

The status of England's Local Wildlife Sites 2014



Status of Local Wildlife Site Systems 2014

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Salt Marsh, Seaton Burn, Northumberland - Naomi Waite

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Rushton Grange Meadows, Northamptonshire – Matt Johnson

1.EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the seventh in a series of surveys that have been conducted by The Wildlife Trusts on Local Wildlife Site systems across England. Across England there are currently 53 administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems. Completed questionnaires were received from 48 of these, although not all those that responded answered every question. These responses cover all but eight local authority areas and three of the ten National Park Authorities across England. For the purpose of the survey, London was treated as a single partnership. Of the five non-responders, one stated the reason was that the partnership was non-functional (Hull) and the remaining four partnerships gave no reason. The non responders are; Brighton and Hove, Doncaster, York and the Local Wildlife Site partnership covering the four unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bristol and North Somerset.

1.1 Local Wildlife Site coverage

More than 42,000 Local Wildlife Sites, cover at least five per cent of England's land area.¹

1.2 Local Wildlife Site systems

Defra recommends that Local Wildlife Site systems should be based on a partnership approach. The local Wildlife Trust and at least one local authority (county, unitary or district/borough) is involved in every active Local Wildlife Site partnership that responded (so at least 89% of partnerships across England). Local Records Centres and Natural England are also cited as partners in a large number of cases – at least 81% and 77% respectively.

1.3 Landowner advice and support

Guidance from Defra states that once Local Wildlife Sites are identified, the partnership should promote the appropriate management of sites and provide support and advice to landowners and/or tenants. At least 11 partnerships provide general landowner advice and support for all their sites; 10 partnerships provide site specific advice to landowners for every site; and three partnerships provide advice/assistance with agri-environment scheme applications for all sites.

1.4 Monitoring

Defra recommends that Local Wildlife Site partnerships should establish a process for monitoring the condition of the selected sites. The majority of partnerships use a structured methodology and survey to monitor Local Wildlife Sites. During the last year, it is reported that only 2,699 Local Wildlife Sites were monitored: approximately six percent of the total, the same percentage as 2011.

1.5 Protection of Local Wildlife Sites

While they have no direct legal protection, Local Wildlife Sites are considered important enough to receive protection through the planning system. National planning policy requires local authorities to identify and provide for their protection through local policy. A total of 38 partnerships stated that all the local plans in their Local Wildlife Site area included policies to protect Local Wildlife Sites. When quizzed whether these policies were implemented

¹ These figures are from a comprehensive set of data (all 53 partnership areas) and use Natural England's figure of 13,039,500 hectares for England's total land area.

effectively or not, three partnerships replied 'yes' and 22 replied 'usually'. Three partnerships reported that they were not implemented effectively and 16 partnerships stated that some of the plan policies were and some weren't implemented effectively; highlighting the importance of following through/overseeing the process of local policy.

1.6 Management schemes

It was not possible from the extent of the responses received to ascertain an accurate figure of how many Local Wildlife Sites were covered by different management schemes. However, the survey showed that at least 1,498 Sites are in Entry Level Schemes, 1,009 are in a Woodland Grant Scheme and at least 970 are in the Higher Level scheme. However, these figures should be treated as a minimum as a higher proportion of partnerships (29) did not know what schemes their Local Wildlife Sites were in.

1.7 Threats to Local Wildlife Sites

The biggest perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites are lack of management (44 partnerships) and inappropriate management (39 partnerships). Development is also seen as a major threat to Local Wildlife Sites in more than half (30) of the Local Wildlife Site partnership areas.

1.8 Loss and damage of Local Wildlife Sites

The following results are from only 31 partnerships (unless otherwise stated) and so are likely to be under the true values. However, they do provide minimum figures, helping gauge the trend of minimum decline and loss of sites. In the five years between 2009 and 2013, 717 Sites were lost/partially lost and/or damaged and 140 of these occurred during 2013.

1.9 Staff

In total, 42 full-time paid staff have worked on Local Wildlife Sites since April 2013. A further 74 paid staff have worked on Local Wildlife Sites in a part-time capacity since April 2013. During the same period more than 314 volunteers have worked in either a part-time or full-time capacity across at least 27 Local Wildlife Site partnerships.

1.10 Resources

A large majority (45) of partnerships stated that they did not have sufficient resources to ensure the identification, management and protection of Local Wildlife Sites in their area. In summary, further resources are required primarily for landowner advice and support, secondly survey and monitoring and thirdly practical land management and assistance. All three aspects rated as being more important than other processes that are also needed and require financial contribution. At least 133 local authorities are providing no financial support towards Local Wildlife Site systems in their area and only eight partnerships receive direct financial support from Natural England; 10 from the Environment Agency and one from the Forestry Commission.

