

# Colchester City Council Biodiversity Duty Report

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## Introduction

In 2021 the Government's Environment Act was introduced, setting various environmental targets to help protect and enhance the UK's natural environment. As part of this, the biodiversity duty on public authorities (previously established in 2006) was strengthened. The duty changed from just conserving biodiversity to now stating that public authorities have a duty for conserving **and enhancing biodiversity**.

In order to comply with this duty, the Act outlines that the Council must:

- Consider what actions we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity across the full range of its functions
- Agree policies and specific objectives
- Act to deliver the policies and achieve the objectives

The actions public 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 the Government's plans for significantly improving the natural environment. Local authorities feed into this work more directly through involvement in the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS') which are discussed later in the report.

To monitor how councils are acting to comply with the duty, the act mandates the Council to report on its work to conserve and enhance biodiversity. As part of this, the Council was required to produce a 'first consideration' of actions it could take by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 and to agree any further policies and objectives it could achieve as soon as possible after this.

The first consideration was included as part of the [Council's 2023 Authority Monitoring Report](#), an annual report used to monitor the extent to which the Council's planning policy objectives are being achieved.

The act also requires the Council to produce a 'biodiversity report' which must include:

- a summary of the action we have taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
- how we plan to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
- the actions you've carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations
- details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans you've approved
- how you plan to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period
- any other information we consider appropriate

The report must be produced by 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026, with subsequent reports produced within a 5 year reporting cycle. Reporting period start and end dates should be established.

The Council is fulfilling this requirement by producing this report which contains strategies, policies and actions the Council has delivered between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025.

The start date for the next reporting period is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 and the end date is the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2030.

### Producing the biodiversity report

The structure of this report was informed by the [Government guidance](#) on producing the biodiversity reports. A small working group was formed at the Council to develop the structure and format of the report, alongside some of the key strategies, policies and actions we were aware of. A summary of the report and its purpose was then sent to Heads of Service and circulated for input across a variety of different Council services. The report was updated following this wider review before being presented at a Cabinet meeting for approval.

## Introduction to Colchester City Council

Colchester City Council serves a population of 192,700 as determined at the 2021 census, and the population is rapidly increasing. The Council delivers a variety of different services for residents including:

- Sport and Leisure
- Parking
- Museums and Tourism
- Operational finance
- Public protection – Environmental Health, Land contamination and pollution, Pest control, Licensing and more
- Neighbourhood services – Refuse collection, Street care and safety
- Sustainability and climate change
- Parks, countryside and open spaces
- Planning
- Health partnerships, community and wellbeing
- Communications and marketing
- Events

Many of these services are delivered in the community and have the opportunity to consider ways in which biodiversity can be conserved and enhanced in the way their services are delivered.

The Council manage a variety of parks, nature reserves, green spaces that are home to a diverse range of wildlife. To ensure these sites are managed to support wildlife, the Council has adopted several approaches such as reducing our use of glyphosate herbicide and reducing mowing regimes to encourage the wilding of areas that can support biodiversity. This work is conducted by rangers in conjunction with a large team of volunteers. Details of the country parks and nature reserves managed by Colchester City Council can be found on the [website](#).

## Section 1 – Policies, strategies and actions completed between January 2024 – December 2025

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
<b>Council wide</b>		
	Strategic Plan 2023-2026	Priority included on ‘conserve and enhance our biodiversity’ in the plan
	Climate Emergency Action Plan	Theme included on ‘Enhance biodiversity and protect our natural environment’ in the action plan with several actions linked to this as outlined in this table.
	Recycling and Waste Strategy	The Strategy encourages residents to compost garden waste and outlines an approach to educating and engaging with residents about reducing waste. The Strategy has a clear priority for increasing recycling, including the provision of free equipment (bags, collection boxes) for dry recycling and minimising general waste.
	Staff Travel Plan	<p>The Council’s Travel Plan aims to encourage staff to use active and sustainable modes of travel (such as walking, cycling and public transport) to travel to and for work where possible. Several initiatives have been introduced to support this including offering free use of the Park and Ride, discounted public transport, salary sacrifice schemes for bikes and electric vehicles and making pool bikes/cargo bikes available for attending meetings and events.</p> <p>In 2025, the Council’s Travel Plan received a ‘Very Good’ accreditation from Modeshift, the national travel plan accreditation body.</p> <p>The Travel Plan helps to reduce emissions and improve air quality within Colchester, which can in turn reduce impacts on biodiversity.</p>

