

LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE REVIEW SPECIFICATION

Summary

Castle Point Borough Council is seeking to appoint specialist consultants to undertake a borough wide review of the Local Wildlife Sites. The review will be used to inform green infrastructure planning, local planning, and the delivery of biodiversity net gain across the borough, and will also be available to other partners, stakeholders, and communities to inform other relevant activities.

At present there are 40 Local Wildlife Sites and 12 potential Local Wildlife Sites in Castle Point. Each of these sites will need to be reviewed. Additionally, any potential new sites identified by the Council, by stakeholders and by the community should also be reviewed.

Each site will need to be reviewed in terms of composition and whether it meets the selection criteria for Local Wildlife Site designation. Each site should also be surveyed in terms of its current condition and should be given a Biodiversity Net Gain baseline score using the national Defra Metric.

Recommendations for each site should be made identifying how the site could be enhanced to improve its Biodiversity Net Gain score. As appropriate, recommendations should also be made about how the wider environment around each site should be enhanced to better connect it into the network of Green Infrastructure.

The Review is required to be completed by Autumn 2023.

Background

In June 2022, the Council took the decision to withdraw its local plan, and to commence work on a new local plan, hereon in known as the Castle Point Plan, focused on meeting the needs of local people and ensuring that development proposals bring about genuine local benefits that are supported by local communities and stakeholders. Place making will be at the heart of the new local plan that we are preparing, and we already know that green infrastructure and the natural environment are important to local people.

The Castle Point Plan will be prepared having regard to the requirements of the Environment Act. To this end, we will be seeking biodiversity net gain, and seeking to determine through the Castle Point Plan how high a proportion we seek to achieve. We will also be looking to inform and integrate with the Local Recovery Network Strategy for Greater Essex.

At a wider level, Castle Point is part of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities. Through this partnership a Joint Strategic Framework is being developed that will guide what good growth looks like across the area. This is being informed by the South Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, and the proposals for SEE Park, which will see the creation of a regional park and integrated network of open

spaces and green infrastructure across South Essex. Strategic projects which form part of the SEE Park proposals will be delivered in and around Castle Point. Additionally, the proposals brought forward through the Castle Point Plan will help to ensure that residents have doorstep access to accessible greenspaces and that there is a network of green links between the different elements of SEE Park for people and for wildlife.

In bringing forward the Castle Point Plan, and delivering green infrastructure and biodiversity net gain, the Council will be seeking to ensure that community and stakeholder engagement is at the heart of the process. There will also be a strong drive towards digitisation of data and information to make it more accessible for a wider range of people to view and interrogate.

Local Wildlife Sites were last reviewed in full in Castle Point in 2012. A partial review was undertaken in 2019, but that was not signed off by the local partnership. It is therefore necessary to undertake a full Local Wildlife Site Review now to inform the Castle Point Plan, and to inform the Council's approach to biodiversity net gain and green infrastructure planning.

The 2012 Local Wildlife Site Review was undertaken in accordance with the Essex Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria dated 2010. This was updated in 2016 and should form the bases for any future reviews (unless subsequently updated).

[LOCALWILDLIFESITESELECTIONCRITERIA2016.pdf \(essexwtrecords.org.uk\)](https://www.essexwildliferecords.org.uk/LOCALWILDLIFESITESELECTIONCRITERIA2016.pdf)

As well as setting out the selection criteria, the above document also sets out the protocol for survey, evaluation and selection. It is expected that this will form the bases for the Local Wildlife Site Review.

Additionally, due to the introduction of biodiversity net gain and the associated Defra Metric, it is anticipated that the survey will include an assessment of each site's composition and condition to allow a Biodiversity Net Gain baseline position to be determined. It is anticipated that by taking this approach the Council will be able to engage in a new and different conversation with the landowners of Local Wildlife Sites about the value and role of their land in plan-making and place-making.

Objectives

1. Technically Robust

The Council is seeking a technically robust Local Wildlife Site Review that follows the protocols for survey, evaluation and selection set out in the Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria 2016 document. This must include the engagement required under stages 1 and 4 with key stakeholders, albeit it is expected that the review will be endorsed by the Local Nature Partnership or a working group of it rather than the ELPS which has been disbanded. It must also include the landowner notification elements as set out in stages 2 and 5. It is expected that fieldwork will

occur on-site and ‘authority to access’ letters will be provided to the appointed consultants under S324 of the Town and Country Planning Act to enable this.

