

# BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

## Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull

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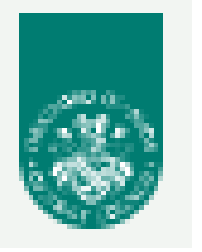
# The Warwickshire Scheme

- There has been a Biodiversity Offsetting scheme in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull since 2013.
- It began as one of several national DEFRA-led pilot schemes in the UK.
- All the LPAs in the sub-region took part in this pilot project and have continued to support this approach since then.

## Context



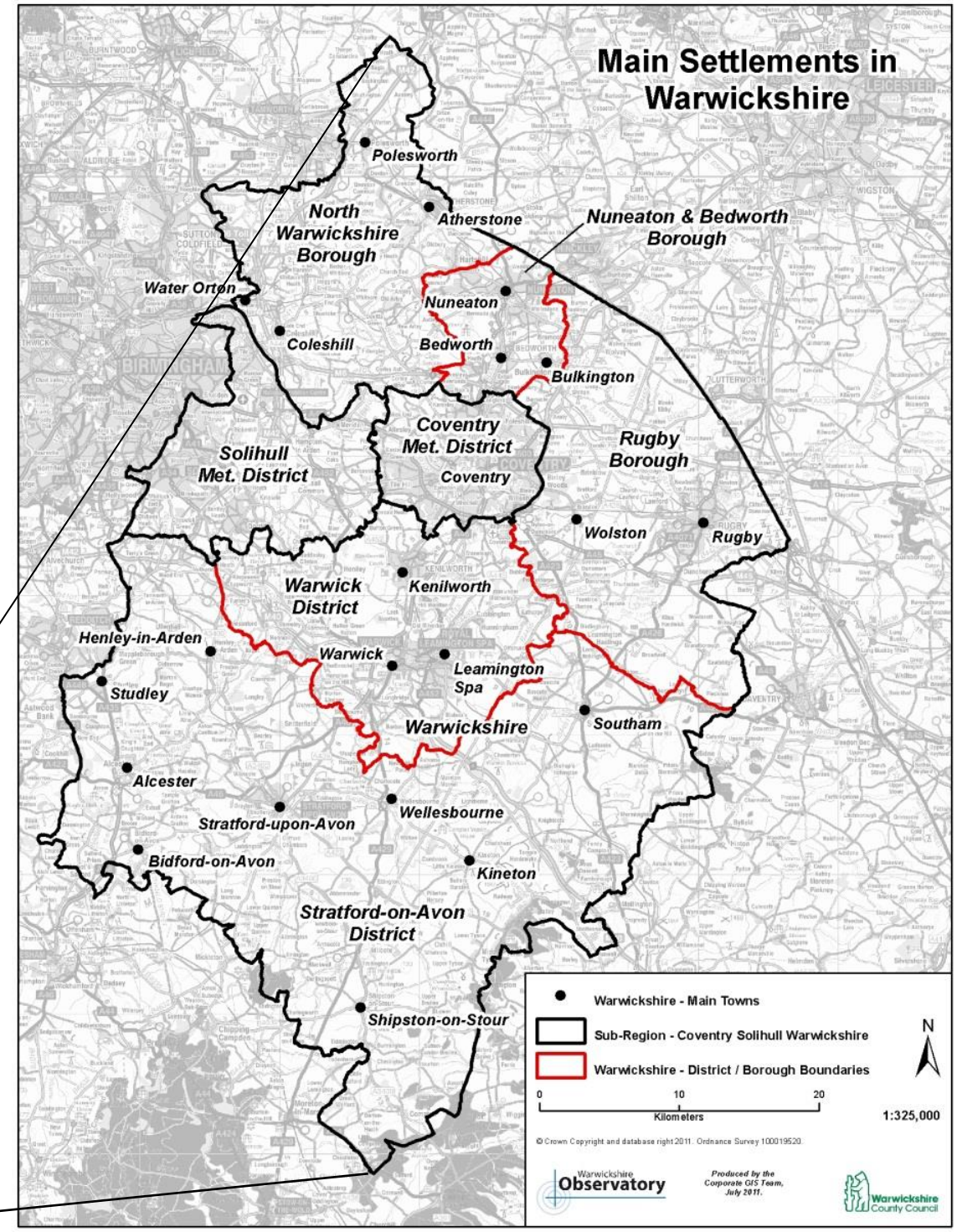
## PROJECT BOARD



## Researchers



## Advisors



# Warwickshire County Council Ecology Unit

- The scheme has been led by the WCC Ecology Unit
- Team of 10 ecologists?
- Provide planning advice service to the WCC, WDC, SDC, RBC.
- Was able to pool ecological expertise
- However, offsetting/BNG was entirely new, and we had to learn as we went along.

## What triggers biodiversity offsetting

- Biodiversity metric required to be submitted on all major and most minor planning applications
- Metric calculation records baseline value, post intervention value including any onsite habitat creation/enhancements
- If there is a net loss, biodiversity offsetting is required
- offset is secured by planning condition or a Section 106

# S106 Options

Requires a scheme of biodiversity compensation to be submitted to the council. This can either be:

- Details of a suitable off-site BNG scheme including a:
  - 30-year management plan
  - contractual agreement to secure delivery and monitoring
- Payment of a financial contribution to Warwickshire County Council

# Option 1: Off-site BNG

- On land owned by the developer elsewhere
- On land owned by someone else either directly with the landowner or via a broker
  - Developer agrees a financial contribution with a landowner/broker to provide the net gain
  - Legal and financial agreements required to secure delivery and monitoring



## Option 2: Financial contribution

- Secured by a S106 agreement
- WCC take on liability to secure BNG sites
- Most popular option so far but slowly changing as more options become available
- Approx. **£5.5 million** in financial contributions to WCC received to date
- This option may not be available when BNG becomes mandatory.

