



Harborough District Council Biodiversity Duty Report

March 2026

Appendix A

What is the Biodiversity Duty

When originally enacted, Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 required that 'every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'.

The Environment Act 2021 then amended Section 40 of the NERC, to further strengthen the 'duty' placed on local authorities. Planning Practice Guidance for complying with the biodiversity duty, sets out that:

'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. This means that a public authority must:

- Consider what the council can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration.
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.

To meet its biodiversity duty public authorities should have completed a 'first consideration' of what action to take for biodiversity by 1st January 2024 and then agree policies and objectives as soon as possible after this date. Agreed actions should then be reconsidered within five years of completion of this 'first consideration' with subsequent rolling reconsiderations at a frequency of no longer than every five years.

Local authorities (excluding parish councils) and local planning authorities must publish a biodiversity report which documents the policies and actions carried out to comply with the biodiversity duty. The end date of your first reporting period should be no later than 1 January 2026. After this, the end date of each reporting period must be within 5 years of the end date of the previous reporting period.

The status of biodiversity in Harborough District

The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been recently adopted by Leicestershire County Council. The Strategy was compiled collaboratively with all local authorities, with input from many partners. The LNRS has mapped the habitats of the area and identified areas where habitats could be improved or created.

The baseline study identifies that tree cover is lower in the area than the national average (6% compared to 13%). More concerning only 1% of the whole area has a high biodiversity score. The area suffers from flooding, poor quality soils, mineral exploitation, pests and invasive species.

According to Harborough Local Plan 1.21% of the Harborough district's area is covered by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) while a further 0.42% is

covered by Local Wildlife Site (LWS) designations. There are several SSSIs in the east of the district protecting the remains of ancient woodland which are of high nature conservation, landscape and historical importance. The district has one geological SSSI, the Tilton Railway Cutting.

The data is fully mapped and provides a baseline for action which is found here at [Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy | Leicestershire County Council](#)

What can Harborough District Council do to meet the enhanced Biodiversity Duty?

Action on biodiversity across Harborough District is covered by the following plans and policies.

1. [Corporate Plan](#) sets out the Councils' priorities and is delivered through statutory functions and agreed areas of action including the Climate Emergency Action Plan, which provides monitoring for many of the priority activities, particularly in relation to climate and biodiversity.

2 [Local Plan and supporting documents](#)

Provides a place-based approach to sustainable development. It is monitored and enforced through planning teams. This includes specific agreements around open space and typologies (including natural and semi natural greenspace on new development at the rate of 8.5 ha per 100 population) and the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement. [Draft local plan for submission](#)

Corporate Plan 2024-31

The Corporate Plan aims to address four key priorities in its implementation.

- Place and community
- Healthy lives
- Environment and Sustainability
- Economy

The Corporate plan has a series of critical outcomes that it seeks to address, the following outcomes are particularly important in relation to the biodiversity duty.

- CO5 -The district will be shaped through good design that addresses local needs and promotes healthier life choices
- CO10 – Physical and mental health will be addressed to prevent crisis and support those that are most vulnerable in our communities including those that face loneliness, food and fuel poverty and those that need support to remain in their own homes.

- CO11 – Our natural environment will be protected and enhanced with improved access to green open space and increased biodiversity.
- CO13 – Environmental crime will be reduced and enforcement will be used to achieve this.
- CO16 – Environmental impacts of growth are mitigated as far as practically possible.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

Harborough District Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and the Climate Emergency Action Plan details action under 6 commitments.

