

Enhancing Nature

Staffordshire County Council’s Natural Environment Strategy

What is this strategy for?

Our natural environment strategy sets out how we, Staffordshire County Council, will conserve and enhance biodiversity and the wider natural environment on our land and through our functions.

We value the natural environment and recognise the vital role it plays in Staffordshire: environmentally, socially, economically and for our health and wellbeing. We also understand the pressures facing our natural environment, and the need to take action now to help nature recover.

We have declared a climate change emergency and made a nature recovery declaration through our Full Council. This strategy sets out how we will care for nature. It includes action we will take over the coming years. In late 2025, we will report on progress and set out an updated strategy.

Why do we need this strategy?

Across the world, nature is in crisis. One million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades. Our planet is experiencing the largest loss of life since the dinosaurs and it is largely the result of human activity.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970 and 13% of species in England are threatened with extinction.

A suite of commitments have been made by Government, some of which are international commitments made through the COP15 Biodiversity Agreement:

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance
- protect 30% of UK land

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats
- reduce the risk of species extinction
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term

The Environment Act 2021 provides some of the legal mechanisms to support nature recovery in England. It includes the development of local nature recovery strategies, a strengthened biodiversity duty for public bodies and the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain through the planning process.

Staffordshire is a beautiful rural county but, like much of the UK, nature is under pressure here too. In 2022 Staffordshire County Council made a nature recovery declaration, recognising the need to take action for wildlife. This strategy sets out the actions we will take to contribute to nature recovery through our own activities. This will form part of wider efforts across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which will be identified through the local nature recovery strategy.

Helping nature helps us

By helping nature, we are also helping ourselves. Nature provides important goods and services that support our wellbeing and quality of life. From the insects that pollinate our food crops, to trees storing carbon, nature is essential to us.

Insert diagram of ecosystem services

Mission Statement

We will directly support nature recovery in Staffordshire, through targeted action across our land and functions, and as a champion for activity across the county.

To achieve this, we will:

- 1. Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent*
- 2. Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.*
- 3. Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.*
- 4. Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.*
- 5. Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.*
- 6. Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges.*
- 7. Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land.*
- 8. Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.*
- 9. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.*
- 10. Raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.*

1. Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire County Council has been appointed as the responsible authority under the Environment Act to work with partners to coordinate development of a local nature recovery strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The LNRS will identify the most important areas, opportunities, and priorities for wildlife.

Actions

- 1.1 Working with partners, lead the development and publication of the LNRS
- 1.2 Coordinate collaborative delivery and monitoring of the LNRS
- 1.3 Review and republish our natural environment strategy to ensure it supports delivery of the LNRS.

2. Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) will be a legal requirement for most development from 2024. This will include our own county council developments which will need to demonstrate at least 10% gain in terms of area habitat (e.g. grassland, woodland), hedges and watercourses where these are affected.

We will also have a responsibility for checking, monitoring and recording all BNG connected with planning applications for which we are the planning authority, and we will report our progress on this.

Actions

- 2.1 Ensure effective delivery mechanisms are in place to deliver BNG through the planning process.
- 2.2 Identify county council land that could support BNG delivery.
- 2.3 Work collaboratively with local authority partners, landowners and environmental bodies to maximise the benefits of BNG for nature recovery.

3. Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.

We undertake many different operations that impact on the environment for example management of highways, local flood risk and minerals and waste planning. We need to review activities to ensure they meet our

strengthened duty to enhance biodiversity and minimise wider environmental impacts.

This includes when we are making decisions and developing strategies and plans, but also in our day-to-day activities.

Actions

- 3.1 Ensure County Council decisions take account of biodiversity conservation and enhancement and ensure that staff receive appropriate induction and training.
- 3.2 Consider biodiversity enhancement through all policy and strategy development for example, Better Health Staffordshire, Local Transport Plan, Flood Risk Strategy, Minerals and Waste Local Plans.
- 3.3 All council contracts and supplies to be peat-free wherever possible.
- 3.4 All council contracts and supplies to reduce pesticides wherever possible.
- 3.5 Promote positive behaviours and prohibit the use of environmentally harmful materials and activities on county council land, such as balloon launches, Chinese lanterns, disposable BBQs, other non-biodegradable materials.
- 3.6 All county council activities to follow good practice for biosecurity for example when working in and adjacent to water, or when receiving delivery of imported plants and construction materials.

