

HAMPSHIRE
BIODIVERSITY
PARTNERSHIP

Review of Land Management Provision within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Hampshire

Summary

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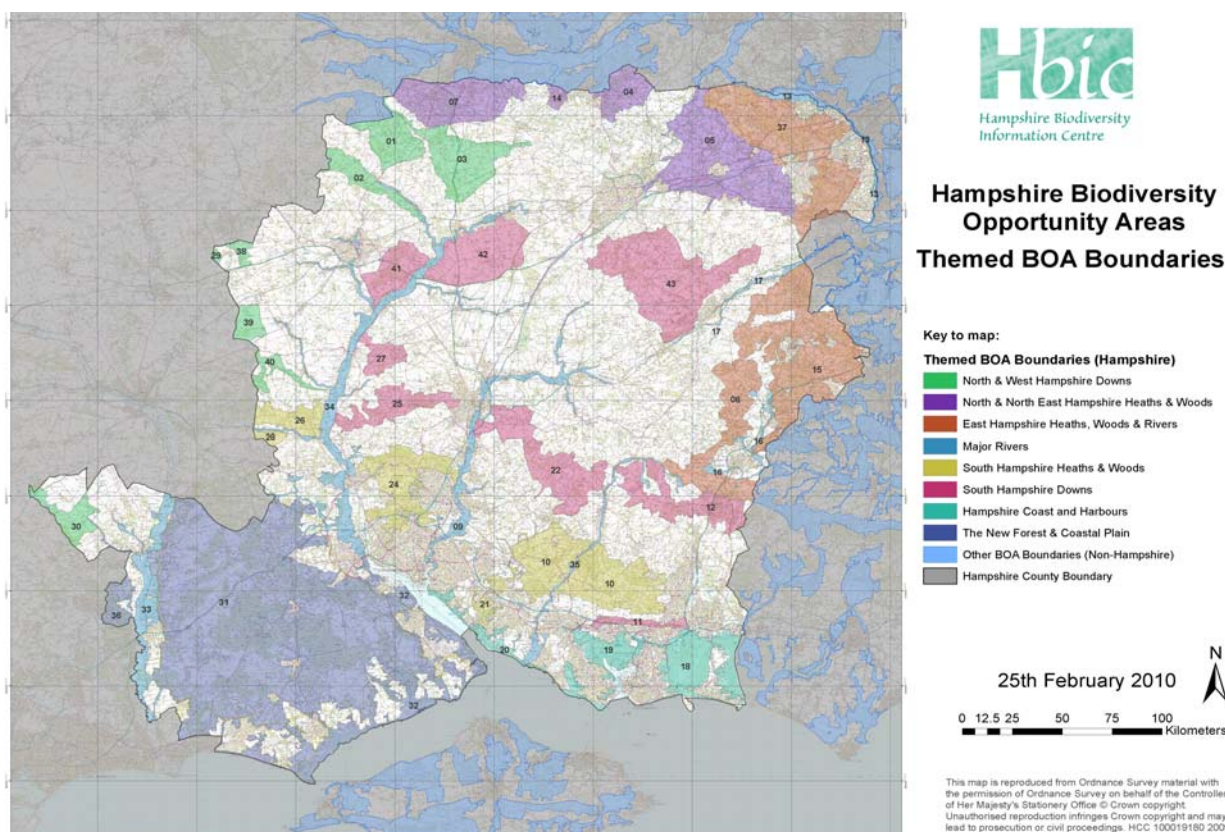
Purpose

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) represent a targeted landscape-scale approach to conserving biodiversity in Hampshire. They are areas which have been identified as providing the greatest opportunities for habitat creation and restoration and where resources can be focused to have the greatest positive impact for wildlife.

This report reviews land management provision within BOAs in Hampshire. Commissioned by Hampshire County Council on behalf of the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership, this landmark report provides a detailed assessment of current provision for land management within these key areas, enabling the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership to take an informed and considered way forward in supporting and developing robust and resilient biodiversity, in the face of pressures such as climate change.

Methodology

Research for this report included a review of existing data such as biodiversity habitat data, Opportunity Mapping, national grant scheme coverage, strategic influences and relevant strategies. In addition a comprehensive review of all current projects and partnerships was undertaken, with data gathered through questionnaires and a workshop. This was undertaken across all 41 BOAs (which were grouped by theme for the purposes of reporting).



