

**MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT
COUNCIL
BIODIVERSITY DUTY
REPORT 2026**



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March 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) 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 Mid Suffolk 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, **MSDC 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, MSDC 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 Mid Suffolk'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. MSDC 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, Mid Suffolk 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, Mid Suffolk 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.

The Council has further strengthened its commitment to nature recovery by approving a **new Biodiversity Action Plan (2025–2030)**. This BAP builds on the success of the earlier joint plan but is more ambitious, more targeted, and aligned with updated national policy frameworks such as LNRS and BNG. The new BAP focuses on priority habitats and species of greatest relevance to Mid Suffolk and sets clear targets for delivery over the next five years.

Looking ahead, Mid Suffolk will continue to enhance biodiversity through improved planning policy, expanded partnership working, targeted grant funding, integrated council-wide action, strengthened monitoring and development of a local Habitat Brokerage Scheme for BNG. The new **Nature Recovery Budget**, approved in November 2025, will support delivery of the next stage of nature recovery, including community grants, landowner engagement and targeted habitat creation.

In summary, this reporting period has seen significant and measurable progress toward reversing nature's decline in Mid Suffolk. MSDC 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, MSDC is well-placed to drive the next phase of nature recovery and fulfil its statutory responsibilities under the Biodiversity Duty.

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

NATURE IN MID SUFFOLK

The district of Mid Suffolk 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.

Across Mid Suffolk, there are 36 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), six Local Nature Reserves, 208 County Wildlife Sites (covering 1,487 hectares) and 792 hectares of ancient woodland. Specifically, the Council manages two Local Nature Reserves, three private County Wildlife Sites and nine accessible County Wildlife Sites or other sites.

WHAT IS MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S BIODIVERSITY DUTY?

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?

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-scale.
- **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, MSDC 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 MSDC'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.

BIODIVERSITY EMERGENCY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT APPROACH

In 2020, MSDC 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.

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

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 £161,900 for Mid Suffolk to support mapping, planting, equipment, communications activity and planning work.

DELIVERY OF THE 2020 JOINT BAP

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.

TREE CANOPY COVER SURVEY

MSDC 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 Mid Suffolk 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](#).

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.

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.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM'S BIODIVERSITY CAMPAIGN

MSDC'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:

- **23 biodiversity Instagram reels and videos**, viewed a total of **1,197,899 times** across Mid Suffolk channels.
- **21 photo-led biodiversity posts**.
- **21 press releases** linked to biodiversity and nature recovery initiatives.

Mid Suffolk's biodiversity Instagram reels have been particularly impactful, with several high-performing videos covering topics such as:

- **Wildflower meadow signage and myth-busting**
- **Tree for Life case studies**
- **Community and home meadow creation**
- **Environmental benefits of wildflower meadows**

One standout example was the **wildflower post-installation reel**, which generated **over 1.1 million views**, demonstrating exceptionally strong public interest when biodiversity content is framed in a clear, visually engaging way.

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.

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



Figure 1: Bee Orchid in Stowmarket meadow

It became clear that 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 (m2)
2022	37,761
2023	86,450
2024	82,788
2025	114,341



Figure 2: Image showing an example of a long grass/wildflower meadow sign

The Public Realm team 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.

Examples of wildflower meadows:

A [new wildflower meadow](#) was created in Harleston, in autumn 2021, on parish land.

Needham Lake contains some areas managed as meadow. Needham Lake is a 13-hectare popular countryside attraction, centred around a flooded gravel pit, close to Needham Market. Part of the site is a Local Nature Reserve - with wetland areas, meadows and a small woodland. It's home to a variety of wildlife, and in the summer you can find many species of dragonflies and small birds.- [Open spaces](#)

Previously part of the formal gardens of a large manor house, Church Meadow Nature Reserve in Coombs now supports a variety of wildlife. The hedgerows are full of small birds in spring with Whitethroat and Yellowhammer commonly heard. The meadows support many wildflowers and recently southern marsh orchids have made a welcome reappearance. The upper meadow is bright with buttercups in early summer. In the lower meadow the small pond supports many dragonflies whilst grass snakes can sometimes be seen around its edges.

