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Report to: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)

Report title: **Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Biodiversity Duty Report**

Report from: Head of Planning Design and Engagement Services, Economy
and Infrastructure Directorate

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1. Purpose of this document

- 1.1 Local authorities and local planning authorities are required to publish a biodiversity report which sets out how Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's (SMBC) will comply with our statutory Biodiversity Duty.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'Biodiversity Duty', which means that public authorities in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 5.41 'Biodiversity Duty'

"An amendment to the original Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) section 40 duty, provided for in the Environment Act 2021, extends the biodiversity duty on public authorities to include the enhancement of biodiversity alongside conservation by way of creating "the general biodiversity objective".

- 2.2 Click here to view the full wording of part 6 of the Environment Act 2021 - Biodiversity objective and reporting <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/part/6> (opens in a separate window).

3. Compliance with the Biodiversity Duty

- 3.1 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity (habitats and species) as set by the Environment Act 2021 and the amended Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act). This is known as 'the biodiversity duty'.
- 3.2 A key effect of the Environment Act was to amend, (from 1 January 2023), S40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) from a duty to "conserve" to a requirement to both 'conserve' and "enhance'. With the aim to provide for the enhancement or improvement of biodiversity, not just its maintenance in its current state.
- 3.3 To comply with the Biodiversity Duty the Council as a public authority, must
 1. Consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
 2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on its consideration.
 3. Act to deliver its policies and achieve its objectives.
 4. Report on its biodiversity duty actions.
- 3.4 To meet the terms of the 'biodiversity duty' the Council, was required to consider the actions it intended to undertake to conserve and enhance biodiversity no later than 1st January 2024. As soon as possible after this initial consideration the Council was

required to agree policies and objectives to deliver these actions.

- 3.5 Although there is no guidance from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) on what should be included in the first consideration, the Council took a report to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder Climate Change and Planning on 18th October 2023 to consider the 'Natural Capital Investment Strategy' (NCIS) appended to this report, which refers to the Biodiversity Duty (Section 5).
- 3.6 The NCIS is a vehicle to fulfil our Biodiversity Duty, amongst other natural capital objectives to address the biodiversity crisis and contribute to the achievement of national targets to halt the decline in species abundance and to significantly improve the natural environment.
- 3.7 In addition to the Solihull NCIS the Council are also a partner in the Warwickshire NCIS and have endorsed the document. The Warwickshire NCIS provides a greater focus on environment markets and financial intervention and investment meaning it complements the work of the Councils own NCIS, helping promote cross boundary working and delivery.

4. Links to National Targets

- 4.1 Action that the Council takes for biodiversity will contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity. The Environment Improvement Plan [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK](#), published in January 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment.
- 4.2 By 2030, the government has committed to:
- Halt the decline in species' abundance.
 - Protect 30% of UK land.
- 4.3 By 2042, the government has committed to:
- Increase species' abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels.
 - Restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
 - Reduce the risk of species' extinction.
 - Restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

5. Biodiversity Report Contents

- 5.1 The required information can be provided in any way the Council deems appropriate. However, Defra have provided a template report structure [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversity-duty) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversity-duty->

actions

- 5.2 Government guidance provides advice on complying with the duty and reporting on this compliance. The end date of the first reporting period should be no later than 1st January 2026 and the report must be published within 12 weeks of the period's end (26 March 2026). When the Local Authority must publish a Biodiversity Duty Report detailing, amongst other things, actions that have conserved and enhanced biodiversity and plans for future actions to inform progress on actions taken.
- 5.3 The end date of subsequent reporting periods should be no later than 5 years after the end of the previous reporting period (so by 1st January 2031). Reports must be published within 12 weeks of the end of each reporting period. Defra has not clearly indicated how it intends to extract report content following publication by Local Authorities, and so further guidance may be forthcoming. Council officers will report to Members on the progress of the future Biodiversity reports and actions being taken to meet our legislative requirements.
- 5.4 ***Mandatory Information by Law, The Report Must Include:***
- A summary of the action the Council has taken to comply with the Biodiversity Duty.
 - The policies and objectives the Council has set to meet our Biodiversity Duty.
 - The actions the Council has completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.
 - An explanation as to how the Council has taken account of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, protected site strategies and species conservation strategies.
 - Set out how the Council plans to comply with the Biodiversity Duty in the next reporting period (five years).
 - Set out the actions the Council has carried out to meet biodiversity net gain (BNG) obligations.
 - Provide details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans the Council have approved.
 - Detail how the Council plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period.
 - Any other information the Council considers appropriate.

6. Biodiversity Report

Summary of the action taken by Solihull Council to comply with the biodiversity duty

- 6.1 Local authorities (excluding parish Councils) must write and publish a biodiversity report as outlined above. Each report must include the start and end dates of the reporting period and be published within 12 weeks of the reporting period end date. The Council will update this document as further guidance becomes available on Biodiversity

Reporting requirements.

- 6.2 The attached Report has followed advice provided by Defra to define its structure and content, and identifies actions undertaken that accord with the duty.
- 6.3 The biodiversity duty applies to all wards of the Council and across all service areas. However, the current Biodiversity Duty Report has been developed by officers in CLAUDE in consultation with officers from key service areas who currently participate in the Climate Change and Sustainability Group. This position will be updated and developed in subsequent reporting periods.
- 6.4 The Biodiversity Duty Report summarises the action the Council has taken to comply with the biodiversity duty and demonstrates that Solihull Council already undertakes many of these actions and has existing policy, strategy and team practices that will meet this duty. More details on these actions and functions follow in the Sections below:

7. Section One: The Council's Policies, Objectives and Actions

- 7.1 This section of the report explains the policies and objectives the Council has set to meet the biodiversity duty and the actions completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.
- 7.2 Solihull's wildlife, ecosystems and habitats are vitally important to us all, as the loss of biodiversity affects our lives in many ways, from the insects that pollinate our food to the green spaces that enhance our resident's health and wellbeing. The Council has a key role to play in conserving and enhancing biodiversity, through:
- Developing and implementing external and internal policies and strategies.
 - Administering the planning system.
 - Managing land and buildings including public open space, nature reserves, civic buildings, commercial property and infrastructure.
 - Engaging with business and the public.
 - Conducting research and managing information.
 - Procurement (goods and services).
 - Implementing economic, environmental and social initiatives, projects and programmes.
 - Leading by example.
- 7.3 The Government has introduced an enhanced duty for public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This is the strengthened

'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduces.

- 7.4 To meet the terms of the 'biodiversity duty' the Council, was required to consider the actions it intended to undertake to conserve and enhance biodiversity no later than 1st January 2024. As soon as possible after this initial consideration the Council was required to agree policies and objectives to deliver these actions.
- 7.5 Although there remains no guidance from Defra on what should be included in the first consideration, the Council took a report to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder Climate Change and Planning on 18th October 2023 to consider the 'Natural Capital Investment Strategy' (NCIS) appended to this report, which refers to the Biodiversity Duty (Section 5).
- 7.6 The NCIS was referenced in the Council Plan Priorities, Deliverables and Outcomes update 2022 -2023 and was cited at Full Council on 9th July 2023, before going to Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board on the 19th July 2023 and Cabinet Member on the 18th October 2023 prior to consultation. The NCIS was adopted at the CPH Climate Change and Planning Decision Session on the 29th July 2024.
- 7.7 The NCIS is a vehicle to fulfil our Biodiversity Duty, amongst other natural capital objectives to address the biodiversity crisis by protecting, restoring and enhancing nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing and contribute to the achievement of national targets to halt the decline in species abundance and to significantly improve the natural environment.
- 7.8 The Delivery Plan provides a framework of key actions for achieving this and will coordinate the efforts across the Council to deliver current and planned actions, including those that contribute towards the Biodiversity Duty and will set out how the Council will work with a range of partners and key stakeholders, to consider future (short and medium term) actions and an appropriate way of measuring, monitoring and reporting the NCIS aims. To achieve our aims, we need to work collaboratively - the natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries.
- 7.9 The NCIS is a strategic document 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. It will therefore sit alongside and not replace existing initiatives, strategies and policies and fully integrated with our social and economic agendas.
- 7.10 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.
- 7.11 Responsibilities and timescales for carrying out actions will be allocated by the Climate Change & Sustainability (CCS) Working Group, a joint board created to link interested parties and the oversight of the NCIS and the Climate Change Prospectus and Action Plan – helping align biodiversity and climate change policy and projects.
- 7.12 Funding and financing are an important focus of the Delivery Plan, and new funding models need to be explored to maximise opportunities to deliver natural capital

improvements across Solihull.

- 7.13 A key action within the NCIS Delivery Plan is to support the Warwickshire Natural Capital Investment Strategy Project Board and Working Group, which include Solihull and Coventry. This provides a clear opportunity to work collaboratively at a sub-regional level to build a shared knowledge base and funding mechanism that generates greater opportunities to maximise access to environmental markets. It also creates a shared platform from which to utilise the nature-based compensation monies and other income streams generated through the planning system or other voluntary markets. A Natural Capital Investment Plan (NCIP) will be produced to support the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull (WCS) NCIS.
- 7.14 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has been chosen as one of four areas in the UK to deliver Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programmes. these programmes are part of the government's new Green Finance Strategy (2023) to support a green industrial revolution and transition to a climate resilient, nature-positive, net zero economy.
- 7.15 The WMCA will work with regional stakeholders to develop a pipeline of projects that have the scale and impact needed to attract significant levels of investment and help deliver the priorities set out in the West Midlands Natural Environment Plan. The WMCA is the only major urban area to be chosen for Defra's two-year Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme as greater environmental responsibilities are set to be transferred from Whitehall to the region as part of the recently announced Deeper Devolution Deal.
- 7.16 Importantly, the potential investment secured as part of the programme will also enable the WMCA to deliver more nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation, the development of a local nature recovery strategy, and improvements to air quality.
- 7.17 Whilst the introduction of an enhanced duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity is a new requirement for public authorities in the exercise of their functions the Council, in addition to the recently adopted NCIS (July 2024), does have several existing policies and objectives that show how we are, and will continue to, meet the biodiversity duty. These documents help us to conserve and enhance Solihull's natural environment, landscape character and local distinctiveness. Also helping us protect wildlife, encourage community involvement, promote our parks and open spaces and promote sustainable development, they help shape our borough to be well designed, accessible and valued. These are listed below:

Local Policy

- **The Council's Corporate Plan (2025 – 2030):** to deliver an enhanced well-connected natural environment.
- **Solihull Cultural Strategy (2025 – 2035):** is the golden thread running through the Council plan and the main Council priorities, which puts residents' wellbeing, the environment and economy at its heart.
- **The Local Plan (2013) and Local Plan Review (2024):** which includes a number of policies that seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity in new development and acknowledges that the setting of new objectives and policies will fall within the remit of the Local Plan Review (Subsequent reports will track progress on this

matter and provide appropriate detail). This includes in particular work carried out by the CLAUDE team and the LPA to prepare for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), mandatory from 12 February 2024, such as training for officers and members and the development of guidance to provide assistance for applicants for planning permission.

- **Climate Change Action Plan (formerly Net Zero Action Plan) (2021):** We declared a local climate emergency in 2019, supported by the development of a Climate Change Action Plan in 2021, a comprehensive strategy to meet Solihull's 2041 net zero target, with biodiversity being a key component of its broader aims to improve the natural environment, air quality, and overall community well-being.
- **Solihull Economic Strategy (2023 - 2032):** which includes working with businesses for positive biodiversity gain.
- **Solihull Green Spaces Strategy Review (2014):** which includes wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness.
- **Solihull Urban Forestry Strategy (2019 – 2029):** which seeks to protect, promote and enhance our urban forest.
- **Solihull Nature Conservation Strategy First Review 2010 – 2014:** which provides guidance on how the authority expects nature conservation to be considered in the development management process.
- **Solihull Green Infrastructure Study (2012):** identifies opportunities to enhance existing and identify areas for new.
- **Solihull Countryside Strategy: First Review (2010 – 2020):** aimed to protect and enhance the character of the borough's countryside, which makes up two-thirds of its area. The strategy sought to balance the needs of a diverse rural economy with the conservation of natural resources and increased public access. The results of the review informed subsequent policies, including later local and green infrastructure plans.
- **Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (2016):** Provides an overview of the landscape character across the Borough and provides guidelines that will help to manage change. It also supports the Solihull Local Plan process in considering spatial planning options and decisions within the planning application process. The document is also intended to inform community development, village plans, countryside priorities, heritage and historic landscape characterisation work, education, employment and housing initiatives through to contribution it makes to the understanding of the natural, cultural and perceptual factors of the landscape.
- **Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (2010):** is to promote better management and understanding of the historic landscape resource, and of the accommodation of continued change within it, and to establish an integrated approach to its sustainable management in partnership with other organisations.
- **Warwickshire Landscapes Guidance: Arden (1993):** refers to a series of landscape assessment reports and guidelines, originally published in 1990 and updated in 1993, that focus on the Ancient Arden landscape character area in

Warwickshire. These guidelines provide detailed information on the area's distinctive features, such as its fragmented woodland, ancient hedgerows, and scattered ponds, to inform planning decisions and promote landscape conservation and enhancement.

- **Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2015:** Through the management of flood risk, maximise opportunities to improve water quality and enhance biodiversity wherever possible.
- **Solihull Clean Air Strategy (2024 - 2028):** which summarises the impact air quality can have on habitats and the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Regional Policies, Objectives and Actions include:

- **The WMCA Natural Environment Plan (2021 – 2026):** Which includes several priority actions to protect, restore and enhance our region's natural environment.
- **The West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS):** A strategic plan, required by the Environment Act 2021 and led by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), to coordinate efforts to protect and improve the region's natural environment. It identifies priority areas and actions for nature recovery, such as increasing tree planting, enhancing wildlife corridors, and improving access to green spaces for all communities. The plan provides a unified, regional view of nature, building on existing local efforts and enabling collaboration between local authorities, landowners, businesses, and citizens.
- **WMCA State of Nature Report (2025):** provides an overview of the existing distribution and types of natural environments across the entire West Midlands Combined Authority area, including Solihull. It examines the value these habitats provide to both wildlife and people and helps to prioritize actions for nature recovery and expansion within the region.
- **The State of Habitat Report (2025):** Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Natural Capital Assessment Partnership team (a partnership including the Trust and 8 regional local authorities) have put together a State of Habitats 2025 report for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. The data in the report shows us the overall diversity of habitats, where different habitats are found and the area of these. This is vital information as there are competing pressures on limited available land.
- **The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013):** is a strategic mechanism to deliver GI enhancements across the partner authorities to meet national, sub-regional and local GI needs. Resulting in a well-connected, accessible and biodiversity resilient landscape, supporting economic growth, social health and climate change adaptation.
- **The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy (WCS NCIS) (2024):** is a collaborative, sub-regional plan by local authorities to protect, restore, and enhance natural assets, serving as a mechanism for attracting and directing investment into the environment. It aims to build a shared knowledge base and funding platform to maximize access to environmental markets, such as those for biodiversity net gain and carbon. The strategy focuses on identifying and valuing natural capital across the sub-region to create funding opportunities.

- **Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP):** There are 52 biodiversity action plans for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, 27 for our vulnerable species and 25 for our characteristic habitats, ranging from woodlands and wetlands to urban and rural settlements.
- **National Character Area 97 Arden:** provides a description of the landscape, including its key characteristics and how the area has changed over time, an overview of the NCA's natural capital (the benefits of the area to society) and statements of environmental opportunity – setting out how the landscape could be managed for the future.
- The information and evidence in these documents can:
 - Help the Council and the local community to make informed decisions about the places that they live in and care for.
 - Guide actions to achieve nature recovery, including through Local Nature Recovery Strategies and detailed local actions in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).
 - Support the planning of large-scale conservation projects and the design of land management schemes.
 - Enable discussions regarding the provision of Nature-based Solutions, supporting climate resilience.
 - Inform choices about landscape change
 - Encourage and support partnership working towards a common vision, aims and delivery.

Projects

- 7.18 This report provides further examples of how matters relating to biodiversity are translated into actions on the ground via the Council's CLAUDE team, which for many years in collaboration with the Council's Public Realm and Forestry teams, have enabled an extensive range of sites to be sensitively managed and protected for their biodiversity interest for the benefit of people and wildlife. The team seeks to ensure the continued protection and enhancement of these sites including through community involvement in conservation activities.
- 7.19 This report also includes projects, actions and initiatives that the Council has completed, or continues to deliver either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity. In recent years, award winning projects such as Solihull Habitats & Nature Improvement Project (SHNIP) and Wildlife Ways (WW), part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in partnership with the Environment Agency and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust have seen huge environmental improvements across the borough. Some of which are included in the West Midlands Natural Environment Plan 2021 - 2026 as examples of leading best practice.
- 7.20 We hope that this investment in the natural environment of Solihull ensures these projects have a lasting positive impact and legacy for our communities, contributing to the quality of place, biodiversity and those ecosystem services that contribute positively towards people's health and well-being.
- 7.21 In keeping with the Council's motto '*Urbs in Rure*' (town in the country), Solihull's natural environment is one of its greatest assets. Preserving nature and

enhancing biodiversity plays a vital role in the fight against climate change and protecting our residents' health and wellbeing.