1. The Council commits to demonstrate political and corporate leadership in acting on climate change
2. The Council commits to managing its own assets and services, with the aim of reducing carbon emission to net zero by 2030, as far as practical
3. The Council commits to working with residents and communities to support their actions in reducing emissions and help them increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change
4. The Council commits to working with businesses to support their actions in reducing emissions and help them increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change
5. The Council commits to ensuring that new development is designed to mitigate emissions and be resilient to the impacts of climate change
6. The Council commits to working in partnership to promote resilient natural systems that will help to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Biodiversity initiatives are integrated throughout the activities outlined in the plan. Each year, an annual delivery plan is developed in consultation with various Services as part of the organization's service planning process. Specific actions and key performance indicators (KPIs) are established, and progress is reported to the Cabinet on a quarterly basis. Some examples of the work we have been doing in Harborough District include:

Rewilding schemes

Leadership is an important aspect of the climate emergency plan and on biodiversity work. In 2025, the Council demonstrated its commitment to environmental stewardship by acquiring three plots of land, (133.3 acres to the north of Market Harborough) which will support nature restoration alongside public access, part of a dedicated [rewilding project](#). This initiative aims to restore native habitats, encourage wildlife return, and provide new green spaces for the community to enjoy. The rewilding project will focus on increasing biodiversity by planting native species, establishing wildflower meadows, and creating habitats for pollinators, birds, and small mammals. The Council will also work closely with local environmental groups and volunteers to support ongoing maintenance and educational activities within the park.

Encouraging nature back into towns

In addition to land acquisition, the Council is exploring opportunities to enhance urban biodiversity. Plans are underway to install a [peregrine falcon](#) nesting ledge on the Council offices, providing a safe space for these protected birds of prey and helping raise awareness of local wildlife conservation.

Furthermore, the Council is investigating the [installation of swift boxes](#) around its buildings. These boxes offer vital nesting sites for swifts, a species that has seen a decline in numbers due to loss of suitable nesting habitats. By promoting such projects, the Council not only supports the local ecosystem but also encourages residents to participate in conservation efforts, fostering a sense of community stewardship for nature.

Improving Council owned parks and open spaces.

Working on Council-owned parks and land is a vital source of biodiversity and also showcases the Council's stewardship and forward-thinking approach to climate matters. Harborough has proactively shifted from traditional municipal planting to pollinator-friendly planting in parks, which has resulted in a noticeable increase in bee populations in local green spaces. Interpretation boards are placed alongside these plantings to help visitors understand the changes and the benefits of wildflower areas.

The Council also maintains a robust tree management program, with trees checked regularly and managed carefully. Any trees that are removed are promptly replaced, and additional planting has taken place across the district to enhance green cover. Close collaboration with local "In Bloom" groups has further advanced pollinator-friendly initiatives. For example, two tiny forests were recently planted in Market Harborough and Broughton Astley in partnership with EarthWatch, engaging over 100 community volunteers in hands-on environmental action.

Partnerships with parish councils and volunteer groups are central to these efforts. At a recent community planting event, a participant shared, "Being part of the tiny forest project gave me a sense of ownership and pride in helping create a legacy for future generations." Such strong community involvement not only builds trust but also encourages broader participation in the Council's sustainability initiatives.

Working Together

The Council collaborates with a range of partners to enhance biodiversity and strengthen environmental stewardship across the district. These partnerships, spanning government agencies, environmental organizations, and community groups, play a vital role in delivering tangible benefits for local ecosystems and residents. By supporting diverse initiatives, the Council encourages local participation and cultivates a shared sense of responsibility for nature

The Council works closely with the Leicestershire County Council Invasive and Non-Native Species Initiative (LINNSI) to tackle the proliferation of invasive species, thereby protecting native plants and wildlife and preserving the ecological integrity of parks and waterways. In addition, collaboration with the flood authority enables the Council to participate in natural flood management schemes, which help mitigate flood risks and enhance water quality for local communities. Through the Green Living Leicestershire Partnership, the Council actively encourages sustainable living practices, promoting environmental well-being and delivering benefits for both residents and the wider district.

The East Mercia River Trust manages the Welland River catchment, where it has implemented natural flood management strategies and addressed pollution resulting from run-off and septic tank discharges. These interventions have contributed to improved water quality and fostered healthier river ecosystems. Similarly, the Soar Catchment Partnership leads initiatives for natural flood management within the Soar Catchment and has created wildflower habitats along the Sence, thereby restoring natural landscapes and enhancing local biodiversity.