TREE PLANTING AND THE FREE TREES, HEDGING AND WILDFLOWER SCHEME

In 2021, Mid Suffolk and Babergh District 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.

Aiming to be 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 Spring and Autumn).

Trees, hedging and wildflower seed given out by MSDC to plant on land outside the councils' ownership (* up to 31st December 2025):

Period	Trees	Hedging	Wildflower Seed
21/22	265	2445	0
22/23	127	4655	5980
23/24	105	2160	4000
24/25	315	2055	400
25/26*	16	970	2000
Total	828	12285	12380

Eligible applicants include:

- Town and Parish councils
- Community groups
- Charitable organisations
- Public landowners

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

MSDC also planted trees on their own land, mostly making use of the Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF), though with some smaller schemes of lower numbers.

Trees planted on the council's 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	140	0
22/23	0	0
23/24	36	0
24/25	0	79
25/26*	0	0

THE CURRENT MID SUFFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN (2025-2030)

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 Mid Suffolk, this resulted in the creation of the new Biodiversity Action Plan for 2025–2030.

The current BAP sets out MSDC'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 2025 and 2030. By identifying priority habitats and species, the plan ensures that 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 actions the Council will take to deliver these ambitions under each priority habitat and species area.

Arable Field Margins and Hedgerows

To support arable field margins and hedgerows, which remain under pressure from agricultural intensification and lack of appropriate management, the Council will work closely with landowners and partner organisations such as the Woodland Trust, Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Catchment Sensitive Farming advisers. Actions include providing free hedging plants and trees through the district's free trees, hedges and wildflower scheme where there is public benefit, and supporting projects that increase the area and quality of hedgerows. The Council also aims to influence positive management practices on land it does not own by connecting landowners with appropriate expert support.

Calcareous Grassland

To address threats such as fragmentation, invasive species, and changes in land use, the Council will identify existing calcareous grassland sites and explore opportunities to purchase land for habitat protection or restoration. Work will continue with partners to improve management on privately owned sites, while management of Council-owned meadow areas will be expanded to help meet the Council's target of having 30% of land for wildlife by 2030. The planning process will also be used to safeguard these rare habitats by ensuring no loss to development.

Lowland Meadows

The Council will continue and expand meadow management across its own estate, looking for new locations suitable for wildflower meadow creation. This will include improvements in equipment and techniques for best practise meadow management. Opportunities through planning and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will also help retain and create meadow habitats. A strong focus will be placed on improving public understanding of meadow management to reduce complaints and support the transition toward more natural green spaces. The Council will explore capacity to also make equipment and expertise available to non-council landowners and encourage community-based meadow clusters, grazing exchanges, and improved management practices across the district.

Open Mosaic Habitats and Natural Regeneration

Recognising the vulnerability of open mosaic habitats - often perceived as neglected or ripe for development - the Council will identify sites suitable for natural regeneration, including disused or low-grade agricultural land. Where feasible, the Council may purchase land for habitat creation, while also working with partners to expand the extent of open mosaic habitat both on council-owned land and district-wide. The planning system and site designation will support the safeguarding of these areas where appropriate.

Ponds

The Council will map, assess and develop management plans for council-owned ponds, and improve their ecological condition through restoration and better maintenance. The planning system will be used to encourage the creation of new ponds in suitable developments, contributing toward BNG gains. The Council also aims to support private landowners by offering advice on pond creation and management and by helping to secure funding where appropriate.

Traditional Orchards

To protect and restore traditional orchards, the Council will work with parishes and community groups to create new orchards, manage existing ones, and promote community stewardship. New orchards will also be planted on council land where there is local interest, including the establishment of clone banks to preserve heritage fruit varieties. Free fruit trees will continue to be offered through the trees, hedges and wildflower scheme and Tree for Life initiative, supporting orchard creation across the district. The Council will also encourage orchard retention and new planting through the planning process.

Swifts

As a red-listed species (globally threatened or facing significant decline in UK populations), swifts are a priority for action. The Council will increase roosting opportunities by installing swift boxes on its own buildings - at least five metres high, in shade and with a clear accessing flight path - and ensuring swift bricks are incorporated into new developments facing to the north or east. It will promote the installation of boxes on private property and encourage residents to record sightings and submit data to the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) to improve understanding of local swift populations.

