



*Basingstoke
and Deane*

Living Landscapes

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Natural Environment Strategy

2014



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The council wishes to thank all those who have contributed to the preparation of this strategy.

Introduction

1. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council first published a landscape and biodiversity strategy, *Living Landscapes*, in October 2003. Since that time significant progress continues to be made in incorporating natural environment considerations into the work of the council. Much of the previous version of the strategy (published in 2010) remains relevant and as a consequence, this third draft revision of the strategy reflects this. It does not include a wholesale review of the document but refreshes and updates aspects where appropriate, including changes to policies, updates on projects and the action plan.



Pamber Forest Local Nature Reserve

2. Since the original strategy was adopted the council continues to support, and has helped to establish a number of conservation volunteer groups and community-led conservation projects. It has declared new local nature reserves, and has introduced more wildlife-friendly approaches to the management of some of its open spaces. Successful partnerships have been developed with external organisations to deliver conservation

advice and projects in the wider countryside, and survey and recording work has been undertaken to improve understanding of the borough's natural environment and the species that it supports. Specific planning policies have been introduced through the local plan to ensure proper regard is given to the natural environment when assessing planning applications; planning guidance has been produced to assist with the implementation of these policies; and biodiversity is now a routine consideration in assessing planning applications, alongside landscape issues. In addition the council has adopted a Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013 to 2029) for the borough which includes a number of biodiversity-related projects within its action plan.

3. Despite this progress, the pressures on the natural environment are greater than ever and there is much more that needs to be done to secure a healthy natural environment. The wider national and regional context of policies and mechanisms for protecting the natural environment has also changed since the original strategy was published and there continues to be a legal duty for local authorities to have regard to biodiversity conservation (including opportunities for restoration and enhancement) in carrying out their functions¹. Furthermore, the publication of the Lawton Report² in 2010 and the high profile given to its findings in the Natural Environment White Paper³ has galvanised understanding that more needs to be done to halt the loss of biodiversity. One of the key messages of the report with respect to wildlife sites was that they needed to be “bigger, better and more joined-up”. The White Paper also recommended the setting up of strategic Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and the council is a member of

the Hampshire and Isle of Wight LNP. The Partnership's priorities include:

- protecting and improving the natural environment
- promoting a sustainable green economy
- reconnecting people and nature
- promoting the need to invest in nature for the many benefits and ecosystem services it provides.

In 2011 DEFRA published Biodiversity 2020⁴ which followed on from the Natural Environment White Paper and the UK Government's pledge to halt the loss of all biodiversity by 2020. In national planning policy⁵ consideration is given to biodiversity with policies in place for avoiding a net loss of biodiversity and achieving a net gain where practicable in new developments. At a local level, the Council now has three performance indicators specifically reporting on any changes to areas of wildlife habitat as a result of development or council initiatives.

Scope of the Strategy

4. This document sets out how the council proposes to focus its resources to help meet its obligations and commitments to the conservation of the natural environment. It is not intended to serve as a general strategy for all aspects of looking after the borough's natural environment, much of which is outside of the council's influence. However, the strategy does describe how we will work with partner organisations and community groups and volunteers. It will also provide useful information on our approach for organisations who may wish to work with the council in the future.



Common Frog

5. This strategy differs from the council's Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy in that the GI Strategy focuses on the network of green spaces and other environmental features within the borough and the role they play. The GI network provides places that are more resilient to climate change, that have distinct local character, that provide open space and associated facilities for people to live and work in and as places that promote well-being. The natural environment is one of a number of key beneficiaries of a strategically planned and delivered green infrastructure, whereas this document focuses on work and action that will be undertaken by the council or in conjunction with key partners to specifically provide benefits to the natural environment alone.

6. In addition to setting out specific actions and approaches to protecting and enhancing the borough's natural environment, the strategy will also be used to influence the preparation of other council documents that will have an influence on wildlife and the landscape.

¹ Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

² Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network. Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS. September 2010.

³ The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature HM Government. June 2011.

⁴ Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. DEFRA 2011.

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework. Department for Communities and Local Government. March 2012.

Local Policy Context

7. In addition to legal obligations, the primary policies driving the strategy are set out in the borough's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) 2011 to 2026 known as *Pride in Our Place* and in the Council Plan 2013 to 2017, which is informed by the SCS.

8. *Pride in Our Place* includes the following priorities that are of particular relevance:

- protecting and enhancing the quality of the built and natural environment.
- improving access to the countryside.
- encouraging local communities to take greater responsibility for their surroundings.

9. The council plan 2013 to 2017, includes the aim to:

“Protect, restore, reconnect and expand biodiversity and the rural nature of our borough through better management of our woodlands, parks and open spaces — and the introduction of additional green infrastructure and implementation of a new Green Infrastructure Strategy.”



Grazing of Basingstoke Common to replicate the traditional management of grassland habitat

What do we mean by the natural environment?

The borough's landscape is the product of centuries of human management interacting with natural processes. Therefore, no part of it is entirely natural. In fact, some of our most precious wildlife habitats, such as heathland, developed as a result of human influence on natural plant and animal communities. Nevertheless, in contrast to the built environment of towns and cities, much of the countryside and many of the green spaces within our towns, including the interconnected network of private gardens, are heavily influenced and characterised by the presence of wildlife and the action of natural processes. The term natural environment is used within this document to refer to all such spaces.



Woodlands sculpture at Great Binfields Copse

The Benefits of the Natural Environment

10. A well-cared for natural environment is essential for all life and provides benefits without which we could not live such as clean air and water, pollination of agricultural crops, regulation of climate and raw materials such as timber. However, it also makes many other important contributions to community wellbeing, as well as being important in its own right. These types of benefits are known as ecosystem services, which are essential for the support of life on Earth and human society. The vital importance of ecosystem services, and the importance of accounting for them in economics, is gaining increasing recognition, for example through works such as the UK National Ecosystem Assessment⁶ and the findings of the Natural Capital Committee⁷.

11. *Pride in Our Place*, the sustainable community strategy for the Borough of Basingstoke and Deane, describes six themes for community wellbeing. Examples of benefits that a healthy natural environment can contribute to the six themes of the community strategy include⁸:

A safe borough

12. High-quality outdoor environments, especially where the community is involved in their stewardship, help to create a sense of pride and ownership over neighbourhoods thus making an important contribution to deterring crime and anti-social behaviour. Woodlands and trees will also play an increasingly important role in influencing climate, providing cool environments during the summer, and habitats, including trees and woodlands, can play an important

role in managing flood risk by helping water to drain into the ground more naturally and maintaining the natural function of river floodplains.



Natural drainage and flood plain habitats can help to reduce flooding incidents

A healthy borough

13. There are strong links between health and the natural environment. Brisk walking, cycling, horse riding, and running can make a significant contribution to the recommended levels of moderate exercise people should undertake and the experience of carrying out these activities in an attractive natural environment provides a major motivating factor. Volunteer conservation work and gardening for wildlife are also recognised as providing sufficient levels of exercise to benefit health. The positive effects of the natural environment on mental wellbeing and stress reduction are obvious and there is increasing evidence to support this⁹.

⁶ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

⁷ The State of Natural Capital: Towards a framework for measurement and valuation. A report from the Natural Capital Committee. April 2013.

⁸ These benefits were formally identified by the Natural Environment Forum of the Basingstoke Area Strategic Partnership.

⁹ Health and Natural Environments - An evidence based information pack. Natural England. March 2012



Mountain bikers enjoying the healthy outdoors

A learning and creative borough

14. The natural environment has always inspired the arts and sciences, and some of our most celebrated writers and artists have drawn their inspiration from it. As well as providing inspiration for the creative arts, the natural environment provides opportunities for lifetime learning such as environmental studies to support school curricular, pastimes such as bird watching, and the social and teamwork skills that can be developed through volunteer conservation work.

A prosperous borough

15. The natural environment makes a major contribution to the attractiveness and image of the borough, which is an important factor for local businesses in recruiting and retaining employees. It underpins the rural economy by attracting customers to the countryside and its appeal is a significant motivating factor in the enjoyment of income-generating activities such as horse riding, field sports and fishing, bird watching, walking and cycling. In turn, the rural economy underpins the management required to conserve much of the countryside. For example managed woodlands can conserve important habitats as well as make a contribution to local and regional economies in terms of jobs and wood fuel energy.



Countryside recreation makes an important contribution to the rural economy

An environment that's good to live in

16. A healthy natural environment underpins many of the environmental benefits that contribute to our quality of life and, in some cases, even make life possible. For example, natural ecosystems maintain soil fertility and ensure the pollination of crops that we need for food. They also provide clean

air and water, replenishing the borough's water resources.



Bee performing vital pollination service

An inclusive borough with strong communities

17. Nature conservation has a long history of volunteer involvement and can provide a strong focus to help bring communities together to improve their neighbourhoods. Community conservation projects can embrace a wide range of activities, utilising many different skills and aptitudes, from digging ponds to planning and management and from simple recording of flora and fauna to specialist botanical and zoological study. Such work is particularly good for bringing people of different age groups, ethnicity and social backgrounds together.



View over the North Wessex Downs AONB

The Borough of Basingstoke and Deane's Natural Environment

Overview

18. The Borough of Basingstoke and Deane covers an area of some two hundred and forty five square miles and over ninety per cent of this is rural.

19. Straddling two distinctive geological areas, the Thames Basin and the Hampshire Downs, the landscape of the north of the borough contrasts strongly with the south.

20. The southern area is dominated by chalk downland and a large part of this area to the west of Basingstoke is recognised as being of national importance by its inclusion in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (see Fig. 1). Here the downland rises and forms a more or less continuous ridge along the top of the AONB terminating in spectacular scarp slopes just south of Kingsclere. Areas of important chalk grassland occur along this ridgeline including such notable sites as Watership Down, the setting of Richard Adams's famous book, and Beacon Hill, site of an Iron Age hill fort and Site of Special Scientific Interest, from which there are panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

21. The gentle southern dip slope of the North Wessex Downs, and much of the rest of the southern part of the borough, are characterised by a mixture of arable farmland punctuated by clumps and patches of woodland, the latter tending to occur over deposits of clay and flint, which restricted the historical clearance of woodland for agriculture.

