

# Biodiversity Strategy for Basingstoke and Deane 2023 to 2029

Large print edition



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# Foreword by Cllr Chris Tomblin, Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency



In 2021, the council declared an ecological emergency, an issue that is important in the future wellbeing of our borough. The emergency sets out a number of matters to be taken forward so that biodiversity is protected and enhanced and that its decline is reversed. One key element is the production of a Biodiversity Strategy for Basingstoke and Deane 2023 to 2029 that sets out the vision, priorities and actions that will be required to achieve this.

Biodiversity is essential for our existence and we are losing it an alarming rate. This year's state of nature report told of a country that is massively depleted in nature and rapidly declining, even faster than scientists predicted.

We aim to provide the necessary leadership in helping to arrest the decline of biodiversity and start the long hard climb toward recovery within the borough.

The strategy sets out a number of objectives and priorities that will help us move forward with purpose and make a difference, along with responding to requirements of the Environment Act 2021. Where the objectives detail what we are intending to do to affect change, the priorities are the areas we want to focus our work to ensure we are being as impactful as possible. The strategy sets out principles that provide commitments in our approach to biodiversity work moving forward. It also sets out a number of actions that will be developed as stand-alone projects to achieve its aims. These ongoing actions will mean that the strategy will be a living document that will evolve, based on emerging practices and regular monitoring.

# Introduction

In recognition of the international consensus on the state of the natural environment and the importance of nature to our community and residents, the council declared an ecological emergency in 2021, the purpose of which was to emphasise the need and urgency required to stop the severe decline in biodiversity and outline how we can restore nature. The council has already begun to deliver action on the ground including early adoption of net gain principles, managing open space to promote biodiversity, declaring Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), two full time biodiversity officers advising on planning applications, capital investment in green infrastructure, volunteer management by the in-house ranger team and through an ecological checklist for reports to cabinet. This biodiversity strategy is a map of our biodiversity in the borough, our route to make a difference and the next steps in taking action and tackling the depletion of nature across our landscapes, in our rural and urban environments. We will go on this journey with our partners and will track our progress, bringing everyone with us as we go.

## What is biodiversity and why is it important?

The variety of life on Earth and its biological diversity is commonly referred to as biodiversity. The term includes all species of plants and animals and their interrelationships and refers to the 'species richness' of a place. It includes the creatures, bugs, bacteria that exist around us at all times. It is the trees, plants, animals and fungi that exist and interact together, such as in woodland, grassland and rivers in a complex web of different ecosystems. It is all the ways we vary within a species and the way everything interacts with each other. It is all life on earth, and so we humans are part of the biodiversity picture as well. It is inseparable in our understanding from life and how we survive and thrive.

*“Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side.”*

***Ernst Schumacher, Small is Beautiful***

## **Biodiversity matters because:**

- It provides many of the essentials of our lives including oxygen, food, water, clothing, medicines and much loved landscapes.
- It contributes to climate stability for example up to a fifth of all soil carbon in the UK is locked away in grassland<sup>1</sup>.
- It boosts business with more than half the world's gross domestic product (44 trillion) being highly or moderately dependent on nature<sup>2</sup>.
- It provides nature-based solutions to help buffer us from natural disasters such as flooding.

Our understanding of nature in the borough is good but to help give us a really clear idea of the state of our nature, we've commissioned an audit of nature for the borough.



## The state of nature

The State of Nature 2023 report paints a worrying picture for the UK's biodiversity. It shows 19% of species have declined since 1970; nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction.

We know that biodiversity across the country has been on the decline for centuries, but this has accelerated since the second world war with the start of industrial farming practices and an increasing population. In 2010 the Government published the Lawton report which described how habitats are increasingly fragmented and under pressures from urban sprawl and agricultural intensification, as well as pollution and chemical usage, and invasive non-native species, and exacerbated by the effects of climate change.

According to the State of Hampshire's Natural Environment Report [1] (2020), Hampshire's nature shows a decline similar to the national trends with 48% of 50 of Hampshire's most notable species in decline and 82% of Hampshire's rivers failing to reach good ecological status.

## Legislation and policy background

There has been increased focus on biodiversity at national and local level. The House of Commons [2] (2021) acknowledged that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, whilst the recent Environment Improvement Plan (2023) reinforces the commitments made to restore nature across the country.

The Environment Act 2021 is a ground-breaking piece of legislation seeking to help us achieve gains for nature in England. It has provided a suite of new tools for Local Authorities, as well as placing an Enhanced Biodiversity Duty on us. This duty makes it our legal obligation to not only "have regard" for biodiversity but to enhance it in our areas for our residents. This strategy outlines how the council is planning to deliver on this Enhanced Biodiversity Duty. Furthermore, it brings into law Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Conservation Covenants and Biodiversity Net Gain. All three provide tools for local planning authorities, and other public and private bodies in England to prioritise, conserve and enhance features and sites for the restoration of nature.

The Environment Act is fundamental in achieving the goals outlined in the Environmental Improvement Plan. The successor to the 25 Year Environment Plan it includes goals the government believes will help achieve nature restoration in England, many of which are legally binding. One of these is achieving 30% of England protected by 2030; strengthening, creating, enhancing and investing in nature at scale. Councils should be supporting the delivery of these goals and outlining how in strategies such as this.

Prior to the Environment Act, other legislation has been, and remains, key in protecting and promoting biodiversity in the UK. This includes the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations act 2010 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. These and other pieces of law help us, and other organisations and individuals protect and enhance biodiversity. Where our activities relate to other mechanisms such as planning, other laws and policies have influence, perhaps most significantly the National Planning Policy Framework.

[1] Hampshire County Council (2020) State of Hampshire's Natural Environment.

