

**CABINET – 20 JUNE 2012**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I**

**Title of Report:**

SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL DRAFT GREENSPACE AUDIT AND REPORT 2012  
& DRAFT ECOLOGICAL EVIDENCE BASE FOR SUNDERLAND'S LOCAL  
DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK 2012

**Author:**

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**Purpose of Report:**

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's recommendation to Council to approve the 2012 Draft Sunderland Greenspace Audit and Report and 2012 Draft Ecological Evidence Base for public consultation, and to seek its approval for its use in developing the Local Development Framework.

**Description of Decision:**

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Endorse the 2012 Draft Greenspace Audit and Report and 2012 Draft Ecological Evidence Base for consultation purposes.
2. Following the close of the consultation and in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio holder, to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to make any minor amendments to the attached report prior to its adoption. The final report will be used:
  - a. As part of the evidence base to inform the emerging Local Development Framework, and
  - b. As a material consideration in determining planning applications.

**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:**

The decision is required to provide essential evidence to inform corporate policy, and chiefly to support progression of the Core Strategy to proceed to its next stage (statutory consultation) in accordance with the Council's adopted Local Development Scheme.

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

All local planning authorities are charged under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 with the preparation of a Local Development Framework (LDF), which must include a Core Strategy. They are also charged with preparing the LDF in accordance with the provisions of an approved Local Development Scheme.

The Core Strategy must be informed by a robust evidence base. The need for evidence regarding the city's greenspace and ecological requirements is emphasised in the National Planning Policy Framework. To not undertake such updates in the light of the changing circumstances in the city would undermine the planning policy framework and could jeopardise the Core Strategy at Examination. Consequently, no alternatives can be recommended.

**Impacts analysed:**

Equality  Privacy  Sustainability  Crime and Disorder

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

**Yes**

**Scrutiny Committee**

**Scrutiny Lead Member for City Services**

**Is it included in the Forward Plan?**

**Yes**

**Planning and Highways Committee**

**SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL DRAFT GREENSPACE AUDIT AND REPORT  
2012 & DRAFT ECOLOGICAL EVIDENCE BASE FOR SUNDERLAND'S LOCAL  
DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK 2012****REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE****1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's recommendation to Council to approve the draft 2012 Sunderland Greenspace Audit and Report and 2012 Draft Ecological Evidence Base for public consultation, and to seek its approval for its use in developing the Local Development Framework.

**2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DECISION**

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to:
1. Endorse the 2012 Draft Greenspace Audit and Report and 2012 Draft Ecological Evidence Base for consultation purposes.
  2. Following the close of the consultation, to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to make any minor amendments to the attached report prior to its adoption. The final report will be used:
    - a. As part of the evidence base to inform the emerging Local Development Framework, and
    - b. As a material consideration in determining planning applications.

**3.0 GREENSPACE BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Greenspace is important to the city and its residents. The availability of accessible green space can improve quality of life in a number of ways. In particular the availability of green space provides people with opportunities to engage in healthy activities and there is ample research showing the beneficial links between outdoor activities and good physical and mental health.
- 3.2 Sunderland is fortunate to have a relatively high proportion of greenspace compared to other land uses. It is also clear from the audit that residents across the city are generally able to access greenspace provision for a variety of purposes. The current position provides the basis by which the council and partners are able to promote development in the city without compromising the quality of the environment or limiting access to green space. The availability of ample greenspace offers the city a variety of opportunities to retain and attract residents and businesses to the city.
- 3.3 The Audit's recommendations clearly indicate that not all greenspaces will be retained in perpetuity in their present state. Looking at the availability of greenspace at a local level will inform decisions about the use of greenspace within the context of the condition and extent of provision. Policies will be developed to ensure that these are progressed in a balanced and considered way.

