

## **Waverley Borough Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2026 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025**

### **1. Background and the purpose of this report**

- 1.1 Section 40 of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#) places a duty on public authorities to conserve biodiversity. Section 102 of the [Environment Act 2021](#) “strengthens” this duty to include the enhancement of biodiversity and places a number of specific obligations for public authorities including:
- consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity,
  - agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration, and
  - act to deliver the policies and achieve the objectives.
- 1.2 The Environment Act also requires qualifying developments to achieve a biodiversity net gain (‘BNG’). This is administered through the planning system.
- 1.3 Local authorities must publish a “biodiversity report” setting out details of the actions taken when meeting these requirements. Local Planning Authorities must include a section setting out what actions it has taken and will take to deliver BNG. This document is our biodiversity report.
- 1.4 The government has published guidance on how to comply with the [strengthened biodiversity duty](#) and [what to put in biodiversity reports](#).
- 1.5 Local Authorities are required to publish reports about how they have met their biodiversity duty on a five-yearly basis. The reports must include information about future actions that will deliver the biodiversity duty.
- 1.6 Local government reorganisation means that Waverley Borough Council will be replaced by the new West Surrey unitary authority in April 2027. Decisions about future actions beyond this period will be the remit of the new authority. As a result, the information about future actions in this report is limited.

#### **Biodiversity Context in Waverley Borough**

- 1.7 Waverley Borough supports a diverse range of landscapes and habitats which contribute to the ecological value of the wider county of Surrey. The borough includes a mixture of rural and urban environments and contains significant areas of woodland, heathland, farmland and river corridors.
- 1.8 The Council manages over 2,200 hectares of land across more than 500 individual sites. These sites include countryside, parks and recreation grounds, commons, cemeteries, road verges, housing greenspaces and other open land, together

supporting a wide range of habitats including woodland, parkland, grassland, heathland, wetlands, watercourses and farmland.

- 1.9 Some of the Council's sites are protected through statutory or non-statutory designations:
- Statutory designations: Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Local Nature Reserves (LNR).
  - Non-statutory designations: Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and common land protected through planning policy.
- 1.10 The borough's landscapes encompass fifteen distinct landscape character types, as identified through landscape character assessments, ranging from chalk downland and wooded greensand hills to river floodplains and wooded low Weald landscapes.
- 1.11 Principal habitat types across the borough include woodland and parkland, grassland and heathland, wetlands and watercourses, farmland habitats, urban green spaces, cemeteries and churchyards, and road verges and hedgerows.
- 1.12 Woodland is a particularly important habitat. Approximately 34% of the borough is covered by woodland significantly higher than the national average of approximately 13%. Key habitats of principal importance include:
- Mixed deciduous woodland, beech and yew woodland, wet woodland, and wood-pasture and parkland
  - Traditional orchards, lowland meadows, lowland calcareous grassland, and floodplain grazing marsh
  - Lowland heathland, reedbeds, and standing open water habitats
- 1.13 Wetland habitats play an important ecological role in the borough. Key wetland features include Frensham Great Pond and Weybourne Local Nature Reserve, alongside numerous smaller waterbodies supporting amphibians, birds and aquatic species.
- 1.14 Agricultural land forms a significant component of the borough's landscape and economy. Arable field margins represent an important habitat for flora, birds and invertebrates.
- 1.15 The Council's biodiversity work therefore takes place within a landscape that contains both highly valuable ecological sites and areas where significant opportunities exist for habitat restoration and improved connectivity.

