

Cambridgeshire and  
Peterborough  
Local Sites Handbook

Version 7

2026

This handbook is a guide to how the Local Sites system operates in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is aimed at people who work with this system of non-statutory sites, including landowners and land managers, officers within conservation organisations and statutory agencies, local government officers and land advisers. The aim of the handbook is to enable relevant organisations to understand their role within the system, including helping to conserve important sites for biodiversity or geodiversity, promoting their sympathetic management and in forward planning and development control.

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This handbook has been compiled with reference to the document *Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management* produced by Defra (2006). It is to be read in conjunction with the Terms of Reference for the Local Sites Panel and the separate documents relating to the selection criteria for the different types of Local Site.

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
What are Local Sites? .....	4
Legislative and policy context .....	5
2. Local Sites in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.....	7
The Local Sites system and Local Sites Panel .....	7
Selection criteria .....	7
The selection process and changes to Local Sites .....	10
Deselection of a Local Site .....	11
Ratification and the Local Sites Register .....	11
3. Working with landowners.....	12
Awareness and benefits of the Local Sites system.....	12
Permission to access land.....	12
Results of survey .....	12
Proposals to panel and right to object .....	13
Concerns .....	13
Planning applications and legal obligations .....	14
4. Site safeguarding and management.....	15
Planning policies and the planning system .....	15
Other legal protection .....	16
Promoting the positive management of Local Sites .....	17
Monitoring of Local Sites .....	18
5. Data.....	20
Data protection and sharing .....	20
Charging for information .....	21
6. Potential sources of funding.....	22
7. References and supporting documentation .....	23
References.....	23
Supporting documents .....	24

# 1. Introduction

## ***What are Local Sites?***

Local Sites are sites identified and selected for their importance for biodiversity or geodiversity at a county level. Although they are non-statutory, they complement the series of internationally and nationally designated sites providing a more comprehensive coverage of sites of natural history importance and interest. The principle is that, whilst they may provide other benefits, Local Sites contain features of ‘*substantive nature conservation value*’ and the purpose of selection is to provide recognition of the site’s value and to help conserve those features by affording it a degree of protection (Defra, 2005). Selection is based on defined criteria set at the county or city level to qualify what is ‘substantive’ in the local context.

The term ‘Local Site’ is used within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as a collective term to include County Wildlife Sites, City Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites; it is also the term promoted by Defra as a generic term for these sites to foster a common understanding of the sites across the country. In other counties these sites may come under different names such as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Wildlife Sites or Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.

Local Sites can be found on public and private land and rely on the goodwill of the landowners for their conservation through sympathetic management. They vary in shape, size and current land use and can include road verges, quarries (both active and post-extraction), arable land, rivers and churchyards as well as more conventional sites of natural history interest such as woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and exposed rock surfaces. These sites play a vital role in the conservation of the county’s biological natural heritage by providing essential wildlife refuges, corridors and buffers linking to and protecting other sites in the network, and in the conservation of its geological and geomorphological natural heritage, by highlighting the local geodiversity.

Local Sites complement the series of internationally and nationally designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Special Areas for Conservation (SACs). However, these tend to be a representative set of sites of the best examples of a particular feature of conservation importance, whereas the selection of Local Sites operates on a comprehensive basis, selecting all sites that meet the selection criteria, many of which may also meet the criteria for the statutory sites. Local Sites are thus often of equal importance in biological and geological conservation, and the comprehensive nature of the Local Sites system means that as a suite of sites they are at least of national importance for nature conservation, supporting significant areas of national priority habitats and representing natural landscape character. The seminal Lawton Review *Making Space for Nature* (2010) identified that the statutory system of SSSIs was not fit for purpose and was insufficient in itself to act as a functioning ecological network. Local Sites, together with SSSIs, provide a much more

extensive set of core sites, stepping-stones and corridors on which functioning ecological networks can be built and sustained.

### ***Legislative and policy context***

Local Sites are not designated and protected by law but are recognised and protected within the development planning system. These sites are described as ‘non-statutory’ and are protected under local, as opposed to national, policy and material consideration is given to them during the planning process, with any adverse effects to be avoided or mitigated. While Local Sites themselves are not protected by law, appropriate measures are needed to ensure the conservation of any legally protected species present within them.

