

Natural Capital Investment Strategy and Delivery Plan 2024

Responding to the biodiversity crisis, by protecting, restoring and enhancing nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing.



Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present Solihull's Natural Capital Investment Strategy and Delivery Plan, our first step in addressing the balance of natural capital resources within our borough. This is part of our long-term plan for Solihull which includes the 100 year vision for the Forest of Arden.

Our natural environment is a vital part of Solihull, and we are lucky to have a wide range of habitats within our borough, from rivers, streams and canals to ancient woodlands and wildflower-rich grasslands. This strategy is a way of recognising the value of the natural environment to us, so that we can make the right decisions about how to protect, conserve, restore and enhance these valuable assets. It also begins to address the challenges ahead as we face the impacts of climate change on a local scale within our borough.

This strategy and delivery plan summarises the council's current activity and details how we will increase our understanding of natural capital, embed its value across all aspects of the council's work and identify opportunities to increase its value. The delivery plan will seek to coordinate efforts across the council, but we will also need to work with neighbouring authorities, businesses, communities, statutory agencies and third sector organisations. The natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries. To achieve our aims, we need to work collaboratively.

We look forward to working alongside you on the strategy.

Councillor Andy Mackiewicz, Cabinet Member Climate Change and Planning

Executive Summary

The term natural capital refers to the elements of the natural environment that provide valuable goods and services to society.

Evidence shows that significant and ongoing changes in land use, the way we manage our land, coupled with the ongoing effects of climate change are having the biggest impacts on nature, biological diversity and those natural processes that underpin value to people.

The Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) is the council's delivery mechanism for responding to the biodiversity crisis, by protecting, restoring and enhancing nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing. The NCIS is a strategic document, which is referenced in the most recent Council Plan, and summarises the council's current activity in terms of the natural environment and sets out a delivery plan of actions to increase opportunities for investment in natural capital.

The council's work on the natural environment needs to be fully integrated with social and economic agendas. For the NCIS to be successful, it will need to be linked to work around housing, economic growth, skills and transport in a similar way to the Net Zero Action Plan.

The NCIS and delivery plan summarise the council's current activity in terms of the natural environment and details how the council, over the next five years, will increase its understanding of natural capital, embed its value across all aspects of the council's work and identify opportunities to increase its value.

The delivery plan will coordinate the efforts across the council and will set out how the council must work with a range of partners and key stakeholders, such as neighbouring authorities, businesses, communities and third sector organisations to achieve the NCIS aims. It covers a broad range of natural environment projects, focusing on species recovery and developing wildlife corridors, tree and hedgerow planting, health and wellbeing, improving access to green space, data and knowledge sharing, funding and financing and the supporting actions and behaviour changes needed to ensure these actions are achieved.

Responsibilities and timescales for carrying out actions within the delivery plan will be allocated by the Natural Capital Working Group.

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1.0 What is natural capital?

1.1 Natural capital describes the part of nature which directly or indirectly underpins value to people, including ecosystems, habitats, species, water, soils, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. In combination with other types of capital, natural capital forms part of our wealth; that is, our ability to produce actual or potential goods and services into the future to support our wellbeing.²

1.2 Natural capital is derived from natural assets such as habitats, soils, water and biodiversity. These natural capital assets provide a wide range of benefits to people, called ecosystem services.

Ecosystem services are commonly divided into three types:

1. Provisioning services – products obtained from nature, e.g. food, water and timber.
2. Regulating services – benefits obtained from environmental processes that regulate the environment, e.g. air and water quality, carbon storage, cooling/shading and flood protection.
3. Cultural services – non-material benefits that people obtain from nature, e.g. health and wellbeing, interaction with nature, recreation, education, aesthetic appeal and sense of place.



Natural capital investment is a relatively new approach, both globally and nationally. However, the links between the economy, human wellbeing and the natural environment are increasingly being realised and understood. There is also a growing recognition that this approach should be evidence-based and used to inform socio-economic decision-making across all sectors of our society. Whilst natural capital can be impacted by both elements of the built environment, such as renewable energy generation and enhanced standards of building (to help drive down carbon generation) and by elements of social and community choices and actions (such as green

travel), these sit outside the direct scope of this strategy.

© CaBA Partnership³

1.3 Detailed definitions about natural capital have been provided by the UK government's Natural Capital Committee (NCC). The latest definitions are from 2019 and are periodically reviewed.⁴

1.4 As a public authority with responsibilities to all our residents, visitors and businesses, natural capital is of key importance for all directorates within Solihull Council and we already have ambitious and exciting plans to increase opportunities for investment in natural capital. We have set out our

² [Natural Capital Committee \(2019\) Natural Capital Terminology](#)

³ [Home - CaBA \(catchmentbasedapproach.org\)](#)

⁴ [Natural Capital Committee \(2019\)](#)

plans to tackle the climate emergency through our Net Zero Action Delivery Plan⁵ and this Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) will detail how we will increase our understanding of natural capital, embed its value across all aspects of our work and identify opportunities to increase its value.

1.5 Natural capital approach

1.6 The continued degradation and loss of nature and natural processes has an impact not only on nature itself, but also on our health, wellbeing and the economy. We recognise that it is not possible to fully quantify the value of nature, especially its intrinsic value, however by taking a natural capital approach, we can provide a framework to address these failures and better reflect and communicate the multiple values of nature.

1.6 The Dasgupta Review⁶ on the Economics of Biodiversity, calls for urgent and transformative change in how we think, act and measure economic success to protect and enhance our prosperity and the natural world and puts forward ways in which we should account for nature in decision-making.

