

Designated Sites

Headlines

- **Over 36% of the Sheffield district is covered by sites with European, national or local designation. These offer valuable habitats to wildlife, with some level of protection, as well as natural spaces for people. The majority of European designated sites are in the Peak District National Park.**
- **Sixty percent of designated sites are composed of moorland habitats (heathland, upland and bogs). Woodland is the next-best represented habitat, covering nearly a quarter of all designated site land.**
- **Over 99% of Sheffield's biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition. This is higher than the UK figure of 94% for all SSSIs.**
- **Sheffield currently has 253 Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and 17 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Over half of LWSs (140 or 55%) are under positive conservation management.**
- **However, over 100 LWSs are not currently in positive conservation management, and since 2011 we have lost five LWSs due to irreversible habitat loss. Lack of ongoing management resources is a constant challenge for wildlife sites, even if they are covered by a designation.**

Introduction to designated sites

Nature sites and areas of countryside can be 'designated', which means they have special status as protected areas because of their natural and cultural importance. Sites that are important for nature conservation can be designated at different levels. The highest level of protection is offered to sites that are of European significance: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The next level of protection is for nationally important sites: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). There are then locally designated or 'third tier' sites: Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). Sheffield contains a mixture of these designated areas, with the exception of NNRs, and designations can overlap.

Designation means that these places have clear boundaries; in most cases, laws and/or policies make sure that the habitat and wildlife are not harmed or destroyed and some sites can be used by people for recreation and study. Places are made into designated areas by organisations, such as Natural England (NE) and local councils, through application where appropriate of national and international laws and policies. There are restrictions on activities and developments that might affect a designated or protected area, for example building new houses or roads. The level of restriction depends on the level of designation of the place and can include areas next to as well as in those areas. In total, 36.4% (13,341ha) of the district is covered by one or more designations with 24.7% having European level protection, 24.9% with national protection and 11.4% with local site designation.

What habitats are covered by designated sites?

Upland habitats, comprising of bogs and heathland, make up the majority of habitats within designated sites (60%; Figure 1). This is primarily because of the large Peak District National Park (PDNP) which is designated as a SPA, SAC and SSSI. Nearly a quarter of the designated area is woodland (23%) with this habitat distributed mostly to the central and eastern parts of the district and often as part of a mosaic of habitats associated with grasslands (Figure 2). These sites are mostly LWSs and LNRs (see overleaf) that provide quality and accessible natural habitats to people within urban areas. Key regions of standing and running water designated as LWSs include large reservoirs which serve as important breeding sites for birds.

