

Natural Environment Strategy

Delivering our duty to
conserve and enhance
biodiversity



Foreword

Staffordshire County Council has an important role to play in caring for our natural environment. Our services can impact positively on nature if we provide those services in thoughtful ways that carefully consider how we can best act as custodians for future generations.

Nature gives us most of what we value in life, but is in steep decline, with one in six species at risk of extinction. Staffordshire's location makes it an important place for upland and lowland plants and animals, meaning that we can make a difference to reverse the decline. For example, Staffordshire is home to the largest remaining area of lowland heathland in the Midlands – Cannock Chase, a significant expanse of which is owned by the County Council. Lowland heathland is rarer than tropical rainforest, and supports scarce and threatened species.

This Strategy sets out our high-level ambitions and intentions when it comes to the exercise of our



Councillor Hayley Coles,
Cabinet Member for
Communities and Culture

functions, focusing on our Places, our Duties and our People. We will place nature at the heart of what we do, and we will report back on how we've done when the time comes. In the meantime, we commit to working with our partners and communities to be the best guardians of nature that we can be. We will support our communities wherever possible to empower them to make a difference, and we will ensure there is ongoing engagement with key stakeholders including farmers, other landowners and businesses, to secure the best outcomes for nature.



What is this strategy for?

Our Natural Environment Strategy sets out how we, Staffordshire County Council, will conserve and enhance biodiversity and the wider natural environment on our land and through our functions.

We value the natural environment and recognise the vital role it plays in Staffordshire: environmentally, socially, economically and for our health and wellbeing. We also understand the pressures facing our natural environment, and the need to take action now to help nature recover.

This strategy sets out how we will care for nature. It includes action we will take over the coming years. Our progress to 31st December 2025 is set out in our Biodiversity Report. This strategy covers the period 2026-2030. In 2030 we will report on progress and set out an updated strategy.

This strategy complements the Council's broader Environmental Strategy, which was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 17 December 2025. It is intended that the strategy will be the main vehicle for addressing the 'local nature recovery' theme in the broader Environmental Strategy, but that it will also help to address some of the other themes therein.

Why do we need this strategy?

Across the world, nature is in crisis. One million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades. Our planet is experiencing the largest loss of life since the dinosaurs and it is largely the result of human activity.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970 and 13% of species in England are threatened with extinction.

A suite of commitments have been made by Government, some of which are international commitments made through the COP15 Biodiversity Agreement:

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- **halt the decline in species abundance**
- **protect 30% of UK land**

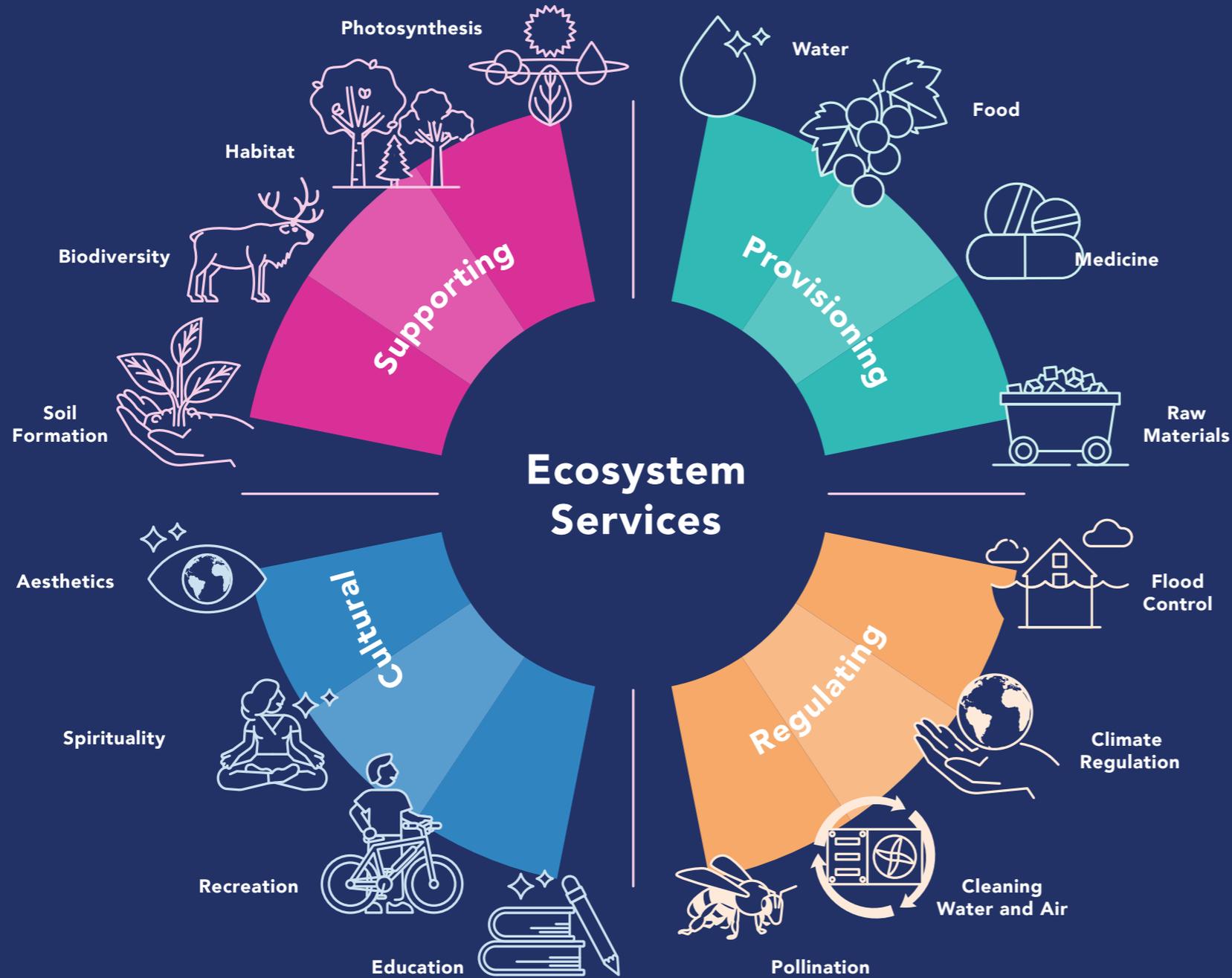
By 2042, the government has committed to:

- **increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels**
- **restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats**
- **reduce the risk of species extinction**
- **restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term**

The Environment Act 2021, and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended) provide some of the legal mechanisms to support nature recovery in England. It includes the development of local nature recovery strategies, a strengthened biodiversity duty for public bodies and the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain through the planning process.

Local nature recovery is one of the eight key themes identified in the Council's broader Environmental Strategy.

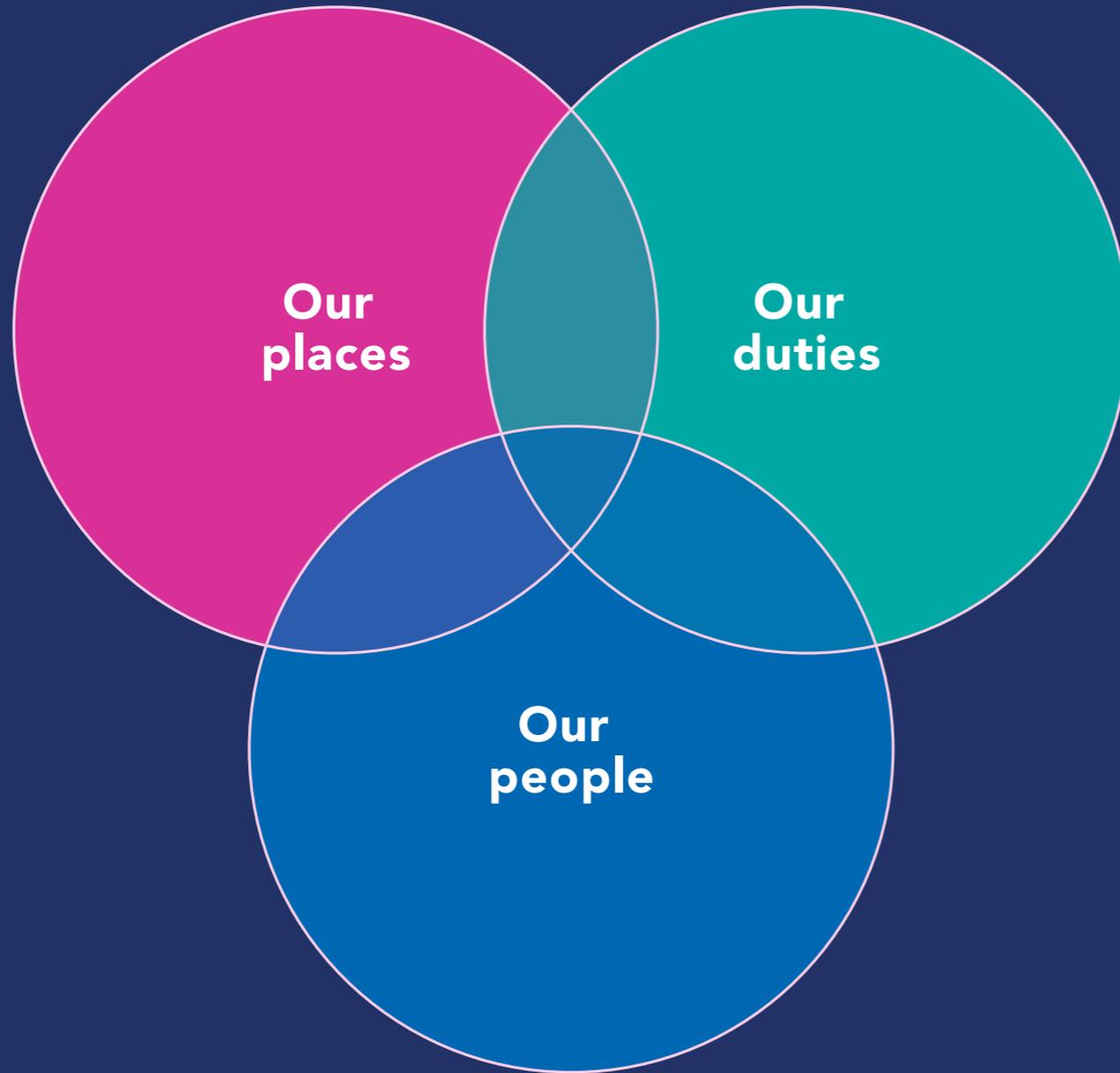
Staffordshire is a beautiful rural county but, like much of the UK, nature is under pressure here too. In 2022 Staffordshire County Council made a nature recovery declaration, recognising the need to take action for wildlife.