2.INTRODUCTION

2.1 What are Local Wildlife Sites and why are they so important?

Local Wildlife Sites are sites with 'substantive nature conservation value'. They are defined areas, identified and selected locally for their nature conservation value, based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species that have a national, regional and importantly, a local context.

Found on both public and private land, Local Wildlife Sites vary in size and shape from small ponds and copses and linear features such as hedgerows, road verges and water courses to much larger areas of habitat such as ancient woodlands, heaths, wetlands and grassland. Collectively, they play a critical role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage by providing essential wildlife refuges in their own right and by acting as stepping stones, corridors and buffer zones to link and protect other site networks and the open spaces of our towns and countryside.



Local Wildlife Site Claxby Roadside, Lincolnshire - Rob Oakley

Local Wildlife Sites are vitally important for wildlife and people alike. Many studies have shown how they add value to local communities and contribute significantly to our quality of life, health, well-being and education. While many are private, and or out of reach - the very existence of this network of thousands of areas of natural habitat across the country, contributes to the wildlife we find in our gardens, parks and other public natural spaces. Ultimately, they also provide some of the natural services we rely on to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment; such as clean air and water, pollinators and food production, and flood resilience.

Along with our statutory protected sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites now represent the core areas where much of England's wildlife now resides. As changes in land-use have eroded and

fragmented the wildlife-rich expanse of habitats that once covered the country, these places are now refuges for wildlife - remnant 'islands' in a 'sea' of intensively managed urban, coastal and rural landscapes. Some habitats such as wildflower meadows, mires, fens and wet woodlands are now so scarce that the majority qualify for Local Wildlife Site status as a minimum. They offer vital havens for a wealth of wildlife including many threatened and declining plants.

No matter how rich in wildlife they are on their own, these sites are not enough to sustain wildlife populations indefinitely. The State of Nature report², published in 2013 by a partnership of conservation organisations, revealed that over the past 50 years, 60 percent of 3,148 native wildlife species studied have been in decline, with 30 percent in sharp decline. Currently, more than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing altogether. If society wants to stop and reverse this trend of wildlife loss and provide for nature's recovery, we have to expand, restore and recreate habitats on a landscape-scale, way beyond the boundaries of traditional nature reserves and wildlife sites. This is central to The Wildlife Trusts' Living Landscape vision³ and core to the outcome of a comprehensive review of England's wildlife sites led by Professor Sir John Lawton in 2010.⁴

Lawton's review revealed that there were '*serious shortcomings*' in our existing network. The report made a clear statement that '*the heart of England's ecological network needs to be high quality sites which support thriving populations of wildlife from which species can disperse to other parts of the network and which deliver a range of essential ecosystem services.*' The report recommended that '*planning policy should provide greater protection*' to Local Wildlife Sites; and that '*local authorities should take responsibility for the identification and monitoring of Local Wildlife Sites and the management of LWS must be improved.*' It concluded that '*we need to take steps to rebuild nature*' by providing more natural areas, which are bigger, better and more joined up, so that existing fragments of wildlife-rich land are reconnected to create a climate-resilient and self-sustaining whole.

Lawton's review of England's wildlife sites was followed in 2011, by the Natural Environment White Paper: '*The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*', in which Government committed to '*move from net biodiversity loss to net gain, by supporting healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks.*' It's mission to '*halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.*' It specifically stated that '*By 2020, we want to achieve an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife. Over time, we plan to have 90% of priority wildlife habitats in recovering or favourable condition. We will work to achieve more, bigger, better and less-fragmented areas for wildlife, including no net loss of priority habitat and an increase of at least 200,000 hectares in the overall extent of priority habitats.*'

2.2 What is a Local Wildlife Site System?

A Local Wildlife Site system is the partnership-based approach for identifying, selecting, assessing, monitoring and protecting Local Wildlife Sites. Systems are most commonly administered on a county or unitary authority scale and their efficient delivery requires access to a large volume of up-to-date information and data.

² Burns F, Eaton MA, Gregory RD et al (2013) *State of Nature Report*. The State of Nature Partnership

³ <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/living-landscape>

⁴ Lawton, J (2010). Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. Submitted to Secretary of State (Defra)

To ensure site protection and system and site integrity, all systems should have clearly documented procedures with defined partnership roles and mechanisms for delivery. These should be developed and adapted to suit local circumstances in line with agreed national common standards. To help increase consistency and understanding, Defra published '*Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management*' in 2006.

