

**REPORT TO:** Development Control Committee

**DATE:** 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Enterprise, Communities and Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Resources

**SUBJECT:** Local Wildlife Site Designation

**WARDS:** Boroughwide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To approve the addition of two newly identified Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), the removal of one LWS and boundary amendment to two LWS on the Local Wildlife Sites List. The LWS List forms part of the evidence base that informs Development Management decisions and supports the production of the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan that will replace the remaining policies from the Unitary Development Plan.

### **2.1 RECOMMENDATION:** That Committee approves;

1. The addition of new Local Wildlife Sites at
  - Gigg Lane, and;
  - Keckwick Brook Corridor;
2. The deletion of a Local Wildlife Site at Runcorn East Railway Station, and;
3. Boundary changes to;
  - Haystack Lodge, and;
  - Haddocks Wood Pasture Local Wildlife Site

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, places a duty on all public authorities in England and Wales to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making and to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by Government in its Biodiversity 2020 strategy.
- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that pursuing sustainable development includes moving from a net loss of biodiversity to achieving net gains for nature, and that a core principle for planning is that it should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 3.3 The designation of a 'Local Wildlife Site' is non-statutory and, as such, they are not directly protected by law. Designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protect nationally and internationally important wildlife areas, and are covered by legislation. However, these

designations do not protect all wildlife at a local level, and cannot ensure that the countryside as a whole is rich in wildlife.

- 3.4 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are of significant value for the conservation of wildlife. These sites represent local character and distinctiveness and have an important role to play in meeting local and national targets for biodiversity conservation. The purpose of their selection is to provide recognition of their value and to help conserve those features by affording a level of protection.
- 3.5 Therefore LWS fill an important gap not covered by other designations and they are vital in maintaining the full range of wildlife across the borough. The only form of protection afforded to LWS has been through the local planning system as designated LWS are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- 3.6 Work has already commenced on the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan, as the planning policy document which will replace the remainder of the UDP. This document will detail sites across the Borough to be allocated for a specific purpose, such as Local Wildlife Sites. Policies will also give protection to these areas and will be shown on an accompanying Policies Map. This will be a key tool when assessing planning applications for all forms of development affecting wildlife sites at a local level.

#### **Procedure for Local Wildlife Site Selection**

- 3.7 To meet the national habitat and species targets for England, Defra and Natural England set criteria<sup>1</sup> and guidance for the identification of Local Wildlife Sites to support the UK Biodiversity Action Plan at the local level.
- 3.8 In Halton, site selection is administered through the Halton Local Wildlife Sites Partnership which was formed in 2011. Potential sites are principally proposed through evidence gathered in the production of a local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)<sup>2</sup>. The BAP identifies potential sites requiring further investigation.
- 3.9 Halton has a total of 50 LWS that meet the criteria and a number of sites that are programed for further investigation. Site assessments are undertaken by suitably qualified bodies such as the Merseyside Environment Advisory Service (MEAS) or the Cheshire Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership.
- 3.10 Local Wildlife sites are monitored and managed through annual surveys carried out by Open Space Services, who maintain a data portfolio of sites for their ecological and biodiversity value.
- 3.11 Proposed new sites and those identified for de-selection are confirmed by the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership and, once approved, are presented for adoption by the Council for inclusion in the evidence base supporting the production of the Local Plan.

#### **Adoption and removal of Local Wildlife Sites**

- 3.12 Previously changes to the LWS List have been reported to Executive Board for approval, but are being presented to Development Control Committee for approval today on the advice of Legal Services.



