

Report subject	<b>Statutory Duty to Biodiversity</b>
Meeting date	17 December 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>Access to nature is of vital importance for the health and well-being of residents and visitors, supporting mental and physical health.</p> <p>BCP is an area of high nature value but access to green spaces is unequal, and biodiversity is generally declining across the UK and within BCP.</p> <p>This report outlines the actions taken by BCP Council to comply with the Biodiversity Duty under the Environment Act 2021. It summarises our Green Infrastructure strategy framework, a report on Biodiversity net gain, our mitigation policies and delivery, green space capital improvements and countryside management.</p> <p>It presents BCP's first report on biodiversity and a summary of monitoring, reporting and our actions for delivery for nature recovery. These plans will ensure nature is considered fully, declines are reversed and that access to nature is provided. It will support the greening of our urban environment and are part of the work as foundation level Nature Towns.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) The first BCP Biodiversity report is approved, meeting BCP's Statutory duty under the Environment Act, including the first report on Biodiversity Net Gain</b></li> <li><b>b) A high-level Green Infrastructure action plan is approved, including a BCP Urban Nature Forum and the formation of the Nature Recovery Dorset delivery group</b></li> </ul>
Reason for recommendations	To meet statutory duty to biodiversity as set out in the 2021 Environment Act.

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

## Background

1. Biodiversity is at the centre of the BCP Council Corporate strategy vision and priorities, with strong reference to nature flourishing and having a thriving and healthy natural environment. There are ambitions for people to have pride in our streets and public spaces; flourishing green spaces that support the well-being of people and nature; active and healthy quality of life.
2. The Environment Act 2021 strengthens the biodiversity duty originally set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, requiring public authorities to:
  - Consider what actions they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
  - Agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration.
  - Act to deliver those policies and achieve the objectives.
  - Report on their actions and future plans.
3. This applies to all public authorities, including local authorities and local planning authorities, but excludes parish councils from mandatory reporting.
4. The strengthened Duty means as a public authority, BCP must:
  - Consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
  - Agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration
  - Act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives
5. The first biodiversity report publication to be made by 26 March 2026 covering period ending no later than 1 Jan 2026. Subsequent reports are to be every 5 years from the end of the previous reporting period
6. The Council's biodiversity actions contribute to national biodiversity goals and targets, which are:
 

**By 2030:** Halt the decline in species abundance and protect 30% of UK land for nature.

**By 2042:** Increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030; reduce the risk of species extinction; and restore 75% of our (UK's) one million hectares of terrestrial

and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term<sup>1</sup>

### **Biodiversity Net Gain report**

7. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a planning policy requirement under the Environment Act 2021, mandating that developments in England must deliver at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity. This is achieved by enhancing or creating habitats either on-site or off-site, measured using the Defra Biodiversity Metric
8. The enhanced biodiversity duty requires the Council to publish a report that includes a summary of actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty, how the Council intends to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period, actions carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations and how the biodiversity net gain obligations will be met in the next reporting period.
9. A new Habitat banking mechanism, proposed through the Financing Nature cabinet paper December 2025, explains and provides greater detail on the future provision of off-site units within BCP, creating opportunities to improve habitats within BCP as mitigation for off-site habitat loss.
10. BNG is now embedded in the validation and determination of planning applications, developers must submit:
  - A biodiversity metric calculation showing pre-development habitat value.
  - A biodiversity gain plan detailing how the 10% uplift will be achieved.
  - A site plan and habitat condition assessment.
11. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must refuse to validate applications missing required BNG documentation and LPAs are encouraged to go beyond statutory duties by:
  - Developing local BNG policies in Local Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents.
  - Aligning BNG delivery with Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).
  - Establishing a biodiversity evidence base to inform planning decisions.
  - Using triage approaches to focus resources on high-impact applications.
12. As detailed in Appendix 1, since adoption, in BCP there has been:
  - 16 Biodiversity Gain Plans approved, of these, 2 have achieved 10% net gain on site; the other 14 off-site through purchasing units.
  - These off-site units mean that 2.44 area habitat units have been bought, and 0.22 hedgerow units.

