



Spotlight on SSSIs

Working towards the goals of Biodiversity 2020

Issue 9 – December 2016

I'm delighted to bring you the ninth issue of 'Spotlight', the newsletter highlighting the achievements of farmers and other land managers in improving the condition of SSSIs.

I'm thrilled to announce that Natural England has notified a new Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - the West Pennine Moors. This new SSSI covers 76 square kilometers and is the largest land SSSI we've notified since 2004. This is a significant achievement for us and all our partners involved. We will work with owners and land managers to make sure we continue to protect and enhance the wildlife in this special area. You can read more about it below.

We hear from Luke Bristow and Neil Fuller about the Essex Grazing Project and how Red Poll cattle are helping manage SSSIs through dedicated conservation grazing. Natural England's advice and Environmental Stewardship funding have also been vital to the project's success and you can read how the project has grown since its conception in 2009. Not to mention how the Old English goats are helping too!

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We've also provided the latest SSSI reporting information and I'm delighted to report that this continues to show the results of the hard work and commitment from all our partners, farmers and land owners towards achieving our Biodiversity 2020 aims.

The Bees' Needs Champions Awards 2016 took place on 8 November, celebrating bee-friendly initiatives and Natural England nominated three farms for the farming category. Read more about the three farmers below and what they are doing to help bees and other pollinators.

As with issue 8, we have also included an article about one of our 'Star Sites'. Star Sites are examples of SSSIs, big and small, that are either vital for reaching our Biodiversity 2020 target of 50% of sites in favourable condition, or help us achieve long term goals for ecological restoration. This time we focus on the Cotswold Water Park SSSI which covers 135 hectares and 10 lakes, which were created by gravel extraction. This site is nationally and internationally important as the (temporary) home to overwintering and breeding water birds, as well as supporting diverse aquatic plant communities.

We also have information on our new chargeable advice service for SSSIs and an article on the Eden SSSI as to how Catchment Sensitive Farming and Environmental Stewardship funding have helped improve the habitat.

Finally, may I encourage you to complete the SSSI survey highlighted on page 7. We want your views on a whole host of issues from how you view Natural England to how you manage your SSSI.



Caroline Cotterell

Caroline Cotterell
Director, Strategy Implementation

The Essex Grazing Project

Luke Bristow, Project Manager, Essex Grazing Project and Neil Fuller, Lead Adviser, Natural England.

The project was conceived in 2009 by Essex County Council to tackle the challenge of delivering conservation grazing on designated sites with public access, against a backdrop of dwindling local government spending on the natural environment.

Prior to 2009, the council relied on local farmers for its grazing to help conserve its 345 hectares (ha) of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and deliver Environmental Stewardship on 548ha. With a range of habitats (acid grasslands, wood pasture and coastal wetlands) it was becoming increasingly difficult to find farmers to deliver targeted grazing management.

This was made even harder with a diminishing number of livestock farmers: between 2000 and 2009 cattle numbers decreased by 28 per cent (8,500 animals) in the South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland National Character Area.

From the outset we wanted to provide dedicated conservation grazing, informed, as much as possible, by ecological monitoring and the best available evidence. However, we were conscious that the project needed to aspire to be self-financing and, given the considerable pressures on Local Authority budgets, operating as a 'business' to demonstrate 'best-value' has been critical.



Old English goats on a former landfill site

So the project began ...

We bought four native breed Red Poll cattle along with some basic equipment to move and handle them, gradually expanding to graze three of the Council's Country Parks: Hadleigh Park (part of Benfleet and Southend Marshes SSSI); Thorndon Country Park (part of Thorndon Park SSSI) and Weald Country Park. Red Poll cattle were chosen primarily due to their size, temperament and connection with Essex and East Anglia.

Support from local Natural England advisers was instrumental in establishing the project, and the funding provided by Natural England's Environmental Stewardship scheme, particularly the 'native breeds at risk supplement', was vital to kick-start and sustain its growth. Expanding the project to offer an apprenticeship position and training for volunteers - to act as 'lookers' - has also been important, helping to secure additional funding and raise the project's profile.



Bella our apprentice in action (administering medicine)

Having established the principle on Council land, it became apparent that our partners were in need of a similar solution, with many finding it difficult to identify farmers whose commercial objectives were compatible with their requirement to manage open spaces for wildlife and people. Indeed we give as much thought to minimising conflicts with park-users as we do to achieving nature conservation objectives.