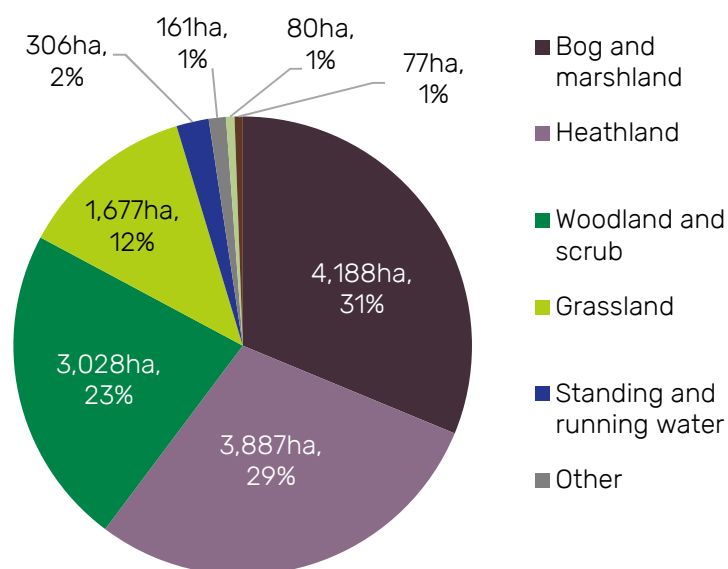
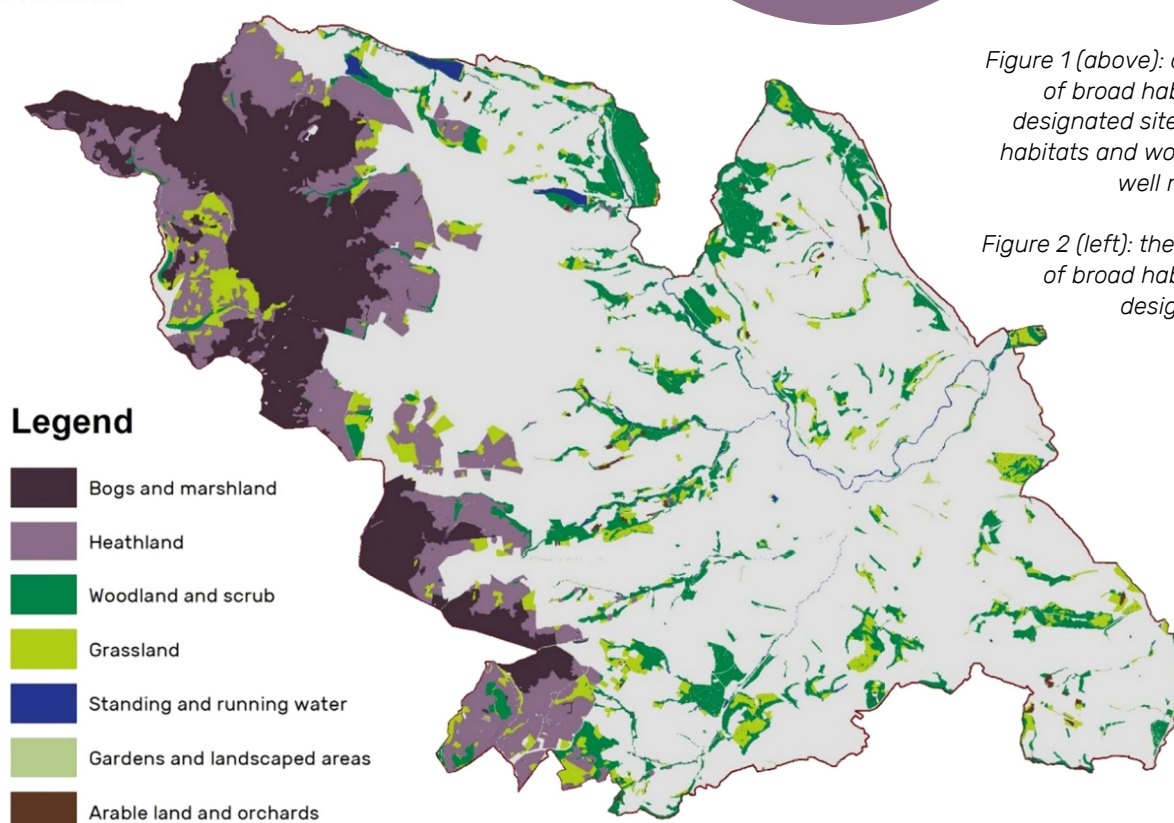
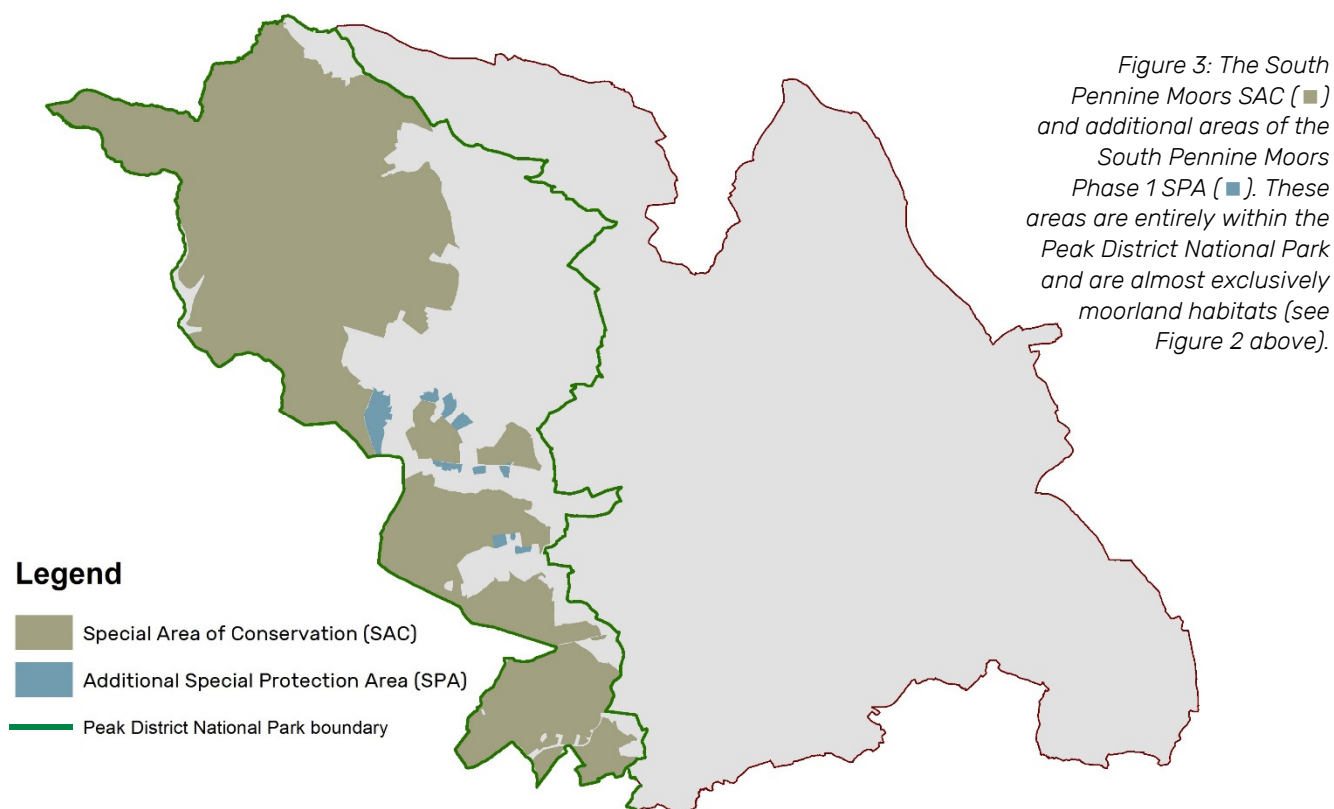


