

# Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of Local Sites for geodiversity and biodiversity

## Final Report: Part B, Findings of the Telephone Surveys

Prepared for: Defra

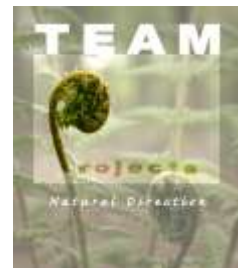
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## **Experience of the Partnerships: findings of the telephone survey**

### **1.1 Introduction**

1. This part of the report provides a summary of information provided during structured telephone surveys with five Local Sites (LS) Partnerships. The section headings reflect the range of topic areas covered during these surveys. The findings describe the relevant processes and procedures in place within each LS Partnership to support site monitoring and conservation and reflect the broad experience and views of those participating in the survey.
2. In all cases, the lead partner was participated in the telephone survey. As the lead representative, they were invited at key points during the survey to suggest other members of the Partnership who might offer further information to help build up a picture of the activities of the Partnership. There was a particular emphasis in this respect to try, where possible, to talk to partners responsible for the delivery of geological conservation activity. Other partners with particular expertise in relation to site management or monitoring, or who perhaps had helped to develop particular approaches to assist in delivery of the work of the Partnership, were also interviewed. These specialists generally confined their input to questions relating to the topics of particular relevance to their area of work (e.g. countryside managers).
3. In all, telephone surveys were carried out with 12 participants in five Partnerships, with an additional two participants providing a combined response to the questions by email (at their request). Participants included lead partners from four Local Authorities and one Wildlife Trust and various partners from RIGS groups, the Geology Trusts, various County Councils environmental teams or advisory bodies, Local Records Centres, The Wildlife Trusts and a National Park Authority. These respondents included geologists, ecologists, planning ecologists, a Local Authority planner, Local Records Centre staff and managers, environmental service providers and countryside managers/advisors.
4. To ensure that reporting correctly reflected the surveys, the completed write-ups were sent to lead partners (and in many cases others who took part in the survey) to be checked. Amendments arising from this process ensured factual descriptions of processes were correctly described and views correctly articulated. There are a few cases where individuals within Partnerships have differing views and it was considered important to reflect these individual viewpoints rather than try and achieve a consensus view.
5. Not all partners participated in the telephone survey, so the findings do not necessarily represent the experience or views of all members of a particular LS Partnership.
6. The primary purpose of the telephone surveys is to further understanding of the progress being made, identify good practice and the issues encountered in delivery. It is not a test of performance of individual Local Sites Partnerships or Local Authorities, but an investigation to test the conservation outcomes of Local Sites to inform policy makers and other stakeholders, and to identify and share good practice.
7. “Local Sites” is a generic term recommended by Defra as a “common-currency” (Defra, 2006), and is used in national planning policy and guidance. Some Local Sites systems have adopted the term, but others prefer to retain use of the names originally devised for these sites. Findings presented in this part of the report use the locally-used term to reflect the strong degree of local ownership in the delivery of Local Sites activities.
8. Locally-used terms in this report for Local Wildlife Sites are:
  - In Hampshire and North Yorkshire: “Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation” (SINCs)
  - In Hertfordshire: “Wildlife Sites” (WSs)
9. Locally-used terms for Local Geological Sites in Hampshire and Hertfordshire are:
  - Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS).

## 1.2 Hampshire

### 1.2.1 Context

10. The SINC system in Hampshire was established in 1994. The former Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership (HBP) led a number of different conservation-related work streams, including SINC related activities. The HBP was led by Hampshire County Council (HCC), which also holds the strategic responsibility for the SINC system across the county. Being an umbrella organisation, HBP brought together the key stakeholders aiming to raise awareness of Hampshire's natural environment and increase commitment to its conservation. Recently, the HBP lead role has been passed to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HWT) with SINC-related policy development and delivery continuing under an HCC lead.
11. Independent of this process, HWT has received Defra funding to lead on the development of a new Local Nature Partnership (LNP), an initiative that covers Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the Solent and South Wight Seas. It is not yet known the extent to which the LNP will take on the former role of the HBP and whether it will include any support for the Local Site system and it remains to be seen how the HWT can use their recent funding award to support the Local Sites system.
12. This work of the SINC Partnership is underpinned by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) a biological records centre, launched in 2002, hosted by HCC and supported by Local Authorities, government agencies, wildlife charities and biological recording groups. In relation to SINC, HBIC provides services such as GIS mapping, data analysis and habitat surveys - and overall identification & monitoring of SINC and the management of the SINC Panel. Away from HCC, Local Authorities and others are responsible for SINC activity at the local level and liaise as necessary with HCC and HBIC in relation in the coordination of on-going survey and condition assessment.
13. In Hampshire, over 3,800 sites have been designated as SINC, in all, covering 9% of the county. This is the largest number of Local Sites in any English county, being nearly double that of any other (ref: SDL stats, 2012<sup>1</sup>).
14. Hampshire is one of the few places in England where there isn't a well-established Local Geological Sites system or local geoconservation / RIGS group. Only very recently, following concerted local activity underpinned by financial support from Natural England, were three SINC proposed by HBIC and approved by the SINC Panel on the basis of their geodiversity interest. Whilst this represents progress in the protection of known geological interest, the Partnership feel that the fact that relatively few sites were designated is a reflection of a number of factors: compared with other areas of the country the county is not noted for its geological interest, the effectiveness of the SSSI system in conserving sites of known geological interest, and the fact that the selection criteria used previously required access for educational purposes as mandatory. Plus no interested geologists in Hampshire are keen to take forward a local group despite numerous attempts by HBIC & Natural England to kick start a group (HBIC offered to provide secretariat).
15. HBIC identifies SINC using detailed selection criteria<sup>2</sup> that are applied to data from a variety of sources. These include an ongoing county-wide habitat survey programme carried out with landowner permission and which is funded by the HBIC Partnership, as well as additional records received from many voluntary recording groups and individuals. A site may qualify due to the presence of an important habitat or for supporting a rare species. A site may also qualify if it supports a rich assemblage of species. HBIC provides an updated GIS layer of SINC for each local authority in Hampshire once at year minimum. A formal decision as to whether or not a site qualifies as a SINC is taken by a panel on the basis of HBIC advice as to the extent that a site qualifies against specific selection criteria. The panel comprises representatives from HCC, HWT and Natural England. Nearly a fifth (20%) of SINC in Hampshire are owned by public bodies or NGOs.

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<sup>1</sup> Single Data List 160-00 on Improved Local Biodiversity – source: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/environment/biodiversity/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/hampshire/sincs/important-sites-sinc-criteria.htm>

## 1.2.2 Management Advice and Local Sites

### Encouragement and support for the management of Local Sites

16. There are three main elements to the provision of support for the management of SINC.

- **Direct approach:** All landowners receive written notification of when a SINC has been identified on their land and this includes provision of “signposting” on how to access management advisory services conducive to retaining the sites importance for wildlife. Typically, this would be to provide contacts for national schemes that fund appropriate land management (e.g. Natural England for agri-environment schemes and Forestry Commission contacts for woodland schemes) and local project advisers.
- **Responding to ad hoc requests:** Partners in the HBP respond to ad hoc requests for management advice from landowners and managers. Some partners are able to provide management advice (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, some District Councils with Countryside Officers, New Forest Land Advice Service (see Box 1 below) though the breadth of organisations with capacity for this provision has decreased recently. The take-up and nature of the provision of this advice is not monitored by the Partnership specifically for SINC, and there has not been a call for this; information on management activity is dispersed being held by various partner organisations.

#### Box 1: The New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS)

The NFLAS began in February 2010 and is currently active in and around the New Forest and Avon Valley. The project is hosted by the New Forest National Park Authority and is also funded by the New Forest Verderers and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. It offers a free independent advice service for the land managing community in and around the New Forest and Avon Valley, specifically identifying support for landowners and/or managers responsible for SINC as a key service feature.

The NFLAS holds SINC information, supplied by HBIC, from across the serviced area. The NFLAS relies on HBIC to survey the SINC resource through a Service Level Agreement with the NPA, and supplement this through walkover surveys where opportunity arises during the course of advisory work.

Generally, the service does not contact landowners up-front to offer advice on the basis of SINC presence but instead uses SINC data as a strategic tool to target contact with landowner/managers. This could take a number of forms:

- NFLAS seeks firstly to establish a constructive relationship with the landowner, typically achieved through the provision of land management training events, or through getting to know a landowner following an approach to the service. Only when a constructive relationship has been established would NFLAS seek to broker a way into possible management negotiations with a view to furthering SINC interests.
- Where a landowner/manager approaches NFLAS to ask for advice in the completion of Entry Level Stewardship or Higher Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme application forms, the service would use desktop surveys to establish the presence of SINC within the land holding, and would use a site visit as an opportunity to carry out a walkover survey and condition assessment. Management information would be fed back as part of the advice sought by the landowner and would typically be included as part of the Higher Level Stewardship application.

- On occasion, SINC landowner/managers known to the NFLAS have been sent leaflets introducing the service, but this has generally drawn little response, for reasons that are unclear.

Constructive relationships with landowner/managers are essential in ensuring good, long-term positive outcomes for SINC, with historic mistrust in the motives behind SINC designation, and consequent difficulties of access and communication, a significant barrier to advising positive management.

- **Promoting knowledge of SINC:** A further element of support to encourage site management comes by actively ensuring partners and others involved with local conservation initiatives are aware of the existence of SINC, provided with information on their value and any other available information from surveys of site condition. This strategy has been in place for a number of years as a means of facilitating the provision of land management advice and assisting land managers with accessing available grants. Examples of past and current initiatives that make use of this information include:
  - the Wildlife Trust's "Linking Landscapes" initiative for habitat restoration and landscape-scale working to achieve reconnection of habitats (New Forest and South Downs National Parks),
  - heathland restoration initiatives, such as "The Hampshire Grazing Project" (a three-year initiative funded by Hampshire County Council and English Nature) and "Grazing for wildlife in north and east Hampshire"
  - the recently announced Nature Improvement Area (NIA) "South Downs Way Ahead" which extends from East Sussex into Hampshire and which seeks to better connect, manage and enhance the chalk ecosystem. Details of downland SINC within the NIA have been provided by HBIC for use with the planning and management of this initiative.

17. The outcome of this approach is that the types of sites most likely to have active management plans, with site-specific objectives are:

- in public ownership (Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities, Forestry Commission, MoD)
- sites in areas with active land management advisers (National Parks)
- sites on habitats that have been the specific focus of conservation projects (e.g. heathlands)

18. Whilst the strategy in place provides effective use of limited resources, the Partnership feel that overall, the support currently provided does not constitute a systematic approach to the provision of advice for SINC in the county, due to the ad hoc nature of implementation. This approach has been adopted out of necessity and the main barriers to achieving a more systematic approach are:

- that there currently is no-one available to provide co-ordination on management activity; and,
- an overview cannot be gained because there is no feedback on management advice activity and the resulting information is dispersed.

19. Guidance documents to support land management are in use by various partners and advisory organisations, but no shared resource exists from which partners can draw. It was felt that there would be value in being able to provide such a resource to partners.

20. Surveys of Local Sites arranged by HBIC on behalf of the Partnership (150 sites; approximately 4% of sites/year) could be used to assess the extent to which sites are being managed sympathetically

(e.g. there are records on presence of active management, such as grazing, coppicing) but this information has not been requested by partners from HBIC.

21. The three Local Geological Sites in the county are exposures and as such do not require active management.

### **Single Data List and NI 197 – how informative has the process of information provision been?**

22. Public landowners, particularly those within the Partnership, have found the process informative because it has alerted them to the need to address the management needs of their own sites, effectively putting their own house in order. Second tier councils (Districts and Boroughs) have responded well in this respect. Other public bodies (notably Government depts.) have been more reluctant to participate in the process, citing lack of time
23. In terms of lessons learned, the results of assessment of SINC to produce the Single Data List (SDL) 160-00 on Improved Local Biodiversity for 2010-11 have been used by HBIC to allocate all SINC to one of three categories that categorise the status of SINC to reflect whether they were judged to be in positive management based on advice received from land managers, evidence collected through survey of SINC and from scrutiny of Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements: Yes (42%) / No (8%) / Don't know (50%). This exercise has been particularly informative in helping the Partnership to gain an overview of the number, distribution and nature of sites where activity needs to be focused; it is felt that further scrutiny of the "don't knows" will help the Partnership in planning future activity and targeting advice, with woodland sites already identified as requiring attention.

### **1.2.3 Survey and Monitoring**

#### **Co-ordination of survey and monitoring activity in Hampshire**

24. Hampshire has a well-established process for establishing and monitoring the condition of sites. A flexible service-based approach has been developed and each year, all partners are given the option to "buy-in" to the services of an ecological survey team (since 1989 this has comprised a dedicated team of two field ecologists who have built up considerable knowledge of the SINC resource in the county). This activity is coordinated by HBIC (since 2002) who also collate and manage the results of site surveys as far back as 1979. Uptake of the service is good, with 18 partners opting to use the service, each deciding the amount and nature of the site survey or monitoring they require for their SINC.
25. HBIC has an established agreed process for assessment and monitoring of a site's condition and this takes account of the management objectives of the SINC – with monitoring focused on establishing whether the site is as it should be, with assessment for example, of whether recorded notable species are present and recording of evidence of the management practices present and whether these are appropriate.

#### **Establishing the baseline condition of Sites**

26. Baseline condition survey of SINC sites typically involves Phase 2 /NVC surveys but extend to full condition assessments (based on quadrats), and/or hydrological surveys/transects on SINC, where these are requested (e.g. from the Environment Agency). When recording the baseline condition of SINC, a simplified SSSI form or "FEP" (Farm Environmental Plan) type of approach is now used, this involves the mapping and survey of the sites and features of interest. It does however add another hour or two to a survey and so is only used when specifically requested - so very few SINC (30-40) have been assessed in this way. However, approximately 80% of sites have been surveyed to Phase 2/NVC level with management observations.
27. A basic assessment of RIGS condition can be made as part of the site selection process (e.g. scoring between 0-10) (GCUK, 2001) but the actual assessment process is adapted locally, and it is thought that baseline condition is not recorded in Hampshire as it was reported "*the completed forms that support the designation do not require information on condition*".

## Monitoring site condition

28. Hampshire has an active approach to monitoring, with a process in place to schedule and deliver a 5-10 year cycle of site monitoring for non-woodland habitat and 10-20 year cycle for woodlands, though there is variation in what can be achieved locally arising largely from landowner access issues and the level of funding districts are able to contribute in relation to the number of sites they have. The scheduled frequency of monitoring is ultimately determined by individual partners, but in practice there are a number of factors which work in combination to determine the frequency of monitoring:
- type of habitat – woodlands are monitored less frequently;
  - risk of change – sites in proximity to urban areas are monitored more frequently;
  - management sensitivity – some sites dependent on particular grazing or hydrological regimes are monitored, on request, on a 2-5 year cycle
29. The main barrier to monitoring site condition is the refusal by landowners to provide site access. It is not possible to use site condition information obtained from other sources (e.g. HLS, other monitoring schemes, site surveys) unless they have followed the Common Standards Method (for monitoring SSSIs) or HBIC’s own simplified method of assessment, which limits available opportunity.
30. HBIC uses a standardised methodology for assessing the ecological and management condition of local wildlife sites. This methodology has been designed for use in Hampshire and has been based on condition assessment guidelines for SSSIs, adjusted to take account of the possible lower conservation value of SINC’s and local variations of structure and composition of vegetation across the county<sup>3</sup>.

