



## Report to Policy Committee

**Author/Lead Officer of Report:** Rowan Longhurst, Service Manager – Countryside

**Tel:** 07826942956

**Report of:** *Ajman Ali, Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services*

**Report to:** *Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee*

**Date of Decision:** *11<sup>th</sup> March 2024*

**Subject:** *Summary of the Task and Finish Group for biodiversity on Council land (in response to the Council's Declaration of a Nature Emergency)*

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

### **Purpose of Report:**

This report seeks agreement from the Committee to endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group which met between July 2023 and January 2024 and to approve the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.

### **Recommendations:**

The Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report and thank everyone involved in the productive and useful discussions had during the Task and Finish Group.
2. Endorse the recommendations proposed by the Task and Finish Group.
3. Approve the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.

### **Background Papers:**

*Link to Council motion declaring a Nature Emergency in Sheffield: [Sheffield City Council - Agenda for Council on Wednesday 16 June 2021, 2.00 pm](#)*

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Adrian Hart</i>
		Legal: <i>Louise Bate</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>Ed Sexton</i>
		Climate: <i>N/A</i>
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	<b>SLB member who approved submission:</b>	<i>Ajman Ali, Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services</i>
3	<b>Committee Chair consulted:</b>	<i>Cllr Richard Williams</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	<b>Lead Officer Name:</b> <i>Rowan Longhurst</i>	<b>Job Title:</b> <i>Service Manager - Countryside</i>
	<b>Date:</b> <i>14/02/24</i>	

## 1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 Sheffield has declared a nature emergency. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world and is in the bottom 10% globally. This loss is caused primarily by human population, agricultural and urban expansion, habitat loss, pollution, invasive species and climate change. Nature is our life support system.
- 1.2 However, nature has an extraordinary ability to recover, and we can solve this problem. It is critical that we all focus our efforts towards helping the natural world. Sheffield City Council is combating this issue locally by developing multiple solutions at a local and regional level. These include a review of how we develop, use and manage land across the city and the creation of new nature-based solutions.
- 1.3 The natural history of Sheffield is very special, a unique confluence of geography, geology, climate and ecology. The city and its wider region sits in a fairly central location in the British Isles, nestled in the ‘foothills’ of the eastern Peak District with a hugely varied landform that ranges from very low level (Don Valley <30m) to the moorland line (western moors >500m). The city has very varied habitats, from neutral and acidic grasslands, higher altitude heather moorland and bog and lower-level dry heaths and extensive woodland coverage. Five major rivers (and many lesser watercourses) flow through Sheffield. This natural diversity means that Sheffield boasts a rich and varied natural environment, often supporting species that are at risk and threatened nationally.
- 1.4 Sheffield is also a heavily wooded city, with canopy cover already exceeding the government’s 2050 target. Within the city’s extensive woodland area are over 80 ancient woodlands. Ancient woodlands are woods that have existed since at least AD 1600 and have developed irreplaceable, complex ecosystems. Woodlands in Sheffield comprise the majority of the city’s Local Wildlife Sites – resulting in green arteries that weave their way through the city, often following watercourses and acting as vital habitat corridors.
- 1.5 The Environment Act 2021 has set legally binding targets to halt species decline by 2030, and as a result a number of new legislative requirements are in place which strengthens the Local Authority’s legal ‘Biodiversity Duty’. In addition, the Government’s Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP) builds on the 25 Year Environment Plan and sets out further goals to improve the environment and increase prosperity.
- 1.6 Changes to the planning system with the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies are two of the main mechanisms which will help local and regional authorities take action for nature and meet 2030 targets.

- 1.7 As a city, we're incredibly privileged to access such rich landscapes, however, they are under threat – by climate change, urban pressures and a lack of management caused by continual pressures on resources. In order to effectively meet 2030 and EIP targets we must manage our own resources effectively and maximise partnership working and recognise that holistic ownership and management of Council land is required to deliver on nature recovery.
- 1.8 The Task and Finish Group met five times between July 2023 and January 2024. Membership of the group was drawn equally from the 3 political parties on the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee at the time. All members were from the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee, though substitutes from outside the committee were sought when required. Officers from various Council Services attended depending on the agenda item.
- 1.9 Following a stakeholder mapping exercise, the group extended the invitation to key partners in the city. These were:
- Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust,
  - Green Estate/Chair of the Green Space Forum (where representatives of the city's community groups/Friends' of convene) and
  - Eastern Moors Partnership.
- 1.10 During these sessions a range of topics was covered to brief Members on the issues impacting the biodiversity crisis, the Council's biodiversity duty and opportunities to work collectively with communities and partners to halt species decline.
- 1.11 These sessions are summarised in Appendix 2, with the key recommendations that stemmed from discussions outlined below:
1. Approve the Council's 'First Consideration' under its enhanced biodiversity duties which is provided in Appendix 1.
  2. A further report be produced on proposed biodiversity objectives and policies no later than Spring 2025, to align with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
  3. A further report be produced to outline the action needed to increase our commitment to give 30% of our land to nature by 2030 (including reference to climate change, land, trees & woodlands and green & open spaces) to 40%.
  4. Note the work already being undertaken to promote biodiversity enhancements in Sheffield – details of this are included in the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.
  5. Recognise the contributions and expertise offered by officers from the Ecology, Planning, Climate Change, and Parks and Countryside

Teams and the external partners that brought a wealth of knowledge to the Task and Finish Group.

