

Single Data List 160 – Improved Local Biodiversity in Berkshire 2013-14

SDL 160 (previously NI 197): Proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented

Summary

This report calculates the number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Local Geological Sites (LGS) that have been in positive conservation management in the five year period from 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2014.

Local authorities are required to report on SDL160 to DEFRA each year as a measure of their success at protecting their local biodiversity. SDL160 can also be used as an indicator for Local Plans, as required by National Planning Policy Framework para. 117 (“local authorities should... identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity”).

The implementation of positive conservation management, defined as management that contributes to maintaining or enhancing the features of interest for which a site has been selected, has been assessed by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) across all six Berkshire Unitary Authorities using a standardised methodology which was approved and verified by Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum (now the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership) in 2009.

**The overall figure for Berkshire for 2013-14 was 48%, an increase of 6% from the previous year.
The figure for Wokingham for 2013-14 was 44%, an increase of 3% from the previous year.**

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1. Single Data List 160 for Berkshire

The SDL160 figure for Berkshire has increased since last year from 42% to 48%. Even though the number of local sites has slightly decreased from 765 to 763, the number of qualifying sites over the five year period has increased from 321 to 364.

Single Data List figures for Berkshire Unitary Authorities in 2013/14 are as follows:

Local Authority	No. of Local Sites	No. sites qualifying under criteria					Total	SDL 160
		LGS (1)	LWS (1)	LWS (2)	LWS (3)	LWS (4)		
Bracknell Forest Council	58	2	23	5	23	13	31	53%
Reading Borough Council	22	0	3	13	1	5	15	68%
Slough Borough Council	6	0	2	0	2	1	2	33%
West Berkshire Council	473	4	29	222	23	10	235	50%
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	87	4	12	16	13	9	30	34%
Wokingham Borough Council	117	1	32	26	31	13	51	44%
Berkshire total	763	11	101	282	93	51	364	48%

For comparison purposes, the figures for the previous year (2012/13) are as follows:

Local Authority	No. of Local Sites	No. sites qualifying under criteria					Total	SDL 160
		LGS (1)	LWS (1)	LWS (2)	LWS (3)	LWS (4)		
Bracknell Forest Council	57	2	20	4	18	14	29	51%
Reading Borough Council	21	0	3	13	1	5	15	71%
Slough Borough Council	6	0	2	0	2	1	2	33%
West Berkshire Council	473	4	26	178	21	8	199	42%
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	90	4	12	12	13	6	28	31%
Wokingham Borough Council	118	1	24	28	15	13	48	41%
Berkshire total	765	11	87	235	70	47	321	42%

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2. Single Data List 160 for Wokingham Borough Council

Wokingham Council	No. of Local Sites	No. sites qualifying under criteria					SDL 160
		1	2	3	4	Total	
2013/14	117	32	26	31	13	51	44%
2012/13	118	25	28	15	13	48	41%
2011/12	121	16	34	1	13	51	42%
2010/11	120	15	26	0	12	48	40%
2009/10	120	13	26	0	8	47	39%
Berkshire total 2013/14	763	101	282	93	51	364	48%

Change in SDL 160 since last year

There was an **increase** in the proportion of sites in positive conservation management in Wokingham from 41% to 44%. This was due to a slight decrease in overall number of Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites from 118 to 117, and the number of qualifying sites for the 5 year period increasing from 48 to 51.

The Local Wildlife Site that was deselected in 2013 was:

Site name	Site code
Southlake Park	SU77L03

Comparison with the rest of Berkshire

The proportion of sites in positive conservation management in Wokingham is 4% lower than the overall Berkshire total of 48%.

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3. Background

3.1 Local Wildlife Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (previously known as Wildlife Heritage Sites) are areas in Berkshire which include important and rare habitats and species. The 42,000 LWS in England (covering 5% of land) are essential in conserving wildlife in the UK and halting the loss of biodiversity, by creating a better connected landscape of wildlife buffers, corridors and stepping stones.