## Users and uses of survey and monitoring information gathered by partners

31. The main users are the public bodies in the Partnership (see table below). Information on the geological sites was not thought to have been placed on Natural England’s LGS (RIGS) database yet. Although Natural England has the relevant GIS layers, greater regard to the range of available SINC data would be beneficial to the delivery of agri-environment schemes to ensure benefit to SINC interests, particularly in the set-up of agreements.

Users	Uses
Wildlife Trust	Informing on effects of site management, planning and delivery of strategic landscape-scale initiatives
County Council Countryside Service	“FEP” type data used to support assessment of sites for their suitability for HLS agreements
Natural England	“FEP” type data used to support assessment of sites for their suitability for HLS agreements
Environment Agency	Informing on effects of site management – particularly effects of hydrological regimes
Planning Departments	Planning and delivery of minerals and wastes planning functions (CC) Assessing impacts of development (all planning authorities) Reporting of Single Data List to Defra Compiling Annual Monitoring Data for DCLG

## Overall assessment of the condition of Local Sites

32. The HBP monitor around 140 SINC’s per year and as part of this process record evidence of management operations, whether the sites continues to meet the criteria for which it was designated or whether this has been “lost”. If the site is lost, reasons for the change are recorded based on evidence – e.g. to agricultural development, amenity land, planning/ development related losses. This information is used by 2nd tier Authorities for the Annual Monitoring Reports they submit to DCLG.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, P.J. 2009. Development of standardized methods for condition assessment of local wildlife sites



33. Data on site condition is available for just over 18% (699) of SINC's (based on survey data gathered over the past 6 years where +ve/-ve management has been recorded). It is impossible to estimate with confidence the current overall proportion of SINC's in any favourable or unfavourable condition for two reasons:

- the condition of a large proportion is unknown; and,
- where site condition data is available, some of it (5%) is considered out of date, being over 5 years old.

34. The data available for sites monitored between 2007-2010 is shown in the table below, but this data cannot be extrapolated, as it cannot be assumed to be representative of sites as a whole. It shows a very mixed picture of site condition for the sites that have been surveyed in recent years.

Year of survey	Total SINC's surveyed	% in favourable condition	% in unfavourable condition
2010 (all)	169	47%	53%
2009 (all)	129	57%	43%
2008 (all)	131	36%	64%
2007 (all)	84	48%	52%

35. Based on evidence from monitoring, knowledge and experience it is felt that habitat types across Hampshire fare rather differently with regard to their overall condition. Species-rich grassland sites are considered to have been subject to the most deterioration, as a result of neglect, improvement and overgrazing (mainly by horses), and there are a substantial number of cases where the substantive interest has been lost. Heathland habitats are considered to have come under much better management as a result of concerted efforts and targeted schemes to improve their management. Woodland habitats are considered to have had mixed outcomes, with some evidence of over and under management.

36. There are large numbers of small sites in Hampshire, with 61% of site being under 5ha. The larger the SINC the more likely it is that management is known (HCC, 2011), reflecting that larger sites are a focus for resources and support. However, the percentage of sites in positive management drops off for site over 50ha. This probably reflects that the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence tend to own larger sites, for which management is unknown due to difficulties of obtaining data from their respective estates<sup>4</sup>.

#### 1.2.4 Resources for management and survey of SINC's

37. The system for the survey of SINC's is operated using Service Level Agreements, with eighteen partners using the services of two full-time dedicated ecological field surveyors. Twice yearly updates to the system database are carried out. All 2nd tier planning authorities (13), the National Park authorities, the Wildlife Trust and the County Council use the service.

38. Funding for management advice is ad hoc.

#### 1.2.5 Local Sites and Development

39. The HBIC Partnership interacts closely with the planning process and all Local Authorities are represented in the Partnership, including representation by planning officers. Planning applications are screened/monitored<sup>4</sup> by HBIC for the majority of the relevant district/unitary authorities and for the County Council, who consult their own ecologists or the County ecologists as necessary, so they can take action and provide the necessary advice, information and support to ensure SINC's are protected.

<sup>4</sup> Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership, 2011. National Indicator 197: proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management is or has been implemented. Hampshire County Council.

The screening process is used to establish where SINCs may be affected by proposed development. Development Control officers are not directly involved with the Partnership and the role of HBIC and the ecologists in providing advice and data to them is considered vital. In those District authorities without ecologists it is felt that there is a much increased risk of data being used without understanding and this is of concern to the Partnership. In general:

- The planning process should protect SINCs at an early stage (i.e. by virtue of the influence of the LDF on decision making by the authority and developers, and at pre-application stage) but the number of sites protected in this way is not known.
  - In the past year, 2010-2011, one SINC has been lost and seven have been partially lost. It is important to recognise that in these cases the damage/loss had occurred prior to the application being submitted.
  - SINCs are not considered to be adequately protected by The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)(Agriculture) (England) (No.2) Regulations 2006. The Regulations include a requirement that farmers request Natural England to 'screen' projects that increase the productivity for agriculture of uncultivated land or semi-natural areas where these projects extend to greater than 2 hectares (previously 0.5ha) to establish whether there is likely to be a significant effect. If Natural England considers this to be the case, the applicant must submit an environmental statement assessing the effects of the project on the environment. The application must also be subject to public consultation after which, NE will issue a final consent decision. However, changes to farming practices on private land are often not subject to the provisions of the Regulations, and there is little comeback for farmers who undertake damaging management operations without the impact assessment and notification to Natural England required by the Regulations. The Regulations do not cover over-grazing.
  - Many (48% - 500/1045) grassland SINCs are under 2ha and so not covered by the Regulations
40. A list of common abuses of the EIA regulations that have occurred in Hampshire was provided and has been provided to Defra.
41. Where a development had conditions or SECTION 106 agreements attached requiring monitoring measures, HBICs experience is that this data is rarely collected through a formal monitoring programme.

### **1.2.6 Strategic Considerations**

42. Without co-ordination, the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership has lost its capacity to work together to develop their views and thinking in relation to the Lawton Review in any coordinated or strategic way, although it is hoped the new LNP will adopt this role. Despite this, there are various examples in the County of work that seeks to realise the outcomes envisaged in the Review. Information on Local Sites has been used in biodiversity opportunity mapping, to help assess management needs in initiatives such as Living Landscapes and in developing proposals such as the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area, which includes a focus on connecting SINCS and other designated sites along the national trail.

### **1.2.7 Barriers and Strengths**

43. The main barriers to achieving a well-balanced approach to the conservation, protection and management of SINCs are considered to be:
- lack of protection afforded by the designation itself;
  - lack of enforcement of EIA regulations – where owners often breach the regulations, through draining, overgrazing and ground disturbance & too many loopholes; and,
  - lack of suitable funding opportunities to encourage the management small sites;
  - lack of dedicated officer to promote good management to landowners of all the SINCS which are owned by 'non-farmers'.
44. The main strengths of the Local Sites system and the work it carries out are considered to be:

- strong-buy in from Local Authorities has resulted in a good level of monitoring across the Partnership area;
  - good quality survey and monitoring data;
  - frequent updates of boundary and evidence from monitoring data – twice yearly updates
45. Increasingly, the view is that the strengths of the SINC system have been significantly weakened by staff and funding cuts, and that the dissolution of the HBP may result in the loss of strategic direction and coordination of relevant partners. Cautious optimism that the HWT will be able to take on this role is seen as the only way forward, but it remains very unclear whether the remit of the LNP will include the roles for which the HBP has previously been responsible.

## 1.3 Hertfordshire

### 1.3.1 Context

46. Hertfordshire is located immediately to the north of London, with its southern edge only 20 km from central London. In 1993, 70% of land was in agriculture and woodland (Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991 - 2011<sup>5</sup>) but there are also areas of development and growth (see: Main report map 2: Defra rurality map), Hertfordshire is the second most densely populated county nationally (ref: Comprehensive Area Assessment 2010). The countryside is influenced by the pressures of lying so close to a major world city and there is a significant area of greenbelt in the south of the County.
47. The Hertfordshire Wildlife Sites Partnership (WSP) was set up in 1997 to identify and protect Local Sites (both Wildlife Sites and RIGS). The Partnership is led and coordinated by Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) working with partners - Herts Biological Records Centre (HBRC), Hertfordshire RIGS Group, Natural England, the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service (CMS), Chilterns AONB, FWAG and the Environment Agency.
48. A formal Ratification Committee, comprising HMWT, HBRC, NE, EA and Herts RIGS group are responsible for the designation of sites. Local Authorities do not endorse the sites, but they do recognise them in Local Plans. All landowners receive written notification of when a Site has been identified on their land, although it is thought that this information is often not passed on when there is a change in ownership.

### 1.3.2 Wildlife Sites

49. There are about 1,930 Wildlife Sites in Hertfordshire, extending over approximately 13,500 hectares (approx. 8% of the county area), these include meadows, ponds, woodland and urban green spaces. The majority (62%) of Wildlife Sites are privately-owned. A site may qualify due to the presence of an important habitat or because it supports a rare species or assemblage of species.
50. The majority of Wildlife Sites were designated following a Phase 1 study of Hertfordshire (1994-1997), which was a joint project between HBRC and HMWT, funded by HCC, English Nature and the District and Borough Councils, with a primary aim of collecting information to identify all Wildlife Sites. Information and records held by HBRC were also used to support site selection. Species sites were designated mainly on the basis of HBRC records, with some supporting surveys. There are still likely to be areas of potential interest that are not listed as LWSs, due to lack of biological data held. Some sites designated on the basis of species records (particularly protected species records) are under review to ensure they meet existing qualifying criteria and conform to field boundaries or identifiable features on the ground (i.e. supporting habitats). The site selection process is in line with the Defra 2006 guidance and includes a requirement that the data used for selecting Wildlife Sites should not be more than 10 years old. However, much supporting data is now more than 10 years old due to the difficulties relating to access and lack of resources for updating surveys.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/fullstructureplan0907.pdf>

### 1.3.3 Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)

51. The Hertfordshire RIGS group was formed in 1990, with a membership drawn from organisations with an interest in the county's geology along with individuals able to make a specialist contribution (ref: Herts Geological Strategy, 2003<sup>6</sup>). The Herts RIGS group became part of the Hertfordshire Geology Society in (2012), which brings benefits of wider membership.
52. There are currently 21 designated RIGS sites within Hertfordshire which have been formally adopted in the Local Plan. Most (18) were designated in the 1990's, though the substantive geological interest of two sites has since been lost. A further three RIGS were designated in 2009.
53. The RIGS range from geomorphological sites (mainly landforms such as chalk escarpments), puddingstones and glacial erratics, to chalk pits and quarries. Seven RIGS are also designated for their wildlife interest. There are RIGS in both public and private ownership, with about a third owned by charitable Trusts. The remaining sites are owned by public bodies, private organisations and landowners.

### 1.3.4 Management Advice

#### Encouragement and support for the management of Sites

54. With the exception of work of the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service, encouraging and delivering management advice and supporting management activity is an area that, at present, the Partnership is able to devote relatively little time to. However, advice is offered to all landowners of Wildlife Sites following habitat site surveys.
55. The advice provided by the HMWT and Herts RIGS groups on behalf of the Partnership takes the following forms:
  - **Direct approach:** when contact is made with landowners to gain permission to survey Wildlife Sites (as part of the site survey), an offer is made to provide management advice (advice is provided after survey reporting). There is an uptake of about 10%, representing about 6 sites a year;
  - **Direct approach:** Herts RIGS group assess management needs and provide advice to owners /land managers (via the Herts Wildlife Sites Partnership) as required (not all sites require active management). The advice provided takes into account what it is possible and realistic to achieve;
  - **Responding to ad hoc requests:** Some management advice for WSs is provided "on-request" following ad-hoc contact from either landowners or members of the public. This is usually combined with a site survey so that recommendations are science-based.
56. HMWT produce an annual Wildlife Sites newsletter, with funding from the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum which sign-posts landowners to funding opportunities and encourages owners to contact the Partnership for free advice.
57. No detailed management advice is provided for WSs by HMWT without first ensuring a recent site survey has taken place. Site-specific management advice is provided and there is a strong emphasis on tailoring advice to what is possible and practical for the particular site. Management plans are kept relatively informal and brief. In some cases owners are sign-posted to Environmental Stewardship or the Woodland Grant Scheme but these schemes are often considered too bureaucratic by landowners – given that many are not operating working farms and/or own small sites. As such they are also unlikely to qualify for agri-environment support which primarily targets larger sites as part of whole farms in Herts.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.geo-east.org.uk/newsletters/herts/a\\_geological\\_strategy\\_for\\_hertfordshire2003.pdf](http://www.geo-east.org.uk/newsletters/herts/a_geological_strategy_for_hertfordshire2003.pdf)

58. Management actions for geological sites are identified and recorded using standard RIGS assessment procedures as part of site survey (as long as access is possible). Whilst these are general in nature, they are site-specific. There are RIGS volunteers with the skills necessary to provide specialist help with practical management work and this is offered by the group when it is considered appropriate. RIGS condition assessments are also sent to landowners and advice offered where relevant.
59. The work of the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service in relation to Wildlife Sites is described in Box 2.

**Box 2: Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service (CMS)**

CMS was established in 1975 and have delivered a county-wide service since 1989. Now with 14 staff the CMS works with Local Authorities, voluntary organisations, thirds sector organisations and landowners to bring about improvements to the landscape, wildlife habitats and public access, as well as creating opportunities for education and public enjoyment. CMS is hosted by and receives core funding from Hertfordshire County Council as well as from many of Hertfordshire's District and Borough Councils.

Close working with HMWT and HBRC, means activities are informed by Wildlife Sites data, including the results of monitoring, and biological records that provide a broader context to the Sites. The emphasis is on input to individual sites, as well as an leading landscape-scale initiatives, bringing sites into beneficial management by facilitating the range of actions needed through three core activities:

**Provision of management advice and management plans**

Initial targeting by the CMS has focussed on Ws owned and managed by Local Authorities, where management is less likely to be influenced by the winds of business decisions. Free advice is also provided on-request to landowners and communities to assist with habitat management, restoration and re-creation, including advice on how to care for sites through schemes such as Environmental Stewardship. This encompasses a broad range of organisations from community groups (e.g. Friends of Greenspace groups), local charitable trusts, housing associations and parish councils to farmers or landowners. A strong emphasis is placed on building relationships and taking account of the capacity and ability to deliver – this applies to all landowners and takes account of the multiple uses and demands on sites.

CMS prepare land management plans, particularly for local authority owned sites (as part of annually agreed work programmes). A pragmatic approach is taken to the production of site-specific management plans but focussed on the use of mapping with text describing rationale and specifications. Typically plans are presented with a lot of attention given to spatial description and interpretative mapping. Overlays might be used to make clear the work planned, who will do this and on which parts of the site. Large greenspaces may have plans with a map per year, with “draw-out maps” illustrating plans for specific parts of the site. For smaller sites a 5 year plan may be visualised on a single map. For the written aspects of the plan, CMS consider the two key elements that most influence the acceptance of plans are (i) providing the rationale for the work and (ii) providing detailed information about what will happen – the specifications. If conflict is to be avoided, information about planned management activity needs to be widely distributed to stakeholders (volunteers, locals). The more detailed plans assist volunteers and contractors to deliver their contributions and include the costing of onsite work – essential in support for bids for external funding.