6. Acknowledge the role that the Council plays in bringing stakeholders together, sharing knowledge, promoting best practice and inspiring the city to take action for nature.
7. Recognise the rich and diverse natural environment in Sheffield, and the importance of both managing what we already have, as well as what can be created.
8. Support the ‘Lawton Principles’ and that we should strive for habitats that are “*More, bigger, better and joined*” in order for nature to thrive.<sup>1</sup>
9. Propose that the Parks and Countryside Service works with City Future colleagues to develop an organisational response to the findings. This should outline resourcing structures, a strategic lead for nature recovery and commit to establish a group that continues the work of the Task and Finish Group and wider stakeholders. This work should shape a Nature Emergency Action Plan and progress other policies, projects and plans already in motion.
10. Build on evidence from the Sheffield State of Nature report and forthcoming South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and priority species lists to set local species recovery targets and work plans with partners.
11. Note that high quality, biodiverse, accessible, safe and resilient green spaces are not evenly distributed across the city and often more deprived communities are most adversely impacted by the climate and nature emergencies. A more prosperous city is one where nature thrives in an equitable way and can support a thriving community through the benefits it provides.
12. Recommend the Parks and Countryside Service continues to review land management practices (including mowing regimes) and prioritise opportunities for habitat restoration, creation, and enhancement in the city’s green spaces.
13. Support changes in land management that maximise practical opportunities for Nature Based Solutions, whilst acknowledging change can be difficult in some situations. This should focus on Natural Flood Management, so green spaces contribute to ‘slowing the flow’ and also help to sequester carbon and increase biodiversity.
14. Propose that appropriate resource is allocated to meet the Council’s enhanced biodiversity duties. Note that this resource will not sit within one Policy Committee. This will support the production and delivery of the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network, Submitted to the Secretary of State, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 16 September 2010, can be accessed [here](#)

and enable the revenue potential of Biodiversity Net Gain to be maximised and an associated policy produced.

15. Recommends that apprentices and Parks and Countryside staff continue to be trained to play a key part in building and maintaining productive relationships with communities and groups engaged with nature recovery on council land. And recommends that they are supported with appropriate site-specific land management plans to encourage good ecological practice and empower communities to take action for nature.
16. Recommends that Parks and Countryside produces an update report on glyphosate use on Council owned and managed land.
17. Agrees to develop a communication plan that shares the vision for Sheffield to be a city where nature thrives alongside a thriving community, so that communities are empowered and included. This could include biodiversity awards similar to the allotments awards.
18. Recommends that opportunities for initiatives that enhance wellbeing through human engagement and connection to the natural environment and nature are explored. Recognises that fast growing, widely accessible and cost-effective initiatives are used by other local authorities and relevant external funding sources should be utilised.

## **2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?**

- 2.1 Responding to the Nature Emergency was a public commitment made by Sheffield City Council in June 2021. Understanding the city, its existing makeup and the opportunities that exist on various land will be key in responding to both the nature emergency, and the linked climate emergency.

## **3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?**

- 3.1 Following a stakeholder mapping session three external partners were invited to join the Task and Finish group to provide their expertise and help shape discussion and recommendations. They were the:
  - Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust,
  - Green Estate/Chair of the Green Space Forum (where representatives of the city's community groups/Friends' of convene) and
  - Eastern Moors Partnership.

- 3.2 These partners brought a wealth of direct experience and were able to share the views of other community groups from around the city.

#### **4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

##### **4.1 Equality Implications**

- 4.1.1 Whilst an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required for this report, we recognise that more disadvantaged communities are disproportionately impacted by Climate Change and by association the Climate and Nature emergencies.

- 4.1.2 Individual projects, proposals or other initiatives requiring a committee decision will include their own EIAs as appendices to reports.

##### **4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications**

- 4.2.1 There are no specific financial or commercial implications arising from this report however, the recommendations each carry with them a degree of resource requirement. Whilst many reflect current and ongoing work and part of various services day to day workloads, in most respects they require further resources to deliver. Council departments proactively seek and apply for funding that helps deliver on this work. Workstreams associated with new legislative requirements such as implementing Biodiversity Net Gain are particularly resource intensive and are not yet fully known due to their complexity. Any requirement will be brought in a future report.

##### **4.3 Legal Implications**

- 4.3.1 The Council's duties in relation to species abundance and Biodiversity Net Gain are summarised in Appendix 1.

The Task and Finish Group was formed in line with the Council's Constitution.

There may be legal implications arising from future decisions and actions to implement proposals. Future proposals and their legal implications will be the subject of further reports where required.

##### **4.4 Climate Implications**

- 4.4.1 There are no specific climate implications arising from this report however, it is widely accepted that there are strong links between the climate and nature emergencies, in many instances they are inextricably linked. Climate Impact Assessments will be completed as required throughout the process and for any resulting actions.

##### **4.4 Other Implications**

4.4.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 Do nothing. Not responding to the nature emergency declaration and working across the Council and with partners across the city would prevent us capturing the work being undertaken and understanding the scale of the challenge going forwards.