Case Study Climate change means there is an increasing risk of wildfires, but also accidental fires from barbeques and lanterns can be avoided.

Case Study

White-clawed crayfish are threatened by crayfish plague which can be carried on equipment, pets and clothing. Biosecurity measures 'check, clean, dry' include checking equipment over for any animals that may be 'hitching a lift', drying and cleaning kit between sites and use of disinfectant.

4. Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.

The network of protected sites across the country provides vital space for nature. There is a national target to make sure that 75% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are in 'favourable condition' by 2042.

We have 1404 hectares (ha) of land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (nationally important) at Cannock Chase and Chasewater Country Parks, of which 1077 ha of Cannock Chase is also designated as Special Area of Conservation (internationally important). Currently 90% of our SSSI land is improving in condition and working towards favourable status. There are studies under way to investigate why some areas are not in recovering condition.

We also have 297 ha designated land in around 20 Local Wildlife Sites, which are of county level importance. These sites require survey and a review of management.

Some of our protected sites include Scheduled Monuments and other important historic features, such as the remains of two Great War training camps on Cannock Chase. Managing for nature and managing historic features often go hand in hand, and conserving and enhancing the historic environment can play a key role in delivering sustainable nature recovery.

Actions

4.1 Continue delivery of our management schemes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest to reach favourable condition and undertake regular monitoring.

4.2 Establish a programme of surveys of Local Wildlife Sites in council ownership and update management briefs.

4.3 Embed best practice guidance on the historic environment when deciding management approaches for nature.

Case Study

Grazing at Chasewater - grazing of heathlands and other habitats is a good way of managing land. Grazing animals create better conditions for wildlife by recreating natural processes.

Case Study

Specialist equipment cutting heather on Cannock Chase. This low-impact mower does not damage historic features such as the remains of the Great War Training Camps.

5. Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.

There is a national target, and global commitment, to have 30% of land protected for biodiversity by 2030. To make a meaningful contribution to this target, ideally land should both have some form of protection and be in positive management so that it is either in, or moving towards, good condition for wildlife.

While guidance is awaited on what will count towards the national target, we estimate that around 22% of our land (excluding highways) may be relevant as it is protected, in management schemes and moving towards good condition for wildlife. Our priority is to continue to manage these sites towards good condition.

We will also explore the potential to increase council land protected and managed for biodiversity, which could potentially include land secured for biodiversity net gain, improved management of local wildlife sites, and land in higher tier agri-environment schemes. We will also undertake work to assess and understand the scale of opportunity to enhance biodiversity on land associated with highways.

Actions

5.1 Ensure management measures and monitoring regimes are in place on all protected sites.

5.2 Identify further opportunities to protect our land for biodiversity including land associated with highways.

5.3 Encourage uptake of schemes that support biodiversity on county leased land.

Case Study

Meadows and other habitats at Redhill Business Park meet criteria for designation as Local Wildlife Site only ten years after creation.

6. Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges by April 2025.

Staffordshire County Council is the highways authority responsible for managing roads and rights of way across the county, excluding motorways and trunk roads. Roadside verges can provide important

corridors for wildlife movement, and sources of food and shelter for pollinating insects and other species. In Staffordshire some verges, particularly in East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

There are opportunities to improve our verges for wildlife with careful management. In urban areas, gaining community support and understanding for this approach will be important for success.

Actions

6.1 Survey road verges and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement where compatible with safety.

6.2 Review management of verges to promote biodiversity and increase carbon capture where appropriate.

6.3 Raise awareness of the importance of verges for wildlife.

7 Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land by April 2025.

Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970, and 13% of assessed species in England are threatened with extinction. 64% of flowering plant species assessed in England have seen decreases in their distributions. The UK holds key populations of some species which are rare elsewhere in the world.

We are already involved in species recovery work on country parks and other landholdings. For example, we are involved in projects to restore and conserve native crayfish, adder, nightjar and rare insects at Cannock Chase. On our country parks and business parks we are championing work to support amphibians such as great crested newts, and we are also adopting measures to support wildlife in our properties, such as bird and bat boxes.

Usually, good habitat management will ensure that species thrive, but some species need extra help. The local nature recovery strategy will develop a list of key species for the county. We will cross check that list against our land and include relevant species in management plans for all sites.

