



National Trust

8 Hills Regional Park Spatial Framework

Report on findings from phases 1-3

Final report
Prepared by LUC
June 2023

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Land Use Consultants Ltd
Registered in England
Registered number 2549296
Registered office:
250 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8RD

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 LUC was commissioned by the National Trust to create a spatial framework for the proposed 8 Hills Regional Park. The 8 Hills Regional Park aims to protect and enhance the landscape on Birmingham's southern fringe, increasing peoples access to it and boosting its biodiversity and ecological connectivity. The commission is split into two phases, the first phase has included:

- Baseline data collection and review to identify priority areas, sites and links for nature and recreation.
- Stakeholder consultation to collect local knowledge and priorities for the development of the regional park from existing users of the area and from groups located in close proximity who may benefit from the development.
- Production of a long list of potential opportunities which would address the constraints and take advantage of the opportunities established through the baseline review and consultation.
- Development of a concise and clear vision and set of objectives for the regional park.
- Stakeholder workshop to test draft opportunities, vision and objectives.
- Preparation of final report on the outcomes of the first phase and set out recommendations for the next phase of work.

1.2 The first phase of work was undertaken between January and April 2023. The second phase of work will involve the preparation of the final spatial framework and accompanying delivery plan.

1.3 This report presents the outcomes of the first phase of work and is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: background and context
- Chapter 3: summary of baseline data

- Chapter 4: summary of consultation results
- Chapter 5: overview of the 12 potential opportunities identified (including mapping of opportunities)
- Chapter 6: final agreed vision and objectives for the regional park
- Chapter 7: recommendations for stage 2 and the development of the final spatial framework and delivery plan

1.4 A separate baseline report, as well as short reports summarising the outcomes from both the consultation and stakeholder workshop, have been provided to the National Trust separately and can be referred to for more detail in conjunction with this report.

Chapter 2

Background

Regional Park Context

2.1 The concept of regional open spaces was pioneered by Abercrombie's Greater London Plan of 1944 and the current London Plan (2021) offers a public open space categorisation which defines London's regional parks as: "large areas, corridors or networks of open space, the majority of which will be publicly accessible and provide a range of facilities and features offering recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural or green infrastructure benefits".

2.2 However, there is no defined template or set of criteria for a regional park. Regional parks are spatial entities based on a set of aims and objectives, which will vary from park to park. Regional parks are not statutory designations and therefore they do not have the same level of prominence or protection as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.3 The reasons and mechanisms for establishing Regional Parks are diverse, with an equally diverse range of objectives and visions. Common elements of Regional Park visions include:

- Working with partners to promote connectivity and co-operation at a landscape-scale
- Capitalising on a distinctive landscape character or sense of place
- Consistency in approach across an area
- Enhancing the visitor economy
- Improving branding and identity/ promoting an ambitious cross-boundary vision
- Improving quality of life and sense of place for residents and visitors
- Regeneration and economic development

Work to Date

2.4 Previous to this commission The National Trust has undertaken several pieces of scoping work, the development of an initial evidence base, a rationale for the inclusion of the regional park in Bromsgrove District Council's Local Plan and a draft planning policy. Alongside the preparation of the Spatial Framework LUC is preparing, The National Trust has also been working with 3Keel to identify funding models for the delivery of opportunities identified.

Regional Park Scoping Report

2.5 In 2021, the National Trust commissioned LUC to provide an overview to the concept of regional parks, explore relevant case studies and make recommendations for further research to support their strategy.

2.6 The research found a growing policy engagement with the regional park concept. The London Plan's public open space categorisation provides guidance for the application of the concept in London, by outlining a definition and providing size guidance use to inform the plan making process. Whilst the NPPF does not explicitly highlight the concept, it encourages Local Authorities to plan for the enhancement of natural capital across local authority boundaries. Regional parks could provide a mechanism for doing this.

2.7 The research found that, outside London, there is no standardised framework or guidance for the successful application of the regional park concept in the plan making process although there are growing examples of Regional Parks outside London, such as the Clyst Valley Regional Park¹.

National Trust's Evidence Base

2.8 In 2021, the National Trust prepared an extensive evidence base for the 8 Hills Regional Park concept. This report formed part of their representation to Bromsgrove Council to include the regional park in their preferred option for the Local Plan.

2.9 The evidence base outlines the background to the regional park concept, an overview of the key strengths, a draft vision, the various weakness, opportunities, and threats of the

concept, followed by the various future opportunities and challenges. This evidence base should be read in conjunction with the baseline research report that LUC developed.

Local Plan Rationale

2.10 In 2022, the National Trust commissioned LUC to prepare a rationale for the inclusion of the 8 Hills Regional Park in the Bromsgrove Local Plan. This report drew on the research into the concept of regional parks in England and the evidence base document compiled by the National Trust on behalf of a range of partners.

2.11 The rationale found that the regional park would provide a strategic response to the following issues:

- Improving land management
- Improving habitat connectivity
- Offer opportunities for carbon sequestration
- Providing recreational opportunities close to where people live
- Contribution to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).
- Green Belt enhancement
- Strategic land management through a partnership approach.

2.12 The rationale also included a draft planning policy for inclusion in the Bromsgrove Local Plan.

Purpose of the Spatial Framework

2.13 Subsequent to this initial work the National Trust developed an overall aim for the project to: 'protect and enhance the landscape, its biodiversity and connectivity and increase people's access to it for health and wellbeing.' In relation to development, they stated the 'The regional park concept is not about preventing development but about establishing a robust landscape

¹ [Home | Clyst Valley Regional Park \(clystvalleypark.org.uk\)](http://clystvalleypark.org.uk)

framework that delivers nature, recreation, activity travel and sustainable farming, whilst accommodating potential housing growth'.

2.14 They aimed to achieve this in two ways, by encouraging Bromsgrove District Council to support the 8 Hills Regional Park in their local plan and by creating markets to incentivise landowners to make changes to some of their land management practices including improving ecosystem services and providing more public benefits such as free public access in return for new types of funding.

2.15 The spatial framework seeks to identify spatially specific opportunities and priority areas, sites and links for nature and recreation for the development of the regional park, meeting the initial aim. The spatial framework also aims to identify key strategic links between the regional park and settlement edges, inform options to enhance visitor experience across the park area, outlines potential economic opportunities and ensure the deliverability of all options proposed. The work also aims to define the final boundary for the park using value judgements of key landscape features and ecological networks.

Funding Models

2.16 Alongside work to establish what an 8 Hills Regional Park might look like; the National Trust have explored new finance models to fund the delivery of some of the elements identified. Specifically, they have been investigating the creation of local markets where landowners can be incentivised to make changes to land management, improving ecosystem services and public access in return for new types of funding. 3Keel have been working on The National Trust's behalf to identify local landowner and buyer interest in creating a local market for land management enhancement. LUC and 3keel met regularly during the development of the spatial framework to date to ensure that their work is streamlined, particularly regarding stakeholder consultation.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 This chapter outlines the methodology used for phases 1-3 of developing the 8 Hills Spatial Framework.

Baseline

3.2 The first part of the commission involved a baseline analysis of primarily mapping data, recent policy documents, such as the draft Worcestershire Green Infrastructure Strategy, and the MHM 'Making Connections' report (2022) and built on the National Trust's own baseline analysis carried out in 2021.

3.3 The analysis formed the basis for the development of the spatial framework and informed the assessment of constraints and opportunities, which, supplemented by the consultation findings, were used to identify opportunities for development and the vision and objectives for the regional park.

3.4 The baseline report presented findings from the analysis under six topics with supporting figures; Landscape and Environment, Habitats and Biodiversity, Access, Climate Change, Heritage and Development.

Consultation

3.5 To build on the baseline data analysis, selected local user and interest groups (identified by the National Trust) were engaged with between the end of February and mid-March 2023.

3.6 The consultation was hosted on LUC's consultation hub and formed two parts: a survey where participants answered a series of questions and an interactive map where participants could plot their feedback onto a map of the regional park area. Specifically, participants were asked to identify challenges and opportunities for the development of the regional park based on the themes of recreation, access and nature.

3.7 There was a strong response to the consultation with 61 responses to the survey and over 150 comments were left on the interactive map. Responses were received from a variety of groups including;

- parish councils,
- community associations,
- friends of groups,
- walking, running and cycling clubs,
- heritage and environmental interest groups.

3.8 The consultation built on the findings from the audience consultation MHM consultants carried out during 2022. They assessed the population profile of the surrounding area and identified correlations between different population groups and barriers to accessing greenspace and recreational opportunities.

Analysis and development

3.9 Through the analysis of the baseline data and consultation results, a multi-disciplinary team of professionals at LUC, including planners, landscape architects, transport planners and ecologists, identified 12 initial opportunities for the development of the regional park which would provide benefits for access, recreation and nature. The identification of opportunities also involved an initial assessment of the benefits and challenges associated with their delivery.

3.10 Based on the identified opportunities and the initial ambition and aims for the regional park set out by the National Trust, a concise vision was developed to describe where we are trying to get to and the benefits that the regional park seeks to deliver for people and nature. A series of 10 draft objectives was also developed outlining the actions needed to achieve the vision.

Workshop

3.11 To test the initial opportunities and draft vision and objectives two expert stakeholder workshops were convened. These were held via MS Teams on the 27th March and the 4th April 2023 each with 22 stakeholders in attendance in total across the two workshops.

3.12 Both workshops commenced with a presentation on the work undertaken to date, providing a summary of the key findings from the baseline data analysis and mapping and from the initial consultation with selected local community and interest groups. The opportunities in relation to recreation, access and ecology and the draft vision and objectives were then presented with an opportunity for discussion following each section. Key points arising from the discussion were captured on an online Miro board. The workshop slides and Miro boards were issued to attendees after the workshop to allow for any further comments to be captured.

3.13 The findings of the workshop have informed the development of a vision and objectives for the regional park, presented in chapter 6. Feedback on the draft opportunities has informed their development and the comments will be considered again early in the next phase of work to inform the more detailed development of opportunities.

Chapter 4

Baseline Findings

Introduction

4.1 The baseline analysis helped to inform the key opportunities and constraints for the development of the regional park and the vision and objectives. The baseline analysis was split into six topics, the headline findings from each are summarised here. The full baseline report is available as an addendum.