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
Planning		
	Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	The Council adopted a Biodiversity SPD in 2023. The SPD acknowledges that biodiversity protection and provision is a duty that public bodies, developers, landowners and society generally all share. The SPD aims to clearly set out the principles the Council expects to ensure that development proposals create space for nature and details of what the Council will expect applicants to submit with planning applications.
	Call for sites for green infrastructure	As part of the preparation of the new Colchester Local Plan to 2041, the Council included green infrastructure in the call for sites (winter 2023/24). Green infrastructure includes the different green spaces and blue spaces (rivers, wetlands etc.) that provide valuable environmental, economic and health and wellbeing benefits supporting people and wildlife. Seven sites were put forward for improvements to green infrastructure and were assessed.
	Green Networks and Waterways Engagement	As part of the iterative Issues and Options engagement for the new Local Plan, the Council held a green network and waterways (green infrastructure) engagement between 9 November 2023 – 5 January 2024. Stakeholders and the public were asked to comment on how they use existing green spaces and waterways; views about the current condition of spaces and suggest any improvements which could be made; and to suggest ideas for new green spaces. The comments received and a review of green infrastructure strategies led the Council to prepare a vision, character description and guiding principles for Colchester’s green network and waterways. These guiding principles have been incorporated into the new Local Plan Preferred Options draft. The vision and guiding principles can also be used by all other Council teams where relevant to their work.
	Approach to new Local Plan	The approach to the new Local Plan, which was agreed by Local Plan Committee in October 2023, is using the green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point and key

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
		purpose of the new Local Plan. As of December 2025, the Local Plan is currently out for Regulation 18 consultation on the Preferred Options Local Plan.
	Biodiversity Protection and Biodiversity Net Gain Evidence Base for new Local Plan	The Council commissioned biodiversity evidence to support the new Local Plan. There were three key elements of this study, firstly assessing all Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) sites that passed the first sieve in terms of likely harm to biodiversity. Secondly, looking in more detail at potential allocations and commenting on likely harm, and recommended mitigation, enhancement, and biodiversity net gain measures. Thirdly, a review of offsite BNG sites submitted as part of the BNG call for sites and a strategic review of the existing biodiversity across the city and potential connections and enhancements, with link to the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The strategic review identified areas of biodiversity importance and these have been included in the Local Plan Preferred Options draft as 'strategic biodiversity areas'.
	Local Wildlife Sites Review	The Council commissioned a Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) partial Review as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan. LoWS likely to be affected by allocations in the plan were reviewed. Eight LoWS were proposed for extension subject to further survey work. Ecologists have also surveyed five sites recommended by Colchester Natural History Society for designation as LoWS and are carrying out a desktop survey of preferred site allocations in the Preferred Options Local Plan where the Biodiversity Protection study identified potential harm. If the desktop survey finds that any of the preferred site allocations is likely to meet LoWS selection criteria, surveys will take place in spring 2026. At the time of writing, the Council has not received the results of the further survey work and desktop survey.
	Understanding and protecting ecological value of Middlewick Ranges	The Council sought to understand the ecological value of Middlewick Ranges, by commissioning ecological surveys (botanical and invertebrate) of the habitats and wildlife on the site. These surveys were completed during

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
		<p>2024-2025. The botanical report concludes that there are many priority habitats on the site, including an area of lowland dry acid grassland which is considered of ‘high botanical nature conservation value’.</p> <p>As part of drafting the Preferred Options Local Plan, the Council has included Middlewick Ranges as a suggested ‘local green space’ recognising that the site is of particular local importance to the community. This would afford the site a higher level of protection from development. The Council has also been in communication with Natural England to discuss the site and its future protection. Both parties recognise the important habitats and ecological value of the site.</p>
	Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)	The Council is a partner in the Essex Coast RAMS, which is a strategic mitigation strategy to avoid and mitigate the impacts of increased recreational disturbance along the Essex coast. Officers are part of the Essex Coast RAMS review steering group. An updated RAMS Strategy, with funding in perpetuity, is expected to be finalised by April 2026.
	Colchester Orbital improvements	The Colchester Orbital is a 17-mile walking and cycling route around the city’s urban area through many of Colchester’s biodiversity rich green spaces, following Public Rights of Way where possible. The Colchester Orbital is in the process of being made more accessible through barrier removals/upgrades and terrain improvements alongside work being done to increase awareness of footpaths and cycle paths so more people can access natural environment/green space for enjoyment of biodiversity. Improved accessibility along various sections at Salary Brook Nature Reserve, Lexden Woods have been completed. Cymbeline Meadows and Bourne Valley are in progress.
	Section 106 (s106) payments and improvements in natural environment	Look to utilise s106 payments provided by developers to fund improvements in green space maintenance/enhancement where possible.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
Sustainability		
	Greening Policy	This policy introduced the removal of the use of Glyphosate from general use within Council parks and green spaces for treating weeds.
	Sustainable planting	Reduction of annual bedding to a mix of perennial and shrub planting and drought resistant plants used in planting schemes in parks
	Water Saving on allotments	Allotment sheds are required to all have a gutter and water collection system such as a water butt.
	Not using peat-based composts/products	Peat based composts/products are not used on any Council shrub borders or beds.
	Mowing regimes	<p>Council has reduced the number of grass cuts on many of its green spaces to promote growth of wilder areas/wildflowers which support biodiversity.</p> <p>Additional works are also underway to support the creation of new wildflower areas on open spaces, either through reducing grass cuts to once per year or leaving areas to naturalise. Several areas were already identified and had 'no mow' signage installed to explain to residents why this approach was being taken. More information about the sites being managed can be found on the <a href="#">Council website</a>.</p>
	Ranger educational activities – Schools and young people	<p>Funding for education rangers was sourced in 2023 and has contributed to funding 2 roles for 2 years. The rangers, amongst other activities, deliver environmental education and forest school activities on countryside sites and within schools, particularly in deprived areas of Colchester. They have supported over 2,400 children from different schools and youth organisations in making educational visits to the Council's green spaces over 2 years.</p> <p>Following the success of the programme, further funding has been secured to enable the rangers to continue this valuable work.</p>

