

Note: *The current published SINC criteria appear in the Isle of Wight UDP (May 2001). They are essentially an adaptation of the Hampshire SINC criteria adapted for the Island. Since that time, Biodiversity Action Plans have come on line and, recently, DEFRA has issued guidance on Local Sites. It is therefore timely that we should review our SINC criteria in the light of current guidance.*

Isle of Wight SINC Selection Criteria (Revised)

Government has an objective to promote sustainable development by ensuring that biological and geological diversity are conserved and enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economic development. Non-statutory wildlife sites are recognised by Government in making a vital contribution towards delivering both the UK and Local Biodiversity and Geodiversity Action Plan targets and maintaining local natural character and distinctiveness. They provide important and widely distributed wildlife refuges for much of our fauna and flora and, through their connecting, stepping stone and buffering qualities, they support statutory nature conservation site networks.

The UK's Biodiversity Steering Group has identified Local Biodiversity Action Plans as the best way forward for the conservation of biodiversity at all levels and the implementation of national targets. The Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership was set up in response to this call. One of its early roles was to identify Habitat and Species Action Plans, which relied on an assessment of which nationally important species and habitats occur here. This took place through an auditing process summarised in the *'Wildlife of the Isle of Wight – an audit and assessment of its biodiversity'*, published July 2000.

UK BAP Priority habitats do not receive statutory protection, but they are listed (as "Habitats of Principal Importance") within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and planning guidance in PPS9 states that "local authorities should also conserve other important habitat types that have been identified ... as being of principal importance".

SINC (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) is a non-statutory designation used to recognise high quality nature conservation sites within the county which do not have the statutory protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). In a few instances, an SSSI which has been designated solely for geological interest, has been identified as a SINC if it also has substantive biological interest of local importance. The designation does not place any legal restrictions on how a landowner manages or farms the land. For proposals involving a change of use which will require planning permission, there are policies in the Local Plan which will need to be taken into account. Recognition of the value of SINC will help in the delivery of the Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan.

The Isle of Wight Council recognise that many habitats and species are likely to be influenced as a consequence of climate change and sea level rise. In order to ensure their continued survival into the future, it will be necessary to provide opportunities for habitats and species to migrate. In some circumstances, habitats may migrate into areas of currently low biological interest. Planning policies will seek to protect from development, areas which are at risk from environmental change.

All sites should be clearly defined on a 1:10,000 scale map and, where possible, should be no smaller than an OS land parcel. When defining boundaries, a site should normally

include any adjacent, or internal, semi-natural habitat, which, though it may not be important enough in its own right, makes an important contribution to the overall habitat and species diversity of the site. This would include mosaics of heathland, unimproved grassland, scrub and plantation.

1. Woodland

a) All ancient semi-natural woodlands.

This comprises all sites shown on the Natural England Provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory.

b) Other ancient woodland where there is a significant element of the original semi-natural woodland surviving.

This category includes plantations over ancient woodland sites, as shown in the Ancient Woodland Inventory. They generally contain boundary banks and rides which have retained a semi-natural flora and fauna. Ancient semi-natural woodlands which are below the threshold for inclusion in the Woodland inventory (< 2 ha), can also be included here. These can be included only if evidence of ancient origin is particularly strong, based on field data including species composition, woodland structure, and presence of woodbanks or earthworks or other features associated with ancient woodlands and examination of historical maps to demonstrate woodland continuity on the site. The wood should be present on the 1793 Mudge Survey maps.

c) Other semi-natural woodland, if they comprise important community types of a restricted distribution in the county, particularly semi-natural wet woodlands and species-rich secondary woodlands.

This category applies to semi-natural, not plantation, woodland displaying biological and physical features consistent with NVC communities W1, W2, W5, W6, W8 or W10, but does not have to be an ideal fit. For example, the dominant canopy species may not resemble the NVC community, whilst the field layer composition may be a better indication of the NVC community type. Such woods may be more precisely described using Peterken stand types.

d) Areas of bracken/bramble underscrub with an abundance of bluebells.

These are stands of bracken with a comparatively herb-rich ground flora reminiscent of damp woodland and conforming to the NVC community W25a.

e) Any pasture woodland and wooded commons not included in any of the above, which are of biological and historic interest.

This category applies to sites that support habitats and species that are traditionally associated with parkland or wood pasture and/or support blocks, groupings, scattered old (>150 years) or veteran trees in combination with either grazed woodland or grassland and or in combination. It also applies to old/veteran trees (at least 150 years old) that are known to support fungi, and/or invertebrates, and/or lichens that are either characteristic or specialist species of veteran trees. Associated features of sites may also be included such as grassland, ponds, woodland and old walls.

Justification. The ecological and physical features of an ancient woodland site will have developed over hundreds of years. They cannot be recreated within any practical time frame. Ancient semi-natural woodlands are an essential part of the 'critical natural

capital' and a significant source of biodiversity in the county. Lowland wood pasture and parkland may be derived from ancient semi-natural woodland. Semi-natural non-ancient woodlands, especially the larger examples, may be important locally or as potential links between ancient woodlands. Older secondary woodlands (over 100 years old) have often developed significant biodiversity value. Wet woodlands are recognised as a priority habitat.