Landscape and Environment

4.2 The landscape character of the area is one of rolling topography and irregular field patterns interspersed by the 8 distinctive hills. The land is primarily pastoral, with historic farmsteads, though the historic field pattern becomes more geometric and topography flatter towards the east of the area. Most existing parkland and recreational sites are located around the hills in the west, while the east contains mostly agricultural land. The conglomeration of visitor sites in the west has led to high visitor pressure, the negative effects of which are leading to erosion and there is a clear opportunity to open and encourage access to the east of the area to ease pressures on the west. Worcestershire's Green Infrastructure Framework recently published for consultation, identified the Bittell Reservoirs, as a potential location for a new visitor destination, relieving pressure, particularly on Lickey Hills Country Park and providing a new offer around the aquatic environment.

Habitats and Biodiversity

4.3 The east/west distinction is also apparent in the area's biodiversity, with a reasonably high-quality network of habitats present in the west with less priority habitats recorded in the east, likely again linked to more intensive farming practices in this area. Several SSSIs have been designated based on the presence of priority habitats including dingle woodlands, lowland heathland, lowland meadows and good-quality grassland. There are nine SSSIs in total and most of these are in an unfavourable condition. Several protected species have also been

recorded in the area including various species of birds, bats and a notable breeding water vole population in some of the watercourses near to Bromsgrove (for which Worcestershire County Council has prepared a management strategy).

4.4 Natural England mapping identifies significant opportunities to enhance and expand habitat networks across the area, improving habitat resilience, particularly to the centre and west of the area. Addressing these alongside the gaps noted in the access network would provide the opportunity to create new green and blue infrastructure corridors. Opportunities to extend and create new habitat networks in the east of the area, particularly woodland, could also help to improve water quality issues in some of the water courses and the Bittell Reservoirs.

Access

4.5 Given the significant benefits associated with access to good quality greenspace, improving access to the area for local and surrounding communities is seen as a core objective of the regional park.

4.6 There are reasonable road connections to most key existing recreational destinations in the area, although congestion around key sites was noted as well as clusters of reported traffic incidents. More sustainable modes of travel are limited with only two rail access points, convoluted and irregular bus services and limited cycle access, particularly when travelling east to west across the area. Once within the area, there are notable gaps in the public rights of way (PRoW) network with an west to east distinction again notable by both presence and existing use of routes. The North Worcestershire Path runs east to west across the area; however, this is no longer actively promoted and the path condition, and wayfinding along the route, is variable meaning it is not accessible to all users.

4.7 Access barriers don't just take a physical form; psycho-social barriers such as awareness, lack of confidence, navigation, safety, and feeling out of place are commonly reported barriers to accessing the countryside. These barriers vary by demographic with those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, women and people with disabilities most likely to report barriers to access. Previous consultation carried out by MHM consultants identified areas of south Birmingham and south Dudley to the north of the regional park area where psycho-social barriers to accessing greenspace were most notable and where the development of the 8 Hills Regional Park could have the greatest impact on outdoor activity. This was supported by recently published Natural England data which identifies areas with high deprivation and low

access to natural greenspace, with many areas experiencing both high deprivation and low access located along the northern boundary of the park area.

4.8 A key factor in enhancing the accessibility of greenspace to more people is the provision of activities, which provide an offer to a wider group of people and raise confidence. Visitor facilities are also a key supporting factor, with toilets and catering facilities attracting more people and enabling them to stay longer. At present there are only three main centres offering activities and visitor facilities in the area, at Clent, Waseley and Lickey Hills Country Parks.

Climate Change

4.9 Opportunities to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change were identified through the baseline analysis.

4.10 There is extensive existing woodland across the area, especially in the west and centre which will sequester and store carbon. Other priority habitats present such as heathlands and wetlands provide carbon sequestration and storage benefits. Natural England mapping identified habitat expansion opportunities which, if taken forward, would increase carbon sequestration and storage while enhancing biodiversity.

4.11 Increased woodland cover can provide natural flood management in areas of high flood risk and protect settlements downstream. Opportunities for new riparian woodland were noted in areas of high flood risk along most existing watercourses in the area as well as additional wider catchment woodland potential, predominantly on existing agricultural land in the east, which has been identified as poor quality.

4.12 The area will also provide a cool, tranquil environment, supporting nature and providing a place for people to escape from the urban environment during more intense and frequent heatwaves.

Heritage

4.13 The historic landscape character of the area, one of rolling topography and irregular field patterns, is one of the key heritage features, with historic living patterns of small settlements and farmsteads still visible. The landscape is said to have inspired the mythical shires within the novels of J.R.R Tolkien. There are numerous registered heritage buildings and assets across

the area; however, there is limited interpretation of most of these and the historic landscape, and limited access to many of the historic buildings.

4.14 The condition of most assets is unknown; however, assumptions can be made based on the minimal management of them and reported instances of anti-social behaviour. Again, the primary managed heritage assets are the Country Parks at Clent Hills, Lickey Hills and Waseley Hills.

4.15 The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust are currently developing a series of trails associated with erratic boulders transported to the area by ice flows during the ice age. The dismantled Halesowen railway and North Worcestershire Path both pass currently unmanaged and uninterpreted heritage sites such as berry mound camp (an iron age hillfort) and pass through the historic landscape. They provide opportunities to improve accessibility to the area while allowing greater interpretation and celebration of the area's heritage.

Development

4.16 The topography of the area and designation as Green Belt has historically protected the area from development. This protection will remain, but the area will not be immune from development pressures, for housing and associated infrastructure.

4.17 The publication of Bromsgrove District Council's Local Plan preferred option has been delayed due to the need for further assessment of infrastructure requirements for the Plan's delivery. As such there is current uncertainty about which sites will be allocated for new housing development in the area and a further review of baseline information once site allocations are known is recommended. New development could provide opportunities to implement aspects of the regional park proposals.

Chapter 5

Consultation Findings

5.1 The consultation with selected interest groups in the 8 Hills Regional Park study area and surrounding area generated 61 survey responses and over 150 mapped comments. The questions posed to respondents were categorised around three themes; recreation, access and nature. This chapter outlines the key findings in relation to these themes.

Recreation

5.2 Respondents were asked about key existing destinations for recreation, reasons for visiting and how the visitor experience could be improved for different groups.

Key findings

- The known honey-pot sites of Clent Hills Country Park and Lickey Hills Country Park are the most visited destinations
- Additional visitor facilities such as cafés, toilets and street furniture would encourage greater use of the area
- Poor maintenance, litter and dog fouling were noted as concerns when visiting the countryside
- Access to the natural environment is the main reason why people visit the area
- Improved signage and awareness of the area as well as additional facilities would enable people to explore more of the area, particularly the Bittell Reservoirs and the North Worcestershire Path

5.3 Survey respondents indicated that Lickey Hills Country Park is the most popular destination to visit in the area, followed by the Clent Hills Country Park and the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. Respondents listed walking, eating and drinking out and sports and games as the most popular activities to partake in, in the regional park area. However, it was noted that the existing café, toilet, walking/cycling routes and car parking facilities require upgrading across the area. One participant noted

"There is usually nowhere to sit down for a break/ tie a shoelace or have a drink".

5.4 Similarly, another participant stated that

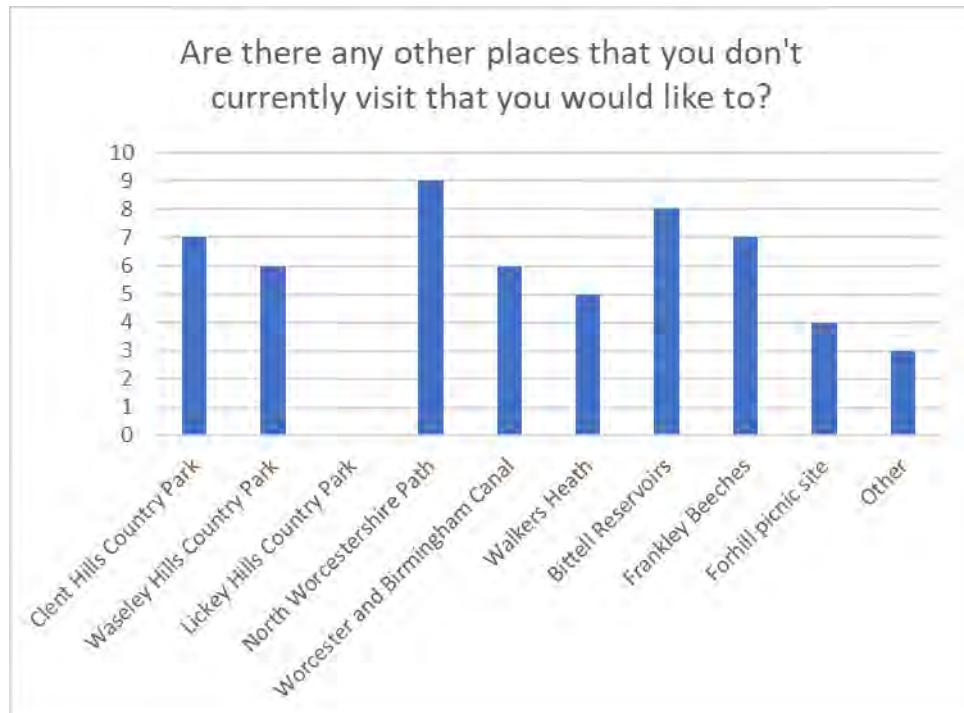
"the shortage of public toilets is always an issue".

5.5 Findings also correlated with the baseline data, demonstrating that increasing and enhancing visitor facilities will encourage more people to access the area.

5.6 Spending time in the natural environment was the most common reason why visitors were attracted to the regional park area, followed by it being a place to improve fitness/ physical health and to 'get away from it all'.

5.7 The survey also identified areas which would be desirable locations to visit but which are not currently accessed by respondents. The North Worcestershire Path, followed by the Bittell Reservoirs were the most common destinations selected, aligning with opportunities identified through the baseline assessment. Responses to the survey again suggested that improved signage, an upgraded café, parking and public transport facilities would make visitors more likely to visit these areas. Many respondents stated that they were unaware of these areas, highlighting the need for both increased marketing and signage.

Figure 5.1: Survey results for identified locations that respondents would like to visit.