2.0 Current position

2.1 We are currently in both a climate emergency⁷ and biodiversity crisis⁸, reflecting the potential collapse of critical ecological services such as clean air, fresh water and fertile soils. Resolving these crises requires immediate and comprehensive action at local, national⁹ and global¹⁰ levels. Habitat loss, climate change, pollution and invasive species are among the key drivers of species decline and extinction. Through this NCIS, the council has an opportunity to set out our intentions on a local level to addressing these issues.

2.2 Enhancing our natural environment, improving air quality and reducing net carbon emissions are key priorities of the environment section of the Council Plan 2020-2025¹¹. One of the outcomes of the Council Plan is to have an enhanced and well-connected natural environment.

2.3 If we are to achieve these aims, then we first need to understand what natural capital is, the current regulatory and policy framework and what we have now (our baseline). From there, we can look for opportunities to protect, enhance, restore, and create natural capital. This strategy sets out a delivery plan which provides a framework of key actions for achieving this over the next five years.

2.4 The NCIS will provide a strategic umbrella for other council strategies including nature conservation (biodiversity), countryside and woodland, all of which are due to be refreshed.

⁵ [The Action Plan for Net Zero in Solihull | Net Zero Solihull](#)

⁶ [The Economics of Biodiversity; The Dasgupta Review \(2021\)](#)

⁷ [Facts about the climate emergency | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#)

⁸ [No let-up in net loss of UK's nature | The Wildlife Trusts; Working with Nature, Chief Scientists Group Report, Environment Agency 2022](#)

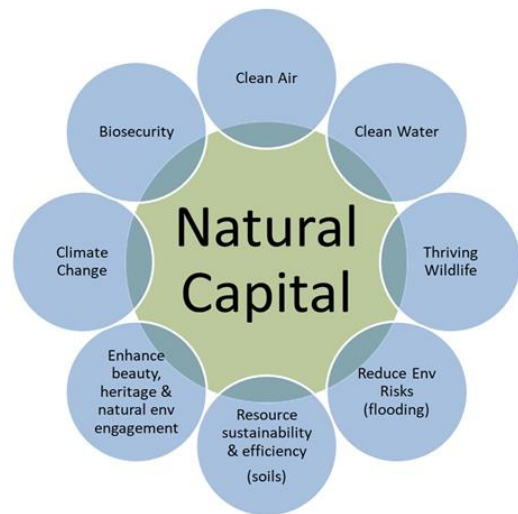
⁹ [Delivering 30by30 on land in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [COP15: Nations Adopt Four Goals, 23 Targets for 2030 In Landmark UN Biodiversity Agreement | Convention on Biological Diversity \(cbd.int\)](#)

¹¹ [Solihull Council Plan 2020 - 2025: 2022/2023 Update](#)

3.0 Vision – where do we need to get to?

3.1 A borough where all parts of society, partners and key stakeholders, including neighbouring authorities, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local communities can enjoy the benefits, are invested in the protection of, and have access to all parts of the natural environment, recognising our reliance on natural capital and the impact we have on it.



3.2 The protection, restoration, enhancement and creation of natural capital resources is a priority for Solihull Council to address both the climate and ecological emergencies.

3.3 Outcomes of the delivery plan

3.4 This NCIS and delivery plan aims to deliver the following outcomes:

1. Fully assess the natural capital baseline of all relevant council assets, especially parks and open spaces, to identify the current state and value of our natural capital.
2. Review of all assets outside council ownership/control to assess natural capital opportunities.
3. Produce a natural capital database (to include a green and blue infrastructure assets map), combining all existing data currently in different formats/spreadsheets (e.g. ArcGIS, TreePlotter, Solmaps), to support the establishment of the borough's baseline position and be regularly and easily updated.
4. Invest in resource to deliver the NCIS.
5. Produce a delivery plan with key actions that are monitored by a Natural Capital Working Group.
6. Continue to work in partnership with other organisations, key partners and stakeholders, local communities and businesses to protect, restore, enhance and create new areas of habitat across Solihull.

4.0 Context

4.1 The council has plans to protect, restore, enhance and create its natural environment. Plans to tackle the climate emergency through the #WM2041¹² have already been developed with the natural environment playing an important role. This NCIS focuses on how the council will address the biodiversity crisis.

4.2 To understand what Solihull can achieve in terms of addressing the biodiversity crisis, we need to take account of the regulatory and policy environment that we are operating in. This section reviews policies, plans and projects that have the power to strengthen and enable our local and regional natural capital ambitions.

¹² [WMCA Our Action to meet the Climate Challenge](#)

5.0 Legislation and policy

5.1 Legislation and policy detail our existing duties, responsibilities and ambitions regarding natural capital. A summary of key legislation and policy is provided below but note that this is not an exhaustive list.



Legislation

- Environment Act 2021 - Legislation to improve air and water quality, tackle waste, increase recycling, halt the decline of species, and improve our natural environment.
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 - Under section 40 of the NERC Act, local authorities have a statutory duty to conserve biodiversity whilst carrying out all their functions. This duty has been strengthened through the Environment Act 2021 so that the duty now includes 'conserve and enhance biodiversity'.



Legislation

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
- The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) 2000
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000



National Policy

- National Planning Policy Framework
- UK 25 Year Environment Plan
- UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. Reviews, plans and policy drivers (national, regional, and local)
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
- Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (The Lawton Report, 2010)
- The Lawton Report: Making Space for Nature 2012
- Dasgupta Review; The Economics of Biodiversity (2021)

5.17 Regional context

5.18 Solihull benefits from a rich ecological network, which links to the wider landscape and supports a wide variety of habitats and species. It also provides open spaces for physical activity, improved air quality and flood alleviation.