Biodiversity at a Glance	Key Figures
Total land managed by Council	2,200+ hectares across 500+ sites
Woodland cover	34% of borough (national avg: 13%)
Landscape character types	15 distinct types
Habitat types managed	Woodland, heathland, grassland, wetland, farmland, urban green space, and more
Biodiversity Net Gain requirement	Minimum 10% for qualifying development

## 2. Our policies, objectives and actions

### Corporate plans and policies

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy 2024–2028 sets out a number of priorities including creating a more sustainable borough. This priority includes the outcome of improving biodiversity and preserving the natural environment through:
- protecting and enhancing Waverley's natural environment, landscapes, habitats and wildlife,
  - delivering environmental sustainability, including supporting nature recovery and climate change adaptation,
  - managing parks and open spaces to support biodiversity,
  - ensuring new development minimises environmental impacts and contributes positively to the natural environment,
  - safeguarding designated sites, priority habitats, ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- 2.2 Our Corporate Delivery Plan sets out how we will deliver the aims and objectives of the corporate plan. It identifies the following projects that have relevance for biodiversity conservation and recovery:
- improving the management of Council-owned land to support biodiversity,
  - embedding biodiversity into service planning and decision-making,
  - supporting partnership working to deliver wider nature recovery outcomes,
- 2.3 ensuring planning services supports sustainable development and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements,

- developing internal processes to support monitoring and reporting of biodiversity outcomes.

### **Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan**

2.4 The Council adopted a Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan (2022–2032) which provides the strategic framework for managing biodiversity across council-owned land. The Biodiversity Policy is supported by an associated dataset identifying Council-owned land, its status and designation, and the presence of management plans. The policy sets the following vision:

“To improve Waverley’s natural environment by enriching biodiversity, increasing habitat connectivity across the landscape and promoting community engagement in biodiversity conservation.”

2.5 The policy aims to:

- maximise biodiversity within open spaces
- improve habitat connectivity across the borough
- support biodiversity initiatives and partnerships
- plan for climate change impacts on ecosystems
- develop a robust monitoring strategy
- support biodiversity net gain delivery through planning.

### **Parks and countryside management and Council Assets**

2.6 Some of the council’s most important biodiversity assets are statutory designated sites including Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves. These sites are managed under stewardship schemes such as Higher Level Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship agreements agreed with Natural England. These agreements include defined management prescriptions and monitoring requirements to maintain or improve habitat condition. Management of these sites is overseen by the Council’s Countryside Ranger Team.

2.7 The Countryside Ranger Team manages a wide range of other sites across the borough, including commons and woodlands. Woodland sites are managed in conjunction with the Council’s Arboricultural Team and are informed by woodland management plans where these are in place.

2.8 Woodland habitats are particularly important within the borough and support a wide range of species including birds, mammals, invertebrates and plant communities. Woodland management plans are in place or in development for many of these sites.

- 2.9 The Council manages a range of formal parks, recreation grounds and amenity spaces. These sites primarily provide recreational and community functions but also offer opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Changes to management practices on some sites have included:
- adapting mowing regimes to allow flowering plants to develop,
  - introducing planting schemes supportive of pollinators,
  - retaining habitat features such as hedgerows and trees.
- 2.10 These measures aim to enhance biodiversity while maintaining the recreational value of these sites for residents and visitors.
- 2.11 Delivery of the Council's Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan requires appropriate officer capacity and coordination across services. During the reporting period, progress on some elements of the action plan has been constrained due to limited officer resources.
- 2.12 However, the Council has approved funding to support the recruitment of a shared Biodiversity Officer with Guildford Borough Council. This role is intended to provide dedicated capacity to help progress biodiversity action planning, support evidence gathering and monitoring, and strengthen coordination between biodiversity policy, land management and planning functions.

### **Asset management service**

- 2.13 The Assets team closely works with Waverley Borough Council Biodiversity Policy in our day to day management of Waverley's land and property portfolio. The team works closely with the Greenspaces team and also consult with the team on any new property transactions to ensure that BNG opportunities are fully explored.