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
	Ranger walks, talks and activities for adults	Expanded programme of talks and activities from 25 sessions per year to 64 sessions annually in 2024. These include wellness walks, wildlife walks, wildlife ID sessions and more.
	Volunteer conservation work parties	Conservation and country park maintenance sessions are organised for volunteers to gain skills and awareness for protection and enhancement of biodiversity. Over 400 volunteer days supported this work in 2023/24 and over 600 volunteer days in 2024/25. Additional volunteer days have been contributed to conservation through working alongside The Conservation Volunteers.
	Opportunities for staff to participate in projects supporting biodiversity and raising environmental awareness	A staff volunteer policy was introduced in Summer 2024, enabling staff to have 2 days per year to take part in volunteering activities. Supporting this, the Council have organised tree planting and litter picking sessions for staff to participate in which they can use their volunteering hours to cover their participation. The Council also has a staff allotment which staff can get involved with that supports local food growing, biodiversity and wellbeing. A garden is also available at our waste depot site that refuse workers can use for wellbeing.
	Trees for Years project	Providing 10,000 trees per year for free to local people to plant in their gardens, schools, parish areas. This ran for 17 consecutive years between 2008-2024, but did not run in 2025 due to funding constraints.
	Legacy grazing project, High Woods Country Park	Using Goats, sheep and cattle to graze meadows on High Woods Country Park as part of managing habitats.
	Woodchip Recycling as mulch	Recycled woodchip from in-house tree team produced during tree felling/management is used on borders as a mulch. This benefits biodiversity as it reduces the need for use of herbicides to manage weeds.
	Cymbeline Meadows river restoration	Coir rolls introduced for river bank protection and solar water troughs project to reduce cattle damage/erosion of riverside banks.
	Use of sustainable material in play equipment and surfacing	Consider suppliers with good percentage of recycled or sustainable products for use in procurement.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
	Green Flag awards	2 green flag awards achieved annually for Castle Park and High Woods Country Park, including in 2024 and 2025. 1 green flag awarded for Cemetery and Crematorium in 2024.
	Provision and management of allotments	Allotments are valuable green spaces, often within urbanised areas, that can provide habitats, green corridors and sources of food for wildlife as well as supporting people’s wellbeing. The Council manage 18 allotment sites across the city.
	Supporting active travel in Colchester	<p>The Council has delivered, and is continuing to deliver, many projects to promote active travel in Colchester. These include providing short term hires of electric bikes, facilitating the use of on street electric bike hire provided by Dott, providing secure bike storage facilities in the city centre and upgrading the <a href="#">Cycle Colchester website</a> with a variety of information on cycling, including a map of on and off road cycle routes (also available as a paper copy).</p> <p>This work has an overlap with that on the Colchester Orbital, encouraging and supporting people to access and appreciate green spaces (and their wildlife) across Colchester.</p>
<b>Neighbourhood services</b>		
	Campaigns on reducing flytipping and littering	Supported the Essex ‘SCRAP fly tipping campaign’ from January 2025 to April 2025 to encourage responsible disposal of waste. The Council also works with external contractors who help to reduce littering.
	Litter Warriors scheme and Community impact days to reduce litter in environment	The Council runs a ‘Litter Warriors’ scheme, providing volunteers in the community with litter picking equipment to conduct their own litter picks. Between 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2025, 757 bags of litter were collected by volunteers and disposed of by the Council. During 2025, litter picking kits were loaned to communities for 39 events.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
		Additionally, the Council regularly organises community days to tidy up litter hotspots in the city centre, many of which are also near green spaces. This helps to make the environment safer for wildlife and more inviting for people to visit and experience these green spaces.
	Fleet transition to lower emission vehicles	Parks teams currently use 2 electric 'gator' vehicles for travelling to tasks, reducing vehicle emissions.
<b>Asset Management</b>		
	Housing Asset Management Strategy 2021-2026	Includes consideration of ways to utilise/increase areas of green space around housing. The Council's policy on not using glyphosate to kill weeds has also been adopted on most areas around the grounds of the Council's housing.
	Improving energy and water efficiency of the Council's buildings	<p>The Council has been taking action to reduce energy and water use at several key buildings. For example, several measures have been installed at Leisure World Colchester, a key sports and leisure facility, to reduce energy and water use including an innovative water filtration system.</p> <p>Reducing energy and water use will help contribute to reducing pressure on natural resources, and thus on biodiversity.</p>
<b>Health partnerships and wellbeing</b>		
	Crematorium and Cemetery – Designed to support biodiversity	The grounds of the Cemetery and Crematorium in Colchester are managed with biodiversity in mind. 15 bird boxes have been put up, log piles and bug boxes have been created to support insects and nesting bats are supported in the onsite chapel. Beds and borders at the site have also been planted with a range of flowers and plants to attract pollinators and insects, alongside the plants themselves being drought friendly, reducing need for water use.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
	Community Newsletter	Monthly community e-newsletter sent to a variety of community organisations which raises awareness of initiatives, activities and grants that can offer people support and opportunity on a variety of topics. This does include mentioning about initiatives associated with wildlife and raising awareness, including available grant funding opportunities.
<b>Other services</b>		
	Greener Living newsletter	e-newsletter produced every two months and send to over 2800 residents covering updates on Council environmental projects and news, many of which relate to projects that are linked to conserving and enhancing biodiversity
	Economic Development Strategy	'Planet' is one of the four priorities of the Strategy, focussing on supporting businesses to reduce their environmental impact/emissions.
<b>Partnership working with other organisations</b>		
	Natural History Society volunteer surveys	The Council works with volunteers from Natural History Society who help to conduct wildlife monitoring surveys to determine the biodiversity present some of the Council's green spaces.
	Work with Town and Parish councils	Worked with Wivenhoe Town Council on their <a href="#">pilot project</a> looking to reduce grass cutting regimes and the benefits this can have for biodiversity.
	Providing opportunities for charities and not for profit organisations	We work with many charities to provide opportunities to improve skills linked to conservation and park maintenance. Support is given to the The Conservation Volunteers and the sessions they run on Council owned green space. Regular parks maintenance activities are also run with Level Best Enterprises, a charity providing work and life skills training and opportunities to adults with learning disabilities.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Relevance to biodiversity duty and progress achieved
	Public awareness events with Essex Police Rural Engagement Team	We work alongside the Essex Police Rural Engagement Team to hold regular events at our country parks and wildlife sites to inform and educate the public on how to help protect wildlife and raising awareness about wildlife crime
	Sourcing expertise from Environment Agency to support habitat management	To improve the management of our waterways, we work with the Environment Agency who have provided us with advice to support this. They have also donated a dissolved oxygen meter so we can test ponds on some of our countryside sites to ensure they are at safe oxygen levels for wildlife.
	Colchester Travel Plan Club	CCC hosts the Colchester Travel Plan Club, supporting a network of businesses and organisations in Colchester to develop and implement workplace travel plans, increase uptake of active and sustainable travel and decarbonise their business travel fleets. CTPC also hosts knowledge sharing sessions with members with external speakers on travel and general sustainability topics including biodiversity.

