

Advice Note

Process for selecting and confirming Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Greater London

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide advice on the selection, assessment and recommended designation process of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Greater London. This advice note is for use by those involved in the SINC selection and designation process, including but not limited to London Boroughs, practitioners delivering SINC survey and assessment (referred to as 'SINC Review' in this document) and those who own and manage these sites.

Set out below is a process, developed by the London Wildlife Sites Board (LWSB), by which London Boroughs (including the City of London) should select and approve SINCs. **Boroughs are not obliged to follow this process but if another process is used it must conform to the policy framework described by national and regional planning policies identified in Section 2 below.**

1.2 The Importance of the 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. SINCs are identified and given policy protection through the Local Plan system, including the London Plan¹, which identifies the need to protect biodiversity and to provide opportunities for access to nature. It recommends identifying and protecting a suite of sites of importance at Metropolitan, Borough and Local level in order to protect the most important areas of wildlife habitat in London and provide Londoners with opportunities with contact to the natural world. The Mayor's London Environment Strategy² sets out criteria and procedures for identifying such land for protection in Local Plans. An update to this is provided in this Advice Note as part of a 2025 update and as approved by the Mayor of London.

The legal and planning policy framework, which supports nature conservation and recovery, including the SINC network includes:

- Greater London Authority Act 1999
 - The London Plan¹
 - The London Environment Strategy²
- Town & Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990 (as amended)³
 - The Mayor of London and the Joint Planning Committee for London
 - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)⁴
- National Planning Policy Framework⁵
- Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)⁶
- Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended)
 - Habitats and Species of Principal Importance⁷
 - Biodiversity Duty^{8,9}

¹ Available online: [The London Plan 2021 | London City Hall](#)

² Available online: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/les_appendix_5_-_sinc_selection.pdf

³ Available online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents>

⁴ Available online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents> - Part I Planning Authorities, 7a Mayoral development

⁵ Available online: [National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ Available online: [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#)

⁷ Available online: [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#) – Part 3 Wildlife etc., Section 41 Biodiversity lists and action (England)

⁸ Available online: [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#) – Part 3 Wildlife etc., Section 40 Duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity

⁹ GOV.UK (2024) Complying with the biodiversity duty. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty>

- Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)¹⁰
- National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949¹¹
- Environment Act 2021
 - Nature Recovery Targets¹²
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)¹³
 - BNG¹⁴

1.2.1 Nature Recovery

SINCs are core to London’s nature recovery with a network of Metropolitan, Borough and Local SINCs that overlap, extend, buffer and connect between the upper echelon of statutory designated nature conservation sites. This forms the basis of the Greater London LNRS. They provide ecological connectivity and stepping stones between statutory designated sites and the wider greenspace and garden network, helping to maintain ecosystem health and functionality despite the pressures of the urban environment.

1.2.2 Climate Resilience

London faces three principal climate risks – surface water flooding, drought and overheating. In response to the climate emergency, the London Climate Resilience Review 2024 and London City Climate Resilience Strategy 2020 set out the recommendations and actions, aimed at equipping London and its environment for future climate challenges. The SINC network, along with other green infrastructure across the city, contributes to addressing climate risks, as well as securing wider ecosystem services such as water quality and air quality.

1.2.3 Areas of Deficiency (AoD) in Access to Nature

As a key co-benefit, the SINC network also provides opportunities for London’s residents and visitors to access and connect with nature to enjoy its many benefits. Many of the habitats, species and landscapes of SINCs are also an important constituent of London’s heritage and cultural identity.

1.3 Why a Process is needed

A London Wildlife Sites Board (LWSB) has been established to ensure a transparent and consistent approach to the SINC selection system in London and to ensure that the selection and approval of SINCs by Boroughs is consistent with the legal and planning framework to identify and protect SINCs, as well as national and regional guidance. See **Section 1.2** ‘The Importance of the SINC Network’ above.

The views of the LWSB should be sought when the Borough is seeking:

- to identify a site as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for nature conservation or to amend an existing Metropolitan site. Sites of Metropolitan Importance are selected by the Mayor in partnership with the Boroughs.
- to validate their site selection process.
- advice on changes to policies and procedures relating to the identification and selection of SINCs.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The London Boroughs

2.1.1 Protection in Planning Policy

Each borough is responsible for embedding effective recognition and protection of SINCs located within their administrative borough boundary within local plan policy as set out in Policy G6 of The London Plan.

A site’s SINC status is of ‘material consideration’ in the determination of a development application, among other factors. The key to affording better protection for SINCs is up-to-date reviews and data to support a site’s particular designation, active management and/or use, and strong, clearly worded policy to advocate for their protection. It is the responsibility of London

¹⁰ Available online: [The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#)

¹¹ Available online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97>

¹² Available online: [Environment Act 2021](#) – Part 1 Environmental governance, Chapter 1 Improving the natural environment

¹³ Available online: [Environment Act 2021](#) – Part 6 Nature and biodiversity

¹⁴ Available online: [Environment Act 2021](#) – Part 6 Nature and biodiversity

Boroughs to obtain and maintain up-to-date data on all land of nature conservation interest, including SINC, that are located within the administrative borough boundary, irrespective of land ownership¹⁵. It is also important for the London Boroughs to have up-to-date information on the distribution of priority habitats and species within the borough, as well as to identify opportunities to expand the network and to reduce areas of deficiency in access to nature.

Additional protection can be provided under the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949, which enables London Boroughs following consultation with Natural England to declare the selection of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) on land which they have a legal interest. This can be applied to SINC and include those sites considered supporting the best examples of habitats or those that offer the potential for research or education.

2.1.2 Scoping, Commissioning and Reporting of SINC Reviews

London Plan Policy G6(B) requires that London Boroughs, in developing Development Plans, to use up-to-date information about the natural environment and the relevant procedures to identify SINC and ecological corridors to identify coherent ecological networks. It is the responsibility of the London Boroughs to commission a qualified ecologist¹⁶ to undertake a review of the SINC network within their administrative area against the set of criteria provided in **Section 6** below. This should be undertaken every 5-10 years^{17, 18}.

It is recognised that the ability to schedule and/or fund a SINC Review to align with a Local Plan review cycle can be challenging. Therefore, the scope of the SINC Review may include a partial review in lieu of a full SINC Review where appropriate, for example in response to a new allocation for development, to new or indicative evidence of habitats and species change and where funding may be constrained. Guidance on the approach to scoping a SINC Review is provided within the SINC Resource Hub¹⁹ and should be referred to when developing a tender specification.

Following the completion of the SINC Review, the survey data and a set of recommendations should be prepared and submitted to a Local Site Selection Panel, whose responsibility it is to provide independent, expert advice on the approach to surveys and evaluation and to validate any recommendations on SINC status. The SINC Review should be supported by data held by Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GIGL), who are the primary data holder for London. It is expected that London Boroughs should hold a service level agreement (SLA) with GIGL and that data collected from the SINC Review should be submitted to GIGL as part of the SINC Review process.