**Helping source and secure funding for conservation work**

Help is provided with securing funding from schemes such as Environmental Stewardship, woodland grant schemes, and the Landfill Communities Fund. Assistance is provided to landowners, farmers, NGOs and Local Authorities with ELS and HLS applications. Agri-environment support has been targeted based on the county NE statements and the opportunity to influence the management of Ws within any single holding.

This has resulted in Stewardship and woodland agreements (CSS, ELS and WGS, EWGS schemes

combined) covering just under 8,700 hectares<sup>7</sup> of the area of Wildlife Sites.

#### **Encouraging and supporting volunteers**

The CMS share skills and resources with volunteer and local action groups to develop plans and actions and help carry out management projects on Wildlife Sites. Not all volunteers have the skills to assist with site conservation activities. Overall the CMS draw on the services of over 350 volunteers – approximately 180 of these involve themselves through 3 x mid week volunteer groups and Friends of Green Spaces Groups. Developing Friends Groups of volunteers that advocate positive management and support Local Authorities in their decision making and day to day management has been beneficial to Wildlife Sites.

60. Generally, it is felt that the information needed to identify sites requiring management is available: the lead partner is aware of the work of partners and others outside the Partnership through regular contact with CMS, the Herts RIGS group, Natural England, Forestry Commission and NGOs. A range of data is obtained from partners and is used mainly for compiling the SDL 160 returns (e.g. GIS layers showing the location of beneficial options of agri-environment and woodland schemes, management plans from the CMS).
61. There is liaison between the RIGS group and the Wildlife Trust to discuss the management needs of RIGS that are also designated for their wildlife interest. These are primarily chalk pits and quarry sites, and one in particular is critically in need of work. Arranging work on such sites can be complex: for example, from a geological perspective, vegetation may need to be cleared from exposed rock faces, but there may be issues regarding the wildlife interest on the site (e.g. if the site has protected species). In these situations, as well as gaining landowner consent, there needs to be consideration of factors such as disturbance of wildlife, potential damage to site interest, using appropriate expertise to carry out management and meeting health and safety issues. Dealing with such complex matters understandably takes time and the progression to a stage where management plans are in place for such sites has to take into account what is achievable given various constraints.
62. The recent merger of the Herts RIGS Group and the Herts Geological Society has the potential to increase the number of individuals that can be called upon as volunteers to assist with site management.
63. One RIGS site, a puddingstone, is actively managed by a Local Residents Association, they keep the feature clear of vegetation; management advice was provided for this site and it is thought a management plan was produced.
64. Use is made of existing guidance documents. UKRIGS (now GCUK) provide national guidance to support assessments for site designation (2001) and site condition (2008) and these are used by the Herts RIGS group. The CMS have produced a range of guidance. They also maintain a library of up to date resources, kept up to date through internet searches, subscription to periodicals and regular contact with Defra and other organisations. CMS has contributed to the development of guidance produced by Natural England.
65. The approaches described have been adopted out of pragmatism (both for geological and wildlife sites) as progress depends upon what is possible given the constraints on those involved with delivery of site management. For example, grazing is often not possible on grasslands, so there is no point drawing up a grazing plan - a mowing regime is tailored to reflect the species interest of the site. The overall approach adopted is considered responsive and reactive. There is a desire to further the approach if funding could be obtained to increase support for management, but this is tempered with the knowledge that a lack of landowner enthusiasm and the consequent low level of demand from landowners for site management is a major barrier to securing positive management of sites. A

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<sup>7</sup> The area is likely to be less as NE data on beneficial scheme options is assigned to a whole field polygon which is not the case for some options such as 'EC4 Management of Woodland Edges' and 'HB11: Maintenance of hedges of very high environmental value'.

regionally funded two-year project by Natural England and the East Regional Wildlife Trust (2010-2012) to encourage and facilitate private landowners into Stewardship by offering a free FEP (with HMWT contributing through targeted mailings) resulted in one Stewardship Agreement. For the level of administrative input this was felt not to be a good return on time invested.

66. The aspects of the current approach that are considered to work particularly well are:

- the pragmatic, open door policy;
- access to the resources, expertise and facilities provided by the CMS;
- the impact volunteers have on landowners who share an interest in the WSs - being aware that volunteers carry out surveys, and then receiving a professional survey report, encourages landowners because they can see the level of commitment there is for achieving positive nature conservation outcomes;
- the ability of the CMS to marry different funding and sourcing streams to deliver plans, funding and volunteer involvement to deliver conservation objectives using a “cradle to grave” approach.

67. Some quarry owners operating under old planning permissions have an obligation to backfill the quarry at the end of its working life with the consequent loss of the geological interest of the site. Quarries operating under more recent planning permissions have a requirement for the operator to negotiate a restoration agreement with the local authority prior to the end of the life of the quarry and in these cases there is more scope for some geological interest to be preserved.

68. Lack of interest from private landowners is the major barrier to securing positive management of sites. Partners are mindful that they do not have the authority to impose management. Landowners need to be complicit, there must be an interest in delivering management and normally, a financial driver for management (this may come from a scheme, or market forces – e.g. demand for firewood driving a woodland management plan).

69. The Partnership itself has very limited resources to promote management. There are also concerns about the ongoing funding of the work of partners. Core funding from Hertfordshire's Local Authorities for CMS remains under pressure, as with all Local Authorities nationally. CMS has focused attention on ensuring that Hertfordshire Local Authority owned WSs are promoted to the HLS scheme on behalf of their sponsors, taking precedent over those applications developed with private landowners. However, HLS is considered to be having an impact and is regarded as about the only tool attractive to agri-business to influence land management at a landscape scale and the CMS continues to help in developing schemes where they present significant opportunity for WS.

70. For grasslands, facilitating cattle or sheep grazing or cutting of sites is a particular issue. In Bedfordshire, the BCN Wildlife Trust has set up a landowner-liaison service where those with livestock or tools can be matched to owners with grasslands in need of management. This was subsequently trialed in Herts by the HMWT but with little uptake success by landowners, possibly due both to a lack of landowners with machinery or livestock to offer, and a lack of landowners with the need for such management assistance (e.g. because of the high level of horse-ownership in Herts).

71. The outcome of this situation is that the types of wildlife and geological sites most likely to have active management:

- are owned by Local Authorities, other public bodies (such as parish councils), charitable Trusts or other NGOs;
- are in targeted environmental management programmes (e.g. HLS/WGS);
- also have statutory designations (SSSIs, National Nature Reserves);
- are a specific type of sites, associated with uptake of offers of free advice - such as churchyards

72. There is some evidence that active management is occurring for sites in private ownership that do not have a management plan, but this is rare and associated with enthusiastic owners (e.g. with rare

breeds) and a few family farms that are still carrying out traditional management techniques. There are also WSs with out of date plans prepared by CMS, but where it is known management is continuing with beneficial effects but, again, cases such as these are unusual.

### **Single Data List and N197 – how informative has the process of information provision been?**

73. The process of compiling evidence to support the SDL 160 indicator is considered to have been very informative by all partners interviewed. It has highlighted what is “unknown”, and for geological sites, the SDL is felt to have provided a focus on what is important in terms of condition and whether there are factors that are having a detrimental effect on the site. It has also led the Partnership to gain a much better understanding of management already in place for WSs. Having to consider the available evidence when pulling together information for the SDL has brought greater understanding of available information and some partners (e.g. CMS) have adapted their recording systems to enable them to better deliver information for the SDL.
74. One of the outcomes of the process is recognition of the need for consultation with the Partnership / key partners before grants are given to ensure they are tailored well to the interest of Sites; work is in progress with both Natural England and Forestry Commission to ensure there is consultation at an early stage to achieve this.

#### **1.3.5 Survey and Monitoring**

75. The site selection process utilised a body of information from each site, which acts as the baseline output describing site interest. The focus is now on follow-up surveys, to provide further, more comprehensive baseline evidence of site interest and information to support assessment of the condition of sites and future monitoring.

#### **Baseline survey of site condition (Local Wildlife Sites)**

76. HMWT lead delivery of habitat surveys to establish the baseline condition of Wildlife Sites. Survey work is done mainly by Wildlife Trust ecologists with support from volunteers.
77. A map of the Wildlife Site is prepared that identifies management units and the habitats present. Survey work focuses on botanical data collection (because of the skills available at the Wildlife Trust). This involves checking that the site still maintains its substantive value and recording the presence and frequency of all vascular plants within habitat compartments) identified on the site. The survey is comprehensive being somewhere between a Phase 1 and Phase 2 survey and usually takes a full day to complete (sometimes two or three days for very large mosaic sites). A description of the site is prepared and details taken of evidence of site management. Survey data and records are held at the HBRC and ultimately input on the RECORDER system.
78. HBRC hold a variety of species records and supporting information received from many voluntary recording groups and individuals. It is considered that these could be of value in supporting the assessment of condition of Wildlife Sites but there are currently no plans or resources to do this. The net result is a lack of demonstrable evidence to show how WSs are performing for the species they support.
79. A county-wide Habitat Inventory is currently being produced by HMWT from a combination of various GIS layers, including 2008-2010 aerial photography. This mapping work is helping to identify WSs which have been lost as well as potential new candidate WSs as it enables initial assessment of several sites which may have been missed from the 1990's Phase 1 survey due to lack of access, changes in land use or significant changes in habitat condition. Any potential new candidate sites identified as a result of this project are being prioritised for a detailed baseline site survey (as described in paragraph 77) to support their potential designation and at the same time provide comprehensive assessment of their baseline condition.
80. Whilst the Partnership aspires to a 10 year cycle of survey for WSs, this in reality is currently not achievable. A 10 year rolling programme would require survey of 170 sites/year; at present, typically



40-60 sites/year are surveyed. Species based survey work is not taking place as part of these baseline surveys - although the data HBRC collate from other monitoring programmes in the County may be of value to future site survey or assessment.

81. The main barriers to the collection of survey data, in order of their impact are: funding (a skilled ecologist would make the biggest impact on the progress that could be made), volunteer expertise (this is being addressed through training) and obtaining site access, as a lot of site owners refuse this.
82. It is felt that there are significant numbers of site-owners who are “sitting on land” in the expectation that it can be developed in future and this contributes to the high number of refusals of permission to carry out surveys. One interviewee noted improved understanding and recognition of the need for an “evidence-based approach” to support wildlife conservation by key individuals in Local Authorities but added that the legacy in this respect had not been strong.
83. The following types of site are most likely to have comprehensive baseline data describing their condition:
  - Local Authority owned sites;
  - Sites designated for their habitat interest;
  - Sites designated for their species interest that had a supporting field-based species survey at the time of their designation (reptiles/ amphibians)
  - Sites owned by Water Companies, the National Trust and Church-owned sites;
  - Farmers who want survey data to support future applications for agri-environment schemes

#### **Baseline assessment and survey of site condition (RIGS)**

84. A rolling programme of survey work inspecting RIGS and assessing their condition began in 2009, two years after formation of the Partnership. Over the past four years, 11 of the 21 RIGS have been assessed and there are plans to survey a further three later this year (2012). RIGS designated in the 1990s (which still retain features of interest) are being surveyed as a priority. Small disused pit sites are the most difficult to survey and the most in need of a baseline assessment. The frequency of survey is determined mainly by the availability of volunteers.
85. The survey work is led by two experienced geologists from the RIGS group, who are joined on some assessments by other volunteers with specialist geological knowledge and expertise of particular types of site. Volunteer numbers have declined in recent years and the RIGS group currently has access to about five such specialists.
86. The work involves field assessment and review of past records, working to the current agreed assessment standards in place, and involves:
  - re-baselining the site – updating the original records, including site boundaries using the current UK RIGS Site Assessment Form, recording a range of information that supports site selection (ref: GeoConservationUK, 2001);
  - assessing site condition using the standard UK RIGS methodology (UKRIGS, 2008).
87. Securing site access can sometimes cause problems for the collection of survey data, for example on sites with protected species.
88. The results of surveys and supporting information are submitted to the Partnership once a year and are captured electronically and held by HBRC. It is believed all geological site records have been scanned. The RIGS group holds a copy of the survey results and a copy is sent to landowners if they seem open to receiving management advice.
89. The RIGS information gathered for the PCM form that is submitted as evidence for the SDL 160 has also been provided to Natural England as part of a national data collation exercise.

90. At present, the focus of survey effort is on ensuring all RIGS receive a site survey to confirm their baseline condition. There is the intention to continue monitoring RIGS once these initial site surveys have been completed - it is likely that chalk sites would be a priority for future monitoring due to their condition (paragraph 102).

### Users and uses of survey and monitoring information gathered by partners

91. The main users and uses of survey and monitoring information arising from wildlife and geological sites are shown below

Users	Uses
Wildlife Trust (lead partner)	Informing ongoing WS management; Reporting of Single Data List to Defra Assessing potential impacts of development on sites identified during screening of planning applications
HBRC	Dissemination of wildlife and geological data Provision of planning support to HCC District and Borough authorities
Local Authorities	Planning and delivery of minerals and wastes and other planning functions (CC) Assessing potential impacts of development (all planning authorities) Keeping LDPs up to date
Herts RIGS Group / Hertfordshire Geological Society	Educational resource
Landowners	Landowners receive a summary of the results of survey and monitoring
Wildlife Trust & other organisations leading/ delivering strategic initiatives	Informing on effects of site management, planning and delivery of strategic landscape-scale initiatives. Schemes targeted at habitat and species restoration.
Consultants	Consultants use the LRC for data searches and this therefore feeds into development control and forward planning functions.
Natural England	RIGS data collation

92. Occasionally, the Partnership obtains survey data gathered by consultants to support planning determinations. If these have been carried out at an appropriate time of year using recognised methods, they are included in the records held by the HBRC.

93. HBRC hold site records and maintain the GIS layer showing both the wildlife and geological sites, which is supplied to the Wildlife Trust and all local authority planning departments annually. The records for each site are also being captured electronically. As part of the process the GIS layer for Wildlife Sites is being systematically reviewed against sites data to ensure any boundary changes flagged up by surveyors have been captured, although changes are also made as and when boundary anomalies are identified.

94. In the past barriers to the collation and management of data, included a lack of expertise to deal with the range of formats of computerised data submitted to the LRC, but this has been largely overcome. There have been occasions when not all relevant survey data are sent on to the Records Centre, especially when this is collected by volunteers, but processes are being put in place to try and prevent this from happening in future.

95. Data arising from the WS surveys are held by the HBRC and therefore should also be stored on National Biodiversity Network systems. Information about survey activity is not recorded on BARS, but it was noted that now that the survey data is collected at a more detailed level it is more valuable for informing BAP related activities.

### Overall assessment of the condition of Local Sites

96. Partnerships were asked to provide data on the condition of their sites, if this was available, and to provide a level of confidence in such information. Other than the information on positive management compiled for the Single Data List, the Partnership do not have enough analysed survey data to provide a meaningful analysis of the condition of Wildlife Sites.

