

SINC Resource Hub Glossary

General terminology

Geodiversity	The variety of rocks, soils, and landscapes that support ecosystems.
Statutory Designation/protection	A legal status given to sites, habitats, or species that are protected by national or international laws. This means they must be considered in planning decisions and managed to safeguard their ecological value. Examples include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). These protections ensure that important wildlife and landscapes are preserved and managed responsibly.
Non-statutory designation/protection	A classification given to sites that are important for nature conservation but are not protected by law. Instead, they are recognised through local policies, planning guidance, or conservation initiatives, such as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). While these designations help influence planning decisions, they do not have the same legal protection as statutory (legally protected) sites like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
Green Infrastructure	Natural and semi-natural spaces and features like parks, trees, rivers, and green roofs that support nature and people.
Local Plan	A document created by councils that sets rules for how land is used and protected in an area.
Planning Policy	Guidelines that shape decisions on building and land use, ensuring development balances growth with environmental protection.
Action plan (e.g. for biodiversity, species, or habitats)	A strategy created by local councils (boroughs) to protect and improve specific species or habitats. It sets out goals, actions, and timelines to support wildlife conservation and enhance biodiversity in a local area. The now dissolved London Biodiversity Partnership also created Species and Habitat Action plans for London as a whole.

SINC terminology

Area of Deficiency in Access to Nature (SINC AoD)	Areas where people have to walk more than one 1 km to reach an accessible SINC of Metropolitan or Borough Importance. The distance is measured along actual walking routes via roads, bridges, and paths from site access points. Find out more here .
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Borough Grade (I & II)	Sites that support habitats or species of value at the borough level. Although sites of similar quality may be found elsewhere in London, damage or loss to these sites would mean a significant loss to the borough. Borough Grade 1 sites are of a higher status than Borough Grade 2 sites.
Local Grade	Sites that are important for the provision of access to nature at the neighborhood level. These sites can be found across the borough and are particularly important in areas otherwise deficient in access to nature.
Local Site Selection Panel	The Local Site Selection Panel reviews borough SINC survey data and recommendations and provides independent, expert advice on the approach to surveys and evaluation. The panel also validates any recommended changes to SINC status. The panel should be a mix of local experts and representatives of statutory agencies, relevant NGOs and borough officials.
London Wildlife Sites Board (LWSB)	LWSB, chaired by the Greater London Authority (GLA), offers help and guidance on the selection of SINC sites. It supports and guides boroughs in selecting sites, and helps provide to provide a transparent and consistent approach across London and ensure the process is consistent with national and regional policy and guidance. The SINC selection process and the LWSB's roles and responsibilities are set out in a SINC Selection Process guidance.
Metropolitan grade	Strategically important conservation sites for London. These sites may contain the best assemblages of London's habitats or species. Sites contain particularly rare or important populations of species, or they may be sites which are of particular significance within otherwise heavily built-up areas of London. Should one of these sites be lost or damaged, something would be lost which exists in a very few other places in London.
Proposed Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (pSINC)	pSINC sites are sites that meet the SINC criteria at the proposed grade and have entered public consultation (Local planning regulation 18) but have not yet been formally adopted within a Local Plan.
Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)	London's equivalent of Local wildlife sites, these sites are recognised for the important habitats and species they support. The SINC system, established in the 1980s, forms a comprehensive network stretching across London, covering a breadth of important wildlife habitats from woodlands, rivers and marshes to public parks, cemeteries and community gardens.
SINC classification	The classification of a SINC site, as determined by its ecological importance within a defined geographical area, such as a borough. SINC sites have a three-tier classification system: Metropolitan, Borough (can be subdivided to Grade I or II) or Local.
SINC Network	The SINC network is a comprehensive system of valuable wildlife sites stretching across London, supporting a breadth of rare and important wildlife habitats

Other designations

Other land designations are also relevant to those seeking to manage and protect London's spaces.

While SINCs are non-statutory sites, they receive significant protection within the planning system. Some areas are granted even greater, or additional consideration in development planning. These designations sometimes overlap spatially with SINCs, as well as with the objectives of SINC protection by safeguarding ecology, amenity spaces, or local character.

