

# BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT 2026



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Babergh District Council (BDC) has a statutory responsibility under the Environment Act 2021 to **conserve and enhance biodiversity**, embed nature recovery across its operations, and report publicly on the actions it has taken during the 2021–2025 reporting period. This Biodiversity Duty Report sets out the progress Babergh has made over the past five years, the changes implemented across council functions, and the strategic direction for continuing nature recovery in the next reporting period – 2026-2030.

Across this reporting period, **BDC has significantly expanded its nature recovery work**. Biodiversity is now increasingly embedded in planning, land management, partnerships, procurement considerations, community engagement, and long-term strategic planning. Council services have adopted more nature-positive working practices, new evidence has shaped ecological decision-making, and community participation has grown substantially. Together, these efforts demonstrate a clear shift toward integrating biodiversity across the organisation, laying a strong foundation for future delivery.

Over the past five years, BDC has implemented an extensive programme of ecological enhancement. Through the **2020 Joint Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)**, the Council undertook major ecological mapping to understand habitat on council-owned land, tree cover, and priority areas for intervention. This mapping provided the foundation for several successful initiatives, including a district-wide meadow management programme, extensive tree and hedge planting, a pioneering Tree Canopy Cover Survey, and community planting schemes. Combined, these initiatives have improved ecological connectivity, increased habitat diversity, and strengthened opportunities for species recovery across the district.

**Tree and hedgerow planting has been a particular success story**. The Free Trees, Hedging and Wildflower Scheme enabled parishes, community groups, schools, and local landowners to access native planting stock to support habitat creation across publicly accessible land. Hundreds of trees and thousands of metres of hedgerow have been delivered both through Council planting and community projects, supported by guidance from the Council's Biodiversity Manager and external partners such as the Woodland Trust and Suffolk Wildlife Trust. These efforts have improved shade, shelter, pollinator resources, and connectivity across Babergh's landscape.

**Meadow creation has also expanded rapidly**, with the Council adopting new mowing regimes across selected open spaces, reducing cutting frequency, and allowing wildflower species to flourish. Mapped meadow sites now form a core part of adaptive management, with ecological outcomes monitored and improvements made annually. Public communication has been strengthened through signage, community engagement, and online information, helping residents understand the

benefits of long-grass management for pollinators, soil health, and carbon sequestration.

**Partnership working has been central to the district's biodiversity progress.**

BDC has collaborated with the Woodland Trust, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Suffolk Tree Warden Network, catchment partnerships, farm clusters, community groups, schools, and volunteer networks. These partnerships have delivered community orchards, wildlife-friendly green spaces, pond restoration, nature-based training, meadow creation, and local tree-planting initiatives. They have also enabled the Council to support and influence landowners, extend ecological enhancements beyond Council land, and contribute to county-wide nature recovery efforts.

The Council has also prepared for and delivered early implementation of **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**. Before mandatory commencement in 2024, BDC had already integrated BNG into planning policy through the Joint Local Plan and the Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document. Since adoption, BNG has been embedded into the planning system through in-house ecology expertise, consistent validation checks, review of submitted metrics and habitat baselines, and the securing of long-term management plans through planning conditions and legal agreements. The recruitment of two Assistant Ecologists in late 2025 has expanded the Council's capacity to ensure BNG is delivered well and monitored effectively.

During this period, the Council has also contributed extensively to the development of the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**. As a Supporting Authority, Babergh has supplied ecological data, reviewed draft proposals, and helped shape county-wide priorities for habitat creation, restoration, and connectivity. This ensures that the district's nature recovery work aligns with the wider, landscape-scale ambitions set out for Suffolk.

Babergh's biodiversity journey has continued to evolve. The Council is now developing its new **Biodiversity Action Plan (2026–2030)**, informed by updated national frameworks, the LNRS, BNG requirements, and lessons from the previous BAP. The new plan sets out a more ambitious, whole-system approach to nature recovery, focusing on priority habitats and species, community engagement, landowner collaboration, climate resilience, and stronger integration across council services.

Looking ahead, the Council will prioritise expanding the ecological network, improving the condition of existing habitats, strengthening the relationship with local landowners, and embedding nature recovery across all decision-making processes. Development of a **Habitat Brokerage Scheme** will support local delivery of off-site BNG, keeping investment within the district and maximising ecological benefit. Enhanced monitoring, increased public involvement, and strengthened partnership delivery will ensure Babergh continues to be a lead in driving nature recovery across Suffolk.

In summary, this reporting period has seen significant and measurable progress toward reversing nature's decline in Babergh. BDC has delivered landscape-scale improvements, strengthened internal processes, expanded community involvement, and positioned itself as a leader in local government biodiversity work. Through continued investment, stronger integration across Council services, and a clear strategic direction, BDC is well-placed to drive the next phase of nature recovery and fulfil its statutory responsibilities under the Biodiversity Duty.

## INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

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### NATURE IN BABERGH

The district of Babergh supports a variety of wildlife rich habitats, including ancient woodland, lowland acid grasslands and heathlands, lowland fens, ponds and rivers. This wide range of habitat also supports a wide range of protected and Priority species, including otters, brown long-eared bats, stag beetles, water voles and the great crested newt.

Babergh has areas which are part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Dedham Vale AONB. The Stour and Orwell estuaries are designated as a Ramsar Site, meaning they are considered wetlands of international importance. In addition, there are 51 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 17 Local Nature Reserves, 187 County Wildlife Sites (covering 1,797 hectares) and 1,404 hectares of ancient woodland. Specifically, the Council manages two Local Nature Reserves and 28 County Wildlife Sites or other sites.

### WHAT IS BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY DUTY?

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Under the strengthened duty in the Environment Act 2021, Public Authorities must:

1. Identify opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Set policies and objectives based on those opportunities.
3. Take action to deliver them.

This ensures biodiversity is incorporated into the Council's planning, public decision-making and operations.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF BIODIVERSITY DUTY?

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The purpose of the biodiversity duty is to ensure that public authorities actively contribute to halting and reversing the decline of nature. It requires councils not only to consider biodiversity in their decision-making, but to take **positive, demonstrable action** to enhance habitats, species, and ecological networks across the areas they influence.

At its core, the duty aims to embed nature recovery into the everyday functions of public bodies so that biodiversity is treated as a fundamental component of sustainable development, climate resilience, community wellbeing, and land management. By identifying opportunities, setting objectives, and delivering measurable improvements, councils help to create healthier ecosystems that support wildlife, provide ecosystem services, and improve quality of life for residents.

More specifically, the biodiversity duty exists to:

- **Ensure public authorities play a proactive role in nature recovery**, rather than a passive or reactive one.
- **Integrate biodiversity considerations into all relevant policies, plans, and operations**, including planning, land management, estates, procurement, and service delivery.
- **Increase the extent, connectivity, and condition of habitats**, helping to restore ecological networks at local and landscape scales.
- **Support the conservation of priority habitats and species**, especially those experiencing long-term national declines.
- **Strengthen climate resilience** by enhancing natural systems that reduce flooding, improve air and water quality, store carbon, and regulate local temperatures.
- **Promote community engagement with nature**, recognising the social, cultural, and health benefits of access to thriving natural spaces.
- **Ensure transparency and accountability**, requiring councils to demonstrate clearly how they are meeting their duty through reporting, evidence gathering, and measurable outcomes.