**National planning advice**

- 3.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreational facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. The NPPF also recognises the wider role of greenspace, stating that successful neighbourhoods require high quality public space, which in turn makes a vital contribution to the health and well-being of communities.
- 3.5 In accordance with best practice, greenspace has been divided into the following typologies:
- a) Parks and gardens
  - b) Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces
  - c) Green corridors
  - d) Outdoor sports facilities
  - e) Amenity greenspace
  - f) Provision for children and teenagers
  - g) Allotments
  - h) Cemeteries and churchyards
  - i) Accessible countryside in urban fringe areas
  - j) Civic spaces.
- 3.6 In addition, further analysis has been undertaken to ascertain the quantity, quality, local value and site accessibility of greenspaces. This has been interpreted as follows:
- Quantity – the amount (by type) of greenspace available
  - Quality – based on detailed survey results, and existing known data
  - Value – capturing how important greenspace is to people
  - Accessibility – how accessible each type of greenspace is available across the city, and also identifying known key physical barriers to access such as rivers, major roads and railways.
- Greenspace and green infrastructure planning in Sunderland**
- 3.7 Sunderland has prepared an Open Space Register and Map for more than 20 years. These registers concentrated on the quantity of provision of parks, amenity greenspace, play areas and outdoor sports facilities.
- 3.8 The last audit of greenspace was undertaken in 2003 and the 2012 audit brings that exercise up to date and adds further value. This draft audit follows the requirements laid out in national policy and includes the most thorough survey of greenspace sites ever to be undertaken in Sunderland. More than 1,750 sites over 3,800 hectares in area were evaluated in accordance with the requirements at paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4.
- 3.9 The NPPF also endorses the concept of ‘green infrastructure’ (GI), which provides further sustainable elements to be considered with regards to the development of city greenspaces, and to support the city’s LDF Core Strategy. As a result, the City Council has begun work on a Green Infrastructure Strategy. A GI Steering Group has also been established, drawing upon internal and external expertise.
- 3.10 A full copy of the draft 2012 Greenspace Audit and Report is available from Members’ Services and a summary of its key findings is attached at Appendix 1.

## **4.0 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DRAFT GREENSPACE AUDIT AND REPORT**

- 4.1 Overall, Sunderland is well provided for in terms of greenspace provision, but this varies from place to place. This report takes account of the levels of provision and conditions and sets out how greenspace in a particular locality can be used in the future.
- 4.2 The draft Greenspace Audit further proposes a suite of city-wide greenspace policy recommendations:
- Set greenspace guidelines and standards that seek to minimise inequalities in terms of greenspace provision, that in turn will ensure that all areas have a range of greenspaces accessible to them
  - The quality of existing greenspaces should be improved in general, and especially in the more deprived parts of the city
  - Alter the use of some types of greenspace, to enable more greenspace variety in key areas
  - Where justified and agreed, re-use low value greenspaces for other forms of development, ensuring that funds are provided and re-used to improve other greenspace within the neighbourhood
  - Better promote our Greenspace product:
    - highlight to inward investors that Sunderland is a green city and has high standards and variety of greenspaces on offer;
    - ensure that we maximise publicity regarding the coast, river and natural environment;
    - focus on promoting regional tourist activities such as the National Cycle Network, facilities at the marina and in our parks and country parks.
- 4.3 Whilst new sources of funding for greenspaces are in limited supply during the present recession, investment can be generated through the re-use of low value greenspaces- the loss of one poor quality, poorly used greenspace site may provide funds that enable other nearby greenspaces to be improved, and a local neighbourhood could achieve an overall greenspace 'net gain'.
- 4.4 Furthermore, significant new residential developments should contribute towards the provision of new or enhanced greenspaces. Policies contained within the LDF will address the required type, quantity and quality of greenspace provision, and will be calculated in accordance with the standards and recommendations outlined in the Greenspace Audit and Report.