### **Planning services**

- 2.14 Waverley Borough Council has adopted the Local Plan Part Two: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies, which provides the detailed policy framework for managing development within the borough. The plan includes a range of policies that contribute directly to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and support the delivery of the Council's biodiversity duty.
- 2.15 The Local Plan Part Two incorporates requirements relating to biodiversity, including:
- protection for designated sites, irreplaceable habitats, priority habitats and protected species;
  - requirements to avoid harm to biodiversity and apply the mitigation hierarchy, seeking to avoid impacts first, then mitigate, and only compensate as a last resort;
  - expectations that development proposals are designed to minimise habitat fragmentation and maintain or enhance ecological connectivity;

- requirements for landscaping and planting schemes that support biodiversity and reflect local character;
- encouragement for development to incorporate biodiversity enhancements within site and building design, including features such as wildlife nesting and roosting opportunities where appropriate;
- implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, requiring qualifying development to achieve a minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity value in accordance with national legislation; and
- alignment with strategic biodiversity priorities, including emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy objectives, where relevant.

2.16 Development Management decision-makers have applied these policies when determining planning applications following the adoption of the Local Plan Part Two. Biodiversity considerations are routinely assessed as part of the planning process, and planning conditions and legal agreements are used where necessary to secure biodiversity protection, enhancement and long-term management.

### **3. Our future actions**

#### **Corporate plans and policies**

- 3.1 Waverley Borough Council will continue to implement the environmental priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy 2024-2028, with a focus on protecting and enhancing the borough's natural environment. This will include integrating biodiversity considerations into corporate decision-making and service delivery, ensuring that biodiversity conservation and enhancement form part of the Council's wider approach to environmental sustainability and climate resilience.
- 3.2 The Council will continue to manage its parks, open spaces and other landholdings in a way that supports biodiversity where appropriate. This will include reviewing management approaches to identify opportunities to enhance habitat value, improve ecological resilience and support nature recovery alongside public access and amenity use.
- 3.3 Officers will continue to engage with the development and implementation of the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy, working with Surrey County Council and other partners to help align local actions with county-wide priorities for habitat creation, enhancement and connectivity once the strategy is adopted.
- 3.4 Partnership working will continue to play an important role in delivering biodiversity outcomes. The Council will seek opportunities to work with neighbouring authorities, land managers, community groups and environmental organisations to support nature recovery and deliver biodiversity benefits across the borough.
- 3.5 Through the delivery of these actions, Waverley Borough Council will continue to strengthen its approach to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, ensuring that

future activity supports both statutory duties and the long-term environmental wellbeing of the borough.

### **Parks, Countryside and Council Land**

- 3.6 The Council will continue to implement the Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan as the primary framework for managing biodiversity on Council-owned land. The dataset identifying Council landholdings, site designations and management status will be updated following a recent programme of site condition surveys and Biodiversity Net Gain potential work undertaken by external consultants. This updated information will help to refine priorities for habitat enhancement and long-term management.
- 3.7 The Countryside Ranger Team will continue to manage designated and priority sites in line with agreed stewardship schemes and management plans, working with Natural England and other partners to maintain and enhance biodiversity value.
- 3.8 The Parks Team will continue to explore proportionate opportunities to support biodiversity within formal parks and recreation grounds, while ensuring that these sites continue to meet their recreational and community functions.
- 3.9 The appointment of a shared Biodiversity Officer with Guildford Borough Council is expected to help progress delivery of the Biodiversity Policy action plan, improve coordination across services, and support future biodiversity reporting.

### **Planning service**

- 3.10 Waverley Borough Council is progressing work on a new Local Plan. The plan will continue to explore opportunities to incorporate biodiversity conservation and enhancement measures within local planning policy, including the role of Biodiversity Net Gain, green infrastructure and alignment with strategic nature recovery priorities.
- 3.11 Development Management decision-makers will continue to apply biodiversity policies and statutory requirements when determining planning applications, ensuring that biodiversity impacts are appropriately considered and that opportunities for enhancement are secured where possible.
- 3.12 Once adopted, the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be incorporated into planning systems and processes, including geographic information systems, to help inform emerging development proposals and planning decisions.
- 3.13 The Council will continue to develop and refine internal processes for tracking biodiversity outcomes, including those associated with Biodiversity Net Gain. This will support effective long-term monitoring, compliance with 30-year management requirements, and future statutory biodiversity reporting.

