

Chapter 11 – Appendix 2: Site designations and terminology

The following section contains a list of site designations and what they mean.

Statutory protected sites

If a site of nature conservation importance has 'Statutory Protection', it means that it receives protection by means of certain legislation in recognition of its biodiversity and/or geological value. (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021)

International and European Designations:

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are strictly protected sites designated under the Habitats Regulations. The habitat types and species are those considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level (excluding birds which are covered by Special Protection Areas). (Planning Aid England, 2019)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

SPAs are areas which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. They are designated under the European 'Birds Directive 1979'. More information about SPAs can be found on the Natural England website. (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021)

Ramsar Wetland

Ramsar sites are wetlands which are considered to be of international significance. They are designated as protected sites under the Ramsar Convention, a treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. (Planning Aid England, 2019)

National Designations:

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

SSSIs are designated under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 where they support habitats and/or species of national importance. SSSIs represent our best sites for wildlife and geology. Well over half, by area, are internationally important and many play an important part in local culture and economies or provide wonderful opportunities for people to enjoy wildlife and the landscape. The natural wildlife and geological features of SSSI's are irreplaceable parts of our national heritage. These are protected in order to preserve their importance, and to prevent damage and development. We have many incidents where these sites are damaged through illegal off-road driving, dumping waste and development. (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021)

National Nature Reserve (NNR)

NNRs were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Most NNRs offer great opportunities to schools, interest groups and the public to experience wildlife first-hand and learn more about nature conservation. There are 224 NNRs in England, representing approximately 0.7% of the country's land surface, with the largest being The Wash. Natural England manages two thirds of NNRs with the remaining reserves managed by authorities approved by Natural England, such as the Forestry Commission and the RSPB. (Planning Aid England, 2019)

Locally Protected Sites:

Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Local Nature Reserves can be created by local authorities, or town and parish councils if the district council have given them power to do this. The local authority must control the LNR land, either through ownership or a lease or agreement with the owner. At least part of it should be publicly accessible. Sites can be selected for their wildlife, geology, education or enjoyment (without disturbing wildlife). (Planning Aid England, 2019)

Non-statutory protected sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

Local Wildlife Sites are sites with 'substantive nature conservation value'. They are defined areas, identified and selected for their nature conservation value, based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species with a national, region.

Found on both public and private land, LWSs vary in size and shape from small ponds copses and linear features such as hedgerows, road verges and water courses to much larger areas of habitat such as ancient woodlands, heaths, wetlands and grassland. They support both locally and nationally threatened wildlife, and many sites will contain habitats and species that are priorities under the county or UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). Collectively they play a critical role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage by providing essential wildlife refuges in their own right and by acting as stepping-stones, corridors and buffer zones to link and protect other site networks and the open spaces of our towns and countryside.

There are currently a number of different terms in use to describe Local Wildlife Sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) and County Wildlife Sites. They are usually selected by the relevant Wildlife Trust, along with representatives of the local authority and other local wildlife conservation groups. (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021)

Local Geological Site

Local Geological Sites (formerly RIGS) were first established in 1990 and are sites that have been designated for their variety of rocks, minerals, fossils and landscape together with the natural processes that form them. Geo-conservation sites specifically highlight local geological diversity and earth heritage. Formal designation comes from the Local Authority, via Local Sites Partnerships and they must meet nationally agreed criteria. Sites are selected by reference to one or more of four basic criteria, which are education and lifelong learning, intrinsic scientific interest, aesthetic value and historical value and context. (Planning Aid England, 2019)

You will also need to be aware of:

Rights of Way (ROW)

As the owner or occupier of land with a public right of way across it, you must keep the route visible and not obstruct or endanger users. ROW are public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways, and byways open to all traffic. These are most often owned and managed by the local Highway Authority but can be on or through private land. (GOV.UK, 2014)

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

A Tree Preservation Order is an order made by a local planning authority in England to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. An Order prohibits the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage or wilful destruction of trees without the local planning authority's written consent. (GOV.UK, 2014)

Scheduled Monument

Not all scheduled monuments are ancient. Monuments and archaeological remains of all dates can be given the protection of scheduling, whether they are prehistoric burial mounds, 20th-century remains of the coal industry or from World War II. Some scheduled monuments contain standing buildings or ruins. Others have no visible remains above ground: it is the buried archaeology that is of national importance. (Historic England, 2021)

Listed Landscapes

Often areas of historic interest are listed as landscapes by Historic England, and this is especially common when the landscape provides an important backdrop to a monument or building or contains specific historical links. Listed landscapes are given designations – Grade I, II, II* – and depending on the level of protection actions within this landscape will be controlled or restricted, including managing areas, planting trees, or creating paths. An example is Birkenhead Park in the Wirral, opened in 1847 and the first municipally-funded park in the world. Though it is a Grade I listed landscape it has run successful Forest School programmes by utilising areas carefully and ensuring care is taken to keep to the restrictions. Listed landscapes are registered on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE). (Historic England, 2021)

Conservation Areas

Although primarily a planning protection, if the green space you use for your Forest School delivery is within or adjacent to a local conservation area, you may need to be mindful of local residents and businesses with regard to times of use, access, and noise levels, as well as ensuring you 'leave no trace'.

Lastly, operating a Forest School site within one of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or 15 National Parks also requires you to ensure you are working within any stipulations set out in the management plans for that area. (National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2021) (National Parks UK, 2021)