Figure 1 (above): composition of broad habitats within designated sites. Moorland habitats and woodlands are well represented.

Figure 2 (left): the distribution of broad habitats within designated sites.



Special Protected Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

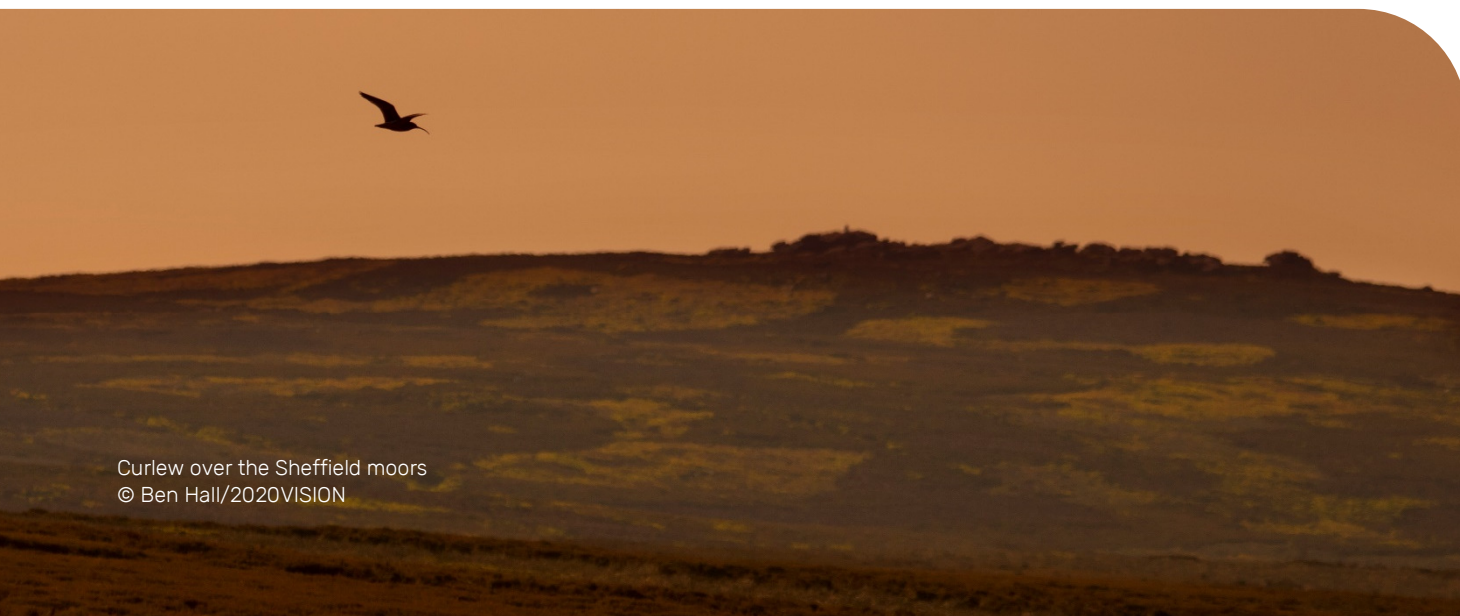


SACs and SPAs have been created under the EC Birds Directive and Habitats Directive. In the UK they form part of a larger European network called Natura 2000. SPAs are areas of the most important habitat for rare (listed on Annex I to the Directive) and migratory birds within the European Union. This high level of legal protection prevents damaging activities to both SPAs and SACs. These European-designated sites are all in the Peak District National Park, which in itself offers some degree of protection through its planning and other policies.