# Off-site BNG delivery in Warwickshire

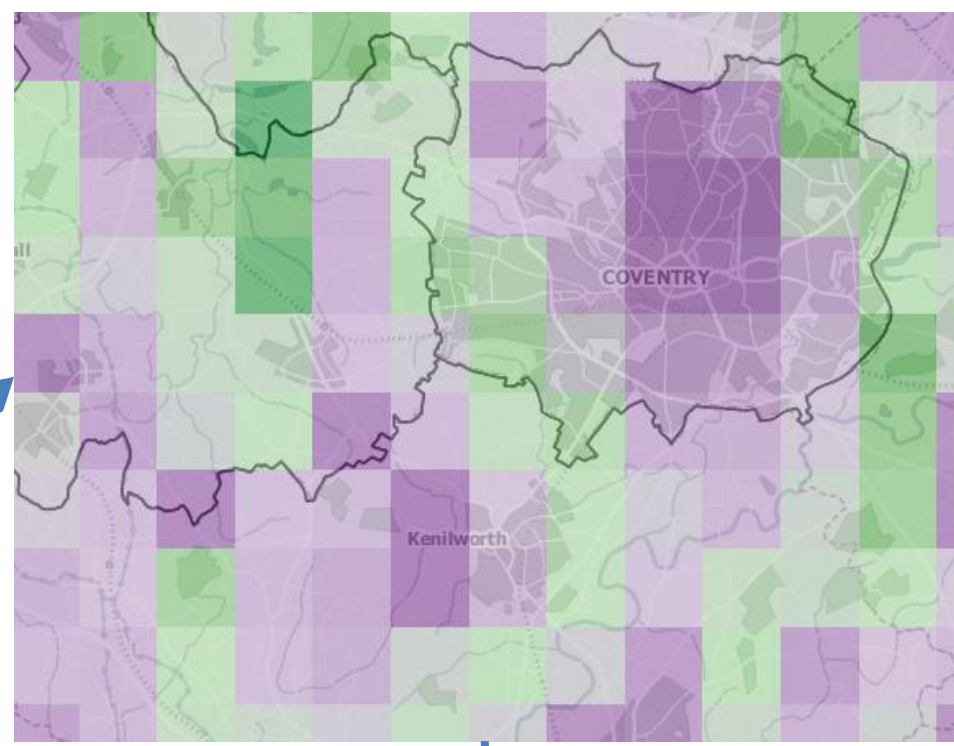
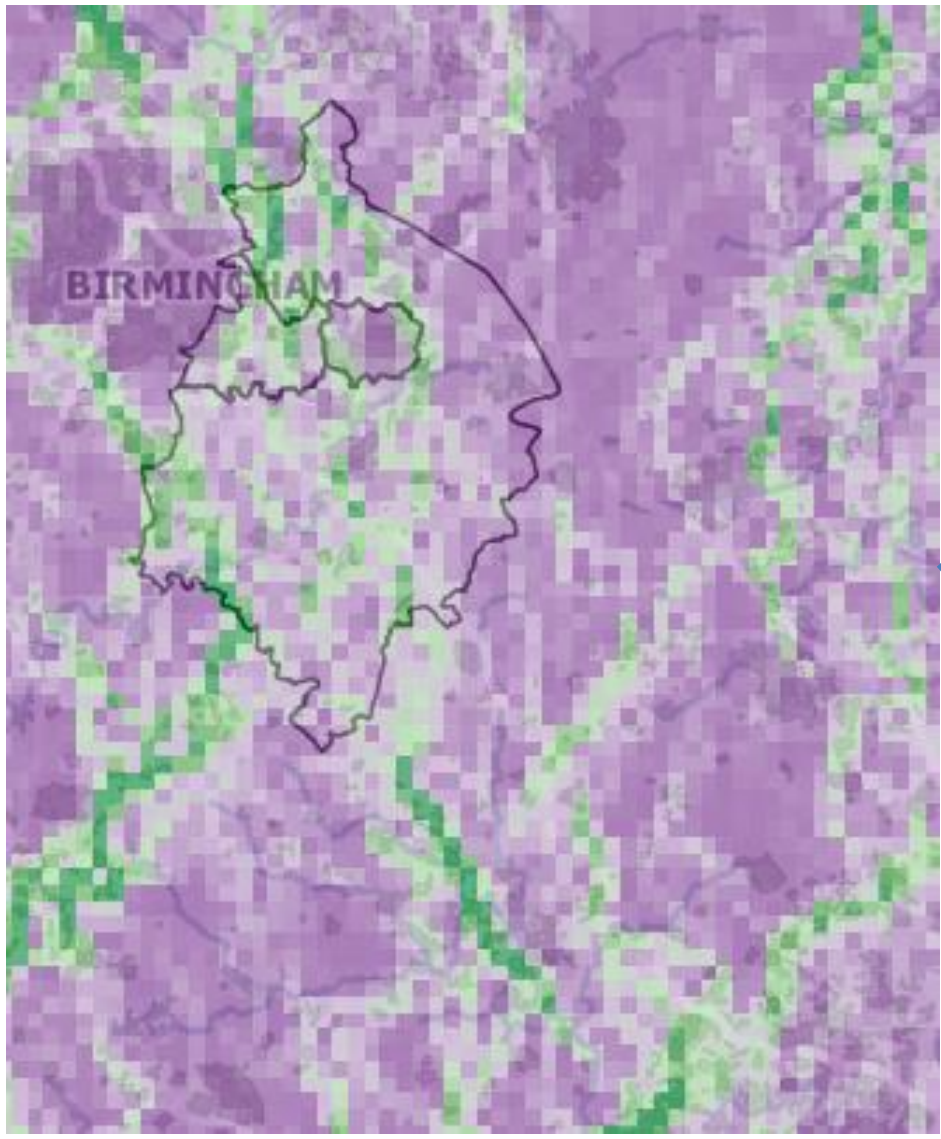
- S106 payments include an administration fee which WCC uses to run our scheme including finding, setting-up and monitoring BNG sites.
- This started the process in earnest, providing funding to employ a part-time ecologist (me) in 2017 to identify and secure offset sites
- The delivery of BNG work in Warwickshire has become self-sustaining through the use of S106 payments