Local Wildlife Site systems select all sites that meet the assigned criteria, unlike Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which for some habitats are a representative sample of sites that meet the national standard. Consequently, many sites of SSSI quality are not designated and instead are selected as Local Wildlife Sites. For some counties, Local Wildlife Sites are amongst the best sites for biodiversity and they form important linkages between other core areas. Therefore, it is essential that the different status assigned to Local Wildlife Sites should not lessen the perception of their importance and the vital role they play in conserving our natural heritage.

"Because of the way sites are selected for national protection, the wildlife-rich habitats of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire receive virtually no legal protection. Just over one percent of our region is protected – the national average is just under eight percent. Our Local Wildlife Sites, without the status of national sites, but which may have just as much wildlife value, therefore support the vast majority of our wildlife. Most survive thanks to sympathetic landowners, and they need support. Without these sites quite simply we would have virtually no wildlife left."

Matt Jackson, Head of Conservation, Policy and Strategy at Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

2.3 Purpose of the survey

With just over five years until 2020, this survey set out to explore the status of Local Site systems across England. The results are presented in section four as an objective analysis of responses to The Wildlife Trusts' Status of Local Wildlife Site systems 2014 questionnaire. Where relevant, some sections are accompanied by extracts from Defra's *Local Sites Guidance* (2006) to give an indication of how current practice in England relates to the guidance.

Since the last survey in 2011, the information gathered has been used extensively by a wide range of organisations and individuals including conservationists, statutory and non-statutory policy and decision makers, landowners, educational establishments and students.

The information has also been used by The Wildlife Trusts to:

- identify, establish and share good practice;
- respond to enquiries about Local Wildlife Site systems;
- support the case for better recognition and protection of Local Wildlife Sites;
- influence national policy including *National Planning Policy Framework*⁵ and associated National Planning Policy Guidance;
- examine trends and anomalies in system activities and to highlight gaps in system management, protection and operation.

⁵ Communities and Local Government (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework*



Staffordshire Moss Farm Local Wildlife Site – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust



Coastal grassland, Northumberland – Naomi Waite

3.SURVEY METHOD

As with previous surveys, the number of administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems was identified and an appropriate contact within each boundary was invited to complete a questionnaire. Administrative boundaries refer to the local authority areas that are covered by a single system or in the case where no system activity exists, the local authority areas that should be covered by a system.

In some counties a number of independent systems share common site selection criteria. In these instances, a suitable county contact was identified and asked to complete a questionnaire. As with the 2011 report, the survey treated London as a single system on the advice of a number of London Boroughs and London's Environmental Records Centre (GiGL).

In developing the questionnaire for the 2014 status of Local Wildlife Site systems survey, feedback on previous questionnaires was used to improve existing questions and to introduce new ones.

Questionnaires were sent out during March 2014 with a return deadline of mid April. Contacts who did not respond by the deadline received a follow-up email and a subsequent telephone call in an attempt to maximise the response rate. Questionnaires not returned by the 17 July were recorded as non-responders.



Grizzled skipper - Andrew Kerr

4.SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 COVERAGE AND SCOPE

4.1.1 Administration boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems

A total of 53 administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems were identified in England, with all London Boroughs treated as a single administrative boundary. In the previous 2011 survey, 52 systems were identified. Collectively the 53 partnerships operating within the identified boundaries cover all local authorities and three of the 10 National Park Authorities in England (Broads, Lake District and New Forest). Completed questionnaires were received from 48 of the 53 partnerships, making answers that were completed by all respondents 91 % reliable.

4.1.2 Number and area of Local Wildlife Sites

There are at least 42,865 Local Wildlife Sites in England, covering more than 623,188 hectares which equates to 346,219 football pitches, almost the size of Devon.

At least five percent of England's land area is Local Wildlife Site. This is a few percent less than the seven percent area that Sites of Special Scientific Interest account for. Some partnerships have quite substantial areas of land selected as Local Wildlife Sites. For example 29% of Somerset's partnership area is selected as Local Wildlife Sites, Greater London's proportion is 19.24% and Sheffield has 18.52% of its partnership land area selected as Local Wildlife Sites.

On average, the percentage of each partnership land area covered by Local Wildlife Sites is 10.9%. The highest coverage of Local Wildlife Sites is 29% of the total partnership area and the lowest is 0.03% of the partnership area.

4.1.3 Ownership of Local Wildlife Sites

Based on the answers provided, the majority of sites (more than half) are owned by practicing farmers. Non Government Organisations (NGOs) own the fewest. The ownership trends are consistent with those in the last two surveys (2011 and 2008). The exact figures are not included because a large proportion of partnerships did not provide a comprehensive response to this question and because some sites have multiple owners, thus decreasing the reliability and the clarity respectively. There was also some overlap of categories, with some NGOs also being practicing farmers eg The Wildlife Trusts.

