

Biodiversity Report

March 2026

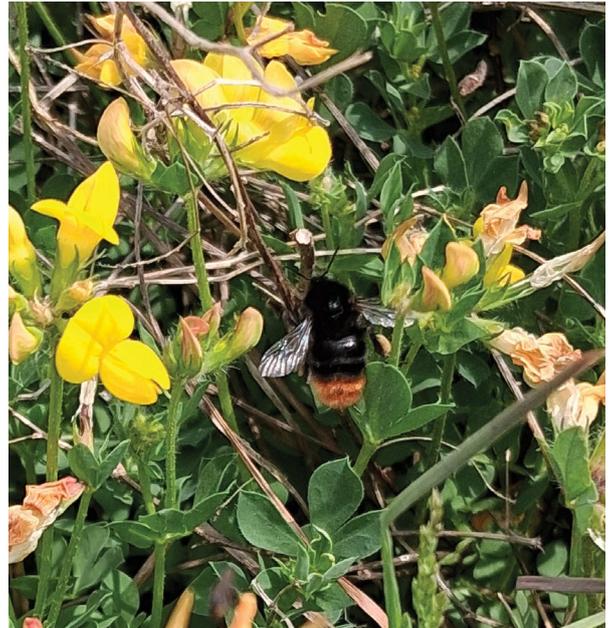
Context - Staffordshire & Staffordshire County Council

According to the June 2022 ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, Staffordshire's population is 886,284 (this excludes the city of Stoke-on-Trent, which has a separate unitary local authority). It covers an area of 2,620km². Larger towns include Burton-upon-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Tamworth, with Stafford at the historic heart of the county.

The southern end of the Pennine Hills characterises the north of the county, which includes parts of the Peak District National Park, while the environment in the south of the county is also hilly, and includes the Cannock Chase National Landscape, which contains the largest area of lowland heathland in the Midlands, and parts of the National Forest. From its source at Biddulph in the uplands of the county, the River Trent carves a route towards Burton-upon-Trent, and on to the East Midlands.

Staffordshire County Council provides a variety of services to the eight districts and boroughs in the county, including highways and transport, economic development, education, health and social care, children and young people's services, libraries, and environment and countryside services. While service needs and provision will remain constant, Local Government Reorganisation is likely to result in some significant changes to local governance, although future arrangements are yet to be determined.

Through its service provision responsibilities, through the exercise of most of its statutory functions (e.g. minerals and waste, education, highways, and planning and development plans and decisions in relation to these functions), and through its land holdings and operations (for example, farms which it owns, leases, and manages, and protected areas which it owns and manages) the County Council can positively affect biodiversity, perhaps more than any other single authority or landowner in the county. It can do this by adjusting its own functional and land management regimes, and through using its position of influence to raise awareness of biodiversity considerations to shape attitudes and behaviours within communities.



Red-tailed Bumblebee

Background - The Biodiversity Duty & Biodiversity Reports

PART 6 Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021¹ introduced a general duty for public authorities in England to consider what policies and objectives they can put in place, and what actions they can take, to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The Act requires public authorities to periodically review these policies, objectives and actions. This has become known as the 'Biodiversity Duty'. It came into force on 1st January 2023. PART 6



Seven Springs, Cannock Chase

Section 103 of the Act, which has the effect of amending section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, requires public authorities to publish 'Biodiversity Reports' on a periodic basis. Other sections of PART 6 of the Act introduced requirements for local planning authorities to secure Biodiversity Net Gain, and for 'Responsible Authorities' to prepare and publish Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).

In May 2023, DEFRA (the Government's Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs) published two sets of guidance to expand on the requirements introduced by the Act as follows:

- (i) Complying with the Biodiversity Duty²; and,
- (ii) Reporting Your Biodiversity Duty Actions.³

This guidance specifies that local authorities must publish their first Biodiversity Report within 12 weeks of the period ending 1 January 2026.

¹ [Environment Act 2021](#)

² DEFRA Guidance on Complying with the Biodiversity Duty - see: [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#)

³ DEFRA Guidance on Reporting Your Biodiversity Duty Actions - see: [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](#)

Staffordshire County Council is therefore required to publish its first Biodiversity Report by Thursday 26th March 2026, covering the period to 1 January 2026. Further Biodiversity Reports must be published within 5 years of the end date of the previous report.

