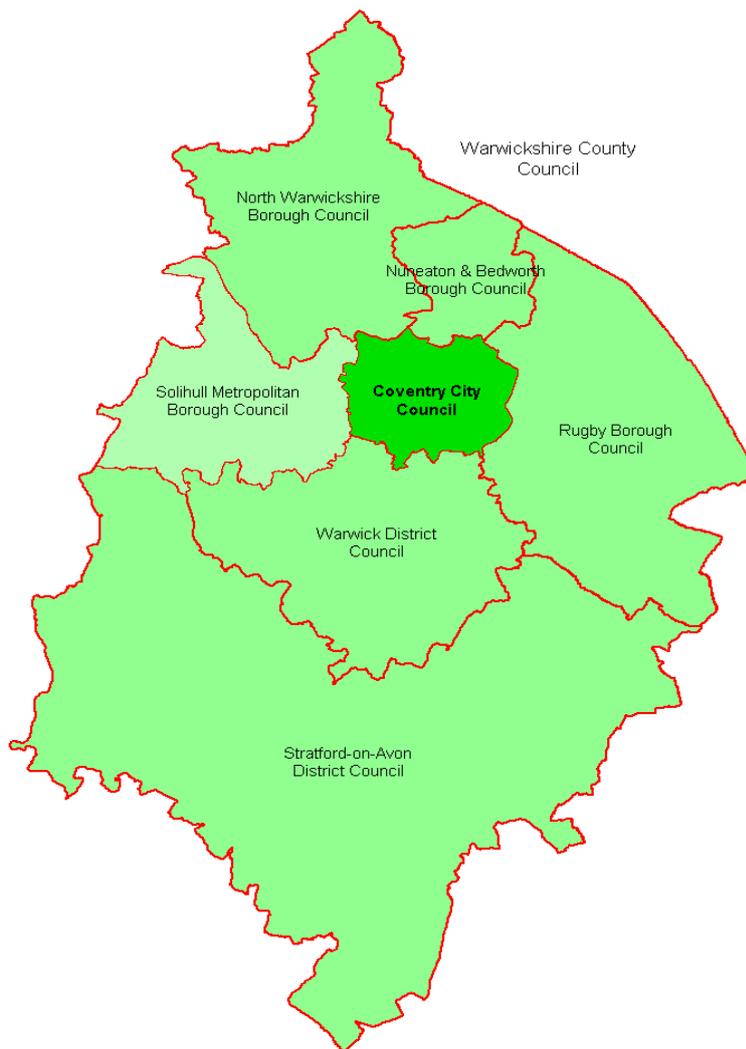




The Habitat Biodiversity Audit & Local Wildlife Sites Project Partnership:

Information Use and Finances for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull



1995 - 2016



Summary

The contributory partners gain the following key benefits from their contributions to this HBA partnership project:

1. A continuous environmental audit for monitoring habitat change across the Warwickshire sub-region at the local level since 1995.
2. A cost effective way of pooling resources for each Authority and Agency to share the cost of achieving key elements of their statutory duty to nature conservation.
3. The cost of the HBA and Local Wildlife Sites Projects is £88,000 per annum, shared between eight funding partners. The equivalent cost of delivery through external consultants is estimated to be in the region of £150,000 based on conservative day rates of £300 - £350 per day.
4. A high quality of environmental information based on nationally agreed standards and tailored to the requirements of each Authority, which represents a significant added value for the Authorities involved.
5. The HBA team has single and collective expertise that is available to the partners offering support and advice.
6. Encouragement of local community and volunteer involvement through training programmes including Phase 1 surveying and botanical field studies.
7. An evidence base that follows recommendations as set out by the Lawton Report (Lawton D.H., 2010) and National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPF) on biodiversity (Communities and Local Government, 2012).

The HBA Partnership Membership

The HBA Partnership consists of all eight Local Authorities with Warwickshire County Council, Coventry, Solihull, Warwickshire County Council and Natural England. The HBA is managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the HBA Team is hosted by Warwickshire County Council. The partnership has a Steering Group where all Partners are represented and a Management Group with an invited membership dependent on the topics discussed. The HBA is also represented on the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Living Landscapes Working Group.

