

NELMS target statement for Mendip Hills (NCA 141)

Your application is scored and a decision made on the points awarded. Both top priorities and lower priorities score points but you should select at least one top priority.

Scoring is carried out by...

Choosing priorities

To apply you should choose at least one of the top priorities, and you can choose lower priorities - this may help with your application.

Top priorities

Priority group	Priority type
Biodiversity	Priority habitats
	Priority species
Water	Water quality
	Flood and coastal risk management
Historic environment	Designated historic and archaeological features
	Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance
Woodland priorities	Woodland management
	Woodland planting
Landscape	
Climate Change	
Multiple environmental benefits	

Lower priorities

Priority group	Priority type
Lower priorities	Water quality

	Archaeological and historic features
	Woodland

Biodiversity - top priorities

Priority habitats

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that maintains, restores and creates priority habitats.

Maintain priority habitat such as:

- Lowland heathland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Lowland meadows
- Traditional orchard

Restore priority habitats (especially proposals which make existing sites bigger or help join up habitat networks) such as:

- Lowland heathland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Lowland meadows
- Traditional orchard

Create priority habitats – to extend or link priority habitat to increase connectivity and reduce fragmentation. Defra is looking for proposals to create priority habitat that will also contribute significantly to improvements in:

- water quality
- air quality
- flood and coastal risk management

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Proposals to maintain or restore Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs including SACs) with eligible features are a priority, and both on-site and off-site options (such as to reduce diffuse water and air pollution impacts on SSSIs) are relevant.

Priority species

For the majority of priority species found on the priority habitats listed above, their ecological requirements can be met through good generic habitat management. Managing for those essential elements associated with priority habitats - in particular bare ground, areas of scrub, varying sward structures will allow these species to thrive.

A number of priority species associated with the area require specific and tailored management and advice. You should carry out land management practices and capital works that meet the specific needs of the following priority species:

- Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- Marsh Fritillary
- Greater Horseshoe Bat
- Lesser Horseshoe Bat
- Starved Wood-sedge
- Locally important species of whitebeam including: *Sorbus eminens s.s.*
- *Anaptychia ciliaris* subsp. *Ciliaris*, A lichen
- Lapwing

Further guidance on the priority species in this area that require more tailored targeted management and advice, as listed, can be found:

- [Links to guidance on those bespoke species' needs found in this area]

Parts of this area are targeted for their woodland bird assemblage, i.e. they contain area(s) assessed as being nationally significant for four or more species (of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pipit, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Marsh Tit, Lesser Redpoll and Hawfinch). Where your land includes such areas, you should carry out land management practices and capital works that:

- maintain/enhance conditions for woodland birds

Water - top priorities

Water quality

The area has particular issues with:

- phosphates, nitrates, sediment, faecal Indicator organisms (FIOs), pesticides, eutrophication & algae in the Bristol Avon Rural, North Somerset Streams and Brue and Axe catchments.

This includes catchments to:

- groundwater drinking sources close to Cheddar, Egford, the Forum Springs (Yelling Mill/Windsor Hill) and Hillhead springs ;

- bathing waters at Weston-super-mare uphill slipway affected by faecal indicator organisms (FIOs);
- the Somerset Levels and Moors Natura 2000 site and SSSI and North Somerset Levels and Moors SSSI catchments affected by phosphates, nitrates and sediment;
- The Bristol Avon Rural catchment contains the drinking water safeguard zones for Natura 2000 sites Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes which are at risk of contamination by pesticides, phosphate, nitrate, sediment and algae.
- drinking water safeguard zones for Cheddar Reservoir which is at risk of contamination by phosphates, nitrates and algae

You should consider options and capital works that address these issues. These are detailed in X guidance document. These options help to improve water quality by controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants. For this area, this includes:

- nutrients from fertilisers and manures
- sediment problems from soil erosion and run-off
- faecal bacteria from both manures and livestock
- pesticides from their use and disposal

Flood and Coastal Risk Management

The priority catchments for this area include:

- River Banwell: upstream of Banwell where the watercourse is non main river.
- Lox Yeo: upstream of the M5 motorway where the drainage comes of the steep slopes of the Mendips.
- The River Chew and tributaries: upstream of Chew Valley Lake
- The Yeo (Congresbury): upstream of Compton Martin where it is non main river and falls steeply off the Mendip Hills.
- Cam Brook and tributaries: Upstream of Litton where it is non main river and falls steeply off the Mendip Hills.
- Wellow Brook and tributaries: Upstream of Chilcompton where it is non main river and falls steeply off the Mendip Hills.