The Biodiversity Report must:

- include a summary of the action taken to comply with the biodiversity duty;
- specify how the biodiversity duty is to be complied with in the next reporting period; and include any other information considered to be appropriate.

Reports from local planning authorities must also include:

- actions carried out to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations;
- details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from approved biodiversity gain plans; and
- information on how biodiversity net gain obligations are to be met in the next reporting period.

Staffordshire County Council is the local planning authority for minerals and waste, transport, and education purposes, and must therefore address the above BNG requirements in these respects in its Biodiversity Report.



Buttercups and daisies

Staffordshire County Council Biodiversity Report

This is Staffordshire County Council's first Biodiversity Report, produced to celebrate the achievements, and progress made, by the County Council in implementing its Natural Environment Strategy, and to satisfy the requirements of Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021, Section 40 (as amended) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and subsequent guidance issued by DEFRA in May 2023. It covers the period to 1st January 2026.



Ox-eye Daisy

- references actions carried out to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations in relation to County Council planning functions, i.e. Minerals and Waste, Transport and Education;
- details biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from approved biodiversity gain plans; and includes:
- information on how biodiversity net gain obligations are to be met in the next reporting period.

What action has Staffordshire County Council taken to comply with the biodiversity duty?

Staffordshire County Council has set out a number of objectives to meet its biodiversity duty. These are included in its 'Enhancing Nature' Natural Environment Strategy, initially approved in January 2024, and updated and approved alongside this Biodiversity Report in March 2026. The ten objectives in the initial Natural Environment Strategy were as follows:

1. Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.
2. Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.
3. Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.
4. Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.
5. Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.
6. Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges.
7. Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land.
8. Use nature-based solutions for adapting to the changing environment wherever possible.
9. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.
10. Raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.

Commentary follows on what the County Council has done to address each of these objectives. Some highlights and associated challenges are referenced.

Objective 1 - Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Having been designated by Government as the 'Responsible Authority' for its preparation, Staffordshire County Council has taken the lead in developing and drafting the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This has involved establishing a Local Nature Recovery Partnership, bringing a range of partners together to identify established areas of importance for biodiversity, and opportunities to enhance that biodiversity. Priorities for nature recovery have been agreed, and actions have been proposed in locations where these would make a particular contribution to achieving these priorities. In the first instance, this has been done through the creation of a map-based resource. Intended to also galvanize partners and inform future funding choices and priorities, the LNRS is to be published for consultation in 2026.



[About](#) [Get involved](#) [Latest news](#) [Contact us](#) [FAQs](#) 



Once the LNRS has been published and adopted, Government expects Responsible Authorities to:

- Lead and convene a partnership focused on LNRS delivery, building on existing governance and partnerships, including Local Nature Partnerships.
- Make links with other parts of the authority and supporting authorities to promote use of LNRS in other decision making (for example Spatial Development Strategies, Local Growth Plans).
- Identify, develop and publicise projects that will contribute to LNRS delivery.
- Track activities or projects that are delivering LNRS priorities that are being funded outside of public funding schemes and share this information with Natural England.

Challenges: Bringing the Local Nature Recovery Partnership together, ensuring sustained input, and agreeing governance to oversee implementation. Maintaining momentum to move onto delivering the Strategy will be challenging, and Government funding dependent, unless other funding sources can be secured, e.g. through external funding bids. Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire is a potential complication, although there may be scope for LNRS delivery related services to be shared. Reconciling the LNRS with local development strategies may be challenge, depending on how much housing and other related development is expected to be accommodated in future, so careful attention will need to be paid to potential policy solutions such as Biodiversity Net Gain.

Objective 2 - Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.

All planning applications are checked for correct submission of BNG information and actions to achieve minimum 10% gain. These are then recorded. The County Ecologist is trained in all aspects of BNG (metrics, UK Habitats survey and condition assessment, watercourse assessment.)

The nature of SCC’s planning function (mainly for minerals and waste applications) means that we have few applications to date that are subject to mandatory BNG. The majority of applications are for amendments to existing long-standing consents, or for small-scale development associated with larger-scale permitted development, for example at sewage works.



Sustainable Drainage pool, Redhill

So far, 2 Biodiversity Gain Plans (BGPs) have been approved under the mandatory condition.