[2] Environmental Audit Committee (2021) Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust? House of Commons Committee Report



## Our borough

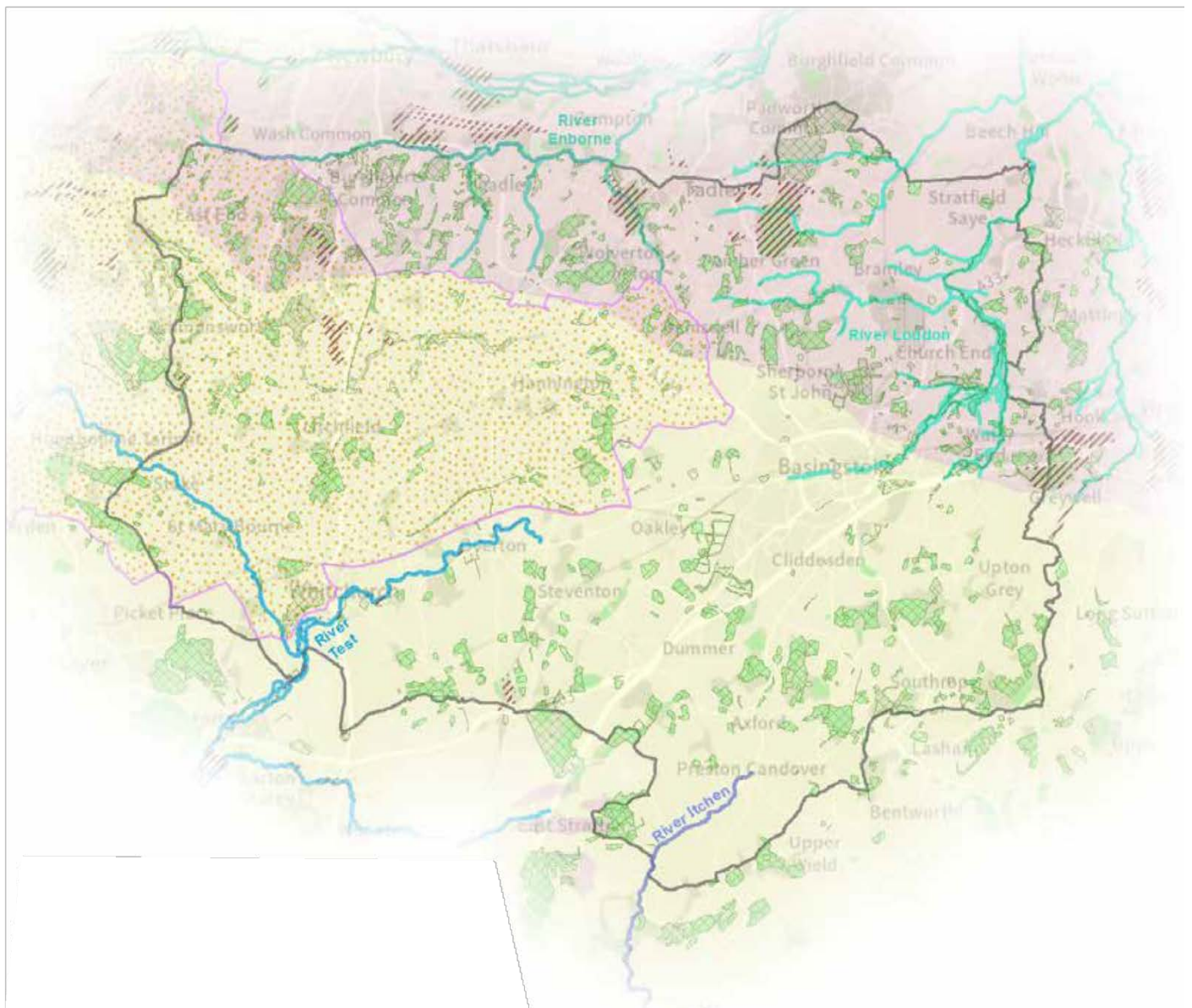
The council has commissioned a biodiversity audit of the borough, produced by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust which is summarised below.

The borough sits at the apex between two geological areas and four river catchments feeding the Solent and the Thames. We straddle the river valleys and the lowlands of Hampshire and its chalk uplands in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. We look south down the River Test and north across the heathlands of North Hampshire and Berkshire and along the Enborne and Loddon rivers, the latter starting its journey across the landscape in Basingstoke town. This diversity is what makes the borough so exceptional and such a fantastic place to live.

We host a significant portion (around a fifth) of Hampshire's Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (locally important protected sites). Over 90% of the boroughs nationally designated sites are in favourable or favourable recovering condition, which is on par with the county as a whole. We have an enviable 20% tree cover whilst 30% of the borough lies within a protected landscape. We host an important population of dormouse amongst this woodland and the substantial 4.3km of hedgerow per km<sup>2</sup>. Our borough supports some of the most nationally important populations of rare arable flora, a nationally important bat roost (Greywell tunnel) and notable butterfly populations.

However, the borough's wetlands and associated habitats fall below the national and regional averages. We support just 87ha of fen, marsh and swamp (0.1% of the borough) which compares unfavourably to a national 9% coverage. A defining characteristic of the Borough is the presence of three catchments (the Enborne, the Test and the Loddon) but the Test is subject to significant pressures from pollution incidents and the Loddon has been shown to have the worst phosphate levels in the country. Yet, we host a regionally important amphibian population and have key sites for dragonfly. Much of the borough's heathland has been lost, and due to a lack of international and national designation is far more subject to impacts and with less access to support and funding than its neighbours in the Thames Basin Heaths. We have 25% less priority coverage than the average in Hampshire and only 5% of the land is actively managed for nature, well below the national target of 30%.

The message is clear – we have some fantastic biodiversity features of real importance but we need to do more for our heathlands and wetlands and all their associated species. We are right in declaring an ecological emergency, and we hope this strategy sets the tone moving forward.