Calving occurs in winter to ensure calves are over three months old when they are turned-out on sites with public access, and we use a 'scoring system' to continually assess and grade cattle for their temperament. Animals are sold or culled that occupy either end of the spectrum: 0 - 'cuddly' and 5 - 'bonkers'!

Interest in the project has resulted in new partnership agreements with three Local Authorities, one NGO and two private landowners.



Red Polls grazing Pitsea Marsh SSSI

What does the future hold?

We will start 2017 with a herd of over 220 pedigree Red Poll cattle and a flock of 85 'Old English' goats. They'll be providing conservation grazing at 15 sites (9 SSSI) covering 352 hectares of land (164ha SSSI) in Essex, Hertfordshire and Kent. Neil Fuller, Lead Adviser in Natural England's Essex Team readily praises the project, stating "Some of our rarer wildlife is fussy but the extra effort is worth it. The Essex Grazing Project neatly combines the use of new technology with traditional grazing methods, ensuring the output (including the dung) is ecologically beneficial. This targeted grazing is helping to restore the quality and character features of SSSI grasslands by conserving important niches, mosaics and habitat transitions and will further assist the delivery of [Biodiversity 2020](#) targets by increasing its positive influence across the wider landscape."

Whilst funding from Natural England and other sources, such as the Landfill Communities Fund, has been significant; the current challenge is securing the long-term viability of the project by reducing its dependence on grant support. Going forward, income from contract grazing and beef sales will become ever more important.

We are seeing a gradual shift in attitudes by conservation land managers from expecting a rent from graziers, to recognition that to achieve the high-quality environmental outcomes they want, particularly on open access sites, they may have to pay for a bespoke service.

The last piece of the jigsaw is the tasty by-product of conservation grazing – grass-fed ethically reared meat! After initially experimenting with direct sales via box schemes and butchers, we changed our approach, striking-up a partnership with a small family abattoir and meat wholesaler to jointly develop

and market a premium brand product: Legacy Beef. This arrangement benefits both parties with the abattoir responsible for fulfilling orders and 'selling' the beef and its story to butchers and restaurants, with project staff concentrating on livestock and conservation management.

Luke Bristow is Project Manager of the Essex Grazing Project working for Essex County Council's Place Services Team. You can find out more about the project at <http://www.essexgrazing.org.uk>

Andrew Hartley and Neil Fuller are Lead Advisers within Natural England's Essex Land Management Team who have assisted the project with advice and support linked to SSSI conservation and the Environmental Stewardship Scheme. Their colleague Jonathan Bustard also assisted by securing funding from Natural England's 'Innovation Fund' to pay for GPS cattle tracking collars and other stock welfare monitoring equipment.

Old English goats

It's a common misconception that cattle will reduce scrub on high-value open habitats. Whilst they can help, their effect is often limited. As scrub encroachment is often a major issue for many of the landowners with whom we work, in 2015 we established a flock of native breed 'Old English' goats.



Effect of goats - ring-barked scrub

The goats have had an excellent effect at two sites (at one they are mixed with Red Poll cattle) where they have defoliated bramble and rose; and ring-barked hawthorn and blackthorn. They also appear to offer excellent potential to manage post-industrial sites with important invertebrate assemblages, and their browsing helps maintain a mosaic of flowery forage and scrub-edge habitat.

Achieving the Biodiversity 2020 goals - report on progress

Jonathan Pearce, Biodiversity 2020 Co-ordinator, Natural England

SSSI condition: the good, the bog and the algae

Golden plovers numbers are up, pygmy rush has returned, blanket bog is thriving and invasive rhododendron has been eradicated. These are a few of the improvements in biodiversity that Natural England staff has recorded on SSSIs over the past six months.

Progress has been most noticeable at either end of the country: upland sites like The Cheviot in Northumberland and Geltsdale and Glendue Fells in Cumbria have recorded significant areas moving into 'favourable' condition; meanwhile the heathland of Goonhilly Downs in Cornwall and the Erme Estuary in Devon are now almost all 'favourable'. Favourable condition means that all the features for which these sites are notified are being adequately conserved.