Onsite
BNG

habitat units	% habitat	hedge units	%hedge	water units	% water
0.12	10.74	0.12	325	0	0
0.12	15.35	0	0	0	0



Hay meadow

There has been no use of offsite BNG units for the approved plans. No approved biodiversity gain plans impact on irreplaceable habitat. So far, use of Statutory credits has not been suggested by any applicants.

We are aware that as numbers of agreed BGPs increase and monitoring needs go beyond a few sites, more sophisticated means of maintaining data will be needed. For the next reporting period we are likely to use a BNG module attached to our development management system.

Between 2026 and 2031 we will continue to follow DEFRA guidance, and best practice, using the Planning Advisory Service BNG Forum to keep up to date with developments.

Investigations in 2024 identified potential areas of SCC land for BNG delivery and we have acquired software to enable detailed assessments to be undertaken. We are also assessing legal processes for securing BNG on our land for internal development purposes. A pilot study has been delayed by other work, particularly on LNRS preparation, but is likely to be complete by end 2025.

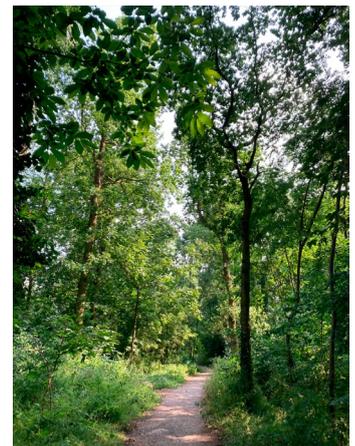
Objective 3 - Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.

- We have begun to embed biodiversity considerations into Council decisions and actions through putting the objectives in the Natural Environment Strategy into practice.
- For example, to promote positive behaviours and reduce risks to the environment, we have been active in communicating the potential harm from disposable BBQs - see [wildfire posting](#).

Highlight - Peat-free Council contracts and supplies, and reduction in use of pesticides.

Staffordshire County Council manages a large and varied countryside estate comprised of twenty one sites that together cover a total of 2,426 hectares (over 6000 acres). There are six main country parks, with visitor centres, including Cannock Chase at 1,311 hectares, nine picnic sites, three small sites and three 'greenways' (disused railways used as multi-user routes, such as cycle paths etc).

Through its operations and contractual purchasing power, the County Council therefore has significant influence. By not using peat, the County Council is helping to protect precious peatland environments which provide habitats for many protected and threatened species. By reducing the use of pesticides, the County Council is helping to create healthier environments for flora and fauna.



Woodland Walk

Peat: No peat is now used in the County Council's Country Parks, including in containerised tree planting schemes. Cannock Chase compost purchased in the last two years has all been peat free. No contractors have needed to use products that might contain peat.

Pesticides: Active and ongoing consideration is being given to reducing the use of pesticides in current and future County Council procurement tenders and grounds maintenance contracts with Entrust. Advice to this effect is being cascaded to project managers.

The County Landscape Architect's specification for planting states that contractors shall not use peat or any peat-based products unless specifically authorised. Peat is also listed as an 'unacceptable material' in contracts, along with tropical hardwoods and non-approved pesticides / herbicides or other chemicals. It cannot therefore be used without written consent. To prevent the introduction of pests and diseases, specifications also reference biosecurity considerations.

Challenges: The County Council is free to stop using peat and to reduce pesticide use, but it does not otherwise have authority over their use. DEFRA announced in March 2023 that some peat containing products would be banned from retail sale from 2027, but that others will be exempt from the ban until 2030. Meanwhile, a Private Member's Bill to prohibit the sale of horticultural peat is currently being taken through parliamentary procedures - see [link](#):



Contractor planting trees



Cannock Chase Country Park 1



Cannock Chase Country Park 2

Objective 4 - Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.

- To ensure that we manage designated sites in our ownership, we have begun to implement a comprehensive programme of surveys to inform their future management.
- We have also re-assessed how we integrate historic environment considerations into the management of designated sites.

Highlight - Designated sites site surveys.

In Staffordshire, we have sites of international and national importance for nature. These include:

- Ramsar sites⁴
- Special Protection Areas
- Special Areas of Conservation
- National Nature Reserves
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest

These sites are checked regularly by Natural England to make sure they are in good condition and that wildlife is doing well.

