



Local Plan 2020-2040

Biodiversity Topic Paper (Preferred Options Stage)

Contents

1. Policy Context	3
European	3
National	3
Local	6
2. Local Context	9
Biodiversity Assets.....	9
Habitats	12
3. Issues and Opportunities	16
Issues	16
Opportunities	18
4. Implications of Drivers for Change	18
5. Objectives	19
6. Issues and Options Consultation.....	19
7. Policy	20
POLICY 47: Biodiversity	20

1. Policy Context

European

- 1.1 Whilst the UK is no longer part of the European Union (EU), EU legislation as it applied to the UK on the 31 December 2020 is now part of the UK domestic legislation, under the control of the UK's Parliaments and Assemblies. As such EU law still applies to the UK.

The Habitats Directive 1992

- 1.2 This legislation (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm) contributes to ensuring biodiversity in the European Union by conserving natural habitats and wild fauna and flora. It consists of 24 articles of legislation grouped into five main categories: birds directive, zoos directive, wildlife trade legislation, habitats directive, invasive alien species regulation. Within the Directive over 1,000 animal and plant species, as well as 200 habitat types, listed in the directive's annexes are protected in various ways via:
- Annex II species (about 900): core areas of their habitat are designated as sites of Community importance (SCIs) and included in the Natura 2000 network. These sites must be managed in accordance with the ecological needs of the species.
 - Annex IV species (over 400, including many annex II species): a strict protection regime must be applied across their entire natural range within the EU, both within and outside Natura 2000 sites.
 - Annex V species (over 90): Member States must ensure that their exploitation and taking in the wild is compatible with maintaining them in a favourable conservation status.

Natura 2000 Network

- 1.3 The Natura 2000 Network (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm) was created as a result of the Habitats Directive Network and is the world's biggest coordinated network of protected areas. This network offers a haven to Europe's most valuable threatened species and habitats.

National

The Environment Act 2021

- 1.4 This Act (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>) requires the UK Government to set legally binding long-term environmental targets. These targets will help secure long-lasting improvement in the natural environment. The Act focuses on four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water and waste. It includes the target to reverse the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030. Specifically in relation to biodiversity, the Act introduces a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all

developments, with very few exemptions, with this needing to be secured for at least 30 years.

The 25 Year Environmental Plan

1.5 This document (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>) sets out the government's plan to improve the UK's air and water quality, and to protect threatened plants, trees and wildlife species. Relevant to biodiversity are the following key points:

- Safeguarding and enhancing the beauty of our natural scenery and improving its environmental value while being sensitive to considerations of its heritage.
- Making sure that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live and work, particularly in urban areas, and encouraging more people to spend time in them to benefit their health and wellbeing

1.6 The plan sets out various aspirations related to green infrastructure including providing more and higher quality infrastructure in urban areas. There is specific mention of encouraging more tree planting in and around these areas.

Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services

1.7 This is the Government's strategy (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69446/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf) to guide conservation efforts in England over the coming decade. It aims to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people. The key priorities are:

- A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea;
- Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy;
- Reducing environmental pressures; and
- Improving our knowledge of conservation.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended 2010 and 2021)

1.8 This is the principal Act (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>) relating to the protection of wildlife in Great Britain. Species listed for protection are in Schedules 1, 5 and 8.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992

1.9 This Act (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/contents>) brings together all legislation that is specific to badgers with the exception of their inclusion in Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (revised)

- 1.10 Section 40 of the NERC (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16#:~:text=An%20Act%20to%20make%20provision,to%20the%20Inland%20Waterways%20Amenity>) Act places a duty to conserve biodiversity on public authorities in England. It requires local authorities and government departments to have regard to the purposes of conserving biodiversity in a manner that is consistent with the exercise of their normal functions such as policy and decision-making. 'Conserving biodiversity' may include enhancing, restoring or protecting a population or a habitat.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

- 1.11 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>), known informally as the CRoW Act or "Right to Roam" Act, gives the public right of access to land mapped as 'open country' (mountain, moor, heath and down) or registered common land. These areas are known as 'open access land'.

National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

- 1.12 Whilst there are no National Parks within the borough this Act (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97>) also covers the establishment and maintenance of nature reserves, creation and improvement of public paths and securing access to open countryside.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997

- 1.13 These regulations (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1997/1160/contents/made>) make provision for the protection of important hedgerows and to protect important hedges from destruction or damage.

