

NATURE CONSERVATION IN SOLIHULL

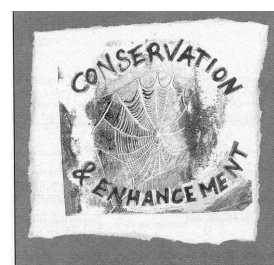
FOREWORD

As Chairman of the Planning Committee, I recognise the importance of protecting the natural environment of the Borough and welcome the publication of Solihull's first Nature Conservation Strategy.

The Council plays a vital part in encouraging nature conservation and strives to set a good example for others in its own activities. Solihull's natural assets comprise not just its designated sites, of which there are many, but the wider environment, both within the Green Belt and beyond. These assets need to be nurtured if the commitment to Biodiversity in the Borough's Environment Strategy is to be met.

The Council will develop its work with other organisations and the community in order to implement the initiatives in this Strategy, which makes a significant contribution to the aims of Local Agenda 21 in Solihull. I am confident that it will be of interest to many people.

Councillor Jim Ryan, Chairman
Planning Committee



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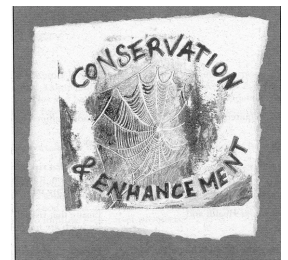
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1.INTRODUCING THE STRATEGY

Aim

To protect, manage and enhance Solihull's natural environment for the benefit of wildlife and people.

The Measures

The strategy will cover the following areas:-

- Protection of the natural environment by preserving the best habitats and rocks and managing the land in the interests of wildlife.
- Improving the natural heritage by enhancing existing habitats and utilising opportunities presented by new developments to create new natural assets.
- Provision of access for people to experience wildlife locally, consistent with the protection of habitats and species.
- Promotion of the benefits of nature conservation by educating the community and publicising examples of best practice.
- Engaging the community in nature conservation by building partnerships to attract resources and encourage involvement.

Purpose

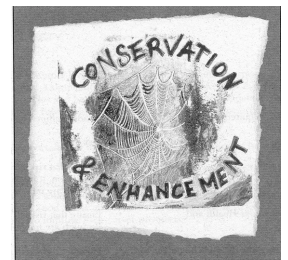
The purpose of the strategy is:-

- To ensure that the importance of the natural environment is recognised.
- To provide a framework for existing and proposed initiatives and prioritise their implementation.
- To encourage partnerships with local communities, businesses and voluntary organisations to enhance the natural environment in accordance with the aims of Local Agenda 21.
- To develop the Biodiversity issue identified in the Environment Strategy for Solihull.

The Benefits

The strategy will deliver the following benefits for Solihull:-

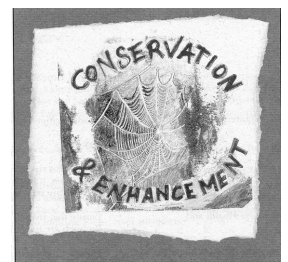
- Safeguarding of plants and animals and the habitats in which they live.
- Provision of an attractive environment and a sense of place and well-being.
- Positive management of the natural environment.
- Access to wildlife and recreational opportunities.
- Increased public awareness of the value of nature conservation.
- Increased networking between the Council, voluntary organisations and the community.



2. CONTEXT

Solihull's Natural Environment

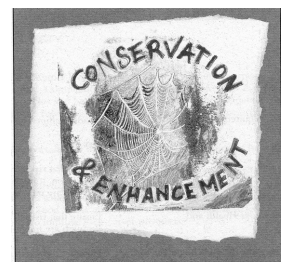
The natural environment includes communities of plants and animals, the places where they live, and the geological and physical features that surround them. *Urbs in Rure*, Solihull's motto literally means 'Town in the Countryside' which describes its essence. The Borough is part of the West Midlands Metropolitan area but has close historical links with Warwickshire. Solihull's natural environment, part of the Arden Landscape, is rich in valuable habitats. Once dominated by the oak woodlands of the Forest of Arden, historical changes in land use have resulted in the development of grasslands and farmlands, interspersed with remnants of ancient woodlands and hedgerows. These habitats and the associated groups of plants and animals are characteristic of Solihull's natural environment. More information about the natural environment will be available from the Habitat Biodiversity Audit.



Woodlands

There are two main types of woodland found throughout Solihull; ancient and secondary woodlands. Ancient woodlands are remnants of the Forest of Arden, dated from 1600 or earlier. Dominant trees were typically oak and birch or small-leafed lime. Characteristic ancient woodland ground flora found include yellow archangel, wood anemone and bluebells. Because of their age, these woodlands may also be of archaeological significance, preserving historic boundary banks, saw pits or evidence of charcoal burning. Good examples of ancient woodland can be seen at Millison's Wood and Smith's Wood which have carpets of bluebells in Spring. Newer secondary woodlands, mostly planted in the 19th Century, have names such as 'covert', 'gorse' and 'spinney'. They typically consist of a mixture of oak, birch, sycamore, beech and ash; for example, Mill Pool Spinney in Solihull and Nappins Covert in Barston.

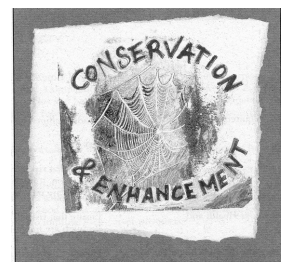
Woodlands are complex habitats with a rich variety of wildlife. Tree canopies, shrub layer, commonly holly and hazel, and ground flora all provide homes for insects, including butterflies; birds, for example woodpeckers; and mammals such as grey squirrels, foxes and badgers. Within Solihull there are 61 woodland Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), 1 Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 4 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). The Council runs a Woodland Management Programme which actively manages 16 woodlands, with the vital help of conservation volunteers, including 3 of the LNRs at Bill's Wood, Millison's Wood and York's Wood.



