



National
Trust



8 Hills Regional Park

Enhancing and sustaining green spaces

Introducing the 8 Hills Regional Park

Where Birmingham meets Worcestershire, there's a substantial amount of green space supporting heritage and nature. Much of this is farmland. Most of it falls within Bromsgrove District Council's boundaries and is designated as green belt.

Some of this countryside is much-loved, attracting visitors from Bromsgrove, Birmingham, the Black Country and beyond. Other parts are less well known or less accessible.



What is a regional park?

A regional park is a much bigger area than a municipal park or a country park. It's a large area with multiple landowners and uses including farming, recreation and places to live and work. The regional park would help to ensure the land provides the most benefit to people in the area by providing a framework for landowners and organisations to work together.



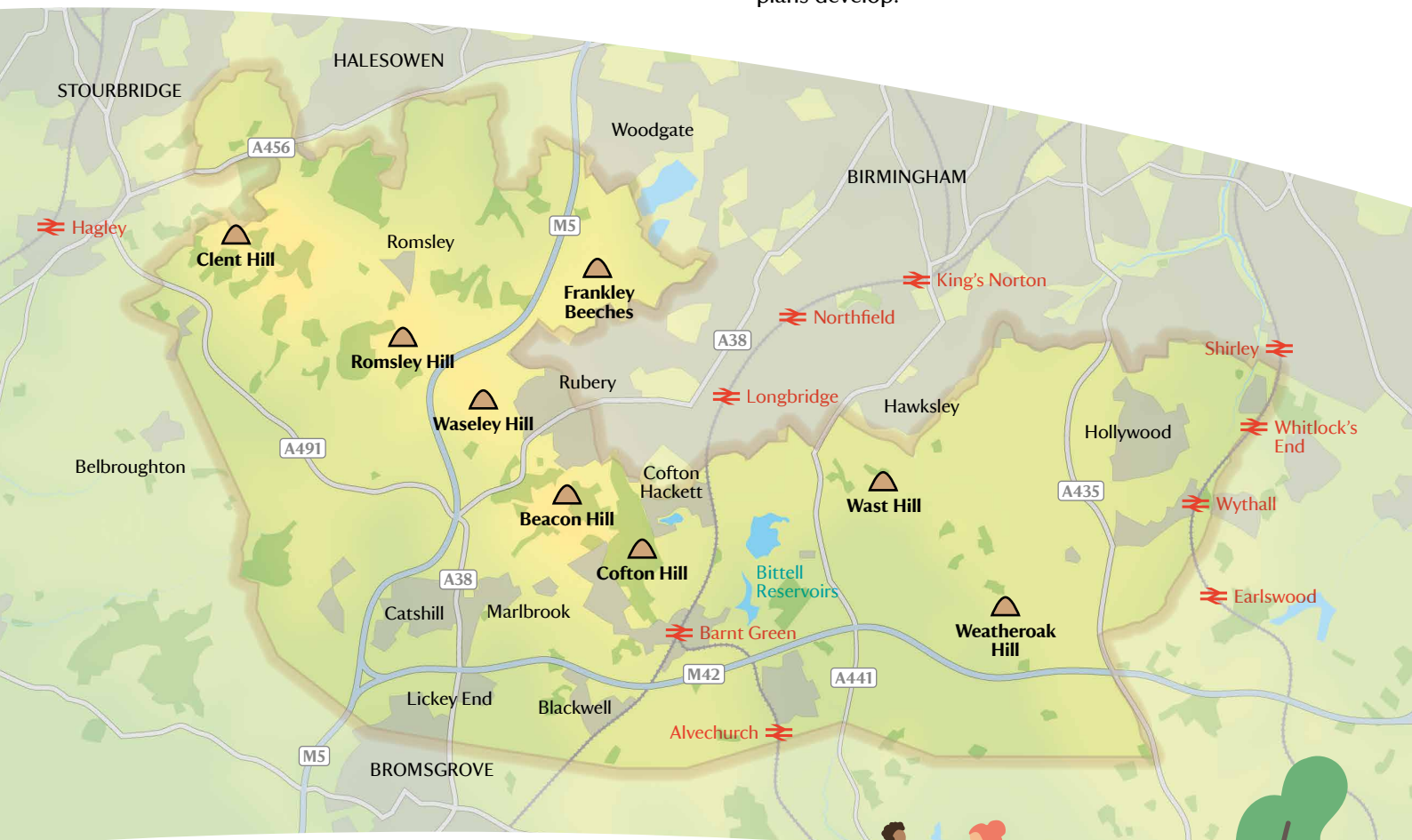
Enhancing and sustaining green spaces for wildlife, for you and for future generations

The National Trust has compiled information to support the creation of a regional park for this area. The idea is to ensure it creates more spaces for wildlife and for people to enjoy. We won't create or run the park but we will help to get the project started. We're working on innovative ways to secure funding for this project as well as local policies to help establish the park.



