



London Borough of Sutton

**Sites of Importance for Nature
Conservation -
Review**

December 2016

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1. Background

- 1.1 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) are non statutory wildlife sites and are generally referred to as Local Sites.
- 1.2 DEFRA has published a guidance document: “Local Sites, Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management”, 2006 and this has been considered in this report.
- 1.3 Local Sites should create a network of locally and regionally important habitat, including buffer zones and wildlife corridors. They play a significant role in meeting the Government’s overall national biodiversity targets to establish more coherent and resilient ecological networks on land that safeguards ecosystem services for the benefit of wildlife and people (Biodiversity Strategy 2020: Priority Action).
- 1.4 The selection of Borough or Local Sites or changes to Borough or Local Sites are matters for local decision-making. Nevertheless, a London Wildlife Sites Board has been set up to update the site selection and approval process guidance to ensure it is consistent with national policy. The London Wildlife Sites Board can validate a Borough SINC review process if required. (The London Wildlife Site Board (LWSB) – update March 2013 <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/SINC%20Selection%20Process%20-%20update%20March%202013.pdf>).

2. Legislation

- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)
- 2.1 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act requires that “every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”
- 2.2 Section 41 of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list has been drawn up in consultation with Natural England, as required by the Act.
- 2.3 The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

3. **Policy Background**

National Planning Policy Framework

3.1 Chapter 11. Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment states the following

109. The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;...

...

111. Planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land that has been previously developed (brown field land), provided that it is not of high environmental value. ...

...

113. Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.

114. Local planning authorities should:

- set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure; ...

...

117. To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

- plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;
- identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;

Other National Guidance

3.2 Further guidance on implementation has been published:

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/biodiversity-ecosystems-and-green-infrastructure/>

3.3 In addition, although PPS 9 is now withdrawn, *Circular 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System* is still valid. This refers to the DEFRA 'Local Sites' guidance.

London Plan

3.4 Policy 7.19: Biodiversity and Access to Nature states the following:

LDF preparation

In their LDFs, boroughs should:

- a use the procedures in the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy to identify and secure the appropriate management of sites of borough and local importance for nature conservation in consultation with the London Wildlife Sites Board.
- b identify areas deficient in accessible wildlife sites and seek opportunities to address them
- c include policies and proposals for the protection of protected/priority species and habitats and the enhancement of their populations and their extent via appropriate BAP targets
- d ensure sites of European or National Nature Conservation Importance are clearly identified.
- e Identify and protect and enhance corridors of movement, such as green corridors, that are of strategic importance in enabling species to colonise, re-colonise and move between sites

Other Regional Guidance

3.5 The London Wildlife Sites Board has issued an advice note for the Process for Selecting and Confirming Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Greater London (March 2013) which updates the selection process in the Mayor of London's Biodiversity Strategy. The advice note includes the following: "The Borough must have access to a current evidence base relating to habitats, species, etc. from which to support site selection, de-selection or changes to boundaries."

One Planet Sutton

3.6 Reviewing Sutton's SINCs will support the One Planet target (NHW 1.3) to implement positive management on Sutton's Nature Conservation sites.

4. Considerations

4.1 Sutton currently has 46 SINCs designated within its planning document. The current policy framework protects designates SINCs and protects them from any damaging impact from development within or adjacent to the site (Policy DM17, Site Development DPD).

4.2 Guidance recommends a review of local sites system every five to ten years to ensure that they continue to represent an adequate selection of sites of nature conservation interest and that the local site system achieves its overall objectives. Therefore sites should be reviewed to assess whether designation criteria still apply. A SINC review should also aim to identify habitats or species of principal importance listed under S41 of the NERC Act 2006 that may justify the designation of new SINCs.

4.3 The Greater London Authority used to carry out a rolling programme of ecological surveys of green spaces in the London boroughs which informed

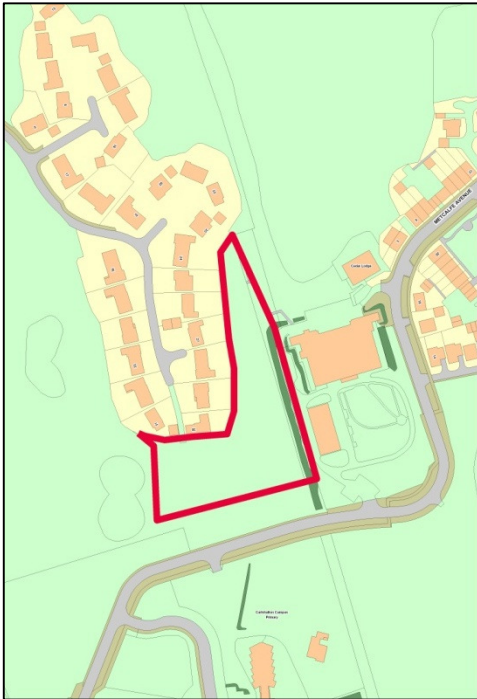
the Local Site selection process. The programme ended with the restructuring of the London Ecology Unit. The last survey in Sutton was carried out in 2006.

- 4.4** Sutton's Biodiversity Team holds up-to-date records for the SINC's under current management by the council. However, a lack of up-to-date survey data for other sites (privately owned, those run as cemeteries, some parks etc.) means Sutton no longer has accurate or up-to-date evidence of the condition of these wider biodiversity assets. There is a risk that lack of up-to-date information on the condition of these sites may impact on the necessary evidence base to inform new planning policies or to provide adequate protection for these sites from development pressure.
- 4.5** In an ideal world, a number of ecological surveys would be undertaken on those sites without current information to determine whether existing designated sites have deteriorated, have been completely lost or no longer fulfil the criteria for designation at a specific grade. The golf courses which are designated for containing chalk grassland areas are of particular concern.
- 4.6** The identification of Local Wildlife Sites and designation value should be based on criteria set out by the London Wildlife Sites Board.
- 4.7** Best practice requires that ecological surveys are carried out in the optimum time of the year to maximise species present, although this can only provide a snapshot of a given date. Seasonality is of particular importance for sites designated for the presence of orchid species.
- 4.8** Updated ecological survey data is needed to ensure a robust and credible evidence base to support the delivery of the Local Plan and other planning policy documents. Without a detailed ecological survey of the borough, we risk being unable to achieve the best possible protection and creation of ecological habitat in the borough.
- 4.9** Planning decisions based on out-of-date ecological data can be challenged through planning appeals, although, it is not the purpose of the planning application to determine and modify the designation of a site. However, it may make it more difficult to justify protection of a site without current information.
- 4.10** In discussions, it was decided that a full review would be impractical and delay the emerging Local Plan. It was determined that the borough would carry the risk for those sites without current information. The current SINC review would concentrate on the incorporation of sites adjacent to existing SINC's, the addition of new sites with current information, the upgrading (or downgrading) of sites with current information and the assessment of two new areas.
- 4.11** Carrying out a SINC review as part of the update of planning policies will demonstrate the council's compliance with the NERC Act 2006. Guidance published by DEFRA on the implementation of the NERC act lists developing a good evidence base in forward planning as one of the activities to demonstrate compliance with the NERC Act 2006.
http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/dutyguidancelocal_tcm6-9234.pdf

5. **Results of the SINC Survey**

2. WELLFIELD SOUTH (publicly owned)

Extension of existing SINC to incorporate new land



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Wellfield South is roughly 0.6ha of rank neutral grassland with a slight chalky 'feel' and scrub fringes. It is on upper chalk and is rank and neutral through the lack of appropriate management. With appropriate management, the site can be restored to chalk grassland, a priority habitat. The site is adjacent to the existing Queen Mary's Woodland and Wellfield Plantation and Grasslands SINC BII (SINC 26). This forms a complex of woodland and grasslands from the old MRC site and now forms remnants around the Wellfield Gardens development. It is unclear why this parcel of land was not included within SINC 26 when that was created.

Current state of Wellfield South

Wellfield South has been managed by the Biodiversity Team for the past 4 years through taking a hay cut. This has improved the sward and species composition to some degree but will not fulfil the Higher Level Stewardship targets for the site. It is currently proposed that the site will receive low density sheep grazing later this year or early next year to help enhance the grassland as well as the introduction of green hay or locally harvested seed to improve species composition. It is envisaged that these measures will enhance the site to the standard of the other grasslands contained within the wider SINC (Wellfield East, West and 'C3'). The site has been subject to annual botanical surveys over this time, as well as a baseline National Vegetation Classification survey (NVC) for the HLS in 2014 to judge enhancement success against. A 10 year management plan for the wider SINC, including Wellfield South, is in the process of being revised and updated to incorporate the HLS agreement.

Decision

Extend SINC 26 to include Wellfield South

Financial Implications

Ongoing management and enhancement of the site is funded through the HLS scheme and through staff and volunteer time.

3. LAND REAR OF VICTORIA AVENUE (privately owned)

Extension of existing SINC to incorporate new land



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The land rear of Victoria Avenue is a small area (c.0.141ha) of scrub, mature trees, burgeoning grassland and a small pond, the land being subject to a S106 agreement from the development of a care home at 69 Victoria Avenue. It is bounded by the River Wandle SINC (M91) to the east and the Sutton-Victoria mainline railway to the northwest. Access is gained by permission of the care home through their rear garden.

Current State of the Land Rear of Victoria Avenue

This area of land has been managed by the Biodiversity Team for around four years. In that time, we have significantly reduced the extent of nettles and replaced with grassland containing typical wildflowers. This is an ongoing process and the site will improve over time with continued management. Crack willows *Salix fragilis* over-shading the pond have been thinned and will continue to be managed to improve the viability of the pond for amphibians and invertebrates. The site has been subject to botanical surveys over the last 4 years. A management plan for the next 10 years has been drafted and will be completed this calendar year.

Decision

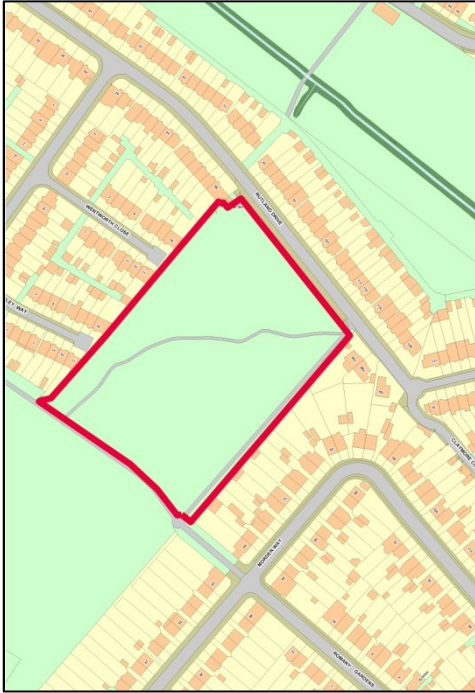
Extend the boundary of the River Wandle SINC to incorporate this parcel of land (as is the case for Wilderness Island, Wandle Valley Wetland etc.) and modify the title to 'Wandle Edge'.

Financial Implications

Monies from the S106 agreement are small but sufficient to provide for the basic management needs of this small site

4. SUTTON COMMON PADDOCK (publicly owned)

Creation of Additional SINC (currently managed by the Biodiversity Team)



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Sutton Common Paddock is the northern aspect of Sutton Common Park and covers 1.66ha. It was used as a sports pitch until 2009, when, due to persistently wet ground conditions, it was deemed that it was no longer suitable for this function. The Biodiversity Team applied for external funding to create a seasonally inundated wet area, a footpath across the site and an interpretation board.

Current state of Sutton Common Paddock

A small area within the 'scrape' to the north of the site was seeded in May 2010 with a neutral grassland mix. Due to funding availability, this small area was the only piece that could be seeded. The remainder of the site has been subject to an annual hay cut, as well as targeted mowing by the Biodiversity Team. The site is part of the HLS agreement and will benefit from capital and revenue monies from that scheme to help enhance the grassland to create a species-rich neutral grassland. From the starting point of a species-poor sports pitch, works have seen an improvement in sward structure and composition but significant further work over the next decade is necessary to meet HLS targets and create a species-rich neutral grassland. Botanical surveys have been undertaken annually since 2009, with a baseline NVC survey undertaken in 2014. A 10-year management plan has been created as part of HLS targets for the site.

Decision

Designate Sutton Common Paddock as a Borough Grade II SINC. It is anticipated that by the time of the next Local Plan review in 10 years or so, this site will be in sufficient condition to be re-designated as a Borough Grade 1 SINC.

Financial implications

Funding for the site, including enhancement and maintenance, is covered by the HLS agreement, the Biodiversity Team and Parks.

5. CUDDINGTON CEMETERY (publicly owned)

Creation of Additional SINC (not currently managed by the Biodiversity Team)



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Cuddington Cemetery is a small (c.0.761ha) publicly accessible cemetery just off Cheam Common Road into Worcester Park.

Current state of Cuddington Cemetery

A Phase 1 walkover survey of Cuddington Cemetery was undertaken on 21st August 2015. This was a standard botanical survey to judge the general value of a site. The majority of the site is occupied by regularly spaced gravestones, surrounded by recently mown short grass. The boundaries of the site are shrub-based, with more managed ('faced') hedgerows to the north and east, whereas the western and southern boundaries are composed of more mature trees and shrubs with less management. Although the grass was short, it was possible to distinguish a number of key neutral grassland indicator species, including bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*. A female brown hairstreak butterfly *Thecla betulae* was noted around the yew on the western boundary. This is a UK BAP Priority Species and a NERC Act Section 41 Species of Principal Importance. The female may have been egg-laying on the stand of cherry plum *Prunus cerasifera* on the western boundary, a foodplant of the caterpillar. The presence of neutral grassland indicator species is unusual in the wider area. The cemetery provides a place of some nature conservation value (potentially with habitat for the scarce brown hairstreak). The site's nature conservation value could be enhanced through more sympathetic management of the grassland areas but this may have implications on service delivery by Parks. Designation of this site should also have a small positive impact on reducing the Area of Deficiency in Access to Nature around Worcester Park.

Decision

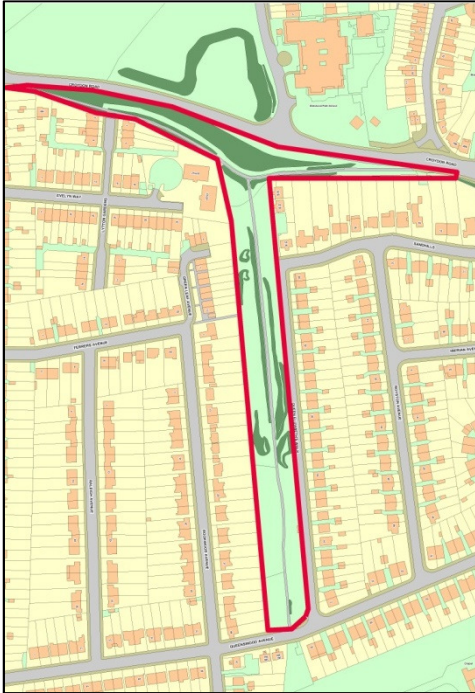
Designate as SINC Borough Grade II

Financial Implications

Without any change in management, this site should not invoke any additional financial burdens. To improve the nature conservation value of the site through more sympathetic management (i.e. hay cutting the grassland) may involve small costs in terms of resources and potentially larger costs in staff time.

6. QUEEN ELIZABETH WALK (publicly owned)

Creation of Additional SINC (not currently managed by the Biodiversity Team)



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Queen Elizabeth Walk is a strip of trees and woody vegetation occupying just under 2ha. It is structurally homogenous, with semi-mature to mature canopy trees, little understorey and almost no ground flora. The site has a heavily trampled earth path running down the centre.

Current state of Queen Elizabeth Walk.

A Phase 1 botanical survey was undertaken on the 18th August 2015. The site is dominated by canopy trees of semi-mature oak *Quercus robur* and small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, mature horse-chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, common lime *Tilia x europaea* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. Understorey trees include young ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and to the south of the site, suckering English elm *Ulmus procera*. The sparse field layer is dominated by brambles *Rubus fruticosus* agg, particularly around the northern boundary.

There are small areas of amenity grassland 'verges' between the woodland and Queen Elizabeth Walk road and at the southern edge of the site. This is species poor and dominated by perennial ryegrass, with a few common flower species typical of areas subjected to nutrient enrichment by dogs and regular gang-mowing. There is an amount of standing deadwood and fallen deadwood within the woodland strip of value to invertebrates, some woodpecker holes of potential use for bats and breeding birds and (semi) mature trees of some value to breeding birds and invertebrates. The site is unlikely to be home to any particularly scarce species but does provide connectivity between two SINC's (Bandon Hill Cemetery SINC 17 and Beddington Park SINC 11).

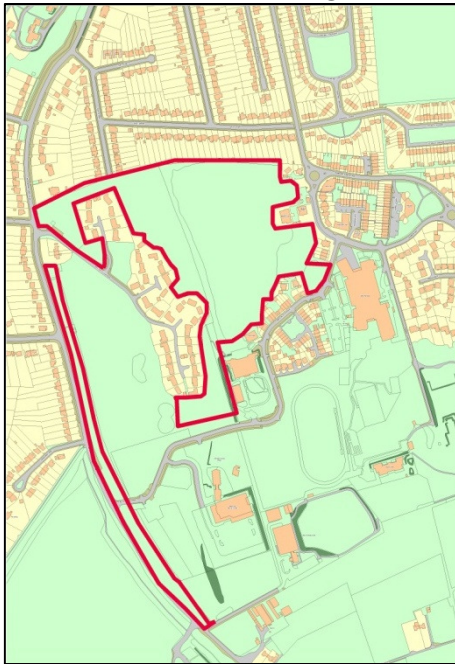
Decision

Designate as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation

Financial Implications

It appears as though current management for the site is restricted to regular mowing of the 'verge' grass areas and some cutting back of vegetation around the earth footpath. It is not envisaged declaring this site a SINC and continuing with the current maintenance regime would incur any additional costs. If enhancement works were to be undertaken, these would incur additional costs (although probably fairly small, depending on works to be undertaken).

