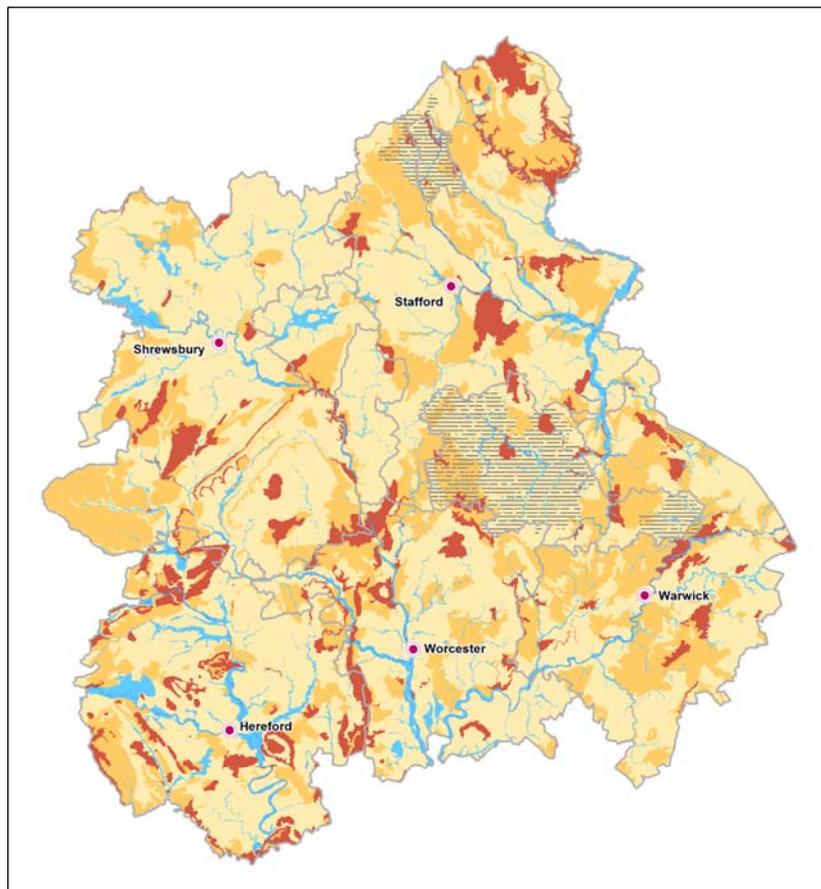


# *Enhancing Biodiversity Across the West Midlands*



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**This Planning Guidance has been prepared by David Tyldesley and Associates for Natural England on behalf of the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership.  
July 2008**

## 1 - Aim of Document

This regional guidance sets out to demonstrate, to local planning authorities, how **Local Opportunity Mapping** for biodiversity in the West Midlands will make a major contribution to achieving national and regional policy objectives and statutory requirements for enhancing biodiversity.

## 2 - The Importance of Enhancing Biodiversity

The maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity is of fundamental importance because it is:

- an integral part of sustainable development;
- an essential component of improving quality of life;
- critical to our future health and well being;
- important for economic development and regeneration;
- an expectation of government policy; and
- a statutory obligation.

## 3 - Statutory Requirements

Section 40 of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* requires:

*“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.....Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.”* (emphasis added)

Section 37 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 also requires development plans *“to include policies encouraging the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems of marking field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.”*

## 4 - National Planning Policy

Planning Policy Statement 9, *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation* (PPS9), strongly emphasises the importance of enhancement as well as conservation of biodiversity. It indicates (paragraph 4) that Government expects local planning authorities to ensure that *“policies in local development documents reflect, and are consistent with, national, regional and local biodiversity priorities and objectives (including those agreed by local biodiversity partnerships).”*

The ‘key principles’ set out in PPS9 (extracts with emphasis added) include:

- Local authorities should assess the potential to sustain and **enhance** environmental resources in the consideration of up-to-date information.
- Plan policies and planning decisions should aim to maintain, **enhance, restore or add to** biodiversity and geological conservation interests.
- Plan policies should take a strategic approach to the conservation, **enhancement and restoration** of biodiversity and geology.
- Plan policies should promote opportunities to incorporate **beneficial** biodiversity and geological features within the design of development.
- Development proposals where the principal objective is to conserve or **enhance** biodiversity and geological conservation interests should be permitted.