Why the name, 8 Hills Regional Park?

The initial study area for the regional park contained eight distinct hills, which are local landmarks, and the strategy has been inspired by a number of regional parks around the UK. This led to a working title of 8 Hills Regional Park, but it may change as the plans develop.



We are looking to create the park in the countryside south of Birmingham



The 8 Hills Regional Park is for you

The pandemic has made more people aware of how much we need access to nature and green spaces. Being outdoors in natural surroundings helps with both our physical and mental health.

But we know that, over time, more housing will need to be built.

The creation of the park wouldn't interfere with this process, but the Local Plan would ensure that any new development doesn't reduce or cut off access to the countryside for local communities. If developers have to consider the green space as a whole, then it's easier to make sure access is improved and increased.



Considering everyone in and around the 8 Hills

Residents, farmers, businesses, developers, interest groups and other organisations (like the Wildlife Trusts, Canal & River Trust and Natural England – to name a few) will all have an interest in the formation of the park.

We've carried out some initial consultation, so we know that there is broad support for the park, but we will be having more conversations and asking for your thoughts when the project is further forward.

One of our main priorities is for the 8 Hills to be included in the Bromsgrove Local Plan.

None of the plans for the park are fixed, but we have some ideas for what the park could look like, and how it could be set up to benefit everyone in the local area and beyond.



What is happening now, without the regional park?

We know that these green spaces are valuable and worthy of improvement, but it's difficult to achieve this for the area as a whole because the land is owned by many different people and organisations.

Creating the regional park will make it easier for these different groups to work together. And it will hopefully allow for the creation of new accessible green spaces so that visitors are spread throughout the area instead of only being drawn to the most well-known places.