It is recommended that Boroughs commissioning a SINC review ensure that the appointed Ecologist possesses relevant experience; familiarity with habitat classification and ecological assessment methodologies, knowledge of habitat functionality and condition within an urban / London context, and awareness of habitat and species presence at both Borough and London-wide scales.

Guidance on the scoping, commissioning and reporting of SINC Reviews is provided in more detail on the SINC Resource Hub.

2.1.3 Local SINC Panel

A Local SINC Panel (LSP) must be established as part of the SINC Review process to ensure that independent, expert advice on the approach to surveys and evaluation and recommendations on SINC status. It is the London Boroughs responsibility to establish or re-convene an effective LSP.

The LSP role is active for a finite period during the SINC Review process with input at two key stages of the process, including prior to the commission of the SINC Review and associated surveys, and following completion of the SINC Review when the set of recommendations has been defined. Expertise is drawn from external experts that the London Boroughs are actively engaged with and through established forums, to usefully mobilise local expertise that can be called upon for similar gain. To ensure appropriate representation and breadth, the LSP may include acknowledged local natural history experts, local wildlife group leads, environmental groups and other relevant established partnerships.

¹⁵ Borough-wide surveys of wildlife habitat were previously undertaken by the London Ecology Unit and latterly the Greater London Authority. This service is no longer provided at the regional level and Boroughs are expected to undertake appropriate surveys. Albeit the GLA and other regional bodies may undertake surveys of regionally important biodiversity and geodiversity resources from time to time.

¹⁶ This can be through paid ecological consultants, preferably members of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), or natural history experts willing to survey sites in a voluntary capacity, or on the basis of up-to-date information provided by surveys undertaken for other reasons e.g. a development proposal

¹⁷ Defra (2006), Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management

¹⁸ It is recognised that some habitats and sites are not likely to undergo rapid change in terms of habitat and species composition and/or some parts of the borough may be undergoing more rapid change through regeneration programmes, therefore location or habitat specific surveys at different time intervals may be appropriate.

¹⁹ Available online: <https://www.gigl.org.uk/sinc-resource-hub/>

Addressing Areas of Deficiency (AoD) in access to nature continues to be an important consideration of SINC, hence; it may be appropriate for London Boroughs to engage with the wider demographic as part of the LSP. This may include linking with wider future initiatives.

It is recommended that the convening, role and input of an LSP must be included in the output report of a SINC Review, including absence where this cannot be achieved for any / all of the process.

2.1.4 Engagement

It is the responsibility of the London Boroughs to engage in the SINC selection and designation process as part of their duty to recognise and protect the SINC network within their Development Plans. Therefore, London Boroughs are expected to drive this process forward and engage with relevant parties, including key stakeholders, ecologists, LSP and the LWSB, who are core in the delivery of this process.

2.1.5 Data Standards

London Boroughs should ensure that any SINC Review undertaken meets the requirements of the SINC Survey Data Standards²⁰ as specified by GIGL and presented on the SINC Resource Hub. A key output of any SINC survey should include updates to SINC designations, grades, boundaries, citations and habitat and species data, which should be submitted to GIGL on completion of the review.

Additional data standards that should be included as part of this review process, include the SINC Citation Template and SINC Areas of Deficiency Survey Data Standards as presented on the SINC Resource Hub.

This data should align with the requirements of the data standards as outlined on the SINC Resource Hub.

2.1.6 Data Exchange Agreements

It is expected that London Boroughs should enter an SLA with GIGL, whereby London Boroughs and consultants working on the behalf of the authority access data held by GIGL to inform the SINC Review. Detail on the data lists that should be used to inform the review are provided on the SINC Resource Hub.

Further to this, it is expected that the data collected as part of the SINC Review should be shared with GIGL as part of the process. This ensures the collation of up-to-date data across each borough, including any changes to SINC grades, boundaries and citations, and allows cross-boundary data analysis, and inform strategic planning and monitoring at a strategic scale.

More detail on data exchange is provided on the SINC Resource Hub.

2.2 The London Wildlife Sites Board (LWSB)

2.2.1 Structure and Representation

The LWSB is an advisory body, whose primary role is to provide support and guidance to London Boroughs on selecting SINC to ensure a transparent and consistent approach is applied across London and that the process is in step with national and regional policy guidance. This includes advising on the proposals for SINC designation that is receives, based on the accompanying supporting data.

The LWSB is convened a minimum of three times a year by the Greater London Authority (GLA). Details on proposed meeting dates are provided on the SINC Resource Hub.

The LWSB represents a range of specialist expertise, spanning not only the designation process but also management planning and delivery. This is as intended in the LWSB Terms of Reference²¹:

“The GLA will appoint a senior officer to the LWSB, ensuring that there is a cross section of local, regional, and national government, as well as London’s key environmental NGOs, required to provide a good range of expertise and experience, for Boroughs seeking advice.”

LWSB Terms of Reference on membership

²⁰ Available online: <https://www.gigl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/G071SINCDataStandards.pdf>

²¹ London Wildlife Sites Board (2010), London Wildlife Sites System – Terms of Reference

2.2.2 Engagement

The LWSB is convened by the GLA a minimum of three times a year. The purpose of the board, is to allow London Boroughs to seek clarification and advice about the recommended SINC selection process, and to present their SINC survey for peer review.

The LWSB will also maintain an overview of national and regional guidance on selection of non-statutory wildlife sites and issue updated guidance and advice as required.

The LWSB will work with the London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum to provide best-practice advice and operational support for Borough officers to ensure the most robust and efficient processes and specifications for commissioning surveys, preparing schedules, etc.

Detail on guidance can be found on the SINC Resource Hub.

2.2.3 Recommendation of SINC Selection Process

The process of ratification and adoption of SINC lies with each London Borough rather than the LWSB. The purpose of the LWSB is to act as an advisory body to provide support and guidance to London Boroughs on process of selecting and designating SINC.

The LWSB will offer to review the site selection process undertaken by the Borough and confirm, or otherwise, that the process is consistent with the guidance set out in this advice note. For the LWSB to comment on the Borough process the following information should be provided:

- a summary of the approach to site survey including details of surveyors
- a summary map and schedule of proposed changes to SINC
- the composition and qualifications of the Local Site Selection Panel

In relation to Metropolitan SINC, the GLA has a role in selecting and confirming the Metropolitan SINC designations in partnership with the London Boroughs. Any recommendations to take forward these sites for designation at this grade must be submitted by London Boroughs or other key stakeholders, such as the London Wildlife Trust to the LWSB for consideration.

2.3 Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GiGL)

2.3.1 Data Stewardship

GiGL is the official custodian of information on London's SINC network on behalf of the LWSB. London Boroughs need to demonstrate that a review has been conducted to a good standard as part of the Local Plan evidence base, for which the inclusion of up-to-date data obtained from GiGL is necessary. The Mayor expects all London boroughs to enter into SLA with GiGL. This is supported by quarterly data exchange between GiGL and its SLA partners, which it actively encourages.

