

Report to Cabinet

20 July 2022

Subject:	Designation of Nature Conservation Sites
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth Councillor Peter Hughes
Director:	Regeneration and Growth Tony McGovern
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Planning Officer, Zoe Wilson zoe_wilson@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the designation of Alexandra Road, John's Lane, and Land at Yew Tree, as shown on the plans set out in Appendix 1 and 2, as 'Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC).
- 1.2 That the Director, Regeneration and Growth, be authorised to make any minor amendments prior to circulation.

2 Reasons for Recommendations







- 2.1 This report informs Cabinet of the result and recommendation of the ecological surveys carried out for Alexandra Road, John's Lane, and Land at Yew Tree.
- 2.2 All of the sites surveyed were classified as a SLINC before the ecological surveys were carried out. The purpose of the surveys was to provide a more up to date assessment of the sites to determine what the status of the site should now be and whether a boundary alteration was required.
- 2.3 It is recommended that the Director / Cabinet Member:



- Approves the extension and part deletion in the SLINC designation of Alexandra Road (as set out in appendix 1 of this report)
- Approves the partial extension of the SLINC at the North and West of John's Lane (as set out in appendix 1 of this report)
- Approves the continued designation of Land at Yew Tree, as SLINC (set out in appendix 1 of this report)

2.4 The recommendation is required to ensure that the Council's Local Plan is based on up-to-date evidence and can continue to be used as the basis for robust and defensible planning decisions.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people Areas of Nature Conservation provide an important educational tool for children and young people
	People live well and age well The environmental infrastructure of the borough has the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits and contribute to environmental benefits, thus contributing to the aim of achieving a healthier population.
	Strong resilient communities The provision of a network of green spaces and nature conservation sites improves the local environment, which in turn makes the borough more attractive as a place to live, work, enjoy recreation in and invest in
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods An attractive environment will significantly improve the prospect of achieving significant numbers of high quality new houses in locations that people wish to live in
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell The environmental infrastructure of the borough has the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits and contribute to environmental benefits, thus contributing to the aim of achieving a healthier population.



4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Sandwell Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (SAD DPD) forms part of Sandwell's Local Plan. It sets out land use policies, allocates land for specific uses or purposes and identifies infrastructure requirements to achieve sustainable communities and development within the borough.
- 4.2 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) are designations identified in the SAD DPD and form part of the Borough's environmental infrastructure. Environmental infrastructure also includes green space and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Such spaces are of importance as they have the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits, contribute to environmental benefits, reduce the urban heat island effect, and benefit high quality residential development. The environmental infrastructure of the borough also provides an important ecological and educational resource.
- 4.3 SINCs and SLINCs are not subject to statutory protection. The Government envisages that sites are afforded levels of protection from development through the Local Plan process. The identification and allocation of SINCs and SLINCs within the SAD DPD is therefore crucial in maintaining and enhancing the Borough's environmental infrastructure.
- 4.4 Incorporating environmental infrastructure principles into Local Plan documents will help meet the Black Country Core Strategy vision for environmental transformation.
- 4.5 The surveying of existing SINCs and SLINCs is essential to ensure that such designations are based on robust and up-to-date evidence.
- 4.6 The potential for planning decisions to be challenged increases where it can be shown that Local Plan allocations are based on out-of-date or incomplete information. Ensuring that there is current information relating to the Borough's inventory of nature conservation sites, including SINCs and SLINCs, reduces this risk.