The PPS (paragraph 5) also goes on to say that the Local Development Frameworks should “*identify any areas or sites for restoration or creation of new priority habitats which contribute to regional targets, and support this restoration or creation through appropriate policies*”

The PPS (paragraph 12) urges local planning authorities to use their plan policies to prevent further fragmentation, and also to repair the fragmented networks that currently exist: “*Local authorities should aim to maintain networks by avoiding or repairing the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats through policies in plans. Such networks should be protected from development, and, where possible, strengthened by or integrated within it.*”

Paragraph 2 states that “*Over time the distribution of habitats and species, and geomorphological processes and features will be affected by climate change and such change will need to be taken into account.*”

Circular 04/2001 *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*, further emphasises the importance of Local Biodiversity Action Plans in spatial planning, urging that Local Biodiversity Action Plans are one of the elements that local authorities should build upon when preparing their Community Strategy, which in turn informs and shapes the direction of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

## **5 - The Influence of Climate Change**

The consequences of climate change for the natural environment are potentially very large and it is essential that development does not exacerbate the negative impacts. Rather it should seek opportunities to facilitate the adaptation of the natural environment and the preservation of vulnerable habitats and species, either in their current locations, or in different locations where these are most conducive to long term survival.

*Planning and Climate Change. Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1* includes, in paragraph 9, the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity, recognising that the distribution of habitats and species will be affected by climate change, and highlighting the need to conserve and enhance biodiversity as one of the key planning objectives.

Paragraph 12 of the supplement, sets out key requirements in relation to biodiversity and climate change. When considering climate change as an issue affecting the selection of land for development, planning authorities should take into account the effect of development on biodiversity and its capacity to adapt to likely changes in the climate (paragraphs 23 and 24). This should be taken to include the need to ensure that corridors that would aid species and habitat movement in response to climate change should not be allocated for any development that would create a barrier to such movement. Rather, planning authorities and their partners should be seeking ways to protect and enhance such corridors in order to facilitate the adaptation of biodiversity to climate change<sup>1</sup>.

## **6 - The Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG 11, June 2004)**

The West Midlands RSS incorporates a biodiversity enhancement policy, Policy QE7 (reproduced in Annex 1 below), which provides a direction for local authorities in taking forward the requirements of PPS9. This policy refers to Biodiversity Enhancement Areas (BEA) and Strategic River Corridors (SRC), and these are shown on the ‘Areas of Enhancement’ map within ‘The Quality of the Environment’ chapter. Biodiversity Enhancement Areas are specific areas across the region that hold some of the more

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<sup>1</sup> Planning authorities and Regional and Local Biodiversity Partnerships will find the 2007 Defra publication (on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership) *Conserving Biodiversity in a Changing Climate: Guidance on Building Capacity to Adapt*, helpful in taking forward biodiversity enhancement initiatives to meet the expectations of the Supplement to PPS1. Other useful Defra guidance includes *Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty* to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This promotes the need to increase the resilience of the natural environment to climate change as an element of that duty.

important biodiversity resources within the region, and have been developed by the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership.

Policy QE7 of the RSS directs local planning authorities to protect, manage and enhance the region's biodiversity, giving priority to habitats and species that are either protected by legislation or considered a priority within the region and to Biodiversity Enhancement Areas. It also seeks to ensure that biodiversity targets are met and that a common approach is adopted to cross boundary features such as Strategic River Corridors.

It is important to note that designated sites i.e. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) do not include all priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats or important locations for Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. Local authorities should therefore look to identify locations that hold important species and habitats within their locality, particularly when those important species and habitats lie outside the boundary of these designated sites.

