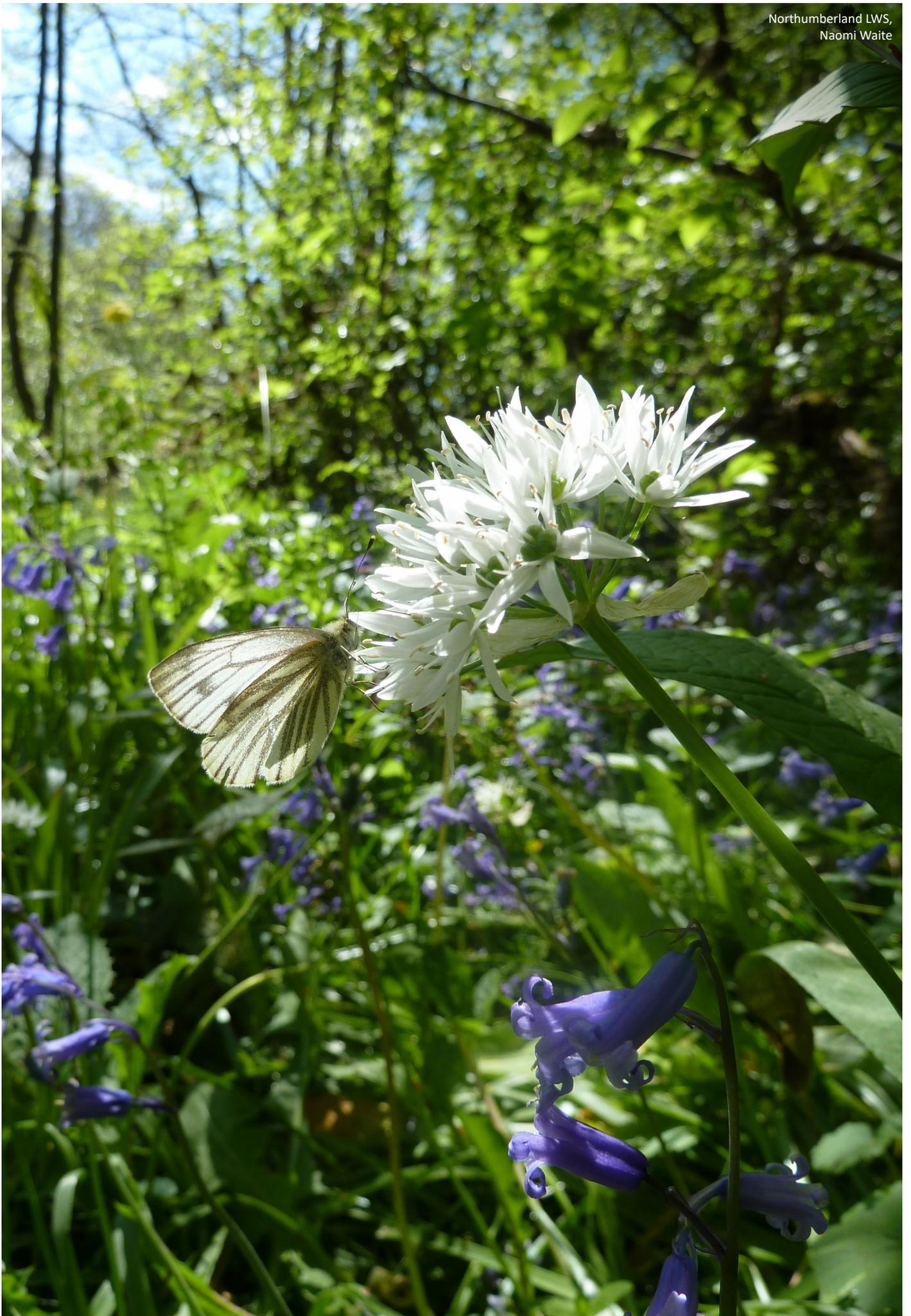


# The status of England's Local Wildlife Sites 2018



## Report of results





# Status of Local Wildlife Site Systems 2017

The Wildlife Trusts believe that people are part of nature; everything we value ultimately comes from it and everything we do has an impact on it. Our mission is to bring about living landscapes, living seas and a society where nature matters.

The Wildlife Trusts is a grassroots movement of people from a wide range of backgrounds and all walks of life, who believe that we need nature and nature needs us. We have more than 800,000 members, 40,000 volunteers, 2,000 staff and 600 trustees. For more than a century we have been saving wildlife and wild places, increasing people's awareness and understanding of the natural world, and deepening people's relationship with it.

We work on land and sea, from mountain tops to the seabed, from hidden valleys and coves to city streets. Wherever you are, Wildlife Trust people, places and projects are never far away, improving life for wildlife and people together, within communities of which we are a part. We look after more than 2,300 nature reserves, covering 98,500 hectares, and operate more than 100 visitor and education centres in every part of the UK, on Alderney and the Isle of Man.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to extend our thanks to everyone who took the time to complete a questionnaire. Thank you also to Gertruda Stangvilaite, for helping to coordinate the survey during her time volunteering with The Wildlife Trusts.

