



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Solihull's Countryside



Solihull's Countryside Strategy 2010 – 2020

Contents

1.	Summary	2
1.1	Aim and objectives	3
1.2	The purpose	3
1.3	The benefits	3
2.	Introduction	4
2.1	The need for a Countryside Strategy	4
2.2	Format	5
2.3	Links	6
2.4	Climate change	8
3	Context and issues	10
3.1	The Solihull Countryside	10
3.2	An appraisal of Solihull's countryside	27
3.3	Policy background	29
3.4	Issues	34
4	The Strategy	36
4.1	Maintain open and rural character	36
4.2	Green Infrastructure	38
4.3	Management and diversification	40
4.4	Conservation and enhancement	42
4.5	Realise the potential for recreation	45
4.6	Maintain local distinctiveness	48
4.7	Promotion and education	50
4.8	Partnerships and the community	52
4.9	Resources	54
4.10	Local objectives	55
5	The way forward	58
5.1	Policies	58
5.2	Partners	58
5.3	Operations	59
5.4	Finance and monitoring	59

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary	60
Appendix 2: Policy	68
Appendix 3: Figure 1 Zone Plan	88

Solihull's Countryside Strategy
First Review 1.0 (6 October 2010)

*Cover photographs, clockwise from top:
Holly Lane, St. John's Church, Berkswell,
and Hampton-in-Arden.*

1. Summary

The countryside provides an environment for living, working, farming, forestry, mineral extraction, waste disposal, water supply catchment and nature conservation, amenity, historical landscapes and recreation for both rural and urban dwellers.

It is essential that the many demands and conflicts placed upon the countryside are effectively managed and, where possible, resolved. The preparation and implementation of a comprehensive countryside strategy is seen as the most appropriate means of achieving this, as well as providing a broader framework for complementary strategies such as the Nature Conservation Strategy and Woodland Strategy.

Solihull's Countryside Strategy aims to take a comprehensive view of the key issues facing the countryside, informing the relevant land-use policies and proposals of the Local Development Framework (LDF). These issues reflect the particular demands and pressures acting upon Solihull's countryside.

Housing and the provision of rural services, whilst important, do not directly form part of the Countryside Strategy. The LDF provides a land use planning context for housing provision (including affordable housing) as part of the Council's Housing Strategy together with infrastructural and social facilities borough-wide.

The document is structured into five main sections:

Section 1

Summarises the Strategy, identifying a series of aims and objectives.

Section 2

Introduces the Strategy including the need for a review.

Section 3

Seeks to put the countryside resource of Solihull into context by reviewing the environment, policy background and the forces for change acting upon it.

Section 4

Highlights a perspective of the countryside, which is translated into a series of strategic policies.

Section 5

Discusses the way forward.

1.1 Aim and objectives

To control and guide future change in Solihull's countryside in order to protect and enhance its character, natural resources and biodiversity, whilst assisting the sustainable management of a diverse and prosperous rural economy, thereby contributing to the overall quality of life within the Borough.

The objectives

The strategy will cover the following areas:

- Safeguarding of the countryside as a landscape resource and enhancement of local distinctiveness;
- Sustainable management of the countryside and the changes to the rural economy;
- Conservation and enhancement of the character of the countryside, the natural and historic environment, landscape, habitats and wildlife;
- Protect and enhance ecosystem services;
- Improved access to the countryside and opportunities for leisure, sport and recreation; and
- Promotion of responsible use and awareness of the value of the countryside as a finite resource

1.2 The purpose

The purpose of the strategy is:

- To ensure recognition of the distinctive character of Solihull's countryside and its important strategic role;
- To provide a framework to ensure that future economic, social and environmental change respects the quality of the countryside, enhances local distinctiveness and provides a high quality environment;
- To increase awareness of the importance of the countryside resource and encourage partnerships which contribute to the quality of its stewardship;
- To create an attractive, safe and sustainable environment;
- To minimise and adapt to climate change by ensuring sustainable forms of economic activity and lifestyles which reduce carbon emissions and make more efficient use of natural resources; and
- To protect and enhance a resilient, biodiversity rich natural environment throughout the Borough.

1.3 The benefits

The strategy will deliver the following benefits for Solihull's countryside:

- Positive proposals for the management and enhancement of the countryside;
- Protection of the countryside from inappropriate developments;
- Improved opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside as an educational and recreational resource, helping to build healthier, safer and stronger communities;
- A framework for sustaining the future health of the rural economy, reflecting the importance of a high quality environment as a basis for economic activity, contributing to prosperous communities;
- Mitigation for and adaptation to the consequences of climate change; and
- Creating biodiversity rich landscapes that are robust enough to provide a range of ecosystem services such as provisioning services (e.g. food, timber), regulating services (e.g. flood control, temperature mitigation), cultural services (e.g. beautiful landscapes) and supporting services (e.g. nutrient recycling).

2. Introduction

This is the first review of Solihull's Countryside Strategy.

This strategy is concerned with Solihull's countryside, its present qualities and the changes and challenges it faces.

Two thirds of the Borough is countryside which plays an important role in shaping Solihull's image and character. Not only does it provide an attractive setting to many of Solihull's towns and villages, but its accessibility is important in enhancing the quality of life enjoyed by the Borough's residents.

Solihull's countryside also has an important role in a wider strategic planning sense; its designation as Green Belt restricts the outward expansion of the West Midlands Conurbation and prevents it merging with the City of Coventry. The "Meriden Gap", an area of the Borough between the eastern edge of Birmingham and Solihull, and the western outskirts of Coventry, is of particular significance. It is vital to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the West Midlands that the character and openness of this relatively narrow band of countryside is maintained.

Background

The previous countryside strategy Solihull's Countryside was adopted by the Council in April 2000 after an extensive process of public consultation. The Strategy sought to strike a balance between the varied interests associated with management and diversification, nature conservation and enhancement.

A significant amount has been achieved within the remit of the previous strategy, but during this period, considerable change has occurred in countryside management. It is reasonable therefore, to expect that an equal, if not greater amount of change is likely in the future.

Competing forces are many and real; they include changing climatic conditions, development pressures — both in quantity and nature, changing patterns of land use in recreation activity, and ever changing public and private sector strategies to meet such change.

2.1 The need for a Countryside Strategy

The quality and attractiveness of the countryside has often been taken for granted because its character has been shaped by the farming industry, it is often assumed that the same industry will continue to protect this character in the future.

The countryside is a place of accelerating change, with farmers looking to diversify to sustain their businesses. At the same time, people have become more mobile, seeking better access to the countryside with growing demands for its use for sport and recreation. In Solihull, urban development and influences have an affect on surrounding areas of Green Belt.

Although the character of the countryside has taken many generations to shape and develop, it can quickly be damaged through insensitive development and change. Whilst the Green Belt designation provides protection against inappropriate development, it cannot ensure affective long-term management of the countryside.

What is required therefore is a different approach where change is anticipated and guided, not just through the control of development, but also by more positive programmes and partnerships involving all those with a stake in the Solihull countryside:

- The Council;
- Landowners and farmers;
- Parish and Town Councils and other bodies representing the residents of the countryside;
- Voluntary groups;
- Environmental groups; and
- Businesses

A common sense of purpose and direction is needed to provide an appropriate balance between the various economic, social and environmental interests and aspirations of different groups. It is the purpose of this Strategy to set out the Council's initial view on how this balance can be best achieved.

2.2 Format

The Strategy sets out an appraisal of Solihull's countryside in terms of its landscape character and the changes it faces. Key issues for land use planning are identified to assist the process of policy choice.

The Council recognises that there are important countryside issues which are beyond the scope of this strategy. These issues are referred to where relevant, but the strategy concentrates on land use planning in the countryside. For convenience, the strategy is divided into ten sections and identifies local objectives based on ten countryside zones, which include the urban areas of north and west Solihull, whose landscape character is considered relevant to this strategy.

The final strategy will be part of the evidence base that will inform the development of the Core Strategy and is intended to provide supplementary planning guidance for countryside matters. It will contribute to the emerging LDF, when the current policies relating to the countryside will be re-examined.

This strategy is one of a series based around the theme of land use planning and is complemented by strategies for Climate Change, Nature Conservation, Woodland, Cycling and Walking, plus a number of others.

Recent shifts in national policy for the delivery of local authority services, such as the Comprehensive Area Assessment initiative and various changes in legislation have also resulted in the need for the Council to review its own policies and show what it can achieve at a local level.

The consequences of these changes already present some challenges; for example, the loss or reduction of habitats, or the polarisation of attitudes between those who live in towns and those who live in the countryside, with the ongoing debate concerning urban versus rural issues.

The changes also present very real opportunities:

- To raise public awareness of the existence and importance of the Borough's countryside and its overall management;
- To work with farmers and landowners to maintain and improve rural businesses;
- To work in partnership with the local community and external organisations to enhance habitats and wildlife;
- To improve and promote the possibilities for informal recreation and access to the countryside.

However, the strategy has a much wider audience; the countryside does not end at the boundaries of Solihull. It is part of the wider Warwickshire countryside characterised by the Arden landscape. Many people in Birmingham and Coventry visit and enjoy Solihull's countryside; therefore the objectives of this strategy have wider benefits, complementing a number of neighbouring authorities' countryside policies such as Warwickshire County Council's Countryside Strategy which have close links with this strategy.

Furthermore, this strategy and associated actions are expected to reflect the aims of the Council's Plan — Solihull in 2018: where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous — and Solihull's renewed priorities.

The Council Plan sets out how we are going to make a distinctive, but complementary contribution to delivery of the local Sustainable Community Strategy, the key document that describes the most important outcomes that we need to deliver for all our communities to be 'healthier, safer, stronger and prosperous'.

Above all, our countryside is a shared responsibility; this strategy is for all those in the public, private and voluntary sectors who use, or have an interest in Solihull's countryside.

2.3 Links

The Countryside Strategy must provide relevant and direct links to pertinent strategies and renewed corporate priorities. Such links will range from directly adjacent local authority strategies, policies and plans, through to regional and national environmental policy or legislation, and all associated community and environmental themes.

The Council's corporate priorities have been realigned to provide consistency with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) themes of:

- Building healthier communities.
- Building safer communities.
- Building stronger communities.
- Building prosperous communities; as well as the cross cutting theme of
- An equal chance for children and young people.

The Countryside Strategy provides a direct link with all these priority themes, notably and especially through LAA targets for building stronger communities, which can impact positively throughout.

Links with other corporate strategic documents can be identified through examples such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Council Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework.

National, regional and local policies concerning the environment are major drivers for the future of Solihull's countryside. Such policies will continue to be an important guide to the Council's approach to management of conservation, environmental protection and access to the countryside

Solihull's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 – 2018

'One Borough: an equal chance for all'

Solihull's Sustainable Community Strategy is a vision for the kind of Borough we want in ten years time and a map for how we get there. The strategy has been produced by the Solihull Partnership, and formally agreed by the organisations which make up that Partnership.

This strategy is our investment in the future, for the generation of people who will live, visit and work in Solihull who will want to know how we secured a sustainable environment and high quality of life. The strategy describes how we, as partner organisations, communities and citizens, will develop the Borough of Solihull as a great place to be. It is based on the needs, concerns and aspirations of local people, and sets out improvement priorities to tackle the most important issues facing the people of Solihull.

The Countryside Strategy will make an important contribution to the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Solihull by guiding change in accordance with sustainable development principles. It should ensure that the quality of the countryside endures for the enjoyment and use by future generations.

Economic development

Solihull's Economic Development Strategy 2008 – 2011 encompasses both social equity and environmental objectives and will seek to promote sustainable forms of economic activity.

Social equity will be pursued in particular by seeking to widen access to economic activity.

Environmental objectives will focus on promoting environmentally sustainable forms of economic activity – both production and consumption - which reduce carbon emissions.

Housing

Solihull's Housing Strategy provides the overall framework for housing activity and investment by the Council and its partner organisations. It is concerned with housing in all tenures and links to more detailed strategies on specific segments of the market, such as council housing and supported housing, the details of which are dealt with in other documents. It is informed also by national housing policy, particularly on sustainable communities.

Health

Good health is essential for quality of life, and building healthier communities is a priority of the Sustainable Community Strategy. Inactivity and lack of greenspace affect our society's health both physically and psychologically. Physical activity has direct physical health benefits as well as raising people's self-esteem. Green environments encourage physical activity, particularly active travel (especially walking and cycling), as well as having psychological benefits.

There is substantial evidence that poor quality environments are strongly correlated to poor health. This is evident within the Borough, for example, marked inequalities in health exist between the wards in the north and those in the south of the Borough. The underlying causes of health inequalities are related to income, housing, education and the environment.

Research published in the Lancet¹ shows that access to green spaces, such as parks, river corridors and canals ('blue gyms') reduces health inequality. The health gap between richer and poorer residents in areas with access to green spaces was half of that in areas where such access was not possible. Links were revealed between the levels of income and access to green space, in relation to deaths from all causes, but particularly circulatory causes, such as heart disease. Researchers surmise that access to green spaces encourages activity and exercise, whilst other studies have linked access to green spaces to stress levels.

The Countryside Strategy will support countryside initiatives and improved access to green space, to enable improvements to the health of all the Borough's residents.

2.4 Climate change

Sustaining our quality of environment is crucial, particularly in the global context of climate change and in April 2009, Solihull's Climate Change Strategy was approved by Cabinet. It looks to both mitigate the causes of and adapt to the consequences of climate change. The Countryside Strategy will make an important contribution to Solihull's approach to climate change.

Climate change is further discussed in Section 3.1, page 14.

¹ Mitchell, R. and Popham, F. (2008) Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study. *The Lancet*. 372(9650): 1655-1660.



Footpath from Berkswell Church, where it passes Berkswell Hall.

3. Context and Issues

3.1 The Solihull Countryside

Character

Solihull's countryside has many strengths; it is an attractive area where the quality of the landscape (the results of the interaction of both natural and human influences on the area) has generally been retained with a strong rural character, providing a major contrast with adjacent urban areas.



Solihull's countryside around Hampton-in-Arden

Solihull's countryside is within the Arden Landscape Character Area, for which a character description is included in Natural England's 'Countryside Character – West Midlands Volume'. Arden Landscape, Character Area 97, is one of 181 regional areas identified by Natural England in its countryside character approach. Landscape Guidelines for Arden have been produced by Warwickshire County Council and the Countryside Commission and are adopted by Solihull Council.

The 'Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden' provides a comprehensive landscape assessment, dividing Arden into seven distinct landscape types of which Arden

Parklands, Arden Pastures, Ancient Arden and Arden River Valleys are evident in Solihull. From this a series of management strategies set out the direction that is required in order to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness. These strategies are supported by a comprehensive set of landscape guidelines that provide detailed advice to guide new development and land management practices.

The historical development of Solihull's countryside is a major factor influencing the character of the present day landscape. In a region with few dramatic physical features it is these subtle human influences, developed over many centuries, which have created a landscape of intimacy and a strong 'sense of place' characterised by a wide range of historical and ecological features. As a result of limiting development, Solihull has many archaeological and historic buildings and remains — about half of Solihull's 387 listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments (as of April 2009) such as Meriden Cross and Packhorse Bridge, are within the countryside and rural settlements.

The landscape retains many ancient features such as:

- a pattern of irregular fields defined by thick hedgerows;
- a network of narrow, winding and often sunken lanes and trackways; and
- a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets.

Most significantly, the appearance of Solihull's countryside remains a wooded landscape with mature hedgerow oaks, remnants of ancient semi-natural woodlands and historic parklands. The association with former common and heath, reflected in the names of settlements such as Hockley Heath and Balsall

Common, imparts a strong sense of unity and is reflected in the widespread occurrence of heath vegetation, particularly roadside bracken.

Ecologically, the natural vegetation of Solihull's countryside is thought to have consisted of dense broadleaved woodland, dominated by oak on the light sandy soils and lime on the heavier clays and loams. Woodland clearance from earliest times resulted in the development of grassland and wood pasture over much of the area, with heath-land on the poorer, leached soils. Marshland occurred in low-lying areas along rivers and streams. All of these habitats have been greatly influenced by land-use history and no large areas have survived.

The sites of greatest ecological interest today are those that retain remnants of these ancient vegetation types. They reflect the underlying geology and soils, and make an important contribution to landscape character. Some, particularly woodlands, also form prominent visual features. Currently the countryside contains a rich mixture of species-rich grasslands, woodlands, wetlands, open water and some remnant heath, not least the River Blythe which, as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), is of national significance.

Agriculture is the main activity in the countryside, and farmers are responsible for managing the land. However, the management of land has been affected by changes in farm practices and agricultural subsidies. Farming practices continue to change and evolve as do landscapes, which can impact on the distinctive characteristics of the countryside.

Solihull's countryside generally consists of good to moderate quality agricultural land (mostly Grade 3) capable of supporting a healthy mixed farming economy. Whilst the intensification of farming methods has led to some removal of hedgerows and the creation of larger fields, the overall character of the landscape has not been severely damaged. Moreover, Green Belt policy has been effective in limiting development.

Promotion of agricultural diversification would help to support farm enterprises and future management of land as well as generating employment opportunities and indirect support for other village services. However, many potential diversification schemes conflict with Green Belt policy, and those which do comply may be less attractive to farmers. Diversification schemes which would result in the greater suburbanisation should be avoided, whilst a positive approach to diversification generally would help to support farming and thereby protect the special character of the Borough's countryside.

If the countryside benefits from many natural assets, its greatest weakness derives from manmade influences in the form of its proximity to major urban areas and the impacts and pressures that result from this. These are often referred to as 'urban fringe' characteristics.

One particular feature is the relative narrowness of the gaps between major settlements such that the "psychological break" between the urban and rural areas is often very fragile. This is further weakened by the level of background noise apparent in many areas, particularly from traffic and aircraft and by the impact of light spillage at night from urban areas and influences. The threat to the quality and character of the countryside from suburbanisation is known and whilst built development is generally controlled through Green Belt policies, light pollution is an increasing problem

Nevertheless, Solihull's countryside can play a positive role in providing access for sporting and recreational activities. There are a variety of opportunities for people to enjoy Solihull's countryside through the existing network of footpaths, towpaths and bridleways. Improving access for walking, cycling and horse riding and encouraging recreation-based diversification will help to sustain this positive role and provide benefits to the wider community.

Change

The pace of change within the countryside is accelerating. However, it is not change itself which should be of concern — there has always been change in the English countryside — but rather, the direction in which this is leading.

Change is an intrinsic characteristic of the countryside. The countryside has never been static, and has evolved as a result of both natural processes and human use. Changes resulting from natural processes, such as vegetation succession, occur normally over very long periods of time and are often imperceptible. In contrast, change due to human actions can often occur very quickly.

All of Solihull's countryside we see today has changed considerably. Some of these changes have been gradual and barely perceived over several generations. While other changes have been sudden and dramatic such as the urban expansion and development of the canal, road and rail networks of the industrial revolution. The scale of change has also varied, from small scale local changes such as the removal of a field tree or length of hedgerow, to more extensive changes such as urbanisation or the impact of extractive industries.

Our perception of change and whether we feel that change is acceptable is influenced by both the scale and pace of change. Landscapes have different purposes leading to different public benefits, at different points in their evolution. In the past, for many, the landscape would have had a primarily utilitarian value, as a source of food, shelter and raw materials. The appearance of the landscape would have been of secondary importance compared to its function, and change within the landscape would not have been regarded as important unless they impacted on its primary function. Over time, we have attached cultural and aesthetic values to the landscape, such as scenic beauty and spiritual enrichment. Natural England has undertaken qualitative social research to provide evidence of the cultural services and experiential qualities that landscapes provide society². Some landscapes which were previously only valued for their practical utility, such as old mineral workings and industrial sites, are now valued for their historic associations or biodiversity interest and are maintained to provide an entirely new set of public benefits.

Today, we are starting to think about the new services and functions that the landscape will need to provide in the future, such as carbon storage, climate change adaptation and flood protection. Over time, these will begin to influence the way people think about the landscape and their attitudes towards landscape change.

Some landscape change has improved the quality of the natural environment, for example where derelict industrial sites have been restored. But the overall picture is one of landscape change resulting in declining diversity, distinctiveness and ecological richness.

² *Natural England (2009) Experiencing landscapes: capturing the cultural services and experiential qualities of landscape*

Over the last century we have experienced:

- a gradual erosion of local distinctiveness in some areas through a process of standardisation and simplification of some of the components that make up landscape character;
- a loss of some natural and semi-natural features, and habitats such as ancient woodlands and unimproved grassland;
- a decline in some traditional agricultural landscape features, such as farm ponds, hedgerows;
- a loss of archaeological sites and traditional buildings;
- increased urbanisation, often accompanied by poor design standards, a decline in the variety of building materials, the importation of urban and suburban building styles into rural areas; and
- a loss of remoteness and reduction in tranquillity, due to built development and traffic growth.

Generally, past landscape change has occurred in a largely unplanned manner, as a result of largely ad hoc decisions. Currently we are much better placed to take an informed view regarding the impact of any changes on the landscape and the types of landscapes we might want to see, for example, we have a much greater understanding of existing landscape character. Using landscape character assessment techniques, the whole of England's landscape has been mapped and described at a national level, and there is increasingly widespread coverage of more localised landscape character assessments. These usually contain some analysis of the forces driving landscape change and may include landscape management objectives. English Heritage's Historic Landscape Characterisation programme also provides a valuable evidence base, with a wealth of information about current landscape character. This understanding of landscape character provides a sound baseline against which any future changes can be assessed.