The Council actively supports Harborough Woodland's ongoing tree planting ventures, with a particular focus on expanding woodlands in the Welland Valley. These collaborative efforts have not only increased the district's woodland cover but also contributed to greater carbon sequestration, helping to address climate challenges. Additionally, the Council has facilitated community tree giveaways, distributing over 8,000 fruit trees to individuals and groups across the area. This initiative enables residents to take a hands-on role in enhancing their local environment, while also strengthening community engagement and fostering collective responsibility for green projects.

The Council works with this partnership to promote food growing in schools, community allotments, and other settings. These efforts foster healthy eating, support local food businesses, and encourage community self-sufficiency.

Through strategic partnerships and targeted initiatives, the Council has achieved measurable improvements in biodiversity, flood resilience, and community engagement. By supporting both organized groups and individual residents, the Council fosters a culture of stewardship, empowering the community to contribute to a greener, more sustainable future for the district.

Policy Frameworks to enhance Biodiversity

Local Plan

The current Local Plan has robust policies to promote and enhance biodiversity. Including policies in site specific policies. The importance of green infrastructure is supported as is biodiversity.

Table 1: Summary of Local Plan Policies impacting on natural environment

<p>6. Natural environment: Protect, maintain, restore and enhance the quality, diversity, character, local distinctiveness, biodiversity and geodiversity of the natural environment, creating biodiversity and geodiversity links between terrestrial and aquatic wildlife sites ensuring that open countryside is protected against insensitive and sporadic development, the characteristics of the local landscape are respected and the unnecessary loss or sterilisation of natural resources is prevented.</p>	<p>GD2: Settlement development, GD3: Development in the countryside, GD4: New housing in the countryside, GD5: Landscape character, GD6: Areas of Separation, GD7: Green Wedges, GD9: Mineral Safeguarding Areas, GI1: Green infrastructure networks, GI2: Open space, sport and recreation, GI3: Cemeteries, GI4: Local Green Space, GI5: Biodiversity and geodiversity, CC1: Mitigating climate change, CC2: Renewable energy generation, CC3: Managing flood risk, CC4: Sustainable drainage, IN1: Infrastructure provision, IN2: Sustainable transport, IN4: Water resources and services, L1: East of Lutterworth Strategic Development Area, SC1: Scraftoft North Strategic Development Area, MH1: Overstone Park, MH2: East of Blackberry Grange, MH3: Burnmill Farm, F1: Land off Arnesby Road.</p>
--	---

The Local Plan is supported by several strategic documents, including the [Open Space Strategy](#), which lays out the amount of green space of different typologies that need to be included in any development. The Open Space Strategy includes specific requirements for natural and semi-natural green spaces, trees, and hedging. The delivery of these typologies is supported through the Development Management process, with specific conditions and agreements and is enforced through Planning Enforcement. The current provision from the Open Space Review (2025) is summarized below,

Open Space Typology	Current Provision (ha)
Allotments, Community Gardens and Orchards	26.36
Amenity Greenspace	147.67
Cemeteries and Other Burial Grounds	43.45
Civic Spaces	1.05
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (including Urban Woodlands)	884.50
Parks and Gardens	29.21
Provision for Children and Young People	10.35
Total (rounded to two decimal place)	1,142.59
Greenways	1,108km

Since 2021 the amount of open space has generally **increased** across all typologies following adoption of the Open Spaces Strategy

Open Space Typology	No (2021)	No. (2025)	Change in No.	Area (ha) 2021	Area (ha) 2025	Change (ha)
Allotments, Community Gardens and Orchards	36	38	2	22.85	26.36	3.51
Amenity Greenspace	312	370	58	109.95	147.67	37.72
Churchyards and Other Burial Grounds	109	108	1	43.50	43.45	-0.05
Civic Spaces	5	5	0	1.05	1.05	0.00
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (includes Urban Woodlands)	117	140	23	871.82	884.50	12.68
Parks and Gardens	9	8	-1	38.05	29.21	-8.84
Provision for Children and Young People	66	68	2	10.34	10.35	0.01
Total (rounded to two decimal places)	654	737	83	1097.56	1,142.59	45.03
Greenways				700km	1,108km	408km

Progress on the Open Space Strategy is assessed every five years during scheduled reviews and updates. While it is challenging to regularly monitor site conditions, audit results have indicated an improvement in quality since 2021.