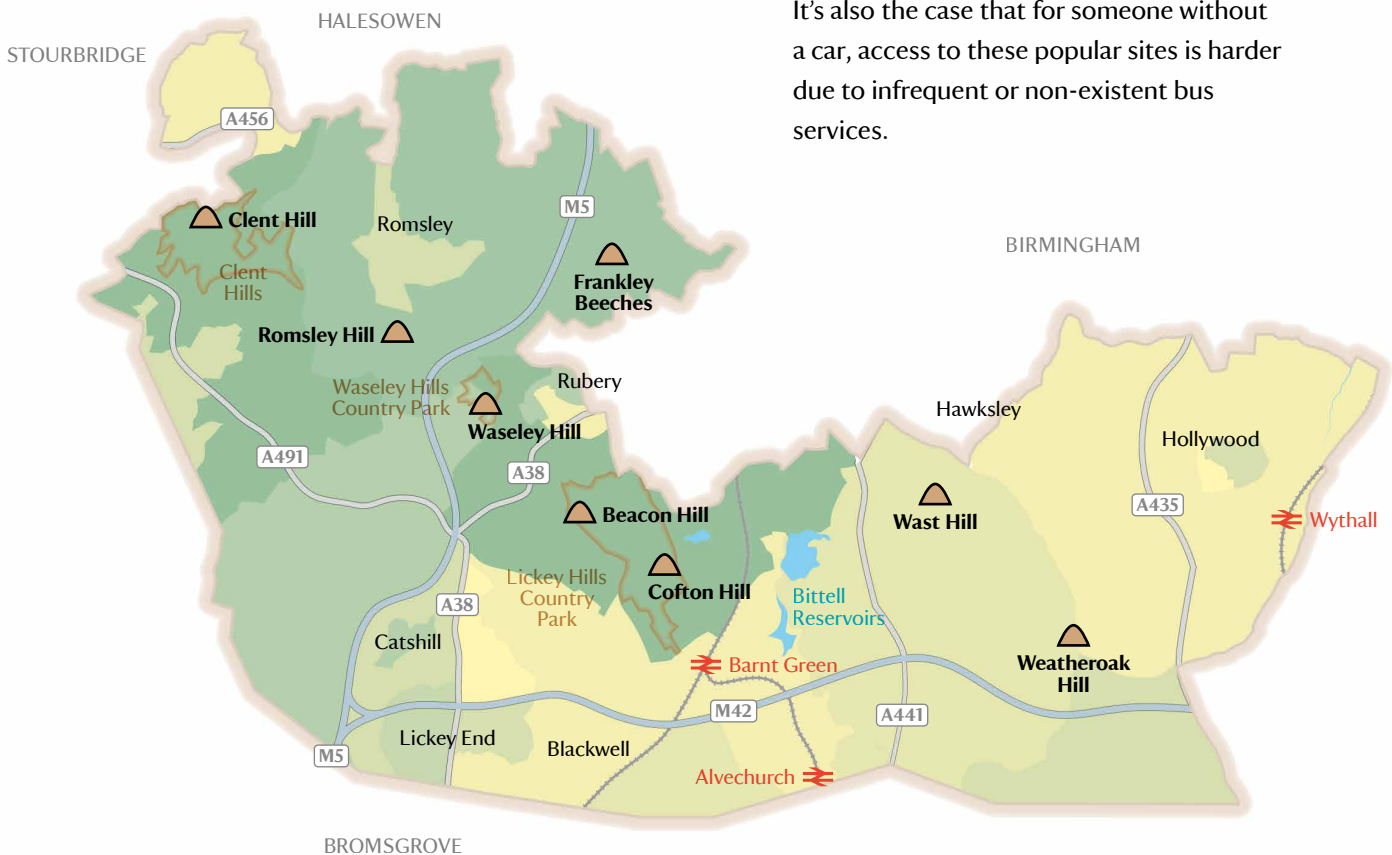
Honeypot sites and visitor numbers

At the moment, sites like the Clent Hills and the Lickey Hills are the busiest sites which welcome very large numbers of visitors. As well as being attractive pockets of countryside, they have facilities and people feel confident about using them.

Each site has a café, toilets, parking and other features that attract visitors, like the Four Stones and the waymarked trails around the Clent Hills, or the children's adventure playground in the Lickey Hills.

But the downside is that these sites can get very busy. As well as putting a strain on the natural environment, this causes problems for visitors and local residents, with parking, access and antisocial behaviour becoming a challenge at times.

It's also the case that for someone without a car, access to these popular sites is harder due to infrequent or non-existent bus services.



Map showing relative abundance of accessible land in the 8 Hills area. Darker colours show higher accessibility.



What if our green spaces were joined up?

At the moment, unless you are a confident map reader and path finder, it can be difficult to enjoy a lot of the green spaces in this area. For example, Uffmoor Wood is close to the Clent Hills and a circular walk can take in both, but the route is not well-known.

If we could create better access to more green spaces, with attractive waymarked trails and more facilities throughout the park, the pressure on the most popular sites could be reduced.

This would mean more people get to enjoy being in nature, without worries about overcrowding, or the route being unusable or unpleasant. And better signage would make it easier for walkers, horse riders, cyclists, mountain bikers and recreational visitors to plan routes, without fear of taking a wrong turn.

Opening up access to more of the land

Much of the land is owned by farmers and this won't change. However, we are looking at financial models to make sure farmers are fairly compensated for allowing any additional access onto their land and providing and maintaining paths and signposts.



Our vision for the 8 Hills Regional Park

From street trees to local parks, and from woodlands to rugged open landscapes, green spaces provide places for recreation and relaxation. They also provide homes for nature, and essential environmental benefits, like drainage to prevent flooding.

The overall vision for the 8 Hills Regional Park is to improve access to the countryside for local communities, create additional income opportunities for farmers, and improve wildlife corridors and heritage features. There are no formal plans for the park yet, but we've researched some of the opportunities the park could bring to the area.



Trails, maps and a cup of tea

Creating an 8 Hills trail across the park, broken up into well-designed shorter walks and with signage and good quality paths for disabled access, will mean more people can make the most of the landscape. More benches, bins and information could also be added along the trail.

There's the potential for multi-use trails for ramblers, cyclists and horse riders, as well as leisure and activity facilities, and public art, all being designed with the environment in mind.

Enhancing the environment

Reducing carbon emissions is vital for the planet as a whole, and the park will bring opportunities for native tree-planting. This will enhance the landscape, capture carbon and potentially improve air quality. And it gives local businesses the chance to invest in projects close to home.

Some parts of 8 Hills are suitable for natural flood management and reducing phosphate and nitrate runoff, protecting our waterways and aquatic wildlife from pollution.

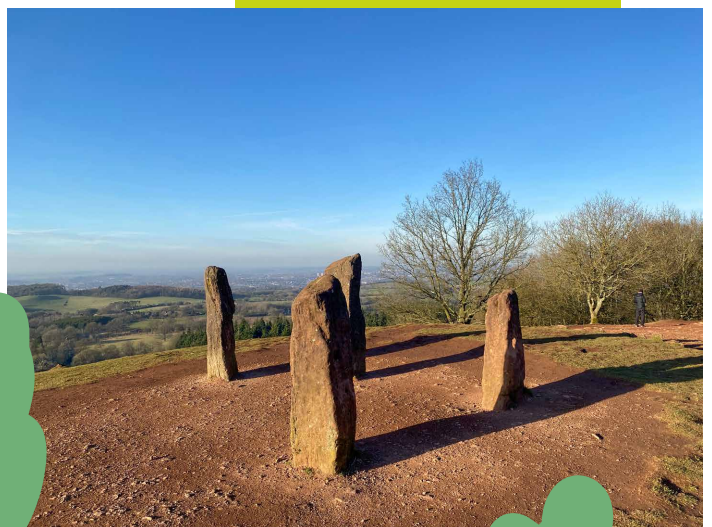
Providing the right incentives for landowners will make nature friendly farming more appealing, which will increase biodiversity and help tackle the nature crisis we are facing.