Issues

The most important anticipated drivers of landscape change and the root causes are considered to include:

- Climate change;
- Agriculture and forestry;
- Built development;
- Living and working;
- Conservation and environmental management;
- Natural resource management;
- Transport infrastructure;
- Minerals extraction;
- Leisure, sport and recreation;
- Energy; and
- Waste management.

Solihull's strategy takes account of these forces for change, together with a number of new issues and concerns. In some areas, these will challenge traditional approaches to landscape conservation, and require a move away from a focus on the appearance of landscape to consider the more explicit services and benefits landscape can deliver for society.

This will require society to be more open to the idea of landscape change, and to accept that even some of our most valued landscapes will need to adapt if they are to meet our future needs.

Climate change

Climate has always been a key defining factor in landscape development and past changes in climate have had a significant role in shaping the physical character of the landscape.

The projected increase in the rate of climate change could have significant impacts on the landscape and introduces a dynamic factor to landscape management. Research on the impact of climate change is generally set within the framework of global scenarios provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, with climate change scenarios for the UK provided by the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP). UKCIP has projected that in the West Midlands, our average daily maximum summer temperatures could be up to 5.50C warmer and winter precipitation could be up by 23% by the 2040s. There is little doubt that climatic changes on the scale envisaged by UKCIP will impact on England's landscape. These changes will result from:

- Direct impacts — examples include changing patterns of habitats and species as they adapt to new conditions, flooding, erosion and changes in agricultural productivity. The direct impacts of climate change are likely to be complex, subtle and slow to materialise, but could be more significant if severe weather events and flooding become more frequent.
- Indirect impacts arising from measures to reduce carbon emissions or sequester carbon. Examples are likely to include on-shore as well as off-shore wind energy developments, other renewable energy developments and associated infrastructure, biofuel and biomass production, and new public transport infrastructure. There may also be measures to increase the area of woodland to store carbon.
- Impacts resulting from planned measures taken by society to adapt to climate change. Examples could include initiatives to promote habitat connectivity and species movement, changes in water and flood risk management (for example, a move towards soft flood defences), and changes in patterns of agricultural production. Within urban areas we may see changes in building design and the management of green space.

To understand how these changes will impact on landscape character and the services provided by the landscape, we need to bring together an understanding of the changes themselves and the landscapes that will be affected. This analysis will need to consider the nature, scale, distribution and likelihood of any changes, and the significance of these changes to specific landscapes. This is fraught with difficulty, principally the degree of uncertainty about the likely impacts. These uncertainties are significant and include:

- the possibility that the magnitude, speed and distribution of climatic changes will differ significantly from those contained in the IPCC and UKCIP scenarios;
- uncertainty about how natural systems will respond to changes in climatic variables such as temperature and rainfall;
- uncertainty about how society will respond to these changes through both mitigation and adaptation measures; and
- uncertainty about external factors such as global economic conditions, the price of oil and political changes.

In combating climate change there is a need for regional action in terms of both adaptation and mitigation.

- Adaptation – focuses of ensuring services, assets, communities, businesses, infrastructure and the economy are resilient to the realities of a changing climate.

- Mitigation – focuses on reducing the emission of greenhouse gases through energy efficiency measures, renewable energy technologies, the Kyoto Protocol, regulation and control etc. in attempt to reduce the rate of climate change.
- Humans influence global climate by releasing greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) into the atmosphere. These gases then absorb energy that is radiated from the Earth's surface, warming the atmosphere and increasing global temperatures. There is a delayed reaction between the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and the affect they have upon altering our current climate. Therefore we are already committed to future climate change for the next 30 to 50 years. This is why adaptation is important now to provide resilience across the region to these changes.

Mitigation is also important now, but for a different reason. To ensure that climate changes remain manageable beyond the next 50 years, there is a need for immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The inertia in the earth's climate system means that the benefits of reductions will not be immediate and therefore the earlier mitigation action is taken, the earlier the benefits will be realised. In the absence of appropriate mitigation, the earth's climate system may accelerate towards a tipping point, beyond which changes may be irreversible, commonly known as 'run away' climate change.

It is critical that both adaptation and mitigation are undertaken and run in parallel.

Agriculture and forestry

As with most farming areas, Solihull has experienced alterations to its pattern of agricultural production where the general trend over recent decades has been one of increased intensification in farming methods. In some cases, this has led to a loss of hedgerows and other valuable habitats, however large areas of farmland are now managed under agri-environmental schemes.

The use of pesticides reduced by 13% between 2006 to 2008, and between 2007-2008 farmland bird populations have showed a slight increase³.

Since 1947, agricultural policy in the UK has been focused upon the maintenance of an agricultural industry to meet the nation's food requirements. Through Britain's subsequent entry into the European Community, the system of support for agricultural production was maintained and enhanced (the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP). Since the early 1980s within Europe, levels of production have exceeded the capacity of the market to absorb it as food surpluses have increased. The consequences of this have been fundamental changes in CAP aimed at reducing agricultural surpluses, resulting in land coming out of agricultural production (set aside) and in farmers seeking to diversify their enterprises to protect incomes. The CAP is due to be reformed after 2013 in order to respond and adapt to change; 'the CAP must also take greater account of the wealth and diversity of agriculture in the EU's 27 Member States'⁴.



Arable farming

³ Defra (2009) *Agriculture in the United Kingdom*,

⁴ European Commission *Agriculture and Rural Development*

Farm diversification can take many forms including new and alternative crops and new non-agricultural uses of land e.g. golf courses. Alternative uses of farm buildings are often sought, particularly the conversion of barns for residential purposes or economic activities such as food processing, farm shops, tourism, crafts and industry.

It should be emphasised that the diversification of the farm business to sustain, supplement or improve farm income is not a novel strategy. Indeed, prior to last century's narrow specialisation, farming was routinely combined with other activities to add value to the business. Perhaps the most profound implication of the changes facing the agricultural industry is the scale the changes entail. The difference now is that income pressures and policy uncertainties are making diversification more attractive for farmers in less marginal circumstances.

Diversification, therefore, is to be positively encouraged whilst recognising particular policy objectives such as Green Belt to ensure that where opportunities do arise, farm practices and new agricultural initiatives are tailored towards environmental conservation and enhancement.

Scope exists also to fully integrate recreation, tourism and nature conservation initiatives as aspects of diversification, rather than at the expense of agriculture, where they meet the objectives of the Countryside Strategy.

The Countryside Strategy supports the aims and objectives of Solihull's Woodland Strategy: First review, and the Forestry Commission's Forestry Strategy for England A New Focus for England's Woodlands.

It is important to create and manage existing woodlands that are self-perpetuating and resilient to climate change, which deliver biomass for renewable energy and which develop economically viable supply chains. The economic benefit of woodlands is a potential driver for the sustainable management of woodlands whilst making a contribution to the national renewable energy targets, as identified in the UK Renewable Energy Strategy 2009.

Built development

The Council's Housing Strategy highlights guidance from PPS 3: Housing, which advises local planning authorities to consider releasing sites solely for affordable housing. 'Rural exception site' policy enables small sites to be used specifically for affordable housing in small rural communities. Solihull does not have rural exception policy (as of October 2010) although there are a number of rural areas within the Borough. This issue is being considered through the LDF.

Since the early 1970s, there have been a number of significant housing and economic developments affecting Solihull's countryside. This has led both to a consolidation of development on the western edge of the Meriden Gap and a rounding off of the larger free standing settlements, including the two major developments within Hockley Heath Parish in the form of the Dickens Heath New Village and the Blythe Valley Business Park.

The relationship between the edge of urban areas and the adjoining countryside is complex, involving physical, amenity and land use issues which often combine to produce blurred distinctions between town and country. The complexity of the relationship is due not only to geographical proximity and association of "urban" and "rural" land uses but also to the interaction and conflicts which can arise within and between these activities.

The areas described above are expressions of a widely recognised feature identified as the urban fringe. Such areas perform a vital role as part of a more extensive countryside, not only in visual terms in providing a setting for towns and cities but also in providing for legitimate urban uses including the needs of formal and informal recreation.

Although difficult to define rigorously, it is important for the Countryside Strategy to adopt a definition of the urban fringe in order to avoid problems of differing interpretation. This also acts as a means of identifying issues and conflicts more precisely, thereby enabling policy approaches to be explored in reconciling problems and securing future opportunities.

The potential recreational value of the urban fringe is emphasised in PPG17 Sport and Recreation. The desire to increase public access to open land within the urban fringe is encouraged, together with the provision of recreational facilities where they are compatible with other uses. Sites for recreational uses within the urban fringe can act as important buffers between agricultural and urban uses. Woodland initiatives within such areas are also encouraged. Facilities to support boating-related tourism and leisure, such as marinas and moorings, which are based on cruising distances, may contribute to landscape change in Solihull.

It can be argued that urban fringe issues arise across the Borough wherever an urban edge is in juxtaposition with the countryside. However, the distinction between urban and rural areas and the nature of the urban fringe are far from clear cut. Despite this, it is evident that Solihull's countryside has been and continues to be the subject of considerable urban pressures. These pressures take many forms and operate over both short and longer timescales being generated by forces within and beyond the Borough.



Dickens Heath (from Dickens Heath LNR)

As noted previously, a major land use planning policy instrument aimed at protecting Solihull's countryside is the designated Green Belt. The operation of green belt policy has been largely successful in restricting the encroachment of unacceptable development in the countryside where they are subject to green belt control.

Whilst Green Belt controls have been able to restrain particular forms of development in the countryside, activities not subject to the same degree of legislative control, along with Permitted Development, have taken place and some have had a detrimental impact upon the countryside. These activities include and can result in: downgraded and under-used agricultural land; vandalism; informal/unofficial recreation and leisure activities; badly and inappropriately managed landscapes; unauthorised rubbish dumping; waste disposal; and open air storage.

The above characteristics can be seen to varying degrees and in differing locations; a strategic response is required to address the situation. Within these areas the countryside is particularly vulnerable as a consequence of these

pressures. Yet it is these areas where countryside is of particular value, given the close proximity of largely open (but not necessarily freely accessible) and green areas to centres of population.

Telecommunication development will be considered where the environmental impact to a minimum. Location of apparatus within sensitive areas such as the Green Belt, archaeological sites or ecological and geological sites may be restricted.

Living and working

Over the last 10 years, nationally there have been large numbers of people leaving urban areas and moving to the countryside. The rural population has grown by 800,000 plus, which has led to increases in house prices and rural families being priced out of the areas where they work. There is a current lack of housing in rural areas and a shortfall in planned housing. PPS 3 Housing has the objective of creating sustainable, inclusive mixed communities in rural areas.

A report to government — Living Working Countryside, the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing (July 2008) — has looked at the challenges facing those who live and work within the countryside. The report makes a number of recommendations:

- That development should be creative, mixed neighbourhoods with shops, workplaces and open spaces;
- For community-led affordable housing initiatives;
- Encouragement of village business; seeking to retain small rural businesses within the countryside, working with them and enabling them to grow;
- Encourage home working, considering growth in work-based home extensions.

Regional strategy documents provide advice on rural regeneration emphasising “access to opportunity and the number and quality of jobs available within sustainable rural communities.”



Grassland at Blythe Valley

Conservation and environmental management

Healthy landscapes are crucial for conserving biodiversity. Natural England’s State of the Natural Environment report is clear that a rich natural environment has landscapes that are diverse, resilient to external pressures and have abundant wildlife populations, which are able to use connected habitats to move through the landscape. Poor natural environments are characterised by simplified land uses, crop monocultures, lack of diversity and fragmented habitats, which are not only small but are isolated, making it difficult for many species to survive.

It is now recognised that to conserve biodiversity and allow ecological systems to function more naturally, conservation activities need to be planned at a larger scale, setting site-based approaches within a wider landscape context. This will mean focussing not just on existing important areas, but also on the connections and networks between areas, promoting greater heterogeneity within landscapes, and restoring/creating areas of semi-natural habitat. Such landscapes will be

more ecologically robust and better able to allow the natural components of that system to adapt to the consequences of climate change.

The West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership (WMBP) manages the Landscapes for Living⁵ project which has a 50year vision for enhancing and restoring the West Midland’s biodiversity. A biodiversity map for the region identifies initiatives likely to impact of the delivery of landscape-scale biodiversity in the region. Biodiversity Enhancement Areas contain important concentrations of biodiversity; they are one approach which, in association with specific species and habitats identified in Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP), ensures the region meets/exceeds its share of UKBAP targets.

Landscape

In recent years, alder, ash and horse chestnut trees have been afflicted by fungal diseases resulting in the loss of many mature trees. ‘Sudden Oak Death’ which kills oak and other species of tree has been reported in Europe and the British Isles; this follows the ravages of Dutch elm disease.

Changes in agriculture have led to the loss of many hedgerows, although Solihull has not been affected as severely as some parts of Arden. New types of crops, such as oil seed rape and linseed have altered the appearance of the landscape.

Other changes include:

- Rural character has been affected by ‘suburbanisation’, including inappropriate building materials and layouts for new development, ornamental planting and upgrading of minor roads.
- There has been agricultural intensification, particularly conversion of permanent pasture to arable, but also conversion from hay to silage. Most of the remaining pasture is more intensively managed, floristically poor and often reseeded.
- There has been loss and deterioration of hedges, as a result of field amalgamation, neglect and lack of management, a switch from livestock to arable production, costs, and a reduction in available manpower on farms. However, many hedges have also been planted and restored via agri-environment schemes.
- There is a lack of young trees to replace the present ageing tree population, especially in hedges and small clumps.
- There has been a general lack of woodland management in many places, leading to deterioration, coupled with conversion from oak to faster-growing, often non-native, species.
- There has been expansion at the edges of the main urban settlements, with the airport buildings and NEC dominating the landscape.
- Recently completed highway schemes and the M42 have considerable impact on the landscape.
- Change in agriculture, as well as past management practices, have resulted in straightened river courses and a loss of wetland habitats.

Invasive species

A number of plant species covered either by the Weeds Act 1959 or by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) should be controlled. Under the Weeds Act 1959, although the primary responsibility for weeds covered under this act lies with the landowner, DEFRA can take action if there is a risk that

⁵ Landscapes for Living Project (WMBP) is described in Appendix A, page ix.

the plants might spread to neighbouring land. It is not actually illegal to have any of the five species growing on plots of land. These species, known as injurious weeds, are:

- Common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)
- Broad leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*)
- Curled dock (*Rumex crispus*)
- Creeping or field thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
- Spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Section 14(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) covers a range of other species, including Japanese knotweed and Giant hogweed listed in Schedule 9, Section II. Under this law, "It is an offence for a person to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any plant on Schedule 9 (Part 2)"

Other Schedule 9 species include numerous pond pests such as Floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*), Parrots feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) Australian swamp stonecrop also called New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) Water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) in addition to Himalayan balsam, mink and signal crayfish. These species have been introduced either accidentally or deliberately into the UK's ecosystems and have subsequently out-competed native species, or have been found to transmit harmful diseases to our native species.

There has been increasing pressure on landowners to take responsibility for the control of invasive species and the Council should be seen to take an active role in promoting a responsible attitude particularly as a significant landowner itself.

Natural resources

Since the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the functions of the natural environment, expressed as 'ecosystem goods and services' have attracted considerable attention. 'A healthy natural environment is indispensable to current and future economic prosperity. Conserving the natural environment is the most efficient and effective way to deliver a huge range of benefits to society'⁶.

Government has signalled that an understanding of ecosystem goods and services will be an important factor in the future management of land.

Landscapes deliver

a wide range of ecosystem goods and services to society, such as food production, clean water, flood management and climate regulation. They also provide a range of non-material cultural services such as spiritual enrichment, recreation, historical associations and aesthetic experiences.

We need to identify the types of landscape that will best help deliver the ecosystem services society will require in the future. However, there may be occasions when proposals to deliver specific ecosystem services will change the character of the landscape in ways that conflict with long held landscape values, especially if land is managed to provide a single service to the exclusion of all others. A greater understanding of the economic value of nature and natural capital is required, which will enable an ecosystem services approach to better inform decision making. Sustained and long-term investment in natural capital will be required⁷.

⁶ Natural England (2009) *No Charge? Valuing the Natural Environment*

⁷ *Ibid*

Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping

The West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership (WMBP) has been developed using Natural England habitat inventories and county wildlife sites in order to apply environmental objectives at a regional scale, which in turn will be used to develop local opportunity maps

The WMBP Landscapes for Living project is developing the regional opportunity map, which represents a 50 year vision for habitat restoration and recreation⁸. The Council is working with the WMBP in developing sub-regional scale local opportunity mapping and this will be progressed further in the Council's emerging Green Infrastructure Study.

Soil

Soil is a fundamental and irreplaceable natural resource, providing the essential link between the components that make up our environment. Soils are hugely variable from region to region and even from field to field, and they perform a number of functions, such as: – food and fibre production, environmental interaction (between soils, air and water), support of ecological habitats and biodiversity, protection of cultural heritage, providing a platform for construction, and providing raw materials.

Soils are under threat from: – climate change, compaction, contamination, erosion, loss of biodiversity, loss of organic matter, and sealing (covering the soil in an impervious layer).

The Government has made commitments to ensure that soil protection is given equal importance as air and water, and soil protection policy has been adopted by the European Commission (EU Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection in September 2006). In support of the EU strategy, Defra has published Soil Strategy for England – Safeguarding our Soils (2009), setting out practical steps to prevent soil degradation. Soil health is a key concern for farmers as it underpins the viability of their businesses. Farmers are required to take action to protect and manage their soils under a variety of regulatory frameworks.

Flood management

The River Trent Flood Management Plan has been produced by the Environment Agency (EA) to understand how the catchment of the river behaves and to develop a sustainable approach to flood risk management over the next 50 – 100 years. The EA intends to encourage land use change, such as in farming practices and through increases in areas of wetland. Sustainable river maintenance and river restoration will result in a landscape and river system that slows down the response to rainfall, which will not allow widespread unmanaged and damaging flooding to occur.



River Cole, which flows east through the borough where it joins the River Blythe

⁸ WMBP (2008) *West Midlands 50 year biodiversity vision and opportunity*

Transport infrastructure

There has been significant growth in traffic and road building in Solihull over the last 30 years, with the greatest impact on the countryside from the M42, which cuts a swathe through the Borough. However, the general growth of traffic has also had considerable impact; road improvements have tended to change the character of rural roads. Increased traffic volumes and speeds have affected rural settlements, with additional noise and light contributing to a greater intrusion across the countryside.

The canal system and towing paths offer travel choices for cycling and walking, also for the transportation of freight and potentially public transport in the future. Solihull's canals can connect rural communities with the urban areas.

High Speed 2 – high speed rail

Currently (September 2010), proposals for a new high-speed rail link from London to the West Midlands (and beyond) are being prepared and will be consulted on. The preferred route will go through the south east to the north east of the borough and will have an impact on Solihull's countryside.

Noise

One of the most significant changes to Solihull's countryside over recent decades is the increasing impact of noise. Not only is traffic noise too obvious across a wide area, particularly close to the motorway, but increased air traffic is evident around the flight paths of Birmingham International Airport. Whilst aircraft will become quieter in the future, the overall level of air traffic has been increasing and will continue to do so particularly with the runway extension.

Minerals extraction

Parts of Solihull's countryside contain sand and gravel deposits with the principle area of extraction over recent decades focused to the south-west of Meriden. In some cases, permission has been given for tipping in the resultant voids. Overall, these operations have a significant impact on local areas at the heart of the Meriden Gap.

For its size, Britain displays some of the most varied geology in the world. This is reflected in the many locally distinctive and varied landscapes which make up the British countryside. The countryside therefore offers a variety of valuable mineral resources including those for the power generating and construction industries, which are vital to sustain the nation's economy.

The location of exploitable minerals is pre-determined by geology, so whilst the financial practicalities and economic incentives to extract minerals may vary over time, the locations for such operations are fixed. As geology is inextricably linked to landscape, so various mineral extraction operations are often focused upon particular landscape types, for example, gravel extraction in river valleys.

The pressures for mineral extraction are often linked to waste and recycling. Quarries can often be as profitable for the disposal of waste through landfill as through the extraction of the mineral itself. With construction industry materials accounting for 70% of all landfill material, the wider adoption of recycling would reduce both the demand for mineral extraction and the demand for quarries for landfill.

As with landfill operations, mineral extraction can affect a larger area than the immediate environs of the quarry in question, through the generation of traffic, noise and dust. However, the creation of new landscapes through sensitive

restoration can provide opportunities for recreation and nature conservation with a beneficial impact on the environment.

