

Report to CABINET

Sites of Biological Importance Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Elaine Taylor Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods

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Reason for Decision

The reason for this decision is to designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough.

Appendix 1 provides a map of the new SBI (Ladcastle Heath) and maps of the other SBI boundary changes (Medlock Headwater & Strinesdale, Moorgate Quarry and Armit Road Lodge). These changes are outlined in Appendix 2 and 3 alongside details of the other SBIs reviewed.

Executive Summary

The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) periodically survey SBI's across Greater Manchester as part of a continuous process and notifies the council when there are changes that need to be made to the designations. This report outlines changes to SBIs from site surveys carried out by GMEU in 2022 (received 2025).

The report seeks to designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) – Ladcastle Heath and adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough, as outlined in Appendix 1, 2 and 3.

Recommendations

1. To designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) – Ladcastle Heath and adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough, as outlined in Appendix 1, 2 and 3; and to
2. Note the District Synopsis and District Fact Sheet.

Sites of Biological Importance Update

1 Background

- 1.1 The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) periodically surveys SBI's across Greater Manchester as part of a continuous process and notifies the Council when there are changes that need to be made to the designations. There may be boundary or grade changes, or where new sites are identified, or existing sites deleted.
- 1.2 The report links to the Council priorities of a 'Great Place to Live' and 'Green and Growing', in that it looks to protect SBIs which are a local nature designation.
- 1.3 In terms of implications, the risks of not adopting the changes to the SBIs will result in the Council failing to utilise the most recent and up-to-date specialist ecological advice available. This may result in the Council determining planning applications, formulating policy, or providing advice based on out-of-date information and evidence. The Council may also be failing its biodiversity duty and failing to have regard to the GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

2 Current Position

- 2.1 This report outlines changes to SBIs from site surveys carried out by GMEU in 2022 (received 2025). GMEU have always reported after the survey year, but this gap has increased.
- 2.2 During the review period, no sites were removed from the Register.
- 2.3 Ladcastle Heath (Grade B), an area of 4.9ha of mostly upland heath and acid grassland was added to the register. This site is within the Green Belt and includes an area that is already designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) named 'Ladcastle and Den Quarries'. The site is bordered to the east by the railway line. The site is not within Council ownership.
- 2.4 Medlock Headwater & Strinesdale gained 0.4ha due to the inclusion of additional areas of woodland.
- 2.5 Moorgate Quarry gained 0.1ha due to technical reasons, which are often due to the increasing accuracy used to draw boundaries and measure areas.
- 2.6 Armit Road Lodge lost 0.3ha due the degradation of the grassland habitat due to lack of management. This is not in Council ownership.
- 2.7 Ashes Clough and Thornley Brook Wood were also visited to be assessed for SBI potential, however further survey is required once permitted development has been completed.
- 2.8 Overall, there has been a net gain in the hectarage of SBIs by 2.6% since the 2021 review. Oldham has a total of 40 SBIs (one being within the Peak District National Park), which has increased overtime from 18 since 1984.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 **Option 1** - To designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) – Ladcastle Heath and adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough, as outlined in Appendix 1, 2 and 3. The advantage of this option is that the SBI will be subject to the principles set out in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to avoid, mitigate and as a last resort compensate any harm. It will also contribute to the GM Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Target 1: To increase the amount of land designated for nature by 5,000ha by 2035, growing this from 11% to 15% of the city-region. There are no disadvantages to this option.
- 3.2 **Option 2** – To not designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) – Ladcastle Heath and to not adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough, as outlined in Appendix 1, 2 and 3. The disadvantage is that the new SBI and boundary additions will not have been designated and therefore the full extent of the SBI's may not be given due consideration under NPPF, Places for Everyone (PfE) and the Local Plan. This option would not contribute to the LNRS Target 1: To increase the amount of land designated for nature by 5,000ha by 2035, growing this from 11% to 15% of the city-region. There are no advantages to this option.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option - to designate a new Site of Biological Importance (SBI) – Ladcastle Heath and adopt changes which have occurred to other SBI boundaries within the borough, as outlined in Appendix 1, 2 and 3.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 No consultation undertaken. When surveying sites GMEU follow the guidelines set out in the GMEU '[SBI Selection Guidelines](#)'¹. This Report is presented in an open and transparent manner.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the designation itself, as the process is primarily policy-led and supported through existing staff resources.

(Mohammed Hussain)

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 Designating land as a Site of Biological Importance enables appropriate planning policies in the NPPF and the Council's Local Plan to be applied in respect of planning applications affecting the land. In accordance with the scheme of delegation for Local Development Framework matters, updates to the Sites of Biological Importance are regarded as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and therefore the report can be approved by the Portfolio Member in consultation with the Executive Director. However, as the report affects 4 wards and is a key decision it is being considered by the Cabinet. (A Evans)

8 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

- 8.1 No. Please see Impact Assessment

¹ The SBI Selection Guidelines are available at https://gmlrc.org/sites_of_biological_importance/.



9 **Key Decision**

9.1 Yes

10 **Key Decision Reference**

11.1 RBO-09-25

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 Sites of Biological Importance Selection Guidelines (2024) -
https://gmlrc.org/sites_of_biological_importance/

13 **Appendices**

13.1 Appendix 1 - Maps of SBIs at Ladcastle Heath; Medlock Headwater and Strinesdale;
Moorgate Quarry and Armit Road Lodge.

Appendix 2 - District Synopsis

Appendix 3 – District Fact Sheet