- |   |   |  |                  |
|---|---|--|------------------|
|  | Borough Boundary                            |  | Ancient Woodland |
|  | Sites of Special Scientific Interest        |  | Chalk            |
|  | Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation |  | Acid             |
|  | North Wessex Downs National Landscape       |  |                  |



- Corporate strategies inform and are informed by the Biodiversity Strategy
  
- Directly related and complementary strategies that inform and are informed by the Biodiversity Strategy
  
- Other supporting strategies that the Biodiversity Strategy will inform and vice versa

## Local policy and strategies

Locally, biodiversity was highlighted as a priority in the Basingstoke and Deane Horizon 2050 Vision which included the natural environment as one of its eight different themes that reflect the areas that matter and are important to our residents, businesses and partners; and in our Council Plan nature is core to our aspirations for “a borough where we protect, restore, reconnect and enhance our natural environment”.

The various policies and strategies most significantly inter-related to the Biodiversity Strategy include the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, Council Plan, Local Plan and others. The diagram on the opposite page shows how these interrelate. The Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2029 brings the various conjoining elements of green infrastructure; landscape, trees and biodiversity into a cohesive whole and outlines how the council support these elements across our work areas. The Living Landscapes Strategy 2014 was the predecessor of the Biodiversity Strategy and together with the Landscape, Trees & Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document 2008 delivered successfully for biodiversity in the borough.

Perhaps most significant is the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy which seeks to improve the environment affected by one of the twin emergencies declared by the council – Climate Emergency and Ecological Emergency. It is vital that these two strategies complement each other in order to tackle issues that jointly confound them and are exacerbated by them.

## Ecological emergency

Councillors unanimously supported a motion to declare an ecological emergency for the borough at a meeting of Full Council on 14 October 2021. This motion recognises the urgency and desperate nature of the situation as well as the need to take action. It was agreed that the council would produce a biodiversity strategy and undertake a nature audit as well as engage our residents more effectively on nature. Preceding this declaration in 2019 the council declared a Climate Emergency. The two crises are intrinsically linked, and the council want to make sure we work toward solving both together where possible.

The council has been working to protect and promote biodiversity for a long time, leading on biodiversity net gain requirements which, along with our strong policy position (see previous section) was recognised by national awards. We have an integrated ranger service that manages sites to promote biodiversity in close partnership with local community conservation groups. The council is a member of various partnerships and works with partners on projects to deliver enhancements for nature and support residents. The declaration urges the council to build on these successes and seek out what else what can be done and where improvements can be made.



## Success story – Petty whin

Wigmore Heath Local Nature Reserve is one of our few remaining pockets of heathland in one of the borough's major urban areas; Tadley. This internationally important habitat has suffered a great deal as a result of development and land use change, which makes small pockets like Wigmore Heath all the more important. The council's Ranger Service works closely with the Friends of Wigmore Heath community conservation group closely. This group has been undertaking management of the site for many years, and with the recent support of the Ranger Service has had some fantastic successes in its restoration.

On a visit to the site in 2023, a Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland surveyor looking at threatened plants found petty whin (*genista anglica*). This rare plant has disappeared across many of its old strongholds as a result of poor management, so its resurgence on this site is all the more encouraging for the joint efforts. The plant is thriving on Wigmore heath with a total of 32 plants making it a stronghold for the plant in Hampshire and an exceptional population for the size of the site.

The council's Rangers will continue to work with Friends of Wigmore Heath managing the site and preserving this rare species.



## Vision

The council recognises the declines in nature and wants to provide the necessary leadership to help restore nature. These declines are all the more concerning as we recognise that nature is hugely important to us all, thanks to the services it provides us. We will embed an approach that realises the importance of the services that a properly functioning ecosystem provides such as clean abundant water in our rivers.

This strategy clearly demonstrates the importance of biodiversity and how we intend to take an active role in nature's recovery. It is a beginning of the journey in bringing back birds, insects and mammals to our landscapes, restoring our natural soundscapes, restoring the quality and connectivity of habitats and greater diversity on our own land and across the borough.

People are all important to success. We want to engage people, especially those that don't necessarily have access to areas where nature flourishes. We want to help everyone understand and appreciate nature's value as well as enabling ownership and action for nature. This can't be done alone and don't have the answers to every issue. So, we want to work in partnership with those that have influence. We want to influence and enable those that can take action. We want to help everyone take action where they can. We want to work together to solve these huge challenges and achieve long term, sustainable impacts.

We will monitor and report on our action and be adaptable to the challenges and opportunities that present themselves, protecting and enforcing, and being robust in our decision making for biodiversity.

## Success story – Volunteering

The Ranger Services team formed in 2022 bringing to previously disparate roles in the council together. One of those roles was partly focussed on supporting local community conservation groups and the other in helping to manage the council's Local Nature Reserves and other sites important for nature. The new team, led by the Ranger Services Team Leader included two rangers and a Community Green Spaces Officer who was full time dedicated to supporting communities and volunteering on council owned land. The team focused on building improved relationships with Natural Basingstoke and other community groups. This has resulted in an increase in the number of groups, from 16 to 20 now working with the Ranger Services team, as well as a formal partnership agreement between Natural Basingstoke and the council.

Despite some severe challenges during the pandemic, the team's excellent work has resulted in an increase of volunteers hours by over 25% and over 600% just for corporate volunteer hours. The team has also increased the number of volunteers involved in helping to manage our reserves by over 60 individuals, a third of the numbers in 2021. These are big wins for the council, the community conservation groups and biodiversity in the borough.



