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Consultation on
the future
management of
Berry Head
National Nature
Reserve



INTRODUCTION

This slide pack provides background information to inform public consultation about the future management of Berry Head National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Berry Head is of great nature conservation, cultural, and historical significance and this consultation will help inform the long-term, management of Berry Head.

The consultation process is being carried out on behalf of Torbay Council and SWISCo.

Berry Head NNR is a much-loved headland situated on the beautiful Devonian limestone coast of south Devon, just outside Brixham.

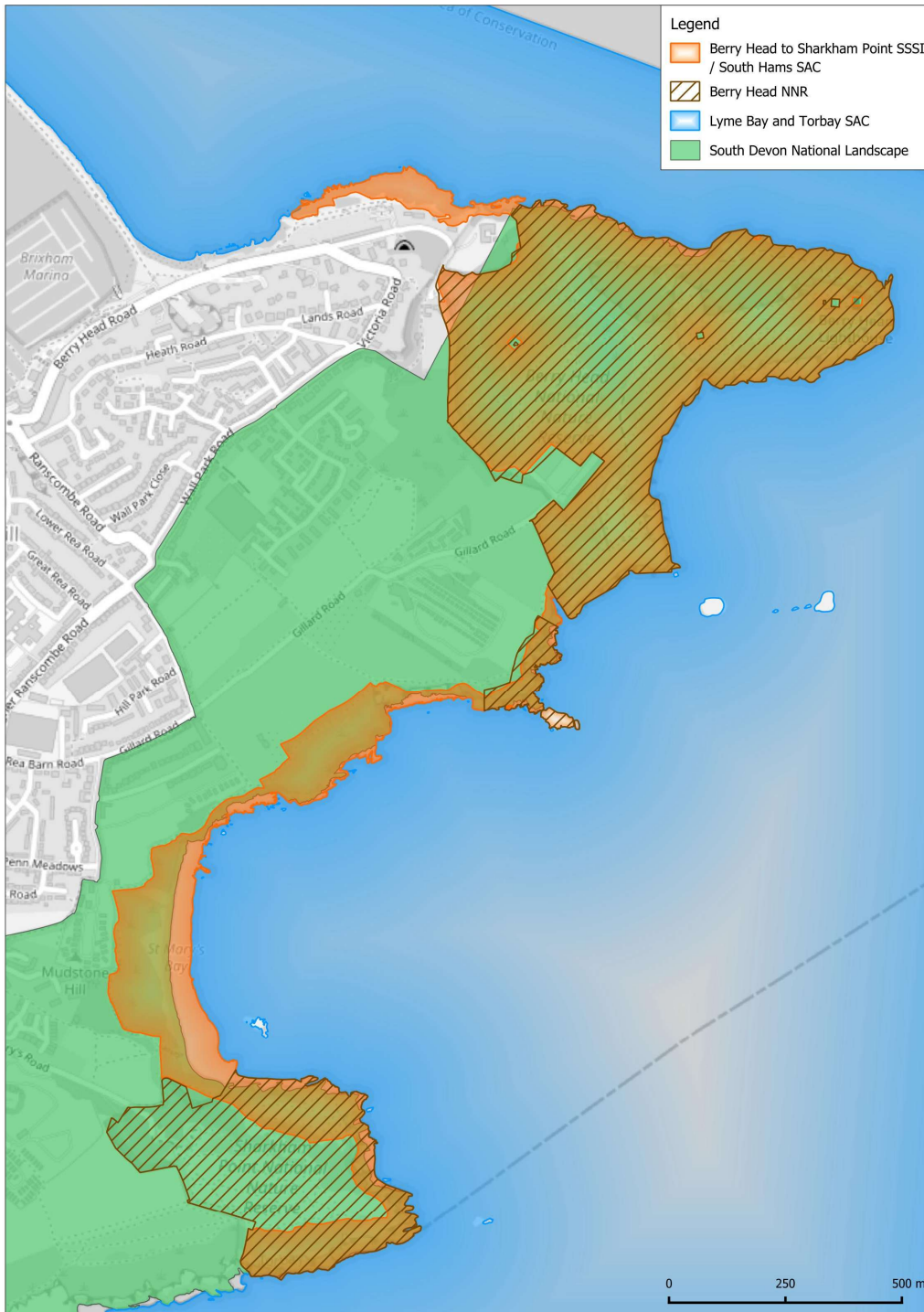
The area is important for its ecological, landscape, and historical interest.

However, Berry Head is subject to a complex range of pressures. These pressures are having a negative impact on the site. We are therefore seeking views on the future, integrated management of Berry Head NNR from all interested parties to ensure a thriving place for nature and people, where heritage is valued and protected.