In the context of the Countryside Strategy and the LDF, the central issue relating to mineral extraction is the desire to balance the economic need for minerals with the need to safeguard the environment. The LDF sets out the policy framework for mineral extraction within the Borough along with more detailed policies and guidance. For the Countryside Strategy it is the impact of minerals extraction upon the countryside and their longer term implications which is of fundamental concern. In addressing these issues as part of the Countryside Strategy, the following aspects of mineral extraction are of key importance. These are:

i. Landscape

Mineral extraction often removes tracts of agricultural land along with hedgerows, mature vegetation, topography and historical features. Restoring areas to agriculture provides considerable opportunities for enhancement; regard must be given to the appropriateness of the landscape enhancement, together with the integration of habitats for nature conservation and recreation initiatives.

ii. Agriculture

In some situations it will be appropriate to restore land used for mineral extraction (and landfill) for agriculture where:

- It comprises part of a farm holding otherwise non-viable without its return;
- Because of the degradation of other land on a farm holding is still occurring e.g. subsidence and flooding; and
- Opportunities exist to release other land for alternative uses appropriate to the countryside.

iii. Nature Conservation

In removing tracts of countryside for mineral extraction, habitats for plants and animals are destroyed. Some of this loss can be mitigated for by restoration schemes which provide positive opportunities for the creation of new and enhanced habitats. In some areas of already degraded countryside, such restoration provides opportunities to enhance the countryside for wildlife.

iv. Recreation

The operation of mineral sites often results in the diversion of footpaths or the impairment of the countryside for recreation through disturbance. However, mineral workings can also provide opportunities for recreation through restoration schemes. Restoration schemes can provide opportunities to reinstate or create footpath links to facilitate access and recreation through the creation of new landscapes (such as sailing lagoons created from former gravel pits).

Leisure and recreation

The countryside faces unprecedented changes in recreation activity and pressure for access will increasingly affect the way it is managed. During the past two decades there has been a dramatic increase in the public's mobility through the private car and public transport network, popularity of new outdoor pursuits and demand for access to open spaces, particularly around centres of population. The canal infrastructure facilitates formal and informal types of leisure and recreation, which may also contribute to landscape change.

Despite this, there are still fundamental barriers which discourage more frequent visits to the countryside. Reasons can include lack of access to a car, lack of suitable alternative routes to countryside sites and physical barriers, which hinder

the enjoyment of, or access by people with disabilities, senior citizens or families with young children.



The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal at Hockley Heath

Although leisure patterns change over time and are susceptible to short term trends, demands upon the countryside for leisure and recreation are likely to continue with consequences for the long term sustainability of the resource. In accommodating legitimate leisure and recreation activities within the countryside, there are both conflicts and opportunities. Competing demands for land can result in conflicts between agriculture, leisure, nature conservation and other uses within the countryside. It should be emphasised that leisure and recreation pursuits within the countryside do not necessarily represent a cohesive and compatible range of activities. In addition, leisure and recreation as a whole and specifically within the countryside has also been perceived as a source of conflict.

Such conflicts emerge through the physical capacity of individual sites, attractions and infrastructure to absorb large numbers of visitors without a detrimental effect upon the environment and the quality of life of communities within such areas.

Whilst it may ultimately prove impossible to fully reconcile the perceived conflicts of leisure and recreation within the countryside, such activities need to be viewed positively overall. This is because such activities offer a legitimate and practical means of maintaining the openness and accessibility of countryside areas designated Green Belt, create opportunities for diversifying agriculture and in securing landscape enhancement. Affective visitor and site management techniques and environmental education are vital to reconciling existing and potential conflicts.

Solihull's countryside provides an important setting for a variety of formal and informal leisure pursuits. Such activities encompass participation in organised sports such as football and golf, with a growing requirement for mountain biking, orienteering, equestrian, shooting and motor sports, together with informal recreation which includes walking and cycling.

The desire to promote a countryside that is accessible to all for appropriate forms of formal and informal recreation is a key theme of the Countryside Strategy.

Energy

Renewable energy describes energy which occurs naturally and repeatedly in the environment, such as wind, movement of water, the sun and from biomass. Technologies are available such as onshore wind generation, hydro, photovoltaics, passive solar, biomass and energy crops, energy from waste, landfill and sewerage gas.

Urban areas and those undergoing growth have potential for decentralised energy generation and community heating schemes, which would go towards the Government's target of 15% of energy from renewables by 2020⁹. Some renewable technologies, such as biomass production, may be carried out within the Solihull countryside in the future, and many of them will have an impact on the countryside, particularly with regard to visual impact.

⁹ Her Majesty's Government (2009) *The UK Renewable Energy Strategy*

Waste management

The management of domestic, industrial and commercial waste is an important environmental issue, and despite efforts to reduce waste production and recycle, the amount of waste produced in Solihull has been increasing every year. We need to make better use of materials – including what we currently view as waste – and we need new technologies to reduce the environmental impacts of what we make, buy and do, for a continuing growing economy.

The best way of managing our waste is not to produce it in the first place. Then we can consider how to where possible reuse the waste and the options available for disposal. The UK government has developed this theme to produce a "waste hierarchy" – a system that shows us the order of preference for dealing with our waste:

1. Waste prevention/Reduce
2. Re-use
3. Recycle / compost
4. Energy recovery
5. Dispose

Solihull and Coventry Councils currently work in partnership to dispose of waste through the existing Waste to Energy Plant, operated by a Local Authority, Waste Disposal Company (LAWDC), Coventry and Solihull Waste Disposal Company, set up in 1994. The Waste to Energy Plant generates electricity that is sold to the National Grid, and heat sold to the nearby Peugeot car factory. Any waste that is unsuitable for incineration and the residual ash from the incineration process is sent to landfill. Landfill is the least preferred method for dealing with waste, and where landfill operations are in existence, restoration schemes will be required when capacity is reached.

Materials recycling facilities (MRF) will be required within the Borough and these may have an impact on the countryside. These facilities require deliveries and collections by large lorries, which obviously contributes to increased traffic, noise and disturbance. Associating MRFs with existing similar operations or landfill sites will help reduce their impact on the countryside.

Bickenhill is currently the only site where expansion is possible, therefore new facilities will be required for managing the Borough's waste. Activities such as composting will be suitable for locating within the countryside.

Awareness and understanding

Countryside surveys and consultation indicate that the majority of visitors live within the Borough and are frequent users of the countryside. However, there is a significant proportion of the population with a low level of awareness the countryside, what to see and do, how to get there etc. This lack of awareness is preventing a considerable proportion of the community from enjoying and participating in the countryside, of gaining any understanding of it, and realising the connection it has to their lives.

There is enormous potential to develop and improve information and interpretation about the Borough's countryside, and to communicate the message of care and responsibility for its future welfare.

Information, auditing and monitoring

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA)
The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) is one means of monitoring change in the countryside in the future. The Council is a partner in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA), managed by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, which surveys all habitats

throughout the sub-region on a rolling programme. In 2008 it was recognised by the European Committee of Regions as best practice for monitoring biodiversity. The sub-regional Wildlife Sites Partnership reviews/monitors Local Wildlife Sites (formerly known as SINC)s in Solihull. Locally important habitats and species that need to be included in Local Biodiversity Action Plans and progress on their protection can be identified more readily with Borough-wide data on species and habitats. The habitat information enables an accurate assessment of the land use change, which assists strategic decision making in relation to the natural environment. It is also vital for the development of the LDF and in determining planning applications. The information, augmented by species and site data identify meaningful indicators of progress towards a more sustainable Borough.

Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (HLC)

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a GIS-based archaeological method for defining the historic and archaeological dimension of the present-day landscape. It can explain how and why the landscape looks as it does, identify landscape's 'time-depth' and facilitate sustainable management.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation programme initiated by English Heritage and run in partnership with County Council Sites and Monuments Records provides a framework for broadening our understanding of the whole landscape and contributes to decisions affecting tomorrow's landscape.

Historic landscape characterisation is concerned with recognising the many ways in which the present countryside reflects how people have exploited and changed their physical environment, and adapted to it through time. It considers this with respect to different social, economic, technological and cultural aspects of life, and the varied underlying influences of geography, history and tradition (Countryside Commission 1993; 1997; Fairclough et al. 1999). It seeks to identify patterns of change and important relics of past change, and to analyse how and why patterns consistently vary from one place to another. The core premise of historic landscape characterisation and its application in planning and conservation is that relationships between people and their environment are dynamic and ever changing. The key policy issue is how society can influence the direction and pace of future change whilst still maintaining links with the past in a way that enriches the present.

Warwickshire County Council has completed the characterisation of the County and it will now be used as a resource by Solihull MBC.

National Local Government Indicators

The national indicator set, which contains 198 indicators, has been developed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 so that it reflects the Government's national priorities. Performance against each of the 198 indicators will be reported by local government to central government. The national indicator set is the way that central government will performance-manage outcomes delivered by local government working alone or in partnerships.

3.2 An appraisal of Solihull's countryside

The Solihull countryside is clearly different from more remote rural areas due to the presence of urban influences. It is almost inevitable therefore, that it will continue to become increasingly suburban in function. The great danger however, is that through a gradual process of incremental change it will also become "suburban" in character. Avoiding this must be one of the central challenges of this strategy.

Solihull's countryside varies in character partly due to differences in the underlying landscape and partly due to the nature and extent of urban influences. To assist the development of this strategy, the countryside has been divided into a number of broad zones reflecting these distinctions, together with the urban areas of north and west Solihull, whose landscape character is considered relevant to this strategy. These zones are identified on Figure 1.

Zone 1 – Hockley Heath Parish

This zone still retains many of the unique features of Arden Pastureland, typically a small scale enclosed landscape, containing a wide variety of natural habitats. At the same time, it is an area where "urban fringe" features are already apparent, including recreational and other mixed uses.

However, it has recently been the subject of significant change as a result of development proposals within the Unitary Development Plan at Dickens Heath New Village and the Regional Investment Site of Blythe Valley Park. This zone may face further development pressure in the future from the expansion of Dickens Heath.

The New Village of Dickens Heath was designed to make best use of existing topographical features and landscape setting. It is largely contained within strong physical boundaries defined by the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal to the north-east and south-eastern boundaries, Braggs Farm Lane and the Country Park to the South, with existing housing and woodland defining the north western boundary.

Blythe Valley Park has been carefully sited within its parkland setting to minimise its effect on the countryside and on Green Belt objectives, having further advantages for nature conservation and recreation.

Zone 2 – The Western Fringe

Much of this zone encompasses existing major development at the Airport, the National Exhibition Centre and the Birmingham Business Park. It is therefore strongly dominated by commercial and urban influences. It is also subject to significant change as a result of the further expansion of Birmingham International Airport and the NEC. The countryside, nevertheless, provides an attractive setting for adjacent commercial and residential areas, as it contains the Grand Union Canal and important wildlife sites. This area is adjacent to the North Solihull regeneration area and so may be influenced by development pressures from the regeneration programme.



St. Thomas' Church, Hockley Heath

Zone 3 – The Motorway Corridor

The corridor bisects the Borough, passing through the Green Belt — the Meriden Gap — separating the main urban area from the settlements of Knowle, Dorridge and Hampton-in-Arden. Whilst being dominated by the motorway, the corridor is also important for nature conservation, particularly as for much of its length it encompasses the River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest and its valley. However, this transport corridor also tends to fragment areas of countryside and forms an east – west barrier to wider countryside access. The FORE business park is located within this zone and covers an area of land between the A34 and the motorway.

Zone 4 – The Setting of Knowle and Dorridge

Although the villages have become urbanised by the scale of infill developments, much of their original character has survived. This is partly due to the relative closeness of the countryside to the village centres which provide an attractive setting for both settlements; the Grand Union Canal to the east of Knowle is a characteristic feature. At the same time, previous developments have been well contained with limited impact on the surrounding countryside or the Meriden Gap.

Zone 5 – The Rural Heartland

This zone contains the most rural parts of Solihull furthest away from overt urban influences and acts as a link with Arden landscapes of the wider Warwickshire countryside. It is the openness of this area, the preservation of its Arden landscape and rural quality, and the limited urban influences that play a key role in maintaining the Meriden Gap between the Birmingham conurbation and Coventry. It also provides the setting for many of the villages and hamlets of the Borough with important historical associations, such as Berkswell, Hampton-in-Arden, Meriden and Temple Balsall. It is the importance of their rural setting and of their attributes that contributes towards the special character of these

small inset villages within the Green Belt.

The Blythe Valley and the River Blythe Site of Special Scientific Interest is a major feature within the zone and there are pressures for sand and gravel extraction particularly to the south-west of Meriden. In some cases, permission has been given for tipping in resultant voids. Overall, these operations have a significant impact on local areas at the heart of the Meriden Gap.

Zone 6 – The Setting of Balsall Common

Balsall Common is a large settlement in the heart of the Meriden Gap which has developed as a commuter base over recent years. Due to its size and elongated shape, it has an influence over a wide area of countryside and exhibits some urban fringe characteristics around its edge. Housing proposals within the Unitary Development Plan have extended development to the north of the settlement's centre. Nevertheless, the countryside provides an attractive setting for the adjacent residential areas and contains important wildlife sites.

Zone 7 – The Northern Uplands

This zone is part of an extensive elongated plateau with large areas of mixed woodlands of considerable ecological value. Winding lanes with high hedges are a characteristic of this area, which features larger fields with few hedges. Whilst much of the area is rural and contained in character, in other parts there are

extensive long distance views over Coventry and the more distant Birmingham conurbation.

Zone 8 – The Coventry Fringe

The character of the countryside in this zone is strongly influenced by its closeness to the urban edge of Coventry. Not only are urban developments visible across the area but there are also a number of “urban fringe” features. At the same time, the landscape tends to be more open and large-scale compared to the adjacent Rural Heartland partly due to the removal of hedgerows. There are only limited and small areas of woodland within this zone.

Zone 9 – West Solihull

The western area of Solihull is dominated by urban development. However, despite the fact that much of the area is urban and strongly influenced by its closeness to Birmingham, pockets of Arden landscapes remain. Remnants of the Arden countryside exist within the Borough's principal parks, and can be seen at Elmdon Park, Malvern and Breuton Park, and within the woodlands of Dorridge Wood, Palmers Rough and Bill's Wood, all of which have considerable nature conservation value.

While these areas serve as a focus for recreational activity they also, together with other areas of open space and the Grand Union Canal, form a refuge for wildlife, connecting the existing urban areas, settlements and centres to the wider landscape, bringing the countryside into the towns.

Zone 10 – North Solihull

Although this zone forms part of the heavily urbanised west midlands conurbation and is separated from the wider landscape by large transport infrastructure, there are remnants of the Arden countryside characteristics in the woodlands of Smith's Wood, York's Wood, Meriden Park Wood and Alcott Wood and through parts of Kingfisher Country Park. These remnants and their position on the edge of the built up area make the landscape character relevant to this strategy and the future green space design in North Solihull. Re-establishing green links to the wider countryside are important.



Woodland management at Yorks Wood,

There are areas within this zone which are currently designated as Green Belt, which includes Kingfisher Country Park, the Cole Valley and other areas of green space.

3.3 Policy background

Since the publication of Solihull's first Countryside Strategy Solihull's Countryside in 1999, national, regional and local policy, strategy and legislation has been developed which has relevance for the countryside, both in terms of sustainable rural development and nature conservation. Key legislation remains the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006.

A comprehensive review and introduction to relevant national, regional and local policy is outlined Appendix 2.

Agricultural production

Historically the production of food supply has resulted in protection given towards agriculture and security for farmers. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) created a system of payments for food production, which has led to the intensification of agriculture in the European Union (EU) over the last 20 to 30 years; this led to significant environmental problems such as water pollution and damage to wildlife and bio-diversity. Reform to the CAP recognises that farming is about managing the countryside and single payments per farm are now made for positive environmental care. Further reform over the next 10-15 years will look for environmentally-sensitive maintaining and enhancing of landscapes and wildlife, addressing pollution, responding to the needs of rural communities and the promotion of sustainable development, however food production will remain a primary driver of the CAP.

Food security is an issue on the national agenda and it may become a local issue in the future. Food security means the ability to have sufficient nutritious and affordable food, together with additional issues of availability, access, quality and safety. Currently the UK enjoys a high degree of food security, with food produced nationally and imported from abroad. The impact of climate change of food production requires preparing for change, and the Government is planning for the UK's food security¹⁰. Climate impacts on harvest and subsequently on supply and prices. Food must be produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and at the same time, increase production and productivity to meet the needs of the growing global population. Locally, it will be important to retain the best quality of agricultural land for food production and farm sustainably with improvements in energy efficiency and transport.

Guiding development

Solihull's countryside has been protected from the unrestricted expansion of Birmingham and Coventry since the early 1960s. Originally designed to guide new development into appropriate locations, the purpose of Green Belt was widened to protect the countryside surrounding built up areas in 1988. The majority of Solihull's Green Belt was approved in the 1970s, although Hockley Heath Parish and the Marston Green area were only confirmed with the adoption of the UDP in 1997. Green Belt policy is set out in government guidance and the LDF, which details villages within the Green Belt that are exempt from green belt policies.

Protection and enjoyment

The importance of the countryside as an amenity and for recreation has been recognised since the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. From the 1960s, public bodies have been expected to consider the natural beauty and amenity of the wider countryside in their activities. Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment, providing practical advice on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone. England's Biodiversity Strategy¹¹ highlights and promotes healthy, thriving and diverse ecosystems as important and integral to everybody's quality of life and well being. The Forestry Commission has a regional forestry framework which has a vision for woodland and forestry to see it help to deliver economic, environmental, cultural and social benefits to people¹².

¹⁰ Defra (2009) *UK Food Security Assessment: Our approach*

¹¹ Defra (2002) *Working with the grain of nature: A biodiversity strategy for England*

¹² The Forestry Commission (2004) *Growing our Future: The West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework*

England's natural environment is unique and makes a major contribution to national and regional character. Geology, soils, landscapes and their biodiversity are a rich inheritance, and there are a wide range of national and international statutory designations protecting England's natural environment.

Natural England encourages and supports initiatives to increase public contact with the natural environment, enabling social, health and recreational benefits to be fully realised. Government policies such as The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW 2000) have lead directly to greater access to the countryside.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is development which meets social and economic needs without undermining the quality of the natural environment. The Government's objectives for rural areas are outlined in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and include raising 'the quality of life and the environment in rural areas through the promotion of good quality, sustainable development that respects and, where possible, enhances local distinctiveness and the intrinsic qualities of the countryside.'

Solihull's Sustainable Communities Strategy 2008 – 2018 is a vision for a sustainable Borough and has informed the Local Development Framework (LDF), which plays a critical role in integrating the Strategy's visions. The LDF will be used to enable development and changes in the use of land, having assessed local needs and issues, to conserve and enhance the environment and to guide decisions on planning applications.

Environmental management, corporate social responsibility and sustainable business ethics are supported by Solihull MBC through initiatives such as Solihull Footprint, which works with businesses, the state sector and third sector to contribute in a positive way in the wider environment.

'Green' jobs and industries are seen as the way to address rising unemployment and climate change in the future. It is important that the UK benefits from 'green' industries and has the skills to work in a low-carbon economy. Low-carbon industry sectors¹³ include carbon capture and storage, ultra-low carbon vehicles, low-carbon buildings and construction, electronics and ICT, business and financial services, and carbon markets.

Character and quality

There is a wealth of information about existing landscape character and the way character is changing in response to current pressures. This evidence can help to underpin strategies and policies aimed at guiding landscape change. The Character of England map and descriptions published in 1999 provides a broad analysis of landscape character across the whole country, although this requires updating, particularly on the identification of forces for change. Many County and District Councils have prepared more detailed Landscape Character Assessments for their area, and many have developed accompanying landscape strategies. English Heritage has promoted a complementary programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation.

In 1993, Warwickshire County Council and the former Countryside Commission produced Landscape Guidelines for Arden following an assessment of the county's landscape character. The guidelines identified the local Arden landscape types, including those within Solihull, and zones where enhancement was desirable.

¹³ HMG (2009) *The UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy*

The Landscapes Guidelines recognise the importance of hedgerows as a characteristic feature of Arden. Hedgerow Regulations (1997) allow the protection of important hedgerows with historic or ecological significance. Natural England has produced a map showing the character of England based on landscape, wildlife and natural features. Natural England has identified the development of a green network of wildlife corridors as a key theme in the Midlands Plateau, in which Solihull lies. The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust) provides information about important landscape features and natural habitats in Solihull.

Countryside quality depends on an understanding of both its landscape character and the condition of the local countryside and the features within it. Natural England's Countryside Quality Counts project measured landscape change over 2 periods of time: 1990-1998 and 1999-2003.

The project showed that:

- 51% of England's National Character Areas (NCAs) had not changed;
- 10% character is being enhanced;
- 20% character is showing neglect; and
- 19% new landscape characteristics are emerging.

The Forestry Commission has a Forestry Strategy for England A New Focus for England's Woodlands to promote the planting of new woodland for environmental and recreation reasons, as well as for timber.

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) provide a framework for understanding and describing an area in a systematic and transparent way, and for identifying the characteristics that contribute to a sense of place and make a particular landscape unique. This understanding can then inform the planning and management of landscape change. It should be used at all landscape scales to facilitate judgements and comparisons on the capacity and sensitivity of different landscapes to different drivers of change; to understand how change may affect the characteristics of landscapes that society values; and to identify areas which offer positive opportunities for landscape improvement and creation. We should use what we know now, to shape our plans for the future. 'The historic environment is not fixed and passive — it's dynamic, vibrant and living.'¹⁴

At a national level, Natural England will continue to review, use and promote the use of Character Areas, and provide and refresh detailed guidance on how to undertake LCAs and their use in planning and managing change.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands 2008 includes policies relating to the region's countryside. The Strategy has been reviewed in phases, with critical rural services included in the final phase.

Solihull LDF

The Solihull Local Development Framework provides the spatial planning framework for the Borough. The LDF will replace the Solihull Unitary Development Plan 2006, forms the current development plan for Solihull. Work is progressing on the Draft Solihull LDF Core Strategy. The Core Strategy will help to deliver the priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy for Solihull.