## Section 2 – Consideration of other relevant strategies

There are several regional and national strategies that influence the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Colchester. The Council has considered these strategies within the report, and these are outlined below.

### Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The requirement for the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) was introduced as part of the Environment Act 2021. The strategies aim to reverse decline in biodiversity and help nature to recover. The 48 strategies being created across England will feed into a nationwide Nature Recovery Network. Essex County Council (ECC) is the responsible authority for the creation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in Essex and Colchester City Council is a supporting authority.

The overarching aim for the Strategy is to create habitats that are ‘bigger, better and more joined up’. The main part of the Strategy development was the creation of maps covering Greater Essex that:

- Outlined existing sites that were considered ‘areas of particular importance for biodiversity’ (APIBs). This included protected sites, local nature reserves and other areas considered important for biodiversity. Separate maps were created for different habitat types.
- Identifying spaces that could provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment (known as ‘strategic opportunity areas’) if managed positively to support habitat protection.

The strategic opportunity areas help to guide where management and/or creation of habitats should occur. It also supports policy development within planning and the local plan by identifying sites where it would be beneficial for habitat creation to contribute to supporting offsite biodiversity net gain.

Alongside the maps, the LNRS also outlines generic priorities for each of the habitat types were outlined. There is also detail on priority species that are at particular risk or in decline and need targeted habitat management to help them recover.

Colchester City Council attended regular meetings with ECC and other local planning authorities during the development of the draft LNRS to feed into the process.

The draft strategy was published for consultation on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024, running to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

The Council submitted a response to the first Supporting Authorities consultation in 2024 and a response to the second Supporting Authorities consultation in Spring 2025.

The final version of the LNRS was published in July 2025 and can be viewed on the [Essex Local Nature Partnership website](#). This includes the strategy document as well as the LNRS interactive web map which shows the APIBs and strategic opportunity areas.