For some partnership areas, the majority of Local Wildlife Sites are *privately owned*, for example, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Lancashire, Lincolnshire and Merseyside. Systems where the majority of sites are in *public* ownership are Birmingham and the Black Country (66%), Greater London (66%) and Stoke on Trent (62%).

4.2 PARTNERS

Defra recommends that the establishment and management of a Local Wildlife Site system should be based on a partnership approach involving organisations which have an interest in biodiversity conservation and that the Local Wildlife Site system partnership should include representation from landowners or their representative bodies, as well as local authorities, statutory bodies and voluntary organisations.

Organisations that make up the partnerships vary from location to location. The Wildlife Trusts and local authorities are partners in at least 89% of all Local Wildlife Site partnerships; Local Records Centres in at least 81%; and Natural England in at least 77%. In total a minimum of 436 individual organisations or individuals are involved in Local Wildlife Site system partnerships across England. Table 1 provides a more detailed list of the types of partners and their level of engagement with Local Wildlife Site systems in England. These figures are based on 47 answers and should be treated as a minimum.

In terms of lead partners, at least 19 are led by a single organisation and at least 27 by a joint collaboration (based on the 46 partnerships that answered this question). The range of organisations taking sole leadership responsibilities is now less varied than in 2011 and there are five fewer organisations with sole leadership responsibility than in 2011. Individual Wildlife Trusts are the most frequent sole leader in a partnership, followed by Local Records Centres and then Local Nature Partnerships.

Organisations in joint leadership were most commonly local authorities and Wildlife Trusts. In total, there are (a minimum of) 30 different organisation types involved in one or more of the partnerships, with the majority of partnerships having between six and 10 partners.



Breach Hill
Local Wildlife Site
in Avon

"Working with Avon Wildlife Trust has given me greater understanding of our Common, particularly the principle of impoverishing the ground by mowing and removing the grass at the end of the season."

Local landowner

Breach Hill Local Wildlife Site - Avon Wildlife Trust

Table 1 The number and proportion of systems where each partner type is engaged

Organisation	Total number of partnerships where partner type engaged	Percentage of partnerships in England At least...
Wildlife Trust	47	89%
A Local Authority (one or more of county, unitary, district/borough)	47	89%
Local Records Centre	43	81%
Natural England	41	77%
County Council	32	74%
District/ Borough Councils	31	58%
Unitary Authority	30	57%
Environment Agency	25	47%
Local specialists	21	40%
RIGS Group (or equivalent)	20	38%
Local Naturalist group	15	28%
Forestry Commission	15	28%
Local Nature Partnership	12	23%
Landowners/managers/tenant	9	17%
RSPB	7	13%
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	7	13%
National Farmers Union	6	11%
Academic/Research institutions	6	11%
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)	4	8%
Water Companies	2	4%
Others	2	4%
National Parks Authority	2	4%
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	2	4%
Woodland Trust	1	2%
Marine Management Organisation	1	2%
Internal Drainage Boards	1	2%
Government Departments	1	2%
Ecological Consultancy	1	2%
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)	1	2%
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)	1	2%
Business representatives	1	2%

4.3 SYSTEM PROCEDURES

4.3.1 Endorsement of Local Wildlife Sites

Once a Local Wildlife Site has been selected, at least 17 partnerships require further endorsement before the site can be adopted within the local plan, leaving at least 28 partnerships which don't require further endorsement once a site is selected against the criteria (based on 45 answers).

The organisations/individuals involved in the endorsement process vary across the partnerships. For two partnerships endorsement is required from the land/site owner, 15 require endorsement from the local authority (three of which specified this would be the job of the council planning committees). The partnerships that require endorsement from the land/site owner are Cambridgeshire and Shropshire. The partnerships that require endorsements from the planning committee are Birmingham and the Black Country, East Riding of Yorkshire and Surrey.

4.3.2 Site de-selection procedures

The majority (43) of partnerships, have a procedure for the de-selection of sites where the nature conservation interest has deteriorated to such an extent that they no longer qualify as Local Wildlife Sites. Four partnerships do not have de-selection procedures, but three of these are developing procedures and of the 43 partnerships with procedures, four are currently reviewing these.

4.3.3 Responsibility for data

Digitised Local Wildlife Sites boundary data

Of the 47 partnerships that provided information, Local Record Centres are the most commonly cited partner responsible for holding digitised Local Wildlife Site boundary data – adopting this role for at least 39 (74%) of partnerships. One or more local authorities (county, unitary and/or district/borough) hold the data for at least 15 (28%) partnerships and Wildlife Trusts for at least 10 (19%) partnerships. For the majority of partnerships (28), this responsibility is undertaken by just one organisation. However, for 19 partnerships, more than one partner holds the data.