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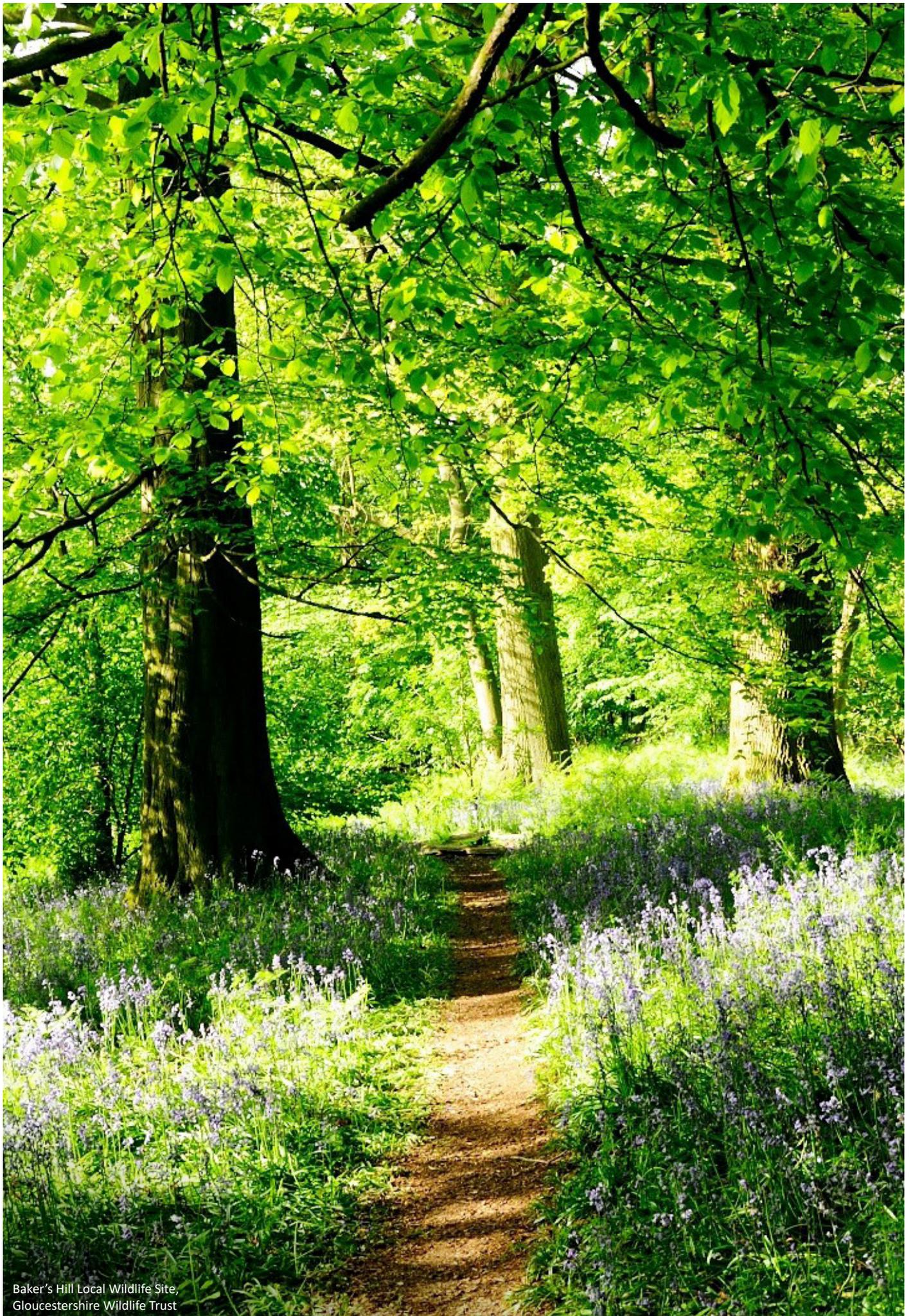


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Baker's Hill Local Wildlife Site,  
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

# 1. Executive Summary

This survey of Local Wildlife Site systems across England was conducted by The Wildlife Trusts in 2017/18. There are currently 55 administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems and completed questionnaires were received from 46 of these, although not all those that responded answered every question, so results should be treated as a minimum.

## 1.1 Local Wildlife Site coverage

There are more than 43, 992 Local Wildlife Sites, covering at least five per cent of England's land area.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Local Wildlife Site systems

Defra<sup>2</sup> recommends that Local Wildlife Site systems should be based on a partnership approach. At least 80% of the Local Wildlife Site partnerships include one or more local authorities (county, unitary, metropolitan borough or district/borough). The Wildlife Trust and Local Records Centres are partners in more than 70% of partnerships (at least 73% and 71% respectively) but Natural England are cited as partners in only 56% of those partnerships that responded to this question.

## 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 12 partnerships provide general landowner advice and support for all their sites; three partnerships provide site specific advice to landowners for every site; and two partnerships provide advice/assistance with agri-environment scheme applications for all sites. Many more partnerships provide advice/support for some of the sites in their area and some will do so on request only. Based on the responses received, the owners of at least 907 Local Wildlife Sites (just 2.1% of England's total) received advice in the last year. A much greater number of Local Wildlife Sites (5,521 – 13% of England's total) were in areas where it was confirmed no advice was given to landowners in the last year. But the lack of information received in response to this question means we still do not have a clear picture of the amount of landowner advice and support provided for the majority of Local Wildlife Sites in England.

