

South Norfolk Council Biodiversity Strategy

2025 - 2030



Foreword

"South Norfolk is a place of remarkable natural beauty, with its rural landscapes, historic market towns, and charming villages, and I am proud of the unique environment we call home. It is our responsibility to conserve and protect these special places, ensuring future generations can continue to enjoy the wildlife, open spaces, and character that make our district so distinctive.

"This Biodiversity Strategy sets out a proactive approach. We will enhance the land we manage through five-year plans, habitat creation, species recording, and transparent monitoring to deliver measurable results. Beyond council-owned sites, we will support biodiversity across South Norfolk, creating larger, better, and more joined-up ecosystems that improve climate resilience and provide attractive, usable spaces for our communities.

"Through partnership with site managers, community organisations, and local stakeholders, we will inspire wider action and embed biodiversity thinking into land use across the district, and so this strategy sets out how we will conserve and protect South Norfolk's natural heritage while helping both people and wildlife to thrive."

**Councillor Keith Kiddie, South Norfolk Portfolio Holder
for The Environment**



Setting the scene

Why biodiversity matters

Biodiversity is the variety of all living organisms, from plants and animals to fungi and microorganisms, and the ecosystems they create. It forms the foundation of thriving natural systems that deliver vital services: clean air and water, climate regulation, flood management, food production, and human wellbeing. Yet biodiversity is under strain and so safeguarding and restoring nature is not only an environmental concern it is fundamental to the long-term health, resilience, and prosperity of our communities.

Our commitment to nature

South Norfolk's diverse landscapes and rich ecosystems face the risk of being irreversibly lost due to mounting climate and ecological pressures. To conserve wildlife and protect natural habitats, South Norfolk's Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity Delivery Plan responds to these challenges by prioritising sustainable land use, biodiversity recovery, and stronger environmental safeguards.

A changing landscape

The Environment Act 2021 establishes a legal framework for reversing biodiversity decline, introducing a statutory target to halt species loss by 2030 and placing a stronger responsibility on local authorities to take action. In Norfolk, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy highlights priority zones for habitat restoration and ecological connectivity, while the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a coordinated approach to improve access to nature and enhance green spaces throughout the region.



Alongside these strategic commitments, there is a growing legal and policy shift towards market-based approaches for securing environmental outcomes. Mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Nutrient Neutrality (NN) are now being embedded in national legislation, often requiring developers to fund mitigation through credit-based schemes. These mechanisms are generating enforceable obligations, and new streams of investment, that can be directed into locally-led, nature-based solutions. As a council, we hold a pivotal role in guiding how these tools are applied to ensure they deliver meaningful ecological benefits for South Norfolk's landscapes and communities.



The value of biodiversity: Why it matters to us all

Biodiversity is more than wildlife; it underpins the natural systems that sustain our lives. Through what are called ecosystem services, nature provides essential benefits to people, communities, and the economy.



Clean air and water

Woodlands and wetlands filter pollution and improve the quality of the air we breathe and the water we use.



Climate regulation

Trees and soils store carbon and cool our towns and cities, helping us adapt to climate change.



Flood protection

Natural landscapes absorb rain and reduce flood risk, protecting homes and infrastructure.



Health and wellbeing

Access to nature-rich spaces boosts physical and mental health, reduces stress and supports active lifestyles.



Food and pollination

Pollinators like bees thrive in biodiverse environments and are essential for crops and food security.



Culture and learning

Nature inspires, educates and connects us to our sense of place, heritage and community.