Hedgerows

Hedgerows form an important part of the Arden landscape giving character to the countryside and distinctiveness to local areas. They also have historical and cultural value. Hedgerows act as wildlife corridors across the Borough linking habitats and allowing movement of animals and colonisation by plants. Hedgerows provide vital habitat, shade, shelter and food for a wide range of insects and butterflies, nesting birds, small mammals and larger mammals including rabbits, foxes and badgers.

Some hedgerows are old and species rich, with mature oak trees, often remnants of the old Forest of Arden, and provide a stronghold for ancient woodland flora. Other hedgerows give a glimpse of the past, marking field and parish boundaries showing how the land was divided and managed. Newer enclosure hedgerows are typically less diverse, dominated by blackthorn and hawthorn, but these still have high conservation value.



Grassland

There are a number of different types of grassland found in Solihull. The value of the grassland for wildlife depends upon two factors; the nature of the soil and any previous management. Many pastures have been improved by the use of fertilisers and ploughing as a result of farming activity. These grasslands are typically dominated by rye-grass and are relatively species poor. In contrast, species rich unimproved grasslands have a high conservation value, supporting many colourful butterflies and other insects. Unimproved grassland meadows can have great floral diversity including a variety of grasses, hay rattle, knapweed, devils-bit scabious, and cowslips. Good examples can be seen at Shadowbrook Meadows near Hampton in Arden and Monkspath Meadow, both of which are SSSIs. In Solihull there are three grassland SSSIs and 14 SINCs.

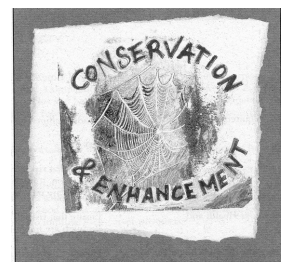
Amenity grasslands found in formal parkland and public open spaces have lower wildlife value, as they are closely mown and fertilised. However, they can provide foraging areas for birds and small mammals in urban areas. In wet areas, often along rivers and streams, marshy grassland can be found. These can be very species rich with various tussock-forming rushes and sedges, meadowsweet, ragged robin, yellow rattle, marsh marigold and southern marsh orchid. Excellent examples are seen at Bickenhill Meadows and meadows along the River Blythe. Abandoned land can also develop a diverse flora which often supports a wide variety of insects and other invertebrates.



Farmland

The majority of Solihull's countryside is farmland. Traditionally, Arden pastures and arable farmlands are characterised by small to medium field patterns with old field ponds. Winding narrow lanes and sunken trackways link scattered farms and hamlets. Many fields are bounded by ancient species-rich hedgerows, often with a ditch and bank. Permanent pastures are typically associated with poorer soil, but have a diversity of plants and animals and are good for wildlife, providing feeding grounds for badgers and birds. In contrast, intensively farmed arable land has little value for wildlife.

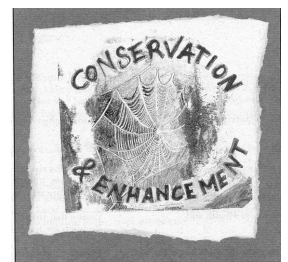
As a result of government policies, major agricultural changes have taken place since the 1940's which have had a significant effect on the value of farmland for wildlife. These include an increase in arable land, at the expense of permanent pastures; the increased use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers which has decreased the variety of wildlife, and polluted streams and rivers; and the removal of important hedgerows and trees. However, in recent years agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship have enabled farmers to manage their land in a way that enhances its value for nature.



Heathland and bogs

Heathland was once a common feature in Solihull. This is reflected in place names such as Hockley Heath and Elmdon Heath. However, it is now rare in the Borough and declining nationally, due to heath being lost to farmland and urbanisation. Fragments of heathy grassland survive at Packington and Earlswood, which support many insects, birds, amphibians and reptiles. Typical heathland plants, including heather, bilberry, gorse, broom and bracken, are still found along roadside verges and in woodlands and hedgerows.

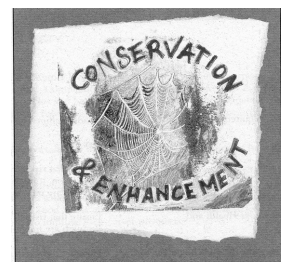
Bogs are permanently wet habitats where dead plants do not fully decompose but form peat rather than soil, and are characterised by sphagnum moss and sundews. There is only one area of true bog left in Solihull, at Bickenhill Plantation, which is designated as a SINC.



Ponds and lakes

There are a variety of ponds and lakes found across the Borough providing standing water habitat. Lakes are an important feature of many parks in Solihull, providing a haven for wildfowl and fish. Lakes are also formed at gravel pit extraction sites, for example, Ryton End in Barston and at Cornetts End in Meriden. Lakes have a high amenity and recreation value too.