The Regional Biodiversity Audit provides a list of priority habitats and species within each local authority area. It is a valuable starting point, but local planning authorities will need to be aware that this list was prepared in 2001 and it is in need of revision. Local authorities should only use this list in consultation with their Local Biodiversity Partnership to help determine local priorities and agree what further information may be required to ensure a satisfactory evidence base for the LDF. Similarly, Annex B of the RSS, which provides a list of important habitats for the Region, is also in need of revision in light of the national review of priority BAP habitats and species. Local Biodiversity Partnerships should therefore be consulted to ensure that the LDF contains the most up to date information on local targets and priorities.

## 7- Landscapes for Living

### Landscapes for Living Vision

**Imagine... a vibrant, diverse and natural West Midlands, where we are connected to our wildlife and landscape; healthy, sustainable communities and local livelihoods, working with nature and securing the future...**

This is a 50 year vision for rebuilding biodiversity in the West Midlands. Local planning authorities can play a major part in achieving this vision, especially by taking a 'landscape-scale' approach which includes the following principles:

- Current knowledge suggests that in ecological terms the most valuable biological networks can be developed in areas that currently possess larger quantities of good quality habitats.
- Large connected areas of habitat are more able to support natural processes and viable populations of species. They are more likely to withstand climate change and other adverse impacts.
- Connectivity doesn't simply mean physical linkage. Less intensively managed and more wildlife sensitive landscapes are more permeable to species, provide 'stepping stones' that allow wildlife to move through the countryside.
- A landscape-wide area approach builds upon the framework of protected areas like Sites of Special Scientific Interest, County Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves. The landscape-wide approach links sites of geological, historic and cultural interest and works in parallel with Biodiversity Action Plans for habitats and species.

- Ecological networks are for people as well as wildlife. They should help connect people and communities, villages and towns with the urban fringes and wider countryside. They should help support economies and provide places for people to live and work.

## **8 - The West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Map**

The regional biodiversity map has been developed by the West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Partnership using the best available consistent regional data sets including the Natural England's Habitat Inventories and County Wildlife Sites. The data has been mapped using Landscape Description Units (LDUs), which provide an indicative biogeographical framework that allows environmental objectives to be applied across the entire region. The total proportional area of all habitats in each LDU was calculated and used to derive three zones. These are

### Zone 1

Large interconnected landscapes rich in biodiversity and providing life-supporting ecological networks

### Zone 2

Extensive areas of habitat linking and buffering other areas and supporting multiple needs

### Zone 3

Generally smaller, more isolated areas of habitat, often in highly modified landscapes, supporting mixed uses and providing ecosystem services.

