



BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY - DRAFT

VISION: HALT THE DECLINE OF BIODIVERSITY,
PROTECT AND RE-CONNECT OUR HABITATS,
RESTORE SPECIES POPULATIONS

Executive Summary

- Our vision is to halt the decline of biodiversity in Southampton, strengthen habitat connections and to improve the condition of our valuable semi-natural habitat. As our statutory Biodiversity Duty, we will deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and ensure our plans for habitat restoration integrate measures from the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Human health ultimately depends upon ecosystem products and services. Environments rich in wildlife benefit wellbeing through emotional, social and psychological benefits.
- Biodiversity contributes to climate stability and carbon storage, up to a fifth of all soil carbon in the UK is locked away in grassland. Biodiversity provides nature-based solutions to help protect our city from climate change related impacts, including radical alterations in our weather pattern causing drought, flooding, extreme temperatures and in turn, changes in phenology (timings of natural events such as birds nesting and leaves appearing on trees)
- In England, we have lost over 15% of species since 1970, there has been widespread loss and degradation of habitats across England dating back many centuries, from which, our wildlife has not recovered. 97% of wildflower meadows were lost between the 1930s and 1984. Four UK high temperature records were broken in 2019 and there was a 12% increase in above average rainfall with significant flooding events. There has been a 41% decrease in species' populations since 1970. The majority of people in the UK acknowledge that nature is under threat and needs urgent action to protect and restore it (Guardian article Sept 2022).
- Southampton's biodiversity is extremely rich, diverse and valuable. It includes nationally and internationally important habitats such as coastal shingle, mudflat, chalk rivers, ponds, grassland, wet meadow and ancient woodland.
- Our semi-natural habitat is under threat through both direct loss (generally from development pressure) and degradation in their condition (due to a lack of management and pressure arising from our increasing population).
- This Strategy sets out key priorities relating to habitats and wildlife within Southampton, identifies the main issues and challenges and outlines how we will tackle those issues.
- As a Council, we have a legal duty to consider biodiversity across all of our functions to help halt the loss of biodiversity and seek opportunities to reverse the decline of habitat loss, species diversity and species abundance.

Our Approach

- The timeframe for the Biodiversity Strategy covers the period from 2023 to 2028, after which time, it will be reviewed.
- The council will improve our knowledge of Southampton's biodiversity by undertaking systematic surveys of our habitats and species. The results of surveys will help identify key species and ensure our land is being managed appropriately.
- We will update our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), providing a record of our ecological baseline, identifying key species and habitats, setting clear goals of what we want to achieve, when and how we will go about it.
- We will increase knowledge and understanding of species requirements and wildlife legislation with increased levels of training for our staff.
- We will continue to develop our understanding and appreciation of the crucial benefits (ecosystem services) that are delivered by a healthy city ecosystem and ensure ecosystem service benefits are understood by all our key staff and decision makers.
- We will ensure that our Local Plan Framework, guiding development in the city, sets out policies for the conservation of important international, national and local wildlife sites, features of biodiversity importance and species. The statutory requirement for BNG will be included in our Biodiversity policy. We will set high standards for all future development, ensuring that the right habitat/green infrastructure is delivered in the right location. To support our Biodiversity policy, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) will provide further information in relation to nutrient neutrality, mitigation for recreational disturbance, and, where and what type of BNG will be required within Southampton.
- Wildlife needs a network of linked habitats. We will retain existing habitat links, strengthen those which have become fragmented and create new ones. Links will be strengthened, both within the city and also into adjoining districts, creating a robust Green Grid.
- Collaborative working. Council departments will work together, ensuring our Biodiversity Duty and our approach to land management protect, enhance and connect habitats across the city. We will work with others on joint biodiversity related initiatives including Hampshire's LNRS and Southampton National Park City. We will work with people studying, working and living in the city, helping forge relationships across communities to encourage people to access, explore and make improvements to their local green spaces. Increasing opportunities for outdoor physical activity and improving mental health and at the same time, benefiting wildlife. Collaborative working on various city-wide projects will be key to making connections between parks, open spaces, the Greenways and other important sites and habitat. Our new Rangers, working with the Ecology team and Maintenance Operation team, will ensure the city's habitats are appropriately managed. We will make improvements in all our semi-natural spaces for wildlife and for people. Our Wilder Community Officers will work closely with residents, helping to engage and empower communities to take action for nature in order to help Southampton become greener and wilder. Our Community Campaigns Officer will continue to work with volunteers on habitat restoration projects.

