Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in North Yorkshire and York

(Outside the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks boundaries)

SINC identification and Survey Procedure

Introduction
In the past one single organisation, North Yorkshire County Council delivered the role of organising and contracting SINC survey and monitoring on behalf of the SINC partnership. To allow flexibility and take account of changing capacity within partner organisations the SINC partnership took the decision to open up the SINC survey and monitoring role to any organisation. The purpose of these supplementary Guidelines is:

- to ensure a consistent approach to all aspects of the SINC process across the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership including landowner contact, survey, selection and monitoring;
- to ensure that all SINCs are surveyed and reviewed to a consistently high standard.

Contents
The attached appendices contain the following series of Guidelines and documents:

Appendix 1: Procedure for proposing new SINCs

Who can propose a new SINC?
Any organisation or individual can propose a SINC. Ideally the proposal should be discussed beforehand with one of the SINC Panel members who can advise if a site is suitable (based on the current SINC Selection Guidelines) for consideration as a SINC. A proposal should include the following information: location details including a grid reference and an outline map of the proposed site; a brief description and reasons such as habitat or species interest for proposing the site; any previous survey information (if available), landowner/manager details. A standard form for proposing a New Candidate SINC can be found below, Appendix 7.

Contacting the landowner
Permission for survey should **always** be obtained from the landowner before the site is visited, with permission granted in writing. A map/plan must always be provided to the landowner with the access request to ensure the correct parcels of land have permission. A standard letter explaining the purpose of SINCs and requesting permission to survey the site is attached in Appendix 7. Survey or monitoring from PROW is not acceptable and will not be supported by the SINC Panel.

Site survey
New sites will require a full baseline survey. Guidance on survey procedure is given in Appendix 2. Standard survey forms and guidance on completing these are contained in Appendices 5 and 4.

SINC Panel Review
The selection procedure for proposed new SINCs is set out in the Guidelines for Site Selection. This follows the same procedure as for the review of existing SINCs. The Panel will arrive at a consensus decision about the proposed SINC. The proposal will either be accepted or rejected, or a request for additional information will be made. The Panel decision will be recorded in minutes of the meeting and will give a clear explanation of the reasons for selection/rejection.

Information required at Panel
The proposer organisation should provide the Panel Chair with all relevant survey data so this can be circulated to Panel members prior to the meeting. The data provided should include a digitised map showing the proposed SINC boundary, survey forms and species lists in electronic format, and a site evaluation using the relevant guideline(s). This data will be verified and entered onto the SINC data system by NEYEDC.

Additional information
The Panel will specify what additional information will be required, and how it should be submitted. To avoid delays, it will not always be necessary to report back to the next Panel meeting, once this information is submitted to the Chair. If the nature of the required information is fairly straightforward, the Chair will use her/his discretion (after consultation with other Panel members if necessary) to decide on a final acceptance or rejection. However, if the additional information needed is extensive or complex, then the proposal may need to be re-submitted at the next Panel meeting.

Informing owners and managers
Landowners and managers should be informed by the proposer organisation of the Panel decision at the earliest opportunity to give them the opportunity to comment. Standard letters informing owners/managers of the SINC Panel decision to select or reject the site are contained in Appendices 8 and 9 respectively. The letter should include a summary of the reasons for selection or rejection and a brief description of the wildlife importance of the land within the owner/managers care (this is usually helpful even where the site does not qualify for SINC selection). Copies of survey forms, species lists and maps should be enclosed with the letter.

Formal notification

Once a new SINC is accepted and the landowner/manager has been informed, the relevant planning authority will be provided with an updated SINC GIS file.

Appendix 2: Baseline or full re-survey procedure

Guidance

Appointment of suitable surveyor
Baseline/full surveys should be undertaken by an experienced surveyor with appropriate identification skills and knowledge of the habitat(s) being assessed. They should be familiar with Phase 1 Habitat and NVC survey methodology with the ability to assess habitats in the field and, have an understanding of land management and the factors affecting habitat/site condition.

Health and Safety
Surveyor health and safety is the responsibility of the employing organisation. Surveyors must adhere to their organisation's health and safety guidelines and risk assessment procedures. In addition they should act responsibly and in good faith while representing the party that has commissioned the survey.

Risk Assessment
On arrival at site, surveyors are required to carry out a risk assessment, considering what hazards are present at the site, who may be at risk from these hazards as a result of carrying out the survey and what measures can be taken to reduce risks to a minimum. The survey should only go ahead if the surveyor considers the risk to health and safety to be low. If this is the case, the surveyor should tick the risk assessment statement on the SINC Survey form. If the surveyor considers the risks associated with surveying the site are unacceptable, then a summary of the risk assessment should be entered into the site description box on the survey sheet and survey postponed or abandoned.

Survey procedure

A. May to September is generally considered the optimum period for surveying vascular plants, although April, October and November visits may also be acceptable depending on the habitat. Surveys undertaken outside the optimum period may place limitations on the survey results and, particularly where the site is of borderline SINC quality, the Panel may require a repeat survey at the optimum time of year. Any return surveys would be at the cost of the proposing organisation/individual, therefore optimum survey timing is recommended.