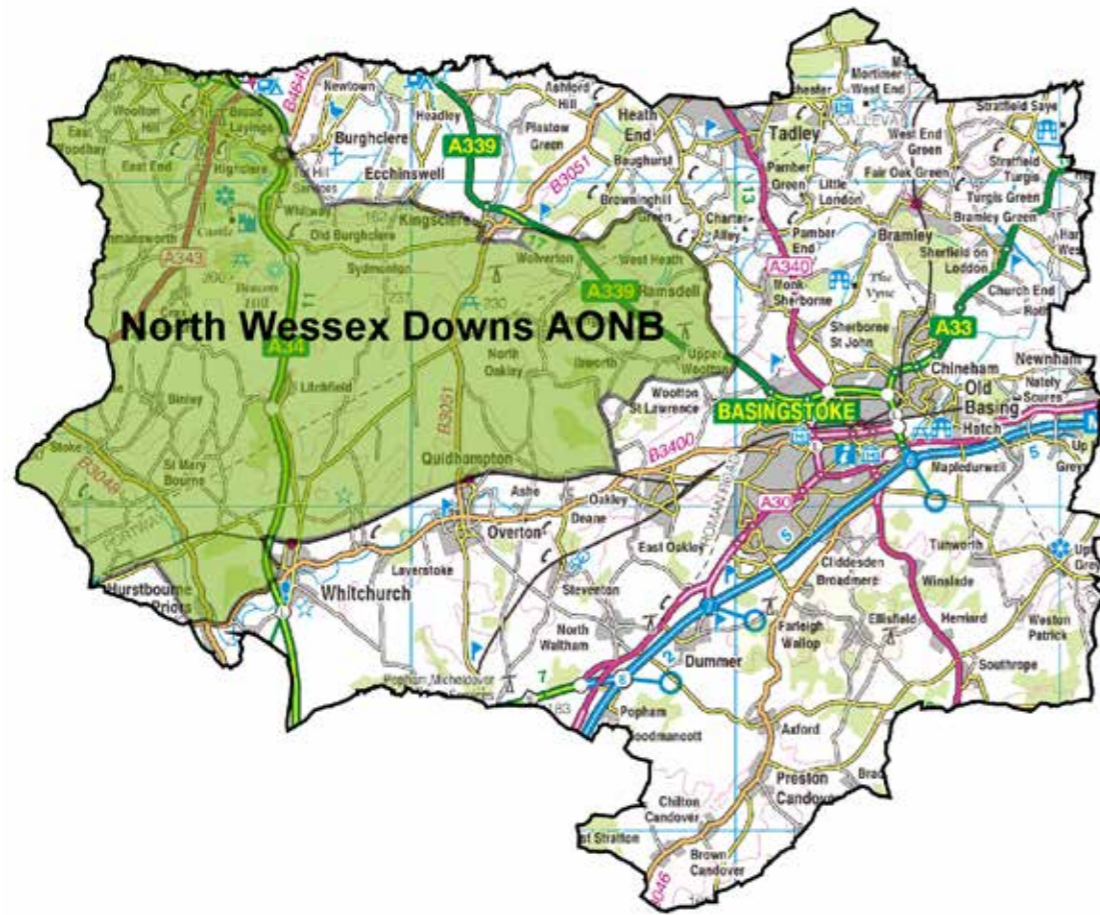


Fig. 1: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
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22. The northern half of the borough landscape is influenced by deposits of clays and sands, which, in conjunction with numerous north flowing streams and land use practices, have led to the development of a more complex landscape of smaller fields, unimproved fens and wet grasslands, mixed farming and numerous patches of ancient woodland. Along with a relatively intact network of hedgerows, containing mature trees, this results in a more intimate and secluded landscape than that of the downland to the south. In the past, significant areas of lowland heath existed in the north of the borough, but these have been reduced to only a few small fragments, including Tadley and Silchester Commons.



The 'Lawn' - part of Silchester Common and Pamber Forest SSSI

23. Two major river systems have their source within the borough. Firstly, the River Test, which is a nationally renowned chalk river and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Bourne Rivulet flows into it south of Whitchurch and, together, these watercourses, associated floodplain habitats, and mixed farming on alluvial soils contrast strongly with the surrounding chalk downland landscape of arable farmland. The River Loddon and its major tributary, the Lyde River, are fed by a series of chalk springs between Basingstoke and Hook. The valleys of these rivers are wide and shallow and contain important wetland and floodplain habitats. The River Loddon and many of its associated habitats have been designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The Bow Brook, which is fed by small streams north of Sherborne St. John and Ramsdell, flows in an easterly direction into the River Loddon.



Bow Brook

Biodiversity¹⁰

24. Within Britain as a whole, there are estimated to be in excess of 88,000 species of terrestrial and freshwater organisms. The more prominent

organisms such as flowering plants, mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians make up less than three per cent of this figure, the greater part comprising insects and micro-organisms such as fungi. The number of species of viruses and bacteria is unknown, but life for higher organisms would be impossible without many of the latter.

Protected and Notable Species



Hedgehog

25. Eight hundred and fifty four protected or notable species have been recorded in the borough (see Appendix 1). These are species that have statutory protection or are recognised as needing special conservation effort. They include species representative of some of the very special habitats found in the borough. For instance:

- Dormice, which can be found in ancient woodlands and species-rich hedgerows.
- Bat species, such as Natterer's bat, of which the largest hibernating population in the UK can be found in Greywell Tunnel.
- Dartford warbler and nightjar, found

¹⁰. Biodiversity, put simply, means the variety amongst all living creatures, from mammals to microbes. It embraces diversity at all levels from the genetic variation within species to the assemblages formed by different species and the habitats in which they live and are a part.

within heathlands in the northern part of the Borough.

- Great-crested newt, a large population of which can be found at Popley Ponds.
- Red hemp-nettle, a rare arable plant found amongst chalky arable soils.
- White-letter hairstreak butterfly, which depends on elm trees, which in turn have a severely restricted population due to Dutch Elm Disease.

Key Habitats

26. The diversity of species within the borough ultimately depends on the variety of habitats present. At the broad level, these range from heavily modified urban areas and arable farmland to semi-natural woodlands and wetlands. Within these broad habitat types, certain key habitats, of particular importance for their biodiversity value, have been identified. These are mainly those habitats that have developed from natural habitats that were modified by historical land management (e.g. unimproved chalk grassland and ancient woodland). However, there are some more modern types of habitat that are of particular importance to wildlife as they enable it to thrive in otherwise hostile environments, including road verges, ponds and arable field margins. Some of these key habitats may be designated for the nature conservation importance or contribute to a particular landscape character or help define landscape scale areas where there are opportunities to enhance and restore biodiversity.

27. The key habitats within the borough are described below and further details of how these relate to UK Priority habitats (otherwise known as Section 41

Habitats of Principal Importance¹¹) are given in Appendix 5.

Key Habitat Type Descriptions¹²

Hedgerows

28. Hedgerows form a network over much of the borough creating distinctive field patterns and providing an important refuge for wildlife. Some hedges were planted during the enclosures of the 18th and 19th centuries. Others pre-date this period and are considered 'ancient'. Species-rich hedgerows are defined as those that contain five, or more, woody species per thirty-metre section or have a particularly diverse range of non-woody plants at their base. There is a strong correlation between species richness and the age of hedgerows, and the flora of hedgerows marking old parish boundaries can be particularly rich.



Wildlife friendly hedgerow

Ancient Semi-natural Woodland

29. Semi-natural woodlands are those that have arisen from natural colonisation by tree seedlings, as opposed to plantation woodlands grown as a timber crop. Semi-natural woodlands that

have been continuously wooded since 1600 are known as ancient. Those that have developed since 1600 are referred to as recent semi-natural woodlands. The borough has an exceptionally rich resource of ancient semi-natural woodland with over 3400 hectares, representing over 20% of the known Hampshire resource. One example is the series of ancient woods in Chineham which have been designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

30. The great age of ancient semi-natural woodlands means that typically they have been colonised by a far greater range of species than recent secondary woodland, although secondary and some plantation woodlands can also provide important habitats for different species. Many ancient woodlands in the borough have been managed in the past to provide small-diameter wood products through repeated cutting of hazel understorey, close to ground level. This practice, known as coppicing, can benefit certain species, including flowering plants and butterflies, which prefer a more open woodland habitat. Coppicing, as a traditional woodland management practice, declined in the early part of the 20th century but has enjoyed a renaissance since the early 1980s in Hampshire, helping to further conservation objectives.

Lowland Pasture Woodland/Parkland

31. These habitats are relics of a traditional practice of managing land for grazing and woodland products. In this case, trees were pollarded, a process similar to coppicing but with the point of cutting higher on the trunk to keep new growth clear of browsing livestock.



Managed ancient woodland

This practice, which occurred both on wooded commons and in private deer parks, gives rise to a grass dominated landscape dotted with mature trees. The practice of pollarding, followed by a period of neglect, leads to the development of important deadwood habitats and cavities that provide a niche for fungi and invertebrates, roost sites for bats and nest holes for birds. Such 'veteran' trees can also host rare lichens and bryophytes. In addition to their habitat value, veteran trees that are relics of traditional pollard management are an important part of the borough's cultural and historic heritage. The Borough has over 500 hectares of lowland wood pasture/parkland, which is nearly 10% of the known total resource in Hampshire. Important examples occur at Highclere Park near Burghclere and Hurstbourne Park near Whitchurch.

Arable Field Margins

32. Uncultivated field margins provide an important refuge for flowering plants and other wildlife that were once a familiar sight in the farmed landscape. Such margins can also play a valuable role in helping to buffer adjacent semi-natural habitats from the effects of fertiliser and pesticide use.

¹¹. As defined in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

¹². All figures for areas of habitats in the Borough are extracted from the 2012/13 Annual Monitoring Report produced by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC).

33. Those field margins which are cultivated but uncropped are a vital resource for rare arable plants such as pheasants-eye.



Arable field margin

Unimproved Neutral Grassland

34. These are areas of flower-rich grassland, often traditionally managed as hay meadows.

35. The unimproved aspect relates to the fact that they have not been subjected to herbicide treatment or nutrient enrichment through the addition of artificial fertilisers. As a consequence, plant diversity is much greater than in improved grassland where relatively few species tend to dominate.

36. The borough has over 160 hectares of this habitat, which is over 10% of the total resource in Hampshire. Ashford Hill Meadows National Nature Reserve is an exceptionally good example, and the mosaic of woodland and meadows there is described as being “without comparison in central Southern England”¹³ There are also some fine examples alongside the River Test, some of which have been designated as SSSIs.

Calcareous grassland

37. This is the typical chalk grassland of the North Wessex Downs and is a relic of sheep farming, which reached its peak in the 16th century. The combination of soil chemistry and selective grazing by sheep and rabbits results in a rich flora and a close-fitting land cover that reveals the subtleties of the downland terrain. Chalk grassland is of particular importance for a number of butterfly species. Juniper, blackthorn and yew scrub is a natural component of this habitat, which adds to its diversity, but needs careful management to ensure it does not dominate. Chalk grassland has been drastically reduced in extent over recent decades and now only a few fragments remain. The borough has over 210 hectares of this habitat, which represents over 10% of the known total resource in Hampshire. Important examples in the borough include Beacon Hill and Ladle Hill near Burghclere.



