

VEGETATED SHINGLE

What is VEGETATED SHINGLE?

Shingle is defined as sediment with a diameter larger than sand and smaller than boulders. It is between 2mm and 200mm in diameter. Shingle sites may include both simple beaches and more complex structures such as spits, barriers or barrier islands formed by longshore drift, or cusped forelands, where a series of parallel ridges pile up against the coastline.

Why is vegetated shingle of CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Vegetated shingle supports an interesting pioneer vegetation with diverse invertebrate communities. Some of these are restricted to shingle habitat. Damage to shingle leads to the loss of some plant species and discontinuity in plant succession can affect the life cycle of certain invertebrates which rely on a particular mosaic of habitats. Vegetated shingle is a globally restricted habitat type with few occurrences outside north-west Europe, Japan and New Zealand.

VEGETATED SHINGLE IN THE DURHAM AREA

The most notable local shingle beach is Jackie's Beach in South Tyneside which is located within the Trow Point to Whitburn Steel SSSI. This is a significant site with large stands of restharrow, scurvy-grass and northern marsh orchids. Short lengths (0.5km) of shingle structure are found at Whitburn, Sunderland and Seaham. At Whitburn Steel, there is a partly man-made raised beach with cobbles and sand which supports carline thistle. There is little vegetation at Roker. The beach at Seaham is an unusual mix of coaly shingle and sand with little vegetation.

Vegetated shingle is at RISK from:

DISTURBANCE - from visitors trampling over the shingle which is a highly mobile environment. It is very fragile and both visitors on foot and in vehicles have damaged many sites. Disturbance may also affect breeding birds such as ringed plover and oystercatcher.



STATUS: *Shingle beaches are widely distributed around the UK. In England and Wales, it is estimated that 30% of coast is fringed by shingle. Most of this is simple shingle beaches, as in the Durham area, rather than shingle structures. Within the Durham area there are some short lengths of vegetated shingle fringing beaches. The stretches of shingle beach along the Durham coastline are a coastal habitat of local importance.*

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CLIMATE CHANGE - likely consequences of climate change include increased wave action and storm frequency. Wave action will be exacerbated as the sea level rises in response to climate change. The intensity of storms is also expected to increase which will also increase the erosive power of the sea.

Vegetated shingle **BENEFITS** from:

MANAGEMENT OF VISITORS - to avoid disturbance to plant communities.

INCLUSION OF CONTINGENCIES for managing vegetated shingle in local strategic plans such as the ICZM Plan.

RAISED AWARENESS of its conservation importance amongst visitors to the coast.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Survey the vegetation at Jackies' Beach and other areas of vegetated shingle along the Durham coast and monitor change.
- Prevent further damage to the shingle beaches in the Durham area by provision of interpretation and raising awareness amongst visitors.