Access to the digitised Local Wildlife Sites boundary data

Access to the data varies. As with holding the data, Local Records Centres and local authorities are the most common organisations to have access to it. Of the 47 partnerships that responded to this question, one or more local authorities (county, unitary and/or district/borough) have access to this data for all 47 partnerships. A total of 30 partnerships make the data available to Wildlife Trusts. Statutory agencies receive the data to varying extents with 26 partnerships making it accessible to Natural England, 19 making it accessible to the Environment Agency and nine (17%) making it accessible to the Forestry Commission. Sixteen partnerships make the data available to local naturalists groups. Table 2 shows the variety of organisations that have access to data across the partnerships.

Table 2: Table showing the types of organisations that have access to data across the partnerships

Organisation	Access to data across the partnership	Percentage of partnerships (based on total number of partnerships)
A Local Authority (county, unitary, district/borough)	47	89
Local Records Centre	45	85
County Council	31	58
Wildlife Trust	30	57
Unitary Authority	29	55
All Partners	28	53
District/Borough Council(s)	28	53
Natural England	26	49
Environment Agency	19	36
Local naturalists/specialists	16	30
Forestry Commission	9	17
Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGs) groups	8	15
RSPB	5	9
Landowners/managers	5	9
Local Nature Partnerships	5	9
Academic Research organisations	4	8
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	3	6
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)	2	4
Water companies (through Service Level Agreements)	2	4
Consultants	2	4
Public	2	4
Available commercially for a price	2	4
National Park Authority	1	2
National Trust	1	2
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	1	2
Rivers Trusts	1	2
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)	1	2
Other Service Level Agreement partners	1	2
National Farmers' Union (NFU)	1	2

4.4 LANDOWNER ADVICE

Guidance from Defra is that once sites are identified, the partnership should promote their appropriate management and provide support and advice to landowners and/or tenants.

4.4.1 Advice given in the last year

The owners of at least 1,184 (2.8% of England's total) Local Wildlife Sites have received advice in the last year. Six partnerships confirmed that no advice had been provided in the last year – the collective number of sites in the areas where no advice has been given in the last year is at least 4,081 (9.5% of England's total).

4.4.2 Advice given in the last five years

The owners of at least 3,794 (8.9% of England's total) Local Wildlife Sites have received advice in the last five years. Three partnerships confirmed that no advice had been provided in the last five years – the collective number of sites in the areas where no advice has been given in the last five years is a minimum of 3,722 (8.7% of England's total).

General advice: At least 40 (75.5%) of partnerships provide general landowner advice and support compared with seven (13%) that don't. Of these 40, 11 (21%) provide this for all sites, 14 (26%) for some, and 15 (28%) on request.

Site specific advice: Forty two (79%) partnerships provide site specific land management advice compared with five (9%) that don't. Ten (19%) provide this for all sites; 18 (34%) provide it for some sites and 14 (26.4%) provide it on request. One partnership did not specify on what basis this advice was provided.

Management plans: Thirty two (60%) partnerships provide specific management plans to landowners/tenants compared with 15 (28%) that don't. Of the 32 that provide management plans, four (7.5%) provide this for all sites; 15 (28%) provide it for some sites; 13 (25%) provide it on request; and one partnership did not specify on what basis this help was provided.

Advice and assistance with agri-environment scheme applications: Twenty nine (55%) of partnerships provide advice/assistance with agri-environment scheme applications compared with 17 (32%) that don't. Of the 29 that provide assistance, three (6%) provide this for all sites; eight (15%) provide it for some sites; 18 (34%) provide it on request; and one partnership did not specify on what basis this assistance was provided.

4.4.3 The constraints limiting landowner advice

No, or limited funding was identified as the most common constraint restricting the ability of partnerships to liaise with landowners (81% of partnerships). This is followed by lack of time (74% of partnerships), and equally, the availability of staff/volunteers. To a lesser degree but still significant; not knowing the landowner (51% of partnerships), irregular contact with landowners (43% of partnerships) and lack of incentives (30% of partnerships) were also considered to be constraints by a number of partnerships.



Norfolk landholder and contractor meeting on site - Norfolk Wildlife Trust

4.4.4 Regional trends on liaising with landowners

All regions require more resources for landowner advice and support. In the Eastern region, 100% of partnerships stated that *not knowing the landowner* was a key constraint.

4.4.5 Targeting advice

Table 3 shows how advice is targeted. Over 30 (57%) partnerships offer advice on request and 11 (21%) offer advice on a rolling programme. Strategic approaches to targeting advice are also adopted by some partnerships, with 20 (38%) targeting advice according to the site's proximity/relationship to landscape-scale conservation approaches (eg Nature Improvement Areas, Living Landscape schemes) and targeting advice on sites that are either not (15% of partnerships) or that are (11% of partnerships) in agri-environment schemes or Woodland Grant Schemes.