Access

5.8 Stakeholders were asked about accessing the regional park area. This included the most popular modes of transport used to access the area, whether the area was easy to navigate and how access can be improved for different user groups. There was a good representation from respondents who travel from areas along the northern boundary of the park area which were identified as priority areas in the baseline report.

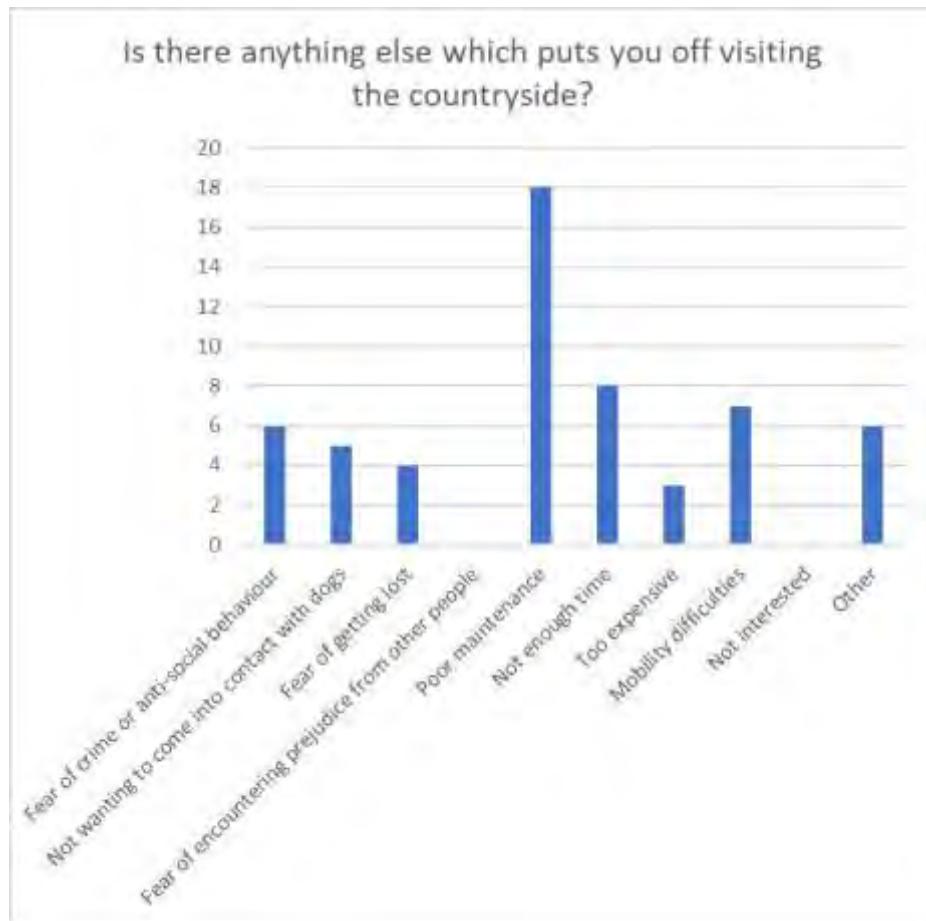
Key findings:

- Poor maintenance was the main reason people were deterred from visiting, followed by a lack of time and mobility difficulties
- Most people travelled to the area by car, citing the difficulties in travelling via other means, including public transport and cycling
- The inaccessibility of public transport and the presence of obstacles such as gates limits accessibility for those with disabilities
- The poor condition of existing public rights of way was noted as a deterrent for all users
- Those travelling to the area by means other than a car were less likely to visit multiple locations, citing lack of transportation options and wayfinding/signage

5.9 Most respondents in the survey travelled to the area from Birmingham (with locations listed including Billesley, Harborne, Kings Norton, Moseley, North Edgbaston and Norton North). All wards, with the exception of Harborne, fall into the most deprived 20% of areas nationally under the Indices of Multiple Deprivation² (Harborne falls into the most deprived 30% of areas). A smaller number travelled from Bromsgrove, Stourbridge, Shropshire and Worcester.

5.10 18 respondents stated poor maintenance as the main reason why they are discouraged from visiting the countryside, followed by time constraints (i.e., not having enough time to visit) and difficulties with mobility (see figure 2.2).

Figure 5.2: Identified barriers to accessing the countryside



5.11 Survey data showed that the private car is the most common mode of transport used to travel to and within the regional park area, followed by cycling (road or trail bike) and walking

² English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

(see Figure 2.3). Most respondents who travelled by car cited the convenience in comparison to other forms of transport, as public transport services are not widely available in much of the regional park area and cycle routes are of poor quality. One respondent stated that;

"we don't have a car and find it difficult to access these places due to a lack of safe cycle tracks, preferably good enough for children to ride on. Also trains and buses are sometimes not frequent enough for a viable day out".

5.12 Another participant who is visually impaired highlighted the lack of inclusive public transport provision to and within the regional park area. As such, accessing the regional park area for those without a car or for people with disabilities including wheelchair users and those with sight impairments presents a significant challenge. It was noted on the interactive map that the presence of stiles and kissing gates in the Frankley area restricts access for those with mobility issues. It was recommended that these are replaced with mobility accessible gates (see Project 2 in the table below).

Figure 5.3: Identified usual means of transportation to 8 Hills Regional Park area



5.13 Further to this, the responses from the interactive map showed the PRoW near Frankley Beeches is difficult to access (i.e., being boggy and uneven). Other access issues included the dangerous crossing point on the A448 dual carriageway on the canal route and how the A491 limits access to the Clent from the south. Both issues currently limit access for walkers and cyclists.

5.14 The survey data showed that respondents who travel to the regional park area by car generally find it easy to visit the places they want to; however, some noted that the narrow lanes, poor parking facilities and lack of signage present a challenge. Many respondents stated that they would use public transport if it were available. To improve access to and from 8 Hills, respondents suggested improving and connecting the existing cycle lanes, establishing a regular bus service, improving toilet facilities, providing free parking and increase signage/information available about other sites within the regional park. Further recommendations from the interactive map included restoring the former landfill site near Lickey Hills for public access, re-establishing past walking trails such as the Illey Way walk, connecting off road paths with PRoWs and improving the general signage across the site.

5.15 Over 60% of visitors travel to different locations within the study area. Those who do not travel within the site cited time constraints (i.e., they did not have enough time to visit more than one location within the area) and the disjointed nature of 8 Hills as the main reasons why they tend to stay in one location. One participant noted that:

"the areas are not yet well linked together; a plan of the broader area (with appropriate paths etc) would be welcome".

Nature

5.16 Stakeholders were asked about their current relationship to nature in the site, what they value when they visit and how this can be strengthened.

Key findings

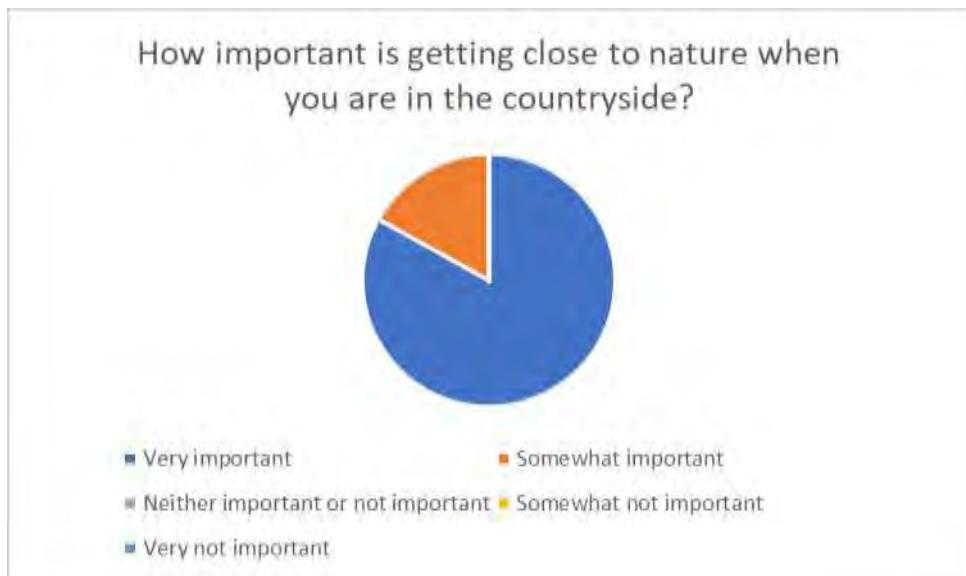
- All respondents noted that getting close to nature was important when visiting the countryside
- Respondents highlighted particular areas which were important for them to access nature
- The user experience in terms of better maintenance and facilities was noted as a way to enable greater access to nature
- The geological importance of the area was noted, with several specific sites of interest mentioned
- Opportunities for natural flood management, including woodland planting in specific areas were identified

5.17 As demonstrated in Figure 4, all respondents to the survey felt that getting close to nature is important when being in the countryside. An array of factors helps those visiting feel close to nature, including encounters with various species of animals, the sounds of nature and the views. The respondents listed many different areas of nature and wildlife they enjoyed seeing in the 8 Hills area, including:

“the blue bell woods in Spring”, “birdwatching in the Bittell reservoir and the canals” and “the Uffmoor Woods to see the deer”.

“It’s always exciting to see something more than what you’d see in your back garden. Like along the canal sometimes we see herons or kingfishers and that’s a real treat.”

Figure 5.4: Identified importance of getting close to nature on visits to the countryside



5.18 The Lickey Hills Country Park was listed as one of the preferred locations to experience nature and wildlife, followed by the Clent Hills Country Park, Waseley Hills Country Park, Bittel Reservoirs and Wythall Park. A range of recommendations were made in survey responses to improve both nature and the user experience within these areas, including fencing off sensitive areas, increasing litter picking, improving toilet facilities and signage.