- 4.7 The sites surveyed were identified as being high priority due to the potential for development.
- 4.8 All of the borough's SINC's and SLINC's are set to be surveyed over the next few years. The order in which they are surveyed will be prioritised by identifying which sites require more urgent attention due to development pressures. There will be a level of flexibility within the list to account for changing development pressures.
- 4.9 Of the three sites surveyed, all will maintain their SLINC status. One site has been recommended for partial deletion and partial extension, one has been extended, and one has maintained its current boundary

Additional Information

- 4.8 The reports are based on recommendations made by The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. The recommendation has been endorsed by the Local Sites Partnership (LSP).
- 4.9 The LSP is a group that consists of the four Black Country Authorities, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and the Black Country Wildlife Trust, EcoRecord, Geodiversity, Natural England, The Environment Agency and botanists. The LSP is responsible for approving any new sites put forward for listing and then ensuring the endorsement/adoption of those sites by their own organisations
- 4.10 SINC's and SLINC's are designations applied to the most important non-statutory nature conservation sites in the West Midlands.

Consultation

- 4.11 The Birmingham and Black Country Local Sites Partnership were consulted in the preparation of the surveys and associated reports that form the basis of the above recommendations and their endorsement sought.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The alternative option would be to base planning decisions on the existing evidence base using the current out of date survey data and such decisions may be subsequently open to challenge due to allocations being based on out-of-date or incomplete information.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The production of survey work and associated reports regarding the potential nature conservation sites are funded through the Regeneration and Planning budget.</p> <p>There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, sufficient resources will need to be identified within existing budgets to ensure that the ongoing nature conservation site review programme can be completed within an appropriate timescale.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The current Local Plan for Sandwell includes the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS), the Sandwell Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (SAD DPD), and a number of Area Action Plans (AAPs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Details are set out in the approved Local Development Scheme (LDS).</p> <p>The SAD DPD and associated proposals map provides policy, land use allocations and infrastructure requirements to achieve sustainable communities and development within the borough.</p> <p>The surveying of existing SINC's and SLINC's is essential in order to ensure that such designations are based on robust and up-to-date evidence.</p> <p>The potential for planning decisions to be challenged increases where it can be shown that Local Plan allocations are based on out-of-date or incomplete information. Ensuring that there is current information relating to the Borough's inventory of nature</p>



	conservation sites, including SINC's and SLINC's, reduces this risk.
Risk:	The Council's corporate risk assessment strategy has been complied with, to identify and assess the risks associates with this decision/recommendation. This has identified that there are no significant risks that need to be reported.
Equality:	The sites that are the subject of this report are included in the Site Allocations & Delivery DPD which was subject of a full Equality Impact Assessment prior to its adoption in 2012.
Health and Wellbeing:	Nature conservation sites have the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits, contribute to environmental benefits, reduce the urban heat island effect, and benefit high quality residential development. The environmental infrastructure of the borough also provides an important ecological and educational resource.
Social Value	Nature conservation sites have the potential to increase levels of physical activity, improve mental health benefits, and contribute to environmental benefits.