# This strategy

**The strategy is borough-wide and outlines the aims and objectives of the council to support biodiversity where it has influence. It sets out:**

- what we must do, for example, legislative requirements and statutory functions;
- where we have direct control, for example, where we have dedicated resource and influence such as through our policies and on the land we own, manage and maintain; and
- where we can lead, enable and inspire, for example, where can we look for additionality and work with partners, and encourage residents, businesses and organisations to take action to support and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity.

**The scope of the strategy includes actions already being taken to benefit biodiversity, additional actions we wish to undertake and reviewing our policies and practices to ensure we are maximising benefits for biodiversity. It also includes our aspirations for biodiversity where we can influence change. It encompasses:**

- The council's ecological emergency declaration commitment;
- The council's responsibilities under national legislation and policy (especially the Environment Act 2021 and its emerging issues) and its statutory duties in relation to biodiversity and protection of the natural environment;
- Estate management on council land including grounds maintenance, management and maintenance of parks and open spaces;
- Support the delivery of the 2011-2029 Local Plan policies and informing and being informed by the emerging Local Plan.

It will include the identification of strategic landscape scale projects and partnerships that will support nature's recovery. In order to maximise the impact of limited resources we need to identify the species, habitats and spatial areas we can have an effect on and where we can, by working in partnership, have an effect on the broader landscape.

**The scope of the strategy does not include:**

- land or features we do not have direct or indirect influence over;
- features or duties that other bodies have responsibility for; and
- where we have no existing or emerging levers available.



## Success story – Biodiversity Improvement Zone

The Biodiversity Improvement Zone (BIZ) was set up in 2020 to pilot changes to the management of small open spaces and road verges in the ward of Hatch Warren and Beggarwood to benefit biodiversity. The aim was to link larger sites within this area of chalky soils that were important for biodiversity, including Old Down Beggarwood Park Local Nature Reserve and Down Grange and promote rare chalk grassland. Some sites had already been enhanced by local volunteers where seeding of chalk grassland species had taken place.

Management was changed from regular amenity cutting to a reduced cutting regime in early spring and in late summer/early autumn and monitored by council ecologists. The first year saw a predominance of common species which were outside of the chalk grassland reseeded areas. During the next four years there were a range of challenges ranging from grassland arising removal to the need for different machinery and the vagaries of the British weather which the pilot was designed to help identify. It showed the councils capabilities and limitations and the need for flexibility.

From 2020 to 2024, in only four years, the range of plant species increased from 152, many of these were species resistant to cutting such as white and red clovers, daisy, creeping buttercup, and rye grass common to lawns to 237 species, which included over 30 specific chalk grassland species and well over a hundred species related to good quality grasslands. Six orchid species were recorded from the area including rare white and violet helleborines. This is an outstanding species diversity for any grassland site never mind one that is confined to small areas in a suburban neighbourhood.

The change has also led to the establishment of insect communities throughout the area the most obvious being butterflies with meadow brown, marbled white, common blue, brown argus and small skipper colonies popping up where non existed before. Kidney vetch a food plant of the rare small blue butterfly has now spread through half of the area and the rare small blue butterfly which feeds on the plant has spread with it. As the supply of food and structure is now year round the other host of beetles, spiders, bugs, bees and other invertebrates is greatly increasing but further in depth survey is needed to record what has now established itself.

## The journey

From the very start the council committed to collaborate rather than consult on the preparation of this strategy, in order to produce an effective working document. The council has worked at pace with our key partners in developing priorities and shared a questionnaire with our community conservation groups as well having conversations across the organisation and we have used this to develop this strategy. This document will require updating and refining, but the aim of this strategy is to halt the decline in nature and start its recovery.

The multiple consultations the council has undertaken over recent years have provided valuable information to help us understand what our communities want to see regards nature. We have captured the great work the council already does for biodiversity as well as the new directions it wants to lead. This data is used to guide our decisions and we will continue to use it to refine our priorities and our actions. We have made sure this document speaks to other strategies and policies the council has. The evidence base and summary can be found in the appended Summary of Evidence.

After publication, the council will focus on delivery. The working group will transform into a delivery group, and the membership will be reviewed to ensure key individuals and teams are represented. The Monitoring Plan will outline how we will monitor and report on the progress of the strategy's delivery and the fulfilment of the council's enhanced biodiversity duty. The reporting will be delivered quarterly to the delivery group and annually to the council's governance bodies. It will also include plans to report to Government on a five-year cycle, as per the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty.

# Principles

The council commits to following certain principles developed with our partners and from listening to our stakeholders. These are vital to help guide us in how we will work on achieving the ambition within this strategy. They help show our partners and the public that we are treating biodiversity as one of our top priorities. Through offering this transparency we are inviting engagement and discussion on how we can all work together to achieve nature's restoration.

## **The council commits to:**

1. Responding to the joint ecological and climate emergencies as a top priority. To do so we need to be innovative and bold in our actions and to think and act progressively. We need to lead for the borough and take ownership of these crises to ensure these are resolved at pace and proactively.
2. Adaptability is our watch word – ensuring our landscapes are adapting and resilient to climate change, ensuring we are an adaptable organisation responding to opportunities as they arise and being able to shift our focus to respond to key issues, and adaptable as people helping us to look at these issues in a different light and to embrace thinking outside the box.
3. Playing to our strengths and focusing our effort where we can make the most difference. We will rely on the value we can bring through the levers we have available, but when opportunities arise, we must maximise our efforts by effectively exploiting them. This requires us to horizon scan and ensure we learn from our past and those around us.
4. We will continue to take action on our land and properties in order to make a direct impact ourselves but also to help test and demonstrate different approaches. Where we take action, we want to be able to take residents and partners on the journey with us. This means we need to be strategic in our planning and select the right action for the right place and throughout think about how best to engage the public about these decisions and to impact others' thinking along the way.
5. Working in partnership with individuals, organisations and communities and leading those partnerships where appropriate but always seeking to positively influence toward enacting action for tackling the joint emergencies. This means internally and externally, empowering staff, partners and volunteers. People are core to our

community so limiting exclusion of any groups is essential. Ensuring we promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our strategy and actions will be central to success.