In Staffordshire we also have many Local Wildlife Sites. These are important for the county and often form stepping stones between the nationally important sites, allowing wildlife to move around.



Local Wildlife Site Meadow, Redhill Business Park

On County Council-owned land (excluding Highways) we have 21 of these sites, and we have contracted Apex Ecology to survey them over three years starting in 2024. The surveys will tell us how well biodiversity is doing on our sites and where we can make improvements.

Challenges: The County Council's programme of site surveys has at times been delayed by bad weather. It is possible that future management costs may exceed current funding availability, but additional management resources are highly likely to be sought from external funders, albeit that this involves some inherent uncertainty.

⁴ Ramsar sites are internationally important wetlands designated under the Convention on Wetlands intergovernmental treaty.

Objective 5 - Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.

- In addition to surveying sites that we own to inform their future management (see above), we are continuing to identify further opportunities to manage and protect land for biodiversity, for example through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Highlight - Collaboration with tenant farmers on the County Farms' estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.

Staffordshire County Council is a significant landowner. It leases dozens of farms, for example, and thereby collaborates with and encourages farm tenants to improve biodiversity in a variety of ways.

The County Farms Estate plays a key role in environmental stewardship and biodiversity enhancement. This involves promoting practices that improve soil health, enhance water quality, reduce harmful emissions, and create wildlife habitats. For example, in 2024/25, a scheme to both improve biodiversity and alleviate flood risk was completed on County Council leased land alongside the Pessall Brook tributary of the River Mease near Edingale in East Staffordshire - see: [Making headway in the headwaters of the Mease - Trent Rivers Trust](#)



River Mease works © Trent Rivers Trust

Hedges on County Farms

The County Farms Estate extends to around 6600 acres (2670 hectares). As of August 2025, tenants on County Council owned farms have 1280 acres (518 hectares) of Estate land entered in Countryside Stewardship schemes. This is approximately 20% of the County Farms' Estate area. A Staffordshire County Council scheme is in development to further facilitate environmental enhancement through hedgerow creation and improvement by tenants. This will look to plant 466km of native hedgerows, where possible incorporating trees into hedgerow design, at a cost of circa £4 million. Funding will be sought from external sources. From an environmental perspective, hedgerows:

- Enhance Livestock Welfare
- Provide shelter from wind, sun, and rain, improving animal comfort and reducing stress.
- Act as natural fencing and help manage grazing areas.
- Support flood and erosion control through slowing water runoff and stabilizing the soil, reducing flood risk and protecting valuable farmland.
- Enhance land value and reputation through well-maintained hedgerows that improve the visual appeal of farmland and demonstrate environmental stewardship.

Hedgerows can also produce saleable goods, such as berries, nuts, and firewood, and even honey if beekeeping is integrated. They can support agroforestry (integrating trees with crops and / or livestock) and other mixed farming systems, increasing funding streams and financial resilience.

Challenges: Projects on County Council leased land are typically dependent upon external funding to one degree or another. On County Council leased farms for example, it is almost always the case that Government funding makes a significant contribution to the delivery of environmental enhancement schemes. Whilst Government funding is uncertain, the County Council will nonetheless seek to take maximum advantage of schemes such as Countryside Stewardship.



Objective 6 - Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges.

- Some local pilot roadside verge management projects have been implemented, at Beaconside, and at the A51 Rugeley Third Access Roundabout.
- Work to accurately map roadside verge ownerships to provide for pilot project expansion to other locations is currently unfunded.

Highlight - A51 Rugeley Third Access Roundabout - Wildlife Restoration Project

The decommissioning of the former coal fired power station in Rugeley opened the site up to redevelopment and, as part of this development, Staffordshire's first all through school ([Rugeley John Taylor | Staffordshire's First All-Through School](#)) opened in September 2025. To facilitate access to the school and to other development opportunities, Staffordshire County Council installed a new roundabout, known as the A51 Third Access Roundabout: [Works continue on new roundabout in Rugeley - Staffordshire County Council Newsroom](#)

In implementing the scheme, and to further its biodiversity duty, the County Council took the decision to use the opportunity of constructing the new roundabout to also set about restoring nature by re-creating an open mosaic habitat [Rugeley Third Access Roundabout - Wildlife restoration project - Staffordshire County Council](#). Images of the project are shown below.



