

# Local Wildlife Sites System Status Review

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**Local Wildlife Sites Project**



<b>Author</b>	Jenny Dawson MChem (Hons) MSc – Senior Ecologist	Date	22/03/2024
<b>Review</b>	Harriet Baber BSc (Hons) - Senior Ecologist	Date	22/03/2024
<b>Approver</b>	Lorraine Parish BSc MSc MCIEEM – Principal Ecologist	Date	25/03/2024
<b>Update</b>	Ashleigh Poole – Local Wildlife Sites Project Officer at RSWT (Note updated to reduce evidence gaps with new information)	Date	07/08/2024
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<b>Validity of Report (CIEEM, 2019)</b>	<p>In most cases, this report will be valid for 12 months.</p> <p>Where habitat management has not been altered and new features have not formed, it is possible the report remains valid for between 12 and 18 months, however it is advised an updated site visit is undertaken to confirm this. Where more than 18 months have elapsed an ecologist should review the information to confirm whether the information in this report can be relied upon.</p> <p>Reports more than three years old are unlikely to remain valid.</p>		

## Partners and Funders

The Local Wildlife Sites Projects is delivered by The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) in partnership with Natural England and funded by Defra's Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) programme. NCEA is delivering a nationwide survey of England's land, coast, and sea: mapping the location, extent and condition of our ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Through comprehensive monitoring and the development of innovative tools and guidance, the programme is providing insights on how and why our environment is changing and the impact of this – so that we can better protect and manage our natural capital for people and the planet.

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## Acronyms

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<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>Definition</b>
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
GIS	Geographic Information System
LERC	Local Environment Records Centre
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
OS	Ordnance Survey
OSMM	Ordnance Survey Master Map
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
TWT	The Wildlife Trusts

# Introduction

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Wildlife Trusts and Natural England have begun a consultation process with Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Partnerships in England and Wales to understand the LWS data they hold and their thoughts around sharing that data. The information collected will assist in identifying the role of LWSs in achieving 30 by 30 and nature recovery and inform what is needed to promote long term sustainability in relation to collecting, managing and sharing LWS data. SWT Ecology Services managed the consultation from 25/10/2023 to 25/03/2024, the process was then finalised by The Wildlife Trusts and the report combines the results from the two processes.
- 1.2 All Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Partnerships in England were contacted with a request to complete a questionnaire which included collecting information relating to the following:
  - The types of LWS data held by Partnerships.
  - Preferences of Partnerships on how they share their LWS data.
- 1.3 The questionnaire was circulated and open from 02/02/24 until 01/08/24.
- 1.4 This report provides a summary of the questionnaire responses including information relating to the following:
  - The status of the LWS Partnerships.
  - Gaps identified.
  - Licensing.
  - Data sharing.
- 1.5 The report also includes choropleth maps showing the quantity and density of LWSs in each Partnership area (where data was available) and identifying broad data gaps.
- 1.6 The questionnaire was sent to contacts based on 2017 LWS Partnership information provided by The Wildlife Trusts and additional research undertaken by SWT Ecology Services to identify current LWS Partnerships contacts. The list provided by The Wildlife Trusts included 55 LWS Partnerships. Based on the questionnaire responses, some of these had since been combined into wider operational areas. For example, this applied to:
  - Sussex LWS Partnership: covers Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex.
  - West of England LWS Partnership: covers Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.7 Of the 50 questionnaires sent out by 15/03/2024, 42 responses were received, equivalent to an 84% response rate. Since the original analysis was completed, another two questionnaires were sent out to additional partnerships and a further seven responses were received, equivalent to a 94% rate.
- 1.8 In relation to the following, the questionnaire respondents advised that there were no current Partnerships operating:
  - **Essex** (Advised by Essex Wildlife Trust, who also noted that Essex Field Club hold up to date data. The questionnaire had also been sent to Essex Field Club, response outstanding).
  - **Wiltshire & Swindon** (Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre advised that there was no current LWS Partnership and that WSBRC owned the data).
  - **Sheffield** (Sheffield City Council advised that LWS Partnership is currently inactive).
  - **Gloucestershire** (Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust advised the partnership isn't currently operating).
- 1.9 It is noted that a few areas, in response to the question Which LWS Partnership do you represent, respondents entered the name of an alternative associated organisation or group, as follows:
  - Cornwall Wildlife Trust.
  - Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (BRC).
  - Kent Wildlife Trust/Nature Partnership Management Working Group.
  - Somerset Wildlife Trust / Environmental Records Centre<sup>2</sup>.
  - Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.
- 1.10 The LWS data received from the above sources, were grouped, where appropriate.
- 1.11 Applying this approach, a total of 44,240 LWSs were reported across England, based on the questionnaire responses received to date (see Figure 2). (Further information relating to data gaps is provided in Section 3 below).



# The Status of the LWS Partnership

## 2. The Status of the LWS Partnership

- 2.1 A summary of the 49 questionnaire responses is illustrated in the figures presented in this report. Associated data derived from the maps created is presented in the table below. From the responses provided, 47 LWS respondents used a recognised administrative area for their operational area. Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside LWS Partnership advised that they did not use a recognised administrative area, and that they could provide an Open Data GIS boundary of the operational area. This was received and was confirmed to align with the administrative areas for Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside authority areas, such that there are no gaps in coverage.
- 2.2 When asked to state the operational area covered (i.e. which Unitary Authority, County, Borough/Districts etc.), where respondents listed county councils, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts, or equivalent, these were combined to map the full operational area, and all district councils within each county council were included, unless the respondent explicitly stated that a district council was not included in their operational area.
- 2.3 Table 1 below presents a list of the questionnaire responses, showing the Local Authority boundaries covered by each respondent's operational area and the LWS density within each operational area (in order of density).
- 2.4 The total cumulative coverage of LWS from all the respondents combined was 750,475 hectares (ha). To help contextualise this, in England, National Nature Reserves (NNRs) cover over 110,000 ha<sup>3</sup>, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) cover 1,009,620 ha<sup>4</sup> and National Parks cover 1,260,400 ha<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.5 Thirty of the original 42 respondents reported that they use OS Master Map (OSMM) either entirely or at least in part. OS Vector Map was also reported as being used by respondents. OS mapping not defined any further (i.e. indeterminate base mapping produced by OS) was used by 11 respondents. A small number of respondents reported also supplementing their

boundary mapping with aerial imagery, as well as publicly available data such as the Ancient Woodland Inventory. No information from the further six respondents.