97. The results of recent habitat site surveys (past three years) have not been subject to the type of overall assessment that would provide the information requested about site condition (though this is feasible). Wildlife sites are monitored by their component habitat compartments. It is known that there is variation in the condition of habitats within sites and from year to year so any assessment of their overall condition is not necessarily a straightforward one. The fact that 364 (out of 1566) Wildlife Sites have a management plan, or are in beneficial options of CSS, ELS, HLS or WGS or EWGS was not considered a basis on which any assessment or conclusions on site condition could be drawn.
98. Eleven of the 21 RIGS in Hertfordshire have been subject to a condition assessment since 2009. The RIGS group is confident that three sites, which were designated in 2009, are in good condition. It is also known that the interest on two sites has been lost. Taking all of this into account, the overall situation for RIGS in terms of their condition is:

Good (or recently designated) 43%

Poor 24%

Awaiting assessment 24%

Lost 9%

### **Overall, is the condition of sites changing?**

99. Overall, the condition of Wildlife Sites is thought to be slowly degrading although the work of partners to secure positive management mean there are clearly a good number of examples where this is not the case. The view from ecologists, which is supported by the findings of the current habitat mapping work based on aerial photography, is that there is a lot of scrub encroachment on sites (often associated with unmanaged grassland), overgrazing by horses and signs of the agricultural improvement of grasslands.
100. Deterioration of woodland flora is associated with browsing animals and increased shading of the understory vegetation due to lack of management. The situation for grassland is more mixed as there is a good level of public ownership of grassland sites so they are targeted for management. Smaller sites are felt to be more vulnerable to deterioration, largely because they are used for horses or because they are neglected.
101. One partner commented: *“expectations of the benefits that can be delivered by Wildlife Sites need to take into account the structural changes taking place in counties such as Hertfordshire, where traditional land management is in decline, with significant reductions in the extent and type of traditional livestock grazing and woodland management”*. By way of illustration of this point - dairy herds in the county have reduced from over 370 to perhaps less than ten herds since the 1950s (MAFF returns and pers comm). Species rich grasslands have reduced by 98% since 1934 (Herts Environmental Forum 2002) and orchards by 92% since 1880. (Herts Orchard Initiative and PTES study)
102. The view, overall for RIGS sites is that small disused chalk pit sites are in gradual decline due to the growth of vegetation through lack of management. The remedial work required to bring geological sites into good condition is not always onerous in itself, but a range of other factors mean that the work cannot always be easily carried out.

### **1.3.6 Resources for management and survey of SINCS**

103. **Management:** There is direct funding stream to the Partnership to encourage and support site management. Funding by HCC and all District & Borough Councils for the work of the Countryside Management Service, is non-specific, but does benefit Wildlife Sites. There are good numbers of volunteers supporting the work of CMS (see Box 2). All management advice by the Herts RIGS group has been provided on a voluntary basis.

104. **Survey:** The time spent by the lead partner on the co-ordination and delivery of site surveys is funded by HMWT through the dedicated full-time post to co-ordinate and contribute to the delivery of Partnership activities. All inputs from Herts RIGS to the ongoing programme of survey have been on an entirely voluntary basis. Occasional, small donations (e.g. from a Friends of Greenspace Group or a volunteer) cover the costs of surveys of specific sites or localities. A few surveys paid for by developers arise as a result of planning applications. Natural England has funded lowland meadow surveys. There are typically between 30 to 45 volunteers able to assist during the site survey season and between them they contribute about 10 full days of effort, with specialist surveyors accounting for about six of these. The Partnership is running training courses to increase the number of skilled volunteers able to assist with habitat survey.

### **1.3.7 Local Sites and Development**

105. It was felt that in general the planning process does take into account Local Sites designation and that active involvement of the Wildlife Trust and planning ecologists at the HBRC ensures this is the case.

106. Those interviewed were aware of a few cases where planning permission had been rejected and WSs, protected from development. One case was known to have been protected from development during the past year, as well as further cases where the need for protection of WSs lying close to developments was taken into consideration. It was known in these cases that the designation was taken into account.

107. One interviewee remarked that that few cases arise that would impact on Local Sites largely because planning policy is effective. Forward planning activities are steering development away from Sites and suggestions are made so that proposals are modified to reduce any impacts. Housing developments are stopped at planning inquiry or prior to inquiry.

108. Two RIGS sites are known to have been destroyed, with the losses having occurred some time ago. A roadside cutting was concreted over (probably for health and safety reasons), and a quarry was infilled (in line with the original planning conditions). Ecologists were also aware of cases where local sites had been lost or damaged by development and added that there is not always consultation with the Partnership. There have been cases where sites come to the planning system but have been destroyed long before and are not redeemable.

109. Recent habitat mapping work using aerial photography has identified WSs that have been built on and cases of garden creep. It was thought that Local Authorities may not be aware of land use changes which have not necessarily been consented through the planning system. There are relatively few such cases.

110. Losses and deterioration of both wildlife and geological sites as a result of other factors, particularly lack of management are considered to be much more frequent – for WSs, this is to the extent that losses attributable to planning and management related causes were considered “just not comparable in scale”. Habitat loss resulting from scrub encroachment and with keeping horses being the most common causes of loss and deterioration.

111. The experience with EIA regulations is that outcomes are nearly always skewed in favour of development. One view was that EIA was potentially powerful but the interviewee had never seen any evidence of it being applied. It was felt that sites are open to abuses of such regulations and examples were provided.

112. There has been evidence of water eutrophication and water quality changes picked up during monitoring and it is felt that on a more widespread scale there may be further gradual long-term ecological change that is negative and for which there is as yet little evidence.

113. There was no knowledge of whether SECTION 106 agreements had been followed up. Planning conditions were seen as more likely to be enforced, because they need to be formally discharged as part of the planning process.

## **Interaction with the Planning Process**

114. Members of the Partnership comment on planning matters, providing support in accordance with their roles /interests, but some of those interviewed would welcome a greater level of interaction. For example, at the pre-application stage applicants have been made aware that they have a RIGS site, but the LPA did not contact the RIGS group at this stage, which is an ideal stage for early intervention / negotiation.
115. There is input to the Forward Planning process by partners and provision of data to the LPAs to support this.
116. More systematic consultation on planning applications that might impact on LWSs and RIGS is desired at an early stage in the planning process - so that the need for surveys can be identified by partners at a timely stage in the application process.
117. A volunteer for the Wildlife Trust keeps a check on planning applications coming forward from the LPAs. The Wildlife Trust, as an organisation, makes submissions on all planning applications where it is identified they might impact on Wildlife Sites/BAP habitats and/or protected species - overall, the numbers of these applications that might impact on Wildlife Sites are considered to be low, and proposed development often impacts on part, rather than all of a site. The HMWT often state what they would expect to happen and see the pre-application stage as a key time for action – for example to ensure a survey of the site is carried out. They receive decision notices and information on planning conditions but it is not always possible to tell the nature of the impact on the site from these. Most (7) LAs also have the support of a planning ecologist (via an SLA) who works for the HBRC, which is hosted by the County Council, and who provides ecological advice to and on behalf of those LPAs.

### **1.3.8 Strategic Considerations**

118. Wildlife Sites in Herts are one of the significant layers in use for the Habitat Inventory study currently underway. After this work is done, it is intended that areas will be identified which should be targeted as Living Landscape areas (there are two already)/ecologically connected areas/networks and the identification of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas forms part of the project. The Partnership may then decide that these areas should be targeted specifically for surveys and advice.
119. The WS GIS layer was provided to assist with the Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan.
120. Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership has received Defra funding to lead on the development of a new Local Nature Partnership (LNP), an initiative that covers the county and intends to bring integrated environmental action and strategies at the landscape-scale. In the LNP proposal, Herts RIGS group stressed the importance of geology and soils in influencing landscape. However, the current suite of RIGS sites are not well-suited to this purpose as they largely single out important peculiarities and unusual features as these are the surface features present in the County. Geomorphological sites are probably the most suited, but there are relatively few (5) of these. The Herts RIGS group wants to work and engage with the Wildlife Trust, and others, to bring a better understanding of the role of geology and soils to the biological and geological interest of the county.
121. Landscape-scale initiatives that target specific areas are selective in where they target action – the comment was made that Wildlife Sites form a suite of Sites representing ecological resources of county importance wherever they are found and the recent focus on such large-scale approaches should not lose sight of this.

## Has designation brought the benefits envisaged?

122. **Management:** A common view was that if Ws haven't brought about the benefits envisaged this is not because of the designation. Whilst designation is important this will, in itself, never address the issue of the decline in traditional land management which has affected all habitats within our countryside, whether rural or even urban. Wildlife Sites are affected by this profound change and are as vulnerable to it as SSSIs still are, unless considerable support is achieving maintenance or enhancement in some way.

123. **Protection:** There were mixed views on the strength of the designation. One view was that the designation was only effective in planning as far as habitats are concerned and even then the protection is weak. Another interviewee felt Local Sites remain vital for a number of reasons:

- They provide a formal resource of known value which can potentially be identified, conserved and monitored. Otherwise there would be nothing tangible other than a suite of broad habitat classifications;
- Local Sites focus conservation requirements, both for planning and site management;
- They reflect resources across the whole county, rather than on special areas or landscape areas. All Local Sites have a role to play - wherever they are: Wildlife Sites provide resources as a reservoir of existing biodiversity, are potential biodiversity refuges, and act as stepping stones or corridors generally through the landscape.

## Strengths and Barriers

124. The main strengths of the Local Sites system and the activities it carries out are:

- That there is a dedicated post to co-ordinate and contribute to the delivery of Partnership activities;
- That there is gradual ongoing improvement of the activities carried out by the Partnership;
- The site selection process – its ability to identify and justify sites of known value. Supporting evidence is increasingly robust and defensible;
- The raised profile designation brings wildlife and geodiversity in planning – with planning officers, councilors and the general public;
- The contributions made by volunteer input;
- The window of opportunity the designation brings to engage landowners and bring about beneficial management.

125. The main barriers to delivery are:

- Funding and expertise (the two are linked);
- The lack of interest from owners;
- Decline in traditional land management – this is fundamental to conservation for both designated and non-designated sites as the same underlying issues need to be overcome if much of the small-scale farming infrastructure and ability to manage sites has gone;
- Communication with larger organisations in the Partnership can present challenges.

## 1.4 North Merseyside

### 1.4.1 Context

126. North Merseyside covers the local authority areas of Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and St. Helens (Main report, map 2). The area is predominantly urban in character (although, 40% of the Partnership area is rural/ undeveloped) and encompasses the city of Liverpool and the surrounding authorities, which are metropolitan district councils. The North Merseyside Local Sites Partnership was established in 2006 and is chaired by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS). The work of the

North Merseyside Partnership covers Local Sites designation, management and monitoring of both wildlife and geological sites.

127. There are strong links with neighbouring Merseyside councils (Halton and Wirral) which operate their own Local Sites Partnerships.
128. The Local Sites Partnership includes representatives from Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and St. Helens Local Authorities, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, Merseyside BioBank and GeoConservationUK and is chaired by MEAS. There is temporarily no representation from Natural England and the Forestry Commission due to staff changes in those organisations. Three local naturalists with specialist skills who regularly volunteer for the Partnership attend meetings on an occasional basis. As well as providing the lead for the Local Sites system, MEAS provide a range of environmental information and support to six Merseyside Local Authorities, with the Planning Services of these authorities being the primary customers. Merseyside BioBank (MBB) is the Environmental Records Centre for the area.
129. The BAP Biodiversity co-ordinator, who was part of MEAS, provided assistance to the Local Sites system from 2006 until funding from Natural England was cut in 2011. The resulting loss of project management skills, knowledge of the LS system and of the Local Sites themselves, was a significant setback for the Partnership, particularly with regard to liaison with land owners and therefore site specific management advice. The main setback has been the loss of time allocated, expertise and enhancing BAP habitats/species being the main job role. The BAP co-ordinator also fed into the Local Sites system by establishing projects targeted to Local Sites.
130. The NW Geodiversity Partnership is one of a number of English regional Partnerships set up in the wake of a series of workshops organised by UKRIGS (now GCUK) and the Geology Trusts in the autumn of 2007. They sought involvement in the North Merseyside LS Partnership to understand more about the status and potential for North Merseyside, which from their perspective, has in the past been considered a relative “cold-spot” for geological sites activities (bearing in mind that Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire are among the most active areas for Local Geological Site conservation.
131. There are 321 Local Sites covering approximately 24% of North Merseyside, about half of which are in public ownership. These sites have been designated within the Unitary Development Plan of each of the North Merseyside Districts. All SSSIs are also designated as Local Sites. There are sites designated both for their wildlife and geological interest.

#### **1.4.2 Local Wildlife Sites**

132. There are currently 260 Local Wildlife Sites in North Merseyside. The Partnership has developed guidelines for their selection (MEAS, 2008) and these are in line with Defra guidance. This work began around 1998, with revised selection guidelines being agreed a couple of years later and published in 2006. They have since been implemented in the four Districts. A site may qualify due to the presence of an important habitat or for supporting a rare species or a rich assemblage of species and habitats. A LWS monitoring system has been developed and is in place and annual monitoring reports are prepared for each Authority.

#### **1.4.3 Local Geological Sites**

133. There are 61 Local Geological Sites, most of which are hard rock sites, which is thought to be a reflection of the interests of the previous RIGS groups, although there are also sites representative of coastal geomorphology. It is thought that most LGSs are in public ownership. The Liverpool RIGS group (now disbanded) had in place a process for identifying sites for designation as RIGS in the 1990s, prior to the development of the nationally agreed RIGS assessment criteria. The local RIGS group developed a scoring system and undertook site assessments in all four Authorities; those sites reaching a given threshold were recommended for designation, but details of all candidate RIGS were made available to the North Merseyside LAs. In Liverpool, all the candidate sites were designated, whereas in the other authorities only the sites that scored above the threshold were designated, with the others remaining “candidate sites”.

134. Four or five years ago, the GeoConservationUK representative joined the Partnership and began a systematic audit of designated and candidate LGSs originally identified by the Liverpool RIGS group. The audit involves field assessment and review of past records in each of the four North Merseyside Authorities, working to the current agreed assessment standards in place, and involves:
- checking that the site still exists /has not been destroyed;
  - re-baselining the site – obtaining and updating the original records using the current UK RIGS Site Assessment Form, recording a range of information that supports site selection (GeoConservationUK, 2001);
  - assessing site condition.
135. This audit has been managed by the LS Partnership representative, who works at the geography department of Liverpool Hope University. Post-graduate students carry out the audit. The process has involved working closely with Local Authorities. So far these audits have been completed for all but Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council and have resulted in the designation of one new LGS. The audit has not involved the identification of any new candidate LGSs in the Partnership area.

#### 1.4.4 Management Advice and Local Sites

##### Encouragement and support for the management of Local Sites

136. Management advice is provided by the Partnership for both wildlife and geological sites and takes the following forms:
- **Following site survey:** For wildlife sites, site owners are provided with a monitoring report and this includes management recommendations. These are general, rather than prescriptive in nature, but relevant to the particular site as they are determined at the time of site monitoring and are therefore site-specific. Management actions for geological sites have been identified using standard RIGS assessment procedures as part of the geodiversity audit and are site-specific;
  - **On request:** very simple management plans have been drawn up for some sites in local authority ownership
137. MEAS staff provide site management advice for wildlife sites but feel that what they are able deliver is fairly limited, due mainly to re-prioritisation of work and time and funding constraints. This has been compounded by the loss of the BAP coordinator.
138. Current management activities are recorded at the time of site monitoring (see box 3); this assists interpretation of site survey data. Where management plans are in place on LWSs, these are reviewed at the time of the survey.
139. Those interviewed were not aware of any management plans being in place for geological sites (e.g. by LAs). Site management needs are assessed as part of the standard RIGS site assessment. This is being carried out by post-graduate geology students from Liverpool Hope University as part of their Master's degree studies. The students receive training in the RIGS assessment techniques on site. Training includes a validation check to ensure the student is fully competent in applying the RIGS assessment methodology – with both the student and the GeoConservationUK representative independently assessing a site and cross-checking the results for consistency.
140. Support for site management is an area of Local Sites activity that delivery teams feel would benefit from being strengthened, both for wildlife and geological sites. There is a growing and active interest in developing a coherent programme of support and advice for geological sites with a desire to feed in the experience gained from work, thus far, on LWSs. Site assessment has identified that many geological sites require some management, but in general remedial work is very achievable.
141. The time required to obtain landowner details, engage with landowners and obtain access to sites is a significant barrier in providing support for site management of LWSs and slows progress in delivering management advice for sites in private ownership. However, it is felt that progress is being



made and SDL reporting shows the progress. In general, it is felt that private landowners lack understanding of Local Sites and what they seek to achieve, consequently they tend to “fear the unknown”. This perception can be overcome in the vast majority of cases but the whole process of obtaining land owner details and engaging landowners is very time consuming, although progress is being made.