Focus

We are developing a Green Grid to help us recognise and safeguard existing green infrastructure and identify how to maximise benefits through introducing more. The Green Grid will set out key green connections in the city, both existing (such as our Greenways) but also aspirational links which we have identified as crucial for ensuring a better connected, greener and healthier city for people and wildlife. A Green Grid policy will be included in our Local Plan Review, helping to guide well-designed development and setting high standards for green infrastructure to be delivered. This policy will be supported by a Green Grid Map showing current and proposed connections. The Green Grid Delivery Plan will identify projects, on the ground, that will be delivered to help create and strengthen connections across the city. The Green Grid Strategy will provide information on how the Green Grid will be implemented by the council. This Biodiversity Strategy is not a standalone document, it is directly connected to the Green Grid Strategy and its aims align with those within that Strategy.

The Biodiversity Strategy provides a statement on how Southampton City Council will protect, enhance, connect and create areas of nature conservation value within Southampton. We will manage land and structures within our portfolio to protect and enhance habitats and species consistent with our statutory duties. We will secure dedicated resources within the council to deliver improvements in semi-natural habitat in the city.

As well as engaging with external stakeholders, we will engage with our own staff to ensure that we are working collaboratively and delivering benefits for wildlife whilst undertaking our statutory duties. We will ensure all the work we undertake as a council (management of our land, housing, schools and other built structures) aligns with wildlife legislation and best practice guidance, making sure we protect habitats and species whilst going about our day-to-day activities.

Our Local Plan Review will include clear policies that ensure development in the city is well-designed, delivers no less than 10% BNG and aligns with the aims of Hampshire's LNRS.

We will work with all sectors of the city, including engaging with as many residents as possible, to design and deliver plans to create green links. Together we will green the grey, tree line our streets, incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and help inspire others to support wildlife.

We have identified five key priorities:

- Priority 1: Protect, Enhance and Connect our Ecological Network
 - Increase the area of habitat located between core sites in the ecological network to act as stepping-stones for species moving between core sites.
- Priority 2: Engage in a Programme of Habitat Management Work to Achieve an Overall Improvement in Habitat Condition
 - A programme of habitat management and monitoring work will lead to an improvement in the condition of habitats on the city's semi-natural greenspaces.
- Priority 3: Increase Species Diversity and Improve Species Populations
 - Identify species which are declining and/or at risk and put in place a programme of conservation management to reverse the decline
- Priority 4: Identify and Deliver Opportunities for the Creation and Enhancement of Habitats
 - Update our knowledge of biodiversity in the city. Ensure all Council land is managed with biodiversity in mind. Retain extent, improve quality (where

needed) of statutory and non-statutory designated land of nature conservation. Help increase the quality, diversity and extent of habitats outside of Council land ownership.

- Priority 5: Priority/ outcomes 5. Increase Resilience of Biodiversity to Safeguard Ecosystem Service Delivery
 - Healthier habitats which are more resilient to climate change