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**Table 1: Operational Areas and LWS Densities**

Respondent	Operational Areas Covered <sup>6</sup>	Density of LWSs <sup>7</sup>	Operational Area (ha) <sup>8</sup>
North Merseyside LSP <sup>a</sup>	Liverpool City Council, Sefton Borough Council, Knowsley Borough Council, St Helens Borough Council	24.0%	55,911
West of England	North Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Bath & North East Somerset Council	21.4%	151,461
London Wildlife Sites Board	Greater London Authority: all 32 London Boroughs	19.7%	159,494
Herefordshire	Herefordshire	13.7%	217,968
Rotherham LWSP	Rotherham Borough Council	11.6%	28,668
Sheffield	Sheffield City Council	11.3%	36,826
Biological Heritage Sites Partnership (Lancashire)	Lancashire County Council	11.1%	308,293
Greater Manchester	Greater Manchester Combined Authority: Combined Authority: Bolton Borough Council, Bury Borough Council, Manchester City Council, Oldham Borough Council, Rochdale Borough Council, Salford City Council, Stockport Borough Council, Trafford Borough Council, Tameside Borough Council, Wigan Borough Council	10.3%	127,667
Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight Council	10.2%	39,302
Barnsley	Barnsley Borough Council	9.7%	32,925
Thurrock	Thurrock Council	9.4%	18,444
Hampshire	Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council	9.3%	385,575
Surrey LSP	Surrey County Council	9.2%	167,054
Cornwall (Wildlife Trust) <sup>10</sup>	Cornwall Council	9.1%	361,041
Doncaster Local Sites Partnership	Doncaster Borough Council	9.0%	56,879
Birmingham and the Black Country	Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton	8.8%	62,521

Respondent	Operational Areas Covered <sup>6</sup>	Density of LWSs <sup>7</sup>	Operational Area (ha) <sup>8</sup>
Nottinghamshire Ecological and Geological Data Partnership	Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council <sup>11</sup>	8.4%	216,247
Hertfordshire LWSP	Hertfordshire County Council	8.0%	164,340
Berkshire	West Berkshire Council, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Windsor & Maidenhead Borough Council, Slough Borough Council	7.7%	126,448
Leicestershire and Rutland	Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council	7.4%	255,204
Bedfordshire and Luton	Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council	7.4%	123,580
Kent Wildlife Trust/ Nature Partnership Management Working Group	Kent County Council, Medway Council	7.1%	390,482
Somerset Wildlife Trust / Environmental Records Centre <sup>12</sup>	Somerset Council	7.1%	351,659
Wiltshire & Swindon (no LWS Partnership) <sup>13</sup>	Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council	6.5%	348,745
Cheshire	Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West & Chester Council, Warrington Borough Council, Halton Borough Council, Wirral Borough Council	6.3%	253,506
Sussex Local Wildlife Sites Initiative	East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council	5.5%	383,442
Staffordshire	Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council	5.5%	271,829
Worcestershire (Wildlife Trust)	Worcestershire County Council	5.3%	174,151
Gloucestershire	Gloucestershire	5.1%	270,666
Northamptonshire	North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council	5.1%	236,799

Respondent	Operational Areas Covered <sup>6</sup>	Density of LWSs <sup>7</sup>	Operational Area (ha) <sup>8</sup>
Cumbria	Westmorland and Furness Council, Cumberland Council	4.7%	718,814
Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside	Northumberland County Council, Newcastle Upon Tyne City Council, North Tyneside Borough Council	4.7%	528,104
Essex (Wildlife Trust) <sup>4</sup>	Essex County Council	4.6%	350,087
Dorset	Dorset Council; Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council	4.6%	269,652
Devon (BRC)	Devon County Council, Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council	4.5%	683,821
West Yorkshire Local Sites Partnership	West Yorkshire Combined Authority: Leeds City Council, Calderdale Borough Council, Kirklees Borough Council, Bradford City Council, Wakefield City Council	4.3%	203,033
Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside LWS Partnership	Durham County Council, Gateshead Borough Council, Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Borough Council	4.0%	258,469
Derbyshire	Amber Valley Borough, Bolsover District, Chesterfield Borough, Derbyshire Dales District, Derby City (unitary), Erewash Borough, High Peak Borough, North East District, South	3.9%	263,083
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes	Buckinghamshire Council, Milton Keynes Council	3.8%	187,433
Shropshire (including Telford & Wrekin) LWSP	Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Borough Council	3.7%	348,932
Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull	Warwickshire County Council, Coventry City Council, Solihull Borough Council	3.5%	225,568
Tees Valley	Tees Valley Combined Authority: Darlington Borough Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Middlesbrough Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	3.1%	81,429
Norfolk	Norfolk County Council	2.9%	550,509



Respondent	Operational Areas Covered <sup>6</sup>	Density of LWSs <sup>7</sup>	Operational Area (ha) <sup>8</sup>
Suffolk	Suffolk County Council	2.9%	385,049
Greater Lincolnshire	Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council and North East Lincolnshire Council	2.7%	718,571
Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project	Oxfordshire County Council	2.6%	260,733
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	Cambridgeshire County Council, Peterborough City Council	2.4%	339,783
East Riding of Yorkshire	East Riding of Yorkshire Council	1.3%	249,017
North Yorkshire	North Yorkshire Council	1.2%	807,602



