



Coventry City Council

Public report
Cabinet Report

Cabinet
Council

6th January 2026
13th January 2026

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change - Councillor J O'Boyle

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director for Regeneration and Economy

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Brandon Wood Nature Reserve

Is this a key decision?

Yes - expenditure is in excess of £1m

Executive Summary:

Coventry City Council has a unique opportunity to repurpose the former Brandon Wood Golf Course as a nature reserve, creating rich habitats to support wildlife and developing a new visitor destination for people to enjoy. The UK is one of the most nature depleted nations in the world, with one in six species at risk of extinction. The Council made a commitment in the Climate Change Strategy (2024-2030) to take action to support nature recovery, and this site presents a significant opportunity to do this at scale. The former golf course is 64ha, which means it will be able to support a huge variety of habitats through the creation of wetlands, grassland and shrub. A much bigger opportunity is also unlocked as it will join up a number of parcels of land already being managed for nature covering 356ha in total (see plans in Appendix 1-3). Together this would create the biggest area of land managed for nature anywhere in the West Midlands, and at 6km from the city centre, it will be the closest nature reserve of this scale to a city centre in England.

The golf course was closed to the public in 2020 and a number of options have been assessed to identify the most appropriate future use of the site. The golf course was managed by Coventry Sports Trust, but the site is prone to regular flooding which limited the accessibility of part of the site. It has now been deemed financially unviable to continue as a golf course. In 2024 Defra introduced a new mechanism whereby new developments are required to offset any biodiversity loss through the purchase of 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG) units, which provides a significant new income stream for creating and maintaining areas for nature conservation for 30 years. The business case for the new nature reserve

is based on a sustainable finance model whereby up to 304 BNG units are created that would generate income to cover costs of creating and managing the nature reserve, with no Council funding required.

The BNG units are likely to rely on offset from development taking place outside of the city, including Warwickshire, the West Midlands and potentially nationally, rather than Coventry developments. This is due to Council policy which requires any Coventry developments deliver BNG within the immediate area or close by and within the city boundary as a default position, contributing to an increase in biodiversity rather than being offset elsewhere. This will help to improve the quality of the city's green spaces and waterways and help create new urban nature networks and green corridors across the city for local people to enjoy. Brandon Wood Nature Reserve will provide an experience where people can immerse themselves in nature in a wilder landscape. Any surplus income generated through the sale of BNG units at the nature reserve will be allocated to activities that support biodiversity gain.

Biodiversity Net Gain is still a relatively new market and there is a lot of regional and national variation in unit values, demand and selling of units. Whilst we can be confident there is a pipeline of development in the sub-region and wider region that equates to demand for units, there is less certainty in terms of timing of units being required. However, if this land is not provided by public bodies such as local authorities, it is likely private landowners will directly benefit from selling units which we are already seeing in the sub-region. To help mitigate this risk, a new Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) has been developed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), which creates a new partnership between the County, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Coventry City Council to enable us to plan and manage BNG and emerging nature markets more strategically through a collaborative approach. This could help unlock funding to support habitat creation and maintenance for BNG sites. Formal approval to join the NCIS partnership is therefore sought as part of this report. We are also working with WMCA to explore similar opportunities, to ensure we maximise the opportunities to grow nature markets and can directly influence and benefit from where investment is delivered. Given the relatively immature state of BNG market at present, it is proposed that delegated authority is given to continue to work up the investment plan, working with NCIS, WMCA and wider markets to provide a clear pipeline of investment and phase delivery on site accordingly. Works could start as early as the second half of 2026, subject to planning and legal agreements.

The project has been developed with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, who already lease a significant area of land for nature surrounding the golf course, including their headquarters next door Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is proposed that the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group will enter into a property transaction with the Council, bringing their expertise to maintain the site as part of the wider landscape to maximise a range of diverse habitats that support nature alongside creation of a seamless visitor experience so that people can enjoy visits to the new nature reserve and adjacent sites.

Work has been undertaken to look at how we can maximise visitor experience to the site and encourage local people to connect with nature. It is proposed to undertake improvements to site infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience, which will include upgraded and accessible footpaths, a new car park, benches and wayfinding. The former club house will be demolished, which will help save the Council costs related to security

and business rates. There is also a further opportunity to enhance the visitor experience through creation of new outdoor education, training and wellbeing hub on the site, which could be located on the site of the former club house.

This is currently at concept stage but could be a fantastic opportunity that will complement the Council's other outdoor education facilities in the city and Plas Dol Y Moch and provides a significant natural site on the doorstep of the city for learning and skills. It is proposed that this option is developed in conjunction with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and is brought back for a decision following due governance process date once a viable business case is developed. This would reduce the extent of the site where BNG units could be delivered by around a third. However, it would provide a significant boost to visitor experience and an opportunity to share associated infrastructure costs. It is therefore recommended that this option is continued to be developed and subject to a future governance decision within the next 12 months, with a backstop position that if this doesn't come forward this part of the site will be part of the wider nature reserve. The financial modelling that supports this decision sets out the potential income that relates to this part of the site and demonstrates that the business case for the nature reserve still remains viable if this section wasn't included in the sale of BNG units.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to recommend that Council:

- 1) Approve the in principal change of use of Brandon Wood Golf Course to a nature reserve and a registered Biodiversity Net Gain habitat bank, including demolition of the former golf club house subject to a formal planning process via Rugby Borough Council to deliver proposed changes to the Site (as shown in Appendix 1 and 3 to the report) and land appropriation within the Council between service areas;
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Economic Development, following consultation with the Director of Property Services and Development, the Director of Finance and Resources (s151 Officer), and the Director of Law and Governance and the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change to:
 - 2a) Enter into the appropriate legal agreements (including but not limited to a property transaction) and to make necessary variations from time to time between the Council and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group for up to thirty years for the Site.
 - 2b) Undertake all necessary due diligence including the investment strategy and subsequent phasing of the project and enter into necessary legal agreements (and make necessary variations from time to time) to maximise Biodiversity Net Gain Units for the whole Site up to £8m.
 - 2c) Enter into appropriate legal agreements to enable the Council to join the Nature Capital Investment Strategy partnership with Warwickshire County Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, including acceptance of funding to support delivery of BNG on the Site if this becomes available through the partnership, subject to formal governance processes.

- 2d) Accept up to £2m in the sale of BNG units to deliver the initial phase of delivery of the Site.
- 2e) Approve the addition of up to £1.4 million for the purposes of delivering the Project (subject to the financial mitigations set out in the financial implications).
- 3) Approve that all Biodiversity Net Gain income from the Site is ringfenced and reinvested in biodiversity and enabling activities.