# Where?

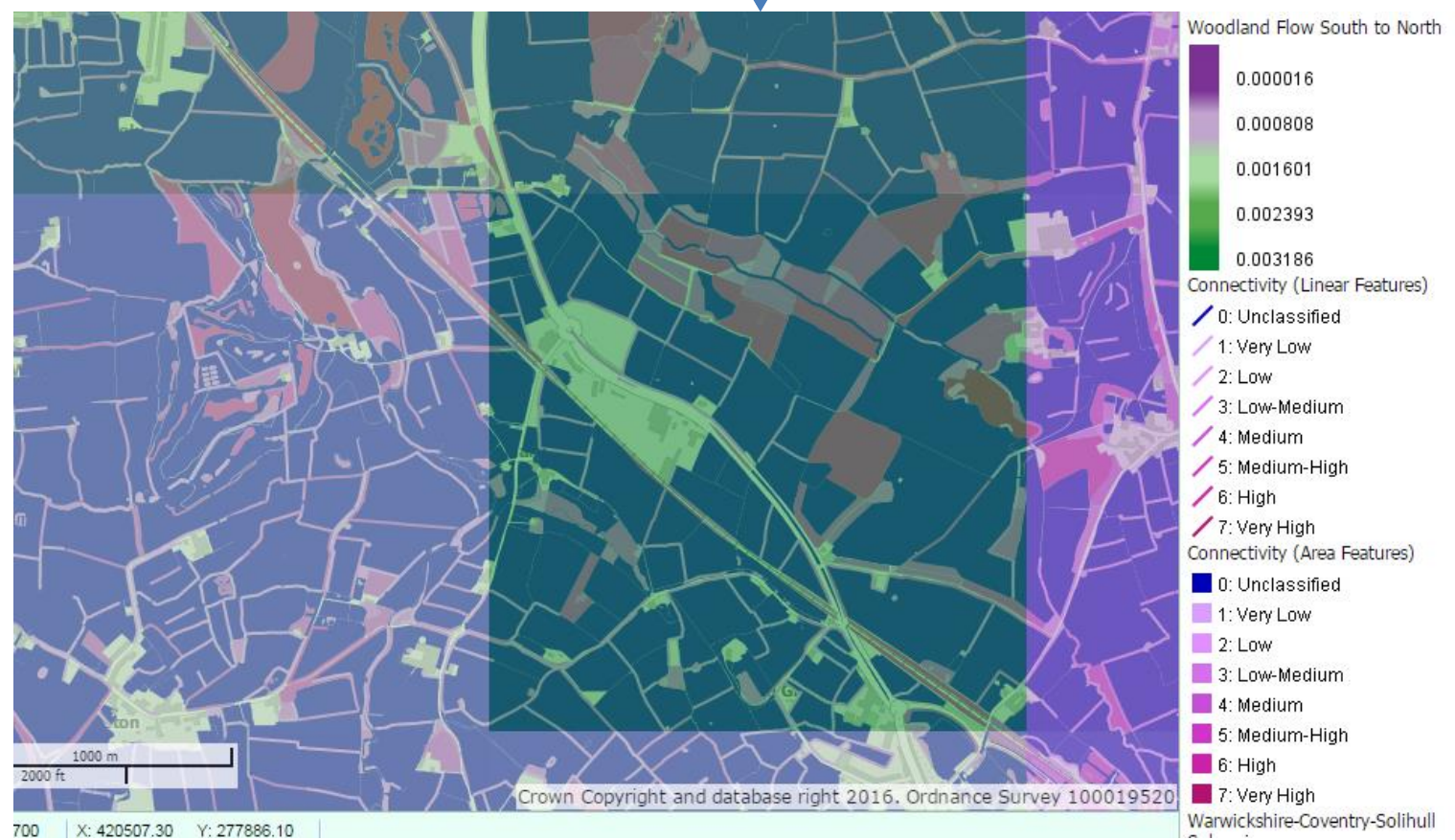
- Offsets are based on putting the right habitat in the right place to make more/larger core areas and connect them together.
- Based on Landscape (Spatial) Ecology mapping in partnership with the University of York.
- Put into practice via the Sub-regional GI Strategy in combination with other delivery mechanisms.

