



PARKS & PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

1. INTRODUCTION

The Warwickshire sub-region has extensive areas of urban development within which there is a high proportion of greenspace which is formally managed municipal parkland or gang-mown amenity grassland. These are important features for local communities, and often carefully designed and supporting historic value but their ecological value is highly variable. At one extreme are the regularly mown lawns with recently planted trees and perhaps some limited planting of exotic shrubs. These sites tend to support little of ecological interest but are valuable for a range of recreational activities such as child playing, dog walking etc. At the other extreme are sites that incorporate a variety of semi-natural habitats such as woodlands, wetlands, flower-rich grasslands, former wood pasture, tall herb and scrub plus collections of old trees. These latter sites have higher value for wildlife'. Some examples include Brueton Park in Solihull, Priory Park in Warwick and Newbold Comyn in Leamington Spa, sections of the Sowe Valley in Coventry and Abbey Fields in Kenilworth. There are also Country Parks and Green Spaces owned and managed by the Local Authorities. Many of the habitats at these sites are covered by other habitat action plans in this BAP..



War Memorial Park, Coventry
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Some areas of public open space have evolved from more natural landscapes e.g. the Sowe Valley of Coventry, and therefore still retain many historic features such as old grassland and old trees. But it is also clear that newly created sites can be designed and managed to incorporate a degree of ecological value (e.g. Burnsall Road in Coventry) e.g. though sensitive mowing regimes and planting schemes.

Areas of public open space in turn attract interesting wildlife, such as good bird populations (including declining species such as song thrush, linnet, green woodpecker and kestrel), insects associated with dead wood and old trees and a good variety of butterflies, moths, hoverflies and bees attracted by the plentiful flowers at many sites. Many unusual trees can be present, including superb examples of exotic trees or cultivars e.g. large cedars and other conifers, unusual oaks and limes, plus some important specimens of native species such as the black poplar (subject of a SAP) and a few mature elms.

The challenge of this HAP should be to maximise the wildlife value of parks and public open spaces while enhancing the recreational value and safety of such areas.

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| 2. | OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS | Target |
| A. | To identify the more ecologically important parks and open spaces and their ownership | by 2007 |
| B. | To maximise our knowledge of such sites and ensure they are appropriately designated (e.g. SINC, TPO, Conservation Areas) | by 2007 |
| C. | To maintain the extent and maintain / improve the condition of semi-natural habitats in and around parks and public open spaces with priority given to those holding UK BAP Priority Species, Red Data Book species, Nationally Scarce and Regionally Scarce species. | 2005-2015 |
| D. | To promote good management practice in parks and public open spaces which will maximise their wildlife value without compromising safety, and to share knowledge through the development of a network of regular communication between landowners and practitioners. | 2007 |
| E. | To encourage local communities to undertake local action which enhances the contribution of parks and public open spaces to biodiversity | 2005-2015 |
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ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Ponds, Lakes & Reservoirs
- Reedbeds
- Fen & Swamp
- Lowland Grassland (all types)
- Woodland
- Scrub & Carr
- Wood-Pasture, Old Parkland & Veteran Trees
- Churchyards & Cemeteries

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Song Thrush
- Bats
- Water Vole
- Black Poplar

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

There are no specific BAP objectives or targets for parks and public open spaces, only some of the habitats they contain e.g. standing open water, reed beds, various grasslands and some of the species typical of these sites e.g. Song Thrush. However, such sites provide a valuable opportunity to promote habitat creation or act as wildlife corridors in a manner that helps address national targets for various habitats. The Biodiversity Strategy for England "Working with the grain of nature" (DEFRA, 2002) regards parks and urban green spaces as a Priority Policy Issue stating:

"Ensuring biodiversity as an integral part of parks, playing fields and other urban greenspace. Multi-functional role of green spaces linked to urban renaissance."

4. CURRENT STATUS

The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) has revealed that nearly 7300ha of amenity grassland exists within the sub-region. It is clear that a very high proportion of this falls into the category of parks and amenity grassland, with further areas representing golf courses or private grounds. Much of it is concentrated within cities, towns and villages and in some areas it represents the predominant form of green space with greater coverage than all the combined coverage of semi-natural habitats (e.g. within Coventry).

Many parks and public open spaces are under local authority control. However, most National Trust sites and large estates with public access contain land that potentially fall under this heading. There are also areas retained by within the development control process which are open to the public.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Some Parks and Public Open Spaces fall within Conservation Areas, Green Belt or Areas of Restraint where they are covered by strong protective planning policies. Local Authority Development Plans provide strong commitments to the provision of minimum levels of public open space, both as a principle and through the listing and zoning of specific sites in associated plan maps. Recommendations for the minimum provision of open space have been published by the NPFA and Natural England (the latter purely for accessible natural green space).