A huge range of actions have been implemented over recent years to achieve this progress. Along the Erme Estuary, a woodland grant has paid for the clearing of rhododendron. At Geltsdale, heather bales have been used to block moorland drainage channels in blanket bog. And at Ash Fell in Cumbria, a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement has allowed for less intensive grazing.



Blanket bog

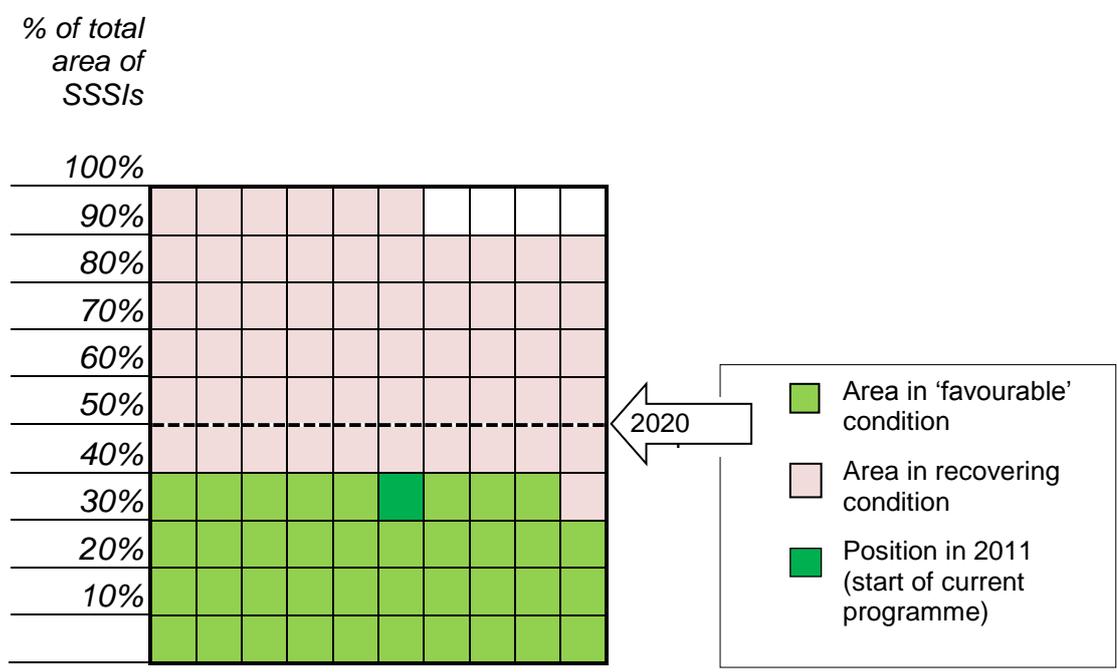


Golden plover

Unfortunately, just like stocks and shares, the fortunes of SSSIs can go backwards as well as forwards. One area of concern on SSSIs along the South Coast is the increasing presence of algae on mudflats. The algae, which can develop in to thick mats, is a sign of pollution and high nutrient levels in the rivers that flow into these sites. In recent months, two areas of Chichester Harbour were changed to unfavourable condition due to the prevalence of algae. Initiatives such as the Solent Diffuse Water Pollution Plan and Catchment Sensitive Farming are seeking to address this issue.

An overall increase

Looking at the picture across the country, there has been an overall increase of 1,800 hectares of SSSIs in favourable condition since April 2016. This means that the proportion of all sites in favourable condition is now edging towards 39%. The proportion of sites assessed in recovering condition has remained stable at 57%. The goal of the England Biodiversity 2020 strategy is to see half of all SSSIs in favourable condition by the end of the decade. As the chart shows, progress towards this milestone over recent years has been slow, but it is moving consistently in the right direction.



Condition of SSSIs in England, November 2016

Key SSSIs that have improved to favourable condition since April 2016

SSSI	Area improved	Key feature
Geltsdale & Glendue Fells, Cumbria	509 hectares	blanket bog, upland birds
The Cheviot, Cumbria	257 hectares	blanket bog, upland birds
Goonhilly Downs, Cornwall	220 hectares	heathland, rare plants
Gouthwaite Reservoir, Yorkshire	150 hectares	wildfowl
Ash fell, Cumbria	142 hectares	upland heath
Erme Estuary, Cornwall	163 hectares	Estuary, woodland

New site of special scientific interest notified

The West Pennine Moors is the largest new Site of Special Scientific Interest notified by Natural England since 2004, covering a total of 76 square kilometers between Chorley, Blackburn, Bolton and Haslingden in Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

This move reflects the national significance of the area and its combination of upland habitats, moorland fringe grasslands and woodland, which support an impressive array of breeding birds. Merlin, curlew, snipe, lapwing and redshank nest in the area and there are large breeding colonies of both black-headed and Mediterranean gulls.

