

## **Complying with the Biodiversity Duty**

### **1. Purpose of report**

To raise awareness of the Biodiversity Duty for Local Authorities as set out in the 2021 Environment Act.

To highlight the key issues for Bedford Borough Council in complying with the Duty, including who is best placed to lead on this new area of work and how the work will be resourced.

### **2. Introduction and background**

This report sets out the key requirements of the Biodiversity Duty for local authorities as set out in the 2021 Environment Act and the issues for Bedford Borough Council in complying with the new Duty.

The Government has produced guidance for local authorities on what is required – this is summarised at Annex 1. This is effectively a new work area for the Council, although we can include a number of existing workstreams to show how we are currently addressing biodiversity as this report highlights.

The action local authorities take for biodiversity will contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity. The [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP23\)](#), published in January 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment.

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance.
- protect 30% of UK land.

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels.
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
- reduce the risk of species extinction.
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

### **3. What is the Biodiversity Duty and timescale for compliance?**

Public authorities in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This is the strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ that the Environment Act 2021 introduces.

This means that, as a public authority, we must:

- Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on this consideration.
- Act to deliver our policies and achieve our objectives.

These tasks are tabulated overleaf.

Key Task	Timeframe
1. First consideration of actions to take for biodiversity, to be published.	By 1 January 2024
2. Policies and objectives to be agreed.	As soon as possible after 1 January 2024
3. Biodiversity report to demonstrate delivery of the policies and objectives.	End date of the first reporting period should be no later than 1 January 2026, then subsequent report within five years for the next reporting period

We must complete our first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024. We must then agree our policies and objectives as soon as possible after that date (it is anticipated that there will need to be further clarification about exactly what is required).

We must reconsider the action we can take within at least five years of when we complete this consideration. However, we could also decide to do this more often, for example, by reconsidering our actions on a quarterly or annual basis.

The Biodiversity Duty was originally set out in the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, but that referred to 'having regard to' biodiversity in carrying out our functions. The 2021 Environment Act has strengthened that reference to become a consideration of what we can do to 'conserve and enhance' biodiversity.

Bedford Borough Council has not reported against the original Biodiversity Duty. A situation which is probably typical of most local authorities.

#### **4. Government guidance on complying with the strengthened Biodiversity Duty**

The Government produced guidance on compliance with the strengthened Biodiversity Duty in May 2023. This included a suggested format for reporting on compliance – a link to the full guidance is included in Annex 1.

The first three sections of the government guidance are statutory, and we must complete those. The remainder of the guidance outlines the range of activity which could be included in our report on how we are meeting the Biodiversity Duty.

Annex 2 to this report contains a table setting out the activity which demonstrates our compliance with the Biodiversity Duty, and a summary of current activity within the Council. This covers the establishment of a strategic framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity, as well as considering how we manage our own land and buildings and how we could influence others (including local residents).

The requirement for new developments to deliver a minimum of 10% Net Gain in Biodiversity will become mandatory in January 2024.

The Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2040, currently in examination, contains draft Policy DM7 on Environmental Net Gain, which builds upon the Biodiversity Net Gain principle, but goes further to include a focus on natural capital assets and the associated benefits such as flood protection, improved water and air quality that can be achieved from developments.

## **5. Conclusion and next steps**

This report fulfils Task 1 as set out in the table of key tasks set out above. The actions set out in Appendix 2 will be published for consideration on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

Task 2 is for our policies and objectives to be agreed as soon as possible after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024. This will be the focus of our work in the coming months.

Task 3 is to produce our first Biodiversity Report no later than 1 January 2026. After this, the end date of each reporting period must be within five years of the end date of the previous reporting period. All reports must be published within twelve weeks of the reporting period end date.

**December 2023**

## **Government guidance on complying with the Biodiversity Duty – reporting framework.**

### **Section 1: Your policies, objectives, and actions**

You must include this information in your report.

Explain:

- the policies and objectives you have set to meet your biodiversity duty.
- the actions you've completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.

### **Section 2: How you have considered other strategies**

You must include this information in your report.

Explain how you've taken into account:

- local nature recovery strategies
- protected site strategies
- species conservation strategies

For example, include information about how:

- you've advised or worked in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) partnership in your area.
- these strategies influenced your policies, objectives or actions.