## 1.4 Monitoring

Defra recommends that Local Wildlife Site partnerships should establish a process for monitoring the condition of selected sites. During 2017, it was reported that only 1,594 Local Wildlife Sites were monitored (3.6% of England's total). This is lower than the number of sites monitored in the year preceding the previous two surveys of LWS systems in 2014 and 2011 and is likely to be a result of the decrease in funding. But the lack of information received in response to this question from a large number of partnerships means we still do not have a clear picture about the true scale of Local Wildlife Site monitoring in England.

## 1.5 Protection of Local Wildlife Sites

While they have no direct legal protection, Local Wildlife Sites should receive protection through the planning system. National planning policy<sup>3</sup> requires local authorities to identify, map and safeguard LWS through local policy and decision making. A total of 36 partnerships stated that all the local plans in their Local Wildlife Site area included policies to protect Local Wildlife Sites. A further four partnerships said that some local plans in their area provide policy protection for Local Wildlife Sites. When quizzed whether these policies were implemented effectively or not, four partnerships replied 'yes', and 20 replied 'usually'. No 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is calculated using the total area of LWS provided by respondents to the survey and Natural England's figure of 13,039,500 hectares for England's total land area.

<sup>2</sup> Defra (2006) Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management

<sup>3</sup> At the time of the survey this was National Planning Policy Framework (2012), now updated to: MHCLG (2018) National Planning Policy Framework

## **1.6 Threats to Local Wildlife Sites**

The biggest perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites are lack of management (41 partnerships) and inappropriate management (32 partnerships). Development is also seen as a major threat to Local Wildlife Sites with more than half (30) of the Local Wildlife Site partnership areas citing indirect impacts and 29 direct impacts of development as a key concern. All of these issues are aggravated by a lack of information about Local Wildlife Sites and the underpinning lack of resources needed to ensure their identification, protection and management.

## **1.7 Loss and damage of Local Wildlife Sites**

The following results are from only 20 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 2013 and 2017, 843 Sites were lost/partially lost and/or damaged and 353 of these occurred during 2017.

## **1.8 Staff**

Based on the 33 partnerships that responded to this question, there were just 11.5 full-time paid staff working on Local Wildlife Sites between January – December 2017. A further 92 paid staff have worked on Local Wildlife Sites in a part-time capacity since January 2017. During the same period more than 147 volunteers have worked in either a part-time or full-time capacity across Local Wildlife Site partnerships.

## **1.9 Resources**

A large majority (40) of partnerships stated that they did not have sufficient resources to ensure the identification, management and protection of Local Wildlife Sites in their area, only one said they did. Further resources are required primarily for survey and monitoring, secondly for landowner advice and support and thirdly for practical land management and assistance. At least 146 local authorities are providing no financial support towards Local Wildlife Site systems in their area – an increase by at least 10% since the last LWS survey in 2014. Eight partnerships received direct financial support from Natural England; 11 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 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 represent the core areas where much of England's wildlife now resides, offering vital havens for a wealth of wildlife including many threatened and declining plants. 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. But no matter how rich in wildlife they are on their own, these sites are not enough to sustain wildlife populations indefinitely.

This year, the Government launched a 25 Year plan for the environment<sup>4</sup>, which included a commitment to develop a Nature Recovery Network to connect our best wildlife sites and to overcome their isolation and fragmentation. We know that in order to make enough space for nature and to allow it to recover from huge losses over the past fifty years, we need to create more places for wildlife to live, over bigger areas, to manage these better and to join them up<sup>5</sup>. A Nature Recovery Network should put this into practice in a nationwide plan for nature. A nationwide set of local nature recovery maps which include Local Wildlife Sites along-side SSSIs and National Nature Reserves would be the key to making this happen.

### 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.

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<sup>6</sup> to help increase consistency and understanding.

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.

<sup>4</sup> HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment

<sup>5</sup> Lawton, J (2010). Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. Submitted to Secretary of State (Defra)

<sup>6</sup> Defra (2006) Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management' in 2006. Although archived, Defra has advised that this has not been withdrawn and remains the most current national guidance on LWS.

## 2.3 Purpose of the survey

This survey explores the status of Local Site systems across England. The results are presented in section four and 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 National standards. The information gathered is used primarily to support the case for better recognition, support and protection for Local Wildlife Sites in policy and land management decisions. The findings of the 2017 survey have already provided vital underpinning evidence to successfully campaign for Local Wildlife Site policy to be included within the revised National Planning Policy Framework<sup>7</sup>.

