

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WIRRAL - SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the proposed changes to the schedule of Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) identified since the adoption of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) in 2000. It recommends that Cabinet recommends to Council that it formally adopts the revised schedule of sites as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of individual planning applications.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Cabinet considered a report on the implications of Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) guidance on the identification, selection and management of local wildlife sites on the 12th December 2007 and endorsed the establishment of the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership (Minute 398). The agreed role of the Partnership incorporates the co-ordination of site selection procedures including survey and identification of candidate sites for designation, deletion, or boundary alteration. The more formalised identification and agreement of proposed changes through the Partnership was intended to enable these new or amended sites to carry some weight in planning terms prior to their inclusion in the statutory Local Development Framework (LDF) for Wirral which will replace the UDP.
- 2.2 The Partnership is currently in the process of reviewing the selection criteria for local wildlife sites as recommended in the DEFRA guidance. On completion of this task (which is expected to take some time to complete) all sites will be re-evaluated against the new criteria and if suitable, identified as proposed Local Wildlife Sites for formal designation through the LDF process. However, the Partnership wishes to formally consolidate all the site changes which have been agreed since the adoption of the UDP under the current criteria before the re-evaluation process takes place. These now need to be formally adopted by the Council for planning purposes.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In most areas of the country, local authorities, working with other local partners, have set up systems of non-statutory local wildlife sites - there are in the region of 35,000 such sites in the country. Local sites are intended to sit below the national statutory designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and complement rather than duplicate protection of habitats and species by other mechanisms such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. These sites provide refuges for much of the UK's flora and fauna, play an important role in meeting biodiversity targets, represent local character and distinctiveness and contribute to the quality of life and well-being of the community. Local Wildlife Site notification also provides landowners/managers with information on the wildlife value of their land to assist them in making choices on management.
- 3.2 Although local sites are non-statutory, national Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation states that Local Sites have a fundamental role to play in

meeting overall national biodiversity targets; contributing to the quality of life and the well-being of the community; supporting research and education; and requires criteria based policies to be included in local development documents against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, such sites will be judged. Development Plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas.

4.0 WIRRAL SITES OF BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

4.1 Wirral currently has a system of local wildlife sites called Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs). These were originally drawn up by Cheshire Wildlife Trust in the late 1980s, replacing the wildlife sites system developed by Merseyside County Council. The sites were last reviewed in full in 1999 by Wirral Wildlife (the Wirral group of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust) prior to the formal designation of 70 SBIs through Proposal NC6 - *Sites of Biological Importance* in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in February 2000. The reasoned justification for Proposal NC6 states that “*sites not currently identified, but which can be demonstrated to meet the criteria specified, will, therefore, also be subject to protection as SBIs under Policy NC5*”.

5.0 WIRRAL LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES PARTNERSHIP

5.1 In 2006 the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published *Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management*, which aimed to promote a transparent and consistent approach to the operation of local wildlife sites systems. A key recommendation in the guidance was the establishment of local wildlife partnerships to manage local sites systems. Cabinet considered a report highlighting the key recommendations and implication of this guidance on the 12th December 2007, endorsed the establishment of the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership and agreed the terms of reference for this group (Minute 398 refers). The role of the Partnership includes the co-ordination of site selection procedures including survey and identification of candidate sites for designation deletion, or boundary alterations.

5.2 The Partnership has begun the process of revising the existing SBI site selection criteria to take account of the DEFRA guidance and recommendations set out in the Wirral Biodiversity Audit (Minute 200, Cabinet 26th November 2009 refers). Once agreed, the Partnership will reassess all existing sites against the new criteria and compile a list of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) that will form a key element of the evidence base for Wirral’s emerging Local Development Framework and inform the consideration of planning applications. This work is still expected to take some time to complete.

6.0 REVIEW OF SITES

6.1 Since the adoption of the UDP sites have continued to be surveyed on a rolling basis, initially by Wirral Wildlife and more recently through the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership, of which Wirral Wildlife is a key member. The local sites schedule is intended to be a comprehensive rather than representative list, including all sites meeting the selection criteria. Given that it will be some time before the selection criteria are amended and existing sites reassessed, it is proposed that a definitive schedule of SBIs be produced, incorporating all the changes made over the period since the UDP was adopted. The Local Wildlife Sites Partnership has therefore agreed the following proposed changes to the original schedule of SBI’s included in the UDP.

New SBIs

- 6.2 It is proposed that the following 7 sites should be added to the schedule of SBIs, as ecological surveys have found that they now meet the original SBI selection criteria;
71. Prenton Dell and Clay Pit
 72. Former RAF Camp, Greasby
 73. Lower Heath Wood, Thingwall
 74. Tom's Paddock, Clatterbridge
 75. The Rectory, Thurstaston
 76. Former Hotel Victoria, Lower Heswall
 77. Manor Farm, Frankby
- 6.3 Site plans and citation sheets for these sites are attached as an Appendix to this report.

