

2026 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) consultation

Consultation statement – Nature SPD

The Council consulted statutory and other consultees on the draft Nature SPD in line with the approved 2018 Statement of Community Involvement (<https://www.sefton.gov.uk/sci>). The consultation period ran from 4 March 2026 to 19 April 2026.

Eight responses were received, from:

- Historic England
- Homes England
- National Highways
- Natural England
- Sefton Resident B
- Sefton Resident S
- Sefton Resident Y
- The Mersey Forest

The table below summaries the main issues raised by consultees ('summary of comment'), and how these issues have been addressed in the SPD ('Council response').

Who made the comment?	Summary of comment	Council Response
Historic England	No comment	Noted.
Homes England	Request to amend the LCR Ecological Network for a specific site in Southport which includes Priority Habitat.	It is not within the scope of the SPD to amend the LCR Ecological Network. This is longstanding, LCR-wide evidence which should not be subject to piecemeal review. Local Plan policy NH2 'Nature' sets out the nature-based criteria for assessing proposals on sites which include Priority Habitat.
National Highways	No comment	Noted.

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Natural England	<p>2. Ecological survey requirements – include proposals on deep peat in Figure 2.2. Development on peat leads to a permanent loss of an irreplaceable asset through extraction or sealing. Natural England does not support the principle of development or extraction of deep restorable peat. (see England Peat Status Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Storage dataset). This evidence should be used as an initial tool to determine whether further hydrological and ground investigations are required. Additional sources of information include The British Geological Survey maps portal and existing borehole data from the British Geological Survey.</p> <p>Where mapping indicates a peat presence and a lack of historic borehole data, further detailed survey is required. A peat survey should be undertaken by a soils scientist and carried out in line with the following methodology: Field Protocol – IUCN UK Peatland Programme.</p>	<p>‘<u>Irreplaceable habitats</u>’ have been added to the list in Figure 2.1 and the first bullet point of Figure 2.2, and a footnote added re Figure 2.1 to state “<u>Irreplaceable habitats as defined by the Framework’s Glossary</u>”. This definition includes blanket bog and lowland fen. The wider peat issues raised are considered to be outside the scope of this SPD, given the local plan and existing national planning policy context. They are issues to be considered in the review of the Local Plan and preparation of any future Supplementary Plans.</p> <p>However, some amendments have been made to section 4 (ecological enhancement) regarding peat. In paragraph 4.2 an additional sub-point has been added to the bullet point relating to the National Planning Policy Framework to refer to “<u>Mitigation of climate change, notably creation or restoration of habitats which can act as carbon stores, such as woodland planting and peatland restoration</u>)”. Paragraph 4.3 has been amended, now saying that to “For all development types, suitable species must be used in landscaping schemes ... Nature enhancements on peat soils should contribute to the creation or restoration of peatland”. Paragraph 4.10 (now 4.11) has also been amended to say that “ ... Such off-site enhancements may include new tree planting, wildflower grasslands, <u>dune or peatland restoration or enhancement</u> or other nature-based improvements or site management as well as species enhancements such as bat and bird boxes”.</p>
Natural England	<p>4. Net gain for biodiversity – ecological enhancement Welcome the reference to the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LCR LNRS) and note its role for Strategic Significance uplift for mandatory biodiversity net</p>	Noted.

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	gain (BNG) in line with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Guidance .	
Natural England	5. Designation of additional Local Wildlife Sites See the Urban Nature Recovery Standard of our Green Infrastructure Framework , which seeks to increase the proportion of green infrastructure that is designed and managed for nature recovery, for example through the provision and sustainable management of Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites.	Noted.
Sefton resident B	In the interests of biodiversity, maximise greenery along all arterial roads and commuter routes, for example dense tree planting, the introduction of hedgerows and wherever possible financial incentives to get more private property owners 'on side'. Clear vegetation along railway lines.	The Nature SPD provides more detailed guidance on existing planning policy. As paragraph 1.8 sets out, it is not a nature conservation strategy or action plan for biodiversity in Sefton, or a strategy to set out priorities for grant funding: the SPD is not accompanied by specific funding for tree or other planting.
Sefton resident B	Use of reconstruction of prized historic buildings, such as Park House Crosby, which had an open expanse of greenery that could be supported with grants to absorb carbon per acre and hectare becoming a new fixture.	The SPD relates almost exclusively to sites where development is proposed in development plans and/or by landowners (sites subject to development). However, section 4 of the SPD sets priorities for net gain for biodiversity – ecological enhancement, including for example hedgerow planting or tree planting
Sefton resident B	Active collaboration with property owners to demolish rows of contemporary post-1950s construction and reconstruct attractive Georgian style terraced housing that will provide long-term habitats for species, such as bats, etc that are essential for daily ecosystems.	It is not the role of this SPD to propose largescale redevelopment. However, it is considered that the SPD provides guidance on conserving and enhancing / providing new habitat for certain species such as bats.
Sefton resident S	I have read the draft Nature SPD carefully and consider it a particularly useful and accurate document. I do not wish to register any reservations.	Noted.
Sefton resident Y	I appreciate the work that has gone into updating this document and the Council's clear intention to strengthen the protection of Sefton's natural assets.	Noted.