1. The Steering Group:

Membership consisting of: Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (manager), Warwickshire County Council (Chair) , Coventry City Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire District Council, Stratford District Council, HBA Manager, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Natural England, Environment Agency (observers)

2. The Management Group:

Members: Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (manager and chair), Warwickshire County Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Natural England, Coventry City Council Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Phase 1 habitat survey and Local Wildlife Sites Team

The HBA and Local Wildlife Sites team consists of a Biodiversity Project Manager, a Phase 1 / GIS Officer and 3 Local Wildlife Sites Officers (2 part time).

The team has a combined knowledge and accreditation in habitat surveying and protected species surveying as set out by Natural England and Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

The HBA Data Sets and Remit:

Phase 1 Habitat Survey

The Phase 1 habitat survey is a standardised system for classifying and mapping wildlife habitats across Great Britain. The Warwickshire sub-region HBA Phase 1 project partnership provides:

- Active support to Local Authorities in selecting areas for survey each year, aiming for 15-20% coverage per annum across the sub-region.
- Habitat survey to Phase 1 national standards (JNCC, 2010 rev. ed) and linked to Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP) habitats.
- Processing of habitat data into a Geographical Information System (GIS) with accompanying information based on detailed Ordnance Survey Mastermap mapping.
- Annual data updates including the completed Phase 1 surveys, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), hedgerows and Local Geological Sites (LGS).
- Educational and research information for students and teachers.

- An enquiry / support service for local authorities, wildlife organisations and individuals.
- Volunteer opportunities and related work programmes in environmental conservation.

The Local Wildlife Site Projects (LWSP) Membership and Panel Membership

The LWSP provides the Partnership with:

- A rigorous process of evaluating and selecting wildlife sites using a panel of local wildlife experts with extensive knowledge of the biodiversity of Warwickshire.
- Recommendations on wildlife site quality and biodiversity for particular habitats.
- Management advice to landowners on best practice in maintaining wildlife habitats.
- Monitoring of designated local wildlife sites.
- National Vegetation Classification (NVC) (J.S. Rodwell ed. 2003 repr.) / Phase 2 local wildlife sites surveyed by experienced qualified surveyors.
- Availability of additional supporting species data from Warwickshire Biological Records and Warwickshire Historical Records.

The use of HBA data by local authorities and benefits of HBA/LWSP Partnership

The Partnership and processes have been recognised at European level as being an exemplar of good practice (European Union Committee of the Regions, 2006).

This is significant in reference to the evidence provided for statutory reportage, fulfilment of NERC Act duties, appropriate evidence for Local Development Frameworks and Core Strategies.

HBA information is critical to the delivery of many statutory requirements at international level and to the delivery of many statutory requirements at international, national and local level including:

International and European requirements:

- Fulfilment of duties under European Union Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive).

- Completion of requirements for Appropriate Assessment applying to Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), transitional plans, Development Plans Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).

National Statutory requirements:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear on the importance it gives to the protection of biodiversity and geodiversity, with its central aim of halting the overall decline in biodiversity and promoting biodiversity net gains. The NPPF advocates a positive planning approach whereby strategies should be established to promote the creation, protection and enhancement of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. This is set within a framework that policies should be commensurate with a site's status within the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites.

Most importantly, however, the NPPF states that "To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

- **plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale** across local authority boundaries;
- **identify and map components of the local ecological networks**, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;
- **promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks** and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;

Regional Partnerships and Working Links

- To enable the Council to feed into biodiversity indicators and monitoring of the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- To enable the Council to make a meaningful contribution to the West Midlands Regional Biodiversity Partnership and use opportunities to gain funds to support environmental enhancements linked to economic outputs

Local information and decision making in development control, green space and nature conservation strategies, and Green Infrastructure plans:

- To inform local authority key strategies on Biodiversity, Nature Conservation, Woodlands, Green Space and Green Infrastructure.