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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Site Plan
- Appendix 2 - Landscape wide plan
- Appendix 3 - Proposed Interventions

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents:

Cabinet Report December 2024: [Agenda item - Climate Change Strategy 2024 - 2030 - Coventry City Council](#)

[Climate Change Strategy – Coventry City Council](#) and [Climate Change Action Plan – Coventry City Council](#)

Warwickshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Nature Partnership, 2025
<https://www.wcslnp.co.uk/lnrs>

Environmental Improvement Plan 2025, DEFRA, 2025 (useful background, project contributes to many targets)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-2025>

[The BNG Report: Pricing and Key Insights October 2025, Biodiversity Units UK](#)

All of the above are available from the Council's website:

<http://moderngov.coventry.gov.uk/eListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeId=124>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes

Report title: Brandon Wood Nature Reserve

1. Context (or background)

Restoring Nature

- 1.1 The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world; this has implications for the environment, for society and for the economy. Restoring nature is a priority for the UK Government to boost biodiversity has significant wider benefits by creating places that people can enjoy nature is important for health and well-being; a thriving natural environment will help us respond better to climate change; and nature also provides significant economic value.
- 1.2 The UK government is committed to halt the extinction of threatened species and reverse nature loss with the effective recovery and conservation of habitats, with a critical target being to conserve and manage 30% of land, inland waters, coasts, and oceans by 2030. This goal is referred to as '30 by 30'. For Coventry, this currently stands at around 11% and a key challenge is to identify where the extra 19% (or 1874 hectares) is going to be found, given the city's urban geography and limitations on available land. The 64 hectare former Brandon Wood Golf Course site is owned by the Council on the edge of the city boundary, and whilst geographically sits in Warwickshire presents a significant opportunity to support nature on the city's doorstep and connect the site to the wider 293 hectare landscape already being managed for nature to create a fantastic asset for residents and visitor destination (see Appendix 2 to the report).
- 1.3 The West Midlands Combined Authority is one of 48 'Responsible Authorities' across England producing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS); a statutory requirement through the Environment Act 2021. The aim is to address the issue of nature depletion as part of a country-wide Nature Recovery Network. The West Midlands LNRS identifies 10 priorities and 62 actions for nature recovery, developed in conjunction with regional stakeholders, including the 7 constituent authorities. Separately Warwickshire is developing a LNRS which Coventry is also responding to, recognising the importance of creating cross-border nature networks. The creation of a new nature reserve on the former golf course will deliver new habitats to support nature conservation that aligns closely with both LNRS. The site will contribute to several national and regional priority habitats featured in the LNRS including wet woodland and reedbed. Potentially this would help reverse the loss of species such as willow tit and numerous invertebrates. Visitors could encounter reintroduced beavers and otters. Ospreys have started to investigate the area, hopefully they will nest on the Wildlife Trust site and will be easily viewed from the new nature reserve without disturbance.
- 1.4 Coventry's Climate Change Strategy (2024-2030) sets out the city's ambitions to support nature recovery and better connect local people to nature. The Strategy was developed in conjunction with the city's Climate Change Board, with recommendations for the city's Nature Pathway provided by key stakeholders including Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, Canal and Rivers Trust, informed by extensive public consultation which identified that nature and green space being very important to local people who responded – wanting to see the Council and city go much further in terms of enhancing and expanding spaces

for nature. The Climate Change Action Plan sets out how we are going to deliver the Strategy, which includes a priority action for the delivery of a landscape-scale nature restoration project. The creation of Brandon Wood Nature Reserve will deliver on this action and provides a significant opportunity to go further by working with partners to maximise opportunities for helping wildlife thrive across the wider 293 hectare landscape it sits within.

- 1.5 This will mean better connectivity between the site and surrounding parcels of land already manged for nature, which is part of the Wildlife Trust's Dunsmore Living Landscape project including adjacent Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Wolston Fields and Steetley Meadows south of the railway line, and to the north Brandon Wood, Brandon Reach, Piles Coppice, alongside Claybrookes Marsh Site SSSI in Binley which can be accessed by foot under the A46. There is also opportunity to better connect the sites to Coombe Abbey in the north. This will create a connected mix of rich habitats for nature to thrive, with improved wayfinding and access for people to explore and enjoy. Much of this natural space already exists on the city's doorstep but is underutilised by local people and this provides a real opportunity to address that, alongside helping to attract visitors from further afield.
- 1.6 Delivering landscape scale interventions to support nature is one of the key priorities in the Climate Change Action Plan, but this must be done in parallel to improving green and blue spaces across the city to support nature, increase climate resilience and for local communities to enjoy. This includes improving the quality and quantity of nature reserves in the city, alongside changing management techniques to create new opportunities to support nature across our parks and open spaces. This includes creating new green corridors to connect natural spaces through tree planting on streets to increase canopy cover across the city and creation of sustainable urban drainage or rain gardens, and could also include green walls, roofs and bus stops with planted areas on roofs, coupled with enhancing the city's water courses through restoring waterways, de-culverting and sustainable urban drainage. These interventions will create more climate resilient streets, help reduce flood risk, provide shade and improving air quality. All BNG income generated at Brandon Wood will be ringfenced and reinvested in biodiversity, alongside this the Council is pursuing other BNG sites to support biodiversity in the city boundary which will help deliver the priorities within the Climate Change Action Plan.
- 1.7 The Council adopted a BNG Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in December 2022. The purpose of the SPD is to give more detailed guidance on Local Plan Policy GE3: Biodiversity, Geological, Landscape and Archaeological Conservation and its aims to:
 - a. lead to a net gain of biodiversity, where appropriate, by means of an approved ecological assessment of existing site features and of the impacts of development;
 - b. protect or enhance biodiversity assets and secure their long term management and maintenance;
 - c. avoid negative impacts on existing biodiversity;
 - d. preserve species which are legally protected, in decline, are rare within Coventry or which are covered by national, regional or local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. From 2024, the Environment Act 2021 required that all developments provide a minimum of 10% biodiversity gain, managed for a minimum of 30 years. Net gain is assessed using a nationally adopted metric developed by DEFRA. By providing more details around Policy GE3 and the Environment Act 2021, the SPD helps protect and enhance biodiversity in the city by giving clear and understandable advice to people who want to develop in Coventry, which could otherwise reduce the city's biodiversity. This detail includes a more specific breakdown of how different developments can avoid biodiversity loss where possible and then offset other losses either on or off site.

- 1.8 Spending time in nature provides significant health benefits for people's physical and mental wellbeing. Natural England guidelines recommend that everyone should be able to access green space or a waterway within a 15-minute walk from their home. Inequities exist across Coventry in terms of access to green space, which can exacerbate health inequalities. Data shows us that global majority groups are less likely to spend time in nature in comparison to people from white backgrounds. Coventry is a hugely diverse city, with over 40% of our population coming from a global majority background, many of whom live in some of the city's least green areas. We must ensure that access to nature is inclusive and better understand the barriers and enablers to engagement. The Council has recently received nearly £1m Nature Towns and Cities Fund to deliver 'Green for All' to address inequalities and inequities in terms of resident access to nature. This project will enable us to work with communities, targeting those with the least access to nature and global majority communities to better understand barriers to accessing nature. We will work with communities to identify opportunities to improve local green spaces which will enable more residents to connect with nature and develop a funding strategy so that we can use natural capital markets such as BNG to support our most deprived communities. We will also take the learnings from Green for All to consider how we can encourage residents from all backgrounds to visit Brandon Wood Nature Reserve and enjoy the benefits of connecting with nature at scale. This means creating accessible and inclusive visitor facilities, alongside developing opportunities for volunteering, training and education on the site.

The Proposal

- 1.9 The proposals at Brandon Wood Nature Reserve will deliver a new 64ha nature-rich site, creating up to 304 Biodiversity Net Gain units which can be sold to offset developments. There will be a variety of habitats delivered, which includes mixed woodland, hedgerows and a variety of grassland and scrub, alongside wetlands, including ponds, scrapes and reedbeds. To open the site up to visitors, the former golf club house which is in a poor state of disrepair will be demolished, and it's proposed that new facilities created including upgraded car park, toilets, accessible paths and picnic areas, alongside benches on nature routes. There will be routes created so visitors can also access Brandon Marsh from the site.
- 1.10 The site will be managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (via TNS Limited a subsidiary wholly owned by WWT) on behalf of the Council, allowing seamless integration between adjacent Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve next door. The Wildlife Trust will

be responsible for creating and managing the new habitats, which will be done through a range of techniques, including introducing a herd of cattle on the site for natural grazing. The Wildlife Trust will be responsible for delivering the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan for the site, which is a requirement of BNG to ensure habitats are created and maintained for 30 years. The BNG will be monitored via a conservation covenant between Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council.