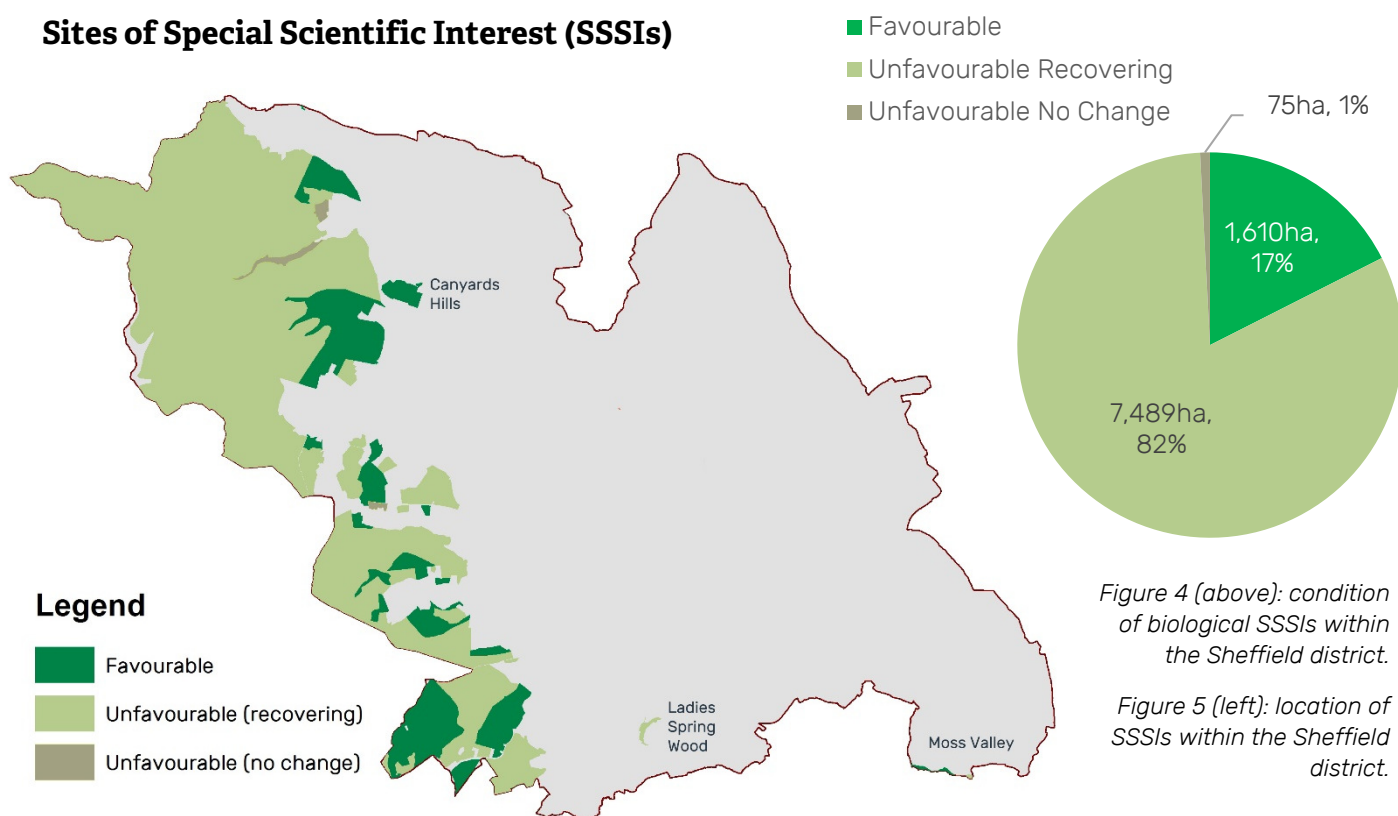
The South Pennine Moors SAC in the Pennine area, plus the Eastern Peak District Moors and Dark Peak SSSIs, are all contained within the same area of the Sheffield district. A total of 8,892ha is covered by the South Pennine Moors SAC and the SPA of the Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1) adds an additional 185ha making a total of 9,077ha (Figure 3). A total of 25% of the Sheffield district is covered by these two designations.

