Planning for Nature

Community Led & Neighbourhood Development Plans

Berkshire Local Nature Partnership
Nature, Health, Economy

Who is this guidance for?

This guide is for anyone who is producing a Community Led or Neighbourhood Development Plan and would like to know how best to incorporate the local natural environment into their plan or simply wants to ensure that their plan complies with environmental legislation.

Contents

© Andy Fairbairn

© Oliver Cripps

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood Plans enable communities to have more control over planning and housing decisions in their local area. They are statutory plans with a legal status. More information can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/neighbourhood-planning

© Debbie Lewis

What do we mean by 'Natural Environment'?

The natural environment includes wildlife, lakes, rivers and man-made waterways, urban green space, open countryside, gardens, street trees, forests and farmed land. It underpins our survival and our prosperity, providing our food, our fuel, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. The natural environment includes natural systems that cycle our water, clean out pollutants, produce healthy soil, protect us from floods and regulate our climate. The term 'biodiversity' is often used to describe the variety and abundance of our natural environment.

Why Should Nature Be Included In Your Plan?

This may seem like an obvious question, but by understanding why the natural environment is important to your community, you can better plan for it at a local level. Think about it, houses are built to provide more people with homes, schools are there to provide education, hospitals provide medical care and businesses provide employment. What do you need the natural environment to provide for your community?

Access to Greenspace

The access we have to green space has a significant effect on our levels of physical health; it provides opportunities for exercise and recreation that is often free and more appealing than a gym. It also has a positive impact on our mental health.

Building materials

Aggregate extraction is big business in Berkshire. Sand and gravel are our main mineral deposits, but are fast running out.

Food production

Approximately half of land in Berkshire is used for farming; providing us with fresh, local produce. Farming can also shape our countryside, help protect our wildlife and provide access to green space.

Air quality

What are your local levels of air pollution and what risks does this pose your community? Vegetation can help clean the air (as well as literally providing the oxygen that we need to breathe).

Provision of drinking water

Nature can help to filter pollutants out of our water; saving water companies money on cleaning it. It can also help us regulate the supply of water by ensuring that we don't have too much in winter and too little in summer.

Production of energy

Renewable energy is a fast growing market. The local environment can provide a sustainable source of energy for your community. For example; solar, wind or hydro power or the provision of wood fuel.

Temperature control

Heat is a rising health concern in Berkshire, with more extreme temperature events expected in the future. Woods are shady and provide a cool environment on a hot day. Trees near buildings can also help to cool them, saving on air

conditioning, and street trees reduce the temperature in urban areas.

Landscape and Culture

The natural environment provides an important sense of place and gives distinct landscape character. It has also shaped our history. In addition to the open downland, river valleys and ancient woodland Berkshire has historic landscapes such as parklands, , commons, reservoirs and gravel pits.

Climate change resilience

Vegetation locks up carbon and helps us to offset carbon emissions made elsewhere. Nature can also help us adapt to the predicted changes in climate, creating a resilient community for the future.

Tourism

Nature is attractive. Berkshire has a strong tourism industry, which relies on people wanting to visit the area.

Wildlife

Many people enjoy the sound of birds, get excited when they see a hedgehog or enjoy watching butterflies flitting about in a meadow.

Education

There is increasing evidence to show that outdoor learning can improve confidence, leadership skills, and self-esteem and reduce anti-social behaviour.

Flood Protection

Nature provides valuable flood defences; floodplain meadows soak up flood water and vegetation on slopes and in towns can help surface water soak into the ground more quickly.

Beauty and spirituality

Nature makes a place more attractive to live and work in.

Checklist

We want our neighbourhood to have...

Access to Greenspace ✓
Building materials ✓
Food production ✓
Air quality ✓
Provision of drinking water ✓
Production of energy ✓
Temperature control ✓
Land scape and Culture ✓
Climate change resilience ✓
Tourism ✓
Wildlife ✓
Outdoor Education ✓
Flood Protection ✓
Beauty and spirituality ✓

What Nature Do We Already Have?

