

South East England Regional Habitat Creation Programme briefing

The Regional Habitat Creation Programme (RHCP), which has been developed in close consultation with Natural England and Local Authorities, aims to provide a strategic and proactive approach for the provision and delivery of compensatory habitats.

Compensatory habitat is required when European Designated Sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) & Special Protection Areas (SPA)) are damaged or experience loss due to flood risk management works or coastal squeeze¹.

Defra have also set the Environment Agency 'Outcome Measures' for Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat creation and remedies for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in unfavourable condition.

The processes by which new habitat can be created, funded and assessed are understandably complex, therefore the programme will be updated as new information becomes available.

The benefits of taking a strategic approach by the Habitat Creation Programme:-

- provides a framework within which site acquisition can be undertaken proactively
- allows opportunities to be realised as they arise
- habitats will be created before they are lost
- land can be purchased at a fair price
- larger, more ecologically robust sites, can be created to offset a number of small scale losses
- provides a delivery mechanism for the habitat requirements of flood risk management plans and projects enabling timely approvals

Habitat Creation programmes are Government's (Defra) recommended vehicle for delivering strategic habitat compensation and are funded through Flood & Coastal Risk Management Grant in Aid in advance of engineering works that cause damage.

The Habitat Creation Programme compiles the compensatory habitat creation needs for the Region from the Appropriate Assessments carried out for the different Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) in the Region.

Habitat needs are therefore based on the estimated impacts of approved SMP policies for all frontages, including Local Authority and third party frontages. It is not necessary for the anticipated compensatory habitats to be in place at the time that the SMP is approved, but only when the damage is likely to occur. The Programme therefore aims to secure sites and develop habitat in a timely manner in advance of damage occurring.

¹ The progressive erosion and loss of coastal habitats (such as saltmarsh and mudflats) which can arise if the natural landward migration of a habitat under sea level rise is prevented by man-made defences and structures.

The RHCP will be identified within the Appropriate Assessment as the proposed delivery vehicle for compensating for habitat losses, so parties agreeing to the SMP are also agreeing to the method for compensating for its impacts.

The Southern Regional Habitat Creation Programme has provisionally included the following habitat needs for the North Solent, based on the findings of the Solent Dynamic Coast Project:

- Epoch 1 - 0-20 years: 153ha Inter-tidal habitat and 463ha Grazing Marsh
- Epoch 2 - 20-50 years: 148.5ha Inter-tidal habitat and 70ha Grazing Marsh
- Epoch 3 - 50-100 years: 88.5ha Inter-tidal habitat

These figures will be updated once the policies for the SMP have been agreed and the Appropriate Assessment carried out.

Delivery of the Habitat Creation Programme will involve partnership working between the Environment Agency, Natural England, Local Authorities and private landowners to ensure that habitat creation sites are secured and developed as efficiently as possible to enable timely delivery of flood and coastal erosion risk management projects for the benefit of all parties.

As a key part of the RHCP, compensatory land has been secured within the Solent estuarial complex, west of Pagham Harbour, which should enable a minimum of 150ha of inter-tidal habitat to be created in the next 5 years, with additional inter-tidal habitat occurring over time as a result of sea level rise. We estimate that this will secure the inter-tidal compensatory habitat required for maintenance and improvement works across the area of the North Solent SMP (which includes Southampton City Council's coastline) until at least 2027. We expect the RHCP to secure land for further habitat creation as required to keep ahead of coastal squeeze effects as they occur.