Sites by Quality Score

Quality Banding	No. of Open Space Sites	% of Sites
Excellent	24	7.79%
Very Good	86	27.92%
Good	115	37.34%
Fair	70	22.73%
Poor	13	4.22%
Total	308	100%

The table below provides an overview of the range of quality and value scores achieved in the site audits. There were only **13 sites** that had a Quality score of Poor. These typologies were Amenity Greenspace and Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (including Urban Woodlands). The greatest range of quality score is within Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (including Urban Woodlands) typology. The greatest value scores range was for Amenity Greenspace.

Range of Quality and Value Score by Typology

Open Space Typology	Sites Audited	Range of Quality Scores	Range of Value Scores
Allotments, Community Gardens and Orchards	N/A	N/A	N/A
Amenity Greenspace	165	41-99	3-79
Cemeteries and Other Burial Grounds	48	57-95	10-76
Civic Spaces	5	62-97	20-52
Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspace (including Urban Woodlands)	51	29-92	9-70
Parks and Gardens	6	67-98	21-68
Provision for Children and Young People	33	60-89	11-81
Total	308	-	-

[Emerging Local plan policies](#)

The emerging Local Plan is at Regulation 19 stage and will be going for examination during 2026.

The objectives of the new plan include

Tackling climate change and enhancing the natural environment: Reduce carbon emissions and implement climate adaptation strategies. Improve the quality of the natural environment by reducing pollution, protecting, enhancing, and extending biodiversity, and creating green infrastructure.

The objective for biodiversity is supported by four specific policies. Each of which you can find in the [developing local plan](#)

The Strategic policy:DS03: Tackling Climate Change and Enhancing the Natural Environment

This policy establishes the overarching framework for reducing carbon emissions, enhancing biodiversity, and improving the quality of the natural environment.

The strategic policy DS03 sets the overarching goals for climate change and environmental enhancement, which are operationalised through the following development management policies:

- DM05: Green and blue infrastructure and open space
This policy focuses on the protection and enhancement of parks, waterways, and other natural spaces within urban areas, aiming to improve ecological connectivity and provide accessible green spaces for communities.
- DM10: Biodiversity and geodiversity protection and enhancement
This policy aims to safeguard and improve habitats, species, and geological features, ensuring that development contributes positively to the district's ecological networks.
- DM11: Managing impacts on land and water quality
This policy is designed to minimise and manage the effects of development on soil health and water resources, supporting high standards of environmental protection.

In addition, the requirements for biodiversity and climate change are covered for site specific policies, as appropriate.

The development of the Local Plan is supported by a wide range of evidence. The Blue Green Infrastructure Study was prepared to identify opportunities for improved biodiversity and open space. The study recognises that Harborough District is mainly farmed land so opportunities for large scale natural areas is limited.

The district is large, covering 59,269 hectares of which only 7.8% is built environment. The chance of developing an approach to deliver 30% of land managed for biodiversity by 2030 (UN 30 by 30) is severely limited, compared to areas with significant national parks. With nearly 80% of all land managed as grassland or for crops farm stewardship is an important way to improve biodiversity.

Biodiversity Net Gain in Development Management

In England, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by the Environment Act 2021). Biodiversity Net Gain is a process to ensure that new development enhances the biodiversity present on the site, or buys offsite credits. It is in place for larger planning applications and in general a gain of 10% is mandated.

HDC have introduced BNG and it is processed via a requirement of the planning application, which is enforced as the site development moves forward to completion. The site will not receive final sign off unless the BNG agreement is fulfilled. Since the duty was enacted the below sites have required a BNG contribution. In some cases the site will not be able to deliver the full BNG requirement and then developers can buy accredited off site contributions.

