

***Caveat – this draft proposed policy has not been signed off internally; as a result this is to be taken as an initial draft of intention.**

Draft Proposed Policy G16 – Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

The borough's Biodiversity and Ecological Network resources will be protected, conserved and enhanced:

Priority will be given to:

- Protecting and safeguarding all designated sites of international, national, regional, county and local level importance including all Ramsar, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, national nature reserves, sites of special scientific interest and biological heritage sites, geological heritage site, local nature reserves, wildlife corridors together with any ecological network approved by the Council;
- Protect, safeguard and enhance habitats for European, nationally and locally important species;
- Have regard to the ecology of the site and the surrounding area (safeguarding existing habitats / features such as but not exclusive to trees, hedgerows, ponds and streams), unless justified otherwise.
- Protect, conserve and enhance the borough's ecological network and provide links to the network from and/or through the development site.

In addition development must adhere to the provisions set out below:

- a) Ensure development seeks to produce a net gain in biodiversity by designing in wildlife and by ensuring that any adverse impacts are avoided or if unavoidable are reduced or appropriately mitigated and/or compensated;
- b) Provide opportunities for habitats and species to adapt to climate change;
- c) Support and encourage enhancements which contribute to habitat restoration;
- d) Where there is reason to suspect that there may be protected habitats/species on or close to a proposed development site, the developer will be expected to carry out all necessary surveys in the first instance, planning applications must then be accompanied by a survey assessing the presence of such habitats/species and, where appropriate, make provision for their needs;
- e) In exceptional cases where the need for development in social or economic terms is considered to significantly outweigh the impact on the natural environment, appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures and/or compensatory habitat creation will be required through planning conditions and/or planning obligations.

Justification (Paragraphs to start at 10.78 in DPD)

- 10.78 The borough includes an extensive network of sites important for biodiversity including the Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA and Ramsar, an internationally important wetland habitat commonly referred to as one of the 'Natura 2000' Sites. Additionally this site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), as well as two other SSSIs in the borough at River Darwen and Beeston Brook Meadow.
- 10.79 Alongside international and national designations are a wide range of regional, county and local designations including Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS), Biological Heritage Sites (BHS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), and Wildlife Corridors all of which are an important part of the network of nature conservation sites and will be protected from development that will cause fragmented networks or isolate habitats. These designations are highlighted on the Proposals Map.
- 10.80 As well as the need to protect, conserve and enhance designated sites it is also important to protect, conserve and enhance nationally and locally important species that use a variety of sites/habitats as part of a nature conservation network. Lancashire County Council is producing an Ecological Network covering the County, including South Ribble's borough. Once finalised this will be an important contribution to the nature conservation agenda and will need to be protected, conserved, maintained and enhanced where appropriate.
- 10.81 Biodiversity has many important roles and functions including protecting biodiversity for its own sake, adapting to climate change, recreation, health and wellbeing etc. As part of a changing climate it is important to allow habitats and species the opportunities to adapt, making provision where possible. Ecological networks form an important basis for this and it is the Council's view that these networks should be maintained and enhanced, where appropriate to allow habitats and species the best opportunity to adapt to a changing climate.
- 10.82 Protected species and habitats play an important role and are protected under European and National Law. Where species or habitats may come under threat, it is the developer's responsibility to carry out all necessary surveys. Ecology surveys need to be provided to assess the quality, quantity and value of biodiversity on site or near the site and how the development may affect biodiversity. In certain cases development will not be permitted and in other cases mitigation/ compensatory measures of equal area, quality and diversity, if not higher will apply to try and reduce or overcome the impacts and where possible provide net gains or enhancements to improve the borough's nature conservation assets.
- 10.83 Natural England has advice for protected habitats/species which will need to be taken into consideration. The three statutory tests set out by Natural England will need to be accorded with.
- 10.84 Further information will be provided within supplementary planning guidance.