The Council will expect the appointed consultant to be able to successfully defend their work at an Examination in Public for the Castle Point Plan, or at a Planning Appeal.

2. Biodiversity Net Gain Ready

As part of previous Local Wildlife Site Reviews, the condition of the sites has been noted as part of the assessment. It is required that a more robust approach to the assessment of condition is undertaken as part of this Local Wildlife Site Review. It is expected that a biodiversity net gain baseline assessment using the Defra Metric is undertaken for each site assessed, whether it be a Local Wildlife Site, or a potential or proposed Local Wildlife Site.

3. Digitised

Whilst the Council will expect a method statement and outcome reports to be prepared, it is expected that the principal output from this work to be a GIS layer with an associated database, so that the Council can interrogate the data and information for different purposes. It is expected that this information should be provided in a way which can be shared with the public and partners to enable wider understanding of Local Wildlife Sites and enable wider participation in the delivery of biodiversity and green infrastructure projects. For the purposes of the community this output should be in the form of an online storyboard or Power BI so that residents can access the findings in a clear and interactive way.

4. Embedded community engagement

The Council expects there to be opportunities for the community to input into the process of identifying Local Wildlife Sites, and outputs which enable residents and other non-specialist stakeholders to understand what has resulted from the work. Stakeholders with the specialism in wildlife and biodiversity, and relevant landowners should be full engaged.

5. Multifunctional outputs

The outputs of the Local Wildlife Site Review are intended to inform not just plan-making but also the Council’s approach to Biodiversity Net Gain and Green Infrastructure Planning. To this end, recommendations should not be narrowly focused, but should look across the range of functions, powers and responsibilities that the Council and its partners have. Furthermore, the intended system of biodiversity net gain creates a market for biodiversity rich land which previously did not exist. The outputs should reflect this, by including appropriate recommendations for landowners to enable them to access the biodiversity net gain ‘market’.

Engagement

As set out above engagement with stakeholders and the community is a critical objective of this work. Therefore, it is expected that the appointed consultant will:

- a) Undertake stakeholder engagement with all local organisations with an interest in wildlife and biodiversity during stage 1 and stage 4 of the five-step process for preparing a Local Wildlife Site Review set out in the 2016 Local Wildlife Sites Selection Criteria document. This stakeholder engagement should be comprehensive and should be fully documented.
- b) Prepare documentation for stage 1 to enable members of the community to understand the work that is planned, and to be able to suggest sites that may be worthy of assessment as a Local Wildlife Site. The Council will use this to invite participation by the community.
- c) Prepare a short, visually interesting summary document for residents which summarises the outcomes of the Local Wildlife Site Review as part of stage 4/5. The Council will send this to earlier participants and host it on their website.

The way that landowners are engaged in the Local Wildlife Site Review will be critical to the success, or otherwise, of securing delivery of biodiversity net gains on these sites. It is therefore expected that:

- a) All landowners of Local Wildlife Sites, potential Local Wildlife Sites and sites suggested for survey are contacted as part of stage 2. Whilst the primary aim of this contact will be to seek access, a short summary information document should be provided to these landowners explaining the Local Wildlife Site review and the potential benefits for landowners of maintaining these sites and securing biodiversity net gain.
- b) These landowners are contacted again at stage 5 to notify them of the outcomes of the review of their site. The notification should be accompanied with guidance on how the landowners could deliver biodiversity net gain.

A presentation to Members should also be costed in as an option.

Deliverables

It is expected that the following deliverables will arise from the Local Wildlife Site Review:

- 1) A method statement and outcomes report in MS Word and PDF
- 2) A stakeholders engagement report in MS Word and PDF
- 3) GIS data as shapefiles with a linked database that is capable of sharing with appropriate partners
- 4) An online Storyboard or Power BI that presents the information in an engaging, accessible, community friendly way.
- 5) Biodiversity Net Gain Baseline reports in MS Excel and PDF for each site.
- 6) Engagement materials and documents as set out above.
- 7) Presentation materials related to any stakeholder engagement event and member briefing.

- 8) The consultant may be required to provide evidence at the examination of the Local Plan, or in relation to planning appeals affecting Local Wildlife Sites identified through the review.

All technical work required to fulfil this commission should be completed by suitably qualified ecologists. It should be noted that a small number of existing Local Wildlife Sites in Castle Point are formed of, or contain, aquatic habitats.