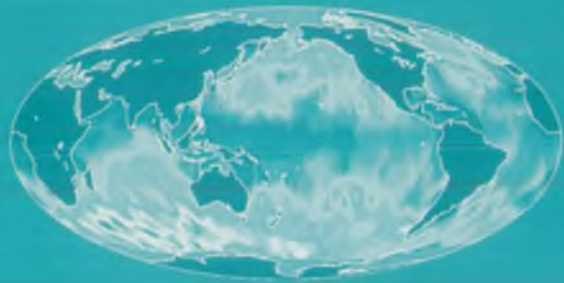


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SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

Conservation  
Designations in  
England and Wales



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# Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Wildlife conservation designations</b>	<b>1</b>
2.2	Sites of Special Scientific Interest	1
2.3	National Nature Reserves	2
2.4	Marine Nature Reserves	2
2.5	Local Nature Reserves	2
2.7	Special Protection Areas	2
2.8	Special Areas of Conservation	3
2.9	Biosphere reserves	3
2.10	Ramsar Sites	3
2.12	Wildlife Sites	4
2.13	Nature Reserves	4
2.14	Regionally Important Geological Sites	4
<b>3.</b>	<b>Landscape designations</b>	<b>4</b>
3.2	National Parks	4
3.3	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	5
3.4	Heritage Coasts	5
3.5	Hedgerows	5
3.6	Special Landscape Areas	5
<b>4.</b>	<b>National conservation mapping initiatives</b>	<b>5</b>
4.2	Countryside Character	5
4.3	Natural Areas	6
4.4	Landmap	6
<b>5.</b>	<b>Heritage designations</b>	<b>6</b>
	Sites and Monuments Records	6
5.2	Scheduled Ancient Monuments	6
5.3	Areas of Archaeological Importance	7
5.4	Listed Buildings	7
5.5	Conservation Areas	7
5.6	Protected Wrecks	7
5.7	English Heritage/Cadw historic designations	7
5.8	World Heritage Sites	8
<b>6.</b>	<b>Agri-Environment designations</b>	<b>8</b>
6.2	Environmentally Sensitive Areas	8
6.3	The Habitat Scheme	9
6.4	Countryside Stewardship	9
6.5	Tir Cymen	10
6.6	Wider countryside schemes	10

<b>7.</b>	<b>Agency duties, policy and guidance</b>	<b>11</b>
7.1	Agency duties	11
7.2	Environment Act S.7: General conservation duties	11
7.3	Environment Act S 8: Duties in respect of SSSIs	11
7.4	Environment Act S 8: Duties in respect of National Parks	11
7.5	Environment Act S 62: Duties in respect of National Parks	11
7.6	The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994	11
7.7	Additional duties in respect of Marine SACs and SPAs	12
7.8	Agency policy and procedure in respect of designated sites	12
7.9	Further information and advice	12
<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Summary of Agency duties in respect of wildlife, landscape and agri-environment designations</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Table 2</b>	<b>Summary of Agency duties in respect of heritage designations</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Table 3</b>	<b>Functional guidance, policies and procedures in respect of designated sites</b>	<b>15</b>
	<b>Selected bibliography</b>	<b>16</b>

# Conservation Designations in England and Wales

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the wide variety of countryside designations now in operation in England and Wales that have conservation (wildlife, landscape or heritage) objectives and their implications for the work of the Agency. This information is presented for managers and other Agency staff who need to have a general awareness of such designations and the implications for their work. The implications for the Agency of these designations, including specific legal obligations, are considered and relevant policy and guidance documents identified. Summary matrices showing how Agency duties apply to each form of designation are also provided.
- 1.2 Much of the land area of England and Wales is subject to some form of designation which has conservation as an objective. The boundaries of these areas often overlap, to the extent that the same land may be covered by a number of designations. Although concentrating on statutory designations, this paper also refers to non-statutory designations. Designations are considered according to their primary purpose, namely wildlife conservation, landscape, heritage, and agri-environmental measures.
- 1.3 The Natural Areas and Countryside Character initiatives, from English Nature and the Countryside Commission respectively, are also considered. Though not strictly designation systems, these initiatives, which cover the whole of England, identify the key wildlife and landscape features and characteristics of an area, and provide an important contextual background for both existing designation systems and the Agency's activities in the wider countryside.
- 1.4 This report is for guidance only, and is not an authoritative statement on the law or Agency policy in respect of such sites. Further guidance is available from the Agency's specialist conservation staff.

## 2. Wildlife conservation designations

### Statutory national designations

- 2.1 A range of statutory national designations exist to fulfil wildlife conservation objectives in Britain. They are targeted to represent Britain's highest quality conservation sites and represent the "cream of our natural heritage".

## 2.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

- 2.2.1 Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the term used to denote an area of land notified under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WLC(A)'81)*, as amended by the *Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985 (WLC(A)'85)*, as being of special nature conservation interest. SSSIs are the basic "building blocks" on which other statutory wildlife conservation designations are based, and they form the most widespread and comprehensive network of protected sites in Britain. All National Nature Reserves, Ramsar sites, Biosphere reserves, Special Protection Areas and terrestrial Special Areas of Conservation are also designated as SSSIs. By 1996 there were just under 4,000 SSSIs in England, covering about 950,000 ha, and 910 in Wales covering just over 200,000 ha. These represent about 7.5 per cent of the total land area. SSSI boundaries can only extend as far as low water mark, and SSSI mechanisms cannot protect marine features (but see sections 2.4 Marine Nature Reserves and 2.8 SACs).
- 2.2.2 Notification is undertaken by the statutory nature conservation agencies – English Nature (EN) and, in Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). SSSIs were originally notified under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (NPAC'49)*, but the *WLC(A)'81* greatly increased the degree of protection offered. However, sites had to be renotified under the latter Act before they enjoyed this increased protection. Further protection was provided by the *WLC(A)'85*, which removed some loopholes in the original Act. Sites are selected against scientific guidelines (economic or social issues are not taken into account) and may be extended, reduced, or denotified completely if the extent of the relevant features of interest changes.
- 2.2.3 The notification process involves informing every owner and occupier of the site, together with the local planning authority and a number of government departments and agencies (including the Agency), of the special conservation interest of the site. A map of the site is provided, together with a list of operations which it appears to EN/CCW are likely to damage its special interest. A covering letter explains the legal requirement to consult EN/CCW before undertaking any of the listed operations. Notification is also included as a local land charge, to ensure future purchasers of the designated land are aware of its status.