Primary habitats of importance in the SAC are European dry heaths, blanket bogs and old sessile oak woods. Habitats of secondary importance are dry heaths and transition mires and quaking bogs.

All of these designations cover extensive tracts of semi-natural moorland habitats including upland heath and blanket bog. The site is of European importance for several upland breeding species, including birds of prey, waders and migratory birds such as merlin, golden plover and dunlin. The recent Peak District State of Nature report goes into more detail on the habitats found within this region and is a valuable management resource.



Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)



SSSIs have developed since 1949 as the suite of sites providing statutory protection for the best examples of the UK's flora, fauna, and geological features. They may underpin other designations. Not all outstanding areas are SSSIs as they are designated at the national scale. LWSs are the best examples at a local scale, and are therefore much more numerous, but do not have statutory protection (see opposite).

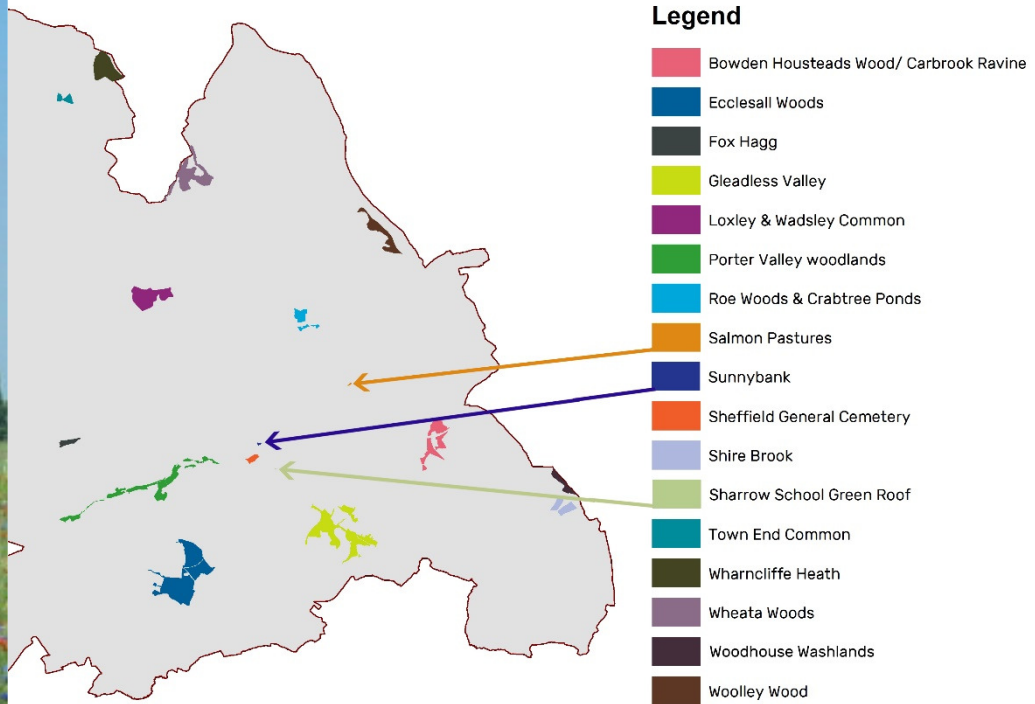
In Sheffield, there are five biological SSSIs covering 9,174.1ha (Figures 4 and 5). The Dark Peak and the Eastern Peak District Moors are covered in the previous page through their additional higher-level designations as SPAs and SACs. Moss Valley SSSI forms part of the wider Moss Valley Woodlands extending into north-east Derbyshire. Canyards Hills SSSI is a distinctive site designated for both its geology and biology. The distinctive 'ridge-and-trough' topography supports areas of boggy vegetation and ponds which is an unusual feature in the dwarf-shrub moorlands of the north peak. The combination of the aquatic habitats in sheltered troughs with very dry banks of mineral soils provide habitats for aquatic plants, invertebrates and amphibians.

Totley Wood SSSI – also known as Ladies Spring Wood – is a fine example of a Pennine oak-birch wood, occupying steep slopes with thin acid soils, but also including the valley bottom where both ash-wych elm and alder woodland have developed. The well-marked zonation of soil and vegetation, allied with the wood's close proximity to the urban area, makes the SSSI a valuable educational site.