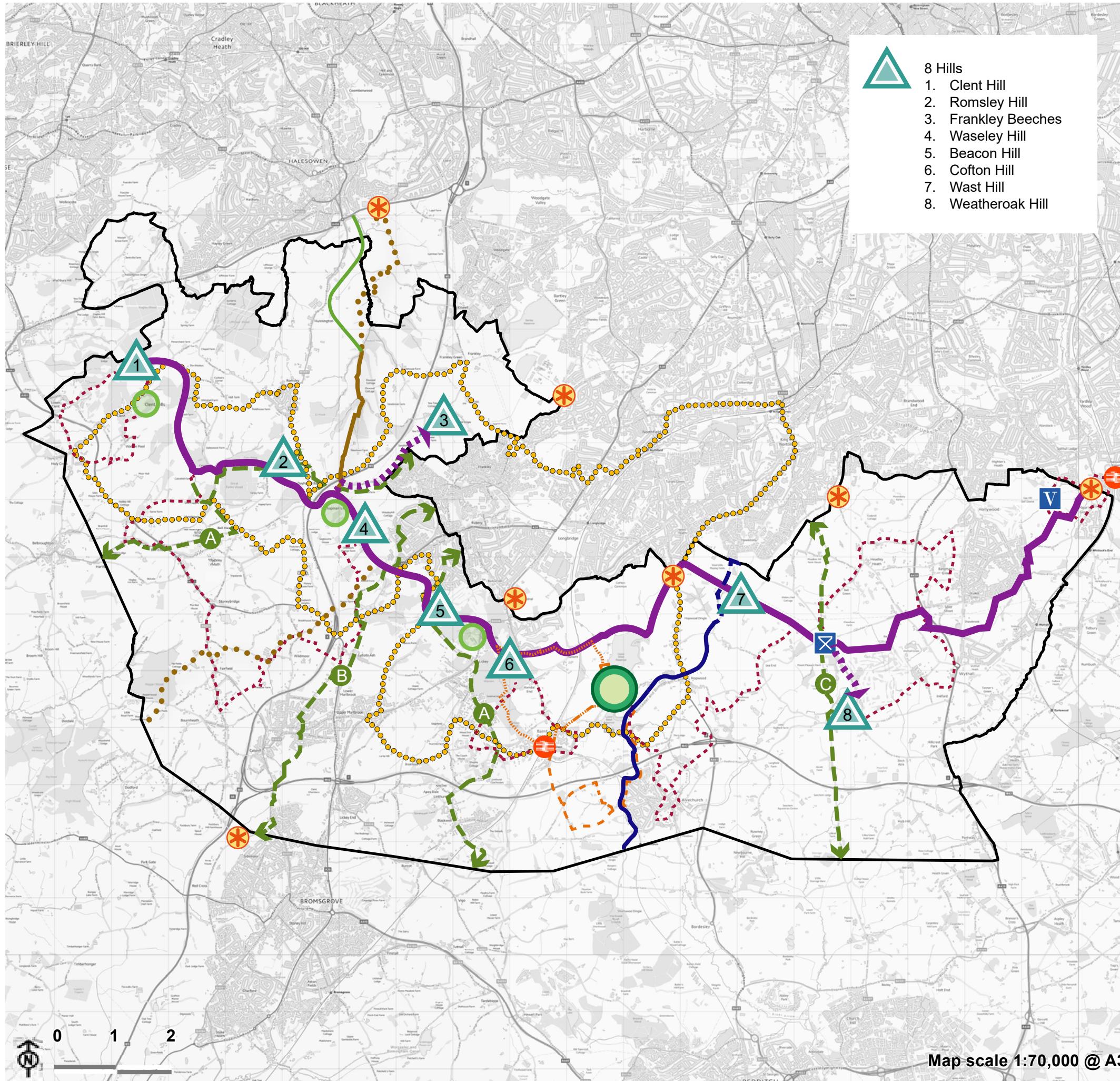
5.19 The geological value of the area was highlighted by respondents and several geological features were identified in the interactive map, including the now destroyed Madeley Heath Pits SSSI, the basalt boulders in Romsley Hill, glacial erratic boulders and the Small Arenig ash glacial boulder. In Lickey Hills, many participants suggested that the glacial erratic boulders could be better advertised throughout the local area with inscribed plaques. It was also noted that the Local Geological Sites (LGS) in the area (Warren Lane Quarry LGS, Barnt Green Road Quarry LGS and Bilberry Hill LGS) could be linked together and promoted as a single entity. Similarly, the Sling Common Gravel Pits SSSI in Clent Hills was highlighted as an area which could be featured in the regional park site due to its geological value.

5.20 Many participants also highlighted the potential to provide increased flood water storage space in the River Rea (near Hollywood), which would reduce flood risk downstream and improve the general water environment in the area. Other opportunities included integrating the Uffmoor Wood site to the north of the Clent Hills into the regional park boundary, enhancing Wythall Park to the south of Hollywood and implementing tree planting to aid natural flood management in the area surrounding Beacon Hill and to plant trees in the previous quarry near Wildmoor.

Chapter 6

Opportunities

6.1 This chapter outlines each of the 12 opportunities identified for incorporation into the 8 Hills Regional Park. It provides an overview of each opportunity, a justification for its inclusion based on both the baseline and consultation findings, a summary of potential challenges and risks and for some opportunities, a case study. The opportunities are split into two sections. 1-9 are primarily related to recreation and access and 10-12 are related to nature.



National Trust
8 Hills Regional Park Spatial Framework

Figure 1: Landscape and Access Opportunities

Opportunity 1: 8 Hills Trail

Creation of a promoted and waymarked 8 Hills Trail which would link all 8 Hills together, approximately 15-20 miles in length. It would largely follow the route of the existing North Worcestershire Path and create new links to the two hills not currently on the route (Weatheroak Hill and Frankley Beeches), allowing a unique journey through the historic landscape and a 'hill bagging' opportunity. The route would also pass other key heritage assets such as Berry Mound Camp and locations with existing visitor facilities such as Forhill picnic site where visitor facility upgrades are also proposed (opportunity 8).

6.2 The delivery of the route can be split into six sub-projects, which can be delivered in combination or individually as and when funding opportunities arise.

1. Initial formalisation of route using existing path networks and improved wayfinding and signposting. This could also involve the integration of interpretation points along the route displaying information on the heritage and ecology of the area.
2. Promotion and advertising of route that encourages use and raises profile of the regional park.
3. Creation and promotion of shorter loop or linear walks that connect to public transport access points, including the introduction of wayfinding signage and promotion of the route from these access points.
4. Creation of formalised path routes to the additional two hills.
5. Improve accessibility of existing paths, including surfacing upgrades, removal of unnecessary gates and upgrade of necessary gates.
6. Improvement of section along A441, avoiding the need to walk along a busy road by creating new field edge paths and an improved crossing point.

Justification and Benefits

6.3 The route would assist in promoting the visitor experience of the 8 Hills Regional Park as a cohesive whole. The route would act as a central spine and connect all hill summits. It would take visitors on a journey through the historic landscape and aim to encourage visitors to view the landscape as a collection of hills while ensuring each hill retains its own distinct character.

- The route would alleviate recreational pressure at existing 'honeypot' sites in the west and increase usage of less popular hills in the east, while also increasing engagement with the local landscape and heritage.
- The delivery of a marketing strategy and enhanced promotion would support the activity of 'hill-bagging', where the public are encouraged to visit all hill summits as part of the wider regional park experience, either as part of a single trip or repeat visits.
- Improvements to the route's accessibility, including surface upgrades and removal of field edge routes, would allow enjoyment of the area by those with mobility difficulties.
- Improvements to sections of the route that are currently a barrier to some users, including addressing the section along the A441 which forms the 'least pleasant section' of the North Worcestershire Path (as identified in the now out of print guidebook for the path) with poor crossings and narrow footways adjacent to a busy road.
- Better waymarking of the route to/from existing public transport links and new signposting from Barnt Green and Hagley stations would increase accessibility to the route to those who do not own a car. This could also reduce car use and indiscriminate parking at popular access points.

Potential challenges and constraints:

- Significant funding would be required for certain elements, particularly the sections of path upgrades and extensions to other hills and public transport links and ongoing maintenance.
- Landowner permission would need to be sought.
- Planning consent may be required.
- Ecological constraints associated with potential requirement for localised vegetation clearance.

Opportunity 2: Bittell Reservoirs Country Park

Creation of a country park encompassing the Upper and Lower Bittell Reservoirs, forming part of a wider chain of country parks within the proposed regional park, creating a new recreational offer associated with the aquatic environment and reducing visitor pressure on existing honeypot sites. To include integration of toilet and visitor facilities and attractions (e.g., play/interpretation/footpaths), car parking and improved access from Barnt Green rail station.

6.4 The Country Park could be delivered as a whole or in several stages as funding arises. Some smaller scale and medium-term sub-projects have been identified:

1. Widen access to water sports opportunities at the reservoirs through work with existing clubs.
2. Improved way-marking to Barnt Green rail station.
3. Integration of the existing route of the Barnt Green Circular walk to provide a fully accessible circular route around both reservoirs with appropriate path surfacing, resting points and removal of inaccessible gates.

Justification and Benefits

- Circular walks and path upgrades will address a gap in existing footpath provision and improve accessibility for all users.
- Improving the water sports offer would open access to adventure sports to a new audience and provide a new visitor offer for the regional park.
- The new Country Park would supplement existing Country Park land use at Clent Hills, Waseley Hills and Lickey Hills, forming a wider chain of semi-rural country parks and relieving visitor pressure on those sites.
- Provide a valuable greenspace to residents within the 8 Hills area and in the densely populated areas of Coton Common and West Heath to the north, which have been identified as having high deprivation and low access to natural greenspace.

- New visitor facilities will support more and longer visits to the countryside and help people realise the mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits associated with these visits.

Potential challenges and constraints

- Landowner consent required and consideration of impacts on adjacent agricultural land use.
- Significant funding required for delivery.
- Business case required to ensure ongoing management and maintenance costs could be covered through revenue streams and/or grants and subsidies.
- Careful management required to ensure no negative impacts on condition of the SSSI, designated for the presence of wading birds.



Figure 6.1: Bittell Reservoirs

Opportunity 3: Discovery Gateways

Creation of a series of settlement 'discovery gateway' features at the north and south of the regional park area to provide improved linkages from the settlement edge. These would promote access to areas identified in the baseline findings as having the highest levels of deprivation and lowest access to natural greenspace by providing points of entrance and navigation. The gateway features could include sculptural installations, local artwork or interpretation signage which is reflective of the unique connections between each location and the 8 Hills area. They may also include the re-surfacing of routes which connect to the settlement edge, improved signage and planting.