# CONDATIS

County / National



District



site

# Strategic areas

## Biodiversity Core Areas

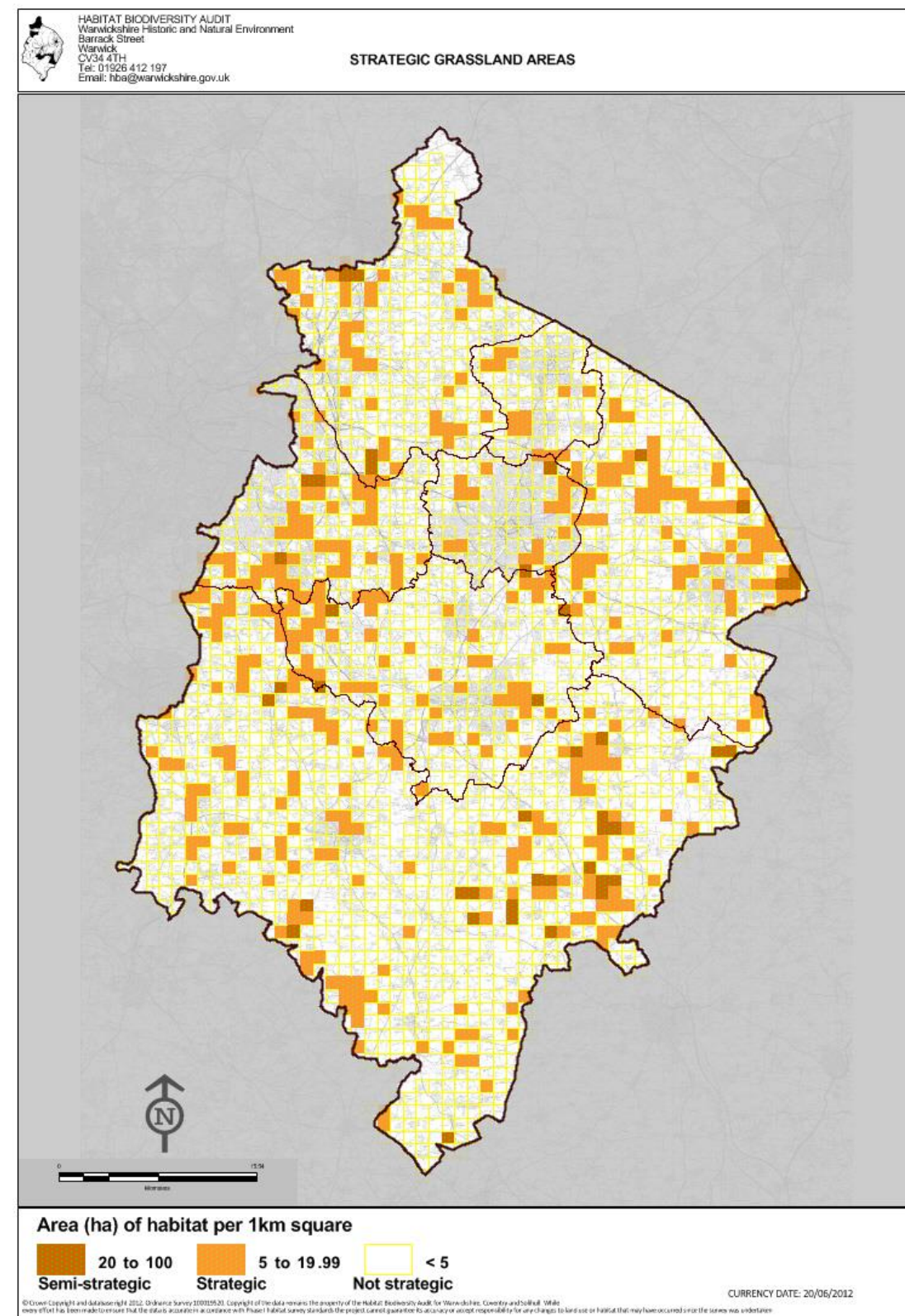
**A 1Km<sup>2</sup> that has 20ha or more woodland or grassland cover enables species to thrive in that square.**

For Woodland & Grassland:

If a 1Km<sup>2</sup> has 20% or more woodland/wildflower grassland then it is a Core Area.