### **Section 3: Your future actions**

You must include this information in your report.

- Explain how your organisation plans to fulfil your biodiversity duty over the 5 years following the end of this reporting period.
- You can report your plans for future actions in each section of your report alongside the ones you've achieved.
- Alternatively, you can summarise your plans for future actions separately. This will form part of your monitoring and evaluation as you can refer to this section in the next reporting period.

### **Biodiversity net gain information (for local planning authorities only)**

You must include information on biodiversity net gain if you're a local planning authority. This should be a separate section in your report.

As a local planning authority, you must include:

- a summary of the actions you've carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations.
- details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans you've approved.
- a summary of how you plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.

The full government guidance is here:

[Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversity-duty-actions)

[Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty)

## Evidence of compliance with the Biodiversity Duty and overview of current situation within the Council

Policy and objectives	<p><u>Climate Emergency</u> In March 2019, Bedford Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency and has pledged to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.</p> <p>The Council recognises the devastating effect climate change is having on biodiversity and working towards net zero in as many aspects of our business as possible is essential.</p> <p><u>Carbon Reduction Delivery Strategy 2020-2030</u> The Strategy sets out the approach that the Council will take to become Carbon Neutral by 2030.</p> <p>As part of this aim, the Council has agreed the following objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incorporate the carbon neutral by 2030 ambition into all Council strategies, work plans and policies including the Corporate Plan, Local Plan, Procurement Policies, Corporate Asset Plan, Finance strategies etc.</li> <li>2. Consider opportunities to increase green investment.</li> <li>3. To buy 100% renewable electricity through energy contracts.</li> <li>4. Generate renewable energy at the best locations to reduce grid electricity, increase stability of supply and avoid price increases.</li> <li>5. Reduce Council energy usage through behaviour change and the implementation of further projects through the council's Carbon Management Fund, implementation of the recommendations made in the Council's Net Carbon Zero Surveys across its estate and proactively pursuing grant funding, e.g., from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.</li> <li>6. Any unavoidable emissions to be offset against local community projects, e.g., tree planting, maximising green area allocations, green walls / roofs.</li> <li>7. Replace council-owned vehicles with suitable electric or hydrogen models when appropriate replacements are available, together with an immediate moratorium on fossil fuel vehicles under 3.5t, as well as promoting sustainable transport alternatives.</li> <li>8. Work with partners to share best practice.</li> <li>9. Ensure that council buildings have a programme of work to improve EPC ratings.</li> </ol>
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10. Work towards the government's goal of no new gas heating; and follow the 'road to zero' (the phasing out of petrol and diesel cars) by 2035, or sooner where replacements are available.

#### Corporate Plan 2022 – 2026

The council's Corporate Plan includes Strategic Priority DP3 to "Enrich our local environment", demonstrating our commitment to tackling the climate emergency by encouraging responsible behaviour in terms of how people travel and manage their refuse.

#### Local Plan 2030

Amongst its "Natural Environment" objectives, the current Local Plan contains the following:

1. Deliver high quality growth that will facilitate the development of more sustainable and inclusive places for local communities, which are equipped to respond to the impacts of climate and economic change and offer the opportunity to live more healthy lifestyles. Where it is viable and sustainable to do so, encourage the re-use of land that has been previously developed.
8. Develop a strong and multifunctional urban and rural green infrastructure network through protecting, enhancing, extending and linking landscapes, woodland, biodiversity sites, heritage sites, green spaces and paths.
9. Support and create a high quality, inclusive and safe built environment which values local landscape and settlement character and which conserves and enhances the historic environment and is enjoyed by all.
10. Protect and enhance our natural resources including air, soil minerals and water to minimise the impacts of flooding, climate change and pollution.

#### Planning Policies in the emerging Local Plan 2040

The Plan includes Policy DM7 on Environmental Net Gain.

Proposals for major development should provide an environmental net gain (in accordance with government policy), securing a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain, through the following:

- i. Enhancement of the existing features of the site, particularly where these deliver significant levels of ecosystem services; or
- ii. The creation of additional habitats on the site; or
- iii. Where it is not possible to deliver net gain solely on-site, there will be a requirement to enhance or create off site habitats.