The next logical step in thinking about the natural environment is to have a look at what your neighbourhood already has. This could include:

- Country Parks
- Village Greens
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Local Nature Reserves
- Protected landscapes
- Street Trees
- Rivers and waterways
- Urban green spaces
- Farmland

- Public rights of way
- Biodiversity Opportunity Areas
- Road verges
- Hedgerows
- Protected species
- Woodland
- Ponds
- Gardens
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The best place to get this information is from your local environmental records centre. In Berkshire, the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) provides detailed information on the locations of protected species and important habitats present in your local area. They also provide bespoke guidance and information on how to identify, protect and improve the local natural environment (fees apply). See www.TVERC.org for more information.

Government host an interactive mapping website, where you can view different aspects of your local natural environment. This can be accessed at http://www.magic.gov.uk/ however this information will not be as up-to-date and accurate as that from the local records centre.

Engaging Local Groups

If you haven't already, now is a good time to involve local groups who have a particular interest in the natural world. You may find that there are local people with a wealth of knowledge about the local natural environment. A good place to start by looking on the Local Nature Partnership's Nature Directory (found at www.BerkshireLNP.org).

Relevant Local Authority Plans

It is important to have a look at what is detailed in the relevant Core Strategy and Local Plan in relation to the natural environment, as any Neighbourhood Plan must be compliant.

- Slough Borough Council; http://www.slough.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/core-strategy-dpd.aspx
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead; http://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/info/200121/planning_and_development
- Wokingham Borough council; http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning/policy/ldf/core-strategy/
- Bracknell Forest Council; http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/developmentplan
- Reading Borough Council; http://www.reading.gov.uk/businesses/Planning/planning-policy/core-strategy/
- West Berkshire Council; http://info.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=28782

And the National Planning Practice Guidance for the natural environment:

http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/

For further information about parts of Berkshire that are located in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty you can visit www.northwessexdowns.org.uk The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan covers a diverse series of topics from land management, to biodiversity and sustainability, historic environment, development, natural resources, communities and leisure and tourism.

How Much Nature Do We Need?

Land is a finite resource and therefore decisions will need to be made about what the land is used for locally. Whilst it is fairly easy to work out, for example, how many schools your neighbourhood may need to accommodate the number of local children, it is not always so easy to work out how much natural space a neighbourhood needs in order to provide the benefits and services identified above. For some, clear standards have been set, however for others expert and bespoke guidance will be needed for each area.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that a core objective of the planning process is to contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment - moving from a net loss to achieving net gains for nature' (NPPF: Paragraphs 9 and 17).

> **Remember**
>
> It is always best to:
> - **Protect** current natural areas
> - **Enhance** with better management or an increase in size
> - **Connect** habitat together so that wildlife species can move about

Access to Greenspace
The Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (developed by Natural England) recommends that everyone should have an accessible natural Greenspace:
- of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;
- at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometres of home;
- one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and
- one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus
- a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.

Visit http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40004 for more information.

Building materials
Your Local Authority will have (or will be developing) a Minerals and Waste Plan which will set out the plan for mineral extraction in an area. It is often possible to create valuable nature reserves on sites where mineral extraction has ended. For example, Bray Pit near Maidenhead: http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/bray-pit

Food production

Farmed land occupies about 50% of land in Berkshire. Depending on the management practices used this land can help support a whole host of wildlife and can provide access to the countryside for residents, as well as providing sustainable, locally sourced food.

Air quality
Each Local Authority will monitor air quality and identify areas where residents may be exposed to high concentrations of pollutants. These can often be found by looking at the Local Authority website.

Vegetation can play an important role in influencing urban air quality; particularly along roads where it can also offer shade and noise reduction. More information can be found from the Forestry Commission at http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/URGC-7EDHQH.

The Environment Agency hold a lot of data about the environment, including an Air Pollution map which can be found here: http://maps.environment-agency.gov.uk/

Provision of drinking water
A number of water companies supply drinking water within Berkshire, with groundwater being the most important source. The Thames Valley is 'seriously water-stressed' which means that we are already using most of the water in our environment.