We are focusing BNG in 1Km<sup>2</sup> where there is only 5-20% cover to create more Core Areas.

However, biodiversity is not restricted to these areas and opportunities to create 20ha of new habitat should not be overlooked. (i.e. immediate creation of a Core Area!)



# Off-site BNG – some rules

- Must demonstrate additionality
  - Habitat expansion i.e. creation
  - Habitat enhancement i.e. improve habitat condition
- Habitat improvements cannot already have funding e.g. CS unless there are measurable enhancements on top of current funded management
- As close to development site as possible and within same LPA
- Habitats improvements need to be maintained for at least 30 years secured through a legal agreement

# Assessing potential BNG sites

- Initial assessment using desk information
  - Is it in the right place ie strategic area
  - Existing survey data?
  
- Field survey to carry out baseline habitat assessments, identify potential for habitat improvements
  
- Calculate potential net gain using metric
  
- Outline proposal

# Developing the scheme

- All BNG schemes require a management plan
- Needs to be costed
- Require a legal agreement



# Offset Management Plan

- Location and site description
- Baseline habitat assessment
- Details of the habitats to be created/enhanced
- Metric calculation
- Management objectives and prescriptions

# Management Plans

- Set realistic targets for habitat creation and enhancement proposals – better to overachieve than fail if condition or habitat type cannot be reached or created
- The Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plan forms the basis for legal agreements (if required) and potential enforcement action if targets are not met
- A standardised approach to ensure consistency
- Where management plans are produced by other parties, these need to be assessed to see whether they are likely to be effective in creating or enhancing habitats,

# Legal agreements

- Legal agreements required to secure off-site BNG
- Commit providers to deliver habitat creation and management for minimum 30-year period
- Must have a legal interest in the land ie landowner or leaseholder
- Landowners selling BNG credits directly to developers required to register scheme with WCC and sign legal agreement
- WCC assess proposed schemes to see if likely to be effective in creating/ enhancing habitats, track unit sales, and monitor scheme.
- BNG schemes on council owned land secured by a MOU.

# BNG providers in Warwickshire

- **Private landowners** - small and large
- **Parish council**
- **District council** - case study below
- **County council** - Country Park (more details in case study), two former landfill sites, and small farm holdings.

# Case Studies

# Case study 1: Ryton Pools Country Park

- A sand and gravel quarry in the 1960s
- WCC acquired the site in 1976 for use as a landfill site for household waste.
- Phased restoration of the landfill began in the early 1980's
- Country park opened in 1996 on completion of restoration

# Ryton Pools Country Park

Management plan by WCC Ecology Unit being implemented by Country Park ranger team. Key elements:

- Ragwort/creeping thistle control
- Erect stock-proof fencing
- Hay meadow management - annual hay cut and aftermath grazing
- Yellow rattle sowed autumn 2017
- Locally harvested wildflower seed sowed autumn 2021
- Annual monitoring

# Case study 2: Saltisford Meadows

Owned by Warwick District Council

Grass-dominated poor semi-improved grassland

Small at just under 1ha. However, it is part of a network of parks and grassland open spaces in Warwick Town centre.

