

24 October 2024

## Protection of Trees, Wildlife and Biodiversity

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces

### 1. Aim

- 1.1. The council has statutory duties to protect trees, wildlife, and biodiversity including conserving biodiversity, ensuring wildlife protection, promoting biodiversity net gain, and overseeing green space management

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the committee members note the work being undertaken by the council to protect trees, wildlife and biodiversity.

### 3. Report detail – know

- 3.1. About a third of Walsall is green, open space. This includes parks, recreation grounds, playing fields, children's play areas, woodlands, countryside sites, nature reserves, and allotments. Additionally, there are numerous roadside verges, canal tow paths and small pockets of green space on housing and industrial sites. Much of this land is managed by the council, as is case nationally.
- 3.2. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of our green space was put into sharp focus, particularly its positive impact on both our physical and mental health. As custodians of this space, it is important that it is valued and managed in a way that protects it for future generations.
- 3.3. The Environment Act 2021 sets biodiversity targets including a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain for developments, halting species decline by 2030 and improving species abundance by 2042. It aims to restore 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, implement Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and strengthen protection for designated conservation sites.

#### What is biodiversity?

- 3.4. Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on Earth, encompassing all species of plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms, as well as the ecosystems they form. It includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.

#### Why is biodiversity important?

- 3.5. Biodiversity is important for several reasons:

1. **Ecosystem Stability:** Biodiversity contributes to the stability and resilience of ecosystems. Diverse ecosystems are better able to withstand environmental stressors like disease, climate change, and natural disasters.
  2. **Human Health:** Many medicines are derived from natural compounds found in plants and animals. A loss in biodiversity could limit the discovery of new treatments and cures.
  3. **Food Security:** Biodiversity ensures the availability of a rich variety of crops and livestock, which is crucial for food security. It also supports pollination, soil fertility, and pest control.
  4. **Economic Benefits:** Biodiverse ecosystems provide resources for industries such as agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and tourism. They also offer ecosystem services like water purification, air quality maintenance, and climate regulation.
  5. **Cultural and Recreational Value:** Many cultures value biodiversity for spiritual, aesthetic, and recreational reasons. Natural landscapes and wildlife are integral to cultural heritage and provide opportunities for recreation and tourism.
- 3.6. Protecting biodiversity is essential for maintaining the health of our planet and the well-being of all its inhabitants.

### **The biodiversity crisis**

- 3.7. There has been a significant decline in the variety and abundance of wildlife and natural habitats across the country. In fact, the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, ranking in the bottom 10% globally and last among the G7 nations.
- 3.8. Nearly one in six species assessed in the UK is at risk of extinction. This includes a wide range of wildlife, from insects to mammals. Many important habitats are in poor condition due to factors like urbanisation, agriculture, and pollution. This degradation affects the ecosystems that support various species.
- 3.9. The loss of biodiversity can lead to ecological imbalances, affecting everything from food chains to climate regulation. Efforts are being made to address this crisis through conservation projects and policies aimed at restoring habitats and protecting endangered species. However, significant challenges remain.
- 3.10. Preventing biodiversity loss is crucial for maintaining healthy ecosystems and ensuring the survival of various species, including humans. There are various steps that can be taken including:
  1. **Protect Natural Habitats:** Establishing and maintaining protected areas like national parks and nature reserves helps conserve critical habitats.
  2. **Sustainable Practices:** Support and buy products that are sustainably sourced, such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance certified goods.

3. **Reduce Pollution:** Minimise the use of harmful chemicals in agriculture and everyday life, including the use of pesticides.
4. **Combat Climate Change:** Reduce your carbon footprint by using energy-efficient appliances, reducing waste, and supporting renewable energy sources.
5. **Promote Biodiversity-Friendly Policies:** Advocate for and support policies that protect biodiversity, such as regulations against deforestation and overfishing.
6. **Restore Ecosystems:** Participate in or support reforestation and habitat restoration projects.
7. **Educate and Raise Awareness:** Spread knowledge about the importance of biodiversity and how to protect it. Education can lead to more informed decisions and actions.
8. **Reduce Invasive Species:** Be mindful of introducing non-native species into new environments, as they can disrupt local ecosystems and manage those that are present.