5.19 The West Midlands Natural Environment Plan¹³ outlines a set of actions that will help restore biodiversity, including four priority themes:

- access to greenspace;
- tree and hedgerow planting;
- wildlife corridors; and
- what they call 'enablers', such as the Natural Capital Investment Plan.

¹³ [West Midlands Natural Environment Plan 2021-2026](#)

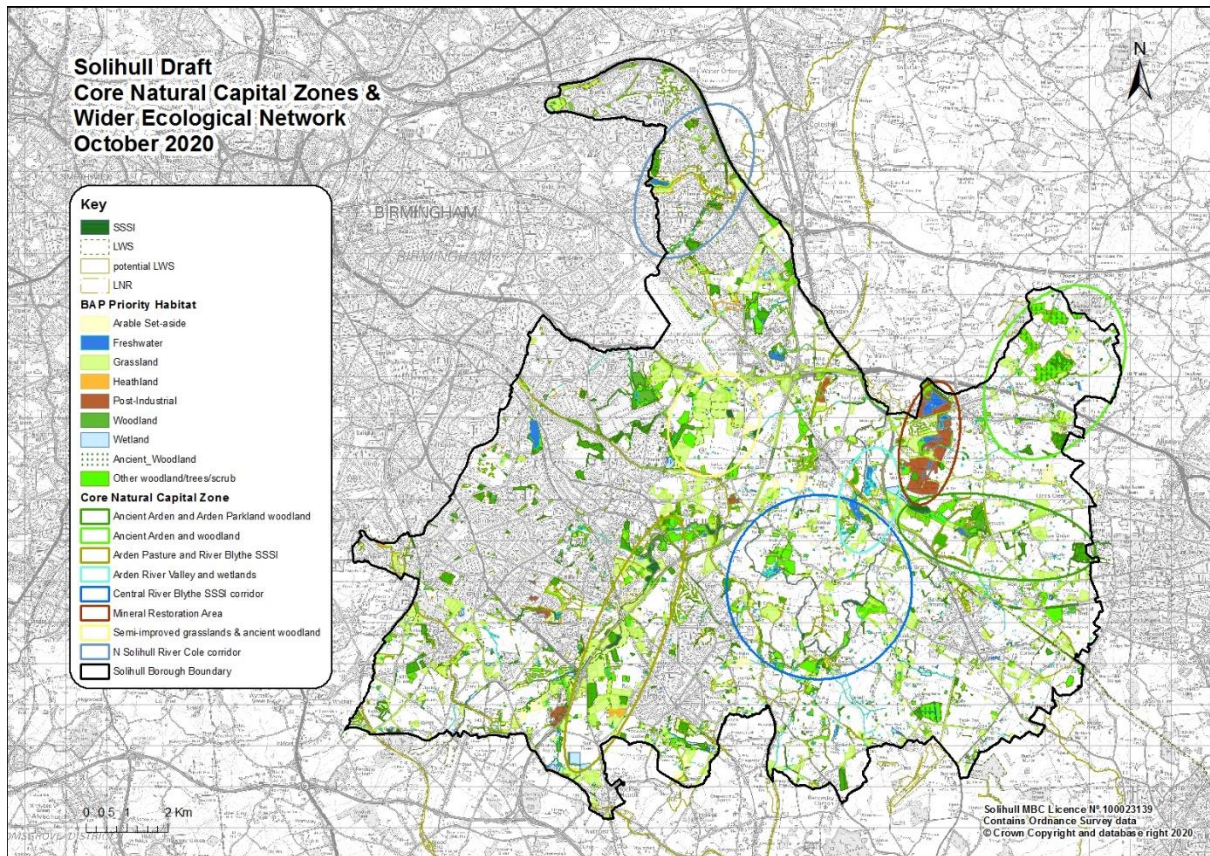
5.20 It also highlights the important benefits that nature has for people’s health and wellbeing – something the Covid pandemic has highlighted, especially for those living in our dense urban areas with limited access to greenspace.

Warwickshire Local Authorities’ Natural Capital Investment Strategy

This forthcoming strategy will give a ‘strategic direction of travel’ for the local authorities to achieve and implement investment in Warwickshire’s natural capital assets. It will be based upon a blended finance model which would incorporate public, private and third sector income streams, in addition to grant funding, philanthropic support and the monies already generated through mandatory BNG.

5.21 Local context

5.22 Understanding the local context and natural capital baseline for Solihull, forms an important part of the delivery plan and especially links to the production of a natural capital valuation for Solihull’s parks and open spaces and wider assets. This will also have strong links to the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for both the WMCA and Warwickshire areas.



