

DONCASTER LOCAL SITES PARTNERSHIP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1. *Local Sites are areas of land that support recognised and valued habitats, species and/or geological features, which are of substantive local biodiversity or geodiversity importance. Local Sites represent the core biodiversity components of local ecological networks and complement statutory sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (which are designated to illustrate and protect the best examples of the UK's flora, fauna and geological features). Protecting and maintaining a functioning ecological network, which includes these biodiverse Local Sites, enables the natural environment to effectively deliver ecosystem services and adapt to pressures such as climate change and development.*
- 1.2. Doncaster's Local Sites System identifies and maintains a series of designated Local Sites for the Borough in accordance with legislation and national and local policy.

2. PURPOSE OF THE DONCASTER LOCAL SITES PARTNERSHIP

- 2.1. The purpose of the Local Sites Partnership is to facilitate the functioning of Doncaster's Local Sites System by:
- ensuring the involvement and support of, and dialogue across, a range of relevant stakeholders;
 - operating the Local Sites system in a transparent way that can be communicated with confidence to all parties (such as landowners and developers);
 - operating clearly understood processes and criteria for the selection of sites; and
 - recommending a sites series that remains robust, and based on sound ecological evidence, at any point in time.

3. PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES (Detailed information is in Appendix 1.)

- 3.1. The following objectives *underpin* the functioning of the Local Sites system and set out the expected role the Partnership will take. The Partnership shall:
- Promote** the role and importance of Local Sites at a strategic level, as part of the core components of ecological networks, and in contributing to nature recovery networks and strategies; and to help Doncaster City Council (CDC), and other local public bodies, to meet their statutory biodiversity duty to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity through their functions;
 - Agree the basis** for Local Wildlife and Geological site selection and endorse this for adoption by CDC;
 - Review the operation** of the Local Sites system; its policy, procedures and site selection criteria; and revise them as necessary;
 - Co-ordinate site selection procedures** including the re/survey of existing Local Sites, identification of new candidate sites; and their assessment against the adopted site selection criteria, taking expert advice as appropriate;
 - Review and make recommendations** to CDC on the status of Local Sites, in accordance with B to D above, and their inclusion within the [Local Plan](#) (via update to the Plan's [Policies Map](#)) for use in informing planning decisions; and to inform other relevant Council functions and services;
 - Establish a process for monitoring** the condition of the selected Local Sites;
 - Actively promote and support site management**, including through the provision of guidance to landowners and managers on the conservation management of Local Sites, to help protect and enhance the sites' special interests;
 - Promote the enhancement of sites** through the enhancement of condition, buffering and increasing connectivity;

- I. **Co-ordinate funding** provision and/or identification and promotion of securing funding opportunities;
- J. **Promote educational use** of sites where appropriate; and
- K. **Support CDC** in establishing and **reporting on Local Site management status** - an indicator on the Government's Single Data List.

3.2. It is recognised that the resources and capacity of each organisation will differ. However, Partnership membership indicates a commitment to support the Local Sites system

4. MEMBERSHIP

4.1. The membership of Doncaster Local Sites Partnership is set out in Appendix 2. It is made up of representatives from CDC, statutory agencies, conservation bodies, and the voluntary and community sector, that all have an interest in protecting, enhancing, and promoting biodiversity and geodiversity conservation at a strategic level. Members will be expected to contribute to the Partnership through the provision of local knowledge, experience, influence, and advice – where qualified/appropriate. Membership is open to new members that can demonstrate their interest and contribution to the aims and objectives of the Partnership, subject to a vote being taken. Membership can include Local Site owners; as this may be particularly valuable when a landowner is responsible for a network of sites, or are in contact with other Local Site owners (e.g. tenant farmers) regarding land management matters, or are themselves local naturalists that can contribute to the Partnership's objectives.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1. Chair: a Partnership member holding position for 1 year or on an agreed rotation.
- 5.2. Administrator: a CDC Officer (responsibilities include: minute taking; meeting planning; and receiving/distributing/ reporting information).
- 5.3. CDC, via the Administrator, is the main point of contact for advice or queries relating to the development and operation of the Local Sites system and is responsible for convening the Local Sites Partnership and for managing the Local Sites system.
- 5.4. CDC may undertake any aspect of site assessment and monitoring to facilitate proceedings, subject to agreement and final endorsement by the Partnership.
- 5.5. CDC will record all aspects of the procedure for managing the system in accordance with the DEFRA Guidance and will make available the basis for individual site selection.
- 5.6. CDC will maintain and publish an up-to-date Local Sites series which will include: an up-to-date list of Local Sites along with their designation status; a means of identifying their location; and an overview of the features of biodiversity and/or geodiversity interest underpinning their designation. The series will support Local Plan policy and will be updated on a regular basis following approval by CDC.
- 5.7. Liaison and correspondence with landowners and managers with regard to designation and management of Local Sites, Candidate Sites or potential future sites will be undertaken by CDC, or, at the request of the Partnership. As such, suggestions for new sites should be reported to the Local Sites Partnership or CDC.

