



Policies and Procedures for the Identification & Selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance in Surrey & Surrey Local Sites Partnership - Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper explains the importance and background to Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) in Surrey; the role of the Surrey Local Sites Partnership (SLSP) in identifying and selecting SNCIs working with local authorities; and how local authorities can adopt and protect SNCIs in local plans. The paper recommends an approach to ensure that local authorities are kept updated of any changes or additions to SNCI registers to ensure local plans and planning decisions are based on up-to-date information.

2. Background

2.1 A 'Local Site' is a defined area, identified and selected locally for its substantive natural heritage conservation value, taking into consideration the most important and the most distinctive habitats and species, or geological features, evaluated within their national, regional and local contexts. Although they do not have any statutory status, many can be equal in quality to the representative, exemplary sample of such sites that make up the nationally selected series of statutory Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are more than 40,000 Local Sites in England overseen by 65 Local Sites systems. These systems vary considerably in terms of their size (both the administrative areas they cover and the numbers of sites selected), and address contrasting landscapes in coastal, rural and urban situations.

2.2 Although 'Local Sites' is the common term recommended for use in key DEFRA guidance¹ on this issue, there remain a number of varying terms in use by Local Sites systems to describe these sites. The generic Local Sites term encompasses both Local **Wildlife** Sites (LWS) and Local **Geological** Sites (LGS), the latter also being known as Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). In Surrey we do refer to RIGS, and most importantly Local Wildlife Sites are referred to as **Sites of Nature Conservation Importance** (SNCIs), mainly for reasons of preserving historical consistency.

¹ See; [Local Sites - Guidance on their Identification, Selection & Management](#) (DEFRA 2006)



2.3 Within each Local Sites system, the criteria for the selection of sites are derived locally with reference to the national site selection framework of criteria recommended by DEFRA in the 2006 guidance document. The guidance also advises that all sites that meet these locally-derived selection criteria should be selected as Local Sites, as a definitive and inclusive system (in contrast with a representative, exemplary one).

2.4 Local Sites may have multiple interests and benefits in addition to their substantive natural heritage conservation value. They may provide social and community functions and can play a part in wider Green Infrastructure or Open Space strategies. They may also have interests relating to education, research or quiet enjoyment.

2.5 Local Wildlife Sites make a vital contribution to delivering our national and international commitments to halt the loss of biodiversity. The majority of England's wildlife and priority habitats are now restricted to our designated wildlife sites, including Local Wildlife Sites. These sites were identified in the 'Lawton Report'², a major independent review, as being vital components in England's ecological network. Local Wildlife Sites provide important refuges for most of the UK's flora and fauna and through their connective and buffering qualities, complement the statutory (nationally and internationally) designated sites. Together, these represent extensive areas of wildlife habitat essential to sustaining populations of rare and declining species within the wider landscape. Within the context of a changing climate, Local Wildlife Sites represent some of the best opportunities to conserve species and their habitats as well as important reference sites for monitoring change. Local Wildlife Sites play an essential role in the natural processes that maintain air, soil and water quality and also reduce the effects of flooding and pollution. They can also provide places for education and research; represent local character and distinctiveness; and contribute to the quality of life and well-being of local communities.

2.6 **Sites of Nature Conservation Importance** have their origin in the 1975 Surrey Structure Plan and since then a system of identification, selection and recommendation for protection in the planning system has been in place, initially under the remit of the Surrey Nature Conservation Liaison Group (SNCLG). Following the recommendations of the DEFRA guidance this body was renamed in 2010 as the Surrey Local Sites Partnership (SLSP).

2.7 Despite the importance of Local Sites, their protection is limited to that offered through jurisdictional planning policy. Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and RIGS can therefore be protected from land-use changes requiring planning permission that would damage them under policies within Surrey's local plans, but these rarely require or imply an expectation for their positive management or to maintain their biodiversity interest. Since 2009 the management of Local Sites has been made accountable as National Indicator 197, now termed Single Data List I60-00. This records the number of sites 'in positive

² See; [Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network](#) (DEFRA 2010)



management' and in consequence, a general awareness of the importance of these sites has been raised. In 2017, of a total 787 Local Sites in Surrey (including 761 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance selected by the SLSP and 26 RIGS), 49% were in positive management. Although many in number SNCIs still only represent 9% of Surrey by area.

