

Policy of the Countryside Survey (CS) partners on access to survey square locations

The aim of this policy is to maximise the utility of Countryside Survey (CS) spatial data in the public interest whilst minimising the risk of compromising future surveys and anonymity of the site locations which would not be in the public interest. The policy ONLY relates to survey square location data and spatial data within survey squares.

All other CS data is publicly accessible.

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- 2018-2023: Natural Environment Research Council award number NE/R016429/1 as part of the UK-SCaPE programme delivering National Capability.
- 2024+: Natural Environment Research Council, *through the UKCEH National Capability for UK Challenges Programme NE/Y006208/1*

The 2007 CS partners were:

- Natural Environment Research Council (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Natural England (NE)
- Welsh Government (WG)
- The Scottish Government (SG)
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)
- Forestry Commission (FC)
- Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

Why are the locations of CS squares considered to be confidential?

CS square locations are considered confidential to preserve the representativeness of sampling sites and the goodwill of landowners. These are both essential elements to the future of the survey to ensure the scientific integrity of the sampling strategy, the protection of the environment, and help to ensure future permission from landowners to survey their land. Future surveys would be compromised if either of these elements were to be jeopardised and our capacity to reliably inform environmental policy would be diminished.

We believe our position on confidentiality to be in the public interest. Any requests for this information will be dealt with by UKCEH, on behalf of NERC and the CS partners, under the terms of the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 (The Act) or the associated Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (The Regulations).

Under what circumstances may locations be released and at what level of precision?

Survey Data access allows users to identify whether or not any survey squares fall within certain predetermined areas (Country, County, ITE Land Class or Environmental Zone). In circumstances where the approximate locations of survey squares is valuable to users of the data, four-digit grid references can be released under licence allowing users to identify in which 10 km x10 km grid square each square is located.

In circumstances where precise location data (six-digit grid references) are essential to the needs of an external user, it is our policy to ask if pre-processing analysis required can be carried out by UKCEH to avoid the need to release the locations. However, in VERY EXCEPTIONAL circumstances, we may agree to provide location information externally under licence. To qualify for this exceptional access the requesting organisation must demonstrate in legal terms that the Intellectual Property (data, models, etc) to be used with the CS data is considered to carry an equal or higher level of confidentiality/protection than the CS data and therefore cannot be released to UKCEH for processing alongside the CS data.

Spatial data from within survey squares (e.g. maps of habitats, linear features) could be used relatively easily to identify the location of a square. It is therefore considered to carry equivalence to the location data and will only be released under the same exceptional circumstances and terms as the six-digit grid references location data.