- 1.11 It is recognised that at present the site is difficult to access by any other means than car. The project will work with stakeholders to bring forward active travel opportunities to the site and surrounding area, including walking and cycling routes, public transport and look at wider connectivity and safety of routes. There are some quick wins that can be delivered to improve wayfinding and accessibility, as people can technically walk from Claybrookes Marsh in Binley directly to Piles Coppice, Binley Woods and onwards, however routes are not clearly signed or promoted. In the medium term, the project will seek to secure funding to deliver a pedestrian crossing on Brandon Lane to help create a safe crossing point to connect the sites together, a more informal crossing currently exists between Brandon Marsh and Brandon Reach. Grant and developer funding will be sought to fund active travel routes which will be part of longer-term plans, with opportunities to connect to Binley Road cycle route and consider wider connectivity to Coombe in the north and Ryton in the south.
- 1.12 Accessibility within the new Brandon Wood Nature Reserve itself will be enhanced, with the creation of dedicated disabled parking and nearby picnic area for visitors to enjoy, a changing place toilet and upgraded paths on the site that are suitable for wheelchairs and hire out all-terrain wheelchairs for visitors keen to explore areas beyond the main path network. A wheelchair accessible viewing platform will also be created in the southern part of the site overlooking the wetland area.
- 1.13 Coventry Outdoors, the Council's Outdoor Education Service, has rapidly expanded over the last four years in response to a significant rise in demand. The current main local base at Coombe Abbey presents constraints that limit further growth and restrict the service's ability to ensure the hub remains able to develop and thrive. As a result, the service has begun exploring opportunities for the development of a new Outdoor Education, Training and Wellbeing Hub that would act as the central operational base, while still retaining some educational delivery and activities at Coombe. A key aim of this development is to strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of Plas Dol-y-Moch—recognising the limitations on capital investment and commercial development at the Plas Dol-y-Moch site itself. Establishing a financially robust hub in Coventry is therefore essential to protecting and securing the future of this highly valued residential outdoor education centre. The proposed Brandon Wood Nature Reserve has been identified as a potential location for the new hub. The proposed development would complement the wider nature reserve by offering outdoor education programmes, adventure and activity sessions, training courses, and wellbeing initiatives. It would also introduce additional on-site facilities for visitors, enabling workshops, classes, and events for a diverse range of users. This enhanced offer would help attract more visitors, increase engagement with nature and the outdoors, and further strengthen the overall outdoor learning ecosystem within Coventry.

- 1.14 At present, the opportunity to create a new facility on the site is still at concept stage and requires further development, which will be done working closely with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. If a new facility is to be located on the new nature reserve site it would have to be located on the site of the golf club house and activities constrained to the top third of the site. This would result in the loss of up to 90 BNG units and associated income but could present a significant opportunity to raise revenue to the Council through the new facility as well as generate wider benefits to children, young people and residents across Coventry, building on the success of the service delivery and ensuring future demand can be met. A range of funding options for the development are currently being explored, including the potential to secure external investment and partnerships to support the delivery of a high-quality, sustainable facility
- 1.15 The outdoor education hub would also help to enhance the site as a visitor destination, as would offer the potential for a cafe and more visitor facilities and activities on site and provides the opportunity to increase footfall through attracting visitors to the site for courses, activities and events. This would need to be achieved in a way that complements the existing offer provided by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust across the wider landscape. This would create huge opportunity to connect people with nature, enhancing wellbeing and promoting sustainability. The business case would need to consider loss of income by not delivering BNG in this part of the site, however it would also offset and reduce some of the infrastructure and overhead costs that the nature reserve would need to cover and helps to create a compelling business case. It is proposed that this proposal is brought back to Cabinet as a separate report for consideration, within 12 months of this report. If this is not viable, the land will be used instead for BNG as part of the nature reserve.
- 1.16 Before arriving at this option, the Council has explored several different uses for the future of the site. The Brandon Wood site was a municipal golf course before closing in 2020 during Covid. This presented an opportunity to review the viability of the site, as golf activities on the site were often constrained by flooding on the southern half of the course often resulting in closure of a number of the golf holes. In its current form it was not considered financially viable to continue without significant investment. Options were explored to identify how golf could be made viable on the site, but these were at significant cost and deemed commercially unviable without substantial capital investment from the Council. Whilst it's recognised that this is a loss of a golf facility in the city, there are alternative golfing provisions.
- 1.17 Other potential uses for the site that have been explored include a hotel, glamping, solar farm and gravel extraction. Options were assessed for viability, however discounted for various reasons including lack of commercial viability and planning and environmental grounds.

Business Case

- 1.18 Biodiversity Net Gain was introduced by Defra in 2024 as a mechanism whereby new developments are required to offset any biodiversity loss through the purchase of 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG) credits, which provides a significant new income stream for creating and maintaining areas for nature conservation for 30 years. This is the basis of the business case for creating a nature reserve at the Brandon Wood, the 64 ha site will generate up to 304 BNG units. The value of units is based on is not

fixed and varies based on market supply and demand but typically ranges from £20,000 to £35,000 per unit. Factors like habitat quality, location, and size influence the final price. Assumptions have been made for the purposes of the commercial model, with units costed at a conservative flat rate of £25,000, however there is potential that they could sell for more or less than this, however we can have a level of confidence given some of the habitats being created are of high value e.g. wetlands which demand far higher unit prices which can be in excess of £50,000.

- 1.19 The income generated from the sale of units will be based on demand from developers seeking to offset biodiversity. Council BNG policy seeks for developments within Coventry to be offset in the city boundary as a default position wherever possible, therefore it is likely that BNG income for Brandon Wood Nature Reserve will be generated from sites outside the city. Whilst we have a good idea of the pipeline of development for the wider region in the coming years that informs there is likely to be a high level of demand for the units, it's more difficult to guarantee timescales of sales particularly as this is a relatively new market. The potential 304 BNG units at the site which would be used to offset development taking place outside of the city, including Warwickshire, the West Midlands and potentially nationally.
- 1.20 Finance Earth have calculated that the demand pipeline for the West Midlands equates to 1323 units in the next 17 years linked to development plans, of which 774 units will be required to be offset in the next seven years. In addition, Warwickshire will require approximately 220 units to be offset in the next five years, some of which could be utilised at Brandon Wood Nature reserve which could be made possible through Coventry joining the Warwickshire and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy Partnership.
- 1.21 Other opportunities for offset include Green Power Park, as they seek to offset BNG funding linked to the development. In summary, we can be confident that the market is there to create demand for all 304 units in the next 5-10 years, generating income to cover habitat creation, management and the majority of infrastructure costs to enhance the visitor experience.
- 1.22 Given the uncertainty regarding the timing of BNG sales, a phased development approach is recommended based on availability of capital up front to avoid the Council having to borrow to cover costs and reduce risk. One route to help alleviate this risk is through Coventry City Council joining a sub-regional Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) partnership with Warwickshire and Solihull, which this report seeks approval to enter into.
- 1.23 The benefits of joining NCIS mean that the Council will be in a stronger position to secure sales of BNG units at the nature reserve, offsetting developments in Warwickshire and Solihull where off-site habitat banks are sought, subject to Coventry signing up to the NCIS partnership and the associated governance processes.
- 1.24 There is a lack of regional supply of publicly owned BNG sites that are currently registered. If this land is not provided by public bodies such as LAs, it is likely private landowners will directly benefit from selling units which we are already seeing in the subregion. These may well be sites that aren't accessible to the public. Brandon

Wood nature reserve provides a significant opportunity to offset BNG and create a publicly accessible site for people to enjoy. It is proposed that the site could be used to offset existing developments that Warwickshire are seeking to identify BNG sites for, alongside future developments such as Greenpower Park where significant offset of units is required.