6. Setting clear measures of success with targets, frameworks, and timeframes. We need to understand that sometimes adaptation is essential, and targets can shift at the same time as offering accountability and enabling us to measure success or failures where they happen and help us understand better how to improve for the future. Monitoring is at the heart of any strategy, but especially important to biodiversity given the myriad of metrics and the need to demonstrate an impact. We will be systematic and inclusive in our efforts.
7. Recognising the importance of the nature recovery network including the lesser-known habitats, not just its core sites, that despite not being as special as our priority habitats are vital network components. Our efforts need to be aligned with strategic drivers, enhancing, and expanding the network wherever possible as well as taking account of the resilience of the wider landscape.
8. Applying an approach that recognises the importance of nature to our residents. Nature is not only significant in its own right, we have a moral and legal obligation to protect and enhance it, but it also is integral to our health and wellbeing in a way that we are only recently beginning to recognise as a society. From the air we breathe to the land we enjoy through recreation, the food we eat to the water we drink, what nature gives us is essential and must be considered in decision making. We must ensure we consider our actions in the context of this natural capital and how we can promote this. We will apply nature-based- solutions wherever appropriate to enable biodiversity and climate friendly approaches that work with nature, rather than against it.

# Objectives

**Working with partners and the public has enabled us to develop a list of objectives that will guide us moving forward. In achieving these objectives, we hope to help halt the decline of wildlife in the borough and start to restore nature. They are framed by:**

- what we must do, for example, legislative requirements and statutory functions;
- where we have direct control, for example, where we have dedicated resource and influence such as through our policies and on the land we own, manage and maintain; and
- where we can lead, enable and inspire, for example, where can we look for additionality and work with partners, and encourage residents, businesses and organisations to take action to support and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity.

These objectives will be met through the delivery of the actions identified in the action plan. One of the key actions to be delivered is the development of a monitoring plan. This monitoring plan will outline how the council will monitor the priorities to enable assessment of the success of meeting these objectives.



# What we must do

## **MD1**

We must deliver our statutory duties regarding biodiversity and ensure they are effective and impactful and maximise opportunities when they arise. We will utilise these duties to limit the impact of development and support nature's recovery. Specifically, this includes:

- a. Enhanced Biodiversity Duty
- b. Hedgerow regulations
- c. Development control
- d. Planning policy
- e. Biodiversity Net Gain
- f. Declaring Local Nature Reserves

## **MD2**

Influence the development of the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, forthcoming Species Conservation & Protected Sites Strategies to ensure they capture the borough's priorities. Take an active involvement in county scale strategies and initiatives to ensure cross-border impacts and joined up thinking. Actively engage with our communities on these initiatives to help them input into and value the wider context. Coordinate the delivery of these initiatives and offer continued support to safeguard their value and impact.

## **MD3**

Support developers in ensuring they fulfil their duties regarding biodiversity and especially Biodiversity Net Gain and are aligned with the wider nature recovery network and optimise quality. Maximise the opportunity that Biodiversity Net Gain provides in guiding investment in nature in the borough. Engender a culture of nature focussed development rather than a mitigative approach.

#### **MD4**

Our enhanced Biodiversity Duty requires us to consider how we can fulfil our duty by January 2024. This strategy sets out how we can fulfil our duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity as well as how we demonstrate this through effective monitoring. We will monitor progress of the strategy and biodiversity within the borough through data gathered by the council, volunteers, and other data sources. We will submit annual reports to the relevant governance bodies of the council and report to the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs every five years as required by the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty.

#### **MD5**

We actively engage with partnerships in the borough and across its borders to support nature's recovery. We are a statutory partner of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and have councillor and officer representation on their Council of Partners. We will continue to actively engage with the National Landscape and other partnerships with a statutory footing, promoting the value of the partnerships and their purpose.

#### **MD6**

We support protection of local sites of value to biodiversity through a variety of mechanism such as LNRs and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). Whilst the SINC designation does not provide any statutory protection, it is given formal recognition through the planning policies of each planning authority in Hampshire. We will continue to recommend sites and actively seek out sites that are worthy of further protection. Our statutory biodiversity duty places an obligation on the council to enhance biodiversity where possible. We will seek to enhance SINCs where on our land and support landowners to do so where on their land.

## **MD7**

The Local Plan captures all policies relating to environmental issues. It continues to be ambitious holding developers to a high standard intended to protect and promote biodiversity. Whenever opportunities arise, the council will seek to embed further ambition in the Local Plan and its successors. Work with partners on Manydown to ensure it is an exemplar development placing nature at its heart.

The Green Infrastructure Strategy outlines our position on all things Green Infrastructure and how we seek to implement this through planning. A Landscape and Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has previously been produced to provide guidance on how planning policies should be complied with. Our Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance outlines how we expect developers to deliver mandatory net gain in the borough. Neighbourhood plans supplement the Local Plan in identifying areas important at the parish level for nature. All of these will be ambitious and forward looking.

## **Where we have direct control**

### **DC1**

Ensure biodiversity is a consideration across our organisation, in our policies and wherever we have influence. We will continue to ensure the ecological implications are considered as part of decisions made by the council. The Biodiversity Team will also continue to work closely with other teams to ensure priorities for nature are taken account of and included where possible. The team will continue to seek improvements across the organisation that benefit nature, working closely with the Climate Change Team to maximise co-benefits of engagement and action. Opportunities will be actively sought to innovate and be impactful and apply nature-based solutions.

