

Part A: Introduction



1. Introduction

This document provides guidance on the selection of Wildlife Sites in Derbyshire outside of the Peak District National Park. It sets out the detailed guidelines under which a site can be selected, and should be read in conjunction with Part 1 of the Derbyshire Wildlife Sites Handbook: Policies and Procedures.

These guidelines were adopted by the Derbyshire Wildlife Sites Panel in 2003. The panel comprises Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, English Nature, Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council's Biological Record Centre. Prior to adoption, an extensive consultation was carried out with local and national specialists, conservation organisations and each of the local authorities.

It should be remembered that the distribution and status of habitats and species in Derbyshire is dynamic and changes over time. The state of our knowledge is also constantly improving. This document is based on the best information available in 2003, and will be regularly reviewed to reflect future changes.

2. Acknowledgements

These guidelines were developed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Sites Officers, Kieron Huston and Debbie Court, from an original draft by Pat Brassley. The members of the Derbyshire Wildlife Sites Panel, who have contributed to the production of the guidelines, are:

Dan Abrahams (and previously Roger Catchpole) – English Nature
Jo Brown – Derbyshire Wildlife Trust
Annie Cooper – Derbyshire County Council
Nick Moyes – Derby Biological Record Centre

A large number of people provided advice and/or information to aid in the production of the guidelines, and the panel is very grateful for the contributions of all of these people. A full list of consultees is included in Appendix 1.

In addition the Trust has reviewed the selection guidelines for other counties in England and has been guided and informed by these documents. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the Selection Guidelines for Lancashire and North Yorkshire. In many instances their guidelines for habitats and species provided ideal templates from which we have borrowed and adapted to suit our own needs in Derbyshire. A full list is provided in Appendix 2.

Illustrations appear courtesy of English Nature ©.

3 Why Revise the Guidelines?

The guidelines in this document replace those set out in the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Derbyshire Handbook (Derbyshire County Council, 1996). The need for a revision of the guidelines for the selection of Wildlife Sites has become necessary due to a combination of developments that include the following: -

- ❖ changes in knowledge and understanding of species, communities and habitats both nationally, regionally and locally;
- ❖ the development of national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, identifying priority habitats and species for conservation;
- ❖ the production in 1996 of Endangered Wildlife in Derbyshire (the Derbyshire Red Data Book) and subsequent supplements and revisions;
- ❖ advice and guidance from the DETR Local Sites Review Group (1999) and the revision of the national Wildlife Sites Handbook (Hawkswell, 1997) which promote the use of a standard set of broad principles across the UK.

4. Aim of the Guidelines

The aim of this document is to enable the identification of those sites that, together with statutory sites, make the most significant contribution to the biological diversity of Derbyshire, and can therefore be considered to be of at least district importance.

The network of Wildlife Sites should specifically:

- a) include the best examples of the full range of habitat types of nature conservation value in Derbyshire outside statutory sites;
- b) include habitats or species that are national, regional or county conservation priorities due to rarity, decline or degree of threat;
- c) reflect the geographical distribution of habitats and species in Derbyshire, by including notable isolated pockets of the more localised habitats or species, as well as sites across the full range of more widespread ones.

5. The Format of the Guidelines

The guidelines are divided into two sections. Section one provides the guidelines for the selection of Wildlife Sites on a habitat basis, while section two provides species-based guidelines.

For each type of habitat in section one there is a description of its status in an international, national and Derbyshire context. For the species groups in section two this is often not possible because of the numbers involved, but a brief overview for the smaller groups (e.g. amphibians) is provided.

This is followed by detailed guidelines on the selection of sites, with instructions on how these should be applied. For habitats, the relevant UK and Local BAP habitat action plans are also listed.

6. The Basis for the Guidelines

6.1 The Ratcliffe Criteria

The selection guidelines for Derbyshire Wildlife Sites are based on a long established and widely accepted method of determining the nature conservation value of a site. This method is known as the ‘Ratcliffe Criteria’ (Ratcliffe, 1977).

The Ratcliffe Criteria provide a standardised and objective way of assessing the value of a site using the following ten attributes:

Size	Naturalness	Representativeness	Rarity	Diversity
Position	History	Fragility	Potential value	Intrinsic appeal

The Derbyshire Wildlife Sites selection guidelines apply this approach by setting out specific ways of assessing a site against these attributes. Thresholds and indicators are then defined which need to be met for a site to qualify as a Wildlife Site. Some examples are given in the following table:

Attribute	Means of Assessment	Threshold / Indicator
Size	Area of habitat	Minimum area
	Species population size	Minimum population size
Naturalness	The habitat has natural characteristics.	Presence of specified features indicative of naturalness e.g. oxbows for rivers.
Representativeness	The habitat is a representative example of its type	Conformity with the NVC definition of the habitat type.
Rarity	Presence of a rare species	Presence of species listed in a county or UK Red Data Book.
	Presence of a rare habitat	Presence of a habitat known to be rare in the county or UK.
Diversity	The site supports a high diversity of species	Minimum number of species from a list of typical ones.
Position	The site is part of a collection of sites within a particular geographical location.	The site is within a threshold distance from another site of the same habitat type.

