Huntingdonshire District Council

Biodiversity Duty Report 2025

Section 1: Our Policies, Objectives and Actions for Biodiversity

1.1 Policies and objectives to meet the biodiversity duty

Statutory context

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on public authorities, in exercising their functions, to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Amendments introduced through the Environment Act 2021 strengthened this duty, requiring authorities to take steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity and to report on actions taken.

Huntingdonshire District Council has met this duty during the reporting period by embedding biodiversity considerations within its existing corporate, environmental and planning policy frameworks, rather than through a standalone biodiversity strategy. This approach reflects a proportionate response consistent with government guidance.

Policy framework

During the reporting period, the Council's biodiversity duty has been delivered through the following adopted strategies and plans:

- **Corporate Plan 2023–2028**, which sets out the Council's commitment to creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations, including protecting the natural environment and supporting sustainable place-shaping.
- **Climate Strategy (adopted 2023)**, following the Council's declaration of a Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency in February 2023. The strategy includes priority actions to restore nature, increase tree cover and deliver biodiversity programmes in partnership with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.
- **Tree Strategy**, which supports habitat creation and connectivity through tree planting, woodland management and urban greening.
- **Planning policy and development management processes**, including the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and the provision of in-house ecological advice.

Together, these documents establish a clear policy basis for conserving and enhancing biodiversity across Council functions, including land management, planning, community engagement and capital investment.

Interim nature recovery framework and LNRS contribution

In advance of the statutory Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Huntingdonshire District Council developed and applied an Interim Nature Recovery Network and Priority Natural Landscapes framework.

Through this work, we identified ten priority landscape areas across the district and focused our efforts on the habitats that matter most for nature locally—river corridors, floodplain meadows, fens and ancient woodlands. We produced an evidence-based, map-led framework to guide where and how we invest in biodiversity and to support consistent, transparent decision-making.

During the reporting period, this interim framework was used by Planning and Parks services to inform site selection, project prioritisation and development management while the LNRS was being prepared. It therefore ensured that biodiversity and nature recovery considerations were embedded in Council decision-making in the absence of an adopted LNRS.

The interim framework directly informed the design and delivery of the Biodiversity for All programme and forms part of the Council's contribution to the emerging LNRS, supporting a smooth transition to the statutory strategy once adopted. While not a statutory planning document, its adoption has informed planning policy, assisting with the consideration of natural priorities relating to development proposals and the consideration of priority landscapes within the planning process.

Biodiversity objectives

Drawing on the Corporate Plan, Climate Strategy and Interim Nature Recovery Network, the Council's biodiversity objectives during the reporting period were to:

- Conserve and enhance biodiversity across Council-owned land and assets.
- Deliver measurable biodiversity enhancement through evidence-based interventions.
- Embed biodiversity considerations into planning and development decision-making.
- Support nature recovery across priority landscapes in partnership with other organisations.
- Enable community-led biodiversity action and develop local green skills.

These objectives guided the actions taken by the Council during the reporting period and demonstrate compliance with Section 40(1) and 40(1A) of the NERC Act.

1.2 Actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty

Biodiversity for All programme

In February 2022, the Council secured £1.35 million from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to deliver the Biodiversity for All (Bio4All) programme. During the reporting period, this programme formed the primary mechanism for delivering biodiversity enhancements on Council land and through community partnerships

In the last 12 months we completed ecological baseline surveys across 14 strategic parks and open spaces. These surveys established biodiversity unit baselines and identified priority opportunities for enhancement, ensuring that investments are targeted and measurable. To give clear direction and oversight, Cabinet-approved delivery schedules were put in place for strategic sites. We also made major capital investments in nature at flagship locations—Priory Park (St Neots) and Hill Rise (St Ives)—where habitat creation and enhancement works were delivered in line with professional ecological advice. To keep delivery proportionate and effective, we adopted a phased approach spanning short-, medium- and long-term strategic sites so that improvements begin now and continue to build over time.

