Habitat and Biodiversity Audit Rugby Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2031 June 2017



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Introduction

1. Purpose of the Habitat and Biodiversity Audit

The purpose of the Phase 1 Habitat and Biodiversity Audit is to provide detailed and robust information to inform the Rugby Borough Local Plan. A detailed knowledge of the Borough's biodiversity resource, including the extent and condition of habitats will help ensure that important habitats and species can be taken into account at all stages of the planning process.

In 1995 the Warwickshire local planning authorities plus Solihull and Coventry unitary authorities, English Nature (Natural England) and the Environment Agency established the Habitat Audit Partnership (HBA) under the management of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. The purpose of the HBA Partnership was and remains to survey every field and boundary in the sub-region to provide up-to-date biodiversity data primarily for Development Strategy and Development Control planning purposes. Following the initial survey of the Warwickshire sub-region in 1998 up to 2001 a mechanism was established to update the survey every 5 years.

The HBA data was used to inform the Core Strategy but budgetary constraints that arose following the adoption of that document led to RBC leaving the partnership in 2009. This had resulted in the biodiversity data for some parts of the Borough becoming significantly out of date. Due to changes in national planning policy following the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012 (NPPF) a new Local Plan has been prepared to ensure conformity with national policy documents.

The 2008 HBA baseline study concluded that the majority of sites protected through statutory designation are located to the west of the Borough, away from the urban edge where development is proposed in the Local Plan. The broad habitat types identified in the Borough by the Habitat Biodiversity Audit are subject to Warwickshire Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Habitat Action Plans and these were considered as the Local Plan was written.

In evaluating development options on the urban edge, the presence of the four RIGS located within the Borough and the locally important SINCs and LNR's were considered. Consideration was also given to the targets set out in the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull LBAP as work on the Local Plan progresses. The survey was undertaken in line with the nationally recognised methodology set out in the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's 'Guidance on Survey Methodology', the Defra 'Hedgerow Survey Handbook: A Standard Procedure for Local Surveys in the UK'.

2. Planning Policy Context

The Council adopted its Core Strategy in June 2011 with the plan allocating two sustainable urban extensions to meet the Borough's strategic housing and employment requirement for the period of 2006-2026.

However, due to changes in national policy following the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 (NPPF) and subsequently the National Planning Policy Guidance March 2014 (NPPG) a new local plan has been prepared to ensure conformity with the NPPF.

The Rugby Borough Local Plan proposes to allocate land for 12,400 new homes and 110 ha of employment land up to 2031. However, there is a need to balance the development requirements of the Borough with the protection of important habitats and biodiversity. It is recognised that it is important to halt the decline in 'characteristic' habitats and species.

A vital element of this is to ensure that Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Wildlife Sites are conserved and managed for future generations. Fragmentation of the landscape caused by habitat degradation or destruction and consequently species loss has been a major contribution to loss of biodiversity within the region and further afield.

HBA Phase 1 data used to inform the Core Strategy is now significantly out of date and NPPF paragraph 158 highlights that it is vital that the authority ensures that the Local Plan is based on adequate, upto-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. This HBA will set out the updated HBA data and ensure compliance with the NPPF through providing sound and robust evidence.

NPPF Paragraph 17 outlines 12 key principles which should underpin plan-making and decision-taking. It states that Planning should:

"...contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework;"

Furthermore, the principle of allocating land of "lesser environmental value" is reiterated in NPPF Paragraph 110: "In preparing plans to meet development needs, the aim should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment. Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework."

NPPF Paragraph 109 states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- Preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
- Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

3. HBA Partnership

The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull is a partnership project, between Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the eight Local Authorities in the area, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The HBA consists of the Phase 1 habitat survey of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, the results of which are recorded on a Geographic Information System (GIS). The digital mapping provides a record of the distribution and extent of all types of habitat across the Warwickshire sub-region. The HBA also provides up-to-date information on Local Wildlife Sites already on record and on the location of other sites which should be considered for selection.