History	The habitat is long established on the site	The site appears on enclosure maps.
Fragility	The habitat is vulnerable to changes in land use	Presence of a known vulnerable habitat.

It is not necessary to assess every site against all of the attributes, and the guidelines make use of the most appropriate attributes for each type of habitat or species. For example the woodland guidelines....

Wd1: Sites included on the Derbyshire Inventory of Ancient Woodland which support semi-natural woodland vegetation

Wd2: Other semi-natural woodlands where field evidence and or map evidence indicates that they are ancient in origin

....are based entirely on the presence of a particular habitat - ancient semi-natural woodland - using the English Nature register or field and map evidence as indicators. They do not include thresholds or indicators for size, diversity or position. This is because it is considered that the rarity, naturalness and historical value of the habitat are sufficient to justify the designation of a Wildlife Site regardless of other attributes.

6.2 The Use of 'Potential Value' as an Attribute

It could be argued that almost any area of land is potentially of high nature conservation interest, provided that enough effort is expended on it. The designation of Wildlife Sites is intended to identify those which currently make the highest contribution to biodiversity. Therefore the designation of sites should depend primarily on their current interest and not their potential value.

However the guidelines do allow for the designation of degraded sites, where the habitat is essentially still classified as semi-natural but where change or damage, which is reversible, has occurred. Examples include heavily grazed woodlands or those where significant planting has taken place. In these cases, the site must retain enough of its ecological interest to qualify under the guidelines, with the potential for further improvement.

6.3 The Use of Non-Ecological Attributes

The attribute of 'intrinsic appeal' is not utilised in the selection of Wildlife Sites. Intrinsic appeal refers to the social or cultural values, such as visual attractiveness or amenity use which are often associated with Wildlife Sites and other areas of conservation importance. While it is possible to measure some of these values, it is not considered appropriate to include them in the selection guidelines. The purpose of the Wildlife Sites system is the preservation of biodiversity, and the objective assessment of biodiversity value is therefore the sole basis for selection. However it is important that the intrinsic appeal of sites is recognised when decisions affecting them are made, and those with the highest appeal may be considered for selection as Local Nature Reserves.

6.4 Defining Rarity

The Wildlife Sites selection guidelines for species are often based on the rarity of the plant or animal concerned. Rarity may be defined at different levels – a species common in Derbyshire may be rare in the rest of the UK – and we have a responsibility to consider our national and international responsibilities.

For the purposes of these guidelines the following definitions apply:

a) *Internationally rare species*. These species are identified in European Community Directives (e.g. The Habitats and Birds Directives).

b) *Nationally rare or scarce species*. These species are identified in the UK Red Data Books. Nationally Rare species occur in less than 16 10km grid squares while Nationally Scarce species occur 16 – 100 10km grid squares in the UK.

c) *Species that are rare in Derbyshire*. These are identified in the County Red Data Book and subsequent supplements. Generally, rare species are those that occur at 3 or fewer localities in the vice-county of Derbyshire. However, species present within 4 – 10 sites are also considered under the selection guidelines where appropriate.

Care has to be taken when considering the rarity of some species, particularly those such as invertebrates or lower plants which are difficult to identify. Apparent rarity can be a feature of the coverage of a survey rather than a true reflection of the occurrence of the species. This factor has been taken into account in the production of these guidelines as far as possible, but a degree of discretion may be required in their application to certain species.

6.5 The National Vegetation Classification

Many of the selection criteria in these guidelines make use of the National Vegetation Classification, or NVC (Rodwell 1991-2000). This provides a country-wide classification system for natural and semi-natural vegetation, and is the most widely accepted and established way of identifying and describing habitat types. Each habitat type is identified by a code (e.g. W10) and defined by the presence of a number of indicator species and their relative abundance.

Assessment of habitats against the NVC is carried out using a standard methodology based on quadrat sampling. The presence and abundance of indicator species is then compared with the NVC definitions to determine the relevant habitat code.