Natural England's Chief Executive, James Cross, said:

"This is a significant moment for the protection of wildlife across a wild and beautiful expanse of north-west England. Our upland landscapes provide vital wildlife habitats and clean water, reduce flood risk and bring enjoyment and a sense of well-being to millions of people.

The West Pennine Moors provide a dramatic backdrop to the surrounding towns and the wild, open spaces have been enjoyed by generations of locals and visitors alike. The hills also provide clean drinking water for thousands of households and their ability to store water plays a vital role in reducing flood risk in urban areas downstream.

Natural England will work with owners and land managers to continue to protect and enhance the wildlife importance of the area, whilst maximising the other benefits from the moors. This includes sensitive management of blanket bogs through careful grazing by cattle or sheep, and maintaining water levels at or around the surface of the peat to make sure the habitat is at its healthiest.

SSSI status will help secure the widest possible commitment to the conservation of the West Pennines and lead to further action to secure the future of this moorland landscape."



Black-headed gull



Curlew

Mike Burke, Natural England's Area Manager for Cheshire to Lancashire said:

"The West Pennine Moors are truly special and wholly warrant this SSSI status. It confers special legal protection and recognises the national scientific importance of its mosaic of upland habitats and populations of breeding birds.

We will continue to work with all farmers, landowners and conservation groups across the area over the coming weeks and months to explain the importance of this designation and agree how we can

work together to protect the area now and in the future. Landowners, occupiers and interested parties now have four months in which to make representations or objections to Natural England, who will then decide whether or not to confirm the notification."



Calf Hey reservoir, Haslingden Grane

Tell us what you think - SSSI Survey

Natural England wants to hear your views as SSSI owners and occupiers. Your feedback is essential to inform how we continue to improve and conserve these sites for the future.

The survey is an opportunity to feedback on a range of issues, including;

- Working with Natural England
- Management of your site
- How information is provided

Please complete the [Natural England survey on SSSI](#). The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Thank you

Celebrating our Bees' Needs farming champions

The [Bees' Needs](#) Champions Awards 2016 were hosted at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew on 8 November. They brought together 30 champions to celebrate bee-friendly initiatives, from playgrounds to parks and farms to famous shopping streets.

The awards were presented by the Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, Lord Gardiner, and showcased bee-friendly initiatives which had successfully adopted the government's National Pollinator Strategy.

As Lord Gardiner said: "Pollinators are essential for food production and the environment. The Bees' Needs Champions show us how to keep our pollinators happy and healthy all year round, and their efforts are an inspiration for us all."

Three farms championing pollinators

The farming category was one of six categories, alongside construction, schools, community groups, youth groups and local authorities. Nominees were selected and submitted to Defra by organisations running competitions under each category.

At Defra's request, Natural England nominated three farms for the farming category award. All three farms either had an Environmental Stewardship agreement or a new Countryside Stewardship agreement.

The three farmers were recognised at the awards and received a Bees' Needs Award from Lord Gardiner for the work they are doing to support wild pollinators and farm wildlife on their farms. Hugh Darbishire, a young farmer who runs the family-owned Hill Farm in Warwickshire, gave an excellent speech at the awards outlining the work he is doing using agri-environment schemes to help the wild pollinators and farmland birds on his farm. Here is a summary of each farm and their pollinator activity.

Hill Farm, Prior's Hardwick, Warwickshire

- 165ha in SE Warwickshire.
- Farmed by the Darbishire family for over 50 years with Hugh taking the reins in 2010.
- Mixed farming enterprise, with sheep (lambing) and arable.
- The farm joined the old Countryside Stewardship scheme in 2002, and Hugh, keen to build on what had been achieved under that scheme, entered into ELS/HLS in 2012. He adopted a comprehensive mix of options designed to benefit farm wildlife, in particular farmland birds.
- The farm now delivers 1.2ha of clover-rich habitat and 1.6ha of wildflower margins, benefitting wild pollinators and other farm wildlife.