## **4. Local Planning Authority biodiversity net gain information**

- 4.1 This section sets out the measures and actions the Local Planning Authority took in order to carry out its statutory functions relating to biodiversity gain as a condition of

planning permission. Previous sections cover biodiversity duty actions that are related to the development of planning policy.

### **A summary of action taken**

- 4.2 The Local Plan requirement for qualifying schemes to achieve 10% BNG came into force when the national mandatory BNG requirement began (12 February 2024 for major developments and 2 April 2024 for minor developments). We undertook the following actions to ensure the BNG planning regime was effectively implemented:
- training was provided for Development Management and planning validation officers so that they were able to check that schemes were providing the correct information and were aiming to achieve the outcomes required by local policy and the national BNG regime,
  - we engaged external consultants to provide specialist ecological support to help assess planning applications,
  - where necessary, we have worked with planning applicants to bring their schemes into compliance,
  - in accordance with Defra guidance, we published a note setting out our detailed approach to strategic significance in the BNG metric. We liaised with other authorities and the Surrey Nature Partnership when developing this approach,
  - when approving planning applications, we have applied a pre-commencement condition requiring applicants to submit information that sets out how they will achieve the required 10% BNG.
  - where applicants are proposing significant onsite gains, we have entered into section 106 agreements to make sure those gains are secured for 30 years as required by the Environment Act.
- 4.3 Between 2023 and 2025, Waverley Borough Council has progressed a number of actions set out in its Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan, focusing on improving habitat management, strengthening evidence and embedding biodiversity considerations across council functions.
- 4.4 Key actions delivered during this period include:
- Embedding biodiversity net gain within planning decision-making, including officer training, validation processes and the use of ecological expertise to support Development Management decisions.
  - Supporting the delivery of strategic habitat banks, including the Chiddingfold Habitat Bank, enabling long-term, secured biodiversity enhancements to be delivered locally where on-site provision is not feasible.
  - Confirming a baseline understanding of council-owned land, including mapping of habitats across more than 2,200 hectares of Council-managed sites to support improved monitoring and reporting.

- Targeted habitat management on Council land, including woodland, grassland, heathland and wetland habitats, delivered through the Greenspaces Team, contractors and volunteers.
- Partnership working with parish councils, local conservation groups and county-wide organisations, supporting invasive species management, wildflower establishment, hedgerow planting and community-led biodiversity projects.
- Improved biodiversity monitoring and evidence gathering, including protected species surveys, habitat condition assessments and contributions to county-wide datasets.
- Progress towards consistent management approaches across designated sites, including Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, commons and sites within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.

4.5 These actions have strengthened the Council's ability to demonstrate compliance with its statutory biodiversity duty and laid the groundwork for longer-term delivery

**Biodiversity gains resulting/expected from approved biodiversity gain plans**

4.6 Biodiversity gain plans approved during the reporting period are expected to deliver at least the Council's policy requirement of a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain for qualifying development across relevant habitat categories.

**A summary of plans for carrying out BNG functions in the next five-year period**

4.7 Over the next five-year period, the Council will continue to carry out its statutory BNG functions under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) by requiring full compliance with statutory and local biodiversity net gain requirements for qualifying development, maintaining a consistent and proportionate approach to the assessment of biodiversity gain plans.

4.8 The Council will continue to confirm that planning applications submit the required information (including biodiversity metric tools and habitat maps) and will check biodiversity gain plans to confirm that they comply with the national BNG regime and the biodiversity gain condition.

4.9 Planned actions include:

- Continued delivery and oversight of off-site biodiversity net gain, including the long-term management and monitoring of habitat banks relevant to Waverley.
- Further development of habitat management plans for Council-managed sites where plans are absent or due for review, prioritising sites within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and those supporting priority habitats.
- Enhanced monitoring and data sharing, including reviewing and extending data sharing agreements with partners to improve the quality and consistency of biodiversity evidence used for decision-making.