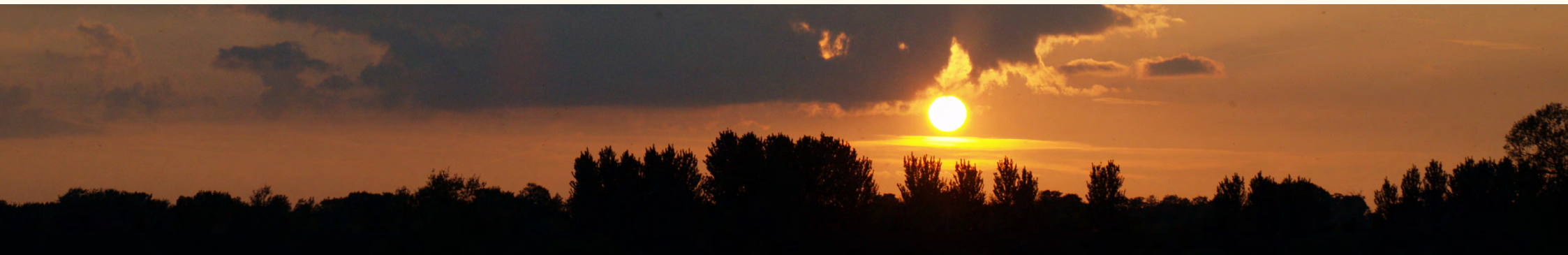
The call to action

Why immediate action is needed

Over the last 50 years the UK has experienced a severe decline in biodiversity and is now ranked among the most nature depleted nations in the world (State of Nature Report 2023). The continuing loss of species is mainly driven by intensive farming, urban expansion, pollution and the increasing effects of climate change. Without urgent action many habitats and species could be lost. Experts agree we have reached a critical tipping point with only about a decade left to halt and reverse this decline. The decisions we make today will shape the future health of our landscapes and the wildlife they support.

Implications for South Norfolk

South Norfolk is largely an arable farming area made up of irregular fields bordered by hedgerows, scattered woodland fragments and areas of grassland and meadow. The most important ecological landscapes include ancient woodland and river valleys, especially those of the Yare and Waveney, which contain a rich variety of wetland habitats, small grassland sites. South Norfolk also contains unique and internationally protected habitats such as the Norfolk Valley Fens Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These habitats are safeguarded under the Habitats Regulations, which require local authorities including South Norfolk Council to assess the ecological impact of new development and prevent harm to these sites through a Habitats Regulations Assessment.



Climate change and biodiversity

Climate change and biodiversity loss are intrinsically linked. Rising global temperatures, altered rainfall patterns, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, including drought, flooding, wildfires, and outbreaks of pests and diseases, are all placing mounting pressure on the UK's wildlife. These climate impacts are accelerating biodiversity decline and disrupting ecosystems already weakened by habitat loss and fragmentation.

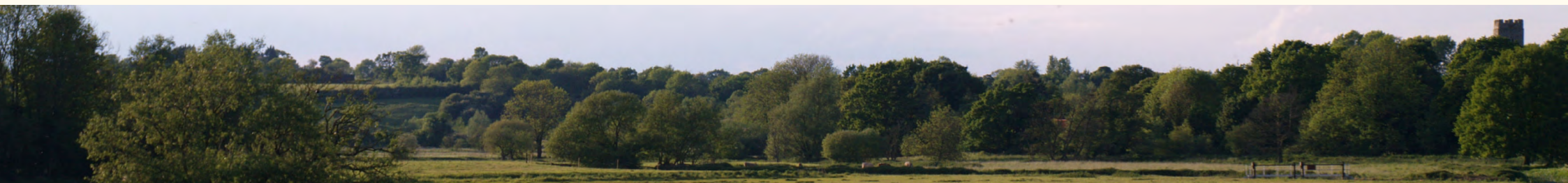
Given these risks, it is crucial that we embed climate resilience into our approach to biodiversity, both across our managed sites, and the wider district.

While continuing to prioritise native species, we also recognise the need to adapt our management to future conditions. This includes the careful introduction of species that are more tolerant of the climate extremes we anticipate. For instance, tree species such as Norway Maple and Sweet Chestnut are being considered for their greater drought tolerance and adaptability to projected climate conditions.



When planting on our own sites, we will consider:

- Selecting drought-tolerant and wildfire-resistant species to enhance long-term resilience.
- Where appropriate, creating diverse, species-rich hedgerows that provide habitat connectivity.
- Using species mixes tailored to local soil types ensuring that plantings are both sustainable and ecologically appropriate.



The mission

To enhance biodiversity on the land we own, shape the greenspaces of the future, and use our influence to create thriving ecosystems that increase species abundance and improve access to nature for everyone.

We recognise that our responsibility extends beyond council land. Protecting biodiversity requires action across the whole district. By working in partnership with local organisations, stakeholders, and communities, we can drive change at a broader scale and support nature recovery across connected landscapes.