2.2.4 An owner or occupier may only undertake an operation appearing on the notified list under one or more of the following conditions:

- EN/CCW have given their written consent;
- four months have elapsed since EN/CCW were formally given notice of the intention to undertake the operation;
- the operation is authorised by a planning permission granted by the local planning authority;
- it is an emergency, and EN/CCW are notified as soon as practicable afterwards.

2.2.5 If EN/CCW will not grant consent, they may decide to offer a payment to the owner/occupier in return for a management agreement which will protect the interest of the site. In 1996, such payments, amounted to about £7 million p.a. in England. In the last resort, EN/CCW may ask the Secretary of State to either make a Nature Conservation Order under S 29 of the WLCA '81 prohibiting specified operations, or to issue a Compulsory Purchase Order enabling them to acquire the site. These latter powers are rarely used.

2.2.6 English Nature's **Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (WES)** aims to promote positive management of SSSIs through annual payments for wildlife protection works that "maintain and enhance" the SSSI's designated features. The scheme also covers the one-off costs of preparing management plans and agreements. Standard payments have been devised for dealing with many different types of habitat. English Nature is now adopting the WES for all new and renewable management agreements on SSSIs. WES schemes are in operation on the River Lugg and River Coquet SSSIs.

2.2.7 English Nature also runs the **Reserve Enhancement Scheme**. This provides grant aid (£750K in 1996/97) to Wildlife Trusts and other voluntary conservation bodies who manage SSSIs (currently about 32 Trusts). The scheme has triggered a dramatic rise in volunteers working on SSSIs.

### 2.3. National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

2.3.1 NNRs are among the best examples of particular habitats in the country and are designated under the WLCA '81. They are all of national if not international conservation importance. All NNRs are SSSIs and enjoy the same level of statutory protection but in contrast to other SSSIs (where conservation may not be the primary objective of the site's management) they are managed specifically for conservation purposes. They are owned or leased by one of the statutory conservation agencies, or managed by an approved body (which may include private companies) to a high

conservation standard under a long term binding commitment, thus providing additional security to their conservation. In 1996 there were 185 NNRs in England, covering about 70,000 ha, and 55 in Wales, covering almost 18,000 ha.

### 2.4 Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs)

2.4.1 The WLCA '81 makes provision for the creation of Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) for the conservation of sites covered by tidal waters. The process of designation is complicated, and is reliant on all groups with an interest in the site coming to a voluntary agreement over the site and any byelaws proposed for it. The conservation agencies, together with any "relevant authority" (which includes the Agency, in the light of its fisheries powers) may use their byelaw making and other powers to help protect the area. To date, only two MNRs have been declared (Lundy and Skomer), and it has been announced by the Welsh Office that they intend to declare the Menai Straits as the third.

### 2.5 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

2.5.1 LNRs are declared by local authorities under the NPAC '49. They are managed by local authorities, in consultation with the statutory conservation agencies, to protect local features and sites of conservation interest for the benefit of local communities. There are 566 LNRs in England, covering about 20,500 ha and 27 in Wales covering over 4,000 ha.

## European obligations

2.6 Two significant Directives from the European Union require Britain to effect protection of wildlife through designation of special areas.

### 2.7 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

2.7.1 Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the protection of wild birds (known as the *Birds Directive*) requires member states to conserve the habitat of the 182 bird species listed in Annex 1 of the Directive, in order to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution. Member states are required to classify the most suitable areas for these species as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Similar measures are to be taken in respect of regularly occurring migratory birds, especially waterfowl, not listed in Annex 1. In England and Wales there are (1996) 75 SPAs, all of which are SSSIs. They cover about 355,000 ha (about 32 per cent of the SSSI network). The *Birds Directive* is implemented through the *Conservation (National Habitats etc) Regulations 1994 (SI 2716)* (the Conservation Regulations) and the SSSI protection clauses of the WLCA'81.

## 2.8 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

- 2.8.1 Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (generally referred to as the *Habitats Directive*) requires member states to maintain or restore, at favourable conservation status, habitats and wildlife of Community interest. Such species and habitats are listed in annexes of the Directive. The Directive also requires a network of Special Areas of Conservation, (SACs) to be set up to conserve particular habitats and species listed in annexes I and II. For England and Wales, a list of 154 possible SACs was submitted by the JNCC to the UK Government in March 1995. Most of these were sent to the European Commission for approval in 1996, and consultations are continuing in respect of other sites. The EU has to agree a list of sites to be designated as SACs for each member state by June 1998. As with the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive is implemented in the UK through the Conservation Regulations and the SSSI protection clauses of the WLCA'81. Before a terrestrial site can be considered for SAC status, the Conservation Regulations require that it is designated as a SSSI. In addition to those already submitted, some further sites, particularly covering rivers, bogs and intertidal areas, may be submitted as candidate SACs once their SSSI designation is completed. Total coverage in England and Wales is likely to amount to about 190 sites, covering about 700,000 ha. Though all of a SAC must also enjoy SSSI designation, a single SAC may not include all of a SSSI, or it may be built up from more than one SSSI. Names given to SACs do not always correspond to SSSI names.
- 2.8.2 The Conservation Regulations modify planning controls, so that planning permission for developments that may adversely affect a SAC may only be granted for reasons of overriding public interest. Where a development which may have a significant effect on a European site is granted planning permission by way of a general development order, it shall not begin until the developer has received written notification of approval from the planning authority. There are also powers to review or revoke existing planning consents that may be damaging if the development concerned has not been completed. The Government has stated that once a site has been identified as a candidate SAC or potential SPA and added to the "UK list" sent to the EC, it should be treated as if it has been classified by the Commission, even if the formal decision is still awaited.
- 2.8.3 Where proposed SACs include sub-tidal marine areas (which cannot be designated as SSSIs), protection is afforded through the establishment of a management

scheme for the site. Under such a scheme, each relevant authority (which includes the Agency, as well as local authorities, harbour authorities, Sea Fisheries Committees and others) sets out how it will exercise its functions so as to conserve the features for which the site has been designated. The conservation agencies also have powers to make byelaws to protect marine sites. There is no requirement for marine sites to be declared MNRs.