Chalk grassland at Beacon Hill, near Burghclere

Floodplain Grazing Marsh

38. Grasslands situated in river floodplains and periodically inundated, some of which were historically managed as water meadows, have become a

scarce habitat due to drainage and, in some cases, conversion to arable farmland. Where they remain, these areas are important for wading birds and wintering wildfowl. The borough has over 800 hectares of this habitat.

Lowland Heath/Bog/Acid Grassland

39. Characterised by purple flowering heather with occasional yellow splashes of flowering gorse, lowland heath is an internationally important habitat type that is a remnant of historical grazing practices. This habitat is particularly important for rare birds including nightjar and Dartford warbler, and silver-studded blue and grayling butterflies, both of which are declining nationally. Diversity is added by bogs, which occur in valleys with impeded drainage giving rise to sphagnum moss dominated plant communities.

40. These habitats, which often occur as a mosaic, are found on acid soils and were once widespread across the north of the borough. Now they are restricted to a few fragments including Tadley, Silchester, Burghclere, and Newtown Commons.

Fen/Carr/Marsh/Swamp/Reedbed

41. These habitats tend to occur together forming mosaics, the different patches representing different stages of succession from open water to species-poor fen, the latter commonly grading into alder and willow woodland (carr). Because of the decline in traditional management, at some sites these different stages are deliberately held in check through conservation management in order to maintain habitat diversity. These habitats are important for a range of plants, birds and invertebrates. Examples in the borough include Mapledurwell Fen and Basing Fen.



Basing Fen

Standing Open Water

42. Numerous ponds and lakes occur across the borough, many of which have been deliberately created for utilitarian or ornamental purposes, including garden ponds. Collectively, these provide an important habitat for freshwater plants and animals. In particular, they play a vital role in the life cycles of amphibians, including the European protected great crested newt.

Rivers

43. Important rivers in the borough include the River Test and Bourne, the Rivers Loddon and Lyde and, running along the northern boundary, the River Enborne. The River Test and the upper reaches of the Loddon and Lyde are nationally renowned chalk rivers, fed from ground water aquifers. The resulting water chemistry, combined with relatively stable flows and cool temperature regimes results in a rich plant and invertebrate diversity. These rivers are also important for game fish and provide suitable habitat for otters and water voles, which are species of conservation concern.

¹³. Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) statement for Ashford Hill Woods and Meadows SSSI



The River Test

Basingstoke Canal

44. Canal habitats, in contrast to rivers, provide stable aquatic environments giving them an important role in the life cycle of many canal species. Basingstoke Canal has particularly high species diversity due to a transition in underlying geology resulting in an alkaline to slightly acid, west/east water chemistry gradient. The canal supports nationally important populations of dragonflies and damselflies and a population of water vole. Within the borough, a large part of the canal route is now derelict, however a small water-filled section remains which is of significant biodiversity value. This is cut off from the rest of the channel by the collapsed Greywell Tunnel, itself an internationally important site for its bat populations.

Road Verges

45. Road verges provide an important refuge for plants that are unable to survive in intensively managed farmland and, in some cases, they comprise important woodland edge habitats. Verges associated with newly built roads and those in urban

areas offer considerable potential for wildlife through appropriate planting and management. They are also, if sensitively managed, good habitats for small mammals such as voles, and consequently ideal for kestrels. Those road verges most important for plants are identified so that specific management cutting regimes can be carried out.

Green Lanes

46. Unsurfaced green lanes, such as the Harrow Way, with their combination of verges, hedges, bare earth and sheltered micro-climates, can have particularly good habitat, as well as aesthetic, value.



Greenlane

Other types of Habitat

Urban Green Space

47. Built-up areas account for around eight per cent of the land area of the borough and include Basingstoke, Bramley, Tadley, Baughurst and Pamber Heath, Whitchurch, Overton, Kingsclere, Oakley, Chineham, and Old Basing.

¹⁴ Green Infrastructure Strategy for Basingstoke and Deane (2013 to 2029).

48. The green spaces of urban areas, such as parks, play a vital role in the quality of life for people living and/or working in them. In addition to aesthetic benefits and opportunities for recreation, such spaces provide valuable habitats for wildlife, which can further enhance enjoyment from such areas and help to foster understanding of, and care for, the natural world. The spaces can act as 'stepping stones' for wildlife within built up areas thereby providing opportunities for the movement of more mobile wildlife through these areas. Five of the council's semi-natural green spaces have been declared as Local Nature Reserves for their value as publicly accessible wildlife areas. These include Pamber Forest, near Tadley, and community woodlands in Chineham and Old Basing.

Gardens

49. Gardens have great potential for wildlife, especially where they contain a diverse structure of plants or contain wildlife ponds, and where they form an interconnected network within urban areas. Gardens can provide a highly significant habitat in urban areas. People can easily improve the wildlife value of their gardens by creating habitats such as log piles, wildflower lawns, garden ponds and providing bird feeding stations. Tips and advice on wildlife friendly gardening are widely available.

Churchyards

50. Churchyards that are under sympathetic management can be of significant importance for wildlife. St Leonard's Church in Cliddesden, for example, is a designated Site of

Importance for Nature Conservation because it supports unimproved species-rich grassland.

Greenways and green corridors

51. River corridors are of particular importance in facilitating the movement of species between separate patches of habitat as well as being habitats in their own right. This is recognised within the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy¹⁴ which identifies the River Test and River Loddon within the borough as Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPAs). In addition, various other linear features such as hedgerows, road and railway corridors, footpaths and cycleways can, in addition to their primary function, facilitate the movement of more mobile species from one habitat patch to another as can the network of green spaces within more urban areas.



Networks of woodland and hedgerow across intensively managed landscape

52. Linear features are also of considerable aesthetic importance in their wider landscape setting, accentuating field patterns and landform.

Trees

53. Street trees, along with those in private gardens and growing in areas of

open space, make a significant contribution to the landscape quality of the built environment, breaking up the hard edges and skylines of urban development. In terms of wildlife, street trees can provide habitat for birds and invertebrates and may act as ‘stepping stones’ between areas of open space.

Artificial habitats

54. Buildings and structures themselves can provide important refuges for wildlife. Lofts, for example, may be used by bats. The taller buildings in Basingstoke provide substitute cliff faces and are sometimes used as nesting sites by birds of prey, such as peregrine falcons. Farm buildings also provide important artificial habitats in the countryside, particularly for bats and barn owls.



House Martin

Designated sites

Protected Sites

55. There are nineteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within, or partly within, the borough. However, SSSIs are just a representative sample of the very best sites and they protect only a very small proportion of the borough’s key habitats. The main form of protection for our key habitats is through their designation as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). This is a Hampshire-wide designation and similar ‘local site’ systems operate in other counties. Currently over 780 of the borough’s key habitats are designated as SINC. While this does not provide statutory control over the management of the sites, SINC designation is a material consideration within the planning system, helps to highlight the importance of the sites to landowners and helps with the targeting of conservation advice and practical work (see Landscape and Biodiversity in the Countryside for further information on conservation advice schemes supported by the council). The distribution of SSSIs and SINC is shown in Fig 2 below. Appendix 2 provides more detailed maps.

Landscape Scale Areas

56. Conservation of biodiversity cannot be left to protection of small independent wildlife sites alone. Many species require a variety of habitat types and/or larger areas of land to meet all of their requirements, they need to be able to freely interbreed with other populations to prevent inbreeding and, due to climate change, it will be increasingly important for them to be able to move across the landscape to find suitable habitat in compatible climate zones. In the “Lawton Report” (Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network¹⁵) this was characterised

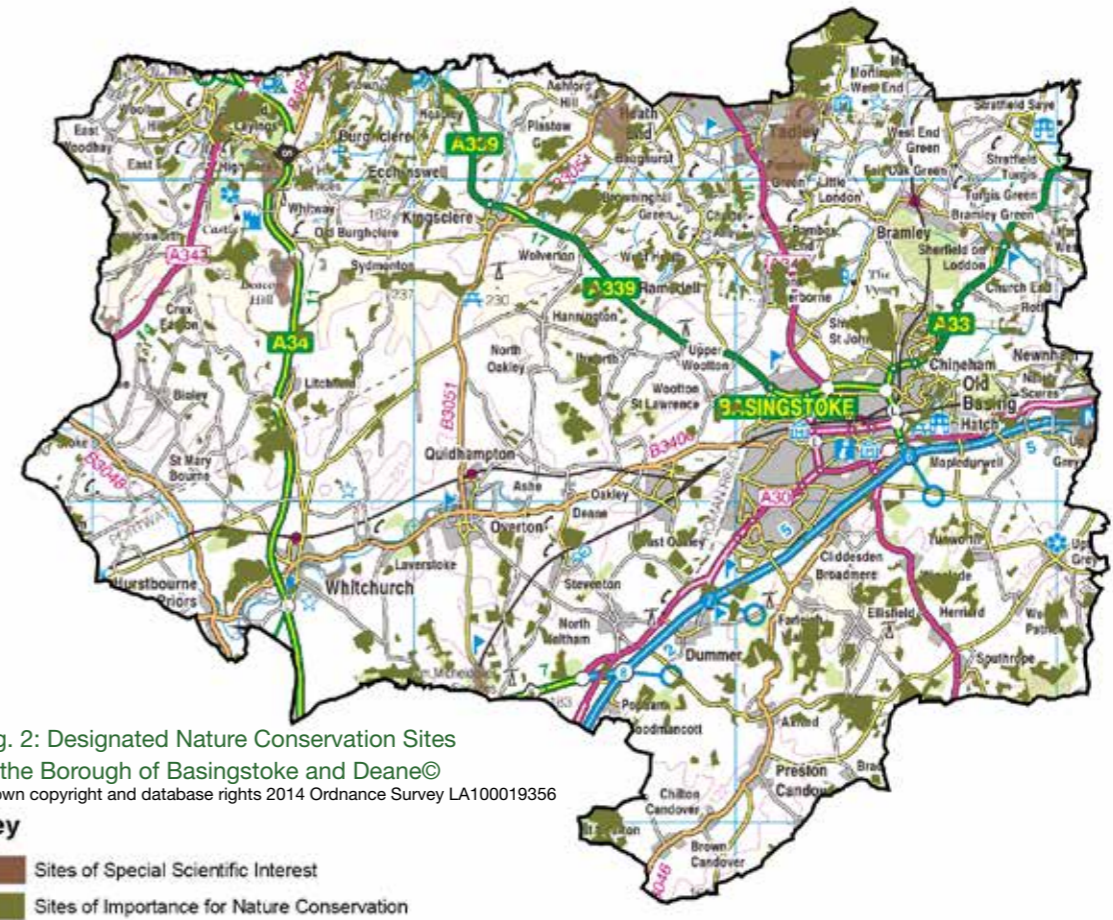


Fig. 2: Designated Nature Conservation Sites in the Borough of Basingstoke and Deane© Crown copyright and database rights 2014 Ordnance Survey LA100019356

Key
 ■ Sites of Special Scientific Interest
 ■ Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

as needing spaces for biodiversity that are ‘bigger, better and more joined-up’. Therefore, it is important that conservation of individual sites is supported by sustainable land management of the wider countryside. Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (see Landscape and Biodiversity in the Countryside) are examples of areas targeted for the creation of the ecological networks recommended in the Lawton report.

