

THE GOBBINS

Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

A statement of Environment and Heritage Service's views about the management of The Gobbins Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of Environment and Heritage Service about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Environment and Heritage Service has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of Environment and Heritage Service is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 2 and 3 for a list of these operations and activities). Environment and Heritage Service welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Areas of coastline holding important colonies of breeding seabirds are scarce in Northern Ireland. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure appropriate management of the area for breeding seabirds together with the geological and the habitat interests.

Seabird colony and habitat interests

The suitability of the site for breeding seabirds is largely dependent on its physical structure. This determines the availability of nest sites and may reduce the vulnerability of nests to predators. It is therefore important that the physical integrity of the site is maintained as far as is possible, taking into account natural processes.

Disturbance is an important consideration with eggs or young birds on ledges being particularly vulnerable to being accidentally dislodged if adults are startled. Disturbance may affect the breeding success of seabirds, particularly those nesting near the top and base of the cliffs. The source of such disturbance can originate both from the land and the sea. Exceptional activities near the top of the cliffs, including particularly noisy activities, should be avoided during the breeding season (April – July) – routine agricultural activities are unlikely to cause problems.

Material dumped over the cliff top also has the potential to destroy adults, eggs and young and can make nest ledges unusable. Activities which could result in the cliff top being destabilized will have a similar impact.

The cliff habitat varies from vertical and near-vertical cliff where vegetation is generally limited, to ledges through less steep slopes which support better soils and

more extensive vegetation. Habitat is more varied towards the bottom of the cliff series with vegetated scree and sparsely vegetated cobble and boulder beach heads. The intertidal area comprises either intact rock and/or boulder and cobble beaches. The pattern of all these habitats is determined by the angle and competence of the cliff and slopes, natural rock and debris slippage, storm and tidal effects and the distribution of the seabirds and their droppings.

Care should be taken regarding any activities which affect cliff and slope stability and the naturalness of the various vegetation communities.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the seabird colony and cliff habitat through sensitive management of the site.

Specific objectives include:

No rock or mineral extraction should be carried out within the site.

Do not undertake exceptional activities near the cliff top which could disturb the birds during the breeding season

Avoid inappropriate use of heavy machinery or persistent overgrazing which may weaken the underlying structure and cause collapse.

Dumping of waste materials over the cliff edge should not take place

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimized

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Geology

Earth science features such as those at The Gobbins may require occasional management intervention in order to maintain access to, and fresh exposures of, the geology. This could include selectively removing vegetation.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological series in an undamaged state including slipped material.

Maintain access to the geological series.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment
hereunto affixed is authenticated
by



G R Seymour
Senior Officer of the
Department of the Environment

Dated the 31st of MARCH 2008