- 2.8.4 Taken together, SPAs and SACs will form the proposed Europe-wide network of sites known as the Natura 2000 series. These will form a coherent ecological network of protected areas, intended to maintain or restore the habitats and species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

## Designations based on international obligations

### 2.9 Biosphere reserves

- 2.9.1 Biosphere reserves are terrestrial and coastal ecosystems, internationally recognised within the framework of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme. In 1977 the UK Government successfully nominated 13 Biosphere reserves of which four are in England and Wales: Braunton Burrows, Dyfi, Moor House-Upper Teesdale, and the North Norfolk Coast. To qualify, sites must meet a minimal set of criteria and conditions, one being that they include a core area, a buffer zone and a transition zone. Individual Biosphere reserves remain under the jurisdiction of the countries in which they are situated and in the UK take advantage of the existing protective designations of NNR and SSSI.

### 2.10 Ramsar sites

- 2.10.1 These are sites designated following the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, in Iran. They are wetlands considered to be of international importance particularly as habitat for wildfowl. Parties are required to promote the "wise use" of wetlands and to take measures for the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing protected areas. If a Party, for its own national interests, deletes or restricts designated wetlands, it is required to compensate for any loss of wetland resources. By the end of March 1996 there were 64 Ramsar sites in England and Wales. All are protected through SSSI designations, some are also NNRs and/or SPAs, and several are proposed SACs.

## Non-statutory designations

2.11 Non-statutory designations are most often made in a county or regional context, and include designations made by local authorities and voluntary conservation organisations. They represent a "second tier" of sites below the SSSI system. They perform an essential role in supporting the statutory sites which, on their own, do not provide a sustainable area for maintaining the habitats and species of England and Wales. They are important for maintaining biodiversity and "keeping the common common" and form a significant component of environmental capital within an area. They generally fall into two categories:

- sites that are identified as meeting certain criteria in terms of their wildlife importance, but are not owned or managed specifically for nature conservation purposes;
- sites that are owned/managed by a Wildlife Trust or similar body specifically managed for nature conservation purposes.

These can generally be termed "wildlife sites" and "nature reserves" respectively.

### 2.12 Wildlife sites

2.12.1 The Wildlife Trusts have developed a framework for the identification and management of wildlife sites. Such sites represent all those within a given area (generally a county) that meet set criteria; they are not just a representative cross sample, or the best one or two examples of a particular habitat. These have previously gone under a range of titles, including:

- **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)**, the title most commonly given to designations made by county councils.
- **Sites of Nature Conservation Importance** is used by the following county councils: Cleveland, E. Sussex, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Surrey, W. Sussex, Tyne & Wear and the metropolitan city council of London.
- **Sites of Nature Conservation Interest** is used by Dorset and the Isle of Wight.
- **Sites of Importance/Interest for Nature Conservation** is used by Essex, West Midlands and Warwickshire.
- **Sites of Scientific Interest/Sites of Ecological Interest** is used by West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Leicestershire.

### 2.13 Nature reserves

2.13.1 Many conservation organisations (for example, the RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust) and individuals own and manage areas of land for conservation purposes. Though some of this is designated, much of it has no statutory protection other than by way of its ownership and management. Such sites are generally termed "nature reserves", though there is no formal definition of the term.

### 2.14 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)

2.14.1 RIGS are sites of importance for their geological or geomorphological importance that do not qualify for SSSI status, and are similar in status to wildlife sites. They are usually designated on a county basis, often by a group set up specifically for that purpose. Over 2,000 RIGS have been identified (1997). The local planning authority, county Wildlife Trust or local EN/CCW office will generally maintain a record of RIGS in its locality.

## 3. Landscape Designations

3.1 There are a range of designations primarily concerned with protecting the landscape characteristics of an area. They tend to be more extensive than wildlife designations, though the protective mechanisms are generally weaker. There is a high degree of overlap between wildlife and landscape designations and this may provide additional levels of protection. For example, 15 percent of the National Parks' land surface has SSSI status, as against 7.5 percent elsewhere.

### Statutory designations

#### 3.2 National Parks

3.2.1 National Parks are designated in England and Wales under the NPAC'49. There are 10 in total, with seven in England and three in Wales. They cover a total of 13,900km<sup>2</sup> or nine percent of the area of England and Wales. In addition the Broads enjoy a similar legal status under their own legislation (*The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988*) and the New Forest has enhanced planning powers similar to those in a National Park. The purposes of National Parks (as revised by the Environment Act 1995) are to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities. Where there is any conflict between these purposes, then greater weight shall be given to the conservation purpose. Protection is limited to restricting "planning permissions", to buying land and entering into voluntary management agreements with landowners. Additionally the Ministry



of Agriculture Fisheries and Food may place a temporary "stop order" on certain specially designated areas of moorland or heath in any National Park, preventing specified agricultural or forestry operations. Planning guidance (PPG 7 in England, TAN 5 in Wales) states that generally, developments in National Parks can only proceed if demonstrated to be "in the public interest".

### 3.3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

3.3.1 AONBs are also designated under the NPAC'49. There are 41, covering about 14 percent of England and Wales (over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and their purpose is to conserve the natural beauty of the landscape. Local planning authorities are responsible for developing and implementing, through local and structure plans, planning and development restrictions to conserve AONBs. Though there are no particular restrictions or planning rules specifically applicable to AONBs (unless the land also enjoys other forms of designation such as SSSI status) Government planning policy makes it clear that within them, stricter criteria should be used to judge developments.

### Non-statutory designations

#### 3.4 Heritage Coasts

3.4.1 Heritage Coasts have no formal statutory basis, but are defined by local authorities for the purpose of conserving undeveloped coasts for public enjoyment. There are 45 Heritage Coasts in England and Wales, covering over 1,500km of coastline. Significant stretches occur both within National Parks and AONBs, and most Heritage Coasts contain one or more SSSIs. As with AONBs, protection is afforded through policies in local and structure plans.

#### 3.5 Hedgerows

3.5.1 *The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 (SI 1160)* afford protection to farmland hedgerows of ecological, historical or cultural significance. Under the regulations, it is an offence (with certain exceptions) to grub up or otherwise remove a hedgerow without first giving notice to the local planning authority. The authority then has six weeks to assess the importance of the hedgerow against set criteria and, if necessary, issue a hedgerow retention order to prevent the hedgerow being destroyed. These regulations apply to any hedgerow more than 30 years old, or of more than 20 metres length, which runs on or alongside:

- agricultural land, including land used for keeping horses and ponies;
- common land (including village greens) and land used for forestry;
- a Local Nature Reserve;
- a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Hedgerows within or bordering a garden are not included. Of particular significance from the Agency's point of view is the exemption from the regulations of its statutory flood defence and land drainage activities.

