

# Biodiversity

## DUTY REPORT

2023 - 2025



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# Introduction

The Environment Act 2021 strengthened the statutory Biodiversity Duty, requiring all public authorities, including local authorities, to take proactive steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. Since January 2023, councils have been required not only to consider biodiversity but to demonstrate positive actions embedded into council functions.

In addition, local authorities must prepare and publish a report every five years outlining how they have complied with the duty.

This report sets out how Cannock Chase District Council (the Council) has fulfilled its enhanced duty and integrated biodiversity considerations across its operations for the reporting period January 2023 to 31 December 2025.

It details the actions taken to understand, protect, and improve the ecological value of the land, assets, and services under our influence. This includes the management of nature reserves, parks and open spaces, planning and development control, and community-involvement and education.

As a local authority, we play a central role in shaping the local environment, both through direct land stewardship and through decision-making that influences the wider landscape. Our work contributes to national commitments such as the 25 Year Environment Plan, as well as local action set out in statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), National Landscape Management Plans and our own Local Plan and Corporate Plan.



Hednesford Hills

## Biodiversity in Decline

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth, encompassing the richness of species, the diversity of habitats they depend on, and the natural processes that sustain ecosystems. Biodiversity underpins essential services upon which we rely, such as pollination of crops, soil formation, climate regulation and clean air and water. In urban and rural areas alike, biodiversity contributes to people's wellbeing by providing access to nature, attractive green spaces and resilient landscapes.

Unfortunately, biodiversity levels in England are decreasing, with wildlife populations in England having declined in abundance by 32% on average between 1970 and 2021. For many species, declines have been more dramatic such as for farmland birds which have suffered an average decline of 59%.

## England-wide Aspirations

The Council's actions under the Biodiversity Duty support national commitments for nature recovery which aim to:

- Restore or create >500,000ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites by December 2042
- Increase tree canopy and woodland cover in England to 16.5% by 2050
- Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.
- Increase species abundance by 2042 to levels above 2022 baselines and at least 10% higher than in 2030.
- Improve the Red List Index for England by 2042, reducing extinction risk compared with 2022 levels.
- Reduce new invasive nonnative species establishments by at least 50% by 2030 (vs. 2000 levels).
- Ensure 50% of SSSI features have actions on track to achieve favourable condition by 2030.





Cannock Chase

## Our Natural Environment

The district of Cannock Chase is home to some of the most treasured landscapes and wildlife habitats in the West Midlands.

At the heart of the area sits the Cannock Chase National Landscape, one of the busiest countryside destinations in the region. It offers wideranging views across heathland, forest and rolling hills, and provides space for walking, cycling, wildlife watching and quiet enjoyment. The National Landscape is recognised nationally for its scenic beauty and receives the highest level of protection.

Surrounding this is a network of green spaces, woodlands, canals, and open countryside which together give Cannock Chase its distinct semirural feel. Much of the district rises from lowerlying urban areas in the south to the wooded plateaux of Cannock Chase before dropping into the wide River Trent valley, creating a landscape rich in variety.

The district contains many protected natural areas, including:

- Two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - internationally important sites protected for rare species and habitats.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Ancient Woodlands and Local Nature Reserves
- Sites of Biological Importance and a Local Geological Site

These areas support a wide variety of wildlife and plant species, some of which are sensitive to recreation and development pressures. Careful management and protection are essential to safeguard them for future generations.

# Policies and Processes

The Council's work to support biodiversity is guided by a set of key policies and processes that help embed nature recovery into everyday decisions and activities. These frameworks make sure that biodiversity is considered in how we plan, manage land, and deliver services, so that looking after nature becomes a routine part of the Council's longterm approach.

## Corporate Plan 2022-2026

The Plan's vision includes a clear environmental commitment:

**“A local environment that is protected, preserved, and enhanced for future generations.”**

This explicitly supports biodiversity enhancement as a longterm aim of the Council's overall direction.

### Priority 1 | Economic Prosperity

While focused on growth, this priority supports sustainable development by encouraging green industries and actions to reduce climate impacts, helping create conditions that benefit the natural environment.

### Priority 2 | Health & Wellbeing

The Plan highlights the importance of parks, green spaces, and access to Cannock Chase for residents' health, reinforcing the need to maintain and improve the ecological quality of these areas.

### Priority 3 | The Community

Commitments to maintaining parks and open spaces, supporting tree planting, and promoting sustainable lifestyles directly contribute to enhancing habitats and supporting biodiversity across the district.

### Priority 4 | Responsible Council

This priority includes reducing the Council's carbon emissions and seeking funding for green initiatives, supporting wider environmental resilience and indirectly benefiting biodiversity.

## Local Plan

Work on the Local Plan (2018–2040) is ongoing, with consultation on the main changes completed in December 2025 and the examination outcome expected in early 2026.

The Plan includes Strategic Objective 7, which focuses on protecting and enhancing the natural environment through policies that require development to safeguard important ecological assets, avoid harm to protected sites, and improve biodiversity where opportunities arise.

It also aims to strengthen ecological connectivity by maintaining linked habitats, protecting landscape character and enhancing green corridors. Policy SO7.8 ensures that Green Infrastructure is protected, expanded and built into new development to support wildlife, climate resilience and community wellbeing.

The Spatial Strategy directs development towards sustainable urban areas and prioritises brownfield land, reducing pressure on sensitive habitats and the Cannock Chase National Landscape.