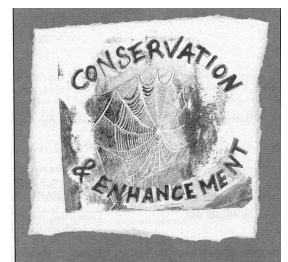
Traditionally, countryside ponds in Solihull occur in the corner of fields, used for livestock to drink. These are becoming gradually overshadowed and dried up and sadly, many are being lost. Others originated as mill ponds and have an additional historic significance. The enhancement of ponds in housing estates and new garden ponds are replacing some of the lost resource. In addition, ponds are often found in woodland clearings, for example, Palmers Rough in Shirley. Ponds are important wildlife habitats which support a wide variety of plants and animals including rare and endangered species. Floating, submerged and marginal aquatic plants provide homes for insects, including dragonflies and damselflies; and wildfowl, such as ducks, moorhens and coots. Ponds are also valuable for amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts. Warwickshire is a stronghold for Great Crested Newts, which are an endangered species, protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act. A good example of a wildlife rich pond can be seen at the Ards in Dorridge. There are 7 pond and lake SINC's in Solihull.



Rivers and streams

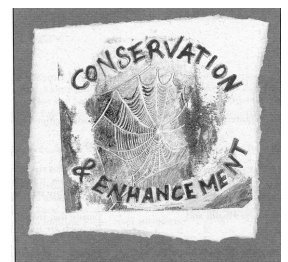
Two main rivers flow through Solihull. The rural River Blythe meanders through the centre of the Borough. The whole of the river is designated as a SSSI and is the finest example of a lowland river on clay in Britain. As such, the aquatic plant and invertebrate communities found are rare. The River Cole starts in Worcestershire, flows through Birmingham and North Solihull and joins the Blythe in North Warwickshire. The whole of the urban Cole valley is cared for as a wildlife corridor, with Project Kingfisher looking after the part in North Solihull, bringing the countryside to urban areas. Although stretches of river are polluted, it still provides a valuable green corridor for wildlife as well as recreation. Animals found include dragonflies, fish, kingfishers, herons, wildfowl, frogs, toads, newts and various aquatic plants.

There are many streams within Solihull, although some in the urban areas are canalised or culverted and may be polluted. In rural areas, streams flow across fields linking wildlife habitats. River corridors often provide additional habitat of ponds, marshy grassland areas and waterside trees of willow and alder, for example at Packhorse Bridge, Hampton in Arden and Shelly Coppice Meadows, near Monkspath, which are important for breeding birds and insects. Natural banks and emergent reed fringes provide suitable water vole habitat, and the otter is also reported to be returning to our area.



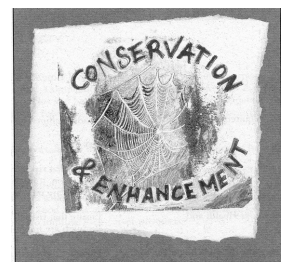
Canals

There are two canals within Solihull. The Grand Union Canal flows through the centre of the Borough and the Stratford-on-Avon Canal flows through Hockley Heath and Packwood. Canals provide green corridors, bringing wildlife to semi-urban areas and are an important remnant of our industrial heritage. The combination of the water, aquatic plants, bankside vegetation, trees, grassland and embankments provide ideal habitat for fish, wildfowl, dragonflies and damselflies, herons, kingfishers and even water voles and badgers. Ancient woodland trees and wildflowers can be found along canal embankments, for example at Knightsbridge Road Wood in Olton. There are 2 canal sites designated as SINC.



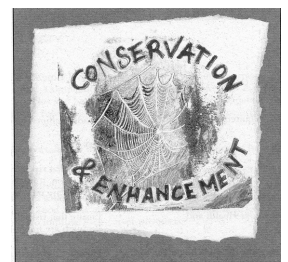
Natural corridors

Natural corridors form a network across the Borough, linking different habitat types. There are a variety of different natural corridors including rivers, canals, railways, road verges and hedgerows. By providing continuous links of natural vegetation, wildlife corridors allow the movement of plants and animals, ensuring that populations are able to mix and remain viable. Natural corridors are particularly important wildlife assets in urban areas bringing the countryside into the town. “Green wedges” and “stepping stones” also link green urban spaces with the countryside. An excellent example of a natural corridor is the River Cole along the Cole Valley.



Geology

The majority of the underlying rock in Solihull is the Triassic Mercia mudstone formation, consisting of red marls and siltstone. This material has formed the basis of an extensive brick making industry during the 18th and 19th Centuries, a remnant of which can be seen at Arden Brickwork RIGS, along the A45, near Stonebridge. This is the only RIGS in Solihull. There are several outcrops of Arden Sandstone in the south-east of the Borough, an important building stone in this area in the past. Of particular interest is an outcrop of Lias limestone around Knowle, which accounts for the calcareous nature of the grasslands. Large expanses of the Borough are covered in boulder clay with interesting glacial lake deposits between Cheswick Green and Hockley Heath and south of Balsall Common. In addition there are well developed river terrace deposits on both sides of the River Blythe. Current palaeoenvironmental research studies these drift deposits to help understand environmental conditions of the past.



Policy Background

Protecting the best sites

Interest in nature conservation has been growing in Britain for many years. Successive governments have increased controls and given local authorities a central role via the planning system and nature conservation legislation. At first, nature conservation was restricted to designating nationally-important sites, such as SSSIs, with powers for local authorities to create Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). In Solihull, important trees and woodlands have long been protected for their amenity value, using Tree Preservation Orders.

Since the 1960s, public bodies have been expected to consider the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside in their activities. Locally, much of the countryside has been designated as Green Belt and protected from unplanned development. The Warwickshire Nature Conservation Trust, now Wildlife Trust, a charity dedicated to protecting habitats and promoting awareness of conservation issues, was established in 1970.