## **6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 The Task and Finish Group brought together a focused group of Members, Officers and external partners to examine key challenges around the nature emergency and provide clear advice and direction to officers developing an action plan for the Council and city.

The breadth and scale of the challenge means that the work of the Task and Finish Group represents one stage in a wider strategy that the Council and city work on to support nature recovery and the scale and cross cutting nature of this agenda is not yet fully understood.



# Sheffield City Council Biodiversity Duties First Consideration Report: Complying with the Biodiversity Duty

## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To raise awareness of the Biodiversity Duty for Local Authorities as set out in the 2021 Environment Act.
- 1.2 To highlight the key issues for Sheffield City Council (SCC) in complying with the Duty including who is best placed to lead on these new obligations and how the work will be resourced.

## 2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 This report sets out the key requirements of the Biodiversity Duty for local authorities as set out in the 2021 Environment Act and the issues for SCC in complying with the new Duty.
- 2.2 The Government produced guidance for local authorities on what is required on 17th May 2023 – this is summarised in this report at Annex 1. This is effectively a new work area for SCC although we can include a number of existing workstreams to show how we are currently addressing biodiversity as this report highlights. SCC does not currently have an up-to-date Biodiversity Strategy, but it has signed up to its own Nature Emergency Declaration in 2021 and committed to developing a comprehensive Nature Emergency Action Plan for the city.
- 2.3 The action local authorities take for biodiversity will contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets on biodiversity. The [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP23\)](#), published in January 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment.
- 2.4 By 2030, the Government has committed to:
  - halt the decline in species abundance,
  - protect 30% of UK land.
- 2.5 By 2042, the Government has committed to:
  - increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels;
  - restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats;
  - reduce the risk of species extinction;
  - restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.
- 2.6 SCC's Nature Emergency Declaration recognises the catastrophic impacts on our natural world as a result of the climate and biodiversity crisis and modern development, while setting out ongoing and future measures to help support the city's natural environment.

## 3. What is the Biodiversity Duty and timescale for compliance?

- 3.1 Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduces.
- 3.2 This means that, as a public authority, you 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.

3.3 You must complete your first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024. You must agree your policies and objectives as soon as possible after this. It is anticipated that there may be further clarification about exactly what is required. You must reconsider the actions you can take within 5 years of when you complete your previous consideration. You can decide to do this more often, for example, you could reconsider your actions quarterly, annually, or every 5 years. Due to resourcing levels, it has not been possible to finalise the First Consideration by the 1 January 2024.

#### **4. Government guidance on complying with the strengthened Biodiversity Duty**

4.1 The Government produced guidance on compliance with the strengthened Biodiversity Duty on 17th May 2023. This includes a suggested format for reporting on compliance – a link to the full guidance is included in Annex 1.

4.2 The first three sections of the Government guidance – shown in Annex 1 - are statutory and we must complete those. The remainder of the guidance outlines the range of activity which could be included in our report on how we are meeting the Biodiversity Duty.

4.3 Annex 3 contains a table setting the activity which could be included to demonstrate compliance with the Biodiversity Duty and a summary of current activity within SCC. This covers the establishment of a clear policy and strategic framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity as well as considering how we manage our own land and buildings and how we could influence others in the city including local residents.

#### **5. Complying with the statutory parts of the guidance**

5.1 Section 1 requires us to set out our policies and objectives for meeting the duty and the actions we have already completed, either alone or in partnership.

5.2 Section 2 requires us to show how we have considered other biodiversity related strategies. This includes the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – itself another new requirement introduced by the 2021 Environment Act. The first LNRS will be produced by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) with a proposed timescale for completion of spring 2025. SYMCA is the designated Responsible Authority for producing the LNRS and has been fully engaged with all the South Yorkshire Local Authorities, surrounding districts, local Wildlife Trusts, Natural England and other partners in the developing LNRS process.

5.3 In Section 3 we must explain how we intend to fulfil the biodiversity duty over the next five year reporting period. This must include reporting on how we are delivering against another new duty introduced by the 2021 Environment Act – delivering Biodiversity Net Gain through the planning system.

5.4 Again, we have been working closely with SYMCA, other South Yorkshire Local Authorities and partners to prepare for the new BNG duty – the requirement for all new developments to deliver a minimum 10% Net Gain in Biodiversity became mandatory in February 2024. SCC's draft Local Plan (the 'Sheffield Plan') was submitted for examination on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023, and includes a specific policy on BNG. The current timetable for adoption of the draft Sheffield Plan is spring 2025.

- 5.5 SCC is currently having ongoing internal discussions looking into the potential opportunities for providing its own offset sites (habitat banks) while exploring scope for becoming a Responsible Body. In becoming a responsible body SCC would need to ensure the requirements of a conservation covenant are being achieved including future monitoring and enforcement action.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 The Council has declared both a Climate and Nature Emergency in recent years, and with both being heavily interlinked measures to mitigate climate change will naturally bring benefits to biodiversity and vice versa delivering wider environmental gains for the city. The Council supports the 'Lawton Principles' and will strive towards enhancing and building an ecological network of habitats that are "More, bigger, better and joined" in order for nature to thrive.
- 6.2 Annex 3 sets out how policy, strategies and changes to the way the Council manages its estate will help to halt the decline of nature within the city and in doing so support its gradual recovery.
- 6.3 The implementation of national mandatory requirements including BNG and the LNRS will support local strategies to help nature's recovery; however the burden this will impose on staff resources through increased workload and financial pressures are recognised, and we must think about the most effective staffing structures to be able to respond appropriately.