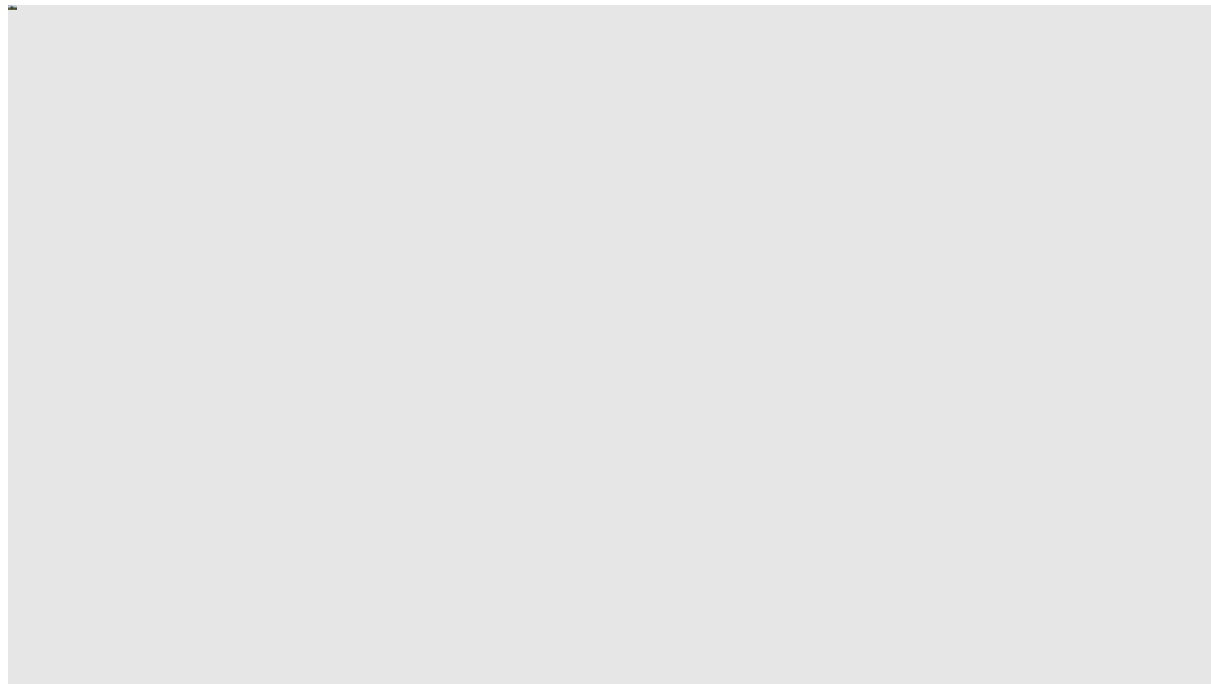
This map can be viewed at a larger scale within the Natural Environment Topic Paper, produced as part of the evidence base for the draft Solihull Local Plan Review¹⁴.

¹⁴ [Local Plan Review - The Evidence Base | solihull.gov.uk](https://www.solihull.gov.uk)

6.0 Why is natural capital important?

6.1 Identifying the value of natural capital can provide important evidence to support sustainable decision-making. International and national legislation and policy require us to take account of environmental impacts, however more recent changes, including the Environment Act 2021 and the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan¹⁵, require measured environmental gains and these can be best demonstrated through a natural capital approach.

6.2 The latest government data shows that the value of health benefits associated with outdoor recreation within the UK was estimated to be between £6.2 billion and £8.4 billion in 2020¹⁶. Additionally, between 2009 and 2020 recreational visits in urban areas and gardens accounted for over 50% of the total health benefits associated with recreation. This is evidence of a direct relation between our health and wellbeing and access to greenspace and nature.



6.3 The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA)¹⁷, funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), estimates that increasing green spaces could reduce run-off and urban flooding which costs around £270 million a year in England and Wales.

6.4 Research by Fields in Trust, using the 2022 Green Space Index¹⁸, finds there is the equivalent of 30m² of publicly accessible park and green space provision per person in Great Britain. But as population increases, it is likely that this figure will reduce, meaning we need to plan for and provide additional, accessible green space for our residents.

6.5 The 2022 Green Space Index also shows that across Solihull there is a variation in accessible greenspace, with some areas achieving the minimum required¹⁹ and other areas having less.

¹⁵ [25 Year Environment Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/25-year-environment-plan)

¹⁶ [Health benefits from recreation, natural capital, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/peopleandplaces/healthandsocialcare/healthbenefits)

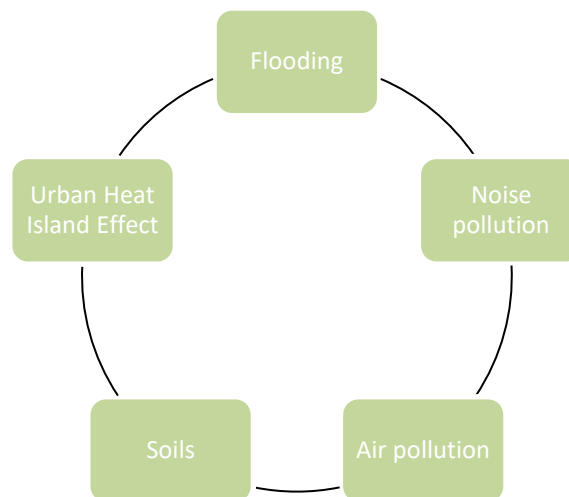
¹⁷ [UK NEA \(unep-wcmc.org\)](https://www.unep-wcmc.org/uk-nea)

¹⁸ [Green Space Index 2022 by Fields in Trust \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com/journal/2022/01/green-space-index-2022)

¹⁹ As detailed in [Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play, England, Fields in Trust, updated 2015](https://www.fieldsintrust.org.uk/guidance-for-outdoor-sport-and-play)

6.6 Case study - Increasing vegetation cover in urban and rural areas results in beneficial effects on the following:

- Flooding – trees can reduce surface water run-off by 80% compared to hard surfacing such as tarmac.²⁰
- Noise pollution - a border of trees and shrubs 30 metres wide can reduce noise levels by 5-10 decibels.²¹
- Air pollution – increasing vegetation cover in urban areas can contribute to a reduction in air pollution, mainly by influencing the dispersal of pollutants across an area.²²
- Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect – the sun’s rays are absorbed by hard surfaces such as pavements, roads and buildings making them warmer than vegetated areas such as parks, gardens, rivers and woodlands.
- Soils – trees help to improve soil health as their root systems improve the ability of soil to absorb water, reducing the risk of wind erosion. Fallen leaf litter also creates new organic matter in the soil, which is a vital element of topsoil creation. ²³



6.7 Rewilding

6.8 Rewilding is the large-scale (>100ha) restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature is allowed to take care of itself. Rewilding seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing them to shape the landscape and the habitats within.