### **DC2**

We will manage our estate to promote biodiversity, resilience and adaptability to climate change, flood risk reduction, and carbon sequestration and explore opportunities to deliver biodiversity net gain on our land. Although our key focus will be on the natural green space, A holistic approach is required to assess our estate, identify potential interventions, identify suitable locations and the impact to other services these interventions may have and pilot the solutions. Our estate must be managed in balance with its uses and the council's other obligations, and

we must be mindful of this where we assess multi-functional green space and seek to make further enhancements for nature. It is essential that this is done in collaboration with various teams across the organisation and interested parties from the public.

Continue our approach to remove and reduce the impacts of non-native species on our estate.

We will seek opportunities for increasing our estate, where appropriate and in line with other policies and the council's finances, to support the delivery of biodiversity net gain and other biodiversity related Section 106 obligations.

### **DC3**

Ensure accessibility to nature for residents through the use of appropriate communications and through physical provision of infrastructure designed for accessibility to ensure the health and wellbeing benefits are available to all. Seek to ensure, where possible, all residents are within close proximity to nature, especially those residents who live in areas of deprivation. Promote the awareness of nature for health and wellbeing, recreation and for nature connectedness. Engage and empower our local communities and promote appropriate and mindful access so that the value of these sites is not diminished through direct or indirect impacts.

### **DC4**

We will maintain up to date baseline habitat and species data for the borough, to inform the council's activities. Ensure our data management and GIS is robust with appropriate data visible to the public.

### **DC5**

Ensure our biodiversity related enforcement is thorough and effective and visible.

### **DC6**

Engage effectively with clear engagement plans for nature related work to ensure audiences are being directly targeted with effective communications.

# Where we can lead, enable and inspire

## **LEI1**

In order to achieve successful nature recovery people are a key priority. We will ensure residents, partners and local organisations are empowered and engaged in the natural world and able to drive change is essential. We will educate and engage young people so that our next generation has an emotional and intellectual connection with nature and feels empowered to make change. We will support the emotional wellbeing and physical health of residents through increasing accessibility of nature sites.

## **LEI2**

Identify priority species, features and landscapes within the Borough. Identify and facilitate landscape scale projects and projects within the priority landscapes.

## **LEI3**

Help improve the natural capital of the wider borough through working with other key stakeholders and landowners. Facilitate the investment of green finance in the borough to enable action to be taken. Explore innovative opportunities to restore biodiversity to the borough, increase carbon sequestration, improve soil health, reduce flood risk, and increase climate resilience and adaptability. Where feasible the council will explore funding options and implementation of these opportunities.

## **LEI4**

Support and advise urban and rural community groups and parishes to continue to effectively manage land owned by the council, undertake monitoring of sites and of biodiversity in the landscape, create community led plans and projects for nature, and support where possible projects on land and features where the council doesn't have direct influence. Support the creation of new sustainable community groups alongside our key community partners and facilitate opportunities to bring together communities across the Borough to focus on nature restoration.

## **LEI5**

Help the gardens of the borough's residents become havens for wildlife.

## LEI6

Support and provide leadership with partners and in partnerships across the borough, in support of nature recovery. These partnerships are fundamental to delivering landscape scale change, so where they are struggling, have expired or aren't present we will look to create or re-energise these in order to shape and enable impact.

## Species, habitats and spatial area priorities

In order to focus our efforts and enable these to be as impactful as possible, we have identified priority species, habitats and spatial areas within the borough, to guide and shape our project and partnership work. This prioritisation is essential to ensure we are as effective as we can be, to guide our limited resource ensure we make an impact in those areas where we can have the greatest impact. These priorities will also help us monitor the progress in protecting and restoring biodiversity.

They have been chosen with our partners and community conservation groups and represent what they and the council see as the most important priorities and will also be fed into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire to ensure they are taken account of at all levels. They have been chosen as they fulfil at least one the following criteria:

- Species which have viable/significant populations in the borough or are priority habitats which are widespread across the borough.
- Species or habitats which can be influenced by the council through site management, projects, statutory duties, partnership or engagement.
- Species or habitats which are rapidly declining nationally and/or locally and are therefore a conservation priority.
- Flagship species which are highly characteristic to the borough and popular with the general public. This are charismatic species such as the dormouse.
- Keystone species which act as an umbrella for action, ie other species benefit from action to enhance or protect keystone species.
- Indicator species which reflect the state of an environment and help us understand how biodiversity as a whole is fairing.

- Species or habitats which are surveyed regularly on borough council sites and/or those for which we hold data. This will be used for monitoring on a borough or county scale and help us assess the success of the strategy.

The detail regarding our monitoring approach will be recorded in our monitoring plan and annual action plans.

Part 2 of the strategy includes the Summary Sheets for the priority species, habitats and spatial areas.

Habitats and their features are core for nature recovery. Where they exist, they are the central sites which require especially focussed management and from which nature recovery networks radiate. They also form core parts of the network across the landscape forming connections between other sites and habitats. They require us to deliver sensitive management where the council manages them or where they are directly adjacent, and for targeting enhancement or creation.

Spatial priorities are important areas identified to help funnel enhancements and creation of habitats that will support species recovery and other ecosystem services. These each have distinct partnerships which the council is involved in and where none exist in the northern heathlands, the council will seek to help create one. These partnerships are focussed on protecting and restoring these key areas for nature. These spatial priorities are also referred to in the council's Local Plan policies and should be considered as areas of strategic significance within the Biodiversity Metric in lieu of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Success is monitored through the investment directed toward these areas, habitat creation and enhancement and associated projects delivered through the partnerships.