- 1.25 Other benefits of joining NCIS mean that we can pool resources and expertise with the other respective authorities, get support with developing BNG markets in Coventry and can work to help regulate BNG market rates across the sub-region and maximise the benefits of improving natural sites locally. We will also work together to explore opportunities to establish other nature markets based on carbon, nutrients, water quality and flood risk within time. There is robust governance in place to manage the partnership, and flexibility for Coventry to decide which sites it seeks to put forward into NCIS. This is important so Coventry can maintain control of how it manages BNG and can ensure that Coventry developments are offset within the city boundary to improve biodiversity across the city.
- 1.26 Separately, West Midlands Combined Authority is exploring the potential of establishing a regional habitat bank to support delivery of the biodiversity enhancements across the region. WMCA have highlighted that there are currently very few opportunities to buy credits in the West Midlands and therefore credits are being purchased for schemes elsewhere in the country. In order to retain the benefits of BNG within the West Midlands, a regional habitat bank special purpose vehicle is being developed, and Local Authorities will be consulted on this over the next few months. It is in Coventry's interest to join this, to ensure we maximise opportunities to market credits for Coventry sites in the wider region as appropriate. The agreement with NCIS won't provide exclusivity and will enable Coventry to also sign up to the WMCA's habitat bank, subject to due diligence.
- 1.27 Several options have been modelled for the commercial case, which include the full site (304 units) and part of the site excluding the northern part of the site which could be used by Outdoor Education, reducing the volume of units to 214. Both scenarios are viable, but it is recommended that the development is phased incrementally to manage cashflow and investment in the site, with a focus on delivery of BNG units initially to create the assets we can sell, alongside demolition of the club house which is currently costing the Council in excess of £70k annually to maintain and is in a poor state of repair.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

Option 1: Do nothing (Not recommended)

One option is to continue doing nothing with the site. This means the Council will still need to pay annual maintenance costs which are in the region of £50-100k, but the public won't benefit as the site will remain closed. There are still benefits to nature by doing nothing as the site has started to effectively rewild itself, however this option would rule out creating habitats to support BNG credits so would result in a significant loss of potential income to manage the site and means we wouldn't maximise the benefits for wildlife and people. The site currently experiences anti-social behaviour and fly tipping, therefore Council is required to undertake regular patrols and clean-up operations – this would be required to continue.

Option 2: Deliver a nature reserve/habitat bank on part of the site (interim option) (Not recommended)

The starting point for the project where a viable business case already exists means we could proceed with establishing the BNG for the southern part of the site, delivering 214 units. This option would benefit biodiversity and raise income through BNG in order for the site to be managed for nature. As set out in Option A in the financial table in Section 5, this option could generate a surplus income of around £1.8m for the site if the 214 units were sold, that would be reinvested in biodiversity and infrastructure at the site.

As part of the site enabling works, we would seek to demolish the former golf club house and surrounding buildings. The building is subject to regular anti-social behaviour and criminal damage, which is costly and also attracts business rates, equating to annual costs to the Council of around £70k. The buildings are in a very poor state of disrepair, and it is not sustainable to maintain them. This would cost the authority approximately £0.4m It is recommended to proceed with demolition of the club house as soon as possible to reduce financial burden to the Council

This is a viable standalone option, however, this would be a real lost opportunity to create a visitor destination, as well as losing out on the opportunity to make the site more accessible and connected with the wider 293ha landscape which should be a significant asset for local people to enjoy alongside creating an attractive visitor destination. It is therefore proposed that this option is treated as an interim option whilst a decision is taken with regards to the development of the northern part of the site and visitor infrastructure, which is addressed in Options 3 and 4.

Option 3: Deliver a nature reserve and create a visitor destination (Not recommended)

This option assumes that the whole site would be developed as a nature reserve, generating income through the creation of 304 units as shown in Option B in the financial table in Section 5. This option would also deliver infrastructure to create a visitor destination and assumes that no outdoor education facility is delivered on the site. The additional costs for infrastructure to create a visitor destination and operating costs for 30 years are approximately £3.1m, which includes upgrading the car park, accessible footpaths, street furniture, toilet facilities and site management. The total cost to deliver this combined option is £8.1m, which would leave a pressure of around £0.5m. It is expected that the pressure could be managed through a number of options to avoid additional investment by the Council, which includes increasing the unit rate of BNG, phasing the infrastructure delivery incrementally based on income generated and demand, and generating income from other activities such as car park operations and seeking grants or potentially private sector sponsorship to cover some of the interventions.

This option would enable the site to be built out incrementally and be financially sustainable, with investment only taking place once BNG credits are sold to developers to avoid the Council having to invest to cover costs up front. Therefore, if the Council received income in year one by selling units upfront, this will cover demolition of the club house and development of the nature reserve with respect to initial habitat creation costs and management costs. Visitor infrastructure would need to be prioritised and link to funding available through BNG, with delivery of key

infrastructure such as car park and footpath upgrades phased earlier and then build out to include toilets and site ranger as funding becomes available. A monitoring group will be established to manage this process, with regular gateway reviews to inform investment decisions to be made in accordance with delegated authority.

This option delivers the objectives, however, is unlikely to provide any surplus income that could be reinvested in biodiversity. It also wouldn't provide facilities on site to deliver outdoor education which offers a unique opportunity to connect young people and residents with the site, which could also be used to support events, training, conferences etc and provide an enhanced visitor experience through facilities such as a café.

Option 4: Deliver a nature reserve and create a visitor destination, with outdoor education hub (Recommended option)

This option will deliver a nature reserve and enhanced visitor experience through making provision for an outdoor education hub on the site, offering users a unique opportunity for young people and residents to connect with nature through outdoor learning and well-being sessions. This would reduce the amount of BNG delivered on the site by 90 units which does reduce the amount of income BNG will generate on the site, but provides an opportunity to share some of the infrastructure costs referenced in Option 3 and removes the need for separate toilets to be delivered and associated staffing, which reduces the amount of BNG income that would need to be invested in the site, leaving a surplus which could be reinvested in biodiversity and associated activities.

This option would be delivered in 2 stages. This first stage would be to approve the creation of 214 units to the bottom two thirds of the site which would start on site in the second half of 2026, subject to planning. The former club house would be demolished in the north of the site, and the Council would work closely with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust on the development of the business case for the outdoor education facility over the next 12 months. At that stage a political decision will be required whether to proceed with the outdoor education facility, if that didn't go ahead the project would revert to option 4.

As with Option 3, this option would see the site built out incrementally and be financially sustainable, with investment only taking place once BNG credits are sold to developers to avoid the Council having to invest to cover costs up front.

