

Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country

Terms of Reference

1. Role and membership of the Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country

The Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country is responsible for providing expert advice to the area's local authorities and other organisations as appropriate on the selection, management, protection and review of the network of Local Sites throughout Birmingham and the Black Country. The partnership is an advisory body set up in accordance with national guidance but has no statutory responsibilities.

The partnership comprises representatives of all the organisations involved in the operation of the Local Sites system. The partnership organisations may have regulatory functions, be site owners and managers or have expertise in ecology or geology. The remit of the partnership is defined in the following sections of this document.

The core membership of the Local Sites Partnership is as follows:

- Local authorities: planning
- Local authorities: land management
- Statutory agencies including Natural England and other agencies as appropriate
- The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country
- EcoRecord (the biological records centre for Birmingham and the Black Country)
- Black Country Geodiversity Partnership
- Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Partnership

Individuals and representatives from specialist groups, land owners and other stakeholder organisations may also be co-opted to the partnership where it is expedient to do so. Roles and responsibilities for individual partners have been agreed by the Partnership and are set out in point 7.

The main objective of the Local Sites Partnership is to provide the technical expertise to advise relevant authorities on all aspects of the Local Sites system in Birmingham and the Black Country. In meeting this objective, the primary roles of the Local Sites Partnership are to:

- Agree the basis of site selection.
- Co-ordinate site selection procedures, including survey and identification of candidate sites, to ensure consistent, accurate recording of information for local sites.
- Actively promote and support site management.
- Establish a process for monitoring the condition of selected sites.
- Review the operation of the Local Sites system at suitable intervals.
- Promote the role and importance of Local Sites at a strategic level.
- Promote the enhancement of sites through buffering and increasing connectivity.

In addition, the partnership will seek to perform the following secondary roles where it has the capacity to do so:

- Promote educational use where appropriate.
- Co-ordinate funding provision and/or identify and promote the taking up of funding opportunities.

In carrying out these roles the Local Sites Partnership will undertake the following activities:

- The selection and publication of defensible Local Sites selection criteria.
- The publication of defensible Local Sites schedules.
- Ensuring that the criteria and principles of the Local Sites system follow national guidelines but take full account of local circumstances.
- Monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Local Sites selection criteria.
- The application of site selection criteria to ensure consistency.
- Acting as mentor to another organisation or individual submitting a site for designation as a SINC or SLINC or denotation of an existing local site.
- Providing verification and accountability for National Indicator 197 returns made by the five Local Authority partners.
- Developing and sharing best practice and expertise with regard to management and surveying of local sites.
- Liaising with landowners to encourage the proper protection and management of local sites.
- Setting an annual work programme of agreed priorities.
- Publishing an annual report of its activities.
- Working with other bodies / committees as deemed appropriate for the discharge of its functions (e.g. Local Biodiversity Partnership, local authorities environment partnerships).
- Other roles where requested by a member of the partnership and if appropriate / possible within the resources of the group (as outlined in Defra guidance). These could include co-ordinating funding provision and/or identifying and promoting the taking up of funding opportunities; promoting educational use etc.

2. Geographical area of responsibility

The Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country will cover the administrative areas of the following Local Authorities (in alphabetical order);

- Birmingham City Council
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Wolverhampton City Council

3. Frequency of meetings and role of the chair

The Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country will meet as frequently as required, typically at least twice annually. The dates of these meetings will be provisionally decided for one complete cycle at a time.

The chair of the partnership will rotate on an annual basis around the core partnership members. The chair organisation will be responsible for:

- Setting and distributing the agenda, consulting with other partnership members where necessary.
- Booking an appropriate meeting venue.
- Receiving apologies from members of the partnership unable to attend meetings.
- Ensuring meetings run to time and according to the agenda.
- Recording the proceedings of meetings.
- Distributing the minutes of meetings.

4. Powers / responsibilities

The Local Sites Partnership may establish sub-groups or working groups from within its membership to more effectively transact its core business. Sub-groups may be established to deal with issues specific to individual local authority areas. Any decisions taken by a sub-group or working group shall not become permanent unless endorsed by the full partnership.

The Local Sites Partnership may co-opt specialist members as deemed necessary in the performance of its functions.

Each partnership organisation shall be limited to two representatives per meeting unless otherwise agreed.

Specific roles and responsibilities of partner organisations are outlined in point 7.