### **Natural capital benefits**

- 3.11. As of 2020, the total asset value of natural capital in England was estimated to be £1.4 trillion. This includes the value of various ecosystem services such as recreation, tourism, and health benefits, which together were valued at £35.7 billion annually.
- 3.12. Natural capital encompasses resources like clean water, productive soils, and biodiversity, all of which support human life and the economy. It's a crucial part of understanding the broader concept of inclusive wealth.
- 3.13. West Midlands Combined Authority has recently released figures, estimating its value to the region, this includes the following:
  - West Midlands tree stock provides £73,446,000 of ecosystem services annually (Carbon sequestrations, pollution removal, avoided run-off).
  - Natural capital assets can provide benefits worth an estimated £21bn to the WMCA area over the next 60 years.
- 3.14. Furthermore, it is estimated that at least 50% of GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature. Continued deterioration of the natural environment could result in GDP being up to 12% lower than it would have been otherwise by the 2030s (as a comparison the COVID pandemic caused an 11% reduction).
- 3.15. Storm Doris (2017), the heatwaves of 2019-20 and the floods in August 2023 cost the region £21.6m. The annual economic cost to the WMCA region by 2050 could be the equivalent of £1.5 – 2.9bn per year.

## Protection of natural habitats

- 3.16. Protection can be done on an individual basis, for example a tree preservation order can be placed on individual trees. There are also protections in place for individual species, e.g. bats, badgers, great crested newts.
- 3.17. Protection can also be undertaken on a landscape level. In England, there are several types of habitat protection aimed at conserving biodiversity and ensuring the survival of various species. Listed below are some of the key types:
  1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs): These are areas designated for their unique flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features. They form the backbone of habitat protection in England.
  2. National Nature Reserves (NNRs): These are some of the most important natural and semi-natural ecosystems in the country, managed to conserve their habitats and species.
  3. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs): These are protected areas designated under the European Union's Habitats Directive to conserve habitats and species of European importance.
  4. Local Nature Reserves (LNRs): These are designated by local authorities and provide opportunities for both people and wildlife to thrive.
  5. Protected Landscapes: This includes National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), which are designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
  6. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Habitats: These are habitats identified as priorities for conservation under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 3.18. These protections are supported by various laws and regulations, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.
- 3.19. There are further non-statutory designations used to protect valuable wildlife habitats at a local level in England, these include: Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs).
- 3.20. SINCs are designated to protect areas that are important for wildlife but may not meet the criteria for national designations like SSSIs. They are also known as Local Wildlife Sites. A site may qualify as a SINC due to the presence of notable species, important habitats, or both. The criteria for designation are based on national guidelines and local biodiversity priorities.
- 3.21. SLINCs are like SINCs but are generally considered to be of lower conservation value. They still play a crucial role in maintaining local biodiversity and ecological networks. SLINCs focus on areas that contribute to the overall ecological health of the region.

- 3.22. Both SINC and SLINC are essential for conserving local biodiversity and ensuring that even smaller, less prominent habitats receive protection and management.
- 3.23. For details of all the sites protected in Walsall, please visit <https://go.walsall.gov.uk/parks-and-green-spaces/conservation-and-the-environment>.
- 3.24. The government is committed to meeting the targets for national biodiversity set through the Environment Act 2021 on species abundance, species extinction and habitat creation and restoration. This is in addition to the international target of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030 (30by30), and our legally binding targets on marine protected areas, woodland and trees, water pollution, and air pollution.
- 3.25. Meeting the Environment Act targets requires creation, restoration and connection of wildlife-rich habitat, reducing pressures on species (for example from habitat fragmentation and climate change), and taking targeted action to recover specific species.
- 3.26. The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) is a growing national network of wildlife-rich places that are bigger, better, and joined-up across the country. The NRN will help to address biodiversity loss, climate change, and improve access to nature, supporting health and wellbeing.

