

Biodiversity Duty Report

March 2026

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1. Introduction

What is Biodiversity?

- 1.1. Biodiversity is defined as **'the variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat, a high level of which is usually considered to be important and desirable.'** (Royal Botanical Gardens).
- 1.2. However, in the context of the West Suffolk Biodiversity Duty Report, we will be considering any past, present or future actions that could impact biodiversity. These include environmental issues such as waste, carbon emissions and supply chain management.

What is Biodiversity Duty?

- 1.3. Biodiversity duty is a legal requirement for public authorities in England, introduced by the Environment Act 2021. It means that councils and other public bodies must:
 - Think about how their work can help protect and improve nature.
 - Set goals and policies to support biodiversity.
 - Take action to meet those goals.
- 1.4. The aim is to make sure that biodiversity – meaning the variety of plants, animals, and habitats – is considered in everyday decisions and operations, helping to restore and protect the natural environment.

What is West Suffolk's Biodiversity Duty?

- 1.5. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty'. This meant that all public authorities had to:
 1. Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
 2. Agree policies and objectives based on our consideration.
 3. Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives and goals.
- 1.6. The duty aims to ensure that biodiversity is integrated into public decision-making and operations. More information can be found at [West Suffolk Council complying with the biodiversity duty](#).

Purposes of this report

- 1.7. This report documents the policies and actions that West Suffolk Council has carried out to comply with their biodiversity duty, acting as a document to communicate what the organisation has done to improve the environment.

Context of West Suffolk

- 1.8. West Suffolk Council is a district council located in Suffolk, which shares a boundary with three counties – Essex to the south, Cambridgeshire to the west and Norfolk to the north. To the east are two of the four other district authorities in Suffolk, Mid-Suffolk and Babergh Councils.

- 1.9. West Suffolk is a predominantly rural district with six towns, Bury St Edmunds, Brandon, Haverhill, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Clare. The population of West Suffolk at the 2021 Census was 179,946, up 5.3 per cent from 2011. West Suffolk is divided into 43 areas known as wards and there are 64 councillors (also known as members) who are elected by residents of the wards to represent them on the council.
- 1.10. West Suffolk Council provides a wide range of services to residents and businesses within its area, which include:
- Council tax and benefit
 - licensing and environmental health
 - housing
 - waste and recycling
 - planning and building control
 - parks, leisure and community services
 - elections
 - economic development.

2. Policies, objectives and actions

Previous objectives we have set and achievements

- 2.1. In December 2023, West Suffolk Council published the [West Suffolk Council complying with the biodiversity duty](#) which outlined how West Suffolk will conserve and enhance biodiversity. This was part of the strengthened 'biodiversity duty', introduced by the Environment Act 2021.
- 2.2. The previous report included a table of activities contributing to biodiversity duty and an overview of the current situation relating to each point. These activities have been reviewed, previous goals evaluated and new goals set in this report. These will be reviewed in the next biodiversity reporting duty timeframe (2026-2027).

West Suffolk Councils strategic priorities and policies

- 2.3. West Suffolk Council declared an environment and biodiversity emergency in 2019 and is working to reduce its own negative environmental impacts and emissions as well as encouraging partners and stakeholders across the district to reduce theirs.
- 2.4. [West Suffolk Councils Strategic Priorities 2024-2028](#) set out the council's vision and priorities. Environmental resilience and sustainable growth is at the heart of these.
- 2.5. The document confirms that West Suffolk are committed to working in partnership with organisations to reduce West Suffolk's environmental impacts. To do this, we will:
 - Provide strategic direction and explore funding opportunities to manage planned enhancements and protections for our district's biodiversity, parks and green spaces.
 - Work in partnership with local and national organisations to achieve our goals of restoration, biodiversity net gain and ecosystem services through a Suffolk-wide green infrastructure strategy.
- 2.6. Following the declaration of an environmental emergency in 2019 and the creation of an Environment and Climate Change Taskforce, a further group was set up in 2023 the Environment and Sustainability Reference Group (ESRG). The purpose of ESRG is to review the existing action plan, and in particular to consider additional actions the council could take to support and encourage West Suffolk residents and businesses to address the climate and environmental challenge.
- 2.7. West Suffolk publishes an annual environment and climate change report. The annual report published for [2024-2025](#) details the environment and biodiversity key successes in this period, which is set out in section 3.32 of the report.