By fulfilling this duty, BDC contributes to regional and national goals for nature recovery, climate adaptation, and sustainable land stewardship, while delivering benefits that directly support residents, landowners, businesses, and future generations.

## WHAT HAS BEEN DELIVERED 2021-2025

### CONSIDERATION OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN OUR FUNCTIONS

During the reporting period, biodiversity has become increasingly embedded across BDC's operations. What began as a relatively contained area of work within the Public Realm team has since evolved into dedicated in-house ecological expertise and, more recently, into a wider Climate and Nature Recovery function. This integrated approach has enabled related environmental activities to be brought together more effectively.

As a result, biodiversity is no longer viewed as the responsibility of a single service area but as a shared organisational priority. Consideration of nature is now more clearly reflected in planning processes, land management practices, community engagement, partnership projects and strategic policy development. Additional teams have also played a role - through grant funding, planning assessments, public realm operations and communications - demonstrating that biodiversity is increasingly recognised and acted upon across the Council as a whole.

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## BIODIVERSITY EMERGENCY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT APPROACH

In 2020, BDC formally recognised the accelerating decline of local wildlife and habitats by declaring a biodiversity emergency. This followed earlier commitments made in 2019, when both Babergh and Mid Suffolk councillors endorsed a strengthened strategic focus on natural capital, ecological networks and partnership-led approaches. These foundations highlighted the need for improved wildlife corridor mapping, better understanding of ecological connectivity and closer collaboration with Suffolk County Council, local NGOs, and conservation groups.

To progress this work, the Councils established a Joint Biodiversity Task Force in July 2020. The group examined where the greatest influence could be achieved through land management, planning policy, community initiatives and wider partnership programmes. Its recommendations directly shaped the first Joint Biodiversity Action Plan, adopted in November 2020 ([Cabinet report](#)), which marked the beginning of a more coordinated and strategic response to reversing biodiversity loss across the district.

## 2020 JOINT BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

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### ACTIONS AND ORIGIN OF THE 2020 JOINT ACTION PLAN

Cabinet approval of the BAP in November 2020 represented a significant milestone: it committed the Council to a series of measurable actions, including detailed mapping of wildlife corridors and council-owned land, expanding tree and hedge planting programmes, improving meadow management, and strengthening biodiversity requirements within the planning process. These measures aimed to deliver tangible ecological benefits while fostering long-term landscape connectivity across the district.

The joint BAP included the following actions:

- 1. Ecological mapping and wildlife corridor identification**

Detailed ecological mapping to understand council land ownership, wildlife corridors and opportunities for habitat enhancement, while also updating information on local wildlife sites and testing how sites connect to the wider ecological network.

## 2. **Tree and hedge planting programme**

An annual programme of tree and hedge planting on council-owned and partner land, using native species and informed by the ecological mapping work.

## 3. **Additional hedge planting**

Promotion of DEFRA hedgerow grant opportunities alongside council-funded hedge establishment where external grant funding was not available.

## 4. **Meadow creation and management**

Replacement of selected areas of close-mown amenity grass with biodiverse meadow management, alongside engagement with developers and communities.

## 5. **Exploration of a green burial site**

Investigation of whether a green burial site could be established within the district.

## 6. **Biodiversity-focused Supplementary Planning Document**

Preparation of planning guidance covering biodiversity, habitat design, native planting and biodiversity net gain.

## 7. **Public biodiversity awareness campaign**

Delivery of a public-facing campaign to build awareness of biodiversity and encourage residents to take positive action.

## 8. **Overall programme investment**

A total projected cost of £157,350 for Babergh to support mapping, planting, equipment, communications activity and planning work.

# DELIVERY OF THE 2020 JOINT BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

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## WORK STEMMING FROM THE ECOLOGICAL MAPPING AND EVIDENCE BASE

The mapping undertaken through the Joint Biodiversity Action Plan provided a robust evidence base for subsequent delivery. It enhanced understanding of existing habitat networks, ecological corridors, council-owned landholdings and priority areas for intervention. This improved evidence enabled more targeted and effective action, directly informing planting schemes, the expansion of meadow habitats and wider nature recovery planning.

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## TREE CANOPY COVER SURVEY

BDC completed a **Tree Canopy Cover Survey**, the first of its kind in rural England, mapping existing tree cover across the district. The survey identified where trees are currently located and calculated canopy coverage **down to ward level**, clearly showing how Babergh compares to the national average. This published dataset provides an evidence base for understanding canopy deficits and supports strategic planning for future planting.

The innovative methodology and outputs led to the Councils being shortlisted for an iESE national award for technological innovation. Although the award was not won, the project significantly raised the Councils' profile. As a direct result, a delegation from the **Metropolitan Government of Tokyo visited in January 2025** to discuss the approach. The published canopy report can be accessed [here](#).

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## TREE PLANTING OPPORTUNITY MAPPING

Alongside the canopy baseline, the Council also developed a **Tree Planting Strategy evidence base** using a GIS model that applied weighted criteria - including air quality, flood risk and deprivation - to identify areas where new tree planting would deliver the greatest co-benefits. This work produced a series of "planting opportunity hotspots" which indicated where trees would most effectively support environmental quality and local communities.

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## GREEN BURIAL SITE

The original joint BAP included exploration of a green burial site. This was not delivered due to the lack of a viable location within the district.

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## COMMUNICATIONS TEAM'S BIODIVERSITY CAMPAIGN

BDC's Communications Team has played an essential role in enhancing public awareness of biodiversity and nature recovery initiatives during the last five years. This work forms part of a wider communications programme that also covers climate change and carbon reduction. Stakeholders engaged include residents, councillors, parish councils, partners, local media and council employees.

A mix of communication channels has been used, including newsletters, press releases, website updates and ongoing social media campaigns. Since the approval of the Council's first BAP in 2020, the Communications Team has delivered an extensive set of biodiversity-focused communications, including:

- **16 biodiversity Instagram reels and videos**, generating **67,612 views** across Babergh channels.
- **30 photo-led biodiversity posts**.
- **21 press releases** covering biodiversity developments, with additional coverage through broader climate and environment news.

Key themes featured in high-performing Babergh content included:

- **The Tree for Life scheme**
- **Wildflower meadow creation and management**
- **The Big Butterfly Count**
- **Tree planting and community habitat projects**

One of the most successful Babergh pieces was the **wildflower sign-installation reel**, which contributed to improving public understanding of meadow management. Educational posts about mowing regimes also reached substantial audiences.

Communications activity has also helped shift public perception. When meadow management changes were first introduced in 2022, concerns were raised about service cuts or site untidiness. Through consistent messaging, direct engagement in comments, and educational content explaining the ecological reasons for longer grass and seasonal mowing, public understanding has significantly improved. Residents now regularly express support, interest and appreciation for biodiversity initiatives.

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## MEADOW CREATION

In May 2022, the Council began formally rolling out an expanded **Meadow Management Scheme** as part of their wider biodiversity commitments. The initiative involved altering mowing regimes across selected council managed open spaces and grass verges, allowing areas to grow longer through the Spring and Summer to support wildflowers, insects, and other wildlife. This shift in management aimed to increase species richness, improve habitat connectivity, and reduce carbon emissions associated with frequent cutting.

As part of the rollout, the council **recorded and mapped all meadow managed areas**, ensuring staff, partners and the public could view where these changes were taking place. These mapped layers were shared on our public-facing mapping system and disseminated to town and parish councils to support local awareness and assist with the wider adoption of meadow-friendly practices across the districts. The mapping formed a core component of the BDC's adaptive management approach, enabling teams to monitor performance, respond to site specific issues, and refine management in subsequent years.