Landscape Character

57. Changing landscape practices over the centuries, along with geology, landform and other physical influences, have created a tapestry of different broad and key habitats across the borough.

58. Based on a study of habitats, land use and landscape history, a landscape assessment, undertaken on behalf of the council, has led to the identification of twenty distinct Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), each representing a tract of land with a recognisable local identity. These character areas are shown in Fig. 3. Full descriptions of the LCAs are given in the Basingstoke and Deane Landscape Assessment¹⁶.

59. Whilst landscape change is inevitable, this approach provides a framework for guiding and monitoring this change to prevent the loss of cherished features and characteristics and to help ensure that opportunities for enhancement and beneficial change are identified and acted upon.

¹⁵ Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K. et al. (2010). Making Space for Nature: a review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to DEFRA

¹⁶ Landscape Design Associates and Wessex Archaeology (2001) Basingstoke and Deane Landscape Assessment. Basingstoke: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

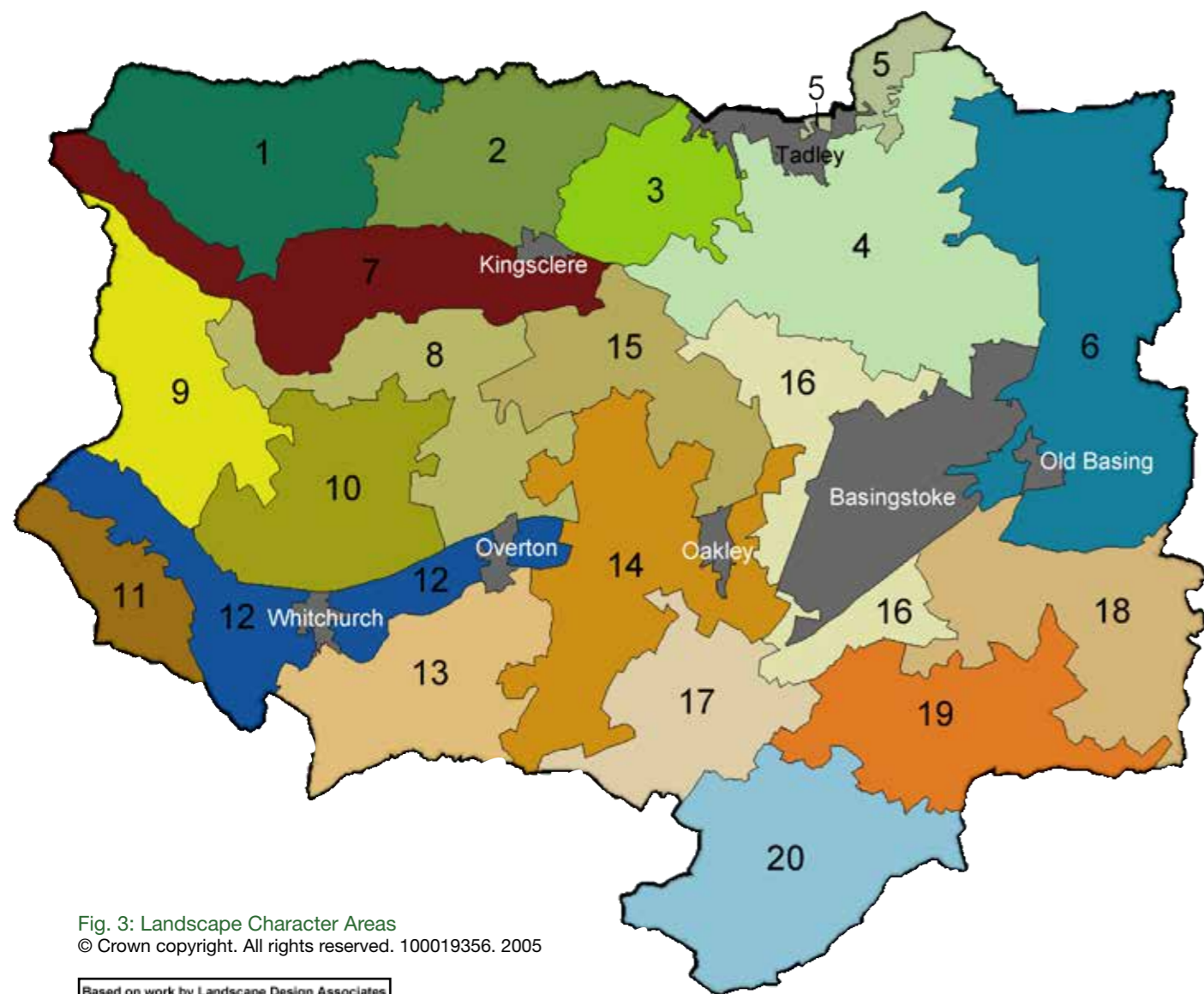


Fig. 3: Landscape Character Areas
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Based on work by Landscape Design Associates

Legend			
1. Highclere and Burghclere	6. Loddon and Lyde Valley	11. Wyke Down	16. Basingstoke Down
2. Ecchinswell	7. The Clere Scarp	12. Test and Bourne Valley	17. Dummer and Popham Down
3. Wolverton	8. Great Litchfield Down and Willesley Warren	13. South Test Down	18. Tunworth and Upton Grey Down
4. North Sherborne	9. Ashmansworth and Binley Down	14. Oakley /Steventon Down	19. Ellisfield Clay Plateau and Valley
5. North Silchester	10. Litchfield Down	15. Hannington Down	20. Candover Valley

The historic landscape

60. Various sites of archaeological interest exist within the borough. There are seventy three Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including Neolithic long barrows, Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age hill forts and iconic sites such as Silchester Roman town and old Basing House. In addition, there are various semi-natural historic features in the borough landscape, including droveways, ancient field boundaries, medieval deer

parks and water meadows. The borough also has twelve sites on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England as well as over ninety that are on the Hampshire Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. However, landscape heritage is not limited to such discrete features and sites. It occurs in the patterns such features form in the landscape as a whole giving it an extra dimension through which the processes of human interaction with the environment can be traced.

Countryside access and recreation

61. The borough has a good network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes, some of which follow historic droveways. Of particular note is the Wayfarers Walk, a 43-kilometre stretch of which runs through the borough, passing through Ashmansworth, East Woodhay (where it passes close to Pilot Hill, the highest point in Hampshire), Kingsclere, Oakley, Dummer and The Candovers. The Three Castles Path, which runs from Windsor to Winchester, also passes through part of the borough via Tunworth, Winslade, Ellisfield and Bradley.

Pressures Affecting the Natural Environment¹⁷

62. The last century was one of social and economic progress that largely ignored the value of, and our dependence on, the natural environment. Halting and reversing this trend requires recognition of past and continuing losses and the issues causing these losses to be tackled as part of an integrated approach to sustainable living. The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) monitors the status of 50 representative notable species in the county. It is estimated that 35 per cent declined between 2002 to 2012¹⁸. Only four per cent are estimated to have increased in terms of population size. 49 per cent are stable (although many of these have

only stabilised following a previous period of decline), six per cent appear to be fluctuating and the status of six per cent is unknown.

63. Impacts on the natural environment are affected by day-to-day consumer choices and people's expectations for a certain standard of living. However, the increasing disconnection between people and the natural environment means that, in many cases, we are unaware of the effect that our everyday choices are having.

64. One of the greatest threats to the character and appearance of the landscape is the loss of local distinctiveness that can be caused by more intensive systems of farming, resulting in loss of historic landscape features and standardisation of management approaches. Other threats include loss of tranquillity due to lighting associated with roads and urban areas, clutter from excessive road signage and standard approaches to road design, lack of locally distinctive building styles and the effects of urban activities on the fringes of built-up areas.



Intensively farmed landscape

¹⁷. This section is based on previous work of the Basingstoke and Deane Area Strategic Partnership (BASP) Natural Environment Forum.

¹⁸. HBIC Annual Monitoring Report 2012/13

65. Biodiversity is declining on a local and global scale and key causes are:

- **Loss of suitable habitat** has been the biggest single factor, not just through direct removal via past development, but through lack of appropriate management. Many of these habitats developed through the influence of past land management but as the pressure for efficiency has led to the replacement of these historic forms of land management with modern farming systems, and as farm incomes have fallen, the economic basis for this type of management has largely disappeared.
- **Habitat isolation and fragmentation** are major contributors to biodiversity loss. Smaller habitats tend to support proportionately fewer species than larger ones and are more vulnerable to other pressures. Where similar habitat types are isolated from one another, species that are unable to cross the intervening land are particularly vulnerable because a decline in the population of one site cannot be boosted by immigration from other sites.
- **Water availability and quality** is essential to all life but wetlands and their associated species are becoming increasingly threatened as the demand for water to support further development in the region increases. Major development can also have significant localised effects on hydrology. Adequate water velocity in streams and rivers is important to ensure turbulence, which helps oxygenate the water for aquatic wildlife, and to prevent silt formation so as to leave a clear gravelly river-bed for fish to spawn.
- **Introduced species** that have been accidentally released into the wild have caused catastrophic wildlife declines in some cases. American mink, for example, have been one of the main causes for a crash in water vole populations and invasive plants such as *Rhododendron ponticum* can smother and shade out native plant communities and have limited

habitat value themselves. Introduced species can also bring new diseases which native fauna can be highly susceptible to.



American Mink

- **Disturbance from human activities** can have a negative impact on certain species. For example, dog walking can disturb ground nesting birds and domestic cats can have a significant impact on song birds, small mammals and reptiles.
- **Pollution**, from major incidents and from the cumulative effects of contaminated rainwater run-off (from both urban and rural sources), can have a significant detrimental impact on biodiversity. Silt deposited into rivers can adversely affect fish breeding and nutrient enrichment of habitats can lead to bio diverse plant communities being overtaken by a few dominant species. Atmospheric pollution, particularly the deposition of nitrogen, is also artificially enriching certain habitats that rely on low nutrient levels to maintain species richness.
- **Climate change** is an emerging and considerable threat to our remaining biodiversity and is likely to exacerbate all of the above problems. Shifting climate zones will require species to move in order to adapt, but habitat isolation will limit this. A warmer climate is liable to encourage the spread of introduced species from more southerly latitudes and pollution is liable

to be exacerbated by more frequent and intensive storms increasing run-off, followed by reduced water levels in the summer.