West Suffolk Local Plan 2024-2041

- 2.8. The [West Suffolk Local Plan](#) contains planning policies and allocations for the growth of West Suffolk over the plan period of 2024 to 2041. The local plan contains the council's spatial and land use vision, objectives and spatial strategy for West Suffolk with the policies and allocations to support their delivery.
- 2.9. Policies in the plan set out how West Suffolk aims to deliver housing, employment, retail, community, cultural and leisure activities and protect and enhance the environment. There is a focus on meeting the needs of our communities through the delivery of affordable homes, the climate emergency, health and well-being, green infrastructure and protection of the environment.
- 2.10. West Suffolk is a rural district with good green infrastructure, locally distinct landscapes and is rich in biodiversity with international, national, and locally important assets located across the district. The West Suffolk Local Plan 2024-2041 contains a suite of policies in relation to the natural environment. The purpose of the policies in this section is to seek to deliver the ambition to restore and enhance our natural environment and reverse the decline of biodiversity.
- 2.11. The policies include:
- Policy SP5 Green infrastructure
 - Policy LP12 Trees
 - Policy SP6 Locally valued landscapes
 - Policy SP7 Landscape
 - Policy SP8 Biodiversity net gain and enhancements
 - Policy SP9 Protected sites, habitats and features
 - Policy LP13 Protected species
 - Policy SP10 Special protection areas and special areas of conservation
 - Policy SP11 Recreational effects of development
- 2.12. In addition to the policies detailed above, all of the site allocation policies in the local plan require bespoke green infrastructure requirements to be delivered on site and any site for 50 homes or more requires 40 per cent of the site to deliver green infrastructure.

3. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

What is BNG?

- 3.1. Government guidance ([Understanding biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK](#)) defines as the following:

'BNG is an approach to development. It makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development.

In England, BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better quality natural habitat than there was before development.'

Introduction of BNG

- 3.2. Biodiversity net gain came into effect on 12 February 2024, or 2 April 2024 for small sites. Small sites were quantified as any application with less than nine dwellings, on a site less than one hectare.
- 3.3. West Suffolk Council's Planning Department have considered all planning applications, with no valid BNG exemption, submitted after the above dates as subject to statutory biodiversity net gain requirements of 10 per cent.

BNG monitoring and data from Mycelia

- 3.4. Mycelia by Verna is a software tool, tailor-made to support local government teams with BNG – from the point of validation through to monitoring and reporting.
- 3.5. As of the 1 January 2026, West Suffolk's Local Planning Authority have approved a limited number of biodiversity gain plans (BGP). Full details of West Suffolk's BNG monitoring can be found in ['Link to Data sheet'](#)
- 3.6. Given how recently the applications have been determined which have a BGP associated with them, these schemes are yet to have been implemented and as such no application to assess the BGP's under discharge of conditions have been submitted.

4. Collaborative approach to biodiversity duty

Environmental Management Group (EMG) Biodiversity Reporting group

- 4.1. West Suffolk have established an Environmental Management Group (EMG) comprising a range of colleagues, including officers from all departments.
- 4.2. The group is open to any West Suffolk employee interested in how West Suffolk can continue to develop and exceed their environmental obligations and goals. Meetings are held every other month.
- 4.3. Biodiversity is on the agenda regularly at EMG, however a bespoke EMG meeting was held in November 2025 for collaborating on how teams and department at West Suffolk influence biodiversity, allowing West Suffolk to collaboratively complete the relevant section of the biodiversity reporting duty report.

How teams and departments at West Suffolk influence biodiversity

- 4.4. The council comprises many teams and departments, all of which carry out different functions and responsibilities. The table in appendix 2 sets out how the various teams and departments at West Suffolk contribute and support biodiversity.