The early phase of the scheme highlighted both successes and challenges. While many sites flourished and delivered visible ecological benefits, such as increased pollinator activity - other areas required adjustments due to soil conditions, public expectations, or site use patterns. In response, the council undertook targeted adaptations, including reseeded certain sites with more diverse mixes, improving communications through signage and local publications, and providing clearer guidance to operational teams. These iterative improvements ensured meadow



**Figure 1: Trial area in Whatfield**

areas became better integrated into public open space management while continuing to support wildlife recovery.

It became clear that allowing grass to grow longer not only encouraged existing wildflowers to emerge but also provided essential resources for pollinating insects, improved soil moisture retention, and enhanced the visual attractiveness of greenspaces for residents.

Since the introduction of the scheme, the change in management regime has seen the following increases in wildflower meadow area:

Year	Total area (m <sup>2</sup> )
2022	1,570
2023	49,988
2024	68,157
2025	72,537

The Council purchased a Grillo cut and collect mower in 2021 for managing the meadow areas. Since then, as the meadow area has expanded, the Council has hired in plant for the cut and collect (2024) and purchased another mower (2025).

Signs have been installed on the long grass areas and wildflower meadows that say ‘we’re letting it grow to help the flowers show’ with a QR code to the Council’s website which explains more about why these areas have been allowed to grow long.



**Figure 2: Long grass area in Melford Road, Sudbury**

Some examples of wildflower meadows in Babergh include: Cordell Place, Long Melford and Melford Road, Sudbury.

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## TREE PLANTING AND THE FREE TREES, HEDGING AND WILDFLOWER SCHEME

In 2021, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils launched a district-wide initiative to support biodiversity by providing **free trees, hedgerow plants, and wildflower seed** to eligible community applicants. [The scheme](#) was formally known as the Parish Tree Planting Project and has since become one of the council’s most successful community-led biodiversity programmes.

The scheme was created to help parish and community groups increase wildlife habitat, expand tree cover, and connect ecological networks across the district. It focuses on planting on **publicly accessible land** and prioritises projects that contribute to wildlife corridors or enhance existing high value habitat areas.

The scheme is intentionally accessible. Applications are open year-round, with no formal deadline, although the council encourages submissions ahead of optimal planting seasons (tree planting from November to March, and wildflower sowing in the Spring and Autumn).

Trees, hedging and wildflower seed given out by BDC to plant on land outside the councils' ownership (\* up to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025):

Period	Trees	Hedging	Wildflower Seed
21/22	37	1545	0
22/23	72	1695	1200
23/24	91	1795	180
24/25	78	260	40
25/26*	36	0	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>5295</b>	<b>1470</b>

Eligible applicants include:

- town and parish councils
- community groups
- charitable organisation
- public landowners

The Council also commits to offering advice, both before application and during aftercare, helping ensure long term success of planting projects.

**BDC also planted trees on its own land**, mostly making use of the Local Authority Treescapes Fund, though with some smaller schemes of lower numbers. (\* current planting period):

Period	LATF Trees	Other Trees
21/22	80	0
22/23	55	0
23/24	9	23
24/25	0	21
25/26*	0	26

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT BAP

By the latter stages of the reporting period, the majority of the actions set out in the original BAP had either been delivered or had progressed substantially. Meanwhile, the wider policy and delivery landscape had evolved significantly, shaped by the introduction of Biodiversity Net gain, the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and a growing level of organisational ambition within the Council.

In response, an **updated BAP began development via the debut of a dedicated working group**, made up of key biodiversity officers and cabinet members. For Babergh, this resulted in the creation of the new Biodiversity Action Plan for 2026–2030.

## OTHER BIODIVERSITY ACTIONS

Information below includes biodiversity actions completed which did not stem from the BAP.

### LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The [LNRS](#) for Suffolk forms part of a national network of 48 strategies introduced under the **Environment Act 2021** to reverse the decline of nature and support landscape-scale ecological recovery. LNRSs are designed to create the space, connectivity, and long-term planning framework needed for nature to thrive. Collectively, they will feed into a national Nature Recovery Network, ensuring that nature becomes “bigger, better and more joined-up” across England.

Suffolk’s LNRS, **developed by Suffolk County Council as the Responsible Authority**, provides a detailed, evidence-based blueprint for the restoration,

enhancement, and long-term protection of habitats and species across the county. It identifies the current condition of Suffolk's natural environment, establishes priorities for recovery, and pinpoints the locations where interventions will have the greatest benefit for biodiversity, connectivity, ecosystem function, and climate resilience. The strategy is structured into four core components:

- **Part A – Strategy Area Description:** detailing Suffolk's existing habitats and the pressures they face.
- **Part B – Opportunities for Nature Recovery:** identifying where habitat creation, enhancement, or restoration would yield the greatest ecological benefit.
- **Part C – Priority Habitats, Assemblages and Species:** setting practical recovery actions tailored to the habitats and species most in need.
- **Part D – Locations for Action:** mapping the areas where targeted action will deliver the highest gains for nature.

These components are supported by extensive appendices covering engagement, methodology, legislation, data analysis, and links to wider environmental strategies.

A key feature of Suffolk's LNRS is the **Local Habitat Map**, which shows both "Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity" (APIB) and the locations where habitat creation or improvement should be prioritised (ACBs). This map provides an essential evidence base for decision making across Suffolk's districts and will guide where development linked BNG should be delivered both on- and off-site. It can also help inform the development of Neighbourhood Plans

As a **Supporting Authority**, BDC has an important role in the preparation, consultation and delivery of the LNRS. The Council contributes ecological data, identifies local priorities, and ensures alignment between the LNRS and planning policy. Babergh participated in the formal consultation phases and workshops, most recently during April - June 2025, following statutory guidance requiring supporting authorities to review and comment on the final draft strategy prior to its publication. The council then provided support and approval for the final version via a cabinet meeting.

The LNRS places strong emphasis on **partnership working**, recognising that successful nature recovery requires collaboration across the public sector, landowners, environmental NGOs, and local communities. Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Norfolk & Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership, land managers, parish councils and local volunteers have all contributed to shaping the strategy's priorities and delivery mechanisms. The LNRS also highlights how nature recovery actions can unlock wider benefits, including flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, soil restoration, improved air and water quality, recreational opportunities, and enhanced community wellbeing.

In summary, the LNRS sets out a long-term, collaborative and spatially targeted plan for restoring nature across Suffolk. For BDC, it establishes clear local priorities, strengthens the evidence base for planning decisions, supports the delivery of BNG, and reinforces the Council's role in driving forward meaningful, landscape-scale nature recovery.

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## CALL FOR LAND

The Tree Canopy Cover Survey highlighted how much lower Babergh's canopy cover was compared to the national average. In early 2023, discussions on this with the Woodland Trust (WT) led to a meeting at which the Woodland Trust suggested a call for land approach, which had been used in other local authority areas, to find land on which to plant trees. This approach was then expanded to cover more than just tree planting, recognising that other habitat creation may be equally important or more appropriate in some locations.

This led to the launch of the Call for Land scheme in November 2023, as a joint venture with MSDC. This scheme encouraged landowners with available land and a desire to manage it in a way that supported biodiversity to register their interest. Once landowners expressed their interest, their land was assessed and, if suitable, they were offered support and advice from a range of organisations, including the Woodland Trust and Suffolk Wildlife Trust. This advice included funding opportunities, how to access materials and labour and how to manage new habitats.