Therefore, if the Council received income in year one by selling units up front, this will fund initial habitat creation to enable development of 214 units on the site. No work would take place on the northern third of the site until a decision is taken around on the outdoor education facility, save for demolition of the club house to reduce ongoing liabilities to the Council as this will be required whether Option 3 or 4 is pursued.

This option will allow more flexibility to accommodate an Outdoor Education facility if a decision is taken to proceed on the site, which would be subject to a further Cabinet decision. Decisions would need to be taken to review how costs are apportioned between the hub and nature reserve as part of the business case development. A monitoring group will be established to manage this process, with regular gateway reviews to inform investment decisions to be made in accordance with delegated authority.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 The proposals respond to consultation undertaken as part of the city's Climate Change Strategy, where a significant amount of feedback from respondents felt nature was an important issue the city need to take more action on, citing a range of reasons related to wildlife and well-being. The Nature Pathway within the Climate Change Strategy directly responds to the challenges we face as a city and sets out clear recommendations for action required to support nature recovery, which includes landscape scale nature restoration projects such as this one.
- 3.2 Consultation has been undertaken with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Trustees as part of the scheme development, who are very much supportive of the nature reserve proposals. The Wildlife Trust is involved in early discussions regarding the Outdoor Education options and principles have been agreed which outline how the organisations will work together to explore this opportunity, ensuring that it complements and adds value to the outdoor education offer the Trust currently deliver at Brandon Marsh.
- 3.3 The project has been developed in consultation with Warwickshire County Council with regard to habitat creation and opportunities to offset units through the Natural Capital Investment Strategy partnership.

4. Timetable for implementing decisions

- 4.1 Work would begin immediately on preparing a planning application for a decision in the first half of 2026, with an expectation that work would commence by the second half of 2026 and take 18 months to complete. During this period, there will be opportunities for local people to have guided tours of the site in development and volunteers to take part in some of the habitat creation works. It is anticipated that all works would be complete and the site fully open to the public by the end of 2027, this will be subject to phasing of the project aligned to the investment plan.

5. Comments from the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial Implications

The business case for this project is proposed to be financially sustainable, with BNG income anticipated to offset costs over 30 years and no investment required. Several scenarios have been modelled to test the variables in terms of visitor infrastructure alongside the impact of introducing the outdoor education hub on the site.

The financial model assumes that the project will receive at least £1.5m investment in year one through selling BNG units up front. This is based on 60 units being purchased for 30 years and cover the costs for habitat creation of 214 units and maintenance of the site for a period until further units are sold.

There are two models presented below, these being:

Option A: this model demonstrates the starting position for the project and aims to create BNG on the lower part of the site only, whilst options for the top part of the site are considered – this aligns with Option 2 above.

This option does not create any visitor experience as this is deemed unnecessary until a decision on how the top part of the site will be utilised (either the Outdoor Education Hub or further BNG units).

This model assumes that the club house will be demolished during prestart activities to ensure that ongoing costs are not incurred for managing repairs, antisocial behaviour etc.

The model demonstrates that this option is financially viable as a standalone project, however the option does not maximise the use of the site for BNG, Outdoor Education or the wider visitor experience.

Option B: this model builds on Option A and considers creating BNG on the remaining part of the site. This option would be further developed if a viable business case for the Outdoor Education Hub is not able to be created. This aligns with Option 3 above.

This option involves the creation of an additional 90 BNG units on the top part of the site, which would bring the total BNG units for sale to 304.

Under this option, the site would be adapted to include a full visitor experience, with a car park, basic visitor facilities and upgraded accessible pathways and viewing platform, as funding to support the project became available through the sale of BNG units. The current model shows a financial pressure of £0.5m. These are currently estimated costs, and the establishment of the project team will work to reduce costs or bring in additional resources to ensure the project remains self sufficient

A model which includes the Outdoor Education Hub (Option 4 above) has not been included, as the infrastructure cost sharing basis for this model has not yet been developed. This business case will be worked on over the coming 12 months and brought forward for consideration as appropriate.

Option	A	B
No. BNG Units Created	214	304
	BNG Site (no visitor Experience) Demolition of the Club House	Full Visitor Experience (No Outdoor Education Facility - site fully BNG) Clubhouse Demolished
BNG Unit creation and maintenance	2,771,436	4,025,201
Golf Club House Demolition	487,902	487,902
Visitor Experience Costs (including infrastructure and staffing)	30,000	2,799,672
Support Costs	74,241	74,241
Business Rates		320,810
Contingency	168,179	385,391
Total Costs	3,531,758	8,093,217
Up front modelled income	(1,500,000)	(1,500,000)
Balance remaining to fund BNG for 30 years	2,031,758	6,593,217
Income from remaining units at £25,000 per unit	(3,850,000)	(6,100,000)
(Surplus)/Deficit	(1,818,242)	493,217

The preferred option would be to deliver the nature reserve and visitor experience, with reduced infrastructure costs as a result of the Outdoor Education Hub occupying the top part of the site. This is the option that the project will work towards modelling, through a phased development approach, and providing a suitable business case can be created, will come forward for consideration within the next 12 months.

The project will seek to further improve any financial the position through:

- a) **BNG units costs** currently the rate of £25k applied is considered cautious, particularly as the site will be creating some high value wetland units which can sell for upwards of £50k each (as demonstrated in the latest [BNG Pricing Report \(October 2025\)](#))

It is proposed that further sensitivity testing is undertaken to refine the BNG rates applied to the site, which could help to offset the existing pressure shown in option B.

When considering the creation of BNG on the lower part of the site only (214 units in total), if the selling price is increased, additional income from the remaining 154 units (214 units created less the 60 which could be purchased up front) could be as follows:

Additional units sold at £/unit	Additional income achievable
30,000	(770,000)
35,000	(1,540,000)
40,000	(2,310,000)

- b) **Other income generation opportunities** this could include the potential to charge for the car park, which will need to be an operational as well as financial decision as part of the phased development approach, as this will need to be balanced with encouraging visitors to the site.
- c) **Business rates** the current profile for business rates assumes an annual cost of nearly £21k until the clubhouse is demolished, with this dropping to a car park only rateable value in the future. There is an opportunity to reduce this and get up to 80% rate relief if WWT operated the car park and toilet, which the project will explore.

Financial Risk

If option A is implemented, which would have an expected 30-year expenditure profile of £3.5m for the delivery and management of 214 BNG units, demolition of the existing club house and relevant other costs, then we would have a liability to maintain the 60 units involved in this initial transaction for the 30 years.

If a scenario arose where the Council were unable to find an active market for the remaining 154 units, at the point at which the decision was made to no longer keep these BNG units available for sale, there would be no ongoing liability to maintain these units.

Whilst there is not a direct correlation between the management of 60 units vs 214, it is anticipated that due to renegotiation of the BNG management programme, a reduction of around a third of the current anticipated costs for habitat management and maintenance could be achieved. If this decision was made in year 10 for example, the total anticipated reduction in liability for the remaining term for the units sold up front is £580k. After achieving the initial income modelled this would leave a gap of £1.4m for which the Council would be liable for costs as funder of last resort.

However, if this scenario was to occur, there are some mitigations which could be investigated, such as, if there is a relevant clause in the Conservation Covenant which allowed the Council to detach or remove part of the site from the BNG scheme (keeping the scheme in place for where BNG has been sold and needs to be delivered for the 30 years) funding from agricultural grants from the government could be considered.