Invasive species and diseases are an increasing threat to wildlife. Some invasive species have been present for many years and are showing a gradual increase where not controlled (such as Himalayan balsam) but others seem to be increasing as a result of climate change (for example warmer, wetter conditions favour fungal diseases such as Phytophthora

found on bilberry). Regular monitoring of habitats is the best way to identify new cases and ensure action is taken early on.

Actions

- 7.1 Retrofit measures for species in existing county council properties and include in all new county council development. Species measures to include where appropriate hedgehog gaps under fences, bird and bat boxes, invertebrate features and pollinator planting.
- 7.2 Continue to create special features for heathland and woodland invertebrates at Chasewater and Cannock Chase.
- 7.3 Continue to monitor and support bat populations on our country parks.
- 7.4 Support adder survey and modelling work for Cannock Chase and the wider county, developing a plan for the species on our land by end 2025.
- 7.5 Continue to support the creation and surveying of ark sites for native crayfish.
- 7.6 Building on the local nature recovery strategy, develop a species action plan for all county council land by end 2025.
- 7.7 Undertake regular monitoring of key habitats to check for invasive species and diseases and undertake action to tackle as appropriate.
- 7.8 Continue to collaborate with tenant farmers on the County Farms' estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.

Case Study

New Moorlands Sensory Garden with planting suitable for pollinators – this was previously just concrete with a small lawn.

Case study

At Cannock Chase, we are working in partnership with expert advice from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on a programme of habitat creation for crayfish, other rare invertebrates, and small fish species.

Use of brushwood bundles
Trees felled to create small pools and backwaters

Case study

A suite of recent measures for biodiversity at school sites

St Leonards School, Stafford

- 'Woodland walk' with peripheral ground left wild to attract wildlife.
- Trees removed have been chopped up and left to rot in clusters (bug hotels) to attract creatures.
- Hedge planting.

Paulet High School, Burton

- Tree planting and naturalised grassland

8 Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.

Climate change is apparent in the increasing stormy weather events with high rainfall and winds, plus hotter summers. We are noticing more flooding and natural flood management can help with this. Good habitat management such as grazing, and bracken control will help prevent wildfires. Many species will struggle to adapt, so providing bigger, more joined up habitats will help them develop stronger populations and help them move to find suitable conditions. We will also need to consider which species will best resist climate change when we plant new areas.

Woodland is an important habitat, supporting many species, but trees can also deliver numerous wider benefits such as carbon storage, buffering pollution, flood protection and cooling. There is a national target to increase woodland cover in England to 16.5% by the end of 2050 and to increase tree cover outside of woodlands.

The local nature recovery strategy will identify priority areas for woodland expansion to link and connect wooded habitats. We are also exploring how we can use nature-based solutions such as tree planting to achieve our net zero carbon target by 2050. Within our landholding we have ancient woodland and veteran trees which are irreplaceable habitats that need particular care. We also have tree diseases such as ash dieback on our land, and this will affect our trees and woodlands over coming years.

Actions

- 8.1 Identify nature-based solutions as part of our climate change adaptation action plan.
- 8.2 Develop a plan by April 2025 for expansion of woodland and tree cover to help achieve net zero, maximising biodiversity and other environmental benefits, ensuring that we follow the principle of 'right tree, right place, right purpose'.

Case Study

Woodland planting at Kingswood Lakeside, Cannock was completed in 2008. It provides attractive screening of development, amenity for local residents and employees, and habitats for wildlife. The edges of blocks of woodland were designed at different angles to maximise the number of micro-climates around the edges of the woodland. Designed woodland connects with areas of existing woodland off site, creating corridors to aid in the movement of wildlife. Open areas in between the blocks of woodland allow for the creation of a network of footpaths.

Case Study

Flood storage swale at St Leonard's Schol, Stafford, which will add water storage volume at key times which will also attract wildlife. Fencing is for safety of young children.

9. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.

Within Staffordshire there are two nationally important protected landscapes, the Peak District National Park and Cannock National Landscape. The National Forest also extends into Staffordshire and is an important area of landscape restoration. On a smaller scale, fifteen Registered Parks and Gardens are also nationally protected. Staffordshire remains largely a rural county with a diverse character. Many areas have a high landscape quality and sensitivity.

