



Managing Woodland SSSI's and Permissions Required from Natural England.

This guidance note has been put together to assist those clients who own SSSI's so that they are aware of their requirements when operating on or near these designated sites.

What is a Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI)?

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a formal conservation designation. Usually, it describes an area that's of particular interest to science due to the rare species of fauna or flora it contains - or even important geological or physiological features that may lie in its boundaries.

You must get written consent from Natural England if you intend to carry out a listed operation within the boundary of the SSSI.

What are the implications to working on a SSSI?

If you wish to do anything on a SSSI it is essential to check if the operation is consented in the original citation developed at the point when the land was designated as a SSSI. Many operations that were already being carried out at the time of designation, such as coppicing or game shooting, may well be included and therefore permitted to continue, assuming the management continues as originally agreed at the time of designation. However, many operations will not be included, or you may wish to make changes to the existing management, and therefore consent from Natural England must be sought before commencing. Most consents are time limited, usually maximum of 5 years before they need to be renewed.

Each SSSI has a list of activities, known as 'operations', which need Natural England's consent. These can be found online. Use the [designated sites system \(DSS\)](#) to search for a SSSI to:

- get the list of 'operations requiring Natural England's consent' (the ORNEC list) - you can download a list for each SSSI
- get a map of the site's boundary
- find out why the site was designated
- get Natural England's 'views about management' report for its steer on how to manage land effectively
- find out the condition of the site



See below for example of 'Operations likely to damage the special interest' which will specific to each SSSI.

Operations likely to damage the special interest

Site name: XXXXXX

Ref. No.	Type of Operation
1	Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, and re-seeding.
2	The introduction of grazing and changes in the grazing regime (including type of stock or intensity or seasonal pattern of grazing and cessation of grazing).
3	The introduction of stock feeding and changes in stock feeding practice.
4	Mowing or other methods of cutting vegetation and changes in the mowing or cutting regime (including hay making to silage and cessation).
5	Application of manure, fertilisers and lime.
6	Application of pesticides, including herbicides (weed killers).
7	Dumping, spreading or discharge of any materials.
8	Burning.
9	The release into the site of any wild, feral or domestic animal*, plant or seed.
10	The killing or removal of any wild animal*, excluding pest control.
11	The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant or plant remains, including tree, shrub, herb, hedge or turf.
12	Tree and/or woodland management+ and changes in tree and/or woodland management+.
13a	Drainage (including the use of mole, tile, tunnel or artificial drains).
14	The changing of water levels and tables and water utilisation (including irrigation, storage and abstraction from existing water bodies and through boreholes).
15	Infilling of ditches.
20	Extraction of minerals, including sand and gravel, topsoil, subsoil, chalk and spoil.
21	Construction, removal or destruction of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks, or the laying, maintenance or removal of pipelines and cables, above or below ground.
22	Storage of materials.
23	Erection of permanent or temporary structures, or the undertaking of engineering works, including drilling.
26	Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb features of interest.
27	Recreational or other activities likely to damage features of interest.
28	Game and waterfowl management and hunting practices and changes in game and waterfowl management and hunting practice.

* 'animal' includes any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish or invertebrate.
 + including afforestation, planting, clear and selective felling, thinning, coppicing, modification of the stand or underwood, changes in species composition, cessation of management.



What if I want to apply for a felling license or develop a Woodland Management Plan (WMP)?

Complete a supplementary notice of operations for work on an SSSI <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supplementary-notice-of-operations-within-an-sssi> and send this with your grant or licence application.

The Forestry Commission will obtain consent from Natural England on your behalf when they process your application. This means that when they send the approved plan or felling licence to you, they'll also send Natural England's consent, which may list additional conditions. Prior to carrying out any work on an SSSI it remains your responsibility to check that you have the relevant consents from Natural England.

You must give full and clear details about the specific nature of the proposed operations, how you propose to carry out and manage them and where and when within the SSSI they would take place. This information allows Natural England to check that you won't harm the SSSI's special wildlife so they can decide whether to give consent.

If you do not have Natural England's permission, you could:

- incur a penalty including a fine of up to £20,000 in the Magistrates court or an unlimited fine in the Crown Court if you - or you allow someone else to carry out work without permission, or for causing damage to an SSSI.
- have to pay to repair any damage to the site

What about land next to a SSSI?

You don't need formal consent for work next to an SSSI but Natural England may choose to advise on precautions you may need to consider so that your work doesn't harm the SSSI. If in doubt – our advice is check.