This strategy is guided by the principles of the Lawton Review (2010), which called for "bigger, better and more joined-up" natural spaces. By committing to this strategy, we aim to take meaningful, lasting action, restoring habitats, supporting wildlife, and creating a thriving natural environment for future generations to enjoy.





Our biodiversity priorities

Priority one:
Enhancing biodiversity
on land we manage



We will survey and improve council-owned sites through tailored 5-year enhancement plans and regular monitoring. This includes habitat creation, species recording, and transparent reporting to demonstrate measurable progress.

Priority two:
Supporting
biodiversity beyond
our boundaries



We will deliver projects on land not owned by the Council but still within our influence. We will do this by leveraging funding for green infrastructure to deliver co-benefits: enhanced biodiversity, improved climate resilience, and more attractive, usable public spaces, i.e. “bigger, better and more joined up”.

Priority three:
Inspiring and
influencing
wider action



Through collaboration with site managers, community partners, and local stakeholders, we will embed biodiversity thinking into land use practices.

What guides our Biodiversity Strategy?

The key national and local strategies that shape South Norfolk Council's approach to biodiversity are:



Environment Act 2021

This national law sets the direction for protecting and restoring nature. It includes a legal target to halt species decline by 2030, requires a 10% biodiversity net gain in new developments, and calls on councils to create Local Nature Recovery Strategies and report on biodiversity progress.



South Norfolk's Climate Change and Environment Plans

Our delivery plans commit the Council to achieving net zero carbon emissions and enhancing biodiversity. They include clear actions on decarbonisation, green-infrastructure, air quality and pollution, and waste reduction.



Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The LNRS identifies the most valuable areas for nature and sets out how we can restore and connect habitats across Norfolk. It supports nature recovery by guiding where we should focus conservation efforts in South Norfolk.



Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy

This plan links green spaces across Norwich, Broadland and South Norfolk. It promotes nature-rich places that support wildlife, help us adapt to climate change, reduce recreational impacts on Norfolk's most vulnerable sites and improve public access to green spaces.

