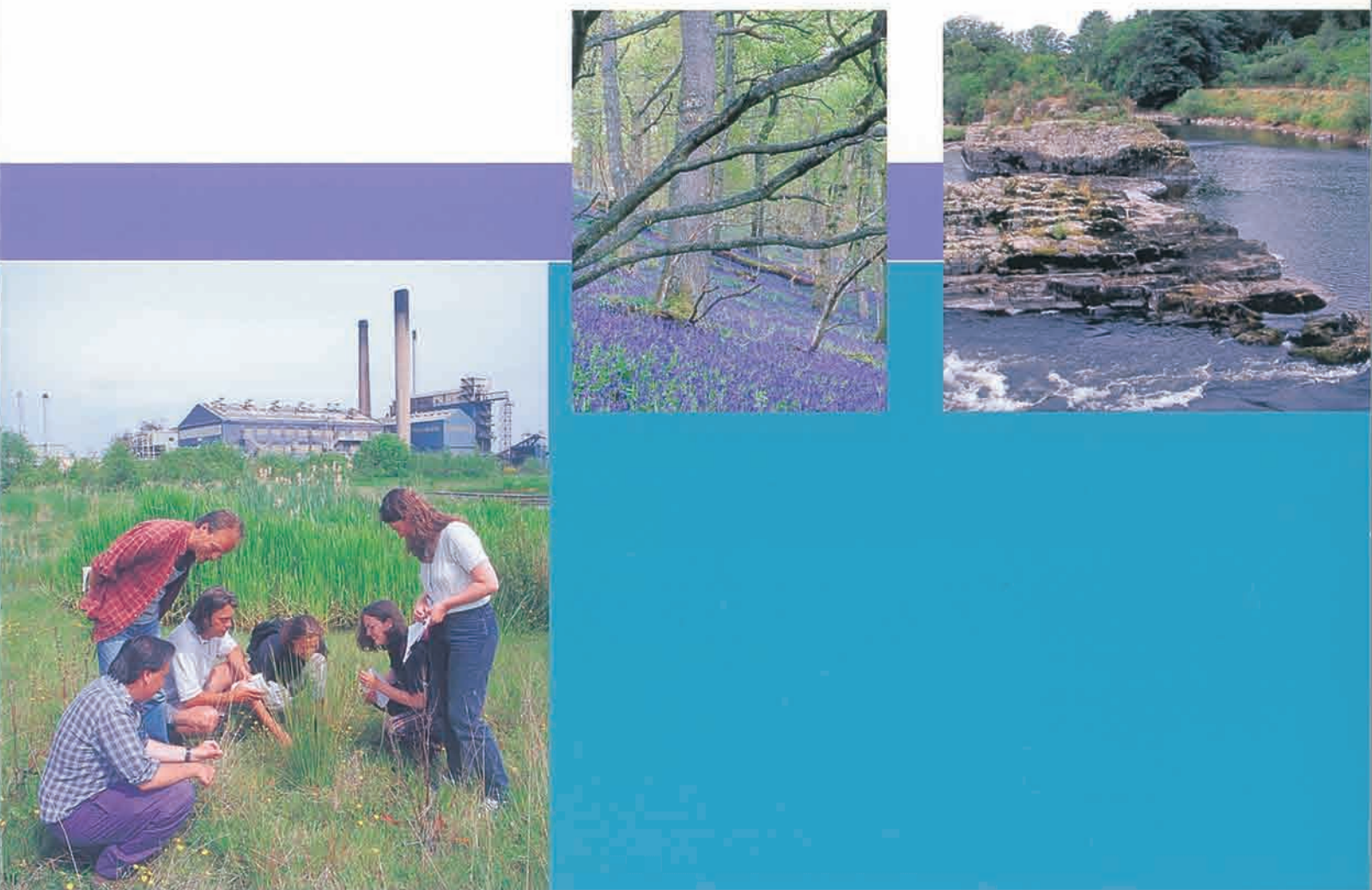


Guidance on Establishing and Managing Local Nature Conservation Site Systems in Scotland



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March 2006

This document was prepared by the Local Nature Conservation Site Working Group, comprising the following organisations:



**British
Geological Survey**
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL



The voice of
Scotland's
environment
movement



RTPI

mediation of space - making of place

The working group was formed with the purpose of preparing this Guidance, and has now disbanded. Enquiries and comments about the content of this Guidance should be directed to the Chair of the Working Group:

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1. The Purpose and Scope of this Guidance

1.1 This Guidance introduces a single purpose for Local Nature Conservation Site systems, and a standard approach to selecting new sites and reviewing existing sites. In doing so, it aims to address the diversity of purpose and function which currently characterise systems of Local Nature Conservation Sites.

1.2 In using the term Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS), we refer to non-statutory sites, selected at local level for biodiversity and/or geodiversity features. We do not include Local Nature Reserves, which are statutory designations, although the Guidance makes reference to them. Commonly used terms for LNCS include Wildlife Site (WS), Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), and Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site (RIGS). When referring to LNCS designated for biodiversity features, we use the term local biodiversity site, encompassing the many different names currently in use. When referring to LNCS designated for geodiversity features, we use the term local geodiversity site, otherwise known as RIGS. We have not included the marine environment within the scope of this Guidance, because of the significant differences in both administrative and ecological context.