You may be able to identify opportunities in your neighbourhood to help clean and regulate the water supply. The Environment Agency has a lot of data about local water: http://maps.environment-agency.gov.uk/

Production of energy
Neighbourhood plans can include policies which support a range of renewable energy solutions appropriate to the area. Guidance is available from the Centre for Sustainable Energy:
http://www.cse.org.uk/thesource/browse/understanding-and-influencing-the-planning-system-1/localism-and-neighbourhood-planning-3

Temperature control
More information on air temperature regulation by urban trees and green infrastructure is provided by the Forestry Commission:
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCRN012.pdf/$FILE/FCRN012.pdf

Climate change resilience
A summary of climate change risks for the UK has been reported by Climate South East: http://www.climatesoutheast.org.uk/images/uploads/South_East_LOW_RES.pdf. Climate UK also have advice on how to build a resilient environment:
http://climateuk.net/resource/building-resilient-environment-%E2%80%93-sector-tools-and-resources

Tourism
The Natural Environment can attract tourists to an area and therefore stimulate the local tourism economy. Does your neighbourhood have a particularly interesting space, such as

Windsor Great Park? Or an exciting species that people come to the area to see, such as Red Kites?

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NWDAONB) attracts many tourists each year. You can find out more about tourism in the NWDAONB on their website: http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/projects/leisure-and-tourism.html and also look at how they manage development in order to keep the area attractive for tourism.

Wildlife
In order for your community to support a variety of wildlife and prevent a net loss to biodiversity a strategy that considers the whole landscape, rather than just individual sites, is required. Core sites, rich in wildlife are required and must be protected from external pressures. These sites also need to be joined up, so that our wildlife species can move across the landscape in order to find food, a mate or flee an extreme event (and recolonize the site afterwards). More information can be found in the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership's Biodiversity Strategy: http://berkshirelnp.org/index.php/what-we-do/strategy/biodiversity-action-plan and by contacting TVERC: www.tverc.org .

Education
The Government have an ambition to 'see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment[1]'. This could include ensuring that schools are adequately equipped with outdoor learning environments on site, or are able to access local natural green-spaces. More information can be found at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605090108/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/learning/default.aspx

Flood Protection
The natural environment can help to manage flood risk, and could help protect developments in areas where flooding is a possible issue. Possibilities include;
- managing the water course up stream,
- setting aside fields to take the flood water averting it from urban areas,
- increasing vegetation to help surface water soak into the ground faster,
- sustainable urban drainage systems

The National Planning Policy Framework has guidance on how neighbourhood plans can consider flooding:

http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/flood-risk-and-coastal-change/neighbourhood-planning-flood-risk/what-advice-and-information-on-flood-risk-is-available-for-neighbourhood-planning/

The Thames Catchment Flood Management Plan will help to plan and agree the most effective way to manage flood risk in the area:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thames-catchment-flood-management-plan

---

[1] HMGovernment (2011) The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature

What else is important?

- **Protect and enhance existing natural assets**

The primary aim of any plan regarding nature should be to seek to protect and enhance existing natural assets. In particular planning policies and decision-making should seek to protect and enhance areas designated for their biodiversity importance; this includes internationally and nationally designated sites, including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Wetlands of international importance (Ramsar Sites) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and locally designated sites, including Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites.

There are species of animal and plant that are protected by Europe under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, in addition to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). These species are protected by law, including breeding and in some circumstances resting sites for the animal species.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006 contains a list of habitats and species of principal importance in England. This list is designed to be used by decision makers, such as public bodies, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

Further Information:

Biodiversity Planning Toolkit (2011) by Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE): http://www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com/

Planning Naturally: spatial planning with nature in mind: in the UK and beyond (2013) by RSPB, CIEEM and the RTPI: http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/planning/planningnaturally.aspx

Planning for a healthy environment: good practice guide for green infrastructure and biodiversity (2012) by the Town & Country Planning Association and The Wildlife Trusts: http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/planning/planningnaturally.aspx

Natural England's guidance on protected species: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/species/europeanprotectedspecies.aspx

British Standard BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity. Code of practice for planning and development: http://shop.bsigroup.com/en/ProductDetail/?pid=000000000030258704

- **Seek opportunities to improve natural connectivity**

Connectivity is an important component of a resilient natural environment. A connected environment can respond to environmental pressures, such as climate change, recover from extreme events and support increased and more diverse wildlife. Any opportunity to enhance the natural environment should seek to improve natural connectivity.

Opportunities for natural connectivity in Berkshire are identified by the network of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). These are defined geographical areas which have been identified as having the potential to be enhanced as habitat networks.