Staffordshire's historic landscapes are rich in cultural heritage. The diversity of our landscapes greatly contributes to our sense of place and local identity, and the historic environment further reinforces the special character of our landscapes.

Working in partnership has enabled us to support the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives that enhance nature, landscape and our historic environment, working closely with local people. Recent examples include Transforming the Trent Valley, the South West Peak Project and working with partners in the Cannock Chase AONB and Special Area of Conservation Partnerships. There are ongoing projects and potential to develop further initiatives that deliver for nature at landscape-scale.

Actions

- 9.1 Ensure County Council decisions take account of landscape conservation and enhancement and our duties for our protected landscapes.
- 9.2 Continue to host the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership and actively support the management and enhancement of our protected landscapes.
- 9.3 Support the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives in key areas as appropriate.
- 9.4 Promote hedgerow creation and restoration where appropriate, to restore and protect landscape-scale character and quality and contribute towards biodiversity net gain.

10 Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.

Nature underpins our quality of life. The health benefits of engaging in nature are well-understood, both for physical health and mental wellbeing. But while nature can look after us, we also need to care for it in return. Never has there been a more important time for us all to take action for nature.

We can all make a difference – by living more sustainably, reducing food waste, using water wisely, and reducing our carbon footprint. We can also get directly involved in supporting nature – by volunteering, taking part in wildlife surveys, supporting a wildlife charity and making our gardens and community spaces wildlife-friendly.

We will support our communities wherever possible to empower them to make a difference.

Actions

- 10.1 Deliver awareness campaigns on ways people can support nature recovery.
- 10.2 Work with other bodies to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
- 10.3 Support volunteering activity on our countryside sites.
- 10.4 Offer support and signposting to nature connection through our network of Library Champions.

- 10.5 Develop a programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities and link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature.
- 10.6 Continue to support forest school provision and other educational initiatives, exploring links to the new natural history GCSE.
- 10.7 Support delivery of the Better Health Staffordshire initiative across the county.

Case Study

Culture Nature, a project developed by Natural England and Libraries Connected has awarded Staffordshire Libraries and Arts Service funding to deliver Growing Connections. This project aims to promote mental health and wellbeing and encourage action for nature's recovery. It will connect arts and practical activities at Biddulph and Perton Libraries with the local environment, engaging difficult to reach groups and encouraging active involvement.

Case study

Recent give-aways of wildflower seeds and trees proved very popular and helped convey messages about the importance of pollinators and the value of trees.

Case study

Gardening for Better Health in Burton-on-Trent focuses on helping communities to grow food, with health and environmental benefits.

Case study

Move More Moorlands is an initiative to encourage more active lifestyles through a series of activities and engagement around our green spaces and countryside.

Action plan

Action Ref.	Action	By when
Objective 1 - Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent		
1.1	Development and publication of the LNRS	April 2025
1.2	Coordinate collaborative delivery and monitoring of the LNRS	2023-2025
1.3	review and republish our natural environment strategy in line with LNRS	December 2025
Objective 2 - Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.		
2.1	Ensure effective delivery mechanisms are in place to deliver BNG through the planning process	
	2.1.1 Include BNG in pre-application guidance and advice	By end 2023
	2.1.2 Check, ratify and record BNG for planning applications	From January 2024 (large sites) and April 2024 for small sites
	2.1.3 Include BNG reporting in minerals and waste annual monitoring report and report on county developments	By end 2024
	2.1.4 Devise monitoring programme for all BNG 30-year plans	By end 2024
2.2	Identify county council land that could support BNG delivery	
	2.2.1 Complete a pilot study on countryside estate and on larger business parks	By end 2024
	2.2.2 Expand pilot work to include all SCC land	By end 2026
2.3	Work collaboratively with local authority partners, landowners and environmental bodies to maximise the benefits of BNG for nature recovery	
	2.3.1 Explore countywide system for promoting and monitoring BNG	By end 2024
Objective 3 - Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment		
3.1	Ensure County Council decisions take account of biodiversity conservation and enhancement and ensure that staff receive appropriate induction and training	Ongoing
3.2	Consider biodiversity enhancement through all policy and strategy development for example, Better Health Staffordshire, Local Transport Plan, Flood Risk Strategy, Minerals and Waste Local Plans.	Ongoing
3.3	All council contracts and supplies to be peat-free wherever possible.	By April 2024
3.4	All council contracts and supplies to reduce pesticides wherever possible	By end 2024
3.5	Promote positive behaviours and prohibit the use of environmentally harmful materials and activities on county council land, including balloon launches, Chinese lanterns, disposable BBQs, other non-biodegradable materials	Ongoing