- **The Solihull Habitats & Nature Improvement Project:** completed in spring 2020, concluded an ambitious three-year programme of habitat creation and ecological enhancement schemes in over 21 publicly accessible green spaces, parks and woodlands across the urban areas of Solihull. The project, conceived in 2017, delivered 100 hectares of enhanced habitat, which will collectively increase and strengthen the capacity of the natural environment to deliver ecosystem services across the region and provide resilience and mitigation against climate change.
- **Wildlife Ways:** a £17 million three- year programme of works aimed to make Solihull greener, creating a network of Green Corridors, opening up and improving existing routes, allowing wildlife to flourish and helping people to walk and cycle across the borough. The project, which ended in Spring 2022, improved 69km of existing footpath and cycle networks and created 23km of new shared use footways and improved access for cyclists, improving connectivity between existing green spaces to reduce species fragmentation and isolation. Increasing species resilience and boosting nature recovery, following the Lawton Review principles of 'more, bigger, better and connected'. The project also improved the habitat value of over 55 hectares of parks and open spaces within the urban areas of Solihull and overall improved the habitat value of over 73 hectares.
- **Solihull Council's Small Habitat Grant Projects:** completed in May 2023 delivered 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 included restoring degraded habitat and 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 included the Blythe Revival projects at Brueton Park and Cheswick Green. These were 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. These already showing use of and colonisation by new and protected or otherwise notable species.
- **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF):** In November 2023, work also began on the enhancement of 3000m² of green and blue space and the planting of 100 trees across the borough as part of the UKSPF 'Solihull's Green Ways' project, built on the success of previous projects.

Actions and Initiatives

- 7.22 **The Arden Free Tree Scheme (AFTS):** is funded by an annual s106 contribution from Birmingham Airport, as part of their obligation to offset their carbon. Individuals or groups can apply to this scheme 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 native trees and shrubs planted. It is safeguarding and enhancing the Arden Landscape and is helping restore features typical of the wider Arden landscape to the urban landscape. The Councils review and technical input of the scheme with the knowledge of the WM LNRS, the Council's policies and of locally important species and habitats is guiding enhanced delivery of wider objectives too to support biodiversity.

- 7.23 Planting Our Future:** This 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. 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. Over 100,000 trees have been planted since its launch in 2020, a significant step that earned Solihull the prestigious status of a Tree City of the World.
- 7.24 Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC):** The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has been chosen as one of four areas in the UK to deliver local investment in natural capital (LINC) programmes. These programmes are part of the government's new Green Finance Strategy (2023) to support a green industrial revolution and transition to a climate resilient, nature-positive, net zero economy. The WMCA is working with regional stakeholders, including the Council, to develop a pipeline of projects that have the scale and impact needed to attract significant levels of investment and help deliver the priorities set out in the West Midlands Natural Environment Plan. The WMCA is the only major urban area to be chosen for Defra's two-year Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme as greater environmental responsibilities are set to be transferred from Whitehall to the region as part of the recently announced Deeper Devolution Deal. Importantly, the investment secured as part of the programme will also enable the WMCA to deliver more nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation, of the delivery of actions within the Wm LNRS and improvements to air quality.
- 7.25 Partnership working:** The current activity across the borough would 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, if the aims and objectives of the Council's Natural Capital Investment Strategy are to be achieved. Whilst the list below may not be exhaustive as circumstances change in the future, the Council's key partners and stakeholders in addition to our internal directorates and groups, currently include:
- **Government and Regulatory**
 - West Midlands Combined Authority and constituent Authorities such as Birmingham City Council
 - Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council
 - Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry England, Centre for Ecology

- and Hydrology, Animal and Plant Health Agency
- National Highways, Network Rail
- **Business** (those based in Solihull and those that work here)
 - Birmingham Airport
 - JLR
 - Rolls Royce
 - Amazon
 - HS2
 - Housebuilders
- **Community**
 - Parish Councils
 - Friends of Groups
 - Tree Wardens
 - Conservation Volunteer Groups
 - Arden Farm Network
 - Faith Communities
- **NGOs**
 - Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust
 - The Natural Capital Assessment Programme (formerly HBA Partnership)
 - Canal and River Trust
 - National Trust - 8 Hills Regional Park
 - Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership
 - Tame Anker Mease Catchment Partnership
 - RSPB
 - Sustainability West Midlands
 - Many local organisations supporting specific species groups.

8. Section Two: Future Actions

- 8.1 This section of the report explains how Solihull Council plans to fulfil its biodiversity duty over the 5 years following the end of this reporting period.
- 8.2 The Council's recently adopted Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) and Delivery Plan: 2024 (Appended to this report) 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.
- 8.3 The NCIS is a strategic document 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. It will therefore sit alongside and not replace existing initiatives, strategies and policies and be fully integrated with our social and economic agendas.
- 8.4 However, for this NCIS to be successful, it needs to expand on coordinated

efforts across the Council, and is involving work with neighbouring authorities, businesses, communities, statutory agencies and third sector organisations to achieve our aims. As the natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries, we shall continue to work collaboratively with our neighbouring authorities and communities to support and align common aims.

- 8.5 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 are allocated by the Climate Change & Sustainability Group.
- 8.6 The Council will make use of available funding streams through the WMCA LINC programme, through the development of the sub-regional Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy, schemes via statutory agencies and other charitable sources to apply measures for better outcomes for biodiversity and will seek those that also deliver multiple benefits for both our people and wildlife. These are necessary to support some of the landscape-level measures required.
- 8.7 The Council will also make use of research agencies and universities where these assist us in review of and benefits of both strategic and directed aims to benefit biodiversity and that support natural capital.

Maintenance and Management of the Natural Environment

- 8.8 Effective delivery of the NCIS Delivery Plan depends 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 in order to ensure such areas can develop their full natural capital potential.
- 8.9 All new projects within the NCIS Delivery Plan must therefore aim to include appropriate funding for maintenance and management for a minimum five years. This will form part of grant funding bids, but where such maintenance funding is not achievable through grants, other mechanisms 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.
- 8.10 The table below summarises the Council's current and planned actions that contribute towards the Biodiversity Duty and future actions which will be considered going forward. Inclusion of any future actions at this stage does not mean that any commitment has been made to take action, it simply signals that these are areas that will need to be reviewed as part of the process of agreeing an appropriate way forward.

Item	Objectives for meeting the Biodiversity Duty	Preliminary Assessment of current and planned actions that contribute towards meeting the objectives and	Future actions for consideration for the first biodiversity
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		policies (either alone or in partnership)	reporting period 2026 - 2031.
1.	<p>Mainstreaming Biodiversity: Plans, Policies and Strategies (either alone or in partnership)</p> <p>Council’s overall approach to meeting The Biodiversity Duty is to mainstream biodiversity, ensuring it is embedded into all Council Services, strategic plans, policies and decision making, not just those directly related to the environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of Solihull NCIS and Delivery Plan • Creation of joint board to link interested parties and the oversight of the NCIS and CCS – helps align biodiversity and climate change policy and projects. • Council Plan 2025 - 2030 Key activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take steps to ensure that our borough is resilient to our changing climate. ○ Progress the Local Plan to ensure a framework is in place to guide development to the right places, whilst protecting what makes Solihull special. ○ Work towards an enhanced well-connected natural environment <p>Actions under our Climate Change Declaration contribute to the biodiversity duty, which includes Solihull’s Natural Capital Investment Strategy which is a key element in our response to the biodiversity crisis and sets out how we will protect restore and enhance nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing.</p> <p>The Solihull Council Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Plan (2013) and Local Plan Review, includes a number of policies that seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity, both solely and cross-discipline, where these align or influence one another. <p>Solihull Local Plan solihull.gov.uk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to coordinate delivery of key actions within the NCIS Delivery Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wildlife Corridors and Species Recovery ○ Health and wellbeing ○ Tree and hedgerow planting ○ Data, technology and knowledge sharing ○ Funding and financing ○ Behaviour change and education • Update planning policy through new Local Plan - Council Plan updates to maintain commitment to conserving and enhancing biodiversity • Identify specific receptor sites for BNG and consider BNG site allocations within new local plan. • Adoption of Local Plan Review • Review protection measures for our most threatened species and work with others to identify positive actions to support their recovery e.g. Species Conservation plan (an extinction avoidance plan) for

		<p>Solihull Local Plan Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We declared a local climate emergency in 2019, supported by the development of a Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) in 2021, with the problems of climate change, air pollution and reduction of species and biodiversity needing to be treated together. Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) solihull.gov.uk • Solihull Economic Strategy 2023 2032 includes working with businesses for positive biodiversity gain. Solihull Economic Strategy • Solihull's Clean Air Strategy (2019 -2024) has since been updated and an Air Quality Strategy has been developed, covering the years 2024 to 2028. This now includes a specific section on the environment summarising the impact air quality can have on habitats and the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity. • Air quality strategy 2024 to 2028 • The Green Infrastructure Study (2012) identifies opportunities to enhance existing and identify areas for new Green Infrastructure. Solihull Green Infrastructure Study • Solihull's Green Spaces Strategy Review (2014) includes wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education and awareness Green Spaces Strategy Review (solihull.gov.uk) • Biodiversity embedded in Green Flag Management Plans. • Nature Conservation Strategy (2010 – 2014), includes biodiversity and guidance on 	<p>native white-clawed crayfish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review protections measures for our most threatened habitats and work with others to identify positive actions to support their recovery e.g. review of extent of and locations of irreplaceable habitats and secure the protection and enhancement of our most threatened habitats including: heathland, wet grasslands, fen, marsh and bog. Identifying those areas that need restoration or facilitation of connectivity between such features. • Identify other plans & strategies when reviewed as an opportunity to incorporate biodiversity where appropriate, including Supplemental Planning Documents e.g. Green Infrastructure and biodiversity SPD, BNG Advisory Notes and Design Codes Updates to the Climate Change Strategy/prospectus. • Ensuring there is robust process for enforcement action where required that threatens our sites, habitats and species through the development of Protected Site Strategies (led by NE)
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		<p>how the authority expects nature conservation to be considered in the development management process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solihull Urban Forestry Strategy (2019 – 2029), seeks to protect, promote and enhance our urban forest. Solihull Urban Forestry Strategy • West Midlands Natural Environment plan (2021 – 2026), which includes several priority actions to protect, restore and enhance our region’s natural environment West Midlands Natural Environment Plan 2021 - 2026 (wmca.org.uk) • The West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the West Midlands (wmca.org.uk) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with WCC on their LNRS to help support, promote and facilitate linkages between the WCC and WMCA LNRS documents – this reflects SMBCs unique position in relation to the 2 respective areas. • Sub Regional Green Infrastructure Strategy • The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy - Endorsed NCIS for CSW and a board member of the group overseeing its implementation with Solihull an ‘interested body’. • Procurement Strategy includes sustainable procurement Corporate Procurement Strategy 2024 - 2029 (solihull.gov.uk) 	<p>and Species Conservation Strategies.</p>
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<p>2.</p>	<p>Positive management of Council owned land and buildings to enhance biodiversity and ensure that existing habitats and species are safeguarded and managed appropriately.</p> <p>To maximise the potential of the Council's estate - buildings, parks, open spaces, watercourses and tree stock etc to conserve and enhance biodiversity, whilst balancing their multifunctional needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of parks and green spaces for nature including the creation of areas of new habitats such as wildflower meadows and woodlands • Native and sustainably UK sourced trees and plant species are used in new planting • Wildflower planting • Planting mixes and species selected to support pollinators • Bedding planting with low value for biodiversity to be largely replaced with herbaceous perennials and wildflower turf meadows, building on the successes for our Wildlife Ways programme. • Reduced the use of herbicides and pesticides and where used targeting this to specific localised treatments. • No use of peat. • Beneficial mowing (low mow) management practices • Beneficial woodland management practices as set out in Urban Tree and Woodland Strategies or in the Council's specific Woodland management Plans. • Making successful bids for external funding to deliver biodiversity enhancements, for example the ERDF and the Local Authority Treescape Fund. • As part of the Council's SHNIP, Wildlife Ways and Small Habitat Grant programme an area of 62.72 hectares of formerly frequently mown amenity grassland is now being managed as urban wildflower meadows. Including the positive woodland management of 105.89 ha of Council owned woodland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the potential for enhancing small scale habitats on Council owned land and buildings, including nest and roosting boxes, green walls, green or brown roofs. • Establish a programme of species and habitat surveys to record and monitor the ecological baseline for Council owned/managed land drawing on previous survey work and existing ecological data (i.e. Local Plan Evidence Base and information held by Natural Capital Assessment Programme NCAP (formerly HBA Partnership) and emerging data through the LNRS to identify the need for further survey work to fill data gaps. • Using the data above, assess the value of such areas against the LWS Green Book criteria (WCC guide to LWS designation criteria) and designate these where they should be, or link these through review of potential for creating new and/or enhanced spaces for nature recovery, and movement between, within our parks and open/green spaces (links with the LNRS and BNG).
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bid for additional funding to deliver local nature recovery projects on Council owned land. • Scope the potential for additional management and maintenance regimes for our parks and green spaces that maximise potential for biodiversity, carbon storage and sequestration. • Assess the condition and review the management of Council owned sites that are protected or designated as being of particular biological importance (Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites). Where required, prepare and implement Conservation Management Plans. • Leading by example: demonstrate the positive role of estate management to businesses, other organisations and the public.
3.	<p>Planning and Development including Biodiversity Net Gain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solihull’s Local Plan and Local Plan Review addresses biodiversity through a number of its policies including those for the conservation of designated and protected international, national and local sites, habitats and species of importance. It seeks to protect and enhance ecological networks and to protect and enhance green infrastructure generally - including open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning policies and Development Management will continue to protect and enhance habitat, species, ecological networks, trees and woodlands, green infrastructure and ensure delivery of mandatory Net Gain through BNG.

		<p>spaces. It also includes a policy related to protecting specific trees and trees on development sites. Moreover, it requires developments to maintain and actively enhance biodiversity in order to provide net gains where possible. These policies are considered and applied to all relevant developments across the borough and are central to the determination of applications for planning permission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and maintenance of the most valuable trees and woodland in the borough through the imposition and assessment of Tree Preservation Orders and evaluation of irreplaceable habitats pertaining to trees, woodlands and parklands. • The Council's CLAUDE team provides ecology advice, including the assessment of planning applications in relation to ecological impacts and net gains in biodiversity. • Biodiversity Net Gain, as calculated using the Defra approved biodiversity metric, is sought through negotiation on planning applications in accordance with Policy P10. On-site biodiversity enhancements are secured through planning conditions with off-site contributions via planning agreements. • Preparation for and responding to the implementation of mandatory 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) is ongoing • To assist the Council in preparing for BNG, planning officers have attended BNG meetings, workshops, and seminars provided by the Planning Advisory Service, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement BNG and ensuring all relevant planning applications are treated in accordance with the Regulations. • Explore the available options for monitoring and enforcement of mandatory BNG. • Scope the potential for Council owned strategic BNG sites within the borough where habitats could be created and/or enhanced, funded through the sale of BNG units to developers in need of them to achieve the required net gain for their developments. • Continue to monitor performance of current secured provisions. • Explore options for BNG investment on a cross-boundary basis with neighbouring authorities where benefits can be identified in a strategic context. • Consider the need for additional resources and expertise
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		<p>Defra, Natural England, and in house officer workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed model conditions to support BNG through planning applications • Procured CMIS system to help record and monitor BNG provisions. • Identified service budget to undertake a baseline review of Council owned land options with a view to identifying BNG receptor sites. 	
4.	<p>Improving our knowledge and monitoring of biodiversity</p> <p>Understand the existing extent and condition of our habitats and species to inform actions to increase their quality, diversity and extent; enable the impact of Council activities to be measured; and identify any new threats and opportunities across the borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCAP (Formerly HBA) have data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Phase 1 Habitat Survey and UKHab Survey mapping; ○ Local Wildlife Sites; ○ Habitat connectivity (woodlands, grasslands and wetlands) opportunity mapping; and ○ Urban greenspace mapping. • The NCAP data has provided the Local Plan (and local Plan Review with the Evidence Base and ecological baseline, identifying key species and habitats across the Borough, including those on Council owned/manged sites. This is supported by GIS mapping data. • Annual monitoring information on biodiversity related policies is included in the Council's Annual Monitoring Report • Contribute to NCAP via specific agreement with WWT/WCC for the provision of data and services • Open-source mapping – Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Nature Improvement Area (NIA), priority habitats, Natural England green 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update Local Plan biodiversity evidence base as required/necessary. • Establish a programme of species and habitat surveys to record and monitor the ecological baseline for Council owned/manged land drawing on previous survey work and existing ecological data (ie Local Plan Evidence Base and information held by the Warwickshire Local Biological Records Centre and emerging data through the LNRS to identify the need for further survey work to fill data gaps and to identify areas meeting the criteria for locally designated sites: LWS or potential LWS (pLWS) where the full assessment is outstanding. • Scope the potential for increasing the amount of land designated as Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in the borough (aiming to meet the

