

Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Commission

Briefing Note on Biodiversity Designations - 14th May 2012

At the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Scrutiny Commission meeting on Wednesday 11th April 2012, further information was requested on how the biodiversity aspect of the Gypsy and Traveller site assessments was undertaken, and the differences between different biodiversity designations.

Site Assessment Process

Biodiversity was considered in two of the stages – Stage 1 and Stage 5:

Stage 1

As part of the initial desk-based assessment at Stage 1, all sites that fell within an area designated as a Local Wildlife Site (formerly known as Sites of Importance For Nature Conservation) were eliminated as they were not considered to be suitable, given the importance of these sites in biodiversity terms (See below for definition of a LWS/SINC). Sites falling within other designations, including Biodiversity Enhancement Sites, were not eliminated at this stage (See below for definition of BES).

Stage 5

Following the site visits, the remaining sites were analysed by the Council's Conservation Officer for their allocation as designated green space (other than a LWS/SINC) or if they formed part of the green network, providing some form of connectivity between one area of green space and another. The site designations were checked to determine if they were:

- i) Local Nature Reserves;
- ii) Biodiversity Enhancement Sites;
- iii) Non-designated sites but forming part of the green network.

The sites were also checked on the Phase I Habitat Survey maps to determine if they contained areas of vegetation that was considered of note (i.e. areas of higher wildlife value, but not necessarily meeting a site designation criteria) or if the sites had records of protected and/or Biodiversity Action Plan species on site or within a 1km radius.

Following this more detailed assessment, 4 sites were considered unsuitable as potential Gypsy and Traveller sites (see pages 153 & 154 of the sites assessment document).

Definition of Designated Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (formerly known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation - SINCs)

The definition of a LWS (formerly called a SINC) is:

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are important reservoirs of rare, local and declining native species and are the best examples of typical Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland habitats. LWSs may also be areas of ecological interest that provide people with the opportunity to learn about, appreciate and experience habitats and species of the natural world.

The sites are put forward for selection based on meeting a broad criteria of habitat type, for example, mesotrophic grassland, broadleaved woodland, mature/veteran tree, river). A site schedule is completed which describes the site and the species of vegetation or the characteristics of say, a watercourse, contained therein. The site designation is then agreed by a panel of nature conservation experts made up of representatives from the Wildlife Trust, Groundwork, County and local authorities, statutory agencies (Environment Agency and Natural England).

Biodiversity Enhancement Site (BES)

The criteria for BES's are set out in the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (2003). The criteria are still relevant and it is generally accepted that these sites form part of the strategic green network for the City due to their proximity or connectivity to adjacent areas of green space and/or because of their wildlife value.

Biodiversity Enhancements Sites (BESs) are designated under one or more of three criteria:

- Sites that have nature conservation value at present but are not up to the standard of SINCs, but which have potential for improvement to that quality.
- Open land of little existing wildlife value, but which has an important place in a wildlife corridor or green network.
- Built or derelict land of little wildlife value but occupying an important position in a wildlife corridor or green network.