The Core Strategy will include policies relating to the countryside, including the Green Belt, the landscape and rural businesses and settlements. The Council may also produce more detailed policy for the countryside in a development plan document or supplementary planning document, if necessary. This Strategy will inform the development of the Solihull LDF, by promoting appropriate policies for the countryside for inclusion within the Core Strategy and/or other relevant development plan documents.

The Core Strategy

The Core Strategy, which is the main LDF document, will set out plans for how and where Solihull will develop in the future and will play an important role in helping to deliver the Sustainable Communities Strategy priorities for improvement.

¹⁴ English Heritage Putting the historic environment to work: A strategy for the West Midlands 2010 - 2015

The Council has consulted on the issues and options paper Challenges and Choices, which informed the next stage of the process – the emerging Core Strategy. Consultation on the emerging Core Strategy ended on the 10th December 2010; responses to the consultation will develop a draft Core Strategy which we aim to publish in 2011. The Core Strategy will contain a Vision, Strategy and Policies.

3.4 Issues

The appraisal of Solihull's countryside and the review of policy highlight a range of key issues which need to be addressed in developing this Strategy.

Issue 1 – The strategic role of Solihull's countryside

How to ensure that its open and rural character is retained, not only in its own right, but also as an integral part of the West Midlands Green Belt with links to the wider Warwickshire countryside. This particularly applies to the need to maintain the integrity of the Meriden Gap.

Issue 2 – Sustaining the environment and landscape of the countryside

How to ensure that the environment, biodiversity and the landscape of the countryside is sustained in the long term. The impacts of climate change and adaptation need to be sensitively managed. Natural resources such as: energy; clean water; clean air; land and soil; minerals; and materials including plant and animal products need to be protected for future generations. The challenge lies in how to use fewer natural resources or use them more wisely.

Issue 3 – The economic viability of Solihull's countryside

How to maintain a healthy farming environment, whilst ensuring that economic change within the countryside, such as farm diversification, is sustainable and does not undermine the quality and character of the natural environment. Encouraging village and rural businesses, working with them to enable them to grow and remain within the countryside.

Issue 4 – The conservation and enhancement of Solihull's countryside

How to encourage the sustainable management of the natural resources of the countryside, retaining it as a haven for wildlife. The protection of vulnerable areas such as river corridors, grasslands, hedgerows and veteran trees is important, whilst new landscapes and habitats are created, to conserve and enhance the landscape quality and biodiversity of the Borough.

Issue 5 – Realising the recreational, sporting and educational potential of Solihull's countryside

How to realise the recreational and educational potential and allow greater opportunities for people to enjoy and learn about the countryside without damaging its character and qualities.

Issue 6 – Addressing the impact and maximising the benefits from development

How to minimise and mitigate against the impact of and maximise the benefits from new development resulting from proposals within the LDF; development including communications systems or other future developments.

The Council recognises that these are not the only issues of importance to Solihull's countryside. The provision of affordable housing, maintaining and expanding local services such as shops, pubs and schools, and improving public transport are all likely to be of high priority to rural residents.

These are not primarily land use issues, however, and whilst planning policies may have influence, must be addressed elsewhere.

Issue 7 – Integration of land use and other policies affecting Solihull's countryside.

How to ensure that the policies and initiatives in this Strategy are co-ordinated with other policies relating to housing, local services and public transport, so that policy implementation is effective.

Issue 8 – Community interaction with the countryside

How we facilitate the whole community's interaction with the countryside to ensure the wider goals of the Sustainable Community Strategy.



4. The Strategy

Introduction

The Strategy for Solihull's countryside has been divided into 10 key strands which address the issues identified in the Section 3. Each strand includes an objective, an explanation of the components which make up the topic, and an indication of what the Council intends to do to implement the Strategy.

The Strategy also includes local objectives for each of the 10 zones introduced in the appraisal of the countryside. The local objectives indicate which of the Strategy strands will be of most significance for each zone, taking account of local characteristics. Using local objectives will help to protect the individual character and quality of each zone, contributing to local distinctiveness.

4.1 Maintain open and rural character

The Council will maintain the open and rural character of the countryside in its own right, including the Meriden Gap as part of the West Midlands Green Belt.

The Meriden Gap

Solihull's countryside is designated as Green Belt, forming part of the West Midlands Green Belt. Green Belt policy, which is contained in the LDF, aims to prevent urban sprawl by keeping the land open permanently. The countryside between Birmingham and Coventry, known as the Meriden Gap, is of particular importance in preventing the two cities from merging. A major challenge involves developing the potential of the positive use of the Green Belt, to enhance its protection, whilst recognising the pressures for development.

Suburbanisation

Most of the countryside's residents rely on the nearby urban areas for jobs and services, such as shopping and leisure. The challenge for the Council is to prevent these functional links from harming the rural character of the countryside. Suburbanisation of the countryside can occur in many ways, such as poorly sited or designed buildings, road development or features, increased traffic, noise and light pollution. Poorly designed or unnecessary signs can be detrimental to the environment.

Zones of distinctiveness

The Council has identified 10 distinct zones within Solihull's countryside which vary in character because of landscape differences and the nature of urban influences. Local objectives for each of these 10 zones have been developed to protect their different characteristics.

What the Council will do

- Continue to protect and maintain the Green Belt in Solihull, particularly the strategically important Meriden Gap, through LDF policies.
- Promote the use of local objectives for Solihull's countryside and urban fringe to enhance landscape character and local distinctiveness:
 - Conservation of existing character, and of particular features which contribute to that character
 - Enhancement by restoration of character where change is causing that character to be lost
 - Enhancement by creation of new landscapes, where the previous character has been lost or where the landscape has been degraded, or where other circumstances are such that there may be scope for change
- Promote countryside management as a means of coordinating the actions and decisions of various bodies and organisations that are active within the urban fringe, where they are relevant to the countryside strategy.
- Raise awareness of the countryside, and the problems and opportunities of the urban fringe through publicity, guidance, and environmental education.
- Through Green Infrastructure planning secure opportunities to establish Green Corridors through associated development schemes and ensure that access links to the countryside are not impaired or severed by the routes of the highways.
- Ensure that landscape proposals associated with development are set in the context of a Green Infrastructure framework to create opportunities for nature conservation and wildlife corridors, in enhancing the setting of the urban edge and the countryside.

4.2 Green Infrastructure

The Council will identify, protect and enhance Solihull's multifunctional network of Green Infrastructure, in terms of parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural green spaces, amenity green space, wildlife corridors, cultural and historic features.

Green Infrastructure

'Green Infrastructure is a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves and needed to underpin sustainability.'¹⁵

The network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse, connect and are at the heart of our cities, towns and villages comprise our Green Infrastructure. Green Infrastructure includes open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees and open countryside. Green Infrastructure may be green, brown or blue, such as canals, derelict land, or ploughed fields; it is publicly and privately owned, and it may be semi-natural or man-made in its origins. It may be considered the essence of local character and a sense of place, the very heart of a community, or dear to the hearts of many thousands some distance away. It comprises all environmental resources, and thus a green infrastructure approach also contributes towards sustainable resource management.

Green Infrastructure provides multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people. It has the clear potential to support both personal objectives (e.g. an attractive, accessible and meaningful local environment) and wider social and governmental objectives (e.g. promoting healthy living and managing the long term finances of health care for an ageing population), i.e. quality of place, quality of environment and quality of life. Solihull's canals — the Grand Union and the Stratford-upon-Avon — are a valuable Green/Blue Infrastructure asset, as they demonstrate multi-functional benefits e.g. conservation and wildlife corridors, cultural/historic environment, sustainable transport, tourism and recreation, and economic viability.

Green Infrastructure may also be seen as part of the life-support system of an area; providing functions and environmental services to a community, such as employment, recreation, physical health and mental well being, social interaction, contact with nature, sustainable drainage systems and enhanced flood alleviation, climate change adaptation and pollution control, improved air quality and providing conditions for biodiversity. These are also known as ecosystem services; biodiversity, through the provision of ecosystem goods and services, supports all of our economic and social development, and is vital to our health and well-being.

Historic landscape characterisation

Historic landscape characterisation considers components of the landscape that are 'natural' but nevertheless the product of centuries of human action, such as hedgerows, woodland, ponds and modified watercourses. It also takes account of more intangible matters reflected in its physical structure: time-depth, and patterns such as settlement, land-use and the mixture of enclosed and non-enclosed land, arable and grazing, woodland and parkland.

¹⁵ Natural England (2009) Green Infrastructure Guidance

The Council sees this information as a valuable resource in offering a greater interpretation and understanding of Solihull's countryside.

What the Council will do

- Seek to protect and enhance rivers and other waterways as important Green/Blue Infrastructure assets in terms of landscape features, natural assets and wildlife habitats, for formal and informal recreation, tourism, and sustainable transport.
- Ensure that any development or activity positively enhances or contributes to the environmental quality of rivers and the catchment areas, in line with the Environment Agency's River Basin Catchment Plan targets for the River Tame catchment,
- Protect areas of ancient woodland from development pressures by establishing buffers between the woodland and development. The extent of the buffer will be on a site specific basis, in accordance with national policy guidance, BS5837:2005 Trees in relation to construction – Recommendations and best practice.
- Where development is within 500m of woodland recorded in Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory, the Local Planning Authority will consult with the Forestry Commission.
- Ensure that the environmental, social and economic implications of mineral extraction and waste disposal proposals are fully appraised for their impact upon the countryside.
- Ensure that restoration schemes have regard to the borough's landscape and historic character. Through the context of the landscape assessment, promote the need for environmental improvements linked to the reclamation of former mineral extraction and landfill sites to wetland, woodland and landscapes for leisure, recreation and historic interpretation, nature conservation and agriculture.
- Identify and implement actions and recommendations from the Council's Green Infrastructure Study¹⁶.
- Consider ways in which Solihull's green assets can contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation, e.g. through flood attenuation. (The success of this will be reported on through NI 189)
- Seek to minimise and adapt to climate change by ensuring sustainable forms of economic activity and lifestyles which reduce carbon emissions and make more efficient use of natural resources. (The success of this will be reported on through NI 186)
- Support measures to reduce the amount of waste entering the waste stream as adopted in the Council's Waste Management Strategy 2004 – 2029.

¹⁶ SMBC (to be published 2010) Green Infrastructure Study

4.3 Management and diversification

The Council will encourage the sensitive and sustainable management of the countryside and guide farm diversification to uses which protect its character and openness.

Agriculture

Management of Solihull's countryside lies primarily in the hands of farmers and landowners and is a by-product of farming practises. These practises have shaped the rural landscape with which we are familiar today. Since the last war, farmers have responded to the government imperative to produce more food by using intensive farming methods, which have led to the removal of many characteristic Arden features, such as hedgerows and ponds.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the EU support system to farmers through agricultural subsidies. In the past this had been linked to how much the farmers produced. However, since 2003, payments have been introduced for environmentally beneficial forms of farming and more emphasis has been placed on rural development and encouraging farmers to look to markets and diversified forms of income to reduce their dependence on subsidy.

The introduction of genetically modified crops could become an issue in the future. There are concerns about genes from such crops infiltrating the natural environment. The Council will encourage farmers considering growing genetically modified organisms to seek advice from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

The increase in the growth of plants such as miscanthus, switchgrass, hemp, corn, poplar, willow, sorghum, sugarcane and a variety of tree species, ranging from eucalyptus to oil palm as biomass (a renewable energy source) to generate electricity or produce heat, may become an issue in the future. There are concerns about the impact these crops may have on those features characteristic of the Arden landscape and the appearance of the rural landscape with which we are familiar today

Best and most versatile farmland

Significant parts of Solihull's Western Fringe, Motorway Corridor and Rural Heartland are classified as best and most versatile agricultural land. The Council will protect these areas for agricultural uses as advised in PPS7 Sustainable development in rural areas. Poorer quality farmland, of less significance for agriculture may be more vulnerable to non-agricultural uses.

Agricultural land can contribute to sustainability through adapting to the impacts of climate change. There is potential for agricultural land to be used in flood risk management, and attenuation schemes.

Agricultural diversification

Many farming businesses are seeking to diversify beyond farming to supplement their incomes. Government advice indicates that the Council should assess the economic and social needs for diversification. Solihull's countryside lies close to major urban areas, which means that there is less need for diversification to provide local employment.

It is vital that new uses should not harm the character of the countryside, its nature conservation value, or its Green Belt function. Diversification schemes which are small-scale do not attract excessive numbers of visitors and complement conservation and enhancement policies are most likely to be acceptable. The government is seeking to encourage renewable forms of energy and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Short rotation coppice and other energy crops are likely to become more attractive and will help to maintain and enhance the character of the countryside. Uses associated with the restoration of the Forest of Arden and informal outdoor recreation would be particularly beneficial.

What the Council will do

- Promote and support agricultural diversification which contributes to the rural economy, sustainability, biodiversity, leisure and access, and positive environmental improvements.
- Pursue countryside management initiatives which aim to maintain the viability of agriculture whilst recognising the need for recreation and public access.
- Pursue opportunities for the development of sustainable woodland management and in respect of private woodland, secure management agreements for sustainable uses where appropriate.
- Encourage the sensitive management of characteristic Arden features, traditional farm landscapes and key habitats.
- Through the Local Strategic Partnership and Sustainable Communities Strategy, encourage landowners to seek advice from DEFRA, Natural England and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) on archaeological, historic and landscape matters, recreation and nature conservation.
- Continue to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land through LDF policies.
- Recognise and support the special needs of agriculture, within the urban fringe, especially where this is marginal.
- Encourage short rotation coppice and other energy crops as an alternative to traditional farm produce.
- Ensure that conservation needs are incorporated into highway verge maintenance.

4.4 Conservation and enhancement

The Council will conserve and enhance the natural environment of the countryside and its historic and archaeological assets.

The Arden landscape

Solihull's countryside is part of the Arden landscape as defined by Natural England in its Countryside Character approach. Warwickshire County Council and the Countryside Commission have published landscapes guidelines for Arden, "an historic region of former wood pasture and heath characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, ancient woodlands and mature hedgerow oaks". The 'Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden provides a comprehensive landscape assessment and sets out a series of management strategies and landscape guidelines to guide new development and land management practices. The Council will take the guidelines into account in considering new development in the countryside and ensuring appropriate management regimes, such as its woodland management programme. The Council has published its first review of its woodland strategy for Solihull Solihull's Woodland 2010 – 2015, which states that new woodland planting will be encouraged.

Hedgerows are a special feature of Arden and they have been preserved well in parts of Solihull, such as in Hockley Heath Parish, but there has been less success elsewhere. The monitoring of these Arden character features is undertaken through the Campaign to Protect Rural England's hedgerow survey and through the Habitat Biodiversity Audit.



Bluebells and Stitchworts, Millisons Wood LWS/LNR

Nature conservation

The Council has published its first review of its Nature Conservation strategy Nature Conservation in Solihull 2010 -2015 which includes the countryside. The countryside is an important natural reservoir, containing nationally significant sites, such as the River Blythe SSSI. The majority of Solihull's Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) lie in the countryside. A key theme for nature conservation in Solihull is to link existing wildlife sites and corridors to form a green network throughout the countryside connecting it with sites in surrounding urban areas. The Habitat Biodiversity Audit demonstrates that the importance of the countryside for nature conservation has been significantly underestimated.

National Indicator 197 (Improved Local Biodiversity) measures the proportion of Local Sites (both geological and wildlife) where positive conservation management has occurred within the last five years of the reporting year. It aims to measure the performance of local authorities for biodiversity by assessing implementation of active management of Local Sites and has been adopted as an improvement target by Solihull MBC. National indicator 197 requires the Council to safeguard and enhance Local Wildlife Sites in order to improve local biodiversity. The Countryside Strategy aims to work as a tool to positively contribute to the Council's duty to deliver NI197.

Natural Corridors

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

Historic environment

Solihull's countryside contains many historic and archaeological sites, ranging from early prehistoric occupation and burial sites to defences of the second world war. Many of Solihull's listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments are located in the countryside or in rural settlements. All are recorded in detail on the Sites and Monuments Record. Awareness of the significance of sites is growing, with an increasing number, such as Eastcote Hall moat and Temple Balsall Preceptory being recognised as nationally important.

The historic environment is particularly important as a finite and non-renewable resource which is fragile and cannot be recreated. Sites generally survive better in rural rather than urban areas, so Solihull's countryside resource is of significance for the wider conurbation.

There are few sites of industrial heritage in the countryside, but the two canals in Solihull, — the Grand Union Canal and the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal — are part of the historic landscape, incorporating features which British Waterways has recorded on its heritage database.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA)

The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) is one means of monitoring change in the countryside in the future. The HBA incorporates the Wildlife Sites Partnership, which reviews/monitors Local Wildlife Sites in Solihull. Locally important habitats and species that need to be included in Local Biodiversity Action Plans and progress on their protection can be identified more readily with Borough-wide data on species and habitats. The habitat information will enable more accurate assessment of the consequences of development for the natural environment, through the development of the LDF and in determining planning applications. The information will be used to identify meaningful indicators of progress towards a more sustainable Borough.

What the Council will do

- Historic Landscape Characterisation should be fully taken into account when proposals for development and changes in land use are being designed or assessed.
- Use the Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines for Arden to inform the management of Solihull's countryside, protecting the characteristic features of the Arden landscape through the LDF and Development Control.
- Use the Hedgerow Regulations to protect the Arden characteristic features.
- Support the aims and objectives of Solihull's Nature Conservation and Woodland Strategies in protecting, creating and managing habitats for nature conservation.
- Promote the identification, protection and management of an integrated network of wildlife corridors, in order to link together designated sites and other wildlife habitats to enhance their ecological value and, where compatible, promote the development of foot, bridle and cycle ways to increase their recreational value.
- Support the Habitat Biodiversity Audit and Wildlife Sites Partnerships to monitor and enhance priority species and habitats in line with LBAP targets.
- Protect and enhance ecosystem services.
- Promote the planting of woodlands through working with the Solihull Partnership and through the Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- Create and enhance Local Nature Reserves and Country Parks.
- Conserve and enhance the natural environment of the River Blythe Corridor, in partnership with the Environment Agency, Natural England, farmers and landowners.
- Continue to support the development, enhancement and accessibility of the Sites and Monuments Record.
- Promote and enhance important archaeological sites through LDF policies, and encourage the development of management plans for historic sites in the countryside.
- Promote and support the positive conservation management of Local Wildlife SitesWork in partnership with local/regional wildlife/environmental organisations, strengthening partnerships and improved biodiversity and sustainable management; such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Living Landscape Project .
- Consider the Aerodrome Safeguarding criteria to ensure the continued safe operation of aircraft.

4.5 Realise the potential for recreation

The Council will encourage greater use of the countryside for informal outdoor recreation and for formal recreational facilities, providing such activities do not harm the natural qualities, character and openness of the countryside.

Access to the countryside

Solihull's countryside offers great potential for informal outdoor recreation because of its location close to the Birmingham conurbation and Coventry. The Council's Rights of Way Improvements Plan (2008) provides details of the rights of way facilities within Solihull borough, and includes an implementation plan for delivering improvements. The Plan identifies walking and cycling routes, which are both means of access to recreational facilities and are recreational facilities in themselves. There are currently 210km registered public rights of way within Solihull.

The Heart of England Way, a regional long-distance footpath which passes through the Borough, and the North Worcestershire Path, which ends just outside the Borough, provide wider links to Warwickshire and beyond. Natural England's 'Walking the way to health' programme encourages people to explore and enjoy their local natural spaces.

The Council's Walking Strategy 2009-2014, seeks to promote walking as a recreational leisure activity and one of the Strategy's aims is to work with Sustrans and other stakeholders to provide improved links to recreational routes. Links between the urban area and the countryside, such as the Cole Valley and Kingfisher Country Park, are vital to provide easy access to the footpath network and other recreational facilities.

Sustainable transport

Solihull Council's Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 identifies the public rights of way network as having potential to provide commuter routes for people linking with the National Cycle Network, schools and local businesses / centre of employment. This will assist the Council in meeting government targets in terms of the reduction in car use, greater social inclusion and improved health. The Council is the process of consulting on the Solihull Cycling Strategy 2009; this seeks to promote cycling as a sustainable means of transport and a recreational activity, which can take advantage of Solihull's countryside, public rights of way and links from the urban fringe.



Footpath across Solihull's countryside

Recreational facilities

Golf courses, fishing lakes and playing fields are just some of the formal recreational facilities located in Solihull's countryside. The Council will encourage new and expanded recreational facilities providing such activities do not harm the character and openness of the countryside.

The two canals in Solihull, the Grand Union Canal and the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal, attract many visitors and the Council will work with British Waterways to manage and promote this recreational resource, providing such activities do not harm the character and openness of the countryside.

Countryside Parks

Kingfisher Country Park is within North Solihull and is part of an important green corridor along the River Cole, Hatchford and Kingshurst Brooks. Kingfisher Country Park was formally known as Project Kingfisher. The Park was established in 1985 to care for an 11km section of the River Cole Valley for the benefit of people and wildlife as it winds through Birmingham and North Solihull. The 3.5km Solihull section of Kingfisher Country Park incorporates Babb's Mill Park and LNR, York's Wood LNR, Cole Bank Park and LNR and Meriden Park. In 2010 the Council extended Kingfisher Country Park an additional 2.5km along Kingshurst Brook and Low Brook to link the Cole with Meriden Park, Alcott Wood LNR and Marston Green Park Local Nature Reserve.