Meadow

NE Adviser Matt Willmott who nominated Hugh's farm said:

"It's been fantastic to be part of Hugh's environmental journey on his farm for the last 16 years. Since taking over full-time management from his father, Hugh has delivered a wide range of quality habitats for farmland birds and pollinators. He takes as much pride in these habitats as he does his conventional cropping and sheep husbandry. His habitat delivery really is on the next level and he provides an excellent example of how farming can be very successfully integrated with conservation."

Langley Farm, West Berkshire

- Farmer Ed Ryder has created over 7ha of flower-rich margins and nectar plots across 10 fields of his farm.
- Environmental margins are colonised by declining butterflies like the marbled white and common blue.
- Additional wildlife habitats include enhancement and creation of species-rich grassland and over 7km of sympathetic hedgerow management.
- Grey partridge, yellowhammer, linnet and skylark are all regularly seen on the farm.

NE adviser Des Sussex who nominated Ed Ryder said: "It has been so rewarding working with Ed from our initial meeting where he was tentatively enquiring about agri-environment schemes, to the current situation - just a few years on - where he has learned how to successfully create and manage parts of the farm to create super wildlife habitats. He has gained in experience and confidence, and it is great visiting the farm to see the wildlife that is now benefitting."

Home Farm, Curry Rivel, Somerset

- Henry and Richard Lang farm 324 hectares area. Their new Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement delivers the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package across the farm
- The package puts over 20% of the farm into management which benefits farmland birds including Lapwing, Grey Partridge, Skylark and Linnet.
- Wild pollinators and other farm wildlife including Brown Hairstreak butterflies, the rare Shrill Carder Bumble Bee, and the Brown Hare also benefit.

NE adviser Judith Weightman who worked with Henry to set up his new CS agreement said: "I am not surprised to see Home Farm nominated for an award: Henry and Richard are committed to conservation and do so much to provide habitat and food for wild insect pollinators. They have restored and created wildflower meadows, several kilometres of wildflower margins and are establishing pollen and nectar mixes in their new CS agreement. The farm has also proved to be a bit of a hotspot for the shrill carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) which is probably the UK's rarest species of bumblebee too."



Left to right: Ed Ryder, Oli Harrison (CFE winner), Lord Gardiner, Hugh Darbishire, Henry Lang

Natural England advice paying dividends

James Phillips, Senior Adviser in Natural England, who oversaw the judging for the farm category selection and works on national Countryside Stewardship priority species and farm wildlife outcomes said: "It is wonderful to see farmers getting the recognition they truly deserve for all the hard work they are doing for farm wildlife and in particular for wild pollinators.

"This is very much a partnership approach. Talking to the farmers it is very obvious that they value their NE advisers and trust and respect the technical advice they receive from them to make their agri-environment agreements work not only for the wildlife found on their farms but also ensuring that any scheme they run with makes sense, is practical to implement and fits around their farm businesses."

Star Site – The Cotswold Water Park SSSI

Robert Howells, Lead Adviser, Natural England

We have been highlighting the importance of SSSIs across Natura England. ‘Star sites’ are examples of SSSIs, big and small, that are either vital for reaching our Biodiversity 2020 target of 50% of sites in favourable condition, or help us achieve long term ecological restoration goals. We thought we’d share them with you in future issues of the Spotlight.

The Cotswold Water Park SSSI is located within the broader landscape of the Cotswold Water Park (CWP). The CWP comprises more than 150 lakes of varying sizes and ages created by gravel extraction which began in the 1930’s and continues today.

The whole park is 100 square km across the countryside of the upper Thames floodplain in north Wiltshire, south Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire. It stretches from Somerford Keynes at its western edge to Lechlade at the eastern end. The SSSI itself covers 135 hectares across 10 individual lakes which are clustered at the western and eastern edges of the Park.

The marl rich lakes created after gravel extraction are nationally scarce and support distinctive aquatic plant communities. Ten lakes were designated in 1994 for their diverse aquatic plant communities which are characterised by the abundance of spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, fennel pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus*, stoneworts *Chara* spp. and Canadian waterweed *Elodea canadensis*.

This new and still evolving landscape is now nationally and internationally important for wintering and breeding birds, whilst the initial aquatic plant interest has declined in the notified SSSI lakes due to a number of factors. This has led to the need to re-notify the CWP SSSI to reflect the lakes importance for birds now and in the future and to secure a better, more sustainably manageable suite of lakes for the aquatic plant interest.