**7. QUEEN MARY'S HOSPITAL WOODLAND, WELLFIELD PLANTATION AND GRASSLANDS AND WOODMANSTERNE ROAD WOODLAND (SINC 26) (Map 7)
Modification of SINC grade (currently managed by the Biodiversity Team)**



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The London Borough of Sutton Biodiversity Team acquired Queen Mary's Hospital Woodland (c.4.5ha) through a land transfer from Bellway Homes in November 2012. The transfer also included S106 monies for management of the site in perpetuity. Since that time, the Biodiversity Team has undertaken substantial works within the woodland, removing c.0.4ha of non-native invasive cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, the creation of a grassland glade and minor infrastructure works. Planned works within the next 18 months include increasing infrastructure for public access, provision of interpretation boards, creation of further glades and woodland rides to increase structural diversity and the creation of a 'wood meadow' once the cherry laurel is fully removed.

Inclusion of the Wellfield grasslands (Wellfield East, West and 'C3' (as well as the inclusion of Wellfield South within this SINC review)) within the recent Higher Level Stewardship agreement and the improvements to these sites over the last five years has raised the value of the whole SINC, providing two contiguous areas of woodland (Queen Mary's and Wellfield Plantation), as well as a suite of species rich chalk grassland in an interlinked ecological complex.

Decision

Increase the grading of SINC 26 (including Wellfield South) from Borough Grade II to Borough Grade I.

Financial Implications

Continued management of the site will be covered by S106 monies and the Biodiversity team's time

8. PYL BROOK (L10, Map 8)

Modification of SINC grade (currently managed by the Biodiversity Team)



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In the years since its creation, Kimpton Balancing Pond has improved significantly, particularly in regard of wetland-edge species scarce within the borough, including sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. The meadow is continuing on its way to becoming a species rich grassland.

The recent creation of a meander and backwater in Hamilton Recreation Ground has improved the physical structure of the Pyl Brook along part of its length. Further restoration work would be ideal along the length running from Hamilton Recreation Ground to London Road but the improvement in wetland-edge species at the balancing pond is providing another, burgeoning, example of this a scarce habitat.

Decision

Increase the grading of SINC 47 from Site of Local Importance to Borough Grade II

Financial Implications

Continued management of the site will be covered by S106 monies and the Biodiversity team's time

9. ST MARY'S COURT, WILDFLOWER AREA (BII 2, Map 19)

Modification of SINC grade (privately owned)



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The current citation reads that this tiny site has been included because of the remarkable occurrence of a very rare plant which is known to exist at only two other sites in Greater London.

The very rare plant is Parasitic Ivy Broomrape but it has been ascertained that there are at least five sites containing ivy broomrape in Sutton and a larger number than thought across London. Bearing in mind this evidence, it is recommended to downgrade this site to one of local importance.

Decision

Decrease the grading of SINC 19 from Site of Borough Grade II Importance to Local Importance

Financial Implications

No implications

10. LAMBERT'S COPSE (BII, Map 29)

Modification of SINC grade (privately owned)



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The current citation reads that this site is a small area of unmanaged woodland and a hay meadow.

However, the site is heavily grazed and is may be subject to repeated cutting rather than merely taking a haycut. As a result, the site has become species poor and so it is recommended to downgrade the site to one of local importance.

Decision

Decrease the grading of SINC 29 from Site of Borough Importance to Local Importance

Financial Implications

No implications

**11. LAND NORTH OF GOAT ROAD (BII, Map 35)
Modification of SINC grade (publicly owned)**



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The current citation reads that the site is a significant wooded screen against Goat Road which is a valuable bird habitat; a wasteland area of considerable biological diversity; and, an area of open grassland which includes a wide variety of flora including a group of bee orchids which is of particular note. The site supports a range of plant communities that are uncommon both in this part of Sutton and neighbouring boroughs.

In a recent walkover, it was clear that the site was largely made up of scrub. A large amount of Goat's Rue, which is an invasive species was seen on site, and there were no bee orchids at the time of the visit. However, their flowering season is short. Given this evidence, it is recommended that the site is downgraded to one of local importance.

Decision

Decrease the grading of SINC 35 from Site of Borough Importance to Local Importance

Financial Implications

No implications