The LNRS suggests several ways in which supporting authorities can support its delivery including:

- Prioritise sites identified in opportunity maps for green space delivery and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) off-site delivery.
- Embed the goals and objectives of the LNRS into planning policies and guidance documents, including local plans and action plans, to ensure that development decisions prioritise biodiversity, habitat restoration and green space provision.
- Promote the use of nature-based solutions, such as green roofs, urban greening, green corridors, and sustainable urban drainage systems in new development projects, to enhance biodiversity, mitigate climate change impacts and improve quality of life for residents.
- Collaborate with developers, landowners, community groups, environmental organisations and other stakeholders to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity, facilitate dialogue on nature recovery priorities, and encourage participation in nature recovery initiatives.
- Identify council-owned land highlighted in the strategy for conversion into nature recovery locations/habitat creation or enhancement.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the implementation and effectiveness of nature recovery actions outlined in the strategy, tracking progress towards biodiversity targets.
- Ensure large scale developments, such as NSIPs comply with LNRS guidance

We have incorporated the Essex LNRS into the Preferred Options Local Plan draft in several ways. The LNRS is referred to in the Preferred Options Local Plan draft with a policy requiring applicants to have regard to the LNRS. The Local Plan approach and vision shares some of the LNRS' 10 priorities. Where there is overlap between site allocations and opportunity areas, the site allocation policy includes a criteria supporting the delivery of new habitat as part of development. We have incorporated relevant habitat priorities and measures into the Plan. For example, one of the trees and woodland actions in the LNRS is 'select native tree species that are well suited to the site conditions and complementary to existing vegetation'; we have included this as a criterion in the tree canopy cover policy.

The Council is also participating in quarterly LNRS delivery meetings organised by Essex County Council to share and learn about actions other supporting authorities are taking to support the integration and delivery of the LNRS.

## Species conservation strategies

As part of the Environment Act 2021, the ability for Natural England to prepare and publish species conservation strategies was introduced. Government outline that the species conservation strategies will “aim to safeguard the future of the species that are at greatest risk. The strategies will find better ways to comply with existing legal obligations to protect species at risk and to improve their conservation status”<sup>1</sup>.

Currently there are no species conservation strategies that have been published but they are in the process of being developed.

However, we ensure site management plans are delivered with protected species in mind, including scheduling any proposed works at the appropriate time of year to negate damage and minimise disturbance to any listed species. Some species on our sites listed under Section 41 ‘species of principal importance in England’ of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) include Common toad, Stag beetle, Skylark, various Lepidoptera including Cinnabar and Small heath, Water vole, Grass snake, Common lizard, and various bat species. Habitats under section 41 that we manage include: acid grassland, rivers, ponds and lowland mixed deciduous woodland. Management of sites will be designed to protect and enhance habitats for all species.

We have installed Barn owl boxes on a couple of sites. Barn owl is a Schedule One species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The Council will consider any species conservation strategies, once developed and published, within any of its site management plans where relevant.

## Protected Site Strategies

In the Environment Act 2021, reference is made to the potential introduction of Protected Site Strategies (PSS) by Natural England. The aim of these strategies is to apply greater protection to the protected sites through situating it within its wider landscape. Management should aim to keep the protected site in a favourable condition **as well as** its surroundings. Landscape wide pressures can ultimately impact on the condition of the protected site indirectly, for example issues related to nutrient discharge and recreational pressures.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted text taken from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty>

The Environment Act defines a protected site as one which is either a:

- European site – These are special protection areas (SPA<sup>2</sup>s), special areas of conservation (SAC<sup>3</sup>s) and Ramsar<sup>4</sup> sites.
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - These are protected sites, valued for their wildlife and natural features in England, supporting many characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and natural features
- Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) - Marine Conservation Zones are areas that protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species

However, there are a range of other local sites that could be classed as ‘protected’ including local wildlife and geological sites, local nature reserves and local wildlife trust reserves. Other national designations such as national landscapes are also valuable for wildlife and should be protected.

Within Colchester, there are 3 SPAs (also designated as Ramsar sites), 1 SAC, 9 SSSIs and 1 area designated as an MCZ. Many of these designated areas extend across boundaries of other local planning authorities of Essex. There are also numerous local nature reserves and local wildlife sites. Key sites and their designations are listed below:

- Colne Estuary SPA (and SSSI)
- Blackwater Estuary SPA (and SSSI)
- Abberton Reservoir SPA (and SSSI)
- Essex Estuaries SAC
- Roman River SSSI
- Upper Colne Marshes SSSI – Within this SSSI, the Council manages two sites (Colne Nature Reserve and Hythe Lagoons)
- Bullock Wood SSSI
- Marks Tey Brickpit SSSI
- Tiptree Heath SSSI
- Blackwater and Colne Estuaries MCZ (and SSSI)

As a Local Planning Authority (LPA), we are required to protect, conserve and restore SPAs and SACs and a responsibility to conserve and enhance the special features of SSSIs. Potential impacts on these sites, alongside local nature reserves and local

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<sup>2</sup> Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are sites designated under the Birds Directive by the member states where appropriate steps are taken to protect the bird species for which the site is designated.

<sup>3</sup> Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are sites of European Community importance designated by the member states, where necessary conservation measures are applied for the maintenance or restoration, at favourable conservation status, of the habitats and/or species for which the site is designated

<sup>4</sup> Ramsar Sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the [Convention on Wetlands](#).

wildlife sites, from development are considered and mitigated through the planning process, including through relevant policies in the Local Plan. The Council's Local Plan is currently being reviewed, which has taken into account updated evidence related to biodiversity as referenced previously.

The Council also manages many nature reserves, wildlife sites and green and blue spaces. Details of all of these alongside site action plans can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Natural England are looking to produce protected site strategies, but there are no strategies currently published.