Data that is both robust and consistent is important, not only to assess new or changing sites but, to feed back into the centralised data held by GiGL. This enables exchange of compatible data and consistent analysis across borough boundaries which, ultimately, feeds back into effective planning, management and monitoring of the network. Examples of wider strategic habitat mapping initiatives led by GiGL, which regular data exchange will inform include:

- Greater London LNRS – Local Habitat Map including London's strategic nature recovery network.
- GiGL Ecological Network Mapping²².
- GiGL Habitat Suitability Modelling²³.

Correct determination of site boundaries and supporting information is the responsibility of the boroughs who provide updates to GiGL. GiGL has developed a network of contacts within the London boroughs and work with them in an ongoing basis to verify designations, access points, proposed SINC and citations.

2.3.2 Data Standards

GiGL have developed a set of data standards, which are expected to be applied to data collected as part of the survey and assessment of SINC. This includes the SINC Survey Data Standards, SINC Citation Template and AoD in Access to Nature to ensure greater consistency and quality in data collation and data shared. Further detail is provided on the SINC Resource Hub.

²² Available online: <https://www.gigl.org.uk/2023/05/25/ecological-network-mapping/>

²³ Available online: <https://www.gigl.org.uk/gigl-services/data-insight-services/habitat-suitability-modelling/>

3. SINC Designation – Grades

There are three grades of designation for SINC in Greater London. These should be applied on the basis of their importance to a particular defined geographic area to recognise that varied urban landscape in London between inner and outer London Boroughs.

3.1 Sites of Metropolitan Importance

Metropolitan SINC are of the highest priority for protection. Should one of these sites be lost or damaged, something would be lost which exists in a very few other places in London.

These SINC may contain the best assemblages of London's habitats or species. Metropolitan 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.

Their identification and protection is necessary, not only to support a significant proportion of London's wildlife, but also to provide opportunities for people to have contact with the natural environment. Management of these sites should as a first priority seek to maintain and enhance their ecological interest but use by the public for education and passive recreation should be encouraged unless these are inconsistent with nature conservation.

3.2 Sites of Borough Importance

These SINC 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 SINC would mean a substantial loss to the borough.

These are sites which are important on a borough perspective in the same way as the Metropolitan sites are important to the whole of London. In defining a Borough grade SINC, the search is not confined rigidly to borough boundaries; these are used for convenience of defining areas substantially smaller than the whole of Greater London, and the needs of neighbouring boroughs should be taken into account. There will be considerable variation in quality between a Borough grade SINC located in an outer borough, typically of higher intrinsic quality, in comparison to an inner borough (or more built up part of a borough) comparatively deficient in wildlife habitat.

The grade typically has a single unified value in planning policy. Historically, this grade may have been subdivided by an LPA to Grade I and II (Grade I being the higher status) where, for example, this was used to set management targets and to recognise or encourage positive change. Going forward, a single, unified Borough grade is recommended to ensure more consistent assessment and defensible interpretation of ecological value during the development planning process. During the interim period, until Borough Grades I and II may be re-titled through the Local Plan adoption, both should be attributed equal weighting in plan-making and development planning decisions.

3.3 Sites of Local Importance

Local sites are of importance at the ward or 'neighbourhood' level. These sites contribute to wider habitat connectivity of the SINC network across each borough and, collectively, across London as a whole. Greater habitat connectivity provides a more permeable landscape for nature to recover and thrive in the face of pressures such as climate change and an increasing population.

Local sites support habitats and species of importance within the urban environment, although these will not / not yet be as rich or representative as those of the higher grade sites in the network.

Reflecting their original purpose to address areas deficient in access to nature, Local sites should ideally be accessible to some degree, however, this is not a precursor to qualification.

Reflecting their original purpose to address areas deficient in access to nature, Local SINC should ideally be accessible to some degree, however, this is not a precursor to qualification.

3.5 Proposed SINC (pSINC)

Proposed SINC (pSINC) 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. This typically applies only where a mid term SINC review is completed.

GiGL launched the pSINC dataset in April 2021 on behalf of the LWSB, as there can be a long gap between SINC reviews and official adoption. pSINC (as well as SINC) data are collated from Boroughs.

Note that the dataset is used by some but not all boroughs, hence; the absence of pSINC cannot be taken necessarily to indicate the absence of any candidate sites meeting the SINC criteria.

3.6 Future Expansion of the SINC Network

SINCs are at the core of the nature network in Greater London and as such represent an important function in delivering nature recovery, climate resilience and access to nature for a growing population. It is therefore expected that London Boroughs should ensure the consideration of future expansion of the SINC network to create a bigger, better, more joined up network²⁴. To identify opportunities to expand the network, including the new candidate sites, it is recommended that London Boroughs consider the alignment of this with nature recovery, rewilding and its co-delivery with BNG.

4. Consideration of Relevant Area Definitions

Making best use of available strategic data is a critical first step in the identification of new candidate sites, assessment of the network as a whole, and in the review of existing SINC. Moreover, cross-compatibility between strategic datasets pertaining to nature recovery, climate change resilience and to wider green infrastructure is important to bring together the commitments of the London Plan and LES.

Detail of this is provided within the SINC Resource Hub.

5. SINC Citation and Survey Information

5.1 Data Stewardship

It is important that any SINC Review undertaken involves the collection of both robust and consistent data in line with GIGL's Data Standards, as detailed on the SINC Resource Hub, and which can then be fed back into the centralised data for Greater London held by GIGL. This enables exchange of compatible data and consistent analysis across borough boundaries which, ultimately, feeds back into effective planning, management and monitoring of the network.

The correct determination of site boundaries and supporting information, including SINC citations, is the responsibility of the London Boroughs and it is expected that this data is provided to GIGL as part of the SINC selection and designation process.

See **Section 2** above for Roles and Responsibilities on Data Stewardship and Data Standards.

5.2 Data Standards

It is the responsibility of the London Boroughs and their sub-consultants to provide robust data in line with the requirements of GIGL's Data Standards, as detailed on the SINC Resource Hub. Key considerations include changes to site boundaries, habitat and species data and updated citations.

See **Section 2** above for Roles and Responsibilities on Data Stewardship and Data Standards.

5.3 Habitat Data

It is recommended that habitat survey data is collected using a standardised, comprehensive survey approach using the London Survey Method format, which is similar to the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology but designed specifically for an urban setting with classifications appropriate for London. Reference should be made to the SINC Data Standards on the SINC Resource Hub.

It is recognised that a wide range of habitat survey approaches are applied depending on the nature and scope of SINC Reviews and as such it is advised that should the approach deviate from the recommended London Survey Method, then this should be noted in habitat mapping exchanged with GIGL to ensure the most complete and effective coverage across London.

5.4 Species Data

Species data collected as part of the SINC Review, should consider protected and notable species, species of principal importance²⁵, Local Nature Recovery priority species. It is important that each SINC Review is focussed on the priorities relevant to the locality and habitats.