B. Landowner permission for survey should be obtained and recorded before the site is visited.

C. Sites should be surveyed as a whole if they are relatively small and homogeneous. Larger and/or more complex sites should be split into multiple recording units; subdivision should be logical and based on management units, major habitat types or variation in wildlife value. Generally, all fields should be surveyed separately, while linear sites should be split into recording units/sub-sites approximately 1km in length. This approach allows the Panel to assess each sub-site on its own merits and prevents the inclusion of areas of less wildlife interest where they do not add value to the site as a whole.

D. Site and recording unit boundaries must be clearly recorded, ideally on a map or aerial photograph. It is preferable to use boundaries that are obvious both on maps and on the ground, such as fences, hedges, paths and watercourses, so that returning surveyors can repeat the process. If obvious boundaries are not available, care should be taken to describe the boundaries in the site description.

The surveyor has the responsibility of proposing the best boundary for the Panel to consider, and should divide the site accordingly at survey. Final site boundaries should include the main interest features as well as buffer areas where appropriate. Areas of less interest should still be surveyed, but ideally as easily definable units that can be rejected while the rest of the site is selected.

E. Any relevant information that can be obtained from the owner/manager should be recorded. This includes past and present management, future intentions, and changes in vegetation structure and flora and fauna. If such data is not available, then the surveyor should try to infer management issues from site condition and other evidence while on site. This will help the Panel to decide the conservation management status of the site.

Time spent on site should be noted, as well as any constraints such as torrential rain or intimidating livestock/dogs. This allows the Panel to assess the degree of thoroughness of each survey, so that failure to satisfy selection criteria can be put into context. If there is only a quick or late visit, for example, this might result in deferral and a request for further survey under more appropriate circumstances. The cost of return surveys would have to be met by the proposing organisation.

G. Recording of fauna is not required for most site selection guidelines, however the surveyor should identify and record as many species as they feel comfortable with. This should include highlighting any additional habitat features that may have potential for individual species or species groups, such as a pond that may support breeding amphibians. Thorough use of the 'Additional habitat features' tick boxes is particularly important.

Procedure

The recommended baseline (or full) survey procedure can be considered in three stages:

Before visiting

1. Identify all owners/managers of the site (to be undertaken by the commissioning organisation instigating the survey).
2. Initiate contact, ideally by letter, covering the relevant background information, enclosing a map of the area, and outlining the purpose of the survey (see Appendix 7). Follow up, if necessary, by telephone or possibly a face-to-face meeting.
3. Request permission to visit.
4. If permission is refused, record for future reference to avoid unnecessary future contacts.
5. If permission is given, agree a visit procedure with the contact(s).
6. If it is feasible, discuss management practices and issues with the contact(s).
7. Record all the above details for future reference.
8. Look at available data about the site and use it as a basis for the forthcoming site visit. This could include citations, previous species lists and maps. These can be supplied by the NEYEDC where they exist.
9. Appoint an appropriate surveyor with the skills and experience relevant to the habitat(s).

On site

The following should be taken to the site:

- Rick assessment forms for completion
- A copy of any previous boundary maps, habitat maps, survey reports (if available).
- A blank base map.
- An aerial photograph (optional but often very useful, especially on more complex sites).
- A 1:25,000 OS map of the area.
- Owner/manager contact details and instructions.
- A supply of survey forms, species checklists, pencils and paper, a clipboard preferably with a waterproof covering, evidence of identification, appropriate outdoor clothing, and binoculars. A grappling hook is essential for most sites being assessed for aquatic macrophytes.

Then:

1. Follow all reasonable requests of the owner, such as meeting beforehand.
2. Assess the appropriate approach to the survey, including division into subsites (if relevant).
3. For sites surveyed as a single unit, or for every recording unit/subsite within a larger site:

- Complete one survey form (see Appendix 5) as fully as possible.
- Record all identifiable plant species.

- Annotate the base map to show boundaries, habitat types and important additional features.
- Assess the condition and conservation management status while walking around, making notes and ticking options on the survey form.

4. Photographs of the site can be useful, for example, showing the general condition of the site or notable features.

After the survey

Provide the North Yorkshire and York SINC Panel Chair with the following for every site surveyed:

1. Contact details for all owners/managers that were involved and gave permission for survey. Detailed notes of when and how they were contacted, and what they said are also very useful.
2. A proposed site name.
3. A proposed site boundary map. This does not have to match the surveyed boundary, but if there is a difference both should be supplied.
4. A map showing fully labelled or numbered recording units/subsites (if relevant).
5. For sites surveyed as a single unit, or for every recording unit/subsite within a larger site:

- A completed survey form.
- A species list (flora and fauna together), preferably as a spreadsheet.
- A description of the site including rare/notable/most frequent/planted plant species, habitat types and general site condition.

Appendix 3: Monitoring survey procedure

Guidance

Monitoring surveyors
Surveyors should have appropriate experience of monitoring surveys with good botanical identification skills in the habitat(s) being assessed and, preferably knowledge of land management and the factors affecting site condition.

Health and Safety
Surveyor health and safety is the responsibility of the employing organisation. Surveyors must adhere to their organisation's health and safety guidelines and risk assessment procedures. In addition they should act responsibly and in good faith while representing the party that has commissioned the survey.

