

**THE HAMPSHIRE BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION CENTRE**  
**SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH**  
**“X” LOCAL AUTHORITY**



**1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2008 to 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2011**

**PURPOSE**

Local Authorities need reliable up-to-date biodiversity information in order to fulfil their obligations to achieve sustainable development; to inform local development frameworks & planning decisions, undertake Environmental Impact Assessments, assess Hedgerow Removal Notices, and enhance biodiversity through local Biodiversity Action Plans and the management of their own land:

Planning Policy Statement 9 : Biodiversity & Geological Conservation, 2005 states that :

“Local planning authorities should adhere to the following key principles to ensure that the potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity and geological conservation are fully considered: Key Principle (i) Plan policies and planning decisions should be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of their areas. These characteristics should include the relevant biodiversity and geological resources of the area”

Planning Policy Statement 12 : Local Development Frameworks, states that :

“The policies prepared by the local planning authority should be founded on a thorough understanding of the needs of their area and the opportunities and constraints which operate within that area. Local planning authorities should prepare and maintain an up-to-date information base on key aspects of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of their area, to enable the preparation of a sound spatial plan meeting the objectives of sustainable development. Local planning authorities are required to keep under review the following matters: i. the principal physical, economic, social and environmental characteristics of their area”

The Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act (July 2006) Part 3 Section 40 “Duty to Conserve Biodiversity” states that:

“ Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”

This Service Level Agreement (“Agreement”) is intended to support “X” Local Authority’s commitment to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre by ensuring funding to the Centre in return for biodiversity data and services to support the above, and in accordance with the following terms and conditions:

- Part 1 Conditions
- Part 2 Service Specification
- Part 3 Provision of data to third parties
- Part 4 Quality Assurance
- Part 5 Representations & Complaints
- Part 6 Contacts

## **PART 1 : CONDITIONS**

This is an agreement between Hampshire County Council (referred to as the "Lead Partner"), acting on behalf of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre Partnership, and "X" Local Authority together referred to as the "Parties " to this Agreement. The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (referred to as "HBIC") is independently managed by a Strategic Management Group comprising representatives from key data users and recording organisations. The HBIC Partnership has the status of a legal partnership, as defined in the HBIC Partnership Agreement which "X" Local Authority is invited to sign up to as a funding body. As a formal partner under the HBIC Partnership Agreement "X" Local Authority 's views will be sought on how HBIC carries out its functions.

### **TERM**

**1.1** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre agrees to provide a biodiversity information service to "X" Local Authority. The Agreement shall begin on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and shall continue for a period of 3 years to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 (the "Term"), unless terminated earlier in accordance with clause 1.23 or 1.24,

**1.2** A review of the intent to renew this Agreement will take place at the beginning of the third year of the Term.

### **STATUS OF AGREEMENT**

**1.3** This agreement is legally binding on both Parties.

### **DAYS/HOURS**

**1.4** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre will undertake up to **X** days of habitat survey work (to include write-up of survey) and up to **X** hours spent on the supply of data and products at the request of and on behalf of "X" Local Authority for the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March in each year of the Agreement.

### **TYPE OF WORK**

**1.5** The requirements of "X" Local Authority are set out in the Service Specification in Part 2 of this Agreement. The Service Specification will be renegotiated by agreement between both Parties prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> April each year.

**1.6** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre agrees to carry out the work described in the Service Specification and will undertake essential maintenance and updating of the Centre's database and GIS for the area covered by "X" Local Authority as part of the Service Specification

### **FEE**

**1.8** "X" Local Authority will pay in advance for each year invoiced in April of that year. The fee will be **£0,000** for 2008/9 and for years 2009/10 and 2010/11 shall be increased by 3% for each year.

### **FURTHER WORK**

**1.9** Any further work requested by "X" Local Authority beyond the agreed days and hours in each of the financial years will be invoiced by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre at the rate of £XXX per day for survey and £XX per hour for supply of data and products for the period of the Agreement (i.e. HBIC's standard cost-recovery rate). Invoices will be presented when the work is completed and payable within 28 days of receipt. The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre will provide "X" Local Authority with quotations on request for additional items of work. See also Clause 2.17 for individual items of work likely to take more than 3 days to complete.