1.3 The Guidance presents the LNCS system as a tool to show where action can best be taken for the conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity. It is not intended as a strengthening of a site-based approach to nature conservation, but as a way to identify where habitats, species and geodiversity of importance to nature conservation may be found. In this way, the LNCS system can support effective action for habitats and species included on the Scottish Biodiversity List and in Local Biodiversity Action Plans, and support action for local geodiversity. The Guidance also explains how a LNCS system can help public bodies to address the Scottish Biodiversity Duty and follow national planning policies and guidance, as well as assist land managers in carrying out actions for biodiversity.

1.4 The procedures recommended in this Guidance are not designed to be prescriptive, but to provide a framework to enable those responsible to establish and maintain a LNCS system to a common standard. The Guidance looks to encourage a spirit of co-operation and consensus, involving land managers, planners, and other stakeholders in selection and action for sites.

1.5 A similar review of local sites in England and Wales has recently been carried out by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and Guidance is due to be published in 2006. Whilst there are parallels with the Scottish Guidance, this is a devolved issue and the legislative and policy context is different north and south of the Border. The review in Scotland has been carried out independently of the Defra review.

2. Legislative and Policy Context

Background

2.1 Local Nature Conservation Sites have a well recognised place in the history of nature conservation in Scotland, complementing the national perspective of other designations with a long tradition of locally-driven initiation and concern. The adaptation of LNCS to local circumstances has been a strength of the designation, and has led to innovation and creative developments. However, the breadth of different approaches has led to confusion as to the meaning and status of sites, and this limits their integration with other policy agendas.

2.2 These issues, as they relate to biodiversity sites, were raised during the passage through Parliament of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill during 2004, and led to the following commitment being made by the Minister:

The emphasis given to biodiversity in the Bill lends local wildlife sites a renewed relevance and importance. I welcome the Committee's suggestion that local authorities and SNH should work together to improve existing arrangements. I will be looking to SNH to take the lead in initiating that process of review.

2.3 In response, a working group was formed (see Annex), and a review of local site systems began in Autumn 2004. The working group decided to include local geodiversity sites alongside biodiversity sites because of their common history, and because of the potential benefits of developing parallel site systems. The working group published this Guidance following a consultation process that took place during 2005.



The Biodiversity Duty, and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

2.4 One of the key objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS), is to halt the loss of biodiversity, and to reverse previous losses, through action for species and habitats. Habitats and species that are a priority for action towards this aim have been placed by the Scottish Executive on the Scottish Biodiversity List, as required under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. At local level, habitats and species of importance to biodiversity have been listed by local biodiversity partnerships, and actions for these are incorporated into Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

2.5 Existing LNCS have contributed to meeting biodiversity objectives by identifying sites that can make a significant contribution to conserving habitats and species listed in Local and Scottish Biodiversity Action Plans. Identification of sites has provided the opportunity to focus the resources available to LBAP partnerships and land managers, and to provide protection for these sites through raised awareness and development control policies. This role for LNCS is recognised in the SBS, which includes in its 'Agenda for Action' the following two objectives:

to 'manage existing and develop new local...wildlife sites to protect and where appropriate enhance conservation interests'; and to 'facilitate identification and recognition of local wildlife sites....and their use to stimulate local awareness and engagement in conservation and education'.



2.6 The biodiversity duty, set out in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, places a duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity (as far as is consistent with their functions), and in doing so to have regard to the aims and objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

LNCS have the potential to help local authorities and other public bodies to identify and prioritise action for habitats and species, in support of the biodiversity duty, and as a contribution to implementing the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

Geological Conservation Review and RIGS Handbook

2.7 The UK Geological Conservation Review (GCR), led by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, assessed and selected exemplar Earth heritage sites of international and national importance, and many GCR sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (see paragraph 2.8). The RIGS Handbook follows the lead of the GCR Strategy and recommends that RIGS should not only have substantive nature conservation value but should also have value for education, scientific study, historical significance, and aesthetic qualities. UKRIGS, RIGS groups and the British Geological Survey have argued for some time that geodiversity audits and action plans should be prepared at local level in Scotland, and that RIGS should be identified and managed in this context.

Local geodiversity sites can conserve important examples of local geodiversity, for the enjoyment and understanding of local people, and can play a significant part in geodiversity audits and action plans.

National and international designations

2.8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are designated in recognition of their importance for biodiversity or geodiversity. Their purpose is to provide a representative suite of the most important sites, and in protecting and enhancing this resource they make a significant contribution to halting the loss of biodiversity and geodiversity. SSSIs do not include sites that are of local importance only. Whilst it is not the primary purpose of LNCS to identify sites of national importance, it may be that while selecting LNCS a site is found which also merits consideration for SSSI status. In addition to SSSIs, Natura 2000 sites are protected areas which aim to maintain habitats and species of European importance listed under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives.