Risk Assessment
On arrival at site, surveyors are required to carry out a risk assessment, considering what hazards are present at the site, who may be at risk from these hazards as a result of carrying out the survey and what measures can be taken to reduce risks to a minimum. The survey should only go ahead if the surveyor considers the risk to health and safety to be low. If this is the case, the surveyor should tick the risk assessment statement on the SINC Survey form. If the surveyor considers the risks associated with surveying the site are unacceptable, then a summary of the risk assessment should be entered into the site description box on the survey sheet and survey postponed or abandoned.

Survey procedure

A. Monitoring surveys are intended to be brief surveys. However, the entire site should be walked and condition assessed.

B. The main aims of the monitoring survey are:

- To check that the site still qualifies as a SINC when assessed against the current selection criteria.
- To assess the condition of the site (in comparison to its condition at the previous survey stage), and to record the reasons for any improvement or degradation.
- To identify the management status of the site and make recommendations for conservation management.

C. It is important to note that the monitoring survey procedure outlined here can only be undertaken where baseline survey data is adequate. The SINC Panel may find it necessary to request that full survey procedure is followed in place of the first monitoring survey in some cases.

D. Full plant lists are not needed. Instead, with reference to the baseline (or last full) survey the monitoring survey should note any previously recorded scoring species. Any previously unrecorded scoring or notable species should also be recorded.

E. Permission for monitoring surveys should be obtained before the site is visited, in the same manner as for baseline surveys.

Monitoring surveys provide the opportunity to check that owner/manager contact details and boundaries are still accurate. It should not be assumed that existing owner/manager information for the site is completely correct or that all of the parties involved in ownership and management are known. The organisation/surveyor arranging the survey should always check with the contacts that they have whether anyone else e.g. other landowners, tenants, site managers need to be contacted.

F. Efforts should be made to identify and follow the boundaries used at the baseline (or previous) survey stage(s). Proposals can be made to the Panel to amend boundaries, but the reasons for these changes should be adequately recorded. If boundary changes appear necessary, full baseline survey data (see Appendix 2) is needed for the areas to be added.

G. Linear sites are generally divided into 1km stretches/subsites for the baseline survey. When monitoring, the 50% sampling technique should be used, whereby alternate subsites are botanically surveyed. This should always include the start and end subsites to ensure that the main interest and wildlife value is still well represented by the boundary. In addition the whole site should be walked and condition assessed.

For large non-linear sites with more than one recording unit/subsite, the 50% sampling technique should be used, concentrating botanical recording on subsites with most wildlife value (which are likely to have higher species index scores). In addition the whole site should be walked and condition assessed.

Procedure
The recommended monitoring survey procedure can be considered in three stages:

Before visiting
1. Identify all owners/managers of the site (to be undertaken by the commissioning organisation instigating the survey).
2. Initiate contact, ideally by letter, covering the relevant background information, enclosing a map of the area, and outlining the purpose of the survey (see Appendix 7). Follow up, if necessary, by telephone or possibly a face-to-face meeting.
3. Request permission to visit.
4. If permission is refused, record for future reference to avoid unnecessary future contacts.
5. If permission is given, agree a visit procedure with the contact(s).
6. If it is feasible, discuss management practices and issues with the contact(s).
7. Record all the above details for future reference.
8. Appoint appropriate surveyor – see notes on full surveys but adjust for monitoring.
9. Look at available data about the site and use it as a basis for the site visit. Citations, previous species lists and maps (which can be obtained from the NEYEDC upon request) will include the following types of information:

- Site boundary.
- Habitat map (if available).
- Site description.
- List of Phase 1 habitats.
- Site evaluation i.e. criteria for which the site has been selected.
- Scoring species list (for all criteria not just the qualifying criteria).
- Site condition (if available).
- Management information (if available).

On site
The following should be taken to the site:

- Risk assessment forms for completion
- A copy of any previous boundary maps, habitat maps and supporting text (if relevant). A blank base map.
- An aerial photograph (optional).
- A 1:25,000 OS map of the area.
- Owner/manager contact details and instructions.
- A supply of survey forms, species checklists, pencils and paper, a clipboard preferably with a waterproof covering, evidence of identification, appropriate outdoor clothing, and binoculars. A grappling hook is essential for most sites being assessed for aquatic macrophytes.

Then:
1. Follow all reasonable requests of the owner, such as meeting beforehand.
2. Assess and repeat (as much as possible) the approach taken for the baseline (or last full) survey, i.e. the same division into recording units/subsites (if relevant).
3. For sites surveyed as a single unit, or for every recording unit/subsite within a larger site:

- Complete one survey form (see Appendix 6) as fully as possible (focusing on management comments, and activities and practices that may have affected the condition of the site).
- Annotate the base map to show boundaries, habitat types/extent and important additional features.
- Assess the condition and conservation management status of the site.

4. For sites surveyed as a single unit, or a 50% sample of the recording units/subsites (see para G above):

- Look for all the scoring species previously recorded, checking them off against the list provided.
- Note additional species of interest, bearing in mind likely scoring species, notable species and other indicators of the habitats known to be present.

5. Photographs of the site can be useful, for example, illustrating the general condition of the site or notable features.