Embracing our heritage

From geological features like glacier-dumped monoliths (rocks), to Iron Age hillforts, a Roman road and medieval settlements, the area has a rich heritage. A popular example from recent history is that the Lickey Hills are thought to have inspired Tolkien's novels.

Creating the park will provide an opportunity to share the region's history more widely with trails, signage and information, and to protect historical sites.





Protecting habitats for wildlife

Heathlands, grasslands, ancient woodland, hedgerows and waterways are all rich habitats for the area's wildlife.

Ponds are home to populations of great crested newts and other amphibians, and the Bittell Reservoirs are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for their populations of waterbirds and aquatic plants.

Local and national organisations are working to protect specific habitats, but there is no overall plan to keep habitats connected across the entire park area. Creating the park will make it easier to protect habitats and wildlife across the area as a whole.

Opportunities for green jobs

Investment in the regional park could enhance opportunities for young people and those not in employment to get training and skills in green jobs, benefiting them and the community as a whole.

The regional park could support place-based skills projects like the Green Academies Project. This multi-partner scheme supported young people to gain qualifications in countryside management and conservation through working in their local green spaces and parks.



Success stories

The concept of managing large areas of countryside in this way is not new and there are regional parks and other similar models across the UK and Europe.

Lee Valley Regional Park, London, Essex and Hertfordshire

Created in the 1960s, this is a 26-mile long linear park, much of it open space. It includes urban green spaces, heritage sites, country parks, nature reserves, lakes, riverside trails and sports venues, including three London 2012 legacy venues. Lee Valley attracts millions of visits a year.

The Park Authority's business philosophy is to be community focussed and commercially driven. Income generated from commercial activities is used to provide crucial funding for grassroots and community programmes across the 10,000-acre regional park.

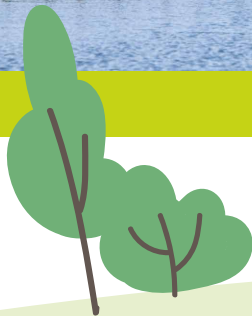


The Parks Trust, Milton Keynes

Established in 1992, the Milton Keynes Parks Trust cares for parks and green spaces, including river valleys, woodlands, lakes, grazing land and road verges in the city. The trust looks after around 6,000 hectares - about 25% of the city's urban area.



The Parks Trust manages a vast network of open spaces, cycle paths and footpaths, and cultural and sporting facilities. They work with developers to encourage good provision of parks and green spaces. They also have plans to invest in and conserve heritage sites in the area. Much of their income comes through endowment investments, as well as donations and legacies.



For further information please visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/8-hills

Frequently asked questions

Q: Where will the funding come from?

A: The funding model for the park is a key piece of the work the National Trust is doing to help ensure the regional park brings long term benefits for the area as a whole.

There are several different places funding could come from. None of these are fixed yet, but they could include:

- Adding key infrastructure to attract visitors to different parts of the park, potentially including cafés and leisure facilities that generate income
- Planning contributions from developers
- Grant funding
- Private investment
- Health funding, related to the wellbeing benefits of the park

Q: If the 8 Hills Regional Park is created, does that mean houses can't be built?

A: No. It's likely that housing development will continue in the area, but the park will help to make sure the impact on the green spaces is managed and that green spaces are enhanced.

Location of housing developments is a decision that will be taken by Bromsgrove District Council, who are currently actively considering the regional park proposal as part of its Local Plan. The regional park will help strategic thinking about where developments are located and will prioritise wildlife and access networks around them.

This presence of the park will also help to make sure local people aren't cut off from their nearest green spaces.



Q: What consultation have you done and whose views have been taken into account?

A: We've invested in some initial research, spending nine months looking at the evidence for the benefits of this park for the region, and the possible challenges that might be encountered.



This research included talking to the organisations listed below, to farmers, local businesses and residents, and to Bromsgrove District Council. We've produced a detailed, technical report to show that this project is both feasible and worthwhile.

This evidence base and report demonstrates that the park is likely to have a positive impact on the local landscape, wildlife and waterways, heritage sites, access to the countryside and placement of new developments.

Documents can be viewed at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/8-hills