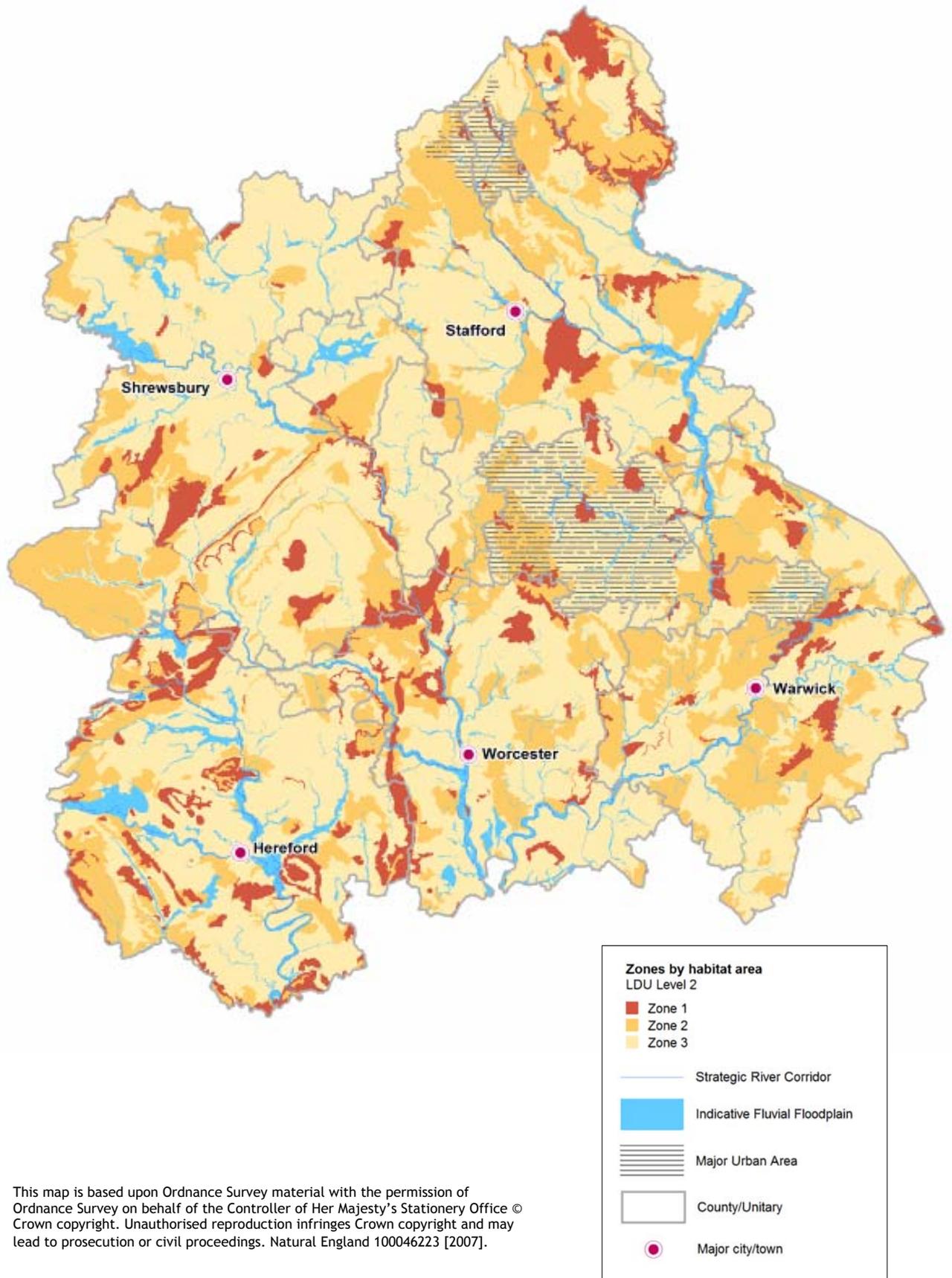
In recognition of the importance of rivers and floodplains, and of the special issues in urban areas, the map also includes Strategic River Corridors, in the form of 'rivers and floodplains', and 'cities and towns' which include valuable biodiversity habitats and features and play a vital role in providing greenspace for urban dwellers.

The West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership is currently working on a regional opportunity map that provides a spatial representation of the 50 year vision. This will be available later in the year and circulated to all LPAs. The regional opportunity map will be produced in accordance with PPS9, which expects regional planning bodies to identify broad areas for habitat restoration and re-creation. More information on the Landscapes for Living project can be obtained from the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership web site ([www.wmbp.org](http://www.wmbp.org))

Four key principles for delivering the regional vision are set out below. Projects and programmes are likely to include a range of different delivery principles and may cover a number of the zones on the biodiversity map. The principles are:

- To improve the quality of life for people within our towns and cities and across the region through increasing the provision of more accessible, wildlife rich open space, providing greater opportunity for people to enjoy wildlife in their daily lives.
- To maintain the existing bio-diverse habitats across the region to provide the building blocks for landscape scale conservation.
- To restore habitat quality, expand habitat area and reconnect habitats to increase the extent, function and resilience of ecological networks and counter the effects of climate change.
- To re-create natural systems to support biodiversity and other land management objectives such as the delivery of sustainable farming and the restoration of river features and floodplain systems to alleviate flooding.