# Local Wildlife Sites System Status Review

**Plate 1: LWS Area Coverage (ha) and Density (%)**

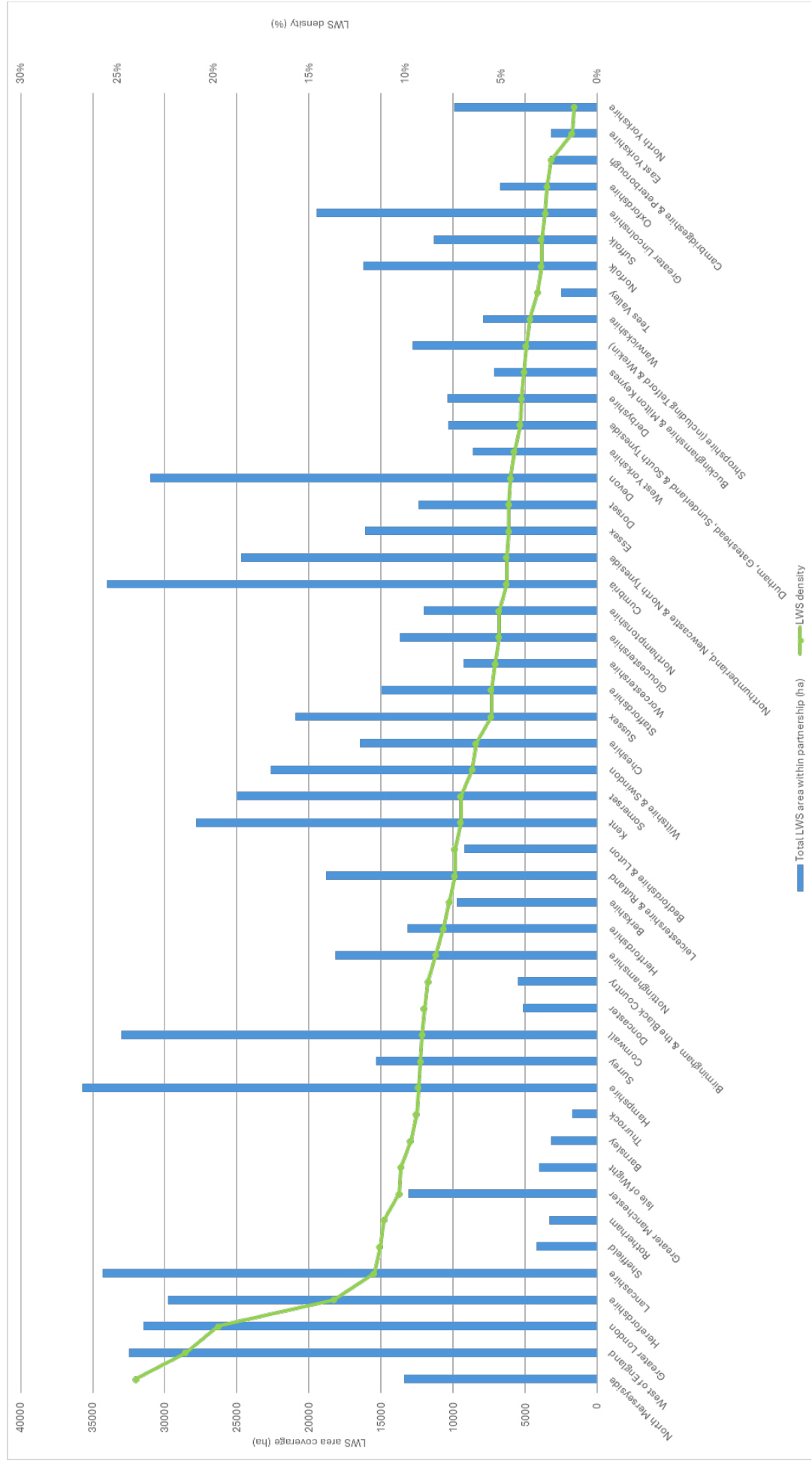
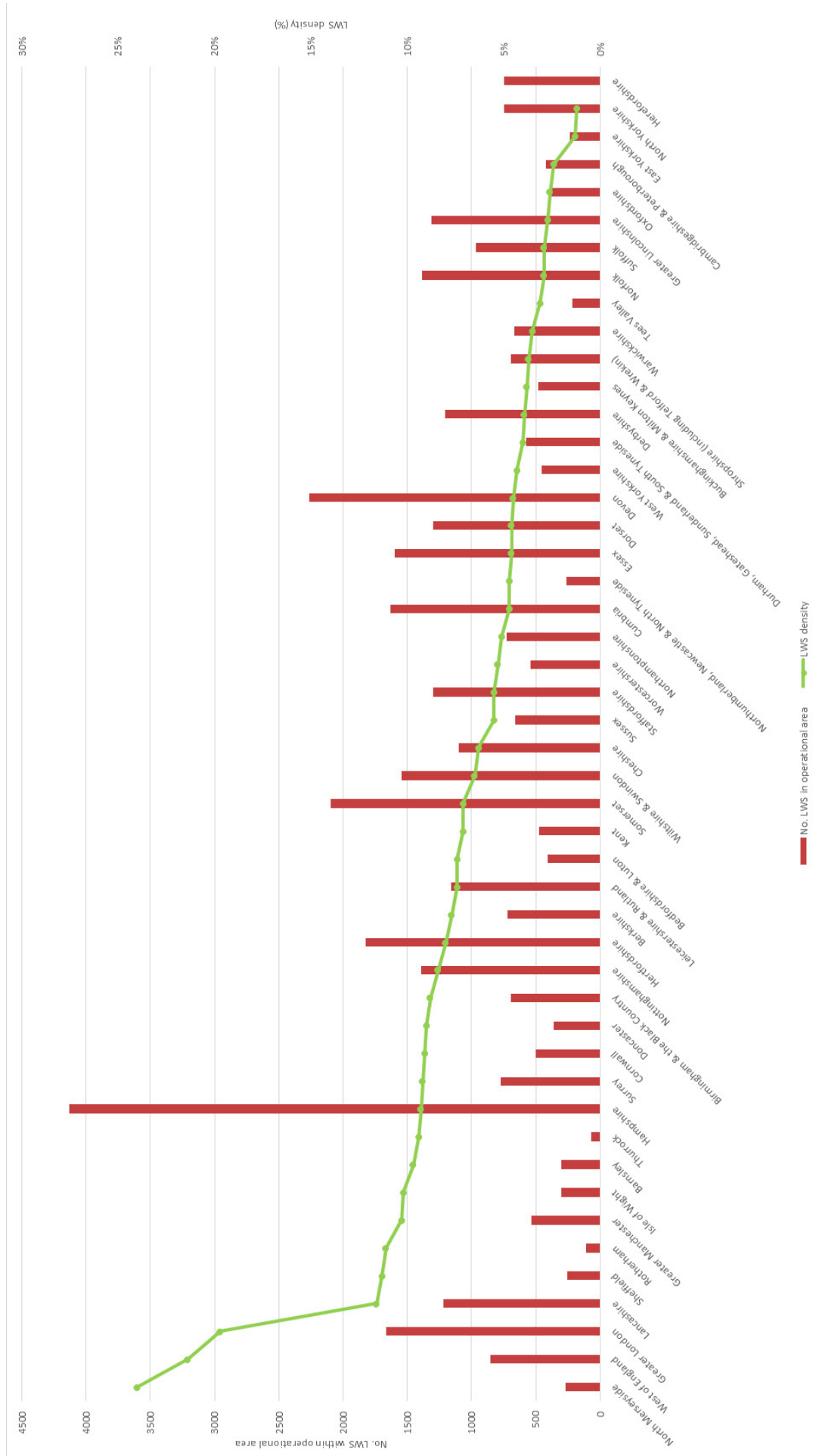