6.5 Seven individual gateway locations have been identified which are on the edge of urban areas exhibiting high deprivation and low access to natural greenspace. The gateways can be delivered together or individually, suggested locations in order of priority are:

- Walkers Heath Park
- Hayes Playing Fields
- Northfield (Ley Hill Park)
- Cofton Park/North Lickey Hills
- Shirley station
- Halesowen Abbey
- Bromsgrove Siliwen Road (NCN5)

Justification and Benefits

- Increased access and accessibility to greenspace by high density populations which exhibit higher levels of deprivation and low access to natural greenspace by providing linkages with wayfinding and improved surfacing from these areas to the regional park.
- Community engagement in the design of the gateways can assist in reducing psycho-social barriers to accessing the countryside such as a lack of 'belonging' by creating

designs which are reflective of the local communities' identity and their links to the 8 Hills area.

Potential challenges and constraints

- Gateways will require capital funding for delivery, but the ability for them to be delivered sequentially will enable the benefits to begin to be realised in the highest priority areas as smaller amounts of funding are identified.
- Requires comprehensive public consultation to ensure local 'buy-in' and confirm prioritisation of gateways and provide a local identity for each.
- Concerns regarding anti-social behaviour and ongoing maintenance will need to be addressed.



Figure 6.2: Example gateways

Opportunity 4: Heritage Trails

Creation of a network of heritage walking trails across the regional park site, utilising historic transport routes and linking key heritage assets. These trails will provide a link between the historic landscape and local communities through the provision of increased signage, wayfinding infrastructure and marketing and promotional activities. This opportunity would maximise the heritage value of the area, bringing new people to the area from the settlement edge and provide opportunities for education, health and wellbeing.

6.6 Five initial potential heritage routes have been identified:

- Shirley station to Berry Mound Fort Camp heritage trail
- Loop from Weatheroak Hill Country Park
- Loop from Lickey Hills Country Park
- Loop from Clent Hills Country Park
- Connection to the planned Erratics boulder trail being led by Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust.

Justification and Benefits

- Opportunities for increasing understanding and appreciation of the historic landscape and educational opportunities for the local communities, visitors and school groups.
- Respond to key priorities emerging from the consultation and workshops to interpret and make more of the areas, cultural, social and geological heritage.
- Promotion of increased linkages with communities on the settlement edge and to public transport access points such as Shirley rail station.
- Opportunities for health and wellbeing associated with improved walking provision through the development of a suite of heritage trails to suit a range of fitness and abilities.

Potential constraints and challenges

- The project would need capital funding to deliver a comprehensive interpretation strategy.
- Landowner support/permission would be required for some of the routes.
- Consultation with Historic England and Local Planning Authority would also be required.



Figure 6.3: Standing Stones at Clent Hills Country Park

Opportunity 5: Halesowen multi-user route

Opportunity to introduce a waymarked multi-user route on the section of Halesowen disused railway, stretching from the settlement edge of Halesowen to the Monarch's Way. The route would provide a connection with the Monarch's Way at Twiland Wood, delivering a network of circular recreational routes at the settlement edge by linking to the existing public rights of way network. Low maintenance street furniture, interpretation, signage and incidental natural play features could be established along the route. Through its location, the route will expand access opportunities by connecting to southern Birmingham, as well as opportunities to learn about local heritage.

Justification and Benefits

- Improvements to pedestrian and cycle access will increase accessibility to the proposed regional park for users without access to private transport and for those populations on the settlement edge.
- Enhancing opportunities for active travel will help to connect people with nature and provide health and wellbeing benefits to users.
- The multi-user route will provide a connection between the urban environment to the north and the rural landscapes of the proposed regional park to the south that is uninterrupted by the A456 corridor which currently forms a barrier and abrupt delineator between the urban environment and the proposed regional park.

Potential constraints and challenges

- The design of the route will require engineering and design input to ensure effective route optioneering.
- Construction works are likely to require vegetation clearance and would need to take place outside the bird breeding season and in consultation with an ecological clerk of works.

- A process of landowner negotiations will be needed as areas of land required for this opportunity currently lie within private ownership.
- A comprehensive consultation programme will be required to avoid conflict between different user groups.

Case Study: Monsal Trail

The Monsal Trail in Derbyshire runs for 8.5 miles in Derbyshire along a former railway line providing access for cyclists and pedestrians through the area and incorporates interpretation on points of interest. A project between 2009 and 2011 saw an upgrade of the route to accommodate cyclists and the re-opening of tunnels through a grant from the Department for Transport. The aim of the route was to make cycling a 'realistic, healthy alternative to using the car' and the project has included the integration of interpretation and an audio heritage trail through the creation of a series of podcasts about people who worked on, lived by or travelled on the former railway line³.



Figure 6.4: Photo of Monarch's Way near Illey

³ Monsal trail: Peak District National Park

Opportunity 6: Shuttle Bus Service

Creation of a seasonal shuttle service that links key locations in south Birmingham with attractions within the park, operated as a ‘hop-on-hop-off’ style circular route, running both clockwise and anti-clockwise. Many of the destinations are not currently connected by public transport, including key sites such as the Bittell Reservoirs, Lickey Hills, Waseley, Clent and Frankley Beeches. The route would prioritise links to urban areas with limited existing greenspace access and car ownership to ensure under-represented groups have access to the regional park. It would also provide the opportunity for visitors to access multiple attractions in a single visit.

6.7 The exact route would be subject to further examination and consultation with local communities to determine the best stopping points, however a possible circular route could connect the following key locations:

Kings Norton – Bittell Reservoirs – Barnt Green Station – Lickey Hills Country Park – Waseley Hills Country Park – Clent Hills Country Park – Frankley Beeches – Kings Norton

6.8 Seasonal operating times would be subject to further consideration and piloting but could be:

- Saturday: Easter to September
- Daily during school summer holidays

Justification and benefits

- Provision of a low cost and accessible transport option will improve social inclusivity by enabling more people to enjoy the area (particularly those with disabilities and from deprived areas) and experience health and wellbeing benefits of the landscape.
- Reduced private car travel provides wider benefits in terms of traffic congestion, air quality, indiscriminate parking and road safety.

Constraints

- Commercial viability is a key constraint and it is likely that a shuttle service would require subsidy.
- Ensuring sufficient uptake of this service would require careful route planning (and scheduling) to ensure the service is convenient and affordable for all.
- The route option noted above would have an approximate 1-hour circular journey time and therefore running it in both a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction would be beneficial to reduce journey times.
- The shuttle service must be wheelchair and pushchair accessible.

Case Study: Dartmoor Haytor Hoppa

The Haytor Hoppa is a seasonal circular, scenic bus service which starts and finishes in Newton Abbot or Bovey Tracey. It connects to some of the most popular visitor destinations within the Dartmoor National Park including the Haytor Visitor Centre and Widecombe-in-the-Moor. It also connects to a number of linear and circular walking routes. The service runs hourly and operates in the summer months. In 2022 it ran:

- Every Saturday from the 28th May – 29th October
- Monday – Friday from the 25th July to the 2nd September

In 2022 the cost of an adult single was between £3.30 and £6.10 and a child single from £2.20 and £4.10. The bus is free to national bus pass holders and children under 5.

Opportunity 7: Network of quiet lanes cycle routes

Opportunity to connect to National Cycle Network (NCN) route 55 and create a network of 'quiet lanes' within the Park, connecting east to west as well as north to south. This project would address the current disjointed and primarily north-south cycle access and provide an opportunity for enhanced cycle travel within the regional park site, as well as safer pedestrian access. This would improve active travel connectivity within the park to key destinations, providing alternatives to the private car and public transport. The opportunity would require limited infrastructure, with the focus mostly on identification of appropriate routes, promotion, signage, and possible road safety / traffic calming measures (e.g., cyclist markings centrally within the carriageway).

6.9 This project could provide an opportunity to use designate some country lanes as 'quiet lanes'⁴ affording greater priority and safety to pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders who use the lanes through measures such as speed restrictions and signage.

6.10 Sub-projects could include:

- Creation of bike hire opportunities at strategic points across the regional park area, including the hire of electric bikes.
- Provision of cycle competency courses and led cycle rides for less confident cyclists and young families.

Justification and benefits

- Enhanced active travel connectivity within the park to key destinations, providing alternatives to private car and public transport.
- Enhanced cycling infrastructure and bike hire opportunities would open up cycling to more users in the regional park site, including those with limited experience and confidence levels.

- Improved waymarking from the new quiet lanes will also benefit pedestrians, further improving the visitor experience.
- This project could result in the development of business opportunities associated with bike hire within the project site.

Potential constraints/ challenges

- There would always remain a residual risk of road traffic using country lanes mixing with cyclists. Therefore, the use of the lanes for cycling is unlikely to be appealing to all, particularly inexperienced cyclists or young families without additional supporting activities.
- Implementation would require liaison and agreement from the Highways Authority.
- Provision of activities for less confident/experienced cyclists would require revenue funding.



Figure 6.5: Photo of country lane leading to Cofton Church Lane

⁴ The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006 (legislation.gov.uk)

Opportunity 8: Enhanced visitor facilities

Support greater use of existing visitor sites in the east with the introduction of toilets and visitor facilities, specifically at Berry Mound Camp and Forhill Picnic Site. This opportunity would enable further access to the area's heritage assets and would also provide convenient stopping off points for users of the 8 Hills Trail, improving the visitor experience for a range of user groups.

Berry Mound Camp

- Berry Mound Camp is an iron age hillfort and one of the only iron age heritage assets in the regional park area. Toilets, catering and heritage interpretation could be provided at this key heritage asset at the far east of the site which has no existing interpretation. This can provide additional interest to a heritage trail and an additional point of interest to the 8 Hills Trail. It is also well positioned close to Shirley Rail station for a shorter, accessible visit.

Forhill Picnic Site

- The existing picnic site at Forhill could be complemented with the introduction of toilet facilities and a seasonal catering offer.

Justification and benefits

- Improved visitor facilities at Berry Mound and the Forhill Picnic site will relieve pressure on the western area of the regional park site by encouraging visitors to use spaces in the east instead.
- Enhanced visitor facilities at Berry Mound Camp would benefit from their proximity to Shirley Rail station and will improve access to people with poor access to natural greenspace, high levels of deprivation and poor health outcomes at the boundary between the regional park area and Birmingham.
- Improved visitor facilities at Forhill Picnic Site will support more visits and longer stays and increase the attractiveness of the 8 Hills Trail through the provision of an additional resting point.