		<p>infrastructure mapping and natural capital mapping.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Natural England target of at least one hectare of LNR per 1,000 people)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor implementation of the policies and proposals in the Local Plan
5.	<p>Projects and Partnerships</p> <p>Working with others on joint biodiversity related strategies, initiatives, and projects, including the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government and Regulatory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internal partners at SMBC. ○ West Midlands Combined Authority and associated constituent Authorities. ○ Warwickshire County Council. ○ Worcestershire County Council. ○ Environment Agency. ○ Natural England. ○ Forestry England. ○ Animal and Plant Health Agency. ○ Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. ○ Historic England. ○ Highways England. ○ Network Rail. ○ TFWM. ○ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review internal processes which can include measures for biodiversity. • Continue to work in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority (and other SA Authorities) to deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which will provide a strategic overview of the habitats throughout the Region; and ensuring the LNRS is well understood across the Council and complements other relevant plans and strategies. • Continue to work in partnership Warwickshire County Council on delivery of Warwickshire’s LNRS. • Continue to work in partnership with Warwickshire CC and Coventry City Council re the WCS NCIS.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazon • HS2 • Housebuilders • Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish/town Councils • Friends of Groups • Tree Wardens • Conservation Volunteer Groups • Arden Farm Network • Faith Communities • Scout and Guiding Organisations • Greener Golf movement • 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 Member of the West Midlands LNRS Steering Group as a Supporting Authority. • Member of the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership (including supporting Warwickshire's LNRS). • Member of the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership. • Member of Tame Anker Mease Catchment Based Approach (TAM CaBA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to collaborate with statutory agencies such as Natural England, The Environment Agency etc. • Continue to collaborate with The National Trust, Canal and Rivers Trust, Severn Trent etc. • Continue to collaborate with neighbouring Local Authorities, including the WMCA Natural Capital Group. • Community groups • Town and Parish Council's. • Continue to support organisations who are working with and supporting communities to improve green spaces, habitat and species diversity such as Parks Friends groups. • Continue to support the efforts of local and national nature conservation groups such as Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership and Tame Anker Mease Catchment Based Approach (TAM CaBA) and the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership. • Continue to collaborate with Businesses and SMEs.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of Local nature partnership for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. • Support Parks Friends Groups and organisations working with and supporting communities to deliver projects that enhance biodiversity. • Work with statutory agencies (The Forestry Commission, Natural England, Environment Agency etc) and partners including Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, and neighbouring Local Authorities. • Work with partners to secure funding for Biodiversity projects such as new woodland planting to deliver the Council's tree planting target of 250,000 Trees over ten years. <p>Work with partners to deliver the Arden Free Tree Scheme, including the Arden Farm Network.</p>	
6.	<p>Workforce Development</p> <p>Training and Education for Councillors and Council employees to ensure that there is a sound understanding of biodiversity across the Council</p>	<p>Raise general awareness, using available guidance and resources. Integrating biodiversity into staff briefings and, where necessary, providing specific training on BNG. For example, all staff and Members to complete e-training such at the Biodiversity e-learning for Councils Local Government Association.</p> <p>Biodiversity e-learning for Councils Local Government Association</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to raise awareness, using available guidance and resources and, where necessary, providing specific training. • Remind staff of volunteering policy and opportunities to undertake voluntary conservation work. • Additional specialist training across the Council for staff involved in the management and/or maintenance of Council owned sites of particular local importance for habitats and/or species.
7.	<p>Behaviour change, Education, Advice,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Council's communication mechanisms, especially the website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the scope to increase awareness by incorporating

<p>Awareness and Engagement</p> <p>Creating a greater awareness of the part everyone can play in supporting nature and biodiversity.</p> <p>Engaging with stakeholders and the public to promote an increased understanding and awareness of biodiversity; to better understand the impact of their actions on nature and wildlife; and deliver community-led biodiversity actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting volunteering other initiatives that involve local communities in biodiversity projects such as SCV and BSMCV. • Supporting Love Solihull and Friends Groups and other initiatives that involve local communities in biodiversity projects such as the Councils Tree Planting programme through Planting Our Future. • Supporting the Arden Free Tree Scheme. 	<p>biodiversity messages into a wide variety of interactions and communications with stakeholders and the public (i.e. the importance of avoiding the use of pesticides and artificial grass in gardens).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a dedicated Council webpage(s) for Biodiversity. • Increased interpretation (boards, leaflets, posters, guided walks, digital communication systems etc). • Incorporating biodiversity in the advice provided to business to increase their environmental profiles. • Continue to pursue funding opportunities for the delivery of community led biodiversity actions • Environmental activities for schools • Engage Business in biodiversity 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.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement behaviour change initiatives and community guardianship to support Biodiversity. This could be by providing information on the Council's website for climate resilient species to plant or advocate the benefits of planting hedges rather than erecting fences or the provision of guides for new homeowners in Solihull, regarding Solihull's valued sites, species and habitats and how to sensitively support these for the future.
8.	<p>Data, technology and knowledge sharing</p> <p>Identifying locations to protect, restore, and enhance the borough's biodiversity needs 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural Capital Assessment Programme ArcGIS TreePlotter Solmaps) Spottitt (carbon and biodiversity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Spatially defining the Borough's natural environment through maps. This will build on existing work undertaken by the Natural Capital assessment Programme and WM LNRS. It will also allow understanding of where areas could be targeted for Investment in biodiversity and existing/ developing

			programmes of activity or for review of the carbon storage capacity of the borough's natural habitats as Natural Capital.
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9. Section Three: Biodiversity Net Gain Information (for local planning authorities only)

9.1 This section of the report includes information on biodiversity net gain. It includes:

- a summary of the actions undertaken to meet biodiversity net gain obligations.
- details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved.
- a summary of how the Council plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.

9.2 Solihull Council's ongoing commitment to biodiversity conservation is a statutory duty strengthened by the Environment Act 2021, requiring both the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

9.3 Solihull has taken action to meet biodiversity net gain (BNG) obligations through early adoption of offsetting programs, comprehensive local planning policies, and strategic initiatives. The borough's efforts are guided by its Natural Capital Investment Strategy and have evolved alongside the national BNG mandate.

Summary of BNG

9.4 Currently approximately 45 applications have required BNG through the development management process, with 225 being observed as exempt. These include 14 as a result of being De Minimis, 15 being self-build, 0 Biodiversity Gain Site, 175 householder and 21 pre-mandatory BNG, since May 2025.

9.5 No applications have yet been received at Biodiversity Gain Plan Stage, although this is anticipated to change over the duration of this report.

9.6 Several applications have been noted to provide a net loss of greater than 50%, to be mitigated off-site, we will be working with developers to minimise this further and ensure sensible decisions are made in relation to delivery of Council requirements e.g. strategic housing allocations and biodiversity losses and impacts, this has to be a combined approach to achieve sensitive developments that incorporate the objectives of the LNRS. This will be reviewed for the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans (the

latter with those preparing and reviewing such plans).

Policy and Strategy Actions

- 9.7 **Early adoption through pilots:** As part of a 2012-2014 pilot program, Solihull worked with Warwickshire and Coventry to trial biodiversity offsetting, a precursor to the mandatory BNG rules introduced in 2024. This helped establish local experience and protocols for assessing ecological impacts and securing gains.
- 9.8 **Incorporation into local plans:** The Solihull Local Plan includes a natural environment policy (P10) requiring new developments to secure a net gain in biodiversity. This is supported by ecological evidence from NCAP, formally the Habitat Biodiversity Audit, in which the Council is a partner.
- 9.9 **WM Mayoral Spatial Development Strategy (SDS):** The SDS will include a specific theme group focused on the Environment. This will focus on biodiversity and ecological enhancement and preservation with a specific focus on the LNRS as part of its evidence base.
- 9.10 **Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS):** The Council's 2024 NCIS details its long-term approach to addressing biodiversity loss.
- 9.11 **Collaborative partnerships:** Solihull works with neighbouring authorities and regional bodies like the West Midlands Combined Authority on large-scale nature recovery strategies such as the WM LNRS that transcend administrative boundaries. It also partners with organizations like the Wildlife Trusts and developers e.g. HS2 and major housebuilders to identify and develop functional habitat creation opportunities that best serve our local species.
- 9.12 **Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull NCIS:** A key action within the NCIS Delivery Plan is to support the Warwickshire Natural Capital Investment Strategy Project Board and Working Group, which include Solihull and Coventry. This provides a clear opportunity to work collaboratively at a sub-regional level to build a shared knowledge base and funding mechanism that generates greater opportunities to maximise access to environmental markets. It also creates a shared platform from which to utilise the nature-based compensation monies and other income streams generated through the planning system or other voluntary markets. A Natural Capital Investment Plan (NCIIP) will be produced to support the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull (WCS) NCIS.

Planning and Development Actions

- 9.13 **Mandatory BNG implementation:** Since the national BNG mandate came into force for major developments in February 2024, Solihull requires planning applicants to submit Biodiversity Gain Plans. The Council is responsible for:
- Processing applications to ensure they meet the 10% BNG target.
 - Securing off-site biodiversity delivery through legal agreements (often a Section 106).
 - Monitoring compliance over a minimum of 30 years.
- 9.14 **Mitigation hierarchy:** The Council ensures developers follow the mitigation hierarchy, which prioritizes avoiding harm to habitats. On-site gains are pursued first, followed by

off-site units and then, as a last resort, the purchase of statutory biodiversity credits.

9.15 **Habitat banks:** Solihull plans to become a Responsible Body and provide its own land as habitat banks for developers to purchase *off-site biodiversity units* to support the in-borough provision. The Council can also serve as a responsible body for conservation covenants, which secure the long-term management of private land used for BNG, discussion have been held with adjacent LPA to support each other in BNG delivery when these are provided within our respective LPAs.

9.16 **BNG Advisory Note:** Solihull is currently preparing BNG Advisory notes to guide sensitive development and our local interpretation of the Mandatory Process to support our development management process, streamlining applications involving BNG.

Habitat Restoration and Creation Projects

9.17 **Habitat creation and enhancement:** Solihull implements habitat projects directly and through developer contributions. Actions include:

- ***Establishing and enhancing habitats*** like wildflower meadows, ponds, and wetlands.
- Using sustainable drainage systems (***SuDS***) in new developments to create ecological features.
- Restoring river and canal networks, such as the ***River Cole*** with ***Warwickshire Wildlife Trust*** and the ***Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership***.

9.18 **Species recovery:** The Council identifies links to specific species recovery plans as part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, working with partners to aid priority species like the white-clawed crayfish, water vole, and hazel dormouse.

9.19 **Green infrastructure and wildlife corridors:** The Council's strategies emphasise strengthening and creating wildlife corridors to connect fragmented habitats. This is delivered through green infrastructure like tree-lined streets and has been supported through our Wildlife Ways programme.

10. Section Four: Information about Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

10.1 This section of the report explains the role and purpose of Solihull Council including:

- a brief description of the authority's functions.
- the size of the authority.
- an outline of its governance and management structures.

10.2 This section of the report also summarises how the Council can affect

biodiversity, both positively and negatively, in relation to:

- the land and estates we manage.
- planning and development decisions.
- the advice we give.
- raising awareness within the community; and
- how operations affect the environment.

Role and Purpose

- 10.3 Solihull Council oversees the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, which covers an area of 69 square miles (178 km²) and has a population of over 220,000 residents.
- 10.4 Solihull Council's role is to deliver high-quality local services, uphold its statutory duties, and improve the lives of residents by creating a thriving, safe, and prosperous borough. Its purpose is defined by its Council Plan 2025-2030, [The Solihull Council plan | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council](#) which sets out a vision for Solihull and outlines strategic ambitions, such as building a vibrant economy, promoting social value, and tackling climate change. The Council is responsible for delivering services like social care, education, waste management, and housing, while also managing public funds and collaborating with public, private, and community sectors.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

- 10.5 **Service Delivery:** The Council is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of numerous statutory services, including social care for adults and children, public health, waste and recycling, and maintaining highways and public spaces.
- 10.6 **Policy and Planning:** Elected Councillors determine policy matters and make key decisions, such as setting the Council Tax and the annual budget. They are guided by the Council Plan, which sets the vision and priorities for the borough.
- 10.7 **Regulatory Functions:** The Council must fulfil statutory duties and has regulatory responsibilities in areas like public health, environmental health, trading standards, and housing.
- 10.8 **Economic Development:** The Council aims to foster inclusive growth and opportunities by supporting businesses and attracting investment to the borough, focusing on areas like the UK Central Hub and the development of the local transport network.
- 10.9 **Community Well-being:** A core purpose is to support residents to have an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer, and more prosperous, reflecting the vision of a thriving community.

How the Council Operates

- 10.10 **Democratic Structure:** The Council is made up of 51 elected Councillors who

represent the local community.

- 10.11 **17 wards:** These are the geographical areas, with each ward being represented by three Councillors.
- 10.12 **Leadership and Executive Functions:** The Leader of the Council chairs the Cabinet, which is the executive group responsible for managing the Council's overall business.
- 10.13 **Scrutiny and Oversight:** Overview and scrutiny panels monitor and check the work of the Cabinet to ensure accountability.
- 10.14 **Council officers:** Council officers are professional staff who provide advice, implement decisions, and manage service delivery.
- 10.15 **Partnerships:** The Council works in partnership with various public, private, and community sectors to deliver its services and achieve its goals.
- 10.16 **Council Plan:** The Council Plan is the most important document, setting out the vision, ambitions, and values that guide the Council's decisions and actions.

How The Council Can Affect Biodiversity

- 10.17 Solihull Council can affect biodiversity through its land use, land management practices and policies, planning, development management and environmental strategies. This influence can be both positive, such as by preserving and conserving habitats, enhancing green infrastructure, and promoting sustainable development, and negatively (although mitigated by policies and supporting strategies), by permitting development that can lead to habitat loss, fragmentation, and increased pollution through its decisions on planning applications and local development plans. The Council has policies to address these issues, including mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and strategies for green infrastructure and natural capital, aiming to balance development with ecological protection.

Positive Effects

- **Strategic Planning:** The Council's Local Plan incorporates policies and strategies to protect, enhance and connect the borough's natural environment and conserve and enhance biodiversity, such as protecting designated sites, priority habitats, and green infrastructure. This safeguards valuable green and blue spaces, including the River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), ancient woodlands, rivers, and canals.
- **Green space strategies:** Through its Green Spaces Strategy, the Council aims to create and maintain accessible, high-quality green spaces, which include Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).
- **Green Infrastructure:** The Council actively promotes and invests in green infrastructure, including corridors and stepping stones, to connect habitats and improve the health of the natural environment across the borough.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** Solihull Council mandates BNG, requiring developments to achieve a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity through on-site or off-site measures, contributing to habitat restoration and creation. This ensures that new developments not only mitigate harm to habitats but also leave the environment

in a measurably better state than before.

- **Habitat Conservation, Restoration and Creation:** Through its planning functions, the Council protects and manages locally designated sites and other ecologically important areas, ensuring positive conservation management. The collaboration with other organisations through our partnership and outreach work also ensures joined up land management considerations to minimise impacts and maximise benefits.
- **Wildlife corridors:** The Council's Natural Capital Investment Strategy focuses on developing and strengthening wildlife corridors, such as semi-natural habitat along watercourses and green bridges. This helps combat the isolation and fragmentation of habitats caused by development and further supports development with green infrastructure built in.
- **Urban meadows and tree planting:** The Council promotes the creation of urban meadows and the planting of trees and hedgerows, which connects and increases biodiversity in urban areas and offers wider environmental benefits, such as flood mitigation and reduction in urban heat island effects.
- **Rewilding and habitat banks:** The Council seeks opportunities for large-scale habitat restoration and, through mandatory BNG, is currently exploring the creation of "habitat banks" on Council-owned land to offset biodiversity loss elsewhere and is supporting other organisations to further protect, restore and enhance existing habitats and species.
- **Water quality:** The Council works with other organisations to ensure water quality measures are considered through planning, and Council or external projects and processes and through generic home ownership responsibilities. This being fundamental to the development of protected site strategies for our SSSI river and wet meadow habitats.

Air Quality: The Council reviews air quality in relation to both people and biodiversity and is working towards review of our designated sites where air quality impacts can be mitigated.

- **Partnerships and Community Engagement:**
 - **Internal and cross-boundary cooperation:** The Council collaborates both internally and with neighbouring authorities, including the West Midlands Combined Authority and Warwickshire County Council, on regional strategies and the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). Biodiversity does not respect administrative boundaries, so this is crucial for landscape-scale conservation.
 - **Community involvement:** Both internal and external projects often encourage community involvement, raising awareness of local wildlife and promoting conservation initiatives.
 - **Public Access and Engagement:** Initiatives to improve footpaths and public access encourage people to connect with nature, potentially leading to greater

appreciation and support for biodiversity.

Negative Effects

- **Habitat Loss and Fragmentation:** Although mitigated by policies, the consenting of new developments can still lead to the loss or fragmentation of habitats, which negatively impacts wildlife populations.
- **Pollution and Waste:** Development, particularly if not managed sustainably, or insensitive land management practices can increase waste and pollution, which can harm water quality and other ecosystems. Much of the Council area lies within identified impact risk zones for our SSSI, these being considered in the Councils actions, plans and projects and development proposals.
- **Development Pressures on the Green Belt:** While the Green Belt offers protection, insensitive or inappropriate development can still damage the character and ecological value of the countryside and can reduce habitat availability and corridor function for natural species movements like migration or necessary species movement in response to climate change.
- **Increased Recreational Pressure:** Potential population growth and changes in trends of recreational activity could increase visitor numbers to sensitive areas, such as canals and rivers, potentially impacting water quality and local flora.