Few parks and public open spaces attain SINC or SSSI quality due to a lack of extensive semi-natural habitat. However, at Coombe Countryside Park, the publicly accessible areas are adjacent to a SSSI; the River Blythe SSSI runs through Malvern and Brueton Park in Solihull and several SINC's are similarly located within or adjacent to municipal parks and public open spaces (e.g. Kenilworth Road Spinney and Tocil Wood and Meadows in Coventry).

Mature trees in parks and public open spaces may be furnished with TPO (Tree Preservation Order) status. Species protected under the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act are known to reside at some sites, e.g. badgers setts within spinneys and scrub at various sites, water vole populations along water courses in Coventry, great crested newts associated with some ponds and bats associated with old trees. These require special attention during site management and land-use change.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Development** – a number of areas of public open space have recently been lost to development or are currently threatened e.g. sections of the Sowe Valley in Coventry.
- **Unsympathetic landscaping or restoration** – especially that which reduces the extent of semi-natural habitat or the number of other ecologically interesting features at a site.
- **Public perception** - local residents can sometimes object strongly to the presence of informal habitat within public open space, seeing it as untidy, a source of hay fever, harbouring vermin, a threat to safety or a fire risk.
- **Site management** - the use of short-term contracts for site maintenance can disrupt continuity of ecologically-sensitive practices at a site and affect liaison with contractors.
- **Recreational pressure** – unavoidable at most such sites, but a factor that can reduce bird populations in particular.
- **Restoration potential** – some areas of amenity grassland still retain semi-natural grassland in a suppressed form and can recover to produce species-rich grassland of valuable NVC categories such as MG5 (with plants such as pignut, great burnet, birds-foot trefoil etc). Efforts should be made to identify areas with potential for restoration.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Survey work and designation - many parks and public open spaces have been subject to a long history of wildlife recording, though the data is of varying scope, detail and age. Coventry has the most comprehensive data due to various surveys carried out between 1982 and 1998 and this has resulted in parts of some sites becoming designated as SINC's.
- Established management - most sites are subject to contract-based management for aspects such as grass-cutting, tree care, planting, litter removal etc. This is usually controlled by the Parks and Amenities departments of local authorities, though some sites are privately owned. Specific nature conservation management takes place at a small number of sites, sometimes involving contractors and sometimes involving local residents or societies. Recent examples of habitat enhancement projects in public open space can be found at Longford

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Park, Coventry (river enhancement), Brueton Park (wet grassland enhancement), Newbold Comyn Park.

- Education - some such sites are regularly used for education such as Coombe Countryside Park (by the Ranger Service there), Brueton Park (by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust) and Priory Park in Warwick (by Warwickshire Museum). Some sites also contain interpretation boards explaining the history of a site or plans for restoration e.g. Jephson Gardens in Leamington Spa.
- **Solihull MBC** is in the process of creating Master Plans for all of their parks. Biodiversity is a recognised inclusion within these plans. This approach with biodiversity is being included in the forth-coming Green Space Strategy. Brueton Park and Elmdon Park are both within Countryside Stewardship schemes.
- **Rugby BC** has strong biodiversity statements within their emerging Parks Strategy and have countryside stewardship schemes in place on areas of council leased farms. Management plans are in place for some Local Nature Reserves which have biodiversity requirements. Other parks within Rugby have been awarded a Green Flag in respect of sustainable management and used to help direct maintenance regimes on many areas of open space.
- **Warwick DC** works in partnership with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to manage a number of Local Nature Reserves in the area. In addition, they are actively seeking to improve the wildlife value of many of our parks and open spaces through adopting management techniques which provide good habitat. These include, leaving areas of unmown grass around the margins of some parks, providing bat and bird boxes in trees, leaving dead wood in trees where it is safe to do so, creating 'habitat piles' of logs in some parks and woodland areas and seeking to reduce our use of pesticides wherever it is practical to do so
- **Nuneaton & Bedworth BC** 'Pride in Our Parks' recognises that standing open water in the form of pools accounts for 30 hectares of their open space and the River Anker runs for 7.25 kilometres through the Borough. The Anker is actually a watershed with the River Trent running North and East and the Rivers Soar, Avon and Severn running South and West. In addition, we have 16.9 kilometres of canals, which are vitally important in maintaining our wildlife infrastructure. About 220 hectares of the Borough are formal parks and 26 allotment sites cover a further 31 hectares. The maintenance of this "green lung" is not a statutory obligation but is a Council priority for which we should all be thankful. The international plan to improve quality of life and the environment across the world, Agenda 21, is fully supported and managed locally by the Council. An urban sprawl devoid of plants, trees, flowers and wildlife corridors indicates a society devoid of spiritual harmony and wellbeing.

