

# Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies

This online resource paper provides information about Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies, which aim to find better ways of fulfilling existing legal obligations and improving conservation status

## Definition and Purpose

A Species Conservation Strategy is a new mechanism to safeguard the future of particular species at greatest risk. The strategies aim to find better ways to comply with existing legal obligations to protected species at risk, and to improve conservation status. It builds on the district level licensing approach for great crested newts.

A Protected Site Strategy will seek to achieve a similar purpose in respect of protected sites. The concept of a Protected Site Strategy is broad and it includes any approach to mitigation or compensation that is wider than the individual project level. They can be particularly helpful where evidence shows sites are being affected by a range of different impacts. There will be a whole variety of solutions that a strategic approach can lead to depending on the factors affecting the site's condition and the local circumstances.

These strategies have come into being because there is a recognition that the largest threats are increasingly those that come from indirect, cumulative impacts, such as air or water pollution and bird disturbance. It is aimed that protected site strategies can put in place so-called 'big-picture' solutions which deal with these threats at a scale which works.

The **Environment Act 2021** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>) (see the **Environment Act 2021 (/planning/spatial-planning/spds-and-information/green-infrastructure-and-biodiversity/environment-act-2021/)** resource paper) addresses Species conservation strategies (clause 109) and Protected site strategies (clause 110) under Part 6: Nature and Biodiversity.

## Key points to consider

- The Government are investing in tree planting and peatland restoration in England through the Nature for Climate Fund, which is aimed at supporting the mitigation of climate change, and it will assist the creation of a Nature Recovery Network of better connected habitats with improved wildlife abundance;
- In terms of a further contextual background, the Government have introduced three new schemes that reward farmers and land managers for facilitating the public goods set out in the

- 25 Year Environment Plan, including plants and wildlife. These schemes are the Sustainable Farming Incentive, the Local Nature Recovery scheme and the Landscape Recovery scheme;
- Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies are designed to provide a more strategic approach to the complex challenge of protecting and restoring species and habitats;
  - The Government's ambition that Species Conservation Strategies will reduce the need for "reactive, site based assessments" and "reduce delays to development". The Government have also referenced the district level licensing approach for great crested newts, and states that the proposed approach to Species Conservation Strategies will help to ensure the roll out of this approach;
  - Protected Site Strategies have a similar purpose, but will cover Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), in addition to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Natural England would be able to assess and provide an opinion on the impacts of any plan, project or other activity on the conservation or management of a particular site;
  - Both strategies are aimed to avoid the need to identify project-specific solutions which can be difficult, time-consuming and costly to implement.

## **What this means for spatial planning and development management**

The measures will place a new duty on local planning authorities to cooperate with Natural England and other local planning authorities and public bodies in the establishment and operation of the strategies. More information is needed on what will be required of local planning authorities in this respect, and how exactly the strategies will be established and operated.

The strategies are aimed to feed into Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs), support local planning authorities and other public authorities in discharging their duty in respect of biodiversity and developing local plans, and complement plans for biodiversity net gain. Please refer to the resource paper of **Local Nature Recovery Strategies (/planning/spatial-planning/spds-and-information/green-infrastructure-and-biodiversity/local-nature-recovery-strategies-lnrss/)**.

The duty to cooperate from the Species Conservation and Protected Sites Strategies is not intended to place any additional costs or burdens on local planning authorities. They will not be required to collect any new information, just submit information which they already have.

There are a number of outstanding questions on these subjects, on which clarification may come in due course. At present, it seems that spatial planning teams of local authorities may have to develop these strategies but the level is undetermined in terms of site, area or district wide, and whether there would be consultations with the public. Alternatively, it may be that landowners could also prepare them for individual sites. Local Nature Recovery Strategies are aimed to cover whole district areas, and how these two strategies will add value to LNRs needs more clarity. The strategies are likely to be submitted to Natural England, but again this needs confirmation in due course.

Although Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies are not likely to become mandatory until the latter half of 2023, Craven District Council recommends use of the **Biodiversity Metric 3.0** (</planning/spatial-planning/spds-and-information/green-infrastructure-and-biodiversity/biodiversity-metric-30/>) now, in order to achieve compliance with Craven Local Plan policy ENV4: Biodiversity, which requires biodiversity net gain wherever possible – please refer to this policy’s wording for more information.

March 2022. This webpage provides general information about relevant planning topics and we hope you find it helpful. Please be aware that it is not a statement of Council policy and does not provide formal policy guidance. For those things, please refer to the Craven Local Plan and supplementary planning documents.