*Making Space for Nature* (Lawton, 2010), an independent review of England’s wildlife sites, recognised the key role Local Sites play in providing joined-up ecological networks which can respond and adapt to the challenges of a changing climate and recommended we improve protection for non-designated wildlife sites.

Under the Environment Act 2021, public bodies including local authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This is an extension of and a stronger duty than that contained within the original 2006 NERC Act “*to have regard to biodiversity*”. All local authorities are required to produce a Biodiversity Duty Report documenting policies and actions they have completed to meet this strengthened duty.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also recognises the importance of Local Sites and requires local planning authorities to identify and map all of the components of their local ecological networks, to allow them to accurately assess the potential impacts of development proposals. The NPPF also recommends that planning policies and decisions enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks. This provides protection for Local Sites as development policies or decisions which would result in the loss of important habitats are very unlikely to be able to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity.

All district councils or unitary authorities prepare Local Plans which provide policies for development control. All of the current Local Plans in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough make reference to Local Sites and include policies which discourage development which would negatively affect them. However, there is a principle of balance of assessing the negative impact to a Local Site against the positives gained by development.

There are a number of other strategic plans which should give due consideration to Local Sites. These include:

- Minerals and Waste Plans prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Catchment Flood Management Plans and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies prepared by the Environment Agency
- Water Level Management Plans

Policies and plans are revised regularly, for the most recent versions of Local Plans refer to the relevant district council or unitary authority website.

## **2. Local Sites in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

As of 2025, there are 480 County Wildlife Sites, 50 City Wildlife Sites (City of Cambridge only) and 27 Local Geological Sites within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The lower number of Local Geological Sites partly reflects that their identification and selection started much later and historically has not been as well-resourced as the biological sites; the number of these will grow. Over time the number of Local Sites fluctuates, with an overall trend of an increase in number as there is a general principle that sites, once selected, will not be deselected.

### ***The Local Sites system and Local Sites Panel***

The Local Sites system in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is a partnership between relevant organisations and stakeholders for the identification, selection, assessment and protection of Local Sites with the objective of ensuring their ongoing conservation and management. It is governed by the Local Sites Panel (“the panel”) who also set and review the selection criteria. The panel operates under its Terms of Reference, set out in a separate document. It usually meets twice per year to discuss proposed changes to sites, potential new selections or deselections, and to review the selection criteria. All members have a responsibility to contribute to and play an active role in helping to administer the Local Sites system and to help meet its objectives.

The panel includes suitably experienced representatives from all the county, city and district councils, the Wildlife Trust, Cambridgeshire Geological Society, GeoPeterborough, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC), Natural England and ideally at least one independent local natural historian. The wider partnership includes Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group East, landowners, local experts including vice-county recorders, the Environment Agency, Forestry England, internal drainage boards and river catchment partnerships. The wider partnership is called upon for advice as appropriate and may attend panel meetings but does not contribute to the final decision-making process.

Available resources define the extent and success of the Local Sites system. The Wildlife Trust takes the strategic lead on proposing and monitoring County and City Wildlife Sites. The strategic lead for Local Geological Sites is jointly shared by Cambridgeshire Geological Society and GeoPeterborough. CPERC is responsible for maintaining the register and GIS data of Local Sites and responding to data requests regarding Local Sites from external stakeholders. The county, city and district councils must take Local Sites into account at all levels of the planning process and in undertaking their other duties.

### ***Selection criteria***

The selection of Local Sites follows guidelines and selection criteria determined by the panel. All sites which meet the criteria should be selected and, other than in exceptional

circumstances, there is a general principle to not deselect sites even if they no longer meet the criteria for which they were originally selected. Site selection is based on available data and generally requires a visit to the site to ensure that it is appropriate for selection and meets the criteria. The application of the criteria in a standardised, objective manner promotes confidence that a Local Site meets a minimum standard and is of *substantive nature conservation value*.

The **County Wildlife Site** criteria were developed in the early 1990s, largely adapted from the existing criteria for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Nature Conservancy Council, 1989) and making them relevant to the county context. Most require the site to meet a set threshold for quality or size of habitat, number of species of interest, or its ability to support a strong population of a species of conservation concern. The aim is to have criteria which are easy to apply either through fieldwork or by utilising data from wider recording schemes or other publications. The criteria are subject to ongoing review by the panel to ensure that they remain relevant.