Term	Explanation
Allotments	Allotments are recognised for their amenity value and potential ecological benefits, under the Allotments Act 1950
Conservation Areas	Conservation areas are valued for their heritage and aesthetic significance, under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 .
Public Open Space (POS)	Public Open Space is a designation applied to sites that are publicly accessible and perform a role in the local community.
Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) and Locally Important Geological Sites (LIGS)	<p>RIGS are currently the most important non-statutory designated sites for geology and geomorphology. They are the geological equivalent to Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. RIGS represent an important educational, historical and recreational resource.</p> <p>In London, RIGS have been selected by voluntary organisations South London RIGS, North West London RIGS and GeoEssex. Although not all sites have yet to be formally designated, sites should be protected as set out in Policy G9 of the London Plan.</p> <p>The London boroughs may also designate certain areas as being of local geodiversity interest (LIGs). They are equivalent to Sites of Borough or Local Importance for Nature Conservation and accorded equivalent protection.</p> <p>GiGL works with the London Geodiversity Partnership to manage data related to the capital's geodiversity sites.</p>
Metropolitan Open Land	MOL is strategic open land within the urban area. It receives less publicity than Green Belt, but has equal legal status; it is a designation that protects open land within the city, as opposed to around the edge. MOL is

	<p>specific to London, and can be applied to open space that contributes to the structure of the city, provides open air facilities for sport and recreation, contains features of historic or biodiversity value, and/or forms part of the green infrastructure network.</p>
Green Belt	<p>Green Belt is a well-known designation applied to undeveloped land around cities to prevent the spread of urbanisation, encourage re-use of previously developed sites and maintain the distinct nature of towns and cities.</p>
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	<p>LNRs are designated for both people and wildlife. They offer people special opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it. LNRs are designated by the local authority under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.</p>
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	<p>NNRs were initially established to protect sensitive features and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research, under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. Their purpose has widened since. As well as managing some of our most pristine habitats, our rarest species and our most significant geology, most NNRs are accessible and provide great opportunities for people to experience nature.</p>
Ramsar	<p>Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention of 1971.</p>
Special Protection Areas (SPA)	<p>SPAs are areas which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. They are European designated sites, classified under the Birds Directive, 1979.</p> <p>All SPAs are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SPA designation provides enhanced protection to SSSIs.</p>
Special Areas for Conservation (SAC)	<p>SACs are areas which have been given special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive. They provide increased protection to a variety of wild animals, plants and habitats and are a vital part of global efforts to conserve the world's biodiversity.</p>

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Sites protected at a national level, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are called SSSIs. Natural England are the statutory body responsible for their safeguarding, monitoring and improvement. London has SSSIs designated for their geological interest.
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Policies and strategies relevant to SINCs

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	<u>Biodiversity net gain (BNG)</u> is an approach which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand. Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) except for small sites will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from 12 February 2024. BNG will be required for small sites from 2 April 2024. BNG will be measured using Defra’s biodiversity metric and all off-site and significant on-site habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years.
Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	A system of locally produced, spatial strategies, mandated under the Environment Act 2021. Evidence-based and locally led by an appropriate Responsible Authority, LNRS identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local priorities for nature recovery • Map the most valuable areas for nature
London Plan	9. The London Plan is the spatial development strategy for Greater London, setting out a framework for how London will develop over the next 20-25 years and the Mayor’s vision for Good Growth. It is updated every five years, the latest published in 2021. London Plan ⁸ policy G6 ‘Biodiversity and access to nature’ states the following protection for SINC sites: <p><i>A) SINCs should be protected.</i></p> <p><i>B) Boroughs, in developing Development Plans, should:</i></p> <p><i>1) use up-to-date information about the natural environment and the relevant procedures to identify SINCs and ecological</i></p>

