

- 1.0 The Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP), adopted in 2000, provides protection for sites of special local importance for nature conservation, known as Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) in Policy NC5. The original schedule of SBIs is identified in the UDP in Proposal NC6 and on the Proposals Map.
- 1.1 In February 2011 Wirral Borough Council formally agreed a revised schedule of Sites of Biological Importance, as a material consideration for use by Planning Committee in the determination of individual planning applications.
- 1.3 The revised schedule of SBIs is set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Wirral's Sites of Biological Importance were originally drawn up by Cheshire Wildlife Trust in the late 1980's replacing the wildlife sites system previously developed by Merseyside County Council. This system has been maintained on a voluntary basis, initially by Wirral Wildlife (the Wirral group of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust), with the assistance of other specialist wildlife groups, and more recently by the Wirral Local Wildlife Sites Partnership, established in 2007.

3.0 2011 Review

- 3.1 Since the adoption of the UDP sites have continued to be surveyed on a rolling basis. This has identified a number of proposed changes to the original schedule of SBIs, including existing sites that no longer meet the criteria for inclusion and should be removed from the schedule, sites where boundary modifications are required to reflect current nature conservation value and additional sites that now meet the criteria for inclusion as SBIs.
- 3.2 Full details of the proposed changes were presented to Wirral Council's Cabinet on 13th January 2011 in a report titled *Local Development Framework for Wirral – Sites of Biological Importance Update*, which can be viewed at:

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=17200>
- 3.3 The Local Sites Partnership are proposing to review the criteria for selecting SBIs follow the publication of guidance on local sites by DEFRA in 2006. In time all SBIs would need to be reassessed against any revised selection criteria. However, in the meantime, the original site selection criteria employed in the assessment of SBIs in the UDP have been used as the basis for the 2011 review. The criteria were developed by Wirral Wildlife, the Wirral Group of Cheshire Wildlife Trust with assistance from specialist wildlife groups such as Wirral and West Cheshire Badger Group, Merseyside Bat Group and the British Trust for Ornithology and were agreed with English Nature (Natural England) and Wirral Borough Council.

4.0 Criteria for Selection of Sites of Biological Importance

- 4.1 Sites of Biological Importance should include all good examples of all habitat types represented on Wirral which are not already Sites of Special Scientific Interest. They are selected solely upon ecological merit, although other factors such as geology, history and management may influence their overall value.
- 4.2 Four primary attributes are used to select sites. Individual sites would normally possess more than one of these. These attributes cannot be ranked in order of importance; all have to be considered in evaluating a site for SBI status. Ownership and planning status are not considered in evaluating sites.

Primary Attributes

- A) Presence of a high quality example of at least one habitat: sites will be among the best local examples of the habitat under consideration. Scarce habitats (locally / nationally) have increased value. Habitats where natural processes are likely to lead to rapid loss of ecological interest are usually less valuable, except where the process of ecological change is itself of interest.
- B) Presence of a high diversity of the species to be expected in that habitat. Number of species alone is not a sufficient guide; a heathland, for example, will have less plant species than a woodland, but still may be a very good example of a heathland.
- C) Presence of good examples of a variety of habitats. A varied site, providing for a range of species, is often of more value than a less diverse area.
- D) Presence of locally or nationally rare or uncommon species, particularly those that are protected by law e.g. Badgers, Great Crested Newts, Bats.

Subsidiary Factors

- 4.3 Other considerations may affect the value of a site: -
- 1) Large size - bigger sites tend to support more animal species and are able to sustain those animals which require large territories.
 - 2) Potential for or existence of good management tending to increase the wildlife value.
 - 3) Key position as a link between other wildlife sites.
 - 4) Presence of geological and / or physiographical features.
 - 5) Educational value for demonstrating biological or other scientific features - accessibility is important.
 - 6) Scientific recorded history - sites with historical scientific records have enhanced value.

4.4 In applying these criteria to Wirral Metropolitan Borough, certain general principles can be drawn for various habitats.

4.5 **Woodland:** Since semi-natural woodland is in short supply in Wirral, SBI woodlands should include:

- i. all woodland which by presence of indicator species appears to be ancient and/or semi-natural;
- ii. all other woodlands of high species diversity (plant/animal), especially where rare species are present.

4.6 **Lowland Heath:** This is a nationally and internationally rare habitat. Wirral has good examples of a particular maritime type. SBIs will include:

- i. all good examples over 2ha.;
- ii. down-graded heathland of this size where birch/pine invasion is the problem, as this can be reversed by management to control the trees.

4.7 **Coastal:** Much of the coast is heavily altered: SBIs will seek to protect all good examples of the following which are not within the SSSIs: -

- i. sand dune, both mobile and fixed, including slacks, maritime calcareous grassland and other features of the sand dune system;
- ii. clay cliffs;
- iii. rocky shore;
- iv. salt marsh.

4.7 **Grassland:** Unimproved / semi-improved grassland is extremely rare on Wirral, except for the small SSSI Meols Meadow. Any diverse grassland discovered in future should be scheduled as an SBI. Grassland diversity can now be judged against the National Vegetation Classification.

4.8 **Fresh water and wetlands:** These are represented in Wirral largely by the numerous field ponds. These are vital to local wildlife and of national interest as north-west England has the greatest density of ponds in the country. The number of ponds has declined greatly in the last 30 years (by around 50%), so that protection and management of the resource is important. Various pond surveys have been carried out, but it is always possible that further good examples will become known or existing ponds improved by good management. Special value will be attached to: -

- i. ponds supporting good populations of Great Crested Newts (legally protected with the main populations in N.W. England);
- ii. clusters of ponds or ones adjacent to other valuable wildlife habitats;
- iii. ponds in an early stage of the succession to dry land (i.e. early in their natural life cycle);
- iv. ponds under active good management.

