



Views About Management

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 28(4)

A statement of Natural England's views about the management of Cotswold Water Park Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

This statement represents Natural England's views about the management of Cotswold Water Park SSSI for nature conservation. It sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Natural England has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of SSSIs of its views about the management of the site.

Not all of the management principles will necessarily 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.

This Statement does not constitute consent for any of the 'operations requiring Natural England's consent'. The written consent of Natural England is required before carrying out any of those operations. Natural England welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Background

Gravel pits, despite their origins, may support wildlife equal in value to that of natural lakes, and can be important habitats for a range of specialised aquatic plant and animal species. The rich variety of wetland habitats associated with flooded gravel pits include extensive shallow and deep open water, vegetated margins, reedbed, fen, damp grassland, surface pools, ditches, scrub and wet woodland, all of which can add considerably to the diversity of the habitats and species present. For example, they often support important populations of wintering waterbirds and breeding bird assemblages typical of lowland open waters and their margins plus associated scrub habitats, as well as important populations of aquatic plants.

Management principles

A variety of water levels and chemistry within the main water bodies is necessary for the maintenance of both the bird species assemblages and charophytes. Charophytes (stoneworts) are aquatic plants which vary in size from a few centimetres to over a metre in length. They are often associated with the early stages of succession in newly dug or cleared waterbodies which have very clear, good quality water which is low in nutrients. They are particularly abundant in calcareous or brackish habitats. In some cases, the more robust species can develop perennial charophyte communities which can last for several decades. For the more sensitive pioneer species suitable habitat conditions require regular management of the early successional stage, so that they will not eventually be 'squeezed out' by more competitive aquatic and emergent vegetation. Such management can often be achieved by periodic and regulated re-disturbance of habitat.

The lateral movement of groundwater through the Cotswold Water Park is important in maintaining water quality, but where pollution occurs in one lake this means that further lakes may be affected in due course. All efforts should be made to eliminate point sources of pollution or prevent them developing. Management actions on the surrounding land should be carried out in ways that do not contribute to diffuse water pollution.

The presence of extensive shallow water and wet marginal substrates will provide the feeding conditions required by a variety of wintering, passage and breeding waterbirds, such as dabbling ducks and waders, whilst other species may require larger areas of open deep water. Structural diversity within and between stands of aquatic vegetation (including emergent, floating and submerged vegetation) can provide important habitat for the immature stages of many fish, and

invertebrates including different dragonfly and damselfly species that require a wide variety of vegetation types. All of these features are essential in supporting large populations of waterbirds. In common with other freshwater systems, artificial water bodies are susceptible to the introduction of invasive species such as non-native crayfish and Nuttall's waterweed *Elodea nuttallii*. Some management may be necessary to control these where they occur.

Standing waters and their surroundings are also popular for recreational activities such as angling and boating, which in many cases can be managed sustainably in a manner which takes account of the management of the water body for nature conservation. This will depend on the size and location of the water body and the nature of its special wildlife interest. Sustainable management can often be achieved through spatial and temporal zoning of activities to minimise disturbance to the breeding and wintering waterbirds in key areas and at sensitive times, such as the nesting season or during periods of severe weather.

There are major military airfields in the vicinity of the SSSI and, in the interests of public and pilot safety, some of the lakes are subject to disturbance and control activities to manage the risk of bird strike to aircraft operating from those airfields. It is anticipated that there will be a need for that activity to continue to be managed through, among other things, the production and implementation of bird hazard management plans and in accordance with the statutory processes for assents and consents.

Surrounding habitats such as scrub, wet and dry woodland and open grassland are important feeding habitat for several waterbird species, and scrub is important for breeding birds. These habitats may require some active management. Management should ensure that appropriate nesting and feeding conditions are maintained across the site for breeding, wintering and passage birds. This might include the maintenance of some open areas with unrestricted views and ensuring any sparsely vegetated islands, bars and margins retain an open character and are kept free of invading vegetation. Exposed areas of bare ground on islands should be maintained to provide nesting sites for breeding terns and little ringed plover, where present. Areas of lush, dense marginal and emergent vegetation should be retained where they are important for nesting birds. Large areas of wetland habitat such as reedbeds should be kept free from disturbance during both the breeding season and winter months. Where nesting grey herons *Ardea cinerea* and/or little egrets *Egretta garzetta* are present, management should aim to keep areas around the heronry quiet and undisturbed to maintain suitable roosting and nesting sites for the species. Whilst some specific management of these habitats may be necessary, with a site as large as the Cotswold Water Park habitat change over time in one lake may not be an issue in the wider context.

Date notified: 7 January 2021

Date confirmed: 1 October 2021