Hedgehogs

To help halt the decline of hedgehogs, the Council will ensure its land management across meadows, scrub, woodland, and pond habitats benefits this species. Planning policies will require hedgehog friendly fencing (with access holes) in new developments, supported by BNG delivery within development sites. Public

education campaigns will promote hedgehog-friendly gardening and encourage residents to submit sightings to SBIS.

Bumblebees

Bumblebee conservation will focus on expanding nectar rich habitats throughout the year through meadow creation, orchard planting, and native species planting in new developments. The free trees and wildflower scheme will continue to provide native shrubs, fruit trees, and wildflower seed to communities. The Council also intends to encourage applicants to incorporate wildflower areas and native planting into development proposals.

Toads

The conservation of toads will be supported through pond creation and restoration, in combination with improved terrestrial habitat management. The Council recognises public safety concerns and the potential introduction of invasive species as challenges, but improvements to pond habitats under other priority habitat actions will also benefit toad populations.

Native Black Poplar

To support one of Britain's most endangered native trees, the Council has planted, and will continue to plant, black poplar trees on its land in suitable locations, distributing trees to landowners, and promoting searches for existing specimens to improve genetic understanding. DNA testing will be funded to confirm the authenticity and clones of newly identified trees, helping conserve genetic diversity across the district.

More information can be accessed [here](#).

THE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF THE BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN AND THE RECONVENING OF THE WORKING GROUP

Following the adoption of the BAP, **it became clear that delivering its expanded ambitions would require additional focus, coordination and resourcing**. As the implementation phase began, the Council reconvened the Biodiversity Members Working Group to reassess delivery capacity and identify how best to support the Plan's more targeted and outcome-driven approach. This review reflected the evolving policy environment and the increased level of organisational commitment to biodiversity and nature recovery.

The Working Group's considerations highlighted the need for **a dedicated funding mechanism to ensure that BAP priorities** - particularly those relating to priority habitats, species recovery and community-level action - could be delivered effectively. This process directly informed the **development of a new Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Budget**. A formal proposal, shaped by the Working Group's

recommendations, was presented to Cabinet in November 2025 and subsequently approved.

The approved Nature Recovery Budget represents a significant step change in resourcing nature recovery within Mid Suffolk. The Council planned to commit approximately £1.8 million over the following three years to accelerate work on habitat restoration, nature-friendly land management, public engagement and ecological enhancement projects. Just over half of this investment would aim to support a new community-facing Nature Recovery Grants Fund, providing targeted support for both river catchment restoration and locally led biodiversity projects, enabling partners and community groups to contribute meaningfully to district-wide recovery efforts.

This renewed and well-resourced approach positions the Council to deliver the 2025–2030 BAP more effectively, ensuring that the Plan’s priorities are supported by clear implementation pathways, strengthened governance and dedicated funding.

OTHER BIODIVERSITY ACTIONS

Information below includes biodiversity actions completed which did not stem from the Biodiversity Action Plans

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**, MSDC has had, and will continue to have, 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. Mid Suffolk 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.

For Mid Suffolk, the LNRS provides a powerful tool to guide future investment and decision making. The district's newly expanded biodiversity and nature recovery budget explicitly aligns with the LNRS, particularly through targeted projects such as habitat restoration, wildlife corridor creation, tree and wildflower planting, and support for community led nature recovery schemes.

In summary, the LNRS sets out a long-term, collaborative and spatially targeted plan for restoring nature across Suffolk. For MSDC, 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.

CALL FOR LAND

The Tree Canopy Cover Survey highlighted how much lower Mid Suffolk's canopy cover was compared to the national average. In early 2023, discussions between MSDC members and 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.

The proposal was also raised with Babergh District Council members, and they were supportive of adopting the same approach. This led to the launch of the Call for Land scheme in November 2023 as a joint council venture. 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 50 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. Fantastic examples of this came in both Woolpit, where approximately **10 acres of meadow, woodland, hedge and orchard was created on parish land** to generate a natural open space for the village, and Felsham, where approximately **5 acres of woodland** was created on a former agricultural field 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](#).

