

## Habitat Action Plan: Lowland Heath

### Current Status and Importance

- Heathland below around 300 metres is generally classed as lowland heath.
- The UK has about 20% of the total of this habitat (58,000 ha of which 55% occurs within England) which is of international significance.
- Whilst many large open tracts of lowland heath habitat have been notified as SSSI within Kirklees the habitat is more associated with slopes and escarpments, often as part of a habitat mosaic.
- Some small areas of lowland heath within Kirklees are designated as local sites and protected against development.
- The amount of lowland heath in Kirklees is not known
- The existence of lowland heath is dependent on the management of grazing and burning to prevent succession and development to scrub or woodland



### Species Use

- Lowland heath is characterised by the presence of plants such as heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), bell heather (*Erica cinerea*), common gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and western gorse (*Ulex gallii*).
- Areas of good quality heathland should consist of an ericaceous (shrubs preferring acidic conditions) layer of varying heights and structures, some areas of scattered trees and scrub, areas of bare ground, gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), wet heaths, bogs and open water.
- The presence and numbers of characteristic birds such as tree pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*), reptiles, invertebrates, vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens are important indicators of habitat quality although the latter 2 groups within Kirklees have been impoverished by air borne pollution.

### Conservation Issues

- Encroachment of trees and scrub and the simplification of vegetation structure due to a lack of conservation management such as light grazing, controlled burning and cutting.
- Nutrient enrichment, particularly deposition of nitrogen compounds emitted from intensive livestock farming, or from other sources.
- Agricultural improvement including reclamation and overgrazing.

## Objectives

- Protect existing lowland heath from development and inappropriate use or management to prevent habitat deterioration.
- Maintain and restore areas of lowland heath within a mosaic of habitats, including the transition to acid grassland, scrub and woodland, where appropriate to soils, climate and existing species' communities.
- Manage areas of lowland heath to create greater structural diversity and maximise their value for their important species' populations.
- Reduce fragmentation of the habitat, especially considering the role of heath as part of the ecological network in a wider forest mosaic.

## Target areas for habitat management and creation

- Much lowland heath occurs within the Valley Slopes zone as part of a forest habitat mosaic.
- The habitat occurs within the Mid-altitudinal Grassland zone, especially on slopes.
- The habitat is present within the Pennine Foothills especially on sloping ground.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at [www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)

## Targets

- To be decided.

## Key Links and Organisations

- Site protection: Kirklees Council, Forestry Commission, Natural England.
- Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group; Forestry Commission.
- Management of lowland heath in Kirklees: Coalfield Heathland Project; Various groups and individual landowners.

## See Also

- [UKBAP: Lowland Dry Acid Grassland](#)
- [UK BAP Lowland Heath Habitat Action Plan](#)