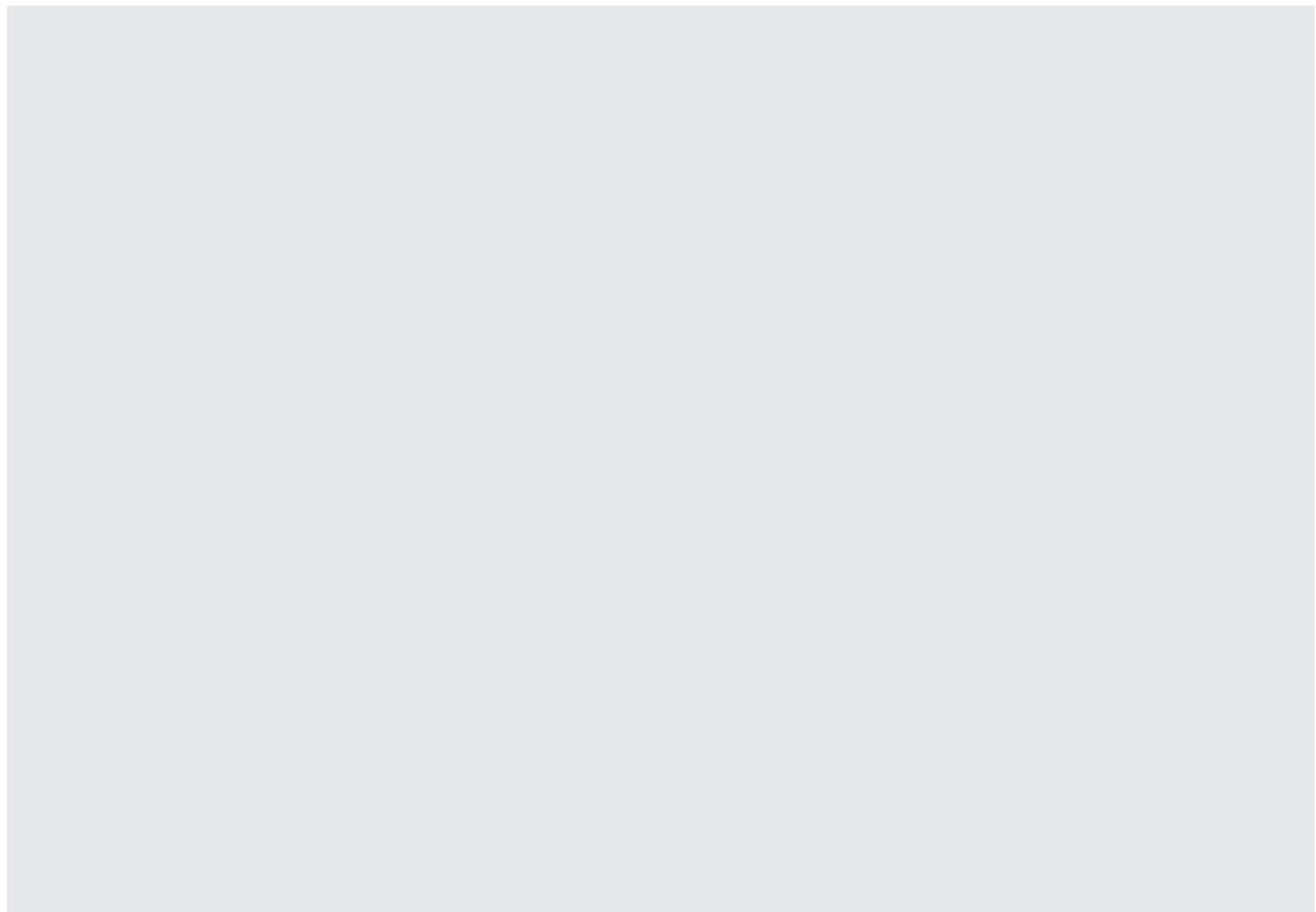
## 3. Survey Method

The number of administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems was identified and an appropriate contact within each, 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. 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 2017 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 November 2017 with a return deadline of mid-December. Contacts who did not respond by the deadline received a follow-up email and a subsequent telephone call in order to maximise the response rate. Questionnaires not returned by the March 2018 were recorded as non-responders.



<sup>7</sup> MHCLG (2018) National Planning Policy Framework.

# 4. Survey Results

## 4.1 Coverage and scope

### 4.1.1 Administration boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems

A total of 55 administrative boundaries for Local Wildlife Site systems were identified in England, with all London Boroughs treated as a single administrative boundary. Collectively the 55 partnerships cover all local authority areas in England, with a few exceptions<sup>8</sup>. Some partnerships are more active than others, with several stating they are currently dormant<sup>9</sup> because of lack of funding. Completed questionnaires were received from 46 of the 55 partnerships<sup>10</sup>, making answers that were completed by all respondents 84% reliable. However, it should be noted that not all those that completed the questionnaire answered every question.

### 4.1.2 Number and area of Local Wildlife Sites

There are more than 43,992 Local Wildlife Sites in England, covering more than 611,000 hectares which equates to about 340,000 football pitches, almost four times the area of London.

At least five percent<sup>11</sup> 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, 9% of the partnership area in both Cornwall and Hampshire is selected as Local Wildlife Site and in Rotherham almost 17% of its partnership land area is selected as Local Wildlife Site.