Challenges teams and departments face at West Suffolk with biodiversity

- 4.5. The current challenges teams and departments face in relation to biodiversity at West Suffolk include:
 - Funding – apply for additional external grants.
 - Lack of staff resource.
 - Public and political perceptions – consultation and education.
 - Cost of disposing and/or managing green waste – investigate and invest in a disposal method for example anaerobic digestion.
 - Young tree fatalities on development sites – creating a tree planting specification for developers, which needs to be embedded in the planning process.
 - Dog ownership post-covid affecting protected sites including sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) and so on (lack of control in that environment).
 - Developers not implementing agreed landscape schemes.
 - Failure of young trees and plants through deer and rabbit damage – more robust protection of young trees and/or plants and controlling of deer.
 - Encroachments (extending gardens and/or fly-tipping).

The highlights from team and departments at West Suffolk in relation to biodiversity

- 4.6. In addition to the achievements and actions detailed in appendix 2, the highlights from teams and departments at West Suffolk in relation to biodiversity this year include:

- The West Suffolk Local Plan 2024-2041 adopted in July 2025, containing a suite of nine policies seeking to deliver the ambition to restore and enhance our natural environment and reverse the decline of biodiversity.
- West Suffolk Recreation Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (June 2025) - The study sets out an approach to avoiding and mitigating the recreational effects of development. The measures are twofold, aimed at increasing green infrastructure and access to nature around new developments, often referred to as suitable alternative natural greenspace (SANG) and in addition increase visitor management within designated sites themselves through a strategic access management and monitoring (SAMM) contribution.
- The procurement and implementation of new biodiversity software (Mycelia) to support the local planning authority in assessing, monitoring and reporting biodiversity net gain (BNG).
- Park volunteers contributed 11,146 hours in the 2024 to 2025 financial year. Our volunteers help us maintain our country parks and gardens.
- Ninety protected species found at council owned and maintained site known as Aspal Close Beck Row.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. West Suffolk are committed to annually reviewing and publishing a biodiversity duty report.
- 5.2. The council has a track record of commitment to the environment and improving biodiversity, as set out in its emergency declaration, resulting action plan and the data within this report.
- 5.3. The council recognises the additional capacity it will need to ensure it meets both its duty and manages the wider biodiversity net gain requirements and is strengthening its officer team accordingly.
- 5.4. West Suffolk will continue to focus and implement the actions set out in appendix 1 and 2. Each year West Suffolk will add new actions and targets.

**Appendix 1. Activity contributing to the biodiversity duty and overview of current situation
Policy and objectives**

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Achievements and ongoing goals and/or timescale
West Suffolk Environmental Policy Statement	<p>In relation to biodiversity, it included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to protect habitats and promoting biodiversity, as well as reducing chemical use. • Using our ability to influence others and encourage all partners to operate in the most sustainable way they can. 	Consider whether this reflects the requirements of the biodiversity duty.	<p>The 2024 Environmental Policy Statement (Environment Policy Statement) includes targets to protect habitats and promote biodiversity and work in partnership with local and national organisations to achieve our goals of restoration, biodiversity net gain and ecosystem services through the West Suffolk</p> <p>Green infrastructure strategy.</p> <p>This reflects the requirements of the biodiversity duty and moving forward, regular reviews will consider whether further requirements need to be added.</p>
West Suffolk Council Strategic Priorities 2024-2028	One focus for action is environmental resilience with reference to the third National Adaptation Programme (NAP).	Review NAP and the actions that the Council could take to protect and enhance biodiversity	No further actions.
Planning policies in adopted local plans	<p>Strategic policies: Policy CS2 of the former Forest Heath Core Strategy and CS2 of the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council.</p> <p>Local policies: Joint Development Management Document DM10, DM11 and DM12.</p>	Continue to implement policies through planning. Some policies may be standardised nationally.	<p>Upon adoption of the New Local Plan in July 2025, previous policies such as CS2 were superseded by the introduction of several new policies to support the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. These are now being implemented through planning.</p> <p>Continue to implement policies through planning in the next reporting period (2026-2027)</p>