Government circular 06/2005

- 1.14 This circular (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-and-geological-conservation-circular-06-2005>) provides guidance on planning and nature conservation covering:

- internationally designated sites;
- national designated sites;
- sites outside of designated sites;
- conservation of species protected by law; and
- other duties and use of statutory powers by planning authorities.

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

- 1.15 Whilst the NPPF (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>) is guidance and not statute, it is an important

document with it advising that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (para 174);
- Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries (para 175); and
- Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity (para 179).

Levelling Up White Paper 2022

- 1.16 The Levelling Up White Paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>) sets out how the Government will spread opportunity more equally across the UK. The paper has limited actions relating to climate change, although it acknowledges that there is opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets. The Paper states that as part of the mission of 'Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging', that ensuring natural beauty is accessible to all will be central to our planning system, with improved Green Belts around towns and cities. This will be supported by Local Nature Recovery Strategies reflected in plan making. There has however been criticism of the paper that environmental quality and access to greenspace has not been properly evaluated.

Local

Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

- 1.17 This action plan (<http://www.sbap.org.uk/>) seeks to coordinate efforts in delivering the UK BAP targets at the local level.

Stafford Borough Corporate Business Plan (2021-2024)

- 1.18 The three year plan (<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporate-plan>) sets out how the council will deliver and sustain economic growth, respect the

environment, support communities and ensure that the borough is a great place to live, work and visit. Within this plan, Objective 3 is:

“To tackle climate change by implementing our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives.”

1.19 Within the next three years to meet this objective this plan states that the council will:

- Reduce emissions from the councils own activities;
- Work in partnership with Government Elected Bodies, Elected Members, Public and Voluntary Sector Partners, Residents and Businesses across the borough to take action that contributes to carbon neutrality and sustainable development within communities across the natural environment;
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change; and
- Implement council green recovery objectives.

Stafford Borough Climate change and Green Recovery Strategy 2020-2040

1.20 This strategy (<https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/Climate-Change-and-Green-Recovery>) sets out how the council aims to recover from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic to achieve a more sustainable borough by protecting and enhancing the environment. The Strategy has the same four objectives as within the Corporate Business Plan. Attached to this Strategy is a delivery plan which provides more details on the milestones that are to be delivered within a given time period.

Stafford Borough Nature Recovery Network Mapping

1.21 This document (https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cme/DocMan1/Planning%20Policy/New%20Stafford%20Borough%20Local%20Plan%202020-2040/Evidence%20Base%20Documents/Nature_Recovery_Network_Mapping.pdf) provides a strategic assessment of the borough’s biodiversity and habitat networks. It provides an outline of the existing nature network and indicates where habitat creation and enhancement may be targeted to contribute to nature’s recovery. Specific opportunities include:

- Protect and facilitate connections between larger woodlands such as Bishops Wood, Swynnerton Old Park and Brocton Coppice / Cannock Chase Woodlands and smaller woodlands in the wider countryside.
- Opportunity in the upper Sow area for the creation and restoration of wet grassland or species rich grazing pasture / Lowland Meadow.
- Identify suitable sites to the east of Stafford where conditions are suitable for the recreation of heathland or where remnant heathland exist for restoration and expansion.

- The creation and enhancement of habitats along the River Sow and restoration of sections of the watercourse itself to improve the connectivity of the high density sites in the upper Sow with sites further downstream.
- Smaller Mosses and areas of peat such as those north of Bishops Wood, South Eccleshall and Coneygreave which have no formal legal protection must be protected and where applicable seek to restore them through re-wetting.
- Creation of swales, grasslands or permanent set aside habitats surrounding watercourses around soft fruit farms to slow down the flow of water, reduce flooding risk and improve water quality to allow sediment and soil run-off to filter out before reaching watercourses.

North Staffordshire Forest Plan

- 1.22 The North Staffordshire Forest Plan (<https://www.forestryengland.uk/forest-planning/north-staffordshire-forest-plan>; formally Bishops and Swynnerton Forest Plans) includes Big Bishops (352ha), Little Bishops (81ha), Burnt Wood (88ha), Tittensor (72ha), Swynnerton Old Park (329ha) and Walton's Wood (13ha) covers an area of 935ha and lies 8km west of Stoke on Trent and 19km northwest of Stafford.
- 1.23 The woodlands are largely (88%) ancient woodland sites now planted with conifers. Pine is the main conifer species covering 50% of the woodland area. Felling operations carried out over the last 25 years as the conifer crops have matured has created a diverse woodland structure across most of the Forest Plan area and the transitional open space has created niche habitats for ground nesting birds and a wide selection of Lepidoptera have been recorded.
- 1.24 The main objectives for the North Staffordshire Forest Plan are:
- Restore ancient woodland sites;
 - Widen rides and roads to increase woodland edge and open habitats;
 - Manage the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to maintain it in a favorable condition;
 - Conserve trees of special interest;
 - Increase deadwood habitats;
 - Manage wet woodland habitats establishing buffer zones;
 - Maintain a pattern of transitional open habitats for ground nesting birds;
 - Continue to grow commercial crops on a sustainable basis through a combination of clearfell and Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS);
 - Make the economic potential of the forest more resilient in the face of a changing climate;

