

Natural England Standard

National Nature Reserve (NNR) Management



1:0 About this standard

Background

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) include some of the best examples of England's wildlife and geology. There are 224 NNRs in England covering 94,000 ha. Natural England manages 142 of the NNRs on its own or jointly with others, and the remainder are managed by Approved Bodies.

NNRs were established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, which specified that they were for "preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area and/or for providing opportunities for the study of, and research into, those features". The Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 extended the role of NNRs to include the provision of opportunities for public enjoyment of nature and/or open-air recreation. The 'three pillars' of nature conservation, research and access are fundamental to NNRs.

Ninety-five percent of the area covered by the NNRs comprises Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Natural England has important statutory duties and roles on SSSIs that are set out in its Strategic Standard for SSSIs.

Natural England's statutory duties and roles in relation to NNRs

Natural England may declare sites which in its opinion meet the criteria that it sets out for National Nature Reserves. It can conversely de-declare NNRs.

Section 35 Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 allows Natural England to approve other organisations (Approved Bodies) to manage NNRs. Natural England will use this standard to ensure that potential Approved Bodies understand and have the capabilities needed to meet the standard at a specific site.

The Natural Environment White Paper (2011) and Biodiversity 2020 set out the policy context for managing NNRs. In particular, there is a need to: manage sites better; coordinate management across sites at a landscape scale; and strengthen the public's connections with the natural environment.

Working with the NNR Partnership, Natural England promotes England's NNR series and helps facilitate the exchange of information across the series. This is done by agreeing shared standards across the series with other NNR managers, by facilitating

the exchange of learning, and by promoting understanding and support for the NNR series amongst government and the public. Natural England provides a contact point for each NNR managed by Approved Bodies to support these functions.

2:0 The Standard

This standard applies to all NNRs, whether they are under Natural England's responsibility or are managed by Approved Bodies. It sets out the key principles for the management of National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and some specific expectations beneath them. It has been created by Natural England in consultation with Approved Bodies in order to support consistent quality of management across all NNR sites.

1. The NNR series will seek to represent the best places for England's biodiversity and geodiversity.

NNRs are selected as being amongst the best examples of England's special biodiversity and geodiversity. Our aspiration is that overtime the series becomes representative of this range of natural heritage. The role of the series is to look after the best examples of those features that rely on conservation action and/or to provide places where good management practice is developed and demonstrated to others.

- Natural England will maintain objective criteria consistent with its Designations Strategy for new NNRs and de-declaring existing sites.

2. A management plan for the NNR will be kept up-to-date and will reflect the requirements of this standard.

Proper management planning is an essential basis for exemplary management and for integrating and meeting all relevant aspects of this standard. A plan has a legal aspect too, by providing the consents required for specified operations likely to damage the special features of SSSIs¹. The NNR has a management plan that describes a site, identifies key features, analyses and sets objectives and specifies the management and monitoring prescriptions. The management plan is written within a year of the NNR being declared.

- The outcomes of management should be reviewed regularly against objectives and the Plan reviewed at least every five years to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

¹ The management plan, and changes to it, should be consented by Natural England's Responsible Officer for the SSSI.

- Records of key management activities are maintained that allow the effectiveness of management interventions to be monitored and reviewed.²

3. The management of designated features and the wider reserve is exemplary.

The primary management of the NNR should reflect its status as being amongst the country's most important sites for nature conservation. Management should address the needs of its designated nature conservation features, other priority habitats, species and geological interests, its historic environment and the ecosystem services it supports, whilst accommodating likely environmental change. It should consider potential impacts on features due to climate change and any adaptive measures required. The management of designated nature conservation features on NNRs will ensure these features are as a minimum maintained at, or progressing towards, Favourable Condition.

- SSSI features are monitored by Natural England according to Common Standards Monitoring³.
- The management of the NNR will contribute to priority species and habitats as specified in Biodiversity 2020 and subsequent national strategies.
- Other aspects of the reserve covered in sections 4 to 9 of this Standard should also be taken into consideration.