## **VAT**

**1.10** All charges will be subject to Value Added Tax ("VAT")

## **REPORTING OF HOURS USED**

**1.11** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre agrees to inform "X" Local Authority in writing when 75% of its agreed days and hours have been used within the year and again when 100% have been used.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

**1.12** All requests to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre by "X" Local Authority for data and survey must be received by the Centre in writing, which may include email.

## **MONITORING**

**1.13** "X" Local Authority shall be represented on the Users Advisory Group which shall meet twice a year to discuss the work programme.

**1.14** Any other meeting considered necessary by "X" Local Authority to discuss progress shall be arranged as and when required.

**1.15** HBIC will keep a log of requests from and on behalf of "X" Local Authority and will produce this twice a year for the Users Advisory Group meetings. The log will include a statement on the number and type of requests made by, and on behalf of, "X" Local Authority. Prior approval for responding to requests from contractors working for "X" Local Authority must be sought from "X" Local Authority

**1.16** HBIC will produce a formal report covering the year's work for submission to the Strategic Management Group and the Users Advisory Group at the end of each year of the Term.

## **SENSITIVE INFORMATION**

**1.17** All information specified as 'sensitive' by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre will be treated as such by "X" Local Authority and not passed to third parties except under the conditions specified in Part 3 of this Agreement or where permission from HBIC has been agreed in writing, or where "X" Local Authority is required to disclose it by law.

## **COPYRIGHT**

**1.18** "X" Local Authority agrees to hold any data supplied by HBIC strictly for internal use and the uses described in Part 3 of this Agreement. Copyright conditions will be attached at all times and data will be used in strict accordance with these copyright conditions, and "X" Local Authority agrees not to supply copies of all, or any part of, the data to any third party, except under conditions specified in Part 3 of this Agreement, without the express written consent of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, or where required to do so by law.

The ownership of all information supplied under the agreement and including all intellectual property therein and all commercial or other confidentiality attaching thereto is and remains the exclusive property of the HBIC Partnership or the individual recorders or recording groups who have supplied data to HBIC.

The ownership of any surveys requested by "X" Local Authority as part of the Agreement shall remain the property of the HBIC Partnership unless specifically agreed otherwise

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**1.19** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre shall operate a quality assurance system as set out in Part 4 of this Agreement and consistent with standards agreed between "X" Local Authority and HBIC

## **REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS**

**1.20** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre shall operate a procedure for dealing with representations and complaints about the service as set out in Part 5 and shall take all reasonable steps to bring this to the attention of service users.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**1.21** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre and "X" Local Authority shall implement an Equal Opportunities Policy for the purposes of this Service, as agreed by the HBIC Strategic Management Group. Copies of the policy will be available on request.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**1.22** The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre shall have regard to and comply, as appropriate, with, the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and any other Acts, Regulations or Orders about health and safety.

## **TERMINATION**

**1.23** "X" Local Authority may withdraw from this Agreement by giving at least a minimum of 12 months notice in writing and giving reasons for withdrawal. It will be liable to pay the full amount due until the end of the notice period

**1.24** In the event of any disclosure by "X" Local Authority or any person employed by it not in accordance with Part 3 of this Agreement, whether intentional or otherwise, the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre shall be entitled to terminate the Agreement forthwith by notice in writing. Where HBIC is in breach of the Agreement "X" Local Authority may terminate the Agreement by giving seven days notice in writing. In either event the fee payable by "X" Local Authority or refunded by HBIC will be calculated pro rata at the date of withdrawal.

**1.25** In the event of any dispute between the parties that cannot be resolved by the HBIC Strategic Management Group (see Part 5) then the parties agree to refer the matter to the arbitration of a single independent Arbitrator to be mutually agreed by both parties, or in default of such agreement to be nominated by the President of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators or a person appointed by him. Any award or decision of such Arbitrator shall be final and binding upon the parties hereto. The cost of such arbitration to follow the event, or in the event of neither party succeeding, to be apportioned between the Parties by the Arbitrator in such proportions as he/she in his/her absolute discretion thinks fit.