Attributes taken into account when determining CWS criteria are based upon the primary principles of site evaluation and selection for biological SSSIs, as originally defined in *A Nature Conservation Review* (Ratcliffe, 1977):

Naturalness	The closeness of a habitat to its form unmodified by human influence. As elsewhere in Britain, all terrestrial habitats have been modified to varying extents. Thus, this characteristic often seeks to relate a site to its state under traditional management.
Diversity	Variety in vegetation communities and habitat structure and in the species they support. Species-richness in comparison to the wider countryside.
Size	The importance and value of a site usually increases with its size. It is generally accepted that each habitat has a size below which its nature conservation value may not be sustainable. The size of the population of a species can be a measure of the importance of the site.
Rarity	The decline and thus increasing rarity of semi-natural habitats warrants their protection. The presence of rare, scarce or threatened species, nationally or locally, indicates high nature conservation value.
Typicalness	Many intrinsically species-poor habitats in Cambridgeshire are characteristic and important habitats in the county context.
Fragility	All sites are sensitive to environmental change. Some sites may be particularly susceptible and without protection and positive management, difficult to safeguard.

The CWS habitat criteria are primarily based on the UK Priority Habitats, with many of the thresholds linked to the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) and defined lists such as the Ancient Woodland Inventory or of indicator species for that habitat. The species criteria are usually linked to published registers of rare, scarce or threatened species, or data relating to known population numbers or other attributes of a taxonomic group. The degree of significance of the attributes varies between different habitat types and taxa and, when used in evaluation of sites of county significance, will generally have lower thresholds than those applying to SSSIs.

Although not directly reflected in the original criteria, selection of CWSs also takes into account the secondary principles of site evaluation and selection for biological SSSIs, defined in *A Nature Conservation Review* (Ratcliffe, 1977). Over time, these secondary principles have become more important due to increasing environmental pressures, including climate change, and the current *Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs* (Bainbridge, *et al.*, 2013) no longer distinguish between the primary and secondary principles, stating that they should both form an intrinsic part of the selection process. As such, as CWS criteria are reviewed, they may now draw upon the secondary principles. The secondary principles are:

Potential Value	Through positive management, nature conservation interest can be quickly recovered or established on sites with remnants of former habitats, sites undergoing natural succession and newly created sites, for instance post-extraction or new greenspaces.
Ecological Coherence	The functional importance of a site to support its species and habitats and within the wider context of the landscape-scale ecological network.
Intrinsic Appeal	Some sites may have considerable and widely perceived intrinsic appeal such as encouraging people’s contact with nature. Others may be important for informal recreation or education.
Recorded History	Some sites with lower current nature conservation interest may have a long history of valuable ecological research and substantial datasets or long-term continuity of habitat.

**City Wildlife Sites** are sites within the urban district of Cambridge City which have a separately defined set of selection criteria based upon the CWS criteria, but with typically lower thresholds and a greater emphasis on the secondary principles of site selection. This reflects their generally smaller size, tendency towards a reduced biodiversity and their use for human recreation and visual appeal. A site within the city will either be a County Wildlife Site or a City Wildlife Site, with the former taking precedence if the relevant thresholds are met and the site is relatively natural. City Wildlife Sites are complementary to statutory sites such as Local Nature Reserves, and a site can be both a Local Site and a Local Nature Reserve as the reasons for selection may be different.

**Local Geological Sites** are assessed against four criteria following national guidelines which are based on the selection criteria for geological SSSIs (Evans et al., 2023). Sites must meet at least one of the criteria, with each criterion being assessed by answering a set of defined key questions. Data collected from fieldwork, published papers and through local knowledge are used to answer the key questions, and a criterion is met if this research confirms one or more of its key questions. The four criteria are:

Scientific	<i>Geological and scientific interest</i> - the value of the site for study by both professional and amateur Earth scientists.
Historic	<i>History of Earth sciences and economic geology</i> - the historical value of the site in terms of important advances in Earth science knowledge, events or human exploitation.
Education	<i>Potential educational use</i> - the value of the site for educational purposes in life-long learning, including field studies and interpretation for the public.
Aesthetic	<i>Contribution to landscape character, local distinctiveness, and wider geodiversity</i> - particularly in relation to promoting public awareness and appreciation of Earth sciences.