In the use of the NVC, it must be remembered that habitats do not always neatly fit into one NVC code, and often fall somewhere along a continuum between two habitat types. Where this is the case, a degree of discretion is required from the surveyor in order to assign the most appropriate code.

7. Application of the Wildlife Site Guidelines

7.1. Use of the Guidelines

In general, any area of land or water which meets one or more of the guidelines is eligible for designation as a Wildlife Site. However there are notable exceptions, such as domestic gardens, and these are identified in the relevant sections.

Where a site meets more than one guideline, all of these should be included in its entry on the Wildlife Sites Register. For example, a site supporting a diverse range of habitats may be selected under the habitat mosaic guidelines and the invertebrate guidelines. The inclusion of all of the relevant guidelines will highlight the range of interest associated with the site and assist in biodiversity auditing and reporting.

7.2 Relationship to Statutory Site Designations

The Wildlife Sites Register does not generally include statutory sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, since these are already subject to the highest level of protection. However where a SSSI has been designated entirely for its geological interest, it may also be considered for designation as a Wildlife Site. Local Nature Reserves, which are primarily designated for their local community value, are also eligible for selection.

7.3 Quality of Information

It is imperative that Wildlife Sites are designated on the basis of the best available information. This should have been obtained through field survey by a suitably qualified and/or experienced person within the last ten years (unless otherwise stated). For difficult to identify species, verification by an acknowledged expert may be required.

8. Determining Wildlife Site Boundaries

Once a site has been assessed as being of Wildlife Site quality, careful consideration should be given to the identification of the boundaries of the designation. Care must be taken not to place an undue constraint on potential development, and undermine the rigour of the Wildlife Sites system, by including significant areas of land that do not meet the selection guidelines. However it may be necessary for the future viability of the site to include habitat that is of lesser value. As a general rule, *at least 50% of the area of a Wildlife Site should consist of land which qualifies under the guidelines.*

When determining Wildlife Site boundaries:

- (a) The justification for the definition of the boundary must be clearly recorded.
- (b) A single Wildlife Site may include adjacent areas of several habitats, each of which qualifies under different criteria.

- (c) Wherever possible a Wildlife Site should consist of readily identifiable management units with clear physical boundaries e.g. a field, a woodland, a roadside verge. For a whole unit to be selected, more than 50% of it must qualify under the criteria. Where there are several qualifying management units adjacent to each other, a single site boundary should be drawn around all of them.
- (d) Where there is an aggregation of qualifying management units of the same general habitat type (e.g. grassland) that are not adjacent, but in close proximity to each other, these may be defined by separate boundaries but designated as a single Wildlife Site.
- (e) If less than 50% of a management unit qualifies under the guidelines, or where the qualifying habitat does not fall within a traditional management unit (e.g. industrial land) it may not be appropriate to designate the whole area. In this case a boundary may be drawn which is not visible on the ground, but relates to visible features (e.g. a line between two landmarks). The site should include as little of the non-qualifying land as possible.
- (f) For wetland Wildlife Sites, where water supply and quality are vital to maintaining their ecological interest, the boundary may be drawn to include an appropriate buffer zone and/or hydrologically linked habitats. In addition, adjacent habitats may be crucial for amphibian and invertebrate populations and may warrant inclusion despite not qualifying in their own right.
- (g) Where a Wildlife Site is designated for a species, or group of species, which has a requirement for a different habitat at each stage of its life cycle (or at different times of year) the boundary should be drawn to include all of these habitats if they are adjacent or in close proximity to each other. For more mobile species such as birds, an area important for only part of the lifecycle / year may be designated, and this is explained in the appropriate section.
- (h) For rivers a problem can occur with determining the boundaries of Wildlife Sites where the river is dynamic and may change course rapidly, thus quickly rendering the boundary out of date. Where the floodplain habitat either side of the river is of Wildlife Site quality, a corridor can be designated which allows for the movement of the river within it. If this is not appropriate, the limits of the Wildlife Site should be defined by fixed points upstream and downstream (with reference to other landscape features where appropriate), and the boundaries either side of the river assumed to change with the river course. It is helpful to provide a written definition of the boundary such as ‘the top of the bank of the main channel’. On less dynamic rivers, flood banks or other physical features can be used to determine Wildlife Site boundaries.

9. Natural Areas

The English Nature Natural Areas approach defines for the whole country, distinct areas based upon geology, wildlife, land use and cultural heritage (see Figure 1 below). In Derbyshire there are 10 different Natural Areas: -

- Coal Measures.
- Southern Magnesian Limestone.
- Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent.
- Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands.
- Potteries and Churnet Valley
- Trent Valley and Rises.
- White Peak
- Dark Peak
- South West Peak
- Urban Mersey Basin

Some of these Natural Areas occur over relatively small areas of Derbyshire, for example, Potteries and Churnet Valley and the Urban Mersey Basin. Others such as Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent lie wholly within Derbyshire.