Sheffield's biological SSSIs are performing well with 99% of all sites in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition (Figure 4) compared to 94% for the UK. However, of this, only 17% are 'favourable' compared to the national figure of 39%. Currently none of Sheffield's biological SSSIs are in decline.



Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)



A Local Nature Reserve (as defined by NE) is a site that is locally important for wildlife, geology, education or human enjoyment (without affecting wildlife). LNRs are designated by a local authority who will have a legal interest in the land (lease or agreement with the owner or occupier) if they are not the owner and manager. LNRs can be brownfield sites, historic sites (such as cemeteries), orchards, commons or other types of site provided they have recognised wildlife or geological interest. Aims, objectives and a management plan are required for designation and at least part of a LNR should be publicly accessible. A commitment to ongoing management for nature conservation, study and research into nature conservation, or both, is central to LNR designation.

Sheffield's LNRs cover a total of 606ha across 17 sites (see above map) covering 11.4% of the Sheffield district. The majority are woodland sites (82% of LNR area) with associated grasslands including amenity grasslands (13%). Key examples of LNRs within Sheffield include Sheffield General Cemetery LNR which is managed for its ecological, historical and social value by the Sheffield General Cemetery Trust. Sharrow School Green Roof LNR (below left) – Sheffield's smallest LNR – was designated in 2009 as the first green roof LNR in the UK. Ecclesall Woods LNR is the largest LNR within the Sheffield district (135ha) and provides valuable access to ancient woodlands for the people of Sheffield; a short case study is given in the Woodlands & Trees chapter. This is followed in size by Gleadless Valley LNR which also contains important areas of ancient woodland together with wildflower-rich meadows. Several smaller LNRs such as Sunnybank (below right) and Salmon Pastures provide respite for both people and wildlife within Sheffield's urban zone.

Wildflower meadow ©
Herts & Middlesex
Wildlife Trust



Sharrow Green Roof LNR
Local Nature Reserve



Sunny Bank LNR
© Tim Mackey

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)

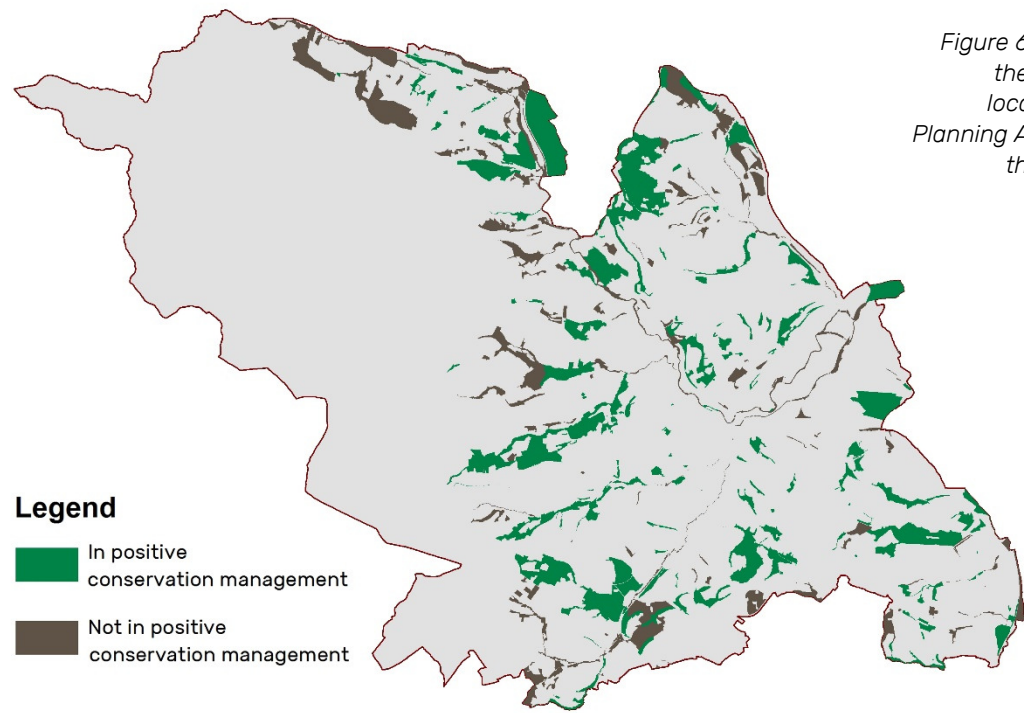
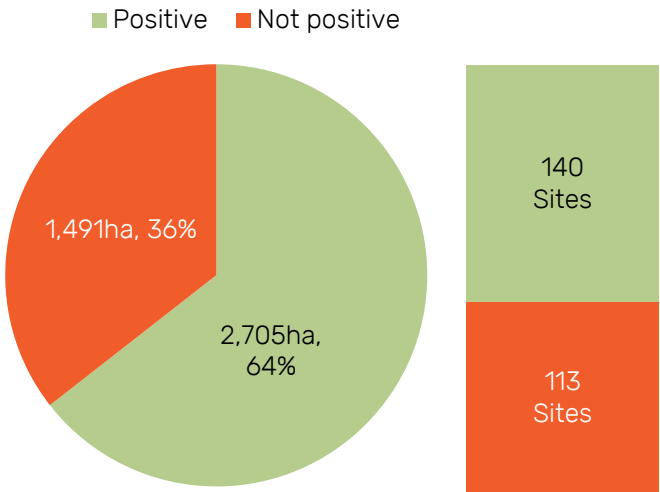