After the survey

Provide the SINC Panel Chair with the following for every site surveyed:

- Any proposed amendments to the site name.
- A map showing any proposed amendments to the site boundary.
- A map showing fully labelled or numbered recording units/subsites (if relevant).
- For sites surveyed as a single unit, or for every recording unit/subsite within a larger site:
  - A completed survey form.
  - Any proposed amendments to the description of the area.
  - Information on major changes to the site condition or conservation management status.
- For sites surveyed as a single unit, or for a 50% sample of the recording units/subsites:
  - A completed checklist of the scoring species from the baseline (or last full) survey(s),
  - clearly showing any species that were not seen and any additional scoring/notable/indicator species that were seen.

Appendix 4: Guidelines for completing survey forms

Guidance

A. There are separate survey forms for baseline surveys/full re-surveys and for monitoring surveys attached at the end of this Appendix. The separate forms reflect the level of information required by the two types of survey. The main difference is the 'Site description' which is required of full surveys only. Otherwise, the type of information that needs to be recorded on each type of form is similar and this Guidance is therefore relevant to both forms (accept where indicated).

B. Survey forms should be completed in the field. One survey form must be completed for each site, or for each recording unit/subsite (if relevant). Where habitats/features/choices have multiple options within them (indicated by a spaced '/'); the correct option must be circled for each site/recording unit/subsite.

C. Species lists should be completed and submitted in electronic format. Each list should be clearly labelled with the site name, subsite name (if relevant), date and surveyor. A DAFOR score should be given for each plant species recorded. Vascular plant species checklists with common and scientific names can be downloaded from the internet e.g. BSBI.

D. Survey forms should be completed as fully as possible and must include the site code, site name, surveyor name, survey date.

- Grid references should be either the central grid reference, or start and end grid references for linear sites.
- Where a site contains a number of discrete land parcels or sub-sites these should be clearly identified by names or with numbers or letters.
- Dates of return visits to sites should be noted on the survey form or a separate survey form should be completed for each visit.
- NVC communities. Surveyors are asked, where possible, to identify and map NVC communities. Surveyors are not expected to record quadrat data in order to do this but using their experience and knowledge make a rapid assessment of NVC types and distribution across the site. If NVC types are uncertain/not possible to determine please say so.
- Phase 1 Habitats should be listed and mapped. See Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey by JNCC.
- Adjacent land-use. The adjacent land use to the site should be recorded as should any boundary features e.g. hedges, fences that mark the boundaries on the SINC.

E. (Baseline/full re-survey forms only). The 'Site Description' section should give a description of the overall character of the site (or recording unit/sub-sites) including the main habitats and any additional habitats. Detailed descriptions of all habitats/features for which the site is being assessed should be included, including the most frequent or characteristic species. In addition, the following information should be provided:

- The exact location of rare or notable plant species or features such as veteran trees should be recorded if possible (including a grid reference) especially on larger and more complex sites. They should also be marked on a map if possible.
- The current management and the condition of the site should be described.
- Any undesirable or invasive species, their location and extent should be recorded.

F. The 'Site Condition' section is intended to provide information that will determine what condition the site is in and whether it is still of SINC quality. The surveyor should refer to the original or last full survey. The following questions are designed to provide the information required.

i. Are there any obvious adjacent land use changes? – This question is intended to highlight potential threats to the SINC from changes in adjacent land

use/management. The surveyor should note any significant land use changes, for example, residential or industrial development, leisure facilities such as caravan parks, agricultural improvement such as recent grassland ploughing, woodland clearance etc. Aerial photographs may be useful in deciding if significant recent change has occurred.

ii. Have the site boundaries changed? – This question is looking for simple observations as to the current boundaries in relation to the original survey. Comments on the boundary should include the type of boundary such as fence, hedge, road, river and the location of the boundary. Also record if a boundary has been lost, if it is stock-proof, or is no longer detectable as a result of the boundary being physically removed or two management units being made into one.

iii. Are changes to the SINC boundary required? The surveyor should indicate here whether they feel that a boundary change is required. A boundary change may be necessary: to exclude land that no longer meets the selection criteria; where there is habitat outside the current boundary which the surveyor believes should be considered for inclusion; to correct errors in the SINC boundary which may have resulted from a previous mapping error. The surveyor should explain on the survey form why they feel the boundary change is necessary. Proposed boundary changes should be clearly marked on a map. Where a monitoring survey indicates a boundary change is required this is likely to require a full re-survey. Please indicate on the form (bottom of first page) if you feel a full re-survey is required.

iv. Within the site are there any land use changes? – This question is intended to record obvious land use changes that resulted in a significant reduction/loss of the interest of the site. The might include for example agricultural improvement (e.g. ploughing, re-seeding, fertilizing, drainage, etc) of unimproved/semi-improved grassland, clear-felling of woodland, or development such as buildings or hard standing. The areas of land use that have significantly changed should be marked on the map and briefly described.

v. Have there been any significant habitat changes since the last survey? – These changes to the site are likely to be subtler than those land use changes identified in the question above. With reference to previous survey information, the surveyor should comment on any significant changes in the extent, distribution and condition of habitats (especially the qualifying habitats), the presence/absence of qualifying species, changes in vegetation composition and structure, the presence of negative indicator species e.g. an increase in coarse grasses, thistles, bracken, scrub etc. For monitoring surveys, surveyors just need to indicate whether the habitats are roughly of the same type, extent and condition (as far as can be determined). If significant changes have clearly taken place these should be briefly described and where possible suggest the possible causes of change e.g. inappropriate management, absence of management etc.

vi. Surveyor comments on changes to the site and overall impression of site condition. – Please provide any comments on changes to the site not covered by the questions above and give your overall impression of the condition of the site e.g. does it appear to be in good, adequate or poor condition based on the quality of the habitats present at the time of survey?