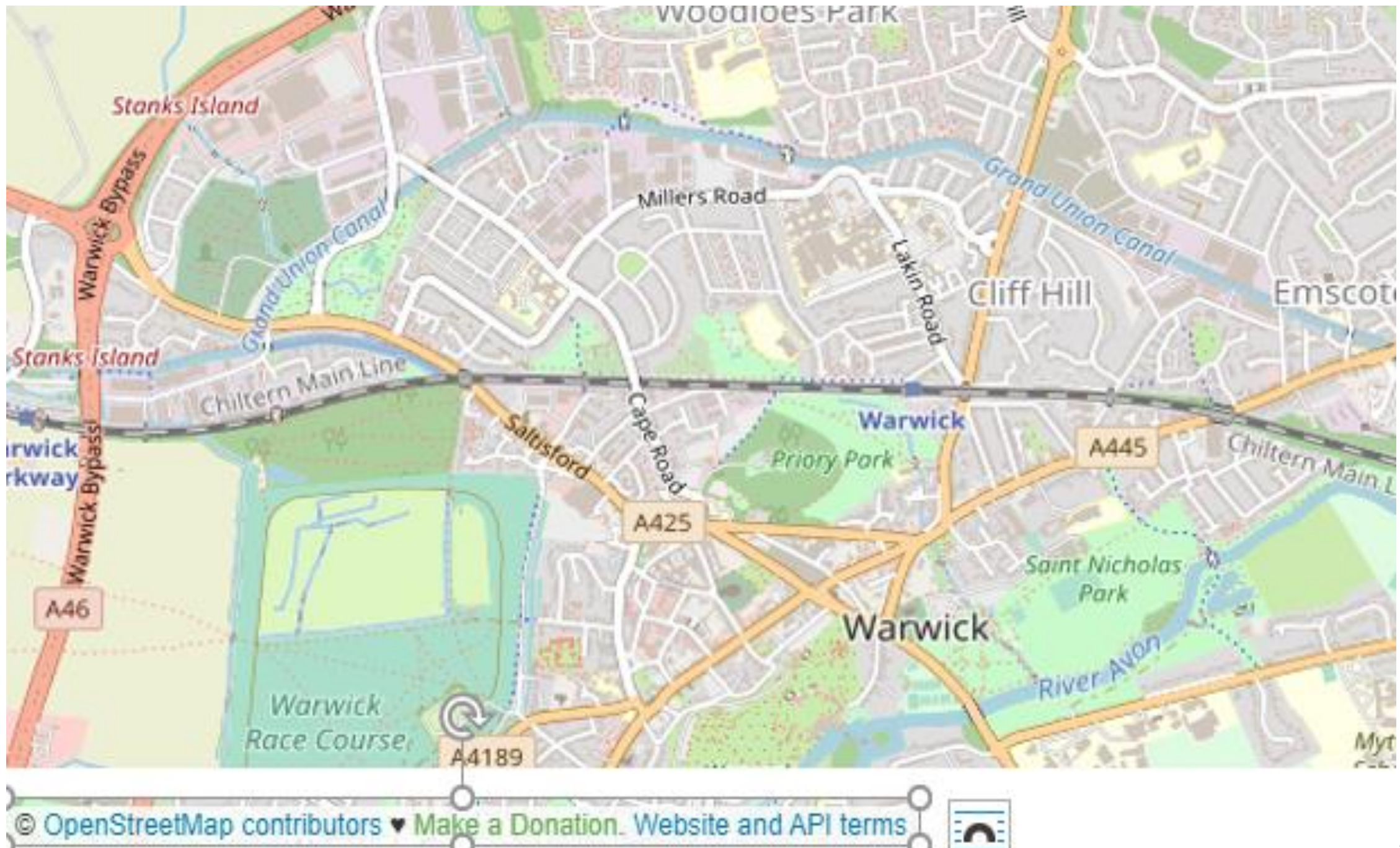
Some of these parks include areas of long grass or wildflowers meadows managed by WDC



Aerial Photography: © Bluesky International Limited 2013



# Saltisford Meadows: position



# Saltisford Meadows: Partnership working

- WCC Ecology Unit and WDC Parks and Green Spaces Team working in partnership to implement management plan
- Yellow rattle sown in autumn 2018
- Wildflower mix sown this autumn
- Hay cut including in WDC's grass cutting contract

## Parks and BNG

- BNG can provide a source of long-term sustainable funding for habitat creation and enhancement
- But requires a long-term commitment ie 30-years
- Schemes must show additionality – habitat enhancements can't already be committed to under current management plans

# Parks and BNG

- Need right skills and knowledge to develop schemes from conception to implementation including:
- Survey and site assessment e.g UKHab and condition assessments
- Experience of habitat creation/enhancement/management
- Working knowledge of biodiversity metric
- Producing management plans

END