One lake is managed as part of a Higher Level Stewardship agreement whilst a further three lakes should be coming into Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship in 2017. The remaining six lakes have no formal management agreements on them. The nature of the sites means that agri-environment schemes are not an easy fit.

Management of the ten units which make up the SSSI varies greatly. There are eight different site owners and the lakes are used for a variety of activities and all have varying degrees of public access which means that almost each unit has to be treated differently.



Cotswold Water Park

Four of the units are owned and managed by Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as nature reserves. Three are fisheries with varying levels of use. Two have no direct use but are on the site of holiday parks and the final unit is an outdoor educational centre with boating.

The Cotswold Water Park is planned to be a multi-function landscape once mineral extraction is complete. This means that tourism, recreation and conservation exist in very close proximity.

The cross-border and fragmented nature of the SSSI also adds to the complexity of management as multiple stakeholders must be considered and involved in decision making. Engaging early with all stakeholders helps make the best decisions for the future of the SSSI and the users of the wider Water Park.

The site is very unlikely to return to favourable by 2020 under the current designation. Currently all ten units of the SSSI are in un-favourable, declining condition. This is a result of a loss of species diversity and an increasing dominance of *Elodea nuttallii* in some waters. Loss of species diversity can be attributed to freshwater pollution from a variety of sources including agriculture and leaf litter from dense tree cover around some lakes.

Re-notification of the Cotswold Water Park SSSI for its internationally important overwintering water bird interest along with aquatic plants and other features will lead to more achievable delivery of a favourable SSSI condition for all the features of interest.

The whole site will be much closer to favourable condition under the planned re-notification and it will properly reflect an environment, which with significant human activity, provides a very important space for an important assemblage of flora and fauna.

Natural England's new chargeable advice service for SSSIs

Joanna Carter, Senior Adviser, Natural England

We are introducing a chargeable service to enable us to continue to offer a consistent level of quality advice for activities on Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Most cases will still be entirely supported by a free service. But you might wish to use the chargeable service if you have a complex case or if you want advice quickly.

If you own or manage a SSSI, or if you are a public body (such as a local authority), you have to apply for consent or assent from Natural England if you want to do activities which might damage the special interest of the site. You can choose to come to us for advice to help you write the consent or assent application.

Natural England has, for some time, charged for its advice on planning and wildlife licensing. We are now extending this service to include advice on assent or consent applications for activities on SSSIs. This will only be for the small number of cases which are complex or for fast-track requests.

The majority of SSSI advice requests we receive are for routine cases which can be dealt with quickly. We will continue to offer a limited amount of free advice on all cases. This will be sufficient to cover repeat and routine activities, including all regular agricultural activities. We will also offer free advice on activities primarily aimed at achieving favourable condition (ie at conserving the special notified features of a site).

We occasionally receive requests for advice on complex or novel activities. Examples are large scale recreational events, or infrastructure development which falls outside the planning system. The initial free-of-charge scoping conversation will identify issues and clarify what advice you need. If you want further advice on these more complex cases, you can now choose to use our chargeable advice service.

In addition, if you need advice in less than 28 days, you can now pay for our fast-track advice service. This will not apply in emergency situations.



Malham-
Arncliffe SSSI



Black hairstreak butterfly at Glaphorn Cow Pasture SSSI

You have a choice of whether or not to use this pre-application advice service; the statutory assessment of the consent or assent notice will continue to be provided free-of-charge.

Get free advice

- in all cases we will offer a limited amount of free advice which will be enough to cover repeat and regular activities, including all routine agricultural activities
- where the primary aim of the activity is the conservation management or restoration of the site (ie favourable condition)
- during an emergency response (eg flooding)

Pay for advice

You can choose to pay for advice if you want

- advice quickly (in under 28 days) through our fast-track service
- advice on more complex proposals for activities on protected sites. Our initial free-of-charge scoping conversation will help clarify what advice you need

Our aim in introducing these charges is to ensure that we can continue to offer a consistent level of free support on all cases, while maintaining the option to provide additional or fast-track advice when requested.

