

Liverpool City Region Ecological Network

Nature Improvement Area focus area

NIA Focus Area 15: North Wirral Foreshore and Liverpool Bay

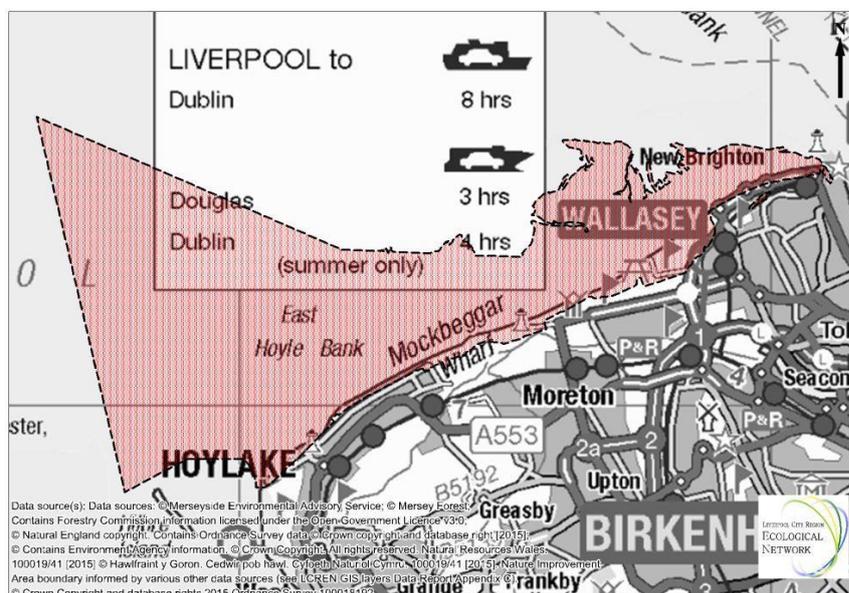
District(s) Wirral

Area 4,265 hectares

Ecological priorities are:

Habitat creation

- There are limited opportunities for habitat creation within the designated sites;
- There are some opportunities for habitat restoration within the sand dune areas at Leasowe Common, Wallasey Golf Course and Leasowe Gun site.



Habitat management

- Management of the designated sites, especially where it will ensure the resilience of the sites to natural and climate change; and
- Enhancing the remnant dune areas.

Existing ecological features:

1. There are 4,230ha of existing habitat.
2. Core Biodiversity Area: 4 Internationally designated sites; 1 SSSI; 5 Local Sites; together with coastal and wetland Priority Habitats
3. Species: The Focus Area contains a large number of important species, mainly breeding and overwintering birds.



Leasowe Bay - merseySights

Focus area description:

The Focus Area is drawn around the designated sites and includes the remnant sand dunes at Leasowe. The area is already heavily protected through legislation and provides a significant contribution towards the City Region's natural assets and green infrastructure. It is one of the largest areas of continuous wildlife habitat and public recreational space in the City Region.

Historic coastal protection has altered the nature and shape of the coastline and has met the objective of retaining a sandy foreshore. The quality of the sand and mud-flats has also improved and the foreshore is now important for a number of feeding and roosting wading bird species. Very high tides see wading birds leave the foreshore for other roosting sites in the City Region.

The area is popular as a recreational facility and in particular activities such as sand yachting. There are limited opportunities for habitat creation given the Focus Area's tight boundary with the urban areas.

Ecological opportunities

Habitat creation:

- **Dune grasslands:** There is some potential to recreate this habitat at Leasowe Common and the golf courses adjacent. The geology is sand and the removal of topsoil and seeding with appropriate species would allow dune grasslands to develop. The rough areas of the golf courses present an opportunity for this without compromising the use and value of the golf course. This would complement the existing habitats present.

Habitat management priorities:

- Nearly all of the Focus Area is covered by site designations that nature conservation objectives i.e. SSSI, SPA, SAC and Ramsar. Management of the internationally designated sites should be carried out with guidance from Natural England.
- There is limited work that can be done to enhance the intertidal sand- and mud-flats apart from ensuring that they are protected and limit damaging practices. Management requirements can be focused in the dune areas around Leasowe. Remnant dune is present that could be enhanced through management and habitat restoration. Green beach (a mix of sand dune and salt marsh habitats) is also developing in front of the hard defences and consideration could be given to management that would allow this to continue to provide for soft coastal defences in front of the existing hard defences.
- Improvements in visitor facilities, including access routes, would benefit habitats and species by reducing trampling and disturbance. Economic aspirations and the ageing population have the potential to increase the pressure on the visitor facilities along the Foreshore. Continued management of the Visitor Economy would provide opportunities to ensure the environment of the foreshore is supported.
- The sandflats are heavily used for recreational purposes, including sporting activities. This is an important facility for the local population and visitors from outside the City Region. Continued management of these activities should ensure that recreation use is balanced with nature conservation objectives for the site.

