

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Delegated Officer Decision – 10 February 2025

Report Title

Rotherham Local Wildlife Sites 2025 boundaries update

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Assistant Director Approving Submission of the Report

Simon Moss, Assistant Director, Planning, Regeneration & Transport

Report Author(s)

Rachel Lindsay, Planning Officer
01709 254746 or rachel.lindsay@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Aston & Todwick Ward
Wales Ward
Wath Ward

Report Summary

This report seeks approval of an update to the Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) Series in Rotherham with the inclusion of two new LWS. These site boundaries will form part of the environmental evidence for the Local Plan and be used in the determination of relevant planning applications.

Recommendations

1. Two new sites: LWS 208 Brookfields Park and LWS 202 Pithouse West be added to the Rotherham LWS series, using the boundaries shown in Appendix 1.
2. That approval is given to proceed with the integration of these Rotherham LWS in the determination of relevant planning applications.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Local Wildlife Site Boundary Maps of LWS 208 Brookfields Park and LWS 202 Pithouse West

Appendix 2 Local Wildlife Sites Series Update 2025

Appendix 3 Equality Part A – Initial Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 4 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

National Planning Policy Framework

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/675abd214cbda57cacd3476e/NPPF-December-2024.pdf>

Rotherham LWS System

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/691/local-wildlife-system-parts-1-and-2>

[Environment Act 2021](#)

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (2022). Notice of Motion – Nature Crisis. Full Council, 25 May 2022.

<https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=91028>

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Cabinet - Response to the Improving Places Scrutiny Review Recommendations on Nature Recovery, 16 September 2024

<https://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=16172>

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Rotherham Local Wildlife Sites 2025 boundaries update

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham's LWS along with Regionally Important Geological Sites, form part of Rotherham's 'Local Site system' and are included in the Non-Statutory Protected Sites designation shown on the Local Plan Policies Map (adopted June 2018). Rotherham's LWS series identifies sites of substantive nature conservation value in accordance with Defra best practice. The Council's Cabinet approved the adoption of the Rotherham LWS system and the initial series of site boundaries in 2008 (17 December 2008, minute 139).
- 1.2 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'Biodiversity Duty', which means that public authorities in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The designation of new LWS is considered compliant with this duty. Furthermore, LWS will contribute to the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) required by the Environment Act 2021. At its meeting of 25 May 2022, the Council resolved to declare a Nature Crisis in Rotherham ('Nature Crisis Motion'), noting that almost half of UK wildlife is in long-term decline. Cabinet's response to a review from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) regarding the opportunities to support nature's recovery in Rotherham was approved in the meeting on 16 September 2024.
- 1.3 The Local Site system is intended to be comprehensive and allows for the inclusion of new sites and changes to existing sites throughout the plan period. As a result of evidence and analysis, information has become available prompting an update to the existing series.
- 1.4 It is proposed to add two new LWS reflecting the biodiversity interest present on these sites. The two new LWS are:
- LWS 208 Brookfields Park (adjacent to Bolton Road, estimated central point postcode S63 7LL)
 - LWS 202 Pithouse West (adjacent to Waleswood Road, estimated central point postcode S26 5PF)
- The proposed new sites boundaries are shown in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 The updated LWS series, including their indicative location map, is shown in Appendix 2.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Rotherham LWS Panel has endorsed these sites as being of LWS value. Designation of the sites would be made in accordance with the Delegation Scheme as set out in the Council's Constitution.
- 2.2 The assessment confirmed that both sites demonstrated substantive nature conservation value by meeting at least one of the selection criteria. The LWS Panel has endorsed these LWS selection, which is based upon the

agreed, published criteria in respect of the substantive biodiversity interest present on site.

