



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 19 June 2025

The Green Pledge

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Carolyn Healy - Cabinet Member: Neighbourhoods, Planning & Sustainability
Lead Director:	James Dunn - Director: Prosperity & Investment
Service Area:	Prosperity & Investment
Report Author:	Stuart Dunlop - Ecology and Green Infrastructure Specialist
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 13 May 2025 Business Briefing – 22 May 2025 Cabinet – 19 June 2025

1.0 Recommendations for Decision/Noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Approve the creation of the Green Pledge scheme, and;
- 1.2 Delegate authority to complete declaration process of Green Pledge sites to the Director of Prosperity and Investment and Director of Policy and Governance, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Neighbourhoods, Planning & Sustainability.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report proposes the introduction of a Green Pledge scheme, encouraging the protection and management of non-Council owned green spaces within the borough.
- 2.2 The Green Pledge will provide long-term management and safeguarding of green spaces of local importance, which are not in council ownership.
- 2.3 Whilst not policy driven, the protection of these sites will assist the Council in its commitment to the provision of locally accessible green spaces and to meet the needs of local communities. These sites are intrinsically important, supporting wildlife, leisure and recreation as well as offering positive health and well-being facilities to local communities.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The proposed Green Pledge scheme builds on the success of the Telford & Wrekin Council Green Guarantee programme, which has so far declared 305 individual sites, and its ongoing programme of Local Nature Reserve Designations, of which 20 are currently declared and at least three more are agreed to be declared. The Green Pledge will form a part of the Council's overarching commitment to promote accessible green space. The borough is approximately 90% green space, with roads, buildings, roofs, footpaths and car parks making up only 10% of the land coverage.
- 3.2 The Green Network, updated for the Local Plan review, which maps the habitat connectivity and functional green corridors across the borough, covers approximately 2,885ha, a legacy of the structure and planning involved in the creation of the Telford New Town in 1971. Within the Green Network sits a hierarchy of statutory and non-statutory sites, comprising:
- c.26ha of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest);
 - c.614ha of LNR (Local Nature Reserves);
 - c.100ha of proposed LNRs;
 - c.626ha of LWS (Local Wildlife Sites), and;
 - c.624ha of Green Guarantee sites.
- 3.3 Site selection criteria has been identified based on the criteria used to select Green Guarantee sites. They explore the sites' value to ecology, biodiversity, local leisure and recreation, and community worth. Whilst it is not expected that each site will meet all the criteria it is considered appropriate to expect Green Pledge sites to successfully meet a combination of the below criteria. Each site must not be owned by Telford and Wrekin Council (TWC).

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	Criteria	Explanation	Evidence Base
1	Ownership	The site must <u>not</u> be owned by TWC. The owner of the site must approve the site's designation.	Telford and Wrekin land ownership datasets and Land Registry.
2	Green Network	Is the site within the Green Network (as defined in the emerging Local Plan)	Green Network mapping 2025 as shown on the policies map within the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan
3	Local Support	Has the community been involved in the site in the past? E.g. community events, litter picking, tree planting etc... .	Council knowledge
4	Ecological Value	Does the site have ecological value evidenced by: a) Historical species records from the Shropshire & Telford Environmental Record Centre b) Natural or Semi-natural habitats present on site c) Potential for wildlife to be present	a) All species records from the Shropshire & Telford Environmental Record Centre b) Council knowledge and interpretation
5	Ecological Corridor/Stepping Stone	Does the site form part of the Ecological Corridor or Stepping Stone as defined by the Lawton Report ¹	TWC Ecological Network Mapping Technical Paper & mapping 2014
6	Friends Group	Is there an active 'Friends of, or other community group involved on the site	Council knowledge
7	Passive Recreation	Is the site used for passive recreation? E.g. dog walking, informal play etc.	Council knowledge
8	Active Recreation	Is the site used for active recreation? E.g. formal sport and more formal play including use of formal play areas, pitches and games areas etc.	Council knowledge

¹ Sir John Lawton. Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (2010).

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9	Cultural/Events Potential	Does the site have potential to be used for small scale community events?	Council knowledge
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- 3.4 The Green Pledge scheme has been developed with Officers from the TWC Ecology & Green Infrastructure and Neighbourhoods and Enforcement Services teams, together with two rounds of consultation with the TWC Environmental Scrutiny Committee. It is designed to encourage long-term positive management of open space in urban areas to improve their accessibility and value to the community around them. Unlike Green Guarantee sites, there will be no policy or ownership based protection on proposed Green Pledge sites, however there may be existing planning conditions which apply to these. If owners decide to look at alternative uses for a site in the future, the Council will consider this against adopted policies.
- 3.5 The Green Pledge is intended to improve the quality of green space in predominantly urban and industrial settings. Public open space in new development sites form an integral part of the experience for residents and the public who live near, commute, exercise and spend recreation time within. Other examples of potential Green Pledge sites could include land managed by local museum trusts or utilities providers, or land owned by businesses in the various industrial estates across the borough.
- 3.6 The Council will improve the quality of these spaces by working with the individuals or companies responsible for the long-term management and maintenance to create a management plan. The management plan will be short and easily accessible for land managers and members of the public, and will look to identify the most valuable features of the space in ecological and biodiversity terms, as well as its visitor infrastructure (benches, bins, play areas) and consider how these can be maintained throughout the lifetime of the site. Organisations managing Green Pledge sites will be supported to better communicate their management practices with the public, something that is especially important where habitats are being managed for wildlife and do not fit the 'neat and tidy' expectations.
- 3.7 Sites welcomed into the scheme will be mapped on a specific GIS online map, which will be available on the TWC Website alongside information about the location, access and parking for these sites. This is in line with the information hosted about other protected sites in the borough.
- 3.8 The company or organisation responsible for the Green Pledge site will also have access to marketing materials to support the promotion of the Green Pledge site.
- 3.9 These materials could be very valuable on residential developments where the quality and long term management of the open space is often a selling point for potential residents, encouraging higher uptake of the housing offered, as well as