## **Annex 1: Government guidance on complying with the Biodiversity Duty – reporting framework**

This Annex sets out the requirements that SCC need to comply with in meeting the Biodiversity Duty.

### **Section 1: Your policies, objectives and actions**

You must include this information in your report. Explain:

- the policies and objectives you have set to meet your biodiversity duty,
- the actions you have completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.

### **Section 2: How you have considered other strategies**

You must include this information in your report. Explain how you have taken into account:

- LNRS
- protected site strategies
- species conservation strategies

For example, include information about how:

- you have advised or worked in a LNRS partnership in your area,
- these strategies influenced your policies, objectives or actions.

### **Section 3: Your future actions**

You must include this information in your report:

- Explain how your organisation plans to fulfil your biodiversity duty over the 5 years following the end of this reporting period.
- You can report your plans for future actions in each section of your report alongside the ones you have achieved.
- Alternatively, you can summarise your plans for future actions separately. This will form part of your monitoring and evaluation as you can refer to this section in the next reporting period.

### **Biodiversity net gain information (for local planning authorities only)**

You must include information on biodiversity net gain if you are a local planning authority. This should be a separate section in your report.

As a local planning authority, you must include:

- a summary of the actions you have carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations,
- details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans you have approved,
- a summary of how you plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period.

You can include quantitative data in this section of your report. It is optional, but it can add useful detail to your report.

In 2023, Defra will provide a suggested format for tabulating any quantitative data on biodiversity net gains you choose to include.

The full government guidance is here:

[Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversity-duty-actions)

[Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty)

## **Annex 2: SCC Declaration of a Nature Emergency (21.05.2021):**

**Councillor Alison Teal, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Neighbourhoods, Wellbeing, Parks and Leisure at Sheffield City Council, said:**

*"We strongly support declaring a nature emergency for many reasons. The climate crisis and pace of modern development undoubtedly has a huge impact on our natural world, with many wildlife and plants suffering the consequences. Our Parks and Countryside service is working in partnership with local environmental organisations like the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust and the Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership, to address this crisis and enhance biodiversity in the city.*

*"We recognise the essential role that nature plays in our eco-system and the urgency to defend our wildlife so it not only survives but can thrive. Sheffield is one of the greenest cities in Europe, with more than 800 green open spaces across the city, and these green assets and environments put us in a strong position to be ambitious and deliver projects that protect and put nature first.*

*"Sustainability and ecology are fundamental to our priorities and can be seen in every part of our work. Ongoing projects include wildlife friendly roofing for bats and birds, the introduction of ponds to support species such as the Great Crested Newt, relaxing of mowing routines and cultivation of meadows to support bee and insect populations, the huge restoration project at Forge Dam, and many community forestry projects that will contribute towards our commitment to plant 10,000 more trees each year under our trees and woodlands strategy.*

*"We're also prioritising green spaces and parks in new developments, such as Grey to Green which has transformed the concrete landscape of our city centre with wild flowers, trees and shrubs, and Pounds Park, a new public space planned within the Heart of the City development.*

*"We agree with the need to address declining biodiversity and our aim is to develop a city-wide biodiversity action plan as soon as possible. It's encouraging to see so much public support for nature and our environment, and we will look to bring a motion to council at the earliest opportunity to declare a Nature Emergency."*

**Councillor Terry Fox, Leader of Sheffield City Council, said:**

*"In line with our commitments to achieve net zero and address the climate crisis, the nature emergency we are facing is an ideal subject for our new cross party transition committee.*

*"We all agree that the state of our climate and declining biodiversity is an emergency of the highest level and we'll be discussing how we can progress this with the urgency it deserves."*

SCC aims to develop a comprehensive Nature Emergency Action Plan (NEAP) for the city. This will include updated habitat and species plans that link to the Local Plan and the Outdoor City, as well as forthcoming nature recovery networks and the Green and Open Spaces Strategy and Trees and Woodland Strategy to provide a future vision and roadmap for Sheffield's environment.

The link below is to the 'resolutions' passed on 21 June 2021 at Full council declaring the Nature Emergency.

