

Liverpool City Region Ecological Network

Nature Improvement Area focus area

NIA Focus Area 01: Sefton Coast

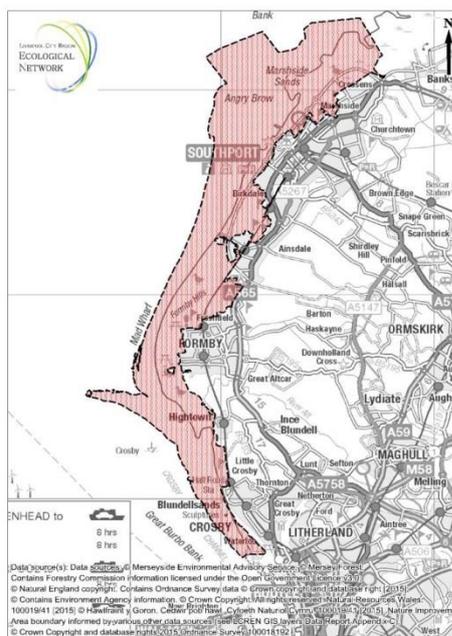
District(s): Sefton

Area 8,148 hectares

Ecological priorities are:

Habitat creation

- Dune heathland, adjacent to the existing at Freshfield Dune heath



Habitat management

- Management of the designated sites, especially where it will ensure the resilience of the sites to natural and climate change.

Existing ecological features:

1. There are 7,983ha of existing habitat.
2. Core Biodiversity Area: 5 International designated sites; 4 SSSIs; 3 NNRs; 2 LNRs; 37 Local Sites, and woodland, grassland, coastal, heathland, wetland Priority Habitats.
3. Linear features: Watercourses; hedgerows; and railway lines.
4. Species: The Focus Area contains a large number of important species. These include sand lizard, natterjack toad, isle of man cabbage, red squirrel, petalwort, dune tiger beetle, breeding, passage and overwintering birds.



Focus area description:

The Focus Area is drawn around the designated sites of the Sefton Coast. This includes the intertidal mud- and sand-flats from the Ribble Estuary to the Mersey Narrows and the sand dune hinterland. The Sefton Coast is the largest extent of sand dunes within the UK and contains 40% of the country's dune slacks.

The Focus Area is already protected through a range of legislation and provides a significant contribution towards the City Region's natural assets and green infrastructure. It is the largest area of continuous terrestrial wildlife habitat and open recreational space in the City Region.

There are limited opportunities for habitat creation given the site's tight boundary with the urban areas and the change in geology when travelling inland. Some habitats are naturally expanding seawards at Southport and Crosby, increasing the extent of dune system and in places, developing saltmarsh.

Much of the Focus Area is Priority Habitat. Large areas within the dunes are under pressure because of limited habitat management and this is resulting in changes in vegetation structure and the resilience of the dune system to climate change. Fundamentally, the dunes are becoming overgrown and this is affecting the ecological value to the detriment of the coastal rare and important species and habitats.

Ecological opportunities

Habitat creation:

- **Dune heathland:** There is potential as a long term aim to create dune heathland. However, this is limited in deliverability at present. Areas adjacent to Freshfield Dune Heath provide the prime opportunity to deliver habitat creation.

Habitat management priorities:

- Nearly all of the Focus Area is covered by site designations that include nature conservation objectives i.e. SAC, SPA, Ramsar. Management of the internationally designated sites is carried out with from Natural England in line with advice provided under Regulation 35 of the Habitats Regulations.
- **Sand Dunes:** There is a significant need to increase the amount and types of management as a many habitats could be in better condition. They could then provide more benefits to the environment and social and economic activities and could increase resilience to climate change e.g. increased storminess.
- Improvements in visitor facilities, including access routes, would benefit habitats and species by managing trampling and disturbance. The economic aspirations in the City Region and the ageing population have the potential to increase the pressure on the Sefton Coast visitor facilities. Increasing the management of the Visitor Economy in the Sefton Coast could provide opportunities to ensure the environment of the coast benefits and continues to support the visitor economy.

Ecosystem Services Benefits

The Sefton Coast 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. The biggest benefit from the identified ecological opportunities would be through managing, maintaining and enhancing the existing designated sites. This could ensure that the area continues to provide ecological benefits and enhances them where needed. The maintenance of the Focus Area could

therefore continue to provide the benefits of climate change mitigation, tourism, recreation and leisure, quality of place and health and wellbeing to the local and wider population.

Management activities would benefit ecological features but could also expand the benefits this area provides to economic growth and resilience. The provision of visitor facilities in line with the Sefton Tourism Strategy could improve recreation facilities and therefore increase 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.

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 & Sefton Coastal Strategy – the prevention of flooding and coastal erosion measures vary along the Sefton coastline. The ecological opportunities would be in line with the identified measures and could help to deliver coastal protection through improvements to coastal habitats, such as sand dunes, that reduce coastal erosion and flooding.

River Basin Management Plans – The designated sites would be impacted by water quality from the surrounding rivers and some management practices. The ecological opportunities of managing the sites could support them to be more resilient and to remove some of the limiting factors.

National Character Areas –the ecological opportunities are in line with the five 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' identified in the Sefton Coast NCA 57 profile. Delivery of the Focus Area ecological opportunities would 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. The scheme could also contribute towards the delivery of our water quality objectives.

Nature Connected – implementation the Focus Area's ecological opportunities will work towards the LNP's Key Action D and would also support the delivery of its other Key Actions.

LCR LEP – the identified ecological opportunities could help to support the LEP's Priority for Visitor Economy such as at Formby Point and Ainsdale, and for sustainable transport. The Focus Area could also help support the LEP's Priority for 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 sustainability. The ecological opportunities could also support the investment opportunities of the Sustainability priority (landscape park, grey to green).