#### Habitat Restoration - Purple Horizons Nature Recovery Project

- 3.27. The Purple Horizons Nature Recovery Project is one of 12 national NRP's and is a collaborative project led by Natural England. Partners include Walsall Council, Lichfield Council, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and local landowners. The project spans up to 12,000 hectares on the fringes of the West Midlands conurbation and is a long-term initiative focusing on restoring and connecting fragmented heathlands to create a mosaic of heathlands, wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands. Ultimately joining up Cannock Chase SAC in Staffordshire down to Sutton Park NNR in Birmingham.
- 3.28. The goal is to improve biodiversity, manage the environment, and protect species such as the very rare Tormentil mining bee. It is one of eight sites in the West Midlands that are known to support almost half of Britain's bee and wasp fauna. The project involves various activities, including tree removal, scrub control, and planting acid grassland species. It has received recognition, such as the Public Sector Award at the West Midlands Combined Authority Natural Environment Awards on March 21, 2023.
- 3.29. So far, the project has seen 40Ha of habitat restored in Walsall, five sites in Walsall have been enhanced for rare bees and wasps with bare earth scrapes and the propagation of Tormentil flowers for the S41 Tormentil mining bee. Seven Walsall sites have had BNG surveys completed with two more in the pipeline and two being developed to full investment readiness.

- 3.30. To better connect people with nature, four interpretation panels have been installed (two at Barr Beacon and two at Shire Oak) and a bee safari event was held for residents, led by a PhD student studying pollinators.

### **Significant programmes**

- 3.31. There are several projects of national or regional significance that the Healthy Spaces team and other officers from across the council are involved with including:

1. Biodiversity Net Gain: The Environment Act 2021 created a new biodiversity net gain condition for planning permission. This is an approach to development and land management that aims to leave the natural environment in a better state than it was before. It involves creating and improving natural habitats to ensure a positive impact on biodiversity.
2. The development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in England is a new initiative aimed at reversing the decline of biodiversity and enhancing the natural environment. They are designed to drive coordinated, practical, and focused actions to help nature recover, creating a network of habitats that support wildlife and improve the overall health of the environment. There are 48 strategy areas covering the whole of England, ensuring no gaps or overlaps. These strategies are part of a broader effort to build a national Nature Recovery Network, aiming to leave the natural environment in a better state for future generations. All Public Authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must “have regard” to relevant local nature recovery strategies in the process.
3. The Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme is an initiative by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) aimed at enhancing the region’s natural environment. Funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), the programme seeks to attract private finance to support natural capital projects. Key goals include:
  - a) Restoring Habitats and Biodiversity: Creating a nature-positive future by restoring habitats and improving biodiversity.
  - b) Nature-Based Solutions: Addressing climate risks, improving water quality, reducing flood risk, sequestering carbon, and enhancing air quality.
  - c) Socio-Economic Benefits: Improving access to green spaces to address health inequalities.
  - d) Building Capacity: Enhancing the capability of local leaders and partners to attract and manage investments.

The programme aims to build a regional pipeline of natural capital projects and develop a Natural Capital Finance Strategy by March 2025.

4. Urban Forest – Forest of Mercia is one of twelve community forests established across England to create well-wooded landscapes for wildlife, work, recreation, and education. Located in southern Staffordshire and Walsall, it covers an area of 92 square miles (23,000 hectares) and is part of the National Community Forest Partnership. Key aspects of the Forest of Mercia, managed from the Innovation Centre at Chasewater, near Burntwood include:
  - a) Environmental Improvement: The forest aims to regenerate communities by planting new trees, improving green spaces, and creating new walkways and cycle paths.
  - b) Community Engagement: It involves local partnerships, including councils and community groups, to manage and develop the forest.

### **Projects in Walsall – large scale**

- 3.32. Large scale programmes currently being delivered by the Healthy Spaces and Environment team to tackle biodiversity loss include:
  - Habitat Management - Countryside Stewardship
  - Tree Planting - Urban Tree Challenge Fund
  - Tree Planting - UK Shared Prosperity Fund
  - Tree Planting - Woodland Accelerator Grant
  - Tree Planting - Other

#### Habitat Management - Countryside Stewardship

- 3.33. Walsall Council has been in receipt of a 10-year Countryside Stewardship grant from Defra, which was extended for a further 5-years in 2023. The grant is used to directly fund operational staff and work in priority habitats, including Brownhills Common SSSI and Barr Beacon LNR and other LNRs. Without the funding the council would have a reduced ability to deliver well maintained, accessible green spaces.

#### Tree Planting - Urban Tree Challenge Fund - £205,000 and £338,000

- 3.34. The council has had two successful grant awards from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund, one for £205,000 and a second for £338,000. The grant provides 80% funding for the costs associated with planting and maintaining trees, including the supply of containerised standard trees, staking, protection, and tree maintenance (replanting, watering, weeding) for three years following planting. The remaining costs are met through match funding, either in the form of money or labour.