How the Council Manages These Impacts

- **In-house Ecologists:** An in-house ecologist advises on planning applications and policy development, ensuring ecological considerations are integrated into decision-making processes.
- **Natural Capital Policies:** The Council's Natural Capital Investment Strategy and Local Plan aim to protect and enhance natural assets for their intrinsic and human benefits, addressing key issues like climate change and biodiversity loss.
- **Planning Conditions & Obligations:** The Council uses conditions and planning obligations within planning permissions to require appropriate mitigation and compensation measures for developments. It also addresses environmental harm where this occurs and liaises with the necessary statutory authorities to ensure remedial action is undertaken.
- **Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** Requires developments to achieve a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity through on-site or off-site measures, contributing to habitat restoration and creation. This ensures that new developments not only mitigate harm to habitats but also leave the environment in a measurably better state than before.
- **Educate, Advise and Raise Awareness:** Increasing understanding of biodiversity and why it is important to conserve and enhance. This is a necessary and relevant need for the borough, actions within our NCIS are being undertaken to support this, not only for the benefit of biodiversity but also for local people, farms, schools, businesses and other organisations to improve their understanding and knowledge of the land they own or manage and support them and link them to other national or regional initiatives, where these are provided.

This can encourage land managers, businesses, and the general public to take action to benefit biodiversity.

Policies, Objectives and Actions that have, and will continue to contribute to the Biodiversity Duty include:

- Public consultation and engagement.
- Including the public in projects that improve biodiversity.
- Engage with schools and young people.
- Work with community and friends' groups.
- Feature biodiversity in public or internal communications.
- Use libraries to raise awareness of biodiversity.
- Putting information boards in green spaces or offering guided walks.
- Including biodiversity considerations in advice for internal and external clients and service users.
- Educating staff on the biodiversity actions and why they are important.
- Supporting the work of external organisations where these promote protection of local habitats and species, or where these seek to restore or enhance habitats for these species to thrive.
- Data sharing, being that important link between organisations and disseminating this or supporting them in their actions.
- Updating policies that support protection, enhancement and restoration of our sites and habitats for local species.

Review Internal Policies and Processes:

10.18 Local authorities have internal policies and processes for staff and facilities that could affect biodiversity. The Council has and will continue to periodically consider how our policies effect biodiversity and we will seek to review and improve these outcomes. Examples of relevant policies and processes that currently contribute to biodiversity include:

- **Transport** - promoting a range of travel options including sustainable travel.
- **Procurement** - buy sustainable materials and supplies to reduce the demand on natural resources.
- **Street Lighting** - the CLAUDE team works with the Street Lighting team and the Highways and Major Infrastructure projects teams to ensure artificial lighting designs minimise effects on nature.
- **Drainage** – the Council has produced a SuDS Design Guide (2023) to be used by all involved in the planning, design, construction, implementation, operation and

maintenance of sustainable drainage (SuDS) principles in Solihull.

11. Section Five: Solihull Council's Top Achievements.

11.1 This section of the report provides a summary of what Solihull Council, as a local authority, has achieved:

Major Projects and Policies

11.2 Solihull's top achievements in conserving and enhancing biodiversity are driven by the Council's key priorities (Council Plan), strategic policies and objectives. As well as the successful implementation of borough-wide habitat improvement projects, a significant tree and habitat expansion through the Council's commitment to large-scale tree planting campaigns and the active involvement of community and volunteer groups.

Award Winning Large-Scale Habitat Creation and Enhancement Schemes

11.3 **Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvement Project (SHNIP):** A three-year program (2017–2020) carried out 24 schemes across 20+ publicly accessible green spaces within the urban areas of Solihull by creating wildflower meadows, planting trees and hedgerows, creating new ponds and woodlands, and restoring river sections.

11.4 The project was conceived, developed and delivered by Solihull Council's Conservation of the Historic Environment, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design and Ecology Team (CLAUDE). **Winning the 2022 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) awards** in the Best Practice – Large-Scale Nature Conservation category and was **Highly Commended** in the **Public Sector Award** category at the **West Midlands Natural Environment Awards 2023**.

11.5 **Outcomes Delivered:** The project delivered 100 hectares of enhanced habitat which collectively will increase and strengthen the capacity of the natural environment to deliver ecosystem services across Solihull and provide resilience and mitigation against climate change.

11.6 The project had a total budget of £1.8million, of which 50% was required to be provided by the Council as match funding for external ERDF funding. The Council was unable to provide this directly but used several S106 Biodiversity Offsetting contributions to provide the additional money required, further helped by funding from the EA. Staff hours to work on the project were donated as 'in kind' funding. Furthermore, all the projects have been designed to avoid any increases to the Council's grounds maintenance budget. This will ensure that management is able to be maintained by SMBC in the long term.

11.7 This impressive investment in the natural environment of Solihull ensures the project has a lasting positive impact and legacy for local communities, contributing to the quality of place and to people's quality of life, health and well-being.

11.8 **Wildlife Ways:** A multi-million-pound environmental improvement project which focused on green infrastructure and included large-scale wildflower turf and seeding,

tree planting, and hedgerow planting to create and improve green corridors within the urban areas of Solihull.

- 11.9 Building on the success of SHNIP, CLAUDE developed and delivered a programme of habitat and environmental improvements across the Borough **winning** the **2021 British Association Landscape Industries (BALI) National Landscape Awards**, in the category Nature Conservation & Biodiversity Enhancement. As well as being **Highly Commended** at the **2024 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Awards** in the Best Practice – Large-Scale Nature Conservation category.
- 11.10 **Outcomes Delivered:** The project improved 69km of existing paths and cycle routes while creating 23km of new ones. The routes have all been landscaped and link, where possible, existing green spaces and offer sustainable transport options. The project also improved the habitat value of 56 hectares of parks and open spaces for the benefit of people and wildlife – that’s the equivalent of more than 90 football pitches! The aim of the project was to create a landscape to help Solihull’s local wildlife thrive and native species survive.
- 11.11 **The Small Habitats Grants Project:** provided grants to organisations in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Economic Partnership (GBSLEP) area. The grants were administered by Solihull MBC and were available from £20,000-£200,000. In total, £2.6 million was spent on projects including grassland creation, woodland management, wildflower seeding, wetland improvement, hedgerow planting, tree planting, and river restoration totalling 181.32 hectares far exceeding the original 20ha target. Successful projects were delivered in Solihull, Cannock, Tamworth, Lichfield, East Staffordshire, Birmingham and Redditch.
- 11.12 Solihull Council’s Small Habitat Grant Projects completed in May 2023, delivered 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.
- 11.13 Small Habitat Grant Projects led by other organisations within Solihull Borough (completed in May 2023) included the Blythe Revival projects at Brueton Park and Cheswick Green. These were 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.

Tree planting and habitat expansion

- 11.14 **Arden Free Tree Scheme:** In partnership with Birmingham Airport this initiative (at the time of writing) has supported over 172 tree planting projects, planting more than 46,877 native trees and shrubs to create hedgerows and small woodlands, restoring and enhancing the rural character of the Warwickshire Arden landscape
- 11.15 **"Planting Our Future"** campaign, launched in 2020, committed the borough to planting 250,000 trees by 2030. By early 2024, the campaign had already planted

75,000 trees with the help of over 700 volunteers. In 2024 Solihull's 'Planting Our Future' campaign won the **West Midlands Natural Environment Public Sector Award**.

- 11.16 **Hope Coppice:** An award-winning nature reserve that transformed empty fields into a thriving biodiversity haven, featuring a community orchard, a Commonwealth Forest, and a space for rehabilitating hedgehogs. In 2024, it won a national **"Best of the Best" Green Flag Award** for its contribution to biodiversity.
- 11.17 **The Armed Forces Community Garden:** created at Hillfield Park by the Councils CLAUDE team in collaboration with the Royal British Legion. It features sensory and wildflower planting, an orchard, and insect hotels to enhance biodiversity and provide therapeutic benefits to veterans. The Armed Forces Community Garden was awarded winner of the **Community Award** at the **West Midlands Natural Environment Awards in 2023**.
- 11.18 **23 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)**, with the majority of those also carrying a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designation such as Brueton Park and Dorridge Park, have been actively managed and enhanced by the CLAUDE team with the support of practical conservation volunteers. Work includes creating new habitats, improving paths, and removing invasive species.

Community and Volunteer Engagement

- 11.19 **Volunteer Involvement:** Community groups and residents were actively involved in the **Wildlife Ways project**, contributing to habitat creation and neighbourhood regeneration.
- 11.20 **Practical Conservation Volunteers:** CLAUDE continue to promote and support two practical conservation volunteer groups. **Solihull Conservation Volunteers (SCV)** and the **Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers (BSMCV)** are key independent groups that carries out hands-on practical conservation, including woodland management, habitat creation, footpath improvements, and invasive species removal, supporting and maintaining good habitat condition within our LNRS and LWS.
- 11.21 **Local Groups:** like the **"Friends of Hope Coppice"** have been crucial in supporting conservation and maintenance efforts in their local areas.
- 11.22 **Schools and Young People:** are actively involved through projects like the Queen's Green Canopy programme, which helped plant over 350 trees at school sites.
- 11.23 **Greener Solihull School Awards:** The awards are an annual celebration of the incredible breadth of climate action taking place in Solihull schools. Open to all schools in the borough, the awards challenge pupils and teachers to learn more about the environment both locally and globally and strive to make their school more eco-friendly. The 2024 awards were attended by 13 winning primary schools. As well as highlighting the work of schools and sharing best practice, the event also included a Question Time session with a panel made up of Council officers and Solihull Council's cabinet member for Climate Change and Planning Councillor Andrew Mackiewicz to give pupils the chance to quiz them on the environment and sustainability in Solihull.
- 11.24 **Community Allotments:** such as **Dickens Heath**, the first allotment in Solihull to win a **Green Flag Community Award**, recognized for its sustainability and for serving as a

sanctuary for rescued hedgehogs, contributing to local biodiversity.

Strategic Approach to Nature

- 11.25 **Natural Capital Investment Strategy:** The Council's strategic document for addressing the biodiversity crisis by protecting, restoring, and enhancing natural capital and the processes that support well-being.
- 11.26 **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Standardized methods are used to monitor ecological improvements, ensuring data informs future management plans and contributes to the understanding of biodiversity in Solihull.

12. Section Six: Consideration of Other Strategies

12.1 This section of the report explains how the Council has taken into account:

- Local Nature Recovery Strategies,
- Protected Site Strategies.
- Species Conservation Strategies.

12.2 The Council supports and collaborates with a number of partner organisations to deliver shared priorities and actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

12.3 There are biodiversity related partnerships such as the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership, [Home | Tame Valley Wetlands](#) led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust with the vision of working in the [Tame Valley Wetlands Living Landscape area](#) (and now designated as a [Nature Improvement Area](#)) and includes local and national organisations, across the public, private and charity sectors. Partner organisations include local groups and wildlife charities, Parish, Borough and County Councils and Defra agencies. As well as the Tame Anker Mease Partnership Catchment Vision: to protect and improve the quality, diversity, and resilience of the water environment within the Tame Anker and Mease catchment for the benefit of people and wildlife. Along with strategies (such as the Sub-regional GI Strategy), which the Council contributes to as a key partner and/or a board member of the group overseeing its implementation with Solihull an 'interested body', including the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership (LNP) [Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership | WCSLNP](#) a collaborative body of local organizations that works to improve the natural environment by driving positive change for nature, people, and the economy. Established in 2012, the partnership aims to deliver benefits for wildlife, help achieve national environmental goals locally, and influence decision-making to recognize the value of nature. They also support the development and implementation of local nature recovery strategies, which set out priorities for nature's recovery and identify opportunities for improvement within the region, including habitat restoration and the creation of ecological networks.

12.4 In addition and most notably the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), [West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) which is another new

requirement introduced by the Environment Act 2021.

- 12.5 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is the Responsible Authority for producing the LNRS for the West Midlands. The core purpose of LNRS is to reverse the ongoing decline of biodiversity and nature.
- 12.6 This collaborative locally led, and evidence-based spatial strategy aims to help restore and link up habitats so that species can thrive. The WMCA has been fully engaged with Solihull Council and the other districts (as Supporting Authorities and members of the LNRS Steering Group), Natural England and other partners in the developing LNRS process. The Strategy agrees priorities for nature's recovery; map the most valuable existing areas for nature; and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals (nature-based solutions).
- 12.7 The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world; this has implications for the environment, for society and for the economy. Nature recovery is a priority for the UK Government, but also for the West Midlands and the 3 million people who live here. Creating places that people can easily access to enjoy nature is important for health and well-being; a thriving natural environment will help us respond better to climate change; and nature also provides economic value for the region.
- 12.8 The WMCA has been working with regional stakeholders to identify actions/delivery mechanisms that can be put in place to improve the region's natural environment, and people's access to it. This was outlined in the region's Natural Environment Plan in 2021. More recently, the work has been given additional focus through two government programmes: the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and the Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

- 12.9 The WMCA is one of 48 'Responsible Authorities' across England producing an LNRS; a statutory requirement through the Environment Act 2021. The aim is to address the issue of nature depletion as part of a country-wide Nature Recovery Network. The West Midlands LNRS identifies 10 priorities and 63 actions, developed in conjunction with regional stakeholders, including our 7 constituent authorities. These fall into three broad areas:
1. Nature recovery (specific focus on sites and species where we need to recover nature)
 2. Delivering wider environmental benefits (including health and well-being benefits and how nature can be used to provide resilience to the effects of climate change).
 3. Enabling delivery for nature recovery (including financing opportunities and capacity-building for delivery).
- 12.10 The final 'sign off' of the LNRS took place at the WMCA Board in November 2025. Following this, the WMCA will move to a delivery phase, building on the significant work that regional partners are already doing in relation to the natural environment. Significant input by the Council has also been made to the development of the Delivery Plan and will continue to support this through the

lifetime of the strategy.

- 12.11 More detail on the documents and maps that comprise the LNRS can be found here: [West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). The LNRS will also form a key part of the evidence base that will inform the West Midlands Mayors Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

Financing and investment for nature

- 12.12 A key barrier to delivery is the lack of financing available for nature outside public funding. It is estimated that 80-90% of natural environment projects are supported through government funding of one type or another. This is unsustainable in the long-term and will not be sufficient to halt the decline of nature. The UK Government has been exploring how private finance might be brought in to more effectively bolster public funding. One of the routes to do this was through the Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme – four areas in England, including the WMCA, received funding from Defra to understand how private finance could be secured for natural environment projects.
- 12.13 Key to this has been understanding investment-readiness (and how to achieve that) in the pipeline of nature projects that exists across the WMCA area. The pipeline, built with stakeholders, now comprises 200+ projects, bringing scale and aggregation that is more attractive to investors and buyers of ecosystem services. This will now be strengthened through the work undertaken as part of the LNRS where we can more easily see priority locations and habitats requiring investment too.
- 12.14 The main outputs from LINC are:
1. A project pipeline - identifying projects requiring investment across the region and how close to investment readiness they are. This is a live pipeline that we will keep up-to-date, supporting stakeholders with projects.
 2. A Nature Investment Hub. This is a digital platform that hosts projects that are closest to investment readiness – it will provide a ‘shop window’ for potential investors, buyers and funders.
 3. A regional habitat bank. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is now a requirement as part of development, where developers are required to purchase credits to offset their impact. There are currently very few opportunities to buy credits in the West Midlands and therefore credits are being purchased for schemes elsewhere in the country. In order to retain the benefits of BNG, we intend to set up a regional habitat bank.
- 12.15 This work is taking place in a wider context of unlocking private investment for the region, including Investment Zones and Local Net Zero Accelerators for example, that will provide opportunities for a more joined up approach. The WMCA will look to work alongside other private investment initiatives as these emerge.

More detail on the documents produced as part of the LINC programme can be found here: [Local Investment in Natural Capital](#)

WMCA Board

12.16 In November 2025 (at the time of writing this report), both the LNRS and LINC will be coming to the WMCA Board as both programmes will be at a critical point in their progress in delivering a better natural environment for the region. At that meeting, the Board will be asked to:

1. Approve the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and associated governance in line with Defra guidance.
2. Approve the launch of the WM Nature Investment Hub to attract funding for regional nature projects and the request for resourcing for continued support to develop the regional nature project pipeline to make projects investment ready.
3. Approve the decision-making route for the WMCA habitat bank Programme Business Case (once completed) for a regionally coordinated approach to delivering Biodiversity Net Gain.

Wider Government Engagement

12.17 In addition to support from the wider WMCA regional stakeholders in delivering on natural environment projects, the WMCA are also progressing conversations with Defra on opportunities that devolution could bring to delivery of the environment programme. Ongoing conversations are taking place on the potential of an integrated settlement to maximise impact and efficiencies in devolving funding that can unlock private investment to deliver nature recovery and wider benefits.

