

Policy DM19: Development and Nature Conservation

- 2.19.1 Building on the adopted Core Strategy policy BCS9, this policy provides further detailed criteria for the consideration of proposals affecting nature conservation sites and features of value in Bristol.
- 2.19.2 Bristol contains a wide range of important nature conservation sites that contribute to a varied stock of natural habitats and species. The city has two sites of international importance: The Severn Estuary, which is a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site, and; the Avon Gorge SAC. The findings of the Severnside & Avonmouth Wetland Habitat Project, October 2010 and December 2011 (the Cresswell study) will be taken into account in determining any proposals which affect the international designations of the Severn Estuary. The documents are available on the Local Plan Evidence page of the council's website. There are also currently five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Bristol, which are of national importance for habitat conservation value.
- 2.19.3 Local nature conservation sites help to ensure the habitats, species and features of value are adequately protected and allow for appropriate public access to nature. Local nature conservation sites in Bristol include Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs), Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and Wildlife Corridors. These sites provide a refuge for flora and fauna; contribute to national biodiversity and geodiversity targets; add to the local character and distinctiveness of an area; contribute to quality of life; enhance the natural processes that support quality of life by maintaining air, soil and water quality; and can also reduce the effects of flooding and pollution.
- 2.19.4 Together the SNCIs and connected sites in Wildlife Corridors form the Bristol Wildlife Network. This network strengthens the resilience of species and habitats to changes in the built and natural environment, including rising temperatures and flood risk associated with climate change. It also encourages public interaction with wildlife and an appreciation and understanding of nature conservation which makes a positive contribution to the quality of life in Bristol.

Development which would be likely to have any impact upon habitat, species or features, which contribute to nature conservation in Bristol will be expected to:

- Be informed by an appropriate survey and assessment of impacts; and**
- Be designed and sited, in so far as practicably and viably possible, to avoid any harm to identified habitats, species and features of importance; and**
- Take opportunities to connect any identified on-site habitats, species or features to nearby corridors in the Wildlife Network.**

Where loss of nature conservation value would arise development will be expected to provide mitigation on-site and where this is not possible provide mitigation off-site.

Development on or adjacent to sites of nature conservation value will be expected to enhance the site's nature conservation value through the design and placement of any green infrastructure provided.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

Development which would have a harmful impact on the nature conservation value of a Site of Nature Conservation Interest will not be permitted.

Wildlife Corridors

Development which would have a harmful impact on the connectivity and function of sites in Wildlife Corridors will only be permitted where the loss in connectivity, or function, of an existing Wildlife Corridor is mitigated in line with the following hierarchy:

- Creation of a new wildlife corridor within the development site;**
- Enhancement of an existing corridor or creation of a new corridor off-site to maintain the connectivity of the Bristol Wildlife Network.**

Habitat, Species and Features of Nature Conservation in Bristol

- 2.19.5 For the purpose of applying provisions of policy DM19, the habitats, species and features which contribute to nature conservation value in Bristol comprise the following locations, habitats, species and development situations:
- International Sites (SPAs and SACs, Ramsar), National Sites (SSSIs). All are shown on the Policies Map.
 - Designated local nature conservation sites, SNCIs and RIGS. These are designated and shown on the Policies Map.
 - Non-designated local nature conservation sites, the Wildlife Corridors. These are available to view on the Explore Bristol section of the council's website.
 - Development sites containing Protected Species.
 - Designated, non-designated sites and other development sites containing Habitats and Species of Principal Importance.

Protected Species

- 2.19.6 Protected Species are subject to separate legislation which determines appropriate development and approaches to mitigation. Protected Species legislation will need to be met before planning permission can be granted.
- 2.19.7 To assist in determining the type of development and locations where Protected Species might be present, guidance is contained within the 'Bristol survey and assessment of impacts upon Nature Conservation'.

Species and Habitats of Principal Importance

- 2.19.8 Species or Habitats of Principal Importance are determined under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It sets out the habitats or species of Principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. Principal Species of Importance in Bristol include otters, water voles, hedgehogs and house sparrows.
- 2.19.9 Often Species or Habitats of Principal Importance will be contained with local nature conservation sites such as SNCIs and Wildlife Corridors. The Bristol Nature Conservation

Map sets out the known Species and Habitats of Principal Importance on sites in the Bristol Wildlife Network (SNCIs and Wildlife Corridors). This can be used to initially identify where these nature conservation assets exist on a development site.

Appropriate survey and assessment of impacts on nature conservation

- 2.19.10 An appropriate survey and assessment of impacts will also be needed to determine developments likely to impact upon Species, or Habitats of Principal Importance. To assist in determining the type of development and locations where Species or Habitats of Principal Importance might be present, guidance is contained within the 'Bristol survey and assessment of impacts upon Nature Conservation'.
- 2.19.11 The guidance note assists with understanding the type of survey and assessment that should be undertaken to inform assessment of impact, potential harm, suitable development and potential need for mitigation or compensation. It explains that the appropriate survey and assessment is dependent upon the type of nature conservation site, particular habitats and whether a Protected Species would be impacted by a proposed development. The guidance also explains appropriate sources of information and the correct approaches to undertaking surveys and reporting of them. The output from the required survey and assessment forms part of the submission information.