- Improved access to and interpretation of important heritage assets.

Potential constraints/ challenges

- Significant capital required to deliver facilities and interpretation.
- Would need a management plan in place to ensure sustainable long-term maintenance.
- Need to consider access to Forhill picnic site to ensure this does not increase traffic and indiscriminate parking.
- There are planning constraints associated with development next to a scheduled monument and consultation with Historic England would be required.



Figure 6.6: Photo of Forhill Picnic Site (left) and Berry Mound Camp (right)

Opportunity 9: Wasthill Tunnel multi-user bypass

Creation of a blue/green corridor incorporating a waymarked multi-user path, to accommodate all users, following the approximate alignment of the Wasthill Tunnel, creating an enhanced link from Hawksley / West Heath to the Worcester and Birmingham Canal and the wider regional park.

6.11 The route of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal through Wasthill Tunnel does not accommodate a towpath, resulting in a barrier to cycle and pedestrian movement from Birmingham's settlement edge. The creation of a new multi-user route, incorporating sections of roadside path and off-road routes would remove this barrier and could include:

- Measures to improve road safety for pedestrians and cyclists along Wast Hills Lane and Redhill Road.
- Coherent signage strategy.
- Incorporation of woodland planting along the route to create a wildlife corridor, enhance habitat connectivity and make the route more attractive for users.

Justification and benefits

- Provision of increased pedestrian and cycle access from southern Birmingham to the proposed regional park, enhancing opportunities for active travel within in the site.
- Enable cycle access to the potential Bittell Reservoirs Country Park (opportunity 2) within 15-20 minutes of West Heath and surrounding area.
- Increased accessibility for users without access to public transport, particularly those high-density populations on the settlement edge.
- The area potential blue/ green corridor would improve access to nature and provide the opportunity to enhance habitat connectivity in an area which has been identified as 'habitat enhancement zone 1'.

Potential constraints/ challenges

- Significant capital funding required for delivery.
- Liaison with key stakeholders would be needed, including engagement with the Highways Authority.
- Cost and buildability of a new path will require a detailed feasibility study and ground investigations.
- Detailed route planning would be required to avoid potential urban constraints such as road crossings and existing development, particularly where the tunnel emerges in Hawksley.



Figure 6.7: Photo of Wast Hills Tunnel Southern Portal

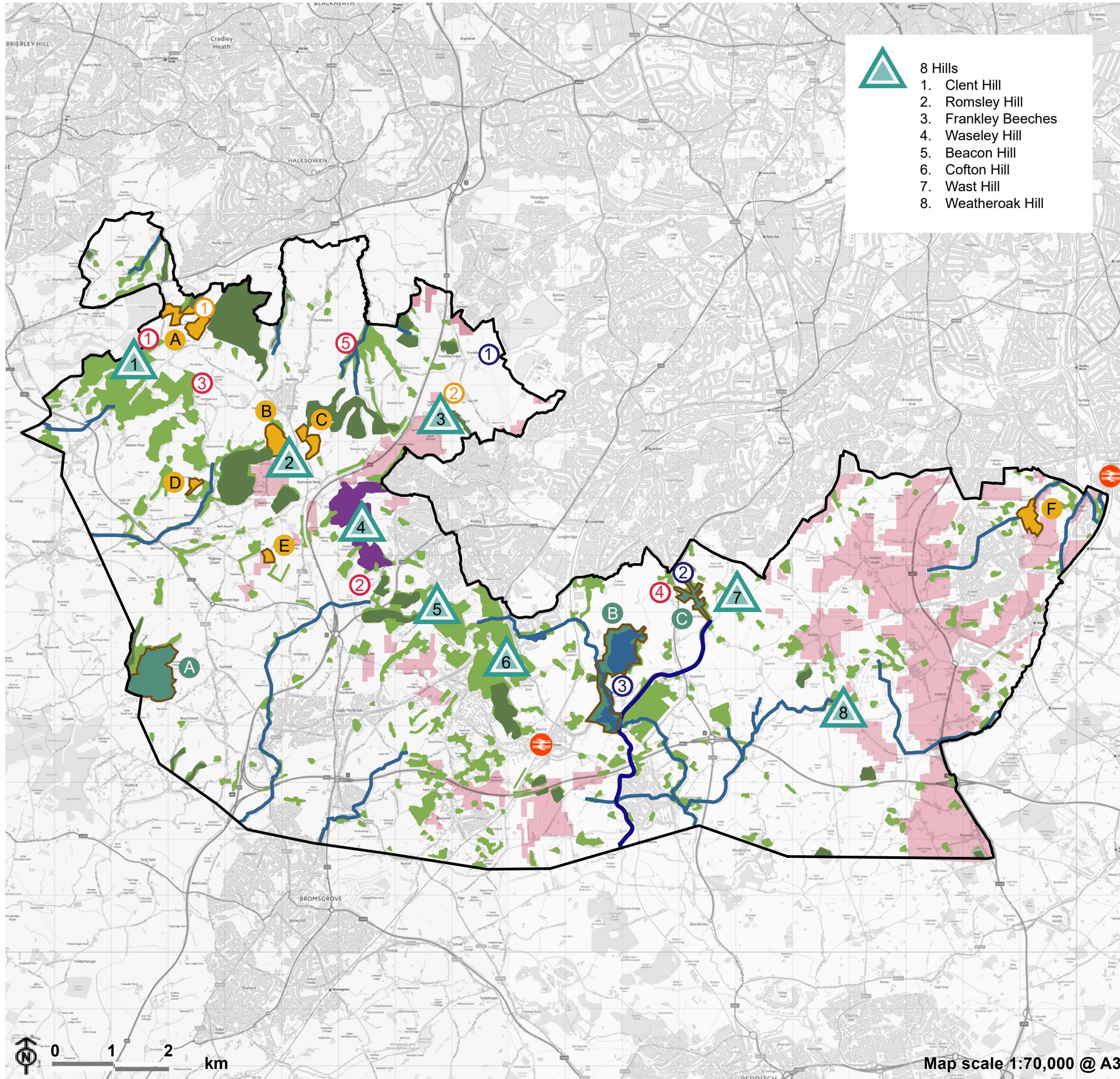


Figure 2: Ecological Opportunities

Opportunity 10. Restoring and creating habitats: wooded network

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - Predominantly woodland habitat

- A: Feckenham Forest
- B: Bittell Reservoirs
- C: Hopwood Dingle

Local Wildlife Site

Ancient woodland

Woodland inventory

WWNP Wider Catchment Woodland Potential

Woodland expansion projects

- 1. Linking Clent Hills towards the north-east through Penorchard and Spring Farms to Uffmoor Wood and beyond.
- 2. Chadwick Manor Estate: wooded areas to be improved and created, in partnership with Bournville Village Trust, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (manager of Beacon and Broadmoor Woods) and Worcestershire County Council (owner of adjacent Waseley Hills Country Park)
- 3. Lickey Hills woodland extension towards the east: partner with tenants for creating new woodland at Cofton Hackett (NT owned), and with St Mowden and Birmingham City Council to extend the woodland network at Cofton Hackett.
- 4. Creation of a woodland buffer around Hopwood Dingle SSSI at Groveley Dingle (NT owned)
- 5. Connecting existing woodlands around Stour headwater streams, east of Romsley and south of Illey.

Opportunity 11. Restoring and creating habitats: lowland meadow and grassland network

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - Predominantly grassland habitat

- A: Penorchard and Spring Farm Pastures
- B: Romsley Hill
- C: Romsley Manor Farm
- D: Sling Gravel Pits
- E: Madeley Heath Pit
- F: Berry Mound Pastures

Grassland restoration projects:

- 1. Clent Hills acid grassland restoration
- 2. Restoration of arable land to grassland at Frankley Beeches and neighbouring land.
- Various locations: Promote marginal in-field measures for birds and pollinators.

Opportunity 12. Restoring and creating habitats: Blue Network

Watercourse / reservoir

Worcester and Birmingham Canal

Blue infrastructure projects:

- 1. Frankley Beeches (NT owned) and Birmingham City Council-owned land around Bartley Reservoir to be re-purposed to create wildlife habitats, strengthening connectivity with surrounding areas.
- 2. Groveley Dingle (NT owned) woodland plantation for buffering the agricultural runoff at Hopwood Dingle SSSI (see Woodland Network opportunity).
- 3. Bittell Reservoir SSSI woodland planting at Groveley Farm (NT owned) and surrounding areas (see Woodland Network opportunity).

Opportunity 10: Creation of a woodland habitat network

Creation of a wooded network, connecting and restoring areas of existing woodland, and creation of new woodland.

6.12 The delivery of a new woodland habitat network, which is 'Bigger, better and more joined up' would be focussed around five key interventions:

1. Improvement of wooded habitats within existing SSSIs, through; enhancement of management such as tackling ash dieback and deer management at Feckenham Forest; expansion and enhancement of woodland at Hopwood Dingle; expansion of woodland along the water's edge at Bittell reservoirs.
2. Expansion of woodland across the site, particularly in areas to the east and adjacent to current wooded areas in the west where it has been identified that increased woodland would be most effective to increase infiltration (stormwater management to avoid flooding).
3. Connecting existing core areas of woodland, using hedgerows and dingle woodlands as connectors between currently fragmented core areas to support wildlife and plant populations and increased their resilience to climate change.
4. Restoration to a semi-natural state of previously ancient woodland sites (PAWS) which have been felled and planted with conifers.
5. Restoration of intensively managed modern orchards to traditional orchards which are more structurally diverse with more habitat niches.

Justification and benefits

- Opportunity to enhance the condition of existing SSSI's, many of which are in poor condition.
- Opportunity to increase woodland coverage assists with climate change mitigation and adaptation through increased carbon sequestration and storage, and natural flood management through targeted planting in areas of high flood risk.

- Improved water quality through targeted planting between agricultural land and water courses.
- Restoration of habitats reminiscent of the traditional landscape character including hedgerows and traditional orchards.
- Improving habitat connectivity and resilience.