Who made the comment?	Summary of comment	Council Response
Sefton resident Y	There is much to welcome in the SPD, particularly the emphasis on early ecological assessment, the strong protection for irreplaceable habitats, and the commitment to designating additional Local Wildlife Sites outside the Local Plan cycle. These are positive steps that will help safeguard Sefton's biodiversity in the long term.	Noted.
Sefton resident Y	Would like to offer constructive comments regarding the treatment of agricultural land and open countryside, which the SPD rightly identifies as functionally linked habitat for internationally important species. This is a crucial recognition. The SPD could go further in ensuring that this type of land receives the level of protection its ecological role warrants.	It is considered that the SPD, together with the Local Plan and national policy, provides sufficient guidance regarding functionally linked land. Where sites contain or could affect functionally linked habitat, it is anticipated that ecological consultants and the Council's ecological advisors would consider this in more detail, for example bespoke advice, discussions, surveys and any potential mitigation
Sefton resident Y	As farmland and open land support qualifying species associated with the Sefton Coast, development on such land should be considered highly constrained. There should be explicit protection for agricultural land and open countryside where they serve as functionally linked habitat. Strengthening the SPDs would help ensure that avoidance — the first stage of the mitigation hierarchy — is genuinely prioritised over mitigation or compensation, particularly in relation to greenfield housing proposals.	It is considered that the SPD, together with the Local Plan and national policy, provides sufficient guidance on this issue.
Sefton resident Y	Would welcome clearer guidance on how ecological constraints will be applied to Prior Approval and permitted development cases. Ensuring that the presence of functionally linked farmland, protected species, or Priority Habitats can justify refusal of Prior Approval would provide greater consistency and certainty for both applicants and communities. The Council should clarify how ecological considerations will influence Prior Approval decisions.	It is considered that the SPD, together with the Local Plan and national policy, provides sufficient guidance on this issue, where siting is a matter for Prior Approval.

Who made the comment?	Summary of comment	Council Response
Sefton resident Y	To strengthen the SPD further and help ensure that Sefton's natural environment is protected in line with the Local Plan and national policy, the Council should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcing that greenfield development should not proceed where ecological harm cannot be avoided • Accelerating Local Wildlife Site designation, particularly for farmland and open land under development pressure 	It is considered that the SPD, together with the Local Plan and national policy, provides sufficient guidance regarding development that would cause ecological harm. It is not considered appropriate to accelerate or amend the steps in the Local Wildlife Site designation process outlined in the SPD.
Sefton resident Y	Support the Council's wider ambitions for nature recovery.	Noted.
The Mersey Forest	Would welcome stronger connections between SPD and The Mersey Forest Plan, so that development in Sefton also helps to deliver The Mersey Forest Plan (benefits for people, nature and climate). Delivering The Mersey Forest Plan will help deliver for nature, as well as bringing benefits for people and climate. Would welcome the inclusion of The Mersey Forest Plan within the SPD.	The Nature SPD provides more detailed guidance on existing planning policy. As paragraph 1.8 sets out, it is not a nature conservation strategy or action plan for biodiversity in Sefton. However, paragraph 1.8 goes on to list some such strategies. The Mersey Forest Plan has been added to this list.
The Mersey Forest	Include The Mersey Forest Plan and accompanying Tree Atlas in the list of LCR and sub-regional evidence and strategies in section 7	These documents have been added to section 7 (References).
The Mersey Forest	SPD should reflect that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has now been adopted by the LCR Combined Authority; amend current references to ' <i>emerging LNRS</i> '	These references have been amended, reflecting the adoption of the LNRS by the LCR Combined Authority in March 2026.
The Mersey Forest	Statistics on p25 should be updated to take account of updated ancient woodland information (see Natural England Ancient Woodland revised data).	The statistics have been amended.
The Mersey Forest	Consider referring to locally significant trees in paragraph 2.23 (see https://liverpool.treestory.me/treestories/).	It is not considered this is appropriate for the Nature SPD.
The Mersey Forest	Increasing tree cover for nature through the SPD will help to deliver the tree cover aspirations set out in The Mersey Forest Plan (15% tree cover by 2050, from a 2025 baseline of 13.7%).	This is a Nature SPD which provides more detailed guidance on existing local and national planning policy. It is not a tree planting strategy for Sefton. The SPD relates almost exclusively to sites where development is proposed in development plans and/or by landowners (sites subject to development). Sefton development plan policies do not
The Mersey Forest	The Mersey Forest Plan has a 3+3-+300 ambition: every home can see 3 trees, every neighbourhood has 30% tree	