3.6		All county council activities to follow good practice for biosecurity for example when working in and adjacent to water, or when receiving delivery of imported plants and construction materials.	Ongoing
Objective 4 - Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042			
4.1		Continue delivery of management schemes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest to reach favourable condition and undertake regular monitoring.	Ongoing
4.2		Establish a programme of surveys of Local Wildlife Sites in council ownership and update management briefs	
	4.2.1	Survey first tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2025
	4.2.2	Survey 2 nd tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2027
	4.2.3	Survey final tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2029
4.3		Embed best practice guidance on the historic environment when deciding management approaches for nature	Ongoing
Objective 5 - Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030			
5.1		Ensure management measures and monitoring regimes are in place on all protected sites	Ongoing see Objective 4
5.2		Identify further opportunities to protect our land for biodiversity including land associated with highways	
	5.2.1	Identify and survey potential county wildlife sites on SCC land	By 2026 / ongoing
5.3		Encourage uptake of schemes that support biodiversity on county leased land	By end 2025
Objective 6 - Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges by 2026			
6.1		Survey road verges and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement where compatible with safety	By end 2026
6.2		Review management of verges to promote biodiversity and increase carbon capture where appropriate	By end 2026
6.3		Raise awareness of the importance of verges for wildlife.	Ongoing
Objective 7 - Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land by April 2025			
7.1		Retrofit measures for species in existing county council properties and include in all new county council development.	
	7.1.1	Develop programme of retrofit opportunities as part of annual maintenance / improvement programme	From April 2024
	7.1.2	Incorporate in all new development	From January 2024
7.2		Continue to create special features for heathland and woodland invertebrates at Chasewater and Cannock Chase.	Ongoing
7.3		Monitor and support bat populations on our country parks.	Ongoing

7.4		Support adder survey and modelling work for Cannock Chase and the wider county, developing a plan for the species on our land.	By end 2025
7.5		Continue to support the creation and surveying of ark sites for native crayfish	Ongoing
7.6		Building on the local nature recovery strategy, develop a species action plan for all county council land	by end 2025
	7.6.1	Produce list based on LNRS priorities	End 2024
	7.6.2	Produce species action plan for all major sites (over 50ha) and sites with known populations of priority species	End 2025
	7.6.3	Produce action plan for sites 5-50ha	End 2026
	7.6.4	Consider remaining sites	End 2027
7.7		Undertake regular monitoring of key habitats to check for invasive species and diseases and undertake action to tackle as appropriate	Ongoing
7.8		Continue to collaborate with tenant farmers on the County Farms' estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.	Ongoing
Objective 8 - Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.			
8.1		Identify nature-based solutions as part of our climate change adaptation action plan	By end 2024
8.2		Develop a plan for expansion of woodland and tree cover to help achieve net zero, maximising biodiversity and other environmental benefits, ensuring that we follow the principle of 'right tree, right place, right purpose'	by April 2025
Objective 9 - Enhance and restore landscape character and quality			
9.1		Ensure County Council decisions take account of landscape conservation and enhancement and our duties for our national landscapes	Ongoing
9.2		Continue to host the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and support the management of our national landscapes	Ongoing
9.3		Promote hedgerow creation and restoration where appropriate, to restore and protect landscape-scale character and quality and contribute towards biodiversity net gain	Ongoing
Objective 10 - Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.			
10.1		Deliver awareness campaigns on ways people can support nature recovery	Minimum 2 campaigns per year
10.2		Work with other bodies to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity	Ongoing
10.3		Support volunteering activity on our countryside sites	Ongoing
10.4		Develop nature champions across our library service to support and signpost	By end 2024

10.5		Develop a programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities and link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature	By end 2025
10.6		Continue to support forest school provision and other educational initiatives, exploring links to the new natural history GCSE	Ongoing / 2024-5
10.7		Support delivery of the Better Health Staffordshire initiative across the county.	Ongoing