G. (Monitoring Forms only) *Recommendations for further survey work* – Based on the answers to questions (*i* to *vi)* above the monitoring surveyor should indicate if follow-up surveys are required. Where significant changes have occurred affecting the ecological status of the site and/or requiring a change to the boundary, this will normally require a full re-survey within 12 months. Where changes have been noted but are not considered significant e.g. changes in habitat quality noted in question (v) that do not immediately threaten SINC status, a recommendation for a follow-up monitoring visit, for example, in 2 or 5 years, may be appropriate. If no changes have occurred and there are no apparent threats to the site, and therefore no further survey is needed until the next routine monitoring visit, this section should be left blank. Please also indicate if the site would benefit from any other surveys e.g. other species groups.

A repeat survey (either a follow-up monitoring or a full re-survey) may also be required if a survey has been hampered by constraints such as poor weather, short grazed/cut vegetation, presence of livestock etc. Please indicate where this is the case.

I. In the 'Site Management' section, the surveyor should record any evidence of site management and use (positive or negative), ticking any choices that are relevant. This might include observations made during the site survey and information provided by the site owner/manager.

J. In the 'Management Comments' section give further details of site management (if known), e.g. is management current, is it long-term, has it changed recently and what implications this may have for the future condition of the site (positive or negative), the area of land affected by management, amenity use, damage (show also on the survey map) etc. If possible to determine, please indicate whether you feel the management appears to be appropriate/inappropriate for all/majority/some/none of the site.

K. In the 'Management Recommendation' section, please provide recommendations for any habitat management that in your opinion would improve/maintain SINC condition.

H. Plant/faunal species not previously noted – The surveyor should list any species not recorded in previous surveys. For monitoring surveys, only additional notable or indicator species (positive and negative) identified during the survey need to be listed. Positive indicator species are characteristic of the qualifying habitat being assessed and are listed under the relevant criteria of the SINC Selection Guidelines. The cover of negative indicator or undesirable species can be an indicator of habitat condition and management status. Examples include: coarse tussock forming grasses, tall herbs (such as cow parsley and hogweed), bracken and scrub which can spread when unchecked by grazing/cutting; species indicative of agricultural improvement such as perennial rye-grass and white clover; species indicative of increased fertility or disturbance such as nettle, creeping thistle, broad-leaved dock and ragwort. Please give each species a DAFOR score.

L. (Full survey forms only) The 'Habitat Features' section is intended to target and guide additional survey work, for example, invertebrate surveys. Surveyors should record all habitat features present within the site or recording unit/sub-site, by ticking all relevant boxes. If appropriate, please provide additional information e.g. target notes on potential species and/or habitat interest that may justify additional survey effort.

M. (Full survey forms only). The 'Veteran tree features' section should be completed if any veteran trees are present

N. (Full survey forms only). This question is covered elsewhere on the monitoring form - see G). In the 'Constraints/need for further survey' section please indicate any constraints to the survey e.g. time of year, terrain, weather, cut/grazed vegetation, the presence of livestock that may have affected the survey results. Also indicate if further survey work is needed at the site e.g. for faunal species. This information may be important if the site fails to satisfy any of the criteria but the Panel think that it has nature conservation value.

Appendix 5 Baseline/Full Re-survey form.

NORTH YORKSHIRE and YORK SINC BASELINE/FULL RE-SURVEY FORM			
Site Code		**Site name**	**Grid reference**
Surveyor(s)		**Survey date/survey duration**	**Risk Assessment completed** Y/N.
Date last surveyed		**Consulted previous survey** Y/N	**Consulted aerial photo** Y/N
Site Area	**Aspect**	**Photos taken?** *(maximum of 3, position & direction taken marked on map)* Yes/No	
Natural Area		**Geology & Soil type**	**Exposed strata**
Adjacent land use			
Phase 1 habitat types			
NVC communities and sub-communities *(where applicable – mark areas on field map)*			
Site Description *(include details of main habitats and any additional habitats, details of the most frequent/characteristic species, rare/notable/invasive species. Show on field map the distribution of different habitats and location of notable features/species etc. Summarise how the site might meet the criteria – refer to SINC Selection Guidelines)*			
CONDITION ASSESSMENT *(only complete for existing SINCs). The Guidance note in Appendix 4 gives tips on the information required here.*			
i) Are there any obvious adjacent land use changes? *If yes, please give details (e.g. development, agricultural changes and show on survey map).*			

ii) Have the site boundaries changed? *Please give details (e.g. type and show on survey map).*

iii) Are changes to the SINC boundary required? *Describe here and show on the field survey map.*

iv) Within the site are there any significant land use changes since the last survey which has resulted in a loss of ecological interest? *Please give details (e.g. ploughing, agricultural improvement, development, clear felling. Show location/extent on survey map).*

v) Have there been any significant changes in habitats/vegetation communities present since last survey e.g. to habitat distribution and quality, vegetation structure, species composition etc. *Please give details including possible reasons e.g. inappropriate management, lack of management.*

