

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Biodiversity Duty

First Consideration Report

(August 2024)

Purpose of Report

This 'first consideration' report responds to the enhanced 'biodiversity duty' of the Environment Act 2021 and sets out how the District Council is currently addressing Biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Duty

The strengthened 'biodiversity duty' requires local authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Public authorities must:

1. Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
3. Act to deliver these policies and achieve their objectives.

As a first step, local authorities must produce a 'first consideration' report to consider actions that they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity when exercising their functions. They must then set out policies and objectives as soon as possible and monitor these in a 'Biodiversity Report' at least every five years. Local authorities must publish their first 'Biodiversity Report' no later than 1 January 2026.

Biodiversity Reports must include:

- A summary of the actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty.
- How the authority plans to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period.
- The actions the authority has undertaken to meet biodiversity net gain obligations.
- Details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from their approved biodiversity gain plans.
- How the authority plans to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.
- Any other information considered appropriate.

There is no guidance as to what the 'first consideration' report should contain. The approach below is to highlight the actions that the Council is currently taking to address biodiversity and, where already known, our future intentions.

Actions to Date – first consideration

Table 1 outlines the measure the authority is currently taking to address biodiversity. These measures were all in place as at 1st January 2024.

Table 1- Measures in place as at 1st January 2024 that address biodiversity

Department	Work Area	Detail
Planning Policy		
	Core Strategy	The Core Strategy (2011-2031) contains policies that seek to protect and improve biodiversity across the district. Relevant policies include: CS.2 – Climate Change and Sustainable Construction CS.3 – Sustainable Energy CS.4 – Water Environment and Flood Risk CS.5 – Landscape CS.6 – Natural Environment CS.7 – Green Infrastructure
	Development Requirements Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	The Development Requirements SPD provides additional guidance on the interpretation and implementation of Core Strategy policies. Sections which are relevant to biodiversity include Part L (Open Space), Part N (Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure) and Part V (Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation)
	Local Wildlife Site surveys	The National Capital Assessment Partnership (NCAP) conducts Local Wildlife Site surveys each year on behalf of the Council. The results of these surveys underpin decisions on whether to designate a site as a full Local Wildlife Site. Local Wildlife Sites are non-statutory wildlife-rich areas that play a key role in nature conservation.
Development Management		
	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies and how local authorities should apply them. Biodiversity ties into the delivery of sustainable development, which is a key strand of the NPPF. Our planning officers consider the policies set out within the NPPF when considering planning applications.
	Planning Practice Guidance	Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) adds further context to the NPPF on a range of topic areas, including on Biodiversity Net Gain. Planning officers refer to this guidance when considering planning applications.

Corporate Strategy		
	Council Plan 2017-2013	The Council Plan lists 'Responding to the Climate Emergency' as one of its key objectives. With this the Council pledges to do all it can locally to contribute to national carbon reduction targets and work to become carbon neutral by 2030.
	Climate Emergency	In 2019 the Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' with Councillors pledging to take local action to contribute to national carbon neutral targets through the development of practices and policies, with an aim to being carbon neutral in the District by 2030.
	Climate Change Emergency Action Program	Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council identified three ambitions to provide focus for work to address the declared climate emergency and the two Councils approved an Action Programme to help achieve these ambitions. The ambitions are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition 1 – Net Zero Carbon Council 2025: ensure the new South Warwickshire Council is net zero carbon within a year of its first elections and that services provided through contractors include carbon reduction targets to deliver net zero by 2030. • Ambition 2 – Low Carbon South Warwickshire 2030: to reduce net carbon emissions from across South Warwickshire by a minimum of 55% by 2030 and alongside this, plan how to further reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. • Ambition 3 - Adaptation 2050: by 2050 to enable our environment and communities to have adapted to the potential of at least a 3 degrees rise in global temperatures by 2100.
Council estate/grounds maintenance		
	Stratford-upon-Avon Local Nature Reserve	In 2023 the 71 acres site alongside the River Avon was designated a local nature reserve for the benefit of wildlife and the community.
Regional Strategies and guidance		
	Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Species and Habitat Action Plans	Six broad habitat types (grassland, farmland, woodland, urban, post-industrial and wetland) have been identified across Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, and these have been subdivided into 25 Action Plans.
	Warwickshire Landscape Character Guidelines	Warwickshire County Council Landscape Team have created the 'Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines' which map and describe the special characteristics of each of the country's seven