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providing peace of mind for residents that their community green space will be managed well in the long term.

- 3.10 The declaration of land under the Green Pledge scheme also contributes to businesses and organisations fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities in relation to biodiversity and the environment.
- 3.11 The Green Pledge synchronises effectively with Biodiversity Net Gain, the statutory requirement for all new development above a certain scale to achieve a net gain of at least 10%, or above, in biodiversity value. Habitats which provide significant onsite biodiversity value will be legally secured and have to be monitored for 30 years. The Council will be able to use the Green Pledge accreditation to encourage developers to plan and invest in new areas of public open space on their sites earlier in the planning process, delivering higher quality open space areas on development sites.
- 3.12 Entry into the Green Pledge will be via an application process allowing the Council to ensure sites meet the criteria and are managed appropriately, as well as vetting applicants to avoid risks outlined later in this report.

4.0 Summary of Main Proposals

- 4.1 This report proposes the creation of the Green Pledge Scheme, by which the Council will recognise and award areas of high quality public open space that is not Council-owned and which meet a number of the criteria set out in paragraph 3.3

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council is committed to recognising and protected locally accessible green space and has already protected 305 Green Guarantee sites alongside extensive areas of Local Nature Reserve.
- 5.2 Creation of the Green Pledge Scheme gives the Council a pathway to increase the number of recognised individual high quality green spaces within the borough, adding to the already extensive suite of protected sites.
- 5.3 The established alternative route for protecting small areas of green space is the Local Green Space designation set out under paragraphs 101 – 103 of National Planning Policy Framework. This route is only available at the time of adopting a new Local Plan or making a Neighbourhood Plan.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 Internal consultation with relevant Council officers as well as the Environment Scrutiny Committee has taken place, and the following two primary risks have been identified:

- reputational risks of awarding Green Pledge status to sites, which have been mismanaged historically, or are under scrutiny for poor management; and
- risks associated with 'greenwashing' whereby inclusion of sites, which are in poor condition or are mismanaged risks 'diluting' the perceived protection of other protected sites in the borough.

6.5 No other risks have been identified associated with the proposal.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 The creation of the Green Pledge and its associate sites will play an important role in maintaining a healthy balance in spatial planning between the built environment and green infrastructure.

7.2 Research has shown that the public health benefits derived from living close to accessible green spaces are considerable and include decreased levels of obesity, heart disease and diabetes as well as lower levels of stress. Access to green spaces is also seen as an effective treatment for clinical depression and regular walking has been shown to increase life expectancy. Provision of accessible green spaces can help to reduce costs on some local NHS services.

7.3 It is increasingly recognised that we are facing three challenges linked to the natural environment:

- The impacts of a changing climate,
- The impacts of current declines in biodiversity, and
- The increasing need to strengthen the connections between people and the natural world.

The protection of areas of Green Pledge land, as part of a wider suite of sites across the borough, will help to address these challenges at a local level.

7.3 The Council recognises the role each site, both small and large, plays in increasing local resilience to a changing climate. The Green Pledge sites will play a supporting role to the larger core sites (including Local Nature Reserves and SSSIs) and the protection ensures residents will have continued access to accessible green space on their doorstep allowing them to create meaningful connections to the natural environment as well as helping people improve their health and well-being by

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engaging in healthy activities locally. The Council is not simply providing these spaces but working actively to ensure they are participatory. Telford's green spaces are cared for by a combination of Council services and just under 30 individual 'friends of' groups, many of which are affiliated with The Telford Green Space Partnership.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Council will not incur any costs for management or maintenance of these sites and therefore there will be no change in budget levels required. Funding from the private sector, Section 106 funding and other infrastructure investment funding can be sought to assist in the maintenance and management of play and sports facilities and other site infrastructure where it has been secured against a particular need in that area.
- 8.2 This investment, where appropriate, will be guided by the upcoming 'Play Strategy' and 'Playing Pitch and Outdoor Recreation Strategy', as well as ongoing biodiversity baseline assessment of sites across the borough. Any improvements or investments would be in line with the criteria identified as acceptable for a Green Pledge site.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 9.1 As the Green Pledge Scheme relates to non-Council owned land, the Cabinet has no recourse to decision-making regarding the management of the land declared in this scheme.
- 9.2 Cabinet is the decision-making body in respect of whether to allow specific sites, landowners, developers or management companies to apply to this scheme. It will also have the ability to remove this designation from sites, which no longer meet the agreed criteria, or for other acceptable reasons. These powers can be delegated to officers, who can exercise these powers without the need to seek Cabinet approval by way of a formal report.
- 9.3 This report recommends arrangements, which clarify when officers are able to exercise their delegated powers in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member in respect of these sites, without the requirement of Cabinet authority.
- 9.4 There are no HR implications.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 The declaration of Green Pledge sites will deliver borough wide benefits and specific impacts in multiple wards.