## **5.0 ECOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Biodiversity and geodiversity legislation**

- 5.1 There are a wide range of European, national and regional acts, regulations, plans and policies relating to the protection of our ecology. The principal mechanism for the legislative protection of wildlife in Great Britain is through The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The legislation is the means by which the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention) and the European Union Directives on the Conservation of Wild Fauna and Flora are implemented in Great Britain. This policy was further strengthened in 2000 by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

- 5.2 Further key legislation and policy is included in the following:
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) created a duty for every public authority to conserve biodiversity
  - The Durham Biodiversity Action Plan reviews the status of wildlife in Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Darlington and County Durham and sets out a framework for action to protect vulnerable and rare species and habitats
  - The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 provides for the designation and protection of 'European sites', the protection of 'European protected species', and the adaptation of planning and other controls for the protection of European Sites
  - The Bird's Directive 1979 covers the protection, management and control of all species of naturally occurring wild birds in the European territory of member states.

### **National planning advice**

- 5.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of the natural environment and expects the protection of the natural environment to primarily be delivered by local authorities through robust local policies and plans. The NPPF continues to appreciate that European and National sites, and protected species, retain their protection status within the planning process. It also expects local authorities to afford local sites and wildlife corridors better protection through their local plans.
- 5.4 These principles are reinforced by other policies within the NPPF including Green Belt protection, rural tourism and local plans. This therefore ensures that the countryside should be protected from piecemeal developments that detract from the character and appearance of the natural environment.
- 5.5 In summary, where development is proposed on or affecting a designated ecological site, authorities should draw a distinction between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and afford the level of protection that is commensurate with the site's status and importance. The starting premise would be to conserve and enhance the ecological value of the site itself. However, this does not represent an absolute barrier to development in itself: where the value of the site would be considered to be outweighed by the development and no reasonable alternatives to the loss of the habitat can be found, it would be reasonable for the authority to mitigate the impacts of the proposal (such as requiring the developer to reduce the scale of the proposal or to provide replacement habitats which are of equal value to the affected site).

### **Ecology protection in Sunderland**

- 5.6 The last major ecological study undertaken in Sunderland was a Phase 1 Habitat survey that reviewed our countryside and wildlife features in 1999. This is no longer considered to provide an up-to-date and robust evidence base that can support updated policies and strategies. An updated evidence base will not only protect and enhance what Sunderland already has but it will also improve the quality of the environment through identifying new opportunities for enhancement and the creation of green corridors within the city.
- 5.7 A better understanding of Sunderland's natural environment also enables more appropriate design and allocation of land for buildings and roads,

recreation, flood defence and the safe control of waste disposal. This will help to underpin the objectives of the Sunderland Strategy and the city's Economic Masterplan through its contribution to our economy, our health and our wellbeing, while at the same time enriching the lives of the people of Sunderland.

## **6.0 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DRAFT ECOLOGICAL EVIDENCE BASE**

6.1 A full copy of the Ecological Evidence Base is available from Members' Services. Appendix 2 provides a high level summary of the report, including detailed evidence regarding the following suite of ecological designations in Sunderland:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA's)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's)
- Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)
- Local Geological Sites (LGS)
- Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).

6.2 The draft Ecological Evidence Base concludes that although Sunderland is home to a rich and diverse landscape with significant biodiversity and geological interest, the designated sites are small, isolated and vulnerable, and proposes that policies be adopted that will help to restore and create wildlife habitats by:

- Improving the quality of designated sites through better habitat management.
- Increasing the size of current wildlife sites, including the creation of buffer zones or joining up two nearby sites to make a larger site capable of sustaining wildlife populations more effectively
- Enhancing connections between, or join up, sites through wildlife corridors
- Reducing the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment.

6.3 This will be taken forward through the emerging Local Development Framework.

## **7.0 NEXT STEPS**

7.1 Upon approval from Cabinet, the draft reports and Greenspace site audit will be made available over the summer for public consultation. The consultation will enable the reports findings and recommendations to be considered, as well as individual sites to be reviewed. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, if responses are received that are of a minor nature, delegated authority is sought for the Deputy Chief Executive to approve any minor modifications prior to adoption. Responses of a substantive nature will conversely be reported back to Cabinet.

