

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1336

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Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

Red Moss of Netherley is one of the best-remaining examples of the once numerous lowland raised bogs in the Aberdeen area. It is the largest in south Aberdeenshire and one of the largest raised bogs in the north-east of Scotland.

In addition to bog, the site supports a number of associated habitats including fen, swamp, woodland and open water. The bog is dominated by heather with harestail cotton-grass and often cross-leaved heath. There is extensive cover, diversity and regeneration of sphagnum bog mosses, including the major peat-building bog mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. magellanicum*, in some areas. A number of artificial hollows occur in the centre of the bog which are dominated by the bog moss *S. cuspidatum* with common cotton-grass. Other bog mosses found include *S. palustre*, *S. fimbriatum* and *S. subnitens*.

Woodland on the site varies from willow carr, with bottle sedge dominating the field layer, to birch woodland around the edge of the site.

The site has good numbers of breeding birds, 39 having been recorded, including wildfowl and waders. A number of notable water beetles have been recorded, including *Hydroporus lingicornis* and *Enochrus ochropterus*, for which Red Moss of Netherley was the first recorded site in Eastern Scotland.

Natural Features of Red Moss of Neherley SSSI	Feature Condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Raised bog	Unfavourable, no change (September 2008)	SAC

The Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) work that is periodically undertaken by SNH assesses the bog in terms of set targets that a raised bog in favourable condition should have. The last monitoring work undertaken in 2008 found the bog was to be in unfavourable condition, due to the low cover of sphagnum and high cover of heather (targets >20% and <=50%).

Past and present management

Red Moss of Netherley has been used extensively for peat cutting. Old peat roads cross the site and form a near continuous ring around the central area with semi-redundant drains radiating out from the bog. A high ridge in the centre of the bog, forming a low dome profile, appears to be the only area that has not been cut-over, although there may be a few other areas of uncut peat remaining. Domestic peat cutting occurred in the 1980s in the north east sector but has since ceased. Very small-scale experimental vegetation management plots were established in a central part of the site by the Aberdeen University Department of Plant Sciences in the late 1980s but no further use of these plots has been made since. Conifers have been planted to the west of the site and there has been some historic burning of drier ground, to the north. There are a number of open pools over the site, which appear artificial and are likely to have been used for wildfowling.

Ponies are grazed over a small area towards the edge of the moss, with no obvious detriment to the features of special interest.

A large part of the site is owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) as a nature reserve. There is some public use of the area for dog walking and bird watching, though the site is generally inaccessible to the public and potentially hazardous.

Objective for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate, to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, where such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those

operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi – SiteLink facility).

To maintain the raised bog and associated habitats, including the flora and fauna these support

(1) The maintenance of a high water table

In common with nearly all remaining raised bogs in Britain, the Red Moss of Netherley has been greatly influenced by peat cutting and drainage. There remains, however, a substantial area of deep peat that is still entirely dependent upon rainfall for its nutrient and water supply.

An ecohydrological study was commissioned in 2005 in order to introduce an informed management programme designed to bring the bog back into favourable condition. The study produced a number of objectives for management which SWT subsequently amalgamated into a ten-year management plan. SWT began to implement their plan in 2007. Active peat growth is being encouraged by blocking some of the ditches on the nature reserve part of the site and raising the water table. This should protect and enhance the quality of this site by increasing the area of active peat-forming plant communities, the main component being mosses. By 2008 when SNH last carried out SCM, improvements were very clear. Other areas of the bog would benefit from damming which in turn would increase water levels on the whole site.

(2) Drainage, peat extraction and agricultural improvement

The site is surrounded, in part, by agricultural land. Drains around the periphery of the site are, therefore, actively maintained and may be detrimentally affecting the hydrology of the site. If peat cutting was to recommence it would be detrimental to the site's interest through direct loss of peat and associated vegetation, and through further disruption to the site's hydrology.

(3) Management of scrub and heather

A combination of factors, including low water levels, is contributing to increased cover of heather and the invasion of scrub and trees. A programme of heather management and scrub removal is highly recommended to allow the peat mosses to recover.

Financial incentives for lowland raised bog management may be available under the Scottish Government's Rural Development Programme. SNH are keen to engage with all the site's owners and encourage active management of the site as a whole.

Date last reviewed: 7 June 2011.