[Resolutions Passed at the Council Meeting on 16th June 2021](#)

**Annex 3: Evidence of Compliance with the Biodiversity Duty (Overview of Current and Future Biodiversity Activities within Sheffield City Council)**

<p><b>Policy and objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Extant Sheffield Habitat Action Plans (HAPs)</b>          To aid biodiversity conservation SCC have drawn up Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) for grassland, woodland, heathland and wetland habitats across 130 target sites in Sheffield.</p> <p>Part of the current HAPs is to identify which of these target sites need to be maintained, which need restoration, and which are suitable for the creation of habitat. We work in partnership with land managers to bring about such changes, either in an advisory or more active role.</p> <p><b>Nature Emergency Declaration</b>          SCC declared a Nature Emergency in 2021 (see Annex 2 for further details). As part of the declaration SCC committed to developing a Nature Emergency Action Plan for the city.</p> <p><b>Draft Sheffield Plan</b>          The draft plan was submitted for examination in October 2023, with an estimated timescale for adoption of spring 2025. The draft plan includes specific policies on biodiversity and BNG, as well as other associated policies.</p> <p>Part 1 Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BG1 – Blue &amp; Green Infrastructure</li> </ul> <p>Part 2 Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GS1 – Development in Urban Green Space Zones</li> <li>• GS5 – Development and Biodiversity</li> <li>• GS6 – Biodiversity Net Gain</li> <li>• GS7 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows</li> <li>• GS10 – Protection and Enhancement of Water Resources</li> <li>• DE3 – Public Realm and Landscape Design</li> </ul> <p>As part of the draft Sheffield Plan site allocation process, all sites were required to submit a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (using the UKHab methodology), so that an understanding of each sites ecological baseline could be established, which would help inform the shortlisted site allocation process. In addition, each site was assessed by SCC’s Ecology Service in relation to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy habitat baseline mapping and other data. This assessment helped to discount some sites which would have significant negative impacts on biodiversity while also helping to inform the need for site specific conditions relating to biodiversity on shortlisted sites, for example, a</p>
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	<p>requirement for the delivery of BNG on site where this would help connect and enhance the future SYLNRS.</p> <p><b>Planning Guidance/SPD's</b>          SCC produced a Biodiversity Net Gain Technical Advice Note (BNGTAN) in September 2023, to provide guidance on how BNG should be achieved as part of planning submissions as the statutory implementation dates approach. The BNGTAN can be viewed via the following link:  <a href="https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-development/local-planning-guidance">https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-development/local-planning-guidance</a></p> <p>SCC proposes to produce a Draft Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document in 2024 to provide further detail in supporting the draft policies in the Sheffield Plan. The intention is to adopt the SPD once the Sheffield Plan has been adopted (now expected to be spring 2025).</p> <p><b>Climate emergency</b>          SCC has declared a climate emergency and in December 2023 the Strategy and Resources Committee issues a suite of statements on behalf of committees, including the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee. This statement noted the creation of the Biodiversity Task and Finish Group and the proposal for incorporating the nature emergency into council governance in the same way as the climate emergency.</p> <p>A plan for the role of the city and council's land in decarbonising and adapting the city to the changing climate is being developed during 2024 and is anticipated to include priorities to protect biodiversity and support nature recovery at the same time as tackling the climate emergency.</p>
<p><b>Background and baseline for SCC</b></p>	<p><b>Ecological input</b>          The Council's Ecology Service continue to provide consultee input into all planning applications where the presence of habitat and/or wildlife is indicated, and advise other sectors of Council on biodiversity duty, conservation policy and legislation.</p> <p><b>Ecological Assessment for Local Plan</b>          See above Policy &amp; Objectives – Draft Sheffield Plan.</p> <p>Of the Sheffield Metropolitan Boundary (i.e. excluding the area of the city that falls within the Peak District National Park Authority Boundary) 18.7% is designated as a Local Wildlife Site, 3.2% is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and 0.2% as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This means that 22% of the metropolitan area is covered by a local or national nature protection designation.</p>



**Habitat Survey**

Scoping work is underway to identify potential habitat banks in SCC land ownership. In addition baseline UKHab ecology surveys have been undertaken on a small number of SCC-owned sites, for the purposes of identifying sites suitable for BNG delivery.

**Recent surveys of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and some other sites**

LWS 're-surveys' are undertaken yearly on a select number of sites. Options for improvements and biodiversity uplift on failing sites (i.e. those *not* in 'positive conservation management') are evaluated. Other, non-LWS sites are currently being identified for BNG delivery potential and LNRS.

**Streets Ahead – Indicative Biodiversity Action Plan**

SCC's Highways Service in partnership with Amey has an indicative Biodiversity Action Plan in place for the Streets Ahead Contract.

**Streets Ahead – Protected Sites Database**

Protected ecological sites are all logged in SCC's Management Information System (MIS) with operatives having access to digital maps of this and physical signage deployed at site to prevent accidental grass or vegetation cutting etc.

**Natural Capital Assessment**

In collaboration with all four South Yorkshire Local Authorities and other additional partners, SYMCA has commissioned a detailed mapping evidence base of our natural environment. The [report](#) by Natural Capital Solutions contributes detailed evidence of the benefits that natural ecosystems provide and the opportunities to enhance them. This evidence base will be used to inform South Yorkshire's upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy (see below).

These maps are derived from multiple datasets and are modelled estimates of natural environment characteristics. As such, the data is not intended to provide an exact or full account of natural environment characteristics for each land parcel, but instead to guide policy and project development decisions.