Plate 2: Number of LWS and Density



# Data Gaps

## 3. Data gaps

- 3.1 As outlined above, 49 responses were received and the questionnaire was sent to 52 LWS Partnership contacts.
- 3.2 A list of the unitary authority, metropolitan borough and county council areas within England was reviewed<sup>15</sup> and compared to the local authority areas listed in the responses received to the questionnaire. The table below outlines the unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs and county council areas not referred to in the questionnaire responses received

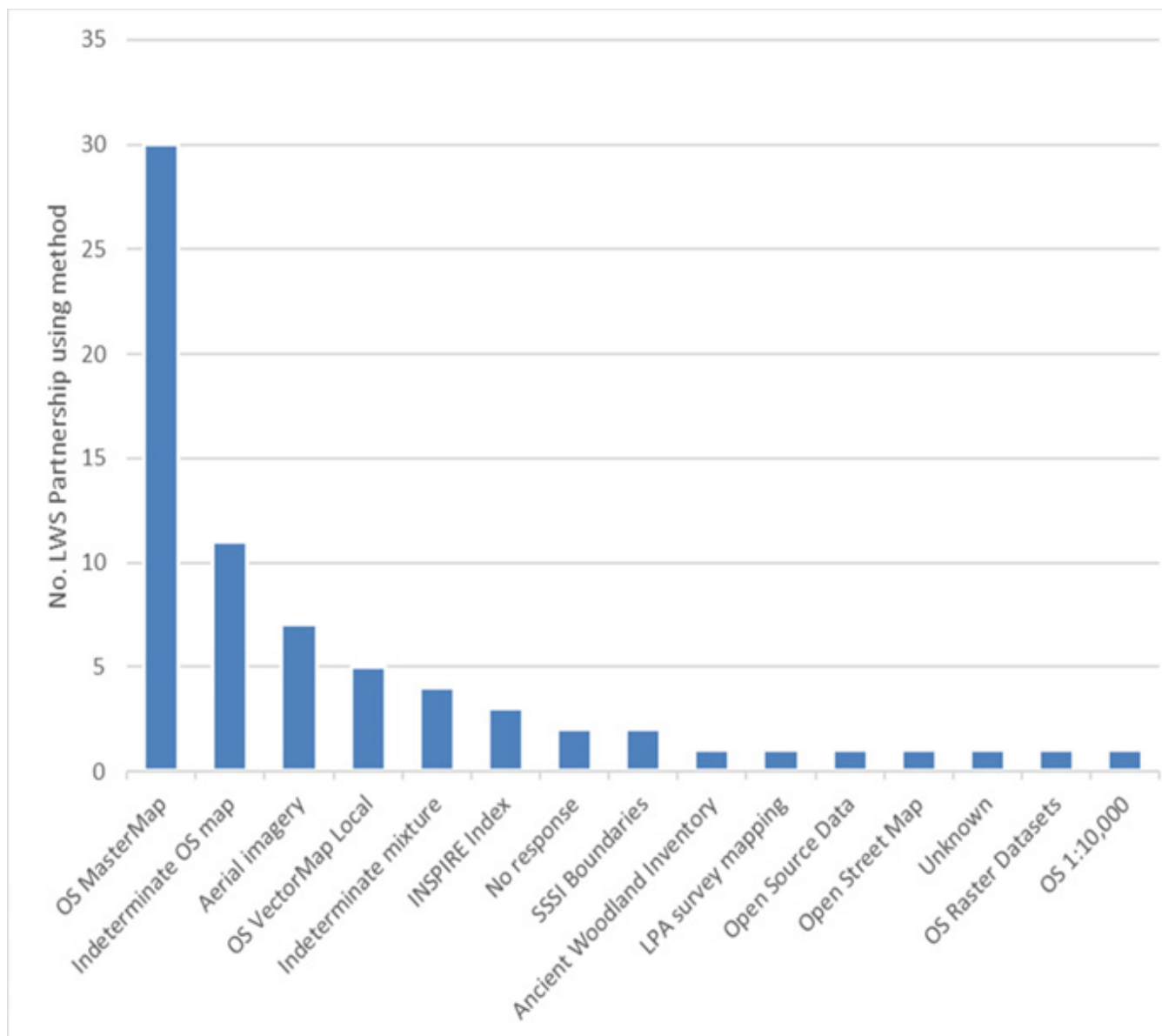
**Table 1: Operational Areas and LWS Densities**

Recognised Authority Area	Notes
City Council of York	York was contacted and no response was received. Response from North Yorkshire indicated that they did not cover East Riding and that they had passed the questionnaire on to the relevant partnership; no response was received.
Hull City Council	The response from North Yorkshire indicated that they did not cover Hull and that they had passed on the questionnaire on to the relevant partnership; no response was received.
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council	The questionnaire response received from Essex Wildlife Trust indicated that Southend-on-Sea was not included in data managed by Essex Wildlife Trust.

- 3.3 The questionnaire responses received from Essex Wildlife Trust, and the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre, advised that these areas do not currently have formal LWS Partnerships. (Essex Wildlife Trust also advised that Essex Field Club held up to date data and the information received from Essex Wildlife Trust does not cover Thurrock).
- 3.4 All but four of the respondents advised that the LWS boundaries were fully digitised. The remaining four<sup>16</sup> reported that the LWS were partly digitised.
- 3.5 28 of the responses highlighted the presence of additional potential LWSs that had been identified, surveyed and met the LWS criteria, that are yet to go through the full formal process of selection (a total of 6,802 potential LWSs). For the majority of the areas, the number of the additional potential LWSs was much lower than the number of officially selected LWSs, except for Northamptonshire, plus Leicestershire and Rutland; both reported a significant number of potential LWSs in their operational areas.
- 3.6 While the majority of respondents advised that OSMM was used to digitise the LWS boundaries, at least in part, there was variance across the responses. Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project advised that the mapping dataset used to digitise the LWS boundaries varied depending on the age of the mapping, and that they are in the process of aligning the older mapping with more current datasets. Leicestershire and Rutland responded that older sites may have been digitised to the old 'landline' layers compared to more recent datasets being used (which were a mixture of aerial photographs, OS Vector Map and OS Master Map).



