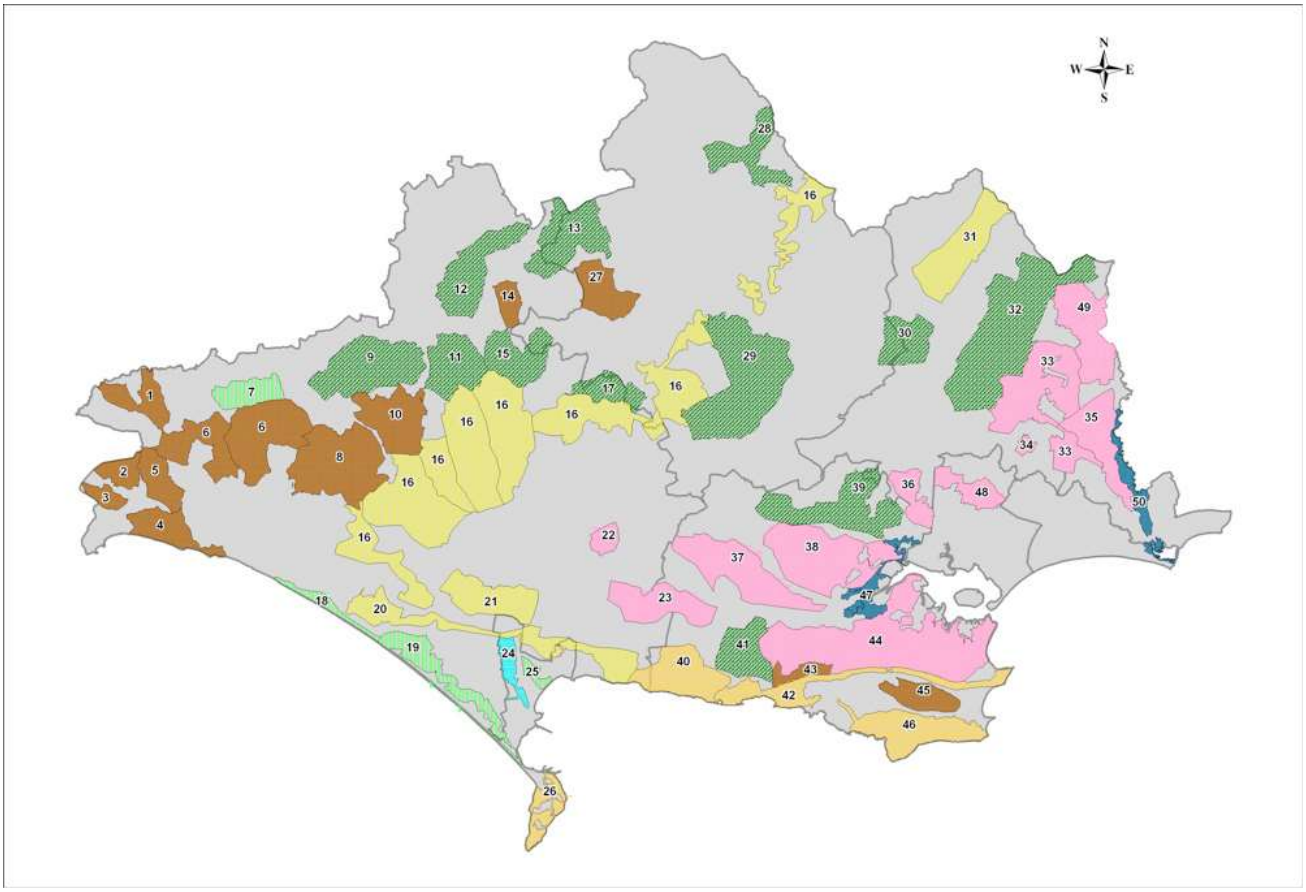
Natural England: website and publications

Dorset and East Devon National Park Group
June 2013

Appendix: Maps



Designated wildlife conservation sites in the Dorset AONB



Strategic Nature Areas in Dorset [Dorset Environmental Record Centre]

Code: for SNA Names see Biodiversity South West website