**South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (SYLNRS)**

The SYLNRS is led by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) as the responsible authority. The supporting authorities are the four South Yorkshire Authorities, Natural England and the Peak District National Park Authority. An Advisory Group and working groups include wider stakeholders such as the



	<p>local Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and others who will help shape a deliverable and informed strategy.</p> <p>The project is currently ongoing, but the current timeframe to complete the SYLNRS is spring 2025.</p>
<p><b>Management of our own estate and important sites.</b> The Guidance lists the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allotments</li> <li>• cemeteries</li> <li>• parks and sports fields</li> <li>• amenity spaces and communal gardens</li> <li>• roadside and railway verges</li> <li>• field margins and hedgerows</li> <li>• rights of way and access routes</li> <li>• woodlands and nature reserves</li> <li>• canals and rivers</li> <li>• water-dependent habitats</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) in Parks</b> Delivery of sustainable drainage solutions in parkland across the city will deliver wider biodiversity and environmental benefits beyond flood risk management. Projects to date include Manor Fields, Pipworth Recreation Ground, Arbourthorne and Beighton SuDS.</p> <p><b>Sheffield Flood Programme</b> As we look to increase and formalise flood storage to reduce flood risk to our city, we have identified a number of locations in parks and outdoor spaces (including a golf course) for new flood storage areas. This gives us an opportunity to increase biodiversity at these sites through our capital investment.</p> <p><b>To Mow or Not to Mow!</b> SCC's Parks &amp; Countryside Service has adopted a relaxed mowing regime on 98ha of Council owned land, with further opportunities to be explored. This will contribute towards addressing the nature emergency and help increase biodiversity in the city's green spaces. Work is ongoing to explore further opportunities for a more naturalised management regime in our parks.</p> <p><b>Tree Planting</b> The Sheffield Tree and Woodland Strategy (STWS) aims to plant at least 100,000 additional trees and replace trees on a 2 for 1 basis in our greenspaces and woodlands between 2018 and 2028. They will be planted across the whole city but largely in the areas where tree canopy coverage is lowest (often areas of higher deprivation). During the 2022/23 winter planting season the Community Forestry team worked with schools and community groups to plant 8,679 trees in the city's schools, greenspaces and woodlands. Over 10,000 trees a year have been planted since the approval of the STWS, so the Council remains on track to achieve its long term target.</p> <p>Other tree planting projects have been delivered in upland areas as part of Natural Flood Management schemes (see Projects and Partnerships).</p> <p>SCC continues to apply for external funding for tree planting, for example funding totalling £143,000 has been secured through the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund to accelerate tree and woodland planting.</p>

	<p><b>Rural Estate Management Plan (REMP)</b> The REMP was approved in April 2023, and includes 5 objectives, one of which is 'Integrated Land Management'. This objective sets out plans to utilise the rural estate to maximise the provision of ecosystem services, reduce emissions and the address the nature and climate emergencies; utilising nature-based solutions in collaboration with third parties where appropriate. An example of this includes a relaxed mowing regime on Council land (see above 'To Mow or Not to Mow').</p> <p><b>SCC Annual Climate Action Report 2023/23</b> The Council's Climate Action Strategy sets out a target to produce a route map during 2024 on how we use our land. Although its focus is on the Climate Emergency it is likely to promote measures to help address the Biodiversity Emergency as well.</p>
<p><b>Assessment of impact of current policies and activities on Biodiversity</b></p>	<p><b>Nature Emergency Declaration</b> Refer to Annex 2 weblink to 'Resolutions passed at the Council Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021', which praises current positive activities while identifying actions to be carried out.</p> <p><b>Sheffield State of Nature Report (2018)</b> As well as showcasing the city's impressive array of natural habitats, the report highlights a pressing need to do more to protect local wildlife whilst recommending ways to achieve this. The SSNR was produced through the Nature Counts Partnership, which includes a range of representatives including SCC's Ecology Service.</p> <p><b>Sheffield Biological Records Centre (SRBC)</b> SCC manages the SBRC, which holds information on the distribution and abundance of species across Sheffield. This provides accurate up to date information on biodiversity and species populations so conservation and management can be effective as possible.</p>
<p><b>Projects and Partnerships</b></p>	<p><b><u>Projects</u></b> <b>Recent and ongoing projects:</b></p> <p><b>Grey to Green</b> An award winning drainage system in the city centre, designed to manage water flow sustainably, while bringing benefits to nature through planting and biodiversity design features which encourage insects to feed, roam and shelter. The principles developed through the Grey to Green project are now being carried forward into further city centre and transport projects including Heart of the City and Fargate and set a blueprint for future works.</p>

As part of the funding requirement for the Phase 2 Grey to Green schemes the proposals had to demonstrate an increase in biodiversity net gain over the assessed baseline value. The BREEAM Land Use and Ecology calculator was used to determine the final biodiversity value of the two respective projects in Phase 2. The combined Castlegate/Exchange Place/Snig Hill sites (completed 2020) demonstrated a 561% increase, while the Angel Street site (completed 2022) demonstrated a 643% increase in net gain.

**Other recent and ongoing projects:**

- Burbage Valley – Nature Improvement Area (NIA)
- Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Partnership
- Upland Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes
- Water-vole conservation
- South-east Sheffield Ponds Project
- SCC re-roofing project (bats and birds)
- White-clawed crayfish: ‘ARK’ sites
- Willow tit conservation
- Black poplar planting (UK’s rarest timber tree)
- Chelsea Road elm tree
- White-letter hairstreak butterfly conservation
- Sand martins on the River Don

**Current and forthcoming projects and statutory requirements:**

**Castlegate Public Park**

A proposed scheme to create a new public park in the city centre on the site of the former Castle Market. Work is proposed to start on site in January 2024, with a completion timescale of summer 2025. The design proposes a high quality public realm including a planting approach similar to Grey to Green, bringing benefits to invertebrates, while the proposed de-culverting of a 65m section of the River Sheaf will introduce a new river habitat within the site.