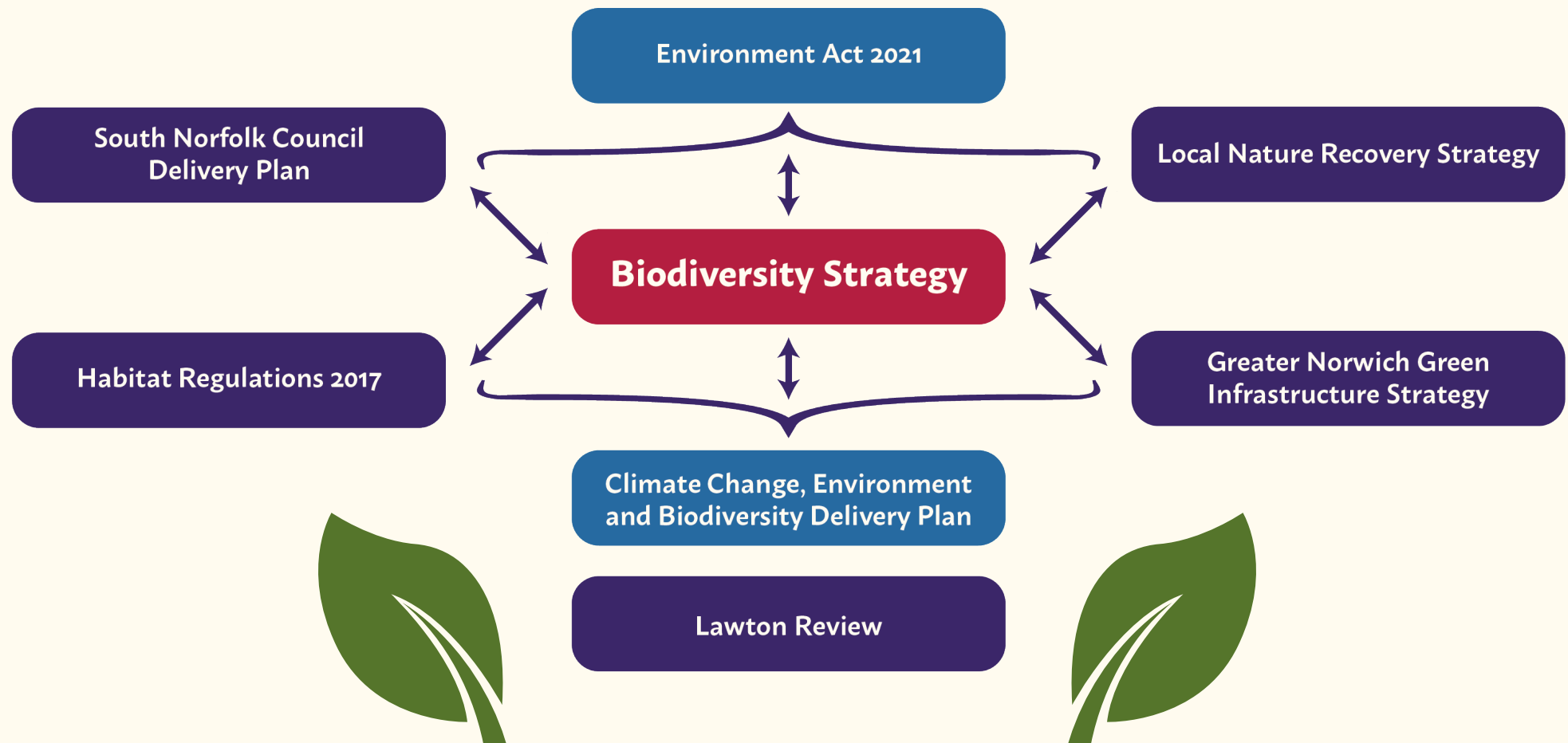


The Habitats Regulations (2017)

This requires any development likely to affect a protected site to undergo an Appropriate Assessment. If harm is identified, the project can only proceed if effective mitigation prevents adverse impacts on the site's integrity. Off-site measures, such as habitat improvements or visitor management, are often secured through legal agreements with the local planning authority, in Norfolk this is done via the [GI-RAMS](#)

Links with other key policies

As already highlighted, our efforts to enhance biodiversity are part of a wider, joined-up approach. This strategy aligns with national, regional, and local policies that shape and guide how we restore nature in South Norfolk.



Turning priorities into actions



Priority one: Enhancing biodiversity on the land we manage

P1



Our role as a landowner

South Norfolk Council owns a diverse set of valuable community spaces across the district, in which we can directly shape nature recovery and biodiversity increase.

This includes 158 Amenity Sites, 11 wooded areas, 9 Commons, 4 churchyards, and Queen's Hills Community Park. Of these sites, 9 are designated as County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

These spaces not only provide vital recreation sites for residents, but also provide many different types of habitats, allowing us the flexibility to promote sustainable management practices for a wide range of habitats and species.

Through sensitive and informed management, we can improve the ecological quality and connectivity of these spaces while ensuring they continue to serve their original purpose as accessible, welcoming places for people.

We want to proactively manage our land to not just restore nature in South Norfolk, but to ensure our species and wildlife actively thrives. By investing in our land to facilitate biodiversity increase, we can lead nature recovery in Norfolk and ensure the long-term survival of our environment.

- We will understand the baseline level of biodiversity currently on our land, set a target for biodiversity increase and identify management solution on our assets to reach this target.
- We will manage our land to create accessible green spaces on our land for residents to enjoy and engage in nature
- We will increase wider awareness of biodiversity and nature recovery on our land for the wider community