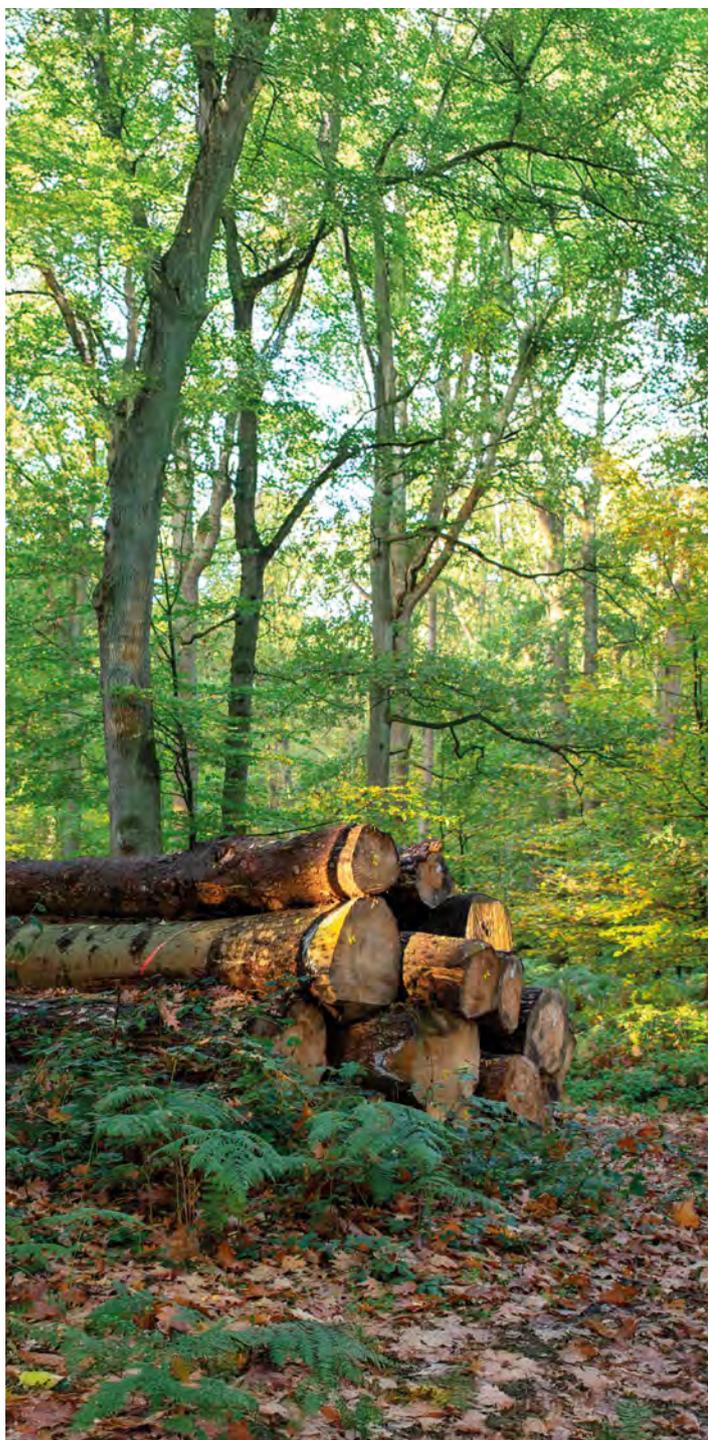
Policies on climate change, pollution prevention, sustainable transport, green infrastructure and good design ensure development provides multiple benefits for nature, people and climate resilience. Requirements to minimise pollution, manage flood risk and promote low carbon development also help biodiversity by improving air, soil and water quality.



Hazelslade Nature Reserve

## Urban Forestry Strategy 2019-2024

The Urban Forestry Strategy sets out the strategy taken by the Council to protect and manage existing trees and woodlands, encouraging natural regeneration, safeguarding important habitats, and making sure new planting uses suitable and varied species that support local wildlife. It also ensures that planning decisions, woodland management and future tree planting all consider wildlife, so that habitat protection, good planting choices and ongoing care are built into routine Council work. The Strategy that has been adopted since 2004 has ensured that all trees removed are replaced on a 1 to 1 basis.



## Climate Change Strategy 2025-2030

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and in 2025 adopted its Climate Change Strategy 2025-2030.

The Climate Change Strategy supports delivery of the Biodiversity Duty by reducing key environmental pressures and creating more favourable conditions for wildlife and habitats across the district.

Through measures such as transitioning to renewable electricity, improving the efficiency of corporate assets and decarbonising transport, the Strategy helps to lower emissions, reduce pollution and disturbance, and enhance environmental resilience. These actions, alongside strong community engagement, education initiatives and partnership working, encourage more sustainable behaviours across the district and support the longterm health and resilience of Cannock Chase's natural environment.



## Cannock Chase Open Space Assessment (2023)

This assessment guides land management by identifying where the quantity, quality, and accessibility of open spaces can be improved. It highlights opportunities for enhancing natural green spaces, improving habitat quality, and strengthening ecological networks helping the Council to prioritise where land management actions, such as restoration, maintenance, or new provision, should be delivered.

## Development Management

The Council's Ecologist is consulted on relevant planning applications to ensure that national and local policy, as well as statutory biodiversity legislation, are fully considered in decision making. The requirement for features such as swift bricks, bat boxes and holes in fencing, to allow wildlife movement through developments, are routinely attached as conditions to planning permissions to increase opportunities for wildlife within developments.

The Council maintains a service level agreement with the Staffordshire Ecological Record, which supplies ecological data, including information on Sites of Biological Importance and species records, to inform decision making. This data supports forward planning and development management by ensuring that ecological considerations are fully incorporated into relevant assessments and policies.



## Health and Wellbeing

The Council's health and wellbeing approach emphasises prevention, partnership working and the use of parks, open spaces and Cannock Chase to support active, healthy lives. This requires high quality, accessible green environments and therefore supports the conservation and enhancement of habitats across the district.



### Future Actions

- **Embed** the identified habitat creation, enhancement and connectivity opportunities from the adopted LNRS into local planning policy, ensuring these are reflected in site allocations and policies.
- **Ensure** a commitment continues in future Corporate Plans to improving local biodiversity by restoring and enhancing habitats and strengthening green networks across the district. This would build on the existing aim to preserve local parks and green spaces and protect the environment for future generations.
- **Include** climate change adaptation measures that deliver biodiversity co-benefits into the next review of the Climate Change Strategy.