### 3.6 Special Landscape Areas

3.6.1 Special Landscape Areas are defined by local planning authorities in their development plans. They signify areas within the scope of the plan of high landscape importance where planning policies will seek to maintain the landscape character and quality.

## 4. National conservation mapping initiatives

4.1 The Countryside Commission and English Nature launched a new initiative, the "New Map of England", in December 1996. Though not strictly a site designation (it covers all of England) it is directly relevant to the designation process. The map depicts the natural and cultural dimensions of the landscape and has been developed to give a common framework to consider issues affecting landscape and nature conservation. It also provides other organisations, including the Agency, who have an interest in the English landscape, its wildlife and natural features, with a strategic tool for use in developing their own policies. The Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions and Government have indicated that they will use the map as the basis for their strategic planning on countryside issues, and character areas have already been referred to in recent revisions of Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs). An initiative with similar objectives (Landmap) is currently being developed in Wales.

#### 4.2 Countryside (landscape) Character

4.2.1 The map identifies 181 character areas (for example, the Yorkshire Dales, the Fens, New Forest, Bodmin Moor and the South Downs) including a detailed analytical description of the nature conservation, landscape and cultural characteristics of the area, together with long term, visionary objectives. A summary description is also available. The Countryside Commission plans to use these analytical descriptions to stimulate further discussion and positive action with partners (including the Agency) and to develop shared objectives for the countryside, its planning and management, into the next decade.

### 4.3 Natural Areas

4.3.1 English Nature has used the same boundaries to produce a map of 92 "Natural Areas", each of which represents an area with similar wildlife and natural features. There are also 24 maritime Natural Areas encompassing England's coastline. Each is supported by a description of its ecological character, identifying its distinctive features. Following discussions with local bodies, a set of long term, visionary objectives will be produced for each area which will provide the wider ecological context for both protected areas and the wider countryside. Natural Areas will provide an overall framework for implementation of habitat and species' action plans under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

### 4.4 Landmap

4.4.1 The Landmap initiative is currently at a pilot stage. If implemented in full it will provide, using a single methodology, a Wales-wide assessment of seven aspects of the landscape. These are:

- geology, landform and hydrology;
- vegetation and habitats;
- historical;
- artistic and folklore;
- rural land use;
- settlement and development.

Outputs are intended to generate policy, management and design guidelines and recommend actions to conserve the best landscapes and restore or enhance others.

## 5. Heritage designations

5.1 Heritage designations cover a range of features, in both rural and urban settings, that are of interest by way of their archaeological, historic or cultural importance and significance. These range from individual objects (such as standing stones and wrecks) and features (ancient ditches and dykes) to buildings (bridges, manor houses) and areas (historic towns, battlefield sites). However, they tend to be less extensive than wildlife or landscape designation, though there is a far greater number of them (about 500,000 scheduled monuments and listed buildings). There is considerable overlap with wildlife and landscape designations because as well as retaining its wildlife and landscape interest, land that has been relatively undisturbed and undeveloped for a long time is likely to have had less of its archeological record destroyed. Legislation in respect of heritage sites tends to place fewer duties specifically on the Agency, but it is nevertheless bound by the general protection clauses that apply to any person or organisation whose

activities impact on such sites. As with wildlife and landscape designations, those for heritage cover both statutory and non-statutory sites.

### The Sites and Monuments Records (SMR)

5.1.1 All known sites and monuments of archaeological interest, whether enjoying statutory protection or not, are listed in the Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) maintained by local authorities (generally county councils). The SMR is an important first stage in securing the positive management and presentation of the historic landscape.

### Statutory designations

#### 5.2 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)

5.2.1 SAMs are designated under the *Ancient Monuments and Archeological Areas Act 1979* by the Department of National Heritage or Welsh Office, on the advice of English Heritage or Cadw (the responsible body in Wales) respectively. Non-statutory criteria are used to help determine if a particular feature merits scheduling. Occupied dwellings and churches (which are in use for religious purposes) cannot be scheduled. Scheduled features, which cover (1990) some 13,000 sites, represent only a small proportion of the total known archaeological sites (over 600,000 in England) and there are likely to be many more undiscovered sites. Lists of all SAMs are maintained on a county basis on the SMR.

5.2.2 Once a site is scheduled, consent (from the respective Secretary for State) is required before any works are carried out on it. Consent is required for repair work as well as works that may be damaging. Consent can only be granted for detailed proposals; approval cannot be given for generalised activity (for example, modifications to a bridge for flood defence purposes) until a detailed design is available.

5.2.3 Grants are available from English Heritage/Cadw towards the costs of repair, recording and conservation of monuments, and they may also enter into management agreements to encourage beneficial management.

### 5.3 Areas of Archaeological Importance (AAIs)

5.3.1 AAIs are also designated under the Ancient Monuments Act 1979, either by the Secretary of State for National Heritage or the local planning authority. Within such areas, potential developers are required to give six weeks notice to proposals to disturb ground, tip on it, or flood it. The development may then be held up for up to four-and-a-half months while the site is excavated or otherwise investigated. To date, there have been five designations, covering the historic centres of Canterbury, Chester, Exeter, Hereford and York.

### 5.4 Listed Buildings

5.4.1 The *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* imposes on the Secretary of State for National Heritage a duty to compile and approve list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Occupied buildings may be listed, but churches used for religious purposes are exempt. Listed buildings are allocated to one of three grades (I, II\*, II), with Grade I being the most important. Grades I and II\* account for about six percent of listed buildings. There are nearly 500 000 (1993) listed buildings of historic (as opposed to architectural) interest in England and 19,000 in Wales (1996).

5.4.2 Once listed, consent from the local planning authority is required for any activity which would affect its character as a building of special interest. Statutory controls apply equally to all listed buildings; the grading system is only an indication of importance, not degree of protection. Controls apply to all works, internal and external, that affect a building's special interest. Consent is not normally required for repairs but they need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as the extent to which character may be affected is a matter of degree. Painting or repainting may, in some cases, require consent. Unconsented works, as well as potentially leading to prosecution, can be subject to enforcement activity to overcome or alleviate their impact.