**Plate 3: Base Maps used by Respondents**



3.7 25 of the original 42 respondents advised that there were no areas where LWSs have not been identified in their operational areas. Where some degree of data coverage gap was reported, example responses included:

- Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull advised that, whilst 'theoretically' the entire operational area had been surveyed, a lot had been via aerial imagery so it was possible that some sites of LWS value may have been missed, and changes to site

management that could lead to sites becoming LWS standard may also have been missed.

- Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project noted that there had not been a comprehensive review of 'wider areas' recently and that Oxford City LWSs are not as regularly surveyed/reviewed.
- Bedfordshire and Luton identified the lack of surveying time as a limitation in relation to documenting potential LWSs.

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# Licencing and Data Sharing

## 4. Licencing and Data Sharing

4.1 28 of the respondents advised that they own the licence to the data (see Question 12 of the questionnaire) that their LWS dataset is derived from. Three responses<sup>17</sup> advised that the licence holder was not known when the questionnaire was completed. The remaining respondents advised that a third party held the licence, and this included licences held by local records centres and local authorities.

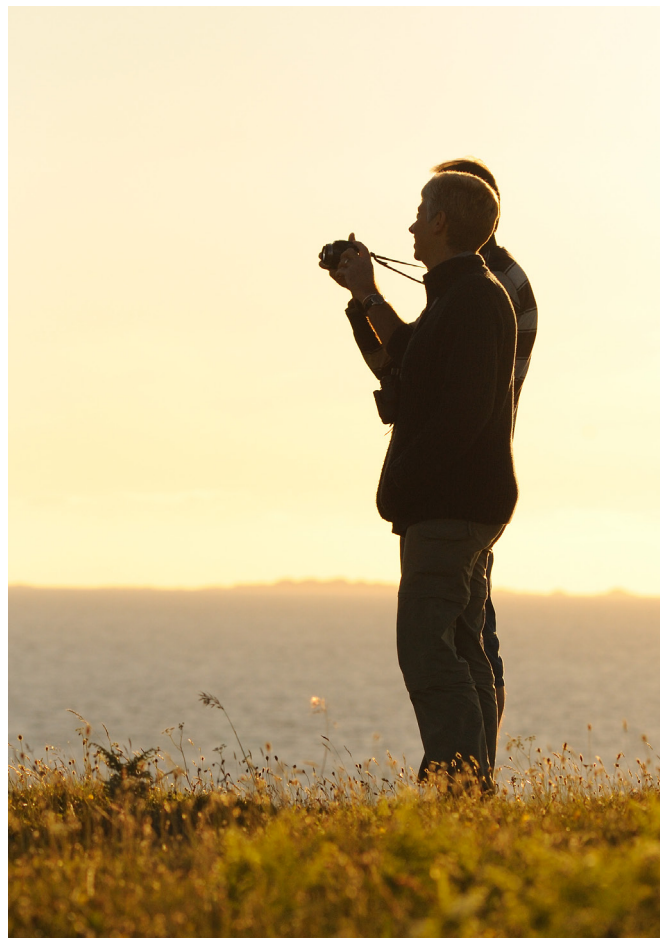
4.2 In relation to a question about whether the LWS Partnership would be interested in sharing data with The Wildlife Trusts and Natural England for the purposes of creating a national map of LWSs (Question 15), the responses were as follows:

- 18 respondents advised they would be interested in a Shared Data Licence agreement.
- Two respondents advised they would be interested in an Open Data agreement.
- Seven respondents were not interested in data sharing.
  - After further discussions with five of the respondents, all would be interested in a Shared Data Licence agreement but one respondent was concerned they couldn't share data due to licensing of OS data.
- The remaining 22 respondents provided other free text responses. Many of these responses were shared across several respondents, and included:
  - Would want a form of Service Level Agreement in place.
  - Any licensing agreements would need to be agreed with other parties.
  - Concerns around existing licensing issues (e.g. OSMM licence requirements), particularly to ensure that Local Environment Record Centre (LERC) income is not affected.
  - Would need more information before making a decision on this question.
  - Concerns about losing a main source of income

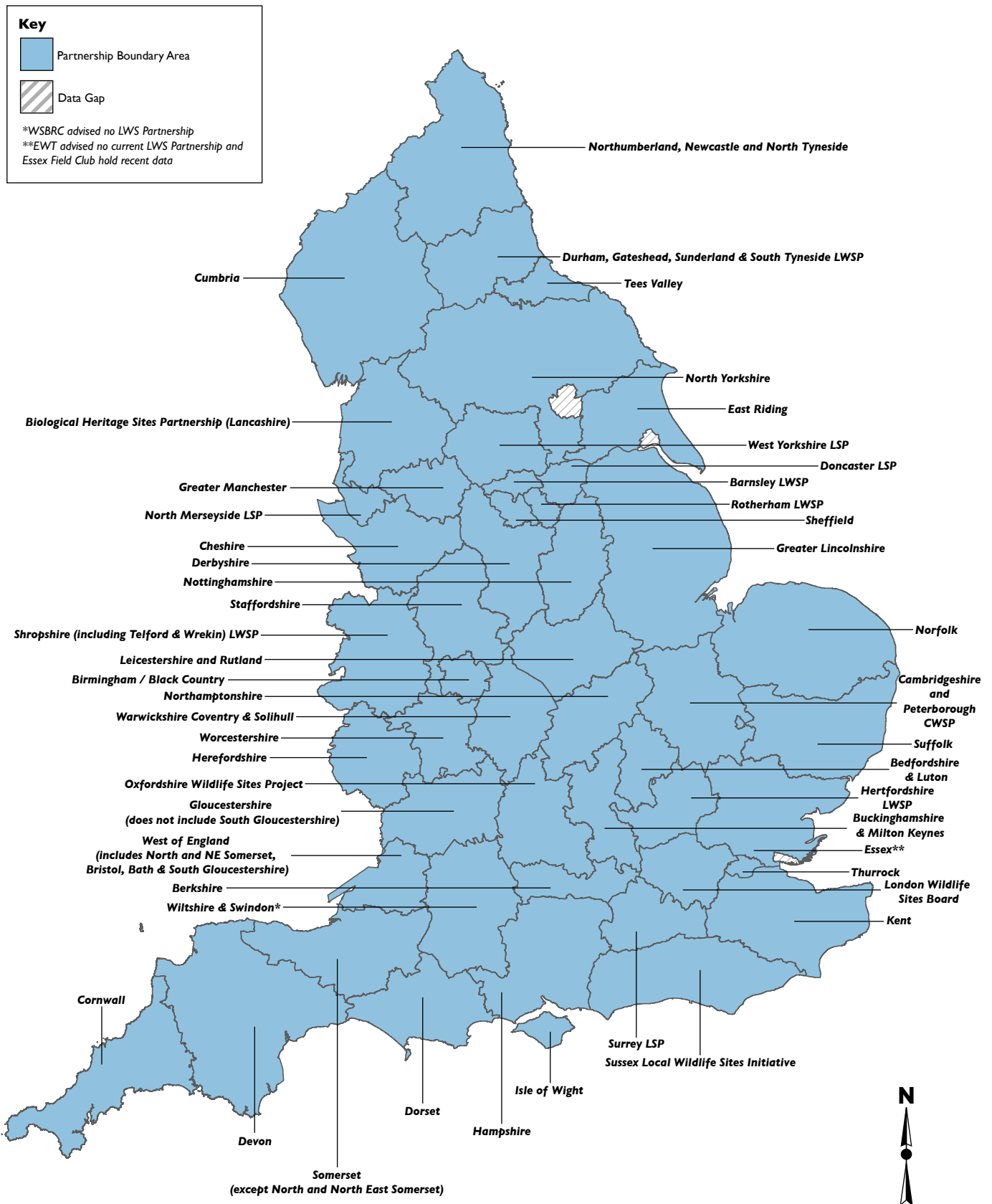
if data becomes freely available, particularly as this income was noted as often used to fund the LWS system.