Findings

North & West Hampshire Downs

This themed area contains eight BOAs, many of which extend across the county boundary, thereby requiring an emphasis on cross boundary initiatives. All the BOAs within this theme area are characterised by the dominance of chalk grassland.

BOAs: 01 Faccombe; 02 Vernham's Dean to Hurstbourne Tarant; 03 Northern Escarpment; West Woodhay to Watership Down

Provision for maintenance: Existing projects within the North Wessex Downs AONB should be sufficient to meet the needs of maintaining the biodiversity resource within these BOAs.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancement of chalk grassland should be sufficiently supported through existing projects led by the AONB. The main focus for habitat enhancement in this group of BOAs would appear to be within areas of woodland and again this should be supported through the AONB.

Provision for re-connection: The main focus of additional activity to support biodiversity restoration should be on re-connecting the remaining fragments of chalk grassland. Realising this significant potential represents a major challenge to restoring biodiversity within this cluster of BOAs. Current provision through the AONB project is aimed at meeting this potential and the high take-up of agri-environment schemes would seem to offer major opportunity for habitat recreation. However, it may well be that much of the action being undertaken within these schemes is being focused on species conservation for farmland birds. To achieve greater biodiversity gains, restoration of extensively grazed grassland needs to be given greater priority. There are also opportunities for providing more comprehensive and appropriate advice on the creation and management of new grasslands.

Governance: Although a number of organisations are involved, the main focus of biodiversity restoration in this group of BOAs is the North Wessex Downs AONB.

BOAs 29 Salisbury Plain; 30 Martin Down - Bouldsbury - Toyd Down; 38 Tidworth (Hants); 39 Porton Down (Hants); 40 Broughton Down (Hants)

Provision for maintenance: Maintenance of biodiversity sites within this collection of BOAs is generally well provided for.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancing the biodiversity value of key sites is being achieved through existing projects, although some areas do not have

habitat based enhancement projects in operation and this may be resulting in a significant gap in biodiversity provision. There are possible mechanisms for initiating further enhancement work. Consideration should therefore be given to whether there is a need to seek additional funding for existing projects and/or extend the scope of current projects to include additional areas.

Provision for re-connecting: There is significant potential for re-creation of chalk grassland within this cluster of BOAs, particularly through Environmental Stewardship (ES), although the significant Ministry of Defence (MOD) ownership in key areas may limit the extent of uptake of ES in these BOAs. There are opportunities for providing more comprehensive and appropriate advice on grassland creation and management. In addition, there are Local Biodiversity Action Plans in place that may provide a strategic framework in which to promote habitat recreation in this area.

Governance: Key deliverers are the MOD who own and manage significant areas within these BOAs, and work in partnership with RSPB, Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation.

North and North East Hampshire Heaths & Woods

BOAs: 04 Silchester Tadley (Hants); 05 Loddon Catchment; 07 East Woodhay to Headley; 14 Ashford Hill (Hants)

Three of these four BOAs span the county boundary, thereby requiring an emphasis on cross boundary initiatives.

Provision for maintenance: Maintaining the biodiversity resource within these four BOAs is being achieved through existing work, apart from the Loddon Catchment BOA. This BOA requires additional effort in order to restore favourable condition to particular Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and positive management to particular Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

Provision for enhancement: Enhancement should be catered for through existing projects operating within this theme area. However, there may be a need for better coordination between projects, a fresh focus on the restoration and re-creation of biological rich grasslands and to secure future funding. In addition, opportunities to tie in with other key features of the area – rivers, wetlands and semi-natural woodlands, could be explored.

Provision for re-connection: Re-connecting the biodiversity resource within and between these four BOAs must be of the highest priority, due in particular to development pressure and habitat vulnerability and fragmentation. This is best achieved through the development of locally based projects which should aim to link existing unimproved grasslands and manage new and existing areas effectively.

Governance: The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust are very active in three of the four BOAs in this area and it would be appropriate for them to take

the lead in these areas. Within the fourth BOA (Ashford Hill BOA) Natural England are best placed to act as the lead organisation.

East Hampshire Heaths, Woods and Rivers

This theme area borders the eastern side of Hampshire and incorporates three extensive and distinct BOAs, two of which are dominated by heathland and one by woodland and chalk grassland.

BOA 08: The East Hampshire Hangers

Provision for maintenance: Maintaining biodiversity value will depend upon maintenance of the steep and difficult to manage woodlands within the area and a focus on SINC, the management status of which is largely unknown within this BOA. Work to support the management of SINC should include establishing effective links with owners.