A site in itself may not demonstrate a remarkable geological or geomorphological feature but may be part of a suite of sites which together help to build up a picture of the geodiversity of the county. A site can be selected as both a Local Geological Site and a County or City Wildlife Site.

### ***The selection process and changes to Local Sites***

Selection of, or a change to, a Local Site requires the information collected through fieldwork or study of existing data sources to be presented to the panel for consideration. Although the majority of new sites or changes to sites are proposed by members of the panel, particularly the Wildlife Trust, Cambridgeshire Geological Society or GeoPeterborough, anyone can put forward a site for consideration. Often an external party may suggest a new site or change to a site and a member of the panel may then prepare the documentation on their behalf. Where required, further advice is sought from local experts and specialists to support the documentation.

Sites are assessed on their ecological or geological merit alone, and not the wider factors of land ownership, politics or potential changes in land use. The boundaries of sites are drawn along ecological or geological lines, and not ownership, though these often coincide. Minor boundary changes can be recommended to CPERC who are responsible for the GIS data without consulting the panel.

As further data become available sites which are already selected may have additional selection criteria added to their citation to fully reflect their importance as a Local Site;

exceptionally some may have selection criteria removed. Removal of a criterion from a site's selection should not be based on data from one survey as natural sites can fluctuate from year to year and recording effort can vary substantially. Failure to meet the threshold for a criterion must be shown to be long-term with no likely chance of recovery. Historical selection criteria should be included on the citation of the site to enable a full understanding of its history.

### ***Deselection of a Local Site***

The general principle is to avoid the deselection of Local Sites, or parts of sites, but in exceptional circumstances this may be considered by the panel. A site cannot be removed from the Local Sites Register for political reasons or as a result of wilful and deliberate destruction or neglect. Sites will not be deselected without sufficient and recent data which present a strong case for deselection and the panel makes the decision to remove them from the register.

A site which has deteriorated or otherwise changed so that it no longer meets the selection criteria may meet other selection criteria or may be restored through positive management. These considerations should be assessed, with the potential for restoring the features of interest of the site, or other features, an important factor in the decision. Only if there is no realistic prospect for a site to recover its original interest or to acquire new ecological or geological interest will it be considered for deselection. The rationale for this approach is to discourage deliberate destruction or neglect of sites.

### ***Ratification and the Local Sites Register***

The decision to select, deselect or make a change to a site is valid and effective from the date of the panel meeting at which the decision was made. The landowners concerned will be notified within a week and in exceptional circumstances can challenge the decision which may then be retracted and postponed until the next meeting. The challenge must occur within one month of notification and will be issued as an addendum to the minutes which are finalised at the next meeting. Panel members must ensure that any other members of their organisation or relevant third parties concerned with a site are informed about a decision as soon as practically possible.

Once ratified, each Local Site has a formal citation sheet written for it which contains a site description, the reason for selection and information on any other features of conservation interest. The site is added to the Local Sites Register by CPERC, a GIS layer showing the boundary of the site, its name and current reason for selection. It is important to note that the Local Sites Register is updated annually around April and so decisions made at panel meetings may not be reflected in this for some time after they become effective.

### **3. Working with landowners**

The guidance provided by Defra (2005) in *Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management* is that all sites which meet the selection criteria are to be selected, and this is regardless of land ownership or use. However, the reality is that positive outcomes for a site are only likely to be achieved through working with their owners, managers and users and while they cannot form part of the decision-making process, their views will be considered by the panel and wider partnership.

#### ***Awareness and benefits of the Local Sites system***

Many landowners are unaware that part of their land has been selected as a Local Site and may be unaware of the Local Sites system in general. This may be because no contact information could be found at the time of selection, or it may be that ownership has changed and this information was not passed on. As resources allow, efforts should be made to contact all landowners of Local Sites to explain to them the importance of their land in the wider context and its safeguarding through sensitive management.

The recognition of part of their land as a Local Site can help landowners to apply for funding through agri-environment schemes and other grant schemes, as and when they become available. Although sympathetic management of a Local Site for its features of ecological or geological importance is voluntary it can make a substantial contribution towards national and local conservation efforts and objectives. It is hoped that the landowner will take pride in their site and manage it positively.