LNCS have the potential to complement national and international designations by identifying further sites of national importance, as well as sites which are of local importance.

NPPG 14 Land use planning and the natural heritage

2.9 National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 14 sets out government policy on land use planning and the natural heritage in Scotland. It recognises that both statutory and non-statutory designations can make an important contribution to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, and that RIGS can also be valuable for education. It states that the development of local site systems, and the level of protection accorded to them, should be a matter for the planning authority.

2.10 NPPG 14 encourages planning authorities to safeguard and enhance the natural heritage beyond the confines of nationally designated areas. It gives guidance on the role non-statutory local sites can play as part of a strategic approach to natural heritage planning, based on a network of LNCS, landscape features and other types of open space. More recently, Planning Advice Note (PAN) 65 on Planning and Open Space has highlighted the importance of natural and semi-natural greenspace in urban areas as part of an open space network (see also para 5.7).

Local biodiversity sites have the potential to contribute to the recommendations of NPPG 14 as components of habitat networks and Open Space Strategies. Local geodiversity sites have the potential to provide an educational resource for Earth science, and may also form part of open space or habitat networks.

Education and involvement in nature conservation

2.11 The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy recognises the importance of people's interest and involvement in biodiversity as a foundation for the enthusiasm and commitment needed for its conservation, and gives local biodiversity sites a role in this under its 'Agenda for Action' (see para 2.5). RIGS are recognised in NPPG 14 as having value for education, and the RIGS Handbook states that one of the primary reasons for establishing a RIGS system is to provide a range of sites which can be used by the local community.

Some LNCS can provide opportunities for people to find out about and enjoy what is special about the biodiversity or geodiversity of their local area.

3. The Purpose of Local Nature Conservation Sites

Local biodiversity sites

3.1 To contribute fully to this legislative and policy context, local biodiversity sites must recognise places of substantive importance for biodiversity, where protecting and enhancing biodiversity can make an important contribution to the objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Each local biodiversity site may also contribute to the quality of the local environment, and may provide opportunities for local people to find out about, and take pride in, their local biodiversity. It is through a Local Biodiversity Action Plan that LNCS can most effectively be co-ordinated with other complementary mechanisms.

Local geodiversity sites

3.2 The legislative and policy context for local geodiversity sites indicates that they can fulfil a similar role to that of local biodiversity sites. These sites provide examples of geology and geomorphology of substantive regional and local importance, where the resource can be conserved so that people can enjoy and find out more about Earth heritage. They can contribute to the quality of local environments, and provide opportunities for informal recreation. Preparation of a Local Geodiversity Action Plan (see box) will guide the identification of local geodiversity sites, and identify other mechanisms contributing to geodiversity conservation.

Local Geodiversity Action Plans: West Lothian Pilot Study

In West Lothian, the British Geological Survey, Scottish Natural Heritage, West Lothian Council and Lothian & Borders RIGS Group have formed a partnership to develop good practice in geodiversity auditing and action planning, and to look at ways to incorporate this into the planning system and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process.

The geodiversity audit will pull together all available knowledge of the area's geology, soils, and landforms, together with the processes that form them, and an assessment of current pressures and threats. This will form the basis for a Local Geodiversity Action Plan (LGAP), which will also identify sites of local importance for geodiversity, and opportunities for enhancement, education, recreation and community involvement. It will promote the free availability of geodiversity data to inform the decisions of the planning authority and of land managers.

The LGAP will highlight the interdependence between geodiversity and biodiversity. It will identify management action which will benefit both, and will identify opportunities for people to find out more about how geodiversity and biodiversity interact.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/SustainableDevelopment/bgs>

A combined approach for biodiversity and geodiversity

3.3 Although establishing local biodiversity and geodiversity site systems requires different types of expertise, and the systems are at different stages of development in Scotland, both systems have a common foundation in recognising local importance through a locally-driven process. Both have the potential to contribute to local environmental quality, education and wellbeing, and so there are benefits to be gained from developing the systems in parallel, and within a similar policy framework.

3.4 Local Nature Conservation Sites should form part of an overall approach to delivering the Local Biodiversity or Local Geodiversity Action Plan, with the following purpose:

To identify biodiversity and geodiversity of at least local importance, and to assist efforts to protect and enhance these interests.

3.5 If LNCS systems conforming to this purpose are established in all local authority areas, LNCS can collectively make a significant contribution to the conservation of our national biodiversity and geodiversity resource.

3.6 Within the LNCS system, a limited number of sites will also be suited to providing a range of additional benefits for the people of Scotland, including opportunities to enjoy and take pride in local biodiversity and geodiversity.



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4. Operating a LNCS System

Nomenclature

4.1 There are over 20 names currently in use for LNCS, and many of these names are long-established and have widespread recognition within a local area. It will be for each local area to decide whether to continue to use established names. However, the name chosen should reflect the new purpose, and so may need to be changed. Throughout this Guidance the terms 'local biodiversity site' and 'local geodiversity site' have been used to refer to each type of LNCS, and it is suggested that these could be used where a new name is needed.