Our skilled driver creating mounds for pollinators and other insects

Close-up of mounds showing they face all directions, so insects have warm and cool conditions to choose from. They have rough and smooth slopes that also give a range of places for insects.

Research increasingly shows that roadside environments have an important role to play in maintaining and restoring lost biodiversity - for example, see: [Road Verges - Plantlife](#) The A51 Rugeley Third Access Roundabout project has demonstrated how the County Council can use capital works projects to help nature to thrive, even in environments which might initially appear to be challenging.

Challenges: The County Council is keen to explore further opportunities to improve biodiversity through the implementation of capital works schemes, and through adapting roadside verge management regimes, but work to accurately map roadside verge ownerships to provide for pilot project expansion to other locations is currently unfunded. Funding sources will continue to be sought.



Mounds for pollinators and other insects

Objective 7 - Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land.

- A species action plan is in place for our largest designated site, Cannock Chase. Additional species can be added in time as LNRS priority species lists are finalised.
- Chasewater is involved in the Purple Horizons project, (see link in Objective 9 'highlight' below), part of which is focused on creating bare ground for invertebrates. As part of the Countryside Stewardship schemes being implemented at Chasewater, it is a requirement that up to 5% of the heathland will have bare ground. We have also created bare ground on Cannock Chase heathland every year, for specialist invertebrates. Dead wood is left in situ as much as possible for woodland invertebrates.
- Bat surveys have been undertaken on Cannock Chase. The CCNL (Cannock Chase National Landscape) team have been supported to undertake an audit of bats in the National Landscape, with results publicised to all landowners. Bat surveys are carried out on a regular basis at Greenway Bank (Warder's Tower), and bat populations are monitored at Froghall Limekilns, part of an SCC picnic site. Batwalks are held at Chasewater and Essington Pools, in conjunction with Staffs Bats.
- Environmental scheme uptake by County Farms Estate tenants is now being monitored - as at August 2025, tenants have 1280 acres (518 Ha) of Estate land entered in Countryside Stewardship schemes. This equates to approximately 20% of the County Farms Estate area.

Highlight - Cannock Chase Adder survey and modelling work

With assistance from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, modelling and field surveys have identified that Cannock Chase is nationally important for Adders, but that the population is likely to be increasingly fragmented.

The County Council is one of many landowners and agencies working to improve the understanding of the presence and status of Adders on the Chase, with a view to sustaining and enhancing the population.

Interventions have been identified, and the County Council is supporting partnership working led by the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership to implement these, taking advantage, for example, of FIPL funding (the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding programme).

In the longer term, and by the 2030 end of the current CCNL AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Management Plan period, the National Landscape Partnership aims to have published a Species Action Plan for Adder (and for nine other target species), and to have delivered targeted actions in partnership with others, including landowners like the County Council.

Challenges: Funding for National Landscapes and FIPL programmes is subject to ongoing central government spending reviews, and resources for the implementation of identified interventions will therefore be an ongoing challenge, particularly for the lead partner, the CCNL team, but also for the FIPL programme. An increased focus on seeking external funding may be necessary.



Adder © K Clarke

Highlight - Creation and survey of 'ark sites' for native White-Clawed Crayfish.

The native White-Clawed Crayfish is a globally-endangered species, which is threatened by crayfish plague, a fatal disease carried by invasive American Signal Crayfish and other invasive crayfish. The disease first appeared in UK watercourses in the 1970s. Native crayfish are consequently fighting for survival and, in Staffordshire, thousands are estimated to have been lost to the disease. White-Clawed Crayfish are an important part of the food chain for otters, fish and birds, and their disappearance would have a severe adverse impact on wetland ecosystems.

The most effective approach for conserving native White-Clawed Crayfish is considered to be the creation of 'ark sites', where other invasive crayfish species can be removed, and the threat that they pose can therefore be contained if not eradicated.

Ark sites are designated areas which are designed and managed to provide safe environments for native species. They can be established in existing water bodies, ensuring a sustainable population of the species in a controlled environment.

Non-native invasive Signal Crayfish have been cleared from some sites in Cannock Chase, and native White-Clawed Crayfish have been transferred to safe 'ark sites'. The Cannock Chase National Landscape team have purchased and used eDNA (environmental DNA) testing kits to assist with these activities. The Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation team have improved biosecurity requirement information for education groups visiting the open water areas of site.