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 planting 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.

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.

TREES FOR LIFE SCHEME



Figure 1: Tree for Life scheme

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

The Council has gifted 771 trees since 2021 with this scheme in Mid Suffolk. It has shown to be very popular as over 300 families across both districts applied to receive a tree in 2024 alone.

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 Mid Suffolk, ensuring that development contributes positively to nature recovery and climate resilience. This SPD can be accessed [here](#).

LAND ACQUISITION

MSDC has purchased two notable sites for nature recovery:

- Palgrave – approx. 1ha of mixed scrub and woodland, abutting the River Waveney
- Thorndon – approx. 25ha of mostly grassland, with some woodland, reed bed, hedgerows and a pond

Ecology surveys have taken place on both, and management plans are to be produced. The approach to both will focus on biodiversity, public access and community engagement.

INFLUENCING OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES' APPROACH TO BIODIVERSITY

MSDC'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 MSDC's Biodiversity Manager to give a presentation on the scheme – 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 MSDC 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

WOODLAND TRUST

In November 2023, MSDC 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 MSDC worked with the Woodland Trust, to [call for land](#) which could be planted on or improved for nature.

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.

Mid Suffolk District Council has worked with volunteers, including from [Friends of Pikes Meadow](#) to plant community orchards at Pikes Meadow, Elizabeth Way and Gainsborough Road in Stowmarket.

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 MSDC 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 Mid Suffolk's landscapes.

This collaboration demonstrates MSDC'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.

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 MSDC, 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 MSDC's own priorities for habitat creation, biodiversity enhancement and climate resilience.

Tree Wardens also collaborate with Mid Suffolk'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 MSDC's strategic ambitions to increase canopy cover and expand ecological networks.

BIODIVERSITY ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE WIDER COUNCIL

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.

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:

WILDLIFE WISE- SMALL GRANT SCHEME

Wildlife Wise is a partnership project between Babergh District Council, 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](#).

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, Mid Suffolk District Council received £998,027 and the following grants were allocated in aid of increasing biodiversity:

- Bacton Garden of Remembrance – A grant of £1,942.50 was allocated to create an area which provides a dedicated, shared space for quiet reflection that supports individual wellbeing. Creates a more diverse environment that benefits local biodiversity through habitat creation and the use of species that will benefit pollinating insects and many other species.
- Needham Market and Somersham – A grant of £1,231 was provided for the enrichment of council-owned meadow management areas using suitable wildflower mixes to enhance the appeal to local residents and increase biodiversity value.

- Pike's Meadow, Stowmarket – A grant of £2,518.24 was allocated for the supply of tree guards, trees and wildflower seeds for the enhancement of the environment, play value, biodiversity and accessibility of the Pikes Meadow public open space.

PRIDE IN YOUR PLACE FUNDING

The Pride in Your Place Grant was established in August 2023 to enable small scale projects which improve the appearance, cleanliness or environment of communities. Up to £250 could be applied for per Mid Suffolk Parish with a population of under 1,500, up to £400 for those with a population of over 1,500.

A total of £2,800 was awarded to projects in the Habitats and Green Spaces category. Some examples of these projects are below:

- Thurston Parish Council renovated a wildlife area on a new green open space.
- Horham and Athelington Parish Council did bulb planting in the village
- Monk Soham Parish Council purchased new flower planters and accompanying plants.
- Worlingworth Parish Council purchased plants and bulbs for roadside planters.

LOCALITY AWARDS

Locality Awards are a 'light-touch' community grant which allow District Councillors in Mid Suffolk 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 £10,000 to allocate.