Provision for enhancement: This area is relatively resilient to change but opportunities for enhancement exist through implementation of carefully planned management.

Provision for re-connection: There is much potential to increase the extent of woodland and grassland in this BOA. Realising the potential for increasing the extent of chalk grassland is the most important priority for restoring biodiversity through re-connecting habitat in this BOA.

Governance: There is significant potential for a partnership approach to restoring biodiversity within this BOA. Key partners could include the National Trust, Hampshire County Council and the South Downs National Park, with support from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and East Hampshire District Council.

BOAs: 15 Wealden Heaths; and 37 Thames Basin Heaths & Plantations (Hants)

Provision for maintenance: Designated wildlife sites occupy a significant proportion of these two BOAs and maintenance of the existing biodiversity resource seems to be well provided for through a combination of Natural England, MOD and County Council initiatives. However there may need to be a greater focus on promoting the positive management of SINC and working with private landowners.

Provision for enhancement: There are a number of projects, partnerships and strategic influences aimed at enhancing the biodiversity resource of these two BOAs. However, there is still significant potential to enhance the biodiversity value of the enclosed woodlands, restore grazing to former wood pastures and the linking of habitats.

Provision for re-connection: Despite the many projects aimed at maintaining and enhancing the existing biodiversity resource, the heathland habitat of these two

BOAs remains broken into many small and often difficult to manage fragments. There are still major challenges which require innovative and radical changes in land-use requiring restoration of extensive areas of alien tree plantations to heathland and acid grassland.

Governance: Achieving biodiversity restoration within these two BOAs requires urgent and coordinated action between the many landowning and administrative organisations both within the county and across the county boundary. Key players include the South Downs National Park, Forestry Commission, MOD, National Trust, Local Authorities and Charitable Trusts.

Major Rivers

This theme area is the only one not located in a distinct geographical area of the county. A total of seven river valleys are included in the Major Rivers theme area. The analysis of biodiversity provision has been split between the four major chalk rivers and the three smaller mixed geology rivers.

BOAs: 09 Itchen Valley; 33 Avon Valley, 34 Test Valley and 35 Meon Valley

Provision for maintenance: Hampshire contains three nationally or internationally important chalk rivers which have been identified as being in poor ecological status. Therefore a major emphasis is currently being placed on the restoration of the rivers delivered through a number of Environment Agency led projects and policy/strategic frameworks. Investment and support for these catchment wide initiatives are particularly relevant to these BOAs, as some of the most intractable problems are with water quality and high phosphate loading, often caused by diffuse pollution. Continued significant investment is still needed to support this work, with particular focus on point source discharge.

Provision for enhancement: Maintenance and enhancement of the riverine BOAs is closely related, as work is needed to restore as well as improve the biodiversity of these rivers. As mentioned above, there are a number of projects, policies and strategies aimed at restoring and enhancing the biodiversity of these rivers. Work is focusing on flood plain and wetland restoration and species conservation which it is hoped will provide a showcase to demonstrate management to attract breeding waders back to key areas.

Provision for re-connection: The maintenance and enhancement of the existing protected wildlife sites in the main chalk river valleys appear to be well catered for. However, outside of the protected sites there is a need to re-connect the river with its flood plain and to re-connect the river mouth with the sea through naturalised estuaries. Due to a limitation with water level management plans, there is a significant gap in the necessary holistic approach to integrating river management with management of the flood plain water levels in those sections of the flood plain outside of SSSIs. There is therefore a need for projects to focus on the re-integration of rivers with their flood plains and the restoration of extensively grazed flood plain grasslands.

Governance: Management of the county's chalk river valleys is largely within the control of the Environment Agency and Natural England and they are best placed to continue to work in partnership with others to develop locally based projects.

BOAs: 13 Blackwater Valley; 16 Rother Valley (Hants); 17 Northern Wey Valley (Hants)

Provision for maintenance: There is considerable support for the maintenance of the existing biodiversity resources within the Blackwater Valley and Rother Valley through existing projects. However, provision in the Northern Wey is less comprehensive.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancing the limited biodiversity resources of these three BOAs is provided for through the projects and partnerships mentioned above.

Provision for re-connection: There is scope for the re-creation of significant areas of biodiverse habitat within these three river valleys, not only along the length of the valley but also linking between habitats on either side of the valley. Realising the potential to create and re-connect biodiversity habitats in these three BOAs will depend upon the work of the existing projects operating in these areas. There seems to be ample scope for these to utilise the strategies and strategic influences already present, to secure significant biodiversity gains.

