

Sussex Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria

Version 2.2 (effective 2026)

These Criteria are applicable to Local Wildlife Sites in the East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove administrative areas only.

The term “Local Wildlife Sites” (LWS) is a term used across England and in Government legislation and guidance to describe locally designated Sites of nature conservation importance.

The recommended selection, modification or deletion of LWS will be agreed by a panel of local experts, the LWS Technical Panel, in line with the Criteria listed below.

The LWS Selection Panel may include suitably qualified or experienced representatives from:

- East Sussex County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Brighton & Hove City Council
- Sussex Wildlife Trust
- Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre
- District or Borough Councils
- Natural England.

And where appropriate, suitably qualified or experienced:

- Local nature conservation experts
- Members of the Sussex Botanical Recording Society
- Members of the Sussex Ornithological Society
- Members of other local nature conservation/recording bodies.

It should be noted that the ecological value of a site is determined by many variables and there will always be the need for ‘best professional judgement’ in site selection. Selection should be based on reliable, up-to-date information.

Accordingly, these Criteria should be updated periodically to reflect changes in:

- Distributions of habitats and species
- Local and national knowledge and understanding
- Biological recording and data availability
- Nature conservation in general.

This Version 2.2 of the Criteria is effective for designation decisions taken from September 2026 until superseded.

Criteria

These LWS selection Criteria have been created with reference to the following local and national nature conservation policies and guidance:

- Local - Sussex Rare Species Inventory, to the extent the data remains current.
- Local - the evolving Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- National - Conservation Designations UK Taxa constituent lists
- National – Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England
- National - Ancient Woodland, as identified by the Natural England dataset
- National – Guidance: Selecting and managing Local Sites (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/selecting-and-managing-local-sites>)

The following Criteria have been set by which the designation, modification or deletion of LWSs will be judged. Any site which meets one or more of the Habitat or Species Criteria is eligible for selection as an LWS. The Supporting Criteria are not sufficient on their own to make a site eligible for selection but may lower the thresholds for what is considered significant in terms of the Habitat or Species Criteria. They may also help in determining the allocation of conservation management resources within an area.

In the Criteria descriptions, “significant” means substantive nature conservation value in terms of the habitat(s), the species present (whether permanently or seasonally), the capacity to sustain viable species populations, or the benefits to local communities. The size of a Site is a key factor in assessing significance, but context is important: smaller Sites can maintain viable populations of some species, especially among the invertebrates, can be significant in their contribution to habitat networks within an area or can exist in areas of generally low nature conservation value.

Habitat Criteria

CH2 Habitat of Principal Importance in England and Irreplaceable Habitat

Significant areas of habitat of principal importance in England, as defined in section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, shall be eligible for selection, together with any habitat defined as irreplaceable habitat.

CH4 Habitat of importance in Sussex

Significant areas of habitat, other than habitat of principal importance in England, which are of importance in Sussex:

- (a) **Sand rock exposures.** Areas of sand rock exposures and associated habitat
- (b) **Ecologically valuable grassland** having a diverse sward of conservation interest. This can include, but is not limited to, significant examples of wet flushes, damp meadows and species diverse sub-communities of National Vegetation Classification MG1 *Arrhenatherum elatius* grassland and MG6 *Lolium perenne*-*Cynosurus cristatus* grassland.
- (c) **Gill woodland.** Steep-sided wooded valleys, especially but not exclusively of ancient woodland, having a flora characteristic of western Atlantic woodland.
- (d) **CHEGD grassland.** Mycologically-rich grasslands.
- (e) **Chalk streams** not meeting the definition of habitat of principal importance.

(f) Species-rich scrub. Areas of scrub having a diversity of species, structure, a valuable scrub-edge ecotone, and/or which provide valuable habitat for important faunal communities or species populations.

(g) Natural character. Sites which are atypical of their local area or contribute significantly to the area's natural distinctiveness.

CH6 Mosaic Habitats and Landscape-scale Species Diversity

(a) A Site comprising two or more sub-habitats, each of which fails to be selected as a Site within its own main habitat criterion group but which, when taken together, are significant.

Or

(b) A Site which is significant in maintaining a mosaic of habitat or landscape-scale species diversity within a local area or across Sussex as a whole.

CH7 Connectivity: Buffers, Wildlife Corridors and Stepping Stones

A Site that would not necessarily warrant selection on its own but which provides significant and clearly identifiable value as part of a connected network of habitat(s) within the local landscape, thereby contributing to the population sustainability and capacity for dispersal of resident or migratory species, particularly where it provides an extension or buffer to the habitat of an adjacent or nearby LWS or other statutory designated wildlife site (e.g. SSSI).

CH8 Site expansion through restoration

Areas of potential habitat in close proximity to existing habitat and receiving appropriate management to achieve the habitat potential.

CH9 Natural Processes

Sites which are significant within a local or wider Sussex context for active natural processes of succession or colonisation (excluding colonisation by invasive non-native species), or of coastal or fluvial erosion and deposition.

Species Criteria

CS1 Species Criteria

Sites supporting significant populations or relict populations of internationally, nationally or locally rare species, or species assemblages, will be eligible for selection as an LWS, or may contribute towards eligibility for consideration under the habitat Criteria. For these purposes, 'supporting' may be defined as sites that either directly support breeding populations of species or provide a significant ecological function for the life cycle of that species, including resident or migratory species to the country or region.

Reference will be given to the following information:

- Sussex Rare Species Inventory, to the extent the data remains current
- East and West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England
- National - Conservation Designations UK Taxa constituent lists

Supporting Criteria

CC1 Historical and cultural associations

A site having significance for its associations with past scientific or artistic endeavour, especially those which relate to the field of natural history, or as an important site in local history and culture.

CC2 Nature appreciation and education

A site which is valuable for the access it provides to local people to experience, learn about and understand nature or which provides particular opportunity for educational research and investigation.

CC3 Fragility

Where a site is eligible for selection and its nature conservation value would quickly be lost in the absence of an ongoing programme of an active conservation management, the site may be classified as Fragile to identify it as a priority for allocation of land management resources.

Bibliography

Local Sites Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management, DEFRA 2006
Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, Section 41, Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England
Local Wildlife Site Selection Criteria, Essex Local Wildlife Sites Partnership, 2010
Guidance for the Selection of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) in Surrey, Surrey Wildlife Trust, 2008