3. Surrey Local Sites Partnership

3.1 The Surrey Local Sites Partnership provides a framework to establish and administer the Local Sites system in Surrey. Many organisations in the county have an interest in biodiversity and geological conservation and already work in partnership. The DEFRA guidance explains that a Local Sites Partnership should build and draw upon these established partnerships. Local authorities should provide leadership in establishing and maintaining the necessary partnerships to identify and manage Local Sites systems, while other key partners should include representatives from the voluntary and community sector such as the Wildlife Trusts who are actively involved in many areas. Statutory agencies and bodies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission can also provide expertise and practical input to the system. Landowners, both private and public, can contribute significantly to the partnership and their engagement will depend on local circumstances.

3.2 Whereas historically the SNCLG sat as an independent group, the SLSP has now been subsumed within the **Surrey Nature Partnership** (SNP) and now sits as a sub-group of the SNP Biodiversity Working Group. Administrative responsibility for the county's RIGS is presently limited to their inclusion in reporting on Single Data List 160-00 and will not be discussed further here.

Role of the Surrey Local Sites Partnership

3.3 The DEFRA guidance outlines the role of a model Local Sites Partnership as follows:

- Agree the basis for site selection;
- co-ordinate site selection procedures including survey and identification of candidate sites;
- actively promote and support site management;
- co-ordinate funding provision and/or identify and promote the taking up of funding opportunities;
- promote educational use where appropriate;
- establish a process for monitoring the condition of the selected sites;
- review the operation of the Local Site system at suitable intervals;
- promote the role and importance of Local Sites at a strategic level (for example in delivering BAP targets (now Priority habitats and Priority species), targeting of agri-environmental schemes) and;
- promote the enhancement of sites through buffering and increasing connectivity.



3.4 Each partnership should agree clear roles and responsibilities for the partners involved and set out the process it will follow, and the criteria it will use for selecting Local Wildlife/Geological Sites. Once sites are identified, the partnership should promote the appropriate management of sites and provide support and advice for owners.

3.5 Whilst the SLSP manages the Local Site system in Surrey on behalf of the local authorities and wider partnership it does not have the resource to lead a model Local Sites partnership to deliver all the above activities. However, as many of these activities fall within the work programmes of the partner organisations much of the above is therefore already being achieved.

Key functions

3.6 In respect of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, the Surrey Local Sites Partnership will:

- Be responsible for site selection;
- retain adequate technical knowledge;
- develop, publish and review site selection criteria;
- select sites against criteria;
- record the qualifying criteria for selection of each site;
- maintain registers of selected sites, by borough/district;
- preside over a site-owner/occupier consultation procedure;
- de-select sites which no longer qualify;
- assist with data collection and the promotion of positive management of Local Sites for Single Data List I60-00.

Membership

3.7 The Surrey Local Sites Partnership has a core membership of professional ecologists from organisations and groups active in the county, however its membership can also temporarily expand to receive the relevant expertise required for the matters under discussion.

3.8 The SLSP will include suitably qualified representatives from:

- Surrey County Council (inc. relevant Countryside Management Partnerships)
- Surrey Wildlife Trust
- Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre
- Surrey borough & district councils (appropriate planning and/or countryside management officers)
- Statutory regulatory agencies (inc. Natural England, the Environment Agency)
- County Recorders, local naturalists of established reputation and representatives from Surrey's specialist recording groups including (but not limited to);



- Surrey Botanical Society
- Surrey Bird Club
- Surrey Amphibian & Reptile Group
- Surrey Bat Group
- Surrey Mammal Group
- Butterfly Conservation (Surrey & South-West London Branch).

3.9 SLSP meetings should ideally be attended by all the above members and every effort should be made to set meeting dates available to all members. The meeting will be deemed quorate when attended by four from the six member-categories listed above. The SLSP will meet at least once annually following the survey ‘field’ season (generally in February or March each year), or as required.

3.10 Individual members will:

- Represent their organisation within the SLSP in respect of the organisation’s functions related to nature conservation and ecology.
- Send a representative or put their views in writing where they are unable to attend.
- Scrutinise the scientific content of the information used in SNCI proposals for accuracy and precision, and assess whether the criteria have been applied correctly.
- Notify the Chair of any conflicts of interest.