Low flowing stream

¹⁹. The original aims were formally identified by the Natural Environment Forum of the Basingstoke Area Strategic Partnership.

²⁰. While it is inevitable that there will continue to be some localised losses of habitats and impacts on wildlife populations from human actions and natural processes, it is essential to our future environmental sustainability that we avoid losses of irreplaceable habitat and that, in other cases, we seek to offset any unavoidable negative impacts on habitats and wildlife populations through positive action to compensate for these losses.

Conserving Our Natural Environment

— Overall Approach

66. Through previous work with key partners in the borough¹⁹, the following collective long-term aims have been identified for the natural environment of the borough:

- a locally distinctive and attractive countryside, with a character that reflects local geology, soils, materials and traditions;
- a halt to the net loss of biodiversity and recovery of wildlife populations and habitats, where possible²⁰; and
- a reconnection of people with the natural environment, farming and other forms of rural land management.

67. The following long-term objectives will be pursued by the council and its partners to help to achieve these aims:

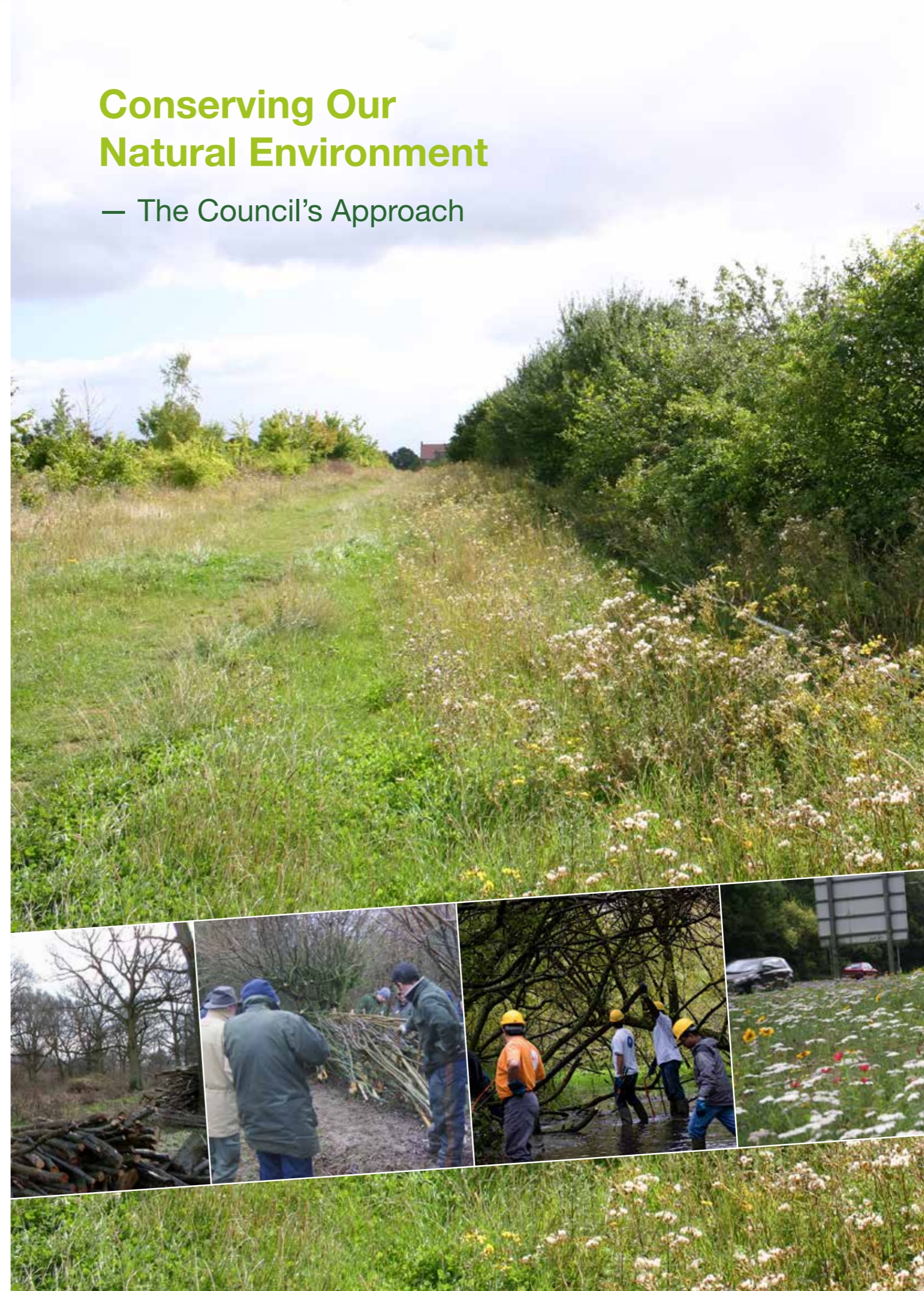
- protection and management of key habitats;
- creation of new habitat to expand and link isolated areas of key habitats;
- protection and enhancement of existing green infrastructure assets to provide space for wildlife, which can also support the health and well-being of our residents.
- sustainable land management in the countryside and built-up areas that supports wildlife;
- a viable and sustainable rural economy to underpin sustainable rural land management;
- species-focussed action for those that

are most under threat or affected by factors that are not addressed by other objectives;

- improved public access to natural green space and the countryside where this can be achieved without adversely affecting the natural environment;
- promotion of opportunities for local communities to learn about and get involved with the care of their local environment; and
- ensuring that adequate green infrastructure is provided to support biodiversity, which in turn supports our growing populations and economy.

Conserving Our Natural Environment

— The Council's Approach



Parks and Open Spaces: Managing Biodiversity on Council Land

68. One of the most significant contributions that the council can make to the conservation of biodiversity is through the management of its own parks and open spaces. This is also a key element of the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy which seeks, as one of its key objectives, to improve biodiversity on council owned open spaces. The borough's parks and open spaces also provide some of the best opportunities for many of the borough's residents and workers to experience wildlife and nature.

69. The council manages a number of open spaces primarily for nature conservation and as areas where people can enjoy quiet recreation in a natural setting. These sites range from remnant historic habitat types such as ancient woodland and heathland to sites that have more recently developed a nature conservation interest through deliberate management.

70. Five council sites are designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), including Pamber Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), near Tadley. Both of these statutory designations give the council a responsibility to manage these sites for the nature conservation interests for which they were designated. The council also has twenty three designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). However, biodiversity is not confined to specially designated wildlife sites. Even road verges and formal parks can make important contributions to urban wildlife with the right management. Leaving areas of grass uncut until wildflowers have set seed, leaving piles of deadwood

and logs in wooded areas, increasing the structural diversity of plantings, with ground cover, shrubs and trees and planting native or nectar-rich flowers all make a positive contribution. The council has been gradually increasing the amount of land that is managed to enhance biodiversity in line with the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy. This recognises many existing open spaces could be enhanced for biodiversity by implementing relatively simple changes in management. One biodiversity enhancement project is the Roadside Verges of Ecological Importance (RVEI) scheme whereby roadside verges within Basingstoke that contain high plant diversity or provide important wildlife corridors are managed by the council for their wildflowers. The council is looking to explore a similar project for improving the wildlife management of hedgerows in suitable locations.



Pamber Forest Local Nature Reserve

71. The council is also responsible for managing approximately 60,000 trees in streets and parks, and 100 hectares of thickets and woodland. In order to maximise the ecological, recreational and landscape value of our trees and woodland, the council is developing a tree strategy. This will ensure that the tree resource is resilient to future pressures, including

climate change, by being diverse in terms of both species and age class. The strategy will also help to ensure that our trees and woodland are accessible to residents, in balance with the surroundings and maintained in a safe and healthy condition.

72. Volunteers play a crucial role in the council's approach to improving the biodiversity of its parks and open spaces. During the 2012 to 2013 financial year, 7,644 hours of volunteer time were spent through work parties and other volunteering work on the council's land. This equates to 6 people working 30 hours a week for one year and makes a valuable contribution to the biodiversity of these sites as well as providing opportunities for people to become involved in the stewardship of their local environment, learn new skills, and work with people of different ages and from different social backgrounds. It also provides a rewarding form of healthy exercise.

73. Proposed Approach

- The council will continue to manage its Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation with biodiversity as a primary objective.
- The council will continue to increase the amount of council owned open spaces managed for biodiversity.
- The council's operations team will continue to improve their understanding of biodiversity and management of parks and open spaces as well as continuing to liaise with voluntary groups in the management of green spaces.

- The council will continue to produce new and review existing green space management plans for all the council's significant green spaces, including those sites with significant biodiversity interest, as outlined in the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy. The work will include the installation of interpretation and information boards where appropriate and making information on the management and biodiversity value of sites more readily available to the public. Volunteering will continue to play an important part in the management of bio diverse parks and open spaces (see Community Engagement Section).

- The council will continue to pursue the habitat creation and restoration targets associated with council owned or managed land as outlined in the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy.

- As part of work under the European Water Framework Directive²¹, a feasibility study has been undertaken to assess the potential for restoring sections of the River Loddon running through Eastrop Park. The project would seek to improve the ecological status of a number of failing culverts running beneath the park. A number of scoping options have been identified and a business plan for the project is being developed with The Environment Agency.

- A Tree Strategy will be developed in order to maximise the ecological, recreational and landscape value of the council's trees and woodlands.

²¹. The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) came into force in December 2000 and became part of UK law in December 2003.

²². The Local Sites Partnership is loosely synonymous with the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre Partnership which encompasses a number of partners including district authorities, Natural England, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, and key wildlife recording groups.

Planning for Green Development

74. New development and construction activities can have sudden and severe negative impacts on the natural environment. However, in the right place, carefully-planned development can positively contribute to landscape and biodiversity.



New wildlife habitat created around housing development

75. The council has draft landscape and biodiversity policies within its emerging local plan to secure appropriate protection of the natural environment. A Landscape and Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has previously been produced to provide guidance on how planning policies should be complied with. The Local Plan is due to be adopted in early 2015 and an update to the SPD will need to be produced thereafter. The council has in-house specialists to advise on the ecological, as well as the landscape, implications of planning applications. Opportunities are sought, wherever practicable, to enhance the biodiversity of a development site through incorporating habitats and habitat features into a scheme.