UKBAP Priority Habitat Action Plans - Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland; Wet Woodland; Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland
LBAP Habitat Action Plans – Woodland; Farmland

2. Neutral/Acid/Calcareous Grassland

a) agriculturally unimproved grasslands;

These are grasslands which are composed of a mixed assemblage of indigenous species in essentially semi-natural communities which have been able to develop without the major use of herbicides and inorganic fertilisers, and without the added influences of processes such as ploughing, re-seeding and drainage management. The category applies to areas of ancient or long established semi-natural grassland that have been identified as supporting NVC communities MG5, MG8, CG1, CG2, CG3, CG6, U1, U3 or U4. Classification of the community should be based on field assessment by a competent surveyor and may not be an ideal fit. The guideline can be applied to sites of any size, but small sites (<0.5ha) will be subject to scrutiny with regard to additional ecological attributes and to the average field size within the locality. The indicator species concerned should be reasonably well distributed over the whole or a significant part of the site. Localised areas of interest that can be reasonably defined can also be considered.

b) semi-improved grasslands which may have become impoverished through lack of management but retain a significant element of unimproved grassland to enable recovery;

Sites which support an average of at least 9 flowering plant species per square metre in the richer areas, although these may be rare within the site as a whole, or restricted to patches. Sites which have been recently created as part of a habitat restoration scheme should not be included.

Justification. These grassland communities represent some of the rarest and most threatened grassland types in the UK and locally. Their presence also indicates that the grassland has not been improved through intensive agricultural management. As a consequence, they support a rich diversity of flowering plants, some of which are restricted to these habitats. Many of these grassland communities are now restricted to small areas but often continue to support rare or localised species. Ancient species-rich semi-natural grasslands are an important part of the Island's critical natural capital, which is difficult or impossible to replace once destroyed.

UKBAP Priority Habitat Action Plans – Lowland Dry Acid Grassland; Lowland Calcareous Grassland; Lowland Meadows; Coastal & Floodplain Grazing Marsh.
LBAP Habitat Action Plans – Lowland Calcareous Grassland; Heathland & Acid Grassland; Lowland Meadows

3. Heathland

a) All areas of heathland vegetation, including matrices of dwarf shrub, grassland and scrub

Areas greater than 1 ha in which the vegetation is dominated by assemblages of at least 25% heath (*Calluna vulgaris* and/or *Erica cinerea* and/or *Erica tetralix*)

b) Areas of heathland which are heavily afforested or have succeeded to scrub or woodland if they retain significant remnants of heathland vegetation that would enable their recovery

Areas smaller than 1 ha that support heathland vegetation in association with other semi-natural habitats of nature conservation interest such as acid grassland and gorse scrub.

Justification Heathland is amongst our most threatened habitats, through destruction and lack of management. The huge historic loss of this habitat on the Island has been accompanied by severe fragmentation.

UK BAP Priority Habitat Action Plans – Lowland Heathland; Lowland Dry Acid Grassland
LBAP Habitat Action Plans – Heathland & Acid Grassland

4. Coastal Habitats

All remaining natural and semi-natural coastal and estuarine habitats which retain some nature conservation interest, including sand dunes, saltmarsh, brackish ponds, grazing marshes and coastal grasslands, sea cliffs, landslips, slopes and chines, and intertidal rocky shores, sandflats and mixed sediment shores.

These important coastal habitats are largely protected within the SSSI system. However, they are such fragile, rare, natural and, sometimes diverse habitats that there should be a presumption in favour of selecting all remaining fragments, excepting for extremely small or severely degraded examples. The seaward boundary is, where appropriate, mean low water.

Justification

Coastal habitats are species-rich and diverse. Their long-term survival is threatened by development, sea level rise and coastal squeeze.

UK BAP Priority Habitat Action Plans – Coastal & Floodplain Grazing Marsh; Coastal Saltmarsh; Mudflats; Coastal Vegetated Shingle; Coastal Sand Dunes; Reedbeds; Sheltered Muddy Gravels; Seagrass Beds; Saline Lagoons; Maritime Cliffs & Slopes
LBAP Habitat Action Plans – Maritime Cliffs; Solent Coastal

5. Wetland Habitats

a) Areas of open freshwater (eg lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and ditches), which support a significant assemblage of aquatic flora and fauna;

b) Reed swamps, fens, flushes, seepages, springs, inundation grasslands etc that support a significant assemblage of flora and fauna characteristic of unimproved and waterlogged (seasonal or permanent) conditions.

This category could apply to all swamp, reedbed and tall-herb fen sites that are over 1ha in size and either consist of a single vegetation community type or a mosaic of wetland NVC community types S3, S4, S6, S7, S12, S13, S14, S18, S19, S20, S21, S22, S25, S26, MG10, MG11, MG12 and MG13.