SITE MANAGEMENT (Please tick)			
Unmanaged*(at least 2 years)*		Recent planting (trees) native/non-native	
Management unknown		Recent planting (other) native/non-native	
Grazed by cattle/sheep/horses (specify)		Coppicing	
Grazed by rabbits		Tree felling	
Grazed *(animal unknown)*		Scrub removal	
Hay/silage cutting		Invasive species mgnt/non-mgnt	
Frequent short mowing		Re-seeding	
Grass cutting with non-removal of cuttings		Managed for game (specify)	
AMENITY USE (Please tick)			
Public use/dog walking		Boating	
Horse riding		Fishing	
Cycle/vehicle use		Other Amenity use (specify below)	

Is there public access to/adjacent to site? (*Is this* a *Right of Way shown on OS map/permissive/informal path. Mark route on survey map*)

THREATS/DAMAGE (Please tick)			
Undergrazed *(tussocky)*		Fire damage	
Overgrazed		Pollution (specify)	
Poaching		Tipping	
Agrochemicals (incl spray drift)		Development including large scale clearance	
Invasive/undesirable species (name)		Off-road vehicle damage	
Scrub encroachment		Recent/long term drainage	

Notes:

MANAGEMENT COMMENTS.

Provide comments on current management and whether this appears to be appropriate/inappropriate for all/majority/some/none of the site

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide recommendations for habitat management that would improve/maintain SINC condition (e.g. coppicing, grazing, hay cutting, scrub/invasive species control, etc).

HABITAT FEATURES/MICRO HABITATS

Geology & Topography		Bare mud at water margin	
Varied topography		Wet flushes	
South facing slopes		Springs	
Scree/hard rock exposure		Deep ruts with water	
Slippage/soft rock cliffs		**Woodland Features**	
Well drained		Veteran trees	
Poorly drained		Pollarded trees (recent/historic)	
Bare dry sand		Coppiced trees (recent/historic)	
Bare ground		Glades	
Disturbed ground		Wide woodland edge	
Water/Riverine features		Wide sunny rides	
Running water		Dead wood - fallen	
Eroding river banks		Dead wood - standing	
Riffles		**Vegetation Structure**	
Shingle banks		Varied vegetation structure	
Pond		Scrub	
Seasonal pools/damp areas		Hedges	
Dry ditches – shallow/deep		Tussocky vegetation	

Others

ADDITIONAL PLANT SPECIES

FAUNAL SPECIES

VETERAN TREES (show on map/provide grid refs and photographs if possible).

Species	**Description of features** *e.g. girth, trunk hollowing, dead woody tissue, limb loss, cavities, loose bark, wounds, scars, rot holes, fungal/epiphytic plants etc*

SURVEY CONSTRAINTS/NEED FOR FURTHER ECOLOGICAL SURVEY

Describe any survey constraints e.g. time of year, terrain, weather, vegetation cut/grazed, livestock. Is further survey work needed e.g. faunal surveys.

SURVEYORS COMMENTS
This could any include information that would be helpful for future surveys e.g. site access, parking, H&S.

Appendix 6: Monitoring survey form.

NORTH YORKSHIRE and YORK SINC MONITORING FORM		
Site Code	**Site Name**	
Grid reference	**Surveyor(s)**	**Risk assessment completed** Y/N
Date of monitoring survey	**Time spent on site**	**Date of last survey**
Consulted aerial photo Y/N	**Consulted previous survey** Y/N	
Photos taken? Yes/No *(maximum of 3, position & direction taken marked on map)*		
SITE CONDITION *The Guidance note in Appendix 4 gives tips on the information required here.*		
i) Are there any obvious **adjacent** land use changes? *If yes, please give details (e.g. development, agricultural changes and show on survey map).*		
ii) Have the site boundaries changed? *Please give details (e.g. type and show on survey map).*		
iii) Are changes to the SINC boundary required? *Describe here and show on the field survey map.*		
iv) Within the site are there any significant land use changes since the last survey which has resulted in a loss of interest? *Please give details (e.g. ploughing, agricultural improvement, development, clear felling. Show location/extent on survey map).*		
v) Have there been any significant changes in habitats/vegetation communities present since last survey e.g. to habitat distribution and quality, vegetation structure, species composition etc. *Please give details including possible reasons e.g. inappropriate management, lack of management etc.*		
vi) Provide comments on other changes to the site and overall impression of site condition (e.g. good, adequate, poor).		
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER SURVEY		
Based on answers to above questions please indicate if a follow-up survey is required. ❑ Full SINC survey required in next 12 months ❑ Repeat monitoring visit required within: ❑ 2 years ❑ 5 years ❑ other: ..... ❑ Survey for other species *(please specify)*……		

SITE MANAGEMENT			
Unmanaged*(at least 2 years)*		Recent planting (trees) native/non-native	
Management unknown		Recent planting (other) native/non/native	
Grazed by cattle/sheep/horses (specify)		Tree coppicing	
Grazed by rabbits		Tree felling	