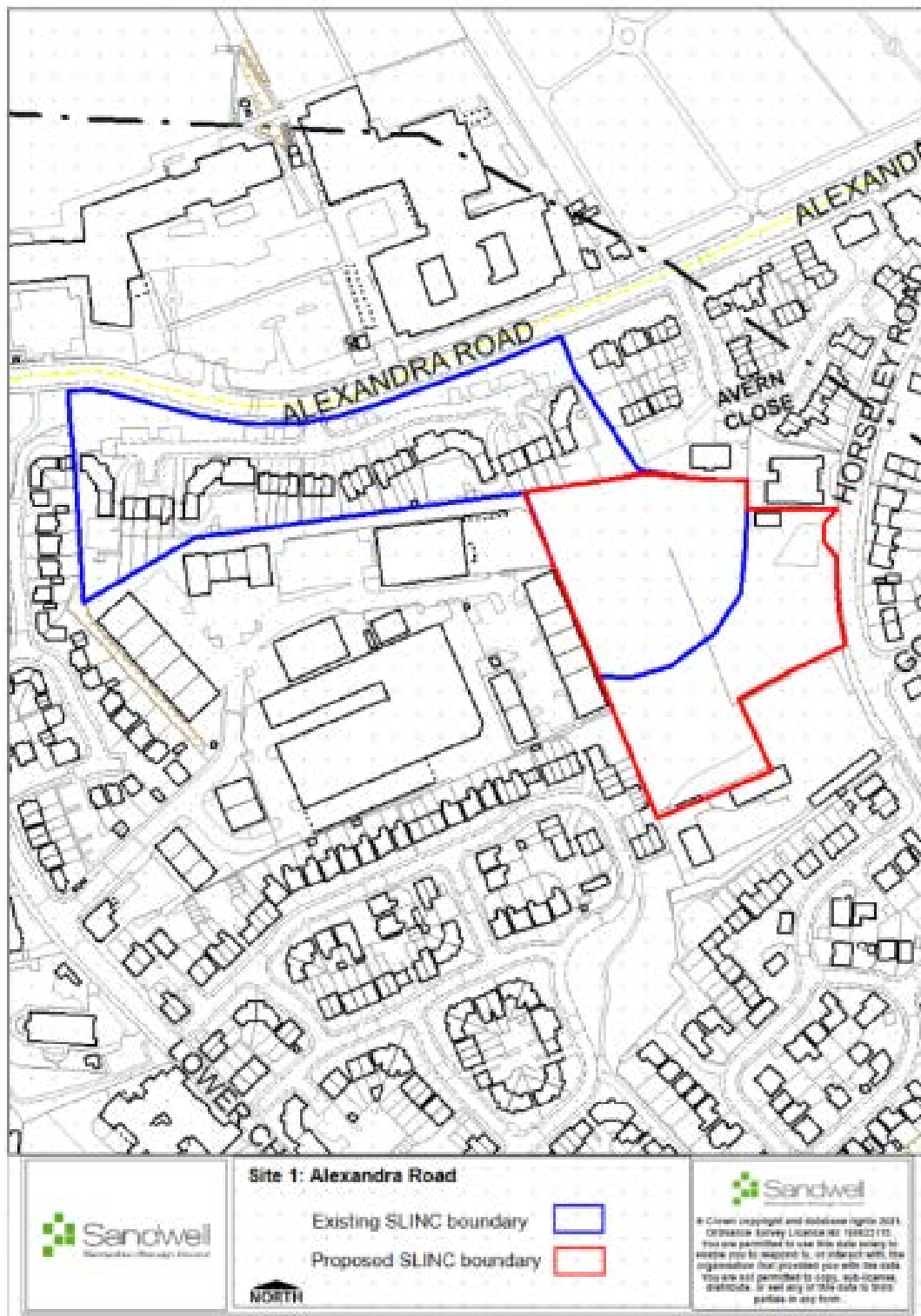
7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Site Recommendations			
Site	Plan No	Site Description	Recommendation
Alexandra Road	1	The northern area of the existing SLINC has been lost to residential development, while the southern area and the additional areas adjacent to the south of the site include areas of semi-natural habitat with moderate species diversity. The designation should therefore be amended to meet the current extent of semi-natural habitat. This includes removing Compartment 1 from the designation and extending the southern designation boundary to include the whole of Compartment	Extension and part deletion
John's Lane	2	John's Lane is deemed to still meet the criteria for SLINC status. Therefore, the area covered by the SLINC designation should be retained. In addition to this, the designation should be extended to include the whole length of the scrub belt running along the eastern perimeter fence and include areas of diverse scrub along the lagoon bankside	Extension
Land at Yew Tree	3	Land at Yew Tree is deemed to still meet the criteria for SLINC status. Therefore, the SLINC designation and area covered by the designation should be retained with a slight extension to include the accurate area of the Broadleaved woodland habitat within the western arm of the site	Maintain current SLINC boundary

