Sussex Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria

These criteria are applicable to East Sussex and West Sussex administrative areas only.

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), a term defined locally, shall be referred to as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in this guidance, a term used across England and in Government legislation and guidance.

The recommended selection, modification or deletion of LWS will be agreed by a panel of local experts, the LWS Technical Panel, in line with the criteria listed below, with reference to the standard selection criteria in the Local Guidance sites guidance 2006, listed in appendix 1.

The LWS Selection Panel may include suitably qualified or experienced representatives from:

- East Sussex County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Sussex Wildlife Trust
- Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre
- District or Borough Councils
- Natural England

And where appropriate, suitably qualified or experienced:

- Local nature conservation experts
- Member of the Sussex Botanical Recording Society
- Member of the Sussex Ornithological Society
- Member of other local nature conservation/recording bodies

It should be noted that the ecological value of a site is determined by many variables and there will always be the need for 'best professional judgement' in site selection. Selection should be based on reliable, up to date information.

Accordingly, these criteria should be updated periodically to reflect changes in:

- Distributions of habitats and species
- Local and national knowledge and understanding
- Biological recording and data availability
- Nature conservation in general

Criteria

These LWS site selection criteria have been created with reference to the following local and national nature conservation policies and guidance:

- Local - Sussex Rare Species Inventory
- Local - Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat and the evolving Sussex LNP biodiversity strategy
- National - Biodiversity 2020
- National – Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England
- National - Ancient Woodland, as identified by County and District Ancient Woodland Inventories

- National – Local Sites Guidance (Defra, 2006)

The following criteria have been set by which the designation, modification or deletion of LWSs will be judged. Any site which meets the following list of criteria is eligible for selection as a LWS:

Habitat Criteria

CH1 Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat
"All areas of Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan habitat shall be eligible for selection."

CH2 Habitat of Principal Importance in England
"All significant [(1)] areas of habitat of principal importance in England, as defined in section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, shall be eligible for selection."

CH4 Sand Rock Exposures
"All significant areas of sand rock exposures and associated habitat shall be eligible for selection."

CH6 Mosaic Habitats
Sites will be eligible for selection where:
(a) "A site comprising two or more sub-habitats, each of which just fails to be selected as a Site within its own main habitat criterion group or on species grounds."
Or
(b) "Where a site that would not necessarily warrant selection on its own provides a significant and clearly identifiable extension to the habitat of an adjacent or nearby LWS or other statutory designed wildlife site (e.g. SSSI).
Consideration to other designated sites or land of nature conservation value in the vicinity will also be considered."

CH7 Wildlife Corridors
"Where two or more LWSs are linked by additional habitat of a type that would allow the dispersal and interchange of species within each site, adding significant conservation value to the habitat or species, then these corridors will be eligible for selection with the LWS or potential LWS sites."

CH8 Site expansion
"Areas of potential habitat in close proximity to existing habitat and receiving appropriate management may be eligible for selection."

Species Criteria

CS1 Species Criteria
"Sites supporting significant populations or relic populations of internationally, nationally or locally rare species, or species assemblages, will be eligible for selection as a LWS, or may contribute towards eligibility for consideration under the habitat criteria. For these purposes, 'supporting' may be defined as sites that either directly support breeding populations of species or provide a significant ecological function for the life cycle of that species, including resident or migratory species to the Country or region.

Reference will be given to the following information:

- Sussex Rare Species Inventory
- Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan and evolving Sussex LNP biodiversity strategy
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England“

(1) ‘Significant’ areas are those capable of providing a substantive contribution to the conservation of Habitat of Principal Importance in England, and/or sustaining viable species populations comprising Habitats of Principal Importance in England, and/or providing a genetic resource for species comprising Habitats of Principal Importance in England.