- Would need internal discussions (within the partnership) before reaching a decision.
  - Two respondents noted that they would not want to have some or all details freely available to commercial end users.<sup>18</sup>
  - Would want it only available for internal use by Natural England.
  - Would require funding from Natural England.
- 4.3 Of the respondents interested in sharing LWS spatial data, the following were noted as requirements in relation to a sharing agreement:
- Would like to know exactly how the data will be used.
  - Would require a guarantee that the dataset will not be used for commercial purposes.
  - Would like to share only certain aspects of the dataset.
  - Would require an agreed recurring licensing fee.
  - Would require simplification or obfuscation of their LWS boundaries to protect their dataset.
  - Other free text responses (some returned by several respondents) included:
    - Further discussion within the Partnership and/or with steering groups/stakeholders needed before identifying requirements.
    - Data must not be given out for free.
    - Legal advice would be needed before determining additional requirements. Data to carry a clear message that the designation does not imply or grant any right of public access.
    - Safeguarding of commercial revenue.
    - Licensing fees to depend on the purpose of the data use.

- 4.4 The key matter relating to data sharing, that was highlighted by a high number of the respondents was how the national LWS map may impact on an important source of income. Respondents noted (in question 17) that commercial end users pay for access to LWS data, and that the income was used to fund the LWS system. In some instances, this was identified as a significant amount of income. Several respondents noted that Natural England would need to provide financial contribution to the LWS work in order to account for loss of income, to ensure the management of the LWS system could continue.
- 4.5 Respondents also noted that some level of data sharing may be more feasible than others, for example sharing of boundaries but not citation data.
- 4.6 Further comments provided by respondents are summarised below:
- LWS datasets are dynamic and updated at different points in time for different operational areas. It would be important for the date of the most recent update to the dataset to be clear.
  - Many LWSs had not been reviewed for some time due to lack of funding required to instigate a regular survey programme. Existing survey work across the LWSs was inconsistent, with decisions on sites to be surveyed and site selection influenced by things such as access constraints and permissions.
  - Working with Natural England on the LWS work could provide opportunities for resources and funding that do not currently exist.
  - A respondent noted that LWSs had been mapped on a county level as part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy process – and based on this queried the value for a national dataset when the county datasets already existed across England.
- 4.7 A concern flagged by several respondents was that LWSs across England have a variety of landowners, and so public availability of the data may require significant efforts to liaise with the landowners.
- 4.8 A respondent noted that, as LWSs do not have the same degree of protection as statutory designated sites such as SSSIs, they are more vulnerable and hence the respondent considered data sharing relating to LWSs to be a sensitive issue.
- 4.9 A respondent noted that Terms of Reference and Terms of Procedures as well as an updated Selection Criteria had been established recently, and that would lead to a more involved selection process.
- 4.10 28 of the respondents were interested in attending stakeholder meetings relating to the LWS consultation, 17 were potentially interested, three were not interested, and one did not respond to this question.