Community-led biodiversity delivery

The Biodiversity for All programme also enabled community-driven biodiversity action across the district. During the reporting period, the Council:

- Delivered two rounds of a Community Biodiversity Grant scheme, supporting parish councils, town councils, schools and community organisations.
- Commissioned biodiversity audits for participating sites and awarded grants to deliver evidence-based habitat enhancement.
- Supported the delivery of 17 community-led biodiversity projects, resulting in habitat creation, habitat improvement and increased ecological connectivity.
- Enabled delivery by Council graduate ecologists, building internal capacity while supporting external partners.

These projects contributed directly to biodiversity enhancement while increasing local ownership and stewardship of nature.

Green recovery and skills development

As part of the Biodiversity for All programme, the Council delivered Green Recovery and Greenskills projects on Council-owned sites. During the reporting period, 11 projects were completed across multiple parks and open spaces. Participants undertook accredited training while contributing to practical habitat works, including tree and shrub planting, wildflower creation, pond restoration, hedgerow management and invertebrate habitat creation. The programme delivered tangible

biodiversity benefits alongside social and economic outcomes, improving employability and wellbeing for participants.

Urban parks and smaller-scale enhancements

In addition to strategic and community-led projects, the Council delivered smaller-scale biodiversity enhancements within urban parks and neighbourhood spaces during the reporting period, including works at sites such as Maryland Avenue and Bevan Close. These interventions improved habitat quality and increased biodiversity value in highly accessible public spaces.

Planning and development management

During the reporting period, the Council implemented actions to embed biodiversity within planning functions. This included applying mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements to relevant planning applications, providing in-house ecological advice to planning officers and applicants, and using the Interim Nature Recovery Network to guide decisions while the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was being prepared. (Further detail on BNG delivery is provided in Section 3.)

Monitoring, data and citizen science

To support monitoring and evidence-based decision-making, the Council promoted the use of the iNaturalist citizen science platform during the reporting period. This resulted in:

- Over 9,500 biodiversity observations recorded across Huntingdonshire.
- Increased understanding of species distribution, including non-native and invasive species.
- Improved ecological evidence to inform land management and future biodiversity actions.

This approach supports ongoing monitoring and adaptive management in line with the biodiversity duty.

Governance and mainstreaming biodiversity

Biodiversity considerations were embedded into Council governance and operations during the reporting period. Cabinet-approved delivery schedules provide a clear mandate for action at strategic sites; biodiversity is integrated into project development and planning processes; and officer training and guidance have been rolled out to ensure biodiversity considerations are applied consistently across relevant services.

1.3 Summary of compliance with Section 40 of the NERC Act

During the reporting period, Huntingdonshire District Council has:

- Established clear biodiversity objectives through adopted strategies and interim evidence-based frameworks.
- Taken practical, measurable steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity on Council-owned land.
- Embedded biodiversity considerations into planning, governance and service delivery.
- Worked in partnership with communities, statutory bodies and external organisations to deliver nature recovery.

These actions demonstrate that the Council has complied with its duties under Section 40(1) and 40(1A) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and has met the reporting requirements set out in Section 40A(3)(a).

Section 2: Our Future Actions for Biodiversity

2.1 Overview

Huntingdonshire District Council will build on the progress made during the reporting period by embedding biodiversity enhancement as a core function of its services and by scaling up delivery through a combination of habitat banking, strategic land management and community-led action.

Over the next period, our work will focus on four areas: delivering measurable gains for nature on Council-owned land; embedding biodiversity in our planning and governance processes; supporting delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS); and putting in place a financially sustainable model for the long-term management of habitats.

2.2 Habitat Banking Programme

Strategic approach

The Council will implement a Habitat Banking Programme to deliver biodiversity enhancement and generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units on Council-owned and leased land.

Habitat banking enables the Council to:

- Deliver its statutory biodiversity duties under the Environment Act 2021
- Provide locally available BNG units to support development
- Retain investment within the district
- Establish a long-term, self-sustaining funding model for biodiversity and green space management

This approach represents a shift from grant-funded delivery to a natural capital investment model, where income from BNG unit sales is reinvested into habitat creation, monitoring and long-term management.

What habitat banking means for Huntingdonshire:
We are establishing a Habitat Banking Programme on Council-owned and leased land. Habitat banking is a practical way to create and enhance habitats and, in doing so, generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units. These locally generated units can then be used to support development that must deliver BNG, keeping investment within the district and ensuring benefits for local wildlife and communities. Income from unit sales will be reinvested into habitat creation, monitoring and long-term management, moving us from short-term grant funding towards a self-sustaining, natural-capital approach.