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Achievements and ongoing goals and/or timescale
Emerging local plan	<p>New policy framework to support the protection and enhancement of biodiversity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SP4 Green infrastructure • LP13 Trees • SP6 Biodiversity net gain • LP15 Protected sites, habitats and features • LP16 Protected species • SP7 Special protection areas and special areas of conservation • SP8 Recreational effects of development <p>Emerging West Suffolk Local Plan was at Regulation 19, Submission Stage.</p>	Submission of plan for independent examination, May 2024.	<p>West Suffolk's Local Plan (2024-2041) was adopted in July 2025. The following new policy framework supports the protection and enhancement of biodiversity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SP5 Green Infrastructure • LP12 Trees • SP8 Biodiversity net gain and enhancements • LP13 Protected Species • SP10 Special protection areas and special areas of conservation • SP11 Recreational effects of development
Suffolk draft BNG guidance	Interim planning guidance, published and implemented by all Suffolk authorities ahead of statutory BNG.	Update required to take into account secondary legislation.	<p>Update to Suffolk wide BNG guidance has not been published.</p> <p>Some district councils are now producing their own guidance notes for BNG. Publish BNG guidance note by 2027.</p>
Tree Management Strategy	Published and used throughout West Suffolk.	Last review in 2019, still deemed fit for purpose and being implemented.	Still deemed fit for purpose and being implemented. Review in 2026.

Background and baseline

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Ecological expertise and resource	<p>One FTE (full time equivalent) ecology and landscape officer.</p> <p>Additional support for ecology and landscape advice is currently being contracted.</p>	Review staff resources to ensure we have the capability and capacity to act.	<p>In May 2025 a FTE ecologist (career pathway) was employed, in addition to the senior ecology and landscape officer post.</p> <p>A FTE landscape architect is employed from February 2026.</p> <p>Ongoing reviews to evaluate if extra resources are needed.</p>
Green infrastructure study – completed 2022 and implemented through existing and emerging planning policy	Evidence base and background report for emerging local plan.	Consider whether there are projects that can be implemented or promoted by the council	<p>Ensure the green infrastructure study is used to implement or promote projects.</p> <p>Review as part of New Local Plan scoping.</p>
Landscape assessment for emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP) includes ecological mapping, and ecological sensitivities – completed 2022	Evidence base and background report for emerging Local Plan.	No action required.	No action required.
Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Study – in progress	Evidence base and background report for emerging local plan.	Complete study and develop a supplementary planning document (SPD)	The West Suffolk Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Study (RAMS) was published in and used to inform

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
		that can be adopted and implemented.	Policy SP11 of the adopted local plan (2024-2041). Continue to implement policy SP11 through planning.
Habitat survey for all allocated sites in the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan and for many other strategic housing and economic land availability assessment (SHELAA) sites	Evidence base and background report for emerging local plan.	No action required.	No action required.
Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	West Suffolk Council is a supporting authority. Suffolk County Council (SCC) timescale for the completion of the LNRS is July 2025.	Joint working with Suffolk County Council (responsible authority) through 2024.	The Suffolk LNRS was published in 2025. Use LNRS to inform planning and inform opportunities for local nature recovery in council plans and projects. Engage with LNRS Local Planning Authority Working Group.
Habitat survey	Wildlife audit of many open spaces last undertaken in 2016	Review	Review
Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk October 2020	PowerPoint Presentation	Review through Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP)	Superseded by Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Managing council (and other) land

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Protected sites (owned or managed by the council)	<p>West Stow Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA) (condition: unfavourable recovering 2 January 2014).</p> <p>(Green Flag Management Plan in place and reviewed annually for the section of the SSSI located in West Stow Country Park). Other section of the SSSI are in private ownership.</p> <p>Lackford Lakes SSSI (condition: favourable 11.08.10) (managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust).</p> <p>Red Lodge Heath SSSI (condition: unfavourable recovering 10.11.09 and 10.10.13) (management plan requires review in partnership with the owners Upton Estates).</p> <p>Maidscross Hill Lakenheath SSSI and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) (condition: unfavourable declining 09.02.13) (management plan requires review in partnership with the owners Elvedon Estates).</p>	<p>Prioritise management plans in place and being implemented for all protected sites, monitor.</p> <p>Review other land in council ownership to identify any sites that are protected.</p>	Continue previous actions.