7.2 The reports will be used to inform policies contained within the emerging Local Development Framework (Core Strategy and Allocations Development Plan Document). To complement the LDF policies and process, a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will be developed in relation to Green Infrastructure

which will outline and justify greenspace, ecological and landscape needs in more detail.

- 7.3 Further research will be undertaken in relation to addressing the key recommendations and guidelines contained in the two reports.
- 7.4 The supply of greenspace will be monitored and a review of the results and progress made will be carried out annually. The monitoring of the supply of greenspace will be linked to the City Council's LDF Annual Monitoring Report review process.

## **8.0 REASON FOR DECISION**

- 8.1 The decision is required to provide essential evidence to inform corporate policy, and chiefly to support progression of the Core Strategy to proceed to its next stage (statutory consultation) in accordance with the Council's adopted Local Development Scheme.

## **9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 9.1 All local planning authorities are charged under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 with the preparation of a Local Development Framework (LDF), which must include a Core Strategy. They are also charged with preparing the LDF in accordance with the provisions of an approved Local Development Scheme.
- 9.2 The Core Strategy must be informed by a robust evidence base. The need for evidence regarding the city's greenspace and ecological requirements is emphasised in the National Planning Policy Framework. To not undertake such updates in the light of the changing circumstances in the city would undermine the planning policy framework and could jeopardise the Core Strategy at Examination. Consequently, no alternatives can be recommended.

## **10.0 IMPACT ANALYSIS**

### **10.1 Equalities**

The greenspace and ecological reports form part of the family of supporting evidence documents to the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is 'equalities' neutral by focussing on land use matters. However, an Impact Needs Requirement Assessment (INRA) has been completed.

### **10.2 Sustainability**

By law, planning must promote sustainable development. This is the underlying objective of the LDF, greenspace and ecological reports.

## **11.0 OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

### **11.1 Financial Implications**

Costs have arisen from developing the evidence base and will arise from the proposed consultation. Funding will be met from contingencies allocated to the LDF.

## **12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**



- National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)
- Planning Policy Guidance 17 (2002)
- Sunderland Council Parks Management Strategy 2004
- Sunderland City Council Allotments Management Strategy (2004)
- Sunderland City Council Activecity-Action for a healthy city (2004)
- Sunderland City Council Sport & Physical Activity Strategy (September 2005 - 2010)
- Moving Forward' Play and Urban Games Strategy June 2007
- Sunderland Playing Pitch Strategy (2004-2011)
- Football Investment Strategy 2010
- National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)
- PPS 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)
- Planning Policy Statement 12 Local Spatial Planning (2008)
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010
- The Bird's Directive (1979)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Tyne and Wear Nature Conservation Strategy (1988)
- Durham Biodiversity Action Plan