## Other local strategies

Essex County Council have produced several other strategies relevant to our work on conserving and enhancing biodiversity. These include:

**Green Infrastructure Strategy** – The [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) sets out a vision to “protect, develop and enhance a high quality connected green infrastructure network that extends from our city and town centres, and urban areas to the countryside and coast and which is self-sustaining and is designed for people and wildlife”.

The Strategy promotes integrating green spaces, such as parks, green roofs, and wildlife corridors into urban and rural planning to support biodiversity. These spaces enhance ecosystem services like air and water purification, climate regulation, and recreation, benefiting both nature and communities.

The strategy has informed the development of the Local Plan, particularly by guiding the integration of high-quality green spaces that support biodiversity and sustainable development and strengthen the city's green network and waterways as outlined in the Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles.

**Essex Green Infrastructure (GI) Standards** – The [Essex Green Infrastructure Standards](#) provide a framework of nine principles and Standards to guide the planning, creation, and management of multifunctional GI across Essex. Developed in response to national environmental policy and tailored to local needs, these standards help ensure high-quality, accessible GI that supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and community wellbeing. The standards offer practical guidance to strengthen biodiversity outcomes in planning, including alignment with Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and the protection of habitats along key watercourses such as the River Colne.

**Water Strategy for Essex** – The [Water Strategy for Essex](#) outlines a vision for managing water supply and demand, aiming to protect and improve water quality while balancing water availability. Essex is one of the driest counties in England and household water consumption in the county is above the national average. Biodiversity can be

significantly impacted by long periods of dry weather through lower water flows, whilst also being impacted by pollution of watercourses, storm overflows and runoff which intensify during heavy rainfall. In Colchester there are many valuable habitats along watercourses such as the River Colne which require protection. The Strategy is considered within planning policies, for example by restricting domestic water consumption to 110 litres per person per day as part of the Renewable Energy, Water, Waste and Recycling Policy (DM25). Additionally, as part of the ongoing Local Plan Review, a water cycle study was commissioned to identify how future planned housing and growth may be impacted by water supply and capacity for treatment of wastewater. As part of their analysis, it was recommended that the restriction on domestic water consumption is tightened to 85 litres per person per day.

**Essex Design Guide** - The [Essex Design Guide](#) promotes biodiversity through principles that encourage habitat creation, ecological connectivity, and integration of green infrastructure in new developments. It provides practical design guidance to meet biodiversity duties, including Biodiversity Net Gain, by embedding nature into urban planning and ensuring developments protect and enhance local habitats. The guide advocates for the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage water runoff and create habitats for aquatic and terrestrial species. SuDS features, such as swales, ponds, and wetlands, not only mitigate flood risk but also enhance biodiversity by providing diverse habitats. The guide also includes recommendations for designing developments that are resilient to climate change. This includes incorporating features like green roofs and walls, which support biodiversity by providing habitats for birds, insects, and plants. It emphasises the importance of integrating biodiversity considerations into all stages of the planning and development process, ensuring that new developments contribute positively to the local ecological network.

## Section 3 – Biodiversity Net Gain

### Actions to meet our BNG obligations

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) aims to leave the environment in a measurably better state for biodiversity, by mandating that development must deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value post development. Since 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024, new planning applications for major developments were required to have regard to the biodiversity net gain policy. BNG has applied to small sites since 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024. Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) must have regard to the BNG policy from May 2026.

The Council has ensured that applications being made since 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024, where applicable, have submitted the required information such as biodiversity metric calculations, biodiversity gain plans and legal agreements in order to comply with BNG policy.

The Council has also been taking further action to support the delivery of biodiversity net gain including:

- Organising training for members and Officers on biodiversity net gain and habitat banks
- Supporting Essex County Council to draft BNG Guidance to be shared across Essex ahead of BNG becoming mandatory
- The Council carried out a BNG call for sites in Summer 2024 as part of the preparation of the new Colchester Local Plan to 2041. This was to identify priority sites that could be used for offsite delivery of BNG. Nine sites were suggested and were assessed by ecologists. Four of the sites were given a high strategic ranking and these have been included in the Regulation 18 Preferred Options Local Plan as the Council's preferred sites for offsite BNG units. These sites are:
  - Abbots Hall Farm, Great Wigborough
  - Maydays Farm, Haycocks Lane, West Mersea
  - Chipping Farm, Copford
  - Brook Meadows, Tiptree
- Secured a section 106 agreement with Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) for the creation of habitats at their Abbots Hall Farm site as part of a habitat bank. EWT are now in the process of registering their habitat bank with Natural England so it can be used as a site for providing off site BNG units to developers who cannot meet the

minimum 10% BNG requirement on the development site. This site is one of those included within the Council’s preferred sites for offsite BNG delivery within the Preferred Options Local Plan.

- Worked with Braintree DC and Maldon DC to secure the Section 106 agreement for the Braxted Hall Park Habitat Bank which is cross boundary.
- Working with other landowners on a number of other Habitat Banks in the CCC administrative area.

## Gains resulting or expected to result through on and off site BNG contributions

The Council is still in the early stages of planning applications being submitted with biodiversity gain plans included. A summary table displayed below shows the latest information (as of end of December 2025) on BNG delivery in planning applications.