6.9 Rewilding encourages a balance between people and the rest of nature so that we thrive together. It can provide opportunities for communities to diversify and create nature-based

²⁰ [Can trees and woods help reduce flooding? - Woodland Trust](#)

²¹ [Noise abatement - Forest Research](#)

²² [1807251306_180509_Effects_of_vegetation_on_urban_air_pollution_v12_final.pdf\(defra.gov.uk\)](#)

²³ [Trees and soil protection | Heart of England Forest](#)

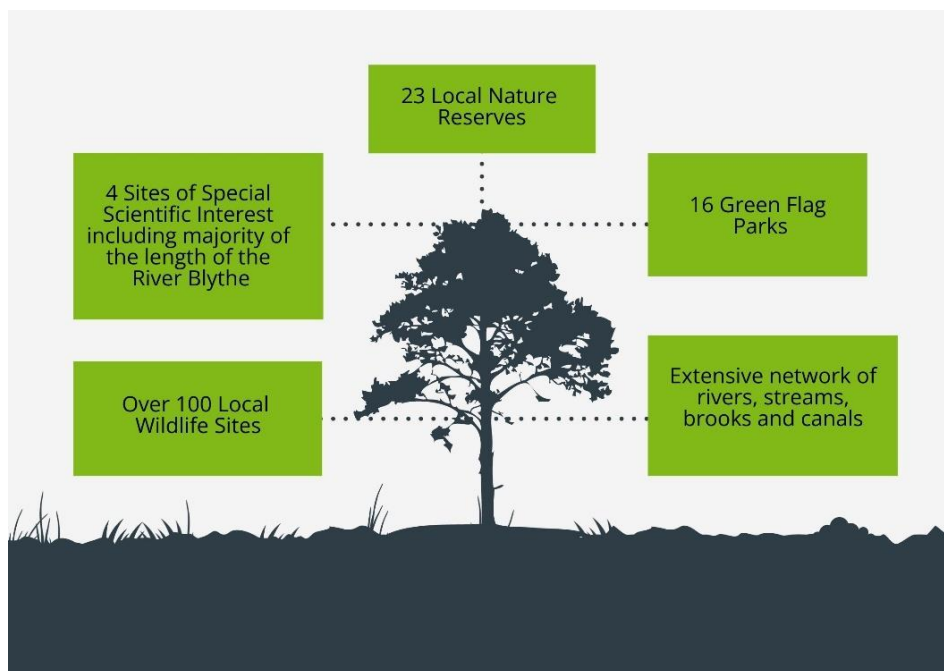
economies; for living systems to provide the ecological functions on which we all depend; and for people to reconnect with wild nature.²⁴

6.10 In Solihull, opportunities for habitat restoration on a large scale are limited, however there are third-party landowners that are already working on schemes. The council will look for opportunities on this scale and will support these schemes where possible.

6.11 Opportunities for working at a smaller scale are also vital to contribute to the restoration and creation of resilient habitat networks, especially when they can be linked together to create larger scale schemes.

7.0 Solihull's natural capital baseline

7.1 Solihull is fortunate to have many high-quality parks and open spaces which provide habitat for a range of wildlife and are a haven for local residents to enjoy.



7.2 There are currently 23 Local Nature Reserves (LNR), with the majority of those also carrying a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designation and 16 Green Flag parks. These open spaces are all accessible to the public, contributing to health and wellbeing benefits. In addition, Solihull has four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a network of over 100 LWS, all of which contribute to the existing green and blue network. It is difficult to compare these figures to other areas, as numbers can depend on factors such as population size, available land and local priorities.

7.3 Solihull benefits from a network of watercourses, including the River Blythe SSSI, River Cole, Grand Union Canal and Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. The Blythe and Cole both have extensive tributary networks, including the Purnell's Brook, Horn Brook and Illshaw Brook for the Blythe and the Kingshurst Brook, Low Brook and Hatchford Brook for the Cole. There are also ancient

²⁴ [Defining rewilding | Rewilding Britain](#)

woodlands including Yorks Wood, Alcott Wood and Bills Wood, numerous veteran and ancient trees and unimproved meadows such as Monkspath Meadow SSSI and Berkswell Marsh Meadow SSSI.

7.4 In addition to parks and open spaces, Solihull Council is also landowner to a variety of other assets including agricultural tenancies, Solihull Community Housing land, highway land and schools. All of these assets should have their natural capital asset value assessed, to ensure that this value is conserved, but also that opportunities to enhance or create value are explored and delivered with the relevant land manager.

7.5 The open countryside between Coventry and Solihull, known as the Meriden Gap, represents a fundamentally important part of the borough in terms of its landscape character and biodiversity value. The Arden landscape is also well represented in the countryside area south of Shirley, where the river Cole corridor provides an important blue corridor.

8.0 Current activity in Solihull

8.1 We are already making fantastic progress in delivering improvements to Solihull's natural capital through a range of award-winning projects, partnership and advocacy work, some of which are included in the West Midlands Natural Environment Plan as examples of leading best practice.