5. The Local Sites designation process

The Local Sites designation process shall be as follows:

- Written application proposing change(s) to Local Sites schedules received by Local Sites Partnership.
- Evidence for need to change Local Sites schedules evaluated by Local Sites Partnership in accordance with national guidance and local standards.
- Decision reached by Local Sites Partnership.
- Originator of proposed changes informed in writing of decision.
- Relevant authorities advised in writing if any changes proposed to Local Sites schedules.
- Relevant authorities consider proposed changes through internal adoption processes and inform Local Sites Partnership and landowners of outcome.

All members of the partnership or any other party can submit sites for consideration by the Local Sites Partnership. The proposer should provide sufficient written evidence (in practice this means a site survey report and SINC evaluation form) to allow the partnership to assess the site against the agreed evaluation criteria. The written evidence must conform to standards agreed by the partnership.

6. Important reference documents for the Local Sites Partnership

- Birmingham and the Black Country Biodiversity Partnership (2010) *Biodiversity Action Plan for Birmingham and the Black Country*.
- Black Country Geodiversity Partnership (2006) *The Black Country Geodiversity Action Plan*.
- Defra (2006) *Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management*.
- Defra (December 2008) *Guidance on the Improved Local Biodiversity Indicator (NI197)*.
- English Nature (1997) *Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in the West Midlands*.
- Lanius (2009) *Local Sites systems in the six counties of the West Midlands. A study*.
- Local Development Frameworks for Birmingham and the Black Country local authority administrative areas.

7. Roles and responsibilities of individual members

Elements of members' contributions to the partnership will be subject to the availability of resources. In certain cases, SLAs or equivalent mechanisms need to be in place to ensure the involvement and delivery of core responsibilities of individual partners to the LSP.

Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Partnership

The role of the Biodiversity Partnership is to:

- Ensure national and locally important habitats and species are identified and actions to conserve and enhance them included within the Local Sites system.
- Provide guidance to ensure that the conservation of habitats and species of principal importance are fully represented within the Local Sites system.
- Keep the Local Sites Partnership up to date with current biodiversity legislation and national guidance on habitat and species conservation, including updating of habitat definitions.
- Assist with local biodiversity reporting requirements through implementation of BARS and other biodiversity reporting mechanisms.
- Raise awareness of Local Sites and the work of the Local Sites Partnership amongst the wider Biodiversity Partnership membership, which includes local conservation societies, friends of groups, private companies and volunteers.

EcoRecord (the Local Records Centre)

The role of the Local Record Centre is to:

- Hold, maintain and provide access to Local Site, species and habitat information.
- Support information collection, and maintenance/review of the Register of Sites.
- Assist with the development and adoption of standards.

Local authorities

The role of the five local authorities is to:

- Have due regard for the findings and advice of the Local Sites Partnership when submitting sites for designation / de-designation or when prioritising sites for surveying and / or management.
- Secure formal designation and de-notification of Local Sites in accordance with individual LA/corporate decision-making arrangements, following selection of sites by the Local Sites Partnership.
- Deal with all planning matters related to individual Local Sites within their respective administrative areas, including defending individual Local Sites at planning inquiries, hearings, etc
- Make arrangements for supplying information on Local Sites within their respective administrative areas to members of the public, according to their statutory duties.
- Compile and present NI 197 data for verification by the Local Sites Partnership

Natural England

Statutory agencies such as Natural England have direct responsibilities and obligations for nature conservation through regulation and their influence on the management of land by others. Natural England will therefore contribute expertise directly to the work of the Local Sites Partnership, and also to the conservation and management of individual Local Sites.

The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country

The Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust has been involved with non-statutory nature conservation sites (now known as Local Sites) since its formation in 1980. It has nearly 30 years collective experience of working to help with their identification, protection, management and appreciation in collaboration with the Birmingham and Black Country's five local authorities, statutory agencies, land owners, conservation organisations and local communities.

The role of the Wildlife Trust is to:

- Undertake / assist with the identification and review of Local Sites through carrying out:
 - Desk study
 - Ecological survey
 - Data capture
 - Assessment / evaluation
 - Reporting
- Provide positive management advice to managers and owners of Local Sites and undertake the management of Local Sites where appropriate.
- Assist the Local Sites Partnership in the preparation and review of local standards and criteria for the operation and implementation of the Local Sites System.
- Engage with the Birmingham and Black Country councils, Local Strategic Partnerships, statutory agencies and others to further the work of the Local Sites Partnership.
- Make available, through the Partnership, the Trust's ecological, biodiversity, education and community engagement expertise, together with access to its wider regional and national networks, for the benefit of Local Sites and their owners.
- Promote and raise awareness of the relevance and benefits of Local Sites and the work of the Local Sites Partnership to wider agendas and local communities.
- Assist with securing funding to enable Local Sites Partnership work.