### Success story – Small blue

Between 2000 and 2010 Old Down and Beggarwood Park Local Nature Reserve chalk grassland was created from former farmland. Both sites were seeded with kidney vetch, a species which is the food plant of the small blue butterfly and managed with the help of the Old Down and Beggarwood volunteer groups. Kidney vetch was also established at an area called St Marks Meadow, a small reseeded grassland in the centre of Hatch Warren and at Garlic Lane roundabout. Numbers of the small blue rose from the mid 2000s and now these sites form one of the larger colonies in Hampshire.

From these sites, with the establishment of the Biodiversity Improvement Zone in 2020 the foodplant, kidney vetch has spread and small blue has now been recorded on another five sites within the Hatch Warren and Beggarwood area including as far afield as Gershwin Road. The insect has also been recorded in recent years on a meadow established by volunteers in Cliddesden and it is to be hoped that it will eventually become established on the eastern side of the town at Black Dam Ponds and Crabtree Local Nature Reserve on the chalk grassland there.

Basingstoke has become a stronghold for this declining important chalk grassland butterfly in the matter of less than 20 years with many colonies in varied locations forming a strong and robust community, through the efforts of local volunteers working in partnership with the council.



The table below lists the priorities and identifies their value and which group of objectives they are aligned with.

Priority	Type of priority			Objectives						
	Indicator species	Charismatic species	Keystone species	Locally significant species	Direct influence	Habitat	Spatial priority	Supporting what we must do	Supporting where we have direct control	Supporting where we lead, enable and inspire
River flies	X		X	X	X				X	X
Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths)	X		X	X	X				X	X
Herpetofauna (amphibians and reptiles)	X		X	X	X			X	X	X
Rare arable flora	X		X	X				X		X
Bats	X		X		X			X		
White & violet helleborine	X		X	X	X			X	X	
Swifts	X		X		X			X		
Barn owl	X		X		X			X		X
Dormouse	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Hedgehog	X	X	X						X	X
River Test (including winterbournes)			X			X	X	X		X
River Loddon			X			X	X	X	X	X
River Enbourne			X			X	X	X		X

Priority	Type of priority							Objectives		
	Indicator species	Charismatic species	Keystone species	Locally significant species	Direct influence	Habitat	Spatial priority	Supporting what we must do	Supporting where we have direct control	Supporting where we lead, enable and inspire
The North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its chalk grassland			X			X	X	X		X
Northern heathlands			X			X	X	X	X	X
Meadows and neutral grassland			X			X		X		X
Woodland, wood pasture, trees and scrub			X			X		X	X	
Hedgerows			X			X		X		
Accessible natural greenspace						X			X	X
Designated sites						X		X	X	
Verges and open space						X			X	X

## Turning words into actions

We need to move forward with optimism and energy. The principles, objectives and priorities all show the path but the actions are how we are going to start walking down it. This strategy is a starting point, not an end so it will be iterative and adapt to new influences and opportunities as they emerge. The action plan in Part 3 sets out the work required to deliver the strategy.

The Action Plan is a dynamic document that will be updated annually. The actions will be built into the work programmes of the teams working on them. It will capture the council's ongoing work on biodiversity and will be used to monitor progress of the strategy's delivery. An annual monitoring report will be produced that will take account of the actions as well as the metrics identified within the monitoring plan. This will be reported annually to committee and will also constitute the council's considerations for the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty as well reported to Government on a five year cycle. Our new Partnership for Nature (Action PA1) will be an essential group for the strategy's delivery as well as ensuring the transparency of our actions moving forward.

The council will continue to invest in biodiversity but will also seek opportunities for securing additional funding through grants and schemes or from our own budget. Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Group meets quarterly to support the delivery of the strategies objectives.