### **Biodiversity report**

13. The first BCP Biodiversity report (Appendix 2) provides a summary of various work across different teams that support biodiversity within BCP, work in partnerships, key measures on specific species along with future actions and priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2023: The Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2023

14. Summary of high-level corporate actions:

- Governance review of the current Council **Decision Impact Assessment** tool for sustainability to improve accountability and decision making for climate and nature.
- Creation of a **nature dashboard** to complement the existing Climate and sustainability online tool to track and report on green house gas emissions and energy usage.
- The Planning Advisory Service have chosen BCP as one of its pilot areas for use of a **nature recovery toolkit** for local authorities. This will help to align green efforts across departments and services, look across other plans and strategies to help streamline benefits and provide a clearer understanding of how to deliver change, funding and cost-saving opportunities.
- Creation of a **habitat banking mechanism** and improvements at three BCP owned sites for nature.
- Develop partnerships for delivery and greater engagement with communities on nature recovery to lead to higher standard Nature Towns accreditation.

**Consideration of Biodiversity in BCP**

15. In 2019 BCP Council formally declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, acknowledging the serious risk climate change creates and the role that our natural environment plays. This cabinet report, the first biodiversity report and accompanying Green Infrastructure action plan are the first formal response to the ecological element of the emergency. However, considerable work takes place on a business-as-usual basis, across project and programme delivery and within partnerships to help restore nature and ensure BCP is a nature-rich place to live, work and visit.
16. The Council actively manages through its own strategic green space team 14 of BCP's 19 SSSI's, 45 SNCI's, 25 LNR's and overall c 2,500Ha of green space. We also support various other designated sites and work in partnership across the conurbation with many organisations with an interest in protecting and enhancing our natural environment.
17. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (commonly known as the Habitat Regulations) require Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRAs) for developments that may affect protected sites (e.g. Special Areas of conservations (SAC's) and Special Protection Areas (SPA's)). Mitigation policies and teams are in place that ensure our Habitats regulations requirements are met and our heathlands and harbours are well protected. This includes education programmes are in place and practical measures are taken to protect these precious habitats. Our work in partnership with the Dorset Heaths Partnership and Birds and Recreation Initiative are held in high regard as national best practice.

## **Green Infrastructure strategic framework, action plan and delivery**

18. The Council has a range of strategies and policies in place that support nature recovery and the ecological emergency, these are summarised in the Green Infrastructure Strategic Framework (Appendix 3), and include:
  - Green Infrastructure Strategy.
  - Urban Forest Strategy.
  - Local Nature Recovery Strategy
  - Habitats Regulations
19. The Green Infrastructure Strategic Framework draws together all of the above policies and strategies and then aligns them to various delivery mechanisms:
  - Financing Nature and a vehicle for Biodiversity net gain.
  - Nature Towns and Cities is the accredited scheme that aims to get more people time in nature close to home, in greener, thriving towns and cities. Millions of people living in urban areas lack vital access to nature and green spaces close to home, yet evidence shows it makes us healthier, more connected and more resilient.
  - A new nature recovery delivery group is being formed for Dorset, with the creation of urban and rural nature forums.
20. The Action plan summarises key work and creates an investible pipeline of projects and deliver at a range of scales, from trees on a corner of a street to multi-partner programmes at landscape scale.

## **Benefits for people and communities**

21. The BCP area is rich in high quality natural environment, and this has a significant role in supporting our resident's and visitors' health and well-being
22. There are over 45 groups actively working to help maintain green spaces and the public realm, from small groups working on roadside planters and litter picking to the constituted groups supporting parks and gardens. These volunteers play a crucial role and make an enormous difference to the management and maintenance of these spaces.
23. In addition, there are on average 700 volunteer hours per month directly facilitated through Council teams, supporting conservation efforts across our nature reserves and encouraging more wildlife into our urban parks.
24. Community food growing opportunities such as allotments, garden growing projects, grow zones linked to park cafés and other spaces are supported by charities such as Grounded Communities, Transition Towns and The Parks Foundations, alongside friends and other groups. These initiatives go hand in hand with supporting nature, for pollinators and wider biodiversity.
25. Through the University of Exeter, a PhD researcher is using Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole as a case study to explore 'Disability and Social Inclusion in Urban Nature'. Considering how disabled people perceive and interact with varied forms of urban nature and how this impacts their lives, in potentially positive and negative ways; and examining how urban areas can be more nature-friendly without

disadvantaging disabled people, by talking to disabled people and hearing their lived experiences of living alongside urban nature. The findings will be brought in to future biodiversity reports.

