



What are Local Wildlife Sites?

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are wildlife-rich sites selected for their local nature conservation value. They support important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species.

LWS are non-statutory sites and as such are not protected by law like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but Local Planning Authorities take the presence of LWS into account when assessing planning applications.

LWS are therefore sometimes thought of as a tier below SSSIs but this is not necessarily the case:

- The SSSI system is a selective system: a selection of sites that meet SSSI criteria for a specific habitat or species are selected, not all of them.
- LWS systems are intended to be comprehensive, although there are most likely important sites out there that are yet to be discovered.
- Therefore nationally important sites that meet the SSSI criteria but are not selected as SSSI, due to it not being a comprehensive system, will be included in the LWS system along with sites that are of more local importance. Although they do not receive the legal protection that SSSIs do.

No legal obligations or restrictions arise from the ownership of LWS; the maintenance of the wildlife value of a LWS is dependent upon the interest, inspiration and hard work of the landowners and managers to continue their management, which to date has maintained the high wildlife value of the site.

However, owning a LWS is viewed positively in applications for certain land management grants such as English Woodland Grant Schemes and it was a factor in Entry and Higher Level Stewardship applications. It is not currently considered in Countryside Stewardship applications but this situation may change; however, many landowners use LWS reports to support these applications.

Why are Local Wildlife Sites important?

LWS play a critical conservation role by providing wildlife refuges, protecting threatened species and habitats, and acting as buffers and as links, corridors and stepping stones between nationally designated sites such as SSSIs. LWS are a component of the core of the Nature Recovery Network that will support adaptation to climate change, reverse the decline in biodiversity, assist in flood prevention, water retention and public wellbeing and enjoyment of the natural world.

Many LWS have an urban or suburban location making them vital spaces for wildlife in towns and cities. Over 19% of LWS in England are in, or within 500 m of urban areas compared with just 3.6% of SSSIs. Therefore publically accessible LWS can be significant in the achievement of the Environmental Improvement Plan target that states 'everyone should live within 15 minutes walk of a green or blue space'.

In the county of Somerset as a whole LWS account for 7% of the overall area, while SSSIs account for 19% (this includes very large SSSIs such as the Bridgwater Bay SSSI which alone is approximately 36 km²).

How are Local Wildlife Sites selected?

LWS systems occur throughout England and Wales; different systems operate in the rest of the UK. Each area, usually a county, uses different criteria for selecting LWS to take into account local distinctiveness.

Local partnerships oversee the selection of LWS using robust, scientifically-determined criteria, local knowledge and understanding of the area's natural environment. LWS partnerships are made up of a variety of stakeholders including Local Planning Authorities, public bodies such as Natural England and the Forestry Commission, nature



conservation organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, biological records centres, farmers and other landowners and local natural history experts.

Sites currently listed as LWS may be on the list because they have been visited in the past and found to be of high wildlife value, or they may be sites that are on the JNCC Inventory of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, or the landowner has been in contact to discuss the high wildlife value of their land.

Local Wildlife Sites in Somerset

There are currently over 2000 LWS in Somerset, spread throughout the county in both rural and urban areas. They vary in size from under a hectare to over 600 hectares and have been selected for a wide variety of important habitats and species, including species-rich ancient woodland sites, populations of dormice, rare plant species and important assemblages of grassland fungi. There may be more sites that would meet LWS criteria whose wildlife value is yet to be discovered.

The Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) is performing an ongoing review of all LWS listed in the county, as part of our responsibility to maintain up-to-date information on the status of wildlife in Somerset.

The purpose of the review is to confirm that the site meets recently amended criteria used to define an LWS. In addition, this survey work adds to our detailed knowledge of Somerset's habitats and wildlife. The formal LWS Panel are responsible for all additions, deletions and boundary changes to the fully designated LWS list. The panel comprises representatives from SERC, Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT), Local Planning Authorities, Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Somerset Botany Group and Somerset Rare Plants Group.

More information on the background of the LWS system and the importance of LWS can be found at: <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/localwildlifesites>.

About Somerset Environmental Records Centre

For over 20 years SERC has been the main source of biological and geological information for Somerset. Set up in 1986, the record centre is a partnership organisation based within SWT and is a member of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC).

SERC currently holds close to 3 million species records from liverworts to lapwings. These records are provided by local specialist recorders and recording groups, professional ecologists and the public. SERC makes this information available to a wide-range of individuals and organisations for use in nature conservation, planning and research.

Funding for the day-to-day operation of SERC comes from a variety of sources including partners (Local Planning Authorities, Environment Agency, water utilities companies and SWT), projects and professional ecologists.

Updating our knowledge of wildlife in Somerset and beyond

If you can help us improve our knowledge of wildlife in Somerset, please let us know what you have seen, where, when and who you are! Visit our online recording page: <http://www.somerc.com/submit-your-sightings/recording/> or email records@somerc.com.

If you want to get in touch with any record centres outside of Somerset, you can find the relevant contact details on the ALERC website: <http://www.alerc.org.uk/find-an-lerc-map.html>.