6. MEETINGS

- 6.1. Meetings should take place at least once a year to progress the Partnership's Objectives.
- 6.2. The timing and format of the annual meeting should allow for agreement on:

- the re/survey programme for the coming year;
- any proposed changes resulting from the previous year's re/survey data or any other new data resulting in, for example, site additions, boundary amendments and site de-designations.

6.3. Additional meetings may take place as and when needed to manage this work. Special meetings can be arranged to discuss specific issues as necessary.

6.4. Discussion and correspondence can, in addition to meetings, be conducted by email.

6.5. Decisions may be made either at arranged meetings or, if required, by email vote. To be considered quorate, at least five (5) members, from at least three (3) different organisations (which can include independent individuals), must be present at a meeting or take part in an email vote.

6.6. Meetings are to be minuted and actions carried out within agreed timescales.

7. ANNUAL REPORTING

7.1. To CDC: via an 'Officer Decision Record' (ODR) on which the relevant CDC Cabinet Portfolio holder will be recommended any required changes to the Local Sites System (primarily, but not limited to, individual sites) by the Local Sites Partnership.

7.2. To DEFRA: CDC is required to report on the proportion of Local Sites in positive management as an indicator on the Government's [Single Data List](#), (Local nature conservation / biodiversity (reference 160-01 previously NI 197) in accordance with DEFRA's guidelines

8. REVIEW & EVALUATION

8.1. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the Partnership every two years; or before that if requested by a partner. The next review will take place in June 2025.

9. LEGAL POSITION

9.1. Nothing in this document will be construed as creating a legal partnership or joint venture. The Partners enter into this Agreement in good faith and in the spirit of co-operation in order to achieve common a purpose. The costs of participation in the Partnership and its work incurred by each partner shall be borne by the partner incurring it, unless a formal written agreement to the contrary is made between the cost-incurring partner and any cost-contributing partner.

10. GUIDANCE

10.1. CDC's Local Sites system has been developed in accordance with national guidance:

- [Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management](#) (DEFRA 2006).
- Guidance on the Improved Biodiversity Indicator (NI 197) (2008).

Appendix 1 Local Sites System – Supporting Information

1. Establishing the Baseline

- 1.1. The Doncaster Local Sites system has been developed in accordance with [DEFRA Guidance](#) on their Identification, Selection and Management (DEFRA 2006).
- 1.2. The Local Sites selection criteria were first adopted in 2009, with the input of an extended group of specialist stakeholders, and following public consultation. The criteria introduced an evidence-based and transparent procedure for assessing and designating sites, based on defined local measures and factors. The stakeholders included professional and amateur naturalists with an interest in species recording and conservation at both a local and/or county scale. Additional work was commissioned from independent ecologists to define, test and consolidate information regarding habitat character and the distribution of species assemblages. All Local Sites in existence before 2009 (formerly known as Sites of Scientific Interest (SSIs) and Regionally Important Geological sites (RIGS) were assessed against the revised criteria.
- 1.3. An abridged version of the selection criteria is included as Appendix 8 to the [Doncaster Local Plan](#) (adopted September 2021).

2. Data Collection and Management

- 2.1. Site assessment is based on data and information available to the Local Sites Partnership. It is important that Local Sites are designated on the basis of the best available data (generally obtained through field survey by a suitably qualified and experienced surveyor). Data should be as up to date as possible and be subject to a system of validation and, in some instances, verification by a credible recorder, or professional in the ecology or geology field. This is a function of Doncaster's [Local Record Centre](#). The Doncaster [Local Record Centre](#) will be the principal source of data used to assess sites, although data will be sought from specific recorders or recording societies for key species groups. The [Local Record Centre](#) has its own information management policies and procedures.
- 2.2. Where substantial records are held by other groups or bodies (and are not held by Doncaster [Local Records Centre](#)), they may be taken into consideration at the discretion of the Doncaster Local Sites Partnership.
- 2.3. The Local Sites Partnership will also commission data collection to inform the assessment and monitoring of Local Site character and condition. This information will be owned by Doncaster City Council (CDC) and be managed by Doncaster [Local Records Centre](#) to support the Local Sites system.