Wildlife corridors for Great Crested Newts

76. Through its membership of the Hampshire Local Sites Partnership²², the council supports a system of designating key habitats as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). While the designation does not provide any statutory protection, it is given formal recognition through the planning policies of each planning authority in Hampshire. These planning policies make any impacts on SINCs a material consideration in determining planning applications.

77. The council planning work also covers the protection of important trees through tree preservation orders and special controls over trees in conservation areas. The council has almost five hundred tree preservation orders in place across the borough, many of which were made many years ago and generally on an ad hoc basis. Therefore, the council has been pursuing a programme of review and updating of these orders. The council also employs specialist arboriculturists to review the implications of planning applications, ensuring that important trees are integrated into development proposals and that adequate provision is made for new tree planting.



Urban treescape

78. The provision and enhancement of green infrastructure is also considered through the council's planning function. In 2013, the council adopted Interim Green Space Standards as part of the draft Local plan. These standards set out the minimum requirements for the provision of new and/or enhancement of existing green spaces to meet the needs of the additional residents generated by new development, without adversely impacting on the quality of life of existing residents. The Interim Green Space Standards cover quantity, distance and minimum size standards for various categories of green space including Accessible Natural Green Space. This category of green space in particular, whilst providing informal recreation for residents, also provides opportunities for biodiversity enhancements.

79. The council, like other public bodies, also must have regard to River Basin Management Plans in exercising their functions. The Environment Agency is responsible for producing River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) under the European Water Framework Directive (WFD). These describe the river basin district, the quality of the water bodies within the area and the actions or measures required to meet the WFD's objective of water bodies reaching good ecological

status. Within the borough the River Loddon forms part of the Thames River Basin Management Plan and the River Test forms part of the South East River Basin Management Plan. The council will give due regard to river basin management plan information in the production of the emerging local plan.

Planning Policies for Biodiversity

Traditionally, the approach to planning policy and the natural environment has been to give consideration to legally protected sites (for example, SSSIs) and species (for example, great crested newts). While current planning policies make protected sites a material consideration and require greatest weight to be given to sites protected under European legislation, emphasis is now given to wider biodiversity considerations, including all habitats and species identified by the government as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the planning system should 'minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.'

The NPPF also states that 'local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of

international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.’

Finally it states that planning policies should ‘plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries; identify and map components of the local ecological networks; promote the conservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations.’

At a local scale draft Policy EM4 (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation) of Basingstoke and Deane’s emerging Local Plan states that:

1. Development proposals will only be permitted if significant harm to biodiversity or geodiversity resulting from a development can be avoided or adequately mitigated and where it can be clearly demonstrated that:
 - a) There will be no adverse impact on the conservation status of key species; and
 - b) There will be no adverse impact on the integrity of designated and proposed European designated sites*; and
 - c) There will be no harm to nationally designated sites; and
 - d) There will be no harm to locally designated sites including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); and
 - e) There will be no loss or deterioration of a key habitat type, including irreplaceable habitats; and
 - f) There will be no harm to the integrity of linkages between designated sites and key habitats.

The weight given to the protection of nature conservation interests will depend on the national or local significance and any designation or protection applying to the site, habitat or species concerned.

2. Where development proposals do not comply with the above they will only be permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that there is an overriding public need for the proposal which outweighs the need to safeguard biodiversity or geodiversity and there is no satisfactory alternative with less or no harmful impacts. In such cases, as a last resort, compensatory measures will be secured to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and, where possible, provide a net gain.
3. Applications for development must include adequate and proportionate information to enable a proper assessment of the implications for biodiversity and geodiversity.
4. In order to secure opportunities for biodiversity improvement, relevant development proposals will be required to include proportionate measures to contribute, where possible, to a net gain in biodiversity, through creation, restoration, enhancement and management of habitats and features including measures that help to link key habitats. This can be provided through:
 - a) On-site and/ or off-site provision linked to new development in accordance with the council’s adopted green space standards; and be
 - b) Focused on identified Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Biodiversity Priority Areas as identified in the council’s Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates) where appropriate.

80. Proposed Approach

- The council’s emerging Local Plan will present a significant opportunity to ensure that the natural environment is taken into account in deciding where new development should be located over the coming years. It will also be an opportunity to secure sufficient additional open space to support future growth and provide opportunities for strategic habitat creation to allow wildlife to move through the landscape as well as potentially contribute to habitat targets identified in the council’s Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy.
- Green Infrastructure, which is defined as an interconnected network of natural areas and other green open spaces that is integral to the health and quality of life of people in local communities and which supports and enhances natural and ecological processes, is an important component of any planning for future growth. The concept continues to be promoted nationally and locally as an integrated approach to providing open space for recreation, wildlife conservation, flood and water management, green pedestrian and cycle routes, gardens and allotments. The protection, restoration, expansion and linking of semi-natural areas, managed for their biodiversity value will also form an important component of the borough’s network of green spaces. As part of implementing the council’s GI Action Plan the council will identify key green corridors that provide wildlife habitat and link existing habitat.
- All Local Plan development site allocations have been or will be assessed for landscape and biodiversity implications, taking into account any species of conservation concern or key habitats liable to be affected, and also identifying opportunities for enhancements.
- The council will continue to work with partners to identify key habitats, and if they do not have a statutory designation,

ensure that they are assessed for SINC status, which then makes them a material consideration within the planning system.

- The long-term viability of new habitat created through development depends on securing adequate resources for its management. The council will continue to take commuted sums from developers when adopting new open spaces to cover maintenance.
- The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is a supporting document in the preparation of the evidence base informing the emerging Local Plan. The IDP details infrastructure requirements through to 2029 in the context of the Local Plan. The IDP also indicates the sources of funding for strategic and local green infrastructure.
- The council will continue to develop guidance and provide advice and training for planning staff and members.



Brown long eared bats

*‘European designated sites’ is the term used to encompass sites that have the highest level of protection in the UK either through legislation or policy. These are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), proposed SPAs (pSPAs) and Ramsar sites.

Landscape and Biodiversity in the Countryside

81. The majority of the borough's landscape, and the biodiversity that depends on it, is owned by private landowners, farmers and foresters. In recognition of the public benefit provided by countryside management, the council works in partnership with other organisations to help deliver several initiatives aimed at helping private landowners to implement forms of management that conserve and enhance biodiversity and protect the features of the landscape that gives it its special local character.

Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area Initiative

82. Led by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area Initiative (see Fig. 4) is a partnership with funding from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, the Environment Agency and local parish councils.

83. The aim of the initiative is to help protect and enhance all that is special about the wildlife, history and landscape of this area of north-east Hampshire while promoting a healthy and sustainable rural



Key
 Rivers Loddon & Lyde Indicative Flood Plain

Fig. 4: Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area
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economy. The project vision is for:

- a varied landscape rich in wildlife;
- an area that local people can enjoy and where they can learn more about their countryside and its heritage; and
- a healthy rural economy.

84. The project works to deliver agreed objectives. These are met by giving advice to landowners and community groups, providing advice on sources of funding, running training courses, walks and talks and publication of newsletters and other guides. Several wildlife and heritage walks have been developed in the borough through the project.

85. The project has worked with over fifty farmers in the area providing advice on environmentally sustainable land management that promotes soil biodiversity and farmland wildlife, reduces rain water run off that carries pollutants into water courses and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Many farmers have been helped into agri-environment schemes that benefit the environment and farm business. It has provided advice to community groups

on pond restoration and has worked with partners to deliver river restoration and habitat improvement works on the River Loddon and its tributaries.

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NWD AONB)

86. In carrying out its various functions, the council has to have regard to the protection of the natural beauty of the NWD AONB. Along with other local authorities in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, it is also responsible for the preparation of management plans for the area and it is preparing the next new plan covering a five-year period. This will set out a broad range of actions for all stakeholders in the AONB and will be used to inform the council's emerging Local Plan and its partnership work in respect of influencing countryside management. Executive support for the implementation of the management plan is provided by a dedicated team based near Hungerford.

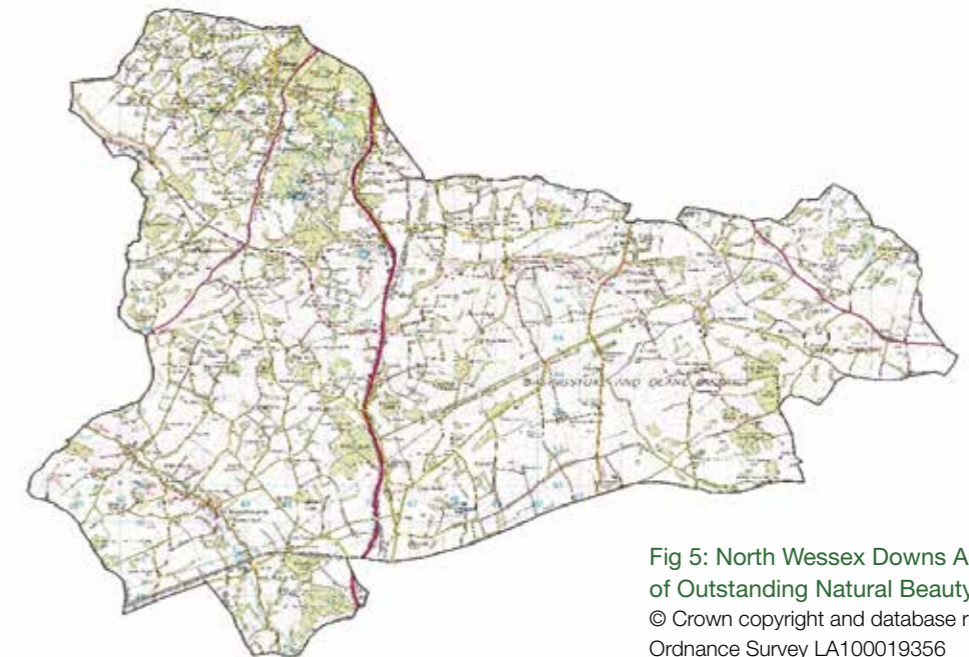


Fig 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
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Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)

87. Across South East England, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) have been identified to provide a landscape-scale framework for delivering the maintenance, restoration and creation of wildlife habitats. Their purpose is to identify areas where there is the most potential for improving biodiversity and subsequently serve as a focus for where conservation effort and resources can have the greatest benefit. These BOAs represent extensive tracts of land and they are not intended to represent

a constraint to development or other land uses such as farming. Nor is it expected that the whole of each land area will be restored to a priority habitat type such as unimproved grassland or woodland. The BOAs represent key areas for the delivery of the recommendations of the Lawton Report and the aims of the Natural Environment White Paper in taking a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation.