3.11 The Secretariat for the SLSP will be provided by the Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC) and meetings will be chaired by the Surrey County Ecologist or another member of the panel as deputised.

3.12 The Terms of Reference and Membership of the SLSP will be reviewed and revised every three years or as national guidance dictates. The Surrey Nature Partnership board will formally ratify any revisions to the SLSP Terms of Reference, SNCI selection criteria, or any other Local Site system policies and procedures.

4. Sites of Nature Conservation Importance selection & adoption process

4.1 The process for selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance through to their recommendation for adoption by the planning sector in Surrey will be undertaken by the SLSP, following the rigorous application of the procedures below.

Selection criteria

4.2 Selection is considered on the basis of a set of published criteria. These are locally developed and designed to identify those sites of substantive nature conservation value in Surrey in a standard and systematic way, and in strict alignment with the DEFRA guidance.



The criteria take into account both national and local priorities and responsibilities, relevant ongoing threats, as well as local distinctiveness. SNCI selection is currently based on criteria published as *Guidance for Selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) in Surrey* (Surrey Wildlife Trust 2008). These selection criteria will be regularly reviewed (at least every five years or as national guidance dictates).

Nomination of sites

4.3 Candidate SNCIs (cSNCIs) will generally be nominated for selection by the SLSP arising from the routine and systematic SNCI register re-survey programme undertaken in conjunction with relevant borough or district councils. However sites can also be nominated for selection by any qualified person or organisation. The person or organisation nominating a site should provide sufficient information to allow the SLSP to review the site against the published criteria. There is a minimum level of information required in order to apply the criteria. The SLSP or SBIC can provide guidance on the collection and presentation of this information.

4.4 A nomination for selection must be supported by validated and documented evidence sufficient to evaluate the site against the criteria. Such evidence can be collected by the parties listed above or may be submitted by other sources. All recorded evidence will have been previously validated by SBIC and copies will be retained at SBIC for future reference.

4.5 Evidence that can be used in the selection of SNCIs includes, but is not limited to:

- Data formatted from a specific SNCI survey/re-survey;
- Data from other surveys or information held by a County Recorder(s) or other specialist recording group (ideally not older than five years);
- Publically available information such as aerial photos, and approved documents such as Environmental Impact Assessments, Environmental Statements, etc.

4.6 The selection process will be fully recorded by SBIC as secretariat (eg. the reasons/criteria met for selection, persons involved in the selection process and the date selection was made), and this documentation will be held with the originally submitted evidence.

4.7 The site selection (or de-selection) procedure will not normally be made in response to a particular threat (for example a current planning application, development site allocation or other change-of-use proposals), and the SLSP retains the preference to defer consideration of such cases until after the outcome of the relevant statutory procedure is itself determined.

SNCI boundaries

4.8 SNCI boundaries are ideally chosen to define a boundary that is clearly demarcated by features on the ground, such as a hedge or fence line. This may include marginal areas within



the site which do not meet the necessary selection criteria (such as areas of poor semi-improved grassland within a field of otherwise unimproved grassland). Sites can also include entire parcels of ground (for example individual fields, or blocks within woodland) which do not clearly meet the criteria, but are justified for inclusion in the context of an overall site complex (for example coniferous plantation stands of no apparent interest which are isolated within an otherwise semi-natural woodland). Continuity with an adjoining, related habitat within a SSSI or an already designated SNCI is a consideration when selecting sites, and sites designated as geological SSSIs or RIGS may also be selected as a SNCI for their wildlife interest.

SNCI decision-making

4.9 The SLSP is responsible for all decisions concerning additions, deletions and boundary changes in respect of the SNCI register(s). The SLSP can communicate by meeting in forum or telephone conference, or by correspondence. These decisions will be made in practice under two possible scenarios:

a) Full SLSP discussion

For all site nominations where SNCI selection is not clear, the SLSP members will each consider the nomination(s) individually. SLSP members will have been provided with a copy of the submitted documentary evidence plus additional summary information (prepared by SBIC in tabulated format). This summary information lists the relevant potential SNCI selection criteria, and any qualification issues (eg. if the site does not easily attain the SNCI criteria thresholds, or if only part of the site appears of SNCI standard). The issues are then discussed in forum or by correspondence, until an agreed decision is reached by majority vote on whether the nominated site can be selected and if so, where its boundary should lie.

