

POLICY ST37: Green and Blue Infrastructure

1. The connectivity, quality, multifunctionality, biodiversity and amenity value of the green and blue infrastructure network will be enhanced, extended and managed through:
 - a) protecting and enhancing the landscape character and the distinctiveness of Green Gaps, Registered Parks and Gardens and ornamental parklands, registered Common Lands and Village Greens, and Local Green Spaces;
 - b) protecting, enhancing and restoring watercourses, ponds, lakes and water dependent habitats where appropriate;

- c) providing for biodiversity net gain, including reconnecting vulnerable and priority habitats (see policy ST38);
- d) protecting and enhancing ancient and mature woodland and hedgerows, and providing for tree planting to secure recreational benefits and/or to aid climate change mitigation;
- e) making appropriate provision for new green/blue infrastructure in new development including open space, allotments, playing fields and outdoor sports facilities, and natural and semi natural greenspace and bluespace; and/or incorporating and where practicable facilitating the improvement of existing provision through the design of development;
- f) applying climate change mitigation and adaptation measures through new development, including flood risk and watercourse management;
- g) linking walking and cycling routes, bridleways and public rights of way to and through development, where appropriate;

2. The function, setting, and biodiversity, landscape, access and recreational value of the following main and minor green corridors, as identified on the Policies Map will be protected and enhanced:

- a) Main green corridors
 - i. Chesterfield Canal
 - ii. River Idle
 - iii. River Ryton
 - iv. River Trent

- b) Minor green corridors
 - i. Trent Valley Way
 - ii. Cuckoo Way
 - iii. National Cycle Route 6
 - iv. River Maun
 - v. Robin Hood Way
 - vi. River Meden
 - vii. River Poulter

c) Major development proposals that lie wholly or partly within the minimum buffer zone of a main green corridor (30m measured from each side of the centre point), or a minor green corridor (15m measured from each side of the centre point) should be supported by an Ecological Impact Assessment and/or landscape statement proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposal. This should confirm the extent of the buffer zone in that location and demonstrate how the design and layout of the scheme will positively respond to its green/blue infrastructure location and minimise the environmental effects upon the green corridor.

3. All new green and blue infrastructure should be accompanied by appropriate management and maintenance arrangements.



8.6 Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geodiversity

8.6.1 Biodiversity and geodiversity are important components of the planning system: a high quality, vibrant natural environment helps strengthen the connection between people and nature and contributes to health and well-being. National policy seeks the protection and enhancement of valued biodiversity and geological conservation interests, seeking measurable net gains in biodiversity.

8.6.2 Policy ST38 aims to prevent harm to biodiversity and geodiversity from direct impacts such as land take, and from indirect impacts such as recreation, changes to the quality of a watercourse, as well as any potential cumulative impacts.

Designated sites

8.6.3 **Internationally designated sites:** Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar Sites are strictly protected. None lie within the District but the Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC is approximately 3km from the District boundary. National policy states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply to development that may affect these sites.

8.6.4 The Sherwood Forest ppSPA lies within the District. The Habitats Regulations Assessment 2023¹⁷ identifies that some potential sites within Bassetlaw contain habitats that have the potential to support the breeding and/or foraging of the Sherwood Forest ppSPA bird population.

8.6.5 On that basis, any schemes that lie within the 5km buffer zone of the Sherwood Forest ppSPA will require a project level 'shadow-level' Habitats Regulations Assessment to ensure any significant adverse effects on the Sherwood Forest ppSPA are identified and appropriately mitigated.

8.6.6 **Nationally designated sites:** Bassetlaw contains a large number of sites designated for their biodiversity and geodiversity importance. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Ancient Woodland have a high level of statutory protection, with national policy advising that developments that are likely to adversely affect these assets should normally be refused. As such, any development within their impact zone should be accompanied by an Ecological Impact Assessment to ensure that the integrity of these assets is protected.

Recreational Impact

8.6.7 Natural England identify that the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre and surrounding forest (including the Clumber Park SSSI, Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC/Sherwood Forest NNR) is a regional recreational resource, drawing visitors from a wide area. Residential development in the District has the potential to increase the recreational disturbance on existing sensitive habitats at these protected sites.

8.6.8 Recreational disturbance has been considered in an Appropriate Assessment. This led to Recreational Impact Assessments being undertaken (for Clumber Park SSSI¹⁸ and for Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC/Sherwood Forest NNR¹⁹). These have

been undertaken with a partnership group, comprising: Newark & Sherwood District Council, Natural England, the National Trust and RSPB (the landowners) and neighbouring authorities. The assessments identify where recreational disturbance is happening at both sites, the main recreational uses causing the disturbance, the proposed zone of influence for each site and broad measures required to mitigate the recreational impact of the expected increase in population in each zone.