The Mendip hills are a relatively high plateau adjacent to the Somerset Level and Moors. In this area you should carry out land management and capital works that intercept and retain water, reduce run off and erosion and maximise the benefits from natural flood management actions throughout the catchments. You should consider options that:

- Reduce the amount and rate of surface water run-off
- Reduce soil erosion

Actions to address flood risk within large parts of the Mendip Hills NCA are highlighted in the Somerset 20 year Flood Action Plan.

Historic environment - top priorities

Active management is important for the long term survival of historic environment remains and to protect them against damage and decay brought about through cultivation, scrub growth, burrowing animals or poor maintenance. These features cannot be recreated once they have been lost.

In this area there are a number of designated heritage features and other historic environment features reflecting a very long history of human settlement and occupation dating back to the Palaeolithic period. Human influences on the Mendip Hills have resulted in complex ritual, industrial and agricultural landscapes extending from the prehistoric period to modern times. The plateau has an outstanding assemblage of heritage assets from prehistoric features such as burial mounds, henges and Iron Age hill forts, to many Roman sites and through to Second World War remains. Many industrial archaeological sites reflect the past lead, coal and cloth industries. With historic farm buildings stone is the predominant building material with pale grey Douling Stone used throughout. Limestone, red conglomerate and honey-coloured oolite are found in the east of area.

The 2014 Heritage at Risk 2014 survey has identified [xxx %] of designated features as being 'at risk', particularly from arable cultivation and plough clipping, animal burrowing, visitor erosion and scrub encroachment.

The following historic environment features are a high priority for active management in this area:

- Designated Features - archaeological features of national significance Scheduled Monuments (SM) and Registered Parks and Gardens (RPG)
- Designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings and non-domestic historic buildings on holdings
- Undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance which are part of the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE)

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that:

- revert archaeological sites under cultivation to permanent grass
- reduce damaging cultivation and harvesting practices through minimum tillage or direct drilling where this offers a suitable level of protection
- remove scrub and bracken from archaeological or historic features
- maintain below-ground archaeology under permanent uncultivated vegetation or actively manage earthworks, standing stones and structures as visible 'above ground' features
- maintain and restore historic water management systems, including those associated with water meadows and designed water bodies
- restore historic buildings that are assessed as a priority in the area.
- address the condition of Registered Historic Parks and Gardens, through the proactive maintenance or restoration of structures or features that make a major contribution to the design intentions or feel of the parkland, provide for their biodiversity and amenity value.

- deal with specific issues that are causing damage or decay to archaeological and historic features, but which are not covered by standard options.

Woodland - top priorities

Woodland management

Management of all woodland to improve structure and species mix is important for biodiversity and to make them more robust in relation to future threats such as climate change, pests and diseases.

Certain types of woodland are a high priority for bringing into management, including:

- protected woodland – those designated for their national biodiversity value
- priority woodland habitat – other unmanaged broadleaved woodland
- priority species – all woodland within current red squirrel range, or within areas important for woodland butterfly and woodland bird species
- Planted Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) restoration – conversion of conifer plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to broadleaf woodland where they are in close proximity to existing broadleaf woodland
- United Kingdom Forestry Standard – unmanaged conifer woodland within catchments subject to eutrophication and acidification, both to reduce pressures on the water environment and improve biodiversity

Woodlands not included in the categories above are a lower priority for management.

All management should comply with the United Kingdom Forestry Standard and other relevant guidance such as 'Managing Ancient and Native Woodland in England'.