Below is the current list of offsite gains

Planning Application Reference	Location	Proposal	Date of Decision	Parish	Method of BNG Delivery	Notes
25/00313/FUL	18 Coopers Lane, Dunton Bassett	Erection of 9 dwellings and associated access, landscaping and drainage infrastructure	21.8.2025	Dunton Bassett	Registered Offsite Gains	Small Sites Metric
24/00736/FUL	Windmill Farm Park Langton Road Kibworth Harcourt Leicestershire	Change of use of paddock to extend car park for farm park visitors	16.1.2025	Kibworth Harcourt	Registered Offsite Gains	
25/00764/FUL	Land At Langton Road Foxton Leicestershire	Change of use from agricultural land to equestrian land and proposed access track and stable block	12.8.2025	Foxton	Onsite Gains	
25/01281/FUL	44 Elmcroft Road North Kilworth	Erection of 1x two storey dwelling (Resubmission)	18.11.2025	North Kilworth	Registered Onsite & Offsite Gains	0.15 area-habitat units to

	Leicestershire LE17 6HX	of 25/00940/FUL)				achieve BNG
25/01672/FUL	South Lodge Walcote Road South Kilworth Leicestershire LE17 6EQ	Proposed portable holiday accommodation unit	5.2.2026	South Kilworth	Onsite Gains	Small Sites Metric, BGP application to be determined

How Harborough District Council will fulfill its Biodiversity Duty

Harborough District Council intend to include actions relating to protecting and enhancing biodiversity duty in the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The Plan is updated and monitored annually and reported via Corporate monitoring.

The Council will take a leadership role in publicising and informing residents on the importance of biodiversity, including working with our communities to provide a biodiverse district. The Council will also look at ways to engage with communities, including through Nature Towns and Cities accreditation. The Council will also work with neighbouring local councils to ensure biodiversity duty is incorporated in the Local Government Reorganisation and carried forward to the new local government structures in Leicestershire.

The following specific actions will be incorporated into the annual reporting mainly under commitments 5 and 6:

Commitment 5

- Investigate processes that could be adopted to monitor BNG delivery more effectively.
- Investigate processes to monitor the ongoing state of BNG sites
- Investigate processes to better monitor open space delivery and state of open spaces more regularly (ideally annually)
- Identify potential sites for BNG accredited offsite delivery (including the new country park)

Commitment 6

- Continue with delivery of biodiversity improvements on our own land, including further opportunities for habitat creation.
- Provide interpretive information for residents on sites developed for biodiversity to increase knowledge and understanding

- Deliver the new rewilding project and country park. Including public engagement, habitat creation, investigation of accreditation for carbon and BNG credits as part of the ongoing maintenance.
- Engagement with parishes and communities to enhance biodiversity in their local areas
- Working with partners such as the Catchment Partnership to identify projects that can also enhance biodiversity.

Progress So far

Below are a number of examples of works that have already taken place and will continue to develop to enhance the biodiversity of the Harborough district.

- Land for has been acquired and in partnership with Wildlife Trust and others is being developed into an important strategic nature recovery site for South Leicestershire.
- [Community Environmental Grants](#) have been put in place and communities have used these in some cases for improved biodiversity, including for glowworms.
- The Green Living Leicestershire Partnership have worked on a [Sustainability Parish Toolkit](#), which includes action on biodiversity.
- BNG is calculated on relevant sites and Planning Enforcement monitor the site to ensure delivery.
- New Open Space Strategy has provided a overview of green spaces and the state of natural and seminatural green space in the district. This will form the basis for future targets.
- Harborough parks and green spaces have been planted across the district with pollinator friendly plants and importantly interpretation boards provided to explaining to residents the reason for the planting.
- [Two tiny forests](#) have been planted in the district, in partnship with Earthwatch. These provide opportunities to engage with residents. Iver 600 trees have been planted in these tiny forests
- 600 trees have been planted on HDC land to bring a woodland environment into an urban area.
- Working in partnership new tree planting, natural flood management and other biodiversity improvements have been delivered incuding [Smeaton Westerby Local nature project](#).
- Harborough District Council delivered a [tree give away](#) with 8,000 native fruit trees given away to residents and communities
- Harborough District has [two AQMA's](#) with active management and monitoring. The AQMAs are in Lutterworth and in Kibworth. The Lutterworth AQMA has been below the threshold level for over 2 years following work to improve traffic flow. There is also a portable air quality monitor, that allows other areas of concern to be investigated. Harborough was part of a project to measure the impact of wood burning in rural areas.