De-selection/ Deletion of Sites

- 6.4 It is proposed that 8 sites should be removed from the schedule of SBIs. The following 6 sites have been found to no longer have sufficient ecological value to merit inclusion on the schedule of SBIs;
8. Irby Common
 10. Irby Ponds
 14. Roberts Wood, Thurstaston
 17. Dungeon Pond, Thurstaston
 27. Raby Ponds
 52. Woodslee Pond, Bromborough
- 6.5 Since their designation as SBIs in the UDP the ecological value of New Ferry Shore (No. 54) and New Brighton Foreshore (No. 58) has been recognised as being of national importance. These sites have been afforded statutory protection through the designation of New Ferry and Mersey Narrows Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by Natural England and therefore no longer require local protection.

Modified Boundaries

- 6.6 It is proposed that the boundaries of the following SBIs should be amended to better reflect the current ecological value of the sites;
3. Caldy Hill
 4. Stapledon Wood, West Kirby
 5. Newton Common, West Kirby
 6. Caldy Golf Course
 13. Royden Park
 15. Wirral Way (Caldy to Heswall)
 20. Quarry Road East, Heswall
 28. Benty Heath Lane Ponds, Raby (additional selection criteria also now met*)
 31. Murrayfield Hospital, Thingwall
 36. Arrowe Park
 45. Bromborough Golf Course Ponds
 49. Holm Hill, Heswall
 50. Eastham Woods and Long Plantation
 57. Bidston Hill
 59. Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site
 67. Meols Field
 68. Pasture Farm Ponds, Moreton
 69. Upton Bridge Wood

**Primary Attribute (iv) - Presence of locally or nationally rare or uncommon species, particularly those that are protected by law.*

- 6.7 The proposed boundary alteration for the Wirral Way - Caldy to Heswall (No. 15) corrects a drafting error on the UDP Proposals Map. It is proposed that Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site (No. 59) be split into two separate sites to reflect the separate ownerships of Wallasey Golf Course (No. 59a) and Leasowe Gun Site (No. 59b). The amendment to the original boundary relates to Leasowe Gun Site. Site plans, showing the proposed changes, and revised citation sheets for these sites are also attached in the Appendix to this report.
- 6.8 A citation for Colley's Farm, Thurstaston (shown on the UDP Proposals Map but missing from the original schedule) is also attached in the Appendix to this report for formal agreement.
- 6.9 Citation sheets for all sites on the schedule have been amended to update factual details, including survey dates and additional species of interest identified through survey work. The "confidential" section on all the citation sheets appended to this report have been left blank on this occasion – information on legally protected species normally included under this heading is restricted to copies of the citations held by Council officers and members of the Wirral Local Sites Partnership.

7.0 **CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 In line with the agreed Terms of Reference, the Wirral Local Sites Partnership has contacted the owners of potential sites for designation or amendment (where known and contactable). Landowners have been advised of the purpose, significance and implications of designation and given the opportunity to comment on the basis for the selection of their site. Similarly, where surveys of existing sites have found that the nature conservation interest has deteriorated to such an extent that a site no longer meets the site selection criteria, owners have been notified and given the opportunity to comment.

8.0 **FUTURE STAGES**

- 8.1 When the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership has completed the review of the site selection criteria, re-assessed the schedule of SBIs and agreed a proposed schedule of Local Wildlife Sites, a further report will be presented to Cabinet to seek approval of the proposed schedule of Local Wildlife Sites for inclusion in the LDF evidence base.

9.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 Local wildlife sites provide protection for areas which can be demonstrated to have local importance for nature conservation. Local sites schedules are intended to be comprehensive rather than representative and all areas which meet the selection criteria for designation should be included. Wirral's local sites, known as Sites of Biological Interest (SBIs), were formally designated in the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in 2000. The UDP indicates that sites not identified in the document, but which are found to meet the criteria for selection should be afforded the same level of protection.
- 9.2 This report identifies a series of proposed amendments to the schedule of SBIs included in the Wirral UDP. These amendments have been agreed by the Wirral Local Sites

Partnership following consultation with land owners. The amendments reflect changes in ecological value of the sites and corrects an error on the UDP Proposals Map.

9.3 The formal approval of the revised schedule of SBIs as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee will ensure planning decisions are based upon the most up-to-date information on local nature conservation value. It will also provide a clear basis for the future review of sites against the new Local Wildlife Sites criteria being developed.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

12.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no equal opportunities implications arising directly from this report.

13.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no community safety implications arising directly from this report.

14.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Local sites make an important contribution to local biodiversity.

15.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation states that development plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas.

15.2 The Site of Biological Importance designations overlay rather than override or replace the existing designations/allocations on the Unitary Development Plan proposals map – in other words, a site can be designated as both Green Belt and as a site of Biological Importance. The tables below identify the UDP designations which will sit alongside the SBI designation. Where a site takes in land with more than one designation, these are identified.

