

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).
Guidelines for their Identification, Selection and Designation

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document describes the process for identifying and gaining recognition for sites of substantive non-statutory nature conservation value in the Isle of Wight. The selection process described will ensure recognition of these sites. They may then be afforded protection through the planning system and be targeted for grants and other resources to assist their conservation.
- 1.2 This guidance is consistent with *Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management* (Defra, 2006) and should be read in conjunction with that publication and *Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation* (ODPM, 2005) and *Planning for Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: A Guide to Good Practice* (ODPM, 2006).
- 1.3 The Defra guidance recommends that Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGGS) are considered alongside sites of value for wildlife. Identification of RIGGS is in progress by the staff of Dinosaur Isle (Isle of Wight Council), but has not yet reached a stage at which they can be incorporated into this system.
- 1.4 These guidelines have been developed by a sub-group of the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership and are endorsed by the Partnership, in accordance with Defra and ODPM recommendations. The Biodiversity Partnership comprises representatives from statutory and voluntary nature conservation organisations and the local authority. The document will be available on the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership website (www.wildonwight.co.uk).

2. What is a SINC?

- 2.1 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), along with biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), some of which are of international importance, are the most important places for wildlife in the county. They have substantive nature conservation value and their continued presence makes a significant contribution to maintenance of biodiversity. They may also have an important role in contributing to public enjoyment and understanding of nature.
- 2.2 SINCs are defined as: A series of non-statutory local sites designated to seek to ensure, in the public interest, the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of species and habitats of substantive nature conservation value. SINCs should include all areas of substantive value, including both the most important and the most distinctive species, habitats, geological

and geomorphological features within a national, regional and local context.

- 2.3 The Biodiversity Partnership seeks to identify all sites which satisfy the selection criteria presented in Annexe 1 of this document. In contrast, through notification of the biological SSSI series, Natural England seeks to protect a representative suite of habitats and assemblages of species (JNCC, 1988). Consequently, not all sites which meet SSSI criteria have been or will be notified as statutory sites.
- 2.4 The aim for the network of SINC's is to provide a comprehensive rather than a representative suite of sites to include the full range of habitat types of nature conservation importance in the county, including sites which support species which are rare or threatened nationally, regionally or in the county.
- 2.5 SINC designation complements protection of habitats and species by other mechanisms. In line with national and regional guidance from Natural England, the Biodiversity Partnership has identified ten Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). These encompass the regional priority areas which are considered to have the greatest potential for restoration and creation of UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats by linking existing good quality habitat. Species which receive legal protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) are frequently mobile and are not necessarily confined to sites identified through the wildlife sites system. Sites which hold important populations of key species or groups of species may qualify for SINC status but not all sites containing important species will be identified as SINC's. Information on species is available from the Isle of Wight Local Records Centre (www.wildonwight.co.uk/lrc).
- 2.6 Increasingly, there is a realisation that to achieve a coherent and resilient ecological network, a landscape scale approach to land management is required. The Isle of Wight Council will identify and manage an accessible network of connected and multi-functional open spaces that covers the Island through the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document. SINC's are a critically important resource in the Island's green infrastructure in providing accessible natural environments rich in wildlife for people to enjoy and experience.

3. Purpose of SINC designation

- 3.1 The purpose of selection of SINC's is to ensure that the nature conservation value of these sites is recognised so that informed decisions may be made on their future management.
- 3.2 The Defra guidance on Local Sites (Defra, 2006) describes the legislative and policy context for SINC's. Reference is made to Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation; Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation; the relationship between local BAPs and Community Strategies; the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Section 74); the Biodiversity Strategy for England; and the EU Habitats Directive (Article 10, transposed into UK law in regulation 37 (now renumbered as Regulation 39) of the revised Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010).