This programme helps us to meet our legal duties to conserve and enhance biodiversity, while providing a clear, local route for developments to achieve their BNG responsibilities.

Phased delivery

The Habitat Banking Programme will be delivered in two phases:

Phase 1 (Pilot – underway)

Phase 1 is funded through underspend from the Biodiversity for All programme and focuses on establishing the model and testing delivery.

Sites include:

- Barford Road Pocket Park (St Neots)
- Huntingdon Riverside
- St Neots Riverside

Key actions include ecological baseline surveys and biodiversity metric calculations, preparation of 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMPs), initial habitat creation, and registering each site on the national Biodiversity Gain Site Register.

Phase 1 sites are expected to be registered in early 2026, enabling the Council to begin the sale of BNG units.

Phase 2

Approval has been granted for a second phase to expand habitat banking across additional sites:

- Spring Common
- Berman Park
- Priory Park

This phase will complete ecological baselines and HMMPs, deliver habitat creation and enhancement, register additional habitat banks and scale our monitoring and management framework. The programme is expected to be fully operational by late 2026, with habitat banking embedded as business-as-usual activity.

Delivery model

Each habitat bank will follow a structured approach: we identify suitable sites and test feasibility; complete ecological baselines and biodiversity metric calculations; design habitats and prepare 30-year HMMPs; secure internal approvals; deliver habitat creation and enhancement; register sites on the national Biodiversity Gain Site Register; and make units available to developers. Long-term monitoring and

adaptive management will then ensure habitats improve in condition over time. Each habitat bank will be secured for a minimum of 30 years, in line with statutory requirements.

Outcomes and benefits

The programme will create and enhance wetlands, species-rich grasslands, woodlands and river corridors, improving ecological connectivity across priority landscapes. It will also build climate resilience through nature-based solutions such as flood mitigation and carbon sequestration. Financially, it will generate long-term income from BNG unit sales, reduce reliance on external grants and provide ring-fenced funding to meet our 30-year management commitments. For local people, it will improve the quality and accessibility of parks and open spaces and create opportunities for volunteering, learning and skills development, supporting health and wellbeing through increased access to nature.

2.3 Biodiversity Delivery on Council Land

Alongside habitat banking, we will continue to enhance biodiversity across the Council's estate. We will implement management plans informed by ecological surveys, expand habitat creation at both strategic and local sites, and improve the condition of existing habitats by changing how we manage land where that will benefit wildlife. Delivery will continue through Biodiversity for All (or successor programmes). We will prioritise action where it can make the greatest difference, guided by the Interim Nature Recovery Network, the LNRS and our existing ecological evidence and baselines.

2.4 Planning and Development

We will keep biodiversity at the heart of our planning functions. This includes implementing and monitoring mandatory BNG requirements; offering proportionate, timely ecological advice to applicants and developers; and facilitating access to locally delivered off-site BNG units through our Habitat Banking Programme where appropriate. Planning decisions will be aligned with LNRS priorities and spatial frameworks to secure coherent, landscape-scale outcomes for nature and people.

2.5 Partnerships and Community Engagement

We will continue to work in partnership with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, the Woodland Trust, Anglian Water, parish and town councils, community groups and volunteers. Our

approach is to co-design local action, widen participation and build the capacity needed for sustained, community-led nature recovery across Huntingdonshire.

2.6 Monitoring and Reporting

The Council will strengthen monitoring and reporting by implementing clear monitoring frameworks for habitat banking sites, track the delivery of biodiversity units and habitat condition over time, and use ecological data—including citizen science—to inform adaptive management. We will report progress and outcomes through future Biodiversity Duty Reports and publish updates on our website to support transparency.

2.7 Summary of Future Actions

Over the next reporting period, the Council will establish and scale a Habitat Banking Programme across Council land; deliver measurable biodiversity enhancement aligned with LNRS priorities; embed biodiversity into planning, governance and land management and develop a sustainable funding model for long-term nature recovery.