15.3 The new sites proposed for inclusion on the SBI schedule listed in paragraph 5.3 above are designated in the UDP as follows:

Site No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
71.	Prenton Dell and Clay Pit	Primarily Residential Area/Primarily Industrial Area/Green Belt
72.	Former RAF Camp, Greasby	Green Belt
73.	Lower Heath Wood, Thingwall	Green Belt
74.	Tom's Paddock, Clatterbridge	Green Belt
75.	The Rectory, Thurstaston	Green Belt/ Area of Special Landscape Value
76.	Former Hotel Victoria, Lower Heswall	Primarily Residential Area
77.	Manor Farm, Frankby	Green Belt

15.4 The sites proposed for deletion from the SBI schedule listed in paragraph 5.4 above are designated in the UDP as follows:

Site No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
8.	Irby Common	Green Belt/ Area of Special Landscape Value
10.	Irby Ponds	Green Belt
14.	Roberts Wood, Thurstaston	Green Belt/ Area of Special Landscape Value
17.	Dungeon Ponds, Thurstaston	Green Belt/ Area of Special Landscape Value
27.	Raby Ponds	Green Belt
52.	Woodslee Pond, Bromborough	Greenspace

15.5 The sites where boundary alterations are proposed for amendment – as listed in paragraph 5.6 - are designated in the UDP as follows:

Site No.	Site Name	UDP Designation/Allocation
3.	Caldy Hill	Green Belt/ Area of Special Landscape Value
4.	Stapledon Wood, West Kirby	Green Belt
5.	Newton Common, West Kirby	Urban Greenspace
6.	Caldy Golf Course	Green Belt/Area of Special Landscape Value
13.	Royden Park	Green Belt/Area of Special Landscape Value
15.	Wirral Way (Caldy to Heswall)	Green Belt/Area of Special Landscape Value
20.	Quarry Road East, Heswall	Primarily Residential Area
28.	Benty Heath Lane Ponds, Raby	Green Belt
31.	Murrayfield Hospital, Thingwall	Green Belt
36.	Arrowe Park	Green Belt/ Countryside Recreation Site
45.	Bromborough Golf Course Ponds	Green Belt
49.	Holm Hill, Heswall	Primarily Residential Area
50.	Eastham Woods and Long Plantation	Green Belt/Urban Greenspace/Countryside Recreation Area/Coastal Zone
57.	Bidston Hill	Urban Greenspace/Area of Special Landscape Value
67.	Meols Field	Green Belt/Washland/Area Requiring Landscape Renewal
59.	Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site	Green Belt
68.	Pasture Farm Ponds, Moreton	Green Belt/Area Requiring Landscape Renewal
69.	Upton Bridge Wood	Urban Greenspace

As can be seen from the tables above the overwhelming majority of sites listed above are already subject to designations which place significant restrictions on development.

16.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report

17.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

17.1 There are no social inclusion implications arising directly from this report

18.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

Ward	Site
Bidston & St. James	57. Bidston Hill
Bromborough	50. Eastham Woods and Long Plantation (part) 52. Woodslee Pond
Clatterbridge	27. Raby Ponds 28. Benty Heath Lane Ponds 45. Bromborough Golf Course Ponds 74. Tom's Paddock
Eastham	50. Eastham Woods and Long Plantation (part)
Greasby, Frankby & Irby	8. Irby Common 10. Irby Ponds 13. Royden Park 36. Arrowe Park (part) 69. Upton Bridge Wood 72. Former RAF Camp 77. Manor Farm
Heswall	20. Quarry Road East 76. Former Hotel Victoria
Leasowe	59. Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site (part)
Moreton West & Saughall Massie	67. Meols Field 68. Pasture Farm Ponds
Pensby & Thingwall	31. Murrayfield Hospital 36. Arrowe Park (part) 73. Lower Heath Wood
Prenton	71. Prenton Dell and Clay Pit
Wallasey	59. Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun Site (part)
West Kirby & Thurstaston	3. Caldby Hill 4. Stapledon Wood 5. Newton Common 6. Caldby Golf Course 14. Roberts Wood 15. Wirral Way (Caldy to Heswall) 17. Dungeon Pond 49. Holm Hill 75. The Rectory

19.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 19.1 Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, (DEFRA 2006) can be viewed at
www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/localsites.pdf
- 19.2 Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, (OPDM 2005) can be viewed at
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/147408.pdf
- 19.3 Local Wildlife Sites – Implications of New DEFRA Guidance, (Cabinet Report 12th December 2007) can be viewed at
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?MID=1115&RD=Agenda&DF=12q%2f12%2f2007&A=1&R=0#10>

20.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 20.1 That Cabinet recommends to Council that the revised schedule of Sites of Biological Interest be adopted as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of individual planning applications.

This report has been prepared by the Forward Planning Section who can be contacted on 691 8218

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