

Humber Management Scheme Action Plan Summary: 2026 – 2031



The Humber Management Scheme (HMS) Action Plan 2026–2031 sets out how relevant authorities will “Maintain or restore the Humber Estuary as a healthy, functioning ecosystem that supports internationally important wildlife while enabling sustainable economic and community activity.”

The Humber is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), together forming the Humber Estuary European Marine Site (EMS). Unfortunately, it faces increasing pressures from a range of sources including: habitat loss and “coastal squeeze”, changes in water availability and quality including some legacy contamination, declines in some bird populations or habitat size, recreational disturbance, prevalence of invasive non-native species and climate change. These issues are compounded by gaps in evidence due to infrequent monitoring and lack of resource to tackle all of the above.

The Action Plan provides a coordinated framework to focus on closing gaps in current management while supporting the sustainable use of the estuary. The plan does not replace individual organisations’ legal statutory duties. Instead, it strengthens delivery through partnership working and shared understanding.

Conservation Objectives

Natural England has identified the conservation objectives for the Humber Estuary. The fundamental aim of the objectives is to maintain or restore the site's integrity. That means ensuring that the estuary continues to function as a healthy ecological system, capable of supporting the species and habitats for which it is designated. Additionally, Natural England also provides Conservation Advice for both the Humber Estuary SPA ([link](#)), SAC ([link](#)) which centres on preserving habitat integrity, ecological function, and species populations.

SPA	
<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate. Ensure that the site contributes to the aims of the Wild Birds Directive.</p> <p>http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5382184353398784</p>	<p>1.1 The extent and distribution of qualifying features</p> <p>1.2 Their structure and function</p> <p>1.3 Support processes which the qualifying habitats rely</p> <p>1.4 The population of each of the qualifying features</p> <p>1.5 The distribution of the qualifying features</p>
SAC	
<p>Ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring:</p> <p>http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5009545743040512</p>	<p>2.1 The extent and distribution of qualifying habitats and species</p> <p>2.2 + 2.3 The structure and function of qualifying habitats and species</p> <p>2.4 Support processes on which habitats and species rely</p> <p>2.5 The populations of qualifying species</p> <p>2.6 The distribution of qualifying species within the site</p>

Water framework directive: Humber Catchment Management plan

The Humber Nature Partnership is the host for the Humber Estuary TraC (Transitional and Coastal) Operational Catchment. The priority river basin management issues to tackle in the catchment are:

Priority River Basin Management Issues:
Heavily modified water body (surrounded by flood banks leading to coastal squeeze)
Angiosperms (historic loss of saltmarsh leading to under-representation in the estuarine system)
<p>Water Quality Toxic contamination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Tributyltin in the sediments of inner estuary ◦ Heavy metals from historic industrial activity in the middle estuary
Water Quality: Dissolved oxygen sag in the inner estuary during summer months

Groups helping to deliver the HMS Action Plan

Humber Estuary Relevant Authority Group (HERAG)

Authorities involved in managing the Humber Estuary include Local Planning Authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, Associated British Ports, internal drainage boards, and the Ministry of Defence. These bodies form the Humber Estuary Relevant Authority Group (HERAG), alongside NGO and Humber Nature Forum representatives. HERAG meets quarterly to discuss estuary management and support delivery of the Humber Management Scheme Action Plan.

Humber Nature Forum (HNF)

The Humber Nature Forum (HNF) has existed in one vein or another for over 20 years, previously being known as the Humber Advisory Group (HAG). Meetings are held three times a year (including one site-visit) whereby topics of interest are presented and discussed amongst the group which includes anyone who is interested in the management and conservation of the Humber Estuary European Marine Site and its surrounding hinterland

Recreational Disturbance and Communications Group

The Recreational Disturbance and Communications Group serves to pull together reports of recreational disturbances around the Humber Estuary EMS and develop a joined-up response to resolve similar issues across the estuary. By having an estuary-wide approach, we could reduce the resources requirement and further the impact of messaging as opposed to addressing the issues in a piecemeal manner.

Data, Monitoring and Research Group

Numerous issues on the Humber Estuary either originate from or are exacerbated by a lack of data or regular monitoring. Additionally, we do not have a good understanding of what data is already being collected and by whom. The aim of this group is to establish what data is currently being collected, what data gaps exist and how these gaps could potentially be plugged.