De-culverting the River Sheaf will allow for re-naturalisation of the channel, fish passage and aquatic planting. A variety of options were developed for the fish passage with the final chosen design bringing the greatest benefits to biodiversity by incorporating an extended rock ramp and nature like channel. The new public park will also include tree, shrub and herbaceous planting.

As part of the initial Ecological Impact Assessment screening opinion SCC’s design team committed to a target of a 200% Biodiversity Net Gain and achieving ‘Building with Nature’ accreditation for the scheme. An initial feasibility stage Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and BNG assessment submitted for planning showed

the proposals would achieve a 19.96% net gain to habitat areas and a 176.03% net gain to river habitats. However, further ecological enhancements have been incorporated into the scheme since planning which are now likely to result in an even higher net gain percentage in the forthcoming BNG design stage report..

**Other current and forthcoming projects and statutory requirements:**

- Beaver re-introduction: feasibility
- Shirebrook Valley: Habitat enhancements
- Swift conservation: citywide
- Parkwood Springs – Active country park
- Grassland management: to mow or not to mow! –
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems
- Nature Recovery: South Yorkshire ‘Local Nature Recovery Strategy’
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

**Partnership working**

**Upland Natural Flood Management scheme**

The Natural Flood Management (NFM) project carried out on Whirlow Playing fields involved partnership working between SCC, the Environment Agency and Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust.

The Steel Valley Project NFM project, is taking place on sites around Bradfield and Stocksbridge, and involves partnership working between the Steel Valley Project, Environment Agency and SCC. Work includes installation of leaking dams, new ponds and restoring existing ones as well as planting 7,500 trees in the catchment of the Upper Don.

**Streets Ahead Indicative Biodiversity Action Plan (IBAP)**

SCC & Amey are working collaboratively with the Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust as well as representatives from the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership (SSTP) to push the IBAP forward in 2024 by means of a comprehensive review.

**South Yorkshire Woodland Partnership (SYWP)**

SCC is one of the Steering Group members of the SYWP. The partnership provides free woodland creation help to landowners in South Yorkshire, with the aim of establishing well-designed, resilient woodland that provides multiple benefits to people, wildlife and the climate. The Partnership collaborates on wider tree and woodland strategy across the region.

**Sheffield Street Tree Partnership (SSTP)**

The SSTP includes SCC, Amey, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Sheffield Tree Action Group and the

	<p>Woodland Trust amongst others. The partnership is working to achieve the sustainable management of Sheffield's street trees along with increasing the existing street tree stock.</p> <p><b>Sheffield Lakeland Partnership (SLP)</b> The SLP includes SCC, The Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency, Sheffield Hallam University and Natural England. Following a National Heritage Lottery funded programme of projects which created a more connected and resilient landscape in the north west of Sheffield the partnership is now committed to a <a href="#">10 year working strategy</a>. The strategy provides a framework for future action with a focus on nature recovery at a landscape scale.</p>
<p><b>Communities and volunteers</b></p>	<p><b>Activity through Ranger teams Friends Groups</b> Rangers work with Friends Groups on a wide range of SCC sites across the city</p> <p><b>Local wildlife groups</b> There are a number of long-running, well-organised conservation groups operating across the city, e.g. Gleadless Valley Wildlife Trust, Shirebrook Valley Conservation Group, Friends of the Porter Valley, Beauchief Environment Group, Rivelin Valley Conservation Group.</p>
<p><b>Education and awareness raising</b></p>	<p><b>Ranger Teams</b> The Rangers organise events, often based on some of our main sites, such as Ecclesall Woods and Shirebrook Valley. They also supervise the work of conservation and friends groups.</p> <p><b>Parks &amp; Countryside Service (PCS)</b> PCS undertake the following in relation to Biodiversity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and communication reviews</li> <li>• Asset and tool review to understand requirements for future management practices.</li> <li>• Reviewing the plants used in bed planting.</li> </ul> <p>PCS continue to develop their apprentice programme to reflect the changing skillset needed to understand and tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies and changes in land management techniques and approaches.</p> <p><b>Streets Ahead – Skills</b> In house teams with specialist skills in implementing Green/Blue Infrastructure have delivered the award winning Grey to Green schemes.</p> <p><b>Community Orchards</b></p>