Swamps and tall-herb fens smaller than 1 ha will be considered where they meet one or more of the following: -

- The site is part of a series of swamp, reed-bed or tall herb habitats along a watercourse
- the site is part of a hydrosere of vegetation types
- the site makes a substantive contribution to the total Island resource of the community type

Justification Though widespread, swamps and tall-herb fens are typically small and fragmented. Many sites supporting these vegetation communities have disappeared due to drainage and agricultural improvements to land and remaining examples are at risk as a result of various impacts including abstraction, poor water quality and development. Any sites meeting the guideline are therefore of significant nature conservation value. Habitats and NVC types which can be more easily re-created are generally of lower nature conservation interest and may not be eligible for inclusion. Some such sites will be of greater interest and should be considered on the full range of ecological attributes, but in general they should not automatically be considered for selection.

UKBAP Priority Habitat Action Plans – Coastal & Floodplain Grazing Marsh; Reed Beds; Fens; Purple Moor-grass & Rush Pasture; Chalk Rivers; Eutrophic Standing Waters
LBAP Habitat Action Plans – Wetlands

6. Species

Sites selected under criteria 1 to 5 represent the best examples of their habitat type and it is highly probable that they will also support populations or assemblages of important groups of flora and fauna which contribute to the biodiversity of the Isle of Wight. However, there may be cases where sites are not necessarily selected for their habitats but support assemblages of species of importance within the county. Under these circumstances, it is important to establish that the species and/or assemblage use the habitats on a more than casual basis. Some priority species may utilise features which it may not be practical to select such as domestic dwellings, active industrial premises and private gardens; many of these species will be protected by the provisions of legislation. Badgers are protected from abuse and disruption by the Badger Protection Act and are considered as a material consideration within the planning system. They are not deemed as a sufficient reason for considering a site for selection. However, where a sett or significant foraging areas are recorded within a site considered for selection on other criteria, this may influence the site's boundary.

Sites that meet one or more of the following guidelines will be eligible for designation as non-statutory Wildlife Sites:

a) Any site which supports a viable population of one or more species protected under the Habitats Regulations or listed in schedules 1, 5 or 8 of the Wildlife and

Countryside Act 1981 (as revised and amended) or in Red Data Books of Britain and Ireland.

b) Any site which regularly supports a viable population of a species that is either:

i) nationally scarce in Britain or

ii) threatened in Europe, but neither in Red Data Books of Britain and Ireland nor 'nationally scarce', where such populations contribute significantly to the distribution pattern or the total population size of that species.

Consideration should be given to the relative size and extent of the population in relation to populations at other sites both within the Island and nationally and to the contribution this makes to the geographical range of the species.

c) Any site that supports a significant proportion of the Island population, or contributes significantly to the range in the Island, of a national BAP priority species, or a local BAP species which could be at risk because of very small populations, recent rapid decline, or habitat loss or change.

d) Any site that supports an assemblage of species that contributes significantly to the overall flora/fauna of the Island.

Formerly developed sites (ie. brownfield sites) may sometimes qualify if they contain outstanding species assemblages.

Justification. Many species receive statutory protection under a range of legislative provisions. Other species have been identified as requiring conservation action as species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in the U.K. (and are listed in Annex C of PPS9) or at a local level. Those species listed as priorities in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and by the Isle of Wight Local Biodiversity Partnership are subject to periodic review.

7. Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGGS)

Sites that meet one or more of the following guidelines will be eligible for designation:

a) Sites outside of existing Geological SSSI designations which display or contain structural, stratigraphic, sedimentological, palaeontological or mineralogical features of local or regional significance.

b) Sites outside of existing Geological SSSI designations which display geomorphological features of local or regional significance.

Justification. The Isle of Wight LGAP recognised the need to identify new RIGGS which illustrate *The Isle of Wight's Geological Record* and contribute to the understanding of *The Role of the Isle of Wight in the history of the Earth Sciences*. Much of the Island's geological heritage is currently contained within existing SSSI's either solely for geological features or jointly with biological features. These guidelines are aimed at including sites which are external to SSSI's and identifying geological interest within existing biological SSSI's.

Isle of Wight LGAP

8. Social Value

Recognition of a site as having wildlife value in no way confers any rights of access either for the public or nature conservation organisations. However, some sites do have existing community value. The following criteria would not, in themselves, be a reason for recognition as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation but may add value to sites which have recognised substantive nature conservation.

a) A site which has value for the appreciation of nature.

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. Sites which are rich in biodiversity and geodiversity can be additionally important for providing people with the chance to experience and enjoy local wildlife and geology. These would include sites which have been identified as Local Nature Reserves, or public green space, or which have a public footpath or bridleway running through the site.

b) A site which is of value for life-long learning

This could, for instance, include a Country Park, a nature reserve or a geological site used for study by both professional and amateur Earth Scientists.

c) A site with 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. Some sites also have links to historic events or have literary or other associations in art. Some sites have played an important role in the history of Earth Science as places where scientific concepts were first demonstrated.

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