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10.2 The creation of the Green Pledge and declaration of sites contributes to several priorities including:

- ensuring that neighbourhoods are safe, clean and well maintained, and;
- improving the health and well-being of our communities and addressing health inequalities.

10.3 The provision of accessible green spaces contributes to supporting the delivery of the Borough's public health priorities, encouraging people of all ages to remain active.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 In 2023, Natural England published the National Green Infrastructure Framework which updated the recommended standards for Accessible Natural Greenspace:

"Everyone, wherever they live, should have accessible natural greenspace:

- Of at least 0.5 ha in size, no more than 200 metres from home
- Of at least 2 ha in size, no more than 300 metres from home;
- At least one accessible 10 ha site within 1 km of home; and
- One accessible 500 ha site within 10km of home; plus
- A minimum of one hectare of Local Nature Reserve per 1000 population"

11.2 Green Pledge sites will contribute to the Borough's continued success in exceeding this standard; sometimes providing a green walking route by which residents can access a larger site and sometimes simply providing a green view or a tiny oasis within the built up area bringing people into closer contact with green spaces and nature and providing opportunities, of varying kinds, for exercise, reflection, relaxation and engagement.

11.3 In 2023 Telford & Wrekin Council adopted a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, a focus of which is the commitment to creating and maintain a green and sustainable borough. The 2022 residents survey, which informed the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, found that almost "*half of residents indicated that improved open green spaces is the most important priority to them for improving cultural, leisure and sports facilities and services*". The Green Pledge contributes to this, adding to the suite of high quality designated sites across the borough.

11.3 Health inequalities are often linked to individuals' access to nature. It has been shown that living close to accessible green spaces can promote public health and reduce levels of obesity, heart disease, reduce stress and levels of depression.

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- 11.4 Access to high quality green space is important to health and well-being at all stages in life. Learning through natural play is a key part of developing imagination, physical fine motor skills and improves a child's ability to deal with stress and adversity in life. Activities in nature can have a significant impact on reducing social isolation and symptoms anxiety and depression in adults.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 Degradation of the natural environment including biodiversity loss through lack of, or improper management, has a greater impact on those in society who are more vulnerable. This has a number of drivers often connected to economic status, health and age. Therefore, preventing and reversing this degradation is likely to have a greater proportional benefit on those vulnerable groups.
- 12.2 Declaration of Green Pledge sites and subsequent appropriate and tailored management for biodiversity and ecosystem services improvement would likely have a tangible local benefit, accessible to all including those identified groups.
- 12.3 Additionally, the Council, working with parish and town councils, friends' groups and local environmental organisations has made a commitment to address the inequalities in physical, cultural and social access to the natural environment.
- 12.4 Volunteering through Friends' groups is a proven and effective way of engaging a wide range of people and provides opportunities for maintaining and improving physical health as well as providing social opportunities. These groups also offer opportunities for local people to be involved in site management and decision-making processes through the steering groups and which TWC, town and parish councils and local people work together for the good of the site. Friends of Groups can be established for sites of varying sizes; many smaller green spaces have active volunteer groups engaged in their maintenance and use.
- 12.5 Telford & Wrekin Council actively deliver the 'Live Well Telford' scheme, an online community directory, which signposts local people to a range of services across the borough. The Telford Green Spaces Partnership (TGSP) was also re-launched in early 2024 and offers an opportunity for volunteers and custodians of important local sites to connect, share experiences and skills and provide support for one another. Any community groups set up around Green Pledge sites would be welcome to use these resources and attend TGSP meetings and improve their reach into their local community through the 'Live Well Telford' scheme.

13.0 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 Green and open spaces in the Borough hold a considerable resource of biodiversity. Over the course of 2024/2025, baseline assessments of the value of these sites have been and are being carried out, identifying areas where improvements can be

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made. The Council is continuing to do this and is making recommendations for management changes to improve and increase biodiversity value on these sites.

13.2 Protecting sites and encouraging positive maintenance assists in improving the ecosystem services they offer, including urban cooling, flood water storage and carbon sequestration.

13.3 Additional benefits, depending on the quality and features of the site could include:

- reduction in carbon emissions
- air pollution reduction and capture;
- water pollution reduction;
- water conservation

14.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Director	01/05/2025	06/05/2025	JD
SDM	01/05/2025	06/05/2025	VH
Finance	01/05/2025	06/05/2025	