²⁴ Lawton, J.H. et al (2010) Making Space for Nature: A review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to Defra

²⁵ As defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act.

6. SINC Criteria

In order to assess the selection and designation of existing and candidate SINCs, this must be considered against a set of core and supporting criteria. The relevance of each criteria is dependent on the individual site and each criterion must be assessed positively i.e. a criterion not met does not count negatively towards the assessment of the site. These criteria are applied in the context of national and regional planning policy guidance on nature conservation whilst also taking into account habitats and species within the context of Greater London.

- **Core criteria** – SINC sites are first and foremost designated for their biodiversity value. This set of criteria are primarily focussed on assessing the biodiversity value of a site and as such are considered to be core in informing the designation of a SINC unless reasonable justification can be provided.
- **Supporting criteria** – this set of criteria provides supplementary support to the selection of a SINC site for designation. These criteria may not be the primary reason for designation but are key in providing additional justification for designating a SINC.

A SINC designation must be graded based on professional judgement of the practitioner on the application of the criteria. It is recommended that the following scoring system is applied to aid and to ensure greater transparency of assessment of the grading of each site against the criteria. This scoring relates to the number or breadth of criteria for which the site has been assessed positively. The application of the criteria for each grade is provided in Table 1.1 below with further supporting information provided in Table 1.2.

For each core criterion, assessors must determine whether a SINC meets the criterion at the Local, Borough, or Metropolitan scale. These individual assessments are then tallied to inform the overall grade of the SINC, following the thresholds outlined in Table 1.1. Supporting criteria do not require grading at these levels; instead, they should be considered as additional factors that strengthen the case for designation.

It is recognised that a site may meet one criterion to an exceptional standard, thus warranting high grade designation in contrast to another, which readily meets multiple criteria but warrants a lower grade designation. As such, it is important that professional judgement of the practitioner is applied during this assessment and evidenced by the criteria in this Advice Note (see Section 7 below).

Table 1.1 SINC Grade – Application of Criteria

SINC Grade	Application of the criteria
Metropolitan	<p>To achieve Metropolitan SINC status, a site typically meets the requirement of a minimum of four core criteria at Metropolitan grade.</p> <p>Where professional judgement has identified strong pan-London value associated with the supporting criteria, a site may not need to meet a total of four core criteria.</p> <p>Supporting criteria alone cannot provide sufficient justification for the designation of a SINC at Metropolitan grade.</p>
Borough	<p>To achieve Borough SINC status, a site meets the requirement of a minimum of two core criteria at Borough grade (or above).</p> <p>It is recognised that in some instances, a site may not meet the requisite core criteria but can be reasonably justified using professional judgement described through the supporting criteria G-O</p> <p>However, supporting criteria alone should not be the primary basis for designation. The site's nature conservation value, demonstrated through at least one core criterion, must remain the principal justification for Borough grade status, with supporting criteria used to strengthen and contextualise this ecological foundation.</p>
Local	<p>To achieve Local SINC status, a site typically meets the requirement of a minimum of one core criteria at Local grade (or above).</p> <p>In common with the wider network, the designation of Local SINC should focus on biodiversity value, including current and potential value. Recognising the origins of the Local designation to address areas deficient in access, it remains important, that Local SINC provide public access or local nature conservation amenity to local residents. Supporting criteria 'Access' is therefore expected to be met unless there is reasonable justification to demonstrate its Local value.</p> <p>It is recognised that in some instances, a site may not meet the requisite core criteria but can be reasonably justified using professional judgement described through multiple supporting criteria.</p>

SINC Grade	Application of the criteria
pSINC	Any sites identified for designation and are registered on the pSINC register will be assigned a grade, Local to Metropolitan in accordance with the approach to assessment as set out above.

7. Professional judgement

Below are examples of where professional judgement should be applied in cases where a SINC is considered to meet a certain grade, but does not meet the minimum threshold of core criteria as defined in Table 1.2. In these instances, the SINC can be demonstrated to hold significant ecological or strategic value through supporting criteria or a feature of particular significance for London.

Metropolitan SINC: **Example site 1** supports populations of two rare snail species, a feature of pan-London significance. Despite not meeting four core criteria, particularly lacking in habitat and species richness, it is justified as Metropolitan grade due to the importance of its species rarity.

Borough SINC: **Example site 2** meets only one core criterion at Borough grade, as opposed to the desired two. However, supporting criteria such as J) *Potential Value*, and N) *Access* provide sufficient justification for its designation, when combined with the importance of the single core criterion (B *Habitat rarity*) that is met at Borough grade.

Local SINC: **Example site 3** functions as an ecological corridor linking two major green spaces and had areas of potential enhancement identified, despite not meeting any core criteria at Local grade. As such, the contributing supporting criteria I) *Geographic Position* and J) *Potential Value*, can be used to justify the designation of Local grade through professional judgement.