Species and habitats

Public awareness of environmental issues increased dramatically in the 1970s with the activities of organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. The government supported international initiatives to protect wildlife habitats and birds, whilst at home it set up an independent Nature Conservancy Council, now known as English Nature. Local authorities were offered advice on planning, managing and promoting nature conservation in their areas. The Council responded with nature conservation policies in its plans, whilst 59 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) were identified in Solihull.

The 1980s saw further protection for sites, and for key species such as badgers and bats. Local authorities were encouraged to negotiate management agreements with private landowners and to promote nature conservation in schools and the community. Government advice emphasised the importance of the planning system for protecting designated sites and conserving nature when development was permitted. A woodland management programme was started in Solihull and the Project Kingfisher partnership established. A review of SINCs in Solihull by the Nature Conservancy Council identified 70 sites. In 1990, the Solihull Green Scheme was set up to coordinate the Council's work on environmental improvements and education.



Agenda 21 and biodiversity

By the 1990s, the concept of sustainable development was gaining widespread acceptance, along with concern about the loss of the natural environment globally. This resulted in two international initiatives; a plan of action for sustainable development called Agenda 21, and a convention on biodiversity, or the diversity of life. In nature conservation terms, sustainability means conserving those natural areas which cannot be replaced, whilst maintaining sufficient natural resources generally to ensure that the diversity of life thrives.

The government responded with a strategy for sustainable development and a Biodiversity Action Plan, which led to plans for threatened or declining species and habitats. Communities have been urged to prepare their own action plans for locally-important species and habitats, and to promote more sustainable lifestyles and development. A Local Agenda 21 Plan for Solihull, including a chapter on the natural and rural environment, was launched in 1998. This strategy is a significant contribution to the aims of Local Agenda 21 in Solihull.

Management and Access

Recent advice from the government on nature conservation recognises the crucial importance of protecting all wildlife habitats, not just designated sites, and the wise use and management of natural resources generally, in line with sustainability objectives. Planning powers have been strengthened and important rural hedgerows can now be protected from removal or neglect. Increasing pressures for access and recreation can conflict with nature conservation. The role of education and access in the management of the natural environment has been widely recognised. English Nature is promoting accessible natural spaces in urban areas and has agreed standards of provision which the Council will adopt as long term aims for Solihull.



Wildlife corridors

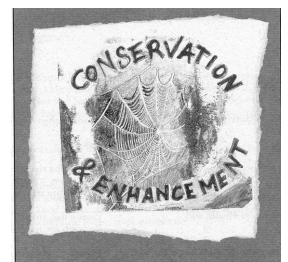
English Nature has produced a map of England showing Natural Areas with similar types of wildlife and natural features. Each area is supported by a description and objectives to guide nature conservation in the future. The main aim in the Midlands Plateau, in which Solihull lies, is to repair damage to the natural environment caused by industrial and economic growth. One of the key themes is the linking of existing wildlife sites and corridors to form a green network. This strategy will contribute to English Nature's objectives by enhancing wildlife corridors and stepping stones in Solihull.

Solihull's strategy

The Solihull Unitary Development Plan, adopted in 1997, gives protection to both important sites and the natural environment outside these designated areas. This strategy will promote additional policies for inclusion in the UDP during the review, protecting species and wildlife corridors, and encouraging wildlife creation in areas of scarcity. The Council has published an Environment Strategy for Solihull which identifies biodiversity as a key issue. The Nature Conservation Strategy develops this issue and explains how the diversity of life in Solihull will be conserved and enhanced.

Beyond Solihull

Solihull's natural environment does not begin or end at the Borough's boundaries. The Nature Conservation Strategy recognises the links to the wider Warwickshire environment and the urban areas of Birmingham and Coventry. In particular, the Council will take into account the Birmingham Nature Conservation Strategy, and develop existing partnerships for the wider benefit of nature conservation



3. THE STRATEGY

Protection

The Council will protect Solihull's important nature conservation sites and ensure that its diverse natural assets are maintained.

Designated sites and protected species

Designated sites, such as SSSIs, and SINCs, are subject to special protection in law and the UDP respectively, because of their contribution to nature conservation. However, protection of these sites alone, which cover less than 3% of the Borough's area, will not be sufficient to ensure the survival of Solihull's wildlife. Many rare, declining and protected species are found elsewhere.

The wider environment

Protection of the natural environment in the wider countryside, and in natural corridors and stepping stones in urban areas is crucial for wildlife survival. The UDP provides some protection from harmful development outside the designated sites. Important trees and woodlands are protected and recent regulations allow some degree of protection for hedgerows. Completion of the Habitat Biodiversity Audit will enable significant natural corridors and sites to be identified and protected.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Conserve and enhance the natural environment of the River Blythe corridor, in partnership with the Environment Agency, English Nature, farmers and landowners.*
- *Designate Local Nature Reserves on appropriate sites.*
- *Review SINCs using the agreed criteria as part of the Wildlife Sites Project.*
- *Identify important natural corridors and stepping stones.*
- *Propose new UDP policies relating to natural corridors, stepping stones and protected species during the review in accordance with government advice.*
- *Identify habitats and species which would benefit from Local Biodiversity Action Plans, and agree a programme for implementation, through the Habitat Biodiversity Audit Partnership.*
- *Use the revised Hedgerow Regulations for protecting important hedgerows.*



Creation And Enhancement

The Council will encourage new habitat creation, and the enhancement of damaged or declining habitats, to maintain a sustainable level of wildlife in Solihull.

Wildlife corridors and stepping stones

Wildlife corridors and stepping stones are particularly important for the migration and dispersal of wildlife, which encourages genetic exchange. Habitat creation can be used to enhance the links between wildlife sites and to expand existing sites. The Council recognises that creating and enhancing sites will help to establish a green network connecting sites in the urban area with the countryside.