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<sup>1</sup> Natural England Standing Advice: Biodiversity Planning Toolkit, Local Sites available at: [http://www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com/stylesheet.asp?file=542\\_local\\_sites\\_](http://www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com/stylesheet.asp?file=542_local_sites_) accessed 9/8/16

<sup>2</sup> Cheshire Wildlife Trust (2014) Local Wildlife Selection Criteria for the Cheshire Region

**Local Wildlife Sites to be added to the Local Wildlife Sites List.**

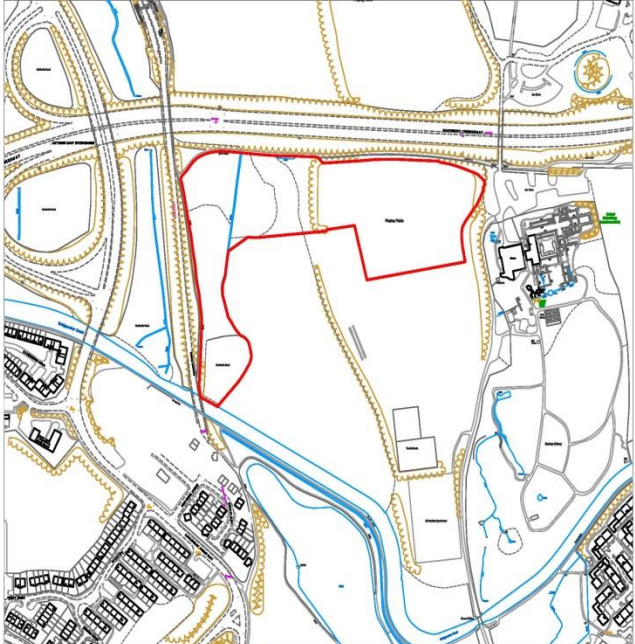
3.13 The following sites meet the criteria<sup>3</sup> for site selection and therefore will be added to the Local Wildlife Sites List.

Local Wildlife Sites to be included	Site/Area
<p><u>ADDITION</u>                      Gigg Lane, Moore –                      Reason for inclusion is provided in the full citation attached at appendix A</p>	
<p><u>ADDITION</u>                      Keckwick Brook Corridor – Reason for its inclusion is provided in a full citation attached at appendix A</p>	

<sup>3</sup> Cheshire Wildlife Trust (2014) LWS selection criteria for the Cheshire region.

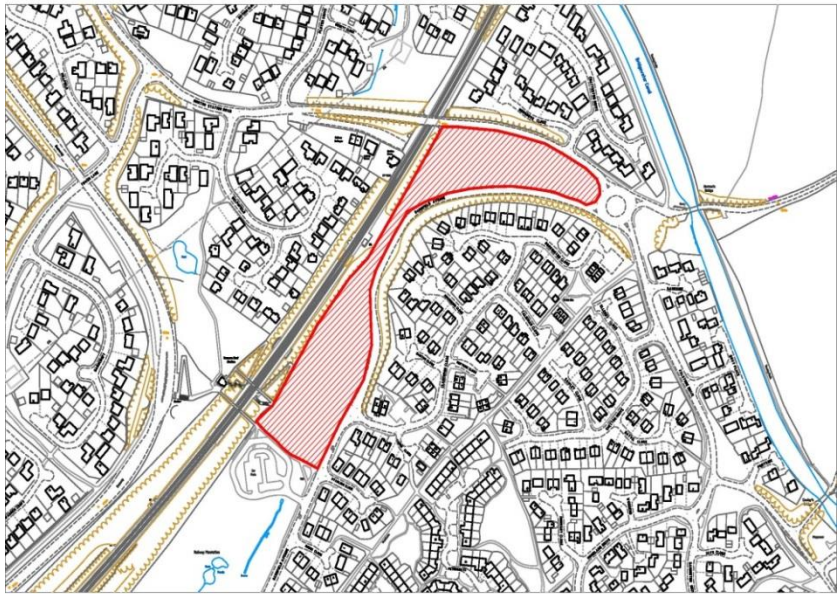
**Local Wildlife Sites to be amended on the Local Wildlife Site List.**

3.14 The following site is subject to a boundary alteration.

<p><b><u>ALTERATION</u></b>                  Haddocks Wood Pasture – boundary altered to incorporate mitigation area associated with development to the east of the site.</p>	
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**Local Wildlife Sites to be removed from the Local Wildlife Site List.**

3.15 The following sites or areas no longer meet the criteria set out above and therefore no longer qualify as a LWS. The following sites will be removed from the LWS List.

