

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Biodiversity Report

Introduction

Local authorities (excluding parish councils) and local planning authorities must publish a biodiversity report.

This biodiversity report documents the policies and actions Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has carried out to comply with its [biodiversity duty](#).

The report covers the period 5 December 2023 to 31st October 2025 and will be published within 12 weeks of 31 October 2025.

Following this, the next report will be published before 31st October 2030.

Section 1:

1.1 Our policies, objectives and actions to meet our biodiversity duty

WHBC has identified “Action on Climate Change” as a Corporate Priority and this is supported by an objective to “Increase and Promote Biodiversity”.

The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016-2036), adopted 2023, contains the following policies, which contribute to advancing the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. Relevant policies / policy extracts as follows:

Policy SP 10 Sustainable Design and Construction

Landscape and biodiversity

New and existing habitat and landscaping are incorporated into the layout and design of proposals in line with sound ecological principles.

Site and building-level landscaping and features promote biodiversity and help achieve other aims, such as climate change adaptation, flood risk and amenity.

Newly created habitat and soft landscaping prioritise the use of native species. Non-native species are only used if they significantly help achieve other policy objectives, such as adapting to climate change.

Proposals seek to create space for growing food, both at a building and wider community scale.

Policy SADM 14 Flood Risk and Surface Water Management

Proposals that require a site-specific flood risk assessment are required to maintain an appropriate development free corridor along watercourses and take opportunities to naturalise watercourses to improve their ecological status, biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

All major development proposals, and all proposals in areas identified as being at risk of surface water flooding, will be required to manage surface water runoff and surface

water flood risk via the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems that... ..use management and control measures that aid multi-functionality of space, enhance visual amenity, support biodiversity and allow for safe interaction with the water environment, as opposed to hard engineered and/or sub-surface features which will be resisted.

Policy SP 12 Green Infrastructure

The Council will work with partners to actively support the creation and enhancement of strategic green infrastructure across the borough. Opportunities to link existing green spaces and to improve public access and amenity will be supported to provide a comprehensive network of functional and linked spaces for the benefit of wildlife, biodiversity and the community. The Council will aim to ensure there is no overall net loss in green infrastructure across the borough within the plan period. Development that would compromise the integrity, functionality or cause significant fragmentation of the green infrastructure network will not be permitted.

Priorities for the creation and enhancement of green infrastructure include river corridors, sites designated for their nature conservation, heritage and/or landscape value and areas of Urban Open Land that are important for community recreation. Development proposals within the borough should plan positively for, and contribute to, the creation and management of high quality, multifunctional green spaces that are linked to the surrounding green infrastructure network. To ensure beneficial results for biodiversity and habitat creation, Hertfordshire's Ecological Networks Mapping should be used (where appropriate) and once available, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, to inform the location and nature of green infrastructure provision.

Welwyn Hatfield Green Corridor

The Green Corridor will connect existing green infrastructure, ecological assets, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways, and provide a community resource that will help maintain a sense of space/separation between Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield consistent with its Green Belt function. It will provide opportunities for the creation of new green spaces; wildlife and biodiversity projects; circular leisure routes; play, sport and leisure facilities; and new off-road routes linked to the surrounding area.

Policy SADM 16 Ecology and Landscape

Ecological Assets

Proposals will be expected to maintain, protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity, the structure and function of ecological networks and the ecological status of water bodies. All developments that are not otherwise exempt will be required to deliver a measurable biodiversity net gain of at least 10%.

Where compensation is required to make development acceptable [following loss or harm to habitat sites and sites of biological importance], necessary financial and/or other provision will be required to deliver and maintain ecological and biodiversity objectives over appropriate time scales.

The Council's **Climate Change Strategy** aims to embed climate change mitigation and adaptation into our plans, strategies and policies by undertaking a range of actions relating to carbon sequestration and nature-based adaptation solutions.

The Council's **Climate Change Action Plan** details projects that will help deliver the overall objectives of the Transition to Net Zero Strategy. Improving biodiversity is a key objective within the plan and it links to other objectives such as carbon sequestration and partnership work.