142. On occasions the advice that can be provided for LWSs has been limited because specialist skills and knowledge are not available to the Partnership, due lack of funding or access to suitably skilled volunteers.
143. In general, MEAS are aware of sites that are already actively managed as a result of the work of partners (e.g. sites in agri-environment or other grant schemes) but there is limited liaison with the organisations operating such schemes, and as a result, it is thought some land management programmes do not take account of the site designation.
144. Local authorities have engaged well with the Local Sites system and this has led to many of the LA owned sites either having received management advice, or having simple management plans in place. It is felt that the process of delivering this advice has increased the appreciation these authorities have of the purpose and value of the Local Sites system.
145. The outcome of this approach is that the types of Local Sites most likely to have active management:
- are in public ownership (particularly LA owned sites) – this has particular relevance for geological sites where public bodies are considered to have a better understanding of site management requirements;
  - are habitats that have been the specific focus of conservation projects (e.g. grasslands);
  - wildlife sites rather than geological sites;
  - also have statutory designations (SSSIs, NNRs) – these sites are more likely to have had resources made available for their management from other sources.
146. There is some evidence that active management is occurring for sites in private ownership that do not have a management plan, and it was noted that some management plans for LA owned sites are very out of date and some geological sites do not require active management.

### **Single Data List and NI 197 – how informative has the process of information provision been?**

147. Compiling evidence for the single data list is considered an important driver for Local Sites activity. It is considered to have been extremely useful because the process of information gathering has:
- raised the profile of both LWSs and LGSs with key personnel in the council; Local Sites have become valued and integral to the work in authorities, with some councils setting internal targets to secure management of further sites. Resources have been secured to survey and manage public sites and it is felt ultimately this will have knock on effects for resourcing the work required to secure the conservation of privately owned sites;
  - demonstrated where management is happening (and is not happening) and who is doing it;
  - helped forge relationships between partners – which in turn provide a strong network for further action that involves Partnership working – such as securing funding for a LNP and instigating or joining habitat-based or landscape scale conservation initiatives;
  - helped forge links between the Partnership and Private Landowners, as the reporting requirement has driven the need for more information to be known about local sites.

#### **1.4.5 Survey and Monitoring**

##### **Co-ordination of survey and monitoring activity in North Merseyside**

148. MEAS co-ordinate the survey of Local Sites in North Merseyside, leading the programme of survey and monitoring for LWSs on behalf of the Partnership.
149. Liverpool Hope University co-ordinate the audit of geological sites. At present a re-baselining of geological sites is still underway. The completion of this audit work and future monitoring of LGSs is dependent on the availability of funding and /or suitable post-graduate student expertise.

### Establishing the baseline condition of sites

150. The systematic process of site selection in North Merseyside included review of existing sites and was based on the collation and assessment of existing data. This was supported by repeat Phase 1 surveys (1996-2000) and some Phase 2 surveys and in effect comprises the baseline survey of site condition. Some sites, particularly those in private ownership, have not been revisited since their designation (designation of sites began in the 1980s).
151. The nationally agreed standard recording form and guidance are used for assessing the baseline condition of geological sites (UKRIGS, 2008). Each year, over the past three years, the audit has assessed all the LGSs within one of the North Merseyside authorities. Only sites in Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council remain to be assessed.

### Monitoring site condition (LWSs)

152. The Partnership aim to monitor wildlife sites on a five-yearly cycle which equates to about 50 sites per year. This has been achieved in the past couple of years, but prior to this when the programme first began this level proved challenging, and fewer sites could be monitored. More recently the monitoring work priority has been raised and resources secured. In 2009, the Partnership agreed the survey and monitoring process for wildlife sites, with results recorded on a standard recording form. Each year, a similar number of sites are selected for monitoring within each of the Districts following review of the status of sites in the Register.
153. The surveys are carried out by MEAS staff and 2 or 3 volunteers that are members of the Partnership. Losses of personnel within Local Authorities has meant there is less time available to retained staff so has reduced the pool of survey personnel in recent years. Surveyors use a site plan to support site survey and are aware of site management recommendations and the conservation outcomes these are seeking to achieve. A detailed assessment process gathers a range of information (Box 3). The results are used to infer site condition and identify any recommendations for future site management and a record is made of when it would be advisable to next monitor the site.

#### Box 3: Site monitoring in North Merseyside

Site extent and surrounding land use: checks that the extent of site has not changed with mapping of any changes; checks for development on any adjacent land; recording of adjacent land use;

Presence of potentially damaging activities: Burning, tipping, motor scrambling, walking, dog walking, horse-riding, shooting, rearing game, cycling, livestock grazing, other grazing (e.g. rabbit, deer), other activities;

Assessment of invasive species: check for the presence of invasive species, record percentage of the site colonised by invasive species and record the type of species present;

Presence and condition of site's substantive value: checks that the habitats and plant species for which the site is designated are still present (and for wildlife that the species or their required habitat are present) – based on presence/absence for each species. This is based on the list of species in the citation. Opportunity to comments on condition, damage, management requirements, enhancement opportunities, any further survey required.

Site management: the form records whether the site is currently managed and who is responsible for this, whether there is a site management plan and who produced this, and/or whether all or part of the site is in a grant scheme, such as ELS/HLS/ WGS. If in ELS/HLS, the form records whether the options are known. The purpose of known management is recorded (e.g. to maintain / enhance features of

interest for which the site was designated and/or to meet BAP targets or for other purposes). Much of this information is often compiled prior to the survey). During survey, estimates are made of the proportion of the site that is managed and a brief description of the current management compiled. If the site is not managed give an estimate of when management last took place. Any management work required on the site is noted together with any potential enhancement opportunities (noting that for some sites no management may be a valid answer).

154. Use is made of data from other sources. It is possible to assess or supplement some aspects of site monitoring (e.g. presence of species) on the basis of information derived from these sources. Merseyside BioBank (MBB), the Local Records Centre for North Merseyside, identify and provide the Partnership with relevant habitat and species records for Local Sites, much of which is available in GIS format. MEAS also has access to additional data from voluntary surveys by local naturalists (where these have been carried out independently of the Partnerships survey programme), surveys by the Wildlife Trust, data from NNRs and limited data for SSSIs (standard publically available outputs, such as overall site condition). Occasionally there has also been access to data collected by the RSPB, and Environment Agency.
155. Data from Natural England are used to identify sites in agri-environment agreements but this does not show the scheme options that apply.
156. There are no formal data flow agreements in place, but the Partnership are very appreciative of the data that is available and would like to develop better data flow arrangements with a range of public bodies and NGOs.
157. The main factors that determine the frequency of site survey are the type of habitat, site size and location, access arrangements and whether there is known to be development pressure in the area and surrounding the site. Sites subject to development pressure have an increased frequency of monitoring. Larger sites, which are often more ecologically complex, are more time consuming /difficult to survey and estuarine sites pose particular difficulties. There are sites where landowners have not yet been identified or contacted.
158. MEAS hold all of the monitoring outputs of LWSs which are held as part of the Local Sites register. Information for some sites where access has not been obtained for survey could be very old.
159. The main barriers to the collection of survey data for both geological and wildlife sites are personnel related; for wildlife sites, staff numbers limit the capacity of the Partnership to deliver monitoring targets and there has been increased pressure on existing staff now that there are less staff, both at MEAS and at district level, contributing to the survey effort. However, effort is being made to continue and build upon the existing progress and strengths. Only around 40% of sites have not been monitored in the last 5 years, this figure has been dropping rapidly in recent years. Use of other resources, such as aerial photography, is being used to focus on possible boundary changes or changes in land use which then feeds into the monitoring programme.

### **Monitoring site condition (LGSs)**

160. There has been a long standing difficulty in accessing the relevant expertise for the survey of geological sites as it has always been based on volunteer effort; the contribution of GeoConservation UK/ Liverpool Hope University is a major step forward in progressing knowledge about the status and future management and monitoring requirements of LGSs.
161. Future contributions to a site condition monitoring programme remain dependent on access to suitable expertise both to lead and deliver site survey and these are considered the main barriers to the collection of survey data.

### **Users and uses of survey and monitoring information gathered by partners**

162. The main user of survey and monitoring information arising from wildlife and geological sites are the Local Sites Partnership, other users are shown in (see table below).
163. It is not known whether the data from geological surveys is held on the RIGS database but it has been recorded in the Geoconservation database format. Data arising from the LWSs surveys is sent to the Merseyside Biobank and therefore should be available on systems such as the NBN Gateway. Information is not routinely sent to BARS, but some may end up on this system from projects led by the Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency.
164. All records relating to the LGSs are processed and held by the Merseyside Biobank, and it believed all geological site records have been scanned. Survey results have been sent to the respective Local Authorities and a copy is held by the University. The results of the audit and condition assessment have yet to be collated by MEAS.

#### Users and Uses

Users	Uses
MEAS	Reporting of Single Data List to Defra Production of the Annual Monitoring Report which sent to all LAs Supporting function to LAs on various aspects of Local Sites protection and management Policy development Project development
Local Authorities	Planning and delivery of minerals and wastes and other planning functions (CC) Assessing impacts of development (all planning authorities) Keeping LDFs up to date Policy development Project development
Liverpool Hope University / GeoConservationUK	Educational resource
Landowners (incl. LA, NGOs, Merseyside Forest, FC, other public bodies)	Some landowners receive a summary of the results of survey and monitoring Informing ongoing site management
Wildlife Trust & other organisations leading/ delivering strategic initiatives	Informing on effects of site management, planning and delivery of strategic landscape-scale initiatives. Schemes targeted at habitat and species restoration.
Merseyside Biobank (the LRC)	Compilation and dissemination of wildlife and geological data
Consultants	Consultants use the LRC for data searches and this therefore feeds into development control and forward planning functions.

#### Overall assessment of the condition of Local Sites

165. Partnerships were asked to provide data on the condition of their sites, if this was available, and to provide a level of confidence in such information.
166. North Merseyside are very confident in the information held describing the condition of geological sites for three of their Local Authorities, as these that have been subject to recent survey, however, the results describing site condition have not yet been collated by MEAS, so no assessment of condition could be made for these sites. The Partnership provided a qualified assessment for LWSs, following analysis of the available information from site surveys that have taken place within the last 5 years.
167. After assessing the information available for a large number of the sites, the conclusion was reached that it was typically not possible to classify an individual LWS site as being in either 'good' or 'poor' condition. This is because the vast majority of sites are neither. They are often a mixture of both. There are many sites where the site condition is unknown because they have not been subject to a full site-based survey since designation.
168. The condition of just over a third (35.7%) of the Local Wildlife Sites is unknown (equates to 93 sites). Of the remaining LWSs (some 167 sites), no simple categorisation of condition can be made, because some sites have management that is keeping a number of features of interest in 'good' condition, but then others areas/features within the same sites are not being managed and are in poor

condition. On other sites there is no management and features are not in the 'best condition', but may not be in poor condition either.

169. To help summarise the overall situation, MEAS consider that of the LWSs with survey data, the majority cannot simply be classified as either 'good' or 'poor'. Some sites still have designation features present but they are declining in quality. Other sites have designation features in different conditions. There are also a collection of sites that have received restoration work so they are recovering in condition at present. For the geological sites, the overall feeling was that most were in reasonable to poor condition - this is based on an overall impression gained from having visited sites rather than analysis of the more comprehensive body of survey data.

170. This situation is felt to be closely linked to the current management status of sites. The management of sites in North Merseyside is an aspect of the LS system where the Partnership is aware that they have yet to achieve the level of engagement needed to achieve the desired conservation results. This means that sites are either not in management, under the wrong management or have piecemeal management and this has led to the current situation. It is felt that the existence of the Single Data List requirement has led to a greater degree of correct management, especially on Council owned sites, but this has not registered in site conditions yet. MEAS is currently in the process of setting up projects to get correct management in sites, but this takes time.

#### **Overall, is the condition of sites changing?**

171. The view from ecologists is that there has been no significant loss of sites, but over the longer term sites are showing signs of ineffective management, with both successional species and undesirable invasive species increasing. The annual monitoring report (MEAS, 2012), demonstrated that loss, but there is a big drive within the Partnership area to bring in grassland management and the increases in the SDL (proportion of sites in positive management) reflects this. However, in ecological terms it may be some time before the benefits are detected through environmental monitoring. Woodland sites are considered to have been more resilient to ecological decline than grassland and wetland sites.

172. The view is that geological sites have been falling into disrepair due to lack of management. There has been no site loss. The remedial work required to bring geological sites into good condition is not onerous, and generally involves base cleaning and removal of vegetation or slumped soil that has obscured rock faces.

#### **Resources for management and survey of LWSs**

173. Funding for site management comes directly from the budgets of the District Authorities. In addition, landfill tax credits have been used to fund management initiatives, such as the Forever Meadows project which is securing long term management to bring about the restoration and regeneration of threatened grasslands (the project area includes St Helens and Knowsley LAs).

174. Financial support for site survey forms part of the funding of existing roles in MEAS, which is provided by the four authorities by means of a service level agreement. The time devoted to site survey and monitoring activities comprises about approximately 15% of 1 FTE. In addition, in kind contributions from partners and volunteer resources (three naturalists, who are also represented on the Local Sites SG) make up further contributions to site survey and monitoring. Geological survey comes as an in-kind/voluntary contribution from GeoConservationUK / Liverpool Hope University.

#### **1.4.6 Local Sites and Development**

175. Given their role in providing planning support to the North Merseyside authorities, MEAS are aware of many cases (30+) where Local Sites have been protected because of their designated status. Of these, about five or six occurred within the last year. It is felt that planning policies to protect LSs are in place and that the site designation is taken into account in both local authority Forward Planning functions and in influencing the outcome of planning proposals. The planning departments in all four authorities are considered to be delivering their duties very effectively with regard to Local Sites protection in an area of England where development pressure is substantial. The pre-application

process is considered to be particularly strong in refining applications going forward, with applicants being advised that they are unlikely to receive consent or that they need to significantly redesign proposals or provide enhancement or mitigation where it is viewed that the development benefits outweigh the nature conservation interest in cases where damage is unavoidable.

