

## **Epping Forest District Council Biodiversity Duty – First Consideration Statement.**

### **Background**

The [Environment Act 2021](#) introduced a strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ which requires all public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. [Defra has published guidance on complying with the biodiversity duty.](#)

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 the government’s plans for 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 2023, 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 conditions, securing their wildlife value for the long term

### **Compliance and Reporting**

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.

As a public authority, Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) must:

1. Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
2. Agree on policies and specific objectives based on their consideration
3. Act to deliver the policies, achieve these objectives and report on them

This report addresses the initial consideration in step 1. As soon as possible following this initial consideration, EFDC must agree policies and objectives to deliver the action. EFDC must then produce a Biodiversity Report detailing actions that have conserved and enhanced biodiversity and plans for future actions. The first formal Biodiversity Report should be prepared no later than 1 January 2026 and must be repeated within five years of the end date of the previous reporting period.

The Government has published guidance on [‘Reporting your biodiversity duty actions’](#). This includes information on when to publish a biodiversity report and what to include.

By law, the report must include:

- a summary of the action you’ve taken to comply with the biodiversity duty

- how you plan to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
- any other information you consider appropriate

Reports from local planning authorities must also include:

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

### **Governance**

An officer working group will be formed to consider future (short and medium term) actions and an appropriate way of measuring, monitoring and reporting them.

### **Consideration of Policy and Actions**

The table below sets out relevant strategies, policies and actions with descriptions of actions and further work to be considered.

## EFDC Policy/Action/Strategy Relevant to Biodiversity Duty

Relevant policies, strategies and actions	Detail and current status	Further work
Corporate Plan	<p>We will protect and enhance our green spaces for future generations while providing decent, safe homes to meet all our needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negotiate developer contributions towards green spaces and the environment as part of planning applications</li> <li>- Meet standards for good quality homes in sustainable locations enshrined within the Local Plan</li> <li>- Protect, maintain, and enhance the ecology, landscape, and heritage of our district</li> </ul> <p>Corporate plan adopted in 2023</p>	Continue with relevant workstreams to deliver objectives
Climate Change Action Plan	<p>The Climate Change Action Plan contains a theme of the Natural Environment, with actions that relate to the following areas. Actions are complimentary to the Green Infrastructure Strategy projects listed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Road side verges</li> <li>- Increase amount of natural and semi natural greenspace</li> <li>- Community Greenspace improvements</li> <li>- Tree planting</li> </ul>	Explore funding options to enable planned tree planting to go ahead.
Local Plan	<p>Policy DM1 Habitat Protection and Improving Biodiversity            Policy DM2 Epping Forest SAC and the Lee Valley SPA            Policy DM5 Green and Blue Infrastructure            Policy DM9 High Quality Design            Policy DM16 Sustainable Drainage Systems            Policy DM17 Protecting and Enhancing Watercourses and Flood Defences</p> <p>The Local Plan was adopted in March 2023, this is supported by the Sustainability Guidance suite of documents, these are supplementary planning documents (SPD) that contain expectations and guidance for green infrastructure for developments.</p>	Ensure new biodiversity duties and objectives arising from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy are taken into account for future review of the local plan.

<p>Green Infrastructure Strategy</p>	<p>This strategy aims to secure long-term carbon sequestration and enhancement of biodiversity. The Council will do this through applying local plan policies robustly in respect of new development through the determination of planning applications. The Council will also invest in tree planting and bring forward sites on Council owned land, including in North Weald, in response to the climate and biodiversity crisis.</p> <p>Strategic projects included in the strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Roadside Wildflowers</li> <li>- Tree planting call for sites</li> <li>- Community greenspace improvement</li> </ul> <p>Site specific projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Roding valley recreation ground enhancement</li> <li>- Creation of North Weald Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)</li> </ul> <p>The Council are currently developing proposals for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground Enhancement prior to engagement with local stakeholders and other key partners.</p> <p>EFDC are also currently developing proposals at North Weald to enhance BNG to the east of the airfield.</p>	<p>Ensure use of generic Green Infrastructure s106 contributions for enhancements to existing open space.</p> <p>Revisit roadside verge projects with consideration of insurance and safety constraints, linking with previous partners such as the Essex Wildlife Trust.</p>
<p>Biodiversity Net Gain</p>	<p>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). Supported by Policy DM1 habitat protection and improving biodiversity</p> <p>The Council will continue to enforce BNG through planning system. The Council are supporting habitat banks coming to the district where landowners looking to sell credits.</p>	<p>Consider land at Honeylands and Lodge Lane (Waltham Abbey) for BNG potential or other utilisation for biodiversity projects.</p>
<p>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</p>	<p>Our Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is currently in development with Essex County Council</p> <p><a href="https://essexnaturepartnership.co.uk/what-is-the-lnrs/">https://essexnaturepartnership.co.uk/what-is-the-lnrs/</a></p> <p>Currently supporting ECC with development of the strategy</p>	<p>Continue to support ECC with strategy development.</p> <p>Share LNRS information when available and help engage with stakeholders by promoting through communications channels.</p>

Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy	<p>Under UK legislation Epping Forest District Council is a competent authority with a duty to ensure that plans and projects, including the adopted Epping Forest District Local Plan have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC).</p> <p>EFDC will continue with actions in the plan to mitigate the impact of development on the EFSAC. This will be beneficial to biodiversity by improving air quality in the forest and the immediate environs.</p>	
Countrycare Team general work	<p>Countrycare maintain 9 Local Nature Reserves across the district along with a further 12 sites some of which are local wildlife sites.</p> <p>The aim of the team is to maintain and enhance the natural environment for the benefit of both local people and wildlife. This is achieved by creating and maintaining habitats, improving public access and increasing awareness of our rural heritage.</p> <p>Countrycare's key objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To preserve the landscape, wildlife habitats and biodiversity value of the district</li> <li>- To promote and support the designation of new local nature reserves and the local wildlife site network across the district</li> <li>- To involve and educate local communities and schools in all aspects of the service's work</li> <li>- To promote a greater understanding and respect for the countryside</li> </ul>	<p>Investigate the potential to upgrade some of the managed areas to local wildlife sites.</p> <p>Explore the potential for wildflower meadow area at Treetop Meadow.</p> <p>Investigate the potential to work with partners to create a wildlife corridor that links 4 key sites in North Weald.</p>
Local Flood Risk Management Strategy	<p>EFDC local flood risk management strategies developed with ECC do not have reference to biodiversity, however previous works completed in this area contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity.</p> <p>Funding from the Environment Agency was used to plant trees to prevent erosion and enhance the bank structure of the River Roding at Roding Valley Recreation Ground.</p>	<p>Maintenance and upkeep of planting at Roding Valley.</p>

<p>Environmental Enforcement</p>	<p>Our Environmental Protection and Drainage Team at EFDC have the responsibility to enforce legislation relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contaminated land</li> <li>- Water pollution</li> </ul> <p>They also work with partners ECC and Thames water to maintain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flood storage areas</li> <li>- Sewage treatment plants</li> </ul> <p>By minimising pollution this helps to protect biodiversity in the area.</p>	<p>Continue with environmental enforcement works.</p>
<p>Grounds Maintenance</p>	<p>Grounds maintenance on council owned land is managed by Qualis Property Solutions. The Qualis grounds maintenance service is responsible for undertaking the following work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mowing grass verges and open spaces</li> <li>- Maintenance of rose beds and shrub borders</li> <li>- Pruning hedgerows</li> <li>- Planting seasonal bedding displays</li> <li>- Maintaining playgrounds</li> </ul>	<p>Work with Qualis Property Solutions to embed policies to maintain and improve biodiversity.</p>
<p>Raising awareness</p>	<p>The EFDC and Countrycare webpages have information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Local biodiversity</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Actions the public can take to improve their natural environment</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Climate change action that can indirectly benefit biodiversity</a></li> </ul> <p>Further to this, the Countrycare team actively involve volunteers in their general work, they also lead events to encourage interest in the biodiversity in our district for example a Christmas walk on 23<sup>rd</sup> December.</p>	<p>Continue with school events to engage younger generations with biodiversity. Investigate the organisation of events for SEND children. Update the Countrycare website.</p>

Estate land management	<p>The EFDC property and land portfolio includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Council offices</li> <li>- Commercial properties</li> <li>- Council owned buildings eg. leisure centres</li> <li>- Council owned housing</li> <li>- Land eg. housing areas, car parks</li> </ul> <p>The current Housing Strategy contains objectives to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve the look and feel of the green spaces on our council and mixed tenure estates.</li> <li>- focus on protecting enhancing and maintaining green spaces through sympathetic landscaping, tree planting, and community growing schemes.</li> </ul>	Consider further where properties/land/estate can be enhanced/managed for biodiversity.
Review internal policies and processes	Relevant internal policies could include procurement, staff travel, waste management and water use.	Review policies to identify those that are relevant