

5 Core Policies

Biodiversity

Policy CS 17

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Biodiversity and geodiversity assets across West Berkshire will be conserved and enhanced.

Habitats designated or proposed for designation as important for biodiversity or geodiversity at an international or national level or which support protected, rare or endangered species, will be protected and enhanced. The degree of protection given will be appropriate to the status of the site or species in terms of its international or national importance.

Development which may harm, either directly or indirectly,

- locally designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites), or
- habitats or species of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity, or
- the integrity or continuity of landscape features of major importance for wild flora and fauna

will only be permitted if there are no reasonable alternatives and there are clear demonstrable social or economic benefits of regional or national importance that outweigh the need to safeguard the site or species and that adequate compensation and mitigation measures are provided when damage to biodiversity/geodiversity interests are unavoidable.

In order to conserve and enhance the environmental capacity of the District, all new development should maximise opportunities to achieve net gains in biodiversity and geodiversity in accordance with the Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan and the Berkshire Local Geodiversity Action Plan. Opportunities will be taken to create links between natural habitats and, in particular, strategic opportunities for biodiversity improvement will be actively pursued within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas identified on the Proposals Map in accordance with the Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Explanation of the Policy

5.110 West Berkshire supports a rich and diverse range of biodiversity and geodiversity assets which reflect both the underlying geology and soils and traditional management practices that have been carried out over many years. The aim of this policy is to provide a framework for conserving and enhancing this richness and diversity both for its own sake, but also the positive contribution that it makes to the overall quality of life and sense of place for residents and visitors to West Berkshire in both urban and rural areas.

5.111 The most important sites for biodiversity and individual wildlife species which receive statutory protection have protection under international and national legislation. Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are internationally important and are afforded the highest level of protection. Candidate SACs and proposed SPAs will be afforded the same level of protection as those already designated.

5.112 There are currently three SACs within the District:

- Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain

- River Lambourn
- Kennet Valley Alderwoods.

5.113 There are no SPAs within West Berkshire, although there is a very small part of the District (256 hectares) around Beech Hill within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The 5km boundary⁽⁸⁵⁾ has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA. However, it is possible that certain types of development up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA⁽⁸⁶⁾ could have an impact on the SPA. Proposals for new residential development of one or more net additional dwellings up to 5km from the boundary of the SPA, and residential development of over 50 dwellings located between 5 and 7km of the boundary of the SPA, will therefore require screening to assess whether they will have a likely significant effect on the SPA. Where a significant effect exists or cannot be excluded, an Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 would need to be undertaken. Proposals will only be permitted if they do not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework will be used to guide assessment and any avoidance or mitigation measures that may be needed. The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to attract new residents away from the SPA is a key part of these avoidance measures, together with strategic access management on the SPA and monitoring. Since the level of development expected to come forward in this area of the District is extremely low, the Council will explore opportunities for cross boundary working in this regard. Alternatively, SANG may be provided by developers for individual developments where it complies with Natural England's guidelines and there is an appropriate contribution to strategic access management and monitoring. In all cases SANGs will need to be agreed with Natural England.

5.114 An Appropriate Assessment of all Core Strategy policies has been carried out to ensure that the Core Strategy will not be detrimental to the conservation objectives of European sites. This concluded that the Core Strategy, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of any of the European sites within the District or those within 5km of the District boundary.

5.115 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are nationally designated sites which have important wildlife or geological value. There are currently 51 SSSIs within West Berkshire covering 1470 hectares.

5.116 The District contains a range of habitats and geological features of local significance designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites. Local Wildlife Sites⁽⁸⁷⁾ are non-statutory sites of significant value for the conservation of wildlife. These sites represent local character and distinctiveness, and have an important role to play in meeting local and national targets for biodiversity conservation. Site selection criteria have been devised and agreed across the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. Local Wildlife Site designations will continue to be assessed by the Council throughout the lifetime of this plan, following recommendations by the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum, in order to keep them up to date. There are currently 493 Local Wildlife Sites covering 6325 hectares.



