Topic Paper 6: The Natural Environment Summary

Introduction

Planning policies should aim to preserve, enhance and protect Knowsley's natural environment.

Context

Knowsley possesses 3 Local Nature Reserve, 75 Local Wildlife Sites and 161 parks and greenspaces of which 20 parks host the prestigious Green Flag award such as Halewood Triangle Park and Jubilee Park.

Key policies, plans and strategies

The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to influence the design and location of new development to help drive nature's recovery and contribute to wider environmental outcomes, safeguard our most important habitats, species and landscapes, and to recognise nature's role in delivering sustainable growth.

The Framework states Local Plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment and reflect the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystems, by using Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Protected Landscape Management Plans, River Basin Management Plans, National Forest Strategies, Community Forest Plans, and other relevant evidence to establish a hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance; identify opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, habitats, and priority or threatened species; steer development towards land of the lowest environmental value; and set standards for green infrastructure provision.

The Framework also states Local Plans should only set local standards for biodiversity net gain which are in excess of the statutory net gain requirement where this is for specific site allocations and is fully justified and deliverable. Local standards should not extend to categories of development which are exempt from statutory biodiversity net gain.

The National Planning Practice Guidance on the natural environment further provide further guidance on implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and states Local Plans should be supported by local nature recovery strategies that are led by a local authority appointed member from the Defra Secretary of State as the ‘’responsible authority’.

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Spatial Development Strategy is being prepared, and it is likely to have policy on the natural environment and nature recovery to support the recovery of nature to aid climate resilience, health and wellbeing, and planning positively towards the natural environment.

The Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2026) seeks to ensure the wider Liverpool City Region is wildlife-rich with a clear pathway to nature recovery, where the benefits of nature are maximised, appreciated and enjoyed by all. The main goals of the Strategy are to ensure nature is recovered and thriving, people and nature are connected, and organisations, communities, and individuals are supported to share responsibility for nature recovery. The Strategy's actions are evidence-led, collaborative and addresses the needs of local communities, embodying an understanding and respect for the natural environment, with nature underpinning local economies and mitigating climate change.

The State of Nature Report for the Liverpool City Region (2022) collates, analyses and interprets ecological information to assess the state of nature within the Liverpool City Region, providing an evidence base for to inform the SDS and future environmental strategies and nature recovery projects. It provides and overview of the status and trends of designated habitats, sites and species within the LCR, as well as levels of ecosystem service provision and engagement with the natural environment by LCR residents

More With Trees: The Mersey Forest Plan (2025) serves as a long-term guide for the work of the Mersey Forest Community Forest's team and partners, extending to 2050 and beyond. The plan keeps up with the national and local policy context, staying alert to changes and reacting to new policy drivers, helping shape policy development to ensure ongoing support for ongoing work with partners. It contributes to place making, new development, regeneration, and restricting, by securing recognition to the Mersey Forest Plan within Local Plans.

The Liverpool City Region Ecological Network Report (2015) is an evidence-based ecological network, comprising information on the city regions' natural assets. It also identifies opportunities to introduce better protection and management of those natural assets and details opportunities to create new natural assets. It can be used to help inform the preparation of Local Plans and support the wider partnership of local authorities, statutory agencies and developers to consider ecology and biodiversity at plan, project, programme and land management levels.

Knowsley's Green Space Action Plan (2024-2030) builds upon the previous Knowsley Greenspace Strategy documents and provides a reference point for all matters relating to Knowsley's parks and green spaces, providing a framework to inform decisions that will ensure that these spaces are managed in an accountable, sustained, and consistent manner. The plan covers each individual ward's parks,

gardens, natural spaces, amenity green spaces, outdoor sports areas, allotments, and children's play areas.

Key issues to be addressed by the Local Plan

- Green and Blue Infrastructure Networks – Green and blue infrastructure performs an important role in supporting biodiversity, enhancing landscape character, managing flood risk, improving health and wellbeing, and increasing resilience to climate change. The Local Plan should ensure that a connected and multifunctional network of green and blue infrastructure is protected, enhanced and expanded.
- Urban Greening and Tree Cover – There is a need to increase tree cover and urban greening across the borough. Development should retain existing mature trees wherever possible and incorporate new tree planting and green infrastructure as an integral part of site design.
- Habitat Connectivity – The borough's network of habitats, including woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, agricultural land and watercourses, should be protected and enhanced to support ecological connectivity and species movement. Development should avoid habitat fragmentation and contribute to strengthening ecological networks.
- Nature Recovery and Green Space Provision – Existing green spaces perform multiple functions, including recreation, biodiversity enhancement and flood management. The Local Plan should identify opportunities to secure additional areas for nature recovery and strengthen the borough's green infrastructure network.
- Biodiversity Enhancement – Evidence indicates that the condition of some biodiversity assets could be improved. The Local Plan should support measures that protect, enhance and restore habitats and deliver measurable biodiversity gains through new development.
- Biodiversity Net Gain Delivery – There is a need to ensure that sufficient opportunities exist for both on-site and off-site biodiversity enhancement. The Local Plan should support the delivery of habitat creation and enhancement projects capable of contributing to Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.
- Development and Environmental Infrastructure – New development should contribute to the delivery of green and blue infrastructure, habitat creation, ecological connectivity, urban greening and wider environmental improvements as part of a comprehensive approach to place-making.
- Sport and Recreation Infrastructure – Future growth will increase demand for outdoor sport and recreation facilities. The Local Plan should ensure that sufficient land is available to meet existing and future needs, improve access to facilities, and secure the provision of new or enhanced sports and recreational infrastructure as part of sustainable communities.
- Parks and Green Spaces – The borough's network of parks and green spaces is a significant asset that supports biodiversity, recreation, health and wellbeing,

and local distinctiveness. The Local Plan should safeguard these areas, enhance their quality and functionality, and maximise opportunities to extend and connect green spaces to create a more resilient and accessible green infrastructure network.