Helping nature helps us

By helping nature, we are also helping ourselves and leaving an important legacy. Nature provides important goods and services that support our economy and our quality of life, making Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit. From the insects that pollinate our food, to flood protection, nature is essential to us, and to those who follow in our footsteps.





Supporting biodiversity

Our natural environment strategy is framed around three pillars:

Our places

includes the land and properties we own and manage, and how we can support nature in these places.

Our duties

includes the functions we carry out as a county council, ensuring we consider biodiversity through all our work.

Our people

includes ensuring our staff are aware of our biodiversity duty and working to deliver it, and our work with our communities and partners to support nature.

Our Places

Ensure our land contributes in the best way to nature recovery

Our land is found in country parks, roads, business parks, schools and farms. In many cases it delivers important functions such as supporting new farmers or providing a safe travelling route. There are also many opportunities for land to enhance nature, for example by planting hedges on many of our farms we can increase shade for farm animals and provide shelter and food for wildlife. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will show us where different actions will help nature most.

Changing long-term weather patterns mean we are now seeing more stormy weather events with high rainfall and winds, plus hotter summers. There is more flooding and natural flood management can help with this. Habitat management such as grazing and bracken control will help prevent wildfires. Many species will struggle to adapt, so providing bigger, more joined up habitats will help them develop stronger populations and help them move to find suitable conditions.

Trees and woodland help reduce pollution, help with flood protection, and increase cooling. There is a national target to increase woodland cover in England to 16.5% by the end of 2050 and to increase tree cover outside of woodlands.

Within our landholding we have ancient woodland and veteran trees which are irreplaceable habitats that need particular care. We also have tree diseases such as ash dieback on our land, and this will affect our trees and woodlands over coming years.

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

There is a national target, and global commitment, to have 30% of land protected for biodiversity by 2030. Land should have some form of protection and be in good management so that it can provide the best conditions for wildlife.

Around 24% of our land (excluding highways) is protected, in management schemes and moving towards good condition for wildlife. Our priority is to continue to manage these sites towards good condition.

We will also explore the potential to increase council land protected and managed for biodiversity, which could potentially include land holdings within the Cannock Chase National Landscape which are currently not protected for biodiversity, land secured for biodiversity net gain, management of local wildlife sites, and land in environmental schemes. We will also undertake further work to assess and understand the scale of opportunity to enhance biodiversity on land associated with highways.

Actions

- **Ensure management measures and monitoring regimes are in place on all protected sites.**
- **Identify further opportunities to protect our land for biodiversity including land associated with highways.**
- **Encourage uptake of schemes that support biodiversity on county leased land.**



Make sure all sites are actively managed to support nature recovery and that SSSIs will achieve favourable condition by 2042

The network of protected sites across the country provides vital space for nature. There is a national target to make sure that 75% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are in 'favourable condition' by 2042.

We have 1404 hectares (ha) of land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (nationally important) at Cannock Chase and Chasewater Country Parks, of which 1077 ha of Cannock Chase is also designated as Special Area of Conservation (internationally important). Currently 90% of our SSSI land at Cannock Chase is improving in condition and working towards favourable status, and around 48% at Chasewater. There are studies under way to investigate why some areas are not doing better.

We also have 297 ha designated land in 21 Local Wildlife Sites, which are of county level importance. These sites are in the process of being surveyed and having management briefs written.

Some of our protected sites also include Scheduled Monuments and other important historic features, such as the remains of two Great War training camps on Cannock Chase. Managing for nature and managing historic features often go hand in hand, and conserving and enhancing the historic environment can play a key role in delivering nature recovery.