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
	<p>London Road Brandon SSSI (condition: unfavourable declining 06.09.21) and council owned parts of London Road Industrial Estate, Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) (management plan requires review).</p> <p>Aspal Close Beck Row Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and County Wildlife Site (CWS) (Green Flag Management Plan in place which is reviewed annually).</p> <p>College Heath Road Mildenhall CWS (management plan requires review).</p> <p>Moreton Hall Community Woods LNR management plan requires review).</p> <p>Haverhill Railway Walks CWS and LNR (management plan requires review).</p> <p>Millfields Way Haverhill CWS (Management plan requires review).</p> <p>Old Town Tip CWS also known as Sandy Lodge, Mildenhall (maintenance agreement in place with United States Air Force (USAF)).</p>		
Allotments	Allotments in West Suffolk are, in the main, managed by town or parish councils or leased to allotment	Review to consider whether there are opportunities to	Review scheduled for 2026/2027

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
	<p>associations. The West Suffolk Council Open Space Assessment Report indicates that there are 39 allotment sites in the district covering 44 hectares</p>	<p>encourage enhancements for biodiversity on sites.</p>	
<p>Cemeteries and churchyards</p>	<p>West Suffolk Council are responsible for the management and maintenance of three active cemeteries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bury St Edmunds Cemetery • Haverhill Cemetery • Newmarket Cemetery <p>West Suffolk Council are responsible for the maintenance of 15 Closed Church Yards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Petronillas, Whepstead • St Peters, Ousden • All Saints, Chedburgh • St Nicholas, Denston • St Andrews, Barningham • St John's, Stoke by Clare • St Mary's, Lidgate • All Saints, Rede • St Mary's, Haverhill • The Great Church Yard, Bury St Edmunds • St John's, Stanton • All Saints, Stanton • All Saints, Hopton 	<p>Review to prioritise those where intervention to enhance biodiversity can generate the most benefits for nature conservation taking into account current condition and potential.</p>	<p>Continue previous actions.</p>

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Marys, Cavendish • The Mayors Cemetery, Bury St Edmunds. <p>There are maintenance regimes in place for all the cemeteries and closed church yard's which the district council are responsible for.</p>		
Public open space (POS)	The West Suffolk Council Open Space Assessment Report, 2021 , classified and mapped all the public open space in West Suffolk.	Review POS function to prioritise those where intervention to enhance biodiversity can generate the most benefits for nature conservation taking into account other requirements of that POS	Schedule review for POS assessment report.
Highway grass verges	Within the district, West Suffolk Council maintains the highway verges in residential areas (within the 30 mile an hour zones) whilst Suffolk County Council Highways Authority employs contractors to flail mow the rural verges twice a year.	Continue to review of maintenance regimes of grass areas maintained by the council in order to increase biodiversity. Consider whether additional interventions would be beneficial and monitor as appropriate.	Continue previous actions.
Biodiversity net gain (BNG) offsetting sites	No sites currently identified	Consider whether any land within councils' control is suitable for BNG offsetting and undertake survey and design to implement such a scheme.	<p>No sites have currently been identified but work has begun to resource suitable land for BNG offsetting.</p> <p>Further considerations and review of progress with goals to hold</p>

Previous and/or current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
			offsetting sites by the next reporting period.

Assessment of impact of current policies and activities on biodiversity

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Sustainability assessment or strategic environmental assessment environmental impact assessment (EIA) Habitats regulations assessment (HRA)	Undertaken for current and emerging local plan and any supplementary planning documents. EIA at project level as required by legislation. Undertaken for current and emerging local plan and any supplementary planning. HRA undertaken at project level where required by legislation.	Continue as appropriate	Ongoing