# Regional Biodiversity Map



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## 9 - Local Opportunity Mapping

Ideally all West Midlands LDFs should include a local opportunity map for biodiversity and a vision for landscape scale habitat connectivity. In taking forward local biodiversity enhancement work through the spatial planning process at a local level it is anticipated that local authorities will use the regional map to begin to develop a **local opportunity map**. LDF documents should include **local opportunity maps** that take account of regional and local targets for habitats and species, as outlined in the RSS and in Local Biodiversity Action Plans. LDFs should identify opportunities for restoration and creation of new habitats, taking account of the opportunities within Biodiversity Enhancement Areas and Strategic River Corridors.

The **local opportunity map** should utilise local survey information to highlight areas of biodiversity importance, particularly focusing on regional and local biodiversity action plan priorities, in accordance with Regional Policy QE7, but also taking advice from Local Biodiversity Partnerships to ensure that priorities are up to date and locally relevant. This initial work will highlight any areas where the evidence base is weak or lacking and flag where further survey work is necessary, so contributing to the overall evidence base for the LDF.

The map should begin to develop and indicate where there are potential opportunities for wildlife enhancement, particularly where the following objectives could be achieved:

- Initiation of sensitive management regimes for important sites currently suffering from inappropriate management
- Development of management plans for sites currently without management
- Restoration of habitat expanse where remnant habitats are reduced to small, unsustainable pockets
- Restoration of linkages between sites where they have previously be severed
- Re-creation of habitat where it is now completely lost
- Creation of new habitat where opportunities arise
- Creation of new habitat linkages to link isolated sites of biodiversity importance, and encourage species dispersal

## 10 - Biodiversity Enhancement Areas

The 14 Biodiversity Enhancement Areas in the West Midlands should feature strongly in **local opportunity mapping** and LDF policy, alongside designated sites and locally important habitats and species.

The Biodiversity Enhancement Areas have been selected to represent some of the more important and concentrated areas of biodiversity, and also areas of opportunity for biodiversity enhancement, including some urban areas. The Biodiversity Enhancement Areas cover approximately 25% of the region and represent a significant proportion of the region's biodiversity, including 70% of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The RSS states at paragraph 8.27 that Biodiversity Enhancement Areas offer some of the best prospects for retaining environments with a rich and resilient biodiversity resource. In accordance with the RSS, ecological integrity within these areas should be reinforced by:

- *supporting* existing biodiversity and landscape enhancement projects;
- *buffering* habitat units from adverse impacts;
- *restoring* and re-creating locally characteristic habitats;
- *expanding* and linking isolated habitat units; and

- *promoting* social and economic benefits by investing in linked facilities for sustainable access, enjoyment, the promotion of health and well-being and education, and in businesses that contribute to and capitalise on a high quality natural environment.

The promotion of social and economic benefits is of considerable importance to the success of all biodiversity enhancement initiatives, and should be a key focus for those working on wider community projects, both urban and rural. Whilst some of these opportunities may lie outside the immediate spatial planning and development control function, many are linked to and feed into the development of LDF.

## **11 - Strategic River Corridors**

Under RSS Policy QE7 (iii) Strategic River Corridors are also identified as areas where local planning authorities should consider and address cross boundary issues relating to biodiversity, to ensure an integrated and comparable approach throughout the Region.

The West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership advises that Strategic River Corridors should be promoted alongside, and should complement the Biodiversity Enhancement Areas, which generally cover the dry terrestrial habitats.

Further information about the Strategic River Corridors can be found on the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership website ([www.wmbp.org](http://www.wmbp.org)) or by contacting the Midlands region of the Environment Agency directly.

## **12 - Responding to Climate Change**

The extent to which habitats and species in the West Midlands can adapt to a changing climate depends largely on how easily they can move through an increasingly fragmented landscape, and whether suitable, high-quality habitats are available to travel through and towards<sup>2</sup>. Regional and local authorities should try to enhance the resilience of these landscapes and reverse their fragmentation by planning for, and expanding the extent of habitat available, and by creating more areas that are sympathetic to wildlife. It is therefore important that these issues are addressed when compiling local development documents and when considering applications for new development.

