

User guide for planners

The Northamptonshire BAP sets out the most important actions for conserving the county's priority habitats and species. It may therefore be a useful reference for those developing planning policy and determining planning applications.

This document does not set out an exhaustive list of all aspirational actions and targets to conserve biodiversity in Northamptonshire. Instead, only the highest priority actions and targets, which are realistic and achievable, are included.

Importance of biodiversity

Biodiversity – a contraction of 'biological diversity' – simply means the variety of life. It refers to the number, variety and variability of living organisms. It is often defined in terms of genes, species and ecosystems.

- Biodiversity conservation is a key principle of sustainable development.
- The natural environment is an important part of local heritage, contributing to a sense of place.
- Biodiversity provides ecosystem services such as climatic stability, clean air and water, pollination and flood protection.
- Visitors who come to see wildlife and attractive landscapes spend money and contribute to the local economy. A biodiverse area is also more likely to be a desirable place to live and work.
- Many people have an interest in wildlife: approximately 1 in 10 UK adults are members of an environment and/or conservation group.

All local authorities have a duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions.

Relevance to planning

The BAP is material to both planning policy and development management. The context for biodiversity conservation is provided by a range of policy and legislation, the most important of which are:

- the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** states that the planning system should minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible (paragraph 109). Key sections for development management are:
 - paragraph 117 regarding planning policy and biodiversity impacts, and
 - paragraph 118 which includes principles for determining planning applications.
- the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006** section 40 requires every local authority to have a regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. This requirement is often referred to as the 'biodiversity duty'.
- Section 41 places a duty on the Secretary of State to maintain a list of species and habitats of principal importance for which conservation steps should be taken or promoted. For many of these species and habitats, locally appropriate conservation steps are identified in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The BAP provides a list of

priority habitats and species found in the county and identifies the priority areas for these.

The habitat and species conservation targets and actions contained in the BAP should be used to inform local planning policy, for example:

- Local Plans
- Core Strategies
- Neighbourhood Plans.

The BAP should be used along with the relevant supplementary planning documents (SPDs) (Biodiversity and Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area¹ [SPA] SPDs) to ensure that planning decisions are made with due regard to biodiversity.

A broader range of relevant legislation and planning policy can be found in Appendix 4.

Aims of the BAP

The aim of the BAP is to provide guidance on Northamptonshire's conservation priorities, how to achieve them and who should, and could, be involved.

The BAP provides a baseline, targets and an action plan up to 2020 for each habitat and associated species.

Structure of the BAP

The BAP was developed by the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Partnership. It reflects collective priorities for conservation and agreed actions to halt wildlife and habitat losses in Northamptonshire up to 2020.

- **Introduction:** includes a background to BAPs, the state of wildlife in the county and the principles for its future conservation. It also identifies priority habitats in each of Northamptonshire's Natural Character Areas.
- **General Action Plans (GAP):** these seven plans cover general strategies, targets and actions for conservation. Of particular relevance for planners is the Policy and Planning General Action Plan.
- **Habitat Action Plans (HAP):**
 - provide a description and baseline for each priority habitat, along with a list of priority areas and a general strategy for conservation
 - set out SMART targets for the conservation of each priority habitat focussing on what proportion should be managed, restored and created by 2020
 - identify priority species associated with each habitat.
- **Appendices:** includes a list of all BAP species occurring in Northamptonshire and the habitats with which they are associated. Most species will be protected through conservation of the priority habitats, however in some cases additional conservation actions are also included.

¹ The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area SPD applies in Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire, and is expected to be adopted in Northampton Borough in 2016. Relevant applications in South Northamptonshire District will also be expected to adhere to the procedures outlined in the SPD.

How planners can use it

- The BAP should be used to help local authorities develop Local Plan policies.
- The BAP should guide the planning decision process to ensure priority habitats and species are conserved, and that development leads to a net gain in biodiversity in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.
- The BAP provides an evidence base for priority habitats and species in the county, their rarity and the areas where their conservation, restoration and creation are most important.
- The BAP provides targets for habitat creation, to guide restoration schemes so they include habitat features most appropriate to the local landscape.
- The BAP should guide multi-functionality in landscaping schemes, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), which create ponds, reedbeds or native hedgerows.

Monitoring and feedback

The BAP process only works if all partners communicate what actions they have achieved and what targets they have met. Planning officers should ensure habitat losses and gains through development are reported.