- WCC Biodiversity Strategy: 'Strand 1 Data and Information. To meet the NERC Act (2006) requirements - the main biodiversity aim of this strand is: 'to obtain, manage and share environmental data to inform decision making and monitor changes' The HBA is a continuous survey of Warwickshire showing habitat types for every single parcel of land in the County (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2015).
- HBA helps to inform development control decisions on a regular basis: WCC Ecology Team hold Service Level agreements with several district authorities to check planning applications with regard to environmental impact assessments and scoping. The HBA Geographical Information Systems (GIS) data sets are used for all checks to inform the planning responses. Without the HBA data, each site would need to be surveyed prior to response.
- To inform calculation of Section 106 contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy with reference to biodiversity value of the land impacted by development. – Biodiversity off-setting.
- HBA data is used in a suite of reporting functions e.g. Annual Monitoring Report and Community Strategy implementation for example. State of the Borough and County Reports.
- To enable a robust case with evidence to be made at Public Inquiries into planning decisions.
- Provide the evidence base in support of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Biodiversity Offsetting : -

Box 1: Habitat mapping within the CSWAPO pilot (Defra, 2014 p.11)

The available habitat mapping was used to assess abundance of particular habitat types within individual 1km grid squares to determine grid squares already deemed to have suitable habitat functionality and connectivity.

- Strategic areas are those 1km grid squares where additional habitat enhancement will help to raise that square to a core functioning area (20% coverage).
- Semi-Strategic areas are 1km grid squares that already have 20% habitat coverage.
- Grid squares with less than 5% coverage are deemed non-strategic with regard to offset location.

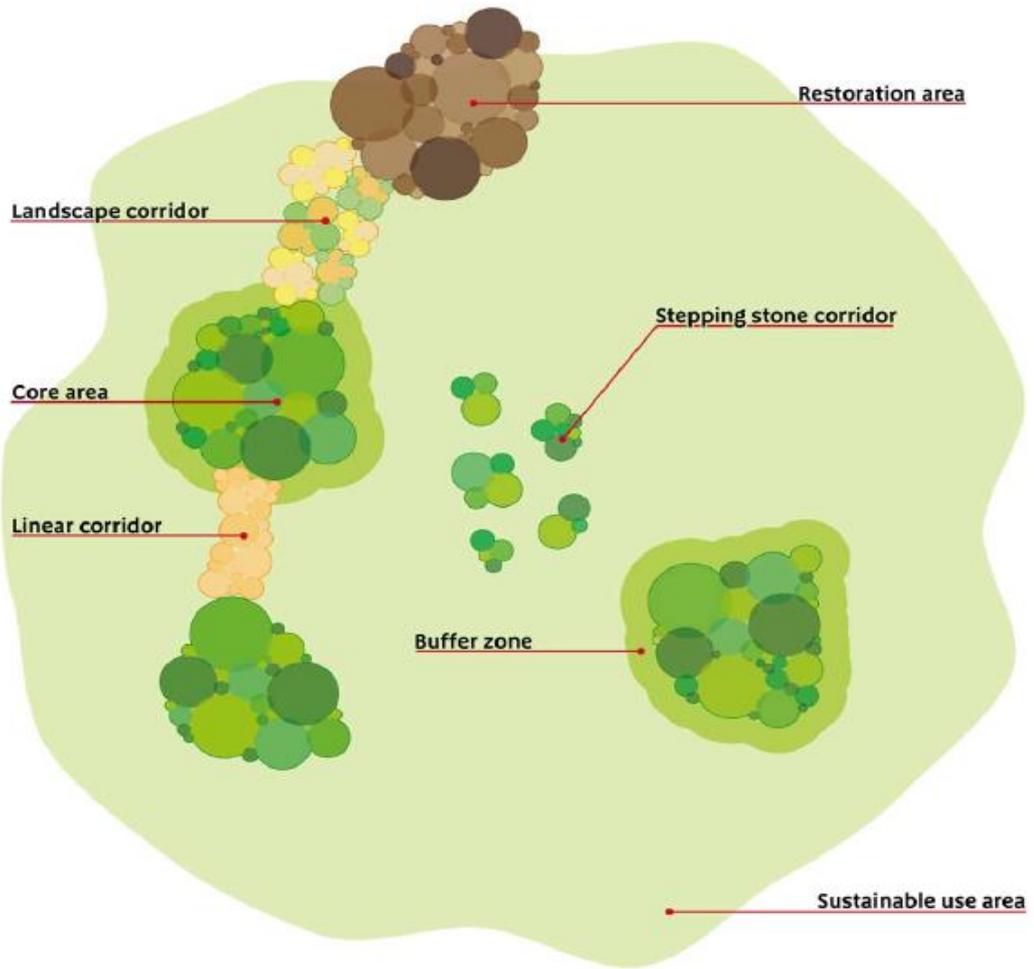


Figure 1 Lawton Report: bigger, better and connected

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