

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE Enterprise, Planning & Infrastructure
DATE 13 September 2011
DIRECTOR Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT Designated Sites Review Recommendations
REPORT NUMBER: EPI/11/134

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the recommendations of the Designated Sites Review project and seek agreement to the re-designation of sites as informed by the review.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the committee: -

- A) Approve the new boundaries for the recommended sites;
B) Agree the sites that will no longer be designated; and
C) Agree that the recommended non-statutory designated sites will be known as Local Nature Conservation Sites.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this committee report, however, a number of Local Nature Conservation Sites cover land in Council ownership.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Designated Sites Review will meet the requirements of the Scottish Planning Policy where local authorities are encouraged to reduce all local designated sites for nature conservation to one type and that these will be referred to as Local Nature Conservation Sites. The new data and the recommendations made will provide up to date information on our local designated sites, providing greater protection through planning policy.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 5.1 Aberdeen City's natural heritage is diverse. It provides us with the natural resources we depend on for food, energy and tourism for example. It also benefits our health and wellbeing; our overall quality of life. We, therefore, need to conserve our natural heritage so that we can continue to enjoy and benefit from it well into the future.
- 5.2 Aberdeen City Council's Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 has been developed to meet the increased recognition of the need to conserve nature, plus changes in local policies and nature conservation legislation. It has also been updated to consider current pressures and challenges such as the increasing need for land for houses and businesses, plus the effects of climate change. The project to review local designated sites has been borne out of the Agenda for Action which helps guide the implementation of this strategy and has been designed to contribute to nature conservation action on the ground.
- 5.3 The project has been constructed to help establish the current state of the natural heritage within non-statutory local designated sites in the Aberdeen City area. In particular, to establish the quality and variety of habitats, plus the number of individual or range of species found at each site.
- 5.4 It has also been some time since reviews were conducted on all non-statutory local designated sites and the information on these sites is now out of date. The new guidance from the Scottish Government, through Scottish Planning Policy, requires local authorities across Scotland with more than one type of non-statutory local designated site within their area to reduce them to just one type of local designation, making the system simpler and more streamlined. The Council currently has two types of non-statutory local designations which are Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS) and District Wildlife Sites (DWS) which will be replaced with a single designation of Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS).
- 5.5 In order to be selected as a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS), sites have been surveyed in accordance with the new criteria set out by the Scottish Government. LNCS have been selected for their biodiversity or geodiversity interests.
- 5.6 Criteria for biodiversity interests include: -
 - Species diversity
 - Species or habitat rarity
 - Habitat naturalness and extent
 - Contributes to national and local biodiversity objectives
 - Provides connectivity between habitats or green networks
 - Facilitates enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage

- 5.7 Criteria for geodiversity interests include: -
- Value for scientific study or education
 - Historical significance
 - Cultural and aesthetic value
 - Promotes public awareness and enjoyment
- 5.8 Each site was surveyed and assessed by ecologists at the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC), and subsequently reviewed against the relevant criteria by a panel of local experts including (but not limited to) representatives from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), University of Aberdeen, James Hutton Institute, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Council. This has ensured that the review has been done in an objective and scientific manner.
- 5.9 Out of all the sites reviewed, one site, Loirston Loch had its recommended boundary altered to reflect the position as set out in the proposed Local Development Plan in respect of opportunity site OP77. The new boundary reflects the previous District Wildlife Site boundary with an increased buffer zone.
- 5.10 Sites of local importance make a considerable contribution to biodiversity. They can also provide opportunities for people to find out about biodiversity or geodiversity; contribute to the local economy and the quality of the local environment; plus help to improve people's own quality of life.
- 5.11 Protection, preservation and enhancement of the designated sites are currently afforded through the Aberdeen Local Plan Green Spaces / New Places 2008, Policy 34: Natural Heritage, and will in the future be replaced by the new Aberdeen Local Development Plan, 2010 Policy NE8 Natural Heritage.
- 5.12 A summary of the recommendations arising from the review are listed in the following Table 1: -

Table 1: Summary of Recommendations

SUBJECT	TOTAL
Local designated sites reviewed	80
Sites recommended to be a Local Nature Conservation Site	65
Sites that did not meet Scottish Planning Policy criteria	15
Final number of sites after some sites have been grouped and/or split	45

- 5.13 The following Table 2 lists all the sites that have been recommended to become a Local Nature Conservation Site. This is the final list after some sites have been grouped or split. Those sites that consist of a group of sites are marked with *, and sites that have been split are marked with **.

Table 2: Recommended Local Nature Conservation Sites

NO.	SITE NAME
1.	Balnagask to Cove
2.	Tullos Hill
3.	River Don Corridor *
4.	Balgownie/Blackdog Links
5.	Loirston Loch
6.	Kincorth Hill
7.	River Dee Corridor *
8.	Scotstown *
9.	Corby Loch
10.	Den of Leggart
11.	Westburn of Rubislaw
12.	Rubislaw *
13.	Hilton Wood
14.	Grandholme Moss
15.	Stoneyhill Wood
16.	Walker Dam & Rubislaw Link
17.	Allan Park Pond **
18.	West Cults Woodland **
19.	Deeside Old Railway
20.	Hazlehead Park
21.	Denwood, Hazlehead
22.	Bucksburn *
23.	Den of Maidencraig
24.	Culds Den
25.	Culds Quarry
26.	Hillhead Road
27.	Farburn Wood
28.	Three Hills *
29.	Den of Moss-Side
30.	Foggieton
31.	Murtle Den
32.	West Hatton
33.	Woodlands Wood, Beidleston
34.	Moss of Auchlea
35.	Rotten of Gairn
36.	Peterculter *
37.	Culter Burn
38.	Kinaldie Den
39.	Culter Compensation Dam