b) Delegation

For minor and non-controversial boundary amendments, such as adjustments to sites so that they accurately match underlying base maps, correcting mistakes in digitisation and deleting areas where there is clear and irrefutable evidence that they would never have met the SNCI criteria (eg. residential garden curtilages, hard standing areas or buildings), or where the land-use has changed since original selection (eg. part of a site has been developed or a woodland cleared with no recourse for restoration); the SLSP defers to SBIC to take decisions on its behalf. These would also include simple corrections and adjustments to adopt more appropriate site names, to Ordnance Survey grid references, or to the record of decisions made for the SNCI. All such decisions do not have to be presented to and specifically approved by the SLSP.

De-selection procedure

4.10 Sites may be completely de-selected as SNCIs if it is found that their nature conservation interest has deteriorated to the extent that they no longer meet the SNCI selection criteria. As with the procedure for making minor non-controversial decisions,



where there is clear and irrefutable evidence that they are no longer of SNCI standard the SLSP delegates the de-selection decision to SBIC. Any other situation, including for example where a successful but essentially short-term restoration of damaged habitat is possible, must be considered by a full SLSP discussion. Information on sites that have been de-selected will be retained by SBIC for future reference.

4.11 Sites may be de-selected if:

- There appears to be no documentary evidence available to support their selection as a SNCI;
- New evidence clearly shows that the qualifying SNCI interest has been irrecoverably lost or destroyed (recoverability will be based on the expertise and judgement of the SLSP as opportunities for restoration will vary depending on the habitats/species in question).

Notification to SNCI owners & managers

4.12 After sites are selected (or de-selected), their owners and any managing agencies will be notified either by SBIC or the relevant local authority. Owners are sent the qualifying documentary evidence for selection and the recorded decision of the SLSP, and would also be provided with sources of advice and funding available for the conservation of the interest features as well as general information about SNCIs in Surrey.

4.13 Owners or occupiers of sites may challenge the factual basis on which an entire/part of a site has been selected (or not selected) as a SNCI. In this event the following procedure will not be used to reverse the selection of a SNCI simply because the owner opposes this, but will be used to re-determine whether the selection process has been properly applied. This procedure will be driven by SBIC under the guidance of the SLSP and cases will be addressed by the full SLSP (by e-mail correspondence, if necessary).

4.14 The selection of a SNCI may be challenged if:

- The evidence used to justify the selection of a SNCI on the basis of the published criteria is disputed as insufficient or inaccurate; for example whether the site actually contains the specific feature(s) that has qualified selection (eg. a population of a rare or notable species); and/or whether this feature is of sufficient quality (eg. does a habitat accurately reflect the vegetation type or community it is claimed to represent or is this significantly compromised, perhaps by the dominance of a non-native invasive species).
- The boundary of a site has been drawn inappropriately, for example by including areas that do not meet SNCI standards and can be practically excluded (but see also 4.8 above).



4.15 Owners will be allowed 28 days from the date of notification to comment on the selection of their SNCI. If a reasonable objection is received within the time period, a further six months is provided to obtain evidence in support of the challenge. This evidence would then be reviewed by the SLSP, alongside the original data, for re-evaluation. The owner is then notified of the final SLSP decision.

Adoption by local authorities

4.16 After sites are selected (or de-selected) by the SLSP, the relevant local authority is formally notified by SBIC as secretariat on behalf of the SLSP, of any changes to the SNCI register for their borough/district. This notification also recommends that the local authority formally adopts the selected sites, after which they may be considered as effectively 'designated'.

4.17 The SNCI register review programme should ideally be phased to coincide with the local plan review cycle (currently proposed as five-yearly) for each borough/district planning authority. However the nomination and selection of new SNCIs or proposed modifications to existing SNCIs is increasingly being driven by *ad hoc* biodiversity assessments commissioned by boroughs or districts or as a response to new data collated by Surrey's wildlife recording community, which is unlikely to synchronise with the five-year review cycle. As already noted, it is presently only when adopted by its local authority that a SNCI can be considered to be 'designated' and consequently subject to relevant planning policy affording it protection from damaging land-use changes under normal circumstances. As there is potentially a protracted process from nomination through to adoption and listing on a register informing a local plan, the SLSP recommends a slightly more flexible approach be taken whereby relevant policy clearly recognises that the published register is essentially a 'live' list open to continuous review, which is then updated as necessary by the local authority in the local plan at the earliest review opportunity.