There is considerable variation in the extent and quality of different habitats between the different Natural Areas in Derbyshire and the selection thresholds have attempted to take this into account. For example, good examples of semi-natural grasslands are especially scarce in the Coal Measures, Trent Valley and Rises and Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands Natural Areas and the threshold for selection has been set slightly lower than for other Natural Areas.



Merlin

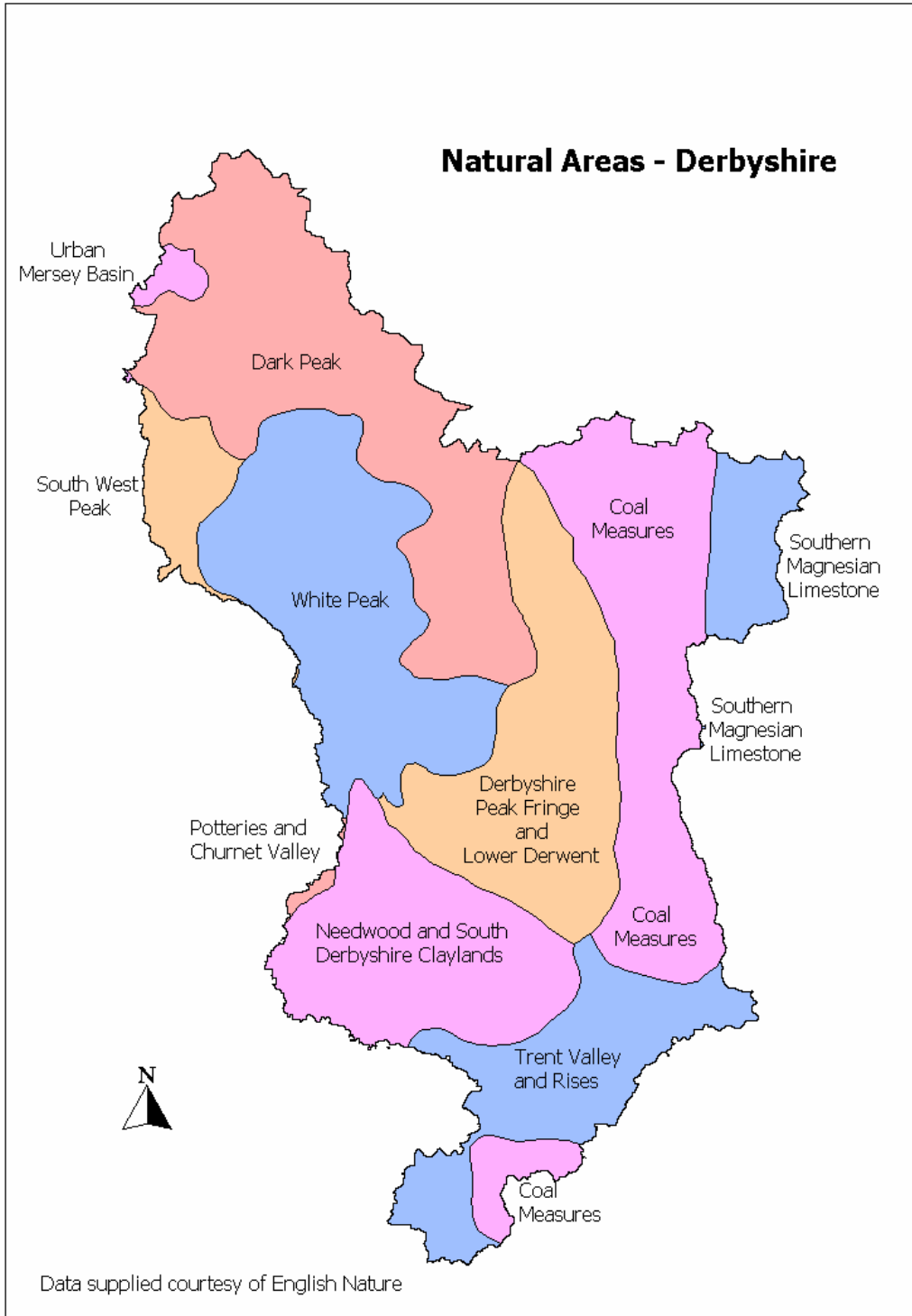


Figure 1: Natural Areas occurring in Derbyshire.