3. Site Naming, Numbering and Status

- 3.1. The naming and numbering of sites will continue to be based upon the original (pre-2009) system, assuming existing names and reference codes and allocating new sites and codes on the same basis. Reference codes are numerical and are prefixed with the former Unitary Development Plan (UDP) ward number for where the site is located, followed by the next unique ascending site number for that area. This approach ensures compatibility with data managed by Doncaster [Local Records Centre](#). The continuing process of site review will lead to changes in the Local Sites series, and this will inevitably result in gaps in the sequence of reference numbers.
- 3.2. Newly proposed sites will be referred to as 'candidate sites' up to the point that they are assessed by the Local Sites Partnership against the site selection criteria, at which point their status will be determined subject to the results of the assessment.

- 3.3. Existing Local Sites, that on reassessment have failed to meet any of the (2009) approved Sites selection criteria, will only be recommended for de-designation when it's considered that the feature of interest has been lost or degraded beyond their potential for restoration.

4. Site Mapping

- 4.1. Local Site boundaries should be mapped according to practical management units. These units will generally correspond with physical features of the habitat or landscape, and therefore be identifiable by map and on the ground. A Local Site which meets only the woodland criteria may support other habitats within its boundary which contributes to its general biodiversity, or it may include a buffer from surrounding land uses. However, the qualifying features of importance should be clearly defined within the site citation and cover the majority of the site's footprint. Local Sites supporting multiple habitats may also be eligible for designation under the Mixed Habitat and Structural Mosaic criteria.
- 4.2. When assessing and mapping Local Sites, man-made features such as areas of hard standing, highways, buildings and associated infrastructure should be excluded, wherever practical, from the designated area, particularly in instances where they are peripheral to the main body of the site. Where the removal of such areas would result in the site becoming significantly dissected or discontinuous e.g. with hedgerows and drains, then these connecting areas should be discounted in site size measurements and when applying the proximity criteria. Within the individual citations, the value of such areas may be noted; however, the reasons for designation should clearly relate to the criteria met. Similarly, although the value of bare ground within habitats is recognised, large areas mapped as bare ground should be discounted from habitat size measurements, as generally small mosaics of bare ground have been mapped as an integral component of the semi-natural habitat.
- 4.3. Where habitat units within a Local Site are fragmented, the component parts should be aggregated to provide an overall site or habitat size. The DEFRA guidance states "*Where a locality has a number of small fragments of semi-natural habitat which together could be managed to provide linkages for natural colonisation or movement, a Local Site boundary can be defined to take in a wider area and include both discontinuous natural patches and the areas separating them*". This approach should be adopted both in the grouping of similar and mixed habitats.
- 4.4. For sites supporting habitats and species, associated with artificial substrates, boundaries should be drawn to correspond with the qualifying feature of interest, or otherwise to physical landmarks and topographic features. Similarly, the boundaries of linear features should be defined between physical landmarks e.g. bridges along a river, or junctions within a hedgerow.
- 4.5. The boundaries of sites selected based upon their species attributes should be drawn to encompass all habitats or features that are important to maintain the species on that site.
- 4.6. Geological boundaries encompass the geological area of importance (as defined by the interpretation of the criteria). Within a site a more precise area may also be identified with a grid reference if it is deemed significant. In some instances, when practical, Local Sites qualifying on biological and geological grounds will share a common boundary, whilst retaining unique reference numbers. This will not always be possible or meaningful and therefore in each instance where biological and geological boundaries correspond, the Local Sites Partnership will make a decision based upon the reasons for designation.

5. Site Assessment, Monitoring and Survey

- 5.1. The process of site assessment will be based on the most up-to-date information available and will require the re/survey of sites and habitats and monitoring of their features of interest in accordance with the following.

- 5.2. The Local Sites Partnership will agree a programme of re/survey and monitoring work each year. The field data will generally be commissioned by CDC and will ensure that a specified standard is met.
- 5.3. A range of monitoring techniques and survey methodologies will need to be used to ensure that appropriate data is collected to make an assessment using the site selection criteria. Site re/survey will include the collection of field data to enhance local knowledge of site interests and general condition including evidence of past or current management.
- 5.4. All survey data will be provided to and managed by the [Local Records Centre](#). The Partnership aims to monitor and re-survey all Local Sites within a 10-year period, on a rolling basis. This will be in accordance with the DEFRA guidance and to steer the implementation and accurate reporting of the local indicator.
- 5.5. Targeted or more intensive survey may occasionally be required to gather data on candidate Local Sites for the purpose of establishing Local Site status. Further survey work may also be carried out on existing designated sites to establish their value for habitats or species other than those used for primary selection. This may include establishing their geodiversity value. Assessments will be undertaken to provide the supporting evidence for a site to be amended or removed from the system. This will include an assessment of whether remediation is possible.