#### Tree Planting - UK Shared Prosperity Fund - £407,000

- 3.35. The UKSPF has been used to recruit a Countryside Estate Officer, whose focus is to improve the maintenance of infrastructure, and to provide capital to upgrade access features, and undertake habitat management works to improve biodiversity at sites like Walsall Arboretum Country Park, Hayhead Wood, Cuckoos Nook and The Dingle, and Lodgewood and Longwood Coppice.

- 3.36. A total sum of £407,000 was awarded. In 2024/25 £35,000 is allocated towards the Countryside Estate Ranger position and £150,000 to implement habitat and access improvements. Access improvements have been completed at Fibbersley Local Nature Reserve, Merrions Wood and Pelsall North Common. Walsall Arboretum Country Park, Cuckoos Nook and The Dingle and Rough Wood are due to be improved this Autumn. Numerous countryside events and volunteer events have been supported through the funding.

#### Tree Planting - Woodland Creator Accelerator Grant- £149,600

- 3.37. The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF) is a government initiative designed to provide financial support to increase the capacity of specialist skills within local authorities. The fund aims to accelerate the delivery of tree planting and woodland creation commitments, particularly in response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. The ultimate goal is to enable more trees to be planted, especially during the winter seasons of 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 3.38. Two officers are currently employed to deliver the woodland accelerator programme: the Woodland Creation & Rewilding Officer and the Community Woodland & Rewilding Officer.

#### Tree Planting - Other

- 3.39. Over the last few years there have been a lot of grants that will support tree planting. Additional awards to support the council's programme have come from:
- Coronation Living Heritage Fund, from Defra, £63,000.
  - Trees for Climate, from The Forest of Mercia, £40,000.
  - Private Donation, £1,000.

#### Tree Planting – Achievements

- 3.40. From October 2023 until March 2024 the various tree planting schemes enabled us to plant 6.92 hectares of trees during 2023 (a total of 19,341 trees on 27 sites). In 2024-25, 31,450 trees are due to be planted on 16 Ha of land.

#### **Projects in Walsall – localised, led by Health Spaces and Environment**

- 3.41. Localised, site specific projects Healthy Spaces and Environment have been leading on include the following:
- Bailey's Pool
  - Fibbersley LNR – Master Plan
  - Merrion's Wood LNR – Master Plan
  - Reedswood Park – Master Plan

#### Bailey's Pool, Bloxwich

- 3.42. Improvement work at Baileys Pool, Bloxwich, has been the result of a successful partnership between Walsall Council and the Canal and River Trust,



supported by a grant from Enovert Community Trust. A total sum of £42,000 has been used to enhance the environmental and recreational value of the pool, making it a more enjoyable space for the community. Key improvements that have significantly improved the aesthetic and ecological health of Baileys Pool, making it a valuable asset for the residents of Walsall include:

1. Environmental Restoration: Efforts have been made to clean and restore the pool, removing over 1.5 tonnes of scrap and rubbish.
2. Pathway Improvements: Over 600 metres of pathway improved making the site safer and more accessible to all residents.
3. Habitat Enhancement: The project has created a better habitat for local wildlife, with families of coots and other species now making the pool their home.
4. Community Engagement: Local groups including Walsall Community Litter Watch and Blox Busters have been actively involved, fostering a sense of community ownership and pride.

#### Fibbersley LNR

- 3.43. The Fibbersley Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Masterplan outlines key improvement works for the reserve which include the following:
- 3.44. Priority Recommendations: The masterplan includes proposals for improving public access, including disabled footpath routes, and creating a diverse and rich habitat experience. The aim is to achieve SSSI designation.
- 3.45. Management Plan 2022: This plan, developed by the Walsall Council Healthy Spaces Team, covers the period from 2019 to 2024. It includes sections on the significance of the reserve, site description, facilities, designations, and legal covenants.
- 3.46. Support from Friends of Fibbersley Nature Reserve: The organisation provides key support for the sustainable future management of the reserve. Regular work parties on site undertaking work such as litter picks, bench/post installation and making benches and bird/bat boxes.
- 3.47. Work at Fibbersley has cost in the region of £90,000, with £6,000 from S106, and £50,000 grant from The Enovert Environment Trust and a further £75,000 award from The Veolia Environmental Trust. A sum of £2,060 was awarded by the Tree Council for hedge improvements.
- 3.48. As well as removing old steps and replacing with a more accessible ramp, a total of 700m of new pathway has been installed, some of which was at some of the worst areas of the site which were impassable in poor weather. Other improvements include a new ladderboard/notice board and sculpture elements, de-vegetation and pond improvement works, and the planting of five fruit trees, three standard oak trees and 200m of new hedgerow.