Potential challenges and constraints

- Landowner permission required and willingness to adapt agricultural practices. This would need to tie in with agri-ecological payment schemes such as environmental land management scheme (ELMs) or biodiversity net gain (BNG) where appropriate.
- Detailed ecological studies and soil analysis required to ground-truth proposals.



Figure 6.8: Photo of Woodland at Frankley Beeches

Opportunity 11: Restoring and creating habitats: lowland meadow and grassland network

Creation of a network of species rich grasslands across the regional park area, improving areas of existing grassland, enhancing connectivity between existing areas and improving overall management practices.

The creation of a grassland network which is focussed around three key interventions:

6.13 SSSI Core Grasslands: Improvements to the management of the four SSSI sites which form the main cores of lowland meadow habitats in the regional park and are of varying condition: Penorchard and Spring Farm Pastures SSSI which is in a favourable condition; Romsley Hill which is in an unfavourable condition due to under grazing; Manor Farm which is in an unfavourable condition due to possible inappropriate level and timing of grazing; and Berry Mound Pastures which is in an unfavourable, declining condition due to under grazing. Enhancement of these areas should follow the principles of 'Big Enough, Messy, Complex and Dynamic⁵'.

6.14 Grassland connectivity: Improved management of existing pockets of good quality semi-improved grassland and lowland dry acid grassland, both of which provide a great opportunity for linking grassland habitats and favour connectivity, including areas around Romsley Hills Farm Meadows, Waseley Hills Country Park, Beacon and Broadmoor Moors and Foxhill House.

6.15 Improved management through three main actions:

- engagement with landowners and farmers to promote regenerative farming techniques
- planting of pollen and nectar mixes and floristically enhanced margins to promote the dispersal of invertebrate species
- implementation of access management measures such as restricted walkways in areas of high use

Justification and benefits

- Opportunity to connect lowland meadows through a network of biodiversity-rich grasslands and valuable lowland meadow within the site.
- Development of the grassland network will support the historic landscape character of the regional park site.
- Opportunity to develop a well-designed and connected grassland network that supports the resilience of several species to climate change.
- Developing and restoring a grassland network has the potential to contribute towards the National Trust's aim of creating and restoring 25,000 hectares of new wildlife habitats by 2025.
- Potential to link to opportunity 8: visitor facility enhancements at Berry Mound Camp.

Constraints

- Delivery will be reliant on gaining buy-in from multiple landowners.
- Fragmentation and small site size lead to population isolation, increased extinction probabilities, and increased vulnerability to external factors such as climate change.
- Intensive grazing and over-grazing lead to the removal of species without a persistent seed bank.
- Under grazing/abandonment may lead to invasion of scrub and bracken.
- Reduced availability of people with appropriate expertise, machinery and livestock.
- Recreational pressures including biking, 4WD vehicle usage, dog walking, horse riding.

⁵ <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/b9c7f55f-ed9d-4d3c-b484-c21758cec4fe/FCS18-InterAgency-Statement.pdf>

Opportunity 12: Restoring and creating habitats: Blue Network

Creation of an enhanced blue network across the regional park site to improve water quality, integrate natural flood management measures and improve ecological value and connectivity within and beyond the area.

An enhanced blue network will be achieved through the delivery of several sub-projects:

1. Focussed woodland planting in the upper catchments of the Severn towards the southwest and the Trent in the north and east to reduce flood risk.
2. Planting of riparian woodlands to re-establish links between waterside habitats and improve the connectivity of wetland habitats.
3. Improve water quality through woodland planting to buffer agricultural run-off in the upper catchments of the Severn and Trent.
4. Removal of weirs which act as a barrier to fish movement to improve habitat connectivity.
5. Create areas of flood water storage in areas such as the river Rea, close to Hollywood.

Justification and benefits

- Opportunities for the creation and enhancement of priority habitats such as wet woodland, grasslands and reedbeds which provide important ecosystem services such as flood alleviation, water provision and the integration of walking routes.
- Opportunities to develop flood risk management measures for Birmingham and the Black Country, including the possible delivery of Nature Based Solutions to flooding and integrated water management in the headwaters of the Illey brook, Cole and Rea catchments.
- Improved climate change refugia measures on site, as a well-designed and connected blue network supports the resilience of a number of species to climate change within the landscape.

- Strengthening delivery partnership with organisations such as Waterside Care, Severn Trent, Environment Agency and Canal & River Trust, Bournville Village Trust and Bittell Reservoirs Diffuse Catchment Management Committee.

Constraints

- Site specific data on ecology and hydrology would be needed to inform the development of any projects.
- Delivery would be reliant on gaining buy-in from multiple landowners.
- Conflict with existing intensive agricultural land use.
- Requirement for collaboration on nature-based solutions between multiple landowners.
- The impacts of measures such as weir removal on ecology and flood risk would need to be carefully considered, working closely with the Environment Agency.
- Soil type-substrate suitability yet to be considered in detail.

Chapter 7

Vision and objectives

7.1 Considering the baseline findings, consultation feedback and long list of potential opportunities, LUC produced a draft vision and set of objectives for the development of the 8 Hills Regional Park. These were presented for consideration and discussion at the stakeholder workshops.

7.2 Some key points arising from the discussion with stakeholders on the vision and objectives included:

- There should be a balance between outcomes for people and nature.
- There should be a more direct reference to the benefits the regional park would have for climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- The benefits for people in communities beyond those in southern Birmingham should be conveyed.
- There should be more emphasis on benefits for priority habitats beyond just woodland.
- The ability for the development of the regional park to address social as well as physical barriers to access should be reflected.
- The importance of landscape character and historic landscape character should be afforded greater consideration.
- The objectives should be reflective of the ability for the regional park to influence the incorporation of greenspace and nature within new development proposals.

Vision

7.3 Following completion of the stakeholder workshops the National Trust held an internal workshop to reflect on the feedback from stakeholders alongside the primary aims of the project for the National Trust. The output from this workshop was a more streamlined vision and objectives, focussing on the most important aims of the Regional Park. This included a clearer

emphasis on access improvements and a direct reference to the financial mechanisms being explored to incentivise sustainable agricultural practices.

7.4 The revised vision is set out below:

"8 Hills Regional Park will recognise and support the health and wellbeing needs of a growing population by providing improved access to the area and around the area, including through an expanded network of paths, multi-use tracks and access points, wildlife habitats and recreational and tourism opportunities.

A range of financial mechanisms will incentivise farmers to provide these benefits alongside sustainable agriculture, ensuring there is space for people and nature to thrive."

Objectives

7.5 Supporting the vision, a set of nine objectives falling into the four themes of access, nature, development and historic landscape have been produced.

Access

- Increase the health and wellbeing of local communities through creation of new public access, ranging from hyper-local, short-loop paths to a larger, strategic network of routes that crosses the landscape, joining up existing routes where practicable.
- Increase active travel and public transport opportunities to access key recreational sites from surrounding boroughs through improvements to the network of gateway locations, access routes and wayfinding and exploring improved public transport links, resulting in a reduced dependency on cars.
- Address physical and social barriers to access and ensure the 8 Hills landscape provides facilities and infrastructure to meet the needs of the communities that live and work in and around it and give them an increased sense of belonging.
- Reduce pressure on visitor sites in the west of 8 Hills by exploring the potential to create a new or extended country park with visitor facilities and activities and improved links to other points of interest in the east.

Nature

- Aid climate mitigation and adaptation by creating incentives for farmers to implement nature-based solutions for water, biodiversity, carbon capture and storage and air quality.
- Protect the landscape character and biodiversity network by enhancing and buffering protected sites, enhancing and linking up priority habitat fragments, and habitat creation.
- Enhance blue corridors for people and nature through restoration, habitat creation and improved access.

Development

- Provide a mechanism for ensuring new development in the area includes nature and greenspace at its heart and contributes to local biodiversity net gain and improved access.

Historic landscape

- Enhance and increase public access to and benefit from the historic landscape and setting of historic assets.

7.6 This vision and objectives for the Regional Park will be critical in guiding the development of the final spatial framework. They will also form an important touchstone for ongoing work as the Regional Park is developed over the coming years.

Chapter 8

Recommendations and next steps

8.1 This initial stage of work has led to the identification of a long list of 12 potential access, recreation, and nature restoration opportunities for inclusion in the 8 Hills Regional Park as well as the finalisation of a Vision and Objectives to guide the next stage of development of the spatial framework.

8.2 The next stage of work will involve the preparation of a spatial framework and accompanying delivery plan for the regional park. It will include planning policy recommendations for Bromsgrove District Council and next steps to deliver the regional park, including a suggested governance approach.

8.3 To progress this next phase of work, the six-stage approach set out below is recommended:

1. Further development and testing of the long list of opportunities, including a cost review and benefit assessments, and engagement with key stakeholders, landowners and delivery bodies to determine their deliverability. This will lead to a more detailed description of each opportunity, and a categorisation of opportunities dependent on the ease of their deliverability into 'smaller delivery ready projects', 'feasibility ready' and longer-term projects.
2. Development of a clear and fully justified park boundary based on specific landscape features, tangible landscape qualities and less tangible perceptual aspects, such as landscape condition, scenic quality, views/vistas, rarity, conservation interests, perceptual aspects and local association.
3. Community consultation on priority projects at an early stage to ensure meaningful influence on proposals. The consultation will provide an opportunity for communities to provide their feedback on the proposed opportunities and their prioritisation.
4. Development of a short list of priority projects which the National Trust can take forward with partners, including suggestions for the prioritisation and phasing of different clusters of projects.

5. Development of governance/partnership options for the 8 Hills Regional Park through an assessment of different options and recommendations on the best approach. Establishing a suitable governance model for the delivery of the 8 Hills Regional Park, which includes the support of key landowners, potential delivery partners and agencies, at this point will be essential for The National Trust to take forward the final spatial framework.

6. Development of the final spatial framework, detailed information on selected projects, delivery plan, programme, policy recommendations and recommendations for next steps.

8.4 It will be important for the 8 Hills Regional Park partnership, when established, to develop branding for the 8 Hills Regional Park. This will help to communicate a clear and consistent identity for the park and raise awareness of the proposals among target audiences, not least local communities.

8.5 It is anticipated that the next phase of work will take approximately five months to complete. The programme may be influenced by Bromsgrove District Council's Local Plan timetable once this is published.