176. Some sites have been lost or damaged as a consequence of development – estimated to be in the order of ten sites since about 1992; at least four of these were subject to some form of compensation or mitigation. The site designation was taken into account in these cases. Losses have generally involved small proportions of sites. Two of these cases occurred in the past year.
177. The slow loss of site value due to lack of management is considered a significantly greater threat to LWSs than development pressure.
178. There was knowledge of some cases of SECTION 106 agreements having received follow on monitoring.
179. Levels of interaction between the Partnership and the planning departments of all four Local Authorities are very high because there is a strong planning representation within the Partnership (both planners and planning ecologists) and this has raised the profile of Local Sites in planning departments.

#### **1.4.7 Strategic Considerations**

180. Green infrastructure projects in North Merseyside involve biodiversity opportunity mapping (e.g. the Liverpool City Region Ecological Framework developed in 2012). It is intended to use the outputs of these activities to identify priorities for site management of both wildlife and geological sites when resources allow. The Partnership was closely involved in the development of this Ecological Framework. As a partner in the project they contributed knowledge of both local and wider regional ecological and geodiversity interest.
181. The Partnership have input to various other initiatives that operate at a landscape-scale to achieve targeted conservation action:
  - Grassland projects (Forever Meadows)
  - Regional level species-led initiatives looking to support water voles.
  - Brown hare project
  - Mersey Forest

#### **Has Local Sites designation brought the benefits envisaged?**

182. For wildlife sites, it is felt that in basic terms, the designation has brought the benefits envisaged for the protection and conservation of wildlife interests. For geological sites, designation has likewise brought protection through planning, but has not yet brought the conservation benefits that arise from appropriate follow-up management action to secure their long term conservation. The geological sites are generally felt to be “stuck in inaction” because there is no-one able to take an active interest in what they are and how to conserve them. It is hoped that the involvement of a geological representative in the Partnership will stimulate the interest and attention required to bring the sites into suitable management.
183. The comment was made that it has been, and remains, a challenge to get the balance of material considerations in the decision making processes for Local Sites (e.g. in preparing local plans and strategic decision making) but over a 20 year period, 90% of sites have been retained in an area that has been subject to very high development pressure and without the designation it was felt that pressures would have led to the loss of many more wildlife and geological sites through land use change. However, it was also noted that the strength of the designation has not always resulted in appropriate/adequate mitigation as an outcome in planning cases, and sites that are considered to be

of equivalent ecological value to those with a statutory designation (e.g. SSSI) are not felt to receive equivalent recognition when it comes to putting in place conservation and protection measures.

## **Barriers and Strengths**

184. The main barriers to delivery are financial resources for operating the system, with site management having suffered as a consequence of having to make delivery choices with limited resources. There is no mechanism to ensure appropriate management of sites and it can be very difficult, or impossible, to encourage this through engagement with owners. Grant schemes such as HLS, WGS and funding available for delivery of the Water Framework Directive are not always well-suited to Local Sites or geared up to focus upon Local Sites as a target for action. Securing funding for the conservation of Local Sites presents a real challenge to the Partnership. These observations apply to both wildlife and geological sites, where in addition it is felt there is a lack of understanding of the nature of sites and how this impacts on their conservation and a lack of appreciation that “you can harm a rock.”
185. The main strengths of the Local Sites system are the “enabling” role it provides and the success partners have had in raising awareness of LSs, achieving local recognition of their value and gaining protection for the sites through planning. The Partnership is considered to be strong with a broad representation of expertise. The procedures it has developed have been tested and found to be effective; the site selection process, for example, has stood up to challenges mounted during the determination of planning applications and Public Inquiry at policy level and site specific level.

## **1.5 North Yorkshire**

### **1.5.1 Context**

186. North Yorkshire has a two-tier local government structure and the county contains most of both Yorkshire Dales National Park and North York Moors National Park. It is one of the most extensive and most “rural” of the Partnerships.
187. North Yorkshire currently has a SINC Partnership which was established in 1997 and is led by the County Council and covers the area shown in Map 2 (main report). Progress is being made in broadening the Local Sites system to incorporate the LGS / RIGS sites that have been and are in the process of being designated by the geo-conservation bodies that are active within the Partnership area.
188. The SINC Steering Group includes representatives from all seven District Authorities, the City of York (which has its own LSP closely aligned to the North Yorkshire Partnership), Natural England, Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust, and more recently, Forestry Commission and Local Records Centre. Active interest and participation from District authorities has declined over the years; capacity for engagement is limited as it is largely driven by Countryside officer/ecologist posts and only two remain within these seven authorities.

### **1.5.2 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation**

189. The SINC Panel has broader membership than the SINC Steering Group drawing on the expertise of local specialists, academics and representatives from designated areas, such as AONBs and National Parks.
190. The vast majority (97%) of the 730 SINC are in private ownership; all are located outside the National Parks. Neither of the National Parks has adopted Local Sites as a non-statutory designation.

### **1.5.3 Local Geological Sites**

191. The County Council is currently working with geo-conservation bodies within the County to assist with the identification, survey, evaluation and designation of Local Geological Sites, using experience gained in the SINC process to provide a similar approach to LGS in terms of contacting landowners, storage of data & communication of sites information to District Councils and partners.

#### 1.5.4 Management Advice and Local Sites (SINCs)

##### Encouragement and support for the management of Local Sites

192. Site survey has evolved to become the primary means for engaging landowners within the North Yorkshire Partnership and is typically the route by which follow-up management advice and support is offered. The majority of management advice is provided as “follow-up” after site surveys that take place either at designation or as part of the ongoing site monitoring programme. Advice is delivered both by “direct approach” and “on request”.
193. With the resources available, the Steering Group felt they had the option to progress SINC conservation activity via either a programme of survey and monitoring or by focusing effort on getting management plans in place. The decision was taken to develop the monitoring programme and use this as a platform for delivering management advice wherever possible.
194. Designation only occurs following a baseline site survey. The data arising from these baseline surveys and an ongoing site monitoring programme has proved to be very useful in identifying sites requiring management.
195. The SINC Panel review results from all surveys and contact is then made with the landowner (by letter) with the response being determined by the survey outcomes as follows:
- **SINCs considered to be in favourable condition:** the landowner is made aware of the survey results. Aspects of site management that are considered to be working well and delivering positive conservation outcomes are highlighted so the owner is aware of those aspects of their land management that work well. The owner is invited to contact the Partnership should they require further management advice;
  - **SINCs considered NOT to be in favourable condition:** the landowner is immediately contacted and offered a site visit with the purpose of providing management advice that will maintain the sites interest. This advice could include making the owner aware of suitable schemes (e.g. agri-environment or WGS). In some cases, practical help is offered (e.g. scrub removal) by volunteers / County Council countryside rangers to “kick-start” positive management with a view to the owner then continuing appropriate management themselves in the longer term. This approach is seen as a good opportunity to increase the number of sites meeting the SDL 160 (previously NI197 indicator).
196. Some management advice is provided “on-request” following ad-hoc contact from either landowners or members of the public (for example if they report concerns about the condition of sites).
197. Management plans are produced where it is considered beneficial. The particular management required and timescale for its implementation is discussed and agreed with the owner. The management plans are kept relatively informal and brief (there is no set style/procedure). Where possible, site monitoring will be linked to the timescale of the management plan (e.g. a 5 year plan).
198. It is felt that delivering management advice as a follow up to site monitoring is a natural progression - the vast majority of landowners are interested in the results of the survey of their sites and this provides a good lead in to discussing site management needs. Sensitive communication is considered key to successful outcomes and owners are always asked about their experience of managing the sites, their aspirations for the site and are encouraged to share their knowledge about its ecological interest.
199. Where it is known there are existing management agreements in place (e.g. HLS, WGS) the relevant parties (NE, FC) are contacted prior to any site visit to ensure there is a good understanding of the management status/ history of the site.



200. The Partnership feel they have good ecological and management skills and experience to draw on, having ecologists, countryside rangers and skilled volunteers able to support delivery of management advice.
201. Information that would be beneficial for establishing site management needs for SINC is known to be held by some public bodies, private companies and NGOs, but has proved difficult to obtain; where it has been obtained, difficulties have arisen because of incompatible data formats.
202. The factors most likely to influence whether a site has an active land management plan in place are:
- whether it has been monitored as part of the SINC site survey programme;
  - whether it is owned or managed by conservation bodies (e.g. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and some local conservation bodies); and,
  - whether it is in a targeted environmental monitoring programme.
203. There is evidence that some sites without management plans are being actively managed in an appropriate way – family run farms that are still carrying out traditional management techniques and publically owned sites (where implementing management takes precedence over the production of a plan) are examples. In both cases monitoring results demonstrate that current management is delivering the desired conservation outcomes.
204. The main barriers to getting management plans in place are obtaining landowner details and access permission. Occasionally, land agents are a little obstructive when the Partnership requests written permission via them, but generally once they have spoken to the survey team, the experience is that communication then becomes much easier and the “light touch approach” in relation to the way management advice is delivered strengthens this engagement.
205. In general terms, the Partnership considers they have access to the information they need to identify sites that require management.
206. The Defra Guidance has been useful and the two ecologists who deliver much of the monitoring and management advice are very experienced, having very good ecological knowledge of the county and site management experience.

### **Single Data List and NI197 – how informative has the process of information provision been?**

207. The process of compiling evidence to support NI197 has been very informative. Reporting began at a time when the Partnership did not have a monitoring programme in place and it made the Partnership “grasp the nettle” to establish the status of sites. It helped focus attention on the need for evidence and this influenced the emerging shape of the monitoring programme. This in turn led to the Partnership gaining a much better understanding of the SINC resource than they previously had. Working to improve against targets has given confidence to the Partnership as this has gradually been achieved.

### **1.5.5 Survey and Monitoring (SINC)**

#### **Co-ordination of survey and monitoring activity in North Yorkshire**

208. North Yorkshire County Council co-ordinate and fund the survey and monitoring of SINC on behalf of the Partnership. There is an established process of site survey, which incorporates:
- a detailed initial baseline assessment of a site’s interest, condition and management needs;
  - subsequent less detailed monitoring to pick up any changes in site condition and management;
209. The survey and monitoring process establishes and takes account of the management objectives of the SINC.

## **Establishing the baseline condition of SINC**

210. Detailed baseline surveys of SINC record site interest and include assessment of appropriate management to maintain this. Baseline condition surveys involve mapping and survey of the sites and features of interest and is usually carried out by one of a group of professional independent specialist consultants. The baseline condition of approximately 95% of sites has been recorded through site survey; much of this work took place between 1998 and 2001. Sites in public ownership are, proportionately, more likely to have baseline data describing their condition, although it should be noted that these make up only 3% of all sites.

## **Monitoring site condition**

211. North Yorkshire has a process in place to schedule and deliver an 8-10 year cycle of site monitoring which equates to about 60 - 70 sites per year. The monitoring process was developed relatively recently, in 2008, and is carried out mainly by trained volunteers. A number of criteria are recorded on standard survey forms as part of a site “walk-over” including: continued presence of the habitats/species for which the site was designated, boundary changes, management changes, signs of notable damage, presence of +ve and -ve indicators, invasive species. The results are used to infer site condition. Surveyors are aware of recommended site management and the conservation outcomes these are seeking to achieve.

212. Occasionally, a resurvey will be carried out by one of the independent consultants (e.g. because there were issues with the site condition but it was beyond their experience/training to detail this); when this is the case a full resurvey to the level delivered at site designation is often carried out – this is felt to be justified given the remoteness of many sites, as the time required for the actual ecological survey work is proportionately relatively modest.

213. Survey work is usually carried out on “clusters” of sites based around selected OS 10km grid squares, selecting one or two neighboring grid squares within each local authority area to achieve good coverage year on year, but can also be instigated following issues reported by members of the public/landowners or a partner organisation. Grasslands and wetlands are the highest priority for survey, together with sites where concerns about the sites conservation status have been reported.

214. Data are collated by the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC); this is a relatively recent arrangement and includes the development of a database to enable more comprehensive and systematic analysis of the data arising from SINC surveys. It is thought that the NEYEDC make species data available via the NBN Gateway and it is known that the BARS system makes reference to the existence of SINC (for example in cases where SINC have a donor or receptor function in grassland restoration projects).

215. The Partnership is beginning to make use of information for SINC that arises from their being in grant schemes (e.g. agri-environment / WGS); this information is considered valuable both from the perspective of being aware of the site management that is planned for SINC (and being able to comment on this) and for obtaining feedback on the condition of sites from the agencies involved. Water quality monitoring data has been sought from the Environment Agency for some riverine SINC and has been very time consuming to obtain; such data is very expensive and time consuming to gather and it is felt that such monitoring shouldn't need to be repeated because of data accessibility or data format issues. Current arrangements are informal, but it is felt that a more formal arrangement to share information about SINC for both agri-environment and woodland grant schemes would be mutually beneficial to all parties. It is felt that the NEYEDC could help overcome some of the data format problems that have been encountered previously as they will be able to develop a longer-term solution for the Partnership.

216. The two main factors that determine the frequency of survey and monitoring are:

- availability of County Council ecologist time to prepare for surveys (in particular the time needed to establish permission to access sites); and,

- the level of capital budget in any particular year, as this determines the number of surveys that can be delivered by the specialist consultants.

**217.** These are considered the main barriers to achieving the desired frequency of survey, together with the relatively short survey season which becomes an issue when access permission cannot be easily arranged. Other barriers encountered include extreme weather events and cases of multiple ownership, where one landowner may grant access, but another refuse (in which case the survey would go ahead if the majority of the site is covered by access permission, the surveyor just wouldn't enter the area with no access permission).

### Users and uses of survey and monitoring information gathered by partners

218. The main users of survey and monitoring information (see table below) are the lead partner and the NEYEDC.

#### Users and Uses

Users	Uses
County Council ecologists	Informing ongoing SINC management; Reporting of Single Data List to Defra Providing advice to planning officers on developments in close proximity to SINC Inputting baseline data to multidisciplinary landscape scale projects
County ecologists District ecologists & countryside officers (where present)	Planning and delivery of minerals and wastes and other planning functions (CC) Assessing impacts of development (all planning authorities) Keeping LDFs up to date
Landowners (incl. LA, NGOs, other public bodies)	Landowners receive a summary of the results of survey and monitoring
Wildlife Trust and other organisations leading/ delivering strategic initiatives	Informing on effects of site management, planning and delivery of strategic landscape-scale initiatives. Schemes targeted at habitat and species restoration.
Consultants	Consultants use the LRC for data searches and this therefore feeds into development control and forward planning functions.

### Overall assessment of the condition of Local Sites

219. Partnerships were asked to provide data on the condition of their sites, if this was available, and to provide a level of confidence in such information. North Yorkshire LSP was able to accommodate this request and reported reasonable confidence in the results provided. The data on condition is derived from a combination of annual site monitoring results from which condition can be inferred (the site monitoring programme began in 2008 and 200+ sites have been monitored), supplemented by further data derived from extrapolation of information obtained from partners for the compilation of SDL returns for Defra. Estimates are:

**SINCs in "good" condition 40%;**

**SINCs in poor condition 20%;**

**SINCs in unknown condition 40%**

220. The "unknown" category is made up both of sites which haven't been monitored since their designation (but where it is intended to monitor them) and those that haven't been monitored because permission to survey was refused or has not yet been gained.

221. There is no clear pattern to the results either geographically or in terms of other factors; the main observation is that some very remote sites that have been in family ownership tend to have continuity of management and tend to be in good condition and that sites subject to some development pressure (incl. tipping etc.) are more likely to be in poor condition.