This scheme generated over fifty enquiries, many of which went on to lead to action on the ground, ranging from the direct supply of trees and hedging to large-scale woodland creation. A brilliant example of this was in Wissington where **approximately 25 acres of natural generation woodland was created on land of private ownership.**

For more information, see link [here](#).

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils hosted a Call for Land Summit in September 2024, a free event designed to support local landowners and community representatives in understanding how their land can better contribute to nature recovery. The Summit, supported by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Suffolk Tree Warden Network and the Forestry Commission, brought together **landowners, town and parish councils, and local environmental organisations**, creating a forum for sharing practical advice and opportunities for environmental enhancement across the district.

The event offered attendees tailored guidance on nature-positive land management, including tree and hedge planting, meadow creation, and options for allowing land to regenerate naturally. The Summit also signposted attendees to available **funding streams, technical support and trusted resources**, helping them to identify and implement measures that improve habitat quality and support native wildlife.

For more information, see link [here](#).

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## JOINT LOCAL PLAN (JLP)

The [Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan](#) was adopted in November 2023. The JLP sets out a vision for Babergh and Mid Suffolk that includes enhancing biodiversity through the delivery of measurable net gains across the districts, supported by an identified ecological network. Within the objectives outlined in the JLP is one specifically focused on protecting and enhancing environmental assets (including designated sites, biodiversity net gains, green spaces, air and water quality, and river corridors) for current and future generations.

Local sites of biodiversity and geodiversity value are identified in the JLP to ensure consideration can be given to the level of protection to these local sites – including County Wildlife Sites, County Geodiversity Sites, Local Nature Reserves and Priority species and habitats.

**Policy SP09 of the JLP – *Enhancement and Management of the Environment***, sets out the Local Plan Policy in this regard. The policy states that development consisting of over 50 dwellings will be required to demonstrate well-designed open space/green infrastructure, proportionate to its scale.

This also includes reference to the monitoring of air quality from traffic on roads within 200 metres of Protected Habitats Sites from September 2021 for a period of 12 months, which will inform future Local Plan policy.

The policy also set out that through Biodiversity Net Gain, all development will be required to protect and enhance biodiversity ensuring the measures are resilient to climate change. However, since this policy was written and taken through examination to adoption, there has been new National Policy and Regulations on the implementation of biodiversity gain.

**Policy LP16 of the JLP – *Biodiversity and Geodiversity***, sets out the requirement at all development must following the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy, alongside measures that development must adhere to. This included the need to identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains, equivalent of a minimum 10% increase, for biodiversity. The policy also states that the Councils will seek appropriate resources from developers for monitoring of biodiversity net gain from developments.

**Policy SP10 of the JLP – *Climate Change***, requires all development to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Approaches include sustainable construction techniques that regulate building temperatures, tree planning and shelter in public realms including public transport nodes and stops, and biodiversity net gain.

**Policy LP24 of the JLP – Design and Residential Amenity**, also refers to the need for development proposals to protect and retain important natural features including trees or hedgerows during and post construction.

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## SUFFOLK COAST RECREATIONAL DISTURBANCE AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION STRATEGY (RAMS)

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, East Suffolk Council, and Ipswich Borough Council have produced a Suffolk Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS), which identifies and costs the measures necessary to mitigate recreational and leisure impacts and confirms how they will be funded from residential development. The intention of the strategy is to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the Habitats Sites, in combination with other plans and projects, over the JLP period to 2037. The Suffolk Coast RAMS is now also known as Wildlife Wise to the public and oversees the expenditure of monies collected from development in accordance with Local Plan policy, on the appropriate and necessary mitigation measures.

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## TREES FOR LIFE SCHEME



**Figure 4: Tree for Life scheme**

The Tree for Life scheme launched in 2018 and offers families living in Babergh a tree to mark the arrival of a newborn or newly adopted children - [Tree for life](#). BDC also offers memory trees to parents who have lost children.

The Council has gifted 410 trees through this scheme since 2021. It has shown to be very popular as over 300 families applied to receive a tree in 2024 alone across both districts.

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## BIODIVERSITY AND TREES SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

The Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted in **March 2025**, provides detailed guidance to support the implementation of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk **Joint Local Plan (2018–2037)**. It sets out clear expectations for how new development must protect and enhance biodiversity, integrate green infrastructure, and appropriately manage and retain trees within proposals.

A key focus of the SPD is clarifying **what the Councils expect from applicants**. This includes demonstrating compliance with the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy, preparing proportionate ecological assessments, considering biodiversity and tree

retention at the earliest design stage, and integrating habitat enhancements directly into site layouts.

Overall, the SPD strengthens the Council's capacity to secure meaningful biodiversity outcomes through the planning system. By providing clarity for applicants and decision-makers, it supports the long-term ambition of protecting, conserving, and enhancing habitats across Babergh, ensuring that development contributes positively to nature recovery and climate resilience. This SPD can be accessed [here](#).

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## INFLUENCING OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES' APPROACH TO BIODIVERSITY

BDC's approach has attracted considerable interest from other local authorities. The Council's Call for Land scheme generated large amounts of attention – which paved the opportunity for BDC's Biodiversity Manager to give presentations on the scheme to the Forestry Commission and National Landscapes Team – further broadcasting the message.

The Biodiversity Manager has also given presentations on biodiversity to the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) on two occasions, once to the southern area group and once nationally. A neighbouring authority started a similar initiative a few years ago (Nature at Work) having talked to staff at BDC about their experience.

The Biodiversity Manager is a member of the Suffolk Verges Group, which is developing a county-wide brand for meadow management and the management of roadside verges, including those designated as Roadside Nature Reserves, bringing together mapping from all Local Authorities who manage areas of grass for wildlife. Together, this body of work demonstrates the leadership and influence the Council has taken in delivering on Biodiversity.

## PARTNERSHIP WORKING

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### WOODLAND TRUST

In November 2023, BDC were calling on local landowners to help them increase the district's tree coverage and improve biodiversity.

This was to mark National Tree Week, where BDC worked with the Woodland Trust, to [call for land](#) which could be planted on or improved for nature.

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### FORESTRY COMMISSION

The Forestry Commission launched the [Local Authority Treescapes Fund](#) which was the government offer for local authorities to restore tree cover in non-woodland areas

which may have been impacted by issues such as disease, habitat degradation or ageing tree stock.

Suffolk County Council secured funding of £201,213 from this fund on behalf of Babergh District Council, East Suffolk Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, Ipswich Borough Council and West Suffolk Council covering planting schemes carried out over three years from 2021-2024.



**Figure 3: Orchard Tree Planting on Pykenham Way in Hadleigh**

Babergh District Council has worked with volunteers from Hadleigh Environmental Action Team (HEAT) to plant a community orchard beside Pykenham Way footpath (between Aldham Mill Hill and Bradfield Avenue).

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## SUFFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST

The Wilder Communities Partnership, led by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, has received essential funding of **£373,356** to be distributed across three years from the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group, of which BDC is a member. This investment ensures the continuation and expansion of the programme, enabling communities across Suffolk to receive expert ecological guidance, specialist training, and tailored support in taking practical action for nature.