4. The NNR contributes to safeguarding and restoring ecosystems beyond its boundaries.

As core wildlife sites, NNRs have an important function in restoring ecosystems at a wider scale than the site itself, notably biodiversity, and in building resilience to climate change. This might be for example by acting as reservoirs and source sites for certain species to connect populations, through demonstrating successful management practices working with natural processes, by coordinating action with others at a larger scale, or by inspiring others to take action. The nature and extent of this function depends on the features on the NNR and the concerted action of partners.

- The management of an NNR will take account of its function in providing and supporting the restoration of ecosystems beyond the site and adaptation to climate change.

² Natural England uses CMSi - see [CMSi](#)

³ For further information, see JNCC website [Protected sites monitoring](#)

5. The management of the NNR provides opportunities for public enjoyment, quiet recreation and engagement.

Provision of public access and enjoyment, both physical and intellectual, can be combined with high standards of nature conservation. Audiences should be able to find out why an NNR is of special significance and have an opportunity to learn about and, wherever possible, directly experience these features. The information people see about a site should help reinforce their positive impressions and understanding of the NNR series. The nature and extent of public engagement will depend on the features at the NNR and the resources available.

- The management plan for the NNR should encourage opportunities to engage with a wide range of visitors consistent with the species and habitat objectives in the management plan.
- Physical access to the site for visitors must be considered where compatible with the nature conservation interest of the site and subject to appropriate assessment of potential impacts.
- Visitor information about the site must be made easily accessible for the public including via a website.
- It must be clear to visitors when they arrive at the main entrances that the site is a National Nature Reserve. The NNR symbol should be used in new signage at main entrances and principal interpretation materials⁴.
- The NNR will demonstrate good practice in conservation and visitor management.

6. Research into the natural environment at an NNR is promoted and knowledge is shared.

NNRs are often highly regarded as locations for research and study, especially in relation to the special features of the site. Information gathered from NNRs, including land management records, can contribute greatly to our understanding of the natural environment and how it is changing. NNR managers themselves rely on good access to data, historic and current, to inform management decisions. Research can be carried out in-house, by contractors, universities, volunteers, amateur experts and others.

- Opportunities and requests for monitoring, research and study into the natural environment should be positively considered.
- The outputs of research must be made available to the wider research community.

⁴ Brand guidelines available from Natural England.

- Species records should be well managed and should be made available to the National Biodiversity Network (the NBN).

7. Communities and stakeholders are involved in the management of the NNR.

Public participation in the management of a site, such as through volunteering, can be very effective in building public understanding and support for the natural environment. It is recognised that the extent to which community participation is feasible will depend upon the particular situation of each site. Management of an NNR should have regard to the views of stakeholders, particularly neighbours and local communities.

- Local communities and stakeholders should be given the opportunity to contribute to how the objectives of the management plan are achieved and to the direct management of the NNR.
- Volunteering opportunities of various types relevant to the reserve should be promoted where feasible.

8. NNR managers will work collaboratively to promote the NNR series and wider goals.

The collective contribution of NNRs to fulfil statutory purposes and wider policy goals is far greater than the individual contribution from each site. Sharing good management practice, scientific evidence and other information is beneficial and is encouraged.

- Each NNR must have a named first point of contact for the purpose of liaison with others in the network of NNRs.
- NNR managers will provide information when requested by the NNR Partnership in order to support promotion of the series and to establish whether this standard and the purposes of the NNR are being met.
- NNR managers should implement opportunities for collaboration with other nature reserve managers in order to enhance the visitor experience and the effective management of collective reserves.

9. NNRs will support opportunities to demonstrate exemplary conservation management to others

Many NNRs provide opportunities for innovating and demonstrating environmental land management techniques that can help build skills and knowledge more widely amongst the sector and other land managers. The sites themselves can also act as 'reference points', providing examples of habitats at or exceeding favourable condition.

- Opportunities and requests for developing and demonstrating land management techniques should be positively considered where compatible with the conservation objectives of the NNR.
- In particular, the effectiveness of management interventions should be assessed and the results communicated.