Number of applications received where BNG is proposed to be delivered	35 <sup>1</sup>
Number of applications received where BNG is outlined to be met fully on site	22
Number of applications received where BNG is outlined to be met fully off site	7
Number of applications received where BNG is outlined to be met through a mix of on site and off site delivery	6
Number of applications where BNG gain plan has been approved	10

<sup>1</sup> Of the 35 applications, 19 are applications received after BNG delivery was made mandatory for eligible applications. The remaining 16 are applications received before the mandatory BNG announcement in 2024, but are still delivering BNG as this was included as a requirement within Policy ENV1 of the Council’s adopted Local Plan

The Council expects that information on BNG delivery will increase substantially in further years. Therefore, consideration is being given to investing in the ‘Mycelia’ software package to more easily monitor and report on BNG delivery.

### Meeting BNG obligations in next reporting period (i.e. next 5 years)

The Council is considering opportunities for encouraging the local delivery of biodiversity net gain. For example, the Council will be trying to identify further sites that could be used to deliver offsite biodiversity net gain so developers have the option to purchase these credits and support local improvements in biodiversity (see section 4). This could include generating opportunities for delivering offsite BNG on Council managed green spaces. The use of the mapping completed as part of the development of the LNRS will be critical in supporting any sites which are brought forward.

## Section 4 – Future policies, objectives and actions

These actions have been identified in liaison with staff from other services areas at the Council, considering the timeframe for delivery of January 2026 – December 2030. Some of these actions are already in progress, whereas some are planned or aspirational projects at the time of writing. Colchester will likely be impacted by devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) proposals taking place over the next few years. These changes will impact how services are delivered and the types and quantity of land that is managed, creating new opportunities for improving the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Alongside this, competing demands on time, funding and land will limit the scale of work which can be delivered. Therefore, all the actions that are included in section 4 of the report are subject to change, including those which are labelled as ‘ongoing’.

We will monitor the progress of actions internally and report this alongside key achievements by the end of the reporting period in December 2030, if not earlier.

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
<b>Council wide</b>			
	Climate Emergency Action Plan	Protection and enhancement of biodiversity actions will continue to be included within the plan. No specific actions to include at this stage.	Ongoing
	New Strategic Plan	Conserve and enhance our biodiversity is a key priority within the current Strategic Plan. There is an expectation that this will continue to inform the Council’s activities beyond the life of the current Strategic Plan.	To be determined following potential LGR and devolution changes
	Staff Travel Plan	The Council will be looking to build on the successes of its Staff Travel Plan, establishing new initiatives to help with the aspiration of receiving an ‘Excellent’ travel plan accreditation.	This is a planned action to be delivered from 2026 onwards

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
Planning			
	Continue requiring 10% BNG uplift	Continuing to require 10% BNG uplift on all non-exempt applications, including NSIPs when this is required.	Ongoing
	Conditioning Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMP) on relevant permissions	As above to ensure approval and delivery of the uplift	Ongoing
	Consider setting higher BNG target	Review the evidence prepared by the Essex Local Nature Partnership justifying 20% BNG & consider if a higher target can be included in the submission draft Local Plan.	Summer 2026
	Continue with progression to agree habitat banks for providing offsite BNG credits in Colchester	<p>Currently working on agreeing habitat banks at several locations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essex Wildlife Trust Abbots Hall Farm – now agreed</li> <li>• Monks Farm, Dedham – Ongoing</li> <li>• Braxted Hall Park – This 75 hectare site extends across three local planning authority boundaries; Colchester City Council, Braintree District Council and Maldon District Council – now agreed</li> <li>• Others are at early discussion stages</li> </ul>	Ongoing

<b>Department</b>	<b>Policy/Strategy/Action</b>	<b>Detail/Current status</b>	<b>Timescale for delivery</b>
	Environment focussed approach to new Local Plan	Continue work on the new Local Plan with a focus on creating a better environment and improving green infrastructure. Justify policies for biodiversity and green infrastructure as part of the Local Plan examination.	Predicted that Local Plan will be submitted for examination towards the end of 2026.
	Ensuring nationally significant infrastructure projects contribute to avoiding/mitigating impacts on biodiversity alongside biodiversity conservation and enhancement	<p>Where a nationally significant infrastructure project crossed into the Council's boundary, we will engage as a consultee to outline the impacts of projects on biodiversity and outline ways these could be avoided or mitigated.</p> <p>The Norwich to Tilbury electricity transmission line project passes through Colchester and is entering the Examination phase. Within written representations and examination hearings, the Council will seek to outline how the project's likely impacts on biodiversity can be avoided or mitigated, alongside identifying opportunities to contribute to delivery of BNG in Colchester.</p>	<p>Ongoing, when relevant</p> <p>Examination will take place from early 2026</p>
<b>Sustainability</b>			
	Cymbeline Meadows	Designating the site as a local nature reserve and investigating funding options for improving habitats on site, including conversion of arable land into a variety of habitats including tree planting, wetland and wildflower areas.	Aspirational project with timescale for delivery to be determined
	Stanway Country Park	Adopt the new country park and develop the habitats on site to improve the outcomes for wildlife conservation	Planned project, with timescales to be determined