- 8.6.9 The Recreational Impact Assessments^{18,19} show that there is no requirement for a Strategic Solution (Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy) for Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC within the Local Plan.
- 8.6.10 Whilst the evidence¹⁸ shows that the housing allocations identified by this Plan would have the potential to create an adverse recreational impact on the Clumber Park SSSI, Natural England advise that the main driver for the assessments was the proposed allocation of the Bassetlaw Garden Village. Without which, a strategic solution as recommended by the Clumber Park SSSI Recreational Impact Assessment¹⁸, would be hard to justify.
- 8.6.11 On that basis, Policy ST38 identifies that all sites of 50 or more dwellings that fall within an 'Impact Risk Zone' of a SSSI will be required to give appropriate consideration, in particular in relation to the potential recreational impact from the proposal upon that SSSI. Where relevant, appropriate mitigation measures will be sought, which may include an appropriate design and layout to protect the integrity of the SSSI. Measures will take into account acceptable mitigation identified for a proposal to off-set recreational impact associated with the development. Schemes that propose a lower site threshold to circumvent the policy requirement will be resisted.
- 8.6.12 The Council will continue to work with Newark and Sherwood District Council, as well as the RSPB, the National Trust and Natural England to understand and monitor recreational impacts at Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC and Sherwood Forest ppSPA, to ensure that they are appropriately protected and conserved.
- 8.6.13 **Locally designated sites:** At a local level, the District has 4 Local Nature Reserves, 290 Local Wildlife Sites and 24 Regionally Important Geological Sites. All contain habitats, species or geological features of local importance. All have been designated by the Nottinghamshire Ecological and Geological Data Partnership in accordance with locally agreed selection criteria.
- 8.6.14 Policy ST38 will help ensure these sites are protected during development and are managed appropriately for the features for which they are designated. Proposals can sometimes affect land surrounding or neighbouring these designated sites as well as impacting them directly. Policy ST38 therefore requires that appropriate buffers are maintained to ensure that features for which a site is designated are not lost, and that potential impacts are identified through an Ecological Impact Assessment.

Protected and Priority Habitats and Species

- 8.6.15 Habitats and Species of Principal Importance identified under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 include legally protected species such as Great Crested Newts and badgers, as well as local priority habitats and species.
- 8.6.16 Proposals that will potentially affect these species will be required to submit information to enable an assessment of their impact, in accordance with relevant national legislation.

Nature Recovery Network

- 8.6.17 Biodiversity is not confined to designated sites or to the District boundary. Many features serve as wildlife corridors, links and stepping stones, which play a vital part in the Nature Recovery Network, integral to the delivery of the government's 25 year Environment Plan²⁰. The Bassetlaw Nature Recovery Network will form part of the national network of wildlife-rich places, and will be instrumental in the movement of species within and beyond Bassetlaw, to the Humberhead Levels Nature Improvement Area in Doncaster and North Lincolnshire for example.
- 8.6.18 The District's Nature Recovery Network provides a local baseline, with the draft Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping for Bassetlaw and Idle Valley¹⁶ identifying opportunities to help tackle network fragmentation. Policy ST38 will ensure that development within or adjoining the Nature Recovery Network maintains the integrity, value and continuity of the network. Opportunities to enhance and expand its functionality and biodiversity particularly for the four main habitat networks - woodland, heathland and acid grassland, and other grassland and wetland - should be considered. Proposals that lead to fragmentation will be resisted.
- 8.6.19 The Local Plan will contribute to the delivery of a more coherent and resilient ecological network, by connecting designated sites with notable habitats, sites and ecological corridors; trees and woodland identified by Policies ST38 and 39; as well as with land with strong biodiversity value.
- 8.6.20 It will also ensure that the biodiversity value of undisturbed greenfield sites as well as many brownfield sites and built features will be captured. Where possible, these features will be integrated into the functional network and appropriate management sought to retain their importance.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 8.6.21 Biodiversity net gain aims to leave the District's biodiversity assets in a better state than currently exists. Reflecting the principles and definitions of the Environment Act 2021, all new development will be expected to secure at least 10% net gain in biodiversity so that the biodiversity value of the development exceeds the pre-development on site habitat value by at least 10%.

- 8.6.22 Net gain should be delivered on site. Only in exceptional cases where this is not practicable will compensatory off site contributions be appropriate. In general, it is expected that biodiversity net gain can be achieved through good design of new development: features such as sustainable drainage or tree planting are requirements of other Local Plan policies so their use should not create additional costs to development. Use of the latest statutory biodiversity metric will be supported to evidence applications.
- 8.6.23 The requirement for biodiversity net gain is not expected to be a legal requirement until 2023. But the Whole Plan Viability Assessment 2022²¹ confirms that biodiversity net gain can be secured as part of a financially viable development. On that basis, and to reflect the multiple benefits to biodiversity, the natural environment and climate net gain brings, it will be introduced on adoption of this Plan.
- 8.6.24 Reflecting legislation a commuted sum equivalent to 30 years maintenance will be sought and should be accompanied by a management plan to ensure the continued protection of features. Further guidance will be set out in the Greening Bassetlaw SPD.