Table 1.2 SINC Criteria – Application of Criteria for Assessment

CORE CRITERIA

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
A)	Representation	Assess whether the site contains high-quality examples of habitats or species that are characteristic or significant at the London, borough, or local (also referred to as ward) scale.	Representation is judged relative to the scale of assessment (metropolitan, borough, local) and should capture the best examples of habitats or ecosystems (and their associated communities) within that context. Priority habitats are considered, with condition informing the appropriate SINC grade. Examples include habitats of London wide significance (e.g. ancient woodland) and borough specific value (e.g. established brownfield or open mosaic habitats), across both inner and outer boroughs. Habitat quality may not always meet national definitions, but within London's urban setting, the best available examples should be recognised at the relevant scale. This criterion should be considered alongside others, specifically habitat and species rarity, richness, recreatability and potential value. Representation may also take into account the presence of rare or notable species, such as those for which London holds a significant share of the national population (e.g., black redstart, small blue butterfly), as well as species of cultural importance (e.g., European eel, house sparrow).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority Habitat Inventory • Ancient Woodland Inventory • Veteran tree mapping • LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities • Greater London and Middlesex Axiophyte List • Borough Habitat Action Plans • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • Borough Species Action Plans • GiGL Species Dataset – Designated Species & LNRS priority species • Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data • Rare Plants Register • Species atlases • London Bird Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recognised that this criterion is one more heavily reliant on field survey data. Survey data dependent for some – designation should not be constrained where evidence can be sufficiently collated through other criteria. • For species, conservation priorities are determined through the LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities; irreplaceable and priority habitat inventories; species atlases and reports and other principal datasets. • Representation is determined in relation to comparable populations, assemblages, habitats or mosaics, dependent on the scale (national, metropolitan, borough or local) at which they occur. • As described in the proposed text, for habitats, consideration of grade is driven by the condition, including whether fragmented or intact. <p>It is however noted that the assessment of criteria does not necessarily require completion of detailed condition assessments in the field (as for UKHab, for example). Justification, for example in target note form, would therefore aid transparency of assessment for this criterion.</p>
B)	Habitat Rarity	Assess how rare a habitat is, based on its frequency, sensitivity to change, and risk of loss at local or national levels.	Rarity relates to the frequency of occurrence, or abundance, of a habitat. This criterion also considers fragility, recognising that some habitats are 'more sensitive to change and are at greater risk from climate change, human activities or other influences' (MHCLG, 2019 ²⁶). Rarity is considered at a range of scales, from national to London, borough and local, using priority lists such as statutory listing, local action plans and LNRS priorities. Habitat condition is also taken into account when determining the SINC grade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority Habitat Inventory • Ancient Woodland Inventory • Veteran tree mapping • LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities • Borough Habitat Action Plans • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • Greater London and Middlesex Axiophyte List <p>Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As described in the proposed text, the scale at which rarity is concluded – national or London, borough or local – influences the designated grade. • Condition is also taken into account when considering the SINC grade i.e. whether that present is of national, through to local importance. <p>As noted for Criterion A), the assessment of criteria does not necessarily require completion of detailed condition assessments in the field (as for UKHab, for example). Justification, for example in target note form, would therefore aid transparency of assessment for this criterion.</p>
C)	Species Rarity	Assess the presence or potential presence of species that are rare, declining, or vulnerable due to small populations, isolation, or threats to their survival.	Rarity relates to the frequency of occurrence, or abundance, of a species or species assemblage. The presence of a rare species makes a site important, as the loss or damage of even a few sites can threaten its survival. This criterion also considers survival risk, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small or isolated populations - species at the edge of their range - species present at only a small number of sites - species threatened by use or management (including lack of management) - species recognised to be in wider decline. Rarity is assessed across multiple scales: national, London, borough and local, using priority lists such as statutory designations, local action plans, LNRS priorities, rare plants register and species atlases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National protected, notable, red data book and 'of conservation concern' lists • LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities • Rare Plants Register • Borough Species Action Plans • GiGL Species Dataset – Designated Species & LNRS priority species • Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data • Species atlases • London Bird Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As described in the proposed text, the scale at which rarity is concluded – national or London, borough or local – influences the designated grade. • Consideration of survival risk takes into account a number of factors, examples of which are given in the proposed text. This again may be considered at a range of scales, which will inform the grade for this criterion.
D)	Habitat Richness	Assess how many different habitats are present, including how structurally diverse individual habitats may be, and how they support ecological complexity.	Habitat richness relates, not only to the number and relative abundance of component habitats present but also includes structural diversity and supported assemblages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities • Borough Habitat Action Plans • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As described in the proposed text, this criteria is informed by habitat diversity (the number or range of habitats) but also takes into account structural diversity and the supported assemblages within the habitats that are present. • For example, a long-established and favourably managed grassland site, with structural diversity, contrasting areas of seasonal inundation or soil type to provide a range of habitat niches (both spatially and temporally) would be assessed favourably in contrast to a site supporting a higher number of habitats (e.g. grassland, hedgerow, trees and pond) subject to intensive management, close mowing/cutting, and each with limited flora/fauna assemblages.

²⁶ MHCLG (2019) Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment – Standard Criteria for LWS <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment>

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richness similarly applies to sites supporting aquatic habitats. Note that the presence of aquatic habitat will typically increase the habitat diversity and so too the overall mosaic. However, factors such as the presence of natural watercourse substrate, natural (or built) habitat in-channel features, marginal vegetation, etc more strongly influence habitat richness. Comparison with other similar habitats or mosaics within the ward, borough or London as a whole will inform the designated grade. <p>It is recognised that assessment of brownfield habitats can be challenging; 'Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land (OMH)' has effectively replaced this, and is accepted within UKHab and BNG metric but can be widely open to misinterpretation²⁷. To aid assessment, where species data is available, consideration of species typical of this habitat type should be referenced (e.g. dingy skipper, shrill carder bee, streaked bombardier beetle).</p>
E)	Species Richness	Assess the number and variety of species present, focusing on native and locally appropriate species, and comparing richness relative to similar habitats.	<p>Species richness considers both species diversity and abundance. Richness should be judged in comparison with other areas of the same habitat, taking into account borough representation and the contrast between inner and outer London.</p> <p>Native and locally-appropriate species are the primary focus, though some ornamental species may also contribute to biodiversity (e.g. nectar-rich plants that extend the flowering season or provide strong pollinator resources).</p> <p>Not all habitats are inherently species-rich but may still hold high ecological value (i.e. reed beds, heaths etc). These should be recognised even if they do not reach the richness of habitats such as ancient or base-rich woodlands. Accordingly, species richness should be assessed alongside other criteria relating to habitats and species.</p> <p>This criterion does not specifically consider soil diversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National protected, notable, red data book and 'of conservation concern' lists LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities Rare Plants Register Borough Species Action Plans GIGL Dataset – Species Records Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data Species atlases <p>London Bird Reports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recognised that this criterion is one more heavily reliant on field survey data. Survey data dependent for some – designation should not be constrained where evidence can be sufficiently collated through other criteria. As with habitat richness, this criteria goes beyond simply assessment of the diversity or number of species present. Also considered are abundance and the presence of keystone species for all or part of the year. <p>Comparison with similar areas, or mosaics, of habitat within the ward, borough or London as a whole will inform the designated grade.</p>
F)	Important Populations of Species	Assess whether the site supports a significant proportion of a species' population at the relevant scale, contributing to its local or regional viability.	<p>Some SINCs are important as they hold a large proportion of the population of a species for the search area. This may not mean large numbers, particularly where species rarity is high.</p> <p>Such populations may be critical for maintaining local or regional presence, supporting genetic health of wider populations, or acting as sources for natural dispersal or planned reintroduction.</p> <p>Examples include (at the appropriate scale) waterfowl populations, colonial birds such as herons or jackdaws, and the specialist black redstart, closely associated with post-industrial land use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities Borough Species Action Plans GIGL Species Dataset – Designated Species & LNRS priority species Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data Species atlases <p>London Bird Reports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recognised that this criterion is one more heavily reliant on field survey data. Survey data dependent for some – designation should not be constrained where evidence can be sufficiently collated through other criteria. Assessment can be informed by data across a range of scales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historic site data - Distribution mapping (including species atlases) - National (SSSI) data (noting that some Metropolitan sites in the capital are of comparable ecological value). <p>The scale at which comparable population/s occur will inform the designated grade. The urban or peri-urban context of the site in an inner, or outer, London borough is also a factor.</p>

SUPPORTING CRITERIA

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
G)	Size	Assess the overall area of the site or habitat, considering how size influences ecological resilience, species	<p>Large sites are often more important than small sites.</p> <p>Size can act as a surrogate for habitat and species richness where survey data is incomplete, and applies to both habitats and sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SINC Boundary / proposed boundary Priority Habitat Inventory Ancient Woodland Inventory LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities Borough Habitat Action Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of 'size' is, as described in the proposed text, assessed with due consideration of the habitat type and condition. As with all criteria, the location of the site assessed is also paramount. The presence of a sub 5ha area of ancient woodland within a inner borough or highly urbanised