- Improved communication and engagement, including clearer messaging around biodiversity initiatives, site management works and outcomes for residents and stakeholders.
- Ongoing partnership working, supporting parish councils, community groups and neighbouring authorities to deliver coordinated, cross-boundary biodiversity enhancements.
- Alignment with the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy, ensuring that future habitat creation, restoration and enhancement contributes to agreed strategic priorities.
- Review of opportunities on Council-owned land to further support nature recovery, including the potential for additional habitat creation or enhancement projects where appropriate.

## **5. Information about our authority**

- 5.1 Waverley Borough Council covers a large and diverse borough in south-west Surrey, characterised by a rich mosaic of landscapes, habitats and species of county and national importance. The borough includes extensive rural areas alongside market towns and villages and supports a high level of biodiversity relative to its size and population.
- 5.2 Waverley's ecological diversity reflects its varied geology and landform, including greensand hills, river valleys and low Weald landscapes. These features underpin a wide range of habitats, including woodland, heathland, grassland, wetlands, farmland and river corridors, many of which form part of larger, connected ecological networks across Surrey and adjoining authorities.
- 5.3 Waverley Borough Council manages over 2,200 hectares of land across more than 500 sites, including countryside sites, commons, parks, recreation grounds, cemeteries, road verges and other green spaces. These sites collectively support a wide range of habitats and provide important opportunities for biodiversity conservation, enhancement and public engagement with the natural environment.
- 5.4 A number of Council-managed sites are subject to statutory and non-statutory designations and are managed through stewardship agreements and site management plans. Management is delivered by the Countryside Ranger Team and Parks Team, supported by arboricultural, planning and asset management functions, with a focus on maintaining habitat condition, improving ecological resilience and balancing biodiversity objectives with public access and amenity use.

## **6. Our top achievements**

### **Embedding Biodiversity Net Gain within the Planning System**

- 6.1 One of Waverley Borough Council's key achievements during the reporting period has been the successful embedding of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within the planning system following the introduction of the national regime. The Council has established clear internal processes to support the implementation of BNG, ensuring that qualifying planning applications are accompanied by appropriate ecological information, biodiversity metric calculations and Biodiversity Gain Plans.
- 6.2 Training and guidance have been provided to Development Management and planning validation officers to ensure consistent application of BNG requirements. As a result, biodiversity considerations are now routinely embedded at an early stage in the planning process, helping to secure measurable biodiversity gains from new development and ensuring compliance with statutory requirements.
- 6.3 This represents a significant shift from a historic approach focused on mitigation, towards one that actively delivers biodiversity enhancement through development.

### **Strengthening Policy Alignment Through Corporate Strategy and Plan-Making**

- 6.4 The adoption of Waverley Borough Council's Corporate Strategy 2024–2028 has provided a strong strategic framework for biodiversity conservation and enhancement across Council functions. The Strategy places environmental sustainability at the heart of the Council's priorities and recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing the borough's natural environment as part of delivering a resilient and sustainable future.
- 6.5 The Corporate Strategy is supported by the Corporate Delivery Plan, which identifies actions and projects that contribute to environmental and biodiversity objectives. Together, these documents ensure that biodiversity considerations are embedded not only within the planning service but also across wider Council activities.
- 6.6 This alignment between corporate priorities and service-level delivery is a key achievement in meeting the strengthened biodiversity duty.

### **Integrating Biodiversity into Development Management Decisions**

- 6.7 Another important achievement has been the consistent application of biodiversity policies and statutory requirements in Development Management decision-making. Planning decisions during the reporting period have applied the mitigation hierarchy, safeguarded designated sites and priority habitats, and secured biodiversity enhancements as part of approved schemes.
- 6.8 The use of pre-commencement conditions requiring the submission and approval of Biodiversity Gain Plans, alongside Section 106 agreements where necessary, has ensured that biodiversity gains are legally secured and deliverable over the required 30-year period.

- 6.9 This approach provides certainty for developers, decision-makers and local communities, while ensuring that biodiversity outcomes are embedded within development proposals.