The HBA provides important information relating to the context for site review and selection, such as the abundance and distribution of semi-natural habitats and the location of prime biodiversity areas, wildlife corridors and areas deficient in semi-natural habitat. Early results suggested that semi-natural habitat is sparse and fragmented, underlining the value of what remains and the need for more effective protection of local sites.

Although target notes serve to highlight areas of nature conservation interest, the HBA is not selective in nature; rather it is a classification system for habitat types. Identification and selection of sites of substantive nature conservation importance requires a system of site evaluation.

4. Designated Sites in Rugby Borough

There are no sites of international importance within Rugby Borough. However the Borough contains many environmental sites with national and local designations as set out below:

- 7 Sites of Special Scientific Interest,
- 4 Local Nature Reserves,
- 2 Regionally Important Geological Sites;
- and many important nature conservation sites

5. Internationally Designated Sites

In 1992 the European Community adopted Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive). Annex I of the Directive lists 189 habitats and Annex II lists 788 species listed that are to be protected by means of a network of sites. Each Member State is required to prepare and propose a national list of sites for evaluation in order to form a European network of Sites of Community Importance (SCIs). Once adopted, these are designated by Member States as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and along with Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified under the EC Birds Directive, form a network of protected areas known as Natura 2000.

There are no SAC's in Rugby Borough. Ensor's Pool, located in Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough, has three statutory designations as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Ensor's Pool is designated as part of the Natura 2000 network because of the presence of the white clawed-crayfish (see Annex II of the Habitats Directive).

A Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Rugby Local Plan was required to determine any potential implications development in Rugby Borough will have for Ensor's Pool owing to its proximity within 10km from the Rugby Borough boundary. Furthermore, the River Mease SAC with associated Natural England River Mease Catchment Risk Zone was assessed as it lies within 20km of Rugby Borough.

A further three European Sites (Bredon Hill, Worcestershire; Cannock Extension Canal, Staffordshire; and Lyppard Grange Ponds, Worcestershire) that lie close to the boundary of Warwickshire- but outside of the 20km buffer zone around Rugby Borough- were considered and screened out of the HRA. Any impact to Welsh SACs as a result of the Rugby Local Plan were also screened out.

The results of the Stage 1 screening of the Rugby Local Plan concluded that the plan was not considered to have any Likely Significant Effects on any European Sites either alone or incombination with other plans or projects.

6. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) give legal protection to the best sites for wildlife and geology in England. The first SSSIs were identified in 1949 when the then Nature Conservancy notified local authorities of SSSIs, so their conservation interest could be taken into account during the development planning process. Natural England now has responsibility for identifying and protecting the SSSIs in England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Natural England has a duty to identify SSSIs when it is of the opinion that an area of land is of special interest by reason of its flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features. This opinion is based on the exercise of specialist judgement which is informed by scientific guidelines.

The extent of the SSSIs within Rugby Borough (including appropriate buffer zones) are shown in Appendix 5.

All of the SSSIs are located to the West and South West of the Rugby Urban Area. All sites are geographically separate from the Rugby Urban Area. The location of SSIs has been a consideration in the selection of site allocations and the capability of rural settlements to accommodate development. No concerns have been identified by statutory consultees during the Local Plan consultation phases.

7. Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS), designated by locally developed criteria, are currently the most important places for geology and geomorphology outside statutorily protected land such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The designation of RIGS is one way of recognising and protecting important Earth science and landscape features.

The concept of RIGS was first initiated by the Nature Conservancy Councils (NCC) publication Earth Science Conservation in Great Britain – A Strategy (1990). RIGS sites started life as SSSIs denotified after the Geological Conservation Review (1977-1990). The statutory agencies wished to secure their conservation in another form. RIGS sites are those which, whilst not benefiting from national statutory protection, are nevertheless regionally or locally representative sites where '....consideration of their importance becomes integral to the planning process' according to the Earth Science Conservation Strategy (ESCS).