Woodland planting

High priority areas for the planting of new woodlands include:

- biodiversity – planting to buffer and link existing woodlands and other semi natural open habitats within priority woodland habitat networks
- water quality – planting designed to reduce and intercept diffuse pollution from agriculture
- flood risk – planting designed to increase infiltration of heavy rain into the ground, reduce erosion, or slow the flow of floodwaters on floodplains

In order to provide the required biodiversity and/or water benefits, new woodland planting needs to be in the right part of the landscape and to the right design.

Landscape – top priorities

High priorities are the management, restoration or re-creation of landscape features that contribute significantly to the local character by reinforcing the overall pattern and scale of the landscape, together with other important features that give an area its unique and distinctive sense of place.

Top priority in **Mendip Hills** is the restoration of these features:

- Management of hedgerows on the scarp slopes
- Stone walls on the plateau
- Small farm woodlands and other distinctive tree features – copses, clumps, shelterbelts
- Permanent grassland

Climate Change

Climate change will pose variable threats and opportunities in different landscapes. Priority should be given to targeted features and issues that are particularly vulnerable to or affected by climate change.

You should carry out land management practices and capital works that help to:

- make existing priority habitat sites bigger
- extend or link priority habitat to increase connectivity and reduce fragmentation
- reduce the impacts of climate change on local communities, for example by targeted planting of woodland to reduce flood risk
- reduce loss of carbon and emissions of other greenhouse gases
- increase carbon uptake, for example by tree planting
- increase carbon storage, for example by converting arable land to permanent grassland
- provide shade for wildlife and livestock

Multiple environmental benefits

Opportunities for multi-objective agreements

You should look to provide for multiple priorities by selecting options that achieve multiple environmental benefits.

In the **Mendip Hills** you have the greatest opportunity to achieve multiple objectives with:

- Establishing new wetland and woodland habitat within sub-catchments where they're likely to improve water quality, reduce run-off rates into watercourses, add to biodiversity and landscape character and protect historical features

- Change arable cropping systems to low-intensity grassland within the River Banwell, Lox Yeo, the River Chew, The Yeo (Congresbury) and Wellow Brook catchments where the new management system will protect water quality, landscape character, flood risk and biodiversity
- Restore hedgerows to manage water flow, decrease soil erosion, create wildlife habitats and corridors, and strengthen the local landscape
- Select options such as the use of rural sustainable drainage systems, buffer strips and erosion control in the Banwell, Lox Yeo, the River Chew, The Yeo (Congresbury) and Wellow Brook catchments catchment to improve both water quality and support flood risk management
- Conservation and active management of existing woodland, including ancient woodland, mixed woodland blocks and shelterbelts; and promoting new planting where appropriate in accordance with the strategic ambition of the Forest of Avon Trust and the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management plans. This will benefit landscape, water quality, flood risk and biodiversity.
- Maintain woodland and expand where appropriate and in keeping with the landscape character, to support woodland plants, birds, bats and butterflies. Increasing connectivity of the woodland itself for species movement but also connectivity with the wider landscape through linking with hedgerows, parkland, orchards and grassland providing benefits for biodiversity, reducing water flow, improving water quality and regulating climate change

Lower priorities

You should select one of the top priorities. However, you can also select lower priorities as well as this will attract points used to score your application.

You should consider the following other priorities that are of specific interest in this area.

Historic environment - lower priorities

The Historic environment features set out below are a lower priority.

- Maintain designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings.
- Undesignated SHINE features of medium and low Significance
- Priority Undesignated Historic Parklands

Woodland – lower priorities

Woodland Management

Woodlands not included in the top priority categories listed above are a lower priority for management but may still be supported.

Woodland Planting

Areas are prioritised for new planting based on their potential to create biodiversity and water benefits. Woodland planting schemes are scored depending on where the proposed scheme is in relation to the opportunity maps for woodland planting in England and how well the planting design will benefit biodiversity and water.

Lower priorities for appropriately designed biodiversity schemes exist across the whole of England. Opportunities for new woodland planting for water only exist in certain parts of England.