²⁷ Wildlife & Countryside Link (April 2015) Open Mosaic Habitats High Value Guidance: When is brownfield land of 'high environmental value'? Available online at: <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Brownfield%20high%20environmental%20value%20FINAL%20June%202015.pdf>

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
		viability, and connectivity, while recognising the value of small sites in certain contexts.	However, small SINCS remain valuable, especially where they support rare habitats (e.g. heath) or species, or occur in densely built-up areas with limited ecological space. For example, 1 ha of rare habitat may be of higher importance than the same area of a common habitat. No minimum size is prescribed; assessment should consider habitats and species present, in conjunction with core criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • Borough Species Action Plans • GiGL Species Dataset – Designated Species & LNRS priority species • Field survey data – including historic and monitoring data 	environs warrants different valuation to similar in an outer borough or more rural, woodland-rich environs. Consideration of the appropriate grade takes into account the size of a site – or a habitat – in comparative relevance to other similar resources in the ward, borough or metropolis.
H)	Irreplaceable Habitats and Ancient Character	Assess whether the site contains habitats that are ancient or very difficult to recreate due to their age, ecological complexity, or unique conditions.	<p>Habitats of ancient character have valuable ecological characteristics derived from long periods of traditional management, or even a continuity in time to the woodlands and wetlands which occupied the London area before agriculture. Examples include ancient woodlands, old parkland trees, relict heathland, sphagnum bogs and traditionally managed grasslands, which often support rare species.</p> <p>These habitats are vulnerable to degradation from changes in land use (e.g. development, recreational pressure) or management (e.g. planting, fertiliser and herbicide treatment). Irreplaceable habitats also include those that are very difficult or slow to restore once lost, due to age, uniqueness, species diversity, rarity or the complexity and fragility of required conditions. The time to reach target condition is a key factor in determining irreplaceability.</p> <p>Nationally, irreplaceable habitats defined under BNG^{28,29} include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and lowland fen. At borough scale, additional examples may include particularly large trees, good quality acid grassland and heath.</p> <p>The more difficult a habitat is to create, the more important it is to retain. SINC selection should reflect habitats that are irreplaceable, hard to recreate or slow to reach target condition. This criterion is often linked to richness or rarity and may be used as a surrogate for them where survey information is incomplete.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irreplaceable habitat listing • Ancient Woodland Inventory • Veteran tree mapping • Priority Habitat Inventory – including wood pasture and parkland subset • LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities • Borough Habitat Action Plans • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • Field survey and management plan data – including historic and monitoring data • Greater London Council Guide to Habitat Creation (Baines and Smart, 1984) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of Irreplaceable Habitats and Ancient Character are central to assessment of this criterion. Size, connectivity and condition of such habitat/s are also factors. • Where such habitat/s occur but are highly fragmented, in poor condition and/or are beyond restoration, the criteria may not be met sufficient to warrant designation. This is in contrast to those that are demonstrated to be large, well connected and/or favourable condition • Assessment of this criterion does take into account comparison to other examples of the search area but note that rarity is distinct from this criterion. A borough that enjoys relatively widespread ancient woodland, for example, need not downgrade this criterion.
I)	Geographic Position	Assess the site's location in relation to other ecological features, focusing on how well it connects, buffers, or enhances the wider ecological network.	<p>The 'ecological coherence' of a SINC, or its 'position within the ecological mosaic' refers to the relationship or connectivity with adjacent or nearby areas of ecological value. It recognises that a site contributes to a wider functional nature network rather than existing in isolation.</p> <p>Sites that expand, buffer or connect within the SINC network are of particular value. Wider ecological features beyond the designated SINC are also relevant, including wildlife corridors, rivers and tributary networks, biodiverse green infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LNRS Local Habitat Map – Areas of particular importance • LNRS Local Habitat Map – Areas that could become of particular importance ('ACB Zones') • SINC Boundaries • Ordnance Survey Mapping • GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) • GiGL Dataset – BAP Habitat and Suitability Mapping (and wider habitat suitability modelling) • Field survey and management plan data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As described in the proposed text, sites that provide connectivity – either directly or as stepping stone habitats – to other SINCS and to the wider nature network are recognised here. • This criterion also addresses extensions to existing sites where the additional area of ecological value enhances the ecological mosaic in terms of connectivity, expansion and buffering. • It is recognised that direct connectivity may be inherently constrained more densely urban areas (e.g. at the local or borough scale). Local SINC originally designated for the provision of access to nature in areas that are otherwise depauperate, for example, contribute to the 'reach' of the network, even though connectivity may be weak. In such cases, consideration of Criteria A) Representation (at the appropriate scale) is also recommended.
J)	Potential Value	Assess whether the site could realistically increase its biodiversity value, either in general or to meet certain core criteria at a targeted grade, through feasible management or enhancement within a reasonable timeframe.	<p>Potential applies both to existing SINCS that could increase in value and to new sites. Examples include restored gravel extraction areas or sites enhanced as receptors for species reintroduction, where their role within a wider habitat network has been assessed.</p> <p>Potential is important where it contributes to a more connected nature network, meets habitat or species priorities*, or remedies deficiencies in access to nature. It may involve habitat creation, enhancement, or management that addresses limiting pressures, provided this is practically achievable within a reasonable timeframe (e.g. evidenced by progress before the next SINC Review cycle). Where a site demonstrates clear potential for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LNRS Local Habitat Map – Areas that could become of particular importance ('ACB Zones') • GiGL Dataset – BAP Habitat and Suitability Mapping (and wider habitat suitability modelling) • Forestry Commission³⁰ Headline Performance Indicator (dataset listed, in line with the method for prioritisation of Metropolitan Sites for Survey 2025) • Field survey and management plan data – including historic and monitoring data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of this criteria is ideally supported by evidence to the deliverability of the potential value in relation to the target habitats, species, network connectivity, etc. As described in the proposed text, this may include monitoring of establishing target habitats within the next SINC Review cycle. • For sites proposed as an ACB or within an LNRS ACB Zone, consideration for SINC designation is relevant only for new SINCS and where these tangibly contribute towards the strategic biodiversity priorities identified for the ACB / ACB Zone.