Blythe Valley Country Park adjoins the Blythe Valley Business Park and south of the River Blythe, which is a SSSI. It includes a rich mosaic of nature conservation woodland, grassland, hedgerows, streams and wetland that provides opportunities for informal recreation and will be linked to surrounding urban areas by the Blythe Valley Walkway.

Woodlands

The proximity of accessible woodland to both rural and urban communities is important, linking the environment with health and other social and economic issues that can be addressed by green infrastructure provision.

What the Council will do

- Support the Council's Walking Strategy and Cycling Strategy; and promote the public footpath network.
- Maintain and improve public access to the countryside by working with Sustrans and other stakeholders to provide improved links to recreation, encourage sustainable transport such as cycling and walking via the use of the public rights of way network and green corridors.
- Support the Health and Well-Being Strategy together with Natural England's 'Walking the way to health' programme and the Solihull Striders and Strollers health walks.
- In partnership with neighbouring authorities, local communities, government agencies and other NGOs seek to maintain and promote initiatives to protect and enhance the green corridor functions of the Cole Valley and Kingfisher Country Park in relation to access, nature conservation and amenity.
- Create, protect and enhance Local Nature Reserves and Country Parks.
- Through restoration schemes support beneficial after use of former mineral workings for the purposes of recreation and nature conservation
- Promote the development and enjoyment of the widest range of facilities and activities for sport, recreation and tourism, to meet the diverse needs of the community where compatible in terms of character and openness, Green Belt policy, with the Countryside Strategy and LDF.
- Ensure safe and easy access to the countryside which recognises the needs of diverse user groups including those with special needs. Encouraging participation by groups currently under represented in the use of the countryside for leisure, recreation and sport.
- Seek to improve the awareness and enjoyment of the countryside in making provision for appropriate and effective information and visitor management, to reconcile the needs of visitors with the capacity of the place and their impact upon local communities.
- In complementing existing facilities and attractions for recreation and tourism within the area, support the development of additional facilities where they safeguard the viability of farm holdings and are not contrary to landscape and Green Belt policy objectives.

4.6 Maintain local distinctiveness

The Council will maintain existing settlements as attractive and distinct places within the countryside and ensure that any new development is sympathetic to its local character.

Existing settlements

Solihull's countryside contains many existing settlements ranging from small hamlets with a handful of buildings to the large settlements of Balsall Common, Knowle and Dorridge. Larger settlements have had to accommodate significant new housing development in the last 30 years. Much modern development has been uniform, paying little attention to the particular characteristics of individual settlements which makes them distinct from other places. Smaller settlements have retained much of their local distinctiveness, because the scale of new development has been less.

The Government's objective for rural areas is to raise the quality of life, through the promotion of good quality, sustainable development that respects and enhances local distinctiveness, and the qualities of the open countryside (PPS7). Local characteristics — in terms of boundary treatments (native hedges/hedgerow trees), building materials and trees (the borough is distinctive with many large mature oaks, hedgerows and hedgerow trees in rural areas, streets and within front boundaries) — should be promoted to retain local character and avoid sub-urbanisation of the countryside.

Local services

Many of the smaller settlements have lost shops and local businesses in recent years. In others, remaining businesses are struggling to survive. The loss of local shops, jobs and pubs means that people have to travel much greater distances for employment and shopping. At the same time as the need to travel has increased, rural public transport has declined, limiting people's ability to access jobs and services without a car. Rural settlements are increasingly perceived by urban residents as attractive places to live. House prices have risen to reflect this demand, making it more difficult for local people to find housing locally.

The Council has undertaken a Housing Needs survey and made provision for affordable housing in rural settlements on housing sites identified in the previous UDP. Provision of extra housing may help existing businesses to survive and encourage the expansion or replacement of public transport services and a more sustainable lifestyle.

New development

Although new development is severely restricted in the countryside, many of Solihull's existing settlements have been excluded from the Green Belt. The Council will expect new development to respond to the character of the countryside and to protect the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. Where new development is permitted in the countryside, the Council will expect any damage to the rural character to be compensated by conservation and enhancement measures in the locality, for example, the Countryside Park at Blythe Valley Business Park.

Government guidance within PPS3 Housing requires that development should create or enhance a distinctive character that relates to the surroundings, and provides the retention or re-establishment of the biodiversity within residential environments. This is emphasised further in Solihull Council's New housing in context (2003), which provides guidance on the Council's policies regarding design and local distinctiveness.

Modern farming practices have resulted in many traditional farm buildings becoming redundant. Many barns and outbuildings in Solihull have been converted to new uses, usually residential, and the Council has produced guidelines SPG2 Rural Buildings Conversion to ensure that the character of buildings is retained. The government promotes conversion for commercial uses to encourage farm diversification and a positive impact on the local economy.

Some larger commercial uses are located in the countryside and can have difficulty if faced with the need to expand. The expansion of existing businesses is not an exception to normal Green Belt policy. The Council will not normally permit businesses to expand beyond their existing sites and would expect any proposals for development within the site to be justified by very special circumstances.

The 'Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines: Arden' provides a comprehensive landscape assessment, setting out a series of management strategies in order to maintain and enhance regional character and local distinctiveness.

What the Council will do

- Historic Landscape Characterisation should be fully taken into account when proposals for development and changes in land use are being designed or assessed.
- Support the preparation of Village Design Statements by local rural communities in Solihull.
- Help to support existing shops in rural communities by looking at mixed uses flexibly.
- Encourage the provision of improved public transport services for settlements in the countryside.
- Continue to make provision for affordable housing in existing settlements in development briefs for new housing sites.
- Continue to protect the countryside and the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
- Seek opportunities to protect and enhance characteristic features of the countryside associated with new development proposals, by using the 'Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines: Arden' to guide new development, associate landscape design and land management practices.
- Require very special justification for the expansion of existing businesses in the countryside in accordance with Green Belt policy.
- Support proposals for the conversion of buildings to commercial uses where they promote farm diversification or contribute to the local economy and protect the character and openness of the countryside. Promote good design in the conversion of existing buildings.
- Ensure that the environmental and economic implications of mineral extraction and waste disposal proposals are fully appraised for their impact upon the countryside.
- As part of restoration schemes, ensure the protection and integration of habitats for nature conservation and the creation of opportunities for recreation.
- The Council will support positive measures in the countryside that organisational projects for reducing their carbon footprints e.g. use of renewable energy technologies)

4.7 Promotion and education

The Council will encourage people to care for and enjoy the countryside in a responsible way by raising public awareness and understanding of countryside issues.

Promotion

It is important that people are aware of the opportunities and activities which Solihull's countryside offers and shown ways to enable them to take advantage of them. Publicising little known footpaths or facilities will help to relieve pressure on more popular locations and may reduce travel and pollution effects by provision closer to the point of demand. The Council has published booklets and leaflets advertising walks and cycle rides in the countryside. There is scope too for better sign posting and way-marking of footpaths, and for promoting greater use of local open space in rural settlements, as a gateway into the countryside. The Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2008) and Walking Strategy 2009-2014 seek to focus attention on promoting access to the countryside.

Tourism

Solihull Council together with local businesses have established the Solihull Tourism Forum, which aims to promote Solihull's tourist attractions to visitors – including the heritage and rural aspects of the Borough. Solihull's canals offer a potential resource, both in terms of boating and for walkers and cyclists. They also link into Solihull's villages such as Knowle and Catherine de Barnes, and to recreational facilities outside the Borough such as Earlswood Lakes and the wider countryside.

Education

The Council, through the National Framework for Sustainable Schools, encourages schools to look at countryside issues in their curricula and help pupils learn about the natural world and sustainable living, for example, through food growing and biodiversity conservation. Groups of children can visit woodlands and other habitats in Solihull's countryside where children are given the opportunity to learn about the sustainable use of woodlands and biodiversity conservation.

The Council promotes the uptake of environmental initiatives and the incentives available for farmers and landowners for new planting. The environmental activities of other groups and agencies, such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the Solihull Conservation Volunteers will be publicised.

Forest schools are a type of outdoor education in which school children visit woodlands, learning personal, social and technical skills. It has been defined as "an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment".

Forest schools use the woodlands as a means to build independence and self-esteem in school-age children. Topics include the natural environment, for example the role of trees in society, the complex ecosystem supported by a wilderness, and recognition of specific plants and animals. However, the personal skills are considered highly valuable, such as teamwork and problem solving. The woodland environment may be used to learn about more abstract concepts such as mathematics and communication.

Health

Access within the countryside provides great potential for improving the health of the general public by encouraging walking and cycling which helps to prevent heart disease and can have other health benefits.

What the Council will do

- Raise awareness of the benefits of the countryside by publishing and promoting information about the opportunities and activities available, such as guides for walks and cycle rides.
- Work with local land owners to ensure a balance between competing demands of access, the environment, rural business and land owner rights is achieved. And provide information encouraging users of the countryside to respect the land and other activities which exist.
- Take advantage of the opportunities for linking countryside to health improvement programmes, such as Natural England's 'Walking the way to health' and The Health and Well Being Strategy (WMRA 2008).
- Ensure that public footpaths are adequately sign posted from roads, way marked and that there is safe and easy access to the countryside. This should recognise the needs of all user groups and encourage participation by groups currently under represented in the use of the countryside
- Use Council activities and events, such as Oaks and Shires to promote the countryside and related issues.
- Support the Solihull Tourism Forum in promoting Solihull's countryside as an opportunity for tourism to meet the needs of all sections of the community.
- Encourage schools to include rural issues and make greater use of the countryside in their curricula.
- Promote the positive conservation management of the countryside and the sustainable management of woodlands by private landowners.
- Continue to support the services offered by groups such as the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Practical Conservation Volunteers.
- Seek to enhance existing and develop new links and green corridors where the public rights of way network is poorly established or is non existent
- Encourage the development of tourism in the countryside as a means of diversifying agriculture and the rural economy where compatible with the Countryside Strategy and the LDF.
- Seek educational interpretation of restoration sites, such as former mineral workings, which reflect the site's history and nature and biodiversity value, adding to the recreation and leisure value.

4.8 Partnerships and the community

The Council recognises that many people and organisations contribute to the quality of the countryside and will develop new and existing partnerships and involve the community, Solihull Partnership, The North Solihull Partnership and other agencies.

The Council is involved in many partnerships aimed at improving the countryside. The protection and enhancement of the Arden landscape character, recreation, leisure and tourism involves developing partnerships with neighbouring local authorities in Warwickshire and Coventry, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, land owners, farmers, rural businesses and community organisations.

Other partnerships relate to recreation and nature conservation and include government agencies, specialist organisations, local groups and campaigning groups such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE).

The Council also recognises that other organisations, including the voluntary and private sector, has a major part to play in the implementation of this strategy. Many of these, including the Council, are members of the Local Strategic Partnership responsible for the Sustainable Community Strategy

The Solihull Partnership is the strategic partnership responsible for improving outcomes for all people in Solihull. The whole Partnership includes local communities and their elected representatives, and public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations. The Partnership is a non-statutory body which brings together organisations and representatives voluntarily to work in partnership where this adds value.

The Solihull Partnership has produced the Sustainable Communities Strategy 2008-2018 which describes how the Partnership, partner organisations, communities and citizens, will develop the Borough of Solihull as a great place to be. It is based on the needs, concerns and aspirations of local people, and sets out improvement priorities to tackle the most important issues facing the people of Solihull.

Solihull Council is a partner within the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, and is involved with the co-ordination, recording and reporting of actions within LBAP species and habitat plans. The council actively seeks to help in the delivery of these actions plans, and does this in association with community groups, through policy and countryside projects.

Farmers and landowners

Management of Solihull's countryside depends primarily on farmers and landowners and the incentives and policies adopted by the government. The Council will engage with landowners and members of the farming community within the Borough as part of the Green Infrastructure study, through the Council's Solihull Footprint and other initiatives.

Business

The Council has established partnerships with a number of major businesses and organisations representing their interests. These partnerships offer an opportunity to promote the enhancement of the countryside in the interests of the Borough. The Council will encourage businesses to consider planting woodlands and manage habitats in the countryside in order to offset their greenhouse gas emissions.

What the Council will do

- Encourage and support the involvement of the community and businesses in countryside issues through the Solihull Partnership; and develop improved dialogue with farmers and landowners.
- Continue to support the Habitat Biodiversity Audit, Wildlife Sites Partnership and Local Biodiversity Action Plan through monitoring, reporting, projects and staff time.
- Conserve and enhance the natural environment of the River Blythe corridor, in partnership with the Environment Agency, Natural England, farmers and landowners.
- In partnership with Birmingham City Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts and local communities, seek to maintain and promote initiatives to protect and enhance the green corridor functions of the Cole Valley and Kingfisher Country Park in relation to access, nature conservation and amenity.
- Maintain and develop links with local conservation, access and community groups.
- Encourage community participation in countryside management events and activities.
- Foster stronger partnerships and participation in countryside events and activities with statutory bodies and environmental partners.
- Encourage joint schemes and funding bids for countryside projects.
- Encourage farmers and landowners to use government incentives, and to seek specialist advice on ways to enhance the countryside through positive stewardship of the land.
- Work with the North Solihull Partnership in delivery change in North Solihull.

4.9 Resources

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

Council funding

The Council is committed to implementing this strategy and will provide funding and staff resources to enable progress. However, existing budgets for countryside initiatives are inadequate, so the Council will seek to maximise the benefits from its resources by developing partnerships and encouraging funding from alternative sources.

Other sources

There are a wide variety of potential sources of funding for countryside initiatives from the North Solihull Partnership, Natural England, Land Fill companies (SITA Trust and others) and The Forestry Commission amongst others. The Council uses grants from the Forestry Commission to improve Solihull's woodlands. As the priorities of other organisations change, the Council will need to be flexible in its approach to secure funding.

Local communities can obtain grants for local projects from the Warwickshire Rural Community Council and the Birmingham Airport Community Trust. Where major developments are permitted, the Council may be able to secure funding for countryside initiatives from planning obligations.

What the Council will do

- Allocate staff annually towards countryside initiatives.
- Maximise opportunities for grant-aiding from government agencies and other sources including the private sector.
- Work with the North Solihull Partnership in delivery change in North Solihull.
- Encourage and support community initiatives through the Local Strategic Partnership and the Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- Encourage farmers and landowners to adopt a positive attitude to countryside management and to apply for grants to fund positive conservation management of locally important wildlife sites.
- Take into account the Historic Landscape Characterisation when assessing and designing proposals for development and changes in land use.
- Explore the potential for funding of countryside initiatives by developers when considering significant planning applications in, or close to the countryside.
- Encourage all service areas within the Council to allocate resources to fund biodiversity protection and enhancement in line with the section 40 of the NERC Act 2006.
- Attain the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (the UK's Certification for Sustainable Forest Management) which will unlock other funding streams such as the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme Management Grant and give Solihull's woodland direction through short term management planning.
- Use commuted sums and levies where appropriate for strategic large scale Green Infrastructure projects.
- Encourage and support community funding bids for conservation projects.

4.10 Local objectives

The Council will apply appropriate local objectives to the zones introduced in the countryside appraisal, so as to protect local character and distinctiveness.

1. Hockley Heath Parish

The Parish has a small scale enclosed landscape typical of Arden Pastures, but is subject to urban fringe features and uses, and has experienced significant change resulting from UDP proposals. It has considerable recreational potential.

Objectives

- Minimise the impact of new developments on the edge of the countryside
- Maintain the openness and rural character of the gaps between development
- Encourage the retention of farming practices which preserve the characteristic features of the Arden landscape
- Encourage and support the potential of the Stratford-on-Avon canal / Earlswood Lakes as valuable Green / Blue Infrastructure assets.

2. The Western Fringe

This zone is dominated by major commercial and urban influences, such as the Airport and NEC, which have plans for expansion. It contains a small but significant area of countryside and woodland fringe, although the northern part suffers from poor accessibility to the countryside.

Objectives

- Protect the open countryside from further development, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location outweigh the loss or deterioration of the countryside.
- Recognise the importance to the regional and local economy of the major employment centres, whilst retaining the landscape character and local distinctiveness.
- Strengthen and enhance features characteristic of Arden landscape
- Increase opportunities for access to the countryside

3. The Motorway Corridor

The influence of the motorway and associated uses dominates this zone, which also includes important natural features, such as the River Blythe SSSI, attractive open countryside and many recreational facilities.

Objectives

- Encourage further planting along the motorway corridor to screen view from surrounding settlements and facilities
- Resist outward expansion of urban area into the countryside
- Protect and enhance important ecological features and habitats, including the River Blythe corridor and Local Wildlife sites
- Enhance recreational activities appropriate to the area

4. The setting of Knowle and Dorridge

Knowle and Dorridge are within the Green Belt and their proximity to the countryside makes them attractive villages and sort after places to live. The Green Belt between the villages and the urban area of Solihull is relatively narrow and should be retained.

Objectives

- Resist outward expansion of settlements into the countryside
- Increase opportunities for access to the countryside
- Strengthen and enhance urban edge by woodland planting

5. The Rural Heartland

This zone has an open rural character linking it with the wider Warwickshire countryside, which provides an attractive setting for historically important villages and hamlets. Sand and gravel workings and deposits have a significant impact, as do important natural features, such as the River Blythe SSSI.

Objectives

- Protection of rural character from development
- Enhance the effect of wooded enclosure
- Increase opportunities for access within the countryside
- Determine a long term strategy for the use of old mineral workings
- Locate any developments which are likely to attract significant numbers close to public transport and major roads
- Protect and enhance important ecological features, including the River Blythe corridor

6. The setting of Balsall Common

Balsall Common has a major influence on its surrounding countryside, partly due to the significant change resulting from recent development, and partly from urban fringe features and uses.

Objectives

- Resist outward expansion of urban area into the countryside
- Minimise the impact of new developments on the edge of the countryside
- Increase opportunities for access to the countryside
- Strengthen and enhance urban edge by woodland planting and restoring Arden landscape character

7. The Northern Upland

This zone has large areas of mixed woodland of ecological value with extensive views of surrounding urban areas, and from surrounding areas. It has a remoteness compared to surrounding areas, with a good network of footpaths, bridleways and quiet lanes.

Objectives

- Maintain rural character and remoteness
- Protect and enhance important ecological features
- Enhance opportunities for access to the countryside
- Develop links with adjoining authorities to ensure consistent policies

8. The Coventry Fringe

This zone is dominated by the influence of the urban edge of Coventry, with urban fringe features and uses and has suffered from the loss of hedgerows.

Objectives

- Maintain clearly defined urban edge
- Strengthen and enhance urban edge by woodland planting and restoring Arden landscape character
- Increase opportunities for access to the countryside
- Expand recreational opportunities
- Encourage restoration of landscape features and habitats by replacement native hedgerow planting

9. West Solihull

The west of Solihull is dominated by urban areas and Birmingham as its immediate neighbour. There are landscape features characteristic of the Arden landscape within parks and open areas within this zone which are reminders of the countryside.

Objectives

- Protect and enhance areas of green spaces, seeking to restore Arden characteristics in terms of planting
- Protect and enhance important ecological features
- Increase opportunities for recreational opportunities and access to the countryside
- Seek to establish green infrastructure links within the zone and to the countryside beyond

10. North Solihull

This area is on the border of the Warwickshire countryside, but remote from it due to the M42 and M6 motorways. An urbanised area, it has remnants of the Arden landscape within areas such as the ancient semi natural woodlands of York's Wood, Smith's Wood Meriden Park Wood and Alcott Wood. The area has a major benefit of the River Cole valley and associated areas of green space, which are valuable for recreation and nature conservation. The area is undergoing change through a regeneration programme.

Objectives

- Protect and enhance those features characteristic of the Arden countryside within the urban areas
- Seek to establish Green Infrastructure links within North Solihull and beyond into the wider countryside
- Protect and enhance the Cole Valley and Kingfisher Country Park
- Protect and enhance important ecological features

5. The Way Forward

In providing a context for the management of change within Solihull's countryside, the Strategy sets out an on-going framework for effective, co-ordinated and sustained action.

The delivery of Solihull's Countryside Strategy is based upon the successful integration and co-ordination of a number of components. These include a host of organisations, decisions, programmes, initiatives, mechanisms and critically, the availability of resources. Furthermore, it is the sustained application of these components over time which will be necessary to realise the aims and objectives of the Countryside Strategy. As part of this framework it will be necessary to maximise unforeseen opportunities, where they are beneficial to Solihull's countryside.

Mechanisms for the delivery of the Countryside Strategy can be identified as follows: Policies, Partners, Operations, Finance/Resources and Monitoring.

5.1 Policies

The strategic policies of the Countryside Strategy complement the countryside policies of the LDF and integrate with a range of strategic documents relevant to the countryside. As a result, the Countryside Strategy will be delivered through a host of policies and initiatives with the strategy itself performing a co-ordination role. In order to reinforce this role it is necessary to promote the Countryside Strategy to raise awareness of its existence and purpose.

5.2 Partners

The countryside embraces a wide community of interests which includes: the Council, the North Solihull Partnership, local communities, private landowners and farmers, Government departments and agencies, statutory undertakers, voluntary associations and groups. Although there is common ground and co-operation within and between these bodies, it is important to emphasise that a partnership approach is essential to co-ordinate the differing perspectives, priorities and targets of each within the framework of the Countryside Strategy. This is fundamental as within the custodial hands of farmers, landowners and managers lies the countryside landscapes, habitats and wildlife of tomorrow, along with the means of access and recreational opportunities to enjoy them. If the concerns and policy objectives of the Countryside Strategy are to be effectively addressed, an ongoing dialogue needs to be established and maintained within and between these bodies in the best interests of the countryside.