Actions

- **Continue delivery of our management schemes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest to reach favourable condition by 2042 and undertake regular monitoring.**
- **Ensure Local Wildlife Sites in council ownership are managed well for biodiversity.**
- **Develop management plans for all sites to identify how they will support nature recovery.**
- **Deliver habitat creation to contribute to Staffordshire's nature recovery network, e.g. through tree and hedgerow planting.**
- **Ensure the historic environment is cared for when managing for nature.**

There is a national target to make sure that 75% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are in 'favourable condition' by 2042.

Case study

A scheme to improve biodiversity and alleviate flood risk completed on County Council leased land alongside the Pessall Brook tributary of the River Mease. The river is of international importance for its fish species and river habitats.



River Mease works © Trent Rivers Trust
Flood risk work, County Farm, Edingale

Take action for species on our land

Wildlife in England has declined by 32% since 1970, and 13% of key species in England are threatened with extinction. 64% of flowering plant species in England have seen decreases in their distributions. The UK holds populations of some species which are rare elsewhere in the world.

We are already involved in species recovery work on country parks and other landholdings. For example, we are involved in projects to restore and conserve native crayfish, adder, nightjar and rare insects at Cannock Chase. On our country parks and business parks we are championing work to support amphibians such as great crested newts.

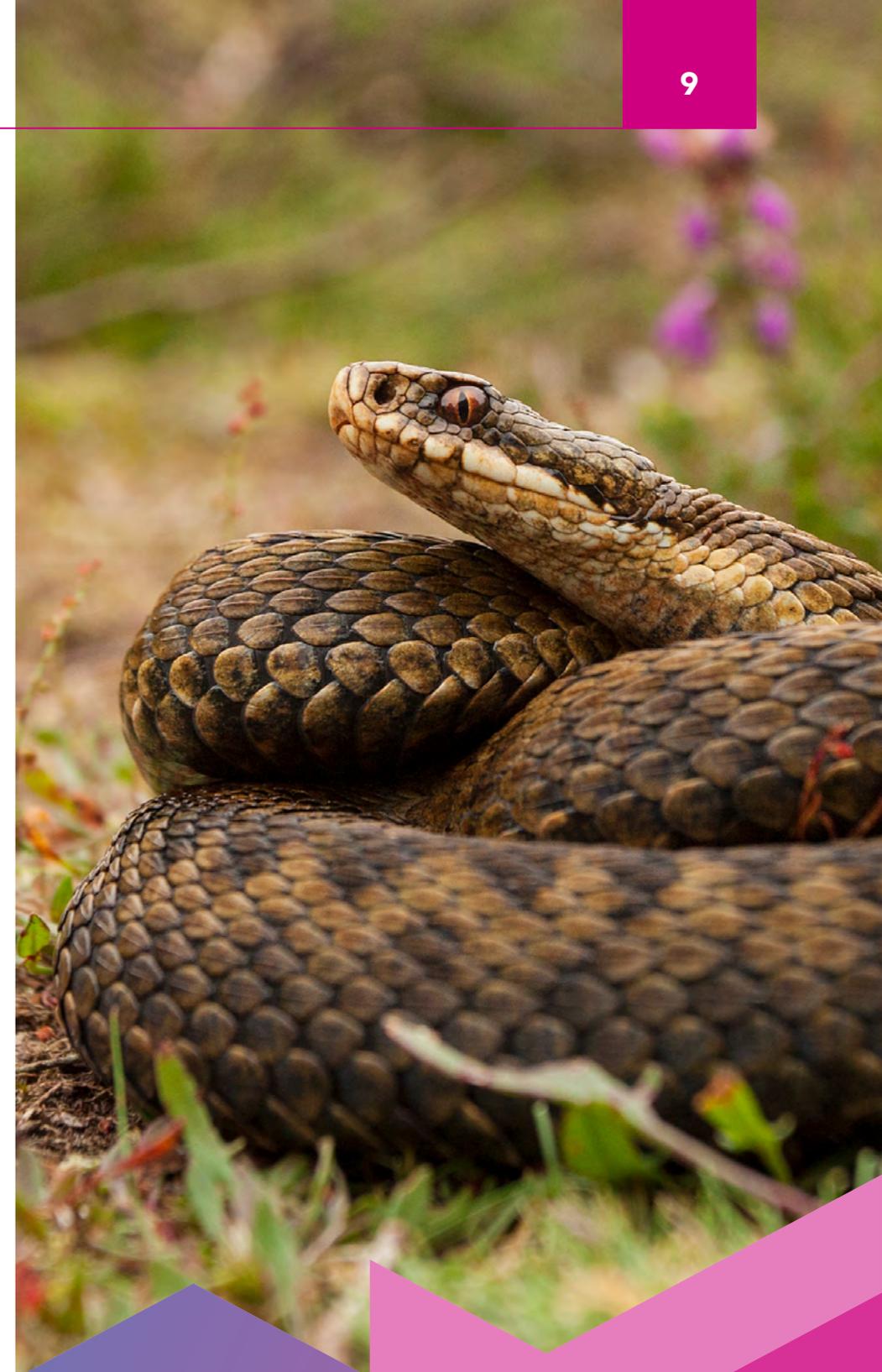


We are also making our buildings wildlife-friendly by adding bird and bat boxes, hedgehog gaps under fences, invertebrate features and pollinator planting.