## **PART 2 : SERVICE SPECIFICATION**

### **KEY OBJECTIVE OF SERVICE**

#### **The provision of accurate, up-to-date biodiversity information to “X” Local Authority**

##### **The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre will :**

**2.1** Provide, on request, copies of original and/or interpreted (impartial) habitat and species data and other supportive material for specific sites in Hart, for use by relevant officers within “X” Local Authority, in making decisions and giving advice, including use in development control, preparation of local development framework documents, land management plans, and the preparation/ implementation of a local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The species data will be provided giving the species name and location, date of record(s), recorder and any further relevant information, except in the case of sensitive species which is to be provided at the resolution defined by the species recording groups. A ‘notable species’ GIS layer can also be provided at regular intervals or on request – see 2.8

An indication as to whether further survey is recommended for each site will be given.

**2.2** Co-ordinate, plan and undertake habitat survey and re-survey to meet the needs of “X” Local Authority. As part of this process HBIC will, with assistance from “X” Local Authority, seek landowners’ permission for surveys of SINC’s for monitoring purposes. For requests from “X” Local Authority concerning development control, forward planning or land management then the “X” Local Authority is expected to obtain landowners’ permission or use its statutory powers under Sections 324 and 325 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. See also 2.16 and 2.21

**2.3** Evaluate habitat and species data for the identification and review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC’s) in “X” in consultation with “X” Local Authority and other relevant bodies, and maintain an up-to-date GIS layer covering SINC boundaries.

In particular, HBIC will provide on a regular basis or as otherwise agreed to “X” Local Authority the GIS boundary data for all those sites in “X” which have been evaluated as SINC’s. The data available will include the site name, grid reference, site area and criteria code(s) under which the SINC qualifies. The data can be provided digitally and/or on paper. The boundary data will incorporate all additional SINC’s, deleted SINC’s and boundary changes made during the preceding year following evaluation of survey data received. HBIC will also supply an updated copy of the boundary data & associated information as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework.

**2.4** Notify landowners in writing that their land has been identified as meeting the SINC criteria, or where there has been a change in the SINC boundary or qualifying criteria.

**2.5** Assess the weekly planning lists to highlight any development proposal which may affect a SINC or other habitat/species of conservation value and notify “X” Local Authority’s DC contact & SLA contact and the County Council’s ecologist dealing with development control of its findings within the specified time.

**2.6** Assist in the preparation of the local development framework documents to highlight any proposed allocation which may affect a SINC or other habitat/species of conservation value, and recommend where new survey is required

**2.7** Survey and assess hedgerows potentially affected by Removal Notices under the Hedgerow(s) Regulations, and by other development proposals.

**2.8** Maintain up-to-date GIS data covering other nature conservation designations, priority habitat and other land use data, surveyed site boundaries and notable species locations and supply on a regular basis or as otherwise agreed.

**2.9** Supply detailed statistics on UKBAP habitats, species and designations within “X” District for the “Monitoring Change in Priority Habitats, Species & Designated Areas” Report as a contribution to the LDF Annual Monitoring Report.

**2.10** Assist “X” Local Authority in the measuring of the LA Performance Indicator N197; the management of local sites (SINCs)

**2.11** Process, validate and manage all habitat and species data collected in “X” District in order to achieve the above.

**2.12** Archive and provide a secure home for all original survey material collected in “X” District.

**2.13** Service requests for data from consultants, students, local groups, the public and others on behalf of “X” Local Authority about sites, habitats and species within their area.

**2.14** The time spent by HBIC supporting local volunteer recording groups and individuals who provide species data in support of all the above in “X” Local Authority’s area will remain outside the scope of this agreement.

### **PERFORMANCE (HABITAT SURVEY)**

**2.15** With regard to Clause 2.2 above it is accepted that factors such as the difficulty of obtaining permission for access to land and the complexity of some sites, as well as other factors such as the weather, do not enable a performance criteria to be set, such as the numbers of sites or hectares which can be surveyed in a year.

**2.16** The Service Level Agreement aims to deliver the number of survey days up to the limit specified in Clause 1.4. It is accepted that HBIC cannot guarantee to deliver all the days of survey time specified unless requests for surveys with full and proper information from “X” Local Authority, as set out in Clause 2.21, are received by HBIC early on in the survey season, the majority by the end of May for each 12 month period. As set out in Clause 2.2 HBIC will also put forward a programme of SINC monitoring on behalf of “X” Local Authority and will endeavour to obtain permission from SINC landowners for that purpose, with assistance from “X” Local Authority where landownership information is known to them.

