



## DISUSED INDUSTRIAL & RAILWAY LAND

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The long history of industrial land-use for storage, demolition and dumping has left a legacy of many neglected patches of land, especially within the more built-up parts of our region. Many of these have only a brief existence, but where heavy disturbance ceases and re-development is delayed, semi-natural habitats such as grasslands, wetlands, ruderal habitats, scrub and secondary woodland start to develop and can evolve into highly complicated habitat mosaics.



Ashlawn Cutting © Nuneaton & Bedworth BC

These sites support some of the richest plant communities in the county (200+ species) although often these do not fall into traditional vegetation classifications. They are also some of the best sites for invertebrates in the Midlands, with many nationally rare species. Great-crested newts occur at some sites, and many bird species are heavily dependent on them, including declining species such as linnet, skylark and kestrel. These sites can be an invaluable resource for local communities by providing easily accessible areas of informal green space in urban parks – where a rich variety of wildlife can be appreciated, and the often robust nature of the sites can support heavier recreational usage than many wildlife sites.

Disused industrial sites, particularly those with large structures and close to water, are used by breeding black redstarts. By nature of their habitat requirements, these birds are nomadic, moving on as their former haunts are redeveloped, but they are rare in Warwickshire.

Disused railway lines can also act as wildlife corridors and public walkways, often through intensive farmland or heavily built-up areas. Most of these sites fall into the category of Previously Developed or 'brown-field' land, which is viewed as a more acceptable location for new development than 'green-field' land. This creates an extra challenge for the conservation of such sites. It is recognised that many of the habitats contained within this action plan are subject of other HAPs – but this HAP is geared towards promoting the diverse character of such sites and assisting the organisations that specifically own, manage or otherwise control them.

## Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

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| <b>2.</b> | <b>OUR OBJECTIVES &amp; TARGETS</b>  | <b>Target</b> |
| <b>A.</b> | To identify all ecologically important industrial sites, derelict land and stretches of disused railway line and their ownership.  | by 2010       |
| <b>B.</b> | To maximise our knowledge of such sites and ensure they are considered for appropriate designation (e.g. SINC or SSSIs).   | by 2010       |
| <b>C.</b> | To maintain the extent and maintain / improve the condition of semi-natural habitats in and around post industrial sites with priority given to those holding UK BAP Priority Species, Red Data Book, Nationally Scarce and Regionally Scarce species. | 2003-<br>2015 |
| <b>D.</b> | To promote the maintenance of extent and the expansion of wildlife habitat following unavoidable development of such sites, including the development of a policy framework for this in local planning documents.                                      | 2003-<br>2015 |
| <b>E.</b> | To promote good management practice and to share knowledge through the development of a network of regular communication between landowners and practitioners.   | 2003-<br>2015 |

**ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS**

- Ponds, Lakes & Reservoirs
- Quarries & Gravel Pits
- Reedbeds
- Fen & Swamp
- Grasslands (all types)
- Woodlands
- Scrub & Carr

**ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS**

- Bloody Nosed Beetle
- Dingy Skipper
- Rare Bumblebees

**3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS**

There are no specific BAP objectives or targets for old industrial sites, derelict land and disused railways, only some of the habitats they contain e.g. standing open water, reed beds, various grasslands and some of the species typical of these site e.g. skylark. However, such sites provide a unique opportunity to promote habitat creation in a manner that helps address national targets for various habitats.

#### 4. CURRENT STATUS

##### **Old Industrial Sites**

Some particularly large and ecologically diverse examples exist in the Coventry, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Birmingham and Tamworth areas. Claybrookes Marsh has been designated as a SSSI and several more as SINC's (e.g. Foleshill Gasworks, Longford Nature Park, the Homefire Plant and Sharman's Tip - all in Coventry). Some have valuable wetlands in addition to grasslands and scrub. Unfortunately, current brown-field policy is resulted in high levels of threat and loss. Emscote Power Station (between Warwick and Leamington), Foleshill Gasworks and a large part of the Coventry Homefire Plant and Sharman's Tip are examples of SINC-quality losses of recent years. On the positive side, in Coventry Claybrookes Marsh is now a LNR and wildlife trust reserve following a long history of threat. The Habitat Biodiversity Audit can provide data on the size of individual sites.

##### **Temporary small sites**

Small, short-lived sites rarely gain SINC-quality, but can contribute markedly to the stock of wildlife habitat present in urban areas in particular and provide stepping stones and wildlife corridors for species to move into urban areas. They provide a welcome splash of colour in summer and often become invaded with buddleia, ragwort, thistles and willowherbs, which in turn attract butterflies, bees and flocks of seed-eating birds like goldfinch and linnet. This undoubtedly boosts the biodiversity of our towns and cities. The HBA can provide some indication of the total area of such land, though it is unclear what the current rate of loss or gain is (gradual loss is suspected due to the current levels of house building).