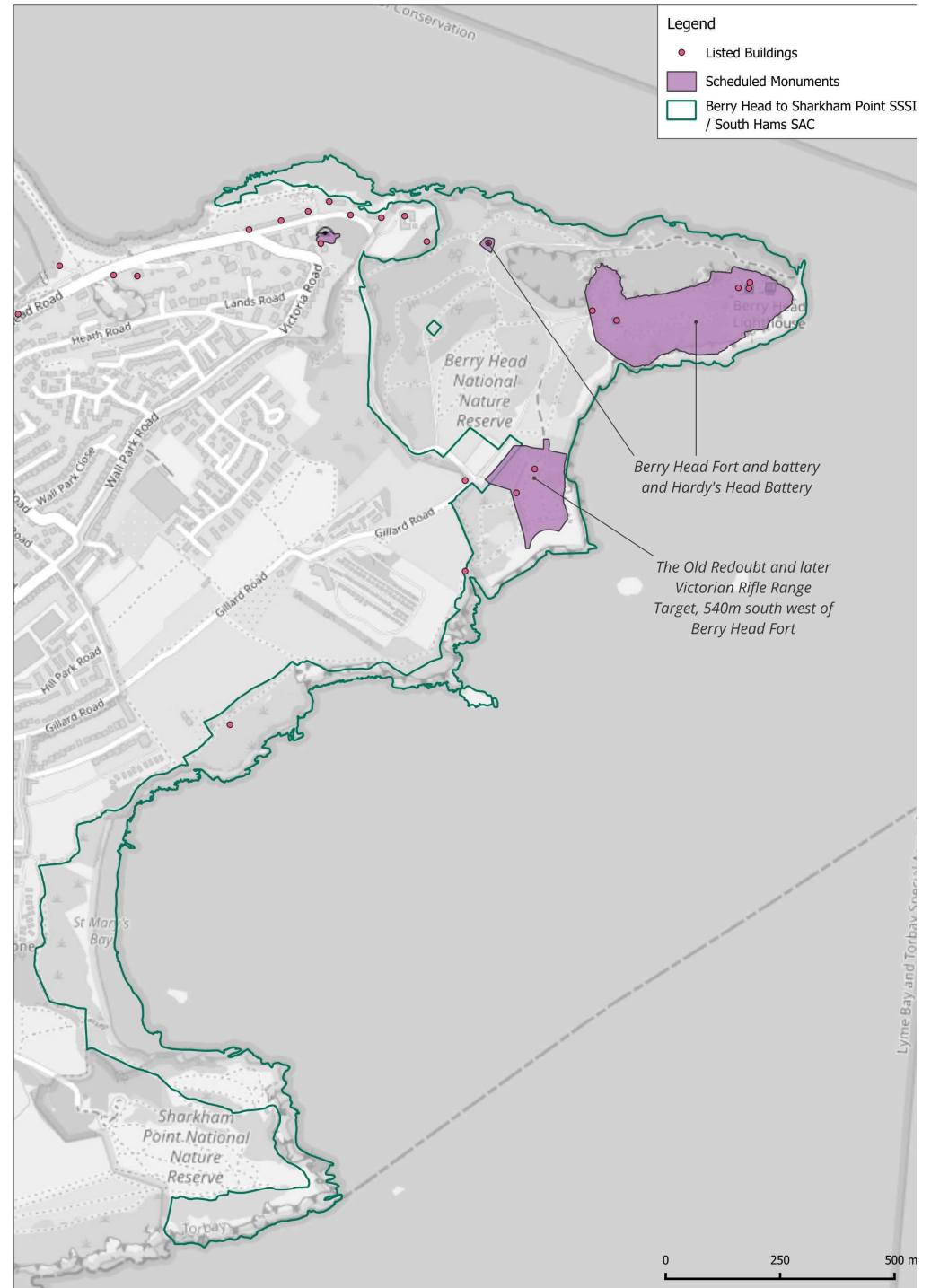
Map 1: Site location



Map 2: Nature conservation designations



Map 3: Heritage features



HERITAGE

Archaeological finds from Berry Head indicate occupation from the Neolithic onwards.

The imposing Napoleonic forts, dating from the late 18th to early 19th centuries, were built from stone quarried on the site. They are considered some of the best-preserved remains from this period in Britain and are Scheduled Monuments.

A scenic view of a coastline with cliffs and a bay. The foreground is filled with green and yellow wildflowers. The middle ground shows a steep, grassy cliffside overlooking a blue bay. In the background, there are more hills and a cloudy sky. A white text box with a black border is overlaid on the image, containing the word 'ACCESS' and a paragraph of text.