- Facilitate access in Burnt Wood; and
- Conserve and enhance surviving elements of the historic environment within the forest landscape.

2. Local Context

Biodiversity Assets

- 2.1 Biodiversity refers to the variety of life in terms of ecosystems and wildlife species that support an overall healthy biological system. Geodiversity refers to the variety of earth materials and processes which shape the Earth as a whole.
- 2.2 The borough has diverse ecological assets including:
- 16 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
 - 3 Ramsar sites (Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere and Motte Meadows) which is an international designation of wetlands designated by UNESCO;
 - 4 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);
 - 2 National Nature Reserves; and
 - 173 sites identified locally as Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs).
- 2.3 Details of these are shown in Table 1.
- 2.4 Within Stafford Borough, approximately 296ha of land is designated as Ramsar sites and 1,001ha has SAC status. Of particular note is the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Cannock Chase was designated as an AONB in 1958 because of its beautiful landscape, its wildlife and its history. It contains a large area of lowland heathland, an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. The AONB also has extensive areas of forest and woodland along with areas of designed parkland, sand and gravel quarrying and mixed agriculture. A section of the AONB lies within the Stafford Borough boundary.
- 2.5 A small area of Cannock Chase partly within the borough is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Cannock Chase SAC is one of the best areas in the UK for European dry heathland and is the most extensive in the Midlands region.
- 2.6 Stafford Borough Council also manage nine Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). These LNRs are places that support a rich variety of wildlife and are important to local people enabling them to interact with the natural world. We are fortunate to have a diverse range of LNRs in terms of having marsh, heath, reedbed, woodland and meadow. The LNRs in the borough are:
- Kingston Pool Covert (south);
 - Astonfields Balancing Lakes;
 - Fairway;
 - Riverside;

- Goodall Meadow;
- Kingsmead Marsh;
- Southern Meadow;
- Ferndown; and
- Barlaston and Rough Close Common.

2.7 Additionally, the council also assists with Stone Town Council's 'Crown Meadow'.

2.8 Within the borough there are 13 Local Geological / Geomorphological Site (LoGS). These are sites of areas of significant earth science importance that are considered worthy of protection.

Table 1: Sites of biological importance within Stafford Borough

Site Name	Description	Designation	Size (ha)	Accessibility
Allimore Green Common	Wet pasture	SSSI	2.7	Public
Aqualate Mere	Largest natural lake in the West Midlands	SSSI, NNR, RAMSAR	72	Public
Astonfields Balancing Lakes	Created for flood defence but has evolved over the years to provide a number of habitats	LNR	4	Public
Barlaston and Rough Close Common	Dry heath and dry acid grassland, abundant with heather, bilberry and bell heather	LNR	14.9	Public
Baswich Meadows	Unimproved, low-lying permanent pasture.	SSSI	13.1	Private
Burnt Wood	Semi-natural woodland, with remnants of ancient broadleaved woodland.	SSSI	41.3	Private/Forestry Commission – paths through
Cannock Chase	Heathland and woodland	AONB, SSSI, SAC	68.65 (sq kilometre)	Public

Site Name	Description	Designation	Size (ha)	Accessibility
Chartley Moss	Largest floating bog. A raft of peat about 3, thick floats on a 13m deep lake.	SSSI, NNR, RAMSAR	107.4	Public
Cop Mere	Lake. Areas of dry and marshy and unimproved pasture fringe of dry woodland.	SSSI, RAMSAR	37.4	Private
Doley Common	Acid grassland/heath	SSSI	17.4	Private
Doxey Marshes	Wet grassland habitat	SSSI	129.3	Public
Ferndown	Meadow and scrub woodland	LNR	6.7	Public
Goodall Meadow	Floodplain meadow	LNR	8.4	Public
Kings and Hargreaves Woods	Wood	SSSI	45.7 and 11.8	Public
Kingsmead Marsh	Wetland	LNR	7.8	Public
Kingston Pool Covert (south)	Damp woodland	LNR	4.6	Public
Loynton Moss	Grassland, wetland, woodland.	SSSI	13.7	Public
Mottey Meadows	Wet meadow	SSSI, NNR, SAC	43.6	Private
Milford Quarry	Old gravel pit, exposures of the Lower Triassic Bunter Pebble Bed	SSSI	6.3	Public
Pasturefields Saltmarsh	Saltmarsh	SSSI, SAC	7.8	Private (Owned by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust)
Rawbones Meadow	Wet meadow	SSSI	21.3	Private
Riverside	Floodplain meadow, marsh	LNR	17	Public