12.18 Solihull sits within the West Midlands Combined Authority and is part of the WM LNRS supporting authorities but given its geographic location is also closely aligned to the Warwickshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Warwickshire LNRS outlines priorities and proposes actions to drive nature's recovery and provide environmental benefits in Warwickshire. The Warwickshire LNRS is being developed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) who are supported by the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership [LNRS | WCS LNP](#) in promoting and enacting the strategy.

12.19 The Warwickshire LNRS is built upon a set of overarching themes designed to guide collective efforts where everyone can take actions to conserve and enhance the natural environment and deliver the WCS LNP Vision. Whose approach focuses on conserving, creating and enhancing habitats and connecting them together to ensure their resilience. Together, all the LNRS around the country create a national approach to recovering nature. This also aligning with the objectives within our Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy.

Biodiversity Net Gain

12.20 Separate to the Biodiversity Duty, The Environment Act introduced a mandatory requirement for a minimum of 10% 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG) from Major development sites from 12th February 2024 and for small sites 2nd April 2024 (amended from November 2023) and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects from May 2026 to "ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy." BNG will be

measured using Defra's biodiversity metric; the habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years. BNG means at least 10% when compared to the site's original biodiversity value. BNG will be achieved through the creation for new habitats and the enhancement of existing habitats both on-site, off-site or in combination. Where developers do not own, or control suitable sites, then off-site biodiversity credits can be purchased. This process is supported by the Mitigation Hierarchy and BNG Hierarchy to avoid and reduce impacts through development. On 29 November 2023 Defra published BNG Regulations and draft planning practice guidance. Officers continue to work through the legislation and guidance to ensure that the appropriate development control processes and procedures are in place to assess, measure and secure the required BNG on planning applications submitted in line with the delivery timescales. The Local Plan review requires development to secure a net gain in biodiversity of at least 10%.

12.21 Following the introduction of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain officers continue to work in support of the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. As well as to integrate with other environmental and land use policies, to maximize their impact and the integration into local planning policy and development management decisions from the outset. The Council has been working hard with developers and other local landholders that are engaged with BNG delivery to deliver the best outcomes for nature through BNG delivery.

Green Spaces

12.22 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.

12.23 The Council manage over 1,500 acres of parks and green spaces including 18 Green Flag sites. They provide a vital space for nature, enhance biodiversity, and boost our mental health and wellbeing; offering beautiful places for our residents and visitors to relax, exercise and enjoy the natural environment. In addition, Solihull has five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within its boundary and two SSSI sites immediately adjacent to it, 23 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and a network of over 100 Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designations, all of which contribute to the existing green and blue network.

12.24 The Council also sensitively manage our 23 LNR, with the majority of those also carrying a LWS designation, these LNR are designated by Natural England for the enjoyment of the public and nature. These LNR reserves total nearly 500 acres of wildlife habitat and benefit from dedicated volunteers who undertake valuable conservation work, directed and supported by the Council to align with each site's specific management plan objectives.

12.25 The Council's Public Realm and Forestry Services are delivering a number of key actions to meet the biodiversity duty including tree planting programmes; adopting management and maintenance regimes for our parks and open spaces that are beneficial to biodiversity. The service is planning areas for improving biodiversity in our parks and open spaces and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity is integral to our Green Flag Management Plans. The Council is constantly re-assessing and including additional measures to fulfil

our Biodiversity Duty and make Solihull more ecologically and climate resilient and wildlife rich.

Nature-based Solutions

12.26 With regard to the Climate Emergency, nature-based solutions are a significant part of the response to limiting climate change. Climate change is a significant cause of biodiversity loss and so the two crises are inextricably linked. Improving biodiversity can support efforts to reduce the effects of climate change. Conserved or restored habitats offer the potential to both reduce and remove emissions by enhancing the ability of ecosystems to sequester carbon dioxide or reverse the decline of an ecosystem so that it no longer emits harmful greenhouse gas emissions and once more becomes a 'net sink' of carbon. Resilient ecosystems can also reduce the impacts of a changing climate, such as flooding and storm surges. To maintain the importance and focus on these related but separate emergencies, they will be addressed and presented through the Council's Climate Change Prospectus and the actions within the Climate Change Action Plan (formally the Net Zero Action Plan and NCIS Delivery plan will be considered through the Climate Change & Sustainability Working Group - An officer working group to consider future (short and medium term) actions and an appropriate way of measuring, monitoring and reporting them, which may include the preparation of a Biodiversity Action Plan. The actions should focus on current activities, identifying opportunities to enhance these and seeking new opportunities particularly partnership arrangements and potential future resource requirements and funding opportunities.

12.27 The Biodiversity Duty Report also lists areas of further work to consider. The Council will look to take account of the strengthened biodiversity duty in several of its policies and strategies as they are reviewed or developed. Including the integration into local planning policy and development management decisions of species conservation strategies and protected site strategies, as and when progressed by the national government.

13. Section Seven: How Our Policies and Actions Have Helped the Environment

13.1 This section of the report expands on section 1 by explaining how our policies, objectives and actions have:

- contributed to conserving, restoring or enhancing species populations or a particular habitat.
- contributed to improving the condition of protected areas and sites.
- benefitted biodiversity – noting the successes and challenges.
- encouraged involvement in important partnerships such as local nature recovery strategies.
- started to address the main causes of biodiversity loss – for example, land use

changes, invasive non-native species, and wider pressures like pollution.

13.2 Solihull's policies, objectives, and actions have contributed to restoring or enhancing biodiversity by focusing on protecting and enhancing the borough's natural environment. Particularly through policies and strategies, green infrastructure (GI) initiatives, partnership projects and promoting habitat connectivity via wildlife corridors and species-specific projects. The primary goal is to create "more, bigger, better and joined" habitats to improve biodiversity and connect ecological networks. Actions include implementing biodiversity net gain, supporting Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and managing public spaces to create nature-based solutions for issues like flood alleviation, thereby enhancing species populations and habitats. These efforts contribute to conserving habitats and species populations through habitat restoration, increasing connectivity, and mitigating the impacts of development.

Policies & Strategies

- 13.3 **Solihull Local Plan (2013):** Recognised the intrinsic value of natural capital and biodiversity, giving specific protection to designated sites and non-designated ecological networks.
- 13.4 **Landscape Protection:** The Council works to protect and restore the diverse features of the Arden landscape, including new woodlands, wetlands, and hedgerows. The Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines for Arden offers guidance, based on detailed landscape assessment, on how development and modern land management practices can best be integrated into the landscape.
- 13.5 **Designated Sites:** Policies protect nationally and locally designated sites, such as the borough's five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) 23 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and 228 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).
- 13.6 **Solihull Nature Conservation Strategy (2010 - 2014):** Established a framework for protecting and enhancing biodiversity, promoting wildlife corridors and the integration of nature into urban areas.
- 13.7 **Green Infrastructure Study (2012 - 2013):** Informed the Local Plan by identifying key ecological networks and green spaces to be managed and enhanced for biodiversity.
- 13.8 **Statutory Duty:** The Council fulfils its statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity under the Environment Act 2021, which strengthens the requirement to protect and manage nature.
- 13.9 **Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS):** This strategy supports a collaborative approach to maximize ecological benefits, leveraging funding from the planning system to invest in natural assets.

Actions and Contributions

- 13.10 **Habitat Creation & Enhancement:** Actions focus on tree and hedgerow planting and using nature-based solutions like wetlands to enhance carbon sinks and flood resilience. The Council emphasizes creating and strengthening natural wildlife corridors to counteract habitat fragmentation caused by development. Projects are designed to

boost species recovery by linking woodlands, grasslands, and watercourses.

- **ERDF Solihull Habitat & Nature Improvements Project:** From 2017 to 2020, this European Regional Development Fund project significantly enhanced publicly accessible green spaces. Specific works included:
 - Grasslands: Improving 30 hectares of public open space, including areas in Dickens Heath Country Park and Elmdon Nature Park, by importing green hay from species-rich meadows.
 - Wetlands: Restoring watercourses and wetlands at Babbs Mill Park, Meriden Park, and Olton Jubilee Park. Works included removing weirs and concrete, adding large woody debris, and creating new reed beds.
 - Woodlands: Undertaking management work in 12 woodlands, including selective thinning to improve resilience to climate change and support ground flora and insects.
- **Wildlife Ways:** This European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) project improved 69km of existing paths and cycle routes while creating 23km of new ones. It delivered over 55 hectares of habitat enhancements within parks and open spaces by planting trees, hedgerows, and wildflowers, earning an award for carbon reduction
- **Arden Free Tree Scheme:** In partnership with Birmingham Airport this initiative has supported numerous tree-planting projects across Solihull and the wider Arden landscape to create hedgerows and new woodlands. It aims to restore native species and protect the area's rural character.
- **Planting Our Future campaign:** Aims to plant 250,000 trees by 2030 with community involvement in tree planting and green infrastructure projects.
- **River restoration:** The Council is a partner in multi-agency efforts to protect and restore key watercourses. This includes collaborative projects with the Tame, Anker and Mease Catchment Partnership, which aims to bring together multiple interests in river basin management planning and enable and engage local organisations – the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA), the Environment Agency and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership for the River Cole, (formally Project Kingfisher, Kingfisher Country Park), and the River Blythe.

13.11 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): The Council delivers BNG through mandatory planning requirements, including the establishment of habitat banks, to offset impacts on nature. The Solihull Local Plan (SLP) makes securing a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain mandatory for development. Developers must first try to achieve this on-site through habitat creation or restoration. Off-site compensation or biodiversity offsetting is only considered as a last resort. The SLP is a key part of implementing the Environment Act 2021, which places a statutory duty on local authorities to "conserve and enhance biodiversity".

13.12 Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): Solihull works with partners to identify focus species and actions for its LNRS, aiming to boost species recovery and improve

habitat connectivity.

- 13.13 **Partnerships:** The Council encourages collaboration with communities, businesses, and voluntary organizations to restore and enhance biodiversity. A number of initiatives, such as "Love Solihull," work to engage the community, businesses, and schools in environmental projects. Practical Conservation Volunteers such as SCV and BSMCV play a major role in conservation and maintaining LNRs
- 13.14 **Green Corridors:** Projects such as the Cole Valley Catchment Vision actively use and promote wildlife corridors, such as the River Cole, to connect fragmented habitats, ensuring the mixing and viability of populations.
- 13.15 **Lighting Strategy:** The Council have reviewed the lighting strategy for the borough and have implemented a 25% reduction in lighting borough wide for 22000 lighting columns, with roughly 1000 remaining to change. These have also been changed from high-pressure sodium lighting to LED lighting, reducing light spill. Our development management processes also review and guide sensitive lighting proposals in relation to biodiversity.
- 13.16 **Invasive Species:** Currently the Council manages several of the listed invasive species on Section 14, Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). These are Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed. We are aware through our habitat and species surveys of land on our ownership of many other species on this schedule and are monitoring whether these need to be brought into current management actions. We advise others on the awareness of invasive species and specific biosecurity measures as required. We acknowledge that there are certain species that are beyond control such as Nuttall's waterweed on our river systems and are reviewed against their potential to damage other wildlife, this specie being considered relatively low risk via Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), or Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) review.
- 13.17 There are no systems in place for control of faunal species, this will need to be reviewed on a case by case basis and is to be informed by strategies for the protection of other protected or notable species or through strategies linked to the LNRS, such as following catchment-based approaches that may cross LPA and LNRS boundaries. Where issues to limit biosecurity issues are of concern i.e. spread of disease from waters supporting signal crayfish, or similar, then preventative measures are promoted through our development management processes and corporate responsibility through our projects.

Examples of Habitats and Species Conservation

- 13.18 **Ancient Woodlands:** Ancient woodlands in Solihull are protected, such as **Bills Wood** and **Millisons Wood** through our policies and actions. Policies require developers to avoid impacts on them, as irreplaceable habitats, and provide buffers around these sites where works or projects lie adjacent to these sites. All developments are expected to show their routes to avoidance and minimisation of harm by using and applying the Mitigation Hierarchy and are expected to evidence this. Where impacts are identified these have to be justified, considered carefully and require bespoke solutions. Positive impacts upon such habitats are supported where these are sensitive and not detrimental to their ecological functioning as valued habitats. In Solihull, there are 23 Forestry Commission approved Native Woodland Plans and these form part of the Council's Woodland Strategy, in addition to the woodland management plans for LWS

and LNRs in our landholding. Many of which were updated during our ERDF funded habitat improvement works.

- 13.19 **Species-rich grassland: *Monkspath Meadow*** is noted as the best example of a species-rich, unimproved hay meadow in the West Midlands and has been maintained in a "favourable" condition. The ***Bickenhill Meadows SSSI*** (two distinct locations) supports wet and damp grassland habitat. One of which lies immediately adjacent to ***Castle Hills Farm LWS*** one of our most extensive areas of grassland habitat. Protected site strategies for these sites developed by Natural England, will be supported by the Council. Castle Hills Farm LWS has been monitored by the Council under a S106 agreement (in perpetuity) since 2008 and is showing signs of great improvement as an addition to and as a buffer to impacts upon the SSSI. A further privately owned area of large floodplain wet grassland has been subject to negative impacts and the Council have stepped in, in partnership with other authorities to ensure the best outcomes for this site as a valued area of intact wet grassland. Another wet and dry grassland LWS site went to appeal and was successful based in part upon the lack of information to support avoidance and minimisation of negative impacts.
- 13.20 **Rivers and watercourses:** The ***River Blythe*** is designated as an SSSI. A project undertaken in September 2025 in Brueton Park replaced an artificial rock ramp that was not functioning well, but supports a man-made lake, and the creation of river habitats along a slow-flowing channel of the river, by narrowing the width of the river and creating better depth profiles in the river by creation of riffles and pools on the River Blythe. This will allow the river to flow more naturally, and is creating new habitats for insects, plants, and fish. Protected site strategies for this site developed by Natural England, will be supported by the Council. Reviews of water quality for the River Blythe have also taken place between Natural England and the Council to identify areas where improvements can be made to reduce negative impacts from businesses and road run off. The ***Kingfisher Country Park*** project and other efforts have sought to protect and restore the river and its tributaries. Supported by initiatives such as the ***Love Your River Cole Project*** (LYRiC) to implement sustainable urban drainage and invasive species control. Our policies also require developments to protect and improve water quality, including through use of nature-based solutions and seek to restore re-charge where abstractions are of concern.
- 13.21 **Farmland birds, dormice, native white-clawed crayfish and butterflies:** Local biodiversity action plans have led to documented successes for certain species. Examples include support for farmers for sensitive land management practices including restored hedgerows for farmland birds, the maintenance of connectivity for dormice currently and for future population expansion of this species, survey and review of actions required to prevent local extinction of the native white-clawed crayfish and active management for species like the Wood White butterfly with relevant habitat creation and planting specifications advice for certain species through our planning functions.
- 13.22 Non-native invasive species are being managed through Council functions and through directed volunteer activity. As new species arrive and are found to be invasive and to find common solutions to issues from invasive species we continue to liaise closely with external organisations, such as through the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership and through regular meetings with the regional group of the Animal and

Plant Health Agency, government briefings and through literature review.

Ecological Data - Local Environmental Record Centre

- 13.23 **The Local Environmental Record Centre** covering Solihull is the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre (WBRC). WBRC has an important role in assisting the Council in meeting both its statutory duties in relation to environmental data but also holds much of the data needed to understand our duty, monitor change, and provide data for the purposes of the Biodiversity Duty report. This includes protected and notable species records and, in collaboration with NCAP (Formally the HBA Wildlife Sites Partnership, WBRC curates' datasets of Solihull's designated nature conservation sites. The Council continues to support this service with relevant ecological data and knowledge to ensure this can be used by others to further support biodiversity. The Council attend the Warwickshire Recorders Day for the local recording community, as a visible presence to show our care and responsibility for our natural environment and are linking more closely with the Birmingham recording groups via the West Midlands LNRS process. More recently with the advent of BNG remote sensing of habitat data has been developed through the NCAP, this is being used to inform developments and strategies for nature recovery along with review of historic data to appreciate what has been lost and where restoration could be actioned.
- 13.24 The Council will periodically review whether other sources of environmental data may be required in relation to the Biodiversity Duty.

14. Section Eight: How the Council has Raised Awareness and Educated the Community

14.1 This section of the report explains what the Council has done to

- raise awareness of biodiversity in the community.
- advise on how to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- incorporate conservation and enhancement of biodiversity into education.
- engage with the public and your staff on biodiversity matters.

Raising Awareness and Advice on how to Conserve and Enhance Biodiversity

14.2 Solihull Council raises awareness on biodiversity in the community and provides advice on conservation and enhancement through a variety of means such as publicised strategies and plans, public consultation and engagement. Together with community focused initiatives, projects, and events. As well as collaborative working with partners and key stakeholders, such as statutory agencies, NGOs and local groups - "***Friends of***" local parks and ***Tree Ambassadors***. All aimed at involving residents in creating a greener, more biodiverse Solihull.