Governance: The Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and Local Authorities are currently very active in the Blackwater Valley and it would seem appropriate that this partnership should take the lead in promoting biodiversity restoration in this BOA. In the Rother Valley, East Hampshire District Council has long taken the initiative in association with local groups and on the Northern Wey, action for biodiversity seems to be led by FWAG although there is also a role for East Hampshire District Council and the Environment Agency.

South Hampshire Heaths and Woods

The South Hampshire Heaths & Woods theme area contains five BOAs of varying character ranging from the chalk landscape to the historic hunting forests and river valleys. The analysis of biodiversity provision has been split into three sections with chalk BOAs being considered separately from the two former hunting forests and the Hamble Valley.

BOAs: 10 Forest of Bere; and 24 Ampfield – Baddesley – Chilworth – Lordswood

Provision for maintenance: Although rich in biodiversity, these two BOAs contain few areas designated as SSSIs. However they do contain extensive areas of SINCs. Maintaining woodland biodiversity within these two BOAs is catered for within existing woodland grant schemes and policies. However, many sites of agriculturally unimproved grassland are vulnerable. Existing projects are able to address problems of maintaining the unimproved grassland resource, but there is

a need for wider coverage of this sort of project to address the conservation and management of this group of vulnerable habitats.

Provision for enhancement: There is wide scope for enhancing the biodiversity value of the woodlands within these two BOAs. There is also scope for enhancing the biodiversity value of the grassland habitats. Enhancing the biodiversity resource can be achieved through Environmental Stewardship and the English Woodland Grant Scheme and there would appear to be scope to significantly expand the area of managed woodland in these BOAs. The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) initiative should also provide a significant source of funding for enhancing and re-connecting biodiversity habitats through the Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy.

Provision for re-connection: Re-connecting the fragmented resource of agriculturally unimproved grassland would seem to be the priority in these two BOAs. Funding for this should be made available through the PUSH GI Strategy. There is scope for further restoring woodland links through woodland creation.

Governance: Responsibility for making things happen for biodiversity in these two BOAs falls between a number of organisations. The Local Authorities under the umbrella of PUSH are potentially the most significant influence and should be the major force for securing biodiversity gains through GI. The Forestry Commission are also a key organisation, as is the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Natural England.

BOA 21 Hamble Valley

Provision for maintenance: There would appear to be sufficient resources to ensure the maintenance of biodiversity value of the designated wildlife sites within this BOA.

Provision for enhancement: Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement occur within the woodlands and there is particular scope for more woodland management within privately owned woods.

Provision for re-connection: Woodland within this BOA is generally well connected but there are significant opportunities to link and extend the small but important lowland meadow resource. The PUSH GI Strategy should provide the vision, impetus and funding to secure the needed re-connection and link to the Forest of Bere.

Governance: Hampshire County Council plays a pivotal role in the management of the River Hamble and its adjacent Manor Farm Country Park and associated local nature reserves at Bursledon and Warsash. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust also has a significant presence in the area. However the most influential organisations are the Local Authorities within PUSH, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency.

BOAs: 26 Tytherley Woods; 28 Dean Hill (Hants)

Provision for maintenance: Maintenance of biodiversity within these two BOAs is well catered for by a combination of landownership and project support, although one of the key projects (Tytherley Woods Project) is due to end in December 2010. Cross county boundary working is also vital for the maintenance of the biodiversity resource within these two BOAs.

Provision for enhancement: There is significant potential for enhancing the biodiversity of these two BOAs including considerable scope to enhance woodland habitat and manage glades, meadows and wetlands.

Provision for re-connection: There is much scope to improve woodland connectivity by extending the area of woodland in the Tytherley Woods BOA, both along water courses and linking existing ancient woodlands. There are also opportunities for the re-creation of chalk grassland and a need for further research, for example trialling management techniques for grassland establishment.

Governance: Managing biodiversity restoration within Tytherley Woods will rely upon a collaboration of the National Trust, Forestry Commission, Butterfly Conservation and Natural England. Within the Deane Hill BOA, collaboration is needed between the MOD, Natural England and possibly Butterfly Conservation and the Wiltshire and Hampshire Wildlife Trusts.

South Hampshire Downs

The BOAs within this Theme Area have been divided into three groups in order to analyse their provision for biodiversity.

