



Designing sustainable communities for people and biodiversity



working today
for nature tomorrow

English Nature

English Nature is the statutory body that champions the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and geology in England. We work for wildlife in partnership with others, by:

- **advising** the Government, local authorities, interest groups, business, communities and individuals on nature conservation in England;
- **regulating** activities affecting the special nature conservation sites in England;
- **enabling** others to manage land for nature conservation, through grants, projects and information; and
- **enthusing** and advocating nature conservation for all and biodiversity as a key test of sustainable development.

We have statutory responsibilities for nationally important nature conservation sites, known as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

English Nature's role in the Sustainable Communities Plan – what do we offer?

Advice and expertise. We can advise on many aspects of nature conservation, including wildlife sites, protected species, wildlife law,



A pair of orchids growing on the green roof of a new development. Mathew Frith

habitat and species ecology, habitat management, survey and monitoring, site assessment, accessible natural greenspace, and people and nature.

Local knowledge. Most of our staff are locally-based, and can therefore give detailed advice on special sites, wildlife issues and habitat creation opportunities.

Information and research. We can provide access to environmental information and research on many aspects of wildlife conservation.

Contacts. We are involved in many local, regional and national networks and partnerships, including Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Community Strategies, and can help you make contact with the right organisations and individuals.

English Nature's position on the Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP)

We believe that biodiversity is a key test of sustainable development, and that people should have opportunities to enjoy nature close to where they live and work. If the SCP is to be a success, four key topics need addressing:

Designated sites. The location and needs of wildlife sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, must be considered at the earliest stages of land-use planning.

Green infrastructure. A well-designed network of linked, accessible, biodiversity-rich greenspaces at a range of scales must be a feature of the new communities.



Healthy, vibrant communities need access to a network of greenspaces that are rich in wildlife.
Lee Valley Regional Park

Sustainable design and construction. Creating spaces for wildlife should be given as much attention during the design of a project as other aspects of construction.

Brownfield sites/previously developed land. Building on previously developed land should not harm wildlife interests which may have developed over time.

Previously developed land is often rich in wildlife and can provide a haven for many rare species. English Nature





Many of the growth areas already have important wildlife sites within them. Epping Forest, a hugely important wildlife and community resource, is already under pressure from poor air quality, mainly caused by car pollution.
Peter Wakely/English Nature 18,486

Special sites – protecting and enhancing our most important wildlife

The location and needs of wildlife sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, must be considered at the earliest stages of land-use planning.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) cover 7% of the land area of England and represent the nation's most important wildlife and geological sites. Together with other wildlife sites, such as Local Nature Reserves, SSSIs are already under pressure from new housing, new roads and human activity.

Substantial new construction and infrastructure investment will be required in the growth areas. Careful consideration of the needs

of special wildlife sites is needed to avoid direct damage, or the cumulative effects of fragmentation of habitats and damage to ecosystems.

Wildlife sites often depend on landscape-scale physical and ecological processes to sustain their interest (e.g. a reliable water supply). Development should seek to maintain or enhance these wider processes.

Planning policies and decisions should be based on robust surveys and information on existing biodiversity resources. On the rare occasions when adverse effects are unavoidable, planning permission should only be granted if adequate mitigation and compensation measures are put in place to deliver net biodiversity and environmental gain.

Green infrastructure - benefits for people and wildlife

A well-designed network of linked, biodiversity-rich greenspaces at a range of scales must be a feature of the new communities.

‘Green infrastructure’, the network of parks, gardens, woods and greenspaces, including linkages such as river corridors, provides many functions. Wildlife conservation, walking and cycling networks, recreation, and a range of ecological services, such as drainage and microclimate, all depend on greenspaces.

Because of the important role that green infrastructure plays in delivering sustainable communities and encouraging economic activity, it is crucial that the greenspace components are ‘designed in’ as early as possible within the planning process, from regional to local scales.

Accessible greenspaces means providing a range of areas that can deliver wildlife and other benefits such as flood control and ensuring that everyone can enjoy the outdoors.
Lee Valley Regional Park



Easy access to wildlife-rich natural places helps to support health and well-being, through opportunities to make contact with nature, be physically active, relax, reduce stress, stimulate the senses and importantly to have fun.

Green infrastructure must be provided at a range of scales to meet the needs of local wildlife and communities. The 10,000-acre Lee Valley Park which runs from North London to Hertfordshire shows how, if planned properly, large-scale green infrastructure can provide the setting for a host of activities from nature conservation to community access and employment. Lee Valley Regional Park



English Nature recommends that no one should live more than 300 metres, or a five-minute walk, from their nearest accessible greenspace.

For more information on access to greenspaces visit www.english-nature.org.uk/special/greenspace

Sustainable design and construction – increasing opportunities for wildlife

Creating spaces for wildlife should be given as much attention during the design of a development as other aspects of construction.

In towns and cities where open space is scarce, buildings and the areas around them can provide valuable habitat for wildlife. So-called ‘living buildings’ incorporate green and brown roofs, vegetated facades, nest- and bat boxes. These help sustain a range of plants and animals while also moderating water run-off, reducing air pollution and reducing extremes of temperature and humidity.

Best practice tools and standards, such as the Building Research Establishment EcoHomes standard,

Even the smallest area planted with native, locally sourced flowers and trees provides an oasis of calm greenspace in an urban area. Peter Wakely/English Nature 16,278



Incorporating engineering best practice, such as the use of retention ponds, as on this new housing development, helps reduce costs, ensures that pollutants are managed effectively and provides habitat for wildlife and an amenity for residents to enjoy. Dr R Wade/University of Abertay Dundee

should be used to ensure full consideration of environmental objectives in development.

A sustainable construction industry should ensure:

- no net loss of biodiversity as a result of construction;
- on and off site, direct and indirect harm is mitigated or compensated;
- opportunities for biodiversity enhancement are sought in the design and construction process; and
- techniques such as Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development Checklists are used in the planning process.

For practical information on how biodiversity can enhance new build and redevelopment in our towns visit www.english-nature.org.uk/special/greenspace/design.htm

Brownfield sites – sensitive re-use of previously used land

Development on previously developed land, brownfield sites, should avoid harming wildlife interests which may have developed over time.

Re-use of previously developed land can provide sites for development without contributing to urban sprawl. Such brownfield land is rarely derelict, and many sites have developed significant wildlife interest since they fell out of active use.

The range of plants and animals found on a site will often reflect the individual character and land-use history of the site, and their retention can contribute to a sense of place and identity for local communities.

The wildlife interest of a site must be properly surveyed and assessed before decisions are made on its suitability for development. This means a thorough assessment should be carried out to inform the design process, to allow wildlife interests to be retained and enhanced within the new urban design.

A former oil refinery on Canvey Island, home of the scarce emerald damselfly, is one of the most important wildlife sites in England. Loss of habitat to new development threatened this brownfield site prior to an innovative approach that enables 900 new jobs to be created while safeguarding the important wildlife here.

David Goddard/BDS



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Promoting learning and educational
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School Year 1 pupils on a nature walk in
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