Community Groups and Engagement

14.3 **Love Solihull:** This environmental initiative co-ordinated by the Council, engages residents in environmental projects. As part of a hedgehog

conservation program, the park mascot "**Horace the Hedgehog**" was created to offer residents tips on how to help wildlife in their gardens and has been used through a 'sticker scheme' applied to tools and equipment to ensure Council grounds maintenance contractors, when using such equipment, take due care for presence of hedgehog, this in turn also protecting other species that occupy similar habitats

- 14.4 **Planting Our Future Campaign:** Solihull MBC have committed to planting 250,000 trees by 2030. This initiative encourages residents, businesses, and community groups to participate in planting trees to increase biodiversity and create green infrastructure.
- 14.5 **Friends Groups and Tree Wardens:** The Council works with local park "Friends Groups" who are instrumental in community-led environmental projects and raising community awareness events. It also supports a network of "tree ambassadors" known as Tree Wardens who helps monitor tree health, protect trees, and raise awareness about the importance of trees within the community.
- 14.6 **Environment Champions:** This former initiative enlisted local volunteers to lead environmental improvement projects, such as planting schemes and conservation efforts. An "**Alice in biodiversity land**" themed project, created by young people, was featured at BBC Gardeners' World Live (2010) to inform the community about protecting biodiversity.
- 14.7 **Practical Conservation Volunteers:** Solihull promotes and supports the Solihull Conservation Volunteers (SCV) AND THE Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers (BSMVCV).
- 14.8 **Events:** Local events listings are reviewed by the Council and checked for where impacts upon biodiversity can be avoided, those that trigger an alert are then provided with the necessary advice to make the right judgement and decisions to utilise the Mitigation Hierarchy. In many cases this has needed direct communication such as the avoidance of impacts to important areas of grassland fungi, reducing impacts to wetland habitats and reducing disturbance to sensitive species. This is now promoting a better understanding across the Council of such potential for impacts and how to best plan in avoidance measures, or where impacts are identified what is the necessary mitigation required.
- 14.9 **General Public Engagement and Communications:** The Council responds appropriately to public concerns and issues for biodiversity and seeks rectification measures where required, often working with partners to deliver this or provides information on where to find out more about their chosen subjects, where this best guides their knowledge. We support and promote biological recording and shall be engaging with the City Nature Challenge in 2026.

Community-Focused Initiatives

- 14.10 **Solihull Community Environment Fund:** In partnership with waste contractor Veolia, the Council provides grants of up to £2,000 for local groups and clubs. The funding supports projects such as planting wildflowers, creating community orchards, and building bug and bird boxes. The partnership with Veolia has been crucial in launching and managing the Community Environment Fund,

demonstrating a shared commitment to environmental improvement.

14.11 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): is a charge Solihull Council places on new developments to fund local infrastructure, facilities, and services like schools, transport, and health services, as well as smaller-scale local projects.

- **Strategic CIL:** Funds large-scale projects across the Borough of Solihull, such as major transport upgrades, flood protection measures, and education facilities.
- **Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL):** Supports smaller, community-focused projects at a local level within specific ward, some of which have been used for biodiversity projects.

Public Events

14.12 Oaks and Shires Event: This promotes the sustainable management of Council owned woodland and supports activities that promote environmental awareness and education within the community, including a heavy horse at work pulling timber out of the woodland whilst minimising damage to plants, a method known as horse-logging. During the first three days of the event, groups of local school children learn more about their local environment and wildlife. During the open day, local families can take part in traditional woodland crafts, including willow weaving and pole lathing as well as meeting the mythical Green Man storyteller. This event is moved around the borough to capture as many people as possible and to spread the message about care and concern for the natural environment.

Strategic Frameworks, Planning and Policy

14.13 Strategies and Plans: Solihull has developed comprehensive policies and initiatives to conserve and enhance biodiversity, including its Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) and policies outlined in its Local Plan. It also participates in sub-regional and national programs to promote coordinated biodiversity efforts.

14.14 Solihull's strategic planning for biodiversity is guided by its Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) and strategic documents such as the Solihull Green Spaces Strategy, the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure Strategy and the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which emphasise the integrated protection, restoration, and enhancement of natural habitats. The Council aims to increase its understanding of natural capital, integrate its value across Council work, and identify opportunities to increase its value.

- **Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS):** This strategy is a key tool for the Council to respond to the biodiversity crisis by outlining actions to protect, restore, and enhance nature and natural processes across the borough. The plan aims to coordinate efforts across the borough and involves collaboration with communities, businesses, and third-sector organizations to enhance natural capital.
- **Solihull Green Spaces Strategy:** This strategy ensures the provision of high-quality, accessible green spaces that meet local needs, providing a framework for investment and management actions to balance enhancement and new provision
- **Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Sub-regional Green Infrastructure Strategy:** This regional strategy provides a framework for a well-connected, accessible, and biodiversity-resilient landscape network, aiming to support economic

growth, social health, and climate change adaptation.

- **West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS):** The Council collaborates with Natural England, the WMCA, and neighbouring Councils to develop LNRS, which are legally required spatial strategies for environmental improvement.

14.15 **Strategic Planning and Policy:** Solihull Council advises on biodiversity conservation and enhancement through its Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS), which supports the protection, restoration, and enhancement of nature, and is informed by planning policies in the Solihull Local Plan. Development planning emphasizes incorporating biodiversity net gains, protecting designated sites and ancient woodlands, and requires developers to consider local and national guidance on species and habitats, as well as the local biodiversity action plan. The Council also collaborates on the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), which contains species action plans for threatened flora and fauna.

- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF must be taken into account in preparing the development plan and is a material consideration in planning. The NPPF emphasizes that plans and decisions should minimize negative impacts on habitats and biodiversity, and aim for biodiversity net gain (BNG), requiring a measurable positive impact on biodiversity.
- **Solihull Local Plan:** This plan contains policies for the natural environment, such as Policy P10, which guides how development should contribute to the conservation, enhancement, and restoration of biodiversity.
- **Protection of Designated Sites:** The Council seeks to protect designated sites, ancient woodlands, and priority habitats, including the establishment of buffers to new developments to connect with green infrastructure assets.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** In line with the Environment Act 2021, the Council educates and requires developers to secure measurable net gains for biodiversity in development projects and provide a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain and provide a Biodiversity Net Gain statement for planning applications.
- **Wildlife Corridors:** The creation and strengthening of new wildlife corridors are encouraged to reduce habitat fragmentation caused by development and to help species migrate in response to climate change.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Opportunities for biodiversity improvements are to be integrated into green infrastructure.
- **Information and Guidance:** Development proposals must be informed by up-to-date information on habitats and species and take full account of national and local guidance on biodiversity conservation.
- **Ecological Advice:** The Council has an in-house ecologist to provide expert advice on planning applications and policy development.

Partnerships

14.16 **Collaborative Approach:** The Council works in partnership with other organisations,

businesses, and local communities to deliver its biodiversity goals and protect and restore habitats.

- 14.17 **Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP):** The Council is a partner in the LBAP, a multi-agency partnership that develops local strategies to protect wildlife and habitats. The LBAP encourages communities to undertake local wildlife projects. Topics include biodiversity, climate change, and recycling.
- 14.18 **Partnerships with Nature Organisations:** such as Warwickshire Wildlife Trust: The Council supports public awareness through its collaboration with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust who are instrumental in community-led environmental projects and raising awareness about the natural environment and through hosting nature education programs at the Parkridge Centre in Brueton Park. These include the "Wildlife Watch After School Club" and a "Nature Club" for home-schooled children.
- 14.19 **Multi-agency Projects and Partnerships:** Working with strategic partners such as the Environment Agency and other environmental agencies such as Warwickshire Wildlife Trust who are instrumental in community-led environmental projects and raising awareness about the natural environment.
- **Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership:** Solihull partners with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust through the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership to protect and restore our river catchments these include: the River Cole and its tributaries (formally Project Kingfisher, Kingfisher Country Park), and separately the River Blythe through the Blythe Alive project. These both lead to discussion of, support for and delivery of shared objectives for the improved health and resilience of the two rivers within the Tame catchment for the future.
 - **Tame, Anker and Mease (TAM) Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) Partnership:** was brought in by Defra in 2011 to help achieve the Water Framework Directive initiatives. These partnerships bring together a wide range of local organisations (including NGOs, water companies, local authorities, landowners, rivers trusts, angling clubs, farming groups, academia, and local businesses) to promote collaborative working at a river catchment scale to realise environmental, social, and economic benefits, including improvements to water quality, enhanced biodiversity, reduced flood risk, resilience to climate change, and greater community engagement with their local river.
 - **The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull (WCS) Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) Partnership** is a *groundbreaking initiative* where local authorities in Warwickshire, Coventry, and Solihull collaborate to strategically invest income generated from the planning system and environmental markets to protect and enhance the natural environment across the sub-region. The strategy outlines a framework for using developer contributions, such as Biodiversity Net Gain, to fund projects that tackle issues like flood risk, improve air and water quality, and boost biodiversity, thereby benefiting local people and the climate. This collaborative approach aims to create a sustainable and low-risk platform for investment, attracting funding for large-scale, landscape-level projects to deliver "more, bigger, better, and joined-up" natural environments for the benefit of all.

- **The Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme:** is providing four pioneering local and combined authority areas with funding of up to £1 million each, over two years, to support them in developing the capability to secure private finance for delivery of local priorities for nature. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) LINC programme is a green finance initiative funded by Defra to attract private investment into projects that restore and improve the region's natural environment. It aims to create a nature-positive future by delivering nature-based solutions to climate risks such as flood reduction and urban cooling, improving water quality and air quality, and increasing access to high-quality green spaces for residents. The programme builds local capacity and develops market mechanisms to mobilise private finance for nature-based projects, contributing to the UK's nature recovery targets.
- **The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership (LNP):** is a collaboration of local organisations that work to drive positive change for the region's natural environment. It was established in 2012 following the UK government's Natural Environment White Paper, which highlighted the importance of valuing nature in local decision-making. It brings together a diverse range of local organisations from various sectors, including environmental, business, health, and academic groups, to achieve its objectives.
- **Love Solihull:** This is an environmental initiative coordinated by Solihull Council to support the community in making the borough cleaner and greener.

Tangible Projects and Local Recognition

14.20 **Involvement in Local Projects:** The success of projects like Solihull's Habitats and Nature Improvement Project, Wildlife Ways and Hope Coppice, which have won national awards and recognition for their biodiversity enhancements highlights the impact of community efforts and the Council's support.

- **Solihull Habitat & Nature Improvements Project:** Through funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Council completed a three-year program of improvements to publicly accessible green spaces. This included restoring grasslands, enhancing wetlands, and managing woodlands, with partners like the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.
- **Wildlife Ways:** A major program of works designed to improve and expand footpaths and cycle routes while promoting biodiversity. The project has enhanced habitat value in parks and green spaces through extensive planting of bulbs, trees, and wildflowers to support pollinators and other wildlife. Creating and enhancing wildlife corridors to link fragmented green spaces, whilst also promoting healthy active travel routes.
- **Small Habitats Grants Programme:** Administered by the Council, this initiative used European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money to fund projects that improved local green and blue infrastructure. It supported grassland, woodland, and wetland enhancements across the wider region.
- **Hope Coppice:** The creation of this woodland and community orchard is a concrete example of how the Council involves the community in planting and

creating new habitats.

- 14.21 Tree Planting Campaigns:** The Council promotes significant planting initiatives to combat climate change and increase natural capital. This includes initiatives such as the Arden Free Tree Scheme, in partnership with Birmingham Airport and the Arden Farm Wildlife Network, which directly involves the community and "Planting Our Future" campaign which supports practical projects, such as creating community orchards and planting trees in part to enhance biodiversity.
- 14.22 Urban habitat enhancement:** The Council manages 23 Local Nature Reserves and promotes changing management techniques in parks and public open spaces to boost biodiversity. It provides advice on incorporating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and green infrastructure, such as living roofs, into urban designs.
- 14.23 Partnerships with Businesses:** The Council engages with local businesses to sponsor community planting events, further embedding biodiversity efforts within the local economy and community. Other efforts include environmental contract social value initiatives, public access to parks and Local Nature Reserves, and promoting public transport and sustainable initiatives to reduce emissions.

Climate Action and Sustainability

- 14.24 Active programs and projects:** The Council promotes planting initiatives to combat climate change and increase natural capital.
- The Council works to reduce its own emissions, with an ambition to be net zero by 2030, and considers its Carbon Budget annually to ensure progress against targets. Currently this is of Council owned land only and does not include all the habitats within our green spaces, this is being reviewed currently as to whether satellite imagery through the Councils work with the NCAP can assist with assessment of a greater area of our landholding and yield finer results.
 - Sustainable Practices: The Council has explored sustainable transport options, such as loaning e-cargo bikes to businesses and trialling driverless shuttle buses as part of its Low Carbon.
- 14.25 Incorporation of Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity into Education:** Through school-based programs, a local awards scheme, and partnerships with environmental organisations. A Schools Sustainability Engagement Officer works directly with schools to foster this learning.

Educational Programmes

- **Support for Schools and Education:** Solihull Council employs a **Schools Sustainability Engagement Officer** to assist schools in developing sustainability practices and integrating them into their curriculum.
- **Education for Sustainable Development:** The Council provide schools with resources and support to help teach students about a sustainable life. Topics include biodiversity, climate change, and recycling
- **Greener Solihull Schools Awards:** This Council-led programme challenges schools to become more eco-friendly and teaches children and staff about local

and global environmental issues. Support is provided by a dedicated Schools Sustainability Engagement Officer. It also challenges children and staff to implement eco-friendly projects, including those focused on improving biodiversity within school grounds.

- **Eco-Schools Programme:** Solihull Council encourages all schools to participate in this international, pupil-led program. Its "Biodiversity" topic prompts students to increase local plant, insect, and animal life by creating wildlife habitats like bug hotels and planting native species.

Partnerships with Nature Organisations

- **Warwickshire Wildlife Trust:** Operates the Parkridge Centre in Solihull's Brueton Park, offering hands-on, curriculum-aligned outdoor learning sessions for schools and groups of all ages. Activities include pond-dipping, mini-beast hunting, and den-building. The Parkridge Centre also runs ongoing programs like the Wildlife Watch After School Club and a Nature Club for home-schooled children, along with seasonal activities during half-term breaks.
- **Field Studies Council:** This organisation actively recruits and trains biodiversity tutors to share their knowledge in the field. While not Solihull-specific, this resource adds to the educational opportunities available to local biodiversity enthusiasts and is used by the Council for biodiversity training from BNG to detailed surveys of species and habitats and this information disseminated where relevant.
- **"Planting our Future"** initiative: As part of the broader Love Solihull campaign, this project supplies and plants free hedgerows in school grounds to create new habitats.
- **School Grounds and Projects:** Practical Examples include Bentley Heath Primary School: An Eco Committee designed and built a bug hotel in the local park, demonstrating how schools can create safe habitats for wildlife. Following the bug hotel construction, pupils from Bentley Heath Primary School spread wildflower seeds to create a vibrant, biodiverse space.
- **Climate Action Plans:** Solihull are developing Climate Action Plans that may involve improving biodiversity on school grounds and embedding projects into the curriculum.
- **Waste and recycling education:** Resources are available for schools on waste management and recycling, with some activities linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which include protecting biodiversity.

Wider Borough Initiatives

- **Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS):** The Council's strategy for addressing the biodiversity crisis includes species recovery and developing wildlife corridors throughout the borough. These projects offer real-world, localized examples of conservation efforts for schools to study.
- **Your Future Solihull Website:** This platform provides educational resources

and support for schools to build their sustainability and climate action initiatives.

Engagement with the public and staff on biodiversity matters

- 14.26 Solihull has engaged its staff and the public on biodiversity matters through large-scale planting schemes, community projects, educational initiatives, and formal strategy consultations. Key programs like "Planting Our Future" and "Wildlife Ways" encourage hands-on participation, while partnerships with conservation groups extend the Council's reach.
- 14.27 There are several regular internal meetings and groups that inform the wider Council on biodiversity matters, these are primarily through the Climate Change and Sustainability Group meetings and discussions, as this group leads on the delivery of the NCIS, but also include talks to other internal disciplines and groups to ensure coherence of current biodiversity issues and knowledge of actions that can be taken by the Council to assist in nature recovery across the borough.

Public Engagement

- 14.28 **Strategy consultations:** The public has been consulted on key environmental strategies, including the Natural Capital Investment Strategy and the Air Quality Strategy, via the Council's digital engagement platform, Your Voice Solihull.
- 14.29 **Planting Our Future campaign:** Aims to plant 250,000 trees by 2030 with community involvement in tree planting and green infrastructure projects.
- 14.30 **Community planting projects:** The Council coordinates community-led projects to enhance local green spaces. One example involved over 100 people, including students and refugees, who planted more than 2,000 trees at St Columban's. Another project, a partnership with Ebsford Environmental, engaged local schools in restoring ponds, teaching children about conservation.
- 14.31 **Collaborative action:** Love Solihull is an environmental initiative coordinated by Solihull Council to support the community in making the borough cleaner and greener. As part of a hedgehog conservation program, the park mascot "Horace the Hedgehog" was created to offer residents tips on how to help wildlife in their gardens.
- 14.32 **"Wildlife Ways" programme:** This multi-million program improved footpaths, cycle routes, and parks across the urban areas of the borough to create wildlife-friendly green corridors. This included planting over a million bulbs and millions of wildflowers to support pollinators and link up green spaces.
- 14.33 **Public access to nature:** The Council provides and maintains access to numerous parks, green spaces, and Local Nature Reserves for public enjoyment and wellbeing.
- 14.34 **Environmental Contract Social Value:** Projects, such as the restoration of Kingshurst Brook, involved community days to educate the public on the importance of environmental care, according to the Social Value Portal.