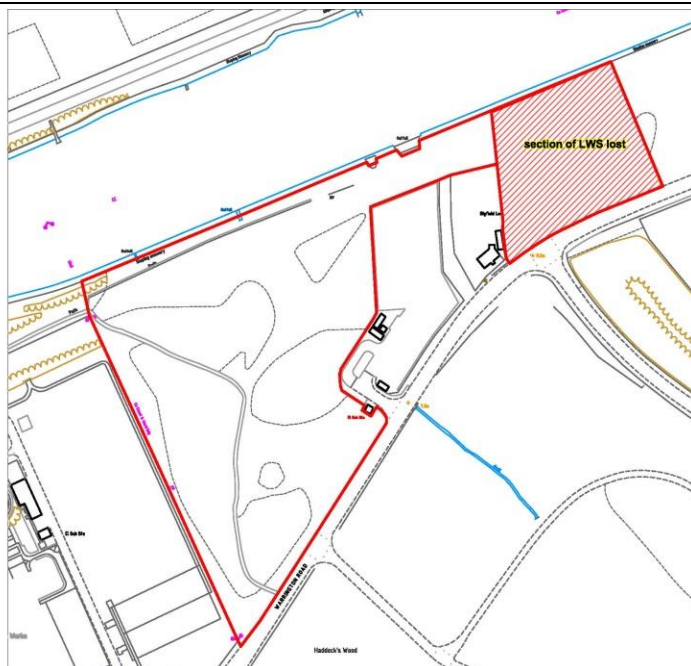
<p><b>Local Wildlife Sites/area to be removed</b></p>	<p><b>Area/Site</b></p>
<p><b><u>DELETION</u></b>                  Runcorn East Railway Station – Whole Site – has been deselected as it no longer meets any of the criteria described in para 3.7 above. This site was originally included using a different selection criteria in 2011 and due to revisions in legislation no longer qualifies for a LWS designation.</p>	

## DELETION

Haystack Lodge - Area east of Bigfield Lodge (shaded).

This area of the LWS was removed due to nutrient enrichment (from horse manure) and the overgrazing of the site which lead to an alteration of the grass sward and its value/inclusion as a Local Wildlife Site.

Mitigation attached to the traveller site planning permission, provided funding to improve the remaining LWS area.



## **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Local Wildlife Sites List form part of the evidence base that will support the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan. This plan will replace the remainder of the Unitary Development Plan<sup>4</sup> that has not already been replaced by the Halton Core Strategy Local Plan<sup>5</sup> or the Joint Waste Local Plan<sup>6</sup>. It will, therefore, be key evidence to support the production of the Local Plan and support the future development of the Borough and the Council's investment strategies.

## **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Involvement from other Council departments such as Open Space Services and the Local Nature Partnership will be required to ensure that sites are identified and monitored to meet the whole range of community needs.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

Policies that are dedicated to preserving the natural environment are one of the best resources for protecting nature. Local Wildlife Sites provide opportunities for education.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Local Wildlife Sites provide opportunities for research and education and represent local character and distinctiveness.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

Local Wildlife Sites can contribute to the quality of life and well-being of the community, with many sites providing wildlife refuges for most of the UK's fauna and flora.

<sup>4</sup> HBC (2005) Halton Unitary Development Plan

<sup>5</sup> HBC (2013) Core Strategy Halton's Local Plan

<sup>6</sup> HBC (2013) Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan

#### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

No specific implications identified.

#### 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The Delivery and Allocations Local Plan will be a key tool in bringing forward development on sites in the urban area by setting out allocations for specific land uses. It will also be vital in ensuring a high standard of development across the Borough, through development management policies on matters such as amenity, design, and the natural environment.

### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The main risk would be the inability through the development management process to protect areas of wildlife value from future development proposals.

### 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The policies in the forthcoming Local Plan will be applied equally to all sections of Halton's communities. Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out during the production of the document to identify the potential impact of proposed policies on Halton's residents. Consultation on draft policies will take place with the stakeholders and the Borough's population and efforts will be made to ensure that all sectors of the community are reached.

