

Appendix A - Wider Strategic Links

Legislation and policy at a national level as well as in a suite of relevant local policy will intersect with the Trees and Woods Strategy. A summary is provided below.

National Policy

In January 2020, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published their report 'Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK'. This report outlined policies and actions for the UK to achieve Net Zero by 2050. The actions identified included increasing UK forestry cover from 13% to at least 17% by 2050 by planting around 30,000 hectares or more of broadleaf and conifer woodland each year, as well as improved woodland management, and planting trees on agricultural land while maintaining their primary use.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) is an independent statutory body established through the Climate Change Act 2008, with the purpose of advising UK and devolved governments on emission targets. They also report to Parliament on progress made in reducing

greenhouse gas emissions and preparations for and adapting to the impacts of climate change

CCC (2020). Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK

CCC (2018). Land Use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change.

The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP)

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP), published in 2018, seeks to halt the decline in biodiversity and to achieve thriving plants and wildlife. It outlines initiatives to achieve this, including the creation of a Species Survival Fund, the establishment of new National Nature Reserves, protection of 30% of land and sea for nature, and incentives for farmers to adopt nature-friendly practices.

The Plan sets out a major commitment to develop a Nature Recovery Network (NRN). This aims to expand, improve and connect wildlife rich places across our towns, cities and countryside in order to tackle the three biggest challenges of our time; biodiversity loss, climate change and improving people's overall well-being. The Nature Recovery Network Strategy will be informed by Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).

The 25YEP's goals and targets will support progress towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) internationally. The UN SDGs are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, we can all have a better quality of life. WNC has adopted the SDGs to help shape the way the Council responds to the climate challenge.

Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021, enforced by the newly established Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), introduced legally binding environmental targets and requires public bodies to consider environmental principles in policy making. The Act seeks to halt the decline of species by 2030.

Environmental Improvement Plan 2023

This is the first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan. It sets out the plan to deliver the ten 25YEP goals with specific measurable targets for improving natural capital, through incentivising a natural capital approach.

The England Trees Action Plan

The ETAP, published in 2021, is the government's overarching strategy for trees. It set out how Government will address biodiversity loss and climate change through the creation and management of trees, woodlands and forests, supported by the Nature for Climate Fund.

It emphasises the huge benefits provided by trees to people, nature, climate, and the economy and supports the need for Trees and Woodland Strategies. The ETAP includes a section on 'Expanding and connecting our trees and woodlands' which describes a package of measures to increase tree planting to benefit nature, water, and towns and cities. The Plan also included measures to build tree nursery capacity and support for knowledge and science for trees and woodlands.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF emphasises a presumption in favour of sustainable development and conservation -favouring development. It recognises the importance in the planning process of environmental protection, and the delivery of multiple services.

Environmental Land Management

The Agricultural Transition is a major reform of agricultural policy and spending in England that is being undertaken as the country moves away from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The goal of this transition is to phase out subsidies for land ownership and tenure and improve support for farmers and land managers, who will be paid to provide both food production, and environmental goods and services.

The Agricultural Transition is aimed at promoting a resilient, productive agriculture sector that can both meet food production needs and address the challenges of the environment and climate.

Local Policy and Strategies

West Northamptonshire Council declared a climate emergency and has pledged, as part of the UK100, to focus on tackling the climate emergency and reducing its carbon emissions whilst delivering economic, and social benefits to residents, employees, and visitors.

Corporate Plan: Fresh Start Bright Future 2021-2025

The Corporate Plan sets out six priority areas to achieve our vision of making West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive. This vision places West Northants 'at the forefront of action on climate change with clean air, sustainable growth and a flourishing natural environment'. The development of a robust Tree Strategy is relevant to all six outcomes and will specifically facilitate our ambitions in the following three priority areas:

- 'Clean and Green', including increased wildlife species and planting more trees, especially on Council land, supporting our ambition to be net zero by 2030
- 'Improved Life Chances', including supporting residents to have healthier lifestyles
- 'Thriving towns and villages', including the drive for economic development that will make West Northants a destination to go to, to secure local benefit from the Ox-Cam Arc*, and to work with communities to co-design public spaces

* In July 2021, we adopted the Oxford – Cambridge Arc Environmental Principals for protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment. These principals aim to double economic growth along the OxCam Arc by doubling nature and ensuring it leads the way in the "zero-carbon living and working of the future". We will achieve this by committing to greener transport, doubling the number of trees and acreage of accessible managed green spaces and supporting local green energy production.