# **APPENDIX 1: SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL DRAFT GREENSPACE AUDIT AND REPORT 2012**

## **A1.0 METHODOLOGY AND CONSULTATION**

- A1.1 Sunderland's draft Greenspace Audit follows PPG17 and CABE guidelines closely. Liaison was also carried out with key internal Directorates and organisations such as Natural England. Each site was visited and assessed using an agreed pro-forma (which is included in Appendix 3 of the main report).
- A1.2 Sites that cross the city boundary have been included in the site audit. A few sites that lie wholly within neighbouring authorities (but adjacent to the city boundary and accessible) have been also been included in the audit, because they are used by Sunderland residents.
- A1.3 Every effort has been made to ensure that the draft Greenspace Audit follows advice and policy contained in other strategies that have been adopted by the City Council to help guide provision and management of specific types of greenspace. These reports include the following:
- Sunderland Council Parks Management Strategy 2004
  - Sunderland City Council Allotments Management Strategy (2004)
  - Sunderland City Council Activecity-Action for a healthy city (2004)
  - Sunderland City Council Sport & Physical Activity Strategy (September 2005 - 2010)
  - 'Moving Forward' Play and Urban Games Strategy June 2007
  - Sunderland Playing Pitch Strategy (2004-2011)
  - Football Investment Strategy 2010
- A1.4 Public consultation was carried out in late 2010 and in 2011 to help to determine local greenspace needs. Sessions were held for each of the city's 5 Area Regeneration Frameworks (ARF's) in October 2010 and January 2011. The sessions sought to check the interim results of the Greenspace Audit, to identify any sites missing off the register and to gain a better understanding on the local value of greenspaces. The January 2011 consultation particularly focused on the following key questions:
- a. What greenspaces do you value the most?
  - b. What makes a greenspace site valuable to local people?
  - c. What types of greenspace people would you like to see more of?
  - d. How far would local people would travel to use different types of greenspace?
  - e. What the most important greenspaces are to local people?
- A1.5 These five questions then formed an online survey which was carried out from April-July 2011 and was also included in the 2011 Sunderland Community Spirit Summer Survey. A further online survey for children and young people was carried out in autumn 2011 together with a schools workshop. Overall, more than 1,000 persons took part.
- A1.6 The consultation results were used to inform site 'value' and also to determine appropriate accessibility distances to greenspaces. Positively, there was a very high correlation between the most popular greenspaces cited in the consultation and the highest scoring sites listed in the Greenspace Audit.

## **A2.0 GREENSPACE AUDIT RESULTS AND KEY POLICY ISSUES**

### **A2.1 Sunderland's greenspace compared with national trends**

The availability of national data and standards on greenspace is limited in its extent. In some cases, Government departments have published documents that refer to national assumptions on greenspace trends. There clearly needs to be caution taken in making any meaningful comparisons with this data.

Nevertheless, it is reasonably accurate to summarise the following key points:

- Sunderland is a green city. The amount of greenspace appears to be well above the national average, and when combined with the amount of open countryside also in the city, it is accurate to report that 57% of the overall city area is green field (undeveloped)
- Sunderland has a good proportion of parkland. The establishment of country parks in recent years has significantly boosted the amount of overall parkland in Sunderland
- Sunderland has made some progress with regards to securing Green Flag awards (5 awarded), but there are a number of local authorities with more than 10 awards, and one authority has 30
- Access to natural greenspaces and woodland in Sunderland is much better than national organisations such as Natural England and The Woodland Trust have stated
- The city has 50% more allotments than the England average recommendation
- There is no clear distinction regarding the amount of greenspace provision in urban and suburban areas in Sunderland, in contrast to national trends that indicate suburban areas having higher quantities of greenspace
- Unlike national indicators, in Sunderland the provision of recreation grounds and sports facility provision does not vary greatly between urban and peripheral areas
- Again, unlike the national picture, there is no clear-cut trend in Sunderland indicating that poorer areas have lower quantities of greenspace provision. Former coal mining villages in the city, for example, may have high quantities of greenspace as a result of land reclamation
- Closely mirroring national trends, however, the quality of Sunderland's greenspace is worse in deprived areas.

### **A2.2 City-wide key results**

The draft Greenspace Audit focuses on the quantity, quality, accessibility and value of greenspaces at both the ARF and neighbourhood level. The full recommendations are contained in the audit report. The following is a short summary of key city-wide issues:

- Within the city, the lowest amounts of amenity greenspace are predictably in the more densely populated parts of the city, particularly around the city centre, though there is also low provision in some outer areas too, such as Town End Farm and Fencehouses
- Many of the best quality amenity greenspaces exist in the central Sunderland area and along the coast. The quality of sites varies between neighbourhoods considerably