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Conduct a biodiversity baseline of ten council-owned land in South Norfolk	A biodiversity baseline study for South Norfolk. The baseline will focus in on ten key sites in South Norfolk to understand the current biodiversity status of these areas. The baseline study will also provide some general recommendations for improving 'amenity' grassland sites	Bng2 - Understand the Biodiversity Baseline in South Norfolk in order to set a target to improve biodiversity Environment Act – S102. General duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity
Creation of a biodiversity improvement regime for specific council-owned sites	Ten improvement regimes for key sites owned by South Norfolk Council. These regimes will focus on actions to be carried out on the sites annually to achieve a 10% biodiversity uplift by 2030. The work carried out on these sites will be reported on annually and in 2030, the sites will be surveyed to confirm the targeted uplift	Bng8 - Promote biodiversity on council-owned land Environment Act – S102. General duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Optimise the use of our land for environmental outreach projects	We will create and maintain community spaces on council-owned land that encourage greater participation in nature and outdoor activities. We will develop and support outdoor learning zones in partnership with schools and community groups to promote conservation and environmental awareness. By working closely with local environmental organisations, such as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and The Conservation Volunteers, we will deliver community projects that enhance understanding of environmental management and promote sustainable land use across our sites. We will also ensure that all our community spaces are accessible and inclusive, enabling every resident to engage with and enjoy them	Ec1 - Improve understanding and raise awareness of climate change and environmental issues to drive positive behavioural changes
Work with council teams to enhance biodiversity on council buildings and land	Creation of a Sustainable Champion network for council staff to actively improve biodiversity in and around the Council's headquarters building	Bng8 - Promote biodiversity on council-owned land



Case Study P1: Enhancing biodiversity on the land we manage

Queen's Hills Community Park

South Norfolk Council manage 90-acres of diverse habitat and wildlife at Queen's Hills Community Park with the help of local volunteers.

The site is a designated County Wildlife Site and is particularly important for its floodplain fen and flower-rich valley side grasslands, as well as being home to four of the UK's six indigenous reptile species. The mix of valley side habitats on the site has become increasingly rare in the post-war period.



Priority two: Supporting biodiversity beyond our boundaries

P2

Supporting nature to flourish across South Norfolk is vital, not only on land owned by the Council but throughout the wider landscape. To achieve this, we will collaborate with partners, organisations, and local communities to deliver projects that restore and connect habitats across the district.

To guide and secure funding for nature recovery, we will draw on national and local policy drivers such as the GNGB Green Infrastructure Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the Environment Act, our Delivery Plans, and the Habitats Regulations. This will enable us to support high quality biodiversity projects beyond our direct landholdings, broadening our impact across the district and embedding the Lawton principles of bigger, better, more joined up.

Through the planning system, we will continue to meet our statutory duties, ensuring Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality are delivered to offset the environmental effects of new developments.

Green Infrastructure underpins this approach. Alongside boosting biodiversity and helping with climate resilience, it offers valued spaces for people to enjoy. In some cases, such as creating Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces, it also directly supports the Habitats Regulations by reducing pressure on internationally protected sites, while opening up new opportunities for wildlife to thrive elsewhere.



Implement and enforce biodiversity net gain requirements in planning

- As the Local Planning Authority, we will ensure all qualifying developments deliver a minimum 10% measurable biodiversity net gain, as mandated by the Environment Act.

Develop and deliver council-led green infrastructure projects

- Beyond our planning responsibilities, we will lead on the design and implementation of Green Infrastructure projects in partnership with local stakeholders.

Support delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces - SANGS

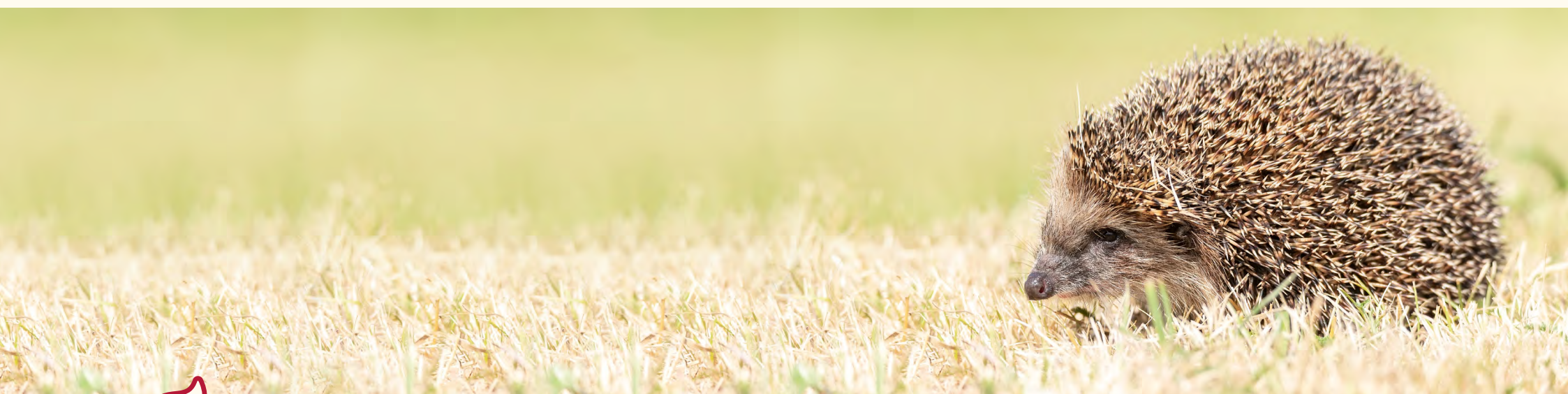
- To reduce recreational pressure on ecologically sensitive protected areas, we will help deliver high-quality SANGs that provide alternative, accessible natural areas for residents, balancing biodiversity protection with community access to nature.