Partnership and education

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Partnerships	<p>The Dedham Vale Natural Landscape and Stour Valley Project.</p> <p>The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Partnership.</p> <p>Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service.</p> <p>River Lark Catchment Partnership.</p> <p>Bury Water Meadows Group.</p> <p>Bury, Brandon, Haverhill in Bloom.</p>	Continue to work with partners, and take all opportunities to improve environment and biodiversity across West Suffolk as appropriate.	Ongoing
Joint working with other authorities	Suffolk wide collaboration on biodiversity net gain (BNG) draft guidance.	Continue to work across Suffolk to update guidance.	<p>Currently working with council ecologists across Suffolk to have a collaborative approach to BNG guidance notes.</p> <p>Continue to work across Suffolk.</p>
Conservation covenant scheme for provision of BNG offsetting sites	Government guidance released.	Consider becoming a responsible body under the conservation covenant scheme.	<p>West Suffolk Council is not currently a conservation covenant.</p> <p>Consider becoming a responsible body under the conservation covenant scheme</p>
Friends groups	Each Green Flag park (East Town Park Haverhill, Brandon Country Park, Abbey Gardens Bury St Edmunds,	Continue to support Friends Groups and seek to extend	Ongoing

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
	<p>West Stow Country Park, Nowton Park Bury St Edmunds and Aspal Close Beck Row) has a friends or volunteer group. From April 2022 to March 2023 a total of 7,763 volunteer hours were contributed to West Suffolk's green and heritage spaces.</p> <p>These volunteer activities in the parks are assisted and coordinated by the park staff and park ranger teams.</p>	<p>volunteer opportunities in nature conservation across the district.</p>	
Green space	<p>Encouraging responsible use through better information.</p>	<p>Review how this can be expanded using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • ranger service • infrastructure (signage) • social media. 	<p>Continue previous actions.</p>
Officer and councillor training	<p>Not available in 2023</p>	<p>Consider a programme of member and officer training, disseminating knowledge about local biodiversity (species locations and habitat conditions).</p>	<p>No progress, same goals as previous plans.</p>
Operational practice	<p>Various training and awareness activities have been promoted within the operational teams including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Suffolk Council's landscape teams have undertaken various hedgehog awareness activities. 	<p>Embed into operational practice biodiversity focused management (as appropriate) and provide training for operational staff.</p>	<p>Training is offered within the parks and greenspace team, where some officers are trained ecologists, able to provide on the job training to colleagues as appropriate.</p> <p>Consider inclusion of formal training sessions to ensure</p>

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> West Suffolk Council's Aboricultural Officers have undertaken bat awareness training. 		operational staff have up to date knowledge of best practice for biodiversity focused management.

Reporting and risks

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Biodiversity net gain (BNG) through planning	Previously not strictly implemented in West Suffolk and not monitored	Develop future monitoring and reporting for BNG secured through the planning service	West Suffolk Council has recently procured an online platform to assist with the monitoring and reporting of BNG for approved planning application with associated BNG. BNG obligations continue to be adhered to in the planning system.
West Suffolk Environmental Statement (ES), 2022-2023	Reporting of environmental performance. For environment and green space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green flags trees planted. 	Consider additional reporting consistent with national targets	West Suffolk Council has published two further environmental statements 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. A report is published annually.
Authority monitoring report (AMR)	Biodiversity not reported in 2023	Review biodiversity reporting	This report marks the first biodiversity report published by West Suffolk Council. Reporting will continue annually for the foreseeable future to meet our biodiversity duty reporting obligations.

Previous/current policies and strategies	Details	Previous plans and comments	Status and ongoing goals
Challenges include development pressures on land, officer resource, funding. Availability of BNG offsetting sites.	Previous mitigations included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adoption of a local plan which means that development sites can be considered in a strategic manner. • Targeting expertise and resources. 	Develop and resource action plan	Review action during the course of 2026.

Appendix 2. How teams and departments at West Suffolk influence biodiversity

Planning Department

Development Management and Strategic Planning Team

- The West Suffolk Local Plan 2024-2041 which was adopted in July 2025 contains a suite of policies in relation to the natural environment including biodiversity, landscaping and sustainability.
- Ensure planning applications are in accordance with local and national policies.
- Commitment to ensuring 10 per cent biodiversity net gain (BNG) is achieved on all planning applications where applicable.
- Encourage and support developers, applicants and partners to deliver and plan for biodiversity and sustainability early in the planning process.
- [West Suffolk Recreation Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy \(June 2025\)](#) – The study sets out an approach to avoiding and mitigating the recreational effects of development. The measures are twofold, aimed at increasing green infrastructure and access to nature around new developments, often referred to as suitable alternative natural greenspace (SANG) and in addition increase visitor management within designated sites themselves through a strategic access management and monitoring (SAMM) contribution.
- The procurement and implementation of new biodiversity software (Mycelia) to support the local planning authority in assessing, monitoring and reporting biodiversity net gain (BNG).