# Managing council land and assets

The Council owns and manages a diverse portfolio of land, including nature reserves, formal parks, amenity green spaces, river and stream corridors, woodlands, cemeteries and incidental open spaces embedded within the built environment. These sites provide habitat for wildlife, support landscape character, and offer valued green spaces for residents.

Our land management approach is underpinned by the principle of enhancing ecological value wherever possible, without compromising the primary function of the land, be that a park, cemetery, sports pitch or nature reserve for example.

## Countryside Sites

The Countryside Team, alongside a small regular team of volunteers, manages approximately 217ha of council-owned semi-natural land which include our most important wildlife habitats including:

- Hednesford Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest / Local Nature Reserve; (LNR)
- Mill Green & Hawks Green LNR / Site of Biological Importance (SBI)
- Hazelslade LNR / SBI; and
- Castle Ring SBI / Scheduled Ancient Monument.



Hednesford Hills

## Hednesford Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest

Hednesford Hills is of national importance for its heathland habitats and has an extant Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement, which provides financial support for the site's management. This agreement is due to expire in 2028.

Management at Hednesford Hills is delivered through a combination of grazing by the Council's own herd of Dexter cattle, selective tree and scrub removal, and the creation of bare ground scrapes. These interventions maintain the structural diversity of the heathland helping support a wide range of flora and fauna.

A full habitat survey of the site was completed by the Council in 2024, providing an up to date evidence base to help prioritise ongoing and future management actions.

Formal monitoring of the site's condition for national reporting is undertaken by Natural England. During the most recent assessment in 2018 the site was recorded as being in unfavourable recovering condition. Good, well managed habitat was noted but the site was judged to just miss the scrub and tree cover target.

In addition to Natural England's assessments, the Council conducts its own habitat monitoring to inform day to day and longer-term management decisions.

Hednesford Hills is also designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

## Local Nature Reserves

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are locally important sites for wildlife, managed for both nature conservation and public enjoyment.

Both Hazelslade and Mill Green & Hawks Green LNR have extant Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreements, which provide financial support for their management. These agreements are due to expire in 2028.

Management at both sites is delivered with both conservation targets and site users in mind. Habitat and species diversity is encouraged mainly through a combination of grazing by the Council's own herd of Dexter cattle and selective tree and scrub removal.

Both sites are monitored annually to assess the condition of their key habitats providing an up to date evidence base to inform future management decisions.

Hazelslade and Mill Green & Hawks Green are also designated Sites of Biological Importance.



## Castle Ring Site of Biological Importance / Scheduled Ancient Monument

Castle Ring is designated as a Site of Biological Importance, recognising its county level significance for the habitats and species it supports. The site consists largely of heathland habitat and supports regionally important reptile populations. Its position within the wider Cannock Chase National Landscape makes it an important ecological stepping stone for wildlife moving across the area.

The site is managed through a combination of selective tree and scrub removal, bracken cutting, and wetland maintenance. These interventions help to maintain habitat diversity, ensuring the site continues to support a wide range of flora and fauna.

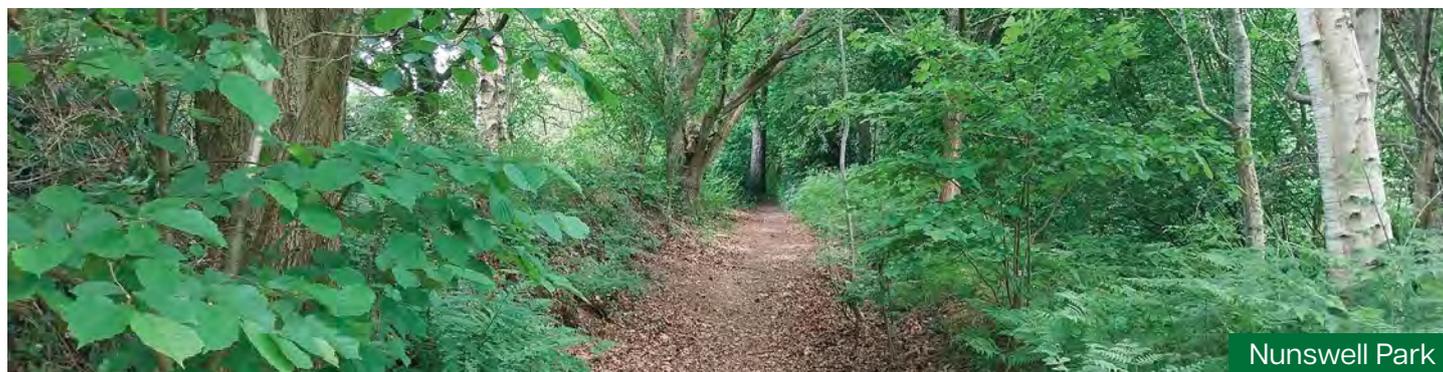
Castle Ring is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument, designated as an Iron Age hillfort. Management actions must therefore balance both biodiversity conservation and the protection of the site's archaeological features, ensuring that wildlife and heritage interests are considered together.

In addition, Castle Ring currently has both a Green Flag award and a Green Heritage award, reflecting its high standards of management, cleanliness and safety whilst also demonstrating that its historic and natural values are both well cared for and celebrated.



## Other sites managed by the Countryside Service

The Countryside Service manages a further nine areas in the district, amounting to approximately 30 ha. These sites include woodlands, some located along stream valleys, as well as wooded sections of former mineral lines, and larger areas such as Fair Lady Coppice and Nunswell Park.



Fair Lady Coppice comprises of woodland, acid grassland, small patches of heathland, and damp, sparsely vegetated ground. The site supports species of conservation concern, including the dingy skipper, a declining butterfly, and overwintering birds such as waders.