Provide grant funding for local biodiversity enhancement projects

- We will continue to offer and promote the Nature Conservation Fund grant scheme that supports community-led biodiversity improvements across South Norfolk. These include the restoration of ponds, planting of new woodlands, creation of wildflower areas, and habitat improvements on both public and private land.



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Deliver projects on land in South Norfolk that enhance biodiversity and increase species abundance	Biodiversity improvements on 20 acres of land we do not directly own by 2030	Bng1 - Restore and enhance biodiversity in South Norfolk GI Strategy – Supporting nature recovery LNRS – Enhancing biodiversity
To screen and assess all new developments to establish 'likely significant effect' on Protected Sites SACs, SPAs, SSI	If a 'likely significant effect' is the outcome of the screening, then a legal agreement is secured with the local planning authority for contributions towards GI (Green Infrastructure) and RAMS (Recreational Avoidance Mitigation)	The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 Norfolk GIRAMS Strategy and Action Plan



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Assist in the delivery of Nutrient Neutrality mitigation and Biodiversity Net Gain credit sites	As a local authority, we provide advice and legal mechanisms to enable the sale of nutrient and BNG credits. These credits support the delivery of mitigation schemes, often nature-based, to offset environmental impacts. Deliverables will be measured via reductions in kilograms of nitrogen and phosphorus levels achieved per annum, and the number of BNG credits generated	The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
Ensure delivery of BNG through the planning system	Implementation of a mandatory 10% BNG requirement for all new qualifying developments	Environment Act – S98. Biodiversity gain as condition of planning permission



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Nature Conservation Fund: provide funding to support community-led nature recovery projects	Five grants of up to £10,000 offered to local communities in South Norfolk to fund biodiversity enhancement projects	Bng4 - Encourage communities to take proactive steps to improve biodiversity GI Strategy – Supporting nature recovery
Working with the adopted LNRS and Greater Norwich Green infrastructure Strategy to identify key strategic sites for biodiversity increase and nature recovery in South Norfolk	Identification of key strategic areas in South Norfolk for biodiversity increase and nature recovery from LNRS and Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy	Bng5 - Work with the Greater Norwich partnership and other organisations to deliver biodiversity and nature recovery GI Strategy – Supporting nature recovery
Delivery of a new country park for South Norfolk	Enhance and expand green spaces by developing new paths, improving access, and exploring opportunities for a new country park	Bng3 - Increase the provision of green infrastructure



Case Study P2: Supporting biodiversity beyond our boundaries

South Norfolk Council's Nature Conservation Fund

As part of South Norfolk Council's commitment to support nature recovery and connect our residents to accessible greenspaces, The Nature Conservation Fund is supporting Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities, schools and landowners with biodiversity projects through grants of up to £10,000.



Priority three: Inspiring and influencing wider action

P3

While we may not lead or directly fund all biodiversity and nature recovery projects in the district, we play an important enabling role. Through our networks, strategic partnerships, convening power, and planning influence, we can support and encourage landowners, farmers, voluntary groups, and other organisations to take action that enhances biodiversity across a broader landscape.



Ways we influence and support wider biodiversity action:

Facilitating partnerships and convening stakeholders

We will collaborate with key partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors, including organisations like the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Rivers Trust, RSPB, and the Woodland Trust, to identify shared priorities.