Ecosystem Services Benefits

The North Wirral Foreshore is a prime draw for ecotourism within the City Region, a significant recreational facility and provides a distinctive sense of place for residents within the wider area. It is also a prime site for outdoor activities such as sand yachting. The biggest benefit from the identified ecological opportunities is through managing, maintaining and enhancing the existing designated sites. This should ensure that the Area continues to provide the ecological benefits and enhances them where needed. The maintenance of the Focus Area should therefore continue to provide benefits for climate change mitigation, tourism, recreation and leisure, quality of place and health and wellbeing to the local and wider population.

Some management activities would benefit ecological features but could also extend the benefits this area provides to economic growth and resilience. The Wirral Coastal Path allows visitors to circumnavigate the Wirral Peninsular. The provision or improvement of visitor facilities would enhance the Coastal Path as a recreation facility and help the visitor economy. These could include the provision of facilities such as paths, toilets and cafes in areas where they are currently lacking. This could reduce visitor pressure in certain locations and would strengthen the whole coast's attraction for visitors. Wirral Council provides a management service for the area, which includes lifeguarding and a coastal ranger service, offering a beneficial resource for schools, colleges and universities. Leasowe Lighthouse, occupied by an active Friends group, also provides a valuable educational and visitor resource.

Focus Area support to wider priorities and strategies

Local Plans – The local authorities in the City Region have worked together to prepare the LCR Ecological Network as a joint evidence base and to help plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. Discussions with neighbouring areas through Nature Connected, the Government-recognised Local Nature Partnership, have enabled wider connections beyond the city region to be made. In line with paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the LCR Ecological Network includes a Core Biodiversity Area of designated nature and geological sites and Priority Habitats, linking networks and strategic priorities for habitat creation or enhancement. This is one of seventeen Nature Improvement Area Focus Areas which together make up the LCR Nature Improvement Area. Although not a Proposals Map designation, further refinement of NIA boundaries and land uses may occur as part of each district's Local Plan processes.

Flood Catchment Management Plans/Wirral Coastal Strategy – the flooding and coastal erosion measures vary along the Wirral coastline. The ecological opportunities are in line with the identified measures and could help deliver coastal protection through improvements to coastal habitats, such as sand dunes, to reduce coastal erosion and flooding.

River Basin Management Plans (Water Framework Directive) – The designated sites will be impacted by water quality from the River Dee and River Mersey and some management practices. The ecological opportunities of managing the sites could help to support them to be more resilient and to remove some of the limiting factors identified in the North West River Basin Management Plan.

National Character Areas –the ecological opportunities are in line with the five 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' identified in the Wirral NCA 59 profile and the four 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' in the Merseyside Conurbation NCA 58 profile. Delivery of the Focus Area ecological opportunities could strengthen landscape resilience and adaptation to climate change. This would help the Character Area achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme – The scheme could support land managers in the delivery of multiple public benefits. Overall, biodiversity should be the priority for the scheme but synergies also exist to maximise opportunities to deliver biodiversity, water quality and flooding benefits together. The scheme could also contribute towards the delivery of a proportion of our water quality objectives.

Nature Connected and Cheshire LNP – implementation of the Focus Area’s ecological opportunities could work towards the LCR LNP’s Key Action D and will also support the delivery of its other Key Actions. They would also contribute to the ‘living landscape’ proposals of Cheshire LNP.

LCR LEP – the ecological opportunities could help to support the LEP’s Priority for Visitor Economy such as at New Brighton and sustainable transport. The Focus Area could also help to support the LEP’s Priority for the Knowledge Economy and Skills by enhancing and inspiring learning for school and higher education students, including work placements/training in the natural environment.

Atlantic Gateway – the NIA ecological opportunities fit with the investment opportunities of infrastructure through flood control and sustainable transport.