

Summary of baseline methodology for the adoption and implementation of National Indicator 197 and Local Area Agreement Local Target 8 in Suffolk

As the Section 44 authority, Suffolk County Council needs to report to Government (Defra) on the national biodiversity and geodiversity indicator (NI197) which measures the number of Local Sites in Positive Conservation Management (PCM). This includes both County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and County Geodiversity Sites (CGS), which include Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS).

This methodology has been based on guidance produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government "National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions".

Suffolk's draft Local Area Agreement (LAA2) has not adopted NI 197 as one of its priority national targets, but instead has adopted a local indicator closely based on it - Local Target (LT) 8. This is defined as 'the percentage of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) under positive conservation management' and LT8 has been set at 50% of CWS in Positive Conservation Management by the end of the three-year LAA2 period i.e. by March 2011. The LAA doesn't include CGS, so monitoring them is separate from reporting to Creating the Greenest County on the Local Target.

Government has stated that performance on NI 197 will be calculated by local authorities as a proportion of all sites where positive conservation management (as defined in guidance) has taken place up to five years prior to the reporting date. It also states that the assessment should be ratified by the appropriate Local Sites Partnership.

As Natural England needs to verify the data, the Local Sites Partnership will include those organizations involved in the existing Suffolk Biodiversity and Geodiversity Partnerships. The development of a single Local Sites Partnership, led by Suffolk County Council, will however involve additional organisations.

As the data for the 2 types of Local Sites is very different, the following is an explanation of how it will be dealt with.

1. County Wildlife Sites

Definition: 'Positive conservation management' (PCM) is defined as maintaining, restoring or enhancing the habitats and species for which the site has been designated in the last 5 years

How will we establish baseline dataset?

In Suffolk, to establish the baseline dataset for all County Wildlife Sites, they are being categorised as a member of one of the following groups that constitute positive conservation management (as defined by Natural England).

First group

- Sites under Environmental Stewardship: Higher Level Scheme
- Environmentally Sensitive Area Agreements
- Sites under Countryside Stewardship

Second group

- Sites under Environmental Stewardship: Entry Level Scheme, provided specified options that deliver tangible benefits for the designated habitats and species, such as EK3, EK4 EL3 and 4 have been selected
- Sites under Woodland Grant Scheme & England Woodland Grant Scheme* this should include an element of deer management, unless it can be proven as unnecessary for particular sites.

Third group

- Any other sites not counted under the first or second groups but in respect of which there is a management plan, or other type of management scheme.

The presence of one of these management schemes on a site does not necessarily indicate PCM for the purposes of this target. Management Schemes on sites that do not maintain restore or enhance the habitats and species for which the site has been designated will not be included.

If only part of the site area is included a management scheme the area covered by the scheme must be sufficient to conserve the features for which the site is designated – there is no magic % of the site area for it to qualify as being in PCM. *Sites in WGS & EWGS are not likely to have a large area of the woodland actively managed in the period of study; however if the scope of the management scheme is to manage a sufficient % the site (including non intervention high forest areas) this will qualify as PCM.

How will we identify the sites in Positive Conservation Management?

County Wildlife Site GIS data has been assessed against GIS data of rural land based schemes to identify sites covered by the first and second groups. The third group will be identified in consultation with the Forestry Commission Private Woodland Officers and staff of Natural England and Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Evidence of implementing management is required for PCM purposes; evidence of management activity carried out and evidence that this management is appropriate and the Local Sites Partnership must sign off the dataset.

2. County Geodiversity Sites (including RIGS)

Definition: ‘Positive conservation management’ (PCM) is defined as maintaining, restoring or enhancing the geodiversity interest for which the site has been designated, in the last 5 years.

How will we establish baseline dataset?

The responsibility for providing SCC with the PCM information for County Geodiversity Sites (CGS) lies with GeoSuffolk. Currently there are 7 RIGS in Suffolk, mapped by SBRC but other CGS have not been formally identified yet.

How will we identify the sites of PCM?

To establish the baseline dataset for all County Geodiversity Sites, they are being categorised as a member of one of the following categories that constitute positive conservation management;

- Sites in a management scheme eg scrub control options in Environmental Stewardship: Higher Level Scheme

- Sites with a site management plan
- Sites with management guidance/advice given to landowners

The presence of a management scheme on a site does not necessarily indicate PCM for the purposes of this target. Management Schemes on sites that do not maintain restore or enhance the geodiversity interest for which the site has been designated will not be included.

Evidence of implementing management is required for PCM purposes; evidence of management activity carried out and evidence that this management is appropriate and the Local Sites Partnership must sign off the dataset. There is a RIGS condition monitoring form that can be used by Geo groups to assess PCM; GeoSuffolk will determine the method used for monitoring CGS and supply location details for this evidence.

3. How will we measure future performance against the indicator for Local Sites?

The responsibility for measuring performance against the indicator will rest with the Suffolk Local Sites Partnership, which has discretion to establish a local process for monitoring the condition of the sites. The Partnership also needs to provide an audit trail for Defra monitoring of this indicator so evidence of PCM must be accessible (not necessarily held in one location).

The Local Sites Partnership also has an important role of co-ordinating the targeting of management schemes for all Local Sites and identification of mechanisms to increase the % in PCM.

Suffolk will be using a CWS Field Visit Recording Form for all advisers who visit CWS. This will help the collation of data on a regular basis (rather than annually) and improve the audit trail.

4. Local Sites Partnership

The Local Sites Partnership is designed to bring together those bodies that can influence the management of Local Sites and needs to co-ordinate their operations and policies to maintain, enhance and promote the Positive Conservation Management of Local Sites. The Partnership will sign off the datasets for NI197

The Partnership members will seek resolve conflicts between biodiversity and geodiversity management as well as identifying and developing opportunities within their organisations to improve management of local sites e.g. through both their land management operations, their advisory service and targeting their funding structures to landowners and conservation bodies.

5. How will we display this information?

Although the baseline dataset will be provided as an Excel spreadsheet, those CWS and RIGS that are in PCM will be identifiable on the GIS layer. This will enable the District Councils to be provided with updated information and target geographic project areas for

delivery mechanisms to improve the number of CWS & RIGS in PCM and thereby help achieve the LAA target. CGS are not currently identified on a GIS layer.

Phil Watson & Sue Hooton
Suffolk County Council

March 2009