Management focuses on removing encroaching scrub from the damp plateau and widening grassland rides through the developing woodland. Heathland areas on the southern side of the site are in Higher Level Stewardship until 2028, with scrub and tree cover removed cyclically to maintain the habitat.

Nunswell Park lies within the Cannock Chase National Landscape and consists of woodland and grassland habitats. A Management Plan was produced for the site in 2025 and is currently being consulted on with Cannock Wood Parish Council.



### Future Actions

As well as continuing work as detailed for the previous reporting period, over the next five years the Council will also:

- **Consider** the benefits and assess the feasibility of introducing conservation grazing to additional council owned sites.
- **Monitor** the outcomes of habitat interventions across sites, with a particular focus on invertebrate responses at Hednesford Hills.
- **Complete** full habitat surveys of all sites managed by the Countryside Service.
- **Strengthen** species recording on council owned sites by submitting records to iRecord and taking part in national species recording schemes at key locations.
- **Produce** up to date management plans for all council owned SSSIs, LNRs and Sites of Biological Importance.
- **Enter** into new stewardship agreements for Hednesford Hills SSSI, Hawks Green & Mill Green LNR and Fair Lady Coppice before they expire in 2028 (subject to Natural England invitation).
- **Explore** opportunities to enter relevant Countryside Stewardship schemes for other council owned sites.
- **Assess** the potential for additional council owned sites to be designated as Local Nature Reserves and progress this where it would deliver ecological and/or community benefits and is supported politically.
- **Ensure** that up-to-date biodiversity actions and priorities are incorporated into the Green Flag Management Plan for Castle Ring.
- **Facilitate** and participate in research projects to improve understanding of the habitats and species found on council owned sites and to support evidence led management.

# Parks

The district's main parks are managed by a team of grounds maintenance personnel, supported by the Council's Tree Team, who oversee the authority's tree stock.

Alongside their formal uses, measures to enhance the biodiversity of the parks have been identified and implemented as follows.

At Cannock Park a 240 metre native hedge was planted two years ago.

At Elmore Park, around 100 metres of new native hedgerow was planted in 2023, increasing habitat connectivity and ecological value. A corner of the park near a neighbouring property has been left to grow during spring, supporting cowslips and other wildflower species. The site's tree trail was updated in 2024 and bulbs were planted around the culvert area to improve seasonal interest and biodiversity.

At Ravenhill Park, a 170 metre strip along the northern side of the sports pitch, adjacent to a hawthorn hedge, has been left unmown to support wildlife. A further 3-4 metre wide unmown margin, extending for approximately 500 metres between the planted trees and the inner amenity grass, provides an important habitat corridor for pollinators and small mammals. In 2023, a 155 metre native hedgerow was also planted to the south of the running track, enhancing habitat connectivity across the site.

Hednesford Park includes a soakaway and associated wildflower bund constructed to help manage localised flooding. Along the northeastern side of the site, birch trees have been planted and the dogwood here is regularly coppiced improving habitat diversity. To the east of the playing fields, the grass is trimmed once annually, and spring bulbs have been planted to provide cover and feeding resources for invertebrates.

A 3,000m<sup>2</sup> area on the eastern side of the large amenity grassland has been left unmown to develop naturally, following issues caused by wet ground conditions. Specifically, in one area a wetland was created where water from the A460 runs into Hednesford Park. Working alongside volunteers, the ground was excavated and planted with pond vegetation to help alleviate path flooding. The project was delivered by the Forest of Mercia, with funding secured through The Friends of Hednesford Park from the Severn Trent Community Fund.

Living willow tunnels have been installed in the Hednesford Park play area, along with fences constructed from recycled willow and dogwood. Recycled wood chip produced from trees previously removed on site has been used to cover and reinforce a number of paths within the park.

Christmas trees collected in Ravenhill, Cannock, and Hednesford Park are also recycled, with the resulting chippings used to strengthen sections of natural paths or spread in planting beds throughout the district.

Habitat surveys have been carried out at Hednesford Park, Cannock Park and Elmore Park by the Council's Ecologist to identify further opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Elmore Park, Cannock Park, Hednesford Park and Ravenhill Park all retained their Green Flag status in 2025. The Green Flag Award scheme places biodiversity at the heart of its judging process through a dedicated criterion and wider expectations around environmental management and climate change.

## Other Open Spaces

For several years, high intensity mowing on selected areas of public open space has been replaced with a lower intervention summer cut and collect regime. This approach allows wildflowers to grow, flower and set seed, creating habitat for insects and other fauna. These meadow areas also provide a welcome contrast to standard amenity grassland for residents. The regime is currently implemented across approximately 14 hectares of land, covering ten separate areas of public open space including the largest areas (>1.8ha) at Kingsway Park, Jerome Road, Cotswold Road and Anglesey Park.

Stile Cop Cemetery retained its Green Flag status in 2025.

## Tree Planting

Between January 2023 and 31 December 2025, a total of 1,224 trees and shrubs (excluding hedgerows) were planted on council owned land including parks, cemeteries, amenity spaces and Cannock Park Golf Course, using funds from the Government's Nature for Climate Fund<sup>1</sup>. Most of these were native species such as rowan, oak and silver birch, which provide canopy cover to support urban cooling, help reduce flooding and create valuable habitat for wildlife.

Lengths of native hedgerow were also planted at Byron Place, totalling 30 metres, and at Barnard Way, totalling 130 metres, using the same funding.

Administered by the Forest of Mercia CIC through the Trees for Climate Programme.<sup>1</sup>

## Future Action

As well as continuing work as detailed for the previous reporting period, over the next five years the Council will also:

- **Complete** full habitat surveys of Ravenhill Park, Green Flag sites and selected larger areas of Public Open Space to identify opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- **Continue** to identify suitable locations for specimen tree planting within areas of Public Open Space and implement planting where opportunities are identified
- **Assess** further of areas of parks and open spaces for their suitability to be managed by a summer meadow cut and collect and implement where appropriate.
- **Develop** a new wildlife area in Cannock Park, adjacent to the tennis courts.
- **Remove** scrub to open up areas of remnant acid grassland and selectively thin planted tree belts in Hednesford Park to promote good woodland structure, retaining standing dead wood where appropriate.
- **Explore** opportunities to integrate biodiversity enhancing practices into the management of allotment sites across the district.
- **Enhance** habitat diversity and reduce maintenance requirements at Cannock Park Golf Course by infilling two former bunkers and partially infilling a third with wildflower/ grass mixes, managing the areas with twice yearly cuts.