### 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 three surveys (2014, 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, North Yorkshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, East Riding of Yorkshire, Shropshire and Devon. Systems where the majority of sites are in public ownership are Hull (88%) and Greater London (84%).

<sup>8</sup> Exceptions include the areas covered by East Lindsey District Council; North York Moors National Park Authority; Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority; Northumberland National Park Authority; and parts of the Peak District and South Downs National Park Authorities.

<sup>9</sup> Known dormant partnerships are Cumbria, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. However, work has begun to re-establish the West Sussex and Brighton and Hove partnership.

<sup>10</sup> Questionnaires were not returned by partnerships covering Brighton, Bristol, Buckinghamshire, Durham, Herefordshire, North Somerset, Surrey and York. While a questionnaire was received from Cumbria, it was not included in the analysis because only the headline questions were answered.

<sup>11</sup> This figure is calculated using the total area of LWS provided by respondents to the survey and Natural England's figure of 13,039,500 hectares for England's total land area.

## 4.2 Partners

Guidance on Local Sites 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. Local authorities (one or more of county, unitary, metropolitan, district/borough) are partners in at least 80% of all Local Wildlife Site partnerships; Wildlife Trusts in at least 73%; Local Records Centres in at least 71%; and Natural England in at least 56%. Formal partnerships can comprise more than 13 members, although for most, the number of partners is between 5 and 8. Table 1 provides a more detailed list of the types of partners and their level of engagement with Local Wildlife Site systems in England.

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
A local authority (one or more of county, unitary, metropolitan, district/borough)	44	80%
Wildlife Trust	40	73%
Local Environmental Records Centre	39	71%
Natural England	30	56%
Unitary Authority	25	46%
County Council	24	44%
Environment Agency	24	44%
District/ Borough Councils	23	42%
Local specialists	20	36%
Local Naturalist group	16	29%
RIGS Group (or equivalent)	15	27%
Forestry Commission	14	26%
Local Nature Partnership	8	15%
Metropolitan Borough(s)	7	13%
Landowners/managers/tenant	6	11%
RSPB	5	9%
Academic/Research institutions	4	7%
FWAG	3	6%
National Parks Authority	3	6%
Country Land and Business Association	2	4%
National Farmers Union	2	4%
AONB	2	4%
IDBs	2	4%
Others	4	7%

*Only 45 partnerships answered this question, but results are presented as a percentage of all partnerships and should be treated as a minimum.*

In terms of lead partners, at least 23 partnerships are led by a single organisation and at least 18 by a joint collaboration (based on 41 partnerships that answered this question). The range of organisations taking sole leadership is similar to 2014, but local authorities (county, unitary or metropolitan borough council) are the most frequent sole leader in a partnership, followed by The Wildlife Trust and Local Environmental Records Centre. Organisations most commonly involved in joint leadership were local authorities (county, unitary, metropolitan borough council or district/borough), Wildlife Trusts and Local Environmental Records Centres.

## 4.3 System procedures

### 4.3.1 Endorsement of Local Wildlife Sites

Once a Local Wildlife Site has been selected, at least 12 partnerships require further endorsement before the site can be adopted within the local plan, leaving at least 30 partnerships which don't require further endorsement once a site is selected against the criteria (based on 42 answers).

The organisations/individuals involved in the endorsement process vary across the partnerships. For two partnerships (Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire) endorsement is required from the land/site owner before sites are ratified. The local authority is involved in endorsing or signing off selected sites for at least 10 partnerships (one of which (East Riding of Yorkshire) specified this would be the job of the council planning committee). Local Nature Partnerships play a role in endorsing LWS for at least two partnerships.

### 4.3.2 Responsibility for data

#### Digitised Local Wildlife Sites boundary data

Of the partnerships that provided information, Local Environmental Record Centres are the most commonly cited partner responsible for holding digitised Local Wildlife Site boundary data – adopting this role for at least 33 (60%) partnerships. One or more local authorities (county, unitary, metropolitan and/or district/borough) hold the data for at least 10 (18%) partnerships and Wildlife Trusts for at least 5 (9%) partnerships. For the majority of partnerships (31), this responsibility is undertaken by just one organisation. However, for 14 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 Environmental Records Centres and local authorities are the most common organisations to have access to LWS data. Of the 44 partnerships that responded to this question, one or more local authorities (county, unitary, metropolitan and/or district/borough) have access to this data for 38 partnerships. A total of 30 partnerships make the data available to Wildlife Trusts. Statutory agencies receive the data to varying extents with 21 partnerships making it accessible to Natural England, 21 making it accessible to the Environment Agency and at least nine make it accessible to the Forestry Commission. At least 16 partnerships make the data available to local naturalist groups. Table 2 shows some of the main organisations that have access to LWS data through 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 (CC, UA, metropolitan, district/borough)	38	69%
Local Records Centre	37	67%
Wildlife Trust	30	55%
Unitary Authority	27	49%
County Council	24	44%
District/Borough Council(s)	23	42%
Natural England	21	38%
Environment Agency	21	38%
Local naturalists/specialists	16	30%
Forestry Commission	9	16%
RIGS groups	8	15%
Metropolitan Borough(s)	6	11%
Water companies (through SLA)	6	11%
Landowners/managers	4	7%
National Park Authority	2	4%
RSPB	2	4%
AONBs	2	4%
LNPs	2	4%
Academic Research organisations	2	4%
FWAG	2	4%
CLA	1	2%
BSBI	1	2%

Only 44 partnerships answered this question, but results are presented as a percentage of all partnerships and should be treated as a minimum.