If you want to access this advice service, please either speak to your usual Natural England adviser or go to our website where you will find an advice request form and contact details:

- Owners & occupiers applying for consents for activities on SSSIs: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-areas-sites-of-special-scientific-interest>.
- Public bodies applying for assents for activities on SSSIs: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sites-of-special-scientific-interest-public-body-responsibilities>

Win win on the Eden SSSI

Christopher Turner, Lead Adviser, Natural England

The Eden is a very fast flowing river system rising on carboniferous limestone. It is designated as a SSSI and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The variation in geology and rainfall throughout the catchment means the river is very floristically rich, with 184 plant species recorded on the River Eden, more than any other river in the UK. Species include Atlantic salmon, trout, white clawed crayfish, sea lamprey, river lamprey and brook lamprey, bullhead and otter. The river's water is limestone rich and supports, not only floating mats of water crowfoot, but also a dynamically changing series of habitats such as swamp, rush pasture, back channels and ox-bow lakes.

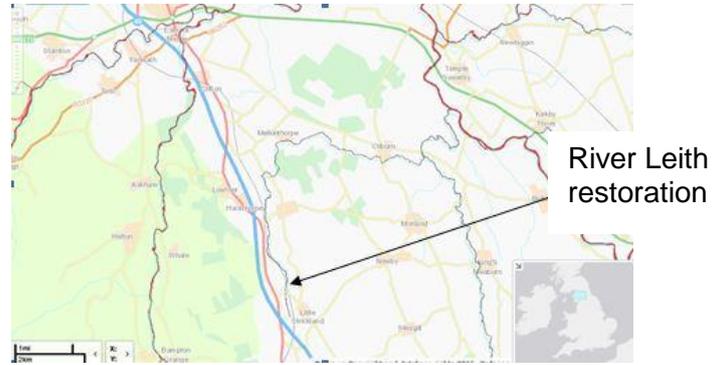
The River Leith tributary rises in Shap and drains into the main Eden, just south of Penrith. Of all the becks and rivers within the Eden SSSI/SAC it is the one which has suffered the longest from sediment and phosphorus impacting on water quality and aquatic biodiversity. The sub-catchment is relatively rich farmland and so lends itself to more intensive production than many of its surrounding catchments. It is, however, very good for water crowfoot as it is particularly limestone rich.

Efforts have been made to improve the river in the last few years including a major investment by United Utilities on Shap sewage treatment works which drain into the headwaters of the river. In addition, successful partnership work with the Eden Rivers Trust has led to the majority of the river being fenced off from livestock.

There has also been a re-meandering project at Thrimby where a heavily canalised section of the river was allowed back into its original meandered channel. Although it is too early to draw strong conclusions regarding numbers of crayfish, salmon and trout, what we can say with confidence is that the geomorphology of the river has substantially improved at this point and is now providing the complex and varied habitat that fish such as salmon and trout require for success.



Before



The tenant farmer, Richard Gordon, and the landlords (Lonsdale Estates) have been central to the project's success. Working together with the Eden Rivers Trust and Natural England, they have not only improved the habitats but also enabled timely investment on the farm. These include a new livestock access bridge across the re-meandered river, fencing off watercourses on the farm, planting up woodland on steep banks above the river, much needed boundary restoration as part of a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme agreement and Catchment Sensitive Farming grants towards roofing livestock feed yards and improved separation of clean and dirty water.

In addition, working with other schemes has resulted in some really positive changes in terms of manure and slurry management including, critically, soil management. Things are changing. Sward slitting, sward lifting and shallow injection systems are becoming more widely adopted. Two farmers recently said that having adopted CSF advice on soil management, they are seeing much less runoff and better grass growth, and this is despite heavier rainfall events.

I see this as two sides of the same coin, if Phosphorus and sediment have a detrimental effect on the SSSI, it also has a detrimental effect on the farm business by robbing it of the precious resources of nutrients and soil, which, together with water, are the very foundation of sustainable and efficient farming. Farmers in this catchment see the point of feeding their crops with nutrients, not the fish in the river.



After

We have a statutory duty to keep up-to-date contact details for our SSSI owners / occupiers. Please can we have the following details to ensure our records are correct:

- **Your name**
- **Name of SSSI**
- **Postal Address**
- **Email Address you would like correspondence sent to**



If you would like to receive future copies of the SSSI Annual Statement and newsletter, please let us know by email on sssi@naturalengland.org.uk or call 0845 600 3078

Photo credits

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