	<p>Where possible and appropriate, linkages should be created with existing habitats and ecological networks with adjoining features.</p> <p>Planning applications should demonstrate how net biodiversity and net environmental gain will be achieved through the production of a supporting statement that considers the contribution the proposal could make to the borough's natural capital.</p> <p>Major development is defined as residential sites of 10 or more units; or on a site where the number of units is unknown, a site area of 0.5 hectare or greater. For non-residential uses, sites where the floorspace to be created is 1,000 square metres or greater or the site area is 1 hectare or greater.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Sustainable Development and Environmental Efficiency Strategy (SDEES)</a></u></p> <p>The SDEES provides a holistic approach to environmental issues faced by the Borough. It is available here: <a href="https://www.bedford.gov.uk/media/2061/download?inline">https://www.bedford.gov.uk/media/2061/download?inline</a></p> <p>The Strategy sets out how the Council will continue to lead by example to increase its environmental efficiency and resilience, whilst also encouraging and supporting local communities and businesses in the Borough to do the same.</p> <p>With regard to biodiversity, the aim is to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems, and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.</p> <p>The 2022/23 Action Plan is available here: <a href="https://www.bedford.gov.uk/media/5221">https://www.bedford.gov.uk/media/5221</a> and contains actions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote green infrastructure and biodiversity across the Council estate (1.9), and</li><li>• Support local communities to help them become resilient to the impacts of climate change (2.0)</li></ul>
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<p>Background and baseline</p>	<p><u>National Introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)</u>  BNG will apply to most new major development under the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) from January 2024 and to small sites from April 2024.</p> <p><u>Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)</u>  Bedford Borough Council is a partner with Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council in preparing a LNRS.</p> <p>Central Bedfordshire Council has been appointed as the Responsible Authority to co-ordinate this work and a dedicated LNRS Officer was appointed in September 2023.</p> <p>Work has begun on preparing the LNRS and it is estimated that this will be complete by Summer 2025.</p> <p><u>Protected Sites' Strategies (PSS)</u>  PSS were introduced by the Environment Act 2021. A protected site is defined as 'a European site, or a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), or a marine conservation zone'.</p> <p>Bedford Borough does not have any European sites or maritime conservation zones within its boundary.</p> <p>However, there are eight SSSI within the Borough. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Odell Great Wood</li> <li>• Felmersham Gravel Pits</li> <li>• Stevington Marsh</li> <li>• Hanger Wood</li> <li>• Biddenham Pit</li> <li>• Tilwick Meadow</li> <li>• Yelden Meadows</li> <li>• Swineshead Wood</li> </ul> <p><u>Species Conservation Strategies</u>  Species Conservation Strategies may only be prepared by Natural England, with the aim of improving the conservation status of any species of fauna or flora.</p> <p>There are currently no Species Conservation Strategies in place within Bedford Borough. However, there are a number of locally relevant strategies and initiatives in place. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The District Licencing Scheme for Great Crested Newts</li> <li>• The county-wide Biodiversity Action Plan was refreshed by the Wildlife Working Group in 2015 and has been endorsed by the Local Nature Partnership.</li> </ul>
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- Species Action Plans developed for Bedfordshire by the Wildlife Working Group. The following plans are available:
  - Adder (2010)
  - Arable plants (2007)
  - Depressed River Mussel (2008)
  - European Otter (2009)
  - Great Crested Newt (2018)
  - Hazel Dormouse (2010)
  - Water Vole (2009)
- In addition, the following Habitat Action Plans have been produced:
  - Arable field margins
  - Floodplain grazing marsh
  - Hedgerows
  - Lowland dry acid grassland
  - Lowland calcareous grassland
  - Lowland heathland
  - Lowland meadows
  - Ponds
  - Reedbed
  - Traditional orchards
  - Wet woodland
  - Wood-pasture and parkland
  - Woodland

#### Natural Capital Assessment

In 2021, the Bedfordshire local authorities and LNRP produced a Natural Capital Assessment for the county. It is available here: <https://bedsrcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Bedfordshire-natural-capital-assessment-report-FINAL.pdf>.