Areas of wildlife scarcity

Some parts of Solihull, especially the more densely built-up areas, have few natural habitats. Creation and enhancement will be important to make wildlife accessible for people in these areas. Certain habitat types, such as species rich grasslands, heathland and wetlands, are particularly scarce. The Council will look for opportunities to increase Solihull's supply of these habitats.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Formulate a new UDP policy to protect and enhance wildlife corridors during the Review.*
- *Show the wildlife network on the UDP Proposals Map.*
- *Allow habitats to regenerate naturally and create new habitats by planting, such as new woodlands and hedgerows in accordance with the Forest of Arden strategy.*
- *Identify areas of wildlife scarcity in Solihull and explore the potential for habitat creation.*
- *Encourage farmers, landowners and the public to create and enhance habitats.*
- *Identify habitats and species which would benefit from Local Biodiversity Action Plans and agree a programme for implementation, through the Habitat Biodiversity Audit partnership.*
- *Identify existing sites which could be expanded or linked to others.*
- *Use locally collected seed for habitat creation, wherever possible.*



Management

The Council recognises that sympathetic management of the natural environment is essential to increase its value for both people and wildlife.

Designated sites and nature reserves

Solihull has a small number of nature reserves which are managed by a variety of organisations to enhance their natural features. English Nature provides management recommendations for designated sites, such as SSSIs, which farmers and landowners are encouraged to adopt.

The wider environment

Public woodlands are managed by the Council with help from local conservation volunteers. The Cole valley, an important wildlife corridor linking Birmingham with the Warwickshire countryside, is managed by Project Kingfisher. The Council recognises that sensitive management of other sites, such as parks, playing fields and verges is important.

The Council intends to explore the potential for using the new environmental capital approach, as a means of valuing and enhancing the wider environment. A review of the nature conservation value of Council-owned land using the Habitat Biodiversity Audit information will help to identify opportunities for enhancement.

Private landowners and managers need encouragement and assistance to manage their land. The Council will promote initiatives encouraging sensitive management such as Countryside Stewardship, and provide advice and assistance to farmers and landowners.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Work with English Nature to apply the environmental capital approach to Solihull.*
- *Review the nature conservation value of its own land and the opportunities for enhancement.*
- *Manage characteristic Arden landscape features and key habitats.*
- *Prepare management plans and information leaflets for its woodlands.*
- *Prepare habitat management guidelines for landowners.*
- *Encourage farmers and landowners to manage SINC's and other sites sensitively.*
- *Promote the use of the Farming and Wildlife Group, Countryside Stewardship and Woodland Grant Schemes by farmers and landowners.*



Impact Of Development

The Council will ensure that all new development proposals take full account of the natural environment.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is development which meets social and economic needs without undermining the quality of the natural environment. The UDP plays a critical role in balancing these needs. During its review, the Council will assess the environmental effects of the UDP, to ensure that its policies and proposals accord with this strategy. This will complement the requirement for environmental assessment of major projects, such as mines and motorway service areas.

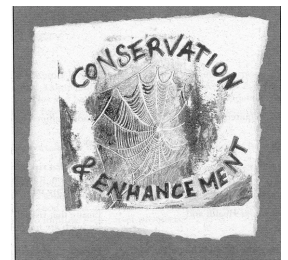
In those circumstances where development takes priority over nature conservation, it will be guided to locations which avoid the most important and sensitive wildlife sites. Careful design and implementation of a development can help to minimise its impact on wildlife.

Compensatory measures

Where damage to nature conservation interests is unavoidable, the UDP provides for appropriate mitigation or compensatory measures. Some proposals may present opportunities for wildlife enhancement or creation.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Undertake environmental assessment of the policies and proposals in the UDP during the review.*
- *Prepare a code of practice for new development, in consultation with developers, landowners and nature conservation organisations.*
- *Take full account of all impacts upon the natural environment in determining all planning applications.*
- *Ensure that environmental assessment statements reflect the importance of the natural environment and are prepared to a high quality, in line with relevant guidelines.*
- *Seek opportunities to enhance existing and create new habitats associated with new development proposals.*
- *Consider the need for an environmental assessment of all Council development proposals.*
- *Devise a standard condition for use on planning permissions where protected species are known to occur.*



Access

The Council will ensure that natural open spaces are available throughout Solihull to encourage regular contact between people and wildlife.

Natural open space

Woodlands, river walkways, meadows, canals, nature reserves and parks are just some of the places where people can experience nature close at hand. Some parts of Solihull have few accessible natural spaces. The Council will identify areas of scarcity and seek opportunities for increasing natural open space. Although the Council will encourage public access to most sites, access to fragile or rare habitats may have to be restricted.

Accessibility

This is affected by the distance from home, the existence of barriers such as busy roads to cross, people's mobility and disability and feelings of personal safety. People must also know where natural open spaces are to be able to visit them. English Nature recommends the provision of accessible natural open space within 300 metres of home. The Council will adopt English Nature's standards as long term aims for Solihull, and seek agreement with farmers and landowners to improve access. Sites may need to be protected from damaging uses.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Aim to give people access to a variety of natural open spaces, with at least one within 1 Km from home.*
- *Identify areas of natural open space scarcity and explore the potential for increasing access.*
- *Publish information on where natural open spaces can be found.*
- *Improve interpretation at existing nature reserves.*
- *Increase the number of Local Nature Reserves.*
- *Improve access to natural open spaces for wheelchairs and pushchairs.*



Promotion And Education

The Council will encourage people to care for and enjoy wildlife by raising public awareness and understanding of the benefits of the natural environment.