## 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 907 Local Wildlife Sites (2.1% of England's total) have received advice in the last year. Nine 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 5,521 (13% of England's total). But the lack of information received in response to this question means we still do not have a clear picture about the amount of landowner advice and support provided for the majority of Local Wildlife Sites in England.

### 4.4.2 Advice given in the last five years

The owners of at least 3,874 Local Wildlife Sites (8.8% of England's total) 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 3,426 (8.3% of England's total).

*General advice:* At least 32 (58%) of partnerships provide general landowner advice and support compared with at least ten (18%) that do not. Of those known to provide general advice, 12 (at least 22% of all partnerships) provide this for all sites, at least 9 (16% of all partnerships) for some, and at least 11 (20% of all partnerships) on request.

*Site specific advice:* At least 28 (51%) partnerships provide site specific land management advice compared with at least 13 (24%) that do not. Of those known to provide site specific advice, three (at least 6% of all partnerships) provide this for all sites; 10 (at least 18% of all partnerships) provide it for some sites and 15 (at least 27% of all partnerships) provide it on request.

*Management plans:* At least 24 (44%) partnerships provide specific management plans to landowners/tenants compared with at least 18 (at least 33% of all partnerships) that do not. Of those that provide management plans, one provides this for all sites; 8 (at least 15% of all partnerships) provide it for some sites; and 15 (at least 27% of all partnerships) provide it on request.

*Advice and assistance with agri-environment scheme applications:* At least 25 (46%) of partnerships provide advice/assistance with agri-environment scheme applications compared with at least 18 (33%) that don't. Of those that provide assistance, two (at least 4% of partnerships) provide this for all sites; 6 (at least 11% of all partnerships) provide it for some sites; 17 (at least 31% of partnerships) provide it on request.

### 4.4.3 The constraints limiting landowner advice

No funding/limited funding was identified as the most common constraint restricting the ability of partnerships to liaise with landowners by at least 41 partnerships (75%). This is closely followed by both lack of time and the availability of staff/volunteers (at least 66% of partnerships). To a lesser degree but still significant; not knowing the landowner (at least 44% of partnerships), access denied by the landowner (at least 36% of partnerships), irregular contact with landowners (at least 35% of partnerships) and lack of incentives (at least 19% of partnerships) were also considered to be constraints by some partnerships.

### 4.4.4 Regional trends on liaising with landowners

Based on the responses received, all regions require more *resources for landowner advice and support*. With at least two partnerships in every region and 100% of partnerships in four regions (East Midlands, North East, North West and West Midlands) citing *lack of capacity* (time and availability of staff and/or volunteers) as a major constraint. At least one partnership in every region and 100% of partnerships in the Eastern region stated that *not knowing the landowner* was a key constraint. Being *denied access* by the landowner is an issue for at least one partnership in every region except for the North East, where this wasn't seen as a constraint.

#### 4.4.5 Targeting advice

Table 3 shows how advice is targeted. At least 28 (52%) partnerships offer advice on request and 11 (20%) on a rolling programme. Strategic approaches to targeting advice are also adopted by some partnerships, with at least 12 (22%) 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 (at least 7% of partnerships) or that are (at least 6% 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	28	51%
Areas covered by specific project funding or campaigns	19	35%
During integrity monitoring or following survey	19	35%
Sites with planning issues or under threat	17	31%
Proximity/relationship to landscape scale conservation approaches (eg NIAs, Living Landscapes, Futurescapes)	12	22%
On a rolling programme	11	20%
It isn't	10	18%
Sites that are not in Agri-environment Schemes or Woodland Grant Schemes	4	7%
Sites in Agri-environment Schemes or Woodland Grant Schemes	3	6%
Proximity to Wildlife Trust Reserves or other Nature Reserves	2	4%
Other	2	4%

Only 44 partnerships answered this question, but results are presented as a percentage of all partnerships and should be treated as a minimum.

## 4.5 Monitoring

### 4.5.1 Local Wildlife Sites monitored in the last year

Partnerships reported that 1,594 Local Wildlife Sites (3.6% of England's total) were monitored to assess their status in the last year. Four partnerships confirmed that no monitoring was undertaken in the last year. The collective number of sites in the areas where partnerships listed no monitoring of any sites has been undertaken in the last year is 2,481 (6% of England's total). A further 8 partnerships provided no answer to this question, accounting for 6,579 Wildlife sites (15% of England's total).

### 4.5.2 Local Wildlife Sites monitored in the last five years

Partnerships reported that 6,815 Local Wildlife Sites (15.5% of England's total) were monitored to assess their status in the last five years. Three partnerships confirmed that no monitoring was undertaken in the last five years. The collective number of sites in the partnership areas where no monitoring has been undertaken in the last five years is 2,223 (5% of England's total), a further 11 partnerships provided no answer to this question accounting for 10,268 (23% of England's total).