### Overall, is the condition of sites changing?

222. The gut feeling of ecologists at the county level is that SINCs are subject to an overall slow deterioration in ecological quality. This is based upon their long experience of working in the county. Monitoring data is considered key to the provision of evidence of change in the longer term, as the current four years of monitoring data is “short” in ecological terms.

#### **1.5.6 Resources for management and survey of SINCs**

223. Financial support from the County Council, in kind contributions from partners and volunteer resources make up the contributions to site survey and monitoring. There are two full-time equivalent ecologists funded by the County Council and between them they spend about two-thirds of a staff year on SINC survey and management. There is also a capital budget provided by the County Council which funds work carried out by the NEYEDC, consultancy fees for site survey work and representations they make at the SINC panel and a small amount for occasional capital management works.

224. There are a good number of volunteers, about 100, who are involved with a wide range of site management work and of these, 16 are fully trained and have the skills to conduct site monitoring work. In the past there was some funding from the District Authorities, but this is no longer the case.

#### **1.5.7 Local Sites and Development**

225. Those interviewed were aware of a few cases where SINCs have been protected from development. The example provided was a chalet development on a SINC designated for its bird assemblages, and in this case it was known that the site designation influenced the planning outcome. The Partnership do not have the resources to monitor outcomes and rather provide advice on request and are therefore unable to estimate the number of such cases in the past year.

226. The Partnership become aware of damage and loss to sites that are identified as a result site survey and monitoring, and also from the work of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (who also provide advice to district planning authorities, particularly focusing on authorities who do not have a planning ecologist of their own) and sometimes from District ecologists (where present). The types of damage picked up by monitoring include the effects of paintballing, motocross, tipping and conversion of areas of SINCs to gardens. The Partnership have looked at some of the sites involved, to see if there was any planning application history, but could not find any evidence of this.

227. There are currently two cases involving SINCs that are going through the planning process.

228. Site monitoring has recorded some sign of damage on just over one third of the sites monitored each year (36%), and it is considered that of this about 15% is attributable to development (incl. permitted development): this includes conversion to gardens, pond creation, tipping of mineral and waste spoil.

229. There has been evidence of water eutrophication and water quality changes picked up during monitoring and it is felt that on a more widespread scale there may be further gradual long long-term ecological change that is negative and of which there is as yet little detectable evidence.

230. One development is known to have had a Section 106 agreement attached that required monitoring measures (water quality monitoring) and it is known that this monitoring is taking place.

231. There is some interaction between the Partnership and the planning process. County and district ecologists and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust are able to provide advice to their respective planning authorities - but it is known that a district ecologist post has recently been lost and the majority of districts have no ecologist in post.

232. The Partnership support Districts by compiling and providing the results of SDL 160 (formerly NI197). An updated list of SINCs and a GIS layer is provided to districts every 1-2 years (or when a significant change has occurred) to assist with development control and the monitoring of internal indicators relating to the LDF.

### 1.5.8 Strategic Considerations

233. The county covers a substantial area (8,654 km<sup>2</sup>) and it is felt that SINCs provide a good basic resource for the planning of strategic habitat, species or landscape-focused initiatives and an ecosystem services approach. Site monitoring to date has resulted in very widely scattered results geographically, and the Partnership are considering the merits of prioritising some monitoring to specifically support the development of strategic initiatives.
234. The Partnership have input to various initiatives that are identifying landscape areas for targeted conservation action (e.g. WT Living Landscapes, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas). This includes providing information to habitat led bids such as the Yorkshire Wildlife Trusts “Southern Magnesium Limestone Grassland” bid where the Partnership were able to provide information on possible donor sites for hay meadow restoration. The data that can be provided is suitable for both habitat and species driven projects. For a project led by Buglife, that is seeking to establish wildlife corridors for bees, the Partnership will target monitoring and management advice to support this, looking to target gaps in provision by building on their established relationships with SINC owners.

#### Has SINC designation brought the benefits envisaged?

235. It is felt that designation has raised awareness of the biodiversity and geological resources in the Partnership area if nothing else. Designation has allowed involvement with the landowners and raised their awareness of ecological value of the land they manage. It is felt that there is still a considerable way to go to get robust protection for sites.

#### Barriers and strengths of the work of the Partnership

236. The main barriers to delivery are the limited staff time and financial resources for operating the system, and finding the time needed to access land ownership details. At a local level, it is considered that there is insufficient recognition of the contribution of SINCs compared to statutory sites (in terms of a robust policy for their protection) and that this is possibly a local manifestation of a wider issue in this respect nationally.
237. The main strengths are the support provided by the County Council. The Partnership is considered to be strong with a good set of guidelines and a monitoring /management approach that works well. There is good knowledge of the County and excellent support from the NEYEDC.

## 1.6 Rotherham

### 1.6.1 Context

238. There are several Local Sites systems in England that cover a single metropolitan local authority area (map 1). The Defra Guidance (2006) provided the stimulus for the creation of the Rotherham Local Sites system, which was instigated, and is funded, by the planning functions within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) seeking to integrate LWSs and RIGS into the Local Plan (approval since given). Sites Panels meet at least twice a year to oversee the selection, evaluation and de-selection of Local Sites. RMBC accept both wildlife and geological sites put forward by the Panels and site owners are made aware of the designation of Local Sites through the Local Plan process.
239. The Rotherham Local Wildlife Sites system is led by the Council’s Ecology Development Officer. The Local Wildlife Sites Panel comprises RMBC, Natural England, Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trust for Sheffield and Rotherham, local interest groups, Rotherham Biodiversity Forum (who produced the local BAP) and the Rotherham Biological Records Centre (which is funded by RMBC).
240. The Rotherham Local Geological Sites Panel (RLGSP) is currently administered by the Sheffield Area Geology Trust (SAGT) and comprises a panel of geological local experts and a non-technical representative from RMBC planning.

241. SAGT currently manages Rotherham Geological Record Centre and provides Development Management advice under a voluntary trial basis - currently with no Memorandum of Agreement or Service Level Agreement in place with RMBC. RMBC aspires to a Local Sites system encompassing a Local Geological Sites system. However, there has been no identified funding stream for the formation of a full LGS system, which would involve securing provision of: i) a funded Geological Record Centre, ii) the development of robust LGS criteria comparable to the LWS criteria and iii) the provision of geodiversity advice (e.g. to the RMBC Development Management Section). The system would also need to include a program of site monitoring, and candidate site survey and analysis against agreed LGS criteria.

### 1.6.2 Local Wildlife Sites

242. There are currently 91 designated LWSs, all of which have been accepted by the Council. The Partnership developed guidelines<sup>8</sup> for site selection in 2007, which have subsequently been updated (RMBC, 2011). These are in line with the Defra guidance (2006). The first set of LWSs was adopted by the Council in 2008. A site may qualify due to the presence of an important habitat or because it supports a rare species or assemblage of species. There are still areas of potential interest that do not qualify as LWSs, either due to lack of biological data held or access restrictions.

### 1.6.3 Local Geological Sites

243. RIGS in Rotherham were first designated in 1999, following a survey carried out by the South Yorkshire RIGS Group (which is now part of the SAGT). There are 26 designated RIGS in Rotherham, three of which were designated relatively recently (2011). Some RIGS are also designated as LWSs.

244. The development of LGS criteria are anticipated to be based on the key geological and geomorphological features and other aspects of the geodiversity as identified in a document that may form part of the Rotherham Geodiversity Action Plan, which is yet to be finalised. The progress made with formally establishing the LWSs is being shared with the SAGT to assist with this process.

### 1.6.4 Management Advice and Local Sites

#### Encouragement and support for the management of Local Sites

245. Contributions directly from the LS Partnership to encourage and support site management have been very limited as there are no dedicated funding streams to support the management of Local Sites. With limited resources the focus has been on setting up the LS system, developing and implementing robust site selection criteria and site selection process and putting in place the programme of site survey. As a result, current activity is limited mainly to provision of support for council-owned LWSs. There are no immediate plans to start a broader programme of advice and support for the management of Local Sites, but looking ahead, such provision is an area those taking part in the survey would like to see developed if there were the resource to do so, as the current approach is not considered to work particularly well for either wildlife or geological sites.

246. There is some flexibility in the approach adopted, which it is felt allows best use to be made of the limited resources available. The management advice provided by the Partnership has taken the following form:

- **Direct approach:** As part of Local Development Plan development, all known landowners of LWSs including RMBC service areas, were sent an information pack about Local Sites in 2011. A Land registry search supported this process. This pack included some basic management advice set out in a FAQ Sheet. This included information that sign-posted site owners to relevant national grant schemes for funding appropriate land management (e.g. agri-environment schemes, woodland grant schemes). A “tick-box” option allowed site owners to request follow-up management advice from the RMBC ecologist; however, take-up of this option has been very low. The opportunity for

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/4716/site\\_selection\\_guidance\\_for\\_rotherham](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/4716/site_selection_guidance_for_rotherham)

informal RIGS management advice was offered in 2010 within a request from RMBC for geological surveyor access (as part of RIGS boundary update work).

- **On request:** Management advice is provided for LWSs by the RMBC ecology development officer, when requested by landowners, but there has been little demand for this. Basic management advice is provided by SAGT without charge when requested by the landowner. Management advice for RIGS from the Local Geological Sites Panel members including the Sheffield Area Geology Trust (SAGT) has also been offered via an information sheet on RIGS which is available on the RMBC web site.
247. Other partners, such as the Wildlife Trusts, provide management advice to landowners and managers of LWSs but there is no monitoring of the uptake of this by the Partnership.
248. The RLGSP have adopted the approach of providing management advice only at the request of the landowner to be consistent with the approach taken by the LWS Panel.
249. The point was made that a careful balance needs to be struck between supporting landowners and providing unwanted and unenforceable advice for Local Sites. As non-statutory designated sites they are protected by the planning system but that does not bring with it any authority to impose management or to resolve neglect. Ongoing support by SAGT for the provision of a list of ‘operations likely to damage’ (comparable to those provided to SSSI landowners) to landowners, which has been raised but not agreed by the LGSP, has had to be considered in this context.
250. Limited staff and financial resources are directed mainly to securing management activity on council owned sites – with the emphasis being on implementing practical management activity rather than drawing up management plans, although some LWSs do have site-specific management plans in place. The point was made that for publically owned geological sites there is no equivalent to the “biodiversity duty” (NERC Act, 2006) placed on public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions.
251. Management actions for geological sites are identified and recorded using standard RIGS assessment procedures as part of site survey and these are therefore available to the Partnership; whilst these are general in nature, they are site-specific.

## Management Plans

252. The Partnership has compiled information on Local Sites subject to other designations and arrangements are in place to receive GIS layers showing sites in particular agri-environment or woodland scheme agreement options. As well as providing information on sites with active management plans, this allows basic checks to be made that LWSs are in appropriate options.
253. SAGT uses site-specific management plans, but none have been prepared for sites in Rotherham.
254. The following types of Local Site are considered most likely to have active management plans:
- **wildlife sites in grant schemes**(such as WGS and HLS/ELS) - larger landowners, including RMBC, focus management of nature conservation interests on areas that may be eligible for stewardship funding, including LWS areas;
  - **sites with other designations – such as** NNRs, SSSIs;
  - some Council-owned wildlife sites.
255. Some management plans on council owned sites are known to be out of date but resources are not diverted to produce updates if it is perceived that no management change is required. Other sites do not require active management and so no plan is needed.
256. There is some evidence that active management is occurring for LWSs that do not have a management plan in place or where it is outdated – the outcomes of site monitoring show that selection criteria are still being met on some sites that don’t have a management plan (typically,

woodlands) and some where the management plan is known to be out of date (e.g. typically, council owned sites).

257. The main barriers to getting management advice and/or management plans in place are:
- **Staff resources:** the Partnership are unable to develop a programme to actively engage and support private landowners (e.g. through an outreach programme);
  - **Financial resources:** RMBC do not have the expertise to provide geological advice and SAGT reserves the right to charge for detailed management plans;
  - **Cost to landowners:** site management has potential short term and long term financial implications for landowners who cannot secure grant funding (this is a particularly issue for geological sites);
  - **Knowledge of land ownership:** obtaining and maintaining information about land ownership is time consuming.
258. SAGT have been approached by three landowners, following Condition Monitoring assessments of their sites, to date none of these sites has a management plan. The management work required on one geological site in RMBC ownership has not been undertaken as Green Spaces does not have sufficient funding for this work within existing budgets.
259. The suggestion was made that all changes in land ownership are notified to the Partnership (in line with SSSIs), but it is recognised that this cannot be required under the current legislation.
260. It was noted that the existing guidance documents related to geological site types provide general matters for consideration in relation to site management, but there is little guidance on the potential enhancement opportunities on sites and related areas.

### **Single Data List and NI 197 – how informative has the process of information provision been?**

261. The Single Data List is considered to have value in that it lends weight to the need for the Council to keep the Local Sites system up and running, but it is not considered to have been a strong driver for action to bring about year on year improvement in the conservation of sites.

### **1.6.5 Survey and Monitoring**

#### **Co-ordination of survey and monitoring activity in Rotherham**

262. The Rotherham LWS Panel meets in February/March to prepare an annual survey programme; this involves identifying sites that are a priority for condition surveys and identifying new candidate sites that require baseline survey. Once agreed, the survey programme is circulated to members of the LWS Panel and the Rotherham Biodiversity Forum, together with a request to establish whether members might be able to help with the survey effort in a voluntary capacity. A key driver for the Partnership is that no LWS should have data that is older than 10 years. There are currently resources available to survey about 5% of sites each year, although the LWS Panel has set itself a target of 10%.
263. Since the publication of the Defra 2006 Local Sites guidance, the Partnership has an aspiration to survey geological sites regularly, ideally, once every 5 years (or at least carry out a survey within 6 years, comparable with geological SSSI monitoring). However, there is no planned programme of regular survey work in place at present. Most of the recent geological monitoring has been undertaken in February – March, linked to available funding at the financial year end.

#### **Establishing and monitoring site interest (Local Wildlife Sites)**

264. The site selection process for Local Wildlife Sites has created a body of information for each site which acts as the baseline evidence of site interest.
265. Since 2006, significant progress has been made in creating a robust process and evidence base for site selection. Prior to 2006, the Borough had a series of sites of 'known interest for nature



conservation' (mainly identified in the 1990's in the run up to the production of the Unitary Development Plan, adopted in 1999) but these were not criteria-based and little supporting information was held. The resources were not available for a programme of field-based survey, so the Partnership drew on existing biological records for the Borough (held by Rotherham BRC) to supplement the information they already held. This allowed the LWS Panel to draw up a list of candidate sites in the Borough. Selection criteria were developed by consultants. Initially these were very hard to apply, as they require site-based data to be compared with indicative species lists. IT solutions have been generated by Yorkshire & Humber Environmental Data Network to help with this, and now most of the assessment work can be automated.