Promotion

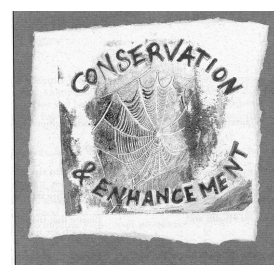
Initiatives such as the restoration of the Forest of Arden and Project Kingfisher caring for the Cole valley, help to raise the profile of Solihull's natural environment. The Council publicises activities at various woodlands, and events during Solihull Environment Week. More recent initiatives such as the creation of Elmdon Nature Park and Brueton Park nature conservation areas offer opportunities for promoting nature conservation.

Education

The Council, through its Environmental Education programme, supports nature conservation projects, such as wildlife gardens, butterfly borders, ponds and tree planting in school grounds, as part of children's education. Partnerships have been established with groups, such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, to promote environmental education. The Council intends to explore ways of expanding this work in the future and will work with the Police to prevent and detect offences against wildlife.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Encourage communities to develop and manage local natural habitats.*
- *Provide information and interpretation at nature reserves.*
- *Involve people in the preparation of Action Plans to implement this strategy.*
- *Play a full and active role in partnerships with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and others.*
- *Offer an annual award for the most significant contribution to nature conservation in Solihull.*
- *Expand its involvement in environmental education.*
- *Develop links with the Police to prevent wildlife offences.*
- *Promote nature conservation by farmers and landowners.*



Information, Auditing And Monitoring

The Council recognises that accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information about Solihull's natural environment is essential if wildlife is to be protected, managed and enhanced.

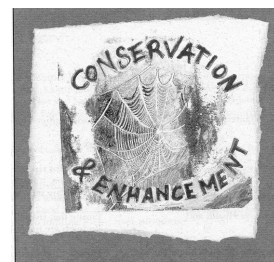
Habitat Biodiversity Audit

The Council is a partner in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit, led by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, which is surveying natural habitats throughout Solihull. This information will be updated on a regular basis.

Up-to-date information about the natural environment will have a number of benefits. The Council, with English Nature and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust will be able to review the SINC's in Solihull, which have not been surveyed since the 1980s. Locally important habitats and species which will need to be included in Local Biodiversity Action Plans can be identified more readily. The habitat information will enable more accurate assessment of the consequences of development for the natural environment, through the UDP review and in determining planning applications. The information will be used to identify meaningful indicators of progress towards a more sustainable future, as part of Solihull's Local Agenda 21 process. Many sites of value for nature conservation also hold important historical records.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Play a full and active role in the Habitat Biodiversity Audit partnership.*
- *Review SINC's using the agreed criteria as part of the Wildlife Sites Project.*
- *Identify characteristic species and habitats for use as indicators of change.*
- *Monitor changes in Solihull's wildlife resource and develop this strategy.*
- *Investigate the potential of integrating ecological and archaeological databases to enable greater protection of important sites.*
- *Prepare and maintain a site alert map showing the distribution of known protected species and sites.*
- *Support the proposal for a local Biodiversity Record Centre.*



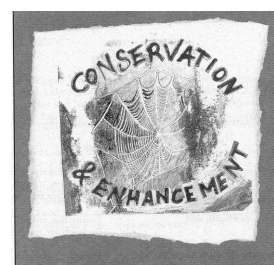
Resources

The Council will provide resources and support towards the initiatives in the Action Plan and will seek support from a variety of sources and partners.

The Council is committed to implementing this strategy and will provide funding and staff resources to enable progress. However, existing budgets for environmental enhancement are insufficient. The Council aims to maximise the benefit derived from its resources by seeking complimentary funding from other sources. Resources may be available for community initiatives from organisations such as Warwickshire Rural Community Council and Birmingham International Airport.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Allocate funding and staff annually towards nature conservation.*
- *Maximise opportunities for grant-aiding from environmental agencies and funding from other sources.*
- *Encourage and support community and individual initiatives through Local Agenda 21.*
- *Encourage developers, farmers and landowners to adopt a positive attitude to nature conservation.*



Partnerships And The Community

The Council recognises that other organisations have a major part to play in the implementation of this strategy. The Local Agenda 21 process is crucial as ultimately nature conservation depends on individual decisions and actions taken at a local level.

Existing partnerships

The Council is already involved in a large number of partnerships whose objectives include nature conservation. Project Kingfisher, which cares for the Cole valley, involves the City of Birmingham, the Environment Agency, English Nature, the Countryside Commission, local Wildlife Trusts and the local community. The Council is also active in the Habitat Biodiversity Audit and Wildlife Sites partnership led by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and is committed to the preparation of Local Biodiversity Habitat and Species Plans. Local conservation volunteers and the Forestry Commission help the Council with the management of public woodlands.

Engaging the community

Involvement of the community is at the heart of Local Agenda 21. The community in Solihull is being encouraged to become involved in nature conservation through the Local Agenda 21 process. This strategy will help to raise people's awareness of the natural environment and nature conservation issues.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO

- *Help to develop the existing Habitat Biodiversity Audit partnership through the Wildlife Sites project and the preparation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans.*
- *Play an active role in Project Kingfisher.*
- *Conserve and enhance the River Blythe corridor, in partnership with the Environment Agency, English Nature, farmers and landowners.*
- *Encourage and support involvement of the community in nature conservation through Local Agenda 21 initiatives.*
- *Continue to support volunteers involved in woodland management and other conservation work.*
- *Develop partnerships with farmers and landowners to encourage nature conservation.*
- *Develop existing partnerships with neighbouring authorities on site specific and strategic issues.*



4. THE WAY FORWARD

Action Plans

This strategy provides the overall framework for nature conservation in Solihull, but does not give details of each project. These will be included in an Action Plan, which will also identify a responsible officer and Committee for each project and targets for its completion. The Action Plan will be updated annually, including a review of the Council's statutory requirements, external pressures and any new opportunities.