Bibliography

Local Sites Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, DEFRA 2006
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England
Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria, Essex Local Wildlife Sites Partnership, 2010
Guidance for the Selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) in Surrey, Surrey Wildlife Trust, 2008

Appendix 1

Extract from: "Local Sites Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, DEFRA 2006":

Reference Criteria for the Selection of Local Sites

Size or Extent

The ability of a site to support a species depends, in part, upon its extent. The requirements of many species of animal for minimal areas for foraging and territories for breeding may preclude their survival within smaller areas of otherwise suitable habitat. The same may also be true of certain plant species where the long-term viability of populations may require a minimal extent of
habitat free from adverse environmental influence, allowing for turnover within local populations Although, for mobile species, including many birds, mosaics of different habitat features or elements at the wider landscape scale are essential, the presence of individual blocks of a particular habitat type of a minimal size can nevertheless be critical.

Where the interest of a site is an active natural process, such as shifting tidal flats, the site boundary should encompass the area of active process as well as any adjacent area to which the process will imminently spread.
Although larger sites can be critically important for supporting viable populations of certain species, smaller sites can also be important where species are able to use them as 'patches' of a larger habitat resource dispersed across the landscape. Small sites may also be the only locally available patches of accessible natural greenspace offering opportunities for the appreciation of nature.

Diversity

A key principle of nature conservation is to sustain the diversity of wildlife, habitats, geological and geomorphological features. The former includes maintaining genetic diversity within populations of animals and plants as well as the diversity of species and habitats. Some habitats are characteristically more species-rich than others. For example, unimproved calcareous
grassland is considerably richer in plant species than heathland. However, each habitat type is characterised by its own range of species. Conserving the diversity that these different habitats represent, and the diversity of their respective floras and faunas, means effectively conserving the integrity of these contrasting environments, one richer in plant species, and the other poorer.

Conserving diversity at a landscape scale can involve maintaining habitats at different stages of ecological succession. This may mean arresting succession of a particular patch of habitat at an intermediate stage or allowing sufficient patches of habitat to proceed

through succession at staggered intervals such that at any one time different patches are at different stages of succession.

England contains a wide diversity of geological features and landforms from a range of eras within a relatively small area. Individual sites and features together contribute to this diversity. The sites in a Local Sites system should seek to reflect the diversity of features that characterise the geology of the area in question as together they provide the basis for understanding the processes that have built and shaped the resource over time.

Naturalness

Human activities past and present have had such an impact that even those parts of the landscape that seem least modified are now more usually described as 'semi-natural'. In this context, the concept of 'naturalness' is probably better considered not as the absence of human intervention or legacy within a site but the degree to which a site supports natural features or
demonstrates active or past natural processes. Eroding coasts are dynamic features dominated by natural processes. In contrast, quarry exposures revealing rock strata betray past natural processes within what is a landscape feature clearly of human, industrial origin. Both significantly demonstrate 'naturalness' by revealing past or present natural process. Within urban areas, natural processes of colonisation and succession can transform previously developed land into seemingly natural vegetation. But it is often the early stages of such natural recolonisation that, though less apparent, are more significant for the presence of rare or scarce species of conservation importance. Therefore, naturalness should be considered as much in terms of process as the presence of 'natural' features.

Rare or Exceptional feature

This is perhaps the most self evident of the criteria. The local loss of a rare species or habitat may result directly in the reduction in its wider geographical range. For species that are rare, local populations may represent an important part of the total species gene pool. The loss of a local population may result in the irreversible loss of genetic diversity, local races or subspecies and
ultimately of species themselves. Exceptional geological features if lost are equally irreplaceable; the environments and processes that created them may no longer exist.

Fragility

Although some habitats and geological features are stable over long periods, others are more prone to change and so are at greater risk of being lost. Such change might be the successional change that occurs naturally or may be due to the direct or indirect impact of other influences or human activities. This may extend to include the influence of climate change. For example, some
invertebrates require grasslands with short open turf with a good proportion of exposed soil. The cessation, or even the reduction in the intensity of grazing, could lead to the loss of species in relatively short periods of time. Similarly many sites such as peatlands are susceptible to erosion and damage from trampling and unmanaged access. Active conservation management is important in maintaining the condition of sites, countering adverse impacts and preventing the loss of ephemeral populations and habitats through successional change. Fragility should not be construed as susceptibility to development. It is the intrinsic sensitivity of habitats or features that should be considered rather than the site's likelihood to face development. Different types of habitat and geological feature have different sensitivities to change and damage. In contrast, many woodlands are

comparatively robust and may require little management to conserve their nature conservation interest over long periods.

Fragility is relevant to evaluation of sites because Local Site designation could aid the conservation of fragile habitats and features through prioritisation of land management resources.

Typicalness

Generally, Local Sites will not be typical of the landscapes in which they are found; their designation is likely to reflect the fact that they are special in some way. Rather, their value lies in them exemplifying a type of habitat, geological feature, or a population of a species, that is characteristic of the natural components of the landscape in which they are found.

Wildlife habitats and geological features play an important role in helping define a 'sense of place' or local distinctiveness. They represent the 'natural character' of an area, especially where this has been lost or eroded from the wider landscape. Similarly, sites may exemplify natural processes past or present whether geological or biological. In this way, Local Sites are likely to
typify the best of the natural environment of an area.

Recorded history and cultural associations

Past investigation or recording of a site can add greatly to its value for understanding processes and change in the natural environment. Many sites also have links to historic events or have literary or other associations in art. Besides revealing environmental change (or stasis) over time such recording or portrayal can also reveal changes in perception of the natural environment and the economic value that it has been ascribed at different times. Because the natural environment has been extensively shaped and influenced by human activity, the natural features that we have inherited and which provide important components of regional and local distinctiveness also represent important parts of our cultural heritage. A good example
of this is the relationship between local geology and building stone. Not only are many towns and cities dominated by buildings made of locally quarried stone, but the former quarries from which such stone came are commonly sites of local value for their geological or ecological interest.
Because Britain has played an important role in the history of Earth Science, many sites are of significance as the places where scientific concepts were first demonstrated.

Connectivity within the landscape

Besides being of intrinsic interest themselves and directly supporting wildlife within their boundaries, Local Sites also have an important role in supporting populations of species within the wider landscape. Such species may not depend on any single site or piece of habitat but rather require a habitat resource which is comprised of numerous patches which though dispersed, are accessible and are potentially parts of a functional network. Individual sites need to be considered in terms of the contribution they make to such networks; not simply the quantity of habitat they provide, but its geographical position. The quality of habitat and the nature of the surrounding matrix are also extremely pertinent considerations.

In considering the geological interests of potential sites, a relevant factor would be the degree to which their interest features contribute to understanding landscape-scale geological or geomorphological processes, past and present.

Value for Appreciation of Nature

The scale and cumulative impact of human intervention in the landscape, plus social changes, such as the decline in land based employment, have had a combined effect in reducing people's contact with nature and a high quality natural environment. There is growing evidence that the positive associations that people have with the concept of nature is reflected in benefits to people's well being. Whilst there is an established history of recognising the intrinsic appeal or aesthetic value of nature manifest in particular places, the amenity and spiritual benefits provided by contact with nature has often been considered a subordinate concern. Sites which are important for the conservation of rare species or exceptional geological features, are rich in biodiversity or typify the natural character of an area will often be additionally important for providing people with the chance to experience and enjoy local wildlife and geology. In populous areas that are poorer in high quality natural environment, sites of lesser intrinsic ecological or geological interest may still be of substantive nature conservation value for the opportunities they provide for the appreciation of nature.

Although the absence of rights of access to sites can clearly affect the opportunities for experiencing, and close enjoyment of, the interest features within them; their protection and enhancement within the landscape can offer significant visual appreciation from neighbouring or more distant locations.

Value for learning

The value of statutory designated sites such as nature reserves, in providing opportunities for research and investigation into ecology and geology has been a long established and accepted principle in nature conservation in Britain. Today, there is an equal need to provide sites for local educational use to enable people of all ages to learn about and better understand the natural world around them.

Some sites may offer particular local opportunities for controlled research, investigation or experimental work. The ease with which people can reach a site, the safety of access and for use of the site, and the rights or permission for using the site will all be relevant considerations.