Through this partnership, Suffolk Wildlife Trust works directly with towns, parishes, community organisations and volunteer groups within the district to help create, restore, and manage habitats that support a diverse range of species. Advisory visits, hands-on training, and accessible guidance empower local groups to undertake projects such as wildflower meadow creation, hedgerow and orchard planting, pond restoration, and habitat improvements in parks, allotments, churchyards, and shared green spaces. These activities are already contributing to improved conditions for species like swifts, hedgehogs, water voles, stag beetles, and other wildlife characteristic of Babergh's landscapes.

This collaboration demonstrates BDC's ongoing commitment to enabling grassroots environmental action and ensuring that communities have the resources and knowledge needed to make a meaningful difference to local wildlife.

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## SUFFOLK TREE WARDEN NETWORK

The Suffolk Tree Warden Network (STWN) is a county-wide volunteer network that **supports the conservation, planting and protection of trees and hedgerows across Suffolk**. It forms part of The Tree Council's national Tree Warden Scheme

and brings together more than 200 trained volunteers who act as local “tree champions” in their towns and parishes.

For BDC, the network provides an important grassroots partnership that strengthens community involvement in nature recovery. Tree Wardens **regularly assist officers with activities such as planting and caring for trees, surveying local treescapes, supporting community orchards, and monitoring ancient, veteran and rare species** - areas of work that directly complement BDC’s own priorities for habitat creation, biodiversity enhancement and climate resilience.

Tree Wardens also collaborate with Babergh’s parish and town councils, to provide informed comments on planning matters involving trees, highlight threats such as pests and diseases, and help mobilise community volunteers for new planting projects. Their role in setting up community tree nurseries using locally collected seed contributes to more resilient, regionally appropriate planting stock, further supporting BDC’s strategic ambitions to increase canopy cover and expand ecological networks.

## BIODIVERSITY ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE WIDER COUNCIL

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### PUBLIC REALM

The Public Realm team, who manages grounds maintenance on Council owned land, have stopped the use of the herbicide Glyphosate. This initiative has helped to enhance biodiversity of the soil. When wood is collected from tree works by the Public Realm team, it is recycled where possible. Plus, any dead wood collected is left on site for insect habitation. Meadow grass that is cut and collected is also recycled. In addition, the Public Realm team positively considers new parish council requests for long grass/meadow areas.

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### COMMUNITIES TEAM

The Communities Team deliver and facilitate grant schemes that community groups, parish councils and charities can utilise. Some examples of biodiversity related grant schemes are listed below:

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#### WILDLIFE WISE- SMALL GRANT SCHEME

Wildlife Wise is a partnership project between BDC, Mid Suffolk District Council, East Suffolk Council and Ipswich Borough Council. This small grant scheme was announced in February 2025 and has grants of up to £5,000 available that will be awarded to projects supporting priorities within the Suffolk Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. The project aim is to avoid and reduce recreational disturbance and damage on internationally important wildlife sites which are designated for their rare birds, other wildlife and habitats (European sites).

Site based project ideas include:

**Infrastructure:** Fencing at European sites to prevent disturbance to species and habitats.

**Screening:** Screening around European sites to prevent visual disturbance to species.

**Monitoring and Data Gathering:** Monitoring and data gathering will inform our understanding of recreational disturbance or inform future projects or other mitigation measures.

**Educational and interpretation Projects:** Educational and interpretation projects, engagement events, or interpretation (long form signage) to educate and inform people about European site sensitivities or promote responsible visitor behaviours.

For more information, see [here](#).

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## RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND

The Rural England Prosperity Fund provides capital grant support to strengthen rural economies and community resilience. As part of this programme, Babergh District Council received £621,369 and the following grants were allocated in aid of increasing biodiversity:

- Cork's Lane, Hadleigh – A grant of £280.28 was allocated to the creation of community tree nursery within the allotments.
- Bentley Copse – A grant of £2,000 for tree contractor works in the creation of an open space adjacent to the playing field to provide public access in an area rich in wildlife, for exercise and wellbeing, together with benefits for biodiversity.

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## LOCALITY AWARDS

Locality Awards are a 'light touch' community grant which allow District Councillors in Babergh to support small-scale community groups and projects - or contribute towards larger projects - that are taking place in their local area. Each Councillor has a budget of £2,000 to allocate.

In the year 2022/23, a total of **£1,950** was spent by BDC Councillors to support projects that helped to enhance biodiversity. Detailed below are examples of biodiversity projects that were supported by the Locality Awards:

- £250 to Greening Glemsford, the Parish Council Climate and Nature Working Group (Glemsford Parish Council) for the purchase of Thermal Imaging Camera (Glemsford)
- £500 to Long Melford Parish Council for supporting Biodiversity project (purchase of plants) and contribution to memorial bench (Long Melford)

- £250 to Viking Forest Project for Viking Forest Project Swift Boxes (Ganges)
- £350 to Elmsett ECO group for bird and bat boxes (Elmsett)

In the year 2023/24, a total of **£2405.58** was spent by BDC Councillors to support projects that helped to enhance biodiversity. Detailed below are the biodiversity projects that were supported by the Locality Awards:

- £ 984.28 to Boxford Parish Council for the purchase of materials for path and new wildlife area linking village centre with playing fields.
- £ 321.30 to East Bergholt CEVC Primary School for purchase of equipment for School Eco-Council Litter Picking Group.
- £ 500.00 to Viking Forest Project for the purchase of swift boxes.
- £ 200.00 to Cornard Environment & Wildlife Group For the provision of new wildlife habitats within the Churchyard.
- £ 400.00 to Hadleigh Environmental Action Team (Bat Group) for the purchase of 'Minibat' wildlife acoustics song meter.

In the year 2024/25, a total of **£508** was spent by Babergh District Councillors to support projects that helped to enhance biodiversity. Detailed below are the biodiversity projects that were supported by the Locality Awards:

- £258.00 to Hadleigh Community for maintaining and developing public planting displays in town centre Gardens.
- £250.00 to Sproughton Millennium Green Trust to put towards the purchase of seeds for wildflower meadow planting.

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## DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

The BDC Development Management team have embedded biodiversity considerations into the planning process by using both an external ecological consultant (Place Services) and their in-house ecologist to review and advise on applications.

BDC's in house ecology team was expanded in November 2025 as two new Assistant Ecologists were appointed. The in-house ecology team, as well as external ecologists, ensure planning applications consider impacts on wildlife and habitats. They also ensure that the correct ecological information has been provided to support applications, including surveys, reports and BNG information. The ecologists use planning conditions and legal agreements to protect habitats and species, and to secure habitat creation and long-term management. The mitigation hierarchy is applied, and enhancements are requested where possible.

Standardised biodiversity enhancement condition wording has been agreed and circulated to all planning officers to ensure consistent application across the service. The Council also encourage early input at pre-application stage to secure better outcomes for biodiversity.

BDC have adopted the Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and officers refer to this SPD when determining planning applications.

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## ROLE OF THE LNRS, WILDLIFE LEGISLATION AND DESIGNATED SITES IN PLANNING

The LNRS allows the planning team to think more strategically about where habitat creation and enhancements will be most beneficial and have the most value. The LNRS provides a strategic framework that guides the Council's decision-making by identifying local priorities for habitat creation, restoration and connectivity. It helps us to steer development toward outcomes that contribute to wider nature recovery.

National wildlife legislation underpins the planning team's approach to protected species, habitats and designated sites, ensuring that statutory duties are met and that planning decisions comply with legal duties. Designated sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Wildlife Sites, and priority habitats, are key constraints that shape the Council's assessments and influence the conditions or mitigation the Council requires.