Table 3 To show how advice is targeted across the partnerships (some partnerships use more than one approach)

How advice is targeted (some partnerships use more than one method)	Number of partnerships	Percentage of total number of partnerships
On request	30	57
Proximity/relationship to landscape scale conservation approaches (eg Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs), Living Landscapes, Futurescapes)	20	38
On a rolling programme	11	21
Sites <u>not</u> in agri-environment schemes or Woodland Grant Schemes	8	15
Advice is not specifically targeted	7	13
Sites <u>in</u> agri-environment schemes or Woodland Grant Schemes	6	11
Areas covered by specific project funding or campaigns	4	8
Proximity to Wildlife Trust nature reserves or other nature reserves	3	6
During integrity monitoring or following survey	3	6
Sites with planning issues or under threat	3	6
According to ecological value and potential for making gains	1	2
Where there are concentrations of valuable sites (of all types) in local landscapes	1	2
Local Nature Partnership sub areas	1	2
Priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats	1	2
Sites that change most rapidly from lack of management	1	2
Sites in proposed neighbourhood plan areas	1	2
Advice not in remit of partnership	1	2

4.5 MONITORING

4.5.1 Local Wildlife Sites monitored in the last year

Partnerships reported that 2,699 (six percent of England's total) Local Wildlife Sites were monitored to assess their status in the last year. Seven partnerships confirmed that no monitoring was undertaken in the last year – the collective number of sites in the areas where *no* monitoring of any sites has been undertaken in the last year is 5,753 (13.4% of England's total). These figures were based on answers from 41 partnerships.

4.5.2 Local Wildlife Sites monitored in the last five years

Partnerships reported that 6,590 (15% of England's total) Local Wildlife Sites were monitored to assess their status in the last five years. Five partnerships confirmed that no monitoring was undertaken in the last five years – the collective number of sites in the areas

where *no* monitoring has been undertaken in the last five years is 4,635 (11% of England's total).



Monitoring, Gowy project, Cheshire – Ben Gregory

4.5.3 Use of the Biodiversity Action Reporting System

A total of eight partnerships stated that they used BARS (Biodiversity Action Reporting System⁶) to help with annual reporting to Defra on the number of Local Wildlife Sites in positive conservation management; seven stated they sometimes did and 33 said they did not.

4.6 LINKS TO PLANNING AND OTHER INITIATIVES

4.6.1 Local Plan policies

A total of 38 partnerships stated that all the local plans in their Local Wildlife Site areas included policies to protect Local Wildlife Sites and seven partnerships stated that protection policies were included in some plans in their area but not others, making protection of sites variable within a system area.

4.6.2 Implementation of Local Plan policies

When quizzed whether these policies were implemented effectively or not, three partnerships replied 'yes' and 22 replied 'usually'. Three partnerships reported that plan

⁶ <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/>

policies in their area were not implemented effectively and 16 partnerships stated that some of the plan polices were and some were not.

4.6.3 Green Infrastructure Strategy

A total of 18 partnerships stated that local authorities (in their partnership area) have a Green Infrastructure⁷ Strategy⁸ and 18 partnerships stated that some local authorities in their area did have a strategy and some didn't. A total of eight partnerships reported that there was no Green Infrastructure Strategy for their area at all.

4.6.4 Local Ecological Network

A total of 22 partnerships stated that the local authorities or Local Nature Partnership in their partnership area had identified and mapped local ecological networks⁹ and 11 stated that some local authorities had and some hadn't. Nine reported that there had been no local ecological network identified or mapped within their partnership area.

4.6.5 Inclusion of Local Wildlife Sites within Local Ecological Networks maps

When quizzed whether these local ecological network maps included Local Wildlife Sites, 30 partnerships reported they did, two stated that some local authorities in their partnership area did include them and some did not and one partnership did not know.

4.6.6 Local Wildlife Sites wholly or partly in management schemes

A high proportion of partnerships (29) did not know whether Local Wildlife Sites in their area were in management schemes. For those partnerships that did provide an answer the most common management scheme cited was Entry Level Stewardship with 1,498 sites in the scheme. This is followed by the Woodland Grant Scheme with 1,009 Local Wildlife Sites, closely followed by 970 Local Wildlife Sites in the Higher Level scheme. Given the level of response, these figures should be considered as an absolute minimum.

4.6.7 Main threats to the loss and/or damage of Local Wildlife Sites

The two biggest perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites is *lack of management* (44 partnerships) and *inappropriate management* (39 partnerships). Development is also seen as a major threat to sites in more than half (30) of the Local Wildlife Site partnership areas.

