Staffordshire & Stoke

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Pre-consultation Draft – November 2025

Introduction

Local Nature Recovery Strategies were introduced through the Environment Act 2021 as a new way to enhance local wildlife and ecosystems. This local nature recovery strategy is one of 48 strategies covering all of England.

The strategy includes a statement of priorities (set out below) and an online map which identifies both existing priority areas for nature and those areas that could become priority areas in the future. The map identifies opportunities where enhancement could make a significant difference – importantly it does not dictate land use.

Whilst focused in particular on nature recovery, the strategy also considers how wider environmental benefits can be delivered, including flood risk management, ait quality and climate impacts.

Why do we need a local nature recovery strategy?

Nature in England is in steep decline. This decline is apparent in Staffordshire.

There are three measures of biodiversity change:

(i) Abundance (the number of individuals which comprise a species).
(ii) Distribution (the proportion of sites or locations in which species are present).
(iii) Extinction risk.

In its 2023 'State of Nature' report[1], the State of Nature Partnership identified that land and freshwater wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% since the 1970s, and that 13% of species in England are threatened with extinction (rising to one in six species in Great Britain). Threatened species in England include the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Hazel Dormouse, and White Clawed Crayfish.

Some species groups have experienced even steeper overall decline. These include moths, and farmland birds. For example, according to UK Government statistics, farmland birds experienced a 58% decline between 1970 and 2021[2]. Whilst it is by no means the only reason for the decline in biodiversity, the way in which we manage land for agriculture is one of the biggest causes for concern but, conversely, applying different

[1] State of Nature – see: State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity
[2] See: Wild bird populations in the UK and in England - GOV.UK

approaches to farming offers a great opportunity to reverse species decline.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Staffordshire Ecological Record are currently working to update their 2016 'State of Staffordshire's Nature'[3] report, which was last published in 2016, and which notes that almost 10,000 different species of invertebrates, fish, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fungi, and vascular plants have been found in the county. In many respects its findings mirror those at national level, although there are local variations in biodiversity. In addition to Hazel Dormouse and White Clawed Crayfish, other examples of species noted to be declining in Staffordshire include Water Vole, Small Heath Butterfly, Daubenton's Bat, Hedgehog, Tree Sparrow and Grey Partridge. – (select those also on shortlist)

Our Shared Vision

At the heart of the country, where the lowland habitats to the south meet the upland habitats to the north, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will be a place where nature thrives. A diverse and connected habitat network will increase resilience, allowing wildlife to adapt to changing conditions. Driven by collaboration between organisations, farmers, businesses and communities, nature's recovery will support our quality of life, prosperity and sense of place.

We asked people about their priorities for nature; here are just a few of the ideas put forward:

"Nature at the heart of every decision"

"Reverse decline in species"

"Annual county biodiversity festival"

"Every parish to have a nature reserve"

"Rewilding"

"Bring back species lost"

[3] State of Staffordshire's Nature – see: State of Staffordshire's Nature report | Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Achieving the vision – our strategic priorities

We have reviewed information from 50 stakeholders including supporting authorities, environmental bodies, farming and landowning bodies and community groups to identify strategic priorities for nature recovery and wider environment benefits across Staffordshire and Stoke.

Our overarching strategic priorities to deliver our vision are:

1. Expand, buffer and improve the condition of existing wildlife habitats and create new areas for nature.

2. Increase species and habitat resilience by connecting habitats together to make it easier for wildlife to move through the landscape.

3. Protect and increase species abundance and range, particularly focussing on interventions for priority species.

4. Improve ecological functionality of habitats and restore natural processes to mitigate climate change and increase the resilience of our communities and landscapes to the changing environment.

5. Reduce pressures and threats to wildlife and habitats by tackling pollution, invasive species, disease, and unsustainable practices.

6. Support the transition to nature-friendly and regenerative farming, promoting practices that increase biodiversity and improve soil health.

7. Integrate green and blue infrastructure and wildlife corridors into urban planning and design.

8. Promote equal access and engagement with nature and empower communities to take action for nature recovery.

9. Expand knowledge of state of nature in Staffordshire through robust system of ecological monitoring and use data strategically to contribute to nature recovery aims.