TVERC's approach to LWS identification, mapping & designation is consistent with the approach taken in other areas in England and in line with the [DEFRA guidance on Local Sites](#). Survey work is carried out by TVERC staff and experienced volunteers, with the aim of surveying sites every 10 years. The information collected is used to assess sites against a range of criteria (available from <http://www.tverc.org/cms/sites/tverc/files/LWS%20criteria%20Nov%2009.pdf>).

A site selection panel meets during the year to assess the results of the site surveys. The panel comprises representatives from TVERC, the local authorities, BBOWT, Natural England and local wildlife recorders. Panel decisions result in sites being designated as LWS (if they meet the criteria), de-selected (if they don't meet the criteria) or deferred (if further survey information is required). Landowners are made aware of these panel decisions and have an opportunity to challenge them. Once any remaining issues about the decisions have been resolved, maps of the location of these sites are distributed to local authority planning staff (as well as other TVERC partners) to ensure they are taken into consideration in the planning process. LWS are protected from harmful development through the planning system but as most sites are in private ownership, their long-term survival depends upon the interest and goodwill of their land managers and owners.

TVERC runs a ten-year rolling programme to survey sites so the total number of sites can change annually. The percentage, not the number of sites, should be compared on an annual basis.

More information is available at <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/local-wildlife-sites>.

3.2 Local Geological Sites

Local Geological Sites (LGS) (formerly known as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites) exhibit important geological and geomorphological features and range from sarsen stones, rock outcrops to geological faces in active quarries. Local Geology Sites are designated by the [Berkshire Geoconservation Group](#).

More information is available at <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/local-geological-sites>.

3.3 The Local Sites Partnership

The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (previously the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum) is responsible for agreeing the criteria and processes by which Local Wildlife Sites are selected. The Site Selection Panel (a sub-committee of this group) is responsible for agreeing to the selection, de-selection or modification of individual sites.

The site selection panel consists of representatives from:

- Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre
- Berkshire Local Authorities (currently West Berkshire ecologist)
- Natural England
- Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
- Berkshire Geoconservation Group

The current membership of the BLNP is:

Business sector and landowners/ managers

- Local Economic Partnership
- Centrica
- Climate Berkshire
- Crex Consulting
- Greenham Business Park
- Oracle Corporation
- Reading Climate Change Partnership
- Southern Energy
- Thames Water
- TV Energy
- NFU
- Little Hidden Farm
- Sheepdrove Organic Farm

Environmental NGOs, civil society organisations

- Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- Campaign to Protect Rural England Berkshire
- Greenspace SouthEast
- National Trust
- RSPB
- Berkshire Community Foundation
- Community Council for Berkshire
- Groundwork
- Farming & Countryside Education
- Waterways/Canals and Rivers Trust
- Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre
- River Thames Society
- Thames Rivers Restoration Trust
- Kennet & Avon Canal Trust

*Butterfly Conservation (Upper Thames)
Local Government/ Parish Councils/ Government
Agencies*

- Bracknell Forest Council
- Reading Borough Council
- Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
- Slough Borough Council
- West Berkshire District Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Earley Town Council
- Frilsham Parish Council
- Inkpen Parish Council
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England
- English Heritage

National Parks/AONBs

- North Wessex Downs AONB

Health (and Wellbeing Boards)

- NHS Primary Care Trust
- Thrive

Academic/Education sector

- BCA (Berkshire College of Agriculture)
- University of Reading
- County-wide specialist groups*
- Berkshire County Riding Club
- Berkshire Mammal Group
- Berkshire Geoconservation Group

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Berkshire Ornithological Club

CVS/Voluntary Action Groups

Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
Reading Voluntary Action
Slough Community Volunteers
Windsor & Maidenhead Voluntary Action
Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People

Local interest groups

5 A Day Market Garden

Bracknell Forest Local Access Forum
Friends of Ruscombe Wood
Mid & West Berks Local Access Forum
Newbury District Ornithological Group
Ramblers West Berkshire
Reading & District Natural History Society
RB Windsor & Maidenhead Local Access Forum
Slough Local Access Forum
Theale Area Bird Conservation Group
West Berks Countryside Society
West Berks Green Exchange

4. Calculating SDL 160

4.1 Selecting sites in positive management

To show that positive conservation management is being undertaken on a Local Site, there must be documented evidence of management that contributes to maintaining or enhancing the features of interest for which a site has been selected and designated.

