

Agenda Item 8

Council – 13 January 2026

**Recommendation from Cabinet
6th January 2026**

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held at 2.00 pm on
Tuesday, 6 January 2026

Present:

Members:

Councillor A S Khan (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar

Councillor L Bigham

Councillor R Brown

Councillor K Caan

Councillor P Hetherton

Councillor J O'Boyle

Councillor K Sandhu

Councillor P Seaman

Non-Voting Deputy Cabinet

Members:

Councillor S Agboola

Councillor P Akhtar

Councillor D Toulson

Non-Voting Opposition

Members:

Councillor J Gardiner

Councillor E Reeves

Councillor P Male

Councillor G Ridley

Other Non-Voting Members:

Councillor R Lakha

Councillor G Lloyd

Employees (by Directorate):

Children and Education
Services

S Kinsell

Finance and Resources

B Hastie (Director for Finance and Resources), T Pinks

Law and Governance

J Newman (Director for Law and Governance), M Salmon

People and Facilities
Management

S Chilton (Director of People and Facilities Management),
A Yarnall

Policy and Communications	N Hart
Regeneration and Economy	R Palmer
Apologies:	Councillor B Christopher Councillor G Duggins Councillor G Hayre Councillor L Kelly Councillor J McNicholas

RECOMMENDATION

Public Business

42. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

54. Brandon Wood Nature Reserve

Cabinet considered a report of the Director of the Director of Regeneration and Economy, that would also be considered at the meeting of Council on 13th January 2026, which sought approval for the in-principal change of use of Brandon Wood Golf Course to a nature reserve and a registered Biodiversity Net Gain habitat bank. Appendices to the report provided: a Site Plan; a Landscape wide plan; and Proposed Interventions.

Coventry City Council had 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 was 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 presented a significant opportunity to do this at scale. The former golf course is 64ha, which meant it would be able to support a huge variety of habitats through the creation of wetlands, grassland and shrub. A much bigger opportunity was also unlocked as it would join up a number of parcels of land already being managed for nature covering 356ha in total (see plans in Appendix 1-3 to the report). 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 would 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 had been assessed to identify the most appropriate future use of the site. The golf course was managed by Coventry Sports Trust, but the site was prone to regular flooding which limited the accessibility of part of the site. It had now been deemed financially unviable to continue as a golf course. In 2024 Defra introduced a new mechanism whereby new developments were required to offset any biodiversity loss through the purchase of 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG) units, which provided a significant new income stream for creating and maintaining areas for nature conservation for 30 years. The business case for the new nature reserve was

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

The BNG units were 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 was due to Council policy which required 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 would 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 would provide an experience where people could immerse themselves in nature in a wilder landscape. Any surplus income generated through the sale of BNG units at the nature reserve would be allocated to activities that supported biodiversity gain.

Biodiversity Net Gain was still a relatively new market and there was a lot of regional and national variation in unit values, demand and selling of units. Whilst the Local Authority could be confident there was a pipeline of development in the sub-region and wider region that equated to demand for units, there was less certainty in terms of timing of units being required. However, if this land was not provided by public bodies such as local authorities, it was likely private landowners would directly benefit from selling units which we were already seeing in the sub-region. To help mitigate this risk, a new Natural Capital Investment Strategy (NCIS) had been developed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), which created a new partnership between the County, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and Coventry City Council to enable planning and managing the 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 was therefore sought as part of this report. The Local Authority was also working with WMCA to explore similar opportunities, to ensure maximising opportunities to grow nature markets and could directly influence and benefit from where investment was delivered. Given the relatively immature state of BNG market at present, it was proposed that delegated authority was 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 to maximise visitor experience to the site and encourage local people to connect with nature. It was proposed to

undertake improvements to site infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience which would include upgraded and accessible footpaths, a new car park, benches and wayfinding. The former club house would be demolished, which would help save the Council costs related to security and business rates. There was 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 was currently at concept stage but could be a fantastic opportunity that would complement the Council's other outdoor education facilities in the city and Plas Dol Y Moch and provide a significant natural site on the doorstep of the city for learning and skills. It was proposed that this option was developed in conjunction with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and was 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 was therefore recommended that this option continued to be developed and, subject to a future governance decision within the next 12 months, with a backstop position that if this didn't come forward then this part of the site would be part of the wider nature reserve. The financial modelling that supported this decision set out the potential income that related to this part of the site and demonstrated that the business case for the nature reserve still remained viable if this section wasn't included in the sale of BNG units.

It was suggested that an All-Members Seminar on nature reserves would be useful.

RESOLVED that Cabinet recommends that Council:

- 1) Approves 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) Delegates 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), 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) Approves that all Biodiversity Net Gain income from the Site is ringfenced and reinvested in biodiversity and enabling activities.