The locations of the four RIGS within the Borough are shown in appendix 5.

The RIGS are each on the edge of the Rugby Urban Area and have informed the choice of locations for development. The sites themselves should be protected and any proposed development in proximity to the RIGS should consider how the sites need to be protected. This can come forward during the planning application process.

8. Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

A Local Nature Reserve or LNR is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities. An LNR may be given protection against damaging operations. It also has certain protection against development on and around it. This protection is usually given via the Local Plan, (produced by the planning authority), and often supplemented by local by-laws. However there is no national legal protection specifically for LNR. LNR are for both people and wildlife. They are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally.

There are 22 designated LNR in Warwickshire and 4 in Rugby Borough. The four designated LNR within the Borough are shown in appendix 6. Owing to the intention of facilitating public access, the LNR in Rugby Borough are located around the Rugby Urban Area; as such they do not prevent development nearby or adjacent to them.

Other important sites in Rugby Borough

9. Ancient Woodlands

Ancient Woodland in England is defined as an area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. Ancient woodland is listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act as being of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity in England. Many rare and threatened species are associated with this habitat. Furthermore relatively undisturbed woodland often contains features of historical, archaeological and landscape importance.

There are approximately 20 areas of woodland in the Borough that contain areas of Ancient Woodland. These are mapped in appendix 8.

10. Important Habitats and Species Without Designation

Section 41 (S41) of the NERC Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list has been drawn up in consultation with Natural England, as required by the NERC Act.

The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

11. Habitats of Principal Importance

Fifty-six habitats of principal importance are included on the S41 list. These are all the habitats in England that have been identified as requiring action in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). They include terrestrial habitats such as upland hay meadows to lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and freshwater and marine habitats such as ponds and sub-tidal sands and gravels.

12. Species of Principal Importance

There are 943 species of principal importance included on the S41 list. These are the species found in England which have been identified as requiring action under the UK BAP.

In accordance with Section 41(4) the Secretary of State will, in consultation with Natural England, keep this list under review and will publish a revised list if necessary. The significance of these lists for Rugby Borough is informed by the priorities of regional and local strategies as set out below:

13. The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit

The Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) was established in October 1995 through a funding partnership of all the local authorities in the area, English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, who act as project managers.

The project is housed at the Warwickshire Museum Field Services within Warwickshire County Council and makes use of the Authority's geographic information system (GIS). The role of the project has evolved with time but essentially runs along a central theme of providing accurate, upto-date and readily accessible ecological data to all the project partners. This can be summarised in a number of stages that are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive.

Stage 1: Undertake a detailed Phase 1 survey of the study area and transfer all data onto GIS

Stage 2: Establish the Wildlife Sites Project and to identify potential Wildlife Sites/Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC). Undertake detailed habitat assessments and transfer boundaries onto GIS

Stage 3: Provide basis for local biodiversity action plan (i.e. the extent of broad and priority habitat types within study area) and a mechanism for setting targets as well as the means to monitor implementation.

Stage 4: Develop local community access to data sets (through community-based projects, library services, Internet etc.)

Stage 5: Monitor habitat and land use change. Introduce hedgerow survey and photographic assessment of particular features (veteran trees, reserves, wildlife sites etc.)

The dataset commonly referred to as the HBA is the digitised copy of a modified Phase 1 habitat survey of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, hereafter referred to as the sub-region. Stage 1 has resulted in the classification of every land parcel within the sub-region and this represents a total area of over 2,250 square kilometres. Every habitat feature has been described in some detail with almost 13,000 habitat descriptions and includes approximately a quarter of a million species records. Land parcels are classified using up to 4 hierarchical levels, the topmost level having 10 broad categories:

- A. Woodland and scrub
- B. Grassland and marsh
- C. Tall herb and fern
- D. Heathland
- E. Mire
- F. Swamp, marginal and inundation
- G. Open Water
- H. Coastland
- I. Rock exposure and waste
- J. Miscellaneous

Stage 2 of the HBA has identified Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). There are a number of SINCs in Warwickshire. SINCs are designated by a panel of local ecological professionals. This is a non-statutory designation, although SINCs are still afforded a high level of protection within the planning system.