8.2 Projects

8.3 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Projects:

- Solihull Habitat & Nature Improvements (SHNIP) completed in 2019 - A three-year, £1.8 million programme of woodland, grassland, wetland and water quality improvements delivered across over 20 parks and publicly accessible green space. Delivering 100 hectares of enhanced habitat, SHNIP collectively increased and strengthened the capacity of the natural environment to deliver ecosystem services across the region and provide resilience and mitigation against climate change.
- Wildlife Ways completed in March 2022 – A three-year, £17 million programme, which has seen massive environmental improvements across Solihull's parks, green spaces and highway verges improving over 24 hectares of wildlife habitats along 69km of existing cycleways and 23km of new shared surface. As part of the programme, thousands of trees, extensive areas of meadows and over three million bulbs have been planted across the borough in strategic locations. These both enhance the visual amenity and promote green travel across the borough for the benefit of the local community. They also serve to connect existing areas of high ecological value via these green corridors for improved wildlife movements across the borough and give these species additional space to colonise. The project included the sustainable management of 11 woodlands and nine grassland sites in addition to over 25 hectares enriched with wildflower seed and one re-profiled watercourse. In total more than 56 hectares of parks and public open space have been enhanced.
- Solihull Council Small Habitat Grant Projects, completed in May 2023 – Several projects with differing habitat restoration objectives, namely Bees & Trees, Damsels & Dragons, Frogs & Logs, Newts & Shoots and Hedges & Sedges. Each of these projects, whilst creating new habitat, also include restoring degraded habitat or improving wildlife corridors all of which have obvious benefits to local biodiversity, but also provide Natural Capital benefits to the

local community in terms of aesthetic value and visual amenity and promote good health and enjoyment of the improved natural landscape for all.

- Small Habitat Grant Projects led by other organisations, completed in May 2023 – includes the Blythe Revival projects at Brueton Park and Cheswick Green. These have been delivered by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust in partnership with the Environment Agency, with support from Solihull Council, to further enhance the local environment and natural capital value for a diverse range of habitats and species and for Solihull residents.

8.4 The Arden Free Tree Scheme²⁵ (AFTS) is funded by an annual contribution from Birmingham Airport as part of their obligation to offset their carbon. Individuals or groups can apply for funding to create hedgerows or small woodlands on their own land. To date, the AFTS has supported 172 individual tree planting projects across Solihull and the wider Arden landscape with a total of 46,877

8.5 Planting Our Future²⁶ – The council has committed to planting 250,000 trees by 2030 through local engagement with schools, residents, businesses and community groups including the Solihull Tree Wardens. The 'Planting Our Future' campaign encourages residents to engage with tree planting, get involved in green infrastructure projects and offers support to private landowners who wish to plant trees.

8.6 Habitat banks and biodiversity net gain – using Solihull Council and third-party land to locate offsite biodiversity credits from approved developments. These areas have the potential to create large new areas of habitat to enhance the existing network of habitats across Solihull.

8.7 Direct site investment – the Council has purchased land at Frog Lane, Balsall Common and at Hope Coppice, Shirley, where tree and hedgerow planting projects have been delivered.

8.8 Existing strategies:

	Natural Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Woodland•Nature Conservation•Countryside•Urban Tree
	Climate Change & Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Climate Change Prospectus•Net Zero Delivery Action Plan•Air Quality (emerging)
	Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Sub-regional Green Infrastructure Strategy for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull•Draft Local Plan and associated Supplementary Planning Documents•Arden Landscape Guidelines

²⁵ [Arden Free Tree Scheme](#)

²⁶ [Planting Our Future](#)

8.9 Partnerships and key stakeholders

8.10 The current activity across the borough could not have been possible without the support of a range of partners and key stakeholders. The council believes this will continue to be of importance, as the aims and objectives of this NCIS are achieved. Whilst the list below may not be exhaustive, as circumstances change in the future, the council's key partners and stakeholders currently include:

	Government and Regulatory <ul style="list-style-type: none">• West Midlands Combined Authority• Warwickshire County Council, Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Worcestershire County Council• Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry England• Highways England, Network Rail• Natural Capital Assessment Programme (formerly HBA Partnership)
	Business (those based in Solihull and those that work here) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Birmingham Airport• JLR• Rolls Royce• Amazon• HS2• Housebuilders
	Community <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parish Councils• Friends of Groups• Tree Wardens• Conservation Volunteer Groups• Arden Farm Network• Faith Communities
	NGO <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust• Canal and River Trust• National Trust - 8 Hills Regional Park• Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership• RSPB• Sustainability West Midlands

8.11 Data

8.12 Natural capital assessment programme²⁷ data including:

- Phase 1 Habitat Survey and UKHab Survey mapping
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Habitat connectivity (woodlands, grasslands and wetlands) opportunity mapping; and
- Urban greenspace mapping

²⁷ [Habitat Biodiversity Audit \(HBA\) | Warwickshire Wildlife Trust](#)

8.13 Open source mapping²⁸ – Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Nature Improvement Area (NIA), priority habitats, Natural England green infrastructure mapping and natural capital mapping.

8.14 Tree Plotter – Solihull Council has recently invested in TreePlotter which is a tree inventory and asset management software system. It is currently used to show the location of all Solihull Council owned trees and woodlands to aid with maintenance operations, however there is potential to expand its access and coverage to more users and areas.

²⁸ [MAGIC \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://defra.gov.uk)

9.0 Delivery Plan

9.1 We can no longer separate the natural environment from other parts of the work we do across the council, and it needs to be fully integrated with our social and economic agendas. For this NCIS to be successful, it will need to be linked into our work around housing, skills and transport in a similar way to the Net Zero Action Plan.

9.2 This delivery plan will seek to coordinate efforts across the council, but we will also need to work with neighbouring authorities, businesses, communities, statutory agencies and third sector organisations if we are to achieve our aims. The natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries. To achieve our aims, we need to work collaboratively.

9.3 The plan covers a broad range of natural environment projects focusing on: species recovery and developing our wildlife corridors, delivering Biodiversity Net Gain, improving access to green space, tree and hedgerow planting, and also supporting monitoring actions that will need to be put into place to ensure these actions are achieved. Responsibilities and timescales for carrying out actions will be allocated by the Natural Capital Working Group.