Humber Environmental Project Pipeline Group

The purpose of the Humber Environmental Project Pipeline Group is to develop project ideas originating from the Recreation and Communication Group, Data, Monitoring Research Group and other sources. These project ideas will be worked up into "bid-ready" project briefs so that we as a collective can be dynamic in our response to funding opportunities that often come with a very short turnaround time.

The group will also meet the requirements of the HMS fulfilling the role of Catchment Host for the Humber Estuary catchment by creating a database of potential projects to address issues opportunistically as funding becomes available.

Action Plan overview

Action	Output
1 Policy and legislation	
1.1. Maintain an effective HERAG working group that delivers for the HMS Action Plan	Quarterly meetings and annual AGM. Priorities identified and Action Plan updated as required.
1.2. Develop a shared understanding of the Humber Estuary system and the most important impacts.	Work towards developing an estuary-wide 2050 vision for nature. The scope of the action and its timescales will be defined.
1.3. Develop and disseminate a shared vision for restoration of an improved estuary	Summary of the ambition/actions for the Humber and the creation of a strategic habitat production map.
1.4. Develop a shared approach and vision to the issues around climate change	Climate change statement allowing the Action Plan to be adaptive.
1.5. Fully embed activities of Catchment Management Plan within the HMS	Embedded plans; project programme; separate audit of EA catchment host grant Aid
1.6. Support the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) when related to the Humber Estuary	Written document detailed how and where LNRS and HMS activities cross over
2 Site safeguard and management	
2.1. Addressing Bird Declines: Recreational Disturbance	
2.1.1 Maintain the Humber Recreational Disturbance Working Group, but expand it to include communications	Continuing with regular meetings with discussions around a strategic approach to recreational disturbance. Include cohesive messaging about the Estuary.
2.1.2 Documenting trends.	Production of an annual report on recreational disturbance
2.1.3 Project: Update Codes of Conduct	Codes from existing authorities or recreational groups are signposted on HNP website
2.2 Addressing bird declines: breeding species	
2.2.1 Funded active management of all existing and potential breeding sites/colonies with an evidence base to support.	Support work of Little Tern Project at Spurn. HMS support sustainable long-term actions for breeding bird populations around the Humber.

2.3 Addressing habitat condition	
2.3.1 Understanding of physical habitat restoration	Audit of existing habitat management. Creation of a sub-group to identify priority habitat improvements.
2.3.2. Understanding the presence of non-native species.	HEY INNS Group Developing a joint Marine INNS Management Plan. If appropriate, develop a biosecurity plan to identify actions to control non-native species.
3 Monitoring, research and data	
3.1. Humber Management Scheme: Reporting	Continue quarterly HERAG meetings to discuss progress
3.2. Migratory fish species (Lamprey) research and monitoring: Investigations into what factors are impacting the population.	What are the current migration barriers and potentially produce a paper. Work with the Great Yorkshire Rivers project and Trent Rivers Trust to collaborate on the Humber Estuary for fish migration.
3.3. Production of estuary monitoring audit and strategy	Consider the production of an estuary monitoring strategy
3.4 Creation of a Data, Monitoring and Research Group	Creation of a list of bodies and their data. Production of a list of prioritised data gaps. Identify actions to address these gaps.
3.5 Improve working relationships with local Universities/Colleges in an attempt to plug data gaps	Clear position on data and evidence needs. Research institutions are aware of these needs through engagement. Support provided to enable research that fills gaps.
4 Advisory	
4.1 Link biodiversity data and response to Humber Emergency Planning	Biodiversity emergency planning advice agreed and issued. Role of HERAG in estuary incidents is defined with protocols established.
5 Communication and publicity	
5.1. Humber Estuary EMS Awareness raising: Social Media/ Signage /Talks	Create a public-facing version of the Action Plan. Actions Progress Success monitored annually and used to refine actions.
6 Development of a Project Pipeline	
6.1 Create a “Programme Development” sub-group to develop ideas into a project plan from the workshop outcomes. This is a key function of LNRS delivery so engagement across both sides of the estuary will be key.	Establish Project Pipeline working group. Proposals produced for priority projects. Annual review of which projects are being progressed into delivery. Action plan updated with projects in delivery.