5.117 Site selection criteria for Local Geological Sites have been drawn up by the Berkshire Geoconservation Group, and there are currently five sites in West Berkshire covering 150 hectares.

85 as shown on the Proposals Map

86 as shown on the Proposals Map

87 available to view on the [Council's online map](http://www.westberks.gov.uk) at www.westberks.gov.uk

5 Core Policies

5.118 Habitats and Species of Principal Importance for Biodiversity in England are published by the Government under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Ancient woodland is also identified as important in the NPPF and is the most extensive natural habitat remaining in West Berkshire. Ancient semi natural woodland currently covers 2894 hectares. There are a further 1164 hectares of plantation on ancient woodland sites which could potentially be restored.

5.119 Regulation 39 of the Habitats Regulations⁽⁸⁸⁾ requires the encouragement of the management of features in the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna. These features are defined as linear features, or stepping stones, which are essential for the migration, dispersal, and genetic exchange of wild species. By protecting these natural habitats and networks across the District, the Council will be able to avoid or repair fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats and ultimately conserve and enhance our priority natural areas and the connections between them. This element of the policy closely links with the Green Infrastructure policy.

5.120 The Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)⁽⁸⁹⁾ builds upon national and regional targets for biodiversity enhancement. Therefore the Council will seek opportunities to support the delivery of the Berkshire BAP. There are many opportunities for biodiversity and geological enhancement in all parts of the District and not just on identified sites.

5.121 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) have been identified by the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum and agreed by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF)⁽⁹⁰⁾. There are 17 which have currently been identified, either whole or in part, across the District (see 'Appendix E: Biodiversity Opportunity Areas'). BOAs do not represent a statutory designation or a constraint upon development, rather, they are the areas where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial results at a strategic scale. The Council will therefore pursue net gains for biodiversity in and around BOAs and projects which seek to enhance biodiversity within West Berkshire, particularly based on Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, will be supported.

5.122 The West Berkshire Living Landscape project is one example of where the Council is actively working to implement strategic biodiversity enhancements in partnership with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). There are other areas across the District where there may be the potential for similar projects at a landscape scale, such as the Kennet Valley East BOA to the south of Reading⁽⁹¹⁾.

Greenham Common



88 [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](http://www.legislation.gov.uk) available at www.legislation.gov.uk

89 [Berkshire Biodiversity Action Plan](http://www.berksbap.org) available at <http://www.berksbap.org>

90 See [Biodiversity Opportunity Areas](http://www.berksbap.org) at www.berksbap.org and [Biodiversity Opportunity Areas Description](http://www.sebiodiversity.org.uk) at www.sebiodiversity.org.uk for further details

91 [West Berkshire Living Landscape Project](http://www.westberks.gov.uk) at www.westberks.gov.uk and [BBOWT information](http://www.bbowl.org.uk/) at <http://www.bbowl.org.uk/>. The project is based around the Greenham and Crookham Plateau and part of Kennet Valley East BOAs on the edge of Newbury and Thatcham and includes Greenham Common, Thatcham Reedbeds and BBOWT's Bowdown Woods Nature Reserve. The project aims to improve this unique grouping of internationally and nationally designated biodiversity sites. Covering more than 27 square kilometres of lowland heathland, ancient woodland, reedbeds, rivers and streams, it is one of the key delivery mechanisms for ensuring biodiversity gains across the Greenham Common area. Taking a strategic approach to the restoration and enhancement of existing priority habitats, and the reconnection of fragmented sites through the creation and enhancement of new sites, green corridors and networks will ensure the potential for biodiversity improvement in this area is realised.

Delivery and Monitoring

The Council will deliver this policy through a variety of mechanisms, but primarily through more detailed policies contained in the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD and the development management process, together with partnership working in the Living Landscape project, the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Countryside Projects, the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, and as a member of the Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum (an emerging Local Nature Partnership) and the AONB Council of Partners.

Changes in areas of biodiversity importance; the condition of SSSIs; the distribution and status of selected species; and the active management of local sites will be reported in the AMR.