266. With the evidence base for site designation being largely generated by data from the Rotherham BRC, there have been barriers to potential site designation where local NGOs have not submitted their data to the BRC (e.g. where there are sensitivities regarding the sharing of information about protected species).
267. Restricted resources meant that the initial set of LWS was identified using RBRC data alone with the system recommending that each LWS would be visited and monitored within any ten year period. The level of data held by the RBRC was considered sufficient for this approach to be agreeable by the Panel.
268. Now the Local Wildlife Sites system is up and running, new candidate sites are surveyed before assessment, mostly because these are the sites about which little is known. Sites are proposed as candidate LWSs by members of the LWSP, which gives some confidence that the site is of interest and worth surveying; if access is denied the site remains a candidate site so that any future planning application can consider this.
269. Habitat presence and quality of LWSs is monitored via a survey programme agreed each year by the LWS Panel; the panel propose to visit each site within the first ten years to confirm designation criteria, and following that, sites should be regularly monitored for quality although limited resources may mean this is not achieved. Sites designated, either wholly or in-part, on the basis of species criteria would benefit from more regular monitoring work to identify changes in population size or range and to maintain the necessary standard of baseline data; local voluntary groups are being encouraged to support this. New survey work may also be programmed for existing designated sites to establish their value for habitats and / or species other than those used for primary selection. The aim of this is to support the principle that sites are capable of supporting a varied and dynamic range of wildlife that cannot be fully understood by 'snap-shot' assessment.
270. Site survey work is done mainly by the RMBC ecology officer with a very limited amount of volunteer support. Survey work focuses on botanical data collection (because of the skills of the officer); species lists are collected for each habitat area or management compartment, where this is known. Notes are also made on the quality of the habitat; any obvious changes to site or habitat extent, evidence of any damage to the site and its cause are recorded, as is evidence of recent management. It is desirable to prepare Phase 1 habitat maps of sites but this has not proved possible to date due to time constraints. The first site survey provides the information needed to confirm the baseline condition of the site in terms of the sites qualifying interest.
271. The Partnership makes good use of survey data from activities carried out by others both for site selection and site survey – they place a strong emphasis on an “evidence-based” approach and consider BRC records to be key data in this respect as the focus of survey and monitoring is on checking that the site has retained its substantive value. For sites with ornithological interest, local groups gather the data for LWSs as part of their monitoring activities and additional information is sometimes gathered specifically for LWSs by these groups – e.g. data on nesting. The additional information assists in applying appropriate selection criteria, e.g. some of the ornithological criteria relate to the presence of certain species or species groups using a site for breeding purposes rather than just being present.

272. At present, the focus of survey effort is on ensuring all LWSs receive a site survey to confirm their baseline condition within 10 years of designation. There is the intention to ensure there is future ongoing monitoring of LWSs once the initial site surveys have been completed.
273. Sites are not monitored specifically in relation to their management objectives in any detailed way due to resource constraints, although checks are made through desk study using GIS to ensure LWSs in schemes such as HLS/ELS/WGS are in options compatible with the site's interest.
274. Factors that influence the frequency of survey are:
- **ease of gaining access to sites** - which has resulted in the monitoring being mainly on publically owned sites, particularly council owned sites (which make up a third of all sites). Work has recently begun on sites owned by the Environment Agency. Relationships are starting to be built with private landowners but obtaining ownership details is very time consuming and a lot of time is required to explain the Local Sites system because of this infrequency of contact;
  - **survey resources**-the volunteer resource that the Partnership has access to is limited. LWS panel members volunteer their time but in general simply do not have additional time to also contribute to survey work;
  - **nature of the substantive interest** - a range of sites is chosen to try and make full use of the length of the survey season. It has not been possible to survey some sites that require specialist expertise that is not available in-house – e.g. those with amphibian interest.
275. All results are sent to the Rotherham BRC and stored on RECORDER, but a dedicated LWS evidence database the "Second Site System" (see Box 4) which is web-based is being developed with funding from Defra. Rotherham LWSP intend to store site-based supporting information such as site plans, boundary mapping, survey history and an evidence trail on this system when it is available.

Box 4: **SECOND SITE SYSTEM**

Information provided by the Yorkshire Humber Environmental Data Network:

"Second Site, or S2, was originally motivated by the need to calculate a return for NI 197 now Single Data List 160-00 and to provide the audit trail of evidence to back up that number. In recording all the necessary audit trail evidence for that decision, Second Site has evolved into a more complete system incorporating everything from Partnership details (with meetings, minutes, agendas and decision records), through to versioned descriptions and site boundaries, survey visits, site assessments, land owner details, permissions, hazards and other associated documents and photos.

Second Site is based on Open Source software, integrates with GIS (currently MapInfo but will hopefully also support ArcGIS in time), runs in a web browser to minimize maintenance requirements and can be installed locally or hosted as a service.

Second Site is currently being piloted by a number of organisations for various different purposes and has recently been extended to carry out site based data searches and to provide a back-end database to support public survey and BioBlitzes."

276. Information on survey activity is not currently stored on BARS, but it is anticipated that it will be when the local BAP is updated.

### **Establishing site condition (Geological Sites)**

277. All designated RIGS have been subject to recent site surveys, but of differing levels of detail:

- **Baseline condition surveys:** Condition assessments of three candidate RIGS were carried out in 2010, prior to their designation using standard UK RIGS assessment procedure in line with a documented and externally verified local methodology<sup>9</sup>
- **Updating original survey records – standard UKRIGS (now GCUK) condition assessment:** most (23 of 26) RIGS were originally surveyed in 1996-1997 prior to their designation. Recent survey work in 2009/2010, resurveyed eight of these sites using the standard UK RIGS assessment procedure.
- **Rapid assessments to update records:** Recent survey work in 2009/2010, also included revisiting the other RIGS originally surveyed in 1996-1997 - to check the designating interest is still present, enabled checks that their boundaries are correct.

278. The recent survey work was commissioned by RMBC. For many of the existing RIGS, boundary changes have been made to conform to good practices. Survey data was obtained from a variety of sources such as literature, maps and other records. Landowner permission was obtained for access to survey sites, or if this was not obtained, viewing of sites was made from rights of way public highways or remotely using aerial photographs. Bedrock stratigraphy RIGS sites where RMBC is the landowner are more likely to have a baseline condition survey.

279. Survey work on the remaining 29 candidate RIGS has not been carried out due to lack of funding.

### Monitoring site condition (Geological Sites)

280. The RIGS are assessed using a recording form that incorporates all of the nationally agreed elements for assessing the condition of RIGS/LGS. One or two professional geologists, contracted to undertake the survey work, are sometimes accompanied by one volunteer. The number of surveyors partly depends on safety considerations.

281. The results are held by Rotherham Geological Records Centre (GRC), which is independently managed by SAGT currently without support from RMBC. The data is also stored within a RIGS–LGS and non-designated site SAGT database. The condition information (but not the supporting evidence) is included within the Natural England data collation project work, and is included on the 160-00 RIGS spreadsheet. The Rotherham GRC also holds a range of other evidence that supports site designation and information on candidate geological sites within Rotherham Borough.

282. The frequency of survey of geological sites is determined by the availability of funding. Whilst a five year resurvey frequency is aspired to, sites may require more or less frequent monitoring depending on factors such as their type, their known condition and whether they have been subject to restoration work. Ongoing site monitoring could inform these decisions.

283. The main barrier to the collection of survey data relate to landowner contact and obtaining access. RMBC Planning and SAGT do not have all the land ownership or landowner contact details. Some landowners do not reply to requests for written permission to undertake survey work. .

284. At present most of the baseline survey and monitoring data is collected by SAGT but there are barriers to the collation of data. Some geological information relating to designated RIGS sites is held by members of other organisations, and by the British Geological Survey (BGS) who may impose charges for the time to access baseline survey records that it holds and manages. At present there are no arrangements to share data with the BGS, or with the Rotherham BRC. In addition, SAGT does not have the financial resources to purchase an OS Mastermap digital license and relies on RMBC to provide map extracts.

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<sup>9</sup> see [http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/5274/rotherham\\_rigs\\_methodology\\_document](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/5274/rotherham_rigs_methodology_document)

## Users and uses of survey and monitoring information gathered by partners

Users	Uses
RMBC Local Sites administrators	Site administration and management Single Data List reporting NE data collation project
Planning Departments	Contribute towards the up to date evidence base to inform delivery of RMBC planning functions, incl. Local Plan Development, assessing planning applications
Wildlife Trusts, Forest Research, Rotherham Biodiversity Forum, others	Input to the development and delivery of strategic landscape-scale and Partnership building initiatives – Living Landscapes / Integrated Habitat Mapping/ Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping
SAGT	as the local geoconservation group
Consultants	Access data via the RMBC usually in relation to planning related matters
Landowners /land managers	For geological sites: inform landowners and land manages with regards to the current condition, and potential management to conserve and possibly enhance the geodiversity interest
Natural England	NE data collation project work (geological sites).

## Overall assessment of the condition of Local Sites

285. Partnerships were asked to provide data on the condition of sites, if this was available, and to provide a level of confidence in such information. Site condition at RMBC is measured using the Single Data List 160 – Percentage of Local Sites in Positive Management. In the 2011 assessment 36 out of 117 sites (91 LWS and 26 RIGS) had evidence of positive management, representing 31% of local sites. Positive management is evidenced by having had documented site management discussions with the site manager, having a management plan, or being in appropriate HLS or WGS options. The Rotherham LWSP and system makes a presumption that a designated LWS retains its qualifying criteria unless there is evidence to demonstrate that it is no longer present and that it cannot be restored. The LWSP has noted previously that the SDL assessment is not sufficient alone to accurately monitor site condition.

286. For RIGS, two (out of eight more recently monitored sites) are known to be in good condition (representing 7% of all designated RIGS sites), six are in poor condition (21%) and the other 20 RIGS are considered to be in unknown condition (72%), because the last full survey date was in 1996.

### Overall, is the condition of sites changing?

287. The view from ecologists is that there is a gradual change in the overall condition of sites, due mainly to a lack of site management, with heathland and grassland suffering from invasion by bracken and scrub respectively. These changes are likely to take some time to detect through the site survey and monitoring programme. Countering this, there are benefits arising from the active management of sites.

288. The results of monitoring of the RIGS sites, together with limited data from the rapid survey work undertaken in 2010 show that many existing RIGS sites within disused quarries are slowly declining, as they are becoming increasingly overgrown with ivy, brambles, scrub and sapling trees. Some sites are being damaged by infilling with soil and rock or landfill as permitted within existing planning permissions and quarry restoration plans. Fly tipping, graffiti and unauthorised fires have also damaged some rock faces

### Resources for management and survey of LWSs

289. **Survey - LWSs:** RMBC fund the ecology officer post and a part-time post at the Rotherham Local Records Centre. The work of the ecology officer has a broad remit and includes both planning support and greenspace-related work. There is about one fifth of a staff post spent on LWS activities, including managing the LS system, delivering the annual programme of site survey, SDL assessment and writing management plans for RMBC sites. There is very occasional volunteer resource available to assist with site survey.

290. **Survey - RIGS:** Survey work is largely funded by RMBC Planning, as and when funding is available. There is limited national funding from Natural England for condition monitoring, which it was thought in future would be likely to be subject to conditional additional match funding for related activities, including interpretation. Volunteers may assist with survey work, but not undertake survey work, as RMBC requires that the professional surveyor is willing to attend a Court of Law should a landowner challenge the survey results.
291. **Management- LWSs:** Funding for site management of council-owned sites comes directly from RMBC. However, there is very little funding available, and works to ensure that health and safety considerations are met on council-owned sites is a priority. There is no resource from the Partnership to support the management of privately-owned sites.
292. **Management- RIGS:** There is no dedicated funding within the RLGSP members for the preparation of management plans or undertaking management work. There is no identified external source of funding to undertake management work, other than funding to be provided by the landowner. Volunteers are understandably unwilling to assist with undertaking management activities in areas without a management plan.

### 1.6.6 Local Sites and Development

293. Those who took part in the telephone survey, were not aware of any cases **in the past year** where Local Sites were protected from proposed development but did recall (over a longer time period) case where:
- a couple of LWSs were initially considered for allocated development during Local Plan development but were not selected as preferred sites following liaison with the Forward Plan Team;
  - part of a LWS was allocated to development in a previous Local Plan (pre-1996 and the establishment of the LS system) – related negotiations between RMBC planning and the landowner resulted in much higher levels of mitigation on the rest of the site.
  - a site formerly allocated to residential development in the Unitary Development Plan was surveyed and found to have a larger area, than originally identified, that met the qualifying criteria, so the whole site was subsequently designated a LWS and it is hoped this will be reallocated to greenspace in the forthcoming Local Plan.

Planning decision(s) took the site designation into account in these cases.

294. SAGT were aware of one case, in the past year, where a geological site was lost or damaged as result of development. This damage occurred as result of an approved restoration plan associated with planning decisions for landfill or quarry restoration made before the 2006 Defra Local Sites guidance and Local Sites system was introduced. A further two RIGS are known to be subject to similar restoration plans, made prior to 2006. To date, none of these sites have come up for a Review of Old Minerals Permissions (ROMP) that may provide the opportunity to modify the restoration plans in order to conserve the geodiversity interests.
295. The ecology officer deals with planning applications that could impact upon LWSs, circulating details to LWS Panel members who may make their own representations as part of the planning process. Sometimes a site meeting may occur and a “Partnership” response might be provided as a result.
296. SAGT works on a voluntary basis with RMBC Planning to provide advice on geodiversity, both within Forward Planning, as well as Development Management. A RMBC Forward Planner attends RLGSP meetings on a non-technical basis to provide a link between the Panel and planning process. RMBC have a procedure in place to notify SAGT when a development is located on a RIGS and RMBC would take into account SAGT comments in a planning decision.

### 1.6.7 Strategic Considerations

297. Rotherham LWS and RIGS boundaries have been used in various mapping projects to identify 'Living Landscapes', 'Habitat Opportunity Mapping' and 'Integrated Habitat Networks' on a regional basis.
298. Various groups represented on the Rotherham Local Sites Panels (e.g. the Rotherham Biodiversity Forum and the Wildlife Trusts) are involved in the delivery of landscape scale projects, such as the Dearne Valley Nature Improvement Area which encompasses part of the Rotherham area. The RGLSP contributed to the successful bid for the capacity building fund for the South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership (led by South Yorkshire Forest Partnership), their involvement was considered important to optimise the role of Local Sites in the wider landscape context. The Wildlife Trust's Coalfield Heathland's (CHP) Project was arranged before the LWS system was in place but sites included in the CHP have since been designated as LWS, and LWSs were included in the Wildlife Trust's South Yorkshire Pond Project.
299. Local ecological networks, biodiversity opportunity mapping and green infrastructure work is anticipated but has not yet been achieved. It is hoped that the Rotherham LWS Panel will support this work although this may be restricted to guiding the focus of the work undertaken by the RMBC Ecology Development Officer.

#### **Has Local Sites designation brought the benefits envisaged?**

300. The Rotherham Local Sites system has been developed through close working with RMBC planning so that the sites feed into the Local Development Plan and there was confidence that this will lead to envisaged benefits for the protection for sites. In terms of achieving the benefits envisaged for the conservation of LWSs, it is felt that this has not been achieved yet, but there is the chance that this can be achieved. It was hoped that NI197 /SDL 160 would have brought more benefits to achieving site conservation but it has not been a strong enough mechanism to draw in more funding for activities to secure widespread positive management of sites.

#### **Barriers and Strengths**

301. The main strengths of the LS system are considered to be:
- the strength of the site selection process developed – which is comprehensive and evidence-based;
  - its success in influencing planning systems and decisions
302. The main barriers to delivery are financial resources for operating the system including ongoing monitoring costs, and establishing the aspired Local Sites system that encompasses a Local Geological Sites system. Site management has suffered as a consequence of having to make delivery choices with limited resources. There are real challenges to be overcome to engage with landowners to secure appropriate site management in the longer term on privately owned sites. If there were funding for dedicated posts for LWSs and an identified funding stream for LGSs it is felt that significant progress could be made.