²⁸ GOV.uk Irreplaceable Habitats (defined in relation to BNG). Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/irreplaceable-habitats>

²⁹ GOV.uk The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024, Schedule: Irreplaceable Habitats. Available online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/48/schedule/made>

³⁰ Forestry Commission (March 2021) Headline Performance Indicator: Percentage of woodland in active management (including the Public Forest Estate). Available online: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/d9c3b4e7-473c-4cec-90f9-23556777be2b>

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
			<p>modest biodiversity enhancement, assessors should note these opportunities in the survey record. Potential should be linked to explicit features or reasons for designation to ensure:</p> <p>(a) management targets delivery, (b) change in value can be measured, and (c) citations are updated accordingly.</p> <p>Potential value should be considered as a contributing supporting criterion only where such enhancements can realistically enable a site currently falling short of grade thresholds to meet at least one additional core or supporting criterion, thereby strengthening its designation.</p> <p>*In line with Greater London LNRS habitat and species priorities and considered alongside rarity criteria.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For existing Local SINCs originally designated to provide access to nature, this criterion gives recognition to Potential biodiversity value where these tangibly contribute towards the strategic biodiversity priorities identified for the ward or (if relevant) borough. It is anticipated to be highly uncommon that a single site alone would deliver at the London (metropolitan) scale. As a supporting criterion, this should be considered in conjunction with the core, and other supporting, criteria that define ecological value.
K)	Typical Urban Character	Assess the ecological value of urban or post-industrial features that support distinctive habitats or species, including both historic and purpose-built green infrastructure – for example abandoned wharves or overgrown walls providing notable bird nesting opportunities, crevices, ferns and wildflowers.	<p>Features of the built environment supporting habitats and species of ecological value, such as canals, railway sidings, post-industrial brownfield land, abandoned wharves, walls, bridges and tombstones colonised by nature, often have a juxtaposition of artificial and wild features. Some of these habitats are particularly, supporting rare species and communities.</p> <p>Alongside historic urban features, modern designs explicitly created for high-value urban ecology are also relevant. Examples include the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, biodiverse green roofs, and naturalised SuDS features, where size and contribution to the ecological network reflect the stated SINC grade.</p> <p>Collectively, these areas are valuable for studying colonisation, ecological succession, and environmental influences. This criterion should be considered in conjunction with others, such as habitat and species rarity, richness, and size.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LNRS Statement of Biodiversity Priorities Borough Habitat Action Plans Ordnance Survey Mapping GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) GiGL Open Space and Open Space features dataset GiGL Urban Greening Features dataset Field survey and management plan data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This criterion allows consideration of sites supporting habitats and species of relatively recent and/or entirely man made origin where these provide tangible benefit to biodiversity; something anticipated to become increasingly important as nature recovery proceeds, supported by the tool of BNG. It is anticipated that this criterion may more often hold relevance to the inner boroughs but also to areas of redevelopment within the outer. Key to assessment of this criterion is the ecological value of the urban feature/s in question i.e. it is not the railway sidings that are recognised but the railway sidings that hold ecological value. As described in the proposed text, this criterion is to be considered in conjunction with others, such as habitat and species rarity and richness, as well as size, all of which are considered for qualification at the appropriate grade. It is recognised that assessment of brownfield habitats can be challenging; 'Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land (OMH)' has effectively replaced this, and is accepted within UKHab and BNG metric but can be widely open to misinterpretation. To aid assessment, where species data is available, consideration of species typical of this habitat type should be referenced (e.g. dingy skipper, shrill carder bee, streaked bombardier beetle).
L)	Cultural and Historic Character	Assess the site's blend of natural and cultural heritage, where historic land use or features contribute to its ecological and community value.	<p>Sites such as historic parks, deer parks and gardens with semi-wild areas, churchyards and cemeteries which have reverted to the wild, and areas that retain features of favourable historic land management such as wood banks, may have a unique blend of cultural and natural history.</p> <p>This criterion is distinct from, but complementary to, historic assets addressed under 'Urban Ecology Features', which focuses on the built environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ancient Woodland Inventory Veteran tree mapping Registered Parks and Gardens Historic Environment Record Priority Habitat Inventory – including wood pasture and parkland subset GiGL Open Space and Open Space features dataset GiGL Habitat and Land Use dataset (includes condition information for some areas) Field survey and management plan data – including historic and monitoring data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key to assessment is the ecological value within sites of cultural and historic character. This may include both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> features of ecological value established by long-term land management (wood banks, ridge and furrow, pill boxes supporting important bat roosts, etc) ecological features that have established within sites of historic and cultural value, which may be through reversion or positive management. As the focus is on the ecological value, use of principal datasets such as Registered Parks and Gardens or the HER is to provide context for the scale – i.e. grade – of importance, be that London, borough or local level.
M)	Geodiversity interest	Assess the presence and significance of geological or geomorphological features, including their scientific, educational, or aesthetic value.	<p>Sites of geological interest (including educational, scientific, historical or aesthetic considerations) are assessed and valued in line with the London's Foundations Supplementary Planning Guidance, through the Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) and Locally Important Geological Sites (LIGS) system. London's Foundations Appendix 4 lists the datasets used, including the presence of a SINC, ensuring site management accounts for maintaining or enhancing features of designation</p> <p>Site of Geological Interest (SGI) not qualifying for RIGS or LIGS are recognised by the London Geodiversity Partnership, though not currently formalised within the London Plan or borough Plans.</p> <p>Geology is recognised in national Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) criteria (MHCLG, 2019), translated from the Ratcliffe criteria of:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RIGS and LIGS dataset SGI dataset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This criteria identifies the presence of a RIGS or LIGS for consideration in the management of a SINC. Like Criterion O) 'Climate Change Resilience', geodiversity expertise is not assumed in the SINC review practitioner and accordingly, this criterion may be under-represented in assessments, particularly where a geodiversity feature is small or otherwise easily overlooked. Assessment of this criterion is streamlined to three aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overlap with the RIGS and LIGS dataset overlap with SGI dataset in line with the Ratcliffe criteria for 'naturalness' and 'typicalness' as translated in MHCLG (2019) and provided in the proposed text (column 4).