Through the Habitats Regulations Assessments that have supported the various iterations of Local Plan documents, there has been recognition of the sensitivity of the internationally Protected Habitats Sites and the potential for significant effects arising from increased recreational disturbance related to new housing development. The sites are protected under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

National policy identifies that development should initially consider whether avoidance of these sensitive areas is practical. In circumstances where this is not possible, appropriate mitigation should be provided, including being able to demonstrate well-designed open space/green infrastructure, proportionate to its scale, and prevents a significant adverse effect on site integrity to a Habitats Site. Such provision can help minimise any predicted increase in recreational pressure to the Habitats Sites by containing the recreation within and around the development site boundary away from Habitats Site. Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space (SANGS) can be helpful in achieving this.

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## BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The Council's in-house and external ecologists have been implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) since it became mandatory in February 2024. This work includes:

- confirming which developments must deliver BNG,
- reviewing BNG submissions to make sure baseline, calculations and proposed habitats are deliverable,
- making sure BNG is secured properly through planning conditions and/or legal agreements,

- reviewing discharge of conditions submissions to ensure submitted BNG documentation supports approved plans.

## EXPECTED BNG RESULTS FROM THE GAIN PLANS THE COUNCIL HAS APPROVED IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

Regarding Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), biodiversity value is measured in standardised biodiversity units. A habitat will contain a number of biodiversity units, depending on aspects like its size, quality, location and type. Biodiversity units can be lost through development or generated through work to create and enhance habitats. More information on how Biodiversity Net Gain works can be found [here](#).

In the table below shows the overall expected gains and losses (in unit terms) from the applications where a gain plan has been approved. For Babergh, a total of three gain plans were approved in the reporting period. Out of these three gain plans, one of them outlined that BNG units would be secured on-site and two applications will secure gains with a combination of off-site and on-site units.

Overall expected gains and losses	Area habitat	Hedgerow	Watercourse
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	1.66	1.00	0.00
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	1.56	1.65	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	-0.10	0.66	0.00
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.15	0.00	0.00
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	0.51	0.00	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	0.36	0.00	0.00
Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	0.27	0.66	0.00

The table below outlines that average percentage change in biodiversity units across all of the gain plans approved in the reporting period:

Overall expected gains and losses	Area habitat	Hedgerow	Watercourse
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	12.37	300.74	13.33
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	320.17	0.00	0.00
Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	12.82	300.74	13.33

Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requires at least a 10% increase in biodiversity units.

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## PROCUREMENT – ENVIRONMENTAL ASK

BDC's [Environmental Ask](#), introduced in 2025, strengthens the role of procurement in supporting the Council's climate and nature recovery ambitions. As part of the wider shift toward embedding environmental considerations across all operations, the Environmental Ask encourages suppliers to demonstrate how their goods and services, supply chains and working practices minimise harm to the environment and create positive impact.

By integrating these expectations into procurement processes, the Council ensures that environmental responsibility is factored into commissioning decisions and contract management, enabling external partners to play an active role in supporting the district's environmental objectives. The Environmental Ask therefore acts as a practical mechanism for extending environmental principles beyond the Council's own estate and into the wider supply chain.

## BABERGH BIODIVERSITY PLANNED AND ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD 2026-2030

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### CONSIDERATION OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN OUR FUNCTIONS

The next phase of work will focus on embedding biodiversity more consistently across council functions, building on the stronger organisational base established during this reporting period, largely by integrating the actions of new BAP. This includes continuing to integrate biodiversity within planning, public realm, grants, communications and wider corporate decision-making, while exploring further opportunities in areas such as procurement, internal champions and cross-service working.

### THE CURRENT BABERGH BAP (2026-2030)

The new Biodiversity Action Plan sets out BDC's **strategic approach for protecting, enhancing, and restoring the district's most important habitats and species**. It provides a clear framework for how the Council will manage its own land, influence landowners, and work with key partners to drive measurable improvements for nature between 2026 and 2030. **By identifying a whole-system approach to nature recovery**, the plan ensures that limited resources are directed where they will have the greatest ecological benefit, while also supporting wider nature recovery objectives across Suffolk. The following sections outline the specific action areas the Council will take to deliver these ambitions under each priority habitat and species area.

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### ENGAGE – INCREASING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN NATURE RECOVERY

BDC **aims to deepen community engagement** by supporting greater involvement in local nature recovery. This includes working with Suffolk County Council, towns

and parishes to expand the Public Rights of Way network through the creation of new permissive paths, improving landscape connectivity and public access to nature, aiming to deliver this between 2027-28. The Council will **also promote the National BioBlitz Network** across Babergh-managed countryside sites and meadow areas, encouraging community groups and schools to take part in ecological surveys that help build baseline biodiversity data. To strengthen collaboration between environmental groups, BDC will establish a **district-wide network or hub to enhance communication and support shared activity** within this financial year. These engagement actions recognise the mental and physical wellbeing benefits of volunteering and aim to cultivate a more environmentally active and informed public.

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## EDUCATE – BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY

Education sits at the heart of BDC's biodiversity approach in the new Biodiversity Action Plan. The Council aims, subject to available resources, to **support schools in developing wildlife areas and tree nurseries on their grounds**, building hands-on learning and opportunities for outdoor teaching. It is also intended, again where resources allow, for schools to be supported to **use nearby green spaces for wildlife surveys, wildflower seeding and extracurricular environmental clubs**, aiming to implement this between 2027-28.

To broaden awareness more generally, Babergh **will consolidate information on funding, networking and environmental guidance** and promote this through its website, communications channels and officer networks. The Council also plans to **relaunch the Call for Land scheme** to encourage landowners to put forward sites for nature recovery, linking them with expert partners and highlighting opportunities under the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Collectively, these measures aim to embed biodiversity knowledge within communities and support behavioural change, whilst also benefiting natural flood management, water and air quality and carbon sequestration.

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## EXPAND – INCREASING HABITAT AREA AND DIVERSITY ACROSS THE DISTRICT

Babergh District Council will continue expanding the district's ecological network by **increasing the extent and diversity of habitats**. This includes delivering and promoting the free trees and hedges scheme, developing community tree nurseries, and increasing planting on council-owned land to raise canopy cover. The planning system will be used to ensure that BNG is delivered effectively and that habitat creation occurs onsite or within the district. **Meadow habitats will be expanded** both through the free wildflower seed scheme and by increasing the proportion of council land under meadow management. **Ponds will also be a priority**, with the Council seeking funding for pond creation and restoration, as well as working with Suffolk Wildlife Trust under district-level licensing to deliver new ponds in suitable

locations. These actions collectively support carbon sequestration, improved air and water quality, flood management and wider climate resilience.

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### ENHANCE – IMPROVING THE CONDITION AND RESILIENCE OF EXISTING HABITATS

To improve existing habitats, the Council **will ensure BNG is delivered robustly** by monitoring planning applications and minimising enforcement cases. **The Council will also strengthen its work with landowners** - particularly through farm clusters - to encourage nature-friendly land management that enhances biodiversity, soil health and water quality. **Citizen science** could play a core role in the district's efforts to improve river health, with opportunities to work with partners and get funding to support expanded water-quality monitoring along the River Stour and its tributaries.

The Council will also promote tree-guard recycling schemes and explore reuse options, reducing plastic waste from tree planting. These enhancement actions aim to increase the ecological resilience of habitats while achieving wider environmental co-benefits.