9.4 Maintenance of the natural environment

9.5 Effective delivery of the Environment Act, Council Plan requirements and the NCIS depend on sustainable long-term management of the natural environment. This applies to all natural assets, including parks and green spaces and all other council-owned and/or maintained land.

9.6 In order to achieve ongoing maintenance and management of our natural assets, identifying suitable funding is vital, in order to ensure such areas can develop their full natural capital potential. All new projects within this delivery plan must therefore aim to include appropriate funding for maintenance for a minimum five years²⁹. This will form part of grant funding bids, but where such maintenance funding is not achievable through grants, other mechanisms³⁰ will be utilised as appropriate to help secure a minimum level of provision. A natural capital valuation of our parks and green spaces is an important first step, which can be used to inform the development of an appropriate maintenance model for future financing.

10.0 Wildlife corridors and species recovery

10.1 The isolation and fragmentation of habitat due to increased development of land can have a detrimental impact on biodiversity. By strengthening existing, and creating new wildlife corridors, we can help to reduce these impacts. These corridors should comprise high quality semi-natural habitat such as grasslands, woodlands and watercourses, but should also integrate into infrastructure such as sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS), green bridges and living roofs/walls where practicable. The effects of climate change will mean that wildlife corridors will become increasingly important to boost nature recovery, as species migrate to reduce the impacts of changes in temperature and to weather patterns.

²⁹ Maintenance costs will be based on the relevant service and current Council contractual rates, with the appropriate level of inflation included over the five year period.

³⁰ Including s106, CIL, NCIL or other form of match funding. The details will be considered by the NCIS Board (or equivalent) when signing off project plans.

10.2 Key actions

- To ensure both the urban and rural areas of Solihull benefit from more, bigger, better and connected areas of habitat, both within, and across LA boundaries and to help drive some of the primary links and connections between the urban and rural opportunities to enhance the natural environment, we will contribute to and develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority. We will also contribute to and develop the LNRS led by Warwickshire County Council and support the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership.
- Maximise the benefits of public open space within new developments, especially how they connect to the wider landscape.
- Deliver biodiversity net gain through mandatory planning requirements but also the provision of habitat banks on Solihull Council land. Solihull Council to become a responsible body in relation to conservation covenants, which will facilitate the setting up of habitat banks on third party land.
- Use nature-based solutions for flood alleviation and deliver projects on our watercourses that increase our resilience to flooding, whilst also protecting and enhancing our natural environment.
- Proactively look for opportunities to create/enhance habitats that are proven carbon sinks e.g. wetlands.
- Continue to support the Natural Capital Assessment Programme, Warwickshire Biological Records Centre and EcoRecord through the submission of species records.
- Identify links to specific species recovery as part of work supporting the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Work with partners and stakeholders to identify priority species for recovery e.g. white-clawed crayfish, water vole and hazel dormouse.
- Work with HS2 to identify legacy land which could contribute to a coherent and resilient wildlife network across the borough.

11.0 Health and wellbeing

11.1 As well as reducing carbon and adapting to increasingly extreme weather events caused by climate change, there are considerable benefits from the natural environment for physical and mental health³¹. Providing and improving access to the natural environment for all communities, is a vital part of supporting the delivery of these benefits.

11.2 Key actions

- Solihull Council will support community groups and volunteers to deliver natural environment projects in their local area e.g. through providing technical advice or signposting to grants and other funding streams.
- Solihull Council will support proposals which will contribute towards a network of high-quality provision as new and/or enhanced recreational facilities including children's play and open space.

³¹ [A Natural Health Service, The Wildlife Trusts, Leeds Beckett University and University of Essex, 2019](#)

- Solihull Council supports the principle of designating land as local green space, including designation within Neighbourhood Plans.
- New housing developments will be required to provide or contribute towards new open spaces or the improvement of existing provision in the area, in line with the new minimum standard of 3.37 ha for sites under 200 dwellings and 3.57 ha for sites of over 200 dwellings per 1,000 population.
- Support the delivery of actions within the council's Net Zero Action Plan and Air Quality Strategy that contribute towards a healthy natural environment.
- Solihull Council will support proposals that encourage greater recreational and leisure use, for example: enhancement of the river and canal network in combination with adherence to other strategies, policies and commitments for green belt protection, biodiversity protection and heritage conservation.
- Develop a plan for including green infrastructure as part of the transport network at project development stage e.g. green roofs on bus shelters and semi-natural habitat in verges, including the planting of street trees.
- Creation and enhancement of urban meadows to increase biodiversity and amenity value of under-used open spaces whilst reducing maintenance costs.

12.0 Tree and hedgerow planting

12.1 Planting trees and increasing woodland cover are positive things we can do now in response to the climate emergency and can also boost our natural capital. Trees provide us with multiple benefits, including capturing and storing carbon as they grow, reducing urban heat islands and flooding and providing habitats for thousands of species.

12.2 Using existing datasets and partnerships we will ensure that the right places are identified for tree and hedgerow planting, and then plant appropriate species. In rural areas, species characteristic of the Arden Landscape will be prioritised, however in urban areas other species and cultivars will be considered. It will also be important to consider changing climate, plant pests and diseases and how this impacts species selection, as we try to build resilience into our natural environment.

12.3 Key actions:

- Deliver the Arden Free Tree Scheme in partnership with Birmingham Airport Ltd until 2028 and explore alternative ways we can extend this initiative when existing funding ends.
- Deliver the Planting Our Future scheme.
- Extend access to TreePlotter across Solihull Council and explore other benefit analysis software and calculations based on I-tree research such as monetary and ecological tree benefits ranging from whole communities to a single tree and/or the predictive health impacts created by the quantity and quality of nature in each area.
- Support the actions within the WMCA Natural Environment Plan including the Virtual Forest.
- Design in access to shade and canopy cover within public spaces, including highway schemes.
- Explore incorporating tree-lined streets into the finished design for every transport scheme which involves redesigning streets.