#### Environmental Principles

In 2021, the Council endorsed the shared environment principles produced by the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Leadership Group. This document is available here: [https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file\\_name=2306](https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=2306)

#### Landscape Character Assessment

In 2020, the Council produced a Landscape Character Assessment, which is available here: <https://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=H1s1ijkK2oPN8wKbNf7JDw%3d%3d&name=Bedford%20LCA%202020.pdf>

#### Waste and Recycling

Waste poses a grave threat to biodiversity, with its accumulation in natural habitats causing harm or death to wildlife.

Recycling tackles this problem by transforming materials that might otherwise litter landfills or the environment into fresh, new products.

In 2021/22 the Council collected:

- 37,799 tonnes of general waste
- 11,414 tonnes of recycling
- 12,470 tonnes of garden waste

#### Flood Risk Management

As a Lead Local Flood Authority, the Council has a duty to develop, apply and monitor a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. This Strategy was updated in 2022 and provides a framework to actively manage and reduce flood risk, to help protect and bring resilience to 'at risk' communities, and to deliver sustainable regeneration and growth.

The LFRMS recognises the role the natural environment plays in protecting people's homes and as a cost-effective way to manage water. It is paramount that we ensure the features already in place, like ditches and watercourses, are maintained and running effectively to hold and convey water efficiently.

We are also exploring how else we can turn to our natural world to store flood water, such as raingardens, wet woodlands, leaky dams, ponds and creating upstream storage areas that will all reduce flood risk and have wider environmental benefits including increased biodiversity and carbon sequestration in re-wetted areas.

Flood resilience is closely linked to climate resilience. Open space and grasslands also have the potential to store more carbon than trees, and grasslands could also be used as water storage areas in times of flood.

The Council is currently developing a Natural Flood Management Project in Kempston West, modelling the whole catchment and looking at locations for upstream storage to hold water back and reduce the flooding impact downstream in Kempston. The upstream storage areas will also increase biodiversity.

Management of our own estate and important sites.

Guidance lists the following:

- allotments
- cemeteries
- parks and sports fields
- amenity spaces and communal gardens
- roadside and railway verges
- field margins and hedgerows
- rights of way and access routes
- woodlands and nature reserves
- canals and rivers
- water-dependent habitats

### Parks and Green Spaces

Bedford owns over 324 hectares of urban parks and amenity areas, two main Country Parks (Priory and Harrold-Odell), 19 other countryside sites, and 50 hectares of native broadleaf woodland. The Council also owns allotments, cemeteries, and closed churchyards.

Our aims are to:

- diversify and increase the extent and quality of wildlife habitats within Parks and Green Spaces, including churchyards and allotments,
- implement good conservation practice to enhance parks and green spaces for nature, and
- raise awareness of the importance of Parks and Green Spaces in the conservation of Bedford's biodiversity.

Current Actions

- Bugs and Bees – the Council has a project in place to create both sown and natural wildflower meadows in previously regularly mown areas of open space. These meadows primarily consist of native species to support biodiversity, particularly pollinators.
- Green Flag Awarded Parks – management plans are in place for Harrold-Odell CP, Priory CP, Bedford Park, and Addison Howard Park. These include details of how biodiversity and habitats within these spaces are being maintained and improved.
- Planting within our parks and open spaces is predominantly either pollinator-friendly and / or native species. These include trees, wildflowers, shrub borders and annual bedding displays.
- Chemical usage within parks and open spaces is kept to a minimum across the borough, and no glyphosate or other weed killing products are used across our countryside sites or Green Flag Parks, with the exception of sports pitches.

### Local Sites

The borough has 123 County Wildlife Sites within it, and nine that overlap with Central Bedfordshire. There are also 14 Roadside Nature Reserves and a Local Geological Site.

These are identified as Local Sites under positive conservation management.

Trees and Woodland

The council's tree stock (approximately 35,000) is regularly inspected to check the health of trees and ensure safety within public spaces. If a tree needs felling (or other significant work) then, where appropriate, deadwood is left on site to create habitats.

The Forest of Marston Vale (FoMV)

The FoMV is a designated community forest covering 61 square miles of land between Bedford and Milton Keynes.

In order to meet the target for 30% tree cover in the Forest of Marston Vale as a whole, Local Plan 2030 Policy 36S sets out a requirement to provide tree cover at 30% within new developments or provide an off-site financial contribution, secured through a S106 agreement.