Local Plan

West Northamptonshire's emerging Local Plan will guide development to 2041. It replaces the current two-part local plans (the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) and the Part 2 Local Plans which were adopted for the former Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire areas.

The Tree Strategy will help to support new policies that will cover the planting of new trees and hedgerows in landscaping plans and the protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, as well as other habitat types, to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain. Relevant planning policy in the Council's current two-part local plans will remain in force until the emerging Local Plan is adopted.

West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan

The WNSP sets out a spatial vision for the area extended up to 2050. It replaces our Joint Core Strategy adopted in 2014 and establishes place-based visions for Northampton, Daventry, Brackley, Towcester and our rural areas. The WNSP reflects the context provided by our Corporate Plan and the collective vision for making West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

It is mandatory for all Local Planning Authorities to produce a LNRS in accordance with the Environment Act 2021. The emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Northamptonshire will specify priority areas for delivering and enhancing habitats across the area. This is an ongoing process and will provide opportunities for planting trees once complete.

The Environment Act establishes two main mechanisms for LNRS delivery: Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and a strengthened biodiversity duty on public authorities.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain is “an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before.” The Environment Bill includes a requirement for all future schemes including the development of land to deliver a mandatory 10 % biodiversity net gain. This net gain will be required to be maintained for a period of at least 30 years. Where there is insufficient space on a development the funds will be used at targeted sites elsewhere which will include tree planting.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

The BAP sets out the highest priorities for action to conserve Northamptonshire's most threatened and declining habitats and species. It specifies that to help minimise adverse pressures on sensitive sites, efforts should be concentrated within urban areas, citing the physical and mental health benefits of access to natural green space, and street trees, for example.

Natural Capital Investment Plan

The NCIP sets out a range of opportunity maps to highlight the best areas for enhancing connectivity and expanding habitat networks, including through tree planting and woodland creation, that can deliver multiple benefits (ecosystem services). The maps look at where demand is high and capacity is currently low. These can be used to identify project locations to deliver certain objectives, including those that link to this Tree Strategy.

The NCIP maps will help to inform the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for West Northamptonshire as well as:

- Locate the best places to deliver biodiversity net gain (offsetting) and natural capital net gain
- Target Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs)
- Natural flood risk management and catchment sensitive farming schemes
- Provide evidence for our Local Plans and green infrastructure strategies
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
- Locating carbon sequestration projects (e.g. UK Woodland Carbon Code projects)

The Plan discusses targets to double woodland cover. WNC woodland cover is currently at 6.9%, which means a commitment to double it would take it to around 14%. This would take woodland cover to around the national average of 13%.

Estate Climate Strategy and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy

These documents call for the Council to explore creating a new productive woodland. The core purposes would be carbon capture and timber production, but the strategies call for the benefits to be maximised, identifying public access and biodiversity gain as being potential ancillary benefits.

Health and wellbeing

Our Joint Health and Wellbeing Board's Live Your Best Life Strategy recognises that while the county is largely green and rural, with much of land usage agricultural, access to green spaces for people who live in the county's urban centres is poor. Air quality in the largest towns is particularly poor and contributing to poor heart and lung health. The strategy sets out an approach to encouraging more active travel, and ensuring that new developments are green, with plenty of access to open green spaces, urban trees and other green and blue infrastructure. This will support the strategy's ambition to maximise opportunities for West Northamptonshire's communities to be fit, well and independent.

Other relevant strategies that are currently in development include:

- **Air Quality Action Plan**
- **Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy** - it will be valuable to maximise the benefits of i-tree information within this strategy, ensuring that the benefits of trees are considered in the Councils approach to tackling climate change.
- **Local Transport Plan**

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning is community-led planning which helps Parish and Town Councils to shape the development of their areas. Through a Neighbourhood Plan local communities can influence local development, identify and protect areas of local green space and set out management strategies for green infrastructure and wildlife

corridors. Once adopted, neighbourhood plans must be taken into consideration in determining planning applications within the area that the plan covers.

Neighbourhood planning provides an opportunity to work collaboratively with local communities to identify sites for tree planting.

Statutory Duties

WNC have a wide variety of statutory duties which WNC are required to perform by law. All landowners have a common duty of care under the Occupier's Liability Acts (1957) and (1984) and statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974).

WNC owns **X** Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are nationally important sites. WN is obliged to manage the SSSIs it owns to achieve "good" or "unfavourable recovering" condition as defined by Natural England. This involves good tree management and encouraging natural regeneration on woodland SSSIs, but also involves removal of trees on sites where they are inappropriate. WNC is bound by the "biodiversity duty" (NERC Act 2006) "The public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity." (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006).