This report covers the 5 year period prior to 31st March 2014 and only analyses those sites which were designated during the 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 period. Any sites which had been de-notified or were proposed as LWS over this period were not included in this assessment.

Baseline data were derived using the process set out below which was agreed at the meeting of the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum on 3rd June 2009. It was decided that for a Berkshire Local Wildlife Site to qualify as being in positive management there had to be evidence that at least 50% of the site was being managed in a way that protected or enhanced the wildlife interest of that site.

Some LWS comprise a number of polygons. The management associated with each compartment has been assessed to make an overall site management determination.

- if a site is made up of two separate polygons of area 3 hectares and 2 hectares, if the first is in positive management and the second isn't the overall site will be assessed as in positive conservation management
- if the area of 2 hectares is in positive conservation management and the area of 3 hectares isn't, the overall site will NOT be considered to be in positive management (as 50% or more of the site needs to be in positive management)
- even if both polygons are in positive management the site will 'score' only once in the total number of sites under positive management
- if a site is in positive management in more than one category, the site is counted only once in the total number of sites in positive management

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Because some LWS 'score' for more than one category, the combined number in the four categories is greater than the number of LWS in positive management.

Some sites have the same site code number but different sites names - these have been counted as separate sites.

When a site spans two local authority areas, it is counted as being within whichever local authority the majority of the LWS is within.

The process for selecting sites in positive management is outlined below. Detailed step by step instructions are held at TVERC. There are four qualifying categories which reflect how a site might be managed.

Criterion 1: Site Management Plan: A record was made of whether a site has a current site management plan. Representatives from land-owning conservation organisations, Local Authorities and other organisations were contacted to determine where an active plan is in place on their landholding. The following organisations were contacted:

- BBOWT, Berkshire Reserves Manager
- Berks Local Nature Partnership
- Berkshire Geoconservation Group
- BeWILD Project
- Bracknell Forest Council
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- National Trust
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Reading Borough Council
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- RSPB
- Slough Borough Council
- Thames Water
- West Berkshire Countryside Society
- West Berkshire District Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Woodland Trust

This criterion is the only one that applies to Local Geological Sites. The Berkshire Geoconservation Group was consulted to determine whether any selected sites were covered by a management plan that takes into account the geological aspects of the site or where active management is being undertaken.

Criterion 2: Environmental Management Schemes: Using GIS, the boundaries of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) were overlaid with boundaries of land in qualifying environmental management schemes. The schemes used were:

- 'Beneficial stewardship options' (determined by Natural England), a subset of:
 - Entry Level Stewardship Scheme
 - Organic Entry Level Stewardship Scheme
 - Higher Level Stewardship Scheme
 - Environmental Stewardship Scheme
- England Woodland Grant Scheme (Forestry Commission)

If land within one or more of the above schemes covers 50% or more of a LWS then that LWS was recorded as being in positive management.

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Criterion 3: Is the site relevant to BAP: A record was made of whether conservation work to create, manage or restore UK BAP priority habitats had taken place in the reporting period. This was determined by contacting the organisations listed under criterion 1.

Criterion 4: Management guidance and advice: A record was made where a land owner of a LWS had received management guidance or advice in the last 5 years and whether it was known if this was acted on. This category also includes LWS that have active local groups that continue to work on the site, contributing the positive conservation of the features, but where an active management plan may not be in place or has expired. Landowners that have had management visits by partner organisations and expressed interest in under taking wildlife friendly practice on site where also considered here. Where there is evidence that management has been taken up sufficiently, then the site can be recorded as being in positive management.

4.2 Calculating the SDL 160 indicator

The indicator is a simple percentage calculated using the following equation:-

$$X \div Y \times 100 = \text{SDL 160 \%}$$

X = number of sites (in the Local Authority area where positive conservation management has been implemented on more than 50% of the site within the last five years.

Y= total number of sites in the Local Authority area at the time of reporting (as in the GIS layer of the 31st March 2013).