Site Name	Description	Designation	Size (ha)	Accessibility
	and wet woodland			
Stafford Brook	Carr woodland, acidic marshy grassland and fen	SSSI	6.9	Owned by Stafford
Stone Meadows and Crown Meadow	Three separate meadows	LNR	14.2 3 (Crown Meadow)	Public

2.9 The borough has several important habitat types and species of local and national importance, including:

Table 1: Habitat types and species within Stafford Borough

Habitat Typology / Species	UKBAP	SBAP
Ancient Woodlands	-	Y
Peat Bogs	Y	Y
Lowland Acid Grassland	Y	Y
Lowland Heathland	Y	Y
Lowland Wet Grassland	Y	Y
Wet Woodland	Y	Y
Saltmarsh / Grazing Marsh	Y	Y
Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>) (Red list species)	Y	Y
Black Poplar (<i>Populus nigra</i>)	-	Y
Great Crested Newt (<i>Triturus cristatus</i>)	Y	Y
Otter (<i>Lutrae</i>)	Y	Y
Water Vole (<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>)	Y	Y
Grass Snake (<i>Natrix natrix</i>)	-	Y
Snipe (<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>) (Amber list species)	-	Y

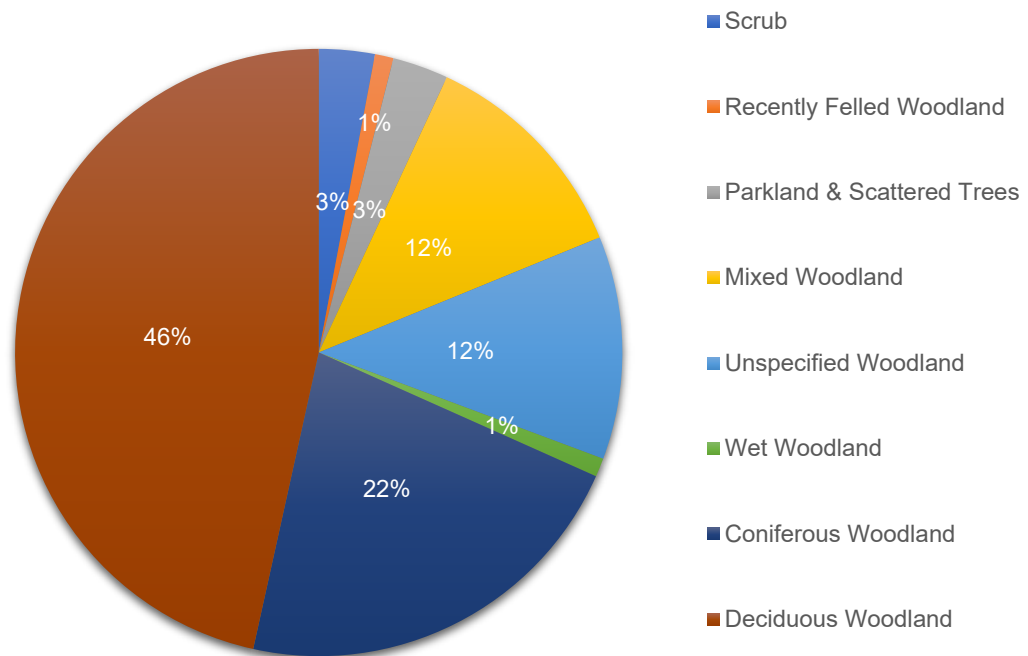
Habitats

Woodland

2.10 Across Staffordshire there is over 25,000 hectares (ha) of woodland (Woodlands in Management in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Forestry Commission (2016)). Whilst information on a borough level is not available Staffordshire currently has approximately 9% woodland cover compared to 8.4% of England under woodland cover at the turn of the 21st Century (<https://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/SoS%20Glossy%20final%20%286%29.pdf>).