BOAs: 11 Portsdown Hill; 12 South Downs (East Hampshire); and 22 South Downs St Catherine's Hill to Beacon Hill

Provision for maintenance: Maintaining the important chalk grassland resource found in these three BOAs appears to be well catered for by Environmental Stewardship. In addition, projects within the South Downs National Park and Local Authority projects focusing on Portsdown Hill should ensure the maintenance of biodiversity within these three BOAs.

Provision for enhancement: There would appear to be scope to enhance the management of Portsdown Hill to further restore areas of open chalk grassland. There are also significant opportunities for enhancing the management of lowland mixed deciduous woodlands.

Provision for re-connection: There would appear to be significant potential for re-connecting the calcareous grassland resources of the two South Downs BOAs and a huge potential for restoration of chalk grassland. There is also a need for further research, for example trialling management techniques for grassland establishment and for providing appropriate advice to landowners.

Governance: The South Downs National Park need to play a pivotal role with support from Natural England, RSPB, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the Forestry Commission and the Local Authorities involved in the PUSH area.

BOAs: 25 Bere Ashley; 27 Somborne Woods

Provision for maintenance: The combination of publicly owned biodiversity hot spots, the presence of traditionally managed coppice woodlands and existing projects/initiatives within these two BOAs maintains their biodiversity.

Provision for enhancement: There is significant scope for enhancing the biodiversity value of the ancient replanted woodlands that are a particular feature of Bere Ashley BOA. The Forestry Commission could take the lead in this process by restoring West Wood to semi-natural condition.

Provision for re-connection: The main focus for re-connecting biodiversity will be through the re-creation of areas of chalk grassland in both BOAs. There is also a need for further research, for example trialling management techniques for grassland establishment and for providing appropriate advice to landowners.

Governance: Key players are Hampshire County Council, the Forestry Commission Winchester City Council, the National Trust and Butterfly Conservation.

BOAs: 41 Harewood Forest; 42 Longparish Important Arable Plants Area; 43 Herriard Wooded Dowland Plateau

Provision for maintenance: Maintaining the biodiversity of Harewood Forest will depend upon appropriate woodland management. However, there are currently no grant schemes operating over the Forest. Within the Longparish Important Plant Area maintaining the biodiversity requires implementation of appropriate arable options within Environmental Stewardship. Within the Herriard Downland Plateau much of the current biodiversity value is in positive conservation management, despite there being little grant support to fund this work.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancing woodland biodiversity is the main priority for Harewood Forest and the Herriard Downland Plateau. At present the English Woodland Grant Scheme does not appear to be operating well within either of these BOAs. Mechanisms for supporting and encouraging private woodland owners and managers to enter the scheme should be considered to achieve better uptake. However, despite the lack of grant funding for woodland management, woodlands in both BOAs appear to be in positive management. Further investigation is needed to identify how this management is being funded and if there are ways in which it can be further supported. There seems to be a role for a project specifically focused on promoting the enhancement of woodland biodiversity within these two BOAs. Enhancing the arable farmland biodiversity appears to be well catered for within existing Environmental Stewardship agreements and projects.

Provision for re-connection: There is significant potential for the re-creation of areas of chalk grassland. There needs to be further work to better identify potential chalk grassland sites. There is also a need for further research to develop appropriate advice to landowners regarding grassland establishment and management. There is also potential for creation of new woodland, woodland corridors and hedgerows to provide improved links between fragmented and isolated woodlands. Apart from the Forestry Commission and Natural England grants, there are no projects aimed specifically at promoting the expansion of woodland cover or enhancing existing woodlands within these BOAs.

Governance: The Forestry Commission would seem the best organisation to take a lead in the restoration of woodland biodiversity within these BOAs with support from Hampshire County Council, Natural England and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Grassland biodiversity restoration projects would be best led by the Wildlife Trust in partnership with Natural England.

Hampshire Coast and Harbours

BOAs: 18 Chichester/Langstone Harbours & Hayling Island; 19 Portsmouth Harbour; 20 The Solent

Provision for maintenance: Maintaining the biodiversity of the intertidal areas of these three BOAs is being addressed through existing projects. The PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy should also provide a mechanism to maintain para-maritime habitats within these three BOAs, although concern has been expressed that this Strategy may not offset impacts of increased pressures on coastal habitats. This issue needs to be addressed by the Local Authorities within PUSH.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancement of coastal biodiversity in these three BOAs will focus on freeing the coasts to react to predicted changes in sea level and coastal processes, assisted by existing projects. The need to provide alternative undisturbed coastal sites for breeding and wintering sea birds and waterfowl is also critically important and further work is needed to address this issue. The PUSH GI Strategy could provide a mechanism by which this issue could be addressed.