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
	Changes to grounds maintenance delivery	The Council is bringing its grounds maintenance delivery in-house as it was previously outsourced to a private contractor. This provides the opportunity to have greater control on managing the way this service is delivered, including on outcomes for biodiversity. Actions and initiatives will be developed over time.	Planned project, with delivery taking place from November 2026
	Investment in more sustainable tools and machinery	Look to use more electric powered tools (rather than using petrol) for parks maintenance. Use biodegradable oils where possible	Ongoing
	Creation of a Pollinator Strategy/Policy Statement	This will outline how Council will aim to adopt a set of principles for supporting pollinators within its parks and green spaces management.	Aspirational project with timescale for delivery to be determined
	Increased understanding and work relating to reducing coastal erosion and flooding	<p>Essex County Council are the local Flood Authority, but working with them the City Council is encouraging, as at the Hythe, exploration of nature engineering that, helpful to biodiversity, reduces the flow of spring waters and excessive rainfalls.</p> <p>Similarly, the City Council has recognised that greater knowledge of managing coastal erosion is required, particularly with the threat of sea level rise and flooding increasing. To increase knowledge, the Council will look to work more with partner organisations, potentially utilising expertise from Tendring District Council who have</p>	Planned project with timescale for delivery to be determined

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
		done more work in this area to date. The role of natural forms of coastal protection which could also provide habitat for biodiversity will be considered.	
	Changes to the Middle Mill Weir in Castle Park	Considering option to not replace the weir which was damaged when the Middle Mill bridge structure collapsed. Not replacing the weir could have benefits for managing more natural river flows and opening up a fish passage.	Planned project with work to take place from early 2026 onwards
	Consider potential overlap for green space management with delivery of climate adaptation benefits	Ensure that the benefits green spaces can deliver that will help reduce the impact of climate risks like overheating, flooding and drought are recognised and considered within future project delivery	Aspirational project with timescale for delivery to be determined
	Supporting active travel in Colchester	Continuing to deliver projects that support the use of active travel modes in Colchester. This includes expanding the secure bike park in the city centre, supporting businesses to adopt the use of electric cargo (eCargo) bikes for deliveries, The Council are currently working with Walk Colchester to develop a Walk Colchester website to complement the Cycle Colchester website, and signpost people to walking resources and green spaces in Colchester.	Ongoing Walk Colchester website to be live early 2026
	Pilot project for sustainable community gardens in urban areas	The Council is developing a business case for a pilot project for creating community gardens that emphasises sustainability, tackling key issues such as flooding, drought and extreme heat in urban areas. These spaces will provide space to	Aspirational pilot project to be developed further in 2026

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
		grow food and wildflowers, supporting wildlife whilst also using approaches like rainwater harvesting to minimise use of water.	
<b>Neighbourhood services</b>			
	Fleet transition to lower emission vehicles	Will be reviewing options for transitioning more small fleet vehicles (vans) to electric vehicles from diesel. Many of these are used by Parks maintenance teams colleagues.	Planned project to take place from early 2026 onwards
<b>Asset Management</b>			
	Naturalisation of Fieldgate Quay	<p>The Fieldgate Quay is in an industrial area of Colchester that runs alongside the River Colne. It is located close to SSSI sites and local nature reserves and provides a link to foot and cycle paths. The sheet piling river wall collapsed in 2020 and works have been taking place to repair the wall.</p> <p>Further works are now planned to remove part of the wall and concrete area, creating a new naturalised embankment, area of green space and extension of the current foot and cycle path. This will support local wildlife and encourage use of active travel to access existing biodiverse nature areas.</p>	Project has started and will continue throughout 2026

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
	Improving energy and water efficiency of the Council's buildings	The Council will continue to identify ways to reduce the energy and water it uses within Council buildings. We will also look to increase our use of renewable energy to reduce emissions produced from the use of fossil fuels. Early work is being completed to develop proposals for rooftop solar panels on Council buildings and assets.	Ongoing
<b>Other services</b>			
	Colchester Natural History Museum redevelopment	Museum to be redeveloped with improvements to exhibitions and environmental performance and efficiency. New exhibitions will focus on protecting and sharing Essex habitats, supporting biodiversity and connecting people with the local environment. Partnerships are being set up with Essex Wildlife Trust, Colchester Natural History Society and others to help with the design of exhibitions and to help maximise engagement, particularly with younger people. The outdoor space surrounding the museum will also be managed to provide opportunities for outdoor learning.	Planned project with delivery timescales to be determined subject to a grant funding application that is progressed
	Communications	Continued promotion of Council's wildlife and biodiversity initiatives alongside ways that residents can take action to support biodiversity in their own lives.	Ongoing

Department	Policy/Strategy/Action	Detail/Current status	Timescale for delivery
<b>Partnerships</b>			
	Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)	The Council will continue to work with multiple partners to support the delivery of the aims of the RAMS within new development	Ongoing