Grazed *(animal unknown)*		Scrub removal	
Hay/silage cutting		Invasive species - mgnt	
Frequent short mowing *eg amenity cutting)*			
Grass cutting and non-removal of cuttings			
AMENITY USE			
Fishing		Bike/Car trials	
Managed for game (specify)		Boating	
Horse riding		Caravans	
Public use/dog walking		Other Amenity use (specify below)	
Any public access to/adjacent site? (*Please state if PRoW shown on OS map/permissive/informal. Mark route on site map*)			
THREATS/DAMAGE			
Undergrazing *(tussocky)*		Fire damage	
Overgrazing		Pollution (specify)	
Poaching		Tipping	
Agrochemicals (incl spray drift)		Development including large scale clearance	
Invasive plants/animals (name)		Off-road vehicle damage	
Other (specify)		Recent/long term drainage	
Notes			
MANAGEMENT COMMENTS.			
Provide comments on current management and whether this appears to be appropriate/inappropriate for all/majority/some/none of the site			
MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS			
Provide recommendations for habitat management that would improve/maintain SINC condition (e.g. coppicing, grazing, hay cutting, scrub/invasive species control, etc).			
ADDITIONAL NOTABLE/INDICATOR SPECIES NOT PREVIOUSLY RECORDED.			

Appendix 7: New SINC proposal form

North Yorkshire and York SINC Survey
NEW CANDIDATE SITES

SECTION 1: Background Information

Site Name:	**Parish / Nearest Village:**
NGR (or 5km^2):	**Proposed by:**
How identified:	**Identified on:**

Office Use Only

Landowner identified? Yes / No	Visited by: Date:
Date considered by SINC Panel:	SINC Panel outcome:
Feedback provided? Yes / No	Added to layer: By: Date:

SECTION 2: Description and Interest of Site

Why is this site interesting?
What habitats are present?
Describe the site and its habitats:

SECTION 3: Site Information

Approximate size:
How typical is this site compared to others in the area?
What is the species diversity?
Are there any rare species?
How is the site managed?

SECTION 4: Evidence Base

Evidence	**Source (if known) and Year**

Guidance Notes

Please fill in as much of the form as possible in order to provide the Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) Panel with the maximum amount of information to base their decision on.

SECTION 1: Background Information

Site Name – this could be the name of the site on an Ordnance Survey map or what the site is referred to locally.

Parish / Nearest Village – this information will help to correctly identify the site and cross-check the grid reference.

National Grid Reference – central site reference taken from an Ordnance Survey map, or the 5km grid square that the site falls in.

Proposed by – name of individual proposing the new candidate LWS.

How identified – information on how the site was originally identified. For example; site visit, aerial photograph.

Identified on – approximate date the site was first identified for its potential as a candidate LWS.

SECTION 2: Description and Interest of Site

Why is this site interesting? Please provide a statement as to why this site is interesting and why it should be considered as a new candidate LWS.

What habitats are present? List the broad habitats found on the site. For example; scrub, reed beds, standing open water.

Describe the site and its habitats – briefly describe how the different habitats on the site fit together. For example; large central area of open standing water with reeds to the north of the water body, surrounded by dense scrub and scattered trees (willow).

SECTION 3: Site Information

Approximate size – estimate the area in acres or hectares.

How typical is this site compared to others in the area? Are there any similar sites to this one nearby?

What is the species diversity? Are there lots of different species on the site (include plants, birds and animals)?

Are there any rare species? List any known national, regional or locally rare species found on the site.

How is the site managed? Briefly describe how the site is currently managed.

SECTION 4: Evidence Base

- Please list, and append to this form, any further information available on the new candidate LWS.
- This should, at least, include a map of the site with its relative position to the nearest village / farm with a clear boundary drawn so it can be cross-referenced.
- Other types of evidence could include management plans, species surveys (species lists of plants, birds or animals), photographs etc.
- If applicable try to include a source, for example the surveyor or consultancy that carried out a survey.
- Please include the year in which each piece of evidence was collected so the LWS Panel can assess its currency.

Appendix 8: Sample letter requesting permission for monitoring surveys and full resurveys

(please choose/delete options as appropriate)

Dear sir/madam/landowners name

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) monitoring

I work for organisation name and I am seeking permission to carry out a wildlife survey of SINC name/an area of land proposed as a SINC as shown on the attached map which I believe you may own or manage.

The surveys are undertaken on behalf of the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership which includes district/borough, North Yorkshire County Council, Natural England, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, and has the support of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and the National Farmers Union (NFU).

The purpose of the survey is to update information on Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)/to assess the wildlife value of land believed to be of wildlife value that has been proposed as a SINC. SINCs are areas of land identified and selected locally for their important wildlife value. Their selection takes into account the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats within North Yorkshire and City of York. They therefore comprise many of our best remaining flower rich meadows, ancient woodlands, ponds, swamps, fens and mires and provide a home to many of our native plant and animal species including many rare, declining or protected species. Over 700 SINCs have been identified across North Yorkshire and City of York and, together with statutory designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, they help to create a network of semi-natural habitats within which animal and plant populations can survive and disperse, and therefore play an essential role in maintaining the full range of wildlife across the County.