4.2 Where there has been a review in accordance with the Guidance, the new set of sites should be referred to as belonging to the 'Local Nature Conservation Site System'. This will allow differentiation between site systems which conform with the Guidance, and those which do not, whilst still allowing for the use of a locally recognised name for sites within the system.

Establishing a partnership

4.3 Responsibility for introducing, reviewing and managing local biodiversity sites and local geodiversity sites should be taken by the local authority, although this may be delegated. Either way, the work should be carried out with the help of a panel of advisors comprising relevant interests and expertise. The involvement of the following groups should be considered:

- Local expert naturalists or Earth scientists
- Local representatives of voluntary and statutory nature conservation organisations
- Land owners and managers
- Farmers and crofters
- Forestry managers
- Water resource managers
- Development planners
- Businesses
- Local communities
- For geodiversity sites, aggregates industry and educationalists

4.4 An LBAP partnership, or local RIGS group/Local Geodiversity Action Plan partnership, is likely to be well placed to form the panel of advisors to the local authority. The local authority may choose to delegate to this panel responsibility for introducing or reviewing the LNCS system.

The Dumfries & Galloway Local Wildlife Sites Team

Dumfries and Galloway Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership provides an example of how local sites can form an integral part of an LBAP, and can be managed through a genuine partnership approach. The Partnership recognised at an early stage in the preparation of their LBAP that LNCS have a role in helping to prioritise and focus action for biodiversity. The plan states:

...“This LBAP recommends the identification of more local sites in order to give recognition to the wealth of wildlife which can be found in our region. Action can then be taken in partnership with landowners and communities to maintain their biodiversity value”.

Priorities for detailed survey, management advice and habitat enhancement on LNCS are linked to the priorities identified in the LBAP's habitat action plans. A separate sub group of the LBAP has been convened to oversee the LNCS system, and to secure additional funding for site management. Partners in the LBAP have offered assistance according to their professional capacity, including the local authority, statutory and non statutory conservation and countryside agencies, local fisheries trusts, and business interests.

Selecting LNCS

4.5 There are many long-established LNCS systems, each developed under local circumstances, and it will be for the local authority to decide whether or not a review of existing sites is required. It will also need to decide whether the existing system is complete.

4.6 It is important that sites are selected according to a standard procedure in order to provide a consistent approach across the country. However, it is not intended that LNCS should be seen as another layer of 'designation', with complex procedural requirements. These should not be necessary, because LNCS have no legal status and therefore no powers or duties associated with them. This Guidance looks to encourage a spirit of co-operation and consensus towards the creation and use of a LNCS system. This will be founded on a partnership approach to selecting and managing sites, and on publishing information about sites through the Local Development Plan.

4.7 The following are proposed as being the key stages for selecting new sites :

- A provisional site is identified, and the landowner or manager is contacted with information about why it has been identified, the LNCS selection process, and the potential for the site to benefit from positive management for its geodiversity or biodiversity interest.
- Existing information about the site is reviewed, and a decision made as to whether further information is needed. If so, permission for access to the site is sought from the landowner or manager, to allow the site to be surveyed to sufficient level of detail to assess its importance.
- The importance of the site is assessed according to locally set criteria, as detailed below (para 4.8). A formal record of the reasons for selection is made.

- A Site Statement is prepared, as detailed in paragraphs 4.15 – 4.16.
- The landowner or manager is provided with information on the survey and assessment, and with the Site Statement.