**2.17** It is agreed that to make the most effective use of the field season (defined as April to September inclusive) that surveys will be written up in the autumn/winter period, to be delivered no later than the 31<sup>st</sup> March following the field season to which it relates. Requests for full write-ups within the field season will be resisted as far as possible and initial views or a summary report given. If a full write-up is to be given during the field season then HBIC reserves the right to either reduce the survey allocation of “X” Local Authority by double the number of days it will take to complete the write-up or charge a fee at the rate of £165/day. This is to deter organisations from using field survey days to do write-ups which deprives them & other partners of available survey days.

### **TIME LIMITS FOR DATA REQUESTS (excluding requests for new habitat survey)**

**2.18** Requests by “X” Local Authority for information need to be responded to within agreed time limits to enable use of the data by “X” Local Authority, and to meet deadlines.

**2.19** Whilst the time limits specified in the Environmental Information Regulations will be adhered to at all times HBIC will endeavour to respond to standard data requests for site and species information to “X” Local Authority within **5** working days of receipt of a request from “X” Local Authority (unless otherwise specified by “X” Local Authority) where HBIC hold the actual data or copies of the data. If HBIC need to seek out the data it will endeavour to respond within 10 working days. HBIC will also use its best endeavours to respond to urgent requests within the timescale required by “X” Local Authority. For larger more complex requests a longer period will need to be agreed. See 2.20

**2.20** A single request for data or GIS work (excluding the provision of revised SINC schedules) should not normally exceed 3 working days to process. If it is likely that such a request will exceed this limit and cannot be accommodated within the number of hours remaining then a separate contract for supplying the work may be required and shall be confirmed in writing. HBIC's standard cost-recovery rate will normally apply unless outside expertise needs to be brought in, for example for specialist species surveys, where the fee may be higher.

#### **RESPONSIBILITY OF "X" LOCAL AUTHORITY**

**2.21** In order for HBIC to undertake work as set out in Clause 2.2 "X" Local Authority will :

- Provide maps clearly indicating the sites they wish to be surveyed;
- Specify purpose and type of survey required
- Obtain permission from the landowners and pass details onto HBIC who will arrange survey dates & times with the landowners. HBIC will seek landowners' permission for surveys of SINCs for monitoring purposes only as set out in Clause 2.16; and
- Specify the date by which the site is to be surveyed and the date by which the survey information is required.

**2.22** To enable HBIC to keep the SINC layer accurate and up-to-date it would be helpful if "X" Local Authority could notify HBIC of any changes to a SINC which is affected by a planning decision involving loss of part or all of that SINC .

**2.23** It is expected that "X" Local Authority will pass on copies of relevant biological data that it holds or receives from other sources to HBIC for HBIC to add to the database and contribute towards a better understanding of Hampshire's flora and fauna for the benefit of all. "X" Local Authority should also remind all consultants that it deals with who are members of the Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management (IEEM) that, under the IEEM Code of Conduct, they are expected to make their biological data available to local records centres.

### **PART 3 : PROVISION OF DATA TO THIRD PARTIES BY “X” LOCAL AUTHORITY**

#### **“X” Local Authority’s normal business purposes**

**3.1** “X” Local Authority is permitted to use information supplied by HBIC in accordance with this Agreement for its normal business purposes. This includes publishing information in :

- Documents associated with the preparation of their Local Development Frameworks
- Other background documents which arise through the development of the Local Development Framework as appropriate
- Other non-statutory and supplementary planning guidance as appropriate
- Strategic Land Management Plans, and Management Plans for land controlled by “X” Local Authority
- Biodiversity Action Plans & Strategies produced by “X” Local Authority

**3.2** The results of development control data searches from HBIC may be made available to the public on request. Information about the identity or whereabouts of legally protected species will be handled in accordance with legal requirements. Reports to the Planning Development Control Committee or Executive which are held in public should respect the sensitivity of certain species (as defined by the species recording groups & flagged by HBIC) and not to mention the species name, referring instead to the presence of a notable species, or the report itself should be treated as confidential and the public excluded if there are appropriate grounds to do so.

