

Wealden
District Council

Wealden District Council: Biodiversity Report 2023 To 2026

March 2026

If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print or in another language please contact the Wealden District Council Planning Team on planning@wealden.gov.uk or via post at:

