

**DERBYSHIRE LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES  
HANDBOOK  
Volume 2**

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**Guidelines for the Selection of Local  
Wildlife Sites  
September 2003 (Revised 2011)**

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**Designed and produced by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust**

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## Contents to Volume 2

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<b>Part A: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Introduction	2
2. Acknowledgements	2
3. Why Revise the Guidelines ?	3
4. Aim of the Guidelines	3
5. The Format of the Guidelines	4
6. Principles Behind the Guidelines	4
7. Application of the Local Wildlife Site Guidelines	9
8. Determining Local Wildlife Site Boundaries	10
9. National Character Areas	11
10. The Derby area	13

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## Part B: Guidelines for Site Selection

<b>11. Section 1: Habitat Guidelines</b>	<b>14</b>
11.1 Woodland	15
11.2 Wood-pasture, parkland and veteran trees	26
11.3 Hedgerows and Scrub	30
11.4 Traditional Orchards	33
11.5 Grassland	36
11.6 Lead rakes and lead spoil heaps	51
11.7 Heathland, blanket bogs & mires	52
11.8 Swamps, reedbeds and tall-herb fens	56
11.9 Freshwater habitats	62
11.10 Mixed Habitat & Structural Mosaics	79
11.11 Arable Plant Communities	84
<b>12. Section 2: Species Guidelines</b>	<b>88</b>
12.1 Fungi, lichens and lower plants	89
12.1.1 Lichens	89
12.1.2 Fungi	92
12.1.3 Mosses and liverworts	96
12.1.4 Stoneworts and other algae	107
12.2 Flowering plants, ferns and allies	109
12.3 Invertebrates	118
12.4 Amphibians	126
12.5 Reptiles	129
12.6 Fish	131
12.7 Birds	133
12.8 Mammals	140

<b>13. References</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>14. Appendices</b>	<b>147</b>
14.1 Appendix 1: List of Consultees	<b>147</b>
14.2 Appendix 2: List of other County Criteria reviewed and consulted	<b>149</b>

# Part A: Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

This document provides guidance on the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Derbyshire outside of the Peak District National Park. It sets out the detailed guidelines under which a site can be selected, and should be read in conjunction with Part 1 of the Derbyshire Local Wildlife Sites Handbook: Policies and Procedures.

These guidelines were first adopted by the Derbyshire Local Wildlife Sites Panel in 2003. The panel comprised Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England (formerly English Nature), Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council's Biological Record Centre. Prior to adoption, an extensive consultation was carried out with local and national specialists, conservation organisations and each of the local authorities.

The distribution and status of habitats and species in Derbyshire is dynamic and changes over time. The state of our knowledge is also constantly improving. During the period 2010 - 2011 the guidelines were revised to take account of these changes. As with the original document, a similar extensive consultation has been carried out to inform the revision.

These revised guidelines are based on the best information available up until the end of 2011. We will continue to regularly review the guidelines to reflect future changes.

## 2. Acknowledgements

The 2003 version of these guidelines were developed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Local Wildlife Sites Officers, Kieron Huston and Debbie Court, from an original draft by Pat Brassley. The members of the Derbyshire Local Wildlife Sites Panel, who contributed to the production of the guidelines, were:

Dan Abrahams (and previously Roger Catchpole) – Natural England  
Jo Brown – Derbyshire Wildlife Trust  
Annie Cooper – Derbyshire County Council  
Nick Moyes – Derby Biological Record Centre

A large number of people provided advice and/or information to aid the production of the guidelines, and the panel is very grateful for the contributions of all of these people. A full list of consultees is included in Appendix 1.

In addition the Trust reviewed the selection guidelines for other counties in England and were guided and informed by these documents. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the Selection Guidelines for Lancashire and North Yorkshire. In many instances their guidelines for habitats and species provided ideal templates which we were able to borrow and adapt to suit our own needs in Derbyshire. A full list is provided in Appendix 2.

This current revision of the guidelines has been undertaken by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's current Local Wildlife Sites Officers, Kieron Huston, Nick Law and Trevor Taylor. In addition several local experts have been consulted for their specific knowledge of certain groups whilst working up the revision prior to wider consultation on the draft revision. Their contribution has been invaluable and for which the Trust is very grateful. Local Wildlife Site Panel Members who have reviewed and contributed to this current revision include:

Dan Abrahams (Natural England)  
Debbie Alston (Derbyshire Biodiversity Officer)  
Jo Brown (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust)  
Ed Green (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust)  
Beverley Rhodes (Derby City Council)  
David Slinger (Derby City Council)  
Chris Monk (Derbyshire Amphibian and Reptile Group)  
Nick Moyes (Derbyshire Biodiversity Officer)  
Dr Alan Willmot (County Plant Recorder)

Illustrations appear courtesy of Natural England©.