Conclusion

Progress on Biodiversity duty will be reported annually as part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Harborough District Council has identified specific areas to work on over the next few years, particularly in relation to the rewilding project but also in relation to monitoring and enforcing BNG more effectively and working with communities and landowners on partnership projects.

Leicestershire Authorities are currently going through reorganisation and the form of the new unitary councils has not been agreed. The district and borough councils are collaborating to identify a common approach delivering, monitoring and reporting on biodiversity duty to ensure that the process is streamlined. This will include agreed reporting structures for the new authorities to ensure continuity of reporting progress.

Appendices to report

BNG reporting In Idox/Uniform for Harborough District council.

< Reception Consideration Pre-App CIL Decision Specials Forward Planning **Biodiversity Net Gain**

BNG Summary | BNG Details | BNG Additional | BNG Monitoring | BNG Offsite | BNG Exemptions | Map | Print | Index

App No. Pre-App Address
U.P.R.N.
Status

Proposal

Biodiversity Net Gain

BNG Applicable? Included on Register? Trading Rules Satisfied?
Initial Habitat Survey Undertaken? Competent Person
Date of Survey Notes
Ecological Impact Assessment? Assessment Date Notes

BNG Stage Application Assessment Site Monitoring Reporting (to Govt)

Start Date End Date
Start Date End Date
Start Date End Date

Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy Reasons for why the hierarchy is not followed

Background research on BNG Monitoring Tools and Methods currently being utilized by other councils

Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tools

- Developed by Defra, these tools calculate biodiversity units based on:
 - o Habitat type, condition, size, distinctiveness, and strategic significance.
- Includes versions for major developments and small sites.
- Available as Excel-based calculators with detailed user guides. [civitynge.com], [gov.uk]

BNG Monitoring Fee Calculators

- Councils like North Yorkshire and Rushmoor use fee calculators to estimate costs for monitoring over the 30-year period.
- Fees cover staff time, legal advice, software, and site visits.
- Helps councils budget and justify resourcing for long-term monitoring. [acp-consultants.com]

Software Solutions

- Some councils are partnering with tech firms like Verna to manage BNG data and automate monitoring workflows.
- These systems help track compliance, manage habitat data, and generate reports.

Reporting Requirements

- Under the Environment Act 2021, councils must publish biodiversity reports by March 2026, covering:
 - o Actions taken to meet BNG obligations.
 - o Outcomes from approved biodiversity gain plans.
 - o Future plans for BNG delivery.

Council Examples of BNG Monitoring

1. Cotswold District Council

- Uses Defra's Biodiversity Metric and the Small Sites Metric to assess planning applications.
- Requires Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMPs), typically following Natural England templates.
- Works with the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund to identify off-site BNG delivery locations.
- Monitoring includes clear timeframes and deadlines for action.
[cotswold.gov.uk]

2. North Yorkshire Council

- Applies the statutory biodiversity metric to all development applications.
- Requires developers to submit a BNG plan and secure habitat management for 30 years via legal agreements.
- Uses monitoring fees to fund additional ecological staff. [northyorks.gov.uk], [verna.earth]

3. Bracknell Forest Council

- Designated a Responsible Body for conservation covenants.
- Assigns council-owned land to create BNG habitat banks.

- Sells biodiversity units to developers and monitors delivery through conservation covenants and the national Biodiversity Gain Site Register. [democratic...est.gov.uk]

4. Essex Councils (e.g., Braintree, Colchester, Southend)

- Developed a joint guidance document outlining BNG expectations, including monitoring and stewardship.
- Includes flowcharts and templates for planning applications and long-term monitoring. [braintree.gov.uk]