Appendix 1 - Wirral Sites of Biological Importance

Site Number	Name	Grid Reference	UDP Proposal Number
B1	Royal Liverpool Golf Course, Hoylake	SJ.208885	NC6/1
B2	Grange Hill, West Kirby	SJ.219871	NC6/2
B3	Caldy Hill, West Kirby	SJ.225860	NC6/3
B4	Stapledon Wood, West Kirby	SJ.231857	NC6/4
B5	Newton Common, West Kirby	SJ.230862 SJ.231864 SJ.230866	NC6/5
B6	Caldy Golf Course	SJ.227843	NC6/6
B7	Caldy Hospital Grounds	SJ.227854	NC6/7
B9	Irby Quarry	SJ.252859	NC6/9
B11	Harrock Wood, Irby	SJ.263845	NC6/11
B12	Backford Road Pond, Irby	SJ.25508415	NC6/12
B13	Royden Park, Frankby	SJ.242858	NC6/13
B15	Wirral Way (Caldy-Heswall)	SJ.219854	NC6/15
B16	Wirral Way (Heswall-Borough Boundary)	SJ.267806	NC6/16
B18	The Dungeon, Thurstaston	SJ.251831	NC6/18
B19	Piper's Lane, Heswall	SJ.253824	NC6/19
B20	Quarry Road East, Heswall	SJ.266827	NC6/20
B21	Heswall Beacons*	SJ.271813	NC6/21
B22	Wittering Lane, Heswall	SJ.258816	NC6/22
B23	Bush Way, Heswall*	SJ.261818	NC6/23
B24	Gayton Wood	SJ.276802	NC6/24
B25	Gayton Hall Wood	SJ.275805	NC6/25
B26	Backwood Hall Farm, Gayton	SJ.280799	NC6/26
B28	Benty Heath Lane Ponds, Raby	SJ.322791	NC6/28
B29	Willaston Copse, Raby	SJ.321788	NC6/29
B30	Barnston Dale	SJ.282837	NC6/30
B31	Murrayfield Hospital, Thingwall	SJ.284842	NC6/31
B32	Manor Wood, Thornton Hough	SJ.294815	NC6/32
B33	Thornton Hough Ponds	SJ.298821	NC6/33
B34	Stanley Wood, Landican Lane, Storeton	SJ.293847	NC6/34
B35	Rake Hey Covert Pond, Brimstage	SJ.30038365	NC6/35
B36	Arrowe Park *	SJ.266864	NC6/36
B37	Limbo Lane Pond, Irby	SJ.26508530	NC6/37
B38	Arrowe Brook Farm Ponds, Greasby	SJ.265865	NC6/38
B39	Greasby Copse and Ponds	SJ.258866	NC6/39
B40	Storeton Wood, Higher Bebington	SJ.313846	NC6/40

B41	Old Sewage Works, Clatterbridge	SJ.323819	NC6/41
B42	Thornton Common*	SJ.322814	NC6/42
B43	Raby Mere	SJ.330808	NC6/43
B44	The Marfords, Brookhurst	SJ.339811	NC6/44
B45	Bromborough Golf Course Ponds	SJ.33718027 SJ.33058040 SJ.33808023	NC6/45
B46	Hargrave House Farm Ponds, Brookhurst	SJ.339797	NC6/46
B47	Plymyard Dale, Brookhurst	SJ.339804	NC6/47
B48	Lowfields, Eastham	SJ.350791	NC6/48
B49	Holm Hill, West Kirby	SJ.222863	NC6/49
B50	Eastham Woods*	SJ.363816	NC6/50
B51	Old Hall Road Woods, Bromborough	SJ.357822	NC6/51
B53	New Ferry Butterfly Park*	SJ.333852	NC6/53
B55	Burrell Road, Prenton	SJ.311860	NC6/55
B56	Wirral Ladies Golf Course, Noctorum	SJ.293884	NC6/56
B57	Bidston Hill	SJ.285894	NC6/57
B59A	Wallasey Golf Course	SJ.284928	NC6/59
B59B	Leasowe Gun Site	SJ.277925	NC6/59
B60	Old Birket, Leasowe	SJ.284914	NC6/60
B61	Leasowe Pond	SJ.27989110	NC6/61
B62	Bidston Marsh	SJ.285910	NC6/62
B63	Sandbrook Lane Pond, Upton	SJ.27208943	NC6/63
B64	Paulsfield Drive Woodland, Overchurch	SJ.262890	NC6/64
B65	Overchurch Park Woodland, Upton	SJ.264889	NC6/65
B66	Leasowe Common	SJ.252913	NC6/66
B67	Meols Field	SJ.244907	NC6/67
B68	Pasture Farm Ponds, Moreton	SJ.25429095 SJ.25379090	NC6/68
B69	Upton Bridge Wood	SJ.265875	NC6/69
B70	Colley's Farm, Thurstaston	SJ.248835	NC6/70
B71	Prenton Dell and Claypit	SJ.295858	NEW
B72	Former RAF Camp, Greasby	SJ.243877	NEW
B73	Lower Heath Wood, Thingwall	SJ.290847	NEW
B74	Tom's Paddock, Clatterbridge	SJ.328813	NEW
B75	The Rectory, Thurstaston	SJ.251842	NEW
B76	Former Hotel Victoria, Lower Heswall	SJ.269808	NEW
B77	Manor Farm, Frankby	SJ.245876	NEW

* Original UDP site names have been amended.