Usually, good habitat management will ensure that species thrive, but some species need extra help. The local nature recovery strategy has a list of key species for the county. We will check that list against our land and include these species in management plans for sites where they are found or could move in.

Invasive species and diseases are an increasing threat to wildlife. Some invasive species have been present for many years and are showing a gradual increase where not controlled (such as Himalayan balsam) but others seem to be increasing as a result of changing weather patterns and extremes (for example warmer, wetter conditions favour fungal diseases such as Phytophthora found on bilberry). Regular monitoring of habitats is the best way to identify new cases and ensure action is taken early on.

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Actions

- Fit measures for species in existing properties and include in all new development.
- Continue to create special features for heathland and woodland invertebrates at Chasewater and Cannock Chase.
- Continue to monitor and support bat populations on our country parks.
- Support adder projects for Cannock Chase and the wider county.
- Continue to support the creation and surveying of ark sites for native crayfish.
- Building on the local nature recovery strategy, develop a species action plan for all county council land by the end 2027.
- Undertake regular monitoring of key habitats to check for invasive species and diseases and undertake action to tackle as appropriate.
- Continue to collaborate with tenants on the County Farms estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.



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Case study

This low-impact mower does not damage historic features such as the remains of the Great War Training Camps, and will be less likely to disturb wildlife such as adders and lizards.



Specialist equipment cutting heather on Cannock Chase. Chase management

Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges by April 2028

Staffordshire County Council is the highways authority responsible for managing roads and rights of way across the county, excluding motorways and trunk roads. Roadside verges can provide important corridors for wildlife movement, and sources of food and shelter for pollinating insects and other species. In Staffordshire some verges, particularly in East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

There are opportunities to improve our verges for wildlife with careful management. In urban areas, gaining community support and understanding for this approach will be important for success.

Actions

- **Accurately map and digitise roadside verge inventory.**
- **Survey road verges and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement where compatible with safety.**
- **Review management of verges to promote biodiversity.**
- **Raise awareness of the importance of verges for wildlife/**