Setting the Scene

- Southampton's geographical position, relatively warm climate, underlying geology and its position between two rivers (the Test and Itchen) has resulted in a city with a diverse range of habitats and species.
- The city supports a wide variety of notable habitats including coast, mudflats, rivers, ponds, wet meadows, heathland, grassland and woodland. Some of these habitats are of significant importance and protected under national and international legislation including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The city also supports 66 Sites of Importance of Nature Conservation.
- The city has a relatively large extent of non-designated habitat, with 49 parks and 1,140 hectares of green open space, including the Common which has over 17 million visitors each year. In total, 20% of the city is classified as publicly accessible green space.
- Southampton neighbours the New Forest National Park, Southampton Water, the Solent and the range of protected habitats within them.
- The Southampton BAP, which updated the 1992 Nature Conservation Strategy, is now over 16 years old. Since the publication of the BAP, there have been significant changes to legislation (the Environment Act, 2021), policy and guidance. The 2021 Environment Act is very ambitious. Its implementation will halt the decline of nature by 2030 and requires all new development to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG. The duty of delivering BNG is the responsibility of Local Planning Authorities. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be created to help build a Nature Recovery Network across England.
- Southampton City Council realises the importance and urgency of halting the global decline in species. The council is committed to improving and increasing the greenspace across the city, playing its part in halting the loss of biodiversity at a local level. We realise the importance of acting without delay; stopping the decline and fragmentation of biodiversity in the city needs to be addressed urgently. Making important changes to the way we deal with our natural environment now will have lasting physical and mental health benefits for the city's population and make the city a more attractive place to work, live and visit. To improve our residents' wellbeing and ensure that wildlife and habitats can persist for future generations, we want to make the city as green as possible. The Council cannot protect and enhance biodiversity on its own; we will need the help residents and visitors.
- We acknowledge there is a balance between the inevitable future growth within the city and the associated pressures that brings, in particular, to designated sites in Southampton and the surrounding area such as the New Forest National Park.
- The key drivers of biodiversity loss in Southampton include climate change, development, pollution (both on the land and in our watercourses), population related impacts (such as habitat degradation/erosion/disturbance/recreation), 'Permitted Development' changes (such as car parking resulting in additional hardstanding), and inappropriate/lack of management of habitat. Small-scale, incremental encroachment on small incidental spaces and private gardens is eroding the city's green network for both people and wildlife. Fragmentation of the green network is affecting the services (benefits) that a healthy, well-connected ecosystem can deliver.

What Do Our Residents Say?

In March 2022, we ran a consultation around a Southampton Green Grid. We asked people what they thought about the city's greenspaces and these are some of the most commonly raised responses:

- There is widespread affection and appreciation of the green spaces in Southampton, and a sense of pride, but people feel that the quality of these spaces has declined in recent years. The Greenways in particular were mentioned as amazing places for wildlife but that better management of these sites is imperative
- Concern about the environment and climate change have been cited as the most important challenges faced by the city. People expressed concern that further development will be detrimental to the extent and quality of our green spaces. (City Vision 2020)
- 98% of respondents would like more nature and wildlife in the city
- 84% of respondents enhance their outside spaces for wildlife, reducing mowing to encourage pollinators, planting pollinator-friendly species, constructing ponds and enhancing gardens for wildlife such as birds and hedgehogs
- 89% of respondents feel that using native species (local and natural) for planting is important for encouraging wildlife and improving habitats and that plants and trees used in landscaping should be chosen to be of benefit to wildlife
- 91% of respondents said that street tree planting improves the character of an area
- Nearly half of respondents mentioned The Common as being their favourite green space in the city due to its close proximity to where they live and being able to walk there. Riverside Park was cited as the next most visited green space
- 91% of respondents said they would like to see more green spaces in the city. The remaining 9% said they would like to see the existing green spaces better maintained and improved
- Asked about what would encourage people to make more use of their green space, the majority of people cited more wildlife, peace and tranquillity, biodiversity and facilities such as toilets/cafés. People also asked for better signage, transport connections and generally better access
- St James Park received an overwhelming number of positive comments (85% of respondents said they felt positive about this park). On the contrary, Mayflower Park was the most mentioned park that is in need of significant improvements.