- Improve biodiversity, by developing local plan policies that: protect the countryside, open spaces, parks and green spaces; enhance the borough's critical environmental assets; create and enhance green infrastructure links across the borough; protect and enhance ecological networks and biodiversity assets. These policies will be subject to public consultation in 2026.
- To keep up to date with best practice and guidance by purchasing ecological advice from Herts CC to inform Local Plan policies and planning decisions.
- Maintain and improve biodiversity. Maintain an up-to-date Tree and Woodland Strategy to guide management of woodlands and street trees.
- Increase resilience to impacts climate change. Ensure that tree officers attend Hertfordshire Tree Health meetings to learn, monitor, report and take action on pests and diseases related to tree health.
- Improve biodiversity by planting and maintaining flowers in key town centre locations.
- Improve biodiversity by establishing and maintaining wildflower meadows along key roads.
- Ensure up to date knowledge and contribute to HCCSP biodiversity baseline study.
- Increase carbon sequestration. Improve canopy cover to alleviate heat island affect in relation to climate change impacts. Explore opportunities for additional tree planting around the borough.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's **Tree and Woodland Strategy (2024 - 2029)** sets out the council's approach to manage the council's trees and woodlands in a safe and sustainable way. This strategy was produced during this reporting period and is a revision of the previous strategy. The policies relating to biodiversity remain, but some reference numbers have changed and are in brackets.

Key policies within the original and updates strategies which help to increase biodiversity are:

Policy 3 Tree Planting: The council's Business Plan has a target to plant at least 300 urban trees across the Borough on publicly owned land each year.

Policy 4 Pests and Diseases: The control of muntjac deer and grey squirrels will be undertaken if the impact of the damage is considered to have a moderate impact on site biodiversity.

Policy 7 (6) Woodland Management: The Council will maintain and enhance Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood as SSSIs and ensure that they are maintained in a favourable conservation condition.

Policy 8 (7) Community Engagement: support volunteers such as Wood Wardens, Friends Groups and the Tree Wardens Scheme.

Landscape Management Plans for the council's woodlands (2 SSSIs and 1 LNR) and other Local Nature Reserves are to be in place to ensure that our sites are managed safely, and for the benefit of nature and biodiversity.

An outline **green space audit** was carried out in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside Management Service. The audit has identified and quantified opportunities for ecological gains across Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council owned greenspaces.

1.2 Actions completed, either alone or in partnership with others, which benefit biodiversity

- Officers from the Council's planning team attend a monthly (single point of contact) meeting, chaired by County Council officers and open to all ten Hertfordshire Districts, to share learning and best practice on biodiversity matters across Hertfordshire, including updates on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire.
- As a result of these monthly meetings, training and development needs have been identified and training has taken place to share learning and development on matters related to biodiversity, in particular mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain.
- In July 2024, officers from across the Council supported the in-person consultation engagement events for the emerging Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery.
- In July 2025, the Council promoted the consultation event for the draft Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

In respect to policies set out in the **Tree and Woodland Strategy** the following key actions have been achieved.

- The Council exceeded its target to plant 300 urban trees across the borough on publicly owned land each year.

In 2023/24, 321 urban standard trees were planted on WHBC and HCC land within the Borough and 300 Whips planted in woodland sites.

In 2024/25, 309 urban standard trees were planted on WHBC and HCC land within the Borough and 363 whips planted in woodland sites.

Over 300 trees have been ordered for the 25/26 planting season and will be planted in the next reporting period.