	<p><i>corridors to identify coherent ecological networks</i></p> <p><i>2) identify areas of deficiency in access to nature (i.e. areas that are more than 1km walking distance from an accessible Metropolitan or Borough SINC) and seek opportunities to address them</i></p> <p><i>3) support the protection and conservation of priority species and habitats that sit outside the SINC network, and promote opportunities for enhancing them using Biodiversity Action Plans</i></p> <p><i>4) seek opportunities to create other habitats, or features such as artificial nest sites, that are of particular relevance and benefit in an urban context</i></p> <p><i>5) ensure designated sites of European or national nature conservation importance are clearly identified and impacts assessed in accordance with legislative requirements.</i></p> <p><i>C) Where harm to a SINC is unavoidable, and where the benefits of the development proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on biodiversity, the following mitigation hierarchy should be applied to minimise development impacts:</i></p> <p><i>1) avoid damaging the significant ecological features of the site</i></p> <p><i>2) minimise the overall spatial impact and mitigate it by improving the quality or management of the rest of the site</i></p> <p><i>3) deliver off-site compensation of better biodiversity value.</i></p> <p><i>D) Development proposals should manage impacts on biodiversity and aim to secure net biodiversity gain. This should be informed by the best available ecological information and addressed from the start of the development process.</i></p> <p><i>E) Proposals which reduce deficiencies in access to nature should be considered positively.</i></p>
<p>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)</p>	<p>The NPPF (2024) is a set of rules and guidelines that shape how land is used and developed in England. It helps local councils make fair and consistent decisions about things like housing, roads, green spaces, and businesses. The NPPF encourages</p>

	<p>sustainable development, meaning it balances the need for new homes and jobs with protecting the environment and local heritage. It also supports community involvement, so local people can have a say in how their areas grow and change.</p> <p>The NPPF provides national policy for SINCs. It emphasises protecting and enhancing biodiversity, valued landscapes, and ecological networks. Local plans should identify, map, and safeguard wildlife-rich areas, promote habitat conservation and restoration, and ensure development leads to measurable biodiversity net gain.</p>
<p>Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006</p>	<p>The NERC Act 2006 is a law that protects and improves England’s natural environment. It requires public bodies, like councils, to consider wildlife and habitats in their decisions and to take reasonable practice steps to further the conservation of such species/habitats</p> <p>Species and habitats of principal importance for conservation in England are listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006. Criteria for this selection in the UK include international threats and marked national decline.</p>
<p>Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981</p>	<p>The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 is one of the UK’s most important laws for protecting wildlife, plants, and natural spaces. It makes it illegal to harm certain animals, birds, and plants, and helps safeguard important sites for nature conservation. The Act also controls hunting and protects public access to the countryside, ensuring that nature and people can coexist sustainably.</p>
<p>Environment Act 2021</p>	<p>The Environment Act 2021 is a major law designed to improve the UK’s environment for future generations. It sets rules on air and water quality, waste reduction, and nature conservation. It also introduces a requirement for developers to leave nature in a better state than before (known as "biodiversity net gain") and creates a new independent watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, to hold the government accountable for environmental progress.</p>

<p>London Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF)</p>	<p>The LGIF is a plan to make London greener by improving parks, rivers, street trees, and other natural spaces. It helps local councils and developers plan for more green areas that support wildlife, reduce flooding, and improve people’s health and well-being. The framework encourages nature-friendly city planning so that London stays resilient and enjoyable for everyone.</p>
<p>Priority habitats &/or species (Section 41 (s41)); London Priority Species List (LPSL); LNRS priority habitats and species</p>	<p>Priority habitats and species typically refer to one of three scales in London. The first two set out priorities for conservation across London, the third sets out priorities for action within the Greater London LNRS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 41 (s41) priority habitats &/or species – are those listed to be of Principal Importance in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Of the s41 list (s41 in England, s42 in Wales), many are also protected under other UK legislation. • London Priority Species List (LPSL) - are species which meet one or more criteria to indicate their conservation status as a species which require conservation action in London. <p>LNRS priority habitats &/or species – are defined within each LNRS (i.e. at the sub-regional scale) to determine the focus for action for recovery through the LNRS.</p>