- The Greenspace Audit now indicates that 89% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have access to high quality play (based on agreed distance thresholds). The ultimate aim is for 100% accessibility. The maintenance of existing sites is also key- if the quality or performance of a site is reduced, then the site's catchment area may also need to be reduced, thereby affecting city-wide access standards
- Access to quality natural greenspaces is fairly even across the city, although north Washington has more limited access. Woodland access is highest in the Coalfield and in Washington. Improving the quality and access to certain sites such as Washington's tree shelter belts could improve spatial access
- Three-quarters of Sunderland residents have 'reasonable' access to formal parks and country parks (access distance based on size and quality of park). There are gaps in terms of quantity and quality of parks scattered across the city
- Whilst allotments provision is higher in Sunderland than the national average, provision varies across the city, with Washington well below, and the Coalfield well above the city average. The overall quality of allotments in the Coalfield area, however, is lower than the rest of the city
- The Sunderland Playing Pitch Strategy and Football Investment Strategy provide detailed evidence that guide outdoor sports needs in the city. The strategies recommend new provision in some areas, but also emphasising the need to protect and enhance existing sites, and to maximise community use of sports fields
- The city's municipal cemeteries are in good condition, and in line with present burial rates there would appear to be a considerable supply
- Greenspace sites considered to be of 'low' value are scattered across the 5 ARF's. The future use of these sites should be investigated.

## **APPENDIX 2**

# **DRAFT ECOLOGICAL EVIDENCE BASE FOR SUNDERLAND'S LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK 2012**

## **B1.0 METHODOLOGY**

B1.1 The previously published Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) has provided the broad basis and guidance for preparing this ecological report. Although it has now been superseded by the NPPF, the broad objectives of PPS9 are still in line with the new framework. PPS9 recommended that the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) should, as a minimum, comprise information on the following:

- International Sites – for example, Special Protection Areas (SPA's), Special Area of Conservation (SAC's), and Ramsar sites
- National sites – for example, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)
- Local Sites - i.e. Local Geological Sites (LGS) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)
- Ancient woodland and other important habitats
- Important networks and habitats (wildlife corridors)
- Previously developed land
- Protected species and species of principal importance for biodiversity conservation.

B1.2 To provide Sunderland City Council with accurate ecological and geological data to inform the LDF and associated planning documents while also assisting in the monitoring of the framework, a number of studies were undertaken during 2009, 2010 and 2011. The survey work undertaken included:

- Collation of up to date information on international and national sites
- A full Phase 1 Habitat survey of the city and a comparison made between survey work undertaken in 1999 and 2011
- A survey of all local wildlife sites -formerly Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI's)
- Identification of new local wildlife sites
- A full survey of all geological sites -formerly Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) or SNCI's
- Consolidation of existing protected species and Durham Biodiversity Action Plan priority species data (including a bird survey)
- Consolidation of existing Durham Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat information
- Identification of important wildlife corridors and networks
- Biodiversity and geological conservation and enhancement recommendations.

## **B2.0 RESULTS AND KEY POLICY ISSUES**

B2.1 As a whole, Sunderland has a relatively high number of protected ecological sites, with a good range of species and habitat. The key message, however, is that in terms of protected area our sites tend to be much smaller in extent, and therefore more isolated and vulnerable. The small size of sites could mean that many species will not reach sufficient population sizes within them to be self sustaining, especially if there is little positive management. Actions

need to concentrate on increasing the size of sites and improving connections between them, which will ultimately lead to improvement and resilience of our ecological network.

## **B2.2 International sites**

Almost 68 hectares of Sunderland's coastline is internationally protected. Sunderland is part of the **Northumbria Coast SPA / Ramsar site** which includes much of the coastline between the Tweed and Tees Estuaries. SPA's are areas which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. Part of Sunderland's coast is also protected as part of the **Durham Coast SAC**. SAC's are areas which have been given special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive. They provide increased protection to a variety of species and habitats with European interest. The Durham Coast SAC is the only example of vegetated sea cliffs on Magnesian Limestone exposures in the UK.

## **B2.3 National sites**

**Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's)** are the country's very best wildlife and geological sites. Sunderland has seventeen SSSI's, though the average size is only one-fifth of the average median size in the UK. Thirteen of the sites are in favourable condition and the four unfavourable recovering sites are Hetton Bogs, High Haining Hill, High Moorsley and Hylton Castle Cutting. The small size of sites could mean that many species will not reach sufficient population sizes within them to be self sustaining, especially if there is little positive management.