## Environmental Practices

Chemical inputs across Public Open Spaces have been significantly reduced, with usage decreasing from approximately 150 litres of glyphosate to around 40 litres of Pistol annually. Glyphosate is now restricted to targeted treatment of Japanese knotweed and essential locations only, such as around tree bases and lamp posts.

At Cannock Park Golf Course, conventional feeds have been reduced through the adoption of products that improve nitrogen availability, alongside the use of Organic Soil Conditioner to support longterm soil health, resulting in lower overall chemical usage. Hedge cutting within Public Open Spaces is undertaken between November and February to avoid the bird nesting season, with any essential works outside this period subject to full checks for nesting activity and halted if active nests are found.



### Future Actions

- **Transition** away from fossil fuel powered tools and vehicles used by land management personnel by adopting electric alternatives where suitable, cost effective options are available within allocated budgets.

## Housing Stock

The Council's housing stock is an area where biodiversity considerations can be integrated directly into the residential environment. Individual gardens, communal outdoor areas and the fabric of the housing itself all offer opportunities to support wildlife, reduce environmental impact and promote nature friendly living.

A new council-lead housing development is currently under construction on the former Aelfgar School site in Rugeley. The scheme will deliver 58 homes in total, including 29 council homes for rent. The properties are being built to the anticipated requirements of the Future Homes Standard, incorporating features such as triple glazing, solar panels, air source heat pumps, mechanical ventilation heat recovery systems and electric vehicle charging points. These measures will help reduce carbon emissions and lower energy bills for future tenants.

To incorporate biodiversity into the scheme, bat and bird boxes are included on selected properties and site fencing is designed to be hedgehog friendly. A buffer zone runs along the edge of the development which will be managed as a summer cut and collect, providing habitat for wildflowers and insects in particular.

### Future Actions

- **Incorporate** features for biodiversity enhancement into the external envelope contract specification for council-owned housing stock, for example swift and bat nesting features, wildlife-friendly fencing etc.
- **Review** the current voided properties policy to include features for biodiversity eg tree (fruit) planting in gardens, wildlife-friendly fencing etc.
- **Include** biodiversity enhancing features within the Housing Business Plan so they can potentially be integrated into future housing development and improvement programmes.
- **Seek** innovative biodiversity solutions from contractors as part of the tendering process to encourage ecological enhancements within contracted works.

# People and Communities

Community engagement and education play a central role in the Council's approach to supporting biodiversity and nurturing a strong connection between residents and their local green spaces. These initiatives build awareness, encourage participation, and strengthen local stewardship of natural environments. The programmes aim to:

- **Increase** understanding of local habitats, species, and ecological processes.
- **Encourage** active involvement in habitat management.
- **Promote** sustainable practices and citizen science across all age groups.

This section highlights the breadth of educational and outreach activities delivered by the Council, supported by quantifiable data, where available, to demonstrate the scale and impact of this work.

## Regular Youth Engagement

A substantial proportion of engagement is delivered through weekly work experience program sessions with school and college groups, undertaken by the Council's Community Officer for Parks and Open Spaces, in conjunction with the Forest of Mercia. Across the academic year, these sessions typically involve around 55–60 young people per week. Activities vary by season and include practical conservation tasks across multiple parks, as well as utilising natural materials to make items such as willow fencing.

The programme is complemented by expert led sessions (e.g., wildlife rescue, small mammal surveys, bat monitoring) delivered with specialist practitioners through the year.

During term time, the Countryside Service host a weekly group of students from Walsall College who engage in activities such as fencing, bird box building and habitat management.



## Project Based Youth and Community Engagement

In addition to weekly activity, the Council supports targeted, time limited projects with youth services, community groups, and scout groups, often linked to school holidays and/or external funding. In 2025, the Council worked with a range of youth and community groups on projects linked to Cannock Chase National Landscape. Activities included building bird boxes, delivering a six week creative project with a local artist that contributed to story walks across four parks and leading visits and story based nature walks focused on local ecology and heritage. Funding from Cannock Chase National Landscape has supported these initiatives, including artist involvement.

## Wider Community Events

From March to October, the Council leads monthly bee walks across seven parks, supporting pollinator awareness and public involvement in ecological monitoring.

Guided walks are also provided on council nature reserves, often coinciding with national campaigns, such as national Heath Week. Over sixty people attended the guided walk on Hednesford Hills in August 2025.

## Self-led Nature Trails

The Council also offers free family friendly self-led trails through parks often aligned to national nature campaigns and seasonal themes throughout the year. These events draw consistent public participation across the park network.



## Volunteering

In the Council's parks and open spaces practical projects are undertaken with volunteers from the local community and have included wetland creation, making willow based structures and natural play features and undertaking path reinforcement work using recycled materials.

The Countryside Service runs a weekly volunteering day every Friday, giving the public the opportunity to support the team in managing the district's nature reserves. Activities include scrub clearance, hay making, pathway maintenance and a range of other practical conservation tasks. All tools, equipment and training are provided, and volunteers enjoy working in some of the Council's most beautiful natural areas while making a meaningful contribution to their care.