Landowners can request for a member of the panel, or other suitable person, to visit the site to provide advice on its management and further information about its ecological or geological importance. This is provided for free, though if a full survey is requested this may come at an agreed cost. If the full survey is on the request of the panel, or otherwise funded, then it will be at no cost to the landowner.

#### ***Permission to access land***

As much of the data required to support a proposal for a Local Site, or a change to its selection criteria, are gathered by fieldwork, access to a site is often, but not always, a fundamental part of the process. Permission will be sought from the landowner who will be provided with a clear and unambiguous explanation of the purpose of the survey and who is to undertake it. Where permission is not granted, either through inability to contact the landowner or through their refusal, surveyors will not trespass on land in order to acquire data.

#### ***Results of survey***

Following on from a survey a full report is usually written which provides a description of the site and its features of interest, details its current condition and provides advice on management. This is shared with the landowner along with other data such as lists of

species present, habitat or geological maps, or historical information. All members of the panel have access to the reports and associated data, as do any funding bodies who have contributed to the cost of the survey. The biological records are stored by CPERC who also share these data with their data partners.

### ***Proposals to panel and right to object***

Landowners are consulted in advance of a proposal taken to the Local Sites Panel about their land and may be invited to attend the relevant meeting. Ideally proposals will not be put forward without support from the landowner, but in exceptional circumstances this may be required in order to conserve an important site. Proposals about a site may also be made directly by the landowner for consideration by the panel. Objections to a proposal can be made by the landowner but the main reasons stated for objection must relate to the ecological or geological status of the site with reference made to the selection criteria, though other relevant factors may also be taken into account.

Following a panel meeting, landowners are informed about the outcome of any decisions regarding their site as soon as practically possible. Although the decisions made are effective from the date of the meeting, an appeal can be made against the decision within one month of notice. The landowner will be provided with a clear timescale in which to put together an appeal based on the ecological or geological features of the site and may be invited to attend the panel meeting at which it will be discussed. In the instance of an appeal being made, the decision to create or amend the Local Site will be put on hold until the next meeting. This will be added as an addendum to the minutes of the meeting at which the decision was made and will be discussed at the next panel meeting. The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the landowner as soon as practically possible after the meeting.

### ***Concerns***

The primary concerns of landowners about Local Sites include restrictions over development, constraints on agricultural practice and fear of public access implications.

Selection as a Local Site does not in itself place additional restrictions on land use; positive management relies on the goodwill of landowners and managers and has no statutory basis. Selection as a Local Site does not grant any rights of access beyond those already legally in place, or limit agricultural or forestry operations beyond the rules defined elsewhere.

With respect to planning, local authority commitments to biodiversity and geological heritage mean that consideration of planning applications should take full regard of the ecological and geological features of interest regardless of recognition as a Local Site. Sites which have not yet been formally selected but meet the selection criteria would still be subject to full scrutiny and often receive the same level of protection within the planning system.

Other concerns may include having the resources or understanding to manage the site appropriately. Recognition as a Local Site often aids in the application to grants and prioritises activities such as advisory visits and survey work often provided for free from local charities, societies and experts.

### ***Planning applications and legal obligations***

There may come a time when a landowner may wish to apply for planning permission to build upon or make a change in use of their site, and their sites may also come under specific regulations such as Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. Regardless of formal selection as a Local Site or not, sites of substantive biological and geological conservation interest are usually recognised within these systems and processes and appropriately safeguarded. The general principle would be to avoid damage to the features of conservation interest, and if necessary, provide appropriate mitigation. Members of the Local Sites Partnership will endeavour to work with landowners to find an appropriate outcome to their requests. Further detail is provided in the next section.

## **4. Site safeguarding and management**

Whilst Local Site status is not a statutory designation, Local Sites do receive some protection through inclusion in the formal planning and development control process, though any site which is not formally selected but is of high enough ecological or geological value should also be carefully considered. Site protection largely relies on the commitment of local authorities, public bodies and utilities to protect sites against damaging development.

The network of Local Sites provides a comprehensive framework and proactive approach for the promotion and prioritisation of nature conservation, including the management of and targeting of grant schemes to UK Priority Habitats. A further important function is their use in monitoring the condition of the best habitat remaining in the area and hence to some extent the effectiveness of conservation action being taken. Most Local Sites systems in the UK are small and under-resourced in relation to their potential, so regular comprehensive monitoring of the condition of sites often remains a luxury; however, the usefulness of such an exercise should not be under-estimated.