2.11 Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of woodland types across Staffordshire, with Deciduous woodland making up 46% making it the most common woodland type.

Figure 1: Types of Woodland within Staffordshire



2.12 In 2017 the Woodland Trust developed the Woodland Access Standard (WAsT) which sets aspirational benchmarks for the creation of accessible woodland. In developing these standards, the Woodland Trust undertook an analysis of accessible woodland for the UK ([space-for-people-woodland-access.pdf \(woodlandtrust.org.uk\)](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/space-for-people-woodland-access.pdf)). The results for the West Midlands, Staffordshire and Stafford Borough are set out below in Table 3.

Table 3: Accessible woodland within Staffordshire and Stafford Borough

Region	Accessible Woods: % population with access to 2ha+ wood within 500m	Accessible Woods: % population with access to 20ha+ wood within 4km	Inaccessible Woods: % extra population with access to 2ha+ wood within 500m if existing woods opened	Inaccessible Woods: % population with access to 20ha+ wood within 4km if existing woods opened	Woodland Creation: % population requiring new woodland for access to 2ha+ wood within 500m	Woodland Creation: % population requiring new woodland for access to 20ha+ wood within 4km	Woodland Creation: Minimum area of new planting required for 2ha+ woods within 500m	Woodland Creation: Minimum area of new planting required for 20ha+ woods within 4km
West Midlands	15.4	63.8	18.9	20.5	65.7	45.7	2453	820
Staffordshire County	12.3	66.8	22.7	29.5	65.0	3.7	788	200
Stafford Borough	6.2	41.2	23.2	41.7	70.6	17.2	194	60

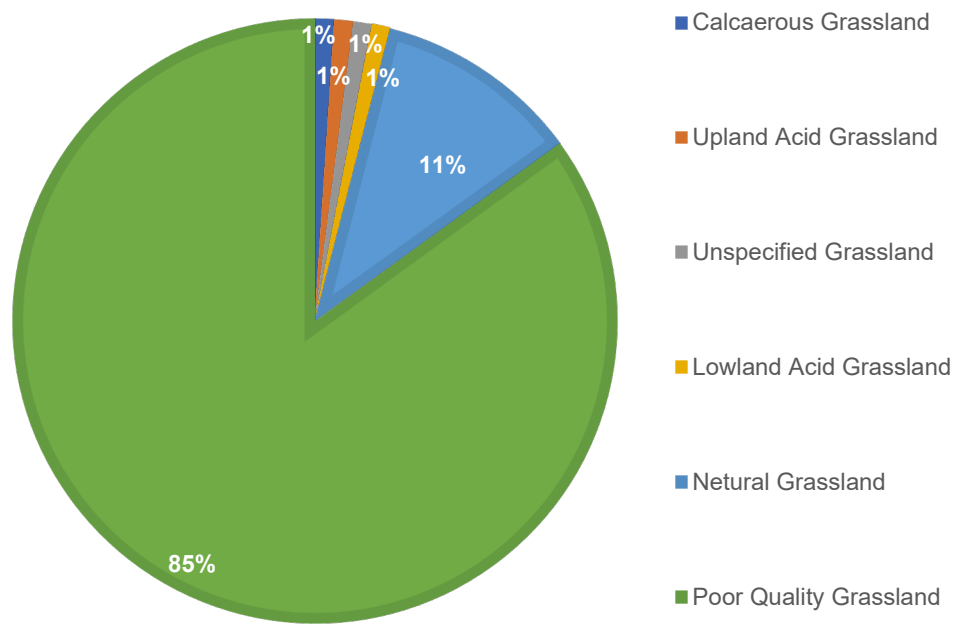
2.13 Unfortunately, Stafford Borough has a higher percentage of population not within the recommended accessible standard for woodland. The lack of woodland within an accessible distance has a negative impact on communities and individuals as access to woodland has been shown to make people healthier, improve mental wellbeing and increase the quality of life.

Grassland

2.14 Since the mid-20th century an estimated 97% of wildflower-rich lowland grassland has been lost in Great Britain and this loss continued through the 1990s (Fuller, R.M. (1987). The changing extent and conservation interest of lowland grassland in England and Wales. A review of grassland surveys 1930-1984. Biological Conservation, 40: 281-300). Similar patterns are reflected in Staffordshire.

2.15 Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of Grassland types across Staffordshire, with unfortunately poor-quality grassland accounting for 85%, making it the most common grassland type found across Staffordshire.