**B2.4 Local Nature Reserves (LNR's)** are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Sunderland has designated five LNR's - Barmston Pond, Tunstall Hills, Hylton Dene, Fulwell Quarry and Hetton Bogs. The City Council has identified a further two potential LNR's at Rainton Meadows and Hetton Lyons. The designation of these 2 sites would help the city meet Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGST) relating to LNR access, and would also strengthen green corridors and links across the city.

## **B2.5 Local sites**

**Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)** were formerly known in Sunderland as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI's). Criteria for the selection of LWS are based on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat types and existing reference works that list species under threat. Out of 70 sites surveyed, 61 sites met the LWS criteria for designation, totalling an overall area of 441 hectares. In addition, a further 14 new LWS sites are proposed, which if approved would provide a further 86 hectares of protected habitat. As with SSSI's, the size of the city's LWS's is small. It is therefore important that the remaining sites are enhanced and protected as these are the key areas for Sunderland's wildlife.

**B2.6** Despite Sunderland's LWS's having an array of DBAP priority habitats- 17 in total- very few of the habitats are in favourable condition, and each habitat condition varies from site to site. There are only 2 sites with all habitats in favourable condition.

B2.7 In terms of **Local Geological Sites (LGS's)**, eleven locations in Sunderland were identified as having geological features that could potentially meet the criteria. These sites had not been reviewed for over 20 years. The sites were surveyed in 2011 and 8 sites met the criteria and will be duly designated. There are a number of management recommendations required to maintain favourable status of the sites, including scrub clearance, regular site monitoring and promotion of sensitive recreation.