**3.3** “X” Local Authority should ensure that SINC boundaries are supplied to solicitors undertaking local searches on land in “X” Local Authority’s area. Requests for supporting information should be transferred to HBIC (as set out in Clause 3.5)

**3.4** Both parties agree that “X” Local Authority’s normal business purposes include releasing information to contractors working on specific projects for “X” Local Authority. However it is always advisable to direct a consultant to HBIC for the most up-to-date information.

#### **General data requests**

**3.5** Under the terms of this Agreement (as set out in Clause 2.11) and in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 HBIC will supply data requesters with information about sites, habitats and species within “X” Local Authority’s area where the relevant data is available.

“X” Local Authority is therefore entitled to inform a data requester of the arrangements for accessing that data through HBIC under Regulation 6(1)(b) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

“X” Local Authority should then follow the guidance on transferring requests for environmental information given in Section VI of the Code of Practice on the discharge of public authorities’ functions under the Environmental Information Regulations.

## **PART 4 : QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre Quality Assurance Policy :**

**4.1 The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre** seeks to maintain the highest standards in biological survey, data management and analysis for its users. It is developing a number of policies, protocols and procedures, in line with those agreed by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), to ensure consistent delivery of these high standards.

### **IMPARTIALITY**

**4.2** HBIC will be expected to act as an unbiased source of data at all times. Interpretation of the data will be limited to a valued assessment of the importance of a site or species against known criteria, such as the Nature Conservation Review criteria, SINC criteria, and notable species criteria, to allow the site or species to be placed within the national, county or local context. Opinions will not be given, for example, on the impact of development on a site or species.

### **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

**4.3** The HBIC Strategic Management Group sets policies for HBIC for implementation by staff. It comprises key data users and suppliers who are encouraged to comment on quality of service so that issues can be foreseen and addressed.

### **PERSONNEL EXPERTISE & RECRUITMENT**

**4.4** Expertise, skills and experience are used as the key criteria in the recruitment of all staff. Senior staff are expected to have a broad experience of ecological survey and data management whilst contract staff and any 'in-house' volunteers are expected to have a relevant scientific degree and sufficient relevant experience to undertake the tasks required in a thorough and competent manner. The HBIC Strategic Management Group will participate in the recruitment of all new staff.

**4.5** All staff will be expected to work towards full or associate membership of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, and therefore abide by its Professional Code of Conduct.

### **TRAINING**

**4.6** All in-house staff and volunteers are assessed and given appropriate training in areas of ecological survey and data management before undertaking work in these areas on behalf of HBIC. Staff have a system of regular performance appraisal and are encouraged to attend professional training courses run by IEEM and other institutions to meet training needs. IEEM members are required to follow a system of Continuing Professional Development.

### **EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**4.7** HBIC contributes to the development of standards in biological recording through the National Biodiversity Network, which comprises a partnership of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, the Natural Environment Research Council, the Natural History Museum, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Federation of Biological Recording and the Association of Local Government Ecologists, amongst others. This process is expected to lead to an accreditation system for Local Records Centres whereby HBIC expects to be accredited at the highest standard at an early date.

**4.8** HBIC and several of its Partner organisations support a number of specialist Species Groups in Hampshire which between them cover most taxonomic groups. Naturalists are encouraged to join these groups and support is given for meetings and training workshops, HBIC are assisting the groups in developing standard recording methodologies and validation & verification protocols in order to promote high quality recording.

## **GEOGRAPHIC ACCURACY OF SITE BOUNDARIES**

**4.9** Site boundaries held in the HBIC manual files will be drawn on base maps at a scale of 1:10000 or greater. This does not apply to statutory sites, where the scale is as drawn by the statutory agency responsible.

**4.10** Site boundaries (polygons) are generally digitised on the GIS at a scale of 1:10,000 but MasterMap (1:2,500) is becoming more frequently used especially within urban areas or when accurately mapping small features e.g. ponds.

**4.11** The mapping base used in the HBIC GIS is currently Ordnance Survey.

## **COMPUTER SOFTWARE**

**4.12** HBIC currently uses the Recorder 6 biological database (on SQL Server) which has been developed by the statutory agencies and HCC. Recorder 6 is a national standard, in three respects:

- Nomenclature: the species dictionary is centrally maintained, ensuring the correct nomenclature is used, and species names are spelt consistently and correctly.
- Species status: the national and international statuses of species are centrally maintained, allowing HBIC to report accurately on the national and international status of species recorded in Hampshire.
- Grid reference validation: the software has an internal check on grid reference at data entry, preventing any gross geographical errors in grid reference allocation.