ACCESS

In addition to its important ecological and historical interest, the area is valued by local people and a range of user groups. People primarily visit for walking (with and without dogs), as well as for wildlife watching, fishing, sight-seeing and other activities. Most people travel by car, but many also arrive on foot from Brixham and via a number of footpaths, including the South West Coast path.

WILDLIFE

Berry Head is home to wonderful wildlife of national and international significance. The mixture of limestone grassland, vegetated sea cliffs, caves, limestone heath, and scrub provide a range of habitats for many special species.

The variety and importance of Berry Head's wildlife is reflected by the site's multiple designations, being a National Nature Reserve, notified as the Berry Head to Sharkham Point Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and contributing to the South Hams Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Some of the rare and special species present at Berry Head to Sharkham Point include: Cirl Bunting, Small Hare's-ear, and Greater Horseshoe Bat.



By Cirl_bunting.jpg, Paco Gómez from Castellón, Spain derivative work: Bogbumber (talk) - Cirl_bunting.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10654353>



By Charles J. Sharp - Own work, from Sharp Photography, sharpphotography.co.uk, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=157449135>

ISSUES AND PRESSURES

However, Berry Head is experiencing a range of pressures, all against a background of the changing climate. These pressures include:

Nutrient enrichment

The grassland and heathland are naturally low-nutrient habitats. Eutrophication (nutrient enrichment) via dog fouling degrades the habitats, reducing the diversity of species as they become outcompeted by more vigorous vegetation.

Trampling and physical damage

Whilst some of the rare species require short vegetation and some bare ground, the degree of trampling is having a detrimental impact on sensitive areas.

Scrub encroachment

Where scrub encroaches onto previously open areas of grassland and heathland, it ultimately changes the habitat and leads to the loss of characteristic species. Scrub can also damage heritage features.

Bird disturbance

Disturbance by people and dogs has been found to induce fear, reduce foraging time, and cause nest abandonment. Ground-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT

Future management will support the continued improvement of the site to meet the obligations of its designations and secure a nature-rich Berry Head where people and heritage are valued.

Management will need to include:

- Scrub management;
- Vegetation management;
- Grazing; and
- Trampling and the reduction of nutrient enrichment.



FUTURE MANAGEMENT – scrub management

Continuing rotational scrub management will ensure open habitats are not encroached upon whilst retaining areas of scrub to provide vital resources for birds and invertebrates, offering nesting, foraging, and sheltering opportunities.

Clearance from areas of the Scheduled Monuments will also help protect the heritage interest of the site.

Scrub management can be carried out manually or using flails and scrub cutters. The use of heavier machinery may be limited on steep slopes although robotic mowers can sometimes be used.

Once areas of scrub have been cleared and the resulting brash removed from the site, ongoing grazing or cutting can be used to ensure the restored areas remain open.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT - vegetation management

In areas where vegetation has become overgrown, contributing to nutrient enrichment and a reduction of wildlife diversity, vegetation cutting will be carried out. This may include meadow management of areas of the site, with seasonal vegetation cutting.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT - grazing

Berry Head was traditionally grazed by livestock. Grazing has been fundamental in creating conditions for the habitats and species we value at the site today. Reintroduction of grazing will control the growth of scrub and saplings and to help increase habitat structural diversity, reducing more competitive species and allow space for the rarer species. Grazing can also be an important follow-on management after scrub has been removed.

Grazing will be using a combination of sheep and cattle. Sheep and cattle graze in different ways and, in combination, can create more varied habitat across the site.

Sheep nibble rather than pull vegetation, and are adept at creating a shorter sward, although they are much less effective at grazing tall vegetation. They will be able to graze on steep slopes and near cliffs where cattle may not.

Cattle grazing results in a varied, tussocky, sward, offering various niches for different invertebrates.

Cows can cope with tall vegetation, whilst their trampling creates small pockets of bare ground. Their dung is important for beetles which, in turn, are vital for Berry Head's Greater Horseshoe Bats.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT – trampling and eutrophication reduction

Running regular engagement events and developing a community of volunteers will help ensure the site is in a good condition for people, heritage, and wildlife. Clear signposting and low rope fencing could help aid people with staying on the paths to reduce the impact on surrounding habitats. Providing clear signage and dog waste bins could contribute to reducing dog fouling and the resulting eutrophication.



CONSULTATION

To help inform the future management of Berry Head and ensure a thriving place for nature and people, where heritage is valued and protected, we are keen to hear your views.

A public drop-in event will be held at the Berry Head Visitors Centre with guided walks on Tuesday 28th April 2026 between 09:30 and 12:30.

An online survey will be available to complete for six weeks from 6th April 2026. QR CODE