Our strategy area

Overview of our environment

Total amount of priority habitat, i.e. areas of particular importance for biodiversity

Mapping undertaken for LNRS purposes has identified that there is **xxyy** hectares priority habitat in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, i.e. habitat of particular importance for biodiversity. Such habitat is made up of the following:

TBC

Total amount of mapped potential habitat of importance, i.e. areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity

Mapping undertaken for LNRS purposes has identified that there is **xxyy** hectares habitat of potential importance in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, i.e. habitat that could become of particular importance for biodiversity. Although not always the case, this is typically habitat which adjoins or is close to existing areas of particular importance for biodiversity, and which therefore offers potential to create, bigger, better, and more joined up habitats.

Tree canopy cover / woodland stats

Tree canopy cover in England currently stands at 12.8%, while average canopy cover in UK towns and cities stands at 16%. According to the latest BlueSky data, canopy cover in Staffordshire County is currently around 14.5%, whilst Stoke-on-Trent has similar canopy cover of 14.7%.[1] The UK Government has enshrined a target in the Environment Act to increase tree canopy and woodland cover to 16.5% by 2050. There is scope to increase canopy cover across the County, both within urban and rural environments, in order to bring Staffordshire into line with this target.

[1] See: UK Ward Canopy Cover - data.gov.uk

Area of tree planting potential (FE low sensitivity map)

Staffordshire presents significant opportunities for increasing tree canopy cover, whether this is through urban street tree planting, community orchards, woodland creation or by integrating trees with farms and other

rural land. This potential has not been fully quantified but spatial targeting of planting using Tree Equity mapping, 3-30-300 reporting, and highway soft verge spatial layers, together with the Forestry Commission's low sensitivity and low risk mapping, can help us to identify opportunities moving forward. In addition, organisations such as Support Staffordshire can help us to work with local community groups to identify tree planting opportunities. Following the principle of 'right tree, right place, right reason', tree planting objectives need to be considered alongside other objectives such as biodiversity enhancement and food security, but there is nonetheless great potential.

Estimate of total number of species, number on long list, number on shortlist

Of the estimated 10,000 species of plants, animals, and other living things such as fungi and lichen which are known to be present in the county, **xxyy** are on the long list of LNRS priority species, while **xxyy** have been identified as higher priorities for more immediate recovery actions.

Areas at risk of flooding

Flooding is a serious matter in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. Flood risk mapping has identified the top 10 urban and top 10 rural communities at most risk of flooding in Staffordshire, which include all of the larger settlements such as Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford, Burton-upon-Trent[1], and Tamworth, and rural communities such as Gnosall and Waterhouses. In Stoke-on-Trent, a number of areas are prone to fluvial and surface water flooding[2], including:

- Fluvial: Trentham, Goms Mill, Stoke town centre, Cliff Vale, Bucknall, Ford Green, Norton Green; and,
- Surface Water: Baddeley Edge, Milton Road, Fenn Park, Eaves Lane, Norton Green, Hilton Road, Uffington Parade and Weston Coyney

Air quality areas

There are a number of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) where air quality has been determined not to be compliant with national air quality objectives. The whole of Stoke-on-Trent is an AQMA[3], while parts of other local authority areas are in AQMAs[4]. Information on AQMAs across the county can be accessed through DEFRA's website.[5]

Nitrate vulnerable areas

Apart from relatively small areas of the county around Leek and Uttoxeter, all of the county falls within Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, as defined and mapped by the Environment Agency. This means that most of the county is at risk from agricultural nitrate pollution, with consequent implications for biodiversity on land and in waterways[6].

Socio-economic info – population, areas of deprivation, greenspace provision data etc.

According to the June 2022 ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, Staffordshire's population is 886,284, and Stoke-on-Trent's population is 259,965, making for a combined total of 1,146,249.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation place Stoke-on-Trent twenty first among the most disadvantaged upper tier local authority areas in England, while Staffordshire is ranked 116th[7].

There is considerable variation between localities in terms of proximity to greenspaces, including local and neighbourhood scale natural greenspaces.[8] As might be expected, some urban areas are more remote from greenspaces, particularly from local scale natural greenspaces, defined by Natural England as being 'Accessible Greenspace of at least 2 ha within 300 m from home'.