All regions regard *lack of management* and *inappropriate management* as a threat and 100% of the partnerships in five out of eight regions concurred that lack of management is perceived to be a threat. Development was perceived as a threat in all regions, but was a particular concern in the North West, the East Midlands and Eastern regions where 80% or more of the partnerships expressed concern.

⁷ Green Infrastructure as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework is: A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

⁸ Communities and Local Government (2012) Paragraph 114, *National Planning Policy Framework*

⁹ Communities and Local Government (2012) Paragraph 117, *National Planning Policy Framework*

Table 4: Perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites

Threat	Number of partnerships	Percentage of partnerships
Lack of management	44	83
Inappropriate management	39	74
Development/land use	30	57
Other agricultural practices	21	40
Access/recreation	15	28
Ploughing	13	25
Pollution	7	13
Vandalism	6	11
Indirect impacts of development eg recreational pressure, cat predation and nitrogen deposition.	5	9
Service operations (eg highways, gas works etc.)	5	9
Invasive species	3	6
Intensification of land use practices	2	4
Waste deployment	1	2
Drainage	1	2
Grubbing	1	2
Pond construction	1	2
Lack of professional support in the way of advice to landowners	1	2

4.6.8 Local Wildlife Sites actually lost and/or damaged

In the context of this report, damage can range from destruction of all or part of a Local Wildlife Site, to a decline in habitat quality and species-richness. The following results are from only 31 partnerships and so likely to be under the true values. However, they do provide minimum figures, helping gauge the trend of decline and loss of sites. A total of 140 Local Wildlife Sites were lost/partially lost and or damaged during 2013 of which at least 34 were lost altogether. In the last five years between 2009 and 2013, 717 Local Wildlife Sites were lost/partially lost and/or damaged, of which at least 112 were lost altogether.



Damage to Local Wildlife Site at Dale Road, Derbyshire - Kieron Huston



Frog orchid thriving at Lots Lane Pasture, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston

Loss and damage by area

Some partnerships have experienced greater losses and damage to Local Wildlife Sites than others. For example, in 2013 in:

Barnsley Out of the 20 sites (34% of Barnsley's total) monitored, five (25% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and one had been lost altogether

Devon Out of the 123 sites (six percent of Devon's total) monitored, eight (six and a half percent of those monitored) were found to be damaged and three had been lost altogether.

Dorset Out of the 78 sites (six percent of Dorset's total) monitored, 22 (28% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and one had been lost altogether.

Hampshire Out of the 129 sites (three percent of Hampshire's total) monitored, 19 (15% of those monitored) were found to be damaged (this includes 15 that had deteriorated) and six have been lost altogether.

Kent Out of the 35 sites (eight percent of Kent's total) monitored, 12 (34% of those monitored) were found to be damaged.

Norfolk Out of the 79 sites (six percent of Norfolk's total) monitored, four (five percent of those monitored) were found to be damaged and three had been lost altogether.

North Yorkshire Out of the 40 sites (five and a half percent of North Yorkshire's total) monitored, four were found to be damaged and five (13% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

In the last five years between 2009 and 2013 in:

Derbyshire Out of the 300 sites (26% of Derbyshire's total) monitored, nine were found to be damaged and 13 (four percent of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

Devon Out of the 584 sites (27% of Devon's total) monitored, 12 were found to be damaged and 12 (2% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

Dorset Out of the 365 sites (29% of Dorset's total) monitored, 118 (32% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and six had been lost altogether.

Hampshire Out of the 650 sites (16% of Hampshire's total) monitored, 47 (seven percent of those monitored) were found to be damaged and 23 had been lost altogether.

Kent Out of the 147 sites (32% of Kent's total) monitored, 45 (31% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and three had been lost altogether.

Lancashire Seven of Lancashire's 1,219 sites have been lost and 83 damaged.

Northampton Out of the 186 sites (27% of Northampton's total) monitored, two were found to be damaged and nine had been lost altogether.

North Yorkshire Out of the 233 sites (32% of North Yorkshire's total) monitored, 69 (30% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and nine had been lost altogether.

Oxfordshire Out of the 24 sites (seven percent of Oxfordshire's total) monitored, seven (29% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

Warwickshire Out of the 16 sites (three percent of Warwickshire's total) monitored, seven (44% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

Wiltshire Out of the 455 sites (30% of Wiltshire's total) monitored, about 100 (22% of those monitored) were found to be damaged and or lost.