### **3 Why Revise the Guidelines?**

The 2003 guidelines replaced those set out in the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Derbyshire Handbook (Derbyshire County Council, 1996). The need for periodic revisions to the guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites is necessary due to a combination of developments that include the following: -

- ❖ changes in knowledge and understanding of species, communities and habitats both nationally, regionally and locally;
- ❖ revisions of national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, identifying priority habitats and species for conservation;
- ❖ updates in Government guidance regarding Local Sites, specifically the publication of revised guidelines for the identification, selection and management of Local Sites (DEFRA, 2006)

### **4. Aim of the Guidelines**

The aim of this document is to enable the identification of those sites that, together with statutory sites, make the most significant contribution to the biological diversity of Derbyshire, and can therefore be considered to be of county importance.

The network of Local Wildlife Sites should specifically:

- a) include the best examples of the full range of habitat types of nature conservation value in Derbyshire outside statutory sites;

- b) include habitats or species that are national, regional or county conservation priorities due to rarity, decline or degree of threat;
- c) reflect the geographical distribution of habitats and species in Derbyshire, by including notable isolated pockets of the more localised habitats or species, as well as sites across the full range of more widespread ones.

## **5. The Format of the Guidelines**

The guidelines are divided into two sections. Section one provides the guidelines for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites on a habitat basis, while section two provides species-based guidelines.

For each type of habitat in section one there is a description of its status in an international, national and Derbyshire context. For the species groups in section two this is often not possible because of the numbers involved, but a brief overview for the smaller groups (e.g. amphibians) is provided.

This is followed by detailed guidelines on the selection of sites, with instructions on how these should be applied. For habitats, the relevant UK Priority Habitat Action Plan(s) (HAPS) are listed. Recent revisions of the Peak District Biodiversity Action Plan [PDBAP] (Peak District Biodiversity Partnership, 2011) and Lowland Derbyshire Action Plan [LDBAP] (Lowland Derbyshire Biodiversity Partnership, 2011) have seen a change in structure to more generic actions, broad targets and actions rather than specific Habitat or Species Action Plans. The 2003 version of these selection guidelines listed appropriate Local BAP HAPs in addition to the UK BAP HAPs. It has not been possible to follow this theme in the revised guidelines due to the changes in the structure of the LBAPS. However, the UK BAP provides the framework against which all LBAPS work and as such the LBAPS still act as the key focus to guide achievement of objectives and targets for achieving the overall aims of the UK BAP.

## **6. Principles behind the Guidelines**

The Wildlife Sites Handbook advises that the criteria for the selection of Wildlife Sites on habitat grounds should consider the following primary elements:

- rarity
- size
- naturalness/typicalness
- diversity

and that secondary considerations could include:

- position in an ecological unit
- potential value
- fragility
- educational/social value



The following section describes the manner in which these elements have been dealt within the guidelines.

### 6.1 Rarity

The Local Wildlife Sites selection guidelines for species are often based on the rarity of the plant or animal concerned. Rarity may be defined at different levels – a species common in Derbyshire may be rare in the rest of the UK – and we have to consider our national and international responsibilities. In addition there are species that are known to be in decline at an international, national or local scale and site designation may be an effective way of trying to halt and reverse these declines.

For the purposes of these guidelines the following definitions and sources apply:

- a) Internationally rare species. These species are identified in European Community Directives (e.g. The Habitats and Birds Directives).
- b) Nationally threatened, rare or scarce species. These species are identified in the UK Red Data Books. The term Nationally Threatened is generally used to refer to the three categories (critically endangered, endangered and vulnerable) as determined by the IUCN. Nationally Rare species occur in less than 16 10km grid squares while Nationally Scarce species occur 16 – 100 10km grid squares in the UK.
- c) Locally rare species in Derbyshire. These are identified in the County Red Data Book and subsequent supplements. Generally, rare species are those that are recorded from 3 or fewer localities or sites in the vice-county of Derbyshire since 1969.
- d) Locally Scarce or Locally Declining species in Derbyshire. These species are known to occur in between 4 – 10 localities or sites since 1969 or thought to be exhibiting serious local decline (for plants significant decline is based upon comparison of two adjacent 21 year periods: 1965 – 1986 versus 1987 – 2008 (Moyes, N.J. & Willmot, A. 2009). For fungi, lower plants and animal species a methodology for significant decline has not been produced and we rely on expert opinion and comparative data to guide us.
- e) UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species Priority List - as amended 2008. (JNCC, 2012)
- f) Birds of Conservation Concern 3 Red List - as amended. (Eaton *et al*, 2009)

Care has to be taken when considering the rarity of some species, particularly those such as invertebrates or lower plants which are difficult to identify. Apparent rarity can be a feature of the coverage of survey rather than a true reflection of the occurrence of the species. This factor has been taken into

account in the production of these guidelines as far as possible, but a degree of discretion may be required in their application to certain species.

Habitat rarity has largely been addressed through the identification of individual habitat types which are considered to be threatened or of value either nationally or in the region, for example by reference to the UK BAP 'Priority Habitats' list, British Plant Communities (Rodwell 1991 *et seq*) and the Peak District and Lowland Derbyshire LBAPs.

## 6.2 Size

It is generally recognised that all other things being equal larger sites are preferable to smaller sites. However, for many habitats we have now reached a point where even the smallest of sites can often support something of value. Consideration needs to be given therefore to the abundance or scarcity of that particular habitat and species present within the locality, County, region or the UK.

Furthermore some very small sites may support populations of very rare species, whilst others may be of value to very large numbers of common species simply by virtue of their large size. It is therefore impossible to assess the suitability of a site for Local Wildlife Site designation by consideration of its size alone, and it must be recognised that size thresholds are particularly subjective and open to challenge. Minimum size thresholds for Local Wildlife Site designation are therefore kept to a minimum within the guidelines. Providing that the quality of the site is sufficient, even the smallest of sites can then potentially be properly selected as a Local Wildlife Site. Further guidance can be found in the Site Boundary section.

## 6.3 Naturalness/Typicalness

Naturalness is determined by the extent to which natural factors rather than man-made or modified factors influence the physical and biological attributes of a landscape, ecosystem or habitat. However, both natural and semi-natural habitats can be of high value for wildlife and in Derbyshire most habitats are semi-natural.

Assessing how typical or natural a given habitat is can be made by comparison with, for example, published sources such as the detailed descriptions of UK plant communities provided by the National Vegetation Classification (British Plant Communities, Rodwell 1991 *et seq*) or existing habitat data held within the LWS system itself. It is also possible to give a subjective, professional assessment of how much a habitat has been modified or degraded as a result of human activities, and to give preference to examples which are comparatively unmodified.

Features indicative of naturalness will vary from habitat to habitat and might include physical or ecological features. For example oxbows, riffles and meanders are often considered natural features of rivers while low soil fertility is often a feature of species rich grasslands and heathlands.

#### 6.4 Diversity

Many habitats are intrinsically diverse, and this element may therefore be addressed automatically by the existence of these habitats within the site, especially where these are 'good' examples. Other habitats (e.g. oligotrophic pools, acid grasslands) have a diversity which is naturally restricted, but which may nevertheless support specialized species which are otherwise rare. Diversity within habitats is therefore deemed to have been addressed provided the site comprises or contains 'good' examples of specified priority habitats.

The diversity of a site can be assessed by comparison with data collected on other sites by LWS surveys over the past 30 years. This data comprises species lists of typical plants or animals for particular habitat types and has been used wherever possible to draw up lists of selection species. These are species are considered good indicators of habitat quality. Further comparison for some habitats can be made with the relevant plant community tables of the NVC, whilst the NVC community tables also include figures for the average number of species per quadrat for each vegetation community.

Another aspect of diversity lies in the interaction between habitats. A potential Local Wildlife Site may contain a number of different, complimentary habitats, and in some cases these may have a combined value which is greater than that of the individual elements when considered alone. In situations where the individual elements each qualify for Local Wildlife Site selection on their own merits this does not present a problem, but merely reinforces the case for designation of the site. However, there may be some instances where the individual elements do not in themselves meet the guidelines, but which together have a combined value sufficient to warrant selection as a 'mosaic site'.

#### 6.5 Secondary elements

It is anticipated that in almost all cases, consideration of the secondary elements is unlikely to result in a site being selected if it does not also meet or exceed one or more of the primary elements listed above. However, the secondary elements may provide powerful reinforcement of the case for selection and they may be sufficient to merit promotion of a borderline site to Local Wildlife Site status.

#### 6.6 Position in an ecological unit

This may be an important consideration, especially in circumstances where a site forms a valuable adjunct to another Local Wildlife Site or to a SSSI, for example, or where a site forms part of a linear complex joining several otherwise isolated sites together. This element is reflected in the approach taken to defining appropriate boundaries.

#### 6.7 Potential value

It could be argued that almost any area of land is potentially of high nature conservation interest, provided that enough effort is expended on it. The designation of Local Wildlife Sites is intended to identify those which currently

make the highest contribution to biodiversity. Therefore the designation of sites should depend primarily on their current interest and not their potential value.

However the guidelines do allow for the designation of degraded sites, where the habitat is essentially still classified as semi-natural but where change or damage, which is reversible, has occurred. Examples include heavily grazed woodlands or those where significant planting has taken place. In these cases, the site must retain enough of its ecological interest to qualify under the guidelines, with the potential for further improvement.

### 6.8 Fragility

The fragility of a given habitat is reflected to a great extent in the overall current extent of the habitat and its rarity. As a result fragility should not be a marked consideration provided the site meets the primary criteria at the time of selection. As with potential value, however, it is a valid point to bear in mind when considering the attributes of a given site and should be highlighted when considering the direction of management resources and funds in the future.

### 6.9 The Use of Non-Ecological Attributes

The attribute of 'intrinsic appeal' has not previously been used in the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Derbyshire. Intrinsic appeal refers to the social or cultural values, such as visual attractiveness or amenity use which are often associated with Local Wildlife Sites and other areas of conservation importance.

As part of this revision Derby City Council requested that the selection guidelines should include a 'social value' criterion. The purpose of this criterion would be to enable the selection guidelines to accommodate some sites in urban settings which whilst not having the substantive nature conservation interest to warrant selection under the habitat and species criteria, are of great social value to local communities as places where they can enjoy wildlife on their doorstep, even though the nature conservation interest is not necessarily substantive in the context of the rest of the City or wider countryside.

As part of the consultation process for this revision this issue was discussed by the Local Wildlife Sites Panel at its meeting during March 2011 with the Panel reaching a majority decision that they could not approve the inclusion of a Social Value Criterion within the guidelines.

### 6.10 The National Vegetation Classification

Many of the selection criteria in these guidelines make use of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) (British Plant Communities, Rodwell 1991 *et seq*). This provides a country-wide classification system for natural and semi-natural vegetation, and is the most widely accepted and established way of identifying and describing habitat types. Each habitat type is identified by a

code (e.g. W10) and defined by the presence of a number of indicator species and their relative abundance.

Assessment of habitats against the NVC is carried out using a standard methodology based on quadrat sampling. The presence and abundance of indicator species is then compared with the NVC definitions to determine the relevant habitat code.

In the use of the NVC, it must be remembered that habitats do not always neatly fit into one NVC code, and often fall somewhere along a continuum between two habitat types. Where this is the case, a degree of discretion is required from the surveyor in order to assign the most appropriate code.

## **7. Application of the Local Wildlife Site Guidelines**

### **7.1. Use of the Guidelines**

In general, any area of land or water which meets one or more of the guidelines is eligible for designation as a Local Wildlife Site. However there are notable exceptions, such as domestic gardens, and these are identified in the relevant sections.

Where a site meets more than one guideline, all of these should be included in its entry on the Local Wildlife Sites Register. Different species will have different habitat requirements and this could influence management needs or potential development impacts. Habitats too have different management needs. The inclusion of all of the relevant guidelines will highlight the range of interest associated with the site and assist in biodiversity auditing and reporting.

### **7.2 Relationship to Statutory Site Designations**

The Local Wildlife Sites Register does not generally include statutory sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, since these are already subject to the highest level of protection. However where a SSSI has been designated entirely for its geological interest, it may also be considered for designation as a Local Wildlife Site. Local Nature Reserves, which are primarily designated for their local community value, are also eligible for selection.

### **7.3 Quality of Information**

It is imperative that Local Wildlife Sites are designated on the basis of the best available information. This should have been obtained through field survey by a suitably qualified and/or experienced person within the last ten years (unless otherwise stated). For difficult to identify species, verification by an acknowledged expert may be required.

## 8. Determining Local Wildlife Site Boundaries

Once a site has been assessed as being of Local Wildlife Site quality, careful consideration should be given to the identification of the boundaries of the designation. Care must be taken not to place an undue constraint on potential development, and undermine the rigour of the Local Wildlife Sites system, by including significant areas of land that do not meet the selection guidelines. However it may be necessary for the future viability of the site to include habitat that is of lesser value. As a general rule, *at least 50% of the area of a Local Wildlife Site should consist of land which qualifies under the guidelines.*

When determining Local Wildlife Site boundaries:

- (a) The justification for the definition of the boundary must be clearly recorded.
- (b) A single Local Wildlife Site may include adjacent areas of several habitats, each of which qualifies under different criteria.
- (c) Where there is an aggregation of qualifying management units of the same general habitat type (e.g. grassland) that are not adjacent, but in close proximity to each other, these may be defined by separate boundaries but designated as a single Local Wildlife Site.
- (d) Where boundaries are indistinct and not all of a site is of interest it may not be appropriate to designate the whole area. In this case a boundary may be drawn which is not visible on the ground, but relates to visible features (e.g. a line between two landmarks). The site should include as little of the non-qualifying land as possible.
- (e) For wetland Local Wildlife Sites, where water supply and quality are vital to maintaining their ecological interest, the boundary may be drawn to include an appropriate buffer zone and/or hydrologically linked habitats. In addition, adjacent habitats may be crucial for amphibian and invertebrate populations and may warrant inclusion despite not qualifying in their own right.
- (f) Where a Local Wildlife Site is designated for a species, or group of species, which has a requirement for a different habitat at each stage of its life cycle (or at different times of year) the boundary should be drawn to include all of these habitats if they are adjacent or in close proximity to each other. For more mobile species such as birds, an area important for only part of the lifecycle / year may be designated, and this is explained in the appropriate section.
- (g) For rivers a problem can occur with determining the boundaries of Local Wildlife Sites where the river is dynamic and may change course rapidly, thus quickly rendering the boundary out of date. Where the floodplain habitat either side of the river is of Local Wildlife Site quality, a corridor can be designated which allows for the movement of the river within it. If this is not appropriate, the limits of the Local Wildlife Site should be defined by

fixed points upstream and downstream (with reference to other landscape features where appropriate), and the boundaries either side of the river assumed to change with the river course. It is helpful to provide a written definition of the boundary such as 'the top of the bank of the main channel'. On less dynamic rivers, flood banks or other physical features can be used to determine Local Wildlife Site boundaries.

## **9. National Character Areas**

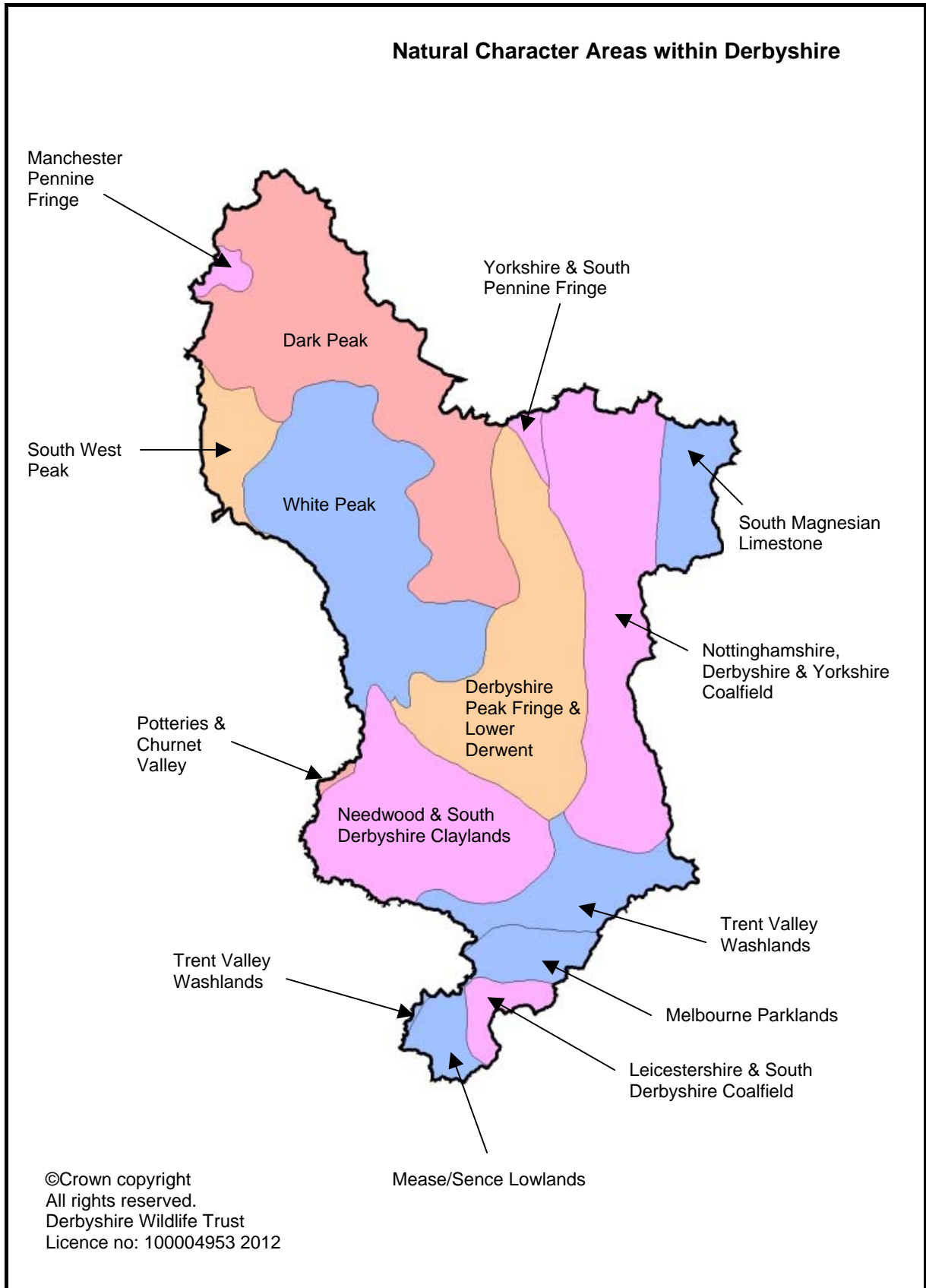
England has been divided into areas with similar landscape character, which are called National Character Areas (NCAs) which were previously known as Joint Character Areas.

In Derbyshire there are 13 different National Character Areas:

- Dark Peak
- Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent
- Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield
- Manchester Pennine Fringe
- Mease/Sence Lowlands
- Melbourne Parklands
- Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands
- Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield
- South Magnesian Limestone
- South West Peak
- Trent Valley Washlands
- White Peak
- Yorkshire and South Pennine Fringe

Some of these National Character Areas occur over relatively small areas of Derbyshire, for example, Manchester Pennine Fringe and Yorkshire and South Pennine Fringe. The only area which is situated wholly within Derbyshire is the Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent NCA

There is considerable variation in the extent and quality of different habitats between the different National Character Areas in Derbyshire and the selection thresholds have attempted to take this into account. For example, good examples of semi-natural grasslands are especially scarce in the Coalfield National Character Areas, Trent Valley Washlands and Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands Character Areas and the threshold for selection has been set slightly lower than for other Character Areas.





## 10. The Derby area.

Since the last revision of the selection guidelines in 2003 there has been concern that the guidelines do not fully capture the nature conservation importance of many sites within Derby City when the urban setting of these sites is taken into consideration.

The need for differing threshold levels for site selection to account for the considerable variation in the extent and quality of habitats in different parts of the county is reflected in variations in threshold values for several habitat selection criteria within these guidelines as outlined in the previous section. It has therefore been possible to address these concerns relating to Derby City sites under the individual habitat selection guidelines by including threshold levels which more accurately reflect the importance of the City's sites. This approach follows DEFRA guidance (DEFRA, 2006).

Derby City continues to grow in size with its outer environs and zones for future development extending beyond the unitary boundary. For this reason, reference to the area where there is a need for differing site selection thresholds is better referred to as the Derby Area rather than specifically to Derby City. Such an approach will also enable these guidelines to remain appropriate for the foreseeable future whilst the inevitable growth of Derby continues.



**Merlin**