A key mechanism in promoting this dialogue will be through the Solihull Partnership.

5.3 Operations

In the delivery of Solihull's Countryside Strategy, Solihull Council has an important co-ordinating role to play. This is achieved through policy implementation, day-to-day decision-making, the negotiation of planning agreements and management agreements of the Council. As a consequence, the role and influence of a number of Divisions within the Council are significant for the countryside.

5.4 Finance and monitoring

The delivery of Solihull's Countryside Strategy relies on the effective use of existing resources and in securing grant aid for which countryside initiatives will be eligible. In the short, medium and long terms, the Countryside Strategy will take the form of co-ordinated action in securing policy implementation through the LDF, along with a rolling programme of schemes and projects implemented through the Council's Business Planning process. Progress will be monitored through divisional performance plans.

The extent to which these and new initiatives can be secured and co-ordinated in the longer term will be a key aspect of delivering and monitoring the Countryside Strategy.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary

Access (public)	Refers to woodland and its associated land open to the public for recreational or educational use (sometimes subject to charges). Does not detract from any legal rights.
Agri-environment schemes	National (or local) schemes that pay farmers to farm in an environmentally sensitive way.
Ancient woodland	A classification for woodland which has been in continuous existence from before AD 1600 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from before AD 1750 in Scotland.
Arden	An area of former wood pasture and ancient farmlands lying on the eastern side of the Birmingham plateau. Traditionally regarded as the land between the river Tame and the river Avon in Warwickshire.
Best and most versatile agricultural land	As defined as land in grades 1 (excellent), 2 (very good) and 3a (good) of the Agricultural Land Classification. The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It helps underpin the principles of sustainable development.
Biodiversity	The variety of life on earth; includes all species of plants and animals, the genetic variation within them and the natural systems that support them.
Biodiversity Action Plan	The UK plan setting proposals and targets for conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
Biomass	Organic matter used as a fuel, especially in the generation of electricity.
Buffer zone	An area of other land-use of sufficient width to protect a semi-natural habitat from significant invasion by seed from a nearby non-native source.
Carbon emission	Carbon dioxide (CO ₂) is released into the atmosphere everytime fossil fuel, such as gas, coal and oil, are burned.
Carbon Sequestration / Carbon storage	Carbon sequestration is the processes of removing carbon from the atmosphere in order to help mitigate global warming. Sequestration is a new technology and a variety of ways of artificially capturing and storing carbon are being explored. Research is ongoing to find ways of enhancing natural sequestration processes.
Climate Change	Long-term significant change in the temperature, precipitation and other weather that a given region experiences attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.
Colonisation	Natural regeneration on previously un-utilised sites.
Community woodland	Local woodlands for people to enjoy, where the needs and wishes of local people are important in planning and management.

Comprehensive Area Assessment	CAA is the external assessment of how well local public services are performing. CAA seeks to assess how well communities are being served by their local public services, including councils, police, health, and fire and rescue services. It emphasises the quality of life of residents, and how well these bodies, working together, are achieving improvement and progressing towards long-term goals. It will also highlight best practice and innovation, and identify any barriers to improvement. Follow the link below to find out more about CAA in Solihull .
Conservation	Protection and management of natural resources that ensures their continuing availability to future generations.
Conservation agencies	Statutory nature conservation agencies: Natural England and the Environment Agency. Non-statutory conservation agencies: Forestry Commission and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.
Core Strategy	A Core Strategy Document is the key compulsory Local Development Document specified in United Kingdom planning law. Every other Local Development Document is built on the principles it sets out, regarding the development and use of land in a Local Planning Authority's area. The principles should be in accordance with the Community strategy.
Countryside character (map)	A zonation of the countryside by its natural and cultural characteristics.
Cultivation	Any method of soil disturbance to aid the establishment of newly planted habitats.
Cultural boundaries	Boundaries of territory or units of specific land-use such as banks, walls and ditches. Some of these features may date back hundreds of years.
Cultural features	Archaeological sites, historic buildings and heritage landscapes including ancient woodlands.
Cultural landscape	An area of countryside whose character is predominantly the result of the patterns of human activity, often built up over long periods of time.
Designed landscape	A pleasure ground, park or large garden laid out with the primary purpose of creating an aesthetically pleasing scene or sequence of vistas.
Development	Change of land-use from forestry or agriculture authorised by the planning authorities, usually for building and urbanisation.
Drainage	An operation to remove excess water from an area in a controlled way.
Ecology	Originally the scientific study of the relationship between living organisms and their environment, the term is now generally used to describe the relationship between a living organism and its environment.
Ecosystem	The interaction of communities of plants and animals (including humans) with each other and the non-living environment. Balanced ecosystems are stable when considered over the long term (hundreds of years in the case of woodland).
Ecosystem goods and services	These are the benefits arising from the ecological functions of healthy ecosystems. Such benefits accrue to all living organisms, including animals and plants, rather than to humans alone. However, there is a growing recognition of the importance to society that ecological goods and services provide for health, social, cultural, and economic needs. Examples of ecological goods include clean air, and abundant fresh water. Examples of ecological services include purification of air and water, maintenance of biodiversity, decomposition of wastes, soil and vegetation generation and renewal, pollination of crops and natural vegetation, groundwater recharge through wetlands, seed dispersal, greenhouse gas mitigation, and aesthetically pleasing landscapes. The products and processes of ecological goods and services are complex and occur over long periods of time.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	Procedure to require assessment of potential environmental impacts that may be initiated under European Union Directives.
Environmental Statement	Statement required where an Environmental Impact Assessment is called for.
Food security	Food security is an issue on the national agenda and it may become a local issue in the future. Food security means the ability to have sufficient nutritious and affordable food, together with additional issues of availability, access, quality and safety.
Forestry	The management of predominantly tree covered land (woodland) whether in large tracts (generally called forests) or smaller units (known by a variety of terms such as woods, copses and shelterbelts).
Forestry Commission (FC)	Government department responsible for implementing forestry policy and regulations in England, Scotland and Wales.
Forestry practice	The techniques used in forestry planning and forest operations to produce all types of forest benefit.
Geodiversity	The variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soil along with the natural processes that shape the landscape.
GIS (Geographic Information System)	An organised collection of computer hardware, software, geographic data, and personnel designed to efficiently capture, store, update, manipulate, integrate, analyse, and display all forms of geographically referenced information.
Green Belt	An area of open land where strict planning controls apply in order to check the further growth of a large built-up area, prevent neighbouring towns from merging or preserve the special character of a town.
Green corridor	Breaks in the urban environment formed by inter-connected areas such as parks, playing fields, woodlands and landscaped areas. Within the main urban areas of Solihull these spaces exist as definable linear routeways and areas. They form part of a network linking urban areas to the surrounding countryside.
Green infrastructure	An ecological network, both natural and engineered, that acts as natural infrastructure; includes canals, ditches, gardens, green roofs, parks, open space, trees, rivers, reservoirs and wetlands.
Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA)	The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) was established in October 1995 to provide accurate, up-to-date and readily accessible ecological data to all the project partners. It incorporates a detailed Phase 1 survey of Warwickshire which has been transferred onto GIS; the Wildlife Sites Project, identifying potential Wildlife Sites/Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs); and provides a basis for local biodiversity action plans.
Informal recreation	Activities for which participants need no specific skills or equipment, e.g. walking and picnicking. The activities tend to exclude team sports and organised events.
Landscape Character	The distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement.
Local Agenda 21	An action plan towards the 21st century providing a blueprint for print for global partnership to achieve sustainable development, endorsed by 179 nations at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Local Area Agreement	A three year agreement, based on local Sustainable Community Strategies, that sets out the priorities for a local area agreed between Central Government, represented by the Government Office (GO), and a local area, represented by the local authority and other key partners through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).
Local authority	Local government planning authority.
Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP)	A non-statutory plan prepared for a locality or region. A means to implement the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, to conserve and enhance biodiversity at a local level. Identifying where actions are required, targets and delivery mechanisms for species and habitats under threat.
Local Development Framework (LDF)	The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a non-statutory term used to describe a folder of documents, which includes all the local planning authority's local development documents. An LDF is comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Plan Documents (which form part of the statutory development plan). • Supplementary Planning Documents. The local development framework will also comprise of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Statement of Community Involvement. • the Local Development Scheme. • the Annual Monitoring Report. • any Local Development Orders or Simplified Planning Zones that may have been added.
Local Nature Reserves (LNR)	Statutory Reserves designated by the Local Authority in consultation with Natural England, with special amenity value locally for education and amenity for the community.
Local Site/ Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	Non-statutory, locally valued wildlife sites which seek to raise awareness of the importance of protecting sites of local nature conservation value, and to formalise non-statutory site systems in order to bring them into line with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 9.
Local Strategic Partnership	An overall partnership of people that brings together organisations from the public, private, community and voluntary sector within a local authority area, with the objective of improving people's quality of life.
Material Reclamation Facility	A location capable of processing co-mingled or source separated wastes in order to recover recyclable materials.
Native species	Species which have arrived and inhabited an area naturally, without deliberate assistance by man. For trees and shrubs in the UK usually taken to mean those present after post-glacial recolonisation and before historic times. Some species are only native in particular regions. Differences in characteristics and adaptation to conditions occur more locally – hence 'locally native'.
Native woodland	Woods mainly or entirely composed of locally native species.
Natural Corridors	A network linking different habitat types including rivers, canals, railways, road verges and hedgerows.
Natural environment	Includes communities of plants, animal and where they live; and physical and geological features that surround us.
Natural resources	Materials (renewable and non-renewable) supplied by nature, including soil, air, water and light.
Naturalised	A species long introduced to an area, which is capable of completing its life cycle there without human intervention.

New native woodland	New woodland especially designed and managed to develop a natural character by using communities of locally native trees and shrubs.
National Indicators	National indicators have been developed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 so that it reflects the Government's national priorities. Performance against each of the 198 indicators will be reported for every single tier and county council Local Strategic Partnership. The national indicator set is the way that central government will performance- manage outcomes delivered by local government working alone or in partnerships.
Passive solar	Passive Solar technologies are means of using sunlight for useful energy without use of active mechanical systems (as contrasted to active solar). Such technologies convert sunlight into usable heat (water, air and thermal mass), cause air-movement for ventilating, or future use, with little use of other energy sources.
Photovoltaics	Photovoltaics are arrays of cells containing a Solar photovoltaic material that converts solar radiation into direct current electricity.
Planning obligation	A planning obligation can arise when a developer either enters into an agreement with the planning authority under S.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or otherwise produces a proposal to carry out works which are not included in a proposed development for which planning permission is sought.
Policy	Chosen course of action, in pursuance of an aim, this guides a continuing process of decision making.
Potential Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (pSINC)	A site which has been identified as having the potential to become a SINC, but has not yet been surveyed to assess its true value. Now known as potential Local Wildlife Sites.
Primary Care Trust	A local health organisation responsible for managing local health services
Principal Parks	Areas of unrestricted public access of over 8 ha within 2km of all settlements of over 500 people. These may contain formal gardens, informal horticultural features, nature conservation areas, equipped children's playgrounds, skate parks or other provision for young people and formal sports facilities. They should be linked by, and contribute towards, the traffic-free network of routes for walking and cycling.
Productivity	The capacity to produce goods and services. Usually applied to site conditions rather than to environmental and social benefits, such as landscape and conservation, although these are an essential component of sustainable development.
Project Kingfisher	Project Kingfisher was formally declared Kingfisher Country Park in July, 2004. It is associated with an 11km stretch of the River Cole running from the Coventry Road (A45) at Small Heath as far as the M6 at Chelmsley Wood. Inaugurated in 1985, it is a joint project sponsored by both Birmingham City Council and Solihull MBC together with English Nature, The Environment Agency, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. Its overall aim is to care for the valley of the River Cole, improving it both for people and wildlife. Kingfisher Country Park has been designated under the 'Man and the Biosphere' programme.

Protected habitats or species	Those protected by the EU Birds Directive, EU Habitats and Species Directive, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000), and Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations (1994) as amended.
Protection	Measures intended to reduce damage (or the risk of damage) to habitats by pests, diseases, livestock, fire and people.
Provenance	Location of plant species from which seed or cuttings is collected. The term is often confused with 'origin' which is the original natural genetic source.
Public Register	Public listing (for a period of four weeks) by the FC of planting and felling proposals to allow public comment.
Public Right of Way	Legally defined route for defined categories of public access which landowners must not obstruct or divert without due legal process. Comprising under s.66 of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981: bridleway – a highway over which the public have the following, but no other, rights of way, that is to say, a right of way on foot and a right of way on horseback or leading a horse, with or without a right to drive animals of any description along the highway; byway – open to all traffic” means a highway over which the public have a right of way for vehicular and all other kinds of traffic, but which is used by the public mainly for the purpose for which footpaths and bridleways are so used; footpath – a highway over which the public have a right of way on foot only, other than such a highway at the side of a public road; and public path – a highway being either a footpath or a bridleway.
Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)	Non-statutory designated sites within a county, with geological or geomorphical features worthy of protection for their educational, research, historical or aesthetic importance.
Regional Spatial Strategy	The Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands 2008 includes policies relating to the region's countryside. The Strategy is being reviewed in phases, with critical rural services included in the final phase. A policy recommendation on critical rural services has been prepared, which will inform work on a new Strategy for the West Midlands from 2010 onwards.
Renewable energy	Renewable energy describes energy which occurs naturally and repeatedly in the environment, such as wind, movement of water, the sun and from biomass.
River catchment	A single surface water system (a river, its tributaries and related drainage, whose boundaries are defined by topography.)
Semi-natural woodland	Woodland composed of mainly locally native trees and shrubs which derive from natural seedfall or coppice rather than from planting. Ancient and semi-natural woodlands are defined as those known to be continuously present since 1600 AD
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Nationally important sites notified by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and protected because of their special interest for flora, fauna, habitats, geological or physiographical features.
Site plan	Detailed work-site plan for operations carried out within the framework of the management plan.
Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)	Non-statutory, locally valued wildlife sites which seek to raise awareness of the importance of protecting sites of local nature conservation value, and to formalise non-statutory site systems in order to bring them into line with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 9. Now known as Local Wildlife Sites.

Species	A taxonomic group of organisms associated with one another according to attributes or characteristics, which can interbreed under natural conditions to produce fertile offspring.
Soft flood defences	Natural methods are used to deal with floodwater as opposed to engineered 'hard' structures. Soft flood defences are designed to work with the natural environment, such as using floodplains, mudflats or saltmarshes which provide space for floodwater, preventing floods elsewhere. They are cheaper and require less maintenance and are beneficial to wildlife.
Strategy	Decisions in a plan which co-ordinate the aims and determine broadly how they will be achieved. Policies and proposals are developed from the strategy.
Sustainability Appraisal	In United Kingdom Planning Law a Sustainability Appraisal is an appraisal of the economic, environmental and social effects of a local development document from the outset of the preparation process to allow decisions to be made that accord with sustainable development. Since 2001, Sustainability Appraisals have had to be in conformity with the Strategic Environmental Assessment EU directive.
Sustainable Communities Strategy	Following the publication of the Local Government White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities,' Local Authorities have a responsibility to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). This describes the LA's understanding of the needs, concerns and aspirations of local people and sets out a number of priorities and areas for action to address these needs.
Sustainable development	Development which meets social and economic needs without undermining the quality of the natural environment.
Sustainable drainage systems (SUDS)	Sustainable Drainage Systems use techniques to control surface water run-off as close to its origin as possible, before it enters a watercourse. They mimic natural drainage processes with the characteristics of storage, slow conveyance and some volume reduction. There are a number of techniques that encompass the essential elements of SUDS such as living roofs, porous paving and ponds.
Unitary Development Plan	Plan produced by the borough council concerned with the use of land and containing policies on housing, the economy, transportation, leisure and recreation, green belt and the environment, for example. Soon to be replaced by the LDF.
Urban fringe	Intermediary area of transition between the hard urban area on its inner edge and open countryside or the fringe of an adjoining urban area. The area includes green space which extends from the edge of urban areas. It is constantly evolving both in terms of the area it covers and the processes occurring within it. Areas portraying these kinds of characteristics are found on the edge of small towns as well as conurbations. (Planning in the Urban Fringe - Initial Report of the Joint Special Advisory Group, Oct. 1990)
Urban greenspace	A collective term to describe green areas which form breaks within the urban area.
Vegetation succession	A collective term to describe green areas which form breaks within the urban area.

Warwickshire Biological Records Centre	WBRC contains information on species distribution and ecological sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull for which it is the most comprehensive data bank of species and habitat records in the County.
Waste-to-energy	Waste-to-energy or energy-from-waste is the process of creating energy in the form of electricity or heat from the incineration of waste source. Waste to energy is a form of energy recovery. Most waste to energy processes produce electricity directly through combustion, or produce a combustible fuel commodity, such as methane, methanol, ethanol or synthetic fuels.
Watercourse	Streams and rivers. (When people refer to the management of the land adjacent to watercourses they usually also mean the land adjacent to ponds, lakes, etc.)
Wildlife	Living organisms that are neither human nor domesticated.
Wildlife Sites Partnership	Oversees the project to develop and maintain a formalised Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) system for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.
Woodland	The part of woods and forests where the ecological condition is, or will be, strongly influenced by the tree canopy. In terms of land cover statistics (in UK), woodland is currently defined as land with trees where the mature trees would cover more than 20% by area.

Appendix 2: Policy background

National policy, Strategy and Legislation

Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) (1995)

Natural England's policy on accessible natural green space states that everyone should live within 300m of 2 ha of accessible green space. Solihull Council produced its own Green Space Strategy in 2006 which included natural green space provision as an important feature.

Agenda 21 (1992)

Agenda 21 was one of the outcomes of the "Earth Summit" held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Since then "sustainable development" has become a key objective in the policy and work of both national and local government in the UK. This led to the UK committing to working towards national strategies for the protection of our local,

Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan (1994)

Emerging from Rio was The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan) published in 1994. This produced lists of threatened and declining species and habitats (amended and updated in 2007) with targets and specific actions for protecting and enhancing their conservation status. The aim of the convention and the subsequent strategies was halting biodiversity loss by 2010.

Climate Change: The UK Programme (2000)

The UK's Climate Change Programme was published in November 2000. It detailed how the UK plans to deliver its Kyoto target to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5%, and move towards its domestic goal to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010. A review was launched in September 2004. The UK already has policies in place which are consistent with its responsibilities under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to protect and enhance carbon sinks, such as forests. The Government is exploring ways of encouraging renewable energy generated from energy crops such as short rotation coppice and miscanthus, and from forest residues and wood fuel. Biomass from forests and woods can also be used as a substitute for fossil fuels. Energy generation from wood has no effect on the overall carbon dioxide balance, provided it comes from sustainably managed woods and forests.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010

These regulations replace The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, and update the legislation and consolidate all the many amendments which have been made to the Regulations since they were first made in 1994. The Regulations provide for the designation and protection of European sites, the protection of European protected species, and the adaptation of planning and other controls for the protection of European Sites. Under the Regulations, local authorities have a general duty, in the exercise of any of their functions, to have regard to the EC Habitats Directive.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 apply in the terrestrial environment and in territorial waters out to 12 nautical miles.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 amended the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, giving greater protection to SSSIs and included within Section 74, lists of habitats and species (taken from the UKBAP) as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) regulations (2006)

The Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) regulations act to protect uncultivated land and semi-natural areas from being damaged by agricultural work, and to guard against possible negative environmental effects from the restructuring of rural land holdings.

What types of work are covered by the regulations?

The regulations cover two different types of project:

1. Projects on uncultivated land, or semi-natural areas that increase the productivity for agriculture. The types of work covered will include:
 - increasing levels of fertiliser or soil improvers
 - sowing seed
 - physically cultivating the soil (by ploughing, tine harrowing, rotovating etc)
 - draining land
 - clearing existing vegetation either physically or using herbicides.
2. Projects that physically restructure rural land holdings. This includes:
 - the addition or removal of field boundaries
 - re-contouring the land through addition, removal or redistribution of earth or other material.

Environmental impact assessment (Forestry)

The Forestry Commission is responsible administering the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 and the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (Scotland) Regulations 1999.

These regulations affect four "forestry" projects. These are:

- Afforestation: Planting new woods and forests, includes direct seeding or natural regeneration, planting Christmas trees or short rotation coppice;
- Deforestation: Felling woodland to use the land for a different purpose;
- Forest roads: The formation, alteration or maintenance of private ways on land used (or to be used) for forestry purposes. This includes roads within a forest or leading to one; and
- Forestry quarries: Quarrying to obtain materials required for forest road works on land that is used or will be used for forestry purposes or on land held or occupied with that land.

Environmental Impact Assessment (Planning, building and the environment)

EIA is a procedure that must be followed for certain types of development before they are granted development consent. The requirement for EIA comes from a European Directive (85/33/EEC as amended by 97/11/EC). The procedure requires the developer to compile an Environmental Statement (ES) describing the likely significant effects of the development on the environment and proposed mitigation measures. The ES must be circulated to statutory consultation bodies and made available to the public for comment. Its contents, together with any comments, must be taken into account by the competent authority (e.g. local planning authority) before it may grant consent.