6. Site Designation

- 6.1. Working within the adopted system, the Local Sites Partnership will make recommendations each year regarding any necessary changes to the Local Sites series. The changes might include new sites for designation, recommendations for de-designation and site boundary changes.
- 6.2. Any recommended changes will be formally reported within CDC via its 'Officer Decision Record' approval process, in consultation with the relevant CDC Cabinet Portfolio Holder. Following this approval any changes to the Local Sites series (site additions and deletions – both in whole or in part, including boundary changes) will be reflected on the Local Plan's [Policies Map](#).
- 6.3. Updated Local Site citations will be issued to Local Site owners by CDC.
- 6.4. Any dispute with the Partnerships recommendations relating to Local Site's (for example designation, de-designation and amendment) must be raised, with supporting evidence, for further consideration

7. Promoting Local Sites and Ecological Networks

- 7.1. The Local Site Partnership and its partners will seek to provide management guidance and/or, where necessary, support owners in producing management plans to promote the management of sites for nature conservation.
- 7.2. Members of the Doncaster Local Sites Partnership may be involved in discussions with landowners and managers with regard to designation and/or the provision of suitable site management advice as part of their organisation's normal role or when requested by the landowner or manager. In such cases the member will inform the Partnership of their involvement and the extent of such involvement.
- 7.3. Other advisory and practical mechanisms to promote and support positive management may be explored, such as talks, workshops, volunteer days, demonstrations and site visits to showcase sites and management techniques for example.
- 7.4. Doncaster [Local Records Centre](#) and CDC, will ensure that relevant and non-sensitive Local Site information is available within the public domain. It will also ensure that the Local Site designation and considerations are incorporated into relevant policies, programmes, and projects. The Council's Local Sites Privacy Notice

can be viewed online: <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/the-council-democracy/local-sites-privacy-notice>

- 7.5. The production of Local Site citations will be used to inform landowners and for public information. When a site enjoys more than one designation (statutory or non-statutory) clear distinctions will be made and summarised in the site citation as an informative to all users, managers and decision makers with an interest.
- 7.6. The Local Sites Partnership will seek to identify and publicise funding [opportunities] for environmental land management, including providing access to sources of information and advice in seeking funding.
- 7.7. The Partnership's engagement with local community organisations can encourage wider community involvement in site management, enjoyment and stewardship. This may be explored for individual sites and also strategically, by developing the links between nature conservation and quality of life benefits and priorities as set out in Doncaster's Borough Strategy. Similarly, the educational value of Local Sites may be promoted through liaison with the local education authority and schools in the vicinity of appropriate Local Sites.

8. Local Sites Reporting

- 8.1. CDC is required to report on the proportion of Local Sites in positive management, as a component of the [Single Data List](#) (*Local nature conservation/biodiversity* (reference 160-01 previously NI 197) in accordance with DEFRA's guidelines.
- 8.2. The Local Sites Partnership will assist with obtaining and verifying the evidence that sites are under positive conservation management, in order to support CDC in their duty to provide an annual assessment.

Appendix 2 Doncaster Local Sites Partnership Membership

List is correct at date of Terms of Reference.

Other individuals and organisations may be called upon to offer specific advice when required.

| Organisation | Contact |
|--|------------|
| CDC: Countryside Service | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Strategic Asset Management | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Technical Support and Improvement | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Planning Policy - Ecology | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Planning Policy - Policy | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Biodiversity | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Geodiversity | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Local Records Centre | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Street Scene (Greenspaces) | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Street Scene (Woodlands) | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Future Parks / Public Health | [REDACTED] |
| CDC: Sustainability Unit | [REDACTED] |
| Yorkshire Farming and Wildlife Partnership | [REDACTED] |
| Doncaster Naturalists Society | [REDACTED] |
| Environment Agency - Midlands | [REDACTED] |
| Environment Agency – Yorkshire & Humber | [REDACTED] |
| Don Catchment Rivers Trust | [REDACTED] |
| Forestry Commission | [REDACTED] |
| Independent Ecologist and County Recorder | [REDACTED] |
| Internal Drainage Board | [REDACTED] |
| Natural England | [REDACTED] |
| Sheffield Area Geology Trust | [REDACTED] |
| Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV) | [REDACTED] |
| Yorkshire Wildlife Trust | [REDACTED] |