Priority/ outcomes 1. Protect, Enhance and Connect our Ecological Network

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Increased protection of existing habitats	Ensure that all existing habitat is safeguarded and being managed appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure policy framework is strong enough to safeguard areas of habitat from inappropriate uses. ▪ Change management regimes used on council owned land to improve habitat condition ▪ Create areas of buffering habitat to protect principal biodiversity features

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Increased habitat connectivity	Increase the extent of habitat located between core sites in the ecological network to act as stepping-stones for species moving between core sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On council land create areas of new habitat to link up existing patches ▪ Use the planning system to deliver new habitat within developments ▪ Ensure landscape planting includes species of recognised value to wildlife ▪ Education campaign around 'wildlife friendly' gardening and landscaping ▪ Create 'stepping-stones' for wildlife – through introduction of new green infrastructure ▪ Plant trees along roads and streets ▪ Ensure SuDS features support biodiversity

Priority/ outcomes 2. Achieve an Overall Improvement in Habitat Condition

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Improved habitat condition</p>	<p>Understand the existing condition of our habitats.</p> <p>A programme of habitat management and monitoring work will lead to an improvement in the condition of habitats within the city's semi-natural greenspaces, whilst also ensuring that our open spaces are safe places for the public to enjoy and receive benefits from.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat Management Plans will be written for each semi-natural greenspace site. ▪ Annual work programmes will be developed. These programmes will be implemented by a team of suitably skilled and experienced staff. ▪ Additional resources, including volunteers and Community Payback participants, will also be involved, ▪ A monitoring programme involving surveys of habitats and species will be put in place. ▪ We will work with our internal teams to implement Habitat Management Plans.

Priority/ outcomes 3. Increase Species Diversity and Improve Species Populations

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Improve species diversity and species populations</p>	<p>Identify species which are declining and/or at risk and put in place a programme of conservation management and initiatives to reverse the decline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify key species within the city ▪ Review habitat requirements for key species ▪ Develop conservation management plans for key species ▪ Implement conservation management plans and increasing opportunities for wildlife such as nesting birds, roosting bats, hedgehogs ▪ Review general management practices and ensure they are consistent with good conservation practices ▪ Establish a programme of species monitoring and recording ▪ Only use pesticide in situations where all other alternatives have been considered inappropriate (eg. designing them out of schemes, reduce weed removal in general, use mechanical removal methods).

Priority/ outcomes 4. Identify and Deliver Opportunities for the Creation and Enhancement of Habitats

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Create and enhance habitats</p>	<p>Update our knowledge of biodiversity in the city. Ensure all our land is managed with biodiversity in mind. Retain extent and improve condition, where needed, of land protected by statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations. Help increase the quality, diversity and extent of habitats outside of our land ownership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update our local BAP ▪ Identify suitable sites/projects for BNG funding ▪ Work with other teams within the council to deliver habitat enhancements on our land ▪ Working with other landowners to develop and deliver habitat enhancements ▪ Biodiversity initiatives to encourage residents to create opportunities for wildlife in their gardens

Priority/ outcomes 5. Increase Resilience of Biodiversity to Safeguard Ecosystem Service Delivery

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>More robust biodiversity</p>	<p>Healthier habitats which are more resilient to climate change and human pressure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring we have sufficient protection buffers around our more sensitive sites to reduce disturbance of wildlife and habitat ▪ Ensure no further loss of habitat ▪ Education. How can people help improve space for wildlife? Why it is important to ensure we don't drop litter, allow dogs to foul/chase wildlife ▪ Right species. Climate adaptable planting and planting species of value to local wildlife ▪ Ensure ecosystem services are delivered in locations where they are needed