Future Water (2008)

Future Water is the Government's water strategy for England. It recognises healthy water resources are necessary for a high-quality natural environment. It states the government's vision for water policy and management is one where, by 2030 at the latest, we have improved the quality of our water environment and the ecology that it supports. It aims to achieve healthy rivers, lakes, estuaries, coasts and groundwaters that provide maximum resilience to climate change and sustain biodiversity.

Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty (Defra, 2007)

This document provides guidance for Local Authorities and emphasises that all departments and functions of local authorities have a vital role to play in the conservation of biodiversity. In particular, the following aspects are highlighted as essential to integrate biodiversity into local authority services:

- Fulfilling statutory obligations for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within the forward planning and development control processes.
- Incorporating the conservation of biodiversity and its benefits into relevant strategies of the local authority. These include Corporate Strategies, sustainable development strategies, procurement strategies, asset management plans, economic development plans and environmental management systems.
- Having regard to biodiversity within partnership arrangements such as Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements.
- Taking account of the links between biodiversity and other environmental programmes such as waste management, energy conservation and response to climate change.
- Delivering the key principles for biodiversity set out in national planning guidance.
- Participating in local biodiversity partnerships and helping to deliver objectives of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (and where appropriate UK Biodiversity Action Plans) within relevant local authority services.
- Working in partnership with other organisations to promote beneficial land management for biodiversity.
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity on the local authority estate.
- Identifying policy drivers and ensuring up-to-date biodiversity data is available to the local authority including support to Local Record Centres.
- Identifying Local Sites of importance for biodiversity and managing systems, in partnership with others, to take these into account within the planning and land management processes.
- Using the benefits of access to biodiversity in the delivery of services to the public such as social care, community development, health, and recreation.
- Supporting appropriate access to nature and understanding of the natural world within schools, community engagement, education programmes and raising awareness of biodiversity to the public.

Hedgerow Regulations (1997)

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 gave statutory protection to most countryside hedgerows.

Inland Waterways: Unlocking the Potential and Securing the Future of Inland Waterways through the Planning System (TCPA 2009)

The purpose of this PAN is to:

- highlight the different types of waterways that form the inland waterway network, including their different characteristics, roles, uses and functions;
- promote the contribution that inland waterways make to economic, social and environmental agendas;
- demonstrate how inland waterways contribute to the Government's key policy objectives;
- highlight the public benefits generated by waterways so that they are fully appreciated by policy-makers and influencers, and by planners at all the different spatial levels;
- identify the key planning policy challenges and issues that need to be

tackled in order to fully unlock the economic, social and environmental benefits of inland waterways and secure their long-term sustainability as a national asset;

- promote the need for a supportive planning policy framework for inland waterways at all the different spatial levels; and
- make recommendations to policy-makers and planners at the different spatial levels on how the planning system can help to secure the long-term future, and support the development, regeneration and improvement, of the inland waterways network.

Local Sites Guidance (2006)

Defra's Local Sites Guidance was produced in 2006 recognising the importance of Local Site Partnerships and the selection of robustly defensible locally important wildlife and geological sites.

Making Space for Water (2005)

Making Space for Water is a strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management which aims to contribute to sustainable development, combining the delivery of social and environmental benefits with the protection of economic assets. It aims to ensure an understanding of the future risks of river and coastal flooding is fully embedded into the spatial planning system, including planning for new settlements and other new developments and that consistent and holistic management of urban flood risk, with strategic planning, partnerships of responsible bodies and clear understanding of various flood risk responsibilities

National Character Areas (Natural England, 2005)

England has been divided into areas with similar landscape character, which are called National Character Areas (NCAs); previously known as Joint Character Areas (JCAs).

The Character of England Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map produced in 2005 by Natural England's with support from English Heritage, was an update to the 1996 map. This map subdivides England into 159 NCAs, it provides a picture of the differences in landscape character at the national scale.

A set of eight regional volumes were published describing the 159 NCAs. These character descriptions of each NCA highlight the influences which determine the character of the landscape, for example land cover and buildings and settlement; they can be downloaded from our website or ordered from our publications section. The NCAs are a widely recognised national spatial framework, used for a range of applications. NCAs form part of the data gathered for a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). LCAs provide more detailed descriptions at a local level within NCAs.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act) created Natural England. Under s.40 local authorities have a duty to have regard for the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of all of their functions. Reference is made in s.41 to a list of habitats and species maintained by Defra which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity or priority species and habitats, these are the UK BAP habitats and species.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

From 1 January 2009, the areas covered by Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) were increased to approximately 70 per cent of England. This includes the 55 per cent originally designated in 2002. Guidance has been produced by Defra and the Environment Agency to help farmers in NVZs understand the requirements, and implement and comply with the new Action Programme measures.

No Charge? Valuing the Natural Environment (Natural England, 2009)

The debate about environmental policies still tends to be underpinned by a strong fear of the 'harm' that efforts to improve the natural environment can do to competitiveness and the economy. This Natural England publication dispels the notion of an inherent trade-off between nature on the one hand and future economic growth and prosperity on the other. In the current economic climate, restoring growth, financial stability and creating jobs are critical short-term goals; Natural England explain how this can be achieved in such a way as to prepare us for the future challenges that lie ahead.

Our Countryside: The Future (2000)

Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England was produced in 2000 and sought to sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all. The report's principle themes were:

- Support vital village services
- Modernise rural services
- Provide affordable homes
- Deliver local transport solutions
- Rejuvenate market towns and a thriving local economy
- Set a new direction for farming
- Preserve what makes rural England special
- Ensure everyone can enjoy an accessible countryside
- Give local power to country towns and villages
- Think rural.

It aimed to reduce development pressure through policies and by targeting development on brownfield sites; strengthen countryside management; develop a more holistic approach, taking account of all landscapes in national best practice guidance; and reverse the decline in farmland birds, restore threatened habitats, and increase funding to maintain biodiversity.

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced statutory spatial planning through the production of Local Development Frameworks and, for the first time, incorporated sustainable development at the core of the planning process. This sustainability principle is backed up by Planning Policy Statement 1 'Sustainable Development and Planning.'

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

Planning Policy Statement 1 sets out the Government's overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. Its states development plans should:

- ensure that sustainable development is pursued in an integrated manner; in line with the principles for sustainable development set out in the UK strategy.

- promote outcomes in which environmental, economic and social objectives are achieved together over time contribute to global sustainability by addressing the causes and potential impacts of climate change.

Planning policies should seek to protect and enhance the quality, character and amenity value of the countryside and urban areas as a whole. A high level of protection should be given to most valued townscapes and landscapes, wildlife habitats and natural resources.

Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change - Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 (2005)

This Planning Policy Statement sets out how planning, in providing for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure needed by communities, should help shape places with lower carbon emissions and resilient to the climate change now accepted as inevitable

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (2010)

Planning Policy Statements set out the Government's national policies on aspects of planning in England. PPS3 sets out the national planning policy framework for delivering the Government's housing objectives. This PPS reflects the Government's commitment to improving the affordability and supply of housing in all communities, including rural areas, informed by the findings of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission. The delivery of housing in rural areas should respect the key principles underpinning this PPS, providing high quality housing that contributes to the creation and maintenance of sustainable rural communities in market towns and villages.

Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (2009)

This sets out the Government's comprehensive policy framework for planning for sustainable economic development in urban and rural areas. One objective of the Statement is to raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas by promoting thriving, inclusive and locally distinctive rural communities whilst continuing to protect the open countryside for the benefit of all.

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010)

This document sets out planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment. The policies and principles set out in this statement also apply to the consideration of the historic environment in relation to the other heritage-related consent regimes for which planning authorities are responsible under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This statement also covers heritage assets that are not designated but which are of heritage interest and are thus a material planning consideration. The historic environment within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is also the subject of general policies within PPS7.

Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)

The national planning policy framework provides considerable encouragement to Local Authorities involved in promoting initiatives such as the Forest of Arden. The Government's Objectives for rural areas are outlined in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and include raising 'the quality of life and the environment in rural areas through the promotion of good quality, sustainable development that respects and, where possible, enhances local distinctiveness and the intrinsic qualities of the countryside.'

Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

Planning Policy Statement 9 (ODPM 2005) on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation and the accompanying best practice guide lays out a set of principles that Local Authorities should follow to ensure that biodiversity and geological heritage are fully considered in the decision making process. The accompanying ODPM circular 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system gives guidance on how the legal provisions for site and species protection and local authority duties for nature conservation need to be taken into account.

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Sport and Recreation (2006)

This PPG describes the role of the planning system in assessing opportunities and needs for sport and recreation provision and safeguarding open space which has recreational value. The guidance observes that it is part of the function of the planning system to ensure that through the preparation of development plans adequate land and water resources are allocated for organised sport and informal recreation.

Local authorities must take into account the community's need for recreational space, having regard to current levels of provision and deficiencies and resisting pressures for development of open space which conflict with the wider public interest.

Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System (2005)

ODPM Circular 06/2005 (paragraph 91) makes specific reference to the conservation and enhancement of ancient semi-natural woodland and veteran trees: 'veteran and other substantial trees and many types of woodland, especially ancient semi-natural woodland, can be of importance for biodiversity conservation. When considering whether particular trees or woodlands merit a TPO in the interests of amenity, local planning authorities should, where appropriate, include consideration of their nature conservation value.' Furthermore, paragraph 90 states that 'when granting planning permission for any development, local planning authorities are under a duty, where appropriate, to impose planning conditions to ensure adequate provision is made for the protection or planting of trees, and to make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) as appear necessary in the circumstances.'

Securing Biodiversity (2008)

Securing Biodiversity - A new framework for delivering priority habitats and species in England aims to halt, and then reverse biodiversity loss. It requires an integrated approach, with a renewed focus on delivery for whole ecosystems, and at a landscape scale. The framework retains and builds upon some of the strengths of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan process, including the target-based approach and strong partnerships. The framework is a renewed call to action and it emphasises the need for clearer accountabilities for delivery. It states that regional and local biodiversity partnerships are a critical component of the framework for delivery.

Securing the Future- delivering UK sustainable development strategy (2005)

In 1994, the UK became the first country to publish a national sustainable development strategy: Sustainable Development, the UK Strategy, following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. A revised strategy, A Better Quality of Life was published in 1999; whilst the current strategy, Securing the Future – delivering

UK sustainable development strategy was published in 2005. The strategy has stronger international and societal dimensions building on the 1999 strategy. It develops five principles with a more explicit focus on environmental limits and agrees four priorities: sustainable consumption and production, climate change, natural resource protection, and sustainable communities; in addition to a new indicator set, which is more outcome focused.

Safeguarding our Soils: A Strategy for England

The new Soil Strategy for England sets out a vision to improve the sustainable management of soil and tackle degradation within 20 years. It covers a range of sectors including agriculture, land management, planning and construction and provides a strategic framework for action that should facilitate Defra's work with delivery partners.

Strong and Prosperous Communities (DCLG, 2006)

A new Local Government Performance Framework for monitoring and regulating local government was set out in Chapter 6 of this White Paper. Key elements of the new framework include Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreements, National Indicators and Comprehensive Area Assessments. Solihull MBC has responded to this by the formation of the Solihull Strategic Partnership, the production of Solihull's Sustainable Community Strategy, adopting National Indicator 197 as part of a suite of Local Area Agreements and reporting on biodiversity as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment under Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) 3.1: the Use of Resources (further details on these given in 2.1.3).

The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009)

Renewable energy is the key to low-carbon energy future. The Government sees the need to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as diversify energy sources. The UK needs to increase the use of renewable electricity, heat and transport, and this Strategy explains how this will happen. The Strategy addresses CO2 emissions, promotes the security of the UK's energy supply and the creation of up to half a million jobs in the renewable energy sector.

Water for people and the environment: Water Resources Strategy for England and Wales (EA, 2009)

This strategy sets out how the Environment Agency believes water resources should be managed throughout England and Wales to 2050 and beyond to ensure that there will be enough water for people and the environment. With the growing pressures on water resources and the water environment, careful planning is essential to ensure there is sufficient water for society and the economy, as well as the environment. This document identifies the actions we believe are necessary, and in particular those that are needed to deal with the serious challenges of growth and climate change.

Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is designed to improve and integrate the way water bodies are managed throughout Europe. Member States must aim to reach good chemical and ecological status in inland and coastal waters by 2015. In the UK the Environment Agency must ensure that River Basin Management Plans are developed through consultation with stakeholders in each river basin district and that the measures in the plans are delivered. This requirement for integrated river basin planning and management will help deliver the necessary collaborative approach and achieve improved water quality. The WFD requires

that all polluters of the water environment should pay, and that implementation of the directive is achieved in a fair and proportionate way across all sectors. The Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) is difficult to apply in practice, particularly in the case of agriculture where farmers' activities have both positive (producing necessary food) and negative (contributing to diffuse water pollution) effects.

Waterways for Everyone (2007)

This report aims to promote the waterways, encouraging a modern, integrated and sustainable approach to their use. This involves conserving the waterways, while at the same time maximising the opportunities they offer for leisure, recreation and cultural heritage, urban and rural regeneration, the natural environment, their contribution to Green Infrastructure, in mitigation / adaptation to climate change and for sustainable freight transport.

Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 remains one of the most important pieces of wildlife legislation in Great Britain, and is divided into four parts.

- Part I is concerned with the protection of wildlife (prohibiting certain methods of killing or taking wild animals, amending the law relating to protection of certain mammals, restricting the introduction of certain animals and plants and amending the Endangered Species (Import & Export) Act 1976)
- Part II relates to the countryside and national parks and the designation of protected areas (amending the law relating to nature conservation, the countryside and National Parks)
- Part III covers public rights of way (amending the law relating to public rights of way)
- Part IV deals with miscellaneous provisions of the Act.

There have been various amendments to the text of the Act, most significantly through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 (in England and Wales). It is also the means by which the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the 'Bern Convention') and the European Union Directives on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) and Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC) are implemented in Great Britain.

Working with the grain of nature: A biodiversity strategy for England (Defra, 2002)

The Biodiversity Strategy for England aims to ensure that biodiversity considerations become embedded in all the main sectors of economic activity, public and private. It establishes the changes necessary to conserve, enhance and work with the grain of nature and ecosystems rather than against them. It takes account of climate change as one of the most important factors affecting biodiversity and influencing our policies. It also sets out a series of actions that will be taken by the Government and its partners to make biodiversity a fundamental consideration in agriculture, water, woodland, marine and coastal management and urban areas. Furthermore the Strategy looks at ways of engaging society as a whole in understanding the needs of biodiversity and what can be done by everyone to help conserve and enhance it.

Regional policy and strategy

Biodiversity and adaptation to climate change

West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership (2008)

This advisory note explains why adaptation is an important issue for local authorities, and will become increasingly so, alongside the already urgent mitigation agenda. It provides a concise explanation of the potential impacts of climate change on biodiversity. It sets out the drivers for action and includes a set of adaptation principles to address the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. It also highlights further resources to develop truly sustainable strategies to deal with biodiversity under the impacts of climate change.

Countryside Character – Volume 5: West Midlands, Character Area 97 Arden

Solihull lies in the Arden character area, for which a character description is included in the Countryside Agency's 'Countryside Character – West Midlands Volume'. The region known as Arden is an area of former wood pasture and ancient farmlands lying on the eastern side of the Birmingham plateau. Traditionally regarded as the land between the river Tame and the river Avon in Warwickshire, Arden type landscapes also extend into north Worcestershire.

The key characteristics of the Arden countryside are:

- Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform.
- Ancient landscape pattern of small fields, winding lanes and dispersed, isolated hamlets.
- Contrasting patterns of well-hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands interspersed with larger semi-regular fields on former deer parks and estates, and a geometric pattern on former commons.
- Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large, old oak trees often associated with heathland remnants.

Enhancing Biodiversity across the West Midlands

West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership and Natural England (2008)

The maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity is of fundamental importance because it is an integral part of sustainable development; an essential component of improving quality of life; critical to our future health and well being; important for economic development and regeneration; an expectation of government policy; and a statutory obligation. This regional guidance sets out to demonstrate, to local planning authorities, how Local Opportunity Mapping for biodiversity in the West Midlands will make a major contribution to achieving national and regional policy objectives and statutory requirements for enhancing biodiversity.

Green Infrastructure: A Prospectus for the West Midlands Region (WMRA, 2007)

The Forestry Commission, on behalf of the Assembly's Regional Environment Partnership, commissioned the production of the West Midlands Green Infrastructure Prospectus and accompanying technical report. The prospectus is designed to inform regional, sub regional and local policy and practice, sets out the regional vision for green infrastructure and has the following five aims:

- To ensure politicians, policy developers and decision makers throughout the West Midlands are aware of the vital roles of Green Infrastructure.
- To advocate greater investment in, and improved management of, the Region's existing Green Infrastructure.
- To ensure Green Infrastructure is appreciated as an essential element of delivering sustainable communities, underpinning growth and regeneration.
- To promote a robust and systematic approach to Green Infrastructure as-

assessment, planning and investment by local, sub regional and regional planning bodies.

- To ensure Green Infrastructure is proactively planned from the earliest stages of strategic plan preparation through to concept and design stages of all future developments in the Region.

Growing our future: West Midlands Regional Forestry Framework Delivery Plan 2010-2013

This delivery plan sets out detailed actions, targets and success indicators with regard to delivering Trees, Woods and Forestry to benefit those living in, working in and visiting the West Midlands.

Landscapes for Living Project (West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership)

To support the West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Strategy second objective, the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership manages the Landscapes for Living Project (funded primarily by the West Midlands Wildlife Trusts). The project seeks to develop a 50-year vision, including a regional biodiversity map showing the areas containing where the region's most precious biodiversity resource is currently concentrated. Solihull lies in the Arden character area, for which a Character description is included in the Countryside Agency's 'Countryside Character – West Midlands Volume'. The predominant character of the Borough is Ancient Arden – an area of former wood pasture and heath, characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, ancient woodlands and mature hedgerow oaks. It is these areas which will need to be expanded and linked to provide the kind of landscape scale approach which will benefit both people and wildlife.

Putting the Historic Environment to Work: A Strategy for the West Midlands 2010-2015

This strategy sets the overall direction for the historic environment sector in the region. It will be a tool, for planning, decision making, setting targets and actions, and will be implemented by many different partners, for the benefit of all throughout the region. The strategy will help guide the day to day activities of the organisations represented on the Historic Environment Forum.

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the West Midlands (2008)

The forthcoming Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the West Midlands policies relevant to this guidance are:

- SR1: Climate Change
- SR2: Creating Sustainable Communities
- SR3: Sustainable Design and Construction
- SR4: Improving Air Quality for Sensitive Ecosystems
- UR1: Implementing Urban Renaissance - the MUAs
- UR4: Social Infrastructure
- RR2: The Rural Regeneration Zone
- CF3: Levels and distribution of housing development
- PA1: Prosperity for All
- PA3: High-Technology Corridors
- PA6: Development related to Higher/Further Education and Research

Establishments and incubator units

- PA10: Tourism and Culture
- PA14: Economic Development and the Rural Economy
- PA15: Agriculture and Farm Diversification
- QE1: Conserving and Enhancing the Environment
- QE2: Restoring degraded areas and managing and creating high quality new environments

- QE3: Creating a high quality built environment for all
- QE4: Greenery, Urban Greenspace and Public Spaces
- QE5: Protection and enhancement of the Historic Environment
- QE6: The conservation, enhancement and restoration of the Region's landscape
- QE7: Protecting, managing and enhancing the Region's Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Resources
- QE8: Forestry and Woodlands
- QE9: The Water Environment
- M1: Mineral Working for Non-Energy Minerals
- T11: Airports

The RSS for the West Midlands (2005) Policy QE7 'Protecting, Managing and enhancing the Regions Biodiversity and Nature Conservation resources' makes clear the priority Natural Conservation assets that are important at the strategic level:

- Species and habitats of international, national and sub-regional importance as identified in the West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Audit, Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) and other BAPs
- Those that receive statutory protection and:
- The biodiversity enhancement areas or BEAs (see below)

The importance of the Blythe catchment as a regional and nationally important landscape and biodiversity feature is recognised by the identification in the RSS of a 'Biodiversity Enhancement Zone'. BEAs are identified by the RSS as 'some of the best prospects for retaining environments with a rich and resilient biodiversity resource' In support of this, the Council has a policy to conserve and enhance the Blythe in Solihull's Unitary Development Plan (UDP): Policy ENV12.

River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plan (EA, 2008)

The River Trent Catchment Flood Management Plan provides a scientific approach to understand and describe how the catchment behaves and what the most sustainable flood risk management policies may be over the next 50 to 100 years. This understanding will be used to plan the most acceptable measures to manage flood risk for the long-term. Relevant policy units include 6 and 10.

Policy unit 6 covers Mid-Staffordshire and the Lower Tame. The overarching objective of Policy 6 is to keep water on the land for longer and to encourage areas which would naturally be wet, to become wet again. To achieve this at a meaningful scale, the EA states a wide range of measures and actions will be required over a significant length of time. The intention is to encourage land use change (i.e. changes in farming practice and increased areas of wetland), more sustainable river maintenance and management (i.e. river restoration) and development control, to create a landscape and river system that slows down the response to rainfall and does not to allow widespread unmanaged and damaging flooding to occur.