### **Engagement with Strategic Nature Recovery Initiatives**

- 6.10 Waverley Borough Council has actively engaged with the development of the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) during the reporting period. Officer involvement has helped ensure that local priorities and opportunities within Waverley are reflected in the emerging strategy. This engagement supports alignment between local planning decisions, Biodiversity Net Gain delivery and wider county-level nature recovery objectives and positions the Council to make effective use of the LNRS once it is formally adopted.

### **Building Foundations for Long-Term Monitoring and Reporting**

- 6.11 The Council has also made progress in establishing the foundations required for long-term monitoring and reporting of biodiversity outcomes. This includes developing internal processes for retaining biodiversity data associated with planning permissions and BNG commitments, which will support future compliance monitoring and statutory reporting.
- 6.12 While many biodiversity gains secured during the reporting period are expected outcomes rather than completed habitat creation, the systems put in place will enable the Council to track delivery and report on outcomes in future reporting periods.

## **7. Monitoring and evaluating our actions**

- 7.1 Monitoring of biodiversity outcomes forms part of the Council's approach to complying with the strengthened biodiversity duty and is undertaken on a proportionate basis.
- 7.2 Key biodiversity sites managed by the Countryside Ranger Team are subject to monitoring requirements through Higher Level Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship agreements agreed with Natural England. These agreements include defined management objectives and reporting requirements, providing an established mechanism for assessing habitat condition and management effectiveness on designated sites.
- 7.3 For other Council-owned land, including parks, commons and woodlands, monitoring is undertaken through site inspections, arboricultural assessments and reviews of management plans where these are in place. Recent site condition surveys and Biodiversity Net Gain potential work have helped to strengthen the Council's understanding of habitat condition across its landholdings.
- 7.4 Monitoring information is used to inform site management decisions, support delivery of the Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan, and provide evidence for future

biodiversity duty reporting. The Council recognises that monitoring approaches will continue to evolve as officer capacity increases and as national approaches to biodiversity monitoring develop.

## **8. Biodiversity highlights and challenges**

8.1 The council recognises that biodiversity in the borough faces a range of pressures including:

- habitat loss and fragmentation resulting from development pressures,
- disturbance to wildlife from increased recreational use of green spaces,
- invasive non-native species affecting habitat condition,
- climate change impacts on ecosystems, and
- limited funding and staff capacity to implement management and monitoring programmes.

8.2 Metric data collection on biodiversity delivery remains a challenge. The data collection maps habitat works on site. It does not capture all activities that cannot easily be expressed through the data. For this reporting period the work delivered by partnerships has not yet fully been captured in the data collection.

### **Case Studies**

8.3 Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across council services, partners, landowners and local communities. In fulfilling its duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity, Waverley Borough Council has supported the delivery of the Chiddingfold Habitat Bank, developed in partnership with Environment Bank. The site, covering approximately 50 acres, is restoring former intensively managed farmland into a mosaic of priority habitats, including species-rich grassland, native hedgerows and woodland edge habitats. This long-term habitat creation enhances ecological connectivity within a wider network of ancient woodland and priority sites, supporting protected and notable species. By enabling biodiversity net gain to be delivered locally and secured for the long term, the project demonstrates how strategic planning decisions can actively contribute to nature recovery while meeting statutory biodiversity obligations.

8.4. In addition, Waverley Borough Council recognises the strategic relevance of the Hampton Estate Habitat Bank in supporting the delivery of its biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. Located within the Surrey Hills National Landscape between Farnham and Guildford, the habitat bank provides high-quality biodiversity net gain units within the Guildford Borough

Council planning area, with Waverley identified as a neighbouring local planning authority. The estate spans three Biodiversity Opportunity Areas identified by the Surrey Nature Partnership and includes the active management of nationally and locally designated sites, including an SSSI, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest and areas of ancient woodland. Its proximity to the Waverley boundary near Farnham makes it one of the most accessible off-site options for developments within the borough, supporting ecologically coherent and strategically located biodiversity enhancement where on-site delivery is not feasible.