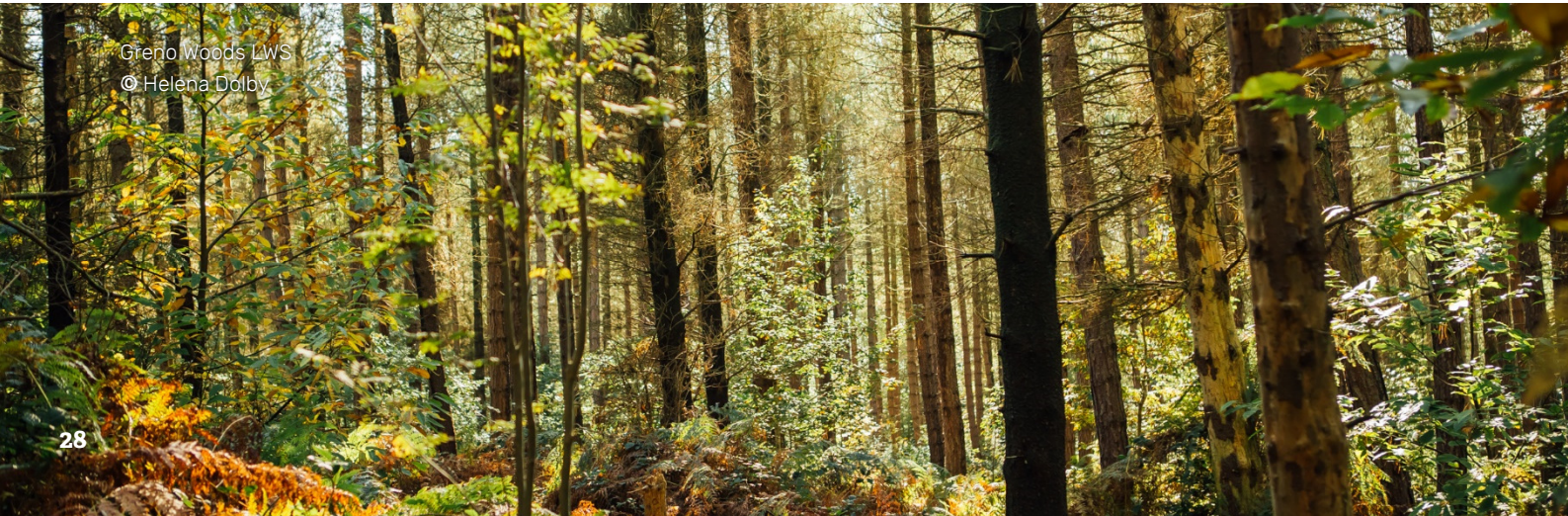
Figure 6 (left): location of LWSs within the Sheffield district. All sites are located within the Sheffield Local Planning Authority Boundary (outside of the Peak District National Park).

Local Wildlife Sites can be privately or publicly owned and in Sheffield a large number are wholly or partly owned by Sheffield City Council (SCC). They have been identified and selected by the Sheffield Local Wildlife Site partnership of local authorities, ecologists and nature experts using robust criteria and ecological surveys. They are not protected by law and for many sites their only protection comes from national and local planning policies. Local authorities report annually on the percentage of sites that are in 'positive conservation management'. Evidence for this includes: a management plan being in place; advice given to landowners; and the site being in a management scheme e.g. environmental stewardship. One of the biggest threats to LWSs is lack of management and resource for management.

Figure 7 (below): conservation management status of all LWSs found within the Sheffield district. Almost two-thirds of land covered by LWSs (2,705.2ha) is in positive conservation management.