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	cover and everyone lives within 300 m of an accessible green space with trees (where there are no separate local authority standards). SPD should reflect the 3:30:300 ambition to bring trees into streets and garden, soften the urban landscape for nature, help connect spaces and to create green corridors.	require new tree planting <i>per se</i> , although they do refer to the role of trees within landscaping schemes and public realm improvements for example. As such, the SPD encourages new tree planting and tree cover where appropriate and part of good design (right tree in the right place).
The Mersey Forest	SPD should aspire to contribute towards the area-specific tree cover ambitions set out in The Mersey Forest Plan, whilst noting constraints on increasing tree cover set out in The Mersey Forest's Tree Atlas (such as best and most versatile agricultural land, peaty soils, international nature designations).	Further, it is considered that there are a number of areas within Sefton where the 15% and 30% tree cover ambitions of The Mersey Forest Plan are not appropriate, for example on the Sefton Coast, in areas of open landscape character, in areas identified for other habitat priorities in the LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy and in the more densely built up parts of Sefton's urban area where there is insufficient space (including on development sites) to achieve an average 30% tree cover. In existing parks and open spaces, while there is a role for increased tree planting, other nature/ naturalistic measures may be more appropriate, for example wildflower meadows.
The Mersey Forest	<p>SPD should contribute to more than 30% tree cover/ higher proportions of tree cover in priority locations identified in The Mersey Forest's Tree Atlas, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parts of Sefton prioritised by the Environment Agency as being in catchments that are highly suitable for Natural Flood Management (NFM) interventions, and SuDS to improve nature and provide other benefits. (The Mersey Forest's NFM Manager can offer technical expertise on appraisal, design, project management of delivery and monitoring) • Tree planting should reflect Sefton's role as a red squirrel stronghold and help secure the expansion of red squirrels into new areas • Heat vulnerable neighbourhoods, notably those in Southport and Bootle that are in the top 20% in terms of social vulnerability to extreme heat • Areas of greenspace deprivation in Sefton, as mapped by Friends of the Earth data • Areas prioritised in the Woodland Trust's Tree Equity map (this also sets canopy goals) 	The Council's standards for open space and accessible to nature space are set out in the 2015 Open Space and Recreation Study , the 2017 Local Plan and the 2017 Open Space SPD and 2026 draft Open Space SPD update . Policies in the 2026 Bootle Area Action Plan , notably BAAP24 Environmental Improvements recognise the important role of and priority for tree planting and nature improvements within this area which has relatively high levels of multiple deprivation and a range of environmental challenges.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the more deprived areas in terms of the national Index of Multiple Deprivation, where open spaces may be especially important to meet people’s health and other needs • Other priority areas, such as those with poor air and/or water quality, or in need of noise regulation. • In tree/ woodland opportunity areas identified by the LCR Local Nature Recovery Strategy Habitat (LNRS) Habitat Map and Statement of Principles. This is already considered in the SPD. 	
The Mersey Forest	<p>Take opportunities from funding through the planning system (e.g. biodiversity net gain (BNG), Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)) and/or funding via The Mersey Forest initiatives to achieve National Planning Policy Framework and The Mersey Forest Plan policies and approaches. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the proportion of sustainably managed woodland, in line with The Mersey Forest Plan target of 80% by 2050 • Achieving environmental, recreation and wildlife enhancements around settlements and within developments • Retaining existing trees and including new trees within landscape/scheme design for development proposals. 	It is considered that the SPD provides the more detailed guidance to help achieve this, within the framework set by local and national planning policy.