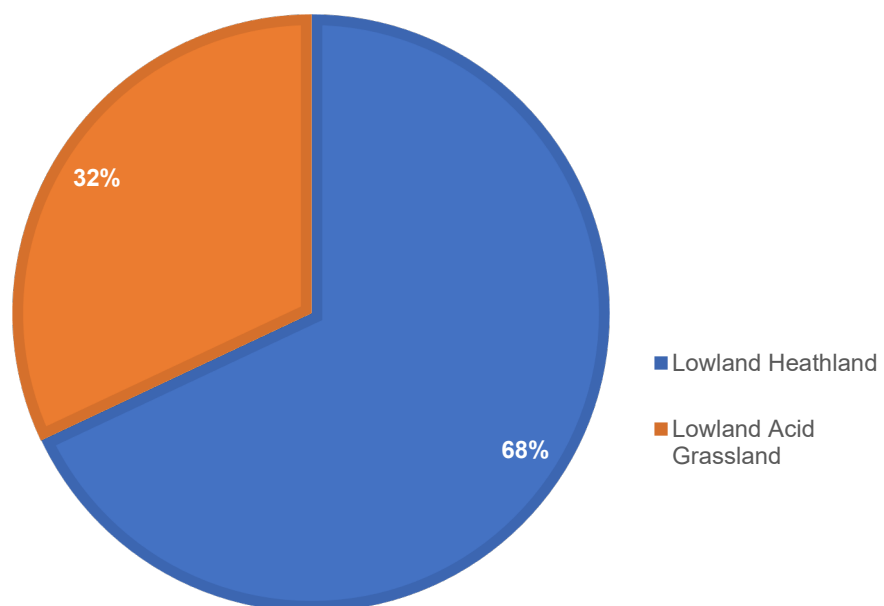
Figure 2 Percentage breakdown of different types of grassland within Staffordshire (total area = 47,210ha).



2.16 Lowland heathland is an internationally rare habitat. An estimated 90% of this habitat has been lost within Staffordshire and therefore the areas that exists within Stafford Borough needs to be protected and conserved.

2.17 Figure 3 shows the percentage breakdown of lowland heath and lowland acid grassland within Staffordshire, with lowland heath making up 68% of the habitat.

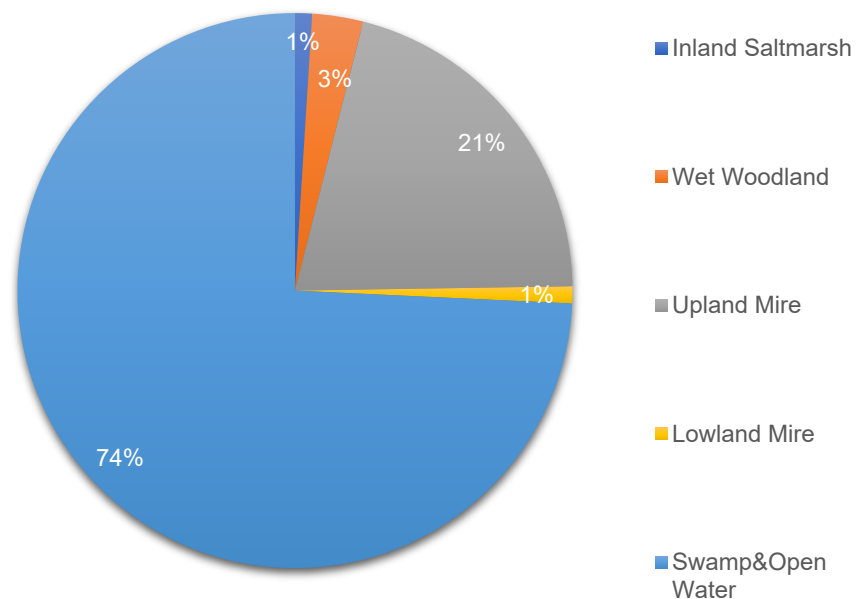
Figure 3: Percentage breakdown of lowland heathland and lowland acid grassland within Staffordshire (total area = 1,731ha).



Wetland

- 2.18 Staffordshire is fortunate to have a series of internationally important wetland habitats including meres, blanket bogs and inland saltmarshes. Within Stafford Borough we have Pasturefields Saltmarsh and Doxey Marshes.
- 2.19 Figure 4 shows the breakdown of wetland types in Staffordshire. Swamp and open water make up 74% so are the most common wetland type with Upland Mire (21%) being the second most common.