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naturalness – sites supporting natural features or demonstrating active/past processes Typicalness – sites exemplifying a habitat, geological feature, or characteristic species population <p>Ecological value, and therefore SINC grade, is assessed independently of RIGS/LIGS designation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of the latter may occur, for example, along natural river courses or beneath woodland and scrub. For all it is the habitats and species of ecological significance – specifically associated with the geodiversity feature – that form the focus of assessment for this criterion. The assessment of grade for this criterion is driven by the ecological significance supported by the feature. Presence of any geodiversity features, whether scoring RIGS, LIGS or SGI should be recorded wherever their management (e.g. requiring exposure from beneath vegetation) needs to be taken into account in the management of the SINC or, vice versa, the designated features of a SINC in the management for geodiversity. Where resources are available to facilitate input from the London Geodiversity Partnership (LGP) as part of a SINC Review, it should be welcomed but not considered mandatory.
N)	Access	Assess the extent and appropriateness of public access, including how it supports community engagement (e.g. local volunteer groups), education, and enjoyment of nature without harming ecological value.	<p>Access is an important consideration, especially in areas where there may be few places for large urban populations to experience the natural world. Nature conservation is not limiting to preserving wildlife but also supports public enjoyment, from specialist naturalists to casual visitors. Appropriate access to a SINC is desirable, though not required for designation.</p> <p>Direct access to all parts of a SINC may not be compatible with sensitive habitats or species. Restrictions may be temporal (e.g. breeding or migration seasons) or spatial (e.g. specific habitat areas). Effective planning and management of recreational access is therefore essential.</p> <p>The community value of a SINC should also be considered. Access that supports public engagement with nature, particularly in urban areas, adds to its importance. The presence of local working parties, such as 'Friends of groups or volunteers, who actively contribute to biodiversity through habitat creation, management, or installation of ecological features, should be reflected in the assessment and strengthen this criterion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GiGL AoD in Access to Nature GiGL Open Space and Open Space features dataset Site access points Management information relating to controlled access – spatial and temporal e.g. educational forest school activities, residential or community access, vandalism control, seasonal access (avoiding sensitive seasons for key species breeding, hibernating, etc and / or key habitats during periods of waterlogging, etc). Field survey – access point data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This criterion relates to a number of other strategic priorities and indices for the capital such as health, green infrastructure and Public Open Space. Assessment of this criterion focuses on direct physical access. Where, however, this is not possible, alternatives such as remote monitoring methods can instead bring access to distant or harder to reach communities, foster educational engagement and underpin new research. The provision of 'nature conservation amenity' from a site periphery or through features such as birdsong may also be taken into account. These alternative access examples need to be strongly evidenced to reflect the designated grade. AoD in Access to Nature mapping is typically interpreted on a borough-wide basis to inform the review as a whole. SINC grade for this criterion is influenced by the AoD that it delivers and as such, it strongly correlated to size. Controlled access to or within the site is also a factor. Local sites within an AOD in Access to Nature do not contribute to the metric but remain important in areas that are limited in biodiverse greenspaces. Interventions to enhance these to become nature-rich should be recorded to inform future management. Where management plans are available, these should be considered in relation to Criteria J) 'Potential Value'. Local sites that are publicly accessible and have potential to support enhancement to meet Borough grade would address the mapped AoD. Again, interventions to meet this opportunity should be used to inform management, where they are known. Some SINC Reviews delivered in combination with Parks and Open Space Reviews or Strategy updates, which can effectively streamline LPA resources to deliver nature recovery within their landholdings whilst directly addressing the interface between access to nature and recreational pressure. Where the nature or scale of access to or within a site is recognised to be a constraint on its ecological value, field data should be used to inform management recommendations.
O)	Climate Change Resilience	Assess the site's capacity to mitigate or adapt to climate change impacts, such as flood management, carbon	<p>The climate and biodiversity emergencies are inextricably linked; there is no solution to the climate emergency without nature recovery.</p> <p>'Climate change resilience' recognises both mitigation (e.g. carbon sequestration in trees, grasslands, soils) and adaptation (e.g. diverse,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGIF mapping The London Climate Risk Map³² (incorporates the GLA Flood Risk Map (informed by the Environment Agency datasets: Flood Risk Areas – Rivers, and Flood Risk Areas – Surface Water) and the GLA Heat Risk Map) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising the provision of climate change resilience delivered by SINC is important to recognise but given the wide range of benefits – from flood alleviation to air quality moderation – is challenging to assess consistently. It is also recognised that, like Criterion I) 'Geodiversity', climate change expertise is not assumed in the SINC review practitioner. Assessment of this criterion is therefore

³² The Climate Risk Map is split into three layers: overall risk, flood risk, heat risk. It allows, however, only limited interrogation, hence; the GLA Heat and Flood Risk Maps are separately listed. Full methods can be found online: ClimateRisk_Metadata_2024_092024update.pdf

Ref.	SINC Criteria	Criteria Description Summary	Detailed Criteria Description	Principal Datasets for Consideration	Application – Supporting Notes
		storage, and supporting species movement.	<p>connected habitats that accommodate species range shifts and withstand drought or flood).</p> <p>When assessing drought resilience, surveyors should consider account whether climate-resilient planting is appropriate. Mediterranean species, for example, may provide greater local biodiversity benefit than exotic introductions such as Australian species.</p> <p>Assessment focuses on the resilience delivered by the site particularly where habitats alleviate climate risk, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slowing surface run off in a flood risk zones near rivers or watercourses • providing flood storage capacity (terrestrial and aquatic). <p>At London, borough and local scales assessment is largely guided by the London Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF)³¹, identifying which strategic needs relevant to climate resilience a site addresses.</p> <p>As with Access, this criterion reflects the permeability of the landscape, where nature-rich habitats contribute to resilience and the wider ecological mosaic. It should be considered alongside other criteria when determining site suitability and grade.</p> <p>This criterion is to be considered alongside the wider criteria when determining the suitability of a site for designation and the appropriate grade.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Agency Working With Natural Processes (WWNP) – relevant datasets e.g. woodlands, floodplains • Borough flood and/or climate risk mapping • London LNRS Local Habitat Map – Areas that could become of particular importance – ‘ACB Zones’ • SuDS Retrofit Tool 	<p>intentionally tied to datasets within the LGIF that are specifically relevant to climate change resilience, to published risk mapping (national and borough examples are provided amongst the principal datasets listed).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all SINCs will provide some degree of benefit. The criterion requires focus on those that deliver at local or potentially borough scale. It anticipated to be highly uncommon that a single site alone would deliver at the London (metropolitan) scale. • As with Criterion L) ‘Cultural and Historic Character’, the focus of assessment is on the ecological feature/s that deliver resilience. In this regard both naturally occurring and created habitat features are relevant, such as a meandering river channel, biodiverse pond system, beaver managed watercourse of wildflower-rich floodplain meadow. • Supporting information on the sensitivity of habitats to climate change, and the influence of condition, is provided for select habitat types in the Natural England Climate Change Adaptation Manual NE751. • Where climate risk to an assessed site is identified it should be reflected in the management recommendations. Opportunities (species selection and habitat creation, seasonal access management, soft engineered in-channel interventions, etc) can then be optimised accordingly. • It is recognised that different habitats – across terrestrial, intertidal or aquatic sites – will sequester carbon at differing rates; a process also influenced by the condition of vegetation and soils. This complex area is not explicitly proposed for assessment as part of this criterion.

³¹ Available online: <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure/london-green-infrastructure-framework>

8. Consultation

The criteria are used with the professional judgement of the practitioner to identify and inform recommendations to designate SINC's supported with adequate information, but it is equally important that this judgement should benefit from additional consideration by a wider range of interested parties. For this reason, the procedures include consultation with individuals and organisations with knowledge of the sites and of London's nature. These include acknowledged local naturalists, voluntary organisations, landowners, statutory authorities, council officers and elected members.

The consultation process should link into advice and recommendations that are provided from the LSP and LWSB and should be completed in step with the LNRS. Consultation should be proportionate to the scope of the review that has been undertaken demonstrating the scope, audience/s engaged, how and at what stage/s of the review.

This consultation is normally achieved using a map and schedule of sites recommended for protection in planning. After the consultation period is over this schedule is revised and the site descriptions may be drafted. Every submission made is considered in this process.

The map and schedule of sites should be updated periodically and at least when comprehensive re-survey permits.

Where the advice from maps and schedules has been incorporated into Local Plans, it has been subject to the statutory consultation and objection and inquiry procedure alongside other aspects of these plans.