Agricultural grade areas

Outside non-agricultural areas, the vast majority of agricultural land in the county is grade 3. There is significantly less grade 2 and grade 4 agricultural land. In other words, most agricultural land is of good to moderate quality (grade 3), and smaller areas are of very good (grade 2), or poor (grade 4) quality.[9]

[1] See Maps 6 and 7 here: Local Flood Risk Management Strategy - Staffordshire County Council

[2] See Stoke-on-Trent Level 1 and Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessments here: Stoke_on_Trent_Strategic_Level_1_Flood_Risk_Assessment_Final_Report_January_2020 (1).pdf and here: StokeL2SFRA_Report_FB (1).docx

[3] See: DRAFT_Stoke_AQAP_04_Jul_25.pdf

[4] For example, see: Air quality - Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

[5] See: AQMAs interactive map

[6] See the Environment Agency interactive map of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones here: Nitrate vulnerable zone designations and appeals 2025 to 2028 - GOV.UK

[7] See English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release - GOV.UK

[8] See: GI Mapping Analysis and Green Infrastructure Map

[9] See: Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Grades - Post 1988 (England) | Natural England Open Data Geoportal

Our diverse natural landscape

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent lies at the heart of England. The area has a strong industrial history and significant transport infrastructure, and yet much remains rural and agricultural in nature. A transitional area between uplands and lowlands, the area has a diverse landscape. This is demonstrated by the number of national character areas represented. These are areas of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, not county or district boundaries. Staffordshire and Stoke includes part or all of eight national character areas, and these are outlined below, including the key habitats, pressures and opportunities.

Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain

A large area including much of northwest of Staffordshire, alongside large areas of neighbouring counties, the Plain is a largely pastoral landscape with little significant woodland area. Wetland areas such as the meres and mosses are a key feature.

Key habitats:

- Water and wetlands – notably the bog and peat habitats of the meres and mosses, plus rivers such as the Penk and Sow, fen, marsh and swamp
- Open habitats – grasslands and cultivated land
- Connecting linear habitats – notably hedgerows

Key pressures:

- Condition of rivers and wetland habitats
- Loss / degradation of hedgerows
- Loss of pasture and agricultural intensification
- Development pressure for housing and infrastructure

Opportunities

- Enhance rivers and riparian / floodplain habitats
- Restoration, buffering and connectivity of meres and mosses

- Hedgerow restoration
- Targeted species restoration for wetland and farmland species

Potteries and Churnet Valley

This area stretches from the urban areas of Stoke and Newcastle-under-Lyme, across ridges, hills and the wooded valleys (known as drumbles), rising up to the edge of the Peak District. It includes the headwaters of the River Trent and the rivers Churnet and Dove.

Key habitats:

- Woodland - Largest concentration of seminatural ancient woodland in Staffordshire
- Water and Wetlands including rivers & streams; canals; tufa, standing open water; bog and peat.
- Open habitats – including important grasslands and heathland.
- Urban habitats
- Rock and Connecting habitats (particularly walls, hedges and road verges).

Key pressures:

- Declining condition of river and wetland habitats
- Decline of connecting habitats and features
- Extent of some open habitats, particularly rare upland meadows
- Development pressure for housing, industry, minerals and infrastructure
- Invasive species and tree diseases

Opportunities:

- Urban habitats and the environmental benefits they can deliver, including connecting people and nature
- Expanding and connecting habitats including woodland and open habitats
- River and wetland restoration
- Targeted species recovery work e.g. water vole, crayfish, curlew, woodland birds, invertebrates and bryophytes, etc.

South West Peak

This is an upland landscape characterised by Millstone Grit, much of which is in the Peak District National Park. It is particularly significant for upland habitats and internationally significant bird populations.

Key habitats:

- Water and wetlands – bog and peat, river valleys and reservoirs e.g. Tittesworth
- Open habitats – upland heathland, grassland habitats including hay meadows
- Trees, scrub and woodland – wooded cloughs, parklands.
- Soil and rock – drystone walls, field barns, rock exposures

Key pressures:

- Agricultural change and pressures on farm businesses
- Climate impacts – water supplies, fire risk
- Recreational pressure
- Declines / degradation of key habitats and species – loss of upland meadows, walls, pressure on species such as curlew, hen harrier, etc.

Key opportunities:

- Recreation management and connecting people with nature
- Habitat restoration and expansion
- Targeted species recovery work, particularly for upland birds
- Targeting of agri-environment schemes
- Restoration of walls and traditional buildings

White Peak

This area is characterised by a raised, undulating limestone plateau with steep-sided limestone valleys. The limestone geology gives rise to caves, crags, drystone walls and traditional buildings, and also underpins its limestone-loving wildlife.