The Developing in the Forest of Marston Vale Supplementary Planning Document was adopted by the Council on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

Consultation on the draft Trees and Development Supplementary Planning Document closes on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

Development proposals within the FoMV area need to demonstrate how they satisfy both the requirements of the Local Plan 2030's Forest of Marston Vale policy (36S) and, in due course, the Local Plan 2040 Environmental Net Gain policy (DM7).

Both policies will then need to be addressed and satisfied through each development proposal. However, there are synergies between these policy requirements, in that the provision of the 30% tree cover requirement can be used to contribute towards the biodiversity requirement for the proposed development.

Furthermore, both the Forest policy and the emerging ENG policy allow for circumstances where partial off-site provision of the policy requirement can be acceptable, and good design should be able to overcome any perceived tensions and ensure complementarity. The allowance for a degree of off-site provision provides the solution for any balance required once the on-site design has optimised what it can achieve.

#### Rights of Way

The Council is responsible for over 950km of Public Rights of Way across the Borough. The Council is responsible to maintaining the surface of this network.

As part of this responsibility, the Council is in the process of producing a Byway Management Plan, which identifies the unique flora and fauna of each site. From this, management plans are being written to determine the regime for maintaining these important routes for wildlife and humans.

#### Verges

The Council has fourteen Roadside Nature Reserves, which are highway verges managed to support biodiversity. In 2020, we undertook phase 1 habitat surveys to ensure that the management regimes for these spaces is supporting biodiversity.

#### Council Buildings

One of the priorities of the Council's Corporate Asset Plan (2019–23) is to reduce the environmental impact of our estate. It achieves its objectives by:

- Ensuring that property is as sustainable as possible in design, construction, operation, and maintenance.
- Reducing energy and water consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Using renewable energy solutions where viable.
- Minimising waste.
- Actively supporting delivery of the targets set out in our Carbon Management Plan.
- Implementing policies to ensure environmental aspects are covered in all projects and maintenance programmes.
- Proactively investing in our commercial estate to ensure that it meets the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and remains lettable.

Assessment of impact of current policies and activities on Biodiversity

Monitoring

The annual monitoring of development plan policies was completed in December 2023. This shows:

- Policy 36S  
The amount of new woodland in the Bedford Borough area of the Forest of Marston Vale during 2022/23
  - 56.99 hectares.
  
- Policies 42S and 43  
Condition of SSSIs in the borough:
  - Favourable 30.8%
  - Unfavourable recovering 17.5%
  - Unfavourable no change 51.6%
  - Unfavourable declining 0.2%
  - Destroyed / part destroyed 0%

Single Data List – Indicator 160

This indicator measures the performance of local authorities at protecting their local biodiversity and geodiversity, by assessing the implementation of positive conservation management (PCM) on local sites. The status of every site that counts towards the biodiversity indicator is reviewed every five years to assess whether they are still considered to be in positive conservation management.

Data from The Wildlife Trust for 2020-22 shows that 72 local sites are in positive conservation management in Bedford Borough, this represents 57.6% of the total number of sites. Historical data shows a gradual increase in the proportion of local sites in positive conservation management.

- The percentage of locally important sites (county wildlife sites, roadside nature reserves and local geological sites) in PCM
  - 2015/16: 50.4%
  - 2018/19: 54.0%
  - 2020-22: 57.6%