### **Options Appraisal**

26. This report meets our statutory duty to have a biodiversity report and meet our duties under the Environment Act. The report highlights the depth of work being undertaken from BCP Council and by its residents and in partnerships to deliver nature outcomes that support the aims of our corporate strategy.

### **Summary of financial implications**

27. Revenue budgets for the Countryside team and within Parks grounds maintenance operations are the only specific budgets for managing nature conservation. Other provision is specific to projects, capital funding (including from Habitat Regulations) and working in partnership with external organisations to bring forward opportunities.
28. There are no specific financial implications from this report.

### **Summary of legal implications**

29. The publication of a first BNG report and biodiversity report meets compliance within the Environment Act requirements.
30. The Council works with local groups and organisations to enable them to have an active role in managing and maintaining spaces. Loosening Council control to enable nature recovery projects is part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and pragmatic methods for enabling groups are in place, whether through formal lease of land, or softer pledges and agreements that set out an arrangement for specific activities or use.

### **Summary of human resources implications**

31. There are no human resources implications from this report.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

32. The biodiversity and BNG reports support work to make BCP a more sustainable place, seeking to create more, bigger, better and more joined up green spaces, for people and nature. The reports support access to nature, food growing opportunities, promotion and enhancement of our natural environment and ways to create a greener, healthier and more resilient place.
33. Recommendations to strengthen the current Decision Impact Assessment tool are made and will be taken forward to ensure nature has a greater weight in Council decision making processes. There are examples from other Councils such as Dorset and Cornwall of decision-making wheels that they have in use and could be replicated.

### **Summary of public health implications**

34. Enhancing BCP's green infrastructure contributes to improving the quality of life for people through enhanced access to nature and potential investment in green spaces. This has known physical health benefits such as boosting the immune

system, improving heart health and reducing the risk of chronic diseases; supports mental health through reducing stress and anxiety, lowers depression rates and enhances emotional resilience.

35. Societal benefits include the promotion of social connection through outdoor activities that foster cooperation, kindness, and a sense of belonging. Time in nature also strengthens environmental awareness and regular exposure can encourage sustainable behaviours and positive attitudes to nature.
36. Summary comment from BCP Public Health and Communities: Biodiversity is a key determinant of health. Loss of natural habitats can increase air pollution, heat stress, and mental health burdens. Integrating biodiversity into planning such as green corridors, urban trees, and nature-based solutions aligns with the One Health approach, benefiting people, wildlife, and ecosystems (WHO, 2025). Creating and safeguarding biodiverse green spaces and protecting wetlands delivers co-benefits: climate resilience, reduced air pollution, and improved wellbeing (UK Health Alliance, 2025; WHO, 2025). See Appendix 5 for full content.

### **Summary of equality implications**

37. The summary of the EIA covering this work states:

The two cabinet reports related to financing Nature and the Statutory reporting of biodiversity are promoting and committing BCP Council to clear Biodiversity outputs, delivery and governance, seeking ways to innovate, improve and support our residents and communities in accessing and supporting nature.

A forward plan of nature recovery delivery work will create more ways to engage with and seek support from local organisations and individuals through new forums and platforms.

Equality considerations show that while everyone in theory can have access to nature, we know there are barriers, and work is required to understand how to remove those and develop opportunities for more diverse groups to support this work, be more involved in decision making and realise the benefits from time in green spaces and nature.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

38. No specific risks identified from this report.

## Background papers

1. BCP Projects [Website](#):
  - a. [Nature Towns](#) page and information
  - b. The [Future Parks programme](#)
  - c. Green spaces [Strategies and plans](#)
  - d. [Let it Grow](#) pages, with maintenance maps for selected parks
  - e. Download and share the [Nature pledge](#)
2. The Parks Foundation [website](#):
  - a. [Guides to support the Nature Pledge](#)
  - b. The [Nature Neighbourhoods](#) project
3. The Dorset [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)
4. Dorset-wide [Habitat regulations mitigation](#)
5. [The Economics of Biodiversity The Dasgupta Review: Headline Messages](#)

## Appendices

1. BCP Biodiversity Net Gain report 2025
2. BCP Biodiversity report 2022-2025
3. GI Strategic Framework, Action plan and delivery model
4. Biodiversity report case studies
5. Public health statement
6. EIA