Key habitats:

- Water and wetlands – notably limestone rivers (above and below ground) which support crayfish, bullhead and dippers.
- Tree, scrub and woodland – ash woodlands

- Open habitats – especially calcareous grassland and calaminarian grassland
- Soil and rock – rock outcrops and caves, drystone walls

Key pressures:

- Low river flows and water supply and quality
- Development pressure for minerals
- Pressures on farm businesses and agricultural change
- Trees diseases such as ash dieback
- Recreational pressure

Key opportunities:

- Habitat restoration and connectivity
- Restoration of walls and traditional buildings
- Targeting of agri-environment schemes
- River restoration schemes
- Recreation management and connecting people with nature

Trent Valley Washlands

This area refers to the river flood plain corridors of the middle reaches of the River Trent. It is a narrow, linear and low-lying landscape, often clearly delineated at its edges by higher ground, and it is largely comprised of the flat flood plains and gravel terraces of the rivers.

Key habitats:

- Water and wetland – river and stream; ditches; fen, marsh and swamp; open water
- Open habitat – grassland in the floodplain; cultivated / arable land
- Connecting linear habitats - hedgerows with hedgerow trees and copses

Key pressures:

- Sand and gravel extraction
- Development pressure for housing, infrastructure and 'big sheds'
- Loss of natural riverine and floodplain habitats and hedgerows

- Agricultural change

Key Opportunities:

- Further quarry restoration, if planned carefully, could create major opportunities for wetland wildlife, expanding form successful examples already in the landscape.
- Washlands flood scheme has created accessible habitats in Burton with major opportunities to connect communities with nature.
- Opportunity to develop Burton as 'capital' of the National Forest and support further expansion of trees, hedgerows and woodland.
- Build on the success of the Transforming the Trent Valley Project and its connections with communities in the valley to support further targeted nature recovery initiatives.

Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands

This area is mainly a rolling plateau sloping from the edge of the Peak District to the Trent Valley. It includes the remnants of the former Forest of Needwood, and much of the area is dominated by mixed farming. It connects the two protected landscapes – the Peak District to the north and Cannock Chase National Landscape to the south west. Parts of the area are also within the National Forest.

Key habitats:

- Water and wetlands – bog and peat, fen, marsh and swamp – e.g. internationally significant wetlands at Chartley Moss basin mire and at Pasturefields inland saltmarsh.
- Trees, scrub and woodland – ancient woodland, broadleaved woodland and veteran trees.
- Connecting linear habitats - hedgerows with hedgerow trees and copses

Key pressures:

- Development pressure for housing and infrastructure
- Flooding and impacts of severe weather
- Fragmentation of woodland and wetland habitats
- Loss of hedgerows

Key Opportunities:

- Location fringing protected landscapes and within National Forest should support delivery of habitat enhancements.
- Hedgerow restoration and woodland expansion.
- Habitat buffering, restoration and connectivity.
- Nature-based solutions e.g. for flood alleviation

Cannock Chase and Cank Wood

This area is characterized by a sandstone plateau which rises above surrounding areas. It includes the largest remaining area of heathland in the Midlands, which is of international significance and forms a key part of the Cannock Chase National Landscape.

Key habitats:

- Open habitats – lowland (transitional) heathland, grassland, cultivated land
- Water and wetlands – rivers and streams, canals, bog and peat, floodplain grazing marsh
- Trees, scrub and woodland – ancient woodland, wood pasture, veteran trees, coniferous forest.
- Connecting linear habitats – hedgerows
- Rock exposures

Key pressures:

- Development pressure for housing and infrastructure
- Recreational pressure is significant including disturbance impacts on protected species
- Commercial forestry production can impact other habitats
- Water supply and risks of over-abstraction
- Impacts of non-native species and diseases
- Agricultural change and pressure on farm businesses
- Air pollution impacts on habitats

Key opportunities:

- National Landscape offers additional focus and resource to support delivery

- Buffering, restoration and reconnecting habitats
- Targeted work for key species, including heathland birds, reptiles, ancient woodland species, crayfish
- Recreational management to support understanding and nature connectedness

Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau

This area is a national watershed between the north-easterly flowing River Trent and the south-westerly flowing River Severn. It is an area with large arable fields, parkland and lowland heathland, as at Highgate Common and Kinver.

Key habitats:

- Open habitats – heathland, acid grassland, arable / cultivated land
- Soils and rock – rock outcrops and exposures
- Trees, scrub and woodland – wood pasture, broadleaved woodland.

Key pressures:

- Habitat degradation and fragmentation
- Recreational pressure
- Soil erosion
- Development pressure for housing

Key opportunities:

- Habitat restoration and connectivity especially for open habitats
- Recreational management and nature connectivity