Sheffield has 253 LWSs (as of 2017), covering 4,196ha or 11.4% of the district, which are all located within the Sheffield Local Planning Authority Boundary outside the Peak District National Park (Figure 6). Of these sites, 140 – 64% of the area – are in positive conservation management (Figure 7) and 113 are not. Ecclesall Woods is the largest LWS in Sheffield (also a LNR), followed by Wharnccliffe Woods and Greno Woods. All three sites are currently in positive conservation management. Indeed, LWSs go a long way to helping protect Sheffield's woodlands – 63% of LWSs habitat is woodland and 49% of all woodlands in Sheffield are covered by this designation.

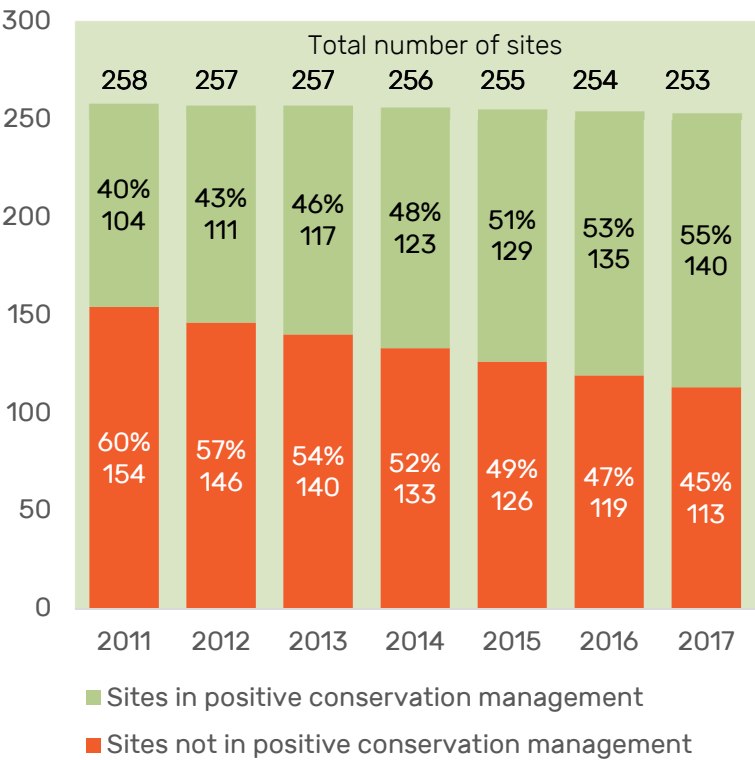


Greno Woods LWS
© Helena Dolby

Changes in positive conservation management status of LWSs

SCC tracks the conservation management status of LWSs on a yearly basis. Figure 8 shows the number of designated LWSs within the Sheffield district and how their management status has changed over time. The number of sites that have remained in positive conservation management for five years prior to the recording date has continued to increase, and from 2015 onwards, over half of all sites have been positively managed. This figure now stands at 140 sites, or 55%. However, the number of LWSs has slowly decreased over time (from 258 in 2011 to 253 in 2017) due to the loss of sites from irreversible habitat loss and serious degradation.

Figure 8 (right): positive conservation management status of LWSs within the Sheffield district between 2011-2017. The total number of sites has decreased but the proportion of existing sites in positive conservation management has increased.
Data: SCC



Case study: Improving the management of Local Wildlife Sites in north Sheffield
Tom Newman, Project Manager, Steel Valley Project

Steel Valley Project works with a range of landowners including SCC, Liberty Steel, the Woodland Trust and Bradfield Parish Council to improve the management of LWSs in north Sheffield to safeguard the species and habitats they support. This has involved a range of consultation and practical work with volunteers, helping people from various backgrounds to gain skills, certified training and improve their employability. Work has been carried out on many different habitats, including woodland, heathland, meadows, rivers, ponds and wetlands. In 2016-17, we improved 16 LWSs, improved or created 28.5km of footpath and supported 1,067 hours of volunteering.

Examples of projects that have been undertaken recently include the creation and improvement of habitats in three ancient woodlands for the willow tit, a declining species; creation and management of ponds to enhance existing woodland habitats; control of invasive non-native species which threaten our native flora in areas of ancient woodland; and re-establishment of meadow management on a semi-improved grassland, to prevent it being lost to scrub encroachment, in partnership with the Woodland Trust.





Wyming Brook nature reserve,
part of the Eastern Moors SSSI
© Sarah Sidgwick