<p>Projects and Partnerships</p>	<p><u>Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership</u>  The LNP brings together those interested in protecting and enhancing the natural environment for the benefit of people, wildlife, and businesses. It aims to be an independent, challenging, ambitious and outward-reaching partnership, leading the way to the creation of a vibrant, biodiversity-rich, climate resilient and sustainable natural environment valued by all, enhancing health and well-being, culture, and an environmentally sustainable local economy.</p> <p>The partners are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity Recording &amp; Monitoring Centre</li> <li>• Bedford Borough Council</li> <li>• Beds, Luton &amp; Milton Keynes ICB</li> <li>• Bedford-Milton Keynes Waterway Park Trust</li> <li>• Bedfordshire Natural History Society</li> <li>• Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity</li> <li>• Central Bedfordshire Council</li> <li>• The Chilterns Conservation Board</li> <li>• Clophill Heritage Trust</li> <li>• Country Landowners' Association</li> <li>• CPRE</li> <li>• Cranfield University</li> <li>• The Diocese of St Albans</li> <li>• Environment Agency</li> <li>• Forestry Commission</li> <li>• The Forest of Marston Vale Trust</li> <li>• The Greensand Trust</li> <li>• Groundwork</li> <li>• Luton Borough Council</li> <li>• Luton Hoo</li> <li>• National Farmers Union</li> <li>• Natural England</li> <li>• RSPB</li> <li>• SE Midlands LEP</li> <li>• Team Bedfordshire &amp; Luton</li> <li>• The Wildlife Trust</li> <li>• The Woodland Trust</li> <li>• Great Ouse Valley Environmental Trust</li> </ul> <p><u>Joint working with other authorities</u>  The Council is working with Central Bedfordshire Council (as the responsible authority) and Luton Borough Council on the creation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Bedfordshire, focusing on nature recovery, enhanced biodiversity, associated climate change and sustainability benefits.</p> <p>We will also work with the Local Nature Partnership, farmers, landowners, communities, and other organisations on this locally-led initiative to help natural habitats flourish in our area.</p>
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	<p><u>Procurement</u> We are an active participant in the Central Buying Consortiums Climate Group – a consortium of like-minded public sector bodies committed to sustainable procurement practice.</p>
Communities and volunteers	<p><u>Community Volunteer Flood Groups</u> The Council has set up Flood Groups across the Borough made up of volunteers within communities that are at risk of flooding. They are a voice for their community on flood related issues and can raise awareness of flood risk in their areas and promote resilience.</p> <p>All Flood Groups are equipped with the knowledge and resources to help their communities before, during and after flooding. They work with the Council and other partners to minimise flood risk, ensure preparedness, and help identify recovery issues.</p> <p>Flood Groups are currently active in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carlton,</li> <li>• Clapham,</li> <li>• Harrod,</li> <li>• Odell,</li> <li>• Riseley,</li> <li>• Stevington, and</li> <li>• Yelden.</li> </ul> <p>New groups are currently being formed in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Barford,</li> <li>• Lower Dean, and</li> <li>• Upper Dean.</li> </ul> <p><u>Public Rights of Way Volunteers</u> The Council works with volunteer groups to protect and enhance the Rights of Way network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ramblers Association (RIPPLE Group) This is a team of volunteers who help to clear and maintain the network. The Group carry out clearance works and install new infrastructure such as “way marking” posts to enhance usage of the network.</li> <li>• Parish Councils Several local Councils have set up volunteer groups to carry out work in their villages. These groups maintain paths and report issues to the Borough Council.</li> <li>• The Green Lane Association The Association has groups of volunteers who help to maintain the Byway network. The tree and shrub clearance work they carry out helps keep encroaching vegetation cut back which allows access for all.</li> </ul>

Education and awareness raising	<p>The Council is committed to increasing biodiversity within its educational settings. In order to achieve this the council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that newly built schools have due consideration for supporting wildlife e.g., by creating gardens, ponds, meadows, or woodlands.</li> <li>• Supports schools with advice and guidance to become Forest Schools, or to develop dedicated Forest School areas.</li> <li>• Supports school holiday activities that promote and educate children on a range of biodiversity topics, e.g., Bug Hotels, Nature Walks, Bird-Spotting Charts etc.</li> </ul>
Actions and reporting	<p><u>Strategic Assessments</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage with Natural England and the Planning Advisory Service in relation to Protected Site Strategies to see if any are planned for the Bedford area.</li> <li>2. Discuss with Natural England the relationship between the Great Crested Newt Licensing Scheme and a possible Species Conservation Strategy for GCNs.</li> <li>3. Co-operate with Natural England in the preparation and implementation of any Species Conservation Strategy.</li> <li>4. Work with the Beds and Luton Wildlife Working Group to investigate the need for updating the Biodiversity Action Plan, local species plans and Habitat Action Plans.</li> </ol> <p><u>Parks and Open Spaces</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop the Bugs and Bees Project to include more spaces for biodiversity to flourish, subject to consultation and work to include the community within the project.</li> <li>2. Existing wildflower meadows within Parks to have annual hay-cut to maintain extent and condition.</li> <li>3. Increase pollen and nectar resource availability through native spring bulb and wildflower planting in appropriate areas.</li> <li>4. Extend management plan coverage to other sites so as to further enhance biodiversity and habitats.</li> <li>5. Improved management of Local Sites to be investigated and implemented where appropriate.</li> <li>6. Explore and investigate new sites for natural regeneration or rewilding.</li> <li>7. Develop the Tree Strategy to focus on ensuring our stock is managed for its biodiversity value as well as for health and safety.</li> <li>8. Run at least two community tree planting events a year to develop and restore woodland areas.</li> </ol>