##### **Disused railway lines and sidings**

Approximately 350km length of disused railway line occurs within the sub-region, and is of highly variable quality and character. The most interesting stretches are those with some species-rich grassland, some scrub and some wetlands, especially if located within a cutting or upon a raised embankment (thereby creating a wider wildlife feature). The best examples include Ashlawn Cutting and Newton Cutting in Rugby (part of the old Great Central line), Goldicote Cutting near Ettington, The Greenway near Stratford, Weddington Country Walk in Nuneaton and Stockton Cutting (the latter one is also covered by the Quarries, Gravel Pits and Sand Pits HAP). Some of these sites are now Wildlife Trust reserves or Local Nature Reserves. Informal access exists on many other stretches, though a few stretches are private. A few stretches have minimal nature conservation value, either because they have become completely scrubbed over or are excessively grazed. The County Council is currently working with the charity SUSTRANS to increase the amenity value of certain stretches of line – The Greenway is the first example of such a scheme, but several more are being planned.

##### **Other categories**

Much flower-rich habitat and scrub is associated with active railway lines, especially sidings, embankments and trapped land between larger junctions – also similarly with some stretches of canal. Many former urban tips have been capped and restored to green space, both formal and semi-natural. Good examples of the latter include Burnsall Road Nature Reserve, Wyken Croft Park and parts of Longford Park in Coventry, and Bailey Park in Nuneaton.

## 4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Claybrookes Marsh and Stockton Cutting are biological SSSIs and LNRs. Several further sites have been formally designated as SINCs. Several sites support Great-crested Newt, which is specially protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act.

## 4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Development** - Most sites fall into the category of Previously Developed land or brown-field land, which is seen as a more desirable location for development than green-field land. There has also been a lack of appropriate habitat compensation for recent losses of SINC quality post-industrial sites.
- **Neglect** – has led to substantial encroachment of scrub, bramble, rank grassland and even secondary woodland, which can reduce biodiversity if species rich grassland, ruderal habitats or open wetland become too restricted (though the same process can help create valuable habitat mosaics where kept in check). All sites need some management to maintain their value in the long-term, and some would benefit from the creation of wetlands and features such as humps, hollows and clifflets.
- **Unsympathetic landscaping or restoration** – This has been a serious issue in the past and can still present problems. However, current planning procedure helps to ensure restoration plans include nature conservation issues as a major consideration. Practices such as regular mowing, tree planting and hard surfacing, have reduced the ecological value of some sites. Resurfacing of the middle of disused railways can be damaging to stretches of species-rich grasslands and important invertebrate populations. Encouraging natural regeneration of vegetation directly upon subsoil or spoil, and allowing human trampling pressure to maintain pathways along desire lines can be far better for species diversity than using fertile top-soil, artificial seed mixtures or artificial surfacing. Tree planting is usually acceptable around the edge of a site, but is usually not appropriate within the body of the site (where floristically-rich habitats or wetlands are more desirable).
- **Small total area and isolation of sites** – many species using these sites are highly mobile (e.g. plants with wind-dispersed seeds), and some isolation can promote useful variation between sites. Isolated sites also act as refuges for scarce less mobile species that have disappeared from the surrounding countryside. However, small sites may only be able to support weak and vulnerable populations of these species. Many insect meta-populations appear to be centred on certain groupings of old industrial sites, being absent from apparently suitable, but relatively isolated habitat. The quality of surrounding land may also be crucial as species may use surrounding farmland habitats (e.g. hedges and flowery field margins) or nearby woodlands for foraging.
- **Excessive disturbance** – most of these sites benefit from light or piecemeal disturbance – it helps combat succession. But catastrophic disturbance that destroys much habitat over a short time period can be very harmful.

- **Recreational pressure** – although light disturbance benefits early successional habitats and can increase habitat diversity it can occasionally be a problem for birds and excessive dog-fouling can promote species-poor grassland by enriching the soil. Some sites suffer from regular arson, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour which can result in sites losing popularity with local residents and politicians.

## 5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Survey work and designation - any sites have been subject to a long history of wildlife recording, though the data is of varying scope, detail and age. Coventry has the most comprehensive data due to various surveys carried out between 1982 and 1998. This data has been used to determine the designation of new Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and resulted in a SSSI (Claybrooks Marsh). The reviews of SINCs in Solihull and Nuneaton & Bedworth are well advanced and a number of sites being assessed are old industrial sites, derelict land or disused railway lines, though the entomological data is less detailed than for Coventry.
- Established management - most active within the SSSIs, LNRs, Wildlife Trust reserves and country parks – most of which will have management plans and a work programme of management activity. The damaging effects of excessive scrub encroachment are now recognised, and substantial scrub has recently been removed from Claybrookes Marsh, Stockton Cutting and Ashlawn Cutting – improving conditions for various scarce flowers and insects.
- Education - the LNRs and many of the Wildlife Trust reserves host an impressive programme of educational events for all age groups.
- Advice provision - this is currently available from a number of organisations and groups for a range of issues e.g. Warwickshire Museum and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for various species and management aspects, Natural England for SSSIs, FWAG and DEFRA for Countryside Stewardship and the Environment Agency for various wetland or landfill-related issues.