Appendix A

Consultation

A.1 Approximately 150 responses were received in the consultation exercise from the following groups:

- Alvechurch Baptist Church
- Alvechurch Parish
- Alvechurch Village Society
- Alvechurch Walking Buddies
- Barnt Green Parish Council
- Birmingham's Erratic Boulders
- Blackwell Adventure
- Brandwood Pool Pocket Park
- Bromsgrove Arts Alive
- Bromsgrove Climate Action
- Bromsgrove Society
- Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council
- Circle Cycling Group in Harborne
- CPRE Worcestershire
- Droitwich Spa Civic Society
- Droitwich Spa over 50s Walking Group
- Fairfield Village Community Association
- Friends of Bartley Reservoir

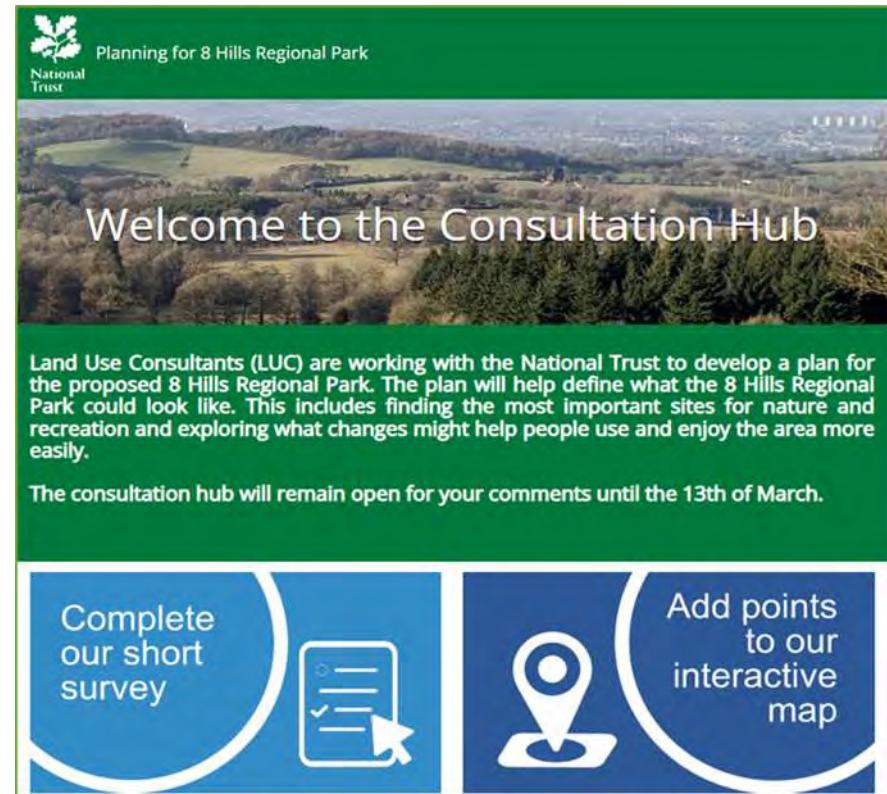
Appendix A
Consultation

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- Friends of Brandwood End Cemetery
- Friends of Jasmin Fields Nature Reserve
- Friends of Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve
- Friends of St John's Bromsgrove
- Halesowen In Bloom
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Gardens Trust
- Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful
- Kings Heath Parish Office
- L.P.C.A
- Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council
- Lickey Hills Society
- Local Residents
- Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum
- Parish Councillors (Catshill and North Marlbrook)
- Push Bikes Birmingham Cycling Campaign and Beacon Roads Cycling Club
- Sight Concern Worcestershire
- The Lickey Community Group
- The Lickey Hills Society
- The Village Magazine
- Trail Run West Midlands
- U3A
- Walking group at All Saints Church in Kings Heath.

- Worcester Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society
- Wythall Community Association
- Wythall Parish Council

Figure A.1: Image of Consultation Hub home page



Appendix A
Consultation

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Figure A.2: Image of comments left on interactive map

Appendix B

Workshop

B.1 In total 22 stakeholders attended the stakeholder workshops.

B.2 Nine stakeholders attended the first workshop on the 27th March 2023. They represented the following organisations:

- Bournville Village Trust
- British Horse Society
- Diocese of Worcester and Earth Heritage Trust
- Disabled Ramblers
- The Ramblers
- The Woodland Trust
- Worcestershire County Council (Flood Management and Public Rights of Way)
- 3Keel

Appendix B
Workshop

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B.3 13 stakeholders attended the second workshop on the 4th April 2023 from the following organisations:

- 3Keel
- Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
- Bromsgrove District Council
- CPRE Worcestershire
- Hagley Parish Council (one participant was representing CPRE Worcestershire and Hagley Parish)
- Natural England

- Redditch Borough Council
- Severn Rivers Trust
- Sport England
- The Environment Agency
- West Midlands National Park Lab
- Worcestershire County Council (Ecology)
- Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Appendix B Workshop

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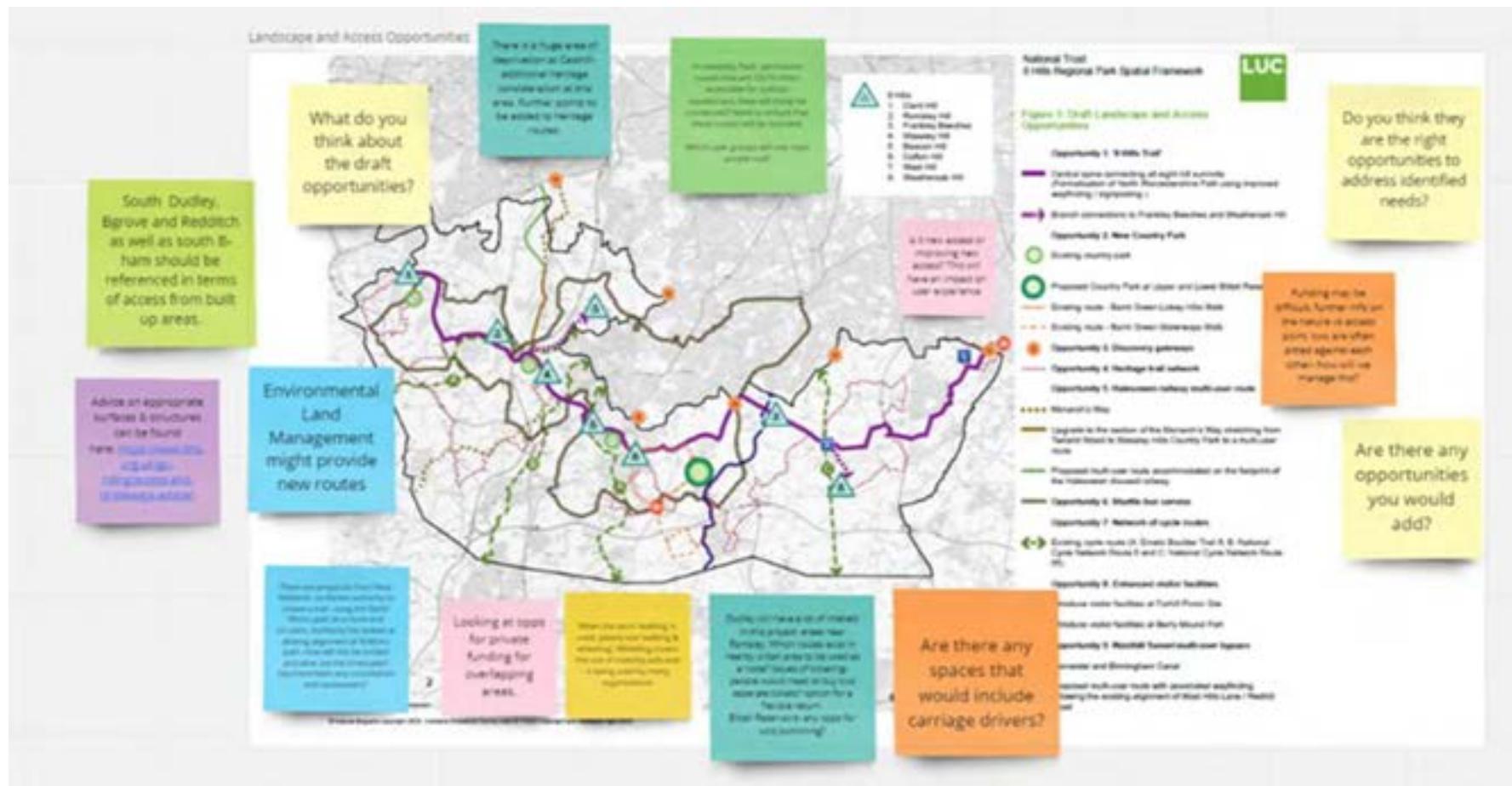


Figure B.1: Excerpt of the Miro Board used in the stakeholder workshop

Draft Vision

"8 Hills Regional Park will offer a wide variety of enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities that are more accessible to everyone, including those living in the park and in urban areas beyond, now and in the future. It will generate health and wellbeing benefits through access to a beautiful, nature-rich landscape that is better protected and managed, with big views, lots of opportunities to see wildlife, high quality visitor facilities, celebrated historical assets, sustainable farming, expanded woodlands and other habitats that capture carbon from the air (helping to mitigate climate change) and help to reduce flood risk."

What do you think about the draft vision?

Should any changes be made?

Vision captures the benefits. Particularly for people- how do we manage risk of overuse? managing the two-encouraging use and managing pressures.

Supportive of vision. Little awareness of the countryside from certain communities- e.g. not realising you couldn't access all areas. Could we have a point on education/ awareness raising? Lack of education created issues during pandemic- litter, environmental destruction

Huge issues with the sudden influx of users. There will be reluctance to expand access to what is already there? include some points on how this will benefit the local economy- local pubs, cafes, shops etc

How will concepts such as accessibility work in practice. Could definitions/ glossary be provided? What is the interface between this project and sub-areas/ local plan etc? Accessible routes often result in the use of horses- other alternatives? From horse riding perspective, they would like to share spaces with other users

Carbon capture is on such a small scale, could this be offset by increased car use? managing this relationship? need to further emphasise benefits for air quality

Figure B.2: Excerpt of the Miro Boards used in the stakeholder workshop.