Therefore, to reduce the risk the management cost burden could be relieved (but not to the scale of BNG) by allowing the delivery partner to enter into countryside stewardship funding and this could be taken off the annual management fee. A point to note is that you cannot access these schemes on land delivering BNG so this couldn't happen as well as BNG.

A worked example is that if annual management of the site could be offset by funding for 30 hectares that has been retired to enter stewardship funding, this could reduce the annual management fee burden by £18k potentially, which could reduce the total exposure by up to £360k.

Given the demand for BNG units already exists and is growing, this is considered to be a limited risk to the Council and will be mitigated through robust governance and further developing the investment strategy and phasing to limit exposure as far as possible.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are several legal implications to be considered in regard to this project.

Biodiversity Net Gain

BNG is a mandatory requirement on all new developments under the Environment Act 2024. BNG requires demonstration of a net gain in biodiversity, maintaining these levels for 30 years after creation via a conservation covenant deed. Units will need to be registered on the national BNG register, and a Conservation Covenant put in place with a Responsible Body, which in this case will be Warwickshire County Council, to monitor the habitat management and monitoring plan, to ensure that BNG duties are fulfilled. Management of BNG falls within Ecology Team, as part of the Planning Service, with support from legal and finance services. The Council would have liabilities to WCC as the responsible body. A bond or other security may be required to guarantee the obligations in the conservation covenant deed. A conservation covenant is binding on any successors in title. The Conservation Covenant Deed will be a legal agreement which needs to be entered into to deliver the Project.

Natural Capital Investment Strategy Partnership

This report seeks approval to enter into a sub-regional Natural Capital Investment Strategy Partnership with Warwickshire and Solihull. This will require Coventry to enter into a contract with the authorities to join the partnership, and officers to actively participate in the partnership through attending meetings which include strategic, technical, finance and legal aspects of the governance. The partnership will provide the opportunity for Coventry to secure funding for the creation of BNG units at Brandon Wood Nature Reserve, up to a value of £2m funds that Warwickshire have already secured for biodiversity offset from developments that have already taken place. This will be subject to legal due diligence.

Legal arrangements with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

The Council will need to enter into a formal agreement with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group to deliver habitat creation and maintenance in line with the habitat monitoring and management plan for up to 30 years as Tenant obligations under a property transaction. A Heads of Terms will be created to support the development of the legal arrangements between the organisations, with external legal support involvement as required. Any such agreement with WWT Group thereof that

constitutes a property disposal will need to be undertaken in accordance with Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Site restrictions

The only access to the site is via Brandon Lane and over a Network Rail bridge. An agreement is in place between British Railways Board and the Council that allows the Council and those authorised by it access over the bridge for the purpose of gaining access to and egress from the Council's golf course and clubhouse. The agreement is for 60 years from 1.1.1977 so it will expire in 2037, for payment of a small annual fee, however the terms of the agreement state that if the Council shall at any time sell or otherwise dispose of their said Municipal Golf Course (other than to another Local Authority) or if planning permission is granted to change the user of the Golf Course then any rights over the bridge etc will automatically cease on any of the above scenarios. Therefore, an agreement will be sought with Network Rail at the earliest opportunity to ensure access to the site can be maintained for the change in use. This is considered low risk, however if a situation arose that Network Rail didn't grant access an alternative access would need to be created using adjacent land owned by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, subject to their agreement and support from Trustees.

There is a covenant in place on the site to allow maintenance access to a telecoms mast which is managed by the Council's operational property team. The project will ensure to continue to provide access as per the covenant agreement.

Procurement Implications

There will be separate procurement exercises undertaken for delivery of enabling and infrastructure works which will be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and compliance with Procurement Act 2023. This will include a contract to demolish the club house.

Subsidy Control

This Biodiversity Net Gain project with the Wildlife Trust is a not-for-profit environmental restoration initiative. All income from BNG units is ring-fenced and reinvested into habitat creation, monitoring and long-term management. No profit is made and no commercial return is sought. As the activity is fully cost-recovery and delivers a public-good environmental function, it is classified as non-economic under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and therefore sits outside the definition of a subsidy.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/?

This will contribute to the One Coventry Plan through delivering interventions at the golf course that will support nature restoration and help to tackle the causes and consequences of Climate Change. This project will directly deliver one of the priority actions within the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, supporting landscape-

scale nature recovery and contribute towards Coventry's '30by30' target and delivering against the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It also provides a potential income stream to support delivery of nature-restoration projects within the city boundary, helping to deliver benefits to the city's more green-deprived neighbourhoods to support the Council's drive to deliver more equal access to green space across Coventry.

The project will also contribute towards the One Coventry priority of financial sustainability, through the proposed funding model which requires no Council investment in the project and provides the capital and revenue funding to support the site for 30 years.

In addition, the project would contribute to the Rugby Local Plan (June 2019), with the site forming part of the Princethorpe Biodiversity Opportunity Area (Policy NE2).

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There are some key risks associated with this project around which include uncertainty of timing of BNG income being generated, variables regarding plans for the northern part of the site, planning requirements, development of license and lease arrangements with the Wildlife Trust, potential issues around access and ensuring that the plans support the area becoming an accessible visitor destination.

However, all of the identified risks can be managed and mitigated with robust governance in place to steer the project, support timely decision making and make the project a success.

A Council Steering Group is already in place which has overseen business case development, this will be expanded to include legal and property teams, alongside Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. There is a clear work programme in place over the next 6 month which will deliver key activities to help de-risk the project as far as possible. This will include:

- Development of Heads of Terms with WWT, leading to development of license agreement with external legal advice to support on structure and terms.
- Planning submitted for demolition of the club house and for habitat creation on site
- Contract awarded for demolition of the club house and works underway
- Further sensitivity testing on commercial model and BNG market to inform investment strategy and phasing via a gateway process, to support delegated authority decision making
- Enter into a legal agreement with Warwickshire County Council to formally join the Natural Capital Investment Strategy Partnership to unlock initial investment and actively participate in NCIS governance
- Apply for Conservation Covenant through Warwickshire County Council and registration of the site for BNG to enable us to start selling units by month 6
- Commence negotiation with Network Rail regarding access to the site over the rail bridge.
- Working with Coventry Outdoors and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust on the development of the outdoor education facility.

No work will commence on site until all of the above activities are complete.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

HR Implications

It is proposed to manage delivery of the project within existing resources, with some funding allocated within the initial 2 years to support project delivery within the Climate Change service, Ecology, Finance, Property and Legal teams.

If the outdoor education facility doesn't go ahead in the future there may be a requirement to also recruit a site ranger to take responsibility for management of the site for visitors, including car park, toilets etc. This has been accounted for in the commercial model.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

The nature reserve will be developed to be an inclusive and accessible site for visitors. There will be dedicated accessible parking bays, accessible paths, alongside opportunity to hire all-terrain wheelchairs to enable visitors to visit a wider range of the site. There will also be accessible toilet facilities, including a changing places toilet, on the site. There will be benches alongside key routes to provide resting spaces for visitors to enjoy the views. There is also an ambition to create an accessible viewing platform over the southern end of the site where visitors can enjoy wetland views. It is acknowledged that not all of this infrastructure is likely to be delivered in the initial project stages, but the introduction of accessible infrastructure will be prioritised as part of the incremental development of the site, with car park and footpath upgrades and benches being key to helping create a site that is accessible for all.