Criteria for selecting local geodiversity sites

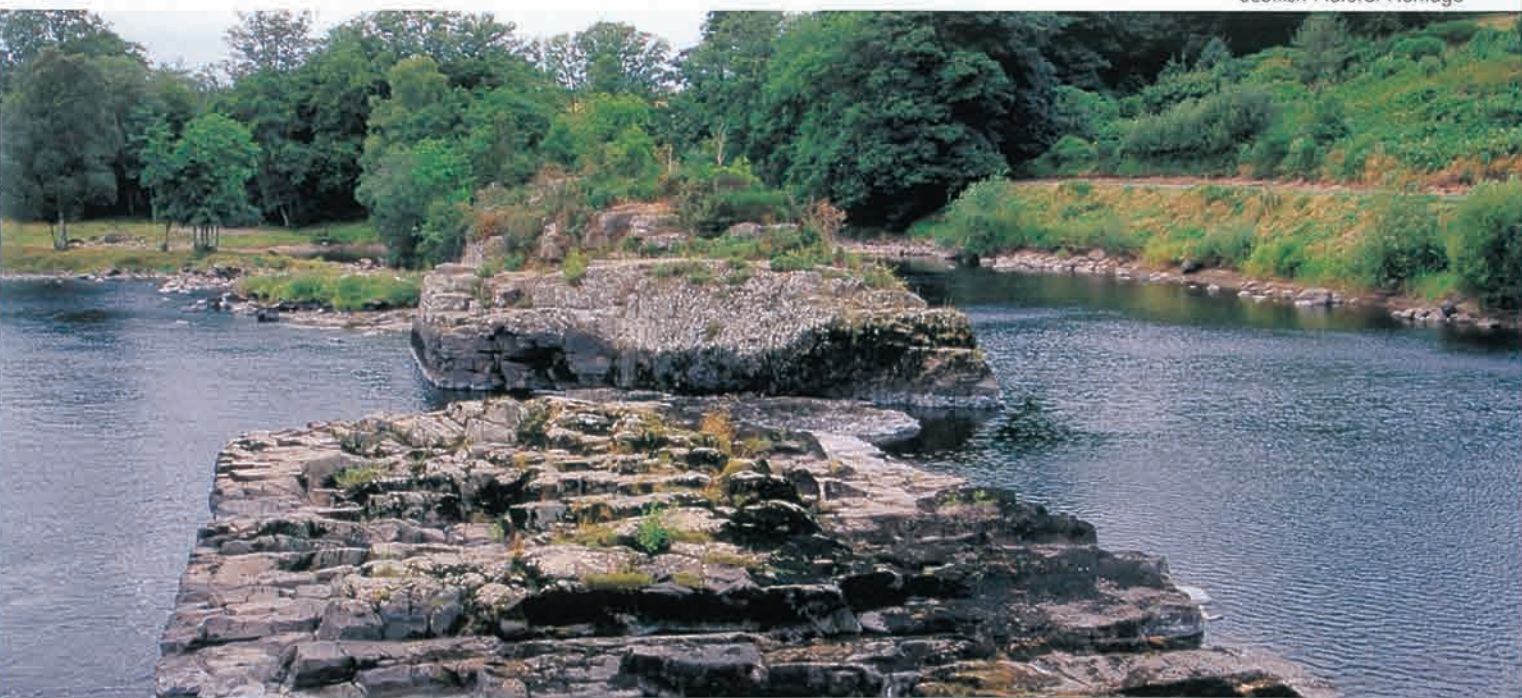
4.8 Local geodiversity sites are selected for their importance to the available geodiversity resource, meaning those geodiversity features which are visible and accessible. For this reason, accessibility of the site and its value for both education and research are of greater importance than for local biodiversity sites, though the site must also represent a significant geodiversity feature. If access to a site is not available, it may still be selected for its geodiversity value. Assessments should be based on the following factors, which are drawn from the RIGS Handbook:

- Geodiversity value in the local context
- Site access and safety criteria
- Value for education and research
- Cultural, heritage and economic value

Further information on each of these factors may be found in the RIGS Handbook.

4.9 Geodiversity data may be drawn from a range of sources, including national data sets and the records or collections of local experts. Given the range of data already available, new survey may not be needed. Ideally, data should be reviewed and supplemented as part of a wider audit for the Local Geodiversity Action Plan (see box, para 3.2). Such a review may have already been done by the local RIGS Group. Site selection should be informed by the knowledge and judgement of the panel of advisors (see para 4.3), which will include local experts. Use of a scoring system will help to clarify discussion and to assess the contribution of each of the factors to the overall importance of the site.

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Criteria for selecting local biodiversity sites

4.10 All sites proposed as local biodiversity sites should be assessed according to each of these six factors:

- **Species diversity.** This factor refers to the number of different species found on a site. A comparative assessment should be made of the number of species recorded against what might be expected to occur within the habitats present in that area.
- **Species rarity.** This factor refers to the species recorded on the site that are considered to be rare, endangered or vulnerable, in a national or local context, including those on the Scottish Biodiversity List and those listed as priorities in the LBAP.
- **Habitat rarity.** This factor refers to the rarity of a habitat within the national and local context.
- **Habitat naturalness.** This factor refers to the degree of current and historic human intervention in natural processes for each habitat type. For example, semi-natural woodland and unimproved grassland are more natural than plantation woodland and improved grassland.
- **Habitat extent.** This factor refers to the amount of a particular habitat found on a site relative to the total found in the local area.
- **Connectivity.** This factor is a measure of the physical links between broadly similar habitats found on a site and in the surrounding countryside, and of the potential for new links to be created.

4.11 These factors are based on those used to assess sites of national and international importance to nature conservation. Assessments require both good data and the local knowledge and expertise of the panel of advisors (see para 4.3), which must include local expert naturalists. Use of a scoring system will help to maintain consistency between sites and ensure that each factor makes a contribution to calculating the overall importance of the site.

4.12 Data may be drawn from a range of sources, for example national datasets, LBAP audits, and the records of local naturalists and societies. If good quality data are already available, then new surveys may well not be needed. Some local authorities will have areas where survey information is limited, for example extensive upland areas, alongside other areas with good information. In these cases introducing a local biodiversity site system in those areas with good information need not be delayed, but the system should be extended when more data become available.

4.13 LNCS may also provide direct benefits to local communities, particularly in urban areas, where a site has been used by local people to enjoy, learn about or become involved in nature. These benefits may contribute to the site selection process, but in order to fulfil the LNCS purpose, all sites must first and foremost be judged to be of substantive local importance to biodiversity, according to the six factors given in para 4.10. Direct benefits to local communities should be taken into account when selecting from amongst a number of sites that are considered to be on the threshold for biodiversity importance, and which might otherwise not be selected.