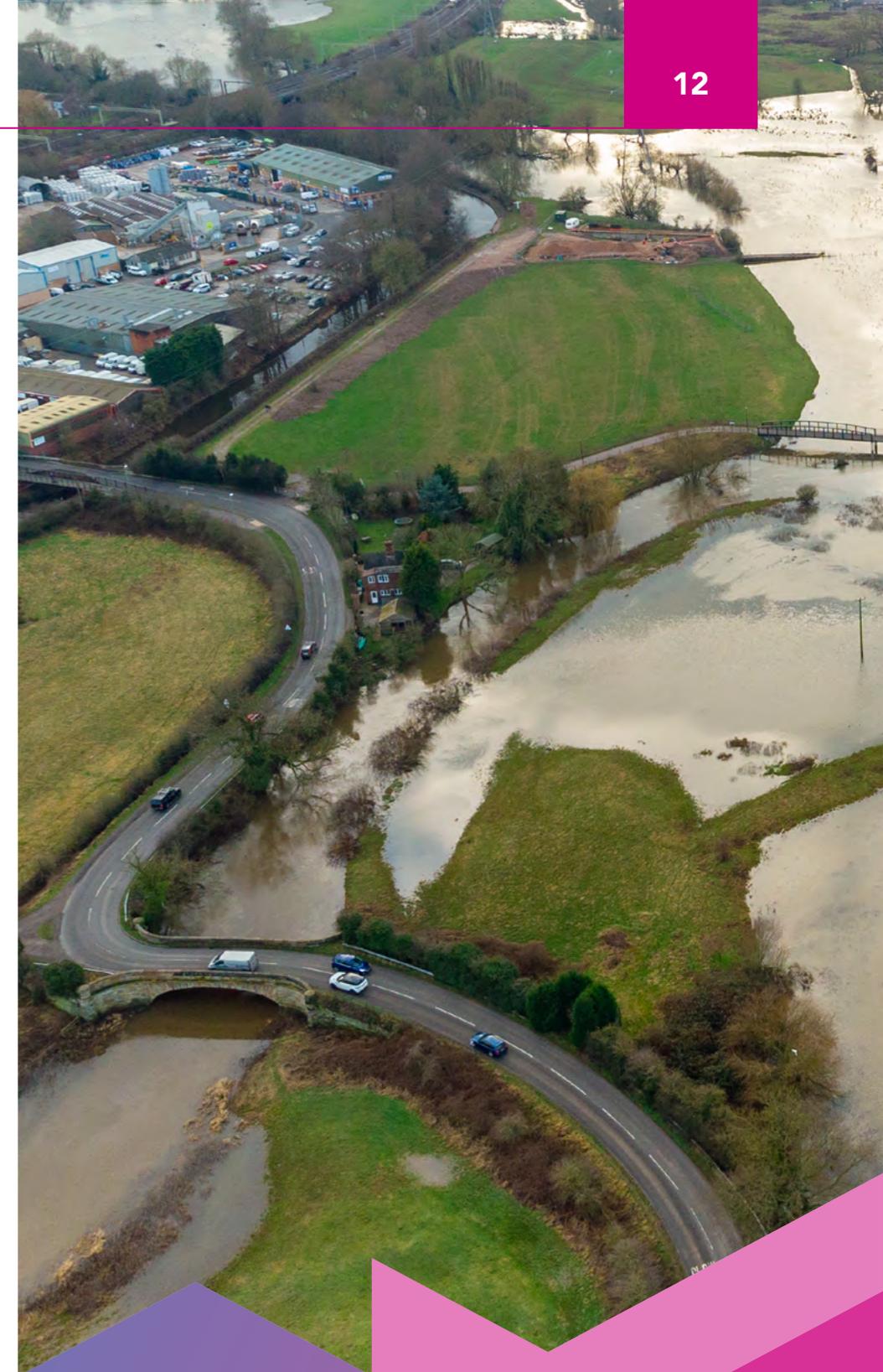


Use nature-based solutions to adapt to the changing environment

Natural solutions include restoring damaged peatlands (for example on the Leek Moors), tree planting to slow rainfall from causing flooding and for filtering out air pollution, creating urban green spaces to reduce flooding and pollution and provide shade and cooling, meadows and hedges for pollinating insects and soil improvement.

Actions

- Identify nature-based solutions as part of our environmental action plan.
- Develop a plan for expansion of woodland and tree cover, maximising biodiversity and other environmental benefits, ensuring that we follow the principle of 'right tree, right place, right purpose'.



Our Duties

Make sure all our work considers biodiversity enhancement and reduces risks to the environment

Staffordshire County Council provides a variety of services, including highways and transport, economic development, education, health and social care, children and young people's services, libraries, and environment and countryside services.

Through its responsibilities and statutory functions (e.g. minerals and waste, education, highways, and planning and development plans), the County Council can positively affect biodiversity. It can do this by adjusting its own work, and through using its position of influence to raise awareness of biodiversity with others.

Lead action for Local Nature Recovery for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire County Council has been appointed as the responsible authority under the Environment Act to work with partners to coordinate delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The LNRS identifies the most important areas, opportunities, and priorities for wildlife. During the strategy period we will be responsible for coordinating delivery and monitoring of the LNRS. To do this we will work with existing and new partners and communities.

Actions

- **Coordinate collaborative actions and monitoring of the LNRS.**



Deliver biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is a legal requirement for most development. This includes our own county council developments which need to demonstrate at least 10% gain to habitats such as meadows, woodland, hedges and streams.

We also have a responsibility for checking, monitoring and recording all BNG connected with planning applications made to SCC, and we will report our progress on this. For Staffordshire County Council this mostly means quarries, waste sites, schools and roads.

Actions

- **Manage BNG actions and monitoring through the planning process.**
- **Create habitats for BNG on county council land.**
- **Work collaboratively with local authority partners, landowners and environmental bodies to maximise the benefits of BNG for nature recovery.**



Policies, Strategies and Operations

We have responsibility for Minerals and Waste Planning, Local Transport Planning, Local Flood management, to name just a few key areas of work. We will ensure that new policies include actions to meet our duty to enhance nature wherever possible. These should include using nature-based solutions as described in 'our property' above, for example the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy prioritises these as a key way to help prevent flooding.

Ensuring people have access to nature is also an important consideration when producing strategies about land-use for example the Minerals Local Plan will show where quarries will be. Restored quarry sites such as the ones managed by RSPB and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust are now great places to see wildlife.

- **All council contracts and supplies to be peat-free wherever possible.**
- **All council contracts and supplies to reduce pesticides wherever possible.**
- **We will continue to ensure good practice for biosecurity across all our activities. This will be important when working in water, or when using plants and materials from outside suppliers.**

Actions

- **Consider biodiversity enhancement through all policy and strategy development for example Minerals and Waste Local Plans.**
- **Identify nature-based solutions in all strategies as appropriate.**



Case study

St Leonards Primary School has a flood relief area in the grounds, which was enhanced with wetland wildflower seeds and now provides habitat for pollinators and butterflies while still helping prevent flooding.



Swale at St Leonards Primary School

Enhance and restore the landscape and help landscape-scale nature recovery

Within Staffordshire there are two nationally important protected landscapes, the Peak District National Park and Cannock Chase National Landscape. The National Forest also extends into eastern Staffordshire and is an important area for landscape restoration.