In addition to improving infrastructure for accessibility on site, the project has considered how access can be improved to the area, which is currently only really accessible by car. Some options have been explored that the project would seek to take forward, including safety improvements and a crossing point on Brandon Lane, opportunities for public transport connectivity to the area which we will seek to influence and upgrading walking and cycle infrastructure to enable access from the Binley Cycle route through to the site and connecting to the wider area, including an aspiration to connect up to Coombe Abbey to the north. There is also the opportunity to restore a pedestrian footbridge over the River These measures have not been included in the commercial case for the project, but funding opportunities will be pursued to bring these forwards.

The Council will seek to create an inclusive nature reserve and take the learnings from the Nature Towns and Cities Green for All initiative to consider how we can encourage residents from all backgrounds to visit Brandon Wood Nature Reserve and enjoy the benefits of connecting with nature at scale. This means creating accessible and inclusive visitor facilities, alongside developing opportunities for volunteering, training and education on the site.

An EIA will be completed for the project and will be regularly reviewed and updated.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

This project will help to deliver objectives of the Council's Climate Change Strategy, through supporting nature recovery and reducing emissions.

This ambitious project has the potential to create significant benefits to biodiversity at the former golf course site, creating a substantial uplift in the quality of habitats to support nature to thrive. The site is currently woodland and grassland, a mix of habitats will be introduced ranging from wetlands, scrub and higher quality woodland and grassland to support a wide variety of species on the site and create corridors to connect to the wider landscape that is already managed for nature conservation. This is a significant step for Coventry to progress towards '30by30' and aligns with the objectives of the West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The opportunity to reinvest surplus income from the Site in biodiversity will help further boost wildlife and support enabling infrastructure to improve access and facilities at the site to provide more opportunity to connect people with nature.

Nature provides a natural carbon sink. The proposed enhancements at the golf course deliver will help to sequester up to 550 tonnes of carbon annually, which will help in the city's drive to reduce carbon emissions in line with UK government requirements.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

This project relies on partner organisation, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust delivering the nature reserve and managing it for 30 years. WWT already lease part of adjacent Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve which is owned by the Council and have been managing it successfully for over three decades. The Trust has been working closely with the Council to develop the project over the last 2 years, and key principles have been agreed in terms of the project structure, governance, habitat creation and management. The Wildlife Trust has consulted with their Board of Trustees who are supportive of the project and will continue to be engaged as heads of terms and legal agreements are developed.

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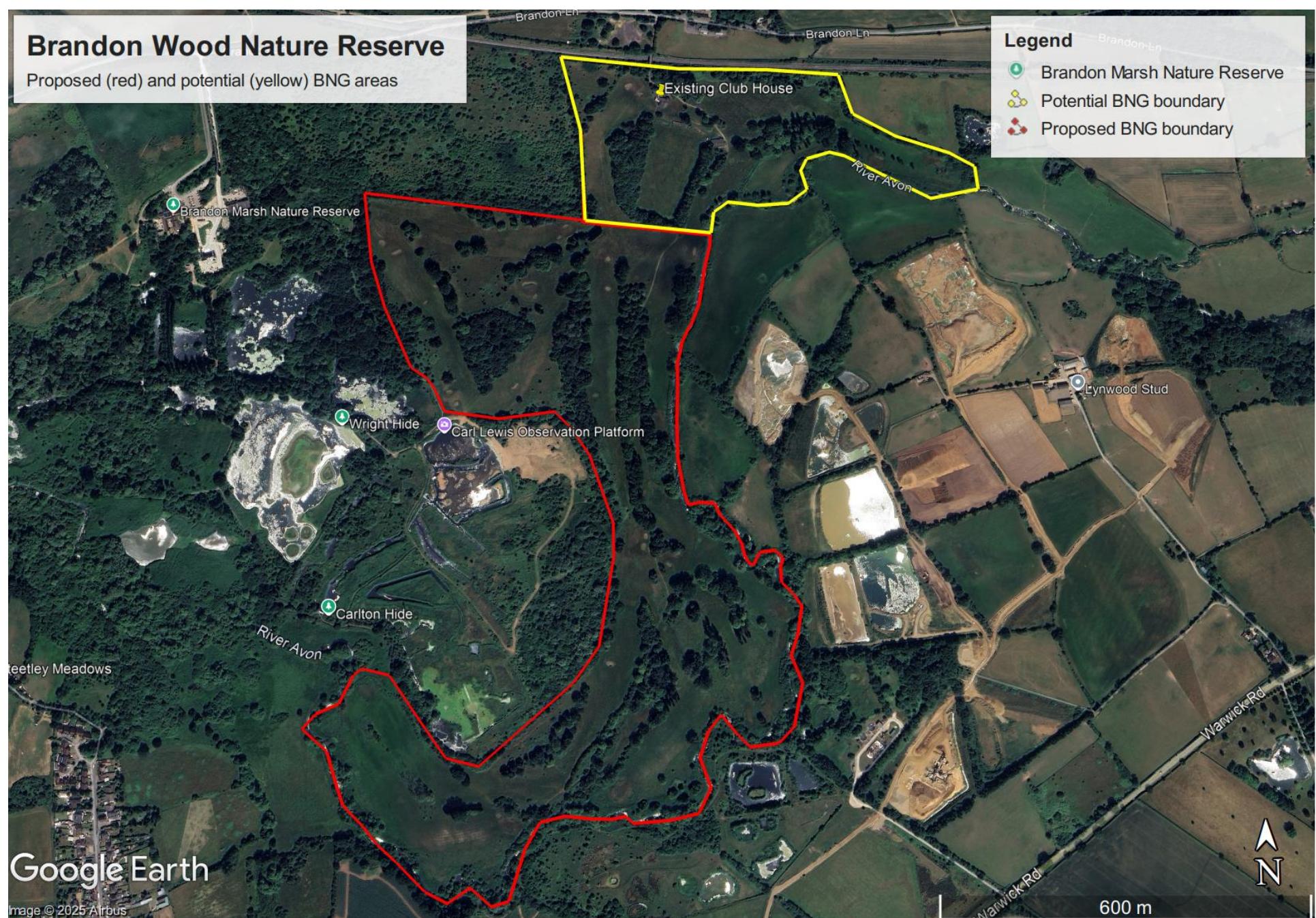
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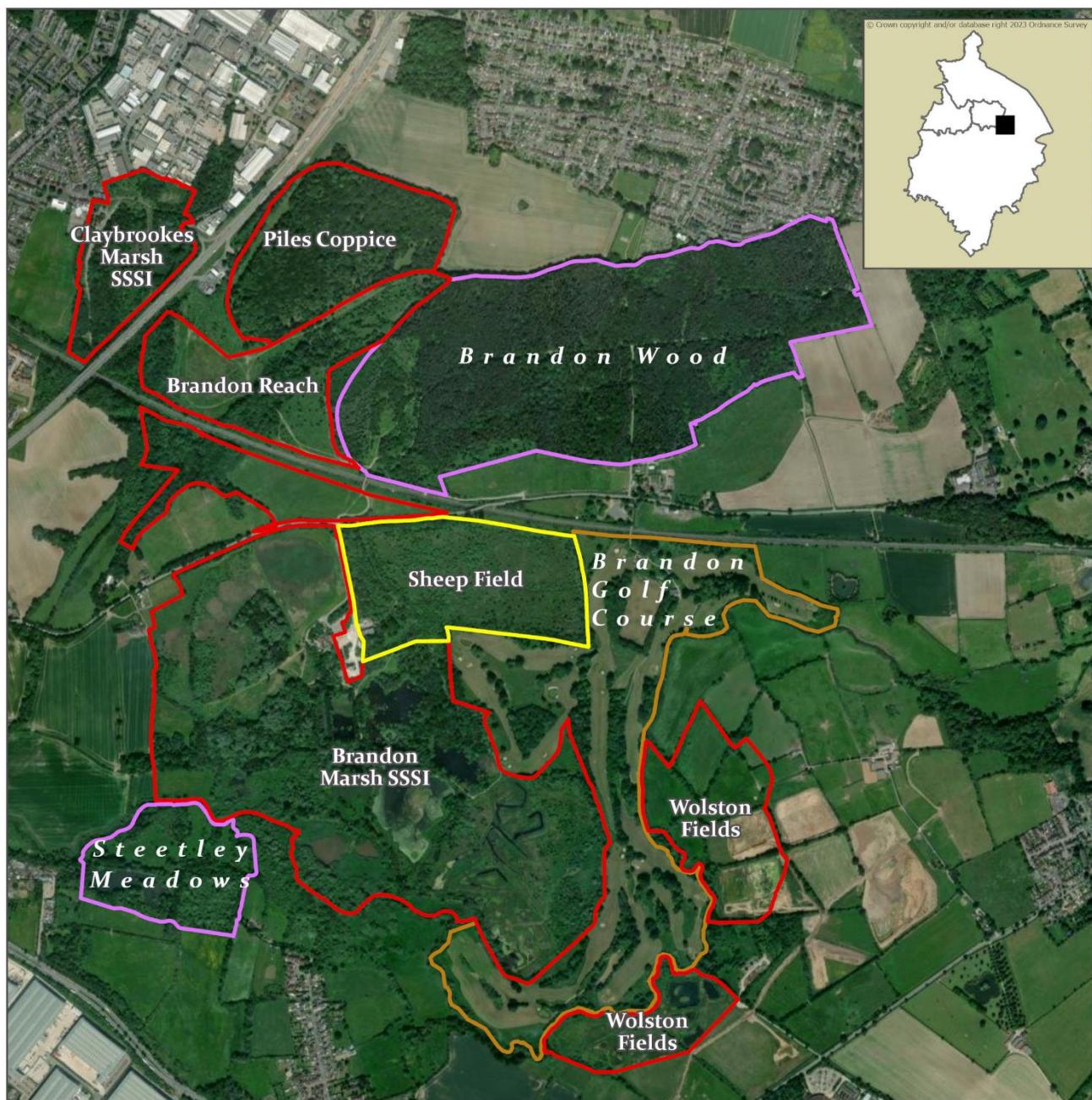
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This report is published on the council's website: www.coventry.gov.uk/council-meeting