4.14 The reasoning behind the setting of local criteria and the selection of a site, must be objective and transparent, and the method and outcome should be recorded and made available.



Information management for LNCS

4.15 For each site, a record of key information should be prepared, to be known as a Site Statement. At the minimum, this should include the following:

- A map of the boundary of the site.
- A record of the reasons for selection as a LNCS.
- A note of outcomes sought for biodiversity or geodiversity and, where relevant, for access, community involvement and environmental education.

4.16 The following could also be provided if resources allow:

- A map of the site showing habitats or geodiversity interest, and any other special features of interest.
- A species list.
- Management recommendations for achieving biodiversity or geodiversity outcomes, or where appropriate, for improving the capacity of the site to provide for access, community involvement or environmental education.

4.17 Data on LNCS should be held either within a Local Record Centre, where one exists, or under the auspices of the LBAP or LGAP. Where possible, data should be held in digital form, and data management standards should be in accordance with those set out by the National Biodiversity Network, and by GeoConservation, the database supported by UKRIGS.

NBN and Fife Environmental Recording Network (FERN)

The **National Biodiversity Network (NBN)** aims to provide easy access to the information people need in making decisions which affect biodiversity. The NBN Trust oversees the NBN Gateway, which provides an online database with mapping facilities. It holds around 19 million biodiversity records that have been contributed by individual wildlife enthusiasts, national agencies, charities and many others. The Gateway covers the UK, including some information on areas where there is no local records centre. For further information see www.nbn.org.uk

FERN provides an example of a records centre which acts a focus for monitoring the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and for involving local recorders and the wider community in survey and management of local wildlife and RIGS. It operates within Fife Council and acts as a one stop shop for all environmental information, from designated sites to individual species records. The centre holds a database on LNCS including site information and boundary data. FERN works closely with SNH through a service level agreement, and also provides information for a number of statutory stakeholders, consultants and the general public. Local authority planners have direct access to data for use in planning casework.

5. Approaches to Policy and Management

Management and enhancement

5.1 There are many existing arrangements which encourage and enable positive management for biodiversity and geodiversity, and from which LNCS may benefit. Forest design plans and agri-environment schemes both take account of nature conservation, and so may account for and address the management needs of LNCS where the opportunity arises. Habitat and species action plans identify priorities for groups of habitats and for species, and identify and pull together funding sources to help make progress with these priorities. In and around settlements, Greenspace projects, Country Parks and Regional Parks may take responsibility for LNCS where there is an opportunity to provide management for nature conservation whilst promoting community involvement and enjoyment.

5.2 The record of outcomes and recommended management contained in the Site Statement should help to identify where action should be taken for the natural heritage under these existing arrangements. The LBAP and LGAP partnerships should oversee actions towards the objectives given in the Site Statement.



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Binn Wood: Perthshire

Binn Wood provides an example of how various sources of third party funding can help a site in private ownership. This is a relatively large area of semi-ancient woodland of high value for biodiversity. As well as typical woodland flora and fauna, including red squirrels, the site is also an important location for the nationally rare sticky catchfly plant.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust secured resources from a combination of landfill tax and private charitable trust sources for survey of the site and for the provision of initial habitat management advice to the owner. Habitat enhancement and public access improvements have subsequently been undertaken by the landowner and Scottish Wildlife Trust Training Teams (local people on a government training scheme), financed by a local landfill operator and the landowner.

Planning policies

5.3 The Local Plan should include an explanation of the purpose of the LNCS designation. It should set this in the context of other nature conservation policies, including statutory designations, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and Local Geodiversity Action Plan (as and when developed). The Local Plan should make available full details of the process followed in selecting sites. Ensuring that LNCS are an effective mechanism requires good communication between development control officers and officers dealing with LNCS. The presence of LNCS should be included early in discussions about the location of development, and planning authorities should consider opportunities to enhance LNCS during development.

5.4 Planning policies for the protection of LNCS should be distinct from policies relating to statutory designations, and should be set out in the context of these policies. Policies should recognise the important contribution of LNCS to nature conservation, and seek to ensure that development does not adversely affect them. Where a planning application concerns land selected as a LNCS, the developer should carry out an assessment of the impact of the proposal on the nature conservation interest of the site. Where it is decided, for significant reasons of social and economic importance, that development should go ahead, there should be provision as far as possible for retention of nature conservation interest through planning conditions. Where this is not possible, the loss should be compensated for by habitat creation or site enhancement elsewhere through planning agreements or conditions.

5.5 The location of LNCS should be clearly identified on the Local Plan proposals map, and boundaries shown. A formal record of the evaluation of the site should also be readily available within the planning process. To this end, Site Statements (see para 4.15 – 4.16) should be made available as supplementary planning guidance within the Local Plan, and included in the consultation process for the Local Plan.

5.6 The presence of LNCS can contribute to the Strategic Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes through providing information on the biodiversity or geodiversity resource. The presence of LNCS should also help to inform an Environmental Impact Assessment.