## 6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended – Core Steering Group- Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>				
<b>PL1.</b> Ensure that all relevant habitat policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9)	LBAPSG	LAs	2005-2015	A
<b>PL2.</b> Lobby for appropriate policy-based protection of brown-field sites of high ecological value.	WWT	NE WM	2003-2015	A
<b>PL3.</b> Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designation as an SSSI.	NE	WWT WM	2005-2015	B
<b>PL4.</b> Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designation as a SINC.	WSP	WWT NE WM LAs	2010	B
<b>Site / Species Safeguard &amp; Management</b>				
<b>SM1.</b> Actively work to ensure development proposals do not reduce the nature conservation value of existing sites, and propose compensatory measures where such damage is unavoidable..	LBAPSG	WWT Sustrans LAs	2003-2015	B,C
<b>SM2.</b> Actively promote that all SSSI-quality sites are subject of up-to-date management plans that account for all the key areas of interest.	WCC	WWT WM LAs	2005-2015	B,C
<b>SM3.</b> Actively promote the preparation of water level management plans for all wetland SSSIs are designed to provide optimal water, including the water table and management conditions and implement fully.	NE	WWT LAs EA	2003-2015	B
<b>SM4.</b> Account for nature conservation in any restoration plans and other strategic plans affecting sites.	LBAPSG	LOs WWT EA LAs	2003-2015	D
<b>SM5.</b> Review existing monitoring of key species on brown-field sites (e.g. dingy skipper) and seek to address gaps in monitoring requirements.	WBRC	BC RSPB WMBC WWT	2006-2015	A
<b>SM6.</b> Produce a list of potential projects for which grant-aid can be sought.	WM	WWT NE	2003-2015	B,C

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<b>SM7.</b> Promote up-to-date management plans that account for all the key areas of interest for all SINC-quality sites.	WSP	WWT WM LAs	2005- 2015	B,C
<b>SM8.</b> Actively recommend measures to increase the extent of connectivity and maintain options to expand area of habitat.	LBAPSG	WCC LAs NE WWT	2008- 2015	D
<b>Advisory</b>				
<b>A1.</b> Inform landowners/managers of the ecological significance of their sites and advise accordingly, including information on suitable grant aid. Establish annual liaison meetings where possible.	WWT	RSPB EA NE WM WWT FWAG	2004- 2015	E
<b>A2.</b> Extend the previous target to cover owners/managers of adjacent land, where it is thought that this will benefit vulnerable species or assemblages, or produce 'stepping stones' between sites.	FWAG	WWT EA WM	2006- 2015	B
<b>A3.</b> Produce and distribute an introductory leaflet for site owners listing sources of advice and grants.	LBAPSG	WWT EA FWAG	2005- 2015	B
<b>Research &amp; Monitoring</b>				
<b>RM1.</b> Continue to survey and monitor sites, especially where BAP species are present, and attempts to secure access to those not yet surveyed. Establish photography, quadrat, NVC and Phase 1 methodologies wherever possible to monitor changes in the habitat.	WBRC	RSPB EN EA BC HBA WWT	2003- 2015	E
<b>RM2.</b> Monitor losses and gains of habitat at a broad, quantitative level.	HBA	WM NE WWT	2005- 2015	A
<b>Communication, Education &amp; Publicity</b>				
<b>CP1.</b> Increase public awareness of the importance of, and threats to, biodiverse brown-field sites and the need for conservation action, through local press releases related to high profile species and environmental events and activities on publicly accessible brown-field sites.	WWT	NE EA RSPB FWAG BC WM	2003- 2015	B

<b>CP2.</b> Hold a local conference to raise the profile of biodiverse brown-field sites in the county to owners and developers, local authority planners and statutory agencies.	WWT	RSPB FWAG WM	2006	B, E
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**Abbreviations:** BC- Butterfly Conservation, EA - Environment Agency, NE – Natural England FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, LA – Local Authority, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LO – Landowner, RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WMBC – West Midland Bird Club, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

## 7. REFERENCES (see LBAP Bibliography web page)

## 8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

UK Urban Biodiversity Action Plan no.754

Buglife (2004) Information on the habitat-management requirements of key invertebrates . CD-Rom £34.99 from Beverley Doyle by email at: [beverley.doyle@buglife.org.uk](mailto:beverley.doyle@buglife.org.uk)

## 9. CONTACT

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