### 9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006	Picow Farm Depot, Runcorn	Paul Wright
National Planning Policy Framework (2012)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Tim Gibbs
Halton Core Strategy Local Plan (2013)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Alasdair Cross
Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (Scoping Document 2016)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Alasdair Cross
Local Wildlife Sites in Halton	Picow Farm Depot, Runcorn	Gary Arnold

## **Appendix A**

**Site name:** Gigg Lane

**Site code:** HA055

**Site map:**



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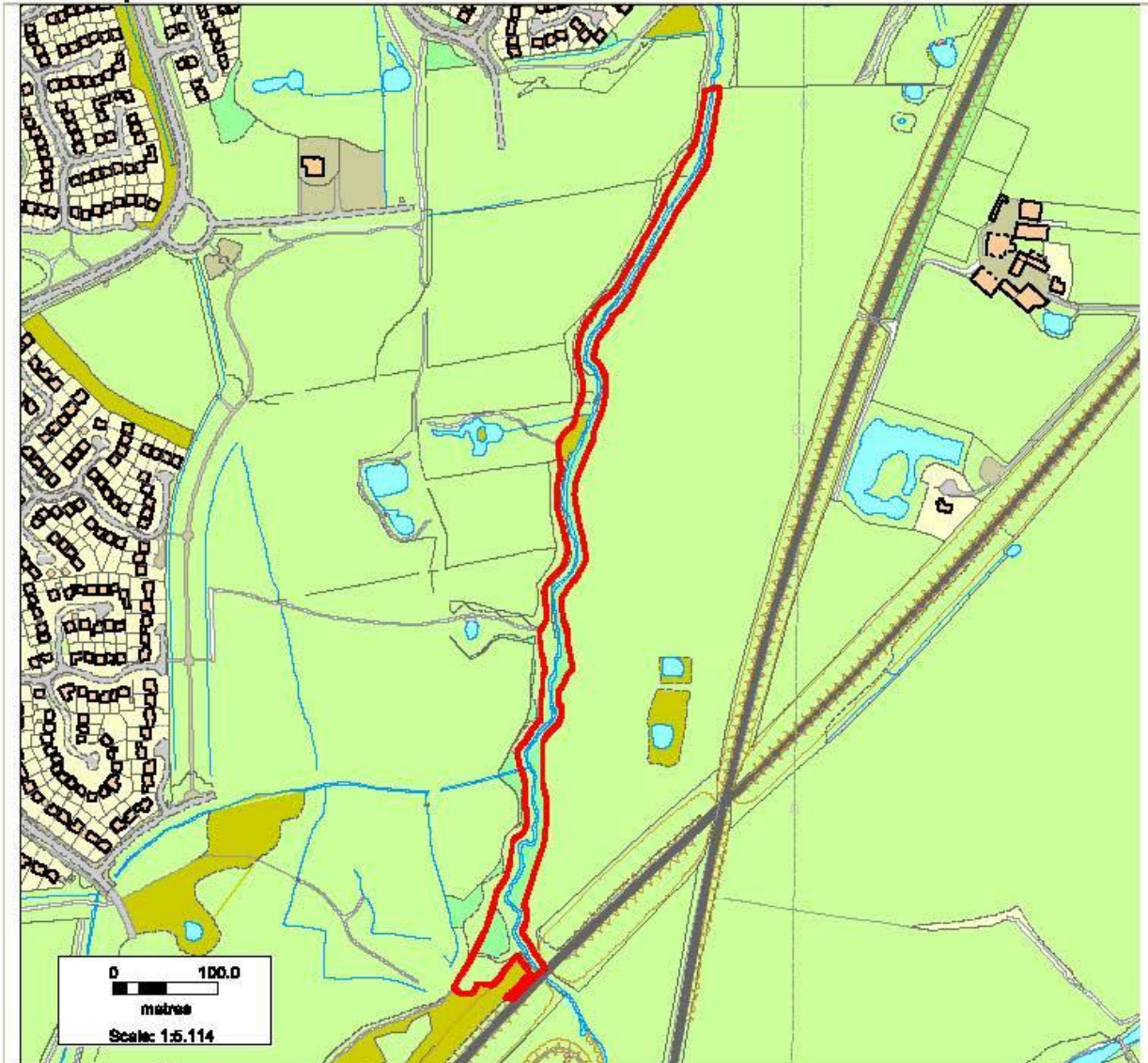