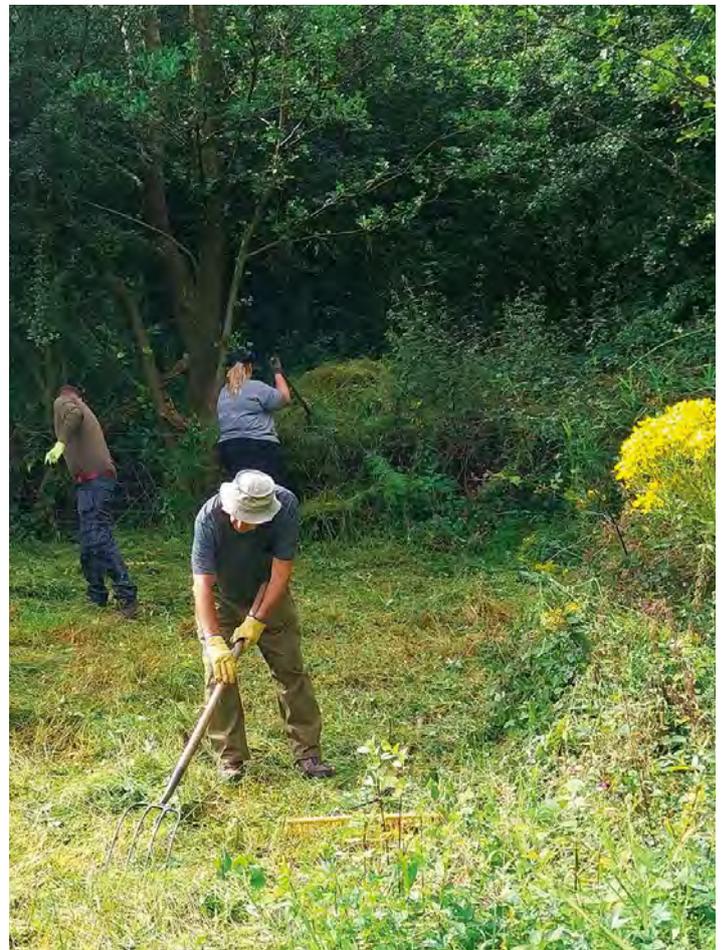
Corporate Working days are also hosted on the Council's nature reserves, and in the 2025, around 10 employees engaged in practical conservation activities.

Over 2025, volunteers with the Countryside Service contributed time equivalent to approximately 40% of a full-time employee.

## Climate Change Awareness

Cannock Chase Council delivered The Great Imagining Cannock Chase in March 2024, engaging over 1,500 residents, including 900 pupils from 16 schools, in climate and nature focused learning. Forty exhibits covered themes such as biodiversity, sustainable resource use, alongside recycling, carbon literacy and renewable energy. The event strengthened partnerships, promoted nature positive behaviour change and supported the Council's wider ambitions for climate action, ecological awareness and net zero commitments.

Throughout 2025 the Council worked in partnership with TGI to develop a wider climate education programme, which has now been expanded across Staffordshire. This programme delivered a series of interactive workshops for schools and community groups, including sessions on biodiversity, a Nature Spotters Guide activity, and the popular Bog in a Box workshop, designed to introduce residents to the importance of peat lands and local ecosystems.



## Cannock Chase Can

The Cannock Chase Can initiative supports residents to improve their health and wellbeing through both fun community based activities and app based challenges. Under the 'Naturally well' theme, app challenges such as the Castle Ring Centenary Photo Trail and Tales from Laburnum Avenue invite people to explore local wildlife and heritage found in our parks and nature reserves. New activities are continually added including from partners in wider Staffordshire such as Transforming the Trent valley and Cannock Chase National Landscape.

## Bee Friendly Schools

In the district, 12 schools have committed to achieving Gold level Bumble bee friendly School status, with the Council funding their applications to support this work. The scheme, run by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, encourages schools to take practical, positive actions that improve habitats for bumblebees and other wild pollinators. To gain accreditation, schools complete a series of bumble bee friendly actions and provide evidence demonstrating how they have created and enhanced pollinator supporting environments.

### Future Actions

- **Expand** the Guardians of Cannock Chase programme to include children and families outside of Scout or Guide groups, subject to securing appropriate funding.
- **Provide** at least 3 guided bat walks for the public on selected council managed nature reserves each year.
- **Provide** a selection of wildlife themed guided walks and events for the public on council-managed nature reserves each year.
- **Install** new and updated interpretation boards on council owned nature reserves, where appropriate, to improve public understanding of the ecological value and management of each site.
- **Expand** bee walks into council nature reserves, as well as parks and cemeteries.
- **Deliver** a series of workshops for Bumble bee friendly schools to help them begin their pollinator supporting activities by introducing pupils and teachers to local pollinator species, habitat improvement techniques and simple actions that create immediate impact.
- **Support** the continuation and further roll-out of the climate change education and awareness programme, subject to securing external funding.



# Integration and co-ordination with partners

Over the reporting period, the Council has worked collaboratively with a range of organisations to support and enhance local biodiversity.

## Cannock Chase National Landscape

A significant proportion of the district lies within the protected Cannock Chase National Landscape. Throughout the reporting period, elected members participated in meetings of the National Landscape Joint Committee, ensuring the district's interests were represented in shaping priorities and decision making.

In 2025, the National Landscape published its new Management Plan, setting out measures to protect and enhance the area's natural beauty, wildlife, heritage, and sense of place while driving nature recovery, tackling climate change, and supporting responsible recreation. The plan was developed through a series of Task and Finish Groups, including the Land Management & Biodiversity group, in which the Council played an active role, helping to shape proposed policies and actions.

During the reporting period, the Council successfully secured several funding awards administered by the National Landscape. This included support to upgrade the pedestrian path at Castle Ring to improve the visitor experience while helping to reduce recreational pressure on the wider monument; funding for new interpretation panels at Hednesford Hills and Hazelslade nature reserves; and financial support for species specific surveys aimed at informing tailored habitat management to safeguard important populations.



