

Neighbourhood Plan Advice Sheet

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust receives many requests for help in writing and also commenting upon Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). Unfortunately, as a small charity, we do not have the staff resources to respond to each of these requests individually. Therefore we have created this general advice sheet telling you what you should consider including in NPs and also where you can access further information and advice.

Some of the other local Wildlife Trusts have agreements with local authorities to provide planning advice and may also have dedicated roles that look at planning applications. Some of these have produced advice on NPs which is available on the internet, we have provided links to some of these documents within this advice sheet. Some of the advice included in this document is directly sourced from other Wildlife Trust's advice and we have included links to the source where appropriate.

Find out what you have

A good way to start your plan is to find out any important features for wildlife in your local area. Some sites have been designated legally (statutory designated sites) and others through local policy (non-statutory designations). You may need to carry out surveys to identify any important areas for wildlife.

Statutory - Designated Sites

These sites are afforded legal protection through either domestic or European law. They include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Local communities play an important role in ensuring the protection of designated sites by ensuring that policies to protect them are included in Neighbourhood Plans. For example, by:

- requiring that potentially damaging developments are steered away from such areas
- implementing 'buffer zones' around sites to minimise the impacts of nearby developments
- identifying opportunities to create wildlife corridors between sites

(http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/default/files/150109_neighbourhood_plans.pdf)

Non-Statutory Designations

These are sites like Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) (www.lrwt.org.uk/what-we-do/local-wildlife-sites/) that are protected in local planning systems but not afforded legal protection. They have been designated due to their importance to wildlife at a county level. These form important habitats in their own right, links between habitats and may also act as corridors linking up other wildlife sites.

Through Neighbourhood Plans these areas (and areas with potential to support wildlife) could be formally identified and provision made for habitat protection, enhancement and creation schemes or policies. The National Planning Policy [NPPF] provides protection for Local Green Space. Local Green Space does not have a single definition but it must be 'in

reasonably close proximity to the community it serves', 'local in character', 'not an extensive tract of land', 'demonstrably special' and of 'local significance' to the community. Examples of local significance include 'richness of its wildlife' alongside beauty, tranquillity, recreation and historic values. If you live near such a site that is important for your community it may be possible to get it into your local plan.

(http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/default/files/150109_neighbourhood_plans.pdf)

Species Records

These indicate the species using different places and habitats. Some species are afforded legal protection in the planning system, therefore knowing where they live could help indicate areas where developments may be undesirable and habitat should be maintained (or enhanced).

Where to Find the Locations of Statutory and Non-Statutory Designated Sites and also Species Records

- MAGIC (Multi-agency Geographic Information for the Countryside - www.magic.gov.uk): mapping of statutory and non-statutory designations, e.g. Local Nature Reserves [LNRs], Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSIs], areas with public access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, habitats, important sites for birds and mammals etc.
- Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre (LRERC) www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-and-ecology and www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/ecology-commercial-enquiries. LRERC holds the most accurate maps of Local Wildlife Sites, along with other statutory and non-statutory-designated sites and also protected species records. You can request a map of both sites and protected species records from LRERC but may have to pay for this service (a basic search for LWS and protected species records is usually free, but a more detailed search with additional species records or archive documents may incur a fee).
- NatureSpot – Leicestershire’s Online Recording System for Biological Records www.naturespot.org.uk
- Local Authorities may have produced Supplementary Planning Documents that outline good practice guidelines in terms of developments and wildlife.

What You Can Include in your Neighbourhood Plan to Protect and Enhance Wildlife (and What We Would Like to See Included in NPs)

There are currently no restrictions as to what kind of content can be in a Neighbourhood Plan. There is much scope and opportunity therefore, to ensure that wildlife, biodiversity and the environment are included in the neighbourhood planning process. We have suggested ways below that you could consider biodiversity and wildlife as a whole, but also how you could include wildlife-friendly elements in new developments:

- **Biodiversity and Wildlife Provisions:**

- Map the habitats to highlight 'biodiversity assets' and areas where improvements could be made to link habitats. This can then be used in Neighbourhood Plans to inform policy and planning decisions. You should note that new Local Wildlife Sites can be designated and also new records of protected species can occur at any time, so the map may go out of date or need refreshing.
- Identify existing habitat corridors that may be used by wildlife to move between areas of habitat.
- Ensure that policies within the Neighbourhood Plan aim not only to protect important wildlife habitats and species, but to enhance existing areas and seek to identify and create new wildlife areas and corridors to link important habitats.
- Ensure that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included within Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders. This should strengthen the need for developers to make provision for wildlife within the development before they are granted full planning permission through a neighbourhood order.
- Ensure the protection of designated sites by implementing 'buffer zones' around sites to minimise the impacts of nearby developments.
- You should also try to encourage people to submit records of sightings of protected species (or all species) to the county records office as this will provide evidence should someone wish to develop in an area that is used by protected species. The records and presence of the protected species will have to be considered carefully in the event of a planning application.
- Consider the needs of all species, but especially protected species when putting together a NP, for example, lighting will need to be carefully considered in areas where there are bat roosts or foraging habitat and gapping up hedgerows will improve bats 'commuting routes'.

- **New Developments:**

- All new development should produce a green infrastructure plan to show how the development can improve greenspaces and corridors for people and nature, in the context of the surrounding landscape.
- Ask that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included with development proposals. This means developer will have to agree to make provision for nature within the development before they are granted full planning permission. Even small scale developments could contribute significantly to creating and enhancing local wildlife habitat. This may be by:
 - Including bird and bat boxes on new buildings
 - Using native plants in landscaping schemes
 - Using climbing plants on walls which can provide shelter and foraging opportunities for wildlife
 - Plant 3 trees to replace every tree that is removed - this wouldn't be suitable for ancient woodland or veteran trees as these are irreplaceable
 - Adding a green roof to new buildings

- Creating new habitat such as woodland, wetland, wildflower meadows or other wildlife habitats
- Ensure that new developments include Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) that benefit wildlife. With the increasing threat of more extreme weather events due to climate change, it is now very important that neighbourhood plans consider correct water management. Good SuDS schemes not only help with water management to prevent flooding but also benefit wildlife for little or no extra cost. The RSPB and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) have produced a great information booklet that you could direct people to when they are designing SuDS schemes. This can be found at www.rspb.org.uk/Images/SuDS_report_final_tcm9-338064.pdf.
- Look at how future developments can offer gains for existing green space through management, survey and monitoring.

(Information from Sussex Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and our own advice)

Useful Sources of Information

'Planning for a healthy environment: good practice for green infrastructure and biodiversity', has been published by The Wildlife Trusts and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), in partnership with a wide range of organisations. It provides guidance for practitioners to ensure nature is taken into account when shaping local areas. www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/2012/07/06/planning-healthy-and-natural-environment

Neighbourhood Plan Advice from Leicestershire County Council (includes a neighbourhood plan toolkit):

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/neighbourhood-planning/what-is-neighbourhood-planning

Leicestershire County Council – direct link to neighbourhood plan toolkit:

www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2015/6/18/neighbourhood_planning_toolkit.pdf

Campaign to Protect Rural England – guidance to Neighbourhood Plans:

www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/planning/item/2689-how-to-shape-where-you-live-a-guide-to-neighbourhood-planning

Several Local Wildlife Trusts have produced their own guidance to Neighbourhood Plans:
Sussex Wildlife Trust

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover/planning/strategic-planning/neighbourhood-plans/how-to-include-wildlife-in-neighbourhood-plans>

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

www.ywt.org.uk/sites/default/files/150109_neighbourhood_plans.pdf

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/NEIGHBOURHOOD%20PLANS%20-%20Wildlife%20and%20Planning%20Guidance.pdf

Norfolk Wildlife Trust

www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/documents/a-living-landscape/wildlife-advice/community/nwt-biodiversity-and-planning.aspx

Bedfordshire, Cambridge and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust

www.wildlifebcn.org/sites/default/files/planning_and_wildlife_what_you_can_do_july_2012.pdf

Funding

There is funding available to help communities produce Neighbourhood Plans. Grants of up to £9,000 are available from Locality to parish councils (see <http://locality.org.uk/projects/building-community/>) and it is also possible to secure up to £10,000 from Awards for All (<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/Awards-For-All>). Locality also offers free expert help.