The lack of information received in response to this question from a large number of partnerships, means we still do not have a clear picture about the true scale of Local Wildlife Site monitoring in England.

## 4.6 Links to planning and other initiatives

### 4.6.1 Local Plan policies

A total of 36 partnerships stated that all the local plans in their Local Wildlife Site areas included policies to protect Local Wildlife Sites and four 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, four partnerships replied 'yes all' and 20 replied 'usually'. No partnerships reported that plan policies in their area were not implemented effectively and 16 partnerships stated that some of the plan policies were and some were not.

### 4.6.3 Green Infrastructure Strategy

A total of 15 partnerships stated that local authorities (in their partnership area) have a Green Infrastructure<sup>12</sup> Strategy and 12 partnerships stated that some local authorities in their area did have a strategy and some did not. A total of five partnerships reported that there was no Green Infrastructure Strategy for their area at all.

### 4.6.4 Local Ecological Network

A total of 17 partnerships stated that the local authorities or Local Nature Partnership in their partnership area had identified and mapped local ecological networks<sup>13</sup> as part of the local plans in their area, 14 stated that some local authorities had and some hadn't. A further two reported that local ecological network maps had been produced for the area, but these hadn't yet been incorporated into the local plans, which were at varying stages of development. Seven 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, 25 partnerships reported they did, seven stated that some local authorities in their partnership area did include them and some did not and one partnership stated that LWS were not included.

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Paragraph 174a, National Planning Policy Framework

#### **4.6.6 Recognition by statutory agencies in planning and licensing applications**

There was a marked difference between statutory agencies and whether or not they take account of Local Wildlife Sites when responding to Planning applications and/or licensing applications. More than half (23) of the 41 partnerships that responded stated that the Environment Agency (EA) always took account of Local Wildlife Sites when responding to planning/licensing applications compared with five partnerships that stated EA never did. By contrast, less than a quarter of partnerships (10 and 7 partnerships respectively) reported that Natural England (NE) and Forestry Commission (FC) always take account of LWS. A far greater number reported that LWS were never taken into account by NE (18 partnerships) and FC (17 partnerships) when responding to planning/licensing applications.

#### **4.6.7 Local Wildlife Sites wholly or partly in management schemes**

Twenty one partnerships 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 Woodland Grant Scheme with 1,189 sites included across 11 partnerships. This is followed by Higher Level Stewardships with 952 sites included over 9 partnerships, and Entry Level Stewardship with 576 sites included over 8 partnerships. Given the level of response, these figures should be considered as an absolute minimum.

#### **4.6.8 Main threats to the loss and/or damage of Local Wildlife Sites**

The two biggest perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites are lack of management (at least 41 partnerships) and inappropriate management (at least 32 partnerships). Development is also seen as a major threat to sites with at least 30 partnerships citing indirect impacts of development and 29 direct impacts as a threat to Local Wildlife Sites. All of these issues are aggravated by a lack of information about Local Wildlife Sites and the underpinning lack of resources needed to ensure their identification, protection and management.

All regions regard lack of management and inappropriate management as a threat and 100% of the partnerships in six out of eight regions concurred that lack of management is perceived to be a threat. The direct impacts of development are considered a threat in all regions. But this is of particular concern in the North East (100% of partnerships) and for all but one partnership in both the West Midlands and the North West. Indirect impacts of development were also a concern across every region, particularly in the North West and Eastern regions where this is a concern for 100% of partnerships.

#### 4.6.9 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 20 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 353 Local Wildlife Sites were lost/partially lost and or damaged during 2017, of which at least 16 were lost altogether. In the last five years between 2003 and 2017, 843 Local Wildlife Sites were lost/partially lost and/or damaged, of which at least 87 were lost altogether.

Table 4: Perceived threats to Local Wildlife Sites

Threat	Number of partnerships	Percentage of partnerships
Lack of management	41	76%
Inappropriate management	32	58%
Indirect impacts of development eg recreational pressure, cat predation and nitrogen deposition.	30	55%
Direct impacts of development	29	53%
Intensification of land use practice	24	44%
Access/recreation	18	33%
Invasive species	18	33%
Other agricultural practice	15	27%
Pollution	12	22%
Ploughing	11	20%
Service operations (e.g. highways, gas works etc.)	8	15%
Vandalism	7	13%

Not all partnerships answered this question, percentages are based on all 55 partnerships and should be treated as a minimum



## Loss and damage by area

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

### One year in 2017:

*Devon:* Out of the 142 sites monitored (seven percent of Devon's total), up to 40 (28 percent of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and four had been lost altogether.

*Dorset:* Out of the 44 sites monitored (three percent of Dorset's total), 11 (25% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality.

*Hampshire:* Out of the 120 sites monitored (three percent of Hampshire's total), 18 (15% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and one has been lost altogether.

*Northamptonshire:* Out of the 25 sites monitored (four percent of Northamptonshire's total), 3 (12% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and one had been lost altogether.

*Nottinghamshire:* Out of the 160 sites monitored (11% of Northamptonshire's total), 19 (12% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and three had been lost altogether.

### The last five years between 2013 and 2017:

*Berkshire:* Out of the 95 sites monitored (12% of Berkshire's total), 10 (11% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

*Derbyshire:* Over the last five years there have been 212 Local Wildlife Sites listed as declining in quality.

*Devon:* Out of the 521 sites monitored (25% of Devon's total), more than 200 were found to be damaged or declining in quality and 18 (3% of those monitored) had been lost altogether.

*Dorset:* Out of the 392 sites monitored (31% of Dorset's total), 70 (18% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and seven of these had been partially lost. A further five had been lost altogether.

*Kent:* Out of the 106 sites monitored (23% of Kent's total), 34 (32% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality.

*Northamptonshire:* Out of the 132 sites monitored (20% of Northampton's total), 13 (10% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and two had been lost altogether.

*Northumberland:* Out of the 260 sites monitored (93% of Northumberland's total), 5 (2% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and five had been lost altogether.

*Oxfordshire:* Out of the 141 sites monitored (38% of Oxfordshire's total), 32 (23% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and eight had been lost altogether.

*Sheffield:* Out of the 130 sites monitored (51% of Sheffield's total), 25 (19% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and three had been lost altogether.

*Shropshire:* Out of the 286 sites monitored (42% of Shropshire's total), 124 (43% of those monitored) were found to be damaged or declining in quality and 11 had been lost altogether.

*Wiltshire:* Out of the 340 sites (22% of Wiltshire's total) monitored, four were found to be lost.

## 4.7 Resources

### 4.7.1 Staffing levels

A total of 11.5 full-time paid staff, over 10 partnerships, worked on Local Wildlife Sites in England in 2017 (based on the 33 partnerships that responded). Although full-time, many of these had other duties beyond Local Wildlife Site work. In addition, a minimum of 92 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 two partnerships having no dedicated paid workers taking responsibility for Local Wildlife Sites and others having as many as eight part-time paid workers.

### 4.7.2 Volunteer levels

At least 24 Local Wildlife Site partnerships make use of volunteers, with at least 147 volunteers working on Local Wildlife Site systems in either a part-time or full-time capacity between in 2017.

### 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 partnership may receive several amounts of funding from different authorities.

Out of the 36 respondents, 22 Local Wildlife Site partnerships reported that their system received direct financial contributions from one or more local authorities in their partnership area compared with fourteen that did not.

When the contributions made by individual local authorities are considered, it can be seen from Table 5 that, at least 60 local authorities contributed up to £5,000 during 2017, with at least 33 contributing more than £5,000. The highest amount contributed by one local authority was £30,000. At least 146 local authorities make no financial contribution to the running of the Local Wildlife Site system in their area. The number of local authorities not making a direct financial contribution to the LWS partnership has increased by at least 10% since the last LWS survey in 2014.

Table 5 To show the financial contributions to Local Wildlife Site systems by local authorities in 2017

Financial contribution	Number of local authorities*
None	146
£1 - £1000	6
£1,001 - £5000	54
£5,001 - £10,000	25
£10,001 - £20,000	4
£20,001 and more	4

\*All figures should be treated as a minimum as not all respondents provided a figure for the number of local authorities making a contribution/or not.

Other resources received by Local Wildlife Site partnerships from local authorities in 2017 are listed below. 23 Partnerships provided details to this open question and some listed more than one resource:

- Time (11 partnerships)
- Office space (9 partnerships)
- Equipment (six partnerships)
- Support eg. IT, Officers (four partnerships)
- Support for Local Environmental Records Centres, software licenses, mapping etc (seven partnerships)

Other individual systems also reported that they received resources in the form of survey work; and adhoc financial contributions for meetings and mileage or indirect payments which support LWS through wider Service Level Agreements.

#### **4.7.4 Statutory Agency contributions**

*Natural England:* Of the 41 partnerships that responded, just one stated it received financial support (of between £10,001-£20,000) from Natural England during 2017. Six partnerships listed 'other' contributions in the form of officer time attending LWS panel meetings; provision of advice; and targeted survey/site visit in relation to EIA and SSSI designation.

*Environment Agency:* Of the 40 partnerships that responded, eleven stated they received financial support from the Environment Agency 2017: eight partnerships received between £1,001-£5,000; and three partnerships received between £5,001-£10,000. One partnership listed 'other' contributions in the form of officer time attending LWS panel meetings.

*Forestry Commission:* Of the 40 partnerships that responded, one received a direct financial contribution from the Forestry Commission of between £1 and £1,000. One partnership listed 'other' contributions in the form of officer time attending LWS panel meetings. But 37 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, 40 of the 41 partnerships that provided a response, stated that they did not have sufficient resources and only one stated they did. However, this partnership still identified areas where further resources were needed.

Of the 41 partnerships that provided a response, the majority stated that additional resources were needed for survey and monitoring (36 partnerships), landowner advice and support (35 partnerships); and practical land management assistance (34 partnerships). Just under half the partnerships identified further resources were also needed for site protection (19 partnerships); site selection (18 partnerships); and data/information management (18 partnerships).

## 5. Further Information

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

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