- Pests and Diseases: at Northaw Great Wood muntjac deer are identified as having at least a moderate negative impact on site biodiversity. The Landscape and Ecology Service arranged managed control of muntjac deer at this site. The number of days on site during the reporting period were: 2024 = 41 and 2025 = 60 days.
- Woodland management: Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Favourable condition status has been confirmed by Natural England for both SSSIs. This confirms that these sites are being maintained in a favourable conservation condition. On 8/3/24, the area of Northaw Great Wood, which is maintained by WHBC, Unit 2, achieved "Favourable" status and it was noted by Natural England that the "site and its management continues to improve for biodiversity and structure". It had previously been assessed as "Unfavourable - Recovering", so this continuation in the site's recovery is an excellent achievement. Sherrardspark Wood was last assessed on 21/1/22 and continued to be confirmed as "Favourable".
- Community Engagement: In the period from 5 December 2023 to 31 October 2025 local volunteers gave an amazing 1,550 days of work.
 - Woodland volunteers carry out tasks include coppicing, tree planting, scrub and grassland management, hedge laying and fencing. Some volunteers lead guided walks and help survey important wildlife species.
 - Tree Wardens volunteer as the 'eyes and ears' for the trees in their neighbourhood. A series of informative meetings have been held in 2024 and 2025 to increase knowledge about trees.
 - Friends' groups and volunteers have maintained town centre planting to enhance biodiversity by planting / maintaining award winning perennial borders and a woodland garden in the heart of Welwyn Garden City.

Landscape Management Plans have been in place for council managed woodlands and Local Nature Reserves in the reporting period at the sites mentioned below. Several of these sites are managed according to government stewardship schemes which ensure the land is managed in a way that: protects, restores or enhances the environment, boosts biodiversity and mitigates the effects of climate change. They also benefit from grant funding.

- Woodland Management Plans at Sherrardspark Wood SSSI, Northaw Great Wood SSSI and Mardley Heath LNR. These sites are managed under a Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier Agreement (2023 – 2028) with DEFRA.
- Landscape Management Plans at Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) including Danesbury, Singlers Marsh, The Commons, Howe Dell and Oxleys Wood. The first three of these sites are managed under an Environmental Stewardship - Higher Level Stewardship Agreement (2023 – 2028).
- Small woods: Forge Orchard has its own management plan.

Green Space Audit

- The Greenspace Audit identified opportunities to alter maintenance regimes on the grounds maintenance contract to support biodiversity. Conservation cuts are now in place for four of these sites.

Climate Change Strategy

- We continue our efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We annually report our GHGE and continue to see a reduction both organisationally and borough wide.

Climate Change Action Plan

- The existing Local Plan was written in 2016. A new plan is being developed and will have more of a focus on climate change, sustainability and the environment.
- Ecological advice has been purchased, and WHBC continue to work collaboratively in the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership's Biodiversity Sub-groups to share best practice.
- The revised Tree and Woodland Strategy (2024 – 2029) has been adopted and is published on the WHBC website. The strategy guides management of woodlands and street trees.
- WHBC Tree Officers have continued to attend Tree Officer meetings with HCC and other Hertfordshire local authority tree officers (these were formally held under the banner of the Herts Tree Health Network) to continue to learn, monitor, report and take action on pests and diseases related to tree health.
- Bulbs, annuals and perennials have been planted and maintained in key town centre locations. Annual bedding includes nectar rich plants, chosen for their impact and their value for pollinators. Some areas of annual bedding have been replaced by perennial beds as a more sustainable option, and two new perennial beds have been established at Anniversary Gardens. These perennial beds offer year-round interest, including berries and seed heads, excellent for wildlife such as birds and pollinators. 150m² of machine planted bee-friendly bulb mix was planted on The Campus, 13500 loose bulbs were planted along Lyles Lane and 250m² of bee-friendly bulbs were planted at Woodhall Open Space. Anglia in Bloom awarded Welwyn Garden City a Gold Award in 2023 and 2024 as well as Best in BID category; and a Silver Gilt in 2025. In 2024 Welwyn Garden City was also awarded Anglia in Bloom “Best Local Authority Floral Display” and “Best Sustainable Planting” and a Silver Gilt for Britain in Bloom.
- Meadow or conservation cuts were provided to 9 existing locations and a further 21 additional sites were added in the 2025 season.
- Officers contributed to HCCSP biodiversity baseline study which resulted in the production of a Biodiversity Baseline Report and Mapping Tool for WHBC.
- Opportunities were explored for additional tree planting in the borough. The Your Tree Our Future Project held in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council has had a record number of participants. In 2024, 10,000 trees were claimed in response to this initiative. In 2025, WHBC increased its contribution to the project, and 13,000 trees have been claimed. These will be given out in the first week of December 2025.