Staffing and resources Cross-departmental strategies

- 14.35 **The Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS)** and other environmental policies demonstrate a commitment to embedding biodiversity considerations across Council

functions, including parks, planning, and other operations.

- 14.36 **The NCIS Delivery Plan:** details how the Council will work with its staff, businesses, communities, and other organisations to embed natural capital into all aspects of its work.
- 14.37 **Internal consultation:** When developing the Council Plan for 2025–30, the Council held dedicated focus groups for employees to discuss key priorities, including environmental matters.
- 14.38 **E-learning resources:** As a local authority, Solihull staff have access to e-learning modules from the Local Government Association, which provides guidance on how Councils can protect natural habitats
- 14.39 **External partnership training:** Solihull Council's grounds maintenance partner, Veolia, received "**Hedgehog Hero**" status for training its frontline staff on how to protect hedgehogs while working. The Council praised this effort and encouraged residents to follow their example.
- 14.40 **Climate Action and Sustainability:** The Council works to reduce its own emissions, with an ambition to be net zero by 2030, and considers its Carbon Budget annually to ensure progress against targets.
- 14.41 **Sustainable Schools programme:** The Council has a dedicated Schools Sustainability Engagement Officer to support schools in promoting sustainability to both students and staff.
- 14.42 **Sustainable Practices:** The Council has explored sustainable transport options, such as loaning e-cargo bikes to businesses and trialling driverless shuttle buses as part of its **Low Carbon Future Mobility project**.

15. Section Nine: How the Council is Monitoring and Evaluating our Actions.

- 15.1 This section of the report explains how the Council has measured our actions and how we have assessed their effects on biodiversity.
- 15.2 Solihull monitors and evaluates its biodiversity conservation efforts through collaborative partnerships, data-driven strategies, and statutory planning requirements, including the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
- Natural Capital Assessment Partnership**
- 15.3 Solihull is a member of the Natural Capital Assessment Partnership, formally known as the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA), a partnership that systematically surveys and collects up-to-date biodiversity data.
- 15.4 Managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the project (established in 1995), is predominantly funded by local authorities across Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. It also benefits from being hosted by Warwickshire County Council, which allows the

team access to other datasets and expertise that complement their own.

- 15.5 Habitat surveys: Since the partnership began, the NCAP team have been gathering habitats data on the ground historically using a survey method known as ‘Phase 1 surveying’ and is now using this along with remote sensed data via Spottitt, a static aerial photography dataset that is being interpreted into the UK Hab habitat methodology and ground-truthed by the NCAP team, with support from the Council for land areas we have survey data for. Together these provide us with up-to-date information about the habitats that are present and is being used to assess change over time to feed into the ‘State of Habitats’ report. Habitats have been re-surveyed on a rolling basis, throughout the sub-region, providing a continuous revision of the habitat map for the region. This data is maintained in a Geographical Information System (GIS) for interpretation and statistical analysis for various outputs, one being to provide the data for the ‘*State of Habitats*’ reporting.
- 15.6 The habitat mapping data is important as it underpins strategic decision making for all the partners involved in the project. It has been used for academic research and wildlife projects such as the Councils Natural Capital and Environmental Improvements and Wildlife Ways programmes, as well as for informing local planning decisions. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust identified its priority Living Landscape areas using NCAP data. Each of the local authorities that provides financial support for the project uses the information produced to help inform the decisions on where to locate new housing and industry developments to minimise impacts on the natural environment, where feasible and will support review (along with the WMCA LNRS) of where the Council are with the government’s pledge of 30 by 30. The NCAP project being now at a baseline stage that we can measure against.
- 15.7 **Local Wildlife Sites:** Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are non-statutory wildlife-rich areas. They can be privately or publicly owned and include a wide range of wildlife habitats. These include ancient woodlands, wetland meadows, species-rich hedgerows, wildlife ponds, former quarries and roadside verges. Some Local Wildlife Sites are equal in value to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and can act as buffers to rare habitats and provide habitat corridors for wildlife to move across the landscape.
- 15.8 The habitat assessments by the NCAP team are used to also identify areas of land and habitats that likely qualify as potential Local Wildlife Sites, allowing the Council to review which require more detailed habitat surveys by the NCAP team to support their designation to LWS, which may include National Vegetation Classification (NVC) as Phase 2 surveys, or species-specific surveys. The results have also been an important monitoring tool for the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) delivery and will serve to also help monitor scale of development, habitat and land use change through BNG and support for the LNRS.
- 15.9 Local Wildlife Sites are selected by a panel of local nature experts. The survey reports are submitted to the panel who determine whether the site should be selected or not.
- 15.10 The sites identified as ‘potential LWS (pLWS)’ are assessed against a set of criteria designed to reflect the scientific and cultural value of potential sites these include the local importance of the site in terms of the rarity of its plant and animal species, its educational value, community and amenity value and its historical and landscape value. These criteria and the LWS designation process are explained within ‘*The Green Book: Guidance for the Selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and*

Solihull (2025).

15.11 There are now more than 660 Local Wildlife Sites, which cover an area of over 7,800 hectares across Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. Solihull alone has 128 LWS and 95 pLWS, awaiting assessment to LWS status. You can see an [interactive map showing the data gathered here](#) and further data is provided in the *State of Habitats Report (2025)* prepared by Warwickshire County Council, this document being reviewed and supported by the Council.

Future Work

- 15.12 Going forward, all these data layers will be enormously valuable when it comes to monitoring how habitats are changing over time and will better inform conservation action at a landscape-level. It will help us to assess for example, the delivery of targets to significantly improve the environment alongside key, wider commitments to protect and conserve a minimum of 30% of land for biodiversity by 2030. Without data, we wouldn't be able to monitor progress toward our conservation goals.
- 15.13 The *UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2030 (2025)* sets out a blueprint for halting and reversing biodiversity and sets out the policy frameworks for each of the devolved nations.
- 15.14 For England, The Environment Act 2021 set legally binding targets to improve the environment (including establishing a national network of LNRs). The Environment Act requires the government to publish a plan for significantly improving the environment, this is known as the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). The most recent EIP was published in January 2023 and this is currently under review.
- 15.15 The revised EIP will provide delivery information to help meet each of the 13 ambitious Environment Act targets alongside key, wider commitments such as 30 by 30 (a commitment to protect and conserve a minimum of 30% of land and sea for biodiversity by 2030). The EIP identifies a number of tools and mechanisms to help with delivery of the targets, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is one of these. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) '30 by 30' objectives include:
- Strengthen - enhancing policy and statutory protections.
 - Extend and create - designating new protected areas and recognising other effective area-based conservation measures).
 - Invest (in habitat restoration within and beyond protected areas.
- 15.16 To demonstrate regional commitment to natural environment targets, the WMCA region published its Natural Environment Plan in 2021. The Natural Environment Plan set out objectives for creating and restoring important wildlife corridors, restoring the region's rivers, increasing the tree canopy cover, creating greater equity in access to nature and to support the creation of jobs in the natural environment. These co-benefits are important as the WMCA region is home to almost 3 million people but comes with challenges that a heavily urbanised landscape brings, including reduced opportunities for habitats and

species.

The Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS)

- 15.17 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.
- 15.18 The plan, which is aligned with the West Midlands Natural Environment 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 Councils' Climate Change and Sustainability Group.
- 15.19 However, the Council is 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.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy (WCS) NCIS

- 15.20 A key action within the Delivery Plan is to support the Warwickshire Natural Capital Investment Strategy Project Board and Working Group, which include Solihull and Coventry. This provides a clear opportunity to work collaboratively at a sub-regional level to build a shared knowledge base and funding mechanism that generates greater opportunities to maximise access to environmental markets. It also creates a shared platform from which to utilise the nature-based compensation monies and other income streams generated through the planning system or other voluntary markets. A Natural Capital Investment Plan (NCIIP) will be produced to support the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull (WCS) NCIS.

West Midlands Combined Authority State of Nature Report 2025:

- 15.21 The State of Nature report brings together a wealth of information to describe the existing distribution and type of natural environments present across the West Midlands. Understanding where our habitats are situated, and what value they offer to humans and wildlife, is important when considering how we prioritise actions to improve, restore and expand nature and where best to deliver those actions.
- 15.22 Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull State of Habitats (2025) report: This document captures the provision of designated sites within these areas, the provision for local wildlife, the habitats present and quantitative representations of the habitats per local area. This can be used to guide a review of specific habitat loss, creation and restoration across the borough.

Planning and Development Management

- 15.23 **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):** is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of local plans and spatial development strategies. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the

emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.

- 15.24 **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** is a systematic process that evaluates the potential environmental consequences of a proposed project or development before a decision is made. It involves identifying, predicting, and evaluating a project's significant impacts on air, water, soil, wildlife, and human health, and proposing measures to avoid, reduce, or offset negative effects to ensure sustainable development.
- 15.25 **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA):** is a multi-stage process to determine if a plan or project will negatively affect a European-designated site, such as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area (SPA). The process involves screening to identify likely significant effects and, if necessary, an "Appropriate Assessment". If adverse effects cannot be ruled out, the plan or project can only proceed if specific legal tests, known as "derogations," are met.
- 15.26 Solihull Council has undertaken Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) as part of its planning processes for documents like the Solihull Local Plan, with a full Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (including SEA) applied to both the Local Plan adopted in 2013 and the Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations Plan adopted in 2014. Solihull also conducts other strategic assessments, such as its Green Belt Assessment in 2016 and the Open Space Assessment in 2019, which contribute to broader sustainability goals.

Examples of Strategic Environmental Assessments in Solihull

- 15.27 **Local Plan:** Both the Local Plan (adopted December 2013) and the subsequent Local Plan Review (withdrawn in October 2024 due to a shortfall in land supply as recommended by the Planning Inspectors) included a full Sustainability Appraisal, which incorporated the requirements of a Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- 15.28 Prior to the withdrawal of the Local Plan Review, the Council had conducted a substantial amount of work to support the plan's development. This included the legally required SEA, which covered all strategic matters, including transport, minerals, and waste.
- 15.29 **New Local Plan:** Solihull Council is developing a new Local Plan and has initiated a new "Call for Sites" exercise to identify potential new housing and development sites. The evidence base from the withdrawn plan, which includes the environmental assessments, is still a material consideration for decision-making.
- 15.30 **Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations Plan** (adopted December 2014) underwent a full Sustainability Appraisal, which included a Strategic Environmental Assessment to ensure no significant adverse environmental effects would occur or to implement mitigation measures.
- 15.31 **Strategic Green Belt Assessment (2016):** While not a formal SEA, this assessment provided a strategic review of the Green Belt in Solihull, identifying broad areas and forming the basis for more detailed assessments.
- 15.32 **Neighbourhood Plans:** For neighbourhood plans within the borough, such as the Berkswell and Meriden Parish Neighbourhood Development Plans, the Council conducted screening reports to determine if a full SEA was necessary. In these cases, it was concluded that a separate SEA was not required because the neighbourhood

plans were in general conformity with the overarching Local Plan, which had already undergone a full SEA/SA.

15.33 **Other strategies:** The Council also develops other environment-related strategies, such as the Natural Capital Investment Strategy and Electric Vehicle Strategy, which incorporate environmental considerations into their strategic decision-making.

15.34 SEAs for transport have focused on promoting sustainable travel options, such as cycling, walking, and public transport, to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.

15.35 Evidence of Solihull's ongoing commitment to environmental assessment can also be seen in the following strategic documents:

- **Climate Change Action Plan:** formally the Net Zero Action Plan Report: This report details the actions Solihull is considering, to meet its net-zero emissions target, including technical analysis and recommendations.
- **Air Quality Strategy (2024-2028):** This strategy details the steps the Council plans to take to further improve air quality in the borough.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

15.36 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council has undertaken Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) to determine whether its planning policies and projects, most recently the withdrawn Local Plan, would adversely affect designated "European sites" of ecological importance.

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) process in Solihull

15.37 **Legal basis:** The HRA is required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 to assess the impact of plans and projects on protected sites, such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

15.38 **Methodology:** The assessment follows a two-stage process:

- **Screening:** An initial screening determines whether a plan or project could have a "likely significant effect" on a European site, either on its own or in combination with other plans. If a significant effect cannot be ruled out, an Appropriate Assessment is required.
- **Appropriate Assessment:** This more detailed, evidence-led assessment evaluates the potential effects on the site's integrity and its conservation objectives.

15.39 **Application to the Local Plan:** HRAs have been carried out to support the Solihull Local Plan and its review. An updated Stage 1 Screening report was completed in September 2020 to consider potential impacts on a number of European sites, including Ensor's Pool SAC and the River Mease SAC.

15.40 **Withdrawal of the Local Plan:** Following the examination of the draft Local Plan, government inspectors recommended its withdrawal, in part due to a dispute over housing numbers and the allocation of Green Belt land. The Council formally withdrew

the plan in October 2024, meaning the HRA for that specific plan is no longer active.

15.41 While the latest Local Plan was withdrawn, the need for HRAs on plans and projects remains.

- **For developers:** Solihull's planning authority will still require developers to provide ecological surveys to support planning applications. The specific requirements are determined by the scale and nature of the development.
- **For the public:** Information on the HRA process, screening reports, and supporting documents for previous versions of the Local Plan can be found on the Solihull Council website. New HRAs will be published as part of the evidence base for any future Local Plan.

15.42 **Local Plan Policy:** Solihull's Local Plan (2013) mandates that development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity, with a focus on protecting designated sites, ancient woodlands, and priority habitats. The Council enforces and monitors biodiversity actions through its planning process, requiring developers to demonstrate net gains.

15.43 **Biodiversity Offsetting:** The Council was a partner in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Defra Biodiversity Offsetting pilot scheme that ran from 2012-2014. This was the only one of the pilot schemes that was successful in continuing to use the Biodiversity Impact Assessment (BIA) Metric that was developed during the pilot. The pilot was successful due to the longevity of the existing Natural Capital Assessment Partnership (NCAP), formally known as the Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) Partnership (running since 1995), the strength of the data that the NCAP provides and the expertise of the local authority ecologist.

15.44 **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** Since 2024, BNG is mandatory for most new developments, requiring a minimum 10% gain. The biodiversity metric quantifies the impact of developments on habitats by measuring biodiversity units, enabling the assessment of both on-site and off-site habitat creation or restoration. Prior to mandatory net gain, Solihull was part of a national pilot scheme for offsetting and used a specific calculation tool developed by Warwickshire County Council.

- **Impact assessment:** Developers must conduct ecological surveys and assessments to calculate the pre-development biodiversity value and assess this against the post-development scenario, using the statutory metric.
- **Compliance monitoring:** The Council monitors compliance with BNG conditions and legal agreements associated with planning permissions.
- **Offsetting scheme:** If on-site gains are not possible, developers provide compensation through an off-site offsetting scheme, which Solihull uses to find and fund appropriate projects.

15.45 **The Authority Monitoring Report:** The Council is required to collect annual monitoring information reporting on progress on delivering the policy objectives in the Adopted Local Plan 2013, which is the statutory development plan for Solihull. It also

summarises other planning policy reporting requirements as set out in legislation.

Policy P10 – Natural Environment

Indicator – Proportion of local sites where positive conservation management is being achieved

The table below sets out Defra data on local sites:

Period	No. of LWS with conservation management	Total no. of LWS in area	Percentage of LWS with conservation management
2013/14	52	104	50%
2014/15	53	107	50%
2017/18	55	120	46%
<u>2019/22</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>48%</u>
<u>2023/24</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>128</u>	<u>42%</u>

Sites where positive conservation management is being or has been implemented in the 5 years prior to the monitoring period. (to be updated).

15.46 The LWS sites include both SMBC-owned, neighbouring authority, NGOs (wildlife trust, canal and rivers trust), privately owned sites etc. Those listed as managed may be LA owned with management plan, just LA owned, privately owned sites with known active management (positive or negative), or those sites with known positive active management, which also as a change in analysis methodology leads to some changes in the figures from year to year.

15.47 The number of nature conservation sites in positive management also shows changes due to threats associated with development (e.g. HS2) and lack of management (e.g. sites in private ownership where the type and extent of active management cannot be confirmed through lack of access). The total number of LWS sites has increased due to the implementation and ongoing management on some SMBC owned sites facilitated through grant funding and s106 contributions, for example, as part of the Council's award-winning Solihull Habitats and Nature Improvement Programme (SHNIP), Wildlife Ways and Small Habitat Grant programme, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). An area of 105.89ha of Council owned woodland has been brought into positive management and an area of 62.72ha of formerly frequently mown amenity grassland is now being managed as urban wildflower meadows, some of which are within the LWS designated sites listed above or may extend the areas of designation in time, subject to further review. This is in addition to a few sites moving from pLWS to LWS through re-survey and LWS panel review. However, the overall percentage of sites with conservation management has decreased due to the larger increase in the number of sites designated and the continued issues with access to survey some of these sites, many being on privately owned land.