SINCs are non-statutory and so are not legally protected but are used to recognise wildlife rich areas within the planning system. SINC selection therefore does not restrict the way you choose to use or manage your land, nor does it bestow any additional public right of access; it simply provides recognition of the wildlife value of the land.

National guidance recommends that SINCs are monitored every 5-10 years, and it is for this purpose that we are contacting you now to request permission to visit and resurvey this site. Surveys usually take place May to September, the timing being dependent on the habitat being surveyed, for example, woodlands in spring and grasslands in summer. The survey will concentrate on recording plants and making a general habitat assessment, although other wildlife will also be noted. In most cases the fieldwork is completed on a single visit. When conducting wildlife surveys, we always try to follow any instructions or advice given, such as letting people know when we arrive and depart, minimising disturbance to livestock or game, and avoiding hazardous situations.

Wildlife information collected during the survey will be recorded on a survey form and will be used by the North Yorkshire and York SINC Panel comprised of local ecological experts to decide if the site satisfies the SINC selection criteria. After this you will be informed of the Panel decision and given the opportunity to make observations. You will be sent a survey report and species lists.

The survey information will be sent to the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC). There are strict guidelines governing the storage, access to, and use of this information. You may request access to the information held at any time, including full species lists from the survey. The data obtained is available for you to use, for example when applying for grants and schemes.

I would be very grateful if you would please complete the brief reply form and return it to me in the stamped, addressed envelope enclosed.

If you have any further queries please contact me on phone number or via email.

Site name/ref: Enter

Please return this form to us using the SAE enclosed

I …….. (please print name) confirm that I am the:

☐ Owner

☐ Tenant

☐ Manager

Of the land outlined in the attached map (or the areas I have indicated):

☐ I give permission for a survey to be carried out. There is no need to contact me again.

☐ Please contact me to discuss the survey.

☐ I do not wish my land to be surveyed. *We would be grateful if you would give a reason where possible.*

……

Signed: …….

Date: ……..

Telephone: …….

Email:……..
(Please provide a telephone number and email address so that we can contact you prior to the site visit.

OR

☐ I am not the owner/manager/tenant of the land shown on the attached map.

I suggest you contact:

Name	Address	Phone number

Appendix 9: Template letter informing owners/managers of the Panel's decision to select/retain a SINC

Dear Landowner's name,

North Yorkshire and York Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)
Site name:

I am writing to thank you for allowing surveyor's name of organisation name to visit this site on behalf of local authority in month year, and also to inform you of the outcome of this survey. Please find enclosed a copy of the survey report that includes a map and site description for the site.

The reason for the visit was to investigate whether the site should be selected/retained as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). These are areas that stand out as being of particular value for wildlife, and which are recognised within the planning system. Guidelines for the selection of SINCs were developed by the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership.

The SINC Panel has assessed the information from the survey against the guidelines and has found that the site satisfies one or more of the selection criteria listed at the end of the citation enclosed. A key to the criteria has also been enclosed for your convenience.

The SINC Panel will be informing the local authority of their decision to select/retain this area as a SINC, with a recommendation that the site is added/retained on the list of SINCs included in the Local Plan.

This is recognition of the value of the land for wildlife, and of the past or existing management. It will not affect how you choose to manage your land, and does not bestow any additional public right of access.

Information on the site is held by the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC). There are strict guidelines governing the storage, access to, and use of this information. You may request access to the information held at any time, including full species lists from the survey.

As owner/tenant/manager of this site (or part of this site), if you have any observations to make about the SINC including: the survey information; the selection of the site; and the management of the SINC, please do contact us.

On behalf of the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership, I would like to thank you again and encourage you to continue to manage this site for the benefit of wildlife.

Please be aware that the status of the site will be kept under review and may change in the light of new information. You may be contacted again within the next 5-10 years to request access to monitor the site.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 10: Template letter informing owners/managers of Panel's decision to reject/deselect a SINC.

Dear Landowner's name,

North Yorkshire and York Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)
Site name:

I am writing to thank you for allowing surveyor's name of organisation name to visit this site on behalf of local authority in month year, and also to inform you of the outcome of this survey.

The reason for the visit was to investigate whether the site could be selected/retained as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). These are areas that stand out as being of particular value for wildlife, and which are recognised within the planning system. Guidelines for the selection of SINCs were developed by the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership.

The SINC Panel has assessed the information from the survey against the guidelines and has found that unfortunately the site does not satisfy the selection criteria at this time. This does not mean that the site has no value for wildlife; it simply means that other similar sites in the area have been deemed to have more substantive nature conservation value.

The SINC Panel will be informing the local authority of their decision to deselect this area as a SINC, with a recommendation that is removed from the list of SINCs included in the Local Plan.

Information on the site is held by the North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC). There are strict guidelines governing the storage, access to, and use of this information. You may request access to the information held at any time, including full species lists from the survey.

As owner/tenant/manager of this site (or part of this site) if you have any observations to make about the decision not to select/to deselect the area as a SINC please do contact us.

On behalf of the North Yorkshire and York SINC Partnership, I would like to thank you again and encourage you to continue to manage this site for the benefit of wildlife.

Yours sincerely,