5.4.3 There are some buildings that have both SAM and listed building status. In such cases, ancient monument legislation takes precedence. However, as part of the monuments protection programme, a review is currently underway and where appropriate such buildings are being descheduled as SAMs, leaving their protection under listing legislation.

### 5.5 Conservation Areas

5.5.1 The *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* also imposes on local planning authorities a duty to designate as conservation areas any "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". There are over 8,000 conservation areas in England (1994). Conservation area status is the main mechanism available to effect conservation policies over a particular neighbourhood or area, as opposed to individual buildings. Designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special architectural or historic interest. Trees also enjoy special protection in conservation areas, and the local authority should be consulted before any felling, lopping or pruning activities.

### 5.6 Protected Wrecks

5.6.1 Wrecks of historic interest located below high water mark are protected under the *Protection of Wrecks Act 1973*. Protected Wrecks are designated by the Secretary of State for National Heritage and are marked on admiralty charts. It is an offence to undertake any development that may affect such wrecks, including excavation or deposition of material, unless under licence from the Department of National Heritage. Coastal protection works or authorisations for discharges to the sea are the Agency activities most likely to impact on Protected Wrecks.

## Non-Statutory designations

### 5.7 English Heritage/Cadw historic designations

5.7.1 The heritage bodies (English Heritage and Cadw) have adopted three non-statutory designations, which are not protected by any specific statutory controls, to help identify, and conserve wider aspects of the historic environment. They maintain registers of sites in each of these categories.

### 5.7.2 Historic Battlefield sites

The location of Historic Battlefields will be taken into account by local planning authorities, and is a material consideration in determining planning applications that impact upon them.

### 5.7.3 Historic Landscapes

Local planning authorities should take Historic Landscapes into account in defining planning policies for the countryside, reflecting the wider historical dimension of the landscape.

#### 5.7.4 Historic Parks and Gardens

As with Historic Battlefields, impacts upon Historic Parks and Gardens will be taken into account, and are a material consideration in determining planning applications. Such sites are graded on a similar basis to Listed Buildings.

#### 5.8 World Heritage sites

5.8.1 World Heritage sites are designated under the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage. The convention was adopted by states to conserve and transmit to future generations the natural and cultural heritage situated on their territory. Such sites are of outstanding international importance and universal value. The inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List requires the approval of the World Heritage Committee. The convention considers that there should be a legally recognised duty on the part of all states to conserve their natural and cultural heritage. There are 13 World Heritage sites in the UK, covering both specific buildings or groupings of buildings (such as Canterbury and Durham cathedrals, Blenheim and Westminster palaces) and wider areas of outstanding cultural interest, such as Ironbridge Gorge, Stonehenge and associated sites and Hadrian's Wall and associated military zone. The city of Bath is a World Heritage site, the only city/town in the country to be so designated.

5.8.2 The presence of a World Heritage site is a key issue to be taken into account by local planning authorities in determining planning applications, and they must formulate specific policies, included in development plans, to protect such sites.

### 6. Agri-Environment designations

6.1 UK Government interpretation of the *Agri-Environment Regulation 2078/92* has led to the setting up of a number of agri-environment schemes in Britain. The main aims of these are the reduced use of chemical inputs; extensification of crop or livestock; extensification of wildlife habitats; and the management of land for public access and recreation. All the schemes are voluntary, and most involve area-based payments for carrying out changes in agricultural practice or for refraining from practices which are considered damaging to the environment. The agri-environment schemes operating within designated areas are listed below together with other schemes which are available throughout the country.

#### 6.2 Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)

6.2.1 ESAs are designated under Section 18 of the *Agriculture Act 1986* by the appropriate agricultural department (MAFF in England and Welsh Office Agriculture Department in Wales). The objective of the ESA programme is to protect and enhance the environment by encouraging environmentally beneficial agricultural practices in the parts of the countryside where the landscape, wildlife or historic interest is of national importance and considered vulnerable to agricultural intensification. Under the scheme, incentive payments are made by MAFF to encourage farmers to enter into 10-year management agreements to maintain traditional, more ecologically sensitive, farming practices. Farmers within these areas are able to enter into 10-year voluntary management agreements for which they receive an annual payment. Each ESA has one or more tiers of entry and annual payments range between £8 and £400 per hectare depending on the requirements of each tier. Farmers are also offered payments for creating new opportunities for public access. Detailed environmental objectives and performance indicators have been drawn up and published for each ESA and payment levels are reviewed every two years. The effectiveness of each ESA is reviewed every five years. Up to 50 percent of all MAFF expenditure in ESAs, excluding that on capital works, is refunded by the EC under the Agri-Environment Regulations. In Wales the ESA scheme will be replaced by a new scheme available throughout the country from 1999.

6.2.2 In Britain there are 22 ESAs in England and six in Wales. Eight (all in England) have management provisions which relate to riverine floodplains. These are: the Broads; Somerset Levels and Moors; the Suffolk River Valleys; Test Valley; Avon Valley; North Kent Marshes; the Essex Coast; and Upper Thames tributaries ESAs. The objectives of the ESAs with floodplain management provisions are "to maintain and enhance landscape quality and wildlife conservation value by the retention of existing grassland and by increasing the area of grassland" and "to enhance the wildlife conservation of wet grassland without detriment to the landscape by maintaining higher water levels in ditches and watercourses".

6.2.3 Details of the management prescriptions which farmers entering into a management agreement are required to follow vary depending on the ESA. They all, however, have a basic management requirement which usually places a restriction on the use of certain cultivation techniques, stocking rates, the use of fertilisers and

pesticides, the introduction of new drainage and a requirement to maintain watercourses and boundary features. The ESA scheme also makes provision for the introduction of more demanding management regimes, for which an increased level of payment is made. These may, for example, require the maintenance of specified water levels and/or place tighter restrictions on grazing and fertiliser use.

### 6.3 The Habitat Scheme

6.3.1 The Habitat Scheme was introduced in 1994 and comprises three options: Water fringe areas, Saltmarsh creation and Former set-aside land. The Welsh Habitat Scheme is targeted at broadleaved woodland, coastal belt, species-rich grassland and water fringe habitats. The Government has announced in the *Rural White Paper* that it will consider integrating the Habitat Scheme with Countryside Stewardship (see below), on completion of its pilot phase in 1998/99. In Wales the Habitat Scheme will be replaced by a new scheme available throughout the country from 1999.

