



Views About Management

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 28(4) as inserted by
Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

A statement of Natural England's views about the management of The Leasowes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

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

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

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 the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Management Principles

Species-rich neutral grassland with an assemblage of grassland fungi

Lowland neutral grasslands require active management if they are to retain their conservation interest, including their assemblages of grassland fungi. In order to maintain a species-rich sward and fungal assemblage, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise the sward becomes progressively dominated by tall and vigorous grasses which, together with an associated build-up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical and fungal diversity of the site.

In hay meadows, the above objective is traditionally achieved by closing the fields to stock in the late autumn and cutting the resultant growth as hay. The cut is usually done in mid-July, but the precise timing depends on local factors, including past management and current weather conditions. It should always be after ground-nesting birds have fledged their young and any short-lived, characteristic plants have set seed. The aftermath is then grazed in late summer/early autumn. Aftermath grazing is important for maintaining a species-rich sward through the control of competitive grasses. Light trampling of the soil by grazing animals also provides suitable sites for seedlings to establish and helps break down leaf litter. However, heavy poaching (i.e. excessive soil disturbance) must be avoided.

On neutral pastures, this management is achieved largely through grazing alone. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (such as the type or availability of stock, or the needs of individual plants, fungi or animals of conservation concern) but should aim to keep a relatively open sward without causing excessive poaching.

Other areas of grassland with fungal interest, such as the golf course at The Leasowes, should be managed by cutting to ensure that the sward is not too high during fruiting times of late summer and autumn and will therefore encourage a better display of fruiting bodies.

Applications of artificial fertilisers, herbicides and fungicides should be avoided. After mowing, any clippings should be removed from the site rather than left on the ground.

The grasslands at The Leasowes occur with a mosaic of hawthorn and gorse scrub, woodland and wood pasture. As well as supporting certain fungal communities, the transition between grassland, scattered scrub and woodland can provide buffering and connecting habitat, as well as being important for other wildlife, especially birds and invertebrates. Any surrounding, well-managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates.

Where possible, supporting habitat should be managed in order to help the possible expansion and connection of high value grasslands and fungal assemblages, in order to further increase the resilience of the interest features of the site.

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

Excessive trampling and erosion of grassland by cattle and the recreational use of the site, by foot or bike, should be avoided in areas that are particularly rich in fungi, and a precautionary approach to the destruction, picking or collection of fungus fruit bodies should be maintained.

Date notified: 7 February 2019