These actions will ensure continued compliance with the Council's duties under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006, while supporting wider environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain Information

Eligible planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requiring biodiversity net gain	**Number**	**Proportion (%)**
Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	107	Not applicable
Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	1053	Not applicable
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	9	Not applicable
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	5	55.56
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	1	11.11
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0.00
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	2	22.22
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of off-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site, off-site units and statutory credits	1	11.11

Overall expected gains and losses across all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	Area habitat	Hedgerow	Water-course
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	24.90	0.33	2.19
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	32.03	3.10	2.43
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	7.13	2.77	0.23
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	28.64	839.76	10.67
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.88	0.00	0.02
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	3.64	0.00	0.06
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	2.76	0.00	0.04
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	313.32	0.00	233.87
Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits	0.02	0.00	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	9.90	2.77	0.27
Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	38.42	839.76	12.39

Impact on irreplaceable habitat	Total	Proportion (%)
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period where the on-site change negatively impacts irreplaceable habitats	0	0.00

Location of off-site biodiversity units	Total	Proportion (%)
Number of off-site biodiversity units located inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	3.64	100.00
Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside LPA or NCA of impact site, but in neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.00	0.00

Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside of LPA or NCA of impact site and neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.00	0.00

Results of monitoring biodiversity gains where the LPA is part of the legal agreement	**Total**	**Proportion (%)**
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans including the delivery of 'significant' on-site gains	5	55.56
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements and habitat delivery expectations for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements but not meeting habitat delivery expectations for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are failing to meet monitoring requirements for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans where the status of monitoring requirements is unknown for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans including the delivery of off-site gains, where the LPA are responsible for monitoring.	0	0.00
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements and habitat delivery expectations for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements but not meeting habitat delivery expectations for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are failing to meet monitoring requirements for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	N/A	N/A
Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans where the status of monitoring requirements is unknown for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	N/A	N/A
Enforcement actions taken in the reporting period	**Total**	**Proportion (%)**
Number of enforcement actions taken during the reporting period associated with Biodiversity Net Gain policy	0	0.00

Tracking monitoring of biodiversity gains	**Free Text**	
Please describe how you have collected information on monitoring (e.g., use of digital software to collect and analyse monitoring data/ manual checking of monitoring reports/ internal monitoring system etc.	Mycelia digital software	

Habitat Type - Area	**Total bio-diversity units at baseline**	**Total hectares at baseline**	**Total biodiversity units post - development**	**Total hectares post - development**	**Net change in bio-diversity units**	**Net change in hectares**
Cropland	15.99	7.99	0.00	0.00	-15.99	-7.99
Grassland	1.85	0.92	28.65	7.56	26.80	6.65
Heathland and shrub	0.00	0.00	1.33	0.25	1.33	0.25
Lakes	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sparsely vegetated land	4.30	2.15	0.00	0.00	-4.30	-2.15
Urban	1.41	1.02	1.27	4.28	-0.14	3.25
Wetland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Woodland and forest	1.09	0.14	1.09	0.14	0.00	0.00
Intertidal sediment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Coastal saltmarsh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Rocky shore	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Coastal lagoons	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Intertidal hard structures	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Watercourse footprint	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00
Individual trees	1.14	0.16	3.32	0.94	2.18	0.79
Total	25.78	12.38	35.67	13.16	9.89	0.79

Habitat type - hedgerows and lines of trees	Total bio-diversity units at baseline	Total kilometres at baseline	Total biodiversity units post - development	Total kilometres post - development	Net change in bio-diversity units	Net change in kilometres
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Species-rich native hedgerow	0.00	0.00	1.37	0.35	1.37	0.35
Native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ecologically valuable line of trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ecologically valuable line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Native hedgerow	0.01	0.00	1.41	0.56	1.40	0.55
Line of trees	0.32	0.08	0.32	0.08	0.00	0.00
Line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	0.33	0.09	3.10	0.99	2.77	0.90

Habitat type - watercourse	**Total biodiversity units at baseline**	**Total kilometres at baseline**	**Total biodiversity units post - development**	**Total kilometres post - development**	**Net change in biodiversity units**	**Net change in kilometres**
Priority habitat	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other rivers and streams	2.19	0.25	2.43	0.25	0.23	0.00
Ditches	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.01	0.04	0.00
Canals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Culvert	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	2.21	0.26	2.48	0.26	0.27	0.00