Figure 4: Percentage breakdown of different types of wetland within Staffordshire (total area = 3.740ha)



3. Issues and Opportunities

- 3.1 Biodiversity faces a variety of issues on both a national and local scale. However, there are also a range of opportunities to help address these issues and improve biodiversity.

Issues

- 3.2 The following issues have been identified as the ones that will have the greatest impact on species and habitats within Stafford Borough.

Climate change

- 3.3 Climate Change is identified as one of the greatest challenges facing mankind as changes in climate have significant implications for present lives, future generations and for ecosystems on which humanity depends upon.
- 3.4 Identified effects of climate change to the borough that have a direct impact on biodiversity are:

- An increase of flooding due to poorly designed development could impact on water quality as chemical and organic pollutant enter water courses;
- Accelerated erosion which can lead to the silting-up of rivers;
- Impact on habitats resulting in the reduction of the ability for species to adapt quickly and survive in the long term;
- Atmospheric pollution, acid rain and increasing river water temperatures; and
- Increased risk of fire and damage to habitats.

Development

3.5 The development of sites can result in:

- On site disturbance and destruction of habitats of protected species and species of principal importance;
- Fragmentation of habitats can lead to a decrease in populations since species may be unable to disperse across a disconnected landscape;
- Noise and light pollution – whilst noise and light generated during and after construction may not directly harm individual animals it can affect feeding and breeding behaviours which can have a long-term impact on population levels; and
- Disturbance by people and pets can also impact on species after construction.

Pollution

3.6 Both air and water pollution can negatively impact on biodiversity assets. Atmospheric pollutants of concern to sensitive habitats that are derived from vehicles include oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), ammonia (NH₃) and the consequential deposition of nitrogen (N) and acid on habitats. This can lead to the nutrient enrichment and acidification of soils, encouraging more tolerant ruderal species at the expense of sensitive plant, lower plant and invertebrate communities. It is known that traffic emissions lead to an increase in Nitrogen and other pollutants, and that this presents a major concern for sensitive habitats.

3.7 Stafford Borough Council undertakes monthly monitoring of air quality across a number of sites within the borough in terms of the gas Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x). This monitoring is undertaken to ensure that levels remain within the acceptable levels.

Invasive species

3.8 All plants on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act are considered an invasive species and as such are a concern in terms of biodiversity due to the fact that they can carry diseases, outcompete or prey on native species, alter food chains and can even change ecosystems.

High Speed Two (HS2)

3.9 HS2 is a planned high-speed railway, which is aimed to be the new backbone of the national rail network, linking London, Birmingham and the East

Midlands and Manchester. It will be the biggest infrastructure project in modern times.

- 3.10 As a result of HS2 in the borough, there will be losses to Ferndown LNR through road widening. Compensation to the main line includes the creation of new ponds and small areas of habitat.

Recreation

- 3.11 Increased visitor pressures and cumulative impacts of recreation on the SAC could result in a number of issues such as:
- Disturbance to wildlife;
 - Vegetation wear, erosion and soil compaction;
 - Damage to nesting sites;
 - Fragmentation of habitats;
 - Tree root damage;
 - Dog fouling;
 - Spread of disease i.e. Ash die back;
 - Contamination (e.g. dogs in water, litter);
 - Vandalism;
 - Impact on achieving necessary management; and
 - Resources drawn away from conservation management to deal with issue caused by recreation.

Opportunities

- 3.12 The potential opportunities related to biodiversity are identified as:
- Habitat improvement and creation via opportunities identified in the Nature Recovery Network
 - Biodiversity Net Gain via the Environment Act 2021
 - Creation of the new garden village will present the opportunity to develop a sustainable community with biodiversity central to it
 - Creation of two Countryside Enhancement Areas at Stafford and Stone
 - Designation of land as Strategic Green Infrastructure

4. Implications of Drivers for Change

- 4.1 The main identified drivers for change are identified as:
- National policy requirements via the Environment Act 2021, National Planning Policy Framework;
 - Development:
 - loss of biodiversity assets.
 - increase in isolated biodiversity sites.

5. Objectives

5.1 The supporting objectives from the Preferred Options are:

- To provide an attractive place to live and work and support strong communities that promote health and wellbeing.
- To increase and enhance green and blue infrastructure in the borough and to enable greater access to it whilst improving the natural environment and biodiversity.