#### 6.3.2 Former set-aside

In England, this option under the Habitat Scheme offers incentives to farmers with land coming out of the now closed five-year set-aside scheme. They are eligible for annual payments of £275/ha if keeping that land out of production will offer significant wildlife benefits.

#### 6.3.3 Water fringe areas

The Water Fringe Scheme is of particular relevance to riverine floodplains in that the aims are to: improve conditions for wildlife in and adjacent to rivers, streams and lakes by encouraging the sympathetic management of waterside fields; encourage the creation of buffer strips to protect watercourses; and reduce bankside erosion. The Water fringe option has been introduced as a pilot in six areas: the Yorkshire Derwent and Rye System; the Ribble Tributaries; the Upper Avon, Wylfe and Nadder; the River Beault; the Shropshire Meres; and Slapton Ley. It is a voluntary scheme in which farmers with land alongside the designated watercourses or lakes can enter into 10 or 20-year management agreements. Annual payments (1996) range from £125/ha to £360/ha.

#### 6.3.4 Saltmarsh creation

The areas of saltmarsh found around the English coastline are recognised as an environmental asset of international importance. They support many unusual plant and insect species and provide feeding and roosting areas for large numbers of wintering and migrant birds. In addition, saltmarshes act as a natural defence against the sea by dissipating wave energy.

However, in many places these areas are eroding as a result of being "squeezed" between sea walls designed to protect the land from flooding and rising sea levels. The saltmarsh option of the Habitat Scheme provides a means by which areas of saltmarsh can be created or extended on suitable land around the English coast.

6.3.5 Saltmarsh creation requires the controlled inundation of land with sea water, which is normally only possible by realigning sea defences inland. This may mean, for example, breaching an existing sea wall where there is a second line of defence further inland, such as an embankment or rising ground. Applications for the saltmarsh option are only accepted in cases where the relevant coastal defence authority (normally the Agency) agrees that setting back the sea defences in this way is the best approach to coastal defence for the area taking all factors into account. In such cases the scheme offers a valuable opportunity for positive conservation benefits to be achieved at the same time by creating new areas of saltmarsh. Annual payments of £195/ha (on permanent grassland) and £525/ha (on arable land) are offered for the conversion of land into saltmarsh where this is consistent with the provision of effective coastal defence. Before inundation by the sea, the site is managed in accordance with a programme which will help prevent erosion of the land when inundation takes place. This is agreed between the farmer and the Ministry and typically includes the establishment of vegetation to stabilise the soil, cutting of vegetation and blocking of existing agricultural drains. The use of fertilisers or pesticides is normally prohibited and farmers agree not to carry out any activity on the site that would prejudice the establishment of saltmarsh vegetation. They also undertake to remove any large accumulations of tidal debris which could inhibit vegetation growth. Agreements under the scheme last for 20 years.

### 6.4 Countryside Stewardship Scheme

6.4.1 This scheme, administered by MAFF (since April 1996 and formerly by the Countryside Commission), encourages the restoration of a wide range of habitats and landscape features in return for annual area-based payments and limited capital payments. It is available throughout England (except in ESAs) and targets a number of areas, including the coast, waterside land, chalk and limestone grassland, old meadows and pastures, field boundaries and historic landscapes. Eligible land management measures include the grazing of saltmarshes or cutting of hay meadows together with a number of associated capital works, for example sluices to allow raised water levels or management of

waterside features such as pollarding of willows. Local priorities are identified in discussion with farming and conservation groups and the scheme is discretionary with only those applications which best meet the agreed objectives accepted. Countryside Stewardship offers 10-year management agreements with annual management payments ranging from (1996) £15/ha to £275/ha. Proposed future arrangements include the establishment of *Countryside Stewardship Targeting Groups* for each MAFF region. Objectives will include a review of the previous year's performance and the production of targets for the scheme at county level, taking account of regional and national objectives. The Government has announced in the *Rural White Paper* that it will consider integrating the Habitat Scheme with Countryside Stewardship (see below) on completion of its pilot phase in 1998/99.

## 6.5 Tir Cymen

6.5.1 Tir Cymen (roughly translated meaning "a well-crafted landscape") is administered by the Countryside Council for Wales (funded by the Secretary of State for Wales). It is an experimental scheme, initially being piloted for five years in three areas. These initial pilot districts are Meirionnydd, Dinefwr and Swansea (land within the Cambrian mountains ESA or the Berwyn SSSI and associated consultation zone was excluded, as environmental payments were already available in these areas). The scheme started in 1992 and rewards farmers with 10-year management agreements for the positive environmental management of their farms for the benefit of wildlife, landscape, archaeology and geology, and for providing new opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside. For such positive management it provides annual, area-based, payments as well as limited capital payments. Some 400 farms (30,000 hectares) are participating. Tir Cymen will be replaced by a new scheme available throughout the country from 1999.

## 6.6 Wider countryside schemes

A number of other schemes offer positive management payments in the wider countryside, though they are not all strictly agri-environment schemes.

6.6.1 The **Moorland Scheme** is available to upland farmers outside ESAs who are willing to reduce their stocking densities and manage their land to improve the condition of heather and other shrubby moorland. Agreements last for five years with annual payments of £25 per ewe removed from the moorland.

6.6.2 The **Nitrate Sensitive Areas (NSAs)** scheme applies to 32 designated areas where nitrate concentrations in water for public supply drinking are most at risk. It aims to encourage changes in farming practices with the specific intention of reducing nitrate leaching, thereby helping to meet the targets set by the EU directive on nitrates in drinking water. Farmers with land in the NSAs can enter the scheme for a five-year period. Options include the conversion of arable land to extensive grassland, the extensification of existing intensively managed grassland and low-nitrogen arable cropping, in return for compensation payments.

6.6.3 The **Countryside Access Scheme** encourages new opportunities for public access to land which is in the guaranteed set-aside option of the Arable Area Payments Scheme for a period of five years. It operates throughout England and Wales, offering annual payments of £90/km for routes and £45/ha for whole or part fields of set-aside land which are opened to new public access.

6.6.4 The **Set-Aside Scheme** is also an EU policy initiative. It provides payments to the farmer where at least 20 percent of arable land is taken out of production for five years and put to fallow, woodland or non-agricultural use. Under the set-aside guidelines, there is an obligation to manage the adjacent habitats. The UK has applied environmental conditions to set-aside management, including prohibiting the removal of environmental features, such as hedges, trees and so on, and the mandatory establishment of green cover either through natural regeneration or sowing.