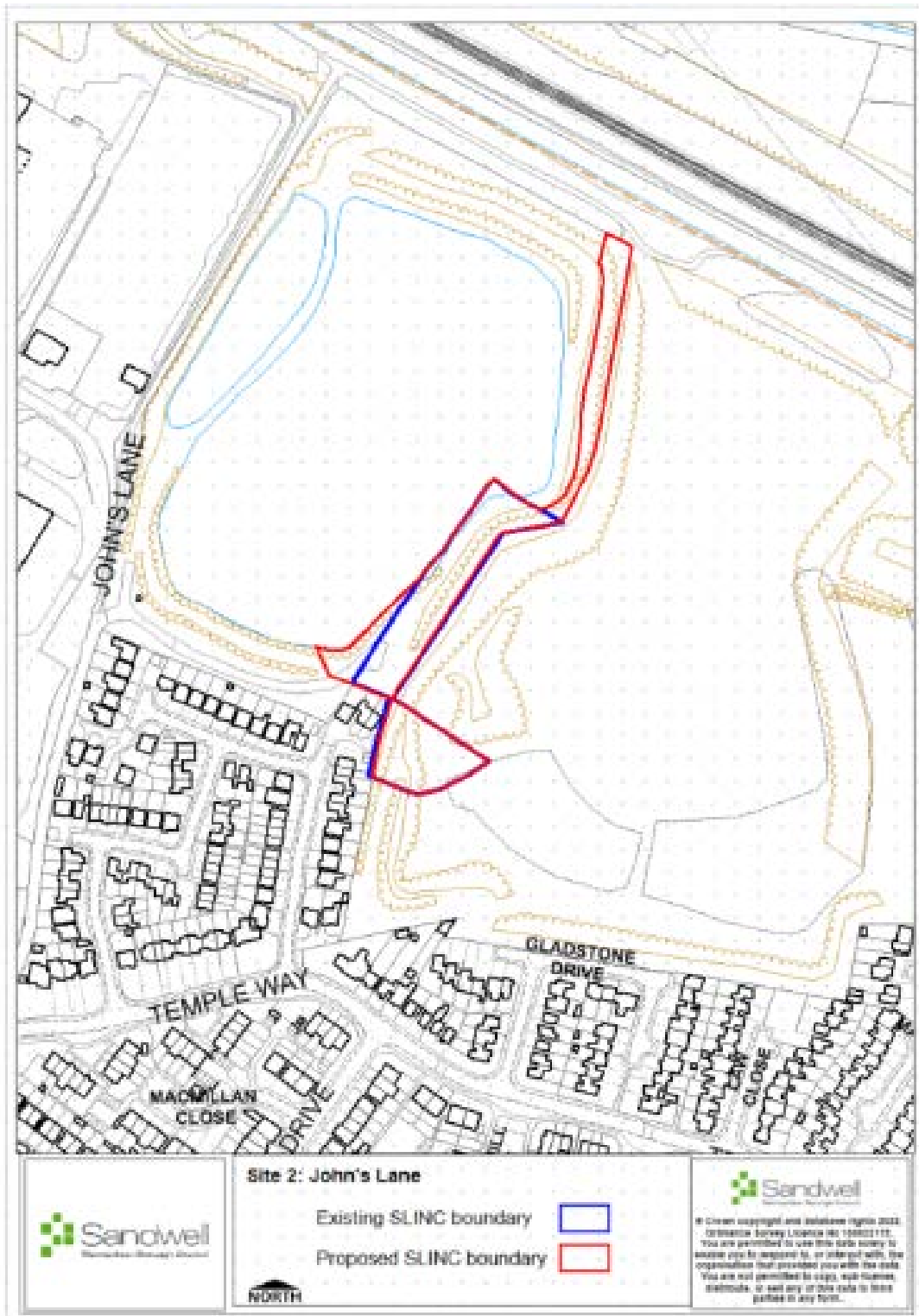


Appendix 2: Site Maps

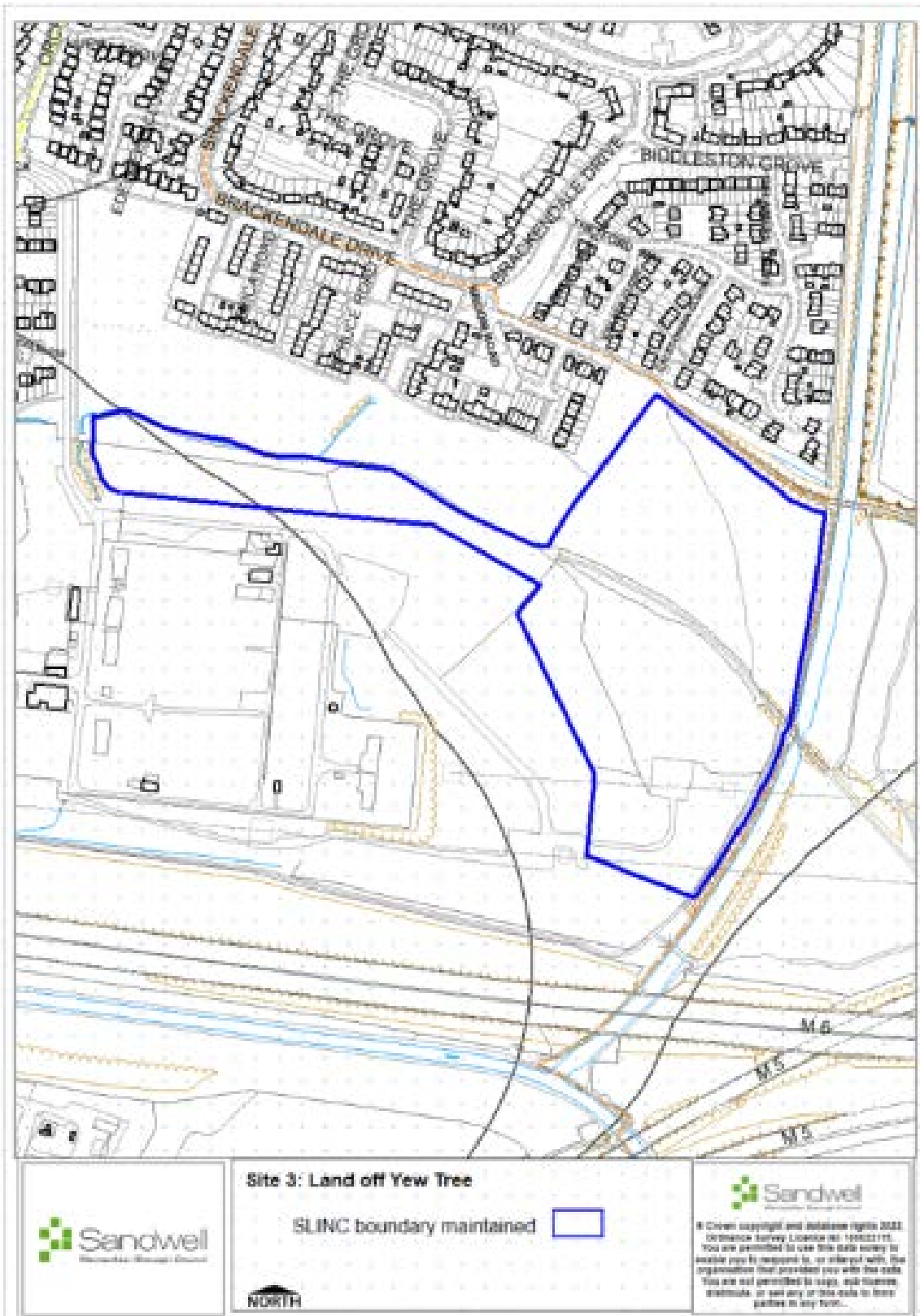
Site 1: Alexandra Road



Site 2: John's Lane



Site 3: Land at Yew Tree



8. Background Papers

None