Appendix 1 – Site Plan

The plan is of the whole site that occupies Brandon Wood Golf Course. The area outlined in yellow indicates the part of the site that is referred to in the report (including Option 4) where a potential outdoor education facility could be located - if it doesn't proceed will revert to ~ 90 BNG units. The area outlined in red is the land proposed for 214 BNG units.





Warwickshire
Wildlife Trust

Brandon Wood Golf Course in wider landscape managed for nature conservation

 Land Managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
 Brandon Golf Course
 Other Land Managed for Nature
- Brandon Wood: Friends of Brandon Wood
- Steetley Meadows: Ryton Conservation Trust

Metres
0 250 500 1,000

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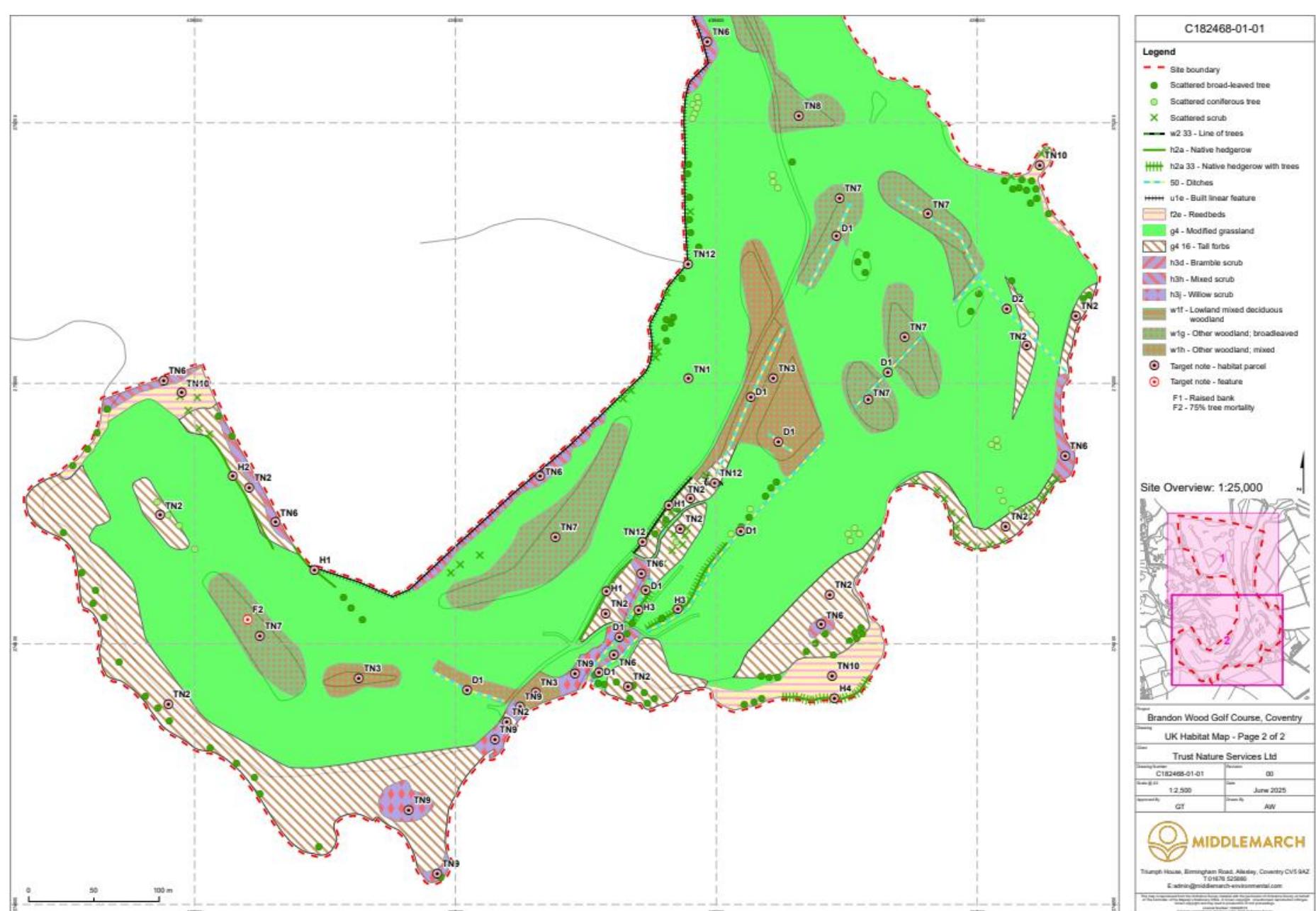
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Appendix 3

Proposed interventions to be delivered at Brandon Wood Nature Reserve produced by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group





Visual of proposed wetlands, provided by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Group