		landscape character areas. The guidelines provide invaluable strategies for managing and enhancing these landscapes.
	Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Sub Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013)	The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure Strategy aims to create a diverse and well-managed Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure network that underpins the quality of life for communities. It is an important piece of evidence for the preparation of plans, policies and strategies relating to green infrastructure.
	Warwickshire County Council Sustainable Futures Strategy (2023)	The WCC Sustainable Futures Strategy sets out a framework, key actions, and enablers for delivering the strategic priority of being a county with a sustainable future. The strategy is organised around 5 delivery themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Built environment and energy • Resources, waste and material recirculation • Sustainable communities and green economy • Natural capital and biodiversity.
	Warwickshire County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2023)	The Climate Change Adaptation plan identifies the risks posed by climate change in Warwickshire, and potential responses across the county. The adaptation plans cover 4 key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure places and people • Water, land and biodiversity • Including Climate Change into emergency planning and response • Building resilience into Council operations

Actions taken from 1st January 2024 – 31 July 2024

Table 2 outlines what measures the authority has undertaken since 1st January 2024 to address biodiversity.

Table 2 – Measures to address biodiversity that were implemented between 1st January and 31st July 2024

Department	Work Area	Detail
Planning Policy		
	Draft South Warwickshire Local Plan	Work ongoing – refer to table below.

Development Management		
	Biodiversity Net Gain 10%	Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) requires developers to deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of 10%. Planning Officers facilitate the process and ensure that developers meet their obligations. This requirement became mandatory for major development in February 2024, and for small sites in April 2024.
Corporate Strategy		
	Council Plan 2023-2027	The Council Plan highlights 'Climate Change' as an area of focus and has an objective to 'increase and protect green spaces which positively affect nature recovery'. All Council functions will seek to ensure delivery of the aims and objectives of the Council Plan.
	Ecological Emergency	On Monday 15 April 2024, Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Cabinet endorsed the declaration of an ecological emergency. Several areas of work were identified to help ensure the council delivers a measurable net gain within the District.
	Free Trees for Farmers	In collaboration with Warwickshire Rural Hub, Stratford-on-Avon District Council contributed towards a scheme that offers free trees for farmers, seeking to increase tree cover across the District.
Council estates/ground maintenance		
	No Mow May	No Mow May is an initiative worked into the new grounds maintenance contract. This reduces mowing and allows different plant species to grow, providing food sources for pollinators and other animals. The longer grass also provides wildlife with shelter. No Mow May also reduces pollution, increases carbon sequestration, and reduces emissions by reducing fuel use.
	Reduction of herbicide use	Under the new grounds maintenance contract, no herbicides will be applied to any grassed areas, floral beds, shrub beds/herbaceous beds or hedges. As part of weed control, herbicides will be limited to hard surfaces and spot treatments of invasive weeds and wildflower areas.

Planned Actions – First Consideration

Table 3 outlines the measures the authority is currently progressing to address biodiversity.

Table 3 - Future actions to address biodiversity

Department	Work Area	Detail
Planning Policy		
	South Warwickshire Local Plan	The South Warwickshire Local Plan, developed jointly by Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils, will contain a number of policies that address biodiversity. The plan will strive to deliver on its vision of ‘a biodiverse and environmentally resilient south Warwickshire’. All policies will be supported by relevant technical evidence.
Regional Strategies and guidance		
	Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	Introduced by the Environment Act (2021), Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) will be used to agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving these priorities. Warwickshire County Council is the responsible authority and officers within Stratford-on-Avon District Council will support and contribute to the production of the LNRS for the area.
	Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy	On 15 th April 2024, Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s Cabinet resolved to endorse the draft Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS). This strategy sets out how the Local Authorities across the sub-region will utilise their nature-based compensation monies and other income streams generated through the planning system or other voluntary environmental markets. The purpose of the NCIS is to manage the process and ensure a coordinated and beneficial approach to natural capital, including biodiversity offsetting, for residents within the sub-region.