40.	Old Manse Wood
41.	Baads Moss
42.	Leuchar Moss
43.	Southlasts Mire
44.	Aberdeen-Inverness-Kittybrewster Railway Line
45.	Rubislaw Quarry

Allan Park Pond has now been split into two separate sites due to having two different types of habitat. The pond will remain as Allan Park Pond (NO. 17 in Table 2) and the second site will be called West Cults Woodland (NO. 18 in Table 2).

- 5.14 The following Table 3 breaks down the sites from Table 2 that are listed as merged. The numbers down the left hand side and the site names correspond with those in Table 2.

Table 3: Merged Sites from Table 2.

NO.	SITE NAME	MERGED SITES
3.	River Don Corridor	River Don Valley, Don Estuary, Braes of Don, Crook of Don, Woodside, Lower & Upper Persley Woodland.
7.	River Dee Corridor	River Dee Valley, Kincorth, Bridge of Dee, Pitfodels Castle, Garthdee, Morrison Island/Shakkin Briggie, Lover's Walk to St. Maik's Well.
8.	Scotstown	Scotstown Moor/Perwinnes Moss, Lochside/Denmore, Glashie Howe.
12.	Rubislaw	Rubislaw Den, North Burn of Rubislaw,.
22.	Bucksburn	Bucksburn Gorge, Burnbrae Moss.
28.	Three Hills	Brimmond Hill, Elrick Hill, Tyrebagger Hill, Gough Burn.
36.	Peterculter	Woodend Woods-Peterculter, Guttrie Hill, Culter House Woods, Hill of Ardbeck.

- 5.15 Of the 80 local designated sites reviewed, 15 sites have not met the required criteria for LNCS as set by Scottish Planning Policy. That equates to the City of Aberdeen having lost 19 per cent of its total local designated sites since they were first surveyed in the nineties. The reasons for not meeting the criteria include: -

- Stricter criteria set by Scottish Planning Policy;
- Encroachment from new development;
- Fragmentation of habitats and isolation of species due to new development; and
- Poor management of designated sites.

- 5.16 While it has been difficult to quantify the exact total area covered by the designated sites that have been lost, given the pressures on natural heritage in urban environments, any loss of a designated site regardless of its size is a concern. Most of these sites will still have some protection afforded from other local planning policies such as Green Space Network or Green Belt, however, this review highlights the importance to protect and enhance our remaining local designated sites in such a way that is complementary with future development.
- 5.17 The following Table 4 consists of those sites that have not met the appropriate criteria for a Local Nature Conservation Site and have been rejected.

Table 4: Rejected Sites.

NO.	REJECTED SITES
1.	Charleston Wood
2.	Kinta Valley
3.	Newton of Sheilhill
4.	Danestone House
5.	Cornhill Hospital
6.	Clerkhill Wood
7.	Monument Wood
8.	Persley Quarries
9.	Murtle House/Newton Dee
10.	Blacktop
11.	Binghill Wood
12.	Little Hill, Kaskieben
13.	Mid Anguston Quarry
14.	Woodland Walks, Foggieton
15.	Fields at Cairdhillock

- 5.18 Appendix 1 contains the maps of each site that has been recommended as a Local Nature Conservation Site (sites still being verified). Each map indicates the current (old) boundary and the proposed new boundary for each site. The old boundary is indicated as a dashed line and the proposed new boundary is a solid line and the areas are shaded in grey. Two sites (Balgownie/Blackdog Links and Corby Loch) cover both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils and the boundary between the two local authorities is indicated with a solid thick line.
- 5.19 A new booklet containing the maps with new boundaries will be produced following the completion of the review.

6. IMPACT

- 6.1 This project has direct links with the administration's Vibrant and Dynamic & Forward Looking requirement to 'adopt and implement policies which safeguard Aberdeen's green belt and green wedges'.
- 6.2 This strategy will also assist the Council in delivering a number of Single Outcome Agreement National Outcomes including: -
1 - 'We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe';
10 - 'We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need'; and
12 - 'We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and enhance it for future generations'.
- 6.3 The project has direct positive impacts on the quality of life for the citizens of Aberdeen due to the benefits derived from having non-statutory local designated sites. Since the project has been borne out of the adopted Aberdeen City Council Nature Conservation Strategy 2010-2015 where an 'Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment' has already been conducted, a further assessment is, therefore, not required as part of this report.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- a) APPENDIX 1 – Non-Statutory Local Designated Sites Maps indicating existing and proposed new boundaries.
- b) Scottish Planning Policy
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/300760/0093908.pdf>
- c) The Aberdeen Local Plan – Green Spaces / New Places, 2008
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Planning/pla/pla_LocalPlan_home.asp
- d) Aberdeen Local Development Plan – Proposed Plan, 2010
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Planning/ldp/pla_local_development_plan.asp

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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