### ***Planning policies and the planning system***

It is important that Local Sites are afforded the maximum protection currently available to them through the planning system. At every opportunity, the planning system should be used to encourage appropriate management for the conservation of these important sites - at the very least to maintain present conservation interest, and ideally to enhance them. Mechanisms to deliver this already exist through Section 106 agreements, Biodiversity Net Gain, planning conditions and local development plans.

Development plans should include provision for the protection of sites important for nature conservation in the wider countryside, including Local Sites. Policies and proposals to protect and enhance Local Sites should be included as well as the locations of Local Sites shown on the adopted proposals map. If not, they may be found in an appendix and include a brief description or explanation of what these sites represent. It is important that policies are written in such a way that they apply to all sites that meet the Local Sites selection guidelines criteria whether or not they currently appear on the Local Sites Register.

Local planning authorities need to have regard to the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, including the production of Local Plans. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) recognises all Local Sites as areas of primary importance for nature conservation. However, this recognition does not afford Local Sites any further protection

In line with the mitigation hierarchy the presumption should always be in favour of site protection rather than mitigation. Development on Local Sites is to be avoided. Unavoidable impacts should be mitigated wherever possible to maintain the value and integrity of sites and the system as a whole. If significant harm to biodiversity or

geodiversity interests cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated for, or compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. Policies should indicate that where development is approved which affects a Local Site, appropriate measures would be required to protect the interest of the site.

Measures to enhance the ecological or geological value of a Local Site should be a condition of planning permission wherever sites are significantly affected by a proposed development. The emphasis of site protection and management can be encouraged through working with landowners and with careful thought and planning these can often bring positive benefits. An imaginative and flexible approach by the planning authorities is therefore encouraged.

Planning applications which may impact a Local Site, either directly or indirectly, should be accompanied by an appraisal of likely impacts and recommendations of how such impacts can be avoided, minimised or mitigated for. The report should also identify residual impacts and compensatory measures to offset them. A suitably qualified ecologist or geologist should produce such appraisals with other specialist input as required, for example, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment or pollution control measures. Where the planning authority is minded to grant permission, planning conditions and agreements should be used to minimise the impact of development and secure recommended mitigation and or compensatory measures.

In some development cases it is not necessary for a formal application to be presented to the local authority. This includes 'permitted' developments, where planning permission has been granted by a development order or a specific statutory provision. Other developments are controlled or carried out by organisations other than local authorities, including statutory undertakers such as the water companies. Operations outside planning control may still have an impact on Local Sites and therefore consultation in such cases should be encouraged wherever possible. Some developments, such as agricultural operations, are excluded from the planning process altogether, but may be covered by the agriculture and forestry Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (see below). In these circumstances positive management is to be encouraged.

### ***Other legal protection***

The **Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001** provide a measure of protection against changes in land management for uncultivated land. If intensification of land use is being considered it may be necessary to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment under these regulations.

The Forestry Commission is responsible for administering the **Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999**. These regulations affect four ‘forestry’ projects. These are:

- **Afforestation:** Planting new woods and forests, includes direct seeding or natural regeneration, planting Christmas trees or short rotation coppice
- **Deforestation:** Felling woodland to use the land for a different purpose
- **Forest roads:** The formation, alteration or maintenance of private ways on land used (or to be used) for forestry purposes - this includes roads within a forest or leading to one
- **Forestry quarries:** Quarrying to obtain materials required for forest road works on land that is used or will be used for forestry purposes or on land held or occupied with that land

If work is planned that could be classed within these four forestry projects, the Forestry Commission should be contacted for further information and advice. If the Commission’s opinion is that the proposed project will have a significant impact on the environment, consent for the work needs to be sought.

In addition, farmers must follow various rules set out in law. The long-standing set of rules around Good Agricultural and Environment Condition (GAEC) and Statutory Management Regulations (SMR) associated with direct payments to farmers have been discontinued. Landowners and managers need to refer to, and adhere to, the most recent rules as listed on the government website under “Rules for farmers and land managers”.