Photo courtesy of Anthony Dunn

## Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Nature Recovery Partnership

Cannock Chase Council is a supporting authority in the development of the countywide strategy for nature recovery. Officers have contributed to its preparation by participating in the Species Working Group, the Planning and Infrastructure Group, and the overarching Steering Group. Their involvement has helped ensure that the district's specific interests have been taken into account in the development of the emerging strategy.



## Species project partnerships

In the reporting period, ARG UK, working in partnership with local organisations and groups on and around Cannock Chase, developed a landscape scale adder conservation programme. The project focused on reversing local adder declines through habitat improvement, connectivity modelling and baseline surveys, and Cannock Chase Council was as an active partner supporting this work alongside other landowners and agencies. That work is set to continue.

### Future Actions

- **Continue** to work collaboratively with Cannock Chase National Landscape to develop and deliver measures that drive forward nature recovery and contribute to the Government's target of protecting 30% of our land for nature by 2030 (30by30).
- **Respond** to consultations on the draft Staffordshire LNRS in a timely manner, to ensure the approved strategy identifies appropriate priorities and longterm goals for nature recovery in the district.
- **Contribute** to the delivery of the priorities for habitat creation, enhancement, and species recovery identified in the LNRS, working as an active member of the Staffordshire Nature Recovery Partnership.
- **Continue** to be an active member of, and contribute to, ARG UK's Cannock Chase adder conservation project to help safeguard and expand adder populations in the district.
- **Engage** with the Trent Re-naturalising and enhancing waterways partnership scheme (Trent ReNEW) to support works that improve the ecological condition of the Saredon brook catchment through the district.

# Biodiversity Net Gain

## Actions to meet biodiversity net gain obligations

A Biodiversity Guidance Note has been prepared by the Council as Local Planning Authority and published on the Council's website. Information provided within the guidance note is designed to help applicants, ecologists and other interested parties understand the Council's BNG process, and to assist decision-making.

The Council encourages pre-application discussions with prospective applicants to discuss their development proposals in relation to BNG prior to submission.

The Council asks an applicant to submit a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Self-Assessment Form as part of their supporting documentation if their planning application is not exempt from the BNG requirements. An associated validation checklist has been published for applicants to see if this is required.

In July 2024, the Council approved a schedule of fees for monitoring significant on-site biodiversity enhancements and all off-site biodiversity enhancements resulting from Biodiversity Net Gain. Since then, relevant planning permissions have been subject to these fees.

The Council employs a full-time Ecologist whose responsibilities include ensuring compliance with biodiversity net gain requirements in planning applications.

## Meeting biodiversity net gain obligations going forward

Over the next five years, the number of significant onsite and offsite biodiversity enhancement schemes requiring council monitoring is expected to increase. To ensure that the LPA can continue to meet statutory biodiversity net gain (BNG) obligations, monitoring fees may need to be reviewed periodically to maintain sufficient ecological capacity and expertise.

The Government has recently announced an intention to raise the size threshold for sites exempt from BNG to 0.2 hectares. This change is likely to reduce the number of planning applications subject to BNG within the district. However, this reduction is not expected to decrease the number of schemes requiring longterm (30year) monitoring, as such obligations are typically associated with larger development sites above the 0.2 hectare threshold. These larger schemes will continue to require oversight to ensure delivery of the agreed BNG unit uplift and compliance with approved biodiversity gain plans.

The Council's preapplication advice service will remain an important mechanism for enabling developers to understand their BNG obligations at an early stage, supporting effective compliance and delivery of biodiversity enhancements.

# Net gains resulting from approved biodiversity gain plans

Major planning applications have been subject to biodiversity net gain requirements since February 2024. Small sites have been subject to biodiversity net gain requirements since April 2024.

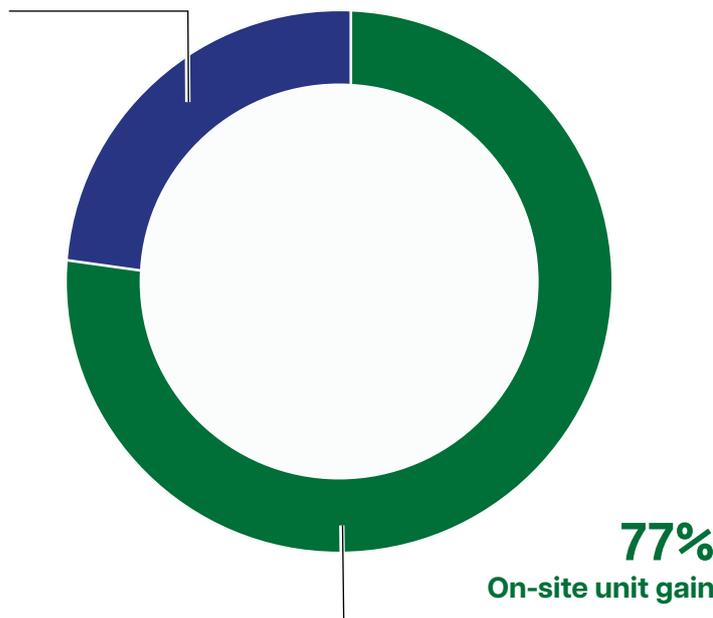
Up to 31 December 2025, three biodiversity gain plans have been approved.

Across these approved plans:

1. The net gain in number of units has been 1.96 units.
2. The average percentage gain has been 101%
3. 79% of the net gain in units was delivered on-site, with 21% delivered off-site. No statutory credits were utilised.