Implementation

The agreed actions will be implemented by inclusion in the business plans of the appropriate business groups in the Council's Environment Services and other departments. This strategy will be used to encourage other departments to play their part in conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Progress will be monitored through the annual updating of the Action Plan.

The contribution of individual projects to the overall aim of this strategy will be monitored by agreed indicators, such as rare or declining habitats or species.

This strategy will be used as supplementary planning guidance, and will assist the review of the nature conservation policies in the UDP. It will be reviewed every 5 years.



A. GLOSSARY

Agenda 21

An action plan towards the 21st century providing a blueprint for global partnership to achieve sustainable development, endorsed by 179 nations at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Biodiversity

The whole variety of life on earth including plants, mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians, invertebrates such as worms and insects, fungi and micro-organisms including viruses and bacteria.

Environmental Capital approach

Consideration of the environment as consisting of assets, divided into critical, constant and tradable capital, as a means of making the sustainability concept practicable. The approach has been developed by the Countryside Commission, English Nature, English Heritage and the Environment Agency, by focusing on what it is about a place or asset that is important, and how it can best be managed in the interests of sustainability.

Habitat

A place in which a particular plant or animal lives, often used in a wider sense, referring to major assemblages of plants and animals found together.

Environmental sustainability

Maintaining the environment's natural qualities, characteristics and its capacity to fulfill its full range of functions, including the maintenance of biodiversity.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs)

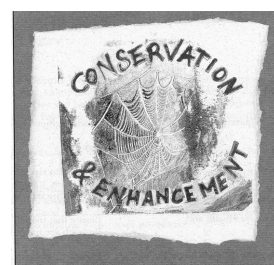
A means to implement the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, to conserve and enhance biodiversity at a local level. Identifying where actions are required, targets and delivery mechanisms for species and habitats under threat.

Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Statutory reserves designated by the Local Authority in consultation with English Nature, with special value locally for education and amenity for the community.

Local Agenda 21 (LA21)

Implementation of Agenda 21, to maintain and improve the quality of the environment and life at a local level, based on partnerships between the community, the Local Authority, local interest groups and local businesses working together to achieve a sustainable community.



Natural environment

Includes communities of plants, animals and where they live; and physical and geological features that surround us.

Nature conservation

The conservation of animals, plants and habitats, and physical and geological features, to ensure their long term survival, by protection, management and enhancement.

Quality of life

Human well-being affected by the working environment, social conditions, health and economic well-being.

Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS)

Non-statutory designated sites within a county, with geological or geomorphological features worthy of protection for their educational, research, historical or aesthetic importance.

Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)

The most important non-statutory nature conservation sites at a local borough level, which are afforded protection by the Local Authority through the UDP.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Nationally important statutory sites notified by English Nature under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and protected because of their special interest for flora, fauna, habitats, geological or physiographical features.

Sustainable development

“Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

or

“leaving the planet as we would wish to find it”.

Tree Preservation Order (TPO)

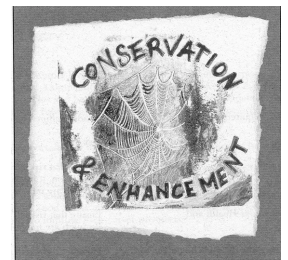
An order made under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), to preserve trees of high amenity value and to prevent felling or tree surgery without consent from the Local Planning Authority.

Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

Plan produced by the Borough Council concerned with the use of land and containing policies on housing, the economy, transportation, leisure and recreation, green belt and the environment, for example.

Wildlife

Any undomesticated organisms, including plants and animals.



B. SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION

National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949

Introduced SSSIs and empowered local authorities to create LNRs.

Countryside Act, 1968

Imposed duty on all public bodies to have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the countryside.

Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

Strengthened the protection of SSSIs, animals and plants, and encouraged local authorities to negotiate management agreements with landowners.

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act, 1985

Further strengthened SSSIs and protected additional species.

DoE Circular 27/87 Nature Conservation

Advised on plan policies and development control practices to protect designated sites and conserve and enhance the wider countryside.

Environmental Protection Act, 1990

Provided further protection for SSSIs.

Planning and Compensation Act, 1991

Strengthened enforcement and development control powers and required plan policies to conserve the natural beauty and amenity of land.

Protection of Badgers Act, 1992

Consolidated previous legislation for the protection of badgers and setts.

Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations, 1994 (The Habitat Regulations)

Transposed the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive into national law, protecting sites and species of international importance.

DoE PPG9 Nature Conservation, 1994

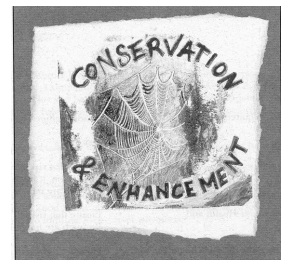
Emphasised the importance of both designated sites and undesignated areas for nature conservation.

Environment Act, 1995

Established the Environment Agency, introduced protection for the water environment and imposed duties to review and improve air quality.

Hedgerow Regulations, 1997

Provided limited protection for “important” countryside hedgerows.