On a smaller scale, 15 Registered Parks and Gardens are also nationally protected. Staffordshire is mainly a rural county with a diverse character. Many areas have a high landscape quality and sensitivity.

Staffordshire's historic landscapes are rich in cultural heritage.



The diversity of our landscapes greatly contributes to our sense of place and local identity, and the historic environment further reinforces the special character of our landscapes.

We have supported the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives that enhance nature, landscape and our historic environment. Recent examples include the South West Peak Project and working with partners in the Cannock Chase NL and Special Area of Conservation Partnerships. We are actively involved in development of a new initiative – Transforming the Trent Headwaters, led by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. We can develop more projects that deliver for nature at landscape-scale through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The success of all these projects relies on working well with other organisations and with local people.

Staffordshire is mainly a rural county with a diverse character. Many areas have a high landscape quality and sensitivity.

Actions

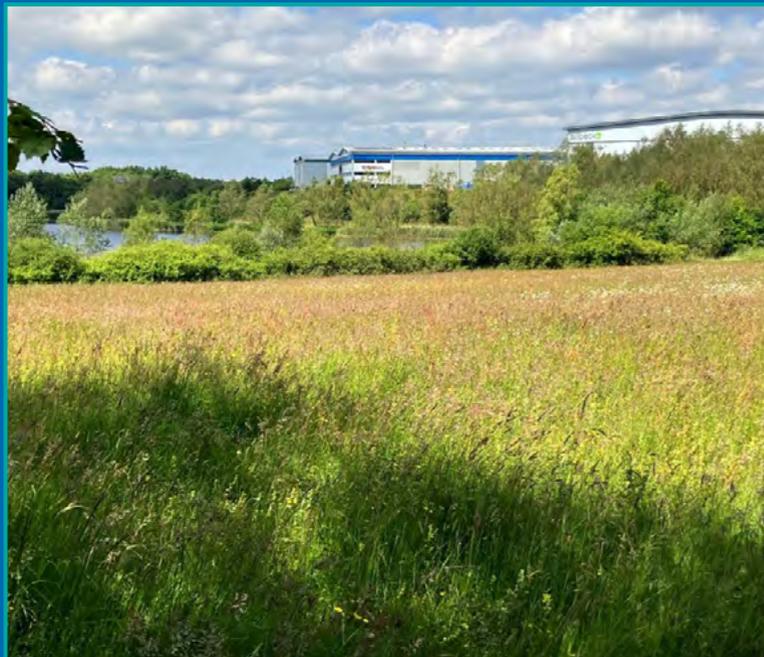
- **Ensure County Council decisions take account of landscape conservation and enhancement and our duties for our protected landscapes.**
- **Continue to host the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership and actively support the management and enhancement of our protected landscapes.**
- **Support the development and delivery of landscape scale initiatives in key areas as appropriate.**
- **Promote hedgerow creation and restoration where appropriate, to restore and protect landscape scale character and quality and contribute towards biodiversity net gain.**

Case Study

Kingswood Lakeside Employment Park

Kingswood Lakeside is a large commercial development between Norton Canes and Cannock. 64 hectares of open land, including Kingswood Lake itself, were retained and incorporated into the site's green infrastructure.

Surplus soils were spread across discrete areas and landscaped to create new woodland, grassland and wildflower meadows.



Kingswood

Meadow near Kingswood Lake

A network of permissive paths was installed alongside existing public rights of way. These enable local residents and employees on the park to access balancing ponds and lakes, woodland and meadows.

Overlooking Kingswood Lake is the largest meadow on the site. Measuring 1.6 hectares, it was created as a new feature and is managed to promote a diverse range of flora. It is now a candidate Site of Biological Importance. Management practices for other grassland areas within the site are being changed to encourage the spread of wildflowers by reducing aggressive grass species.



Meadow at Kingswood, including common spotted-orchid

New woodland plantations were designed with incised edges to maximise the length of woodland edge habitat.

The margins of new balancing ponds received coir mats that were pre-germinated with native marginal and aquatic species. The mats protected new banks from erosion whilst the marginal plants were getting established.



Kingswood

Our People

Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment

Nature underpins our quality of life. The health benefits of engaging in nature are well-understood, both for physical health and mental wellbeing. But while nature can look after us, we also need to care for it in return.

Never has there been a more important time for us all to take action for nature.

We can all make a difference – to reduce our environmental impact, reducing food waste, using water wisely.

We can also get directly involved in supporting nature – by volunteering, taking part in wildlife surveys, supporting a wildlife charity and making our gardens and community spaces wildlife-friendly.

We will support our communities wherever possible to empower them to make a difference.

Staff training & awareness

This strategy involves all our work. Many staff are already actively involved in supporting and enhancing the natural environment, but others may need help to see what can be done in their work area to help nature.

Actions

- We will provide appropriate training on biodiversity and the environment to staff.
- will celebrate what we do for nature.