## On-site vs off-site gains

**23%**  
Off-site  
unit gain



# Actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity 2026 -2030

Theme	Action	Service Area
Policies and Processes	<b>Ensure</b> a commitment continues in future Corporate Plans to improving local biodiversity by restoring and enhancing habitats and strengthening green networks across the district.	Corporate
	<b>Embed</b> the identified habitat creation, enhancement and connectivity opportunities from the adopted LNRS into local planning policy, ensuring these are reflected in site allocations and policies.	Planning Policy
	<b>Include</b> climate change adaptation measures that deliver biodiversity co-benefits into the next review of the Climate Change Strategy.	Climate Change Team
Managing council land and assets	<b>Consider</b> the benefits and assess the feasibility of introducing conservation grazing to additional council-owned sites.	Countryside Service
	<b>Monitor</b> the outcomes of habitat interventions across sites, with a particular focus on invertebrate responses at Hednesford Hills.	Countryside Service
	<b>Complete</b> full habitat surveys of all sites managed by the Countryside Service.	Countryside Service
	<b>Strengthen</b> species recording on council-owned sites by submitting records to iRecord and taking part in national species-recording schemes at key locations.	Countryside Service
	<b>Produce</b> up-to-date management plans for all council-owned SSSIs, LNRs and Sites of Biological Importance.	Countryside Service
	<b>Enter</b> into new stewardship agreements for Hednesford Hills SSSI, Hawks Green & Mill Green LNR and Fair Lady Coppice before they expire in 2028 (subject to Natural England invitation).	Countryside Service
	<b>Explore</b> opportunities to enter relevant Countryside Stewardship schemes for other council-owned sites.	Countryside Service
	<b>Assess</b> the potential for additional council-owned sites to be designated as Local Nature Reserves and progress this where it would deliver ecological and/or community benefits and is supported politically.	Countryside Service, Parks and Open Spaces
	<b>Ensure</b> that up-to-date biodiversity actions and priorities are incorporated into the Green Flag Management Plan for Castle Ring.	Countryside Service
	<b>Facilitate</b> and participate in research projects to improve understanding of the habitats and species found on council-owned sites and to support evidence-led management.	Countryside Service
	<b>Complete</b> full habitat surveys of Ravenhill Park, Green Flag sites and selected larger areas of Public Open Space to identify opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.	Parks and Open Spaces

Theme	Action	Service Area
Managing council land and assets	<b>Continue</b> to identify suitable locations for specimen tree planting within areas of Public Open Space and implement planting where opportunities are identified	Parks and Open Spaces
	<b>Assess</b> further of areas of Public Open Space for their suitability to be managed by a summer meadow cut and collect and implement where appropriate.	Parks and Open Spaces, Grounds Maintenance
	<b>Develop</b> a new wildlife area in Cannock Park, adjacent to the tennis courts.	Parks
	<b>Remove</b> scrub to open up areas of remnant acid grassland and selectively thin planted tree belts in Hednesford Park to promote good woodland structure, retaining standing dead wood where appropriate.	Parks
	<b>Explore</b> opportunities to integrate biodiversity-enhancing practices into the management of allotment sites across the district.	Parks & Open Spaces
	<b>Enhance</b> habitat diversity and reduce maintenance requirements at Cannock Park Golf Course by infilling two former bunkers and partially infilling a third with wildflower/ grass mixes, managing the areas with twice-yearly cuts.	Grounds Maintenance
	<b>Transition</b> away from fossil-fuel powered tools and vehicles used by land management personnel by adopting electric alternatives where suitable, cost-effective options are available within allocated budgets.	Countryside Service, Parks & Open Spaces, Grounds Maintenance
	<b>Incorporate</b> features for biodiversity enhancement into the external envelope contract specification for council-owned housing stock, for example swift and bat nesting features, wildlife-friendly fencing etc	Housing Services
	<b>Review</b> the current voided properties policy to include features for biodiversity eg tree (fruit) planting in gardens, wildlife-friendly fencing etc.	Housing Services
	<b>Include</b> biodiversity-enhancing features within the Housing Business Plan so they can potentially be integrated into future housing development and improvement programmes.	Housing Services
<b>Seek</b> innovative biodiversity solutions from contractors as part of the tendering process to encourage ecological enhancements within contracted works	Housing Services	
People and Communities People and communities	<b>Expand</b> the Guardians of Cannock Chase programme to include children and families outside of Scout or Guide groups, subject to securing appropriate funding.	Parks
	<b>Provide</b> at least 3 guided bat walks for the public on selected council-managed nature reserves each year.	Countryside Service

Theme	Action	Service Area
<b>Communities People and communities</b>	<b>Provide</b> a selection of wildlife themed guided walks and events for the public on council-managed nature reserves each year.	Countryside Service
	<b>Install</b> new and updated interpretation boards on council-owned nature reserves, where appropriate, to improve public understanding of the ecological value and management of each site.	Countryside Service
	<b>Expand</b> bee walks into council nature reserves, as well as parks and cemeteries.	Countryside Service
	<b>Deliver</b> a series of workshops for Bumblebee-friendly schools to help them begin their pollinator-supporting activities by introducing pupils and teachers to local pollinator species, habitat-improvement techniques and simple actions that create immediate impact.	Climate Change Team, Countryside Service, Parks
	<b>Support</b> the continuation and further roll-out of the climate change education and awareness programme, subject to securing external funding.	Climate Change Team
<b>Integration and co-ordination with partners</b>	<b>Continue</b> to work collaboratively with Cannock Chase National Landscape to develop and deliver measures that drive forward nature recovery and contribute to the Government's target of protecting 30% of our land for nature by 2030 (30 by 30).	Corporate
	<b>Respond</b> to consultations on the draft Staffordshire LNRS in a timely manner, to ensure the approved strategy identifies appropriate priorities and long-term goals for nature recovery in the district	Corporate
	<b>Contribute</b> to the delivery of the priorities for habitat creation, enhancement, and species recovery identified in the LNRS, working as an active member of the Staffordshire Nature Recovery Partnership.	Corporate
	<b>Continue</b> to be an active member of, and contribute to, ARG UK's Cannock Chase adder conservation project to help safeguard and expand adder populations in the district.	Countryside Services
	<b>Engage</b> with the Trent Re-naturalising and enhancing waterways partnership scheme (Trent ReNEW) to support works that improve the ecological condition of the Saredon brook catchment through the district.	Countryside Service/Parks and Open Spaces