	<p>Support and training has been funded by Local Area Committees to support communities to better maintain existing community orchards in Beighton and Darnall, supporting tree health and providing opportunities for communities to have access to affordable, fresh and sustainably produced food.</p>
<p><b>Actions and reporting</b></p>	<p><b>BNG implementation</b> We are still in the very early stages of implementing BNG as delivered through the planning system.</p> <p><b>BNG off set sites</b> Work is progressing on identifying suitable sites for BNG off-setting. Delivery of our first BNG habitat projects is likely to commence soon following a strategic review of our land.</p> <p><b>BNG reporting elements</b> No BNG reporting has been undertaken to date.</p> <p><b>Local Plan monitoring</b> No BNG monitoring has been undertaken to date. As part of the future monitoring process the Draft Sheffield Plan, once adopted, will annually monitor the percentage of new developments providing at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, along with the amount and type of BNG provided through development.</p> <p><b>Biodiversity Report</b> SCC will produce its first Biodiversity Report, no later than 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026. The Biodiversity Report will set out the policies and actions SCC has taken to comply with the Biodiversity Duty.</p> <p><b>Streets Ahead – Carbon emissions</b> As part of the Streets Ahead contract records and reports are meticulously produced monitoring carbon emissions on a monthly basis as well as calculating the carbon capture from the highway tree stock and other green estate assets.</p>

<b>Challenges</b>	<p><b>Development pressures on land</b> While there will always be pressures on nature via development seeking to maximise the potential of a site, some measures have been implemented through the Draft Sheffield Plan as part of the site allocation process. These include site conditions being added to sites requiring BNG to delivered on site where a site is located in or adjacent to the future LNRS. This will help to protect, enhance and improve connectivity between habitats in the city.</p> <p><b>Lack of dedicated officer resource</b> Administering BNG is a significant challenge and demanding of officer time. This will place substantial burdens on teams associated with the BNG process including Planning, Ecology and Legal. We need to review how teams are structured to ensure we can manage this as efficiently as possible.</p>
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## **Appendix 2**

### **Overview of the Task and Finish Group sessions**

#### **Session 1 – Governance and Agenda setting.**

***Planning Session – Stakeholder Mapping*** – Sheffield’s diverse and knowledgeable partners who play a role in supporting and shaping nature’s recovery in the city. This included organisations that manage land on our behalf.

- a) Recognise the importance of wide stakeholder engagement in empowering communities to take action for nature and that many groups and organisations across the city and region play a role in supporting nature Recovery.
- b) Consider the reinstatement/refresh of a citywide partnership that brings together stakeholders with a vested interest in the city’s outdoors and the environment.

**Session 2 - Overview of related work from the Ecology, Planning and Climate Change Teams.** *This included the ecology and biodiversity of the Sheffield area, the Local Plan and associated planning policy.*

- c) That the Climate and Nature Emergency is inextricably linked and must be considered holistically in relevant plans and policy
- d) That climate impact assessments require explicit consideration of potential impacts on habitats and biodiversity.
- e) That the emerging Sheffield Local Plan will be the main spatial planning document to guide and shape development in the city and that supplementary planning guidance (SPG) will be drafted to strengthen policies that support nature recovery
- f) Further briefings are provided for members on the council’s approach to delivering Biodiversity Net Gain and the regional Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- g) That the city commissions a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, and adopts the Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards
- h) Ensure the city embraces its rivers and waterways network as an ecological, economic, heritage and social asset.

**Session 3 – External Partner Engagement – Representation from the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Green Estate/Chair of the Green and Open Spaces Forum and Eastern Moors Partnership.** *Partners were invited to share their work and thoughts on how we can work together to respond to the biodiversity emergency.*

- i) That opportunities to link into wider place marketing and the ‘Outdoor City’ brand are maximised to further support a citizen’s understanding of our treasured natural environment and how they can help enhance and protect it and the city should seize the

moment to communicate a clear vision on what a 'Healthy and green Sheffield looks like'.

- j) The council should continue to build on existing and explore new and innovative partnerships at a local, regional and national level – these organisations have a wealth expertise and access to resources.
- k) Partnerships can help prepare a pipeline of 'shovel ready' projects that will help achieve large scale impact and could form a 'Green Investment' opportunity.

#### **Session 4 – Understanding the '30by30' targets and how this informs Sheffield's habitat and species priorities.**

- l) That the council identifies opportunities to meet international targets to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030 (known as 30by30)
- m) Acknowledges the challenge associated with the resource needed to adequately monitor, report and manage our Local Wildlife Sites, but equally recognises the importance of accurate and robust data for these sites.
- n) Opportunities for 'citizen science' can bring great value to monitoring our designated sites if appropriately resourced and managed.
- o) The Parks and Countryside service continues to work with other service areas to identify SCC land which delivers LNRS priorities (e.g. BNG Habitat banks, peatland restoration, wetland, woodland, and grassland creation etc)
- p) The Ecology team continues to work with colleagues in planning to identify opportunities to connect habitats and embed this in spatial decision making.

#### **Session 5 – Governance and next steps – *Understanding important milestones relating to the Environment Act 2021 requirements and how we ensure a collective of understanding is achieved across the council.***

- a) That subject to the Board approving the request, the Climate Oversight Board becomes the 'Climate and Nature Oversight Board'
- b) That biodiversity is considered as part of an impact assessment.
- c) Future work and resourcing should focus on ensuring ecological considerations are embedded in decision making across a range of service areas notably planning, landscape design, land management, facilities management (notably renovation of property), active travel design, infrastructural corridors, and roads.
- d) That upcoming reviews of relevant strategies will embed nature recovery within them.

It is proposed that a number of recommendations from the Task and Finish Group are taken forward and acted upon as part of existing work streams, or where resources allow considered as new activities



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