



Planning: Forward Planning

In England, we operate under a 'planned system', this means that all decisions as to future development and planning applications in an area are informed (principally) by the policies and supporting information of the development plan.

The relevance of this system to biodiversity conservation is that its role is to plan (in a sustainable way) for future development whilst safeguarding and, where possible, taking opportunities to enhance the environment. Information contained in these plans therefore provides us with an invaluable tool for guiding future development in a way that helps to protect and enhance natural resources such as biodiversity. A useful guide to how the planning system works can be found at [A Handy Guide to Planning](#)

National and European Union Planning Guidance

At a national level, Parliament makes laws and sets out the legal framework for planning. National planning guidance has experienced large-scale reforms under the current Government. [Planning Policy Statement 9 \[PPS9\]](#) was directly concerned with the interaction of planning and wildlife protection. PPS9 is now redundant, and has been replaced by the relevant provisions of the [National Planning Policy Framework \[NPPF\]](#). The NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions.

The administrative guidance on the application of the law relating to planning and nature conservation ([Circular 06/05](#)) still applies until further notice. Circular 06/05 is currently used in conjunction with the NPPF rather than PPS9. The NPPF states that the planning

system should contribute to and enhance natural environments by minimising impacts on biodiversity, and providing net biodiversity gains where possible. Coherent and more resilient ecological networks need to be established. The NPPF advises that the planning system should plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries. It recommends that policies need to identify and map components of local ecological networks, and to promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations.

[NERC 2006](#) includes the 'duty to conserve biodiversity' which includes 'restoring or enhancing a population or habitat' (S.40(3)). In England, Site of Special Scientific interest [SSSI] is a very important planning and conservation designation. These SSSIs include England's best wildlife and geological sites. More than 70% (by area) are internationally important for their wildlife and are also designated as Special Areas of Conservation [SACs], Special Protection Areas [SPAs] or Ramsar Sites. The European Union [Habitats Directive](#) and [Birds Directive](#) give legal backing to SACs and SPAs which form a network of protected nature sites across the EU called Natura 2000. Many SSSIs are also National Nature Reserves [NNRs] or Local Nature Reserves [LNRs].

Local Planning Guidance

Local Development Frameworks [LDFs] and Local Plans contain a variety of documents including Core Strategy, Site-specific Allocations and Policies, Area Action Plan, and Proposals Map. These set out a local authority's policies and proposals for land use and development in their area. LDFs are used to guide daily decisions as to whether planning permission should be granted. They provide a firm basis for consistent and rational decisions



on planning and development. Importantly, they also require an examination process before being adopted and used by an authority which allows for public input and adaptation. Influencing the LDF or Local Plan from the start can help to prevent developments in sensitive areas. However, once a plan is agreed it becomes much more difficult to prevent a development.

Planning Guidance and Developments

If you are commenting on local plans/policies, or are considering making representations relating to a planning application, check the national policies on biodiversity conservation contained within the NPPF to see if they support your argument. If they do, then it will add significant weight to your case. Equally, plans and policies contained within the existing Local Plan, Unitary Development Plan, Structure Plan or LDF, can be used in the same way.