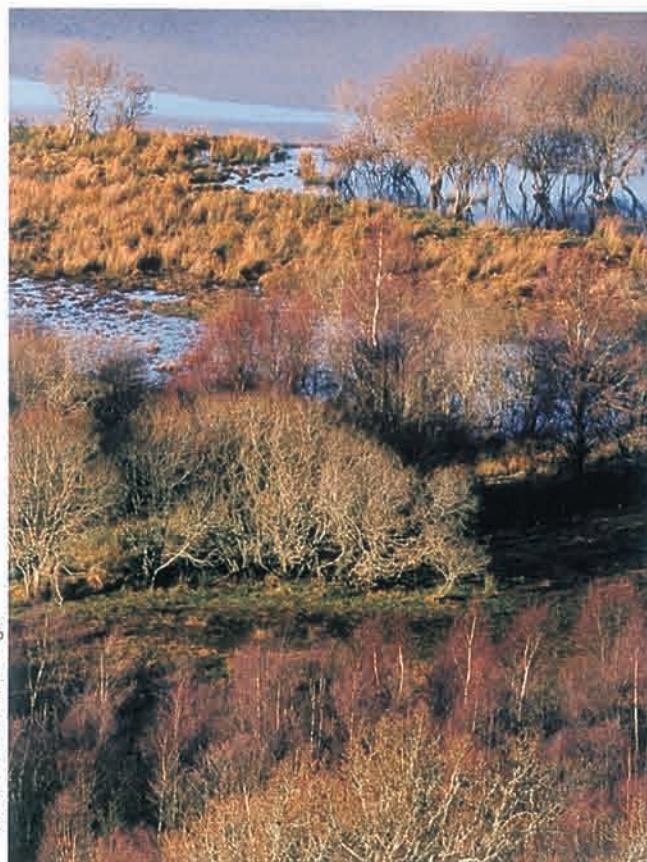
Open Space Strategies and habitat networks

5.7 Planning Advice Note (PAN) 65 'Planning and Open Space' recommends the preparation by each local authority of Open Space Strategies (OSS) for towns and cities, and it describes 'types of open space' to be included in each Strategy. LNCS may fall into one or more of these categories, the most likely being green corridors and natural/semi-natural greenspaces. A LNCS system will be a significant contributor to the OSS goal to create open space networks to 'link and create wildlife habitats' and to 'enhance environmental qualities' (PAN 65 section 20). The OSS will help to identify where a LNCS

system can best contribute to the goals of encouraging community engagement and fostering pride in the local natural heritage. Review of a LNCS system will benefit from consideration alongside the development and implementation of an OSS, but the criteria for designating LNCS should be maintained as separate to those defining open spaces.

5.8 Some Local Authorities have identified habitat networks in order to maintain linked areas of natural open space for wildlife and landscape benefit. These are distinct from Open Space Strategies, but will overlap, especially in urban areas. Local biodiversity sites can act as significant pools of biodiversity within habitat networks, and the need to maintain the connectivity of the network can influence their selection. This will be especially true for those habitats which particularly benefit from good connectivity with similar habitats, for example river corridors or woodlands.

5.9 The Scottish Forestry Strategy, which is currently under review, provides a framework and vision for a national approach to creating and strengthening woodland networks. These networks are viewed as an important mechanism for protecting and restoring biodiversity and strengthening ecosystem functioning. The Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme, which will come to be replaced by Land Management Contracts, supports the planting and management of woodlands to form networks. LNCS have the potential to play a role in the planning of woodland networks, particularly in the lowlands and around towns, where woodland loss is most pronounced and where the benefits of its restoration, to both biodiversity and to people, are most immediate. Work is underway on refining ecological models and planning tools, with the aim of strengthening the ability of forest networks to maintain and restore woodland biodiversity.



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Role in agriculture

5.10 Many LNCS will comprise or include agricultural land. Often their nature conservation interest will depend on a particular type of agricultural management, or on deliberate action for the purpose of managing, maintaining or improving a particular feature. Some farmers and crofters are managing these sites for their conservation value through agri-environmental schemes, such as the Countryside Premium Scheme (CPS), the Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) or the Tier-2 Menu Scheme (forerunner of the Land Management Contracts that will be introduced in 2007).

5.11 The RSS gives a measure of priority to applications featuring 'local priority' habitats and species, and these are determined in consultation with stakeholders. Varying degrees of priority are also given to the inclusion of actions for habitats and species listed in Local Biodiversity Action Plans. These priorities will be included in the selection process for LNCS, and the LNCS Site Statement will help to identify action for their management.