### ***Promoting the positive management of Local Sites***

Beyond the planning process and other regulations, there is, however, little protection against changes in land use and sites are not protected from damage through neglect. Local Sites therefore rely on the goodwill and interest of owners and managers to manage appropriately and sympathetically their features of nature conservation interest.

The key to promoting the conservation of Local Sites is information. It is crucial that owners and other stakeholders are aware of where Local Sites are and why they are important both individually and within a wider county context. With this information owners, planners and conservation bodies can work together to make informed decisions about the future of these sites. Landowners will be offered support and encouragement from the partnership to maintain and enhance their site, this may include general advice, identification of appropriate grants, assistance with application forms or help with writing management plans.

Wider awareness of the Local Sites system by the general public may be beneficial in highlighting the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity in the wider countryside, not just in nature reserves. Raising awareness may encourage local

communities to take action on land in their control and to become more involved in practical nature conservation work such as surveying and site management. However, as many sites are in private ownership with no rights of access, the promotion of public awareness of specific sites should be restricted to those which are owned by local authorities, charities and other public organisations or private landowners who are happy for the conservation value of their land to be publicised. Access to sites, other than rights of access already legally in place, should be permitted by the landowner only with careful consideration of the impacts to the features of nature conservation interest.

### ***Monitoring of Local Sites***

Even with seemingly appropriate management, Local Sites are vulnerable to change. Ongoing monitoring of Local Sites is of vital importance to ensure their long-term positive management and safeguard their features of conservation importance. Regular surveying and monitoring are needed to quickly identify any adverse change and thus to provide support to protect and enhance the sites. Monitoring Local Sites is essential to:

- update information, data and knowledge of the site and its management
- assess the condition of the site and its features of conservation importance
- assess the effectiveness of site management
- assess the effectiveness of site protection
- help focus resources on priority sites
- increase the understanding of any causes of change to the site
- establish and justify the need for continued action

Active monitoring of sites takes time and resources and can only occur with sufficient funding. Ideally each site would be visited every five years so that changes can be identified quickly and responded to if necessary. Where the condition of a site (or one or more of its features of interest) is found to be poor or deteriorating, quick intervention allows appropriate management advice to be provided and support to be given to the landowners to help the site's recovery.

Monitoring also provides evidence for the Single Data List 160 (SDL160) metric, the national indicator on local biodiversity and geodiversity which at least upper tier local authorities are required to report on annually. This metric looks at the most recently known management status of each Local Site in order to provide a measure for the proportion of Local Sites with evidence that positive conservation management is being implemented, or has been within the last five years. This list is maintained by CPERC and is a valuable tool in assessing how successful the Local Sites system is in achieving its aim of protection and enhancement of sites, and of deciding how to use the system to its maximum effectiveness. Monitoring can also help local authorities to meet their duties to conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.

Monitoring programmes do, however, rely on available resources and while some sites are actively monitored due to funding resources available, many may not be visited for years or decades.

## 5. Data

Data pertaining to the Local Sites system includes site surveys and records, site citations, panel minutes, site boundaries, ownership and contact details. These are mainly used by the site owners, conservation and advisory organisations, planning authorities, statutory organisations and environmental consultancies and organisations with an interest in environmental information. Although many of these data are held within the Local Sites Partnership, other organisations or individuals outside the partnership may also hold data relating to Local Sites, which may be more recent.

Type of data	Data manager	Other holder of data
Site surveys - including species records and habitat data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation or person responsible for collection - often the WT, CGS or GP, but could also be any organisation or individual outside the partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPERC</li> <li>Other partnership members</li> <li>Funding bodies</li> <li>Other organisations and individuals</li> </ul>
Site citations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WT, CGS, GP (as relevant)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPERC</li> <li>Third parties on request to CPERC</li> </ul>
Site boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPERC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WT, CGS, GP</li> <li>Other partnership members</li> <li>Third parties on request to CPERC</li> <li>Other local experts (e.g. county recorders) on agreement with CPERC</li> </ul>
Landowner contact details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WT, CGS, GP (as relevant)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not circulated unless in agreement with landowner</li> </ul>
SDL160	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CPERC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WT, CGS, GP</li> <li>Local authorities</li> </ul>
Panel documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All members of Local Sites Panel</li> </ul>

WT – Wildlife Trust BCN, CGS – Cambridgeshire Geological Society, GP - GeoPeterborough,  
 CPERC – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre

### **Data protection and sharing**

The systems used to store and handle Local Sites data have been assessed against the relevant data protection legislation and are, to the best of the partnership’s knowledge, fully compliant. All personal information relating to Local Sites, in various paper and electronic formats, are held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations and are not shared, even amongst members of the partnership, without the owner’s consent.