4.18 The Surrey Nature Partnership has adopted the SLSP within its overall governance and management structure. The Surrey Nature Partnership was approved and its official mandate assured by DEFRA in August 2012. The SLSP's adoption by the SNP aligns with DEFRA guidance on Local Nature Partnerships³, where this states that Local Nature Partnerships "*..have an important contribution to make to strategic planning matters within their area. Government's intention is to add LNPs to the Duty to Co-operate in the Local Planning Regulations as soon as possible after the first LNPs have been announced [now effective]. This will mean that bodies bound by the Duty will need to have regard to the views of LNPs on strategic planning matters.*"

³ See; [An overview of the Local Nature Partnership role](#) (DEFRA 2012)



4.19 It is imperative that the process of nomination and selection of SNCIs becomes more transparent and inclusive, and that the SNP and SLSP work more closely with Surrey's boroughs and districts to establish the best approach to protecting these sites.

4.20 As alluded above there remains the issue of how SNCIs selected by the SLSP and their accompanying information is received and managed, especially by development management teams, in local authorities prior to their recognition under policies in local plans. The status of such sites following selection by the SLSP therefore needs consideration, including the evidence base it has used for this, and how new SNCIs are then taken into account at the earliest stages in the development planning process. The SNP therefore proposes the introduction of a master 'Alert List' and accompanying GIS Map for all selected and nominated sites of potential SNCI quality at whatever stage in the identification process. This can then be used to trigger consultations on pre-application planning proposals with appropriate, specialist organisations. The SNP also proposes to provide support and assistance with describing the relative value of those sites when drafting recommendations in reports to planning committees, especially when these have yet to be recognised in relevant local plans.

4.21 As such, and in addition to informing individual local authorities of any routine changes to the SNCI register and ensuring their ease of access to the master Alert List when available, SBIC will on behalf of the SLSP, provide each borough/district with an updated annual summary of all nominated and selected SNCI. The SNP encourages the Surrey local authorities to have regard to all of these sites, and to formally adopt all selected SNCIs without delay to provide them immediate effective recognition under the relevant planning policy.

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Further references

Circular 06/2005 - *Government Circular: Biodiversity & Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their impact within the Planning System* (ODPM)

Surrey Wildlife Trust (May 2014); *Biodiversity & Planning in Surrey - Version II*

British Standard BS42020:2013; *Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development* (BSI)

