



SITES OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

Every local authority in England has a system for identifying local sites which are of substantive nature conservation value. In Hampshire these are called Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

The designation helps to conserve important and distinctive habitats and species on sites that fall outside of European or national conservation designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation can vary in size from a small pond or woodland to an open expanse of grassland or heathland. Sites can also be linear such as road verges or streams. They include privately owned areas and land owned by local authorities, parish councils, charities or organisations such as the Forestry Commission or Ministry of Defence. Nearly 20% of SINCs in Hampshire are owned by public bodies or non-governmental organisations.



Hampshire has a wealth of protected species and important wildlife habitats including heathland, ancient woodland, old meadows, downland, chalk streams, wetlands and coastal habitats. To help protect these special places over 3,800 sites have been designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, covering 9 % of the county.



Why are SINCs so important ?

- Over 50% of the UK's priority habitat identified (by government) under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan lies outside national nature conservation designations. This gives SINCs a vital role in helping to meet UK biodiversity targets by protecting a large part of this very important resource.
- SINCs help to buffer and connect natural areas, providing ecological networks and increasing resilience of biodiversity to pressures of land use and climate change.
- SINCs contribute to the quality of life and health and wellbeing of the community. They provide attractive countryside and important open space in urban areas. Sites also provide excellent opportunities for recreation and education.

Identifying Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation



The SINC system in Hampshire is managed by Hampshire County Council on behalf of the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership. This includes all local authorities, Natural England, Hampshire Wildlife Trust and many other organisations in Hampshire actively involved with the conservation and management of SINCs.

SINCs are identified by Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) using data from a variety of sources. These include an ongoing county-wide habitat survey programme carried out with landowner permission and funded by the partnership, and additional records received from many voluntary recording groups and individuals.

Data is collated and assessed by HBIC and sites are identified using detailed selection criteria, that are available via the link below.

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/hampshire/sincs/important-sites-sinc-criteria.htm>

A site may qualify due to the presence of an important habitat or for supporting a rare species. A site may also qualify if it supports a rich assemblage of species.

HBIC produces a schedule of SINCs for each local authority in Hampshire. Landowners are notified when a SINC has been identified on their land and offered advice on how to retain its importance for wildlife.

Guidance published by DEFRA suggests that 'Local Authorities should provide leadership in establishing and maintaining partnerships and systems to identify and manage local sites'.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdf/protected-areas/localsites.pdf>

The SINC system in Hampshire follows these recommendations closely and is an example of one of the most comprehensive and progressive local wildlife sites systems in the country.

Performance Framework for Local Authorities

In 2007 the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a set of indicators that form the new performance framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships. This includes an indicator for monitoring enhancement of biodiversity:

NI 197 Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites

This indicator measures the proportion of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (local sites) in Hampshire under active conservation management. Increasing the number of sites under management relies on a wide partnership and support to land owners. Performance will be reported annually by Hampshire County Council on behalf of the partnership.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator>

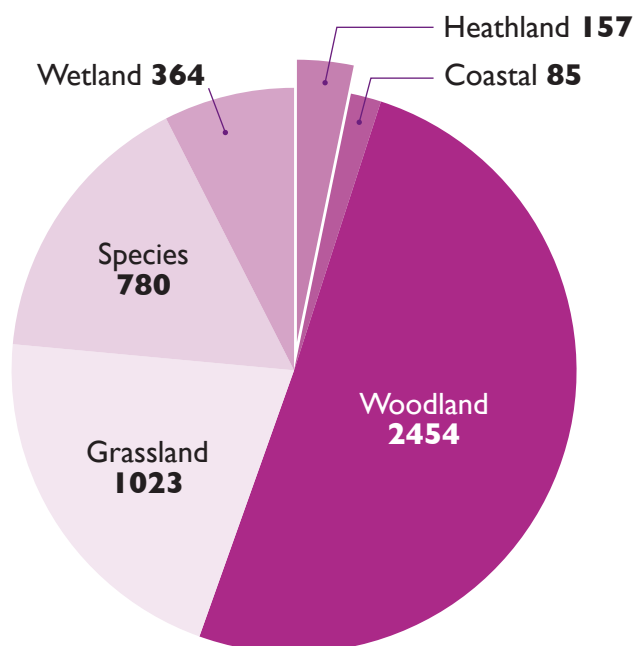


SINCs and the Planning System

The Government's objectives for biodiversity set out in the 'England Biodiversity Strategy' state that planning, construction, development and regeneration should have minimal impact on biodiversity and enhance it wherever possible. In moving towards this aim a new set of Planning Policy Statements (PPS) were drawn up in 2005.

In line with Government planning guidance local authorities in Hampshire are following best practice and identifying the location of SINCS in their Local Development Frameworks together with policies for their safeguard.

Number of SINCs by criteria in Hampshire



October 2008. Note – some SINCS included in more than one category



Management of SINCs

All of the SINCs in Hampshire support nationally important habitats. The majority require management to retain their wildlife interest which could range from coppicing of woodland, to clearing of scrub on heathlands to grazing of chalk downland.

Selection of land as a SINC recognises a legacy of good management and relies on continued stewardship by the land owner or manager. The SINC designation does not impose management restrictions on the owner and does not allow public access on a site where none exists.

Identification as a SINC highlights the ecological importance of a site and can assist in applications for funding schemes such as Environmental Stewardship, English Woodland Grant Scheme, or other grants to help with the cost of management.



Further information:

For further information contact the Ecology Group, Hampshire County Council.

✉ ecology.group@hants.gov.uk

🖱 www.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity/



The Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership aims to raise awareness of Hampshire's natural environment and increase commitment to its conservation. The partnership includes local authorities, Government agencies and voluntary bodies working together to conserve and enhance nature in Hampshire.



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