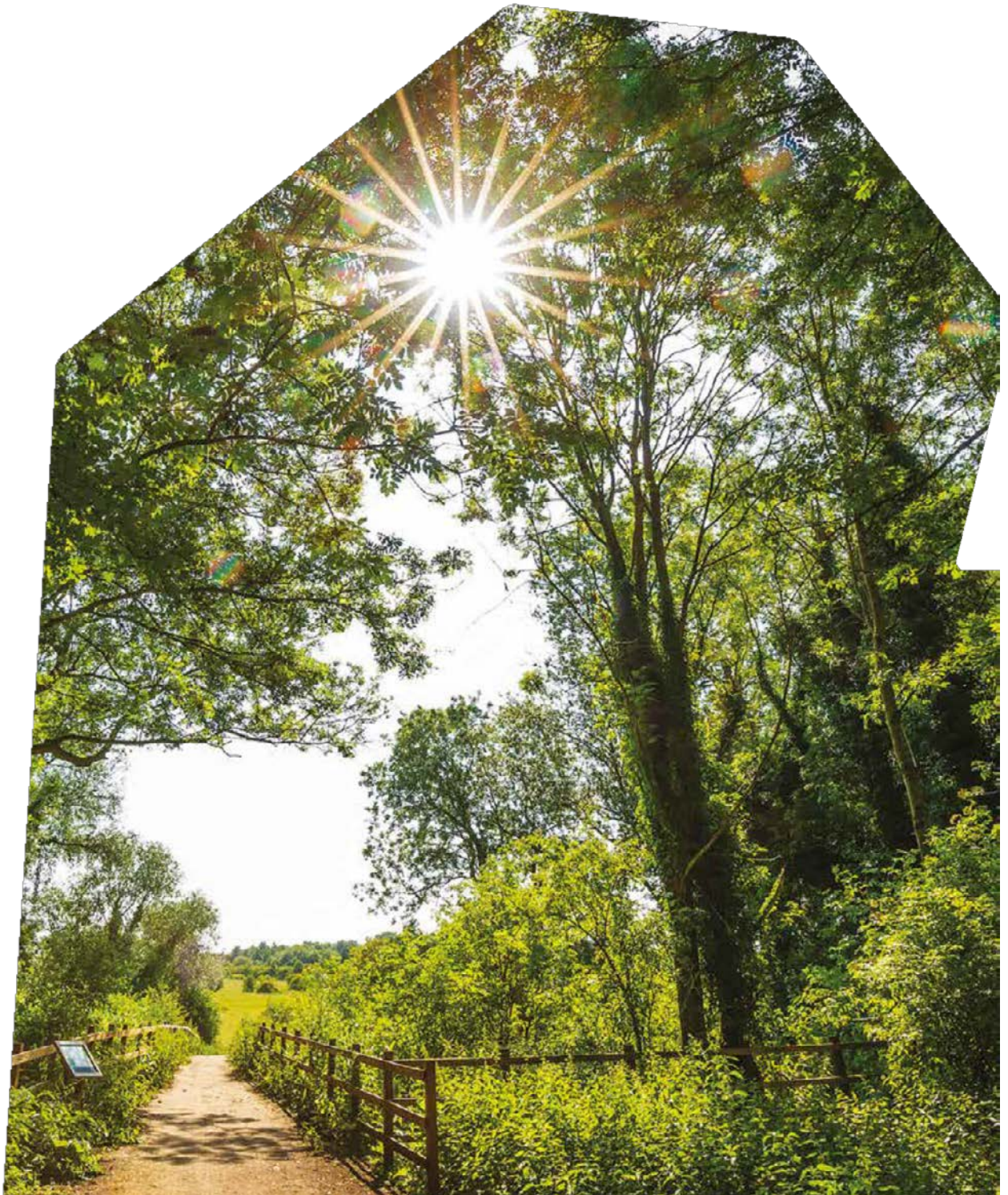
### **Our headline actions include:**

1. The creation of a nature partnership for the borough to help jointly take action for the restoration of biodiversity.
2. Delivering nature plans for our strategic allocations, strategic gaps and surrounds.
3. Embedding Biodiversity Net Gain and maximising its potential including supporting the enhancement and creation of habitats in the borough to supply units for developers.
4. Develop an internal and external engagement plan to help us target engagement and empower staff, volunteers and residents.
5. Explore opportunities across our estate to undertake enhancements for nature and people.
6. Continue to work closely with Natural Basingstoke and other community partners in the management of the estate and for other opportunities.

7. Develop and support garden advice and community champions in partnership with the Wildlife Trust.
8. Prepare monitoring plan to assess our progress and to inform our efforts.

Part 3 of our strategy contains our annual Action Plan for 2024/25.

If you wish to contact the council on biodiversity matters, please email [BiodiversityTeam@basingstoke.gov.uk](mailto:BiodiversityTeam@basingstoke.gov.uk)



# Glossary

**Habitat** – a collection of plants and animals and shared features that we classify together according to the species present and where they are found.

**Ecological Emergency** – the council agreed in 2021 that the poor state of nature constituted a crisis. The councillors all agreed that urgent action was required and that the political will behind such a statement would help the organisation do this with a d for the residents of the borough.

**Local Authorities** – the legal body responsible for the agreed public services in the area. Basingstoke And Deane is a Local Authority in its own right but also a district of Hampshire County Council. Responsibilities are shared across the two organisations for public services in the borough.

**Enhanced Biodiversity Duty** – the Council have a legal duty originally derived from the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and now enhanced by the Environment Act 2021. The duty now states the Council has to enhance biodiversity where possible and report those activities to government. This strategy is outlining how the Council are committed to delivering our duty and our monitoring plan will outline how the Council will report to government and the public as to how we are delivering on it.

**Lawton Principles** – the Lawton Report 2010 was an independent review of nature in the UK with recommendations how to achieve nature recovery. It set out the principles for nature networks and provided the foundation for practicing landscape scale conservation. These are creating bigger nature areas, improving the condition of nature areas and connecting them up across our landscapes.

**National Landscape** – this is an area protected in law for its natural beauty previously known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Borough contains a large area of the North Wessex Downs and works in partnership with the organisation and the other associated authorities to help preserve its beauty and promote its value.

**Site of Importance for Nature Conservation** – these are areas that are protected through planning, which are considered particularly important locally, though don't have legal protection.

**Environment Improvement Plan** – this government document outlines the aspirations of this government in restoring nature. It includes targets, some of these are legally binding for the government to achieve in order to do so.

**Climate Emergency** – the council declared a Climate emergency in 2019 prior to the declaration of the Ecological emergency. This gave political weight to the acknowledgement and has led to greater investment by the council in combatting climate change.

**Environment Act** – this notable piece of legislation has resulted from leaving Europe and requiring UK legislation instead of that derived from European legislation. It contains ambitious and novel tools to help restore nature across England.

**Local Nature Recovery Strategy** – one of the tools created by the Environment Act that is intended to help guide investment in nature. It identifies the priorities at a county level and maps them so these can be jointly targeted.

**Conservation Covenant** – this is a tool created by the Environment Act and is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a "Responsible Body" to manage and enhance a piece of land for conservation. A Responsible Body is a legal body registered with the Government that can act to monitor and enforce the agreement.

**Biodiversity Net Gain** – a tool created by the Environment Act that seeks to leave the environment in a better place by ensuring developments create gains for wildlife. The council is responsible for ensuring developers plan for these gains and deliver them for at least 30 years.

**State of Nature Report** – a report on the state of nature in the UK by a partnership of charitable organisations. The report is undertaken periodically and provides a snapshot of how our nature is fairing. The recent report (2023) highlighted the continuing trend of the loss of nature at a massive scale.

**Priority Habitats** – those habitats protected by legislation and through planning that are considered particularly important for nature.

**Designated Sites** – these parcels of land are legally protected and include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The landowner must manage the land to preserve and promote the habitats or species for which the land is protected.

**Statutory duties** – these are the roles the council has that it must legally perform.



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