Well-being, enjoyment and environmental education

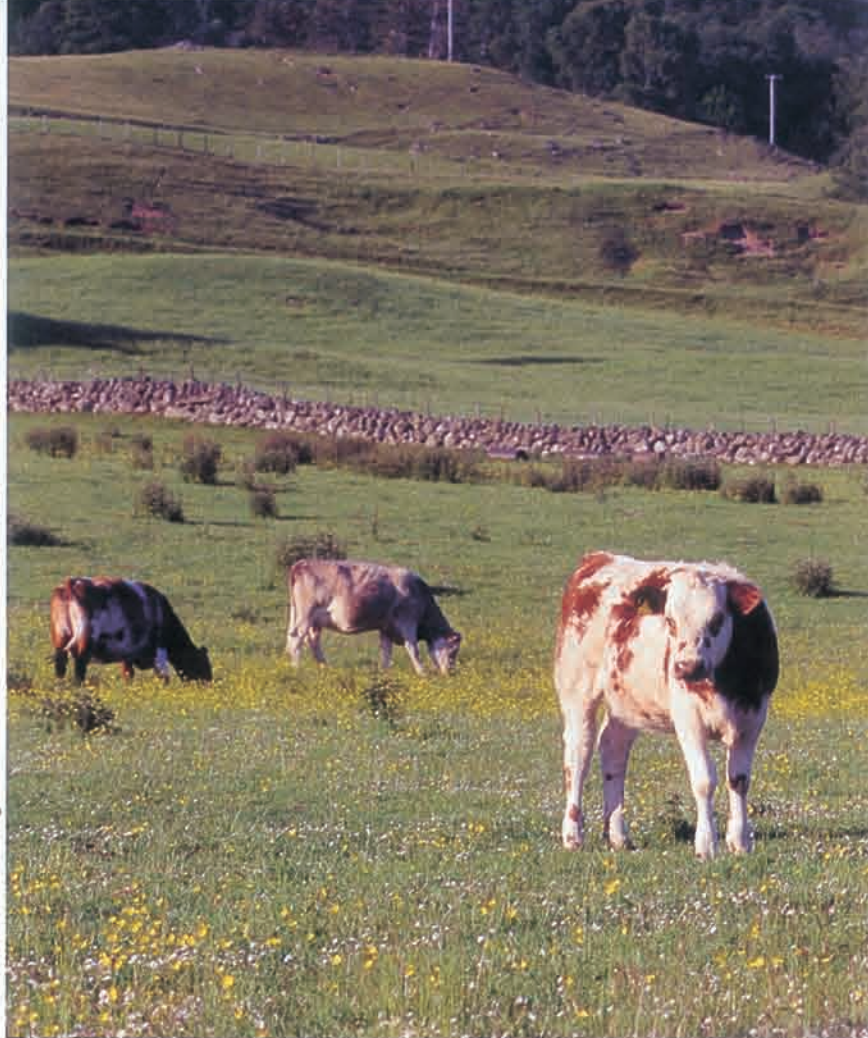
5.12 The Community Planning process has introduced a new emphasis on community well-being and regeneration, with consequent concerns for local environmental quality and the engagement of local people in promoting this. LNCS can make a contribution by raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity and geodiversity to environmental quality, and the importance of conservation to maintaining that quality. Community involvement in the care and enjoyment of LNCS will help to ensure that local people understand and take pride in locally important biodiversity and geodiversity, but the priority for site management should always be in keeping with the conservation of the site's special qualities.

5.13 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) are designated on land identified for its locally special natural interest and/or its educational value, and they are managed primarily for the purpose of nature conservation. This definition distinguishes LNR from LNCS. LNCS are not necessarily managed primarily for the purpose of nature conservation, and educational value is not a primary factor in deciding on their selection. Where a LNCS is managed by the local authority solely for nature conservation, and where there are opportunities for people to enjoy and find out about the local natural heritage, then it may become a good candidate for LNR status.

Hopetoun Road, South Queensferry

Hopetoun Road provides an example of how community interest in a local greenspace area, combined with recognition as a LNCS, can work for local biodiversity.

This site comprises a narrow strip of woodland, grassland and scrub, and was considered for industrial development in the late 1980's. Among the features of interest are northern-marsh and common spotted orchids and locally scarce plants such as kidney vetch, haresfoot clover and squirrel-tailed fescue. Local community action highlighted its importance as an important area of natural greenspace and haven for wildlife within the town. The site was given LNCS status in the Local Plan, and its original boundaries were extended, quadrupling its size. Through the community working in partnership with the local council, the site is now subject to active management to maintain its high biodiversity, and is under active consideration for designation as a Local Nature Reserve.



Relationship to statutory nature conservation designations

5.14 LNCS may be selected in places where there is already a national or international nature conservation designation. If the local interest for which the LNCS is designated is different to the national interest for which the statutory designation is made, the LNCS should exist alongside the statutory designation. If the interests are the same, there is no need to incorporate the site as part of the LNCS system.

5.15 Within Scotland's National Parks, the policies and procedures developed by the Park Authority set out how biodiversity and geodiversity will be protected and enhanced across the Park area. Through the Park Plan, the Park Authority may decide that an approach equivalent to a LNCS system will help prioritise action and assist in decision-making.

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Acronyms

COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
FERN	Fife Environmental Recording Network
GCR	The UK Geological Conservation Review
LNCS	Local Nature Conservation Site
NBN	The National Biodiversity Network
OSS	Open Spaces Strategy
RIGS	Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Site
RSS	Rural Stewardship Scheme
RTPI	Royal Town Planning Institute
SBS	The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy
SINC	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SWT	Scottish Wildlife Trust

Local Nature Conservation Site Working Group Membership

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