

Introduction to Local Wildlife and Geological Sites in Stockton-on-Tees October 2011

What are Local Sites?

Local Sites are considered to be of local importance for biodiversity and/or geodiversity. They are non-statutory sites and therefore have a much lower level of protection than Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

In 2006 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) issued new guidance on the identification, selection and management of Local Sites. Further information is available on both the Defra and Natural England web sites:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designatedareas/localsites/default.aspx>

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/protected/nationally/local-sites/>

How are Local Sites selected?

In accordance with that guidance, the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership has taken on the role of the Local Sites Partnership for the Tees Valley and is responsible for the selection of Local Sites, and the de-selection of sites which no longer qualify.

The Partnership has developed a robust set of criteria for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites, based on the presence of specific flora and fauna, or assemblages of species: **Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership (2010): *Guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in the Tees Valley.***

Local Geological Sites on the other hand are selected by the Tees Valley RIGS (Regionally Important Geologic and Geomorphologic Sites) Group acting as a specialist sub-group of the Local Sites Partnership. Information on the RIG site data base is available at:

<http://www.tvrigs.org.uk/rig-site-database>

Local Sites in Stockton Borough

The Local Sites Partnership has currently identified 57 Local Sites in Stockton Borough which meet the site selection criteria (see ***List of Local Sites in Stockton-on-Tees***). Some are owned by Stockton on Tees Borough Council or Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, but the majority are in private ownership.

It should also be noted that designation as a Local Wildlife Site does not confer any right of access to any person nor does it place any obligation on the landowner to manage their land in a certain way. However, the Biodiversity Partnership is able to provide information and assistance to support positive management of these sites (see below).

Local Sites and the Local Development Framework

Information on Local Sites will form part of the evidence base for the Borough's Local Development Framework, including the Environment Development Plan Document and

Regeneration Development Plan Document. Collectively these documents and the associated information will be used in the determination of planning applications.

This is in accordance with the current ***Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation)*** which advises that Local Sites should be identified in Local Development Frameworks and criteria based policies formulated against which proposals for any development on or affecting such sites will be judged.

Stockton Borough's ***Environment DPD Issues and Options Consultation (2010)*** identified as an option the 'provision of criteria-based policies for development on or affecting Local Sites'.

Finally it is worth noting that many of the current Local Sites were previously designated as 'Sites of Nature Conservation Importance' in the ***Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan, 1997***.

Conservation management of Local Sites

Under the new Single Data List published by the Department for Communities and Local Government, local authorities are required to submit annual data to central government on the 'proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management is being achieved'. In order to support the positive management of these sites the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership may be able to provide information and practical assistance to assist land owners and land managers.