In addition, 'Check, Clean, Dry' procedures are undertaken for any activities in or adjacent to open water in SCC Country Parks, to ensure no spread of non-native or invasive species. If native White Clawed Crayfish are known to be present, equipment is sterilised. If used, construction materials are sourced from reputable suppliers. Plants purchased are UK stock, with as much local provenance as possible.

Challenges: It is an ongoing challenge to prevent the re-establishment of non-native invasive species. Constant vigilance and, potentially, remedial action will be required to maintain 'ark sites'. Encouraging the species' successful and expansive re-establishment beyond the confines of the 'ark sites' will also be challenge. This will potentially require the injection of significant resource and finance, which is likely to require external support.



White-clawed crayfish © N Mott, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Objective 8 - Use nature-based solutions for adapting to the changing environment wherever possible.

- The Flood Risk Management Strategy now includes actions for Nature Based Solutions.
- It is intended that the Transforming the Trent Headwaters (TTTH) project will enable natural flood management at SCC sites in Newcastle and Stoke, including Apedale Country Park.
- A SWOT analysis of the 2024 Corporate Tree Management Strategy is to be undertaken over the next 18 months to identify tree management-related threats and opportunities, and to develop a vision for what good tree management might look like.

Highlight - Taking Nature-Based Solutions forward through the Flood Risk Management Strategy

The United Nations definition⁵ of nature-based solutions is that these are “actions aimed at protecting, conserving, restoring, and sustainably managing natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits”. UK Government Guidance⁶ explains how nature-based solutions can be used to reduce flooding. For example, tree planting and peat bog restoration can help to reduce water flow after heavy rain.

Updated in 2024, Objective 3 in the County Council’s Flood Risk Management Strategy references the intention to seek and secure funding for flood alleviation schemes. Working with partners, one of the ways in which this is to be achieved is through the prioritisation of nature-based solutions to ensure environmental mitigation and enhancement.

The Action Plan⁷ that accompanies the County Council’s Flood Risk Management Strategy emphasises the importance of undertaking ecological assessments in developing funding strategies, and flood alleviation schemes which incorporate ecological benefits.

⁵ See: [Overview of Nature-based solutions | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#)

⁶ UK Government Guidance on Nature-Based Solutions and Flooding - see: [Use nature-based solutions to reduce flooding in your area - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ SCC Flood Risk Management Strategy Action Plan - see: [Microsoft Word - Local Flood Risk Management Strategy Action Plan](#)

Challenges: It will be a challenge to ensure that nature-based solutions put forward as part of flood alleviation proposals secure buy-in from external funding partners. There will need to be a common understanding of the benefits of nature-based solutions, grounded in robust flood risk modelling.



Woody Debris Dam - Wetland management using timber to form leaky dams

Objective 9 - Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.

- The County Council is actively involved in a number of landscape-scale nature recovery projects, including the Transforming the Trent Headwaters (TTTH) Partnership.
- SCC continues to host, support, and contribute financially to the operation of the CCNL Partnership. SCC is also a named delivery partner in the CCNL AONB Management Plan.
- SCC has assisted the CCNL Partnership to significantly improve the hedgerow network, with over 15,000 metres planted, restored or laid so far (5,480 metres in 2024/25), much of this funded through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) programme.
- We provide high-quality, accessible landscape advice to all SCC planning consultations, and CCNL Farming in Protected Landscapes Schemes, with additional advice to key external consultations, including those affecting national landscapes where staff time permits.

Highlights - Support for the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives in key areas.

Landscape scale initiatives are the best way of challenging the fragmentation of habitats and restoring nature. The 2010 Lawton Review⁸, more formally known as 'Making Space for Nature', established four key principles that have become foundational in conservation strategies, as follows:

1. Bigger: Wildlife habitats should be larger to support viable populations of species and reduce vulnerability to threats.
2. Better: The quality of existing habitats must be improved to enhance biodiversity and ecosystems services.
3. More: There should be an increase in the number of wildlife sites to create a more extensive ecological network.
4. Joined Up: Habitats should be connected to allow for species movement and genetic exchange, which is crucial for adaptation and survival.

