

**SUFFOLK LOCAL  
BIODIVERSITY  
ACTION PLAN**

**Maritime cliffs and slopes**

**1 Definition of habitat**

Maritime cliffs and slopes are defined as sloping to vertical faces on the coastline where breaks in the slopes may be formed by slippage and/or coastal erosion. Whilst there is no defined minimum height or angle of slope to distinguish a cliff, the extent of the cliff-top, also covered in this plan, is determined by the landward extent of the maritime influence, (i.e. the limit of salt spray deposition). On the seaward side the plan extends to the limit of the supralittoral zone (immediately above high water) and so includes splash zone lichens and/or other species which occupy this habitat. Maritime cliffs are broadly classified as either hard or soft depending upon their underlying geology. In Suffolk there are only soft cliffs and slopes.

**2 Current status**

The UK BAP estimates that approximately 4000 km of the UK coastline is classified as maritime cliff and slope habitat.

In Suffolk there are approximately 44 km of maritime cliffs and slopes and around 20% of these have cliff-tops comprising agricultural land. Semi-natural habitat, principally scrub, woodland and more rarely heathland and acid grassland occurs on around 40% and the remainder is almost exclusively developed, either within or close to built up areas.

The steeper cliffs, where slippages and erosion frequently occur, provide important breeding sites for sand martins (*Riparia riparia*) and the unusual combination of friable soils, hot, dry substrates and open conditions is able to support invertebrates which occur rarely elsewhere. There are recent records of fulmars, (*Fulmarus gracialis*) nesting on one stretch of maritime cliff.

Only a small proportion, 6.9 km (c. 16%) of the soft cliffs and slopes in Suffolk have been notified as SSSI. However some 0.7 km has also been included in Special Protection Areas under the EC Birds Directive and 1.4 km in Special Areas of Conservation under the EC Habitats Directive. The nature conservation value of the maritime cliffs is also recognised through the inclusion of approximately 2 km on County Wildlife Sites register.

Some 7% of the maritime cliff and slope is in the ownership or control of non-governmental organisations and English Nature. Almost all of the cliffs and slopes lie within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### **3 Current factors affecting the species or habitats**

There is currently no clear indication of trends in the status of maritime cliffs and slopes on the Suffolk coast however the following factors are considered to have a significant influence.

- Coastal erosion is a highly significant factor but does not necessarily result in a loss of biological or geological interest. Erosion is an important process which ensures the renewal of geological exposures and the commencement of botanical succession.
- Coast protection works, involving the construction of hard revetments in front of the cliff face or the re-profiling of cliffs and slopes and re-vegetating with non-native species can result in a reduction in biodiversity.
- There are a variety of cliff-top developments on parts of the Suffolk coastline ranging from individual houses to holiday camps to a nuclear power station. Such development can result in increased demand for further coast protection works which in turn may further reduce the biodiversity interest.
- The post-war intensification of agriculture has resulted in the loss of natural or semi-natural vegetation from many cliff-tops. Arable farming and outdoor pig-rearing have increased the frequency of runoff which has the potential to affect both the composition of plant communities and the rate of erosion of cliffs where land drains discharge from the cliff face.
- The popularity of some undeveloped parts of the coastline for informal recreation has resulted in some soft cliffs and slopes suffering from increased rates of erosion. The proposed introduction of improvements to coastal access, if not carefully planned and managed, could exacerbate this situation.

### **4 Current action**

Work has commenced on the preparation of a replacement Shoreline Management Plan for Sub-cell 3C covering the coast from Lowestoft to Landguard Point. The table of features and issues prepared at the outset of the plan preparation records the presence of Maritime Cliff and Slope BAP habitat at all appropriate locations. The coast north from Lowestoft south beach to the county border with Norfolk is covered by the Shoreline Management Plan for Sub-cell 3B.

### **5 Targets**

The targets established in this plan are in accordance with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Maritime Cliff and Slope and aim to maintain, restore and where possible expand the extent of maritime cliff and slope.

- Seek to maintain the 2006 baseline of existing resource of maritime cliff, cliff top and slope habitat (as mapped by Suffolk Biological Records Centre by 2010).
- Maintain wherever possible free functioning of coastal physical processes acting on maritime cliff and slope habitats.

- Ensure that all maritime cliffs and slopes of SSSI or county wildlife site status are in favourable condition or unfavourable recovering by 2010 and 2020 respectively.
- Retain the amount of maritime cliff and slope habitats unaffected by coastal defence and other engineering works.
- Where possible increase the amount of maritime cliff and slope habitats unaffected by coastal defence and other engineering works.
- Increase the area of cliff-top semi-natural habitats by a minimum of 15% by 2020

## 6 Actions

( for a five year period then reviewed using 2006 as the baseline).

Action (apply SMART approach and include locations where relevant).	Achieve by date	Delivery partners (identify lead and support partners)
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>		
Wherever feasible in the preparation of SMP2 apply policies that encourage the free functioning coastal process. At minimum ensure the undefended cliffs & slopes remain so.	2010	SMP Steering Group ICZM Initiative
Ensure planning policy discourages development close to retreating cliff-tops	2009	Local Planning Authorities
Consider the feasibility of relocating existing vulnerable cliff-top developments	Annual	Local Planning Authorities (considering exceptions to LDF policy)
Target environmental stewardship schemes to encourage the restoration of semi-natural cliff-top habitats	2007 -2010	Natural England
<b>Site safeguard and management</b>		
Apply conservation designations to all remaining maritime cliff and slope that meet national or international criteria and ensure appropriate management	2011	Natural England
Promote the management of cliff-top maritime grassland and heath by scrub control and/ or grazing, to ensure all CWSs are under sympathetic management.	2007-2011	Natural England, SC&HU, SWT, Suffolk FWAG
Apply Higher Level Stewardship schemes to encourage the restoration and management of semi-natural cliff-top habitats(5% of total area)	2007-2011	Natural England, SC&HU, Suffolk FWAG
<b>Research and monitoring</b>		
Review the impact of agricultural land drainage on cliffs and slopes, especially in SACs and review the effectiveness of the consents	?	Natural England, Environment Agency

procedure.		
Monitor the changes in the quality and extent of maritime cliff and slope before and following the implementation of the Suffolk SMP.	2010	SMP Steering Group, SBRC
<b>Advisory</b>		
Encourage the uptake in HLS schemes with objectives of restoring semi-natural vegetation on cliff tops by advising landowners. Two schemes per year.	2009 and annually thereafter	Natural England, Suffolk FWAG
<b>Communications and publicity</b>		
Promote awareness of importance of maritime cliffs & slopes and objectives of this action plan by publishing guidance and publicising successful initiatives.	2008 and annually thereafter	SC&HU, Coastal Habitats Working Group

*Objectives currently not achievable by the plan partners:*