

Rushmoor Borough Council

**Biodiversity Duty
(First Consideration)
Report**

January 2024

Complying with Biodiversity Duty

- 1.1 Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ introduced by the [Environment Act 2021](#)¹ and requires that we must:
1. Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity,
 2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on this consideration,
 3. Act to deliver these policies and achieve the identified objectives.
- 1.2 This report sets out our first ‘consideration’ and what Rushmoor Borough Council are doing to conserve and enhance biodiversity within our borough in order to comply with the new Duty. This first consideration has to be complete by 1 January 2024 and we are required to agree our policies and objectives as soon as possible after this, in line with [Government Guidance](#)².
- 1.3 We must reconsider the actions within 5 years of when we complete the previous consideration, or we can decide to do this more often.
- 1.4 The action local authorities take for biodiversity will contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity. The [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP23\)](#)³, published in January 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment.
- 1.5 By 2030, the government has committed to:
- halt the decline in species abundance,
 - protect 30% of UK land.
- 1.6 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 and
 - restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

Actions taken in this reporting period

- 1.7 The Council has been proactive in undertaking a number of actions to conserve and enhance Biodiversity in the Borough (set out in Table 1 below). This includes preparing strategies and supporting guidance to implement the policies in the adopted [Rushmoor Local Plan 2019](#)⁴.

¹ [Environment Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan>

⁴ <https://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policies/the-rushmoor-local-plan/>

Table 1: Summary of Actions taken to date.

Policy and Strategy (including preparation for Biodiversity Net Gain)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have taken a proactive approach to implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain. Officers negotiate BNG in all major planning applications (ten or more homes or developments of over 1000 sqm of commercial floorspace) and encourage BNG in other applications. • Preparation of a draft Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support the implementation of the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement and Policy NE1 (Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area) and Policy NE4 (Biodiversity) of the adopted Local Plan. • Seeking to launch a Rushmoor Habitat Bank and preparation of a Habitat Bank Procedure Note to support local delivery of BNG. • Adoption of a Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy to support the implementation of Policy NE2 (Green Infrastructure) and including projects specifically designed to enable the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through their delivery.
Management of our Estate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Wildlife Sites (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)) are subject to detailed botanical survey on a rolling programme to ensure up to date evaluation of these County Important wildlife sites. Management recommendations as a result of these surveys have been shared with relevant landowners. • One new SINC was adopted in 2023 (Cove Brook), which provides additional local planning policy protection to an important and extensive wildlife corridor. • Publication of management plans, which are appropriately costed and with delivery timeframes and responsibilities for the following flagship open greenspace sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rowhill Nature Reserve ○ Queen Elizabeth Park ○ Southwood Woodlands ○ Southwood Country Park (Interim)
Training and Competence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training has been delivered to relevant officers working within the planning function, as to how to embed BNG within the planning process. • Training delivered to Planning Committee Council Members to ensure that planning decisions appropriately have regard to BNG and Environment Act legislation and guidance. • Extensive training undertaken on emerging Environment Act requirements, including preparation for the implementation of the BNG mandatory requirement.

Future Actions

- 1.8 The actions we aim to take to conserve and enhance biodiversity duty in the next 5-year reporting period are set out in the table below.

Table 2: Proposed actions in the next 5-year period.

Action	Timeframe for delivery
We will ensure our local policies and strategies conserve and enhance biodiversity (including preparation for BNG)	
Adoption of our Biodiversity SPD to ensure external bodies and individuals are aware of their responsibilities and work in accordance with best practice	The Biodiversity SPD will be adopted early 2024.
Progress GI Strategy Project PP3 – A Biodiversity Net Gain Off-Site Scoping Project and set up a costed Habitat Bank	The Habitat Bank will be launched early 2024. The Biodiversity SPD and supporting Habitat Procedure Note will be adopted early 2024.
Progress GI project PP6 - Review of Potential Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) Sites (including consideration of how ecological enhancement / BNG may form part of the Greenspace’s value)	Project expected to start in 2024 to support the preparation of a new Local Plan.
Progress GI Project PP7 - Carbon Reduction through Tree Planting Feasibility Project through funding bids to Farnborough Airport Community Environmental Fund (FACEF) & Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF), as well as an extension to GI Project PP6	Funding bids were successful. We are now project planning for the planting of a total of 194 new trees, of native species, within an urban environment. Planting and three years aftercare is to be delivered from this winter (2023) until 2028.
Green Infrastructure Project GP1 - Southwood and Cove Brook Floodplain Enhancement Project. Partnership working with the Environment Agency to deliver long term improvements to help delivery Water Framework Directive (WFD) Condition and longer-term management of the Cove Brook SINC, of County Importance for wildlife.	Delivery of this project is schedule for implementation in September / October 2024.
Review internal Councils processes to ensure that our own functions have appropriate level of training for officers and members and have regard to ecology and work in accordance with statutory and policy obligations and best practice	Adoption of revised standard planning conditions and informatives and the Local Validation List which will be reviewed to ensure they meet current protected species and habitats statutory obligations as well as the National Planning Policy Framework planning tests. To be progressed and agreed in 2024 (subject to changes to national policy)
Ensure all relevant officers working within the planning function are appropriately trained in how to embed BNG within the planning process. Deliver relevant training to Council Members to ensure that planning decisions appropriately have regard to BNG and Environment Act legislation and guidance.	Training ongoing.

Action	Timeframe for delivery
Review approach to biodiversity as part of the preparation of a new Local Plan.	Expected to commence work in 2024/2025. Subject to timescales associated with planning reforms.
We will manage our land to improve biodiversity	
Provision of management plans, appropriately costed and with delivery timeframes and responsibilities for our flagship open greenspace sites.	New Management Plans for Southwood Woodlands and Southwood Country Park scheduled for development and publish within 2024/25.
Funding of regular SINC surveys to inform SINC management (via Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC))	Ongoing programme of survey with secure funding.
We will consider relevant strategies	
We will actively engage with Natural England as they develop species conservation strategies and protected sites strategies.	Responses to formal consultation will be undertaken in a timely manner. Opportunities will be sought for partnership working.
Active engagement with development and implementation of LNRS through involvement with Hampshire County Council and other relevant partners – embed consideration of local nature recovery within our core processes.	Officers are already actively engaged in early preparation of the LNRS. LNRS will be prepared in consultation with the Council (as a supporting authority) throughout 2024 and is due to be submitted to DEFRA in December 2024.
Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing	Officers will keep under review the potential for implementing the district licencing scheme.