A changing climate means an increasingly dynamic natural environment, and local authorities should be prepared to respond in a flexible way, in order to manage impacts on biodiversity<sup>3</sup>. This will include consideration of the '*Adaptation Principle for Resilient Landscapes*' described below.

Developing ecologically resilient landscapes

- Conserve and enhance variation within the landscape.  
This means retaining habitat variety on a landscape scale, including variation in vegetation structure, slope/aspect, altitude, water regime.
- Make space for the natural development of rivers.  
The principle is to work with natural processes; for example, managed realignment of flood defences along rivers allows space for such processes to occur.
- Establish ecological networks.

<sup>2</sup> BRANCH Partnership, 2007. *Planning for Biodiversity in a Changing Climate: BRANCH Project Final Report*. Natural England, UK.

<sup>3</sup> Acclimatise, 2007. *What Policies Present Barriers to Adaptation in the UK and the Netherlands?* ESPACE Project Extension Action 1b.

There is a need to think in terms of habitat networks, rather than considering individual sites in isolation. The landscape-scale approach involves taking larger areas into conservation management and linking habitats by means of corridors and stepping-stones.

### **13 - Green Infrastructure**

Green Infrastructure is the network of green spaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, towns and villages. It is the open spaces, waterways, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, wildlife habitats, street trees, natural heritage and open countryside. Green Infrastructure provides multiple benefits for the economy, the environment and people.’(Green Infrastructure Prospectus for the West Midlands, 2006).

Much of the government’s recent guidance and policy promote the essence of green infrastructure as being its sustainable and multifunctional nature and as a place for both wildlife and people.<sup>4</sup> The links between, and potential benefits of green infrastructure for biodiversity are many fold, so long as the network has continuous natural features and is not ‘green’ merely because it includes intensively managed amenity areas with poor species diversity. Green infrastructure can provide the following benefits for biodiversity:

- Reinforces and enhances landscape character and local distinctiveness
- Supports wildlife reservoirs and refuges from anthropogenic pressures (human disturbance, pollution, invasive/domestic species etc).
- Supports environmental processes and natural resource remediation (air, soil and water, sustainable urban drainage and flood alleviation)
- Protects, restores and reconnects fragmented habitats that support priority species currently threatened by agricultural intensification, urban spread and climate change.
- Provides supporting habitat for mobile species within designated sites.
- Has the potential to make a significant contribution to the achievement of Regional and Local Biodiversity Action Plan targets.
- Enables connections with, and an appreciation of wildlife close to people’s homes without travelling to the wider countryside.

The Green Infrastructure Prospectus reinforces the links to biodiversity enhancement by its reference to ‘Landscapes for Living’ -

*“Landscapes for Living is an ambitious new initiative to develop a 50 year biodiversity vision and opportunity map for the West Midlands region. Led by the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership, the project seeks to relate biodiversity opportunities to landscape, heritage and socio-economic elements. It will complement and integrate with other regional and local mapping initiatives and will provide a significant input into the development of a Green Infrastructure strategy for the Region.”*

There are seven ‘Growth Points’ in the West Midlands. Green Infrastructure is seen as an essential component of developing new sustainable communities, and five of these Growth Points are preparing Green Infrastructure Strategies. Green Infrastructure planning has also been incorporated into further development of the Black Country Urban Park.

Local Opportunity Mapping and Green Infrastructure planning should be seen as complementary, and Local Development Frameworks should confirm the links between the two processes.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007. *Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change. Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1*, paragraph 42.

#### **14 - Incorporating Local Opportunity Mapping, Biodiversity Enhancement Areas and Strategic River Corridors into LDFs**

In addition to the general biodiversity policies that may be required within LDFs the following wording is suggested as a framework to assist with policy formation in Core Strategies for local opportunity mapping to ensure the issue of biodiversity enhancement is taken into account. It is expected that the wording will be used as a basis on which more distinctive and locally reflective policy wording can be developed. Supporting text should make reference to local biodiversity assets and their importance to the local community, environment and economy.