6.6.5 **Arable Areas Payment Scheme (AAPS)** provides direct payment compensation to cereal, oilseed and protein crop producers for reduction in price support. Compensation payments are based on historic average yields within a particular region, with the UK being divided into seven regions. The maximum area on which the full payments will be paid are denoted by regional production ceilings; if area limits are exceeded, all payments within the region are reduced pro rata. In return for arable area payment, there is an obligation for farmers to set aside a percentage of their arable land, but both set-aside land and cropped land are eligible for AAPS. Set-aside obligation for scheme applicants does not apply to holdings which produce fewer than 92 tonnes of cereal per annum.

6.6.6 The **Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS)** was introduced by the Forestry Authority in 1988 to encourage high environmental standards in woodland management and provide higher rates of grant for planting native pinewoods and broadleaves. Grants have also been introduced for the environmental management of all

woodlands, with higher rates operating for woods of special environmental value. A revision to WGS encourages farmers to convert farmland to woodland. Higher ratios of broadleaves within the tree mix attract more grant. Farm woodland grants are not available for ESAs and there are limits on planting in less favoured areas.

## **7. Agency duties, policy and guidance**

### **7.1 Agency duties**

7.1.1 The Agency has a number of powers and duties that are relevant to conservation designations in the countryside, ranging from its general duties in respect of conservation to specific duties in respect of the Habitats directive. These are described more fully in *The Agency's Conservation Duties* (Sustainable Development Guidance Note 2) and summarised below. Table 1 shows how each of these apply to the various designations considered above. The Agency has no specific duties in respect of agri-environment designations, though they may provide important opportunities and mechanisms to help achieve desired environmental standards and Agency objectives. Where land has no statutory conservation status, but is owned or managed specifically for conservation purposes, then the wishes of the land owner/manager will reinforce the Agency's statutory duties. Such land is more likely to offer opportunities to further and promote conservation than where there are no conservation management objectives.

### **7.2 Environment Act S 7: General conservation duties**

7.2.1 The Agency's general conservation duties under section 7 of the *Environment Act 1995* (EA'95) apply wherever it undertakes or authorises any activity. For its water management activities, the duty is to *further* the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and landscape features of special interest. For pollution control functions, there is a similar duty to *have regard* to such features. No definition of what constitutes special interest is given, but the presence of any form of designated site (even non-statutory designations) strongly implies that there are features of particular interest present. The same section also includes a duty to *have regard to the desirability* of protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural, engineering or historic interest. This includes all the sites listed in section 5 above.

### **7.3 Environment Act S 8: Duties in respect of SSSIs**

7.3.1 Section 8 of the EA'95 places specific obligations on the Agency in respect of SSSIs. It is required to consult with EN (or CCW) before undertaking or authorising any activity which is likely to damage or destroy the features for which an SSSI is notified. Agency conservation staff will hold schedules of all SSSIs for their area/region, which EN and CCW are statutorily obliged to notify to the Agency. The requirement to consult includes operations or authorisations off the site that may impact upon it, for example upstream discharges, upwind emissions or off-site abstractions affecting its water table. Emergency action is allowed, providing the emergency is notified as soon as practicable afterwards. Where the Agency owns or occupies land within an SSSI, then it also has to follow the same procedures as any other owner of land in an SSSI if it wishes to undertake a notified operation.

### **7.4 Environment Act S 8: Duties in respect of National Parks**

7.4.1 There is a similar duty in respect of National Parks, and the Agency is required to consult with the National Park authority (or Broads authority) if specified land is likely to be affected by Agency activities or authorisations. All land within the Parks (and Broads) has been specified for the purposes of this section.

### **7.5 Environment Act S 62: Duties in respect of National Parks**

7.5.1 The 1995 Act imposes on the Agency (along with other public bodies and statutory undertakers) a general duty to have regard to the general purposes of National Parks (see 3.2.1 above) when exercising or performing any of its functions so as to affect land within a National Park.

### **7.6 The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994**

7.6.1 In addition to its duties towards SSSIs, the Agency has some specific duties towards terrestrial SACs and SPAs through the regulations, which refer to these sites collectively as "European Sites". As a competent authority under the regulations it is required, in the exercise of any of its functions, to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive. Where the Agency enjoys permitted development rights under a general development order (for example flood defence and land drainage improvement works and water resource developments) it must first obtain the written permission of the planning authority before beginning such developments. The Agency must also review any

plan or project it has decided to undertake if it is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site.

7.6.2 The Agency is also required to review any consent, permission or other authorisation it has granted if it is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site. This applies generally to the regulatory powers of the Agency, and specifically to any authorisation granted under:

- Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (IPC authorisations);
- Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Waste management licences);
- Chapter II of Part III of the Water Resources Act 1991 (Control of Pollution).

In undertaking such reviews, the Agency shall affirm, review or revoke its decision to ensure that the authorisation or activity does not adversely affect the integrity of the site, taking the action that is least onerous on those affected.

#### 7.7 Additional duties in respect of Marine SACs and SPAs

7.7.1 In addition to the obligations considered above, the Agency is required to exercise its functions relevant to marine conservation so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. This includes (where applicable) functions under the Sea Fisheries Acts and as a navigation or harbour authority under the Harbours Act 1964, as well the primary functions of the Agency. It is also a "relevant authority" in respect of European marine sites, and may, along with other relevant authorities, establish management schemes under which its functions (including byelaw making powers) shall be exercised so as to secure compliance with the Directive. Ministers may, if necessary, give directions to the Agency to establish a management scheme for a site.

#### 7.8 Agency policy and procedures in respect of designated sites

7.8.1 Most of the Agency's operational functions have adopted specific policies and procedures to ensure compliance with its statutory duties in respect of designated sites. Guidance has also been provided by Ministers in respect of some Agency activities. Table 3 lists the key documents for each function. The level of detail within such guidance is variable, ranging from step-by-step guidance on how to assess impacts on special sites and procedures for consultation to meet Environment Act '95 S.8 obligations, to a passing reference to consider the implications for sites such as SSSIs.