#### **B2.8 Phase 1 Habitat Survey**

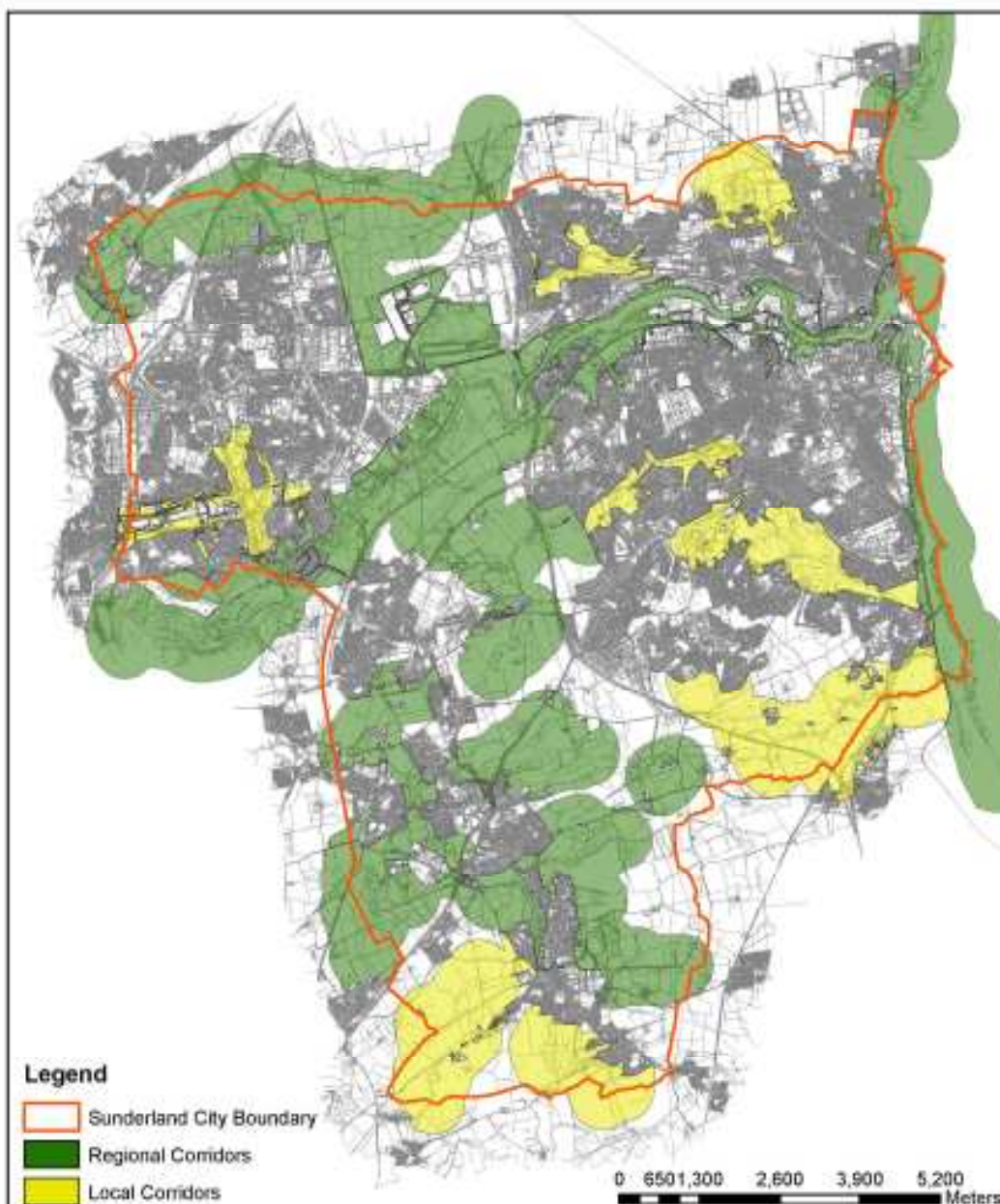
The Phase 1 Habitat Classification and associated field survey technique has been undertaken to assess the remainder of the city's undeveloped land that is not formally protected for ecological purposes. This is the second habitat survey to be undertaken -the first was in 1999- and a comparison has been made between the two. Two key trends have emerged. Firstly, unimproved grassland is gradually becoming semi-improved grassland, chiefly due to scrub invasion and overall lack of ecological management. Secondly, the quantity and quality of wetland areas is also decreasing.

#### **B2.9 Wildlife Corridors**


The importance of wildlife corridors has been recognised for a number of years, and they were first proposed in the 1988 Tyne and Wear Nature Conservation Strategy. Wildlife corridors allow and extend the free movement of species between wildlife rich areas into urban and semi-urban areas and help maintain the viability of certain species and habitats. In Sunderland, a number of regional and local wildlife corridors have been identified that criss-cross the city and link into Tyneside and County Durham (see map below).

B2.10 Following an initial investigation of the corridors, two key issues have emerged:

- Firstly, that further investigation is necessary. There is a lack of habitat information and patchy species records, which means that it is very difficult to predict species movement especially in light of climate change
- Secondly, and as the map below illustrates, there are gaps within corridors, and not all of the corridors link up. As explained earlier in this report, the small size of protected sites in Sunderland affects wildlife movement and corridor connectivity. Buffer zones around protected sites as well as habitat creation in key areas would create stepping stones and enable corridors to link. Crucially, this would improve habitat and species viability.



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 <p>Jonel Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive Office of the Chief Executive P.O. Box 102, Civic Centre Sunderland SR2 7DN</p> <p>Telephone: 0191 561 8773 Email: <a href="mailto:Countryside@sunderland.gov.uk">Countryside@sunderland.gov.uk</a> Web: <a href="http://www.sunderland.gov.uk">www.sunderland.gov.uk</a></p>	National Grid Reference	Contact	C. Dewson
	Project	Approved by	C. Dewson
	Local Development Framework	Drawn by	C. Hogarth
	Subject	Date	12/04/2011
Figure 8 Wildlife Corridors		Scale	Not to Scale
Drawing No. UF 5.36.01.09		Sheet size	A4
		Revisions	