##### **Policy Example**

***“Development should promote the appropriate maintenance, enhancement, restoration and/or recreation of biodiversity through its proposed nature, scale, location and design. The local biodiversity opportunity map, in conjunction with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, should be used to guide biodiversity enhancement measures to be included in development proposals as appropriate to the nature and scale of the development proposed and other environmental interest”.***

##### **Supporting Text Example**

*The Council has prepared a local biodiversity opportunity map, shown at X. The map illustrates the most important areas within the district/borough for biodiversity, and also indicates where it is considered that it is most important and feasible to target biodiversity enhancement action, and what that action should be. The map is produced in conjunction with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and provides a spatial representation of local biodiversity priorities, including designated sites, Biodiversity Enhancement Areas, Strategic River Corridors and wider biodiversity opportunities outside these important areas, including the opportunity to create or restore linkages between important wildlife areas.*

*The local biodiversity opportunity map will be continually developed and updated as local biodiversity action is progressed. For the most up to date version of the map and further guidance on how to utilise the map to develop suitable biodiversity enhancement measures to be incorporated into a development proposal, please refer to your Local Biodiversity Partnership (LBAP)*

## ANNEX 1

### A1.1 West Midlands Spatial Strategy Policy QE7

All the plans and programmes of local authorities and other relevant agencies should:

*i) encourage the maintenance and the enhancement of the Region's wider biodiversity resources, giving priority to:*

*the protection and enhancement of specific species and habitats of international, national and sub-regional importance as identified in the West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Audit, Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) and other BAPs;*

*those that receive statutory protection; and*

*the biodiversity enhancement areas shown on the QE Areas of Enhancement Diagram.*

*ii) include policies and proposals which enable the West Midlands to achieve its minimum share of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) targets as set out in Annex B and the targets of local partnerships and other BAPs;*

*iii) take a common approach to biodiversity and nature conservation issues which cross local planning authority and Regional boundaries especially those relevant to:-*

*the strategic river corridors and tributaries of the Severn, Trent, Avon and Wye, river catchments, and issues in current local Environment Agency plans; and*

*priorities derived from English Nature's Natural Area Frameworks and associated Area profiles and the West Midlands Biodiversity Audit.*

### A1.2 Regional Biodiversity Audit

The Regional Biodiversity Audit is referred to in the Regional RSS policy. At the time of production the audit found that the West Midlands contains 21 of the 26 priority wildlife habitats and one quarter of the 526 priority species identified in the UKBAP.

Although many of the Region's habitats are fragmented or much reduced in area, we still have nationally significant proportions of the following:

- Lowland heathland 9% of England total
- Lowland meadows 20% of England total
- Lowland dry acid grassland up to 10% of England total
- Broad-leaved woodland 10% of England total
- Lowland wood parkland and pasture 9% of England total
- Arable land 9.5% of England total

For some species the region holds a significant proportion of the UK or English population, but for many others a lack of data means this context is unknown. The rich variety of habitats supports examples of important populations in most major groups of animals and plants, including UKBAP priority species such as:

This audit was prepared in 2001 and it is in need of revision. Local authorities should only use the report in consultation with their local biodiversity partnership to help determine local biodiversity priorities and determine what further information may be required to ensure a satisfactory evidence base for the LDF.

## Annex 2 – Biodiversity Contacts

### Warwickshire

<b>Warwickshire LBAP</b> 	Ruth Moffatt	<a href="mailto:ruthmoffatt@warwickshire.gov.uk">ruthmoffatt@warwickshire.gov.uk</a> Tel: 01926 412197  <b>Web site:</b> <a href="http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/biodiversity">http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/biodiversity</a>
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Nuneaton & Bedworth BC		
Rugby BC		
Stratford on Avon BC		
Warwick DC		
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### Worcestershire

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Worcester City Council		
Malvern Hills		
Redditch BC		
Bromsgrove DC		
Wychavon DC		
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### Birmingham & Black Country

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Sandwell MBC		
Wolverhampton CC		
Birmingham CC		
Dudley MBC	Robert Duff	

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