Further Information:

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas by the Berkshire LNP:
http://berkshirelnp.org/index.php/what-we-do/strategy/biodiversity-opportunity-areas

BBOWT'S Recovery Plan for Nature: Living Landscape for all:
http://ibrochurepro.com/11620LivingLandscapes/ib/

- **Identify where nature can be incorporated into other infrastructure designs**

Natural space and biodiversity are best considered at an early stage in any development design, and can often form multi-purpose solutions; for example sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDs) can both support nature and help to manage surface water in urban areas. It is important that green infrastructure functions for both people and wildlife.

Further Information

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance:
http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35033?category=49002

Green infrastructure by design: adding value to development:
http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/MKSM%20GI%20by%20Design%20Guide%20Single%20Page%20Spread%20Web_tcm6-19781.pdf [Note: this has been produced for the West Midlands]

- **Secure adequate long term management of new and existing natural infrastructure**

The natural environment requires good management to remain in favourable condition and function effectively. It is therefore vital that plans identify the long term monitoring and management of both new and existing natural infrastructure.

A funding plan for the ongoing management and maintenance of our natural infrastructure needs to be factored in from the start. There are several different models or approaches which can be taken. Local authorities might include adequate capital and revenue provisions in their own budgets, and planning obligations such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other developer contributions can all play a role. Natural infrastructure can be managed by a dedicated charitable trust or in partnership with organisations with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage it. Not-for-profit organisations and voluntary and community groups can contribute time and labour, raise funds and inspire local ownership to support and manage local sites.

How does nature fit into our plan?

Include a map

A map helps to visualise your plans for the natural environment. It can include the habitats and species that you already have and identify where the opportunities are for creating more, or joining up sites. You can also mark on natural features that your community feel are particularly important; for example a floodplain meadow that stops flood water reaching urban areas, or street trees that reduce air pollution and create a nicer environment.

Ideas for policies

These are examples of the types of policies that could be included in your Neighbourhood Plan;

- Gaps between villages
  - To maintain relevant landscape character
- Trees
  - Retain mature or important trees
  - Development proposals where trees are present require a tree survey, tree protection plan and arboriculture impact assessment
  - Proposals must meet British Standards 5837:2012 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations'
  - Planting of additional trees included in developments, where appropriate, with native species.
- Gardens
  - Gardens should be used as a tool to increase biodiversity and link up green spaces
  - New developments should have no net loss in biodiversity to the local area
- Habitat Connectivity
  - Development proposals should seek to maintain or enhance habitat connectivity
  - This can be backed up via a map highlighting current connectivity of the area
- Biodiversity
  - Development should seek to enhance biodiversity by contributing to the strategic vision for the natural environment in the area
  - Developments must not result in a net loss to biodiversity
- Green Infrastructure
  - Protect existing open spaces
  - Ensure Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGST) are met
  - Development proposals should ensure that green infrastructure is incorporated into the development where possible, e.g. Sustainable Urban Drainage solutions
  - Pedestrian and cycle routes must link together potential destinations and be attractive, pleasant places to be.
- Flooding and Drainage Issues
  - Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage into new development
  - Vegetation used to mitigate flood risk where appropriate

Remember to include the mechanism by which any actions will be achieved, and if funding is required list where this will come from.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

All neighbourhood plans will need to demonstrate how they contribute to achieving sustainable development. More information about what is required to do this can be found in the Government's Planning Practice Guidance:

http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/neighbourhood-planning/the-basic-conditions-that-a-draft-neighbourhood-plan-or-order-must-meet-if-it-is-to-proceed-to-referendum/sustainable-development/#paragraph_072

The Neighbourhood Plan must also be compatible with European Union obligations, including the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and therefore, where the plan could have significant environmental effects a strategic environmental assessment may be required. More information can be found at:

http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/sustainability-appraisal-requirements-for-neighbourhood-plans/

Where to find further help and advice

Hopefully this guide has given you lots of advice and ideas to get started, here are some links and contacts for more information:

- Royal Town Planning Institute – Planning Aid England (http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/what-we-do/) for help with the Neighbourhood Planning Process
- Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust's Senior Conservation Officer (01628 829574) for help with wildlife queries.
- The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (www.TVERC.org) for help with wildlife data and management.
- Berkshire Association of Local Councils (http://www.balc.org.uk/planning/4576458170) for local guidance on planning.