Whilst policy unit 10 covers Birmingham and the Black Country, it is important to note that flood risk within Birmingham is complex and is the result of flooding from a wide range of sources, including the main river Tame, smaller tributaries which run through the city, surface water run-off, storm water drainage and sewer overflow. The CMFP suggests one key aspect of reducing flood risk within the city will be development control, and applying the 'making space for water' approach to urban growth and urban re-generation; working with professional partners to manage flood risk in a coordinated way, not just relying on flood defences.

Securing biodiversity in the West Midlands: The West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Delivery Plan 2010 – 2015

The West Midlands Biodiversity Delivery Plan sets out the priorities for delivery within the region taking account of national priorities. It seeks to guide future delivery by all partners and to assist funding organisations on the regional priorities; focus on those habitats considered to be a priority for landscape scale enhancement; identify delivery issues and mechanisms and identify the landscapes scale projects particular those that require urgent action to meet the delivery gaps identified on an annual basis.

The WM Regional Biodiversity Delivery Plan outlines the regional biodiversity targets to 2015, which are a sub-set of the new revised targets to 2016 developed as part of the RSS review. The targets have been used to develop a list of regional priority habitats for landscape scale restoration. A 50 year 'Biodiversity Vision and Opportunity Map' describes the locations across the region that are considered the best opportunity to enhance biodiversity at a landscape scale over the next 50 years. These include 30 landscape areas, 7 Strategic River corridors, Urban Areas, 9 Growth Points. The delivery plan provides a robust framework for delivering biodiversity within the West Midlands region.

West Midlands Health and Well-Being Strategy (WMRA 2008)

The Strategy's aim is to reducing the health inequalities that exist in the West Midlands by 2020. There are eight main themes within the Strategy: 1.) Planning, Transport and Health, 2.) Housing and Health, 3.) Environment and Health, 4.) Economy, Skills and Health, 5.) Culture, Leisure and Health, 6.) Safer and Stronger Communities, 7.) Children, Young People and Families, and 8.) Later Life. These are key areas where most impact can be made on reducing the health inequalities. One of its important conclusions the Strategy is that decisions made by planning and housing bodies directly affect the health of the population.

Section 4: Environment and Health is particularly relevant to the Countryside Strategy and has the following points (amongst others):

- Promote the benefits of a diverse natural environment for physical and mental health and support the development of green infrastructure
- Increase the number of people using the countryside and green spaces, in particular to work to meet emerging standards for accessible local green space
- Tackle climate change and its impacts, by reducing emissions of global warming gases and promoting adaptation to climate change

West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy: Connecting to Success (Advantage WM, 2007)

Connecting to Success is described as the first low carbon RES, and includes sustainable communities and sustainable living amongst its strategic objectives. It recognises the need for the more efficient use of resources and changes to patterns of consumption and demand. It also recognises environmental technologies have potential for job and wealth creation, particularly in rural areas. Importantly, the WMES also acknowledges the links between poor environment and deprivation. Together with the latest version of the RSS, this will make up the new Regional Strategy as of April 2010.

West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Strategy (2005)

The West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Strategy published in 2005 outlines the following five key challenges for the region:

- Maintaining and improving the condition of habitats, species and ecosystems.
- Developing an area based approach to restoring wildlife.
- Monitoring the condition of habitats, species and ecosystems.
- Re-connecting and integrating action for biodiversity with other environmental, social and economic activity.
- Coping with the impacts of climate change.

West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan (GOWM, 2007)

The West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan sets out the actions that the regional organisations can take over the next three years to move towards a position where all regional policy addresses the causes and impacts of climate change as a central objective. The Action Plan contains 30 actions covering six regional climate change priorities:-

- Planning and environment
- Economy
- Implementation
- Leadership
- Communication
- Targets and monitoring

Delivery of the Action Plan is managed through the Climate Change Office, a body comprising representatives from five key regional partners - the Government Office for the West Midlands, Advantage West Midlands, the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the Environment Agency and Natural England. The delivery of the Action Plan is overseen by a Climate Change Panel comprising Chief Executives and Directors of the five key partner organisations, who report to the Regional Minister.

Local policy and strategy

An Economic Development Strategy for Solihull 2008-2011

The Economic Development Strategy provides a framework for partners from all sectors – public, private, voluntary and community - to respond to the economic challenges facing Solihull. The Strategy will contribute to the delivery of the vision of the 'Sustainable Community Strategy'; in particular providing a framework for:

- ensuring the competitiveness of Solihull and its businesses in the global economy;
- widening economic opportunity to all of Solihull's residents; and
- ensuring sustainable forms of economic activity (production and consumption) which reduce carbon emissions.

Biodiversity and Geological Conservation Validation Checklist (adopted as SPG, 2008)

Solihull's Biodiversity and Geological Conservation Validation Checklist provides landowners and planners details of the types of applications that require ecological surveys before a decision can be made in addition to the time of year to undertake the survey. This tool will ensure that applications are not validated if information on biodiversity impacts are missing, ensure that landowners are aware of and adhere to relevant wildlife legislation, in addition to reducing planning administration costs.

Climate Change Strategy (2009)

To meet the challenge that climate change presents, Solihull council must reduce its carbon footprint and increase its adaptive capacity, in addition to communicating the risks, benefits and opportunities presented by climate change and the benefits of taking action and lead action. In terms of biodiversity impacts, the council needs to ensure good habitat connectivity exists throughout the borough and that areas do not become isolated or fragmented. This will ensure that our native flora and fauna can adapt to climate change by physically moving. Adjustments to the management of parks, roadside green spaces and gardens may need to be made to ensure the survival of plants sensitive to higher temperature and wetter winter conditions. In addition the council will need to monitor and control the introduction or spread of non-native flora and fauna that take advantage of the changed conditions.

Cycling Strategy

Cycling is an important means of sustainable transport and cycling is an excellent way of accessing and enjoying the countryside of Solihull. The purpose of the Solihull Cycling Strategy is to:

- Co-ordinate all policies and programmes of action which assist in promoting cycling as an attractive, safe and sustainable form of transport for all standards of cyclist;
- Identify the objectives, targets and mechanisms to be adopted by the Council in its attempt to further promote cycling;
- Deal with all aspects of catering for, and encouraging utility and leisure cycling;
- Address safety issues and those factors that discourage cycling; and
- Describe the potential for, and means by which, cycling can contribute to meeting overall Local Transport Objectives within the West Midlands.

Economic Development Strategy (2008 – 2011)

The Economic Development Strategy provides a framework for partners from all sectors – public, private, voluntary and community - to respond to the economic challenges facing Solihull. In particular, the Strategy provides a framework for:

- ensuring the competitiveness of Solihull and its businesses in the global economy;
- widening economic opportunity to all of Solihull's residents; and
- ensuring sustainable forms of economic activity (production and consumption) which reduce carbon emissions.

The Strategy has six headline priorities identified which are key to the sustainable economic development of Solihull and ensuring sustainable communities in Solihull:

1. To close the gap of inequality facing some of Solihull's residents – particularly residents of the 'North Solihull' wards of Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge and Smith's Wood;
2. To ensure Solihull's continued competitiveness as an investment location – including by safeguarding key assets including high quality employment sites and business premises, a highly qualified workforce and quality of life assets;
3. To ensure the continued success of Solihull's strategic economic assets: Birmingham International Airport, the NEC, Land Rover, Birmingham and Blythe Valley Business Parks and Solihull Town Centre;
4. To develop local enterprise and ensure the competitiveness of Solihull businesses in a global market place;
5. To ensure a skilled, qualified and entrepreneurial workforce; and

6. To promote environmentally sustainable forms of economic activity (production and consumption) which reduce carbon emissions.

Green Spaces Strategy (2006)

The Solihull Green Spaces Strategy aims to encompass both space for people and for wildlife, taking into account the landscape and local character of different parts of Solihull. It developed proposals to reflect the many functions of the 6 zones identified. This was supported by a green infrastructure plan and put forward some local standards in addition to action and implementation plans.

Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA)

The PPS9 Key Principles state that planning decisions should be based on up-to-date information on biodiversity and geological resources. The Council is a partner in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) which has surveyed all the natural habitats in the area and continues to up date the information on a rolling programme. The habitat data will be used as a sustainability indicator and will enable more accurate assessment of the consequences of proposed development.

Housing Strategy (2010 – 2011)

Solihull's Housing Strategy provides the overall framework for housing activity and investment by the Council and its partner organisations. It is concerned with housing in all tenures and links to more detailed strategies on specific segments of the market, such as council housing and supported housing, the details of which are dealt with in other documents. The Strategy helps implement the objectives of Solihull's Community Strategy 2008- 2018 One Borough: an equal chance for all' and contributes to the corporate Council Plan 2009-2012 and to regional and sub- regional strategies on housing and regeneration. It is informed also by national housing policy, particularly on sustainable communities.

Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2004 – 2029

Solihull Council's Municipal Waste Management Strategy sets out a strategic framework for the management of municipal waste. As a unitary Authority, Solihull Council has a statutory duty for both the collection and disposal of household waste arisings together with associated waste management and recycling targets.

Solihull's Municipal Waste Management Strategy sets out the following:

- The Council's objectives and standards for service.
- Policies and plans on how to achieve objectives and standards.
- Framework for monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Communication plans with Government, key stakeholders, partners and the wider community.

National Local Government Performance Indicator 197 (NI 197): Improved Local Biodiversity (2008-11)

Solihull Council has adopted NI 197. The indicator measures the performance of Local authorities (LAs) for biodiversity by assessing the implementation of positive conservation management of Local Sites (LWS). The indicator relates to the influence LAs have on Local Site systems and the measures and procedures involved in ensuring effective conservation management is introduced to, and acted upon by Local Site owners and managers.

National Indicator 185: CO2 reduction from Local Authority operations measures the progress of local authorities in reducing CO2 emissions from the relevant buildings and transport used to deliver their functions and to encourage them to demonstrate leadership on tackling climate change.

National Indicator 188: Planning to adapt to climate change measures progress on assessing and managing climate risks and opportunities, and incorporating appropriate action into local authority and partners' strategic planning.

National Indicator 189: Flood and coastal erosion risk management records the progress of local authorities in delivering agreed actions to implement long term flood and coastal risk management (FCERM) plans.

National Indicator 197: Improved Local Biodiversity measures the proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented. It aims conservation at the local level. Therefore Local Authorities have a key role to play in conserving biodiversity.

Nature Conservation Strategy: First Review (2010)

The Council has a Nature Conservation Strategy (2010); its vision is "A Solihull that enjoys a high quality environment for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Where biodiversity and geodiversity play an active role in place-making and economic activity, creating robust, self-sustaining, biodiversity rich landscapes which provide a range of ecosystem services, resilient to climate change." It sets out how the Council will achieve this,

North Solihull Green Space Review

The North Solihull Green Space Review evaluates the location, quality and accessibility of green space and develop a strategy that enhances the quality and accessibility (where practicable) of the land available and ensure there will be no overall loss of green space. This study recognises the importance of improving both the quality of green space and how green space is perceived and used together with safeguarding important sites. The study uses the information contained in the Green Space Strategy and the Zone Action Plan to move towards the delivery and realisation of the Zone Action Plan and the North Solihull Strategic Framework. A key commitment of the North Solihull Strategic Framework is that there will be no net loss of green space in the regeneration area. A key driver for the green space methodology is to establish a green space structure that results in a net increase in the quality and connectivity of the green space in North Solihull.

North Solihull Strategic Framework (adopted as SPG, 2005)

The Strategic Framework sets out a vision and regeneration objectives for North Solihull and a comprehensive plan for development and change with in the wards of Smith's Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge and Chelmsley Wood and contains a population of approximately 38,700 people. The Regeneration Area is based on the 'East Birmingham and North Solihull Regeneration Zone as defined in planning guidance and the Regional Economic Strategy (2007).

Place Making in North Solihull: Design Code (Regenerating North Solihull, 2007)

The design code is a document that provides guidance to developers and planners on the future development in North Solihull. The code adds to the information contained in the Strategic Framework adopted as SPG, 2005.

Play Strategy (2006)

During consultations with children, young people and families as part of the Local Preventative Strategy, the lack of "somewhere safe to go and something to do" was a consistent theme.

Societal changes have meant that many children have less access to play and recreational opportunities than ever before, yet evidence shows that quality play experiences are vital to a child's development. Locally, need was expressed for access to the widest possible range of play opportunities in order to build confidence, raise self-esteem and develop new skills.

There are a number of benefits identified for Solihull in having a written Play Policy and Strategy, to:

- Ensure that quality play opportunities are viewed as a right for all children and young people and regarded as an essential part of healthy development.
- Raise the profile of play in Solihull.
- Acknowledge that all partners at a strategic level value play.
- Be a useful document to link current strategies and services in a common framework.
- Help map current provision, and the range of agencies involved, but also identify gaps.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007 – 2012

As part of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act local authorities (LAs) have a duty to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Plan sets out the Council's plans for improving the network of public footpaths, bridleways and byways, in order to make the countryside more accessible for everyone. The Plan contains an action plan based on 7 themes: – signage, network maintenance, promotion and information availability, practical access, creating network links, road crossings and records.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Halcrow, 2008)

Solihull's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) was produced in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS 25) to enable the Council to effectively manage flood risk through each stage of the spatial planning process.

Sustainable Community Strategy (2008)

Solihull's Sustainable Community Strategy (2008) "One Borough: an equal chance for all" has a theme entitled 'A Place to Be' with the priority 'Living within our means – natural resources.' This includes the following outcome 'Ensure that all new development, and existing activities, where appropriate, include measures to conserve and enhance natural resources (soil, air, water and light); manage flood risk, reduce congestion, protect, link and enhance biodiversity and reduce consumption and waste.'

Supporting people is key to this strategy, which aims to enhance our quality for life through actions to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the Borough.

Unitary Development Plan (2006)

Solihull's UDP was published in March 2006. There are nine major policy areas which are all relevant to the countryside and this strategy to varying degrees. The areas of policy are: Housing; Employment and prosperity; Transport; Environment; Countryside; Retailing and centres; Sport, Recreation, Leisure and the Arts; Waste Management; and Minerals.

Urban Forestry Strategy (2004)

Solihull's Urban Forestry Strategy (2004) concentrates on the protection of the Borough's treescape. In addition the Council owns and manages 26 native woodlands, a number of which are ancient semi-natural woodland (PPS 9 directs Local Planning Authorities to have policies to protect Ancient woodland and veteran trees).

Walking Strategy (2009 – 2014)

Solihull Council recognises the importance of encouraging and developing walking opportunities within the borough and is committed to ensuring that 'Solihull is a place where safe, convenient and attractive opportunities to walk for both local journeys and recreational activity are readily available for all'. The new strategy will consider the role of walking now and in the future, how it is encouraged and developed nationally, regionally and locally, and looks at the policy context associated with this. At its heart are the links that the strategy and its associated action plan will need to make with current and future iterations of the Local Transport Plan, the existing rights of way improvement plan and the new Solihull cycling Strategy which is currently being developed.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan outlines how landowners, land-managers and policy makers will protect the characteristic wildlife and landscapes of our sub-region. The plan contains 26 Species Action Plans for our threatened plants and animals. There are 24 Habitat Action Plans including traditional orchards, woodlands, and wood-pasture, old parkland and veteran trees.

Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Project English Heritage, 2009)

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a GIS-based archaeological method for defining the historic and archaeological dimension of the present-day landscape. It can explain how and why the landscape looks as it does, identify landscape's 'time-depth' and facilitate sustainable management. The Historic Landscape Characterisation programme initiated by English Heritage and run in partnership with County Council Sites and Monuments Records provides a framework for broadening our understanding of the whole landscape and contributes to decisions affecting tomorrow's landscape.

Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines – Arden (1993)

Landscape Guidelines for Arden have been produced by Warwickshire County Council and the Countryside Agency and are adopted by the Council.

The 'Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines: Arden' provides a comprehensive landscape assessment, dividing Arden into seven distinct landscape types, and sets out a series of management strategies and landscape guidelines to guide new development and land management practices.

This document provides a detailed landscape character assessment for Solihull, showing on a map the different sub-areas, such as the 'Arden Parklands' area around Hampton-in-Arden, the 'Ancient Arden' landscapes around Meriden, and the 'Wooded Estatelands' around Dorridge. The document provides specific landscape policy guidance for each part of the Arden landscape, and these have in turn become incorporated into LDF policies and other strategies and plans of Solihull.

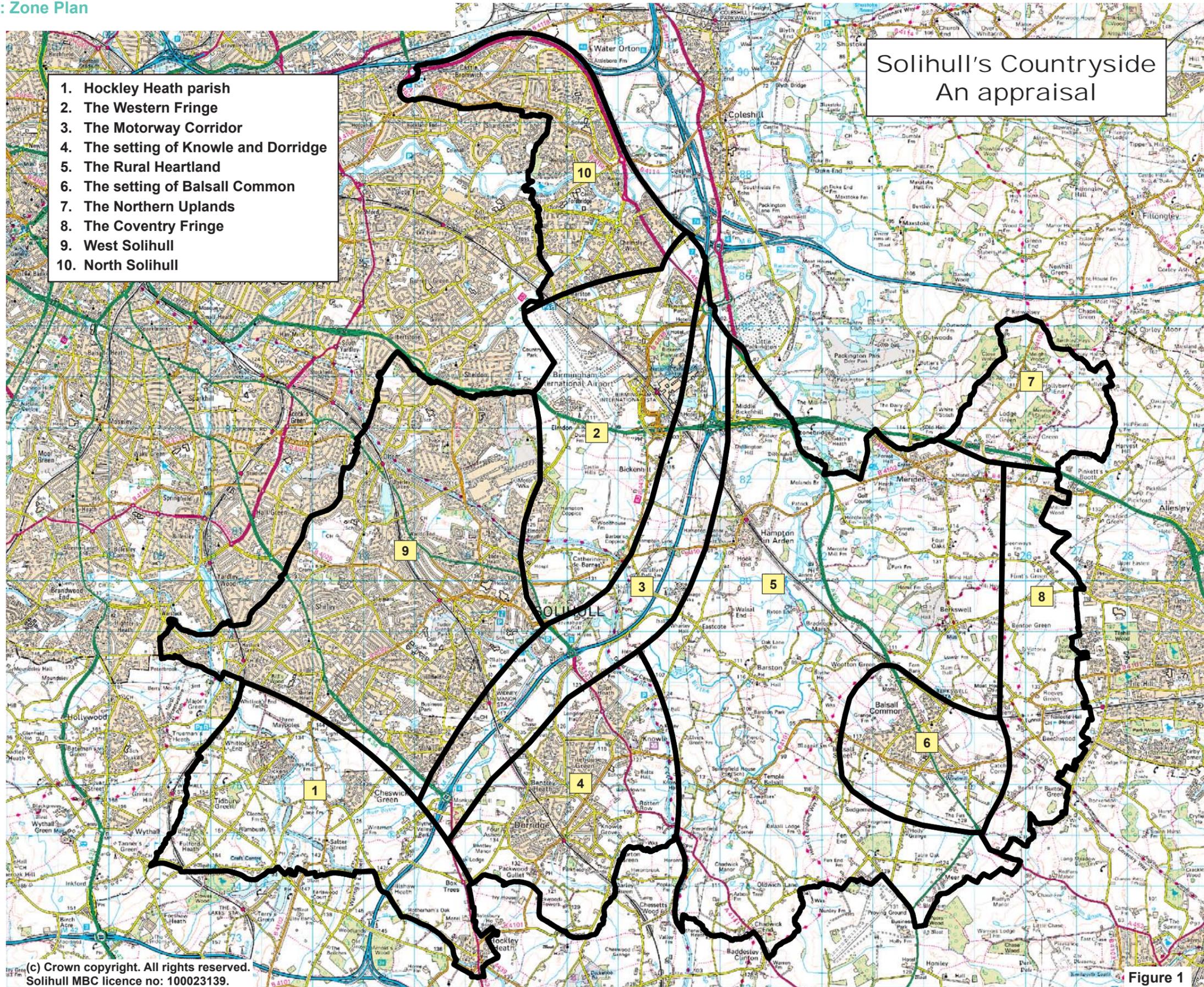
Warwickshire Local Geodiversity Action Plan (draft)

The Local Geodiversity Action Plans (LGAP) set out actions to conserve and enhance the geodiversity of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. They aim to:

- identify and audit the geodiversity resource
- conserve and manage Warwickshire's geodiversity
- protect Warwickshire's geodiversity through the planning system
- research Warwickshire's geodiversity
- increase awareness of Warwickshire's geodiversity with reference to professional bodies, conservation practitioners, landowners, the education sector, and the general public

Woodland Strategy (First Review 2010)

The Council has adopted a Woodland Strategy (First Review) which has the overall aim of protecting, managing and enhancing Solihull's woodlands for the benefit of Solihull residents, recreation, nature conservation and visual amenity.



1. Hockley Heath parish
2. The Western Fringe
3. The Motorway Corridor
4. The setting of Knowle and Dorridge
5. The Rural Heartland
6. The setting of Balsall Common
7. The Northern Uplands
8. The Coventry Fringe
9. West Solihull
10. North Solihull

Solihull's Countryside
An appraisal

(c) Crown copyright. All rights reserved.
Solihull MBC licence no: 100023139.

Figure 1

Solihull's Countryside Strategy: First review 2010 – 2020

Solihull MBC
PO Box 19
Council House
Solihull
B91 9QT

Telephone: 0121 704 8000

www.solihull.gov.uk