In the year 2022/23, a total of **£4,726** was spent by Mid Suffolk District 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 Stradbroke Parish Council for the installation of new swift nesting boxes in Stradbroke and costs of a speaker at Stradbroke Primary School on the topic of swift preservation (Stradbroke)
- £500 to Wingfield Barns CIC for resurfacing car park, improve pond and wildlife area (Wingfield)
- £600 to Suffolk Prickles Hedgehog Rescue for the creation of new 'wildlife garden' as part of hedgehog garden learning zone (Earl Stonham)
- £587 to Street Forge Workshops for support for Mini Beast Haven Project, the purchase of new bird nesting boxes for a conservation project alongside Gislingham Primary School (Gislingham)

In the year 2023/24, a total of **£3,473** was spent by Mid Suffolk District Councillors to support projects that helped to enhance biodiversity. Detailed below are examples of biodiversity projects that were supported by the Locality Awards:

- £600 to Suffolk Wildlife Action Group for drone equipment for mapping and tracking wildlife (Battisford and Ringshall)
- £280 to Debenham Green Team for hedgehog homes across community nature reserve (Debenham)
- £250 to Old Newton Community Environmental Group to purchase of new owl nesting boxes for Little Wood community woodland (Haughley, Stowupland and Wetherden)
- £1250 to Suffolk Wildlife Trust to support the Gipping Valley Sustainable Farming Cluster (Needham Market)
- £1093 to Eyes Open CIC for the district-wide photography competition to promote '30 Days Wild' event (Palgrave)

In the year 2024/25, a total of **£6,967.01** was spent by Mid Suffolk District Councillors to support projects that helped to enhance biodiversity. Detailed below are examples of biodiversity projects that were supported by the Locality Awards:

- £532.46 to River Waveney Trust on behalf of Love the Dove for Purchase of river testing kits for use in the River Dove (Gislingham)
- £990 to Harleston Parish Meeting for Bee hive and spring bulb planting project (Onehouse)
- £1400 to Thrandeston Parish Council for Clearing an overgrown area of meadow to allow for wildflower growth (Palgrave)
- £306.01 to Suffolk Prickles Hedgehog Rescue for Planting of wildflowers as part of nature garden area (Palgrave)
- £1490 to Badwell Ash Parish Council on behalf of Badwell Ash Toad Group for Purchase of amphibian ladders for installation in new development (Walsham-le-Willows)

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

The MSDC 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.

MSDC'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.

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

ROLE OF THE LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY, 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 Planning Team 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.

Development that falls within the 5km Impact Risk Zones for Redgrave and Lopham Fens Ramsar site, and the Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens Special Area of Conservation will trigger consultation with Natural England.

EXAMPLE OF A PLANNING AGREEMENT: (COMMUNITY BENEFIT AGREEMENTS)

Launched in September 2024, the Port One Legacy Biodiversity Enhancement Fund will see £7,500 available each year for the lifetime of the Port One Logistics Park development in Great Blakenham, giving neighbouring parishes the opportunity to improve biodiversity and sustainability in their communities.

The annual sum of £7,500 will rise in line with inflation each year and is available for local organisation in Little Blakenham, Great Blakenham, Bramford, Barham and Claydon to apply for. Eligible organisations include town or parish councils, charities, village hall and playing field committees, sports clubs, community interest companies and community benefit societies.

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

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 Mid Suffolk, a total of seven gain plans were approved in the reporting period. Out of these seven gain

plans, six of them outlined that BNG units would be secured on-site and one application will secure gains off site.

Overall expected gains and losses	Area habitat	Hedgerow	Watercourse
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	135.96	2.94	3.18
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	152.78	11.78	3.61
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	16.82	8.84	0.42
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.20	0.00	0.00
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	0.84	0.00	0.00
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	0.64	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)	17.46	8.84	0.42

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.

PROCUREMENT – ENVIRONMENTAL ASK

MSDC'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.

MID SUFFOLK BIODIVERSITY PLANNED AND ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD 2026-2030

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. 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.

ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES AND DEPENDENCIES IN THE DELIVERY OF 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 3% of Mid Suffolk's district area. This highlights the scale of the challenge. However, the LNRS also identified that Areas that Could Become Important for Biodiversity totals 24% 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

Mid Suffolk District Council, along with other district councils in Suffolk, will be replaced by a unitary council 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 a unitary council. 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.

ONGOING DELIVERY OF THE CURRENT BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Implementation of the MSDC Action Plan (2025–2030), which responds to and addresses our local and national challenges and opportunities, is now progressing through a combination of targeted operational delivery, strengthened community engagement, and the rollout of new dedicated grant programmes. These measures are designed to ensure that the ambitions of the BAP translate into tangible improvements for habitats, species and local communities.

