

## CABINET MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2023

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

**Title of Report:**

Local Wildlife Sites

**Author(s):**

Executive Director of City Development

**Purpose of Report:**

This report seeks Cabinet approval to adopt revised Local Wildlife Site boundaries and designations.

**Description of Decision:**

Cabinet is recommended to approve and adopt the revised Local Wildlife site boundaries and designations as referred to in Appendix 1.

**Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework?      Yes**

**If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework**

**Suggested reason(s) for Decision:**

To establish revised Local Wildlife Site boundaries in accordance with the requirements of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Adopting the revised boundaries will also support the preparation of the South of Tyne and Wear Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

**Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:**

Consideration was given to not adopting the proposed boundary changes, however, this would not reflect changes to habitats which have taken place since the boundaries were originally established and would not ensure that new areas with qualifying features are designated in accordance with regional guidance. It would also make it more difficult to prepare the South of Tyne and Wear LNRS, as it would not be based upon the most up-to-date baseline position of priority habitats.

**Impacts analysed;**

**Equality**  **Privacy**  N/A **Sustainability**  N/A **Crime and Disorder**  N/A

**Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values?      Yes**

**Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution?      Yes**

**Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions?      Yes**



## **CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2023**

### **LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES**

#### **Report of the Executive Director of City Development**

#### **1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to adopt revised Local Wildlife Site boundaries and designations.

#### **2.0 Description of Decision (Recommendations)**

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve and adopt the revised Local Wildlife site boundaries and designations as referred to in Appendix 1.

#### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 The identification of Local Sites, which are subdivided into Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites, is of key importance in carrying out a range of functions as a Local Authority. These include functions as a Local Planning Authority amongst others but will also assist with the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity pursuant to Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006. This will be done by identifying a network of local sites to complement the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which together support habitats and species of principal importance for the purpose of further enhancing the general biodiversity objective. This combined network will also form the basis of one of the three legally required elements of the LNRS, which is a further requirement of the Environment Act 2021.
- 3.2 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) defines locally designated 'Local Wildlife Sites' as areas of substantive nature conservation value that make an important contribution to ecological networks and nature's recovery. They can also provide wider benefits including public access (where agreed), climate mitigation and helping to tackle air pollution. They can be in rural, urban or coastal locations, can vary considerably in size, and may comprise a number of separate sites.
- 3.3 There are more than 40,000 Local Sites in England, covering contrasting landscapes in coastal, rural and urban settings, and many are equal in quality to the representative sample of nationally recognised SSSI.
- 3.4 There have been several different terms used to describe locally important nature sites, including Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS). Defra uses the collective term Local Sites.

#### **Local Wildlife Sites Review**

- 3.5 The existing Local Site designations have been in place for a number of years and have not been updated or reviewed to take account of material changes to the habitat since their initial designation.
- 3.6 The Environment Act (2021) introduced a legal requirement for local authorities to prepare and adopt a LNRS, which will identify important habitat areas to be

enhanced and also look at opportunities to better connect these through improving the corridors and stepping stones between them.

- 3.7 It is therefore important that the Council has an up-to-date baseline of important habitats within the city on which to base the LNRS.