C. CONTACTS

Solihull MBC

Environment Services, PO Box 19, Council House, Solihull, B91 3QT
Email environment@solihull.gov.uk Internet www.solihull.gov.uk

Ecologists 0121 704 6589
Green Scheme/Local Agenda 21 0121 704 6874
Strategy 0121 704 6393

Environmental Agencies

Countryside Commission 0121 233 9399

Midlands Region, Vincent House, Tindal Bridge, 92-93, Edward Street,
Birmingham, B1 2RA

Internet www.countryside.gov.uk

Government agency responsible for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the countryside, providing management advice and support for projects.

English Nature 01743 709611

West Midlands Region, Attingham Park, Shrewsbury, SY4 4TW

Email wmt.en.ap@gt.net.gov.uk Internet www.english-nature.org.uk

The statutory government adviser on nature conservation, responsible for designating SSSIs and advising on the designation of LNRs, SINCs and protected species.

Environment Agency 01543 444141

Upper Trent Area, Sentinel House, Wellington Crescent, Fradley Park,
Lichfield, WS13 8RR

Email enquiries@environment/agency.gov.uk

Internet www.environment/agency.gov.uk

Government agency responsible for regulating the water environment, major industrial processes and waste management, with important conservation duties.

Farming and Rural Conservation Agency 0117 959 1000

Burghill Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, BS10 6YW

Email warkswag@aol.com

Executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, responsible for advising on the design, development and implementation of policies concerning the integration of farming and conservation.

Forestry Commission 01509 852334

Midlands Conservancy, Station Road, East Leake, Loughborough, LE12 6LQ
Internet www.forestry.gov.uk

Government agency responsible for protecting and expanding forests and



woodlands, providing support for new planting and woodland management.

Voluntary Groups

Birmingham and Solihull Midweek 0121 426 5588

Conservation Volunteers

WM Conservation Centre, Firsby Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2QT
Voluntary group affiliated to BTCV dedicated to carrying out practical conservation work in Solihull and Birmingham.

British Trust for Conservation 0121 428 2413

Volunteers (BTCV)

WM Conservation Centre, Firsby Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2QT
Charity dedicated to promoting practical conservation work for wildlife, landscapes and access improvements

Butterfly Conservation 01788 335881

Warwickshire Branch, 149, Norton Leys, Rugby, Warwickshire,
CV22 5RS
Email warwickshire.butterflies@dial.pipex.com
Internet www.butterflyconservation.org.uk
National charity dedicated to saving wild butterflies, moths and their habitats.

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group 01926 318280

Warwickshire College of Agriculture, Moreton Morrell, Warwickshire,
CV35 9BL

Independent charity dedicated to encouraging, by providing confidential professional practical advice, the integration of conservation into farm management.

Royal Society for the Protection 01295 253330

of Birds (RSPB)

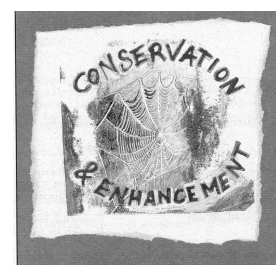
46, The Green, South Bar , Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX16 9AB
Email ian.barber@rspb.org.uk Internet www.rspb.org.uk
National charity dedicated to the conservation and protection of wild birds and their environment.

Solihull Conservation Volunteers 0121 624 0872

Charity affiliated to BTCV, responsible for promoting and carrying out practical conservation work in and around Solihull.

The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham 0121 666 7474
and the Black Country

Unit 310, Jubilee Trades Centre, 130, Pershore Street, Birmingham,
B5 6ND
Email urbanwt@cix.co.uk Internet www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/urbanwt
Charity dedicated to celebrating, protecting and enhancing the wildlife in



the Birmingham conurbation, providing a wildlife information service.

Warwickshire Badger Group ***01203 302912***

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry, CV3 3GW

Charity affiliated to the National Federation of Badger Groups dedicated to encouraging the understanding of badgers and promoting their welfare and conservation.

***Warwickshire Geological
Conservation Group*** ***01203 686463***

56, Beacon Road, Coventry, CV6 4DQ

Voluntary group dedicated to conserving geological sites and fostering interest and education in geology in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, responsible for identifying RIGS.

***Warwickshire Rural Action
for the Environment*** ***01926 493290***

The Abbotsford, 10, Market Place, Warwick, CV34 4SL

Email ridgley@cix.co.uk

Charity dedicated to the preservation of rural culture, providing advice and small grants to community groups to enable local environmental initiatives.

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) ***01203 302912***

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Brandon Lane, Coventry, CV3 3GW

Email warkswt@cix.co.uk Internet www.wildlifetrust.org.uk

Charity dedicated to protecting wildlife and natural habitats in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, responsible for the Habitat Biodiversity Audit.

Local Initiatives

Project Kingfisher ***0121 749 3131***

Shard End Community Centre, Packington Avenue, Shard End, Birmingham, B34 7RD

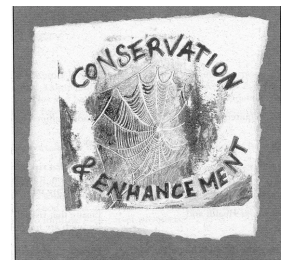
Partnership responsible for caring for and improving the lower Cole valley for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

***Natural and Rural Environment
Specialist Working Group*** ***0121 704 6874***

Local Agenda 21 group in Solihull consisting of members of local organisations, residents' groups, Parish Councils, and the local authority which aims to improve the quality of life and involve the community in its topic area.

***Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull
Habitat Biodiversity Audit*** ***01926 412197***

Warwickshire Museum Field Services, The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS



Email warkshba@cix.co.uk

Partnership led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust undertaking an ecological survey of all 3 areas' habitat types.