**Figure 1: LWS Partnership Boundaries**



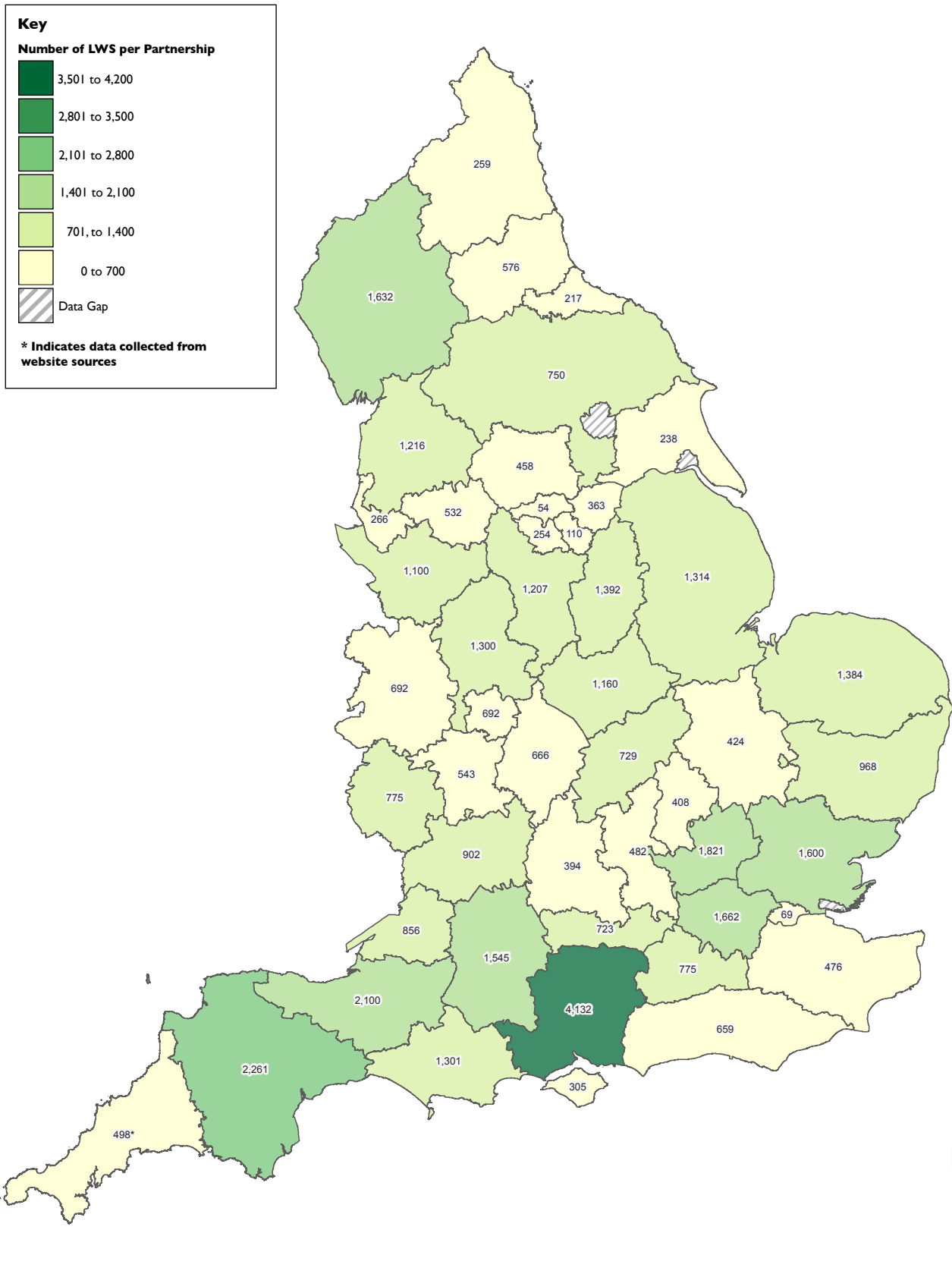
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**Figure 1: Partnership Boundaries LWS Partnership Consultation**





**Figure 2: Number of LWSs**

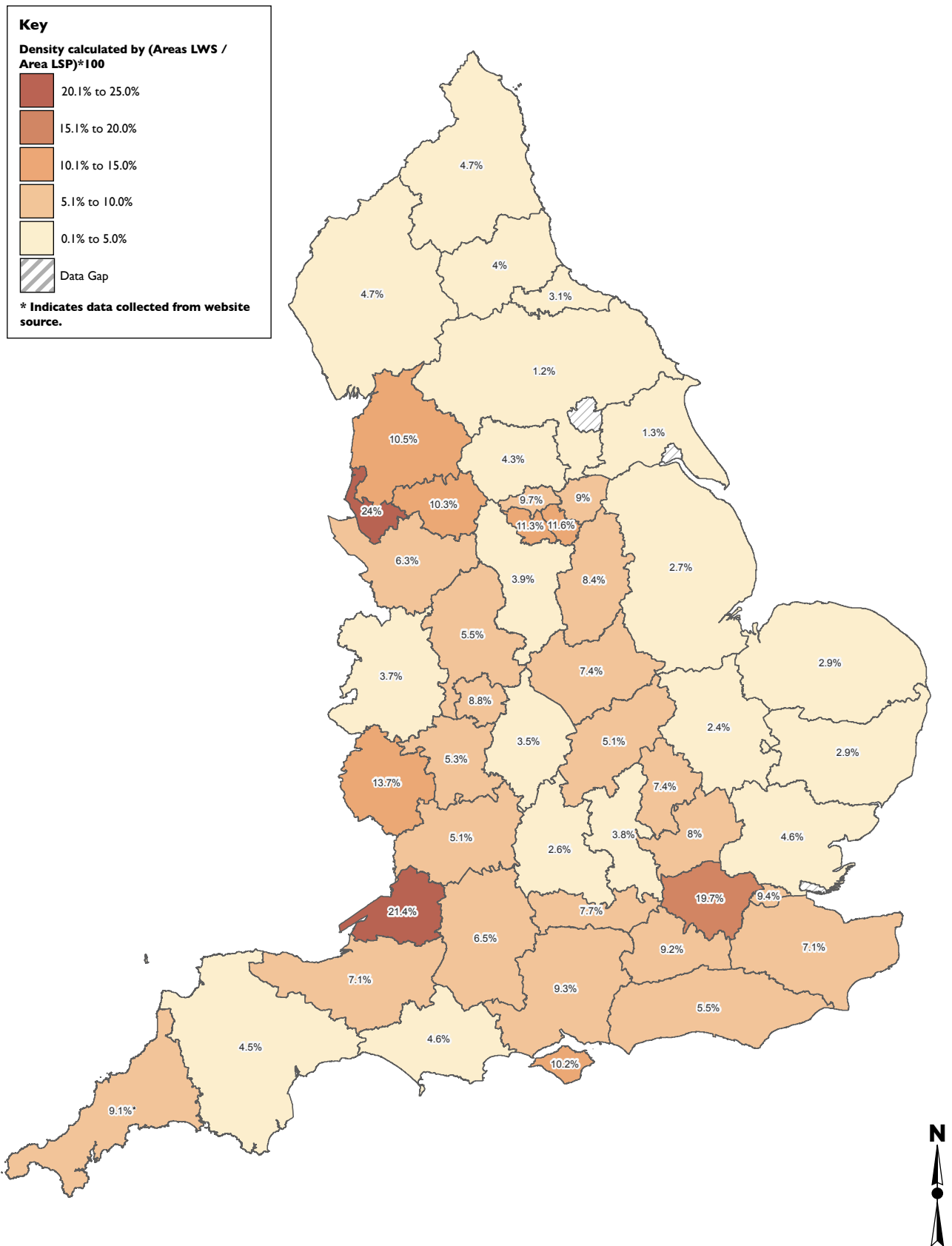


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**Figure 2: Number of LWSs**