#### **4.0 Current Position**

- 4.1 In December 2020, following Cabinet approval, the Council published a review of its Local Wildlife Sites for consultation, which included reviewing the boundaries of existing sites, and also looked at whether any new sites should be designated based on the habitat meeting the qualifying features for designation.
- 4.2 Prior to being presented to Cabinet, the proposed Local Wildlife Site boundary amendments and new sites received endorsement from the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership which confirmed that the proposals fulfil the Selection Criteria. The Local Wildlife Partnership comprises Durham Wildlife Trust (administrator), Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC) and Local Authority Ecologists from Sunderland City Council, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council and South Tyneside Council. The role of the Partnership is to consider the evidence and provide an impartial view on the merits, or not, of amending and designating new local wildlife sites.
- 4.3 There are currently 63 designated Local Wildlife Sites in Sunderland. The review recommended minor boundary amendments to 22 sites and major boundary amendments to 28 sites (as detailed in Section 3 of Appendix 1). The review also identified 18 new sites that meet the selection criteria for Local Wildlife Site status and therefore recommended that these should be designated (as detailed in Section 4 of Appendix 1).
- 4.4 Full details of the review and the changes proposed as part of the consultation in December 2020 can be found in the Local Wildlife Sites Report (Appendix 1) and the Local Wildlife Sites Evidence Report Appendix Report (Appendix 2).
- 4.5 Following Cabinet approval to proceed with the consultation in December 2020, the proposed changes were subject to an 8-week period of public consultation commencing on 18 December 2020 and closing on 12 February 2021. The consultation period included an additional two weeks to the standard 6-week period to reflect that the consultation also coincided with the Christmas break.
- 4.6 As a result of the consultation, a total of 15 representations were submitted regarding the proposals. Full details of the consultation including the responses received are set out within the Consultation Statement (Appendix 3).
- 4.7 The responses received to the consultation were broadly supportive of the proposed designations, however a number of landowners did raise concerns regarding the impact that the designations might potentially have upon the way that they operate or manage their land.
- 4.8 After giving consideration to the representations received, no changes have been proposed to those recommended by the review, as it is considered that the designations should not have an adverse impact upon the way that the sites are currently managed or operated by the respective landowners, as the designation would not require landowners to manage the site in any particular way for nature

conservation. Furthermore, as evidenced within the Local Wildlife Sites and Local Wildlife Sites Evidence Reports, the sites had clearly met the qualifying criteria for designation.

## **5.0 Reasons for the Decision**

- 5.1 To establish revised Local Wildlife Site boundaries in accordance with the requirements of the NERC Act 2006. Adopting the revised boundaries will also support the preparation of the South of Tyne and Wear LNRS.

## **6.0 Alternative Options**

- 6.1 Consideration was given to not adopting the proposed boundary changes, however, this would not reflect changes to habitats which have taken place since the boundaries were originally established and would not ensure that new areas with qualifying features are designated in accordance with regional guidance. It would also make it more difficult to prepare the South of Tyne and Wear Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as it would not be based upon the most up-to-date baseline position of priority habitats.

## **7.0 Impact Analysis**

- 7.1 **Financial Implications** – There are not anticipated to be any additional financial implications resulting from the proposed designations.
- 7.2 **Legal Implications** – There are no anticipated legal implications resulting from the proposed designations.
- 7.3 **Equalities Analysis** – It is not anticipated that there would be any negative impact, however as the many of these sites also have public access, they may provide benefit to the residents that use them. An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken which is attached at Appendix 4.
- 7.4 **Health Outcomes and Health Inequalities** – The site would designate Local Wildlife Sites which will be protected for the intrinsic value. Many of these sites also have public access, which provide benefit to the health and wellbeing of the residents that use them. An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken which is attached at Appendix 4.
- 7.5 **Sustainability** – The proposed Local Wildlife Site designations will identify areas to be protected and enhanced for their wildlife and habitat. These sites will help to provide a carbon store and are likely to be the focus of improvement through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and through Biodiversity Net Gain secured in due course as mitigation in relation to development. An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken which is attached at Appendix 4.
- 7.6 **Co-operative Values** – At Annual Council in May 2015, it was resolved that the following statement be included in the Constitution to reflect the values of the “Co-operative Council”. “Sunderland City Council is a co-operative council and in being so will act ethically in all its actions while adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin its decision making and actions.”

7.7 **Policy Implications** – Any development proposals which could adversely impact upon the designated sites would need to have regard to adopted Core Strategy and Development Plan Policy NE2, which seeks to protect value and integrity of the designated Local Sites.

7.8 **The Public/External Bodies** – The proposed changes have been subject to public consultation as set out within the Consultation Statement (Appendix 3). The designations have also been endorsed by the Local Wildlife Partnership.

## 8.0 **Background Papers**

Appendix 1: Local Wildlife Sites Report [accessible online via link]

Appendix 2: Local Wildlife Sites Evidence Report [accessible online via link]

Appendix 3: Local Wildlife Sites Consultation Statement

Appendix 4: Integrated Impact Assessment