Delivering our strategy

- Southampton's wildlife can only effectively be protected and enhanced with the support of both the Council and the community acting in partnership. Fortunately, there is already a very high level of public support and interest. Encouraging and supporting communities to enhance their local green spaces for the benefit of wildlife also has the potential to deliver benefits across other Council priorities and strategies, such as improving health and wellbeing. The Council will continue to encourage and support communities to improve their local green space for nature.
- The Council will update its BAP; the BAP will act, in part, as an implementation plan for this Strategy and will have clear aims and how those aims will be delivered, including a set of annual actions and monitoring.
- The delivery of this strategy will require the Council to manage its land for the benefit of biodiversity, wherever possible. We will alter grassland mowing (grounds maintenance) regimes to ensure this habitat is managed to benefit wildlife. Our Ranger Team will work closely with our Grounds Maintenance Teams to identify further habitat that can be managed for wildlife. We will work closely with all our teams to ensure we seize the opportunity to improve biodiversity with all our sectors of work (including highways, landscape, schools and housing), providing clear advice in the form of advice/guidance notes to ensure a consistent, joined up approach. All habitat creation activities will take account of any potential conflicts of interest within the council (ie. tree planting must take account of potential impacts relating to sightlines/underground services/archaeology etc).
- The aims and objectives of our Greenspace Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy, Green Grid Strategy and Tree Strategy (to be developed) will all align. This will ensure that our efforts are consistent, joined up and delivered in the right way and in the right locations.
- We will continue with our rolling programme of species-specific and habitat surveys to record and monitor the ecological baseline of the city; the data from these surveys will inform Habitat Management Plans for our semi-natural sites (such as the Greenways and waterbodies). Our Rangers will implement these Habitat Management Plans, over time, improving the condition of all our semi-natural habitat.
- Planning policies and Development Management will deliver some of the priorities within this strategy. Green Grid Policy, Biodiversity Policy and Supplementary Planning Documents to support our Local Plan will ensure appropriate BNG (no less than 10%) is delivered in the right parts of the city. Planning Policy will ensure that future development includes high quality green infrastructure such as green roofs/green facades.
- The Council will continue to work with statutory agencies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, together with partners such as the Forestry Commission, neighbouring Local Authorities and with academic institutions.

- support organisations who are working with and supporting communities to improve green spaces, habitat and species diversity such as Parks Friends groups, SO18 Big Local, Green Volunteer Network and Southampton National Park City. We will support the efforts of local and national nature conservation groups such as People's Trust for Endangered Species, Southampton Natural History Society, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire Bat Group and Hampshire Swift Society.
- Biodiversity will be a consideration as the council undertakes tasks as part of its regulatory and statutory functions.
- All our day-to-day activities (including the actions of those within our supply chain, including sub-contractors) will be compliant with relevant environmental and wildlife legislation and best practice guidance. We expect development and contractors to work to the highest standards; we will make sure we lead by example. Internal wildlife awareness training will be delivered to all relevant staff across the various council departments.
- We will reduce our use of pesticides, ensuring we only use pesticides in situations where all other alternatives have been considered ineffective. Where possible, using non-chemical and manual and mechanical means of managing invasive plants.

How will we measure success?

We will:

- Increase the amount of land designated as Local Nature Reserve (LNR), aiming to meet the Natural England ANGSt target of at least one hectare of LNR per 1,000 people
- In accordance with Part 6, Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021, monitor and report on of the amount of BNG secured via planning
- Improve the condition of our semi-natural habitat and aim for “favourable conservation status” for all of our designated sites
- Increase overall species diversity, restored and improve species populations. We will set clear and specific targets within our updated Southampton BAP
- Ensure continued compliance with relevant habitat and species related legislation whilst carrying out our duties

Detail about what specific targets we are setting in order to see how biodiversity is fairing in our city, will be published in our updated BAP. This document will be reviewed and updated regularly for the duration of this strategy. We will also develop a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to measure our successes of habitat restoration and management and seek to identify means of measuring habitat connectivity through implementation of our GG.

This Biodiversity Strategy will contribute to an overall improvement in the health of the city. The wider benefits of a more natural environment are well recognised, helping with carbon storage, flood alleviation, noise reduction, improved air quality and, people's health and wellbeing. We anticipate that making our city greener, more attractive and therefore a nicer place to live and work, will also result in economic benefits for Southampton.

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