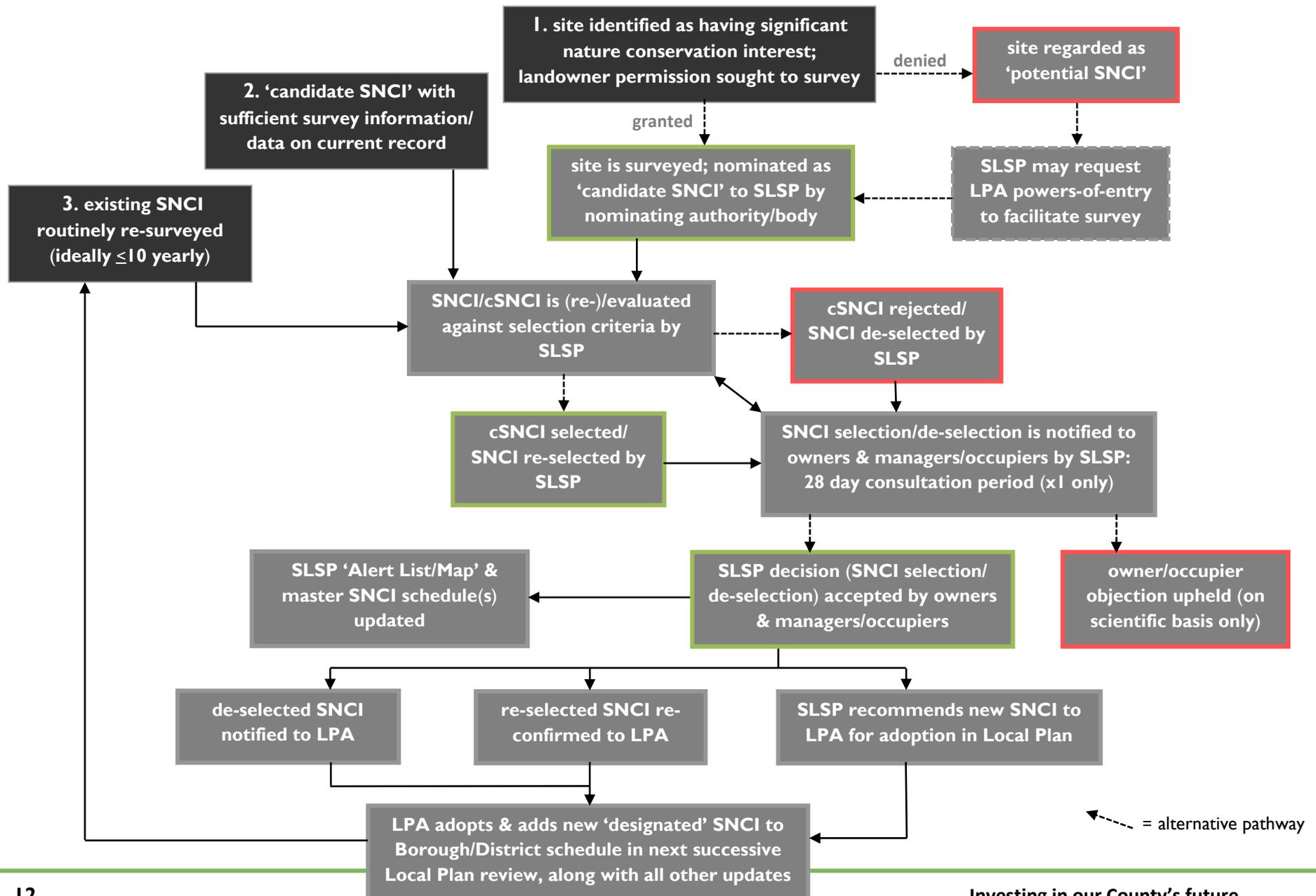


Appendix I: Abbreviated & Glossary

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
LGS	Local Geological Site: a Local Site of importance for geological/Earth Science heritage conservation
LPA	Local Planning Authority: Surrey's 11 Borough/District Councils
LSP	Local Sites Partnership: the administrative/governing authority for a Local Sites system
LWS	Local Wildlife Site: a Local Site of importance for nature/wildlife/biodiversity conservation
RIGS	Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site: synonymous with Local Geological Site (RIGS is used in Surrey)
SBIC	Surrey Biodiversity Records Centre: Surrey's local biological records centre
SLSP	Surrey Local Sites Partnership: Surrey's Local Sites Partnership
SNCI	Site of Nature Conservation Importance: synonymous with Local Wildlife Site (SNCI is used in Surrey)
cSNCI	candidate Site of Nature Conservation Importance: a site nominated, but yet to be selected, for designation as a SNCI
pSNCI	potential Site of Nature Conservation Importance: a site nominated for likely designation as a SNCI, but where further essential survey information is required (used and adopted by Reigate & Banstead Borough, and Mole Valley and Tandridge District Councils)
SNCLG	Surrey Nature Conservation Liaison Group: precursor to the Surrey Local Sites Partnership
SNP	Surrey Nature Partnership: Surrey's Local Nature Partnership
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest: a statutory nature conservation designation made under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)



Appendix 2: SNCI Designation Process Flow Chart





Appendix 3: Legislative & Planning Policy Framework

Much of current government policy and guidance is strongly influenced by the UK’s commitments to international conventions and agreements on the environment, biological diversity and sustainable development. The emergence of the climate change agenda has highlighted the importance of safeguarding and appropriately managing biodiversity interests. It also emphasises the importance of biodiversity within sustainability and specifically, the economic benefits of biodiversity.