- 2.3 The approval of these sites as LWS and integration of their boundaries into the Local Plan will ensure that relevant planning policies are considered in the determination of planning applications relating to the sites. It will assist the Council to comply with national planning policy provisions regarding the natural environment and contribute towards the Council's enhanced Biodiversity Duty (Environment Act 2021) and delivery of the 'Nature Crisis Motion'.
- 2.4 The designation of the sites as LWS will bring an expectation of the sites positive management for nature conservation (requiring site management and periodic monitoring). This action will be supportive towards 'Nature Crisis Motion' and in compliance with the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty upon the Council, from under the Environment Act 2021. It is noted that the approved Cabinet response to the Scrutiny Review Recommendations in respect of Nature Recovery, (as set out in Appendix 1 and dated 16 September 2024), was approved (including Appendix one item 5 'Consider and plan for how the RMBC estate can contribute to biodiversity strategies and targets).
- 2.5 Brookfields Park is a publicly accessible site managed by RMBC Green Spaces team, management costs will be met within existing budgets and any ongoing funding opportunities.
- 2.6 Pithouse West is a publicly accessible site which is owned by RMBC and comes under the care of Asset Management Team.
- 2.7 An option for future RMBC consideration is to explore Biodiversity Net Gain credits funding (selling units to developers for offsite biodiversity credits) which could potentially provide funding for enhanced management of these areas and at other RMBC Local Wildlife Sites.
- 2.8 For information, consideration could be given towards bringing LWS 208 Pit House West over to Green Spaces Team administration, to manage it for wildlife and for its use as an annex to Rother Valley Country Park where upon it is anticipated there would be significant benefits to our nature conservation outputs.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Option 1: approve the inclusion of the new sites in Rotherham's Local Site System

The Rotherham LWS Panel is an expert wildlife conservation panel who have assessed these sites in accordance with agreed, externally verified methodology, using new knowledge obtained. The sites' approval and integration into planning policy would contribute towards the robustness of the Local Plan.

3.2 Option 2: do not include the new sites in Rotherham's Local Site System

Not including the new sites would mean the Local Site System is not kept up to date. The sites have been identified and agreed by the LWS Panel as meriting inclusion. The Council would not be abiding by the relevant legislation and the requirement to maintain an up-to-date system.

3.3 Option 1 is the recommended option.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Council's Greenspaces service and Property Services, who are the land managers of the sites, have been contacted to notify them of the proposed designation. No objections have been raised.

4.2 Relevant ward members have been consulted on this proposal.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 If approval is given, the additional LWS will be integrated immediately into the planning system and will be considered when determining planning applications. This will include:

- Updating the Council's website to provide information regarding the additional LWS.
- Updating the Council's online mapping system to include up to date boundaries regarding LWS.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The costs associated with this Officer Decision will be contained within the approved revenue budgets of the Planning and Green Spaces services.

6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The designation does not bring extra legal requirements on how the land needs to be managed; though there is an expectation that the site will be managed positively for nature conservation (see Environment Act 2021). Any existing legislation that applies to the site will remain in force.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 LWS add to the local character and distinctiveness of an area contributing to a sense of place. A thriving, wildlife-rich environment is considered to benefit both physical and mental health.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 An Initial Screening Equality Assessment has been completed (Appendix 3). There are no detrimental impacts on equalities or human rights identified, and the designation of the LWS may encourage more positive management of the site.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment has been carried out (Appendix 4). The proposed addition of the two LWS to the Rotherham's LWS series is not considered to have any significant implications for CO2 emissions and climate change.
- 11.2 However, the sites' designation may have some indirect benefits. LWS in Rotherham are designated for their ecological interest: protecting these habitats' ecological condition may also conserve their capacity for carbon sequestration.
- 11.3 As per the framework for Rotherham's LWS, the appraisal of sites should be kept valid and up to date through continuous ecological monitoring. Additional monitoring of sites' annual carbon sequestration and total carbon storage would increase the Council's capacity to value ecosystem services and natural capital and could inform future carbon impact assessments.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 None identified.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The operation of a Local Site System enables the Council to demonstrate compliance with current legislation and planning policy, including the need to have a robust evidence base. Designation is based primarily on scientific reasoning and in accordance with national best practice (see the Background Paper: Rotherham LWS System), The system includes all sites that qualify. This can create a conflict of interest between Local Site status and potential for development, as Local Site status will be a designation within the Local Plan and will be a material consideration when determining planning applications. However, the additional proposed LWS are allocated as Greenspace where there are substantial planning policies which already restrict development.
- 13.2 The designation does not bring extra legal requirements on how the land needs to be managed; though there is an expectation that the site will be managed positively for nature conservation (see Environment Act 2021). Any existing legislation that applies to the site will remain in force.

14. Accountable Officers

Simon Moss, Assistant Director, Planning, Regeneration & Transport

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp OBE	Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	Click here to enter a date.

*Report Author: Rachel Lindsay, Planning Officer,
01709 254746 or rachel.lindsay@rotherham.gov.uk*

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).