



TWC/2015/0057

FURTHER COMMENT

We would like to correct a number of statements in the officer's report.

(a) Local Wildlife Sites are not designated solely by Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). The decision to 'adopt' a Local Wildlife Site lies with the **Local Sites Partnership** (LSP) which is made up of representatives from Natural England, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Shropshire Geological Society, ecologists from Telford and Wrekin Council and from Shropshire Council as well as two independent ecologists.

(b) We contest that the assertion that the selection process was not followed properly (see flow diagram below).

- Traditionally verbal land owner permission has been considered adequate. In this case verbal permission was granted by Telford & Wrekin Council's Ecologist. Prior to that, the site is accessible by a public footpath and has been used as an area of informal local green space by local residents by a number of years.
- The **Local Sites Partnership** was presented with the facts regarding the site and background information, including the planning history.
- Selection criteria are based on expert advice, in this case from the Shropshire Fungi Group, and based on comparable criterion used in other counties.
- Telford & Wrekin Council has been aware of the waxcap interest for some time, at least from the Local Sites Partnership meeting in January 2016 when this issue was first raised. However the Council has not taken the opportunity to clarify the situation with further survey in either the autumn of 2016 or 2017 to assess the waxcap interest. A synopsis of the value of waxcap fungi is appended.

(c) In line with DEFRA guidance the **Local Sites Partnership** wrote to Telford & Wrekin Council to notify them of the decision and offer the opportunity for a response. Additional time was given due to the Christmas break and a Telford & Wrekin Council response was received by the LSP on the 31st January 2018.

(d) Unfortunately the Local Sites Partnership has not as yet had time to coordinate and make a formal reply to Telford & Wrekin Council, but the consensus view is that given the concerns relating to the survey data *the most reasonable solution would be for a further survey in the autumn undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist chosen by Telford & Wrekin Council.*

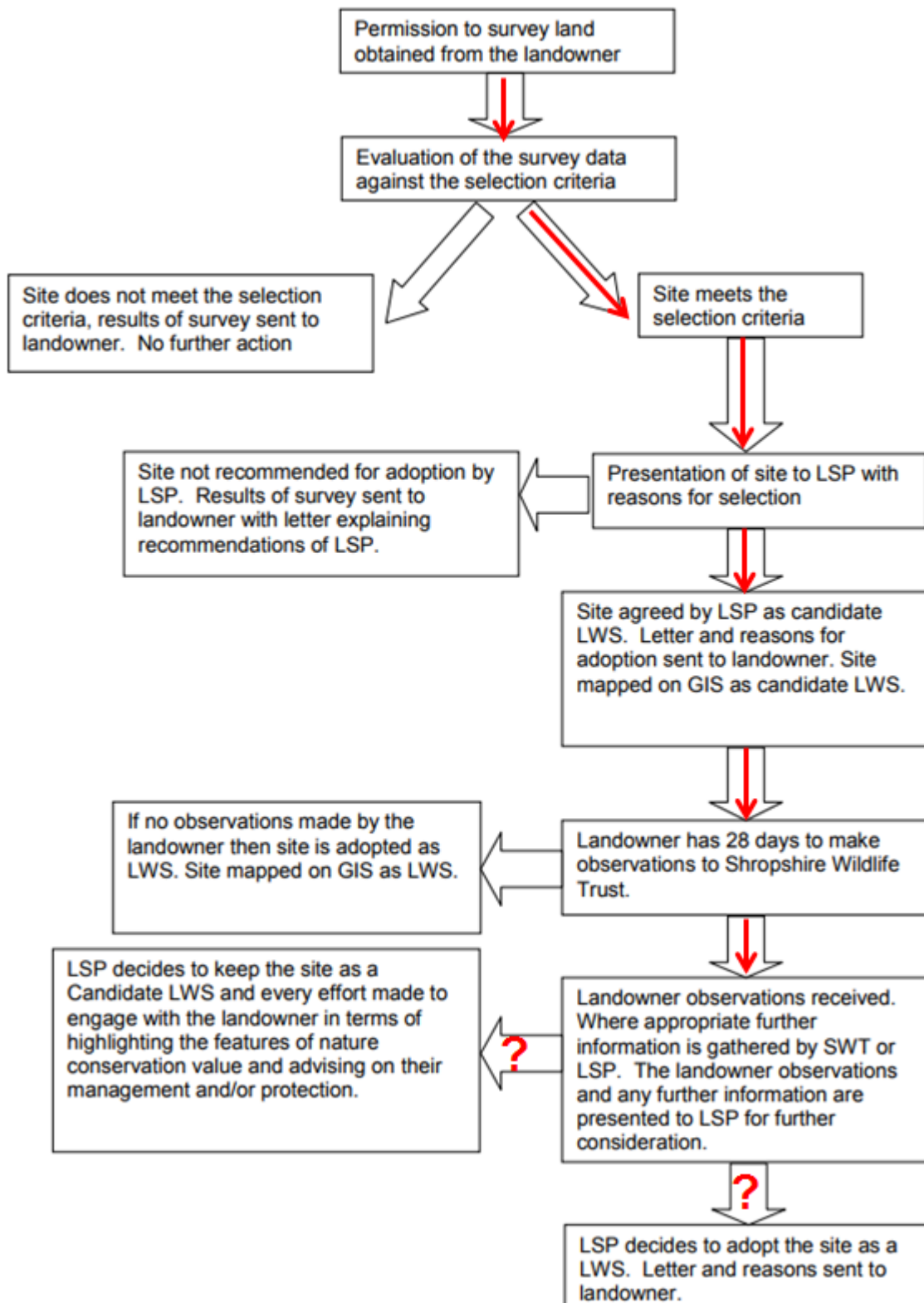
Natural England is also offering the services of a waxcap fungi specialist if this would assist. While a single season may not give the best means of evaluating fungi interest it would at least enable a more informed decision to be made.