⁸ Making Space for Nature - see: ['Making space for nature': a review of England's wildlife sites published today - GOV.UK](#)

Staffordshire County Council is an active participant in the developing 'Transforming The Trent Headwaters' (TTTH) Partnership. TTTH is a large-scale landscape partnership that the Transforming The Trent Valley (TTTV) Partnership will oversee the delivery of. The TTTH Partnership launched its landscape vision in September⁹, and is developing a suite of projects in support of that vision. Partners intend to seek substantial funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to implement those projects. It is envisaged that a 'development phase' application will be submitted to the National Lottery in late 2026. Whilst some formal steps remain to be taken in pursuit of the vision and the funding application, the County Council envisages being the lead partner in taking some projects forward. These may include visitor hubs at Apedale and Greenway Bank Country Parks, should National Lottery funding be secured.

The Trent - Sow Washlands project has successfully delivered several initiatives to improve the landscape and habitats around the High Speed Rail corridor. The project, which began in February 2022, resulted in grassland and wetland restoration, the creation of new river channels and ponds, and wildflower meadows. This helps to conserve and protect rare plants such as the native black poplar, as well as invertebrates, fish and otters. The County Council provided essential financial management for the project.

Other landscape scale initiatives in which the County Council is involved include (through supporting the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership) the Purple Horizons Nature Recovery Project¹⁰, and ongoing work by the National Forest to expand landscape scale forest links.

Challenges: Participation in any landscape scale project invariably necessitates partnership working across large areas, and lengthy timeframes. This can make for more complex working arrangements and procedures than might otherwise be the case. It will be important to remain alert to potential demands on time and resources and resources may need to be re-prioritised to ensure successful delivery.

⁹ Transforming the Trent Headwaters - see: [Transforming the Trent Valley](#)

¹⁰ Purple Horizons - see: [Purple Horizons | Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust](#)

Objective 10 - Raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.

- SCC has actively supported a number of awareness campaigns, for example:
 - The Cannock Chase SAC Partnership's messaging in relation to dog control.
 - Grazing trials at Moors Gorse - see: [Moors Gorse: detailed proposals - Staffordshire County Council](#)
- As the 'Responsible Authority' for the production of the LNRS, the County Council will continue to champion bringing other bodies together to care for our natural environment through this work.
- We have Green Library Champions in libraries who signpost visitors to local green spaces/ country parks. Green Libraries Month is held annually in May, with a focus on encouraging residents to make Staffordshire more sustainable.

Highlight - Supporting volunteering activity on our countryside sites.

Volunteers make a huge contribution towards the achievement of County Council biodiversity objectives by offering their time to help manage land in the Council's ownership and control. This includes practical conservation tasks which are essential for biodiverse environments and flora and fauna to thrive. Such activities include invasive species management, woodland coppicing, habitat monitoring, and litter picking.

Volunteering provides people with opportunities to engage with nature in practical ways. There is increasing evidence of positive connections between nature and wellbeing, some of which are explored in this programme: [BBC Radio 4 - What's Up Docs?, Is nature good for you?](#)

There are existing and / or embryonic volunteer groups based at:

- Cannock Chase Visitor Centre
- Chasewater Visitor Centre / Country Park
- Deephayes Country Park
- Apedale Country Park
- Greenway Bank Country Park

The County Council is looking at new ways of engaging with volunteer groups such as the Ramblers Association and The British Horse Society to help improve and maintain the Rights of Way Network, which is essential in helping people to connect and interact with nature. We have been trialling this engagement on site to understand what resources and guidance may be required. If this is successful, it may be possible to establish similar agreements with other suitable organisations, such as Parish Councils.

The County Council has a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator, and a Volunteer Delivery Plan is in development.

Challenges: Time and ongoing effort is essential to ensure that engagement makes a meaningful difference for everyone involved, and for nature. Although there are many benefits to volunteering, it will be important to ensure that the draw on everyone's time is manageable.



A volunteer group

Highlight - Development of a programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities, which link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature.

aising awareness of the importance of biodiversity from a young age is essential to ensuring recognition of the importance and value of biodiversity in the long term. Young people are key to halting the decline in the variety and abundance of species.

