



Yorkshire
Wildlife Trust

Addressing wildlife in Neighbourhood Plans



Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has limited ability to become engaged directly in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans because there are potentially so many in the county. We hope, therefore, that this advice note provides helpful guidance to enable communities involved in neighbourhood planning to address wildlife issues and in doing this maximise benefits to both to the local environment and the wellbeing of local people.

What are Neighbourhood Plans?

The 2011 Localism Act enables communities to put together a Neighbourhood Plan for their parish or neighbourhood. This gives them the power to form and shape development in their area. Neighbourhood Plans must conform with the Local Plan of their local authority and with the National Planning Policy Framework¹. Essentially, Neighbourhood Plans are developed by the local community, voted for in a local referendum and then 'made' by the Local Planning Authority. They normally last for five years before being reviewed.

They can guide where development such as new homes, shops, offices and open space is located, what it looks like and how it is achieved. Neighbourhood Plans have statutory status. This gives them more weight than some other local planning documents and makes them an important tool to help to protect local wildlife. Neighbourhood Plans also provide an excellent opportunity to improve the local environment, including protecting and enhancing existing assets, such as local parks, nature reserves and other green spaces. This can contribute to Nature's Recovery in Yorkshire, plans for which are being developed through Local Nature Recovery Strategies².



Including the natural environment in your Neighbourhood Plan

It is important to think about the natural environment and green infrastructure from the onset of work on your Neighbourhood Plan, when devising its vision and objectives. This is the starting point from which the rest of your plan will flow, and it will inform your public consultation.

You could set up a Natural Environment Group within your Neighbourhood Planning team to focus on wildlife and greenspace and ensure the community benefits from its natural assets.

You should then identify the important wildlife assets and greenspaces in your neighbourhood and adjoining areas. It is important to include those features identified by and valued by members of your community as well as those in published lists and documents.



¹ National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² Local nature recovery strategies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

These features are likely to include:

■ **Designated sites with statutory protection:** Local Nature Reserves (LNR); National Nature Reserves (NNR); Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar sites.

■ **Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)** that are designated for their importance for wildlife at county level; they are protected under the planning system but do not enjoy full legal protection.

■ **The wider countryside and urban gardens** are also vital for wildlife to thrive. A strip of green or a hedgerow can link wildlife sites providing foraging, shelter and access for small mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects. Appropriately, these places can provide space for nature to thrive and natural beauty for people to enjoy.

■ Your plan should look at all the **existing green space in your area** including parks, playing fields, and landscape schemes identifying where they could be enhanced, and where they could be linked to create green corridors giving local people better access, and enabling wildlife to move within the neighbourhood and beyond.

■ Your survey of assets should **identify landscape features are most valuable for wildlife** such as:

- Unimproved pasture (grassland used for grazing)
- Rough grassland / scrub / derelict land
- Meadows
- Wetlands - fens, marshes, reedbeds
- Hedgerows and scrub
- Native trees (especially with holes and rotten branches)
- Woodland
- Rivers, streams, ditches
- Lakes, ponds
- Older buildings
- Allotments
- Churchyards
- Disused quarries
- Railway embankments, disused railway lines
- Old roads, green lanes
- Road verges
- Traditional orchards



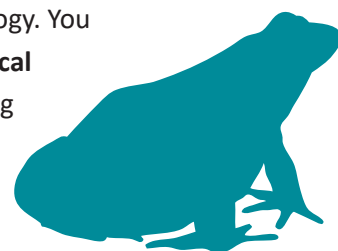
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With wildlife in decline generally and once-common species such as sparrows and starlings being red-listed, i.e. of the highest conservation concern³, the above habitats should be considered for retention in your Neighbourhood Plan.

It is also vital to protect the species of plants and animals using these sites and habitats. Some of these species are given legal protection under the planning system or are priorities for nature conservation. Knowing where they are can indicate areas where development would be undesirable or where the focus should be on maintaining and enhancing their habitat.

Where can I find out about wildlife assets?

Your local Environmental Records Centre⁴ can provide information on Local Wildlife Sites, local species, habitats, and geology. You should also look at your **Local Authority website** including documents relating to the natural environment policies in your latest



³ [Birds of Conservation Concern | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#)

⁴ [LERC-finder - ALERC - Association of Local Environmental Records Centres](#)

local plan. There might also be a **Biodiversity Action Plan** covering your area, which if adopted into policy should be on your local authority's website. Another important resource is the national **MAGIC mapping site** Multi-Agency Geographic Information System for the Countryside⁵.

Develop your Green Infrastructure strategy

Before beginning your strategy work, you should identify any gaps in your group's knowledge and consider involving experts to help. A group of local volunteers could be used to do a survey of biodiversity in your area and produce a green infrastructure inventory/ wildlife map covering your important sites and well as the existence and abundance of species. Migratory and hibernating species need to be surveyed at the appropriate time of year. It is particularly important to look at what is locally special and cared about by local people. These might be species: bats, swifts, barn owls, roman snails, orchids, butterflies, bees, other pollinators, hedgehogs, and habitats, for example hedgerows, woodlands, meadows, individual trees.



Your strategy might include policies to:

- protect and enhance these special features;
- create buffer zones around sites to minimise the impact of nearby developments;
- identify opportunities to create or enhance wildlife corridors;
- recommend the creation of new greenspace and enhancement of existing assets to benefit wildlife (planting native trees and shrubs, creating ponds and wetlands, sowing wildflower meadows);
- incorporate wildlife friendly features into development areas in your neighbourhood such as sustainable drainage schemes (SUDS);
- use native tree and flower species in landscaping plans;
- incorporate bird and bat boxes into built developments;
- Incorporate gaps in walls and fences to allow species such as hedgehog to move through the landscape.

Where new development is taking place in your neighbourhood you might also be able to secure specific improvements through a new initiative called Biodiversity Net Gain⁶. This will be managed by your local authority and is designed to ensure that biodiversity has a 10% gain over any losses due to the development itself.



⁵ [Multi-Agency Geographic Information System for the Countryside – \(www.magic.gov.uk\)](http://www.magic.gov.uk)

⁶ [Biodiversity net gain – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)



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Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is the only charity entirely dedicated to conserving, protecting and enhancing Yorkshire's wildlife and wild places