The publication of *Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity & Geological Conservation* in 2005 indicated the government’s approach to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity through the planning system. PPS9 recognised that Local Sites have a fundamental role to play in helping to meet overall national biodiversity targets, contributing to the quality of life and well-being of the community, and in supporting research and education. In 2012 PPS9 was withdrawn and superseded by the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*. The NPPF has been reviewed and revised in 2018. Paragraph 174 states:

“To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and **locally designated sites** of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation..”*

Legislation/Policy/Guidance Title, Date and Level	Sections of Relevance to Local Sites	Relevance to Surrey SNCI System
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006	Section 40 (1)	Incorporates a general duty that “every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.” The term Public Authority includes all local authorities and local planning authorities. This includes Local Sites and positive management of the biodiversity interests within them.
	Section 40 (3)	There are opportunities within the Local Site network for conserving, restoring and enhancing habitats. All of these measures contribute to the implementation of the duty.
	Section 41 (1)	This section refers to the lists of species and habitats that are considered to be of principal importance for biodiversity conservation. The Local Sites network is a critical component in the conservation of these species and habitats.



National Planning Policy Framework 2012	Paragraph 113	'Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites , so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.'
	Paragraph 117	'To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries; • identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation; • promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;'
National Planning Policy Framework [Revised] 2018	Paragraph 171	'Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites ; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.'
	Paragraph 174	'To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.'
ODPM Circular 06/2005 "Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their impact within the planning system"	Section G Paragraph 95	'Defra will be issuing separate guidance on Local Sites [now extant]. The guidance will provide advice on the development and management of systems to identify these sites. It will propose a framework and standards for their operation as well as for the selection, protection and management of the sites themselves.'



<p><i>Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (DEFRA 2010)</i></p>	<p>Paragraph 2.1.4 Our evolving approach to nature conservation</p>	<p>Local Wildlife Sites are included as 'Tier 2 sites' in the Lawton review; "LWS are identified and selected locally for their nature conservation value. As with SSSIs they take into account the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats, but they do so within a regional and local context as well as a national one - the selection process is overseen by a local partnership. Local Wildlife Sites are non-statutory, having only minimal protection through recognition in national planning policy, and are highly vulnerable to damage and loss. ...in general their management is under-funded. Local Wildlife Sites are important to future ecological networks, because they not only provide wildlife refuges in their own right but can act as stepping stones and corridors to link and protect nationally and internationally designated sites."</p>
<p><i>Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (DEFRA 2011)</i></p>	<p>Chapter 2: Priorities for action Paragraph 2.6</p>	<p>'Priority action: Establish more coherent and resilient ecological networks on land that safeguard ecosystem services for the benefit of wildlife and people'; includes the encouragement of "...local authorities to take a more active and positive role in the management of Local Sites, including through reporting data on such sites in the Government's new Single Data List."</p>
	<p>Chapter 2: Priorities for action Planning and development</p>	<p>'Priority action: Through reforms of the planning system, take a strategic approach to planning for nature within and across local areas. This approach will guide development to the best locations, encourage greener design and enable development to enhance natural networks. We will retain the protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives of the planning system'</p>
<p>The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017</p>	<p>Regulation 41 (1), (2) and (3)</p>	<p>These consolidate the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 with subsequent amendments and came into force on 30th November 2017. The Regulations transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC, on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive), into national law. They also transpose elements of the EU Wild Birds Directive in England and Wales. Clarifies S17(a)(3) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and S12(d)(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to include "policies encouraging the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora".</p>

The Defra Local Sites Guidance (paragraph 10) indicates that the national Biodiversity Strategy is the core means of delivery of the NERC Act 'Biodiversity' duty. The Local Sites network remains a key mechanism for the achievement of *Biodiversity 2020* outcomes, actions and associated CBD 'Aichi' biodiversity targets.

In Surrey, the approach to the Local Sites system is to use the best available resources for the identification, safeguarding and conservation-based management of SNCIs. This approach is made possible through legislative provision, government guidance, opportunities identified by the Surrey Nature Partnership and its sub-groups including the Surrey Local Sites Partnership and closer engagement with Local Site owners and management at local authority level under SDL 160-00. The aim is to deliver a healthy and thriving Local Sites network supporting priority biodiversity features for their intrinsic wildlife value, providing the ability and opportunity for species and habitats to move and develop over time accordingly and, where appropriate, provide opportunities for public enjoyment of nature.