6. Issues and Options Consultation

6.1 Section 9 of the Issues and Options consultation demonstrated that there is wide support for biodiversity policies, with there being specific support for identifying specific opportunities for development to provide additional green infrastructure, provide missing links in the network, and create new habitats. It was also highlighted that the Nature Recovery Network should be utilized to identify specific opportunities, such as identifying sites to deliver projects and address gaps within provision.

6.2 In response to this support, the council has identified a Strategic Green Infrastructure Network and supports the creation of the Penk and Sow Countryside Enhancement Area and the Stone Countryside Enhancement Area, with the designated areas being conserved and the biodiversity value being enhanced. These also provide additional benefits such as helping to manage flood risk, which support the climate change policies.

6.3 Support was also expressed in respect of the Local Plan continuing to protect all designated sites from development and potentially including a buffer zone where appropriate. Through the Local Plan all designated sites will continue to be protected and the council sought advice from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust when conducting the site assessment process to ensure proposed allocations have minimal impact on designated sites. Additionally, the Local Plan contains a specific policy (Policy 48) in respect of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), where development will not be permitted where there are likely to be significant effects on a SAC or other European Sites. For the Cannock Chase SAC all development that leads to a net increase in dwellings with 15km will be required to take necessary steps to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects, specifically through the provision of developer contributions.

6.4 There was also support for the allocation of sites which can deliver biodiversity enhancement, with the benefits being clear and quantifiable, and support for the requirement of increased long-term monitoring of biodiversity mitigation and enhancement measures. The Environment Act 2021 has introduced a 10% mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for all developments which gain planning permission after November 2023, with this BNG, whether onsite or offsite, required to be secured for at least 30-years which involves both the management and monitoring of these.

7. Policy

- 7.1 The requirement for policies to protect, enhance and create habitats that improve biodiversity is set out on an international and national level.
- 7.2 As this topic paper sets out, there is a need and a local desire to protect and enhance biodiversity within the borough. Therefore, a proactive policy approach has been developed that underpins the vision and objectives as set out in the Preferred Options.

POLICY 47: Biodiversity

- A. In accordance with national policy and legislation, planning permission will be refused for development that results in significant harm to biodiversity that cannot be avoided (by locating elsewhere), adequately mitigated, or (as last resort) compensated for.
- B. Within the context of the mitigation hierarchy set out in paragraph A and subject to the specific requirements applicable to designated sites as detailed below, all development shall, unless it is in a category of development that is exempted by the Environment Act 2021 or regulation made thereunder from the requirement to deliver biodiversity net gain, achieve biodiversity net gain of at least 10% as defined in national policy, guidance and legislation, secured in perpetuity (at least 30 years) in accordance with the following requirements:
1. The latest DEFRA metric or agreed equivalent is used to quantify the baseline and post-development biodiversity value of the development site and off-site areas proposed for habitat creation;
 2. The assessment is undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced ecologist and is submitted together with baseline and proposed habitat mapping with the application;
 3. A 30-year management plan is submitted with the application detailing how the post-development biodiversity values of the site and any supporting off-site mitigation will be achieved; and
 4. Any off-site habitat creation/restoration is located in accordance with Stafford Borough's Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- C. Where development is approved which has potential to impact upon biodiversity, developers will be required to:
1. Minimise disturbance to and protect and enhance the site's ecological value (unless compensation is justified in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy);
 2. Put appropriate future management arrangements in place; and
 3. Design appropriate mitigation measures into the proposal.

European Sites

- D. Proposals that have a likely significant effect on European sites will be subject to an appropriate assessment in accordance with the Habitats Regulations. Where the assessment indicates that it is not possible to ascertain that the proposal, either on its own or in combination with other plans or projects, would have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site, development will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where there are no alternative solutions, there is an imperative over-riding public interest and compensation measures are secured.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

- E. Development likely (either on its own or in combination with other development) to adversely affect a Site of Special Scientific Interest will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Sites of local importance

- F. Development likely to have an adverse effect (either directly or indirectly) on a Local Nature Reserve, a Site of Biological Importance, a Biodiversity Alert Site, a Local Geological Site, or a natural watercourse, lake, reservoir, canal or groundwater area (including Water Framework Directive protected areas as listed in the Humber and Severn River Basin Management Plans) will only be permitted where:
1. It can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the proposal that outweigh the need to safeguard the special ecological / geological interest of the site; and
 2. It has been demonstrated, where development would result in significant harm, that it cannot be reasonably located on an alternative site that would result in less or no harm; and
 3. harm can be prevented, minimised, adequately mitigated or compensated for.