Section 2: Our future actions

This section outlines how Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council plans to fulfil its biodiversity duty over the next 5 years. This section can be referred to in the next reporting period.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- Whilst no off-setting sites for Biodiversity Net Gain have yet to come forward within the borough, the local planning authority is exploring the possibility of introducing a S106 service for off-setting sites, should they come forward in the future.
- The local planning authority is seeking to establish BNG monitoring fees for S106 planning obligations, engaging with other Hertfordshire partners to establish best practice.

As part of the **Tree and Woodland Strategy 2024 – 2029** we plan to carry out the following.

- To plant 300 urban trees across the borough on publicly owned land each year.
- Ensure the managed control of muntjac deer and grey squirrels where the impact of damage has a moderate impact on site biodiversity.
- Maintain and enhance Sherardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood as SSSIs
- support volunteers such as the Wood Wardens, Friends Groups and the Tree Wardens Scheme
- Ensure Landscape Management Plans are in place and implemented for the council woodlands and Local Nature Reserves.

We plan to undertake further actions within the **Green Space Audit**, such as planting, conservation cuts, wildflower meadow creation, woodland edge succession, hedge planting, pond creation and woodland planting as and when appropriate and/or funds are available.

As part of our **Climate Strategy**, we aim to continue to embed climate change mitigation and adaptation into our plans, strategies and policies through a range of actions relating to carbon sequestration and nature-based adaptation solution.

Through the **Climate Change Action Plan**, we plan to

- Develop and follow local plan policies that: protect the countryside, open spaces, parks and green spaces; enhances the borough's critical environmental assets; creates and enhances green infrastructure links across the borough; protects and enhances ecological networks and biodiversity assets.
- continue to work collaboratively in the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership's Biodiversity Subgroups to share best practice.
- Continue to work with other tree officers in Hertfordshire and attend Tree Officer Meetings held by HCC to learn, monitor, report and take action on pests and diseases related to tree health.
- Plant and maintain flowers in key town centre locations with a focus on biodiversity and sustainability.
- Establish and maintain wildflower meadows along key roads.

- Continue to explore opportunities for additional tree planting around the borough.

Section 3: Biodiversity net gain information

How we have monitored biodiversity gains and the results of this monitoring:

- Since the introduction of mandatory BNG (12 February 2024 for major developments and 2 April for minor developments), the local planning authority has determined 2 applications involving the approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan following the grant of planning permission. Monitoring indicators from these BGPs are set out below.

How we have used our land as a biodiversity gain site.

- Currently, there is no land owned by the Local Authority that has been put forward for the primary purpose as a biodiversity net gain site.

How we have supported the development of a local BNG market.

- As part of the Local Plan Review, two Call for Sites were held in Spring and Summer 2025. Amongst other land uses, site promotions were invited for the use of land for biodiversity net gain offsetting / nature recovery. No sites for this primary purpose were submitted during the Call for Sites.

Quantitative Data:

The number of biodiversity gain plans approved

Type of development / monitoring period	Approved biodiversity gain plans
Major development (between 12 Feb 2024 and 31 October 2025)	1
Small sites (between 2 April 2024 and 31 October 2025)	1

The split between on-site and off-site gains and statutory credits

Delivery mechanism	Split
On-site gains	100%
Off-site gains	0%
Statutory Credits	0%

The net gain in number of units and average percentage gain across approved biodiversity gain plans

Type of habitat units	Net gain in number of units
Area units	1.06 units
Hedgerow units	1.83 units
Watercourse units	0 units

Number of approved Biodiversity Gain Plans	Average % gain across all approved BGPs
Area units	45.3%
Hedgerow Units	254.1%
Watercourse Units	0%

Section 4: Information about WHBC - planning and development decisions

Biodiversity net gain is a way of creating and improving biodiversity by requiring development to have a positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity.

Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition"). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development.

Section 5: How you have considered other strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS):

All public authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must "have regard" to relevant local nature recovery strategies in the process. The draft LNRS was subject to consultation and due regard is had to the LNRS in plan-making.