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- **Stratford-on-Avon DC** own and manage 29 formal and informal parks, greenspaces and playgrounds throughout the district. Also, in addition, we work in partnership with local friends groups to manage two local nature reserves.
- **North Warwickshire BC** have produced an 'Open Space, Sports and Recreation Background Paper' (March 2004) through their planning section which is to identify Formal Park/Garden, Wildlife Area and Informal Space land allocation (amongst others). Wildlife areas being described as 'Areas dedicated for wildlife conservation, encouraging biodiversity and environmental awareness'.
- **Warwickshire County Council** through the Country Parks and Countryside Access Group own and manage over 730ha of open space at the following locations:

Alvecote Priory	1.5 ha
Pooley Country Park	62.5 ha
Kingsbury Water Park	272.5 ha
Hartshill Hayes Country Park	62.2 ha
Ufton Field Nature Reserve	45.5 ha
Ryton Pools	45.5 ha
Burton Dassett Country Park	45.5 ha
Stratford on Avon Greenway	200.0 ha [An 8 kilometre length linear park with an average width of 25 metres]
Total	735.2 ha

Various management plans are in place and there are specific policies with respect to the pools at Kingsbury Water Park and Ryton Pools; Stuart Ikeringill and Keith Higginson can supply details.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended – Core Steering Group – Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant habitat policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9).	LBAPSG	LAs	2005-2015	A, B
PL2. Ensure the inclusion of biodiversity statements within Park / Open Space Strategies.	LBAPSG	NE WWT	2005-2015	B,C,D

PL3 . Encourage the adoption of a policy discouraging the use of molluscides on land controlled by local authorities e.g. parks, allotments.	WBRC	WWT LAs NE	2006	D
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1 . Actively promote the production of 'Master Plans' for all parks and public open spaces that include areas of biodiversity interest.	LBAPSG	LAs	2010	C,D
Advisory				
A1 . Inform landowners/managers of the ecological significance of parks and public open spaces and advise on management and other issues such as grant aid and courses.	LBAPSG	RSPB EA WWT NE LAs WBRC	2005- 2015	D
A2 . Inform owners/managers of land adjacent to parks and public open spaces of any ecological significance, where it is thought that this will benefit vulnerable species or assemblages, or produce 'stepping stones' between sites.	LBAPSG	WWT EA FWAG	2006	C,D
Research & Monitoring				
RM1 . Continue to survey and monitor parks and public open spaces, especially where national BAP priority species are present.	WBRC	RSPB NE EA BC HBA WWT	2005- 2015	A,B,C,D
RM2 . Monitor losses and gains of semi-natural habitat within parks and public open spaces.	HBA	WM NE WWT	2005- 2015	B
RM3 . Review existing monitoring of key species in parks and public open spaces and seek to address gaps in monitoring requirements.	WBRC	WWT LAs	2006	C,D
Communication & Publicity				
CP1 . Increase public awareness of the importance of the actual and potential value of parks and public open spaces for wildlife.	WWT	NE WM EA BC RSPB LAs	2005- 2015	D,E
CP2 . Organise annual meetings with owners/managers and other interested parties associated with parks and public open spaces.	WWT	EA WM RSPB FWAG LAs NE	2005	C,D,E

Abbreviations: BC- Butterfly Conservation, EA - Environment Agency, NE – Natural England, FWAG - Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LA – Local Authority, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LO – landowner, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WCC – Warwickshire County Council, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES

North Warwickshire Borough Council March (2004) '*Open Space, Sports and Recreation Background Paper*'

DEFRA (2002) "*Working with the grain of nature*". The Biodiversity Strategy for England

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate **Links** web page for links to web sites)

UK Urban Biodiversity Action Plan no.754

UK Built-up Areas & Gardens Biodiversity Action Plan no.62

Green Flag Awards
Urban Parks Forum
Leicester City Council

CABE Space (2006) '*Making contracts work for wildlife: how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks*'. Email: enquiries@cabe.org.uk

Flora Locale – Knowledge Zone. '*Wild plants and your village green*' - free leaflet from Flora Locale, Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Berks. RG17 0UN (sae A5) or email: info@floralocale.org

Emery,M.(1986) '*Promoting Nature in Cities & Towns – a practical guide*'. London. Croom Helm

Mammal Trust UK – '*Living with Mammals*' Survey 2006 – 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG. Tel. 0207 498 5262 or email: enquiries@mtuk.org

British Trust for Ornithology (2007) '*Managing habitat for birds and other wildlife in urban green spaces*'. See www.bto.org.uk for details of the guidelines.

Open Spaces Society (2007) '*Getting Greens Registered*' is available for £17, including p&p., from 25a Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 2BA Tel. 01491 573535, Fax. 01491 573051, email hq@oss.org.uk

Centre for Alternative Technology (2005) '*The Little Book of Slugs*'. Tel. 01654 705950

9. CONTACT

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