- 3.3 Planning Policy Statement 9 states ‘*Sites of regional and local biodiversity and geological interest, which include Regionally Important Geological Sites, Local Nature reserves and Local Sites, have a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets; contributing to the quality of life and the well-being of the community; and in supporting research and education. Criteria based policies should be established in local development documents against which proposals for any development on, or affecting such sites will be judged.* In Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning (CLG, 2008) ‘*areas of protection, such as nationally protected landscape and internationally and locally-designated areas and sites*’ are cited for inclusion on adopted proposals maps.
- 3.4 The criteria for SINC designation in Appendix 1 of this document are rigorous and robust and their use to assess sites will give confidence that those meeting the criteria are of substantive nature conservation value.
- 3.5 SINC notification can provide land owners / managers with information on the wildlife value of their land to assist them in making choices on management. In prioritising allocation of grants, such as payments through Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme, agencies will be able to target grants towards SINC. Other bodies may be able to channel resources to provide advice and practical assistance with management. Practical links may be made with Sustainable Community Strategy (Eco-Island Island Strategic Partnership), such as local group help with conservation management of appropriate sites.
- 3.6 The condition of SINC provides a measure of Biodiversity Action Plan achievements at local, regional and national levels. The Isle of Wight BAP identifies priorities for habitat and species conservation and enhancement within the county and sets targets for habitat and species achievement with reference to those targets in national and regional plans and strategies. The Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership has identified as a priority the need to acquire detailed information on the condition of SINC.
- 3.7 The Local Authority is required to provide reports on local biodiversity to regional government offices through their Annual Monitoring Report, as part of the assessment of the effectiveness of their planning policies. Local Development Framework Monitoring: A Good Practice Guide (ODPM, 2005) makes specific reference to monitoring areas designated for their local significance for biodiversity.
http://www.iwight.com/living_here/planning/Planning_Policy/Monitoring_Reports/
- 3.8 Since 1st October 2006, Local Authorities and Public Bodies have had a duty to have regard for biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act.
- 3.9 The New Performance Framework for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Single Set of National Indicators (October 2007) includes NI 197 Improved Local Biodiversity – proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented. This requires up to date information on the management being carried out on SINC. NI 197 has been selected as a headline indicator in the Council’s Local Area Agreement.

4. Identification and selection of SINC

- 4.1 The great majority of SINC's are already included on the UDP Proposals Map (May 2001) and fulfil the criteria for SINC designation. The boundaries of all these SINC's have been reviewed in order to ensure that they accurately incorporate the interest feature for which they were identified. In some instances this has led to boundary changes. The reasons for amendments to boundaries may be any of the following:
- Mapping errors in the original documents;
 - Exclusion of buildings or maintained gardens;
 - Modifications so as to more accurately encompass the interest features;
 - Loss or destruction of the interest.
- The use of GIS and aerial photography has allowed a more accurate mapping of SINC boundaries than was previously possible at the time that the UDP maps were produced.
- 4.2 In order for any additional proposed SINC's to be considered, sufficient up-to-date information is required. This requires a visit by a competent ecologist/naturalist with the permission of the landowner. The Biodiversity Partnership will then consider any recommendation in the light of the criteria for designation.
- 4.3 As recommended by Defra, sites formally selected by the Biodiversity Partnership Group '*must be submitted to the local authority for inclusion within their Local Development Frameworks at the earliest opportunity*' (Defra, 2006, par. 24). The identification of SINC's within the Island Plan and on the Proposals Map provides the opportunity for comments from the public to be made and gives greater validity and transparency to the identification process.
- 4.4 For any future sites, identified after the Island Plan has been adopted, once they have been through the verification process as described above, prior to formal endorsement, site owners/managers will be informed of the outcome of the Partnership's assessment and will be given the opportunity to make observations on factors relating directly to application of site selection criteria, as recommended by Defra. Parish Councils will also be consulted. At this stage, site owners/managers will also be sent full details of any site survey, including site description and boundary map, and any species lists.

5. Management, monitoring and review

- 5.1 Data relating to sites (whether selected or not) will be held by the LRC on behalf of the Biodiversity Partnership and will be managed according to its published policies and procedures in line with National Biodiversity Network guidelines.
- 5.2 Defra recommends that '*Local authorities should provide leadership in establishing and maintaining partnerships and systems to manage Local Sites*'. It also recommends that '*locational details should be sent to relevant decision makers with further information on the site's features and interest as appropriate*' (Defra, 2006, pars. 16 & 71).
- 5.3 Monitoring of SINC's may reveal deterioration of designated sites. If this is the case, consideration with the landowner/manager will be given to the

potential for restoration of the site's features of interest. If restoration is not feasible, the Biodiversity Partnership may notify owners and other interested parties that formal de-selection will take place. The local authority should then remove reference to the site from its Local Development Framework at the earliest opportunity.

5.4 As recommended by DEFRA, the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership will review these guidelines from time to time. A review would consider if:

- The system is operating in the most effective way;
- The sites selected adequately represent sites of nature conservation interest on the Isle of Wight;
- There is sufficient information on the condition of SINCs; and
- Measures for SINC conservation and management are effective.

Annexe 1. SINC Criteria