Greenspace and Heritage Department

Protecting existing trees

- Through tree preservation orders (TPOs) and conservation area applications we identify and protect ecologically valuable trees and woodlands.
- Retain deadwood and cavity trees where safe to do so.
- Root protection: avoid unnecessary soil compaction and damage during works – critical for ground-dwelling species and mycorrhizal fungi.

Increase tree diversity

- Species selection: plant a mix of native and climate-resilient trees to provide diverse food and habitats for wildlife. Maintain a balance of young, mature, and veteran trees to support different species.
- Understory planting: include shrubs, ground flora to create multi-layered habitats. Allowing for natural regeneration of trees and shrubs where appropriate.
- Growing black poplar clones at key sites including, Nowton Park, Bury St Edmunds with Suffolk Tree wardens.

Enhancing wildlife

- Retaining or creating deadwood features, log piles, and standing stems for saproxylic (deadwood-dependent) species.

- Linking habitats through continuous tree lines (George Lampton, Newmarket), hedgerows, and woodland corridors to facilitate species movement.

Biodiversity security

- Purchasing plants and trees from local suppliers that adhere to plant healthy or have a bio security risk assessment to stop the spread harmful pests and diseases.
- Various grass cutting regimes to support a variety of habitats.
- Work with community groups including the River Lark Partnership, Red Lodge and Bury Water Meadow Group to enhance long grass habitats.
- Park volunteers working within our parks and open spaces to support and enhance habitat management and biodiversity surveys (raising awareness and/or community engagement).
- Reviewing grounds maintenance areas to refurbish in ways to support biodiversity for example more pollinator friendly planting.
- Cross-working with other groups such as Brecks and Dedham Vale supporting habitats.
- Staff trained to be aware of biodiversity for example hedgehog awareness and bat roost and/or survey training.
- Ecological surveys undertaken prior to works being undertaken in sensitive areas.
- Work to tree policy that enables us to allow the unnecessary felling of trees.
- Working with Plantlife to conserve the Artemesia at key sites including, Brandon and College Heath Road, supporting the Moonshine Beetle.
- Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI's), local nature reserve (LNR), (roadside nature reserves (RNR), county wildlife sites (CWS), wood pasture and parkland are managed by the landscape and parks teams at West Suffolk.

Advice given by Greenspace and Heritage Department

- Consulting on open space within planning applications for land being adopted by the council.
- Informal advice to other council departments for example property.
- Provide support and information to community groups and volunteers.
- Guidance on tree preservation order (TPO) trees.
- Ranger service providing support and advice to volunteers. In addition, events provide information and/or education to the general public.

Raising awareness in the community

- Each park has a set of volunteers and/or ranger teams working with conservation groups.
- Ranger and/or park staff led park events held that provide education to members of the public for example bird ringing, bulb planting.
- Event organisers using our sites to promote biodiversity. Including host to annual BioBlitz and recording of species.
- Social prescribing within our parks and open spaces.
- Ranger team working with schools and raising awareness of parks.
- Forest schools using our parks
- Social media and websites promoting biodiversity.

- Working with Suffolk Tree Wardens on raising awareness of black poplars, and host their nursery at Nowton Park.
- Raising awareness on Artemesia through information boards.
- Trout Club at West Stow Country Park raising awareness of river restoration on the River Lark.
- Working in partnership with Anglian Water on the River Lark.
- Supporting community groups (In Bloom groups) who raise awareness within the community.
- Actively encourage school groups visiting West Stow Country Park into the wider park environment.
- Providing locations for professional groups for example the Arboricultural Association for field visits, training and so on.
- Close working relationship with Woodlands Way Community Woodland Group.
- Supporting Realise Futures at Nowton Park.
- Working with volunteers to enhance Risbridge Meadows, Suffolk.
- Mowing regimes and rewilding.
- Signage for loner grass regime is being implemented regarding orchids and bees for interpretation from the public.