**4.13** HBIC is developing a detailed data entry protocol for the entry of sites, habitats, species, personnel and literature data onto the Recorder 6 database whereby the protocol includes minimum standards for valid records. If source data fails to meet the minimum standard it is not entered.

## **VERIFICATION OF SPECIES RECORDS**

**4.14** For species records collected by in-house surveyors and data extracted from external reports, identification of species is verified by HBIC staff. Professional judgement is used to assess the probable accuracy of records. Only a proportion of records are assessed, with priority given to records of rare or critical species. If any doubt is expressed as to the accuracy of a record of a rare species, the record is referred back to the surveyor in the first instance, and then to an expert in the taxonomic group concerned (e.g. the County Recorder, national recorder, Natural History Museum or Kew Gardens), for comment, field checking or specimen examination.

**4.15** Doubtful or rejected records are tagged as 'unconfirmed' in the database or "overwritten" with the preferred name, with details of the doubt or reasons for the rejection of the record. This procedure is used to ensure that the original rejected record cannot appear in any outputs.

**4.16** All data held for a particular taxonomic group will be periodically reviewed by a specialist in that taxonomic group, normally via the County Recorders.

**4.17** HBIC has set up a number of data exchange agreements with the various species recording groups. Each specialist group is encouraged to hold their data on compatible software such as MapMate and exchange data regularly with HBIC. The species groups are responsible for validating their own records and HBIC will undertake a sample check of grid reference and other key data fields before copying the data either onto a separate version of MapMate held by HBIC. Production of species distribution maps may also give rise to the identification of anomalous records which will be referred to source for further validation and verification.

## **VALIDATION OF HABITAT DATA**

**4.18** HBIC operates a set of validation rules for the capture of habitat data to GIS as follows:

Only habitat records which pass the following quality threshold, will be captured to the GIS system:

- Date - accurate to at least a single year, and preferably month and day.
- Classification system - a recognised habitat classification system is used, or the data can be translated without ambiguity.
- Accuracy of habitat interpretation - there are no doubts about the competence of the surveyor in relation to the survey and/or classification system in use.
- Scale of mapping - the habitat has been mapped at a scale consistent with data capture at the 1:10000 scale or greater and with a minimum polygon size normally of 0.25 ha
- Mapping base - the habitat has been mapped onto the OS base or with a sketch map relating to this.
- Accuracy of habitat boundary mapping - habitat boundaries have been mapped with a maximum geographical displacement normally of 10 metres, projected onto a horizontal surface. The latest aerial photographs are used to aid the plotting of habitats on the GIS wherever possible.

Habitat records held by HBIC which are assessed as failing one or more of these validation rules will be marked as such on the paper copy and not captured electronically.

### **SITES OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION (SINCS)**

**4.19** It is the function of HBIC to review and develop the SINC criteria in consultation with Natural England, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, and with the species recording groups with regard to notable species criteria, and then to identify all land within Hampshire which meets the SINC selection criteria. HBIC advises data users on the comprehensiveness of survey data available for particular geographical areas, or for particular habitats, individual species or taxonomic groups. HBIC may also advise users on the additional surveys required to assess an area, habitat or species for a specified purpose

**4.20** HBIC does not seek to record the absence of species from a particular location, as this is rarely possible to prove beyond reasonable doubt. But it will record that a species that has 'not been found' when efforts have been made to relocate it.

**4.21** HBIC will, with the agreement of landowners, pass on information about SINCS requiring management to the relevant project officer (e.g. the HCC Heathland Project Officer, the HCC Woodland Officer, and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Management Advisors etc.

### **VALIDATION OF OUTPUT**

**4.22** All data searches undertaken by HBIC for users are checked by the HBIC Ecologists for accuracy before release to the user, particularly with regard to notable species records

**4.23** Internal spreadsheets with specific protocols will be used for keeping an audit trail of status changes and boundary changes on SINCS. These are used for the validation of SINC Review Schedules and for the regular digital data supply to service agreement holders.

**4.24** Reports compiled by HBIC for users are checked thoroughly for content and accuracy by staff before release to the user.