**Figure 3: Density of LWSs**

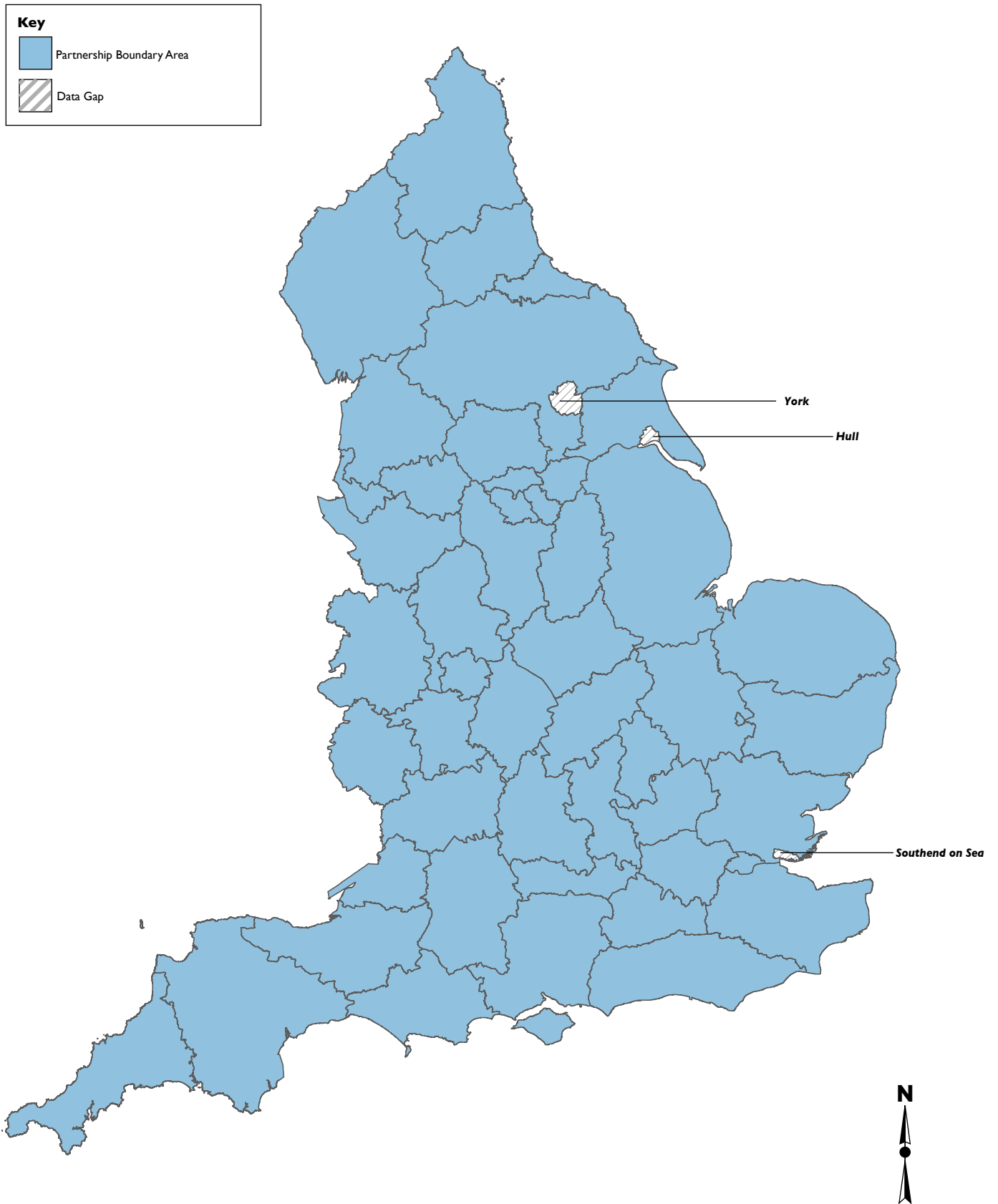


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**Figure 3: Density of LWSs**



Figure 4: Data Gaps



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Figure 4: Data Gaps



# References

1. One additional response was received from the National Forum for Biological Recording, and the information received is included in the questionnaire response spreadsheet that accompanies this report but not included in the analyses.
2. West England advised they covered North East and North Somerset.
3. Sourced from <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england>
4. Sourced from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/england-biodiversity-indicators/1-extent-and-condition-of-protected-areas-2#a-extent-of-protected-areas>
5. Sourced from <https://www.nationalparks.uk/app/uploads/2020/10/Key-Facts-and-Figures-for-the-15-UK-National-Parks.pdf>
6. Sourced from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-structure-and-elections>
7. Calculated as a percentage of the total area of LWSs within the operational area over the total area of the operational area.
8. Based on data derived from the maps presented.
9. North Merseyside Local Sites Partnership stated in their response that their operational area covered standardised Local Authority boundaries. The operational areas listed in this table is taken from the standard Local Authority boundaries. It is noted that the Partnership also stated that their coverage area includes some sites with extensive intertidal and marine areas.
10. In the questionnaire response, Cornwall responded with '1' for the number of LWSs within their operational area. Data published online by Cornwall Wildlife Trust states that this figure is 498, which is more reflective of the 33,000ha coverage also referred to in the questionnaire response. Cornwall were approached to confirm the number of current LWSs. Currently, 498 LWSs have been included in the data reported.
11. NB: The questionnaire response from Nottinghamshire Ecological and Geological Data Partnership stated 'Nottinghamshire' in relation to coverage zone. The Nottinghamshire LWS Handbook states that Nottingham City Council is included in the Partnership's operational area (Nottinghamshire Local Sites Panel, 2018). Hence Nottingham City Council has been included on this basis.
12. West of England advised they cover North East Somerset and North Somerset.
13. Advised by WSBRC.
14. No current LWS Partnership for Essex.
15. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-structure-and-elections>
16. West Yorkshire; Herefordshire; Tees Valley; and Durham, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside.
17. Cheshire, Shropshire, and Essex Wildlife Trusts.
18. NB: This opinion was reflected by additional respondents in response to another question, as detailed further in this report.





The Wildlife Trusts is on a mission to restore a **third of the UK's land and seas** for nature by 2030. We believe **everyone, everywhere, should have access to nature** and the joy and health benefits it brings.

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and **standing up for wildlife and wild places**. Each Wildlife Trust is an independent charity formed by people getting together to make a positive difference for wildlife, climate and future generations. Together we care for 2,300 diverse and beautiful nature reserves and work with others to manage their land for nature, too.

### **The Wildlife Trusts**

 [info@wildlifetrusts.org](mailto:info@wildlifetrusts.org)  
 [wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org)

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