Development that negatively impacts on a SINC will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where mitigation can be proven from the beginning. Some sites that have been highlighted as potentially being of SINC value but have not yet been fully surveyed are known as potential SINCs (pSINCs).

14. Rugby Borough Broad Habitat Types

3 Broad Habitat types are present in Rugby; Woodland, Grassland and Marsh and Open Water. Other miscellaneous habitat types are also present, notably amenity grassland. Mapping of these broad habitat types is in Appendix 10.

The SINCS and PSINCs in Rugby Borough are mapped in appendices 11 and 12

15. Summary of Habitat and Biodiversity Audit

This document has demonstrated that the evidence base is up-to-date and therefore this has established a sound basis for the site allocations outlined in the Local Plan. Mapping of all biodiversity and nature conservation sites referred to in this document is contained in the subsequent appendices.

This mapping demonstrates that the majority of sites protected through statutory designation are located away from the Rugby Urban Area and thus geographically separate from the majority of site allocations. Where the most important biodiversity and nature conservation sites are in relative close proximity to site allocations, further survey work to establish any necessary mitigation measures will be undertaken as part of the planning application process.

Appendices

Sites Surveyed

	Cite News
	Site Name
1	Calcut Elms Meadow
2	Calcutt Elms Marsh
3	Suttons Spinney Pool
4	Bunkers Hill Wood
5	Sallys Hole
6	Brandon Little Wood
7	New Close and Birchley Woods
8	High Wood
9	Little Wood
10	Lemons Wood and Boots Spinney
11	Dingley Osiers and The Thicket
12	Far Popehill Spinney
13	Rugby-Leamington disused railway
14	All Oaks Wood
15	Town Thorns Wood
16	Cawston Spinney
17	Cawston Fox Covert
18	Long Lawford Meadows
19	Lime Kilns
20	Dunchurch Hall Meadow
21	Malpass Quarry
22	Newbold Quarry Park
23	Newbold Lime Works
24	Home Farm Grasslands
25	Burton Mill Meadows
26	Manor Farm Meadows
27	Hopsford Hall Pastures
28	Wolvey Rush Pasture
29	Dog Kennel Spinney
30	Conery Spinney
31	Elmhurst Farm Meadows
32	Copston Spinney and Copse
33	Stretton Croft
34	Osier Meadow
35	Ashlawn Cutting
36	Rugby-Leicester disused railway – Section 1 (Eleven
	Arches)
37	Swift Valley Meadows
38	Kilsby Lane Meadows
39	Oxford Canal Meadows
40	Allans Meadow
41	Abbotts Farm
42	Sowbridge Bottom Meadow
43	Great Central Walk North
44	Newton Pool and Pastures

45	Hillmorton Ballast Pit (Since destroyed)
46	Rugby Radio Station A5 meadows
	Clifton Lakes
47	Hayway Cottage Meadows
48	Taskers Meadow
49	Frankton Meadows
50	Lentons Lane Tip
51	Coombe Abbey
52	Coombe Abbey- Extension
53	Brandon Wood
54	Grassland adjacent to Brandon Wood
55	Piles Coppice
56	Ryton Church Pastures
57	Brandon Marsh Sheep Field
58	Princethorpe Great Wood
59	Old Nun, New Nun and Dukes Wood
60	Ryton Wood Landfill
61	River Avon and Tributaries

HBA Sites Surveyed Map



HBA CURRENCY 2016-2017

1996 - 2005 <u>2006 - 2010</u> 2011 - 2016



Ensors Pool









18

Ancient Woodlands



Strategic Watercourses



Broad habitat Types





PSINC's



All Designations in Rugby Borough