Actions teams have taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity

- 3,000 bulbs were planted in the Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds in November 2023, by volunteers, local schools and West Suffolk Council.
- Introduction of relaxed grass cutting regimes where appropriate (including on new developments).
- Successfully applied for external funding for tree planting to offset financial and resource constraints.
- Traditional woodland and field boundary management techniques for example hedge laying, coppicing, pollarding.
- During refurbishment of shrub borders, introducing more pollinator friendly plants including additional bulb planting.
- Reviewed and reduced chemical usage across the district.
- Support initiatives to promote connecting green spaces through green corridors for example Haverhill Railway Walk.

Environment Team

- As part of the upcoming Mildenhall Hub photo voltaic (PV) canopies project the environment team are proposing to exceed biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements by adding additional offsite enhancements including additional tree planting.
- Arrange litter picks most years for staff to participate to ensure areas are clean.
- Working to improve our procurement policy.
- As a planning consultee, ensure that developments are built to be climate resilient to comply with policy LP1 of the West Suffolk Local Plan. This involves ensuring the development has considered implementing green infrastructure.
- Environment team have incorporated carbon offsetting into the council's 2039 net zero target via an afforestation project to plant 5,000 trees in West Suffolk. Developed a best practice document which will ensure the project is carried out to a high standard.

- Advice focuses on wider climate, carbon, and energy matters rather than biodiversity topics – usually in relation to installing renewable energy systems or replacing gas fuelled equipment.
- The team's projects (solar PV, air source heat pump (ASHPs), electrical vehicle (EV), and so on.) deliver energy and/or operational carbon savings to reduce emissions associated with the council's own operations, plus local communities and business activity.
- As part of the council tackling climate change, the progress on our own emissions reduction is published each year in our annual environmental statement, in order for us to take accountability and demonstrate our emissions.

Families and Communities Team

- Support community groups – focus on biodiversity projects – supporting through funding and time.
- Families and communities support community groups, some of whom are focused on local biodiversity, this support can be through low level such as time, establishing a group right through to help with funding and making projects successful. We also administer a number of streams which can be utilised for biodiversity projects. Funding has been sought through locality budgets, thriving community grants, Building Resilient and Nutrition within Community (BRAN) and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to promote this including Bury Water Meadows Group for a feasibility study (UKSPF) and currently for River Lark Ram Meadow Project, Greener Growth for projects in schools and green spaces, Food growth projects, hedgehog road signs.
- Families and communities have also added sections to our application forms that will allow us to gather info on types of projects being funded. Environmental impact is one of these.
- Support, signposting and advice in relation to community development. Support for groups, charities, members. Engagement with communities. Provide networks and connections and share knowledge of localities.
- Holiday Activity Food Programme – part of this is to encourage families to spend time in open spaces – Family Park Cooking, Explore Outdoor – number of projects have been supported by the team that conserve or enhance biodiversity.

Abbeycroft – West Suffolk's Leisure Facilities

- Routine grounds and building maintenance to ensure habitats are protected during works and green areas remain safe and well-managed.
- Regular litter picking around car parks, footpaths, and green spaces to prevent waste entering local ecosystems.
- Chemical-free or reduced-chemical pool dosing systems (Bury St Edmunds).
- Leak-detection and monitoring systems (included in our environmental audits).
- Solar panels or renewable energy procurement to reduce carbon impact.
- Community-accessible water fountains to reduce plastic bottle usage.
- Improved recycling stations with clear signage (paper, plastics, cans, food waste).
- Specialist recycling (for example pool toys and floats).
- Refill stations and bottle return machines.
- LED energy-efficient lighting.

- Paperless systems such as online bookings, digital membership forms, and digital signage.
- Sustainable café initiatives:
 - Reducing single-use plastics.
 - Encouraging reusable cups and containers.
- Secure bike racks for staff and visitors.
- Carbon footprint reporting to support sustainable behaviours and accountability.
- Internal sustainability challenges (for example 'plastic-free month', 'cycle-to-work week')
- Green teams at each site to drive local action and reporting.