88. BOAs within the borough and their relationship to the rest of the Southeast are shown in Fig. 6.

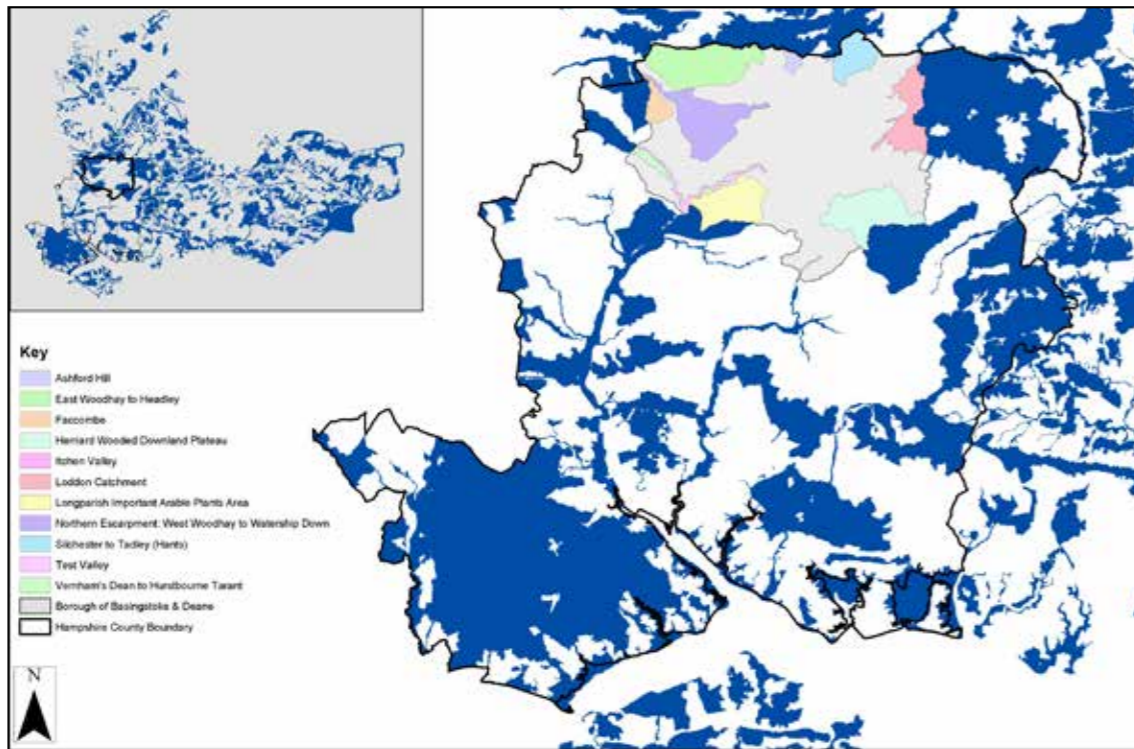


Fig 6: Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)²⁴
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²⁴ The Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) map depicts the regional priority areas of opportunity for restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats. This is a spatial representation of the BAP targets and the BOAs are areas of opportunity, not constraint. The BOAs shown in the map do not include all the BAP habitat in the region, nor do they include all the areas where BAP habitat could exist. In particular, more work is needed to develop approaches in urban and in marine environments.

Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPAs)

89. As stated in the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy, BOAs provide an important focus for multi-agency effort across the southeast of England for influencing countryside management in ways that are beneficial to biodiversity conservation. However, improvements in these areas are always likely to be opportunistic, reliant on incentives such as agricultural subsidies and subject to competing economic drivers over land use and the nature of its management. If significant improvements in local biodiversity are to be achieved, there is a need for the council, working with other landowners and organisations who have the ability to effect land use change, to directly create and restore habitat, particularly where this can create more wildlife friendly links and buffers between and around existing important sites. To this end, two Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPAs) were identified within the GI Strategy (as shown in Fig 7 and 8).

90. The BPAs are based on the borough's two main river corridors, River Test and River Loddon, and were chosen because these represent cohesive linear geographic areas that contain interrelated habitats, linked by the ecological function of the rivers, both of which are of major importance for biodiversity in their own right and in need of better management. Concerted effort to improve the management of existing high value habitats, restore degraded habitats that once had high value and to create new habitats in the place of those that have been completely lost, will complement activities within the BOAs, creating two major linear corridors across the borough from which many species will be able to spread out to take advantage of any habitat improvements within the BOAs.

91. Within each of the Biodiversity Priority Areas the following objectives will be pursued by the council and its partners as outlined in the council's GI Strategy:

- Protect and manage existing key habitats within each BPA
- When opportunities exist create new habitat to expand and link isolated areas of key habitats
- Support sustainable land management Improve public access to the countryside/natural green space within each of the areas where this can be achieved without adversely affecting the natural environment.

Improve public access to the countryside/natural green space within each of the areas where this can be achieved without adversely affecting the natural environment.

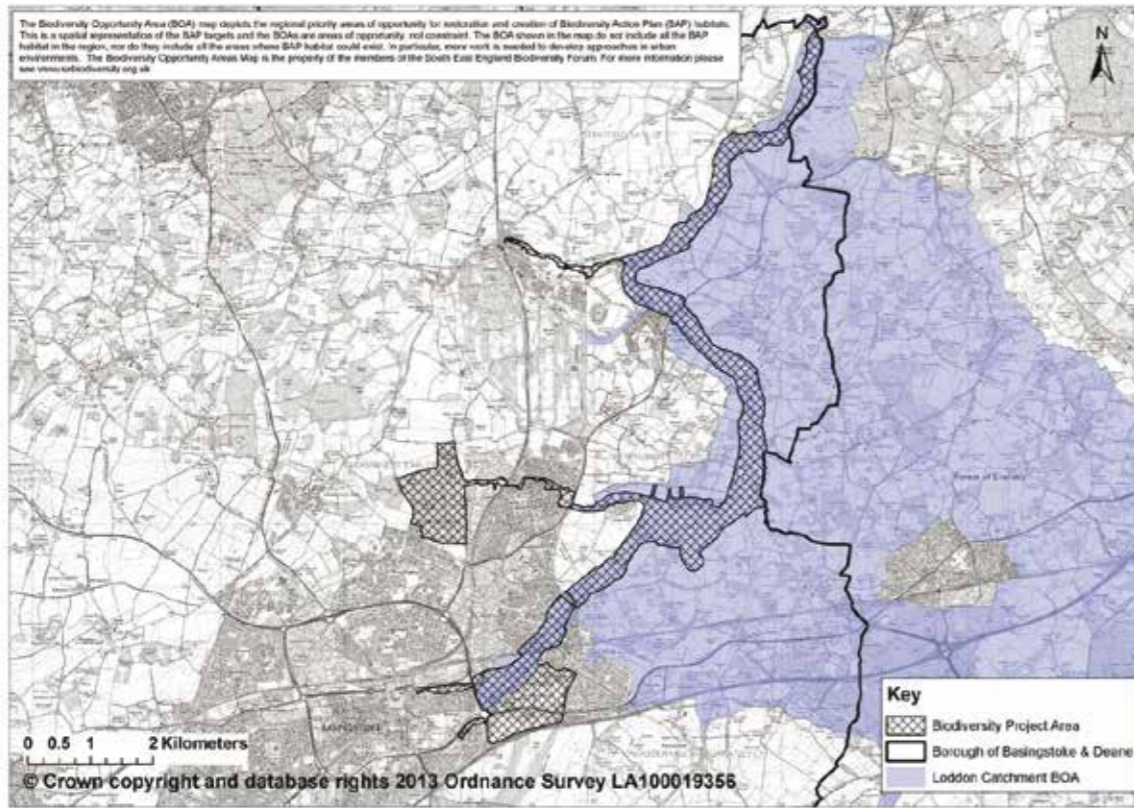


Fig. 7: River Loddon Biodiversity Priority Area (BPA)
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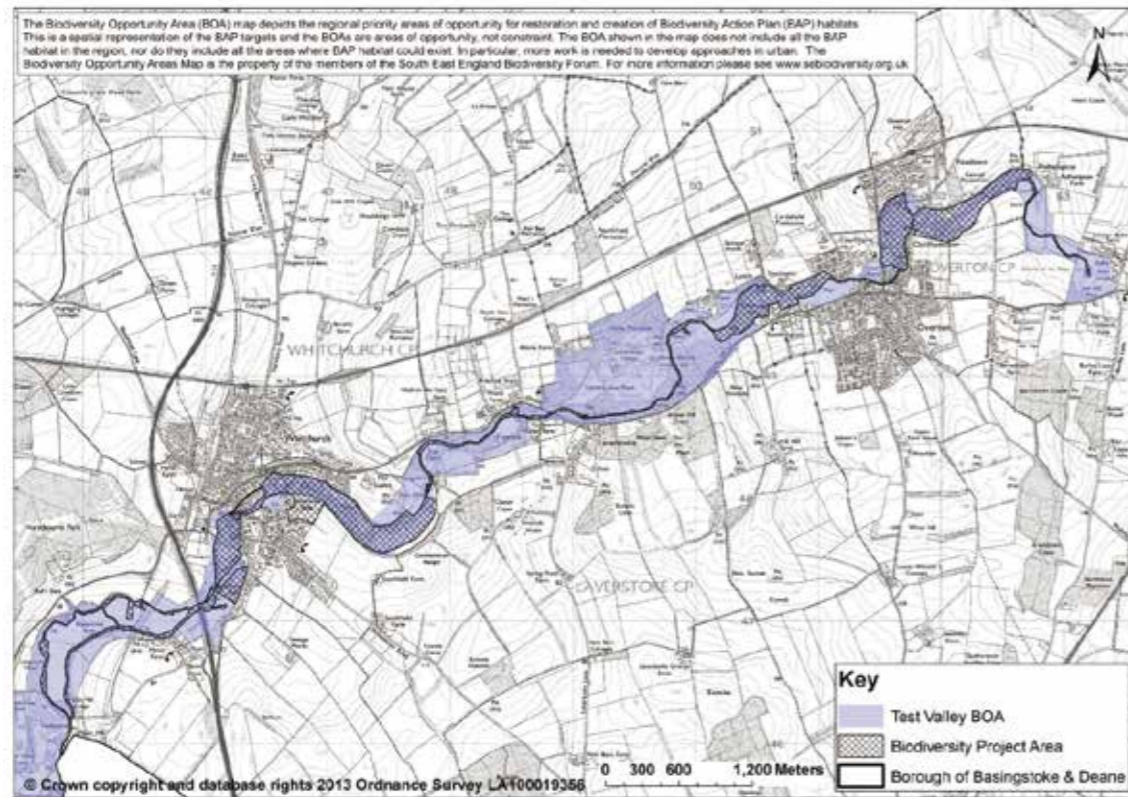


Fig. 7: River Test Biodiversity Priority Area (BPA)
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Land owner advice in other parts of the borough

92. The council supports land owner advice in other parts of the borough by providing funding to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to assist with the provision of advice to land owners and community groups on managing land for wildlife. The Wildlife Trust has specialist knowledge of managing habitats for wildlife and integrating this within other land uses such as farming and forestry. The focus of this effort is on the Trust's Living Landscape Areas, of which four fall fully or partially within the borough of Basingstoke and Deane: Test Valley Living Landscape, Western Thames Basin Living Landscape and Facombe Woodland to Kingsclere Downland Living Landscape in addition to

the Loddon and Eversley Heritage area. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust aims to work with local people to restore, protect and enhance the wildlife, landscape and heritage of these areas, whilst ensuring a sustainable future for the people that live and work there. The Winning Ways for Wildlife Project is another landscape scale partnership led project within North West Hampshire. It is supported by the Hampshire & Isle Wight Wildlife Trust, The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation and Natural England. It aims to improve and link privately owned ancient semi-natural woodland and chalk grassland for the benefit of key indicator butterfly and bird species. It covers approximately 17,300 ha within the western half of the borough and the council sits on the project's steering group. The boundaries of these different initiatives are shown in Fig 9.