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### EMBED – ENSURING BIODIVERSITY IS INTEGRAL TO COUNCIL PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING

Babergh aims to embed biodiversity into its organisational culture by aligning biodiversity actions with wider environmental goals such as **improved water quality, carbon storage, temperature moderation and soil health**.

The Council will also encourage towns and parishes to incorporate the LNRS into neighbourhood plans and work with planning and policy teams to ensure that BNG and LNRS considerations are integral to the Local Plan and development management. This ensures that **biodiversity is consistently considered across departmental functions** and becomes part of routine decision-making.

Further actions for embedding are detailed in the report section : *Further integrating biodiversity across the council*

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### ENDURE – SAFEGUARDING HABITATS AND ENSURING LONG-TERM PROTECTION

Long-term protection of habitats is supported through designation, enforcement and stewardship. BDC will identify suitable council and non-council sites for Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status, **aiming to declare one new LNR each year**. The Council will review and update criteria for Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) to improve the protection of important individual trees, recognising their biodiversity and climate benefits. To ensure survival of newly planted trees, the Council will secure the necessary resources to water all new plantings for at least two years. Additionally, the Council will take **prompt action when developers fail to meet biodiversity-related planning conditions** and will continue working with National

Landscapes (formerly AONBs) to support their delivery programmes. These endurance-focused actions ensure that gains made through the BAP are protected and can persist for generations.

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## THE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF THE BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

During the planning of BDC's new Action Plan, it became clear that effective delivery of its expanded ambitions would depend on deeper partnership collaboration and a stronger focus on securing external funding to support nature recovery across the district. The updated Plan, developed by the **Biodiversity Members Working Group**, embeds this shift in approach by explicitly setting out how the Council will work alongside landowners, communities, environmental organisations and regional partners to achieve shared biodiversity outcomes.

The Working Group also recognised the importance of **accessing external funding** to complement limited council resources and maximise the impact of the BAP. The 2026–2030 Plan therefore places a strong focus on identifying, securing and coordinating grants from government programmes, nature-recovery funds, charitable trusts, and partnership-based investment opportunities.

## ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

There are a variety of challenges to both our ecosystems and local biodiversity, and to our ability to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities in pursuit of local and national goals for nature recovery. Some of the challenges in the previous reporting period, and how we overcame them, have been articulated in previous sections of this report.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Suffolk identified that Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB) represent just 6% of Babergh's district area. This highlights the scale of the challenge. However, the LNRS also identified that Areas that Could Become Important for Biodiversity totals 35% of the district area, showing the scale of the potential for nature recovery.

Below is a summary of the changes and challenges we recognise and anticipate in delivering our biodiversity duty in the next five years. Some of these also represent opportunities.

### **Climate Change**

The region is already being impacted by a changing climate, and as global temperatures continue to rise, there will be an increasing range and magnitude of impacts upon our natural environment from seasonal trends and individual or overlapping extreme weather events. Climate change will bring risks of flooding, drought, more intense storms, wildfires, migration of species and changes to diseases and pests for both flora and fauna.

More broadly, particularly with changes to rainfall and temperature, there may be long term impacts on growth and resilience of vegetation and changes in our landscape as different species and habitats thrive or struggle in a changing climate. Future work needs to be cognisant of these risks and long-term trends to help support resilient ecosystems but also recognise the role and opportunity for green and blue infrastructure to support adaptation in our communities. Monitoring will be crucial to understanding changes and help inform decision making.

### **Pollution**

Nature in the UK is subject to a range of pressures. Pollution, through air, land and water, has put considerable stress upon our ecosystems and local landscapes. Whilst there have been many improvements in monitoring, understanding and addressing pollution sources, there remain challenges to contend with. It will remain important to work with statutory bodies, local residents and businesses, and other stakeholders to address this collectively.

### **Development**

Space for nature, and the breaking up of habitat connectivity has been recognised as a challenge for biodiversity. Development of our settlements, infrastructure and business will continue to support sustainable communities. This is why there is great emphasis on working to support the success of Biodiversity Net Gain and having strong and robust planning policies and Local Plan is important to ensure development impacts are mitigated and opportunities are taken to enhance nature recovery.

### **Resources and finance**

Work to restore landscapes and enhance biodiversity requires resources to both make change and sustain and manage habitats appropriately. There are emerging markets for nature-based finance in addition to other payments and models for changing land use that will need to be explored for work to happen at scale across the district beyond the councils' direct ownership.

### **Changes to National Policy/Legislation**

Changes to national policy and legislation presents challenges for Local Authorities and landowners when working to enhance biodiversity, deliver nature recovery and implement Biodiversity Net Gain. When changes to policy are announced it takes time and resource to respond and adapt to the changes. Uncertainty over continuity may lead to hesitancy in establishing habitat banks, due to the long-term risk to landowners. There may also be discrepancies between national ambitions and practical realities faced at a local level, which can make it difficult for local authorities to deliver meaningful outcomes on the ground.

## Public Support

People have strong connections to their local landscapes. There are also different values applied to particular aspects of landscapes, for example what people use it for, find attractive or wish to see. It is vital that there is ongoing public endorsement and support for nature recovery that meets different needs and provides the widest possible set of benefits.

## Monitoring

Whilst there have been substantial improvements in monitoring capabilities for biodiversity, not least through the advent of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, it remains a challenge to monitor the condition and changes across the district. This relies on the work of dedicated officers, residents and partners, and the ability to share information easily.

## Local Government Reorganisation

Babergh District Council, along with other district councils in Suffolk, will be replaced by three unitary authorities in 2028. Without further details at the time of writing, it is not possible to speculate on what may change with any approach to biodiversity and the transition to unitary authorities. However, given this occurs within the timeframe of the next reporting period, it is important to note.

The following sections set out the activity we are, and intend to carry out, and are responses to many of the changes and challenges noted in this section.

## NATURE RECOVERY IN JOINT LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

BDC are currently progressing the preparation of a new **Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan** under the updated national plan making system, with anticipated adoption in **2029**. This new plan cycle provides an important opportunity **to align local policy with the Council's BAP** and ensure the Local Plan fully reflects **evolving legislation, national guidance, and biodiversity duties**. The development of the revised BAP itself is informed by the Council's legal obligations under the strengthened biodiversity duty introduced by the **Environment Act 2021**.

Updating the Joint Local Plan will allow the BDC to **refresh policies, evidence and technical requirements relating to biodiversity**, ensuring they remain robust and compliant. This is consistent with national guidance, which stresses that public authorities must integrate consideration of biodiversity into decision making, update relevant internal policies and frameworks, and set clear objectives based on the actions they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

A central component of the new policy framework will be the **LNRS**, which acts as a key evidence base for spatial planning and land use decisions. The LNRS is being developed collaboratively across Suffolk, with BDC's officers contributing to its

formulation and refinement through statutory consultation stages. As national policy emphasises, local planning authorities are expected to consider relevant nature recovery strategies when making plans and decisions, meaning the LNRS will directly inform the spatial priorities and policy direction of the new Joint Local Plan.

The integration of the LNRS will support a more strategic approach to **habitat protection, enhancement and connectivity**, ensuring the Local Plan reflects locally identified priority habitats, species and nature recovery opportunities. This aligns with the Council's broader environmental commitments and strengthens its ability to meet statutory reporting requirements regarding biodiversity action and long-term recovery planning.