Community awareness and involvement

We rely on great work from many volunteers to manage our country parks and other sites. Involving people in sites, even if it is an informal arrangement, such as recording wildlife they see on their walks, raises awareness and encourages a sense of ownership.

The County Council will use its communications resources to explain what we're doing and why.

Actions

- Support volunteering activity on our countryside sites.
- Deliver media and awareness campaigns on ways people can support nature recovery, e.g. communicate how to safeguard hedgehogs.
- Promote positive behaviours and prohibit use of materials and activities damaging the environment, such as balloon launches, Chinese lanterns and BBQs.



Health & nature connectivity

There is a proven connection between access to nature and health. Spending just 20 minutes in a natural environment is understood to improve mental and physical wellbeing. Access to nature can help recovery times and can even be a source of beneficial bacteria like probiotics.

Actions

- Offer support and signposting to nature connection through our network of Library Champions.
- Continue the programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities and link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature. In this and other ways, seek to encourage and provide for inclusive access to green spaces, and to empower people to effect positive change.



Case Study

Redhill Business Park

Redhill Business Park is a 28-hectare employment site close to junction 14 of the M6. It is a good example of how a teamwork approach can embed nature into a development site. It is now also a popular place to walk and for workers to take their breaks.

From the outset, Staffordshire County Council required the design of the business park to pay respect to the environment, to preserve important existing habitats and to provide the means to increase biodiversity wherever possible.

The county council established a project group consisting of a project manager, an ecologist, a landscape architect and civil engineers. Their work was supported by technical experts, with ecological survey and reporting in support of the planning application, as well as post-development habitat monitoring.

Early contractor involvement proved crucial by allowing the contractor to become a stakeholder in helping to achieve the project's environmental objectives.



Redhill

As well as supporting 2000 jobs, Redhill Business Park now sustains diverse habitats. Of particular interest are the wet woodland and wet meadow habitats along the northern boundary of the site. Post-development surveys show an increase in species numbers and diversity when compared to the pre-development situation. The boundary of the existing Site of Biological Importance on the north edge of the site has been extended to include more habitats.



Education

Educating children about nature is increasingly important as they now spend on average 50% less time playing outdoors than the previous generation (Raising the Nation Play Commission report.) A recent report by Natural England showed that 91% of children agree with the statement that 'being in nature makes me very happy', but sadly also 23% feel they have a low connection to nature. The report provides further evidence that access to nature is poorer for lower socio-economic groups.

Actions

- Continue to support forest school provision and other educational initiatives, exploring links to the new natural history GCSE.

A recent report by Natural England showed that 91% of children agree with the statement that 'being in nature makes me very happy', but sadly also 23% feel they have a low connection to nature.



Case Study

Pye Green Valley Miyawaki Forest

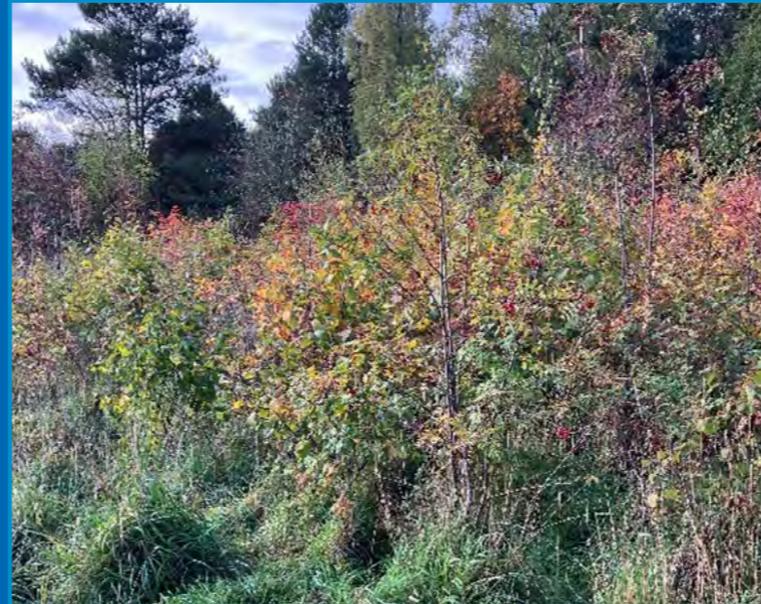
Pye Green Valley is an area of natural open space in Hednesford. It is surrounded by residential developments with three schools neighbouring the site.

6 months after planting



Miyawaki

3 years after planting



Miyawaki

Two areas of the site were set aside to create "mini forests". The technique involves planting trees very close together in order to concentrate as much biomass as possible within a small area.

This style of planting was pioneered by a Japanese arborist named Dr Miyawaki.

The close proximity of the trees to one another seems to encourage rapid establishment. Within 3 years the trees have put on several metres of growth and the plantations are creating good habitat for birds, invertebrates and small mammals.

In the next phase of this work, 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, and another area of forest will be planted. 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.