Provision for re-connection: There is a need for further research to understand the functioning of key habitats. Provision needs to be made to address the increasing pressure being placed upon these functional units of coastal biodiversity in the Solent.

Governance: Management of the coastal environment is the responsibility of a complex of different organisations. The Solent Forum provides a useful umbrella organisation to co-ordinate action.

The New Forest and Coastal Plain

BOAs: 31 New Forest; 36 Ringwood Forest (Hants)

Provision for maintenance: Although the maintenance of biodiversity within the extensive areas of SSSI face many problems there are numerous projects and partnerships aimed at addressing these. The maintenance of the area outside the New Forest SSSI is less assured although there are still projects available which should be able to address the maintenance of biodiversity in these areas. In addition the Forestry Commission who own and manage large areas of land in the BOAs have the responsibility to maintain much of the area.

Provision for enhancement: Although much has already been done, there is huge scope for habitat enhancement within these BOAs with a particular focus on restoration of grazing, management of ancient woods, restoration of heathland and management of aquatic habitats. This should be covered by the numerous projects and partnerships operating in the area.

Provision for re-connection: Enhancement of existing habitat is closely linked with the re-connection of fragmented habitats. The amount of potential habitat that has been identified is huge and includes habitats that can be restored such as heathland restored from conifer plantation, as well as new habitat that can be created, for example lowland meadow habitat created from existing agriculturally improved grasslands. The Forestry Commission has made some progress in restoring conifer plantations to open habitats, but much more needs to be done.

Governance: Realising the huge potential for habitat enhancement and re-connection within these BOAs requires complex working arrangements between many organisations. Key amongst these are the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Verderers, Natural England and the National Trust.

BOA: 32 New Forest Coast

Provision for maintenance: Issues associated with maintaining biodiversity needs to be addressed through existing policy and strategic frameworks such as the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan, and will require the creation of considerable areas of new coastal habitat. The PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy should provide a key initiative in addressing concerns about the impact of a growing Hampshire population on biodiversity, although there are concerns it is currently failing to achieve this. More ambitious and visionary GI projects need to be identified. In addition, ensuring a greater proportion of SINC's are in positive management will be a key objective for the future. It is also important to maintain links and the functioning of wider pastoral economy within the area, requiring continued input from organisations such as the Verderers, National Park Authority and the Wildlife Trust.

Provision for enhancement: Enhancing the biodiversity value of this BOA is being addressed through existing Plans and Programmes which aim to manage the coastline. As coastal squeeze is the major factor threatening the biodiversity of the BOA, there is a need to make progress with initiatives that allow the coast

to move landwards. Some progress has been made in achieving this objective but there is scope for further impetus for enhancing these coastal habitats. There is also a need to address the disturbance and habitat erosion issues associated with public access and recreation on the coast. Co-ordinated action, possibly through the Solent Forum, needs to be taken to address these issues. There is also significant scope for the enhancement of important woodlands and meadows in this BOA.

Provision for re-connection: There is a need to maintain the ecological networks used by migrant birds. Initiatives currently exist which help inform our understanding of these networks. It will be important that partnerships such as the Solent Forum take action to ensure these are maintained and enhanced. There is also a major issue of maintaining and enhancing the connection between the coast and the Crown Lands of the New Forest by restoring access to further sections of the coast for commoners' livestock. As with many other BOAs, it is the small and isolated fragments of biodiverse grassland that have the most urgent need for expansion and re-connection. There are many projects operating in the area that might be able to develop such management.

Governance: Restoring biodiversity within these BOAs will require partnership working between a number of key organisations. The development of Biodiversity Action Plans and the PUSH GI Strategy could provide a strategic resource to achieve this. On the coast, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Solent Forum will be important partners. Natural England clearly plays an over-arching role across this BOA.

Conclusion

This review has identified a total of 112 projects and partnerships and a further 54 strategies and plans. This is an impressive total and reflects the large amount of activity that is taking place in the county to conserve and enhance its biodiversity.

However, the analysis of provision has identified gaps and opportunities within all 41 BOAs, many of which are high priority. Consideration now needs to be given to taking this work forward, for example through the development of more specific management strategies for each BOA. This will be undertaken by the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership Land Management Forum, which has its inaugural meeting in November 2010.