The **Local Sites Partnership** accepts that a 'candidate' site does not have formal protection and is not necessarily a 'material consideration'. It does however indicate that the site is considered very likely to have ecological interest of at least a county level and the council does have a duty to take this into account.

However, this does not affect the views and comments of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust who wish to re-state our objections to this scheme in its present form. Not only would the proposed development destroy a site which may have a high value for wildlife, but it will remove one of the few remaining areas of green space within the Newport area. In fact two separate studies commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council including the original PPG17 study in 2008 make specific mention of the site in regard to it being one of the few sites of natural green space in the area.

Process of Adoption of New Local Sites

(LSP = Local Sites Partnership)



Value of waxcap grasslands

Waxcap grasslands are usually indicative of unimproved and often ancient grassland sites.

From JNCC - Guidelines for the selection of biological SSSI's, Part 2: Detailed guidelines for habitats and species groups

"Often these types of grassland are botanically relatively poor and have been overlooked in the process of SSSI selection. In recent years their scientific interest and importance for biodiversity have become increasingly recognised at the national and international level. Good sites continue to be lost due to factors such as fertilisation, ploughing and re-seeding; insufficient grazing or mowing; and housing or other development".

"Sites rich in grassland fungi are scarce and threatened on a world scale and are declining in extent; we therefore have an international responsibility to conserve them, especially in the face of continuing pressures on the remaining examples of such grasslands. Once damaged, these habitats are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to restore".

"Because of the unpredictability of the appearance of fruiting bodies it is virtually impossible to be sure when a comprehensive fungal species list for a site has been arrived at. Several recording visits over 3 or more years and at different times of the year are often necessary to obtain a full picture. When assessing a site on the basis of a single visit there is a high risk of a false negative – the site may appear to be of little importance since few species are recorded although subsequent visits and additional species records might alter this perception. On the other hand, experience has shown that it is often possible to determine with some confidence on a single visit that a site is a good one for grassland fungi, and for this to be confirmed by further visits".

"The extent of mycologically-rich, unimproved grasslands has declined dramatically in northern Europe over recent decades".

"The UK therefore has an international responsibility for these fungus-rich grasslands, and as many as possible of the best sites should be protected".

Plantlife

"Fungi are crucially important as nature's decomposers and the colourful displays of waxcap fungi on our grasslands in the autumn is very much under threat. We need farmers, planners and politicians to ensure that they are not lost forever".

Plantlife

"The grasslands of the UK, particularly those found in Wales and Scotland, are amongst the most important in the world for grassland fungi. The latter's preference for ancient, pastures and grassland that has not been agriculturally improved means that many species are rare and declining".