4.7 RESOURCES

4.7.1 Staffing levels

A total of 42 full-time paid staff worked on Local Wildlife Sites in England between April 2013 and March 2014 (based on the 42 partnerships that responded). Although full-time, many of these had other duties beyond Local Wildlife Site work. In addition, a minimum of 74 part-time paid staff worked on Local Wildlife Sites during the same period. This distribution is not geographically even, so the average is not a good representation, with at least three partnerships having no dedicated paid workers taking responsibility for Local Wildlife Sites and others having as many as eight.

4.7.2 Volunteer levels

At least 27 Local Wildlife Site partnerships make use of volunteers, with at least 314 volunteers working on Local Wildlife Site systems in either a part-time or full-time capacity between April 2013 and March 2014.



(Wilderness Island, London – Mathew Frith)

Part of Wilderness Island, London, was selected as a Local Wildlife Site in 1989. It was saved from development in 1987 and has since been managed by London Wildlife Trust, on behalf of London Borough of Sutton.

"I cannot remember exactly when I first started volunteering at Wilderness Island but I do remember clearing up the fallen trees as a result of the October 1987 storm. I did not realise then that nearly 30 years later I would be leading the tasks. It has been an interesting and rewarding journey; very much punctuated by bursts of activity by staff from the (London) Trust when we have been fortunate enough to gain funding for major habitat works. The friendship of other committed volunteers who all want to put something back for the local community has made it a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience." Derek Coleman, volunteer

4.7.3 Local Authority contributions

The financial contributions made by local authorities to individual Local Wildlife Site systems can be seen in Table 5. Each system may receive several amounts of funding from different authorities.

Out of the 40 respondents, 32 Local Wildlife Site partnerships reported that their system received direct financial contributions from one or more local authorities in their partnership area compared with eight that did not.

When the contributions made by individual local authorities are considered, it can be seen from Table 5 that, 94 local authorities contributed up to £5,000 during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, with at least 32 contributing more than £5,000. The highest amount contributed by one local authority was £30,000. At least 133 local authorities make no financial contribution to the running of the Local Wildlife Site system in their area.

Table 5 To show the financial contributions to Local Wildlife Site systems by local authorities in 2013-2014

Financial contribution	Number of local authorities
None	133
£1 - £1,000	25
£1,001 - £5,000	69
£5,001 - £10,000	27
£10,001- £20,000	3
£21,000 - £30,000	2

Other resources received by Local Wildlife Site partnerships from local authorities during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 are listed below: 26 systems provided details and some have listed more than one resource:

- Time (18 systems)
- Office space (11 systems) and overheads (three systems)
- Equipment (five systems)
- Support in general (eight systems)

Other individual systems also reported that they received resources in the form of vehicle use, training, expert advice and landowner liaison.

4.7.4 Statutory Agency contributions

Natural England Of the 47 partnerships that responded, eight stated they received financial support from Natural England during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014: three partnerships received up to £1,000; four partnerships received between £1,001-£5,000; and; one partnership received between £10,001-£20,000. Two partnerships did not know what contributions might have been made. Two partnerships reported that they received 'some funds' from Natural England towards the local records centre. Other resources received from Natural England during the survey period included: time, advice and one system also recognised the contribution made to the management of Local Wildlife Sites via agri-environment schemes.

Environment Agency Of the 47 partnerships that responded, ten stated they received financial support from the Environment Agency during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014: two partnerships received up to £1,000; six partnerships received between £1,001-£5,000; and; two partnerships received between £10,001-£20,000. Two partnerships did not know what contributions might have been made. Two partnerships reported that they received 'some funds' from the Environment Agency as part of a local records centre contract. Other resources received by systems from the Environment Agency during the survey period included time and advice.

Forestry Commission Of the 47 partnerships that responded, one received a direct financial contribution from the Forestry Commission of between £1 and £1,000. Two partnerships recognised the contributions made by the Forestry Commission in the form of advice and agri-environment schemes. But 44 partnerships stated they received no resources at all from the Forestry Commission.

4.7.5 Further resources

When asked specifically whether they had sufficient resources to ensure the identification, management and protection of Local Wildlife Sites in their area, 45 of the 47 partnerships that provided a response, stated that they did not have sufficient resources and two stated they did. However, both of the partnerships which stated that they had sufficient resources, still identified areas where further resources were needed.

Of the 47 partnerships that provided a response, the majority stated that additional resources were needed for landowner advice and support (44 partnerships); survey and monitoring (43 partnerships) and practical land management assistance (41 partnerships). Resources to support planning and campaigns are needed by more than half of those that responded (25) and are needed for site selection by just under half (23 partnerships).

5.FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on Local Wildlife Sites or this report, please contact:

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Primula veris, Crich Chase Local Wildlife Site, Derbyshire - Kieron Huston

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