Overall, embedding nature recovery considerations throughout the Joint Local Plan process will help ensure that biodiversity is treated as a central planning principle, shaping development decisions and enabling delivery of long-term ecological enhancement across the district.

## FURTHER INTEGRATING BIODIVERSITY ACROSS THE COUNCIL

During this reporting period, **BDC has strengthened internal awareness, knowledge and capability relating to biodiversity and nature recovery**; heeding national guidance to educate, advise and raise awareness to support effective delivery of the obligations under the Environment Act of 2021. BDC is also **committed to embedding both climate change and nature recovery across all areas of its work** by ensuring that biodiversity considerations are more consistently integrated into decision-making processes, operational procedures and organisational behaviours.

The Council will look to build upon the training and networking of its Climate Change Champions group for the benefit of nature recovery. This group was established to create a dedicated space for employees to come together and share their views, ideas and concerns about the growing challenges posed by climate change.

The group brings together staff from a wide range of service areas across the organisation, not just those working directly in environmental roles. This cross-departmental involvement is a key strength: it ensures that employees who may not typically engage with biodiversity issues remain informed about current developments in nature recovery.

Future aims are for training and networking to support staff gain a clearer understanding of topics such as habitat creation and the wider environmental benefits of biodiversity initiatives, at home, at work and in the community.

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## ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Looking ahead, the Communications Team will continue collaborating with the Climate and Nature Recovery Service on new videos and seasonal content,

celebrating wildlife on council sites, showcasing landowner success stories, and using high-quality photography submitted from site visits or community contributors.

Engaging with schools will be a pivotal factor for the future, allowing the Council to increase its reach, mobilising action within the area and teaching the future generations the importance of biodiversity to our surroundings and communities. These actions will help maintain strong community engagement and support the wider delivery of the Council's biodiversity objectives.

## CONTINUATION OF BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN IMPLEMENTATION

BDC will continue to meet its BNG obligations in the next reporting period through strengthened processes, consistent application of policy, and clear expectations for applicants.

### **Maintaining Clear and High-Quality BNG Submissions**

The Council's ecology team will continue to request **accurate, clear and concise BNG information**, including:

- High-resolution BNG maps
- Detailed habitat descriptions
- Existing and post-intervention habitat condition assessments
- Confirmation of whether BNG delivery is **on-site** or **off-site**, requested as early as possible in the application process.

This aligns with the requirement for planning authorities to ensure that BNG information is sufficient to demonstrate compliance with statutory BNG obligations and contributes appropriately to long-term biodiversity outcomes under the duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

### **Ensuring Long-Term Management and Monitoring**

The ecology team will continue to ensure that any approved BNG proposals include **secured, deliverable long-term management and monitoring arrangements**, consistent with national expectations for authorities to take action that achieves measurable enhancements and ensures ongoing delivery rather than one-off interventions. This includes ensuring that BNG commitments remain enforceable for the required minimum 30-year management period, as reflected in national reporting standards for local authorities.

### **Consistent Use of Planning Conditions and Legal Agreements**

The wider planning team will maintain a consistent approach to applying BNG conditions across relevant development types. Where BNG delivery requires additional security - particularly for off-site habitat creation or complex land management - the Council will continue to secure obligations through **Section 106**

**agreements.** This supports national guidance, which emphasises the need for local planning authorities to demonstrate how they are meeting their BNG obligations and securing meaningful delivery through approved plans and legal mechanisms.

### **Embedding BNG into Ongoing Decision-Making**

BNG delivery will continue to be embedded into day-to-day planning operations, in line with government expectations that authorities integrate biodiversity considerations into all relevant decision-making processes and update internal practices to ensure continued compliance with the biodiversity duty. This includes:

- Ongoing officer training and internal guidance updates.
- Routine integration of BNG checks at validation, assessment, and determination stages.
- Monitoring the implementation of approved BNG plans and maintaining clear records for statutory reporting.

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### **USING BNG GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT DEVELOPERS AND FUTURE ACTIONS**

The Council will continue to strengthen future BNG implementation by making full use of the [Babergh and Mid Suffolk Biodiversity Net Gain webpage](#) which debuted in early 2026 and provides clear, accessible guidance for applicants and developers, summarising the statutory BNG requirements.

This online resource will play an increasingly important role in **informing developers and applicants about what is required at each stage** of the planning process. It clearly sets out:

- What information must accompany planning applications (e.g. written BNG assessments, metrics, maps, and habitat details)
- How applicants should demonstrate whether net gain can be achieved on-site, or the circumstances under which off-site delivery may be accepted
- The expectation that applications conform to local BNG guidance to ensure **consistency in decision-making** and effective assessment by the planning authority.

By directing applicants to this detailed and publicly accessible guidance, BDC will help ensure that future submissions are **more complete, consistent and compliant**, thereby reducing delays, improving ecological outcomes, and supporting smoother implementation of mandatory BNG requirements.

In future reporting periods, the Council will continue to update and refer applicants to this guidance to maintain clarity around expectations and support high-quality nature recovery delivery at the development scale.

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## HABITAT BROKERAGE SCHEME FOR BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are jointly developing a **Habitat Brokerage Scheme** to support the delivery of high-quality, locally-based off-site biodiversity enhancements in line with mandatory BNG requirements. The scheme draws on best practice from early-adopter authorities including Somerset, Buckinghamshire and Devon, and aligns with guidance from the Planning Advisory Service encouraging councils to take a more active role in shaping the off-site BNG market.

The purpose of the scheme is to create a **transparent, well-regulated process** through which landowners can offer habitat banks and developers can source local biodiversity units that directly support nature recovery within the districts. It aims to increase the local supply of off-site habitat creation opportunities, ensure these are located where they can deliver maximum ecological benefit, and help keep BNG investment within the places where biodiversity losses occur.

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### PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The brokerage scheme is being developed to:

- **Support local delivery of BNG**, reducing reliance on purchasing units from outside the district where ecological benefits are less relevant to local communities.
- **Begin the District's supply of high-quality, strategically located habitat banks**, particularly in areas identified within the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and existing ecological networks.
- **Provide a clear, regulated pathway for landowners** interested in establishing habitat banks, recognising that doing so represents a significant 30-year commitment.
- **Ensure developers have access to suitable, locally-appropriate off-site biodiversity units**, reducing the need to rely on statutory biodiversity credits as a last resort.
- **Facilitate transparent matching of supply and demand**, ensuring biodiversity units created are aligned with local ecological priorities.

While habitat banks are not a statutory function of the councils, supporting a local market helps ensure that biodiversity gains are delivered in the most meaningful locations and that local ecological priorities are met.

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### HABITAT BANKS IN BABERGH

There are currently **no registered habitat banks** within Babergh. Developers are therefore forced to purchase biodiversity units from outside the districts, often incurring higher "distance penalties" in the national metric and moving ecological gains away from the impacted area.

The councils' Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) emphasise that **biodiversity loss should be compensated as close as possible to where the loss occurs**. Establishing a brokerage scheme will help retain BNG investment locally, increase strategic habitat delivery, and support nature recovery in priority landscapes identified through the LNRS

## CONCLUSION

This report sets out the plans, activities and successes related to the discharge of the Biodiversity Duty by Babergh District Council in the five-year period 2021-2025. The development of biodiversity's prominence within the authority is evident from the submission, and shows sustained momentum that is being carried forward into the next five-year period with new plans centred around embedding nature recovery in how the council operates, discharge of relevant functions, and how it engages and works with a range of stakeholders and partners.