<b>Site name:</b> Gigg Lane	<b>Site code:</b> HA055
<b>Ward:</b> Moore	<b>Grid reference:</b> SJ579845
<b>Area:</b> 1.55 ha	<b>Ownership:</b> Halton Borough Council
<b>Date of Notification:</b> 12/05/2015	
<b>Date of Revision:</b>	
<b>Status:</b> Local Wildlife Site	
<b>Description:</b>	
<p>The site can be considered as four areas as follows.</p> <p>Area A is an allotment/vegetable plot used by the tenant.</p> <p>Area B is grassland used by the tenant for low-intensity sheep grazing (3 lambs) during the summer and autumn, with grasses including Yorkshire Fog, Common Bent and Wavy Hair Grass</p> <p>Area C is the most biodiverse area, and mainly comprises the old quarry and its slopes, with a possible remnant of the original grassland on the northern side. The quarry was last used during World War II for sand extraction; the sand was used for metal casting. The base of the quarry is damp with species of grass, liverwort, moss, rush and a variety of small herbs. There is some dry heath on one slope – dominant species include Common Heather. The opposite bank is overgrown with Bracken. The area above the heather and below the woodland is very uneven acid and marshy grassland with some scrub. It is reported that sand martins used to nest in the steepest embankment.</p> <p>Area D is mixed deciduous woodland on an embankment, apparently naturally self-sown since 1945. The embankment is reportedly the topsoil removed from the quarry area before the sand was extracted. The dominant species is Silver Birch. The hedge on the western side is old and species-rich. There is an old Hazel hedge, no longer maintained, on the northern edge. The north-east side slopes very steeply down to the stream and is somewhat infested with Himalayan Balsam spreading upwards from the watercourse.</p>	
<b>Criteria for selection:</b> H1 – Lowland mixed deciduous woodland H12 – Undetermined grassland H13 – Lowland heathland (dry) H14 – Lowland heathland (wet) H23 – Open mosaics on previously developed land H25 – Hedges	
<b>Most recent survey:</b> 03/07/14 & 08/07/14	
<b>Inventories:</b>	

Site name: Keckwick Brook Corridor

Site code: HA057

Site map:



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<b>Site name:</b> Keckwick Brook Corridor	<b>Site code:</b> HA057
<b>Ward:</b> Daresbury	<b>Grid reference:</b> SJ565829
<b>Area:</b> 1.89 ha	<b>Ownership:</b> Halton Borough Council
<b>Date of Notification:</b> 12/05/2015	
<b>Date of Revision:</b> N/A	
<b>Status:</b> Local Wildlife Site	
<b>Description:</b>	
<p>Keckwick Brook drains the surrounding farmland, woodland copses and grassland. It is about two metres wide and flows northwards eventually to the River Mersey. The stream shows signs of active erosion, with exposed, unvegetated banks and areas of shingle and pebble. The dynamic nature of the water flow shows some faster and some slower sections. The stream and its banks form an important wildlife corridor in the Mersey Valley. The banks are mainly alder-dominated, semi-natural wet woodland, with some mown and unmown grassy margins alongside the footpath. In one area on the east side, the land is farmed right up to the bank.</p> <p>The Keckwick Brook valley connects with Bog Wood and runs downstream to Pitts Heath Wood (and Moore Meadows), Green Wood, Oxmoor (and then to the Ship Canal, Wigg Island and the Mersey), and upstream from Daresbury Nature Area and Murdishaw Wood. It is about 250m from Sandymoor Wood. Most of these areas are LNRs.</p>	
<b>Criteria for selection:</b> H11 – Restorable BAP grassland H21 – Rivers H24 – Wildlife corridors/buffers	
<b>Most recent survey:</b> 15/07/2014 & 18/07/2014	
<b>Inventories:</b>	Deciduous woodland - Priority Habitats' Inventory for England (Version 2.0 beta) Coastal Floodplain Grazing Marsh - Priority Habitats' Inventory for England (Version 2.0 beta)