#### 7.9 Further information and advice

7.9.1 Agency conservation staff in the areas and regions can provide further information on the location of designated sites, the reasons for their designation and contact points within relevant external organisations for further information. They may also be able to provide an initial assessment of the likelihood of a given Agency activity or authorisation having a significant impact on a site.

7.9.2 The National Centre for Environmental Monitoring and Assessment is developing mapping facilities and databases for selected conservation designations.

7.9.3 At a national level, production of specific operational policies and procedures in respect of designated sites is the responsibility of relevant Heads of Function, in liaison with the Head of Conservation. The Environmental Strategy Directorate is responsible for the development of longer term strategy and cross-functional policies for the delivery of the Agency's conservation duties.



**Table 1 Summary of Agency duties in respect of wildlife, landscape and agri-environment designations**

Designation <sup>1</sup>	Agency Duty				
	Env' Act '95 S.7	Env' Act '95 S.8	Env' Act '95 S.62	Conservation Regs '94	Hedgerow Regs '97
<b>Wildlife</b>					
SSSI <sup>2</sup>	●	●			●
NNR	●	●			●
MNR	●				●
LNR	●				●
SPA	●	●		●	●
SAC	●	●		●	●
Biosphere	●	●			●
Ramsar	●	●			●
Wildlife site	●				
Nature reserve	●				
RIGS	●				
<b>Landscape</b>					
National Park	●	●	●		
AONB	●				
Heritage Coast	●				
Hedgerows	●				●
Special Landscape Areas	●				
<b>Agri-Environment</b>					
All schemes	●				

<sup>1</sup>A given site may carry more than one designation, in which case duties apply in a cumulative manner. For example, if an SSSI is also an SAC, and located within a National Park, then three separate sets of duties apply. Care must therefore be taken to ascertain the full status of given sites in order to determine the overall extent of their protection.

<sup>2</sup>There are additional obligations under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 on Agency-owned SSSIs.

**Table 2 Summary of Agency duties in respect of heritage designations**

Designation <sup>3</sup>	Agency duty			
	Environment Act '95. S.7	Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act '79	Planning <sup>4</sup> Act '90	Protection of Wrecks Act '73
Scheduled Ancient Monument	●	●		
Areas of Archaeological Importance	●	●		
Listed Building	●		●	
Conservation Area	●		●	
Protected Wreck	●			●
Sites & Monuments Records	●			
Historic Battlefields	●			
Historic Landscapes	●			
Historic Parks & Gardens	●			
World Heritage	●			

<sup>3</sup>A given site may carry more than one designation, in which case duties apply in a cumulative manner. For example, if a scheduled ancient monument is located within an SSSI, which is also an SAC, then three separate sets of duties apply. Care must therefore be taken to ascertain the full status of given sites in order to determine the overall extent of their protection.

<sup>4</sup>Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

**Table 3 Functional guidance, policies and procedures in respect of designated sites**

Function	Activity	Reference
<b>All</b>	<p>Statutory guidance, including protection of designated and non-designated sites, on the Agency's principal, sustainable development, aim.</p> <p>General guidance from government.</p> <p>The Agency's conservation duties.</p> <p>Activities affecting Habitats Directive sites.</p>	<p>The Environment Agency and Sustainable Development. DOE, MAFF, WO. Nov 1996.</p> <p>Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation under S.10 of the Water Act 1989. DOE, MAFF, Welsh Office. 1989.</p> <p>The Agency's Conservation Duties. Sustainable Development Guidance series No.2. Environment Agency 1996.</p> <p>The European Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora: An assessment of the potential implications of SI 1994 No. 2716, The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 for Environment Agency policy and operational activities. Version 4. 20 October 1995.</p>
<b>Conservation</b>	General guidance on the conservation activities.	Conservation Directory (Agency update in prep).
<b>Estates</b>	Management of Agency landholdings (including disposal).	Estates Manual. Estates Function. Vol 15, version 3. Environment Agency. Revised 1996.
<b>Fisheries</b>	Fish stocking authorisations.	Technical Directorate Procedural Manual. Vol 5 Environment Agency. Revised 1996.
<b>Flood Defence</b>	<p>General guidance on environmental procedures.</p> <p>Environmental procedures for Flood Defence works.</p> <p>Preparation of Water Level Management Plans.</p> <p>Operations affecting SPAs and SACs.</p>	<p>Code of Practice on Environmental Procedures for Flood Defence Operating Authorities. MAFF, Welsh Office 1996.</p> <p>Environmental Procedures for Inland Flood Defence Works. MAFF, English Nature, National Rivers Authority 1992.</p> <p>Water Level Management Plans: A procedural guide for operating authorities. MAFF 1994.</p> <p>The EC Habitats Directive: Implications for Flood and Coastal Defence. MAFF 1995.</p>
<b>Local Government Liaison</b>	Preparation of LEAPs.	In preparation.
<b>Process Industry Regulation</b>	<p>BPEO Assessments for IPC.</p> <p>Periodic reviews under IPC.</p>	<p>Best practicable environmental option assessments for IPC. Technical Guidance note E1. Environment Agency 1997.</p> <p>Four year reviews under IPC. Opshelp guidance: IPC. Environment Agency 1997.</p>
<b>Recreation</b>	Management of Agency landholdings.	Site Management Manual.
<b>Waste Management</b>	Landfill restoration and post-closure management.	Waste Management Paper 26E: Landfill Restoration and Post-Closure Management
<b>Water Quality</b>	Discharge consenting.	Discharge Consents Manual. Water Pollution Control. Vol 24 Environment Agency (revised 1997).
<b>Water Resources</b>	<p>Abstraction licensing.</p> <p>Drought Order/Permits.</p> <p>Assessment of hydropower proposals.</p> <p>Protection of environmental features dependent upon groundwater.</p> <p>Appraisal of water resource projects, including groundwater abstractions and Drought Order Permits.</p>	<p>Licensing Manual. Water Resources. Vol 20 Environment Agency (revised 1997).</p> <p>Drought Manual. Water Resources. Vol 32 (Interim issue) Environment Agency 1997.</p> <p>Hydropower Development: A Handbook for Environment Agency Staff. Vol 27 March 1995.</p> <p>Policy &amp; Practice for the Protection of Groundwater. National Rivers Authority 1992.</p> <p>Applying the Conservation Duty and Habitats Directive Regulations to Environment Agency Authorisations: Technical Guidance on the Environmental Appraisal of Water Resource Projects with particular reference to Drought Permits. August 1996.</p>

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