Influencing delivery of nutrient neutrality mitigation through nature-based solutions

In our role within the joint venture behind Norfolk Environmental Credits, we will help steer the delivery of nutrient mitigation schemes toward nature-based solutions, such as habitat restoration. This approach allows us to meet legal obligations for nutrient neutrality while also delivering wider ecological benefits.

Promoting landscape-scale recovery and connectivity

We will advocate for and help shape strategic, cross-boundary nature recovery projects that improve ecological connectivity, such as wildlife corridors, river restoration schemes, and woodland planting, particularly those aligning with the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Provide education and training to enable individuals, communities, and land managers to deliver sustainable biodiversity and green infrastructure projects	Deliver a series of workshops, guidance materials, and engagement sessions that encourage biodiversity projects within the district	Bng4 – Encourage communities to take proactive steps to improve biodiversity
Promote and facilitate funding opportunities for community-led green infrastructure projects	Promote and signpost organisations to wider local/national funding in partnership with organisations	Bng4 – Encourage communities to take proactive steps to improve biodiversity
Influence the delivery of nutrient neutrality mitigation through nature-based solutions	Support the delivery of wetlands and other habitat-based solutions via the Nutrient Mitigation Fund and Norfolk Environmental Credits joint venture, ensuring projects deliver both regulatory compliance and ecological benefits	Bng6 – Reduce the impact of nutrient levels in water courses



What we will do	The key deliverables	Strategic priorities met
Respond to statutory consultations to advocate for strong biodiversity policy, including Biodiversity Net Gain in NSIPs	Submit responses to national consultations (e.g. on NSIP BNG implementation) to ensure local ecological priorities are reflected in national decision-making	Bng7 - Achieve a biodiversity net gain on all new developments
Stay informed and engaged with the evolving landscape of mitigation funding, including the emerging Nature Recovery Fund under the Planning Infrastructure Bill	Monitor policy developments, participate in consultations, and use our position to influence how funds are allocated. Where possible, we will advocate for localised ecological benefits and seek to shape delivery mechanisms that reflect district-level priorities	BNG1, BNG4, BNG6 – Support local biodiversity through strategic influence, community empowerment, and effective mitigation



Case Study P3: Inspiring and influencing wider action

Establishing 'The River Waveney Trust at Frenze Beck'

We support and empower community groups, 'Friends of' groups, and charities to take positive action for nature. We provide advice, funding, and practical support to help these groups plan and deliver effective conservation work. Our partnership with the River Waveney Trust at Frenze Beck Nature Reserve demonstrates this approach, showing how good habitat management, collaboration, and volunteer involvement can inspire others to do the same. The site now benefits from a dedicated volunteer group, the 'Frenze Beck Volunteers' who manages it and has become a valued local hub for both wildlife and the community.



Monitoring and reporting



Priority	How we will measure progress
Priority one: Enhancing biodiversity on land we manage	We will conduct baseline ecological surveys on ten council-owned sites to record habitats, species (including protected ones), and site conditions. Each site will follow a tailored Five-Year Biodiversity Enhancement Plan, with seasonal actions such as meadow creation, pond restoration or hedgerow planting. Annual monitoring will assess ongoing progress, and all sites will be resurveyed every 5 years to ensure a 10% uplift has been achieved
Priority two: Supporting biodiversity beyond our boundaries	For projects on third-party or community-owned land, we will measure success through the number and quality of biodiversity projects delivered. Where feasible, we will support projects with baseline assessments, set clear ecological goals, and monitor progress through partner reporting, grant scheme outcomes, and ongoing engagement with landowners and delivery organisations. As the local planning authority, we will also support the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Nutrient Neutrality (NN) measures and report annually on outcomes, including kilograms of nutrients offset and BNG credits sold or delivered
Priority three: Inspiring and Influencing Wider Action	Impact will be tracked through the reach and uptake of initiatives, such as community training, guidance, and collaborative planning. We will document how biodiversity has been embedded into wider land-use decisions (e.g., consultation responses, partnership projects, strategic GI)

Reporting on all three priorities will be published annually on the Council's website. These reports will cover the full scope of biodiversity-related activities undertaken by the Council. This includes work on our own land, projects we fund or support elsewhere in the district, and efforts to inspire and influence wider action.