Designated International and National Nature Conservation Sites

- 2.19.12 The SPA, SAC and Ramsar international sites receive the highest level of protection and no significant negative effects upon the habitats, species and special features of the sites will be permitted. The Severn Estuary SPA, SAC and Ramsar site and Avon Gorge SAC are identified and protected by international conventions, European Directives and subject to statutory protection in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Relevant proposals will therefore need to be supported by sufficient evidence to demonstrate there would be no significant effect on the integrity of these international sites. Within Avonmouth this will include proposals that impact upon land which lies outside the Severn Estuary SPA Boundary, where it provides habitats for SPA Qualifying Species and/or the Qualifying Assemblage. The Cresswell study 2011 contains information on the location of the known inland habitats.
- 2.19.13 Development on land within or outside SSSIs will be expected to meet the requirements for SSSIs set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.19.14 For the international and national sites, the relevant legislation and protection will apply, in addition to the requirements of policy DM19.

Designated Local Nature Conservation Sites - Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs)

- 2.19.15 Although they do not receive the same legal protection as international or national nature conservation sites, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) collectively represent the city's critical stock of natural capacity. In some areas of Bristol, SNCIs offer people their only valuable contact with wildlife. Therefore, development proposals which would harm the nature conservation value of an SNCI will not be permitted.
- 2.19.16 The 'Bristol Nature Conservation Map' displays the location of SNCIs within Bristol and also gives an overview of habitats and species on each SNCI. This, along with more

detailed information from the appropriate survey and assessment, should inform any development proposal which may impact upon an SNCI to ensure harm is avoided.

- 2.19.17 For land to be given SNCI status strict criteria have to be met. These criteria establish the site as having substantive value for nature conservation due to the presence and condition of particular species, habitats and features.

Wildlife Corridors and the Wildlife Network

- 2.19.18 Wildlife Corridors contribute to the function and long-term value of SNCIs through the connectivity they create, forming a Wildlife Network across Bristol. Wildlife Corridors contain habitats and features that allow species to effectively move through and settle on a site, although they do not have the intrinsic value to meet the criteria to be considered as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.
- 2.19.19 In order to maintain the integrity of the Wildlife Network, as required by Core Strategy policy BCS9, development proposals will be expected to understand the role and route of any Wildlife Corridors on a development site and any habitats and features which contribute to a Wildlife Corridor's function, along with current and potential species which might utilise the wildlife corridor.
- 2.19.20 The Bristol Nature Conservation Map displays the location of Wildlife Corridors within Bristol and also gives an overview of valuable habitats and species on each site. This information, along with more detailed information from the appropriate survey and assessment required by policy DM19, will be expected to inform development proposals.
- 2.19.21 Development should integrate existing wildlife corridors. Where this is not practicable it should provide suitable mitigation in the form of on-site, functional Wildlife Corridor(s). Development should also provide mitigation for any habitats, species or features of value associated with the Wildlife Corridors, where they are harmed or lost. This should take place on the development site wherever possible.
- 2.19.22 Where it is not possible to replace Wildlife Corridors, or their associated habitats, species and features of value within a development site, consideration of off-site mitigation to recreate a wildlife corridor in the nearest section of the Bristol Wildlife Network will be appropriate, provided the overall connectivity of the Bristol Wildlife Network is not harmed. Planning obligations may be utilised to secure off-site mitigation for habitats, species and features replacement, and to create or enhance new Wildlife Corridors.

Policy Links

Bristol Local Plan Core Strategy – Lead Policy

- BCS9: Green Infrastructure

Other key Core Strategy policies

- BCS13: Climate Change
- BCS21: Quality Urban Design
- BCS23: Pollution

Application Information

Nature Conservation Report

Development which would take place on or adjacent to Habitat, Species and Features of Nature Conservation in Bristol which might have an impact upon them should be supported by an appropriate survey and assessment of impacts.

A Nature Conservation Report should contain the findings of the appropriate survey and assessment of impacts. It should also contain appropriate survey information, details of the survey methodology, conclusions as to the impact and any proposed mitigation or enhancement to meet the provisions of this policy.

An appropriate 'Wildlife Survey' of impacts should be provided where Protected Species and some Species of Principal Importance are present on any of the above nature conservation sites, or on a development site.

A biodiversity or geological survey and assessment of impacts should be provided where development might impact any sites of value or Habitats of Principal Importance.

The guidance note 'Bristol survey and assessment of impacts upon Nature Conservation' sets out further detail as to when a Wildlife Survey or Biodiversity/Geodiversity Survey should be undertaken, sources of appropriate information, information on correct methodology, assessment of impacts, and how to report findings.

Policy DM20: Regionally Important Geological Sites

- 2.20.1 There are a number of Regionally Important Geological Sites within Bristol. These sites are worthy of protection for their scientific, educational, research, historical or visual and landscape importance.

Planning permission will not be permitted for development that would have a harmful impact on a Regionally Important Geological Site's features of value.

- 2.20.2 Regionally Important Geological Sites are indicated on the Policies Map.

- 2.20.3 In considering proposals on or adjacent to Regional Important Geological Sites account will be taken of how the proposal conserves and enhances the site's geological interest, through its design and placement.

Policy Links

Bristol Local Plan Core Strategy – Lead Policy

- BCS9: Green Infrastructure

Application Information

Design and Access statements should consider the impacts on Regionally Important Geological Sites and explain how these have been addressed.