### Merrion's Wood LNR

- 3.49. The Merrion's Wood Masterplan is designed to enhance and preserve this beautiful local nature reserve in Walsall. Key elements of the plan include:
1. **Habitat Conservation:** The masterplan focuses on maintaining and improving the diverse habitats within Merrion's Wood, including oak and beech woodlands, fields, and hedgerows. This is crucial for supporting local wildlife, such as bats and various bird species.
  2. **Community Involvement:** The plan encourages community engagement through the Friends of Merrion's Wood group, which organises events and volunteer activities to help maintain the wood and promote its use.
  3. **Recreational Facilities:** Enhancements to recreational facilities are a significant part of the masterplan. This includes maintaining trails for walking, bird watching, and other outdoor activities, ensuring the park remains a popular spot for picnics and family outings.
  4. **Educational Programs:** The masterplan includes educational initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of conservation and the natural history of Merrion's Wood. These programs aim to engage schools and local groups in learning about the environment.
  5. **Sustainability Efforts:** Efforts to improve sustainability within the park include managing invasive species, promoting native plant growth, and ensuring the long-term health of the woodland ecosystem.

### Reedswood Park – Master Plan

- 3.50. The Reedswood Park Masterplan is a comprehensive initiative aimed at revitalising and enhancing the park's facilities and natural spaces. Here are some key elements of the masterplan:
1. **Wildlife Habitat Restoration:** One of the primary goals is to restore the park's ponds to create a thriving wildlife habitat. This includes improving water quality and planting native vegetation to support local biodiversity.
  2. **Community Engagement:** The plan emphasises community involvement through various activities and events. This includes educational programs and volunteer opportunities to engage residents in the park's upkeep and development.
  3. **Recreational Facilities:** Upgrades to recreational facilities are a significant part of the masterplan. This includes enhancing the children's play area, outdoor gym, and sports facilities like the basketball court and football pitches.
  4. **Green Flag Status:** Reedswood Park was awarded Green Flag status in July 2023, recognising its high standards of maintenance, safety, and community involvement.
  5. **Art and Culture:** The masterplan also integrates art and cultural elements, such as the installation of sculptures and the creation of spaces for community art projects.

3.51. The masterplan aims to make Reedswood Park a vibrant, accessible, and ecologically rich space for all visitors and will be funded through the Bloxwich Towns Fund.

### **Projects in Walsall – localised, led by partners**

3.52. Localised partnership projects Healthy Spaces and Environment have been supporting on our sites include the following:

- Bee Inspired
- Froglife

#### Bee Inspired

3.53. The Walsall Bee Inspired Project is an innovative initiative by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust aimed at promoting bumblebee conservation through community engagement and volunteering. Key highlights include:

1. **Volunteering Hub:** A Bumblebee Volunteering Hub has been established in Walsall, which serves as a model for engaging volunteers from diverse communities.
2. **Sculpture Trail:** A new sculpture trail was installed at Reedswood Park, featuring captivating bumblebee sculptures created by artist Daisy Askins. This trail aims to blend art and nature, encouraging visitors to explore and reconnect with their surroundings.
3. **Community Engagement:** The project works with local charities and organisations to create Bumblebee Champions who inspire their communities to take positive actions for bumblebees, such as growing more flowering plants.
4. **Educational Impact:** Through various activities, events, and training sessions, the project educates the public about the importance of bumblebees and how to support their conservation.
5. **Funding and Support:** The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which has been instrumental in supporting the initiative and ensuring its success.