NATURE RECOVERY ON COUNCIL OWNED SITES

The Council will aim to provide long-term security for all its own nature recovery sites, both those acquired already and for future acquisitions.

This will include:

- Carrying out ecology surveys to provide a baseline and inform future plans
- Reviewing the LNRS to help shape future plans and support its delivery
- Producing a management plan including, where appropriate, input from local communities
- Reviewing potential sources of income, such as agri-environmental schemes, woodland management grants, and livestock grazing, to provide long-term sustainability
- Seeking opportunities for local community engagement, access and volunteering

- Designation of sites as Local Nature Reserves, to provide security of use and increase opportunities for funding

COMMUNITY NATURE RECOVERY GRANT

A key element of ongoing delivery is the establishment of the **Community Nature Recovery Grant with a total budget of £525,000 for the period up to March 2028**. This provides financial support for projects that enhance biodiversity and encourage community involvement in nature recovery. The fund is designed for charities, voluntary environmental groups, community organisations, town and parish councils, and schools, enabling a wide range of stakeholders to take action for local wildlife. Grants of up to **£50,000** are available, with a Small Grants option offering awards of up to **£2,000** for smaller-scale initiatives.

This funding stream forms part of the Council's wider commitment - supported through the Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Budget approved in November 2025 - to empower communities and partners to deliver meaningful biodiversity outcomes across the district.

CATCHMENT AND LANDSCAPE NATURE RECOVERY GRANT

Alongside community-focused funding, the Council is also preparing to launch the **Catchment and Landscape Nature Recovery Grant**. With the same budget of £525,000 to March 2028, this programme is aimed at partnerships, trusts and organisations working across larger spatial scales, particularly those addressing river catchments and associated landscape systems. The grant will support nature-based solutions, land acquisition, biodiversity restoration projects and initiatives that contribute to improved water quality, reduced flood risk and strengthened ecological connectivity. Grant applications are expected to open on **April 1st 2026**, forming a key delivery mechanism for BAP actions relating to rivers, wetlands and wider ecological networks.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

To support effective delivery of these programmes and broaden public participation, the Council will recruit a **Nature Recovery Engagement Officer**. This role will enhance capacity for coordinating stakeholder involvement, facilitating community projects, advising applicants to the grant schemes and promoting wider awareness of nature recovery opportunities with residents, schools, businesses and local councils. The post forms an important part of the Council's investment in resourcing the BAP, enabled by the approval of the Nature Recovery Budget.

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. With schools and wider community groups and partners, the possibilities for monitoring, reporting and citizen science will be explored, allowing greater information to be captured whilst also engaging and connecting people with nature.

Engagement will also include town and parish councils, raising awareness of the role they and their communities can play, along with support and advice to deliver biodiversity improvements in their area. This will include the use of mapping and information from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and how this can support local projects and Neighbourhood Planning.

These actions will help maintain strong community engagement and support the wider delivery of the Council's biodiversity objectives.

NATURE RECOVERY IN JOINT LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

MSDC 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 MSDC 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. 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, **MSDC 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. MSDC 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, corporate reporting, operational procedures and organisational behaviours.

The Council will look to build upon existing good practice internally of champions, cross-service working, training and support to staff for climate change, that has helped embed this agenda in the culture and practice of the organisation. 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 to 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.

The Council will continue to utilise and build upon current work, to affect change through the Council's various different levers and influence, such as in procurement, and its partnerships, both within the district and across the county. This is to ensure biodiversity and nature recovery is considered, promoted and delivered through all available means to the greatest effect and maximum efficiency.

CONTINUATION OF BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN IMPLEMENTATION

MSDC 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.

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, MSDC 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.

HABITAT BROKERAGE SCHEME FOR BNG

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 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 facilitate 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.

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.

HABITAT BANKS IN MID SUFFOLK

There are currently **no registered habitat banks** within Mid Suffolk. 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 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 Mid Suffolk Council in the five-year period 2021-2025. The evolution of the work in scale and 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 ambitious plans centred around embedding nature recovery in how the council operates, the management of natural assets, discharge of relevant functions, and how it engages and works with a range of stakeholders and partners.