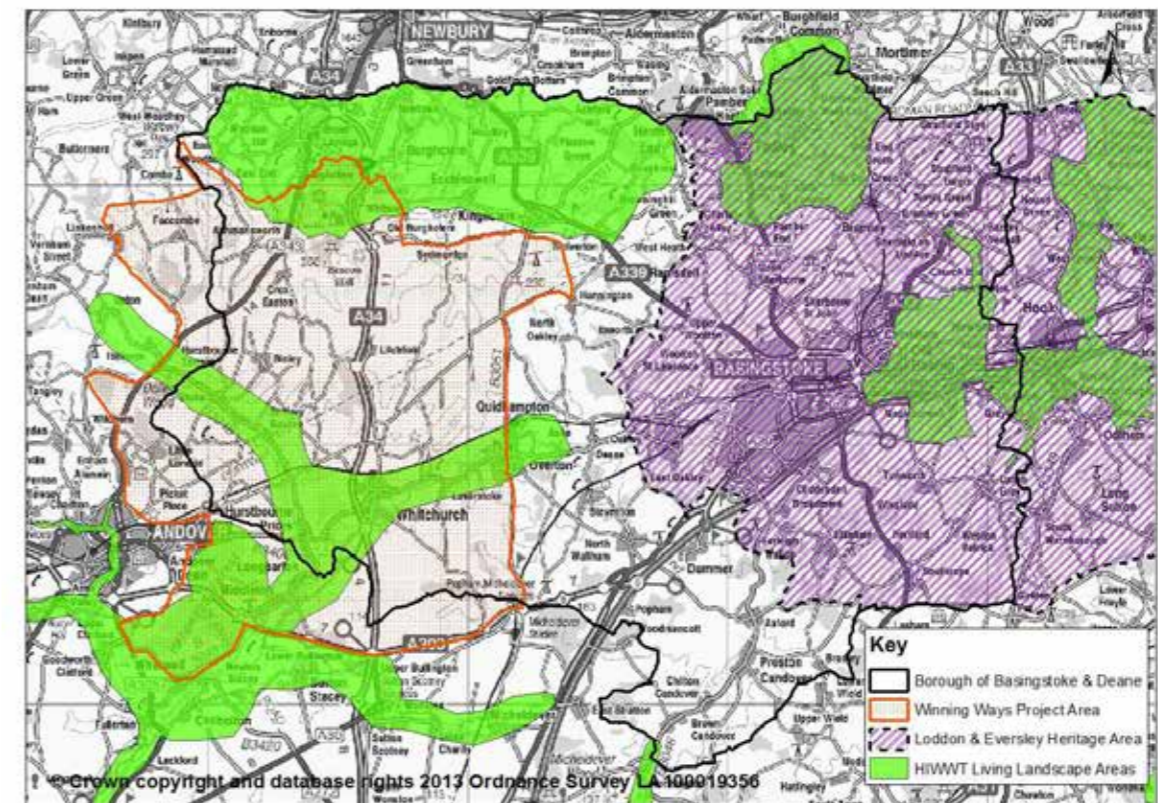


Fig. 9: Other Land Owner Advice initiatives within the Borough
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93. Proposed Approach

Working in partnership with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and other partners has proved to be the most effective means of influencing conservation in the wider countryside. Therefore the council will continue to work in this way. However, the focus of this work will be on the existing Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area, the North Wessex Downs AONB and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust led Living Landscape Areas. These areas partly reflect the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, but vary slightly to take into account local priorities, the council's particular duties in relation to the AONB and the opportunity to link with priorities of other organisations allowing for partnership working. The council, in conjunction with its partners will seek, in particular, habitat enhancements and creation along the corridors of the River Loddon and River Test which have been identified as Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPAs).



Hedgerow management training run by the council

Working with the Community

94. The involvement of local communities in the stewardship of their local environment is essential to the successful long-term conservation of biodiversity and in ensuring that people get maximum pleasure and other benefits from its conservation.



Volunteers making nest boxes

95. The council supports Natural Basingstoke, a voluntary association of sixteen constituted community conservation groups that carry out practical conservation work on public land. In addition, council staff lead a number of work parties for corporate volunteering initiatives and for individuals. In the 2012 to 2013 financial year, volunteers put in over 7,500 person hours of work making a major contribution to improving the biodiversity of the council's open spaces.

96. Council staff also give talks and organise events to promote community involvement in biodiversity. In June 2013 the first Basingstoke 'BioBlitz' event attracted over 250 people to help survey a public open space. Over 270 different

species of wildlife were recorded during the course of a day. In the organisation of these events the council seeks to involve a range of stakeholders and organisations for effective partnership working and engage a wide range of the community in biodiversity issues. Most of the conservation groups currently supported by the council are based in or around Basingstoke. In order to promote and assist community-based conservation work in other parts of the borough, the council, in partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, have been promoting a parish conservation planning toolkit. These help local parishes map some of the key habitats and species within a parish, town or village boundary. The maps can be linked to parish plans or village design statements and can help to identify ways to protect and enhance biodiversity locally.



Volunteers undertaking pond management

97. The council has supported free food initiatives, such as 'Incredible Edible North Hampshire' which resulted in new community orchards being planted in one of the council's parks. The orchard will be managed in a traditional manner, thereby helping to provide a new key habitat.

98. The council also runs a Tree Warden network in the borough. Tree Wardens are volunteers, appointed by parish councils or other community organisations, who gather information about their local trees, get involved in local tree matters and encourage local practical projects to do with trees and woods. Tree wardens have been involved in the council's annual tree planting programme and in creating tree trails. The Tree Warden Scheme is a national initiative run by the Tree Council.

99. The council supports environmental improvements that are undertaken by community groups. To help achieve this the council provides a grant known as the Community, Heritage and Environment Fund (CHEF) which is open to anyone wanting to engage the community in improving the environment anywhere in the borough. One of the areas of work the grant can be used for is in improving the natural environment.

100. Another potential source of funding for one-off capital projects that would improve or enhance the natural environment is the council's Local Infrastructure Fund (LIF). This is a fund which local communities and voluntary groups can apply for within an area of development that has accrued the New Homes Bonus²⁵. Projects that qualify need to make a significant, long lasting improvement to the local community which could include improving local green infrastructure.

101. Proposed Approach

- The council will continue to support community conservation groups working on public land, ensuring that management plans are in place for each site, assisting with training, where possible, and funding

for small capital works. In addition, the council will seek to recruit new volunteers and continue to lead corporate work parties and provide opportunities for individuals wishing to become involved in practical conservation work.

- The council will continue to work with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to promote a 'tool kit' to assist with the preparation of parish conservation maps.
- The council will continue to run a Tree Warden network and encourage their involvement with conservation groups as well as deliver a training programme for Tree Wardens and volunteers.
- There is a significant amount of volunteer wildlife recording carried out in the borough, for example by specialist recorder groups who supply data to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre. The council will continue to run training courses for volunteers to improve their data recording and information skills.
- The council will seek to empower local communities by improving the availability of information on the natural environment, including better 'sign posting' of existing sources of information.
- The council will continue to explore how it can engage a wider section of the community, including individuals and organisations, through provision of local information, promoting wildlife gardening, competitions and other initiatives such as Bio Blitzs which promote species recording.
- The council will continue to support community focused environmental improvement projects through the provision of the Community, Heritage and Environment Fund (CHEF).

Information, Monitoring and Review

102. The availability of information about the natural environment of the borough, especially for those areas managed by the council and its partners, is essential to inform appropriate action and assess its outcome. The Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC), which is jointly funded by Hampshire local authorities and other organisations, plays a central role in this. This centre serves as a countywide data facility for habitat and species records collected by a range of individuals and organisations. It identifies and reviews Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in partnership with other organisations and undertakes an annual habitat survey programme for the council.

103. The council currently uses three headline indicators in respect of biodiversity:

- The first is to avoid any loss of land that is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or as a SINC, as a result of planning decisions. It undertakes an annual audit of planning decisions issued to see if any have led to the direct loss of key semi-natural habitats that are designated as SINCs.
- The second is to record the amount of key habitats that are created and/or restored through new developments or on private land through council initiatives, such as the council's Community, Heritage and Environment Fund (CHEF).

- The final indicator measures the amount of council owned land that is managed or enhanced for biodiversity with a target that this amount is increased year on year.

104. Currently lacking from the current approach to monitoring is an indicator that measures long-term changes in landscape character and biodiversity outside of designated sites in the wider countryside.

105. Proposed Approach

- The council will continue to support the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) and promote it as the first point of contact for data on the borough's natural environment. It will work with the centre's staff to agree each annual programme of survey work.
- The council will monitor actions to enhance biodiversity on its own sites by monitoring completed work programmes and actions in the individual management plans developed for these sites.
- The council will continue to monitor for any loss of designated sites through development control decisions or any key habitats created or restored. It will continue to monitor the implementation of habitat enhancements on its own land.
- To share information about implementation of the strategy and outcomes for the natural environment, the council will publish an annual review of progress.



Volunteers checking Dormouse boxes

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²⁵ New Homes Bonus is aimed at supporting areas and communities that have been affected by recent housing growth; for every new home built and occupied the government gives the council a New Homes Bonus grant each year for six years.