15.48 The positive management of LWS (and LNR sites) in our ownership, are in the main due to the hard work from our volunteers, as directed/overseen by the Council.

15.49 In July 2024 the Council's adopted a Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) and Delivery Plan in response to the biodiversity crisis. 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. One objective of the NCIS is the positive management of Council owned land and buildings to enhance biodiversity and ensure that existing habitats and species are safeguarded and managed appropriately. This has been progressed through the Councils' Climate Change and Sustainability Group and we are seeing a step change in inclusion of and greater consideration and appreciation of the value of biodiversity in our projects.

- 15.50 However, the natural environment does not respect administrative boundaries. To achieve our collective aims across the region, we need to work collaboratively with partners and key stakeholders, and the Council recognises the need for a landscape-scale approach to the natural environment and the protection, restoration and enhancement of nature, natural capital, and the natural processes that support our wellbeing.
- 15.51 The Council is contributing to the emerging West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which is another new requirement introduced by the Environment Act 2021. The core purpose of LNRS is to reverse the ongoing decline of biodiversity and nature. The Strategy will agree priorities for nature's recovery; map the most valuable existing areas for nature; and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals (nature-based solutions). Solihull sits within the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) LNRS but is also closely aligned to the LNRS led by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) through the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership. The WMCA LNRS is expected to be in place by the end of March 2025.
- 15.52 Together these elements combine to reflect and reinforce Solihull's character of 'town in the country' living up to the Borough's motto: "*Urbs in Rure*" and delivery of the Council Plan in respect of planning and the environment to create an enhanced, well connected natural environment.

Key Monitoring Activities

- 15.53 **Condition of designated sites:** The Council continue to liaise with Natural England regarding the health and condition of SSSI in the borough, this will be developed further through the Councils support in the development of Protected Site Strategies. Regular surveys check the condition of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and these are used to inform local biodiversity records for species, update the NCAP habitat data and inform requirements for practical management by the Council or its volunteers.
- 15.54 **Habitat enhancement tracking:** Progress on habitat creation and restoration projects is tracked. For example, Solihull's 2022 CIEEM award winning Habitat and Nature improvements project provided over 100 hectares of habitat enhancements across the borough.

- The Council's **£17.6 million Wildlife Ways programme**, funded by a combination of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Priority Axis 6d Preserving and Protecting the Environment and Promoting Resource Efficiency, National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). which ran from 2018 to early 2023 built on the success of the Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvements Project delivered 73.19 hectares of improved wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and wildlife.
 - **Eleven Council owned woodlands**, with a noted decline in both structural and species diversity in the canopy were selected for positive management works to amend these issues. Forestry Commission approved woodland management plans were developed for each site to inform the felling licences. Works included selective thinning, coppicing, management of invasive species (e.g. snowberry, cherry laurel, rhododendron) creation of rides, glades and ponds, supplementary planting of native trees, shrubs and wildflowers, creation of fallen and standing deadwood habitats, along with improved access, interpretation and infrastructure.
 - Soil analysis and baseline botanical surveys identified areas of parks and open space which would be suitable for grassland enhancements. These sites underwent ground preparation works including chain harrowing to create bare ground and eradicate weeds. Green hay from local donor sites combined with wildflower seeding was used to enhance the existing sward. The grasslands are now on an annual cut and collect regime.
 - Monitoring of one road verge at Moorend Avenue showed **an increase** in positive indicator species from **17** in 2020 to **27** in 2021, this rising to 29 species in 2023. Negative indicator species decreased from **6** to **4** over the same time period with the loss of spear thistle and false oat-grass. This is likely due to targeted management and an increased abundance of yellow rattle.
 - Restoration of **500m** of the **Kinghurst Brook** involved creating meanders, berms, pools and riffles to slow down water flow, creating habitat for plant, fish and invertebrate species. This allows the channel to have restored natural features and functions within the original engineered two-stage channel and builds upon earlier downstream works at Meriden Park and elsewhere on the river catchment.
 - Reviewing the project ecological monitoring scheme, the independent Summative Assessment concluded that **'The level of survey and monitoring is exemplary. The management plans are well written and accessible with a focus on clearly illustrating the works to be carried out and their rationale.'**

15.55 **The Small Habitats Grants (SHG) project** provided grants to organisations in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Economic Partnership (**GBSLEP**) area. The grants were administered by Solihull MBC and were available from £20,000-£200,000. In total, **£2.6 million** was spent on projects including grassland creation, woodland management, wildflower seeding, wetland improvement, hedgerow planting, tree planting, and river restoration totaling **181.32 hectares** far exceeding the original 20ha target. Successful projects were delivered in **Solihull, Cannock, Tamworth, Lichfield,**

East Staffordshire, Birmingham and Redditch.

- Standardised methodologies were used to monitor ecological improvements. Baseline surveys were conducted at all sites, and these are being repeated to a specified timescale depending on the habitat type and nature of the intervention. All monitoring data is compared to the baseline and previous years' data and is then added to the management plan so that any future amendments are centrally recorded.
- The following techniques were used:
 - ***Condition monitoring assessments (CMA)*** developed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for woodland and grassland sites, specifically adapted for Warwickshire from Natural England's SSSI CMAs.
 - Use of the ***Modular River Physical (MoRPh)*** survey methodology, as a scaled hydro morphological assessment method in addition to water quality measurements and macroinvertebrate surveys using Biological Monitoring Working Party index (BMWP) and Average Score per Taxon (ASPT) and now introducing Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (RMI) survey methods to aid development of citizen science review for the future.
 - Predictive SYstems for Multimetrics (PSYM), developed by the Freshwater Habitats Trust, has been used on some of our park's pond habitats to assess water quality and species diversity within these habitats. This uses data of macroinvertebrate presence and aquatic and marginal plants and can be used to assess a pond's value and change in quality over time.

15.56 We hope that this investment in the natural environment of Solihull ensures these projects have a lasting positive impact and legacy for our communities, contributing to the quality of place and to people's health and well-being. We carefully designed the projects to collectively increase and strengthen the capacity of the natural environment to deliver ecosystem services across the region and provide resilience and mitigation against climate change.

15.57 **Air quality monitoring:** The ***Solihull Air Quality 2024-2028*** notes the need to consider air pollution's impacts on habitats, acknowledging its knock-on effect on biodiversity. We are currently testing the air quality in the borough using diffusion tubes at 54 sites.

15.58 As part of our legal duties, Solihull Council is required to undertake an annual review and assessment of air quality across the borough and present the results in the form of an Annual Statement Report. The reports are submitted to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for scrutiny prior to publication.

15.59 ***The Solihull Climate Change Action Plan*** (formally the Net Zero Action Plan) **reports on the Councils' status regarding the** Natural Environment Key Performance Indicator, which reports on the proportion of local sites where positive conservation management is being or has been implemented, **as reported above.**

15.60 Solihull Climate Change Action Plan is currently under review including actions relating to the Natural Environment. Councillors have agreed to rename the former formally the Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP) 'Solihull Climate Change Action Plan' to

reflect the inclusion of actions related to adapting to the impact of climate change (flooding, extreme heat etc.) as well as cutting carbon.

16. Section Ten: Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges

16.1 This section of the report highlights the Council's main achievements and describes what the anticipated challenges may be over the next 5 years.

16.2 Solihull's biodiversity highlights include a Borough with a diverse variety of habitats and a rich and a varied green infrastructure network; conservation successes, and proactive strategies, but it also faces significant challenges from urban development, habitat fragmentation, and climate change these are outlined below.

Highlights

- 16.3 **Diverse Habitats:** Solihull features a rich variety of natural assets, including oak woodlands from the historic Forest of Arden, remnants of ancient woodlands, wetland, parkland and grassland, which support a wide range of species and habitats.
- 16.4 **Rich and varied green infrastructure:** The borough's green (and blue) infrastructure extends beyond large parks to include gardens, street trees, rivers, canals, and public rights of way, creating a connected network of natural spaces.
- 16.5 **Significant conservation successes:** Since 2016 Solihull Council has undertaken a wide range of habitat and nature improvement projects across the borough. Delivered through successful external funding grants, which have received both local and national acclaim through a number of awards to date. Noteworthy achievements include:
- ***Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvements project: 2022 CIEEM Best Practice Large Scale Practical Nature Conservation Award Winner***
 - ***Wildlife Ways: Highly Commended 2024 CIEEM Best Practice Large Scale Practical Nature Conservation Award*** – plus representatives of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities were quoted that the programme “exceeded their expectations”.
- 16.6 **Network of protected sites:** The borough features several nationally and locally important sites, including:
- ***The River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)***, the best example of a lowland-clay river in England.
 - ***Monkspath Meadow SSSI***, the best example of a species-rich, unimproved hay meadow in the county.
 - ***Berkswell Marsh Meadow SSSI***, the largest example of fen meadow habitat in the West Midlands, that has developed within a valley mire system.
 - ***Bickenhill Meadows SSSI***, two locations of 4 fields comprising flood and hay

grassland/meadow habitats that are botanically rich and diverse.

- **Clowes Wood and New Fallings Coppice SSSI**, Part of this ancient woodland site lies within our borough, supporting wet and dry woodland types and an important breeding bird population.
 - **Brook Meadow, Darley Green SSSI**, this important flood meadow lies immediately adjacent to our boundary and most likely is hydrologically linked to land inside our boundary.
 - **Coleshill and Bannerly Pools SSSI**, this woodland, wet and dry heath and bog habitat developed over a valley mire system, lies immediately to the east of the Council's boundary and most likely is hydrologically linked to land inside the Council's boundary.
 - Noting further SSSI sites' Impact Risk Zones may extend into our boundary, from site outside of the Council's physical boundary.
 - **A network of 128 Local Wildlife Sites**, these supporting various habitats of Principal Importance (HoPI or Priority Habitats).
 - **23 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)**, including **Babbs Mill, Dorridge Wood, and Millisons Wood**.
 - **Ancient woodlands** including **Yorks Wood, Alcott Wood and Bills Wood, Parkland habitat** and **numerous veteran and ancient trees**.
 - **Fen habitat** at **Berkswell Moss LWS**, presence of 'schwingmoor' a particularly rare and valuable floating vegetation habitat, that has developed within a basin mire and at **Berkswell Marsh Meadow SSSI**. Noting other location of this habitat type as an irreplaceable habitat require review and due attention, where these may be evident in the borough.
- 16.7 **Proactive environmental policies:** In addition to the Local Plan, the Council has adopted forward-looking strategies and plans to safeguard its natural environment, such as the Natural Capital Investment Strategy and the Climate Change Action Plan (Formally NZAP). These include goals to:
- Ensure biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% on new developments.
 - Embed the value of nature into decision-making.
 - Plant **250,000** trees over **ten** years.
- 16.8 **Community initiatives and engagement:** Whilst a great deal of project work has been delivered by specialist contactors across the Borough there is a significant volunteer involvement, which with numerous community organisations have contributed a considerable number of hours of voluntary conservation time to important biodiversity projects.
- 16.9 **Community initiatives:** In particular, Love Solihull, Planting Our Future and Friends groups, including Solihull Tree Wardens who encourage residents to engage with tree planting schemes and get involved in green infrastructure projects - a significant step

that earned Solihull the prestigious status of a Tree City of the World.

- 16.10 **Conservation Volunteers:** Solihull Council continue to promote and support two practical conservation groups – Solihull Conservation Volunteers (SCV) and Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers, in the sustainable management of Council-owned woodlands and Local Nature Reserves for the benefit of people and wildlife. We are indebted to these groups in helping to maintain and improve the natural environment around Solihull.
- Volunteer tasks not only helps to maintain and improve the environment in Solihull and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, it also allows people to learn new skills and increase their knowledge of nature and the environment in their area. Promotes wellbeing, a sense of local pride and ownership, equality, diversity and inclusion. Enabling communities to thrive, to be healthier and happier.
 - Volunteer actions also have clear economic benefits through the very visible environmental improvements undertaken across the Borough, which contributes to the positive perception of the area. Furthermore, the volunteers save the Council a substantial sum. In the 2023-2024 period (April to March) it is estimated this equated to £53,391.00. This figure is based on 2410 volunteer hours worked in 2024.
- 16.11 **Arden Farm Network:** Promotes and supports sustainable farm practices and knowledge sharing for our local farmers across the Arden Landscape.
- 16.12 **Active Management of Public Spaces:** Management techniques are evolving in public open spaces, churchyards, and cemeteries to foster biodiversity. Veolia Solihull, Solihull Council's grounds maintenance partner, have been recognised with the **Green Flag Award** for their maintenance of parks and green spaces, with **18 sites** receiving this prestigious honour in 2025, and won the **"Best of the Best"** award in 2024 for their work with Solihull Council and volunteers on the **Hope Coppice** biodiversity project. Veolia also runs the **Solihull Community Environment Fund**, which awards grants of up to £2,000 to community groups for environmental projects, and contributes to **Solihull Council's Greener Schools Awards**. Veolia's was also awarded **'Hedgehog Hero'** status by the **Hedgehog Preservation Society** for their work supporting local hedgehogs through their conservation initiative.

The Main Challenges Over the Next 5 Years

- 16.13 **Development pressure and green belt loss:** Despite being a "town in the country," (Urbs in Rure), Solihull faces intense development pressure on its extensive Green Belt. While policies exist to mitigate impacts, development has the potential to result in the direct loss of habitats, degrades the historic Arden landscape, and fragments ecological networks, threatening biodiversity. Changes to national planning policy alongside both the Local Plan and Mayoral SDS will be key policy drivers in relation to this matter.
- 16.14 **Balancing growth and conservation:** Solihull's local plans aim for substantial growth, requiring careful management to minimise negative impacts on natural assets while maximising opportunities for sustainable development. This includes navigating the complexities of integrating biodiversity into new transport infrastructure and managing the impacts of increased air traffic from Birmingham Airport.
- 16.15 **Habitat fragmentation and loss:** While policies exist to mitigate impacts,

development still results in the direct loss or fragmentation of habitats. Inadequate consideration of cumulative impacts from multiple developments can have significant long-term effects on ecological networks.

16.16 **Intensification of Farming:** Modern farming practices have led to the removal of hedgerows and the creation of larger fields, which can reduce habitat diversity.

16.17 **Threat to ancient woodland:** Though policies protect ancient woodland, development still presents a potential threat. Any adverse impacts require wholly exceptional circumstances for development to proceed.

16.18 **Inadequate management:** In areas where green spaces are considered "surplus to needs," they may be re-allocated for other uses, leading to a net loss of green space and its associated biodiversity value.

Policy Limitations and Implementation Issues

16.19 **Insufficient ecological resources:** A national survey of local authorities, referenced by a wildlife organisation, found a significant lack of ecological staff and resources to effectively deliver BNG and scrutinise planning applications. This suggests that policy intentions may not always be met in practice.

16.20 **Biodiversity offsetting issues:** As a "last resort" measure, biodiversity offsetting could still result in a net loss of local biodiversity, particularly if the offsite compensation is less valuable ecologically than the original habitat. The Council must also ensure monitoring and long-term maintenance of these offset sites.

16.21 **Risk of policy compromises:** The need to balance development, economic growth, and environmental protection can sometimes lead to decisions that compromise the Council's own biodiversity objectives. This requires strong governance and a consistent emphasis on environmental net gain.

Indirect Impacts

16.22 **Increased visitor pressure:** Improved accessibility to green spaces can increase visitor numbers, which may place pressure on sensitive habitats if not managed correctly.

16.23 **Climate Change:** Rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events directly alter ecosystems and drive a cascade of indirect effects, like shifts in species ranges and increased spread of diseases. The Council has a Net Zero Action Plan, but climate change still poses a significant threat to biodiversity.

16.24 **Pollution:** Emissions from agriculture, industry, and transport, including greenhouse gases, nitrogen, and phosphorus, pollute air and water, leading to acid rain, nutrient imbalances, and toxic effects on ecosystems.

16.25 **Decline of priority habitats:** Some of Solihull's key habitats are in poor condition. For example, the River Blythe SSSI remains in an "unfavourable" state due to water quality and invasive species. Rare habitats like heathland and bog have significantly declined due to urbanisation and agricultural land conversion.

16.26 **Tree health and resilience:** While tree planting is a priority for the Council, threats

like ash dieback and oak-specific diseases (e.g., Acute Oak Decline) put significant pressure on the borough's tree population, reducing its resilience to future threats.

- 16.27 **Invasive Species:** The introduction and spread of invasive species, which outcompete native species and disrupt ecosystems pose a threat to our native biodiversity.
- 16.28 **Declining Species Populations:** The borough faces the risk of losing iconic species, such as our native, white-clawed crayfish.
- 16.29 **Habitat Fragmentation:** While direct habitat conversion is a clear impact, the roads, power lines, and other infrastructure built to support human settlements and industries create extensive fragmentation, dividing habitats and isolating populations

17. Background papers used to compile this report

- 17.1 [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#)
- 17.2 [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](#)

18. List of Other Relevant Documents

- 18.1 Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy [Natural Capital Investment Strategy | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council](#)