#### Froglife

3.54. The Froglife project in Walsall, known as Coalface to Wildspace, is an exciting initiative aimed at conserving amphibians and reptiles while engaging the local community. Key aspects of the project include:

1. **Habitat Improvement:** The project focuses on creating Neighbourhood Wildlife Corridors to improve habitats for reptiles, amphibians, and other wildlife. These corridors act as green stepping stones, connecting larger green spaces across Walsall.

2. **Community Engagement:** Froglife ran Wildlife Gardening Workshops where community members learn about native amphibians and reptiles and how to support them in their gardens and local greenspaces. These workshops also involve practical habitat improvements.
  3. **Educational Initiatives:** The project includes educational components like the Frogglebox film, which explores Walsall's geological and natural history. This immersive digital experience connects the area's deep history to its current wildlife and people.
  4. **Creative Activities:** In 2023, the project hosted creative workshops where members of the community-built LEGO® models reflecting Walsall's geological time periods. These models are now displayed in local libraries.
  5. **Speaking Sculptures:** The final phase of the project involved creating wildlife-themed Speaking Sculptures through community art workshops, adding an artistic element to the conservation efforts.
- 3.55. The project is funded by grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and West Midlands Combined Authority has provided £67,000 for pond improvement work. The project runs from 2022 to the end of 2025.

### Future

- 3.56. Although a lot has been achieved, there is still so much more to be done. Work is ongoing to identify suitable tree planting locations and embed a financially sustainable approach to the ongoing maintenance and management of both the tree stock and borough's health land.
- 3.57. The ultimate ambition is to create a thriving and sustainable nature recovery network between Cannock Chase and Sutton Park that is resilient to climate change. Successful implementation would deliver improved biodiversity, geodiversity and landscape value, to be enjoyed by people in a sustainable way. The programme of work aims to link and buffer these sites and also increase the value that people and businesses put on local biodiversity and the landscape, providing collaborative exemplar, demonstrating how nature and people can live and work together in a balanced way.

### **Conclusion**

- 3.58. The Walsall Plan has undertaken a call for sites and the council will need to carefully balance the various competing demands placed on land.
- 3.59. Nationally and locally, nature needs our help. We not only need to prevent a further decline in biodiversity, but we also need to reverse it. We need to provide nature with space to thrive, ensuring that habitats are linked, and of necessary scale to support our precious wildlife. This is not only good for nature it is good for the economy, and it is essential for good health and wellbeing.

#### **4. Financial information**

- 4.1. The majority of the council's countryside management work is grant funded as outlined above.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

- 5.1. Biodiversity and access to nature help reduce social and economic inequalities by improving health, creating economic opportunities, and fostering community resilience. Exposure to green spaces enhances physical and mental health, reducing disparities in conditions like obesity, heart disease, and depression, particularly in low-income areas. Nature-based solutions also create jobs, while ecosystem services like clean air, water, and pollination support sustainable livelihoods, especially in marginalised communities.
- 5.2. Nature access enhances educational outcomes and social cohesion, reducing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students and fostering stronger community networks. Additionally, biodiverse environments strengthen climate resilience by buffering against extreme weather events, which disproportionately affect poorer communities. Protecting ecosystems helps reduce the vulnerability of these groups to environmental risks and economic losses.
- 5.3. Culturally, nature reinforces identity and well-being, particularly for indigenous and local populations. By promoting balanced rural-urban development and integrating green infrastructure into cities, equitable access to nature is expanded, helping to alleviate inequalities in quality of life and economic opportunity

#### **6. Decide**

- 6.1. Committee members are asked to note the content of the report

#### **7. Respond**

- 7.1. At a strategic level, the borough has many attractive areas of open space and places for nature. The borough local plan will make sure that new homes and places of work are in the right locations but also seek to protect valuable open space and nature conservation sites.
- 7.2. At an operational level, work will continue to secure appropriate grant funding that empowers the council to continue delivering against our statutory duties and ambitions in respect to trees, wildlife and biodiversity.


#### **8. Review**

- 8.1. The council will continue to monitor environmental impacts, compliance with biodiversity targets, and stakeholder engagement. Long-term monitoring and comparison to baseline data will help determine progress toward ecological restoration and conservation goals.

## **9. Background papers**

9.1. None

### **Author**

Jaki Brunton-Douglas  
Healthy Spaces and Environment Manager  
(01922 654371)  
 [jaki.brunton-douglas@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:jaki.brunton-douglas@walsall.gov.uk)