9. Continue to manage Roadside Nature Reserves to support biodiversity, with regular surveys to ensure that maintenance is still appropriate.
10. Investigate ways of further supporting biodiversity through planting and maintenance regimes, focusing on native and pollinator-friendly planting, including drought-resistant planting to ensure survival in a changing climate.
11. Continue investigating non-chemical alternatives to reduce pesticide usage within the borough.

#### Trees

1. Establish a programme to assess tree cover in the borough and monitor the health of its trees and woodlands.
2. Expand Bedford's tree coverage (working with the Forest of Marston Vale), planting resilient species at appropriate locations.
3. Explore the use of trees and woodlands to reduce flood risk and provide shade and shelter.

#### Flood Management

1. We will raise awareness of the importance of land management techniques. Some of our most productive agricultural land is in flood plains, and flooding has a significant impact on agricultural productivity. Farming methods can contribute to increasing flood risk through poor land use and management practices. We will work with landowners and farmers to explore techniques that help store excess water whilst improving resilience to droughts and improving both biodiversity and water quality.

#### Council Buildings

1. Use the opportunities offered by the construction, redevelopment, or refurbishments of Council buildings to include green open spaces, green roofs and water harvesting to support the 'greening' of the environment, encouraging carbon sinks and biodiversity.
2. Actively seek opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain across the Council's rural estate.
3. Include obligations to practice sustainable farming methods in all new Farm Business Tenancies.

#### Education

1. Support schools with capital funding to improve the biodiversity of their settings. This could be achieved through ring-fencing some Community Infrastructure Levy receipts for schools' projects that promote biodiversity in growth areas.

	<p><u>Support and Encouragement</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage the management and protection of soil during planning, development, and construction processes in order to maintain soil function, quality, and stability.</li> <li>2. Support measures to manage flood risk and identify opportunities for natural flood management.</li> </ol> <p><u>Waste and Recycling</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investigate the carbon impact of introducing doorstep glass recycling versus bottle bank collection.</li> <li>2. Investigate the carbon impact of introducing doorstep food waste collection.</li> </ol> <p><u>Procurement</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue to protect and improve the environment through social value commitments built into the Council's tendering process.</li> <li>2. Update procurement policy to include carbon and environment considerations within tenders.</li> <li>3. Tenders over £100,000 to have an Environmental Impact Assessment, reviewed and signed off by the Energy Team to ensure considerations of Energy, Waste, Transport etc.</li> </ol> <p><u>Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Council is procuring support from third-party experts to assist with assessing planning applications and upskilling its own officers.</li> <li>2. A request for additional resources to undertake this work is being taken forward through the Council's 2024/25 budget-setting process.</li> <li>3. Work will take place on agreeing potential BNG off-site habitats for enhancement or creation in cases where it is not possible to deliver net gain solely on-site.</li> </ol> <p><u>Rights of Way</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We will engage with Parish Councils over the next twelve months to encourage more of them to set up volunteer groups in their areas.</li> </ol>
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<p>Challenges and mitigation</p>	<p><u>Staff resources</u>  The introduction of new duties places a strain on existing resources. A pressure bid for £75k of revenue spending per annum has therefore been submitted for inclusion in the 2024/25 budget-setting process to allow additional resources to be acquired.</p> <p><u>Lack of understanding of the new requirements</u>  Officers have not yet had the time or opportunity to become fully trained in undertaking the Council’s new duties. Therefore, as well as securing assistance from third party experts, it is the intention that their involvement will include running training sessions to upskill existing staff.</p> <p><u>Corporate prioritisation</u>  Following the election of a new Administration in May 2023, the Council is currently preparing an updated Corporate Plan. This will be the opportunity to ensure that biodiversity is, and is seen to be, a corporate priority.</p>
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