Through its network of Family Hubs, the County Council has developed an extensive programme of activities to celebrate nature. Recent examples of these activities include the following:

- Woodland Wanderers - 10-week nature-based learning course for families with children aged 5-11 in East Staffordshire. Activities included forest walks, scavenger hunts, bird listening, and creative nature crafts. Ended with a celebration event featuring sapling planting and forest campfire.
- Natter & Nature - weekly sessions for families in East Staffordshire to connect with nature through walks, crafts, and sensory experiences like bird listening and canal walks.
- Stafford Buggy Meets - Facebook group (600+ members) facilitates walks and meetups, promoting mental health and child-friendly outdoor activities.
- "50 Things to Do" Cultural Journey - promoting nature and outdoor experiences in South Staffordshire: bug hunts, forest walks, birdwatching, cloud watching, building dens, climbing trees, mud pies, stargazing, butterfly hunts, nature reserve visits - encourages low-cost, accessible activities to build cultural capital and personal development.
- Little Bloom & Bee, starting September at St Leonard's Church, Wigginton. Sessions include 'mud kitchens', water play, nature storytelling, creative outdoor activities - aimed at young children and parents, fostering early engagement with nature.

In addition to the above, and through the Department for Education funded Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, Staffordshire Family Hubs worked with almost a dozen providers to offer outdoor and nature-based activities to over 2500 children in Summer 2025.

The Council's 'Best Start' strategy will look to build on the work already happening with Family Hubs, prioritising health, education, and family support, and recognising that environmental quality is inseparable from children's development and wellbeing.

Healthy families thrive in safe play spaces and rich learning environments, with direct benefits for every community. The early years are a critical window for shaping lifelong attitudes. When children experience nature as a normal and cherished part of life, they are far more likely to grow into adults who value biodiversity and sustainable living. If nature is absent from childhood, fostering environmental responsibility later becomes much harder. Integrating environmental goals into Best Start is not an "add-on"; it strengthens our offer by promoting resilience, curiosity, and wellbeing. This creates a virtuous circle:

- Healthy environments improve child outcomes—better physical and mental health, richer learning experiences.
- Positive early experiences with nature sow the seeds of stewardship—habits formed in the 0-5 years last a lifetime.

By embedding nature into Best Start, we ensure children flourish today and grow into adults ready to care for the world that sustains us all.

Challenges: Additional resource to provide for further strategic overview of 'ground up' local initiatives may help to provide for experiences to be more widely shared among those taking programmes forward in future years. There may be opportunities to seek external funding to carry programmes forward, especially if expanded in scope.

Highlight - Pye Green Fruit Tree Trail

The County Council is working with the Forest of Mercia and local schools to create a community planting event in January 2026. Fruit and nut trees will be planted in an avenue alongside a footpath at Pye Green Valley in Hednesford. In addition, a small new woodland will be created by planting a mix of native broadleaved species. The project will: engage the local community in tree planting and care; promote food security; educate school children in basic horticulture and food production; and enhance the local environment whilst providing space for nature to thrive.

The small woodland will be created using the Miyawaki technique by planting a variety of native trees and shrubs in a small area of fertile soil. Developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, the method aims to restore local ecosystems, increase biodiversity, and create resilient woodlands that can become self-sufficient within a few years.



Apple tree

Future Actions - how does Staffordshire County Council plan to fulfil its biodiversity duty over the next five years, following the end of this reporting period?

The County Council has reviewed and updated its Natural Environment Strategy, and the updated strategy has been published alongside this Biodiversity Report. The Strategy will continue to provide the framework for the County Council to take action over the coming years. For example, it provides context for the current development of a County Farms Estate Hedgerow Planting Proposal, which is aiming to plant over 450km of native hedgerows to serve various purposes, including enhancing biodiversity and improving habitat connectivity.

It is highly likely that, when the Natural Environment Strategy is reviewed again, there will be further coalescence around the objectives and priorities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The LNRS will increasingly provide the context and framework for partnership working to deliver enhanced biodiversity.

The implications of Local Government Re-organisation for Staffordshire are currently uncertain. Whilst the biodiversity duty will endure for whatever organisation/s succeed the County Council, it is likely that there will need to be further re-appraisal of the Natural Environment Strategy and accountabilities for delivering the objectives therein, alongside the objectives and priorities in the LNRS.





www.staffordshire.gov.uk

To request this document in accessible format,
please contact **communications@staffordshire.gov.uk**