- Explore carbon banking and the sale of credits to organisations who need to compensate for their unavoidable impacts.

13.0 Data, technology and knowledge sharing

13.1 There is already considerable activity being undertaken across Solihull Council for the benefit of natural capital, however there is not one place where that activity and knowledge can be recorded and shared. If we are to achieve the aim of the Council Plan to have an enhanced and well-connected natural environment, then we need to provide a place where we can support and share our learning and enable change.

13.2 Identifying locations to protect, restore, and enhance the borough's natural capital need to be informed by data to demonstrate that appropriate interventions are proposed and based on an assessment of priorities. Without this understanding, we risk implementing projects that could be detrimental to the borough's biodiversity, landscape character and local distinctiveness.

13.3 Key actions

- Produce a natural capital database, combining all existing data currently in different formats/spreadsheets (e.g. ArcGIS, TreePlotter, Solmaps), to support the establishment of the borough's baseline position and be regularly and easily updated.
- Produce a natural capital valuation of Solihull's parks and open spaces and use this evidence to inform a strategy for sustainable future funding of their management.
- Spatially defining the borough's natural environment through maps. This will build on existing work undertaken by the Natural Capital Assessment Programme. It will also allow understanding of where areas could be targeted for investment into nature, building in the work around access to green space, and existing/ developing programmes of activity.
- Create a Natural Capital Working Group with representation from across Solihull Council ³². This group will set timescales for delivery of the actions within the delivery plan and will meet regularly to monitor progress and share knowledge about best practice. The group will also undertake review of the strategy in line with current policy and legislation. Regular updates will then be provided to members through existing reporting mechanisms.
- Internal training to embed natural capital across all directorates of Solihull Council e.g. through Lunchtime Learning seminars.
- Continue to engage in external partnerships such as Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, West Midlands Combined Authority, Natural Capital Assessment Programme, Warwickshire Biological Records Centre and EcoRecord to share data and learning.

³² Current membership includes representatives from Public Realm, Strategic Land, Climate Change & Sustainability, Conservation of the Historic Environment, Landscape Architecture, Ecology and Urban Design, Planning Policy, Forestry, Highways, Drainage, Development Management and Economic Growth.

14.0 Funding and financing

14.1 Our focus in recent years has been to use external grants to fund improvements to our natural environment (e.g. ERDF, Environment Agency and West Midlands Combined Authority), however these funding streams cannot be relied upon and in the case of ERDF have now ended. New funding models need to be explored to maximise opportunities to deliver natural capital improvements across Solihull.

14.2 The Environment Act 2021 has a mandatory requirement for new development (with a small number of exemptions) to deliver 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) and this has the potential to provide a funding source for creating and managing new areas of habitat. This requirement will start from November 2023, where relevant applications will need to use the Natural England Biodiversity Metric³³ to demonstrate a minimum of 10% measurable net biodiversity gain.

14.3 This BNG resource could be used by Solihull Council on their own land or land held by third parties through legal agreements (e.g. S39 of Wildlife and Countryside Act or conservation covenants). It also provides an opportunity to contribute towards staff costs, therefore helping ensure the council is suitably resourced to monitor and manage enhancements to the natural environment.

14.4 Key actions

- Fully assess the natural capital baseline of all council assets to identify the current state and value of our natural capital and use this to inform the creation of biodiversity banks. Initially this should involve an assessment of council-owned parks and open spaces, followed by other council-owned land to realise their value. This evidence can then be used to inform a future funding model to ensure that ongoing management is sustainable.
- Support the Warwickshire natural capital investment strategy project board and working group. To explore how the sub-regional local authorities can utilise the nature-based compensation monies and /or other income streams generated through the planning system or other voluntary markets.
- Identify new sources of investment, biodiversity net gain, s106, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) etc.
- Investigate further external funding opportunities e.g. Species Recovery Fund from Natural England
- Investigate the use of carbon credits for urban forest projects (e.g. tree planting) sequestering carbon dioxide, and whether these can contribute to the Net Zero agenda.

15.0 Behaviour change and education

15.1 For many years, we have worked with our Friends groups, conservation volunteers and partners such as the Wildlife Trusts, Canal and Rivers Trust, schools, parish councils, community gardens and orchards to maintain and improve the rich diversity of habitats which can still be found in and around the borough. We greatly value this shared expertise and passion, recognising that we cannot hope to reverse the decline and help our species adapt to a changing climate alone. For this

³³ [Natural England Biodiversity Metric](#)

reason, the new strategy seeks to further engage with a variety of partners and key stakeholders to respect, protect and enhance our borough's wildlife and the multiple benefits it provides that enhance Solihull's natural capital.

15.2 Key actions

- Use the council's communication mechanisms, especially the website, to increase and encourage public awareness and understanding of natural capital.
- Explore how we can make the best use of the benefits of the community and voluntary resource to maximise opportunities.
- Showcase council projects and the natural capital benefits that they bring to local communities and businesses, whilst engaging with local communities to become involved in the future of their local sites and the biodiversity and natural capital value of these spaces.
- Implement behaviour change initiatives to support the natural environment vision and outcomes. This could be by providing information on the council's website for climate-resilient species to plant, advocate the benefits of planting hedges rather than erecting fences, or supporting initiatives on water efficiency such as: rain gardens and other sustainable drainage system initiatives, or using trees to provide shade and mitigate urban heat.

**Conservation of the
Historic Environment,
Landscape Architecture,
Urban Design and Ecology**

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