All data collected as part of surveying current and potential Local Sites are covered by the provisions of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. This means all species and habitat data will be considered available for release to third parties (including consultants and developers) unless it is in the public interest not to do so. Site owners may request that the species and habitat information is not shared with third parties without prior written permission, though as the policy is in favour of the release of survey data, this will be by exception.

In exceptional circumstances certain records (particularly of sensitive species or features) collected as part of a survey of a Local Site, or potential Local Site, may not be released. Information on protected species and advice on relevant legal implications is given to the owners and managers of sites where appropriate. CPERC, the Wildlife Trust, and the landowner will consider the release of sensitive species information on a case-by-case basis.

CPERC can identify where species and habitat data must not be released to third parties and the members of the partnership will ensure that CPERC are aware of any survey data that must be treated in this manner. In exceptional circumstances and where a landowner insists, the holders of the data will not provide it to CPERC.

The Wildlife Trust, Cambridgeshire Geological Society and GeoPeterborough are responsible for ensuring that CPERC is provided with the most up to date information on Local Sites for it to be disseminated to those who need to use it. CPERC acts as a central point of contact for enquiries relating to Local Sites, except for informal enquiries from landowners of sites, such as enquiries about management which are better directed to the relevant organisations mentioned above.

CPERC is the manager and holder of the up-to-date Local Site GIS layers which also act as the Local Sites Register. CPERC shares these layers with relevant organisations, including local authorities, by agreement. On request, and in agreement with CPERC on their terms and conditions, local experts may also be provided with the Local Site GIS layers if it encourages the generation of further ecological and geological data and understanding. For more information contact CPERC.

### ***Charging for information***

An administration charge may be made to third parties to meet the costs of searching for, collating and preparing data on request. For further information on charging for the cost of providing information and the Terms and Conditions under which data is supplied please visit the CPERC website [www.cperc.org.uk](http://www.cperc.org.uk).

## 6. Potential sources of funding

The Local Sites Partnership can play a valuable role in identifying, publicising and providing access to sources of information and advice for funding environmental land management. Sources of funding vary from time to time, but a wide range of potential funding schemes may include:

- Government **Countryside Stewardship schemes** set up under section 18(1) of the Agriculture Act 1986 and section 98 of the Environment Act 1995.
- **Planning conditions and Section 106 agreements** with developers for work to secure public benefit. These could include measures to improve public access and interpretation. Section 106 agreements could also include one-off or ongoing payments for positive management.
- Sale of **Biodiversity Net Gain units** through creation of biodiversity off-setting sites or habitat banks for developers to purchase off-site net gains.
- Local authorities can make **payments under Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** for entering into management agreements in respect of any land in their area for the purpose of conserving or enhancing its natural beauty, or promoting its enjoyment by the public.
- A range of **lottery, landfill tax credit schemes, regeneration funding, foundation and trusts grants** are available for voluntary and community sector-led initiatives geared to environmental, health, quality of life, social inclusion and other objectives which may be relevant to Local Sites. Examples include grants from local water companies and the Natural Cambridgeshire Partnership.
- Local **councils**, at all tiers, may also have a small grants or community funding programmes from time to time which offer a contribution towards the costs of environmental projects.

## 7. References and supporting documentation

### References

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### ***Supporting documents***

The following documents are complementary to this handbook, setting out further detail on how the Local Sites Panel operates and the selection criteria for each type of Local Site. They are all subject to frequent updates, the most recent versions can be obtained from the Wildlife Trust website: <http://wildlifebcn.org/wildlife/wider-countryside/local-wildlife-sites/cambridgeshire> or on request by contacting the Wildlife Trust.

- The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Sites Panel – Terms of Reference, Roles and Responsibilities
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough County Wildlife Sites – Selection Guidelines
- Criteria for the Selection of City Wildlife Sites
- Cambridgeshire Geological Society’s Local Geological Site Selection Strategy