



LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES IN KENT

What are Local Wildlife Sites?

Local Wildlife Sites are areas which are important for the conservation of wildlife in the administrative areas of Kent and Medway. They may support threatened habitats, such as chalk grassland or ancient woodland, or may be important for the wild plants or animals which are present.

In Kent, there are over 450 Local Wildlife Sites, covering a total area of over 27000 ha (67500 ac) (roughly 7% of the county). They range from a 0.13 ha (0.3 ac) churchyard important for its orchids, to grazing marsh sites of over 1000 ha (2500 ac).

Local Wildlife Sites are not the same as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs are legally protected, and are nationally important for wildlife. Local Wildlife Sites are important at the county level, and have no statutory protection.

Kent is not unique in having Local Wildlife Sites. Most counties and unitary authorities have a similar system.

Local Wildlife Sites in Kent used to be known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).

Why are Local Wildlife sites important?

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) protect the very best wildlife areas in the UK, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protect areas which are important on a European scale. However, these designations do not protect wildlife at a local level, and cannot ensure that the countryside as a whole is rich in wildlife. So Local Wildlife Sites fill an important gap not covered by other designations. The importance of these sites is recognised in government policy: the 2005 Planning Policy Statement 9 says, *'Regional and local sites of biodiversity and geological interest ... have a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets, contributing to the quality of life and the well being of the community and in supporting research and education'*.

How are Local Wildlife Sites chosen?

Local Wildlife Sites in Kent are selected by reference to a clear set of criteria, based on the importance of the sites for particular wildlife habitats or wild species. The selection process also draws on the expertise of some of the county's most experienced and knowledgeable naturalists.

Information on sites is gathered from a range of sources, including targeted site surveys, the county-wide Kent Habitat Survey, and specialist natural history organisations. Land Registry searches are used to identify owners so permission can be sought for surveys.

Since 2005, land-owners and local authorities are also consulted before any land is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. This is to make sure that sites are only designated where there is a good scientific basis for doing so, and to check the accuracy of the survey information, the proposed site boundaries, and so on.

Kent Wildlife Trust manages the Local Wildlife Sites system in Kent, but the Kent Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group makes the final decision on the criteria by which sites should be chosen, and on the selection of individual sites. This steering group includes representatives from wildlife bodies, local authorities, and organisations representing land-owners and farmers.

Copies of the criteria by which Local Wildlife Sites are selected in Kent are available from Kent Wildlife Trust.

What do Local Wildlife Sites mean for land-owners?

Local Wildlife Sites have no protection in law. The owner of land which has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site is not obliged to carry out work to protect or maintain the land's wildlife interest.

However, it is hoped that owners and managers of Local Wildlife Sites will want to consider wildlife when making their management decisions.

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Kent Wildlife Trust is able to provide advice about suitable management to managers and owners of Local Wildlife Sites, and may be able to help find sources of grant aid to support management work. Wherever possible, the Trust will try to provide this help and advice for free, or will seek to cover costs through grant aid.

Other organisations, such as the various Countryside Management Partnerships in Kent, may also be able to provide advice on suitable management and grant aid.

The designation of land as a Local Wildlife Site does not mean that anyone has rights of access to the site which they would not otherwise have.

The Local Planning Authorities in Kent (the County Council, Medway Unitary Authority, and the various district, borough and city councils) recognise the importance of Local Wildlife Sites, and provide protection for them in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and the various Local Plans or Local Development Frameworks.

Generally, planning policies protect against development which would damage the wildlife interest of any Local Wildlife Site, except where the need for development is so great that it is judged to override that interest.

What information is available about Local Wildlife Sites?

For each Local Wildlife Site, Kent Wildlife Trust keeps information on the site's special wildlife interest, together with a map giving the boundaries of the site. This information is made available to partners in the Kent Biodiversity Steering Group, local Authorities, and the owner of the site concerned. We will normally make details available to any other bona fide organisation or individual, though in these cases, we normally charge an administration cost.

Details of the locations of Local Wildlife Sites in Kent may be found in the maps which accompany Local Plans: you will normally find a copy of the Local Plan for your area in the relevant main library. The Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre also keeps details of the locations and boundaries of Local Wildlife Sites and can make these available as part of a requested data search.

Kent Wildlife Trust keeps contact details for the owners and managers of Local Wildlife Sites, but these are kept confidential and are not passed to any other organisation without the express permission of the person concerned.

Further information

To obtain a copy of the Criteria for the Selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Kent, copies of information on individual sites, or more information on Local Wildlife Sites, contact

Alison Riggs, Kent Wildlife Trust, Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3BD. Tel: 01622 662012. Fax: 01622 671390. E-mail alison.riggs@kentwildlife.org.uk www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk.

For advice on the management of a Local Wildlife Site, contact

Neil Coombs, Kent Wildlife Trust, Tyland Barn, Sandling, Maidstone, Kent ME14 3BD. Tel: 01622 662012. Fax: 01622 671390. E-mail neil.coombs@kentwildlife.org.uk www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Other useful contacts

Kent Biodiversity Partnership c/o William Moreno, Environment and Waste, Kent County Council, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XX. Tel: 01622 221537. Fax: 01622 221636. E-mail william.moreno@kent.gov.uk www.kentbap.org.uk.

Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre, Brogdale Farm Office, Brogdale Farm, Brogdale Road, Faversham, Kent. ME13 8XZ. E-mail: info@kmbrc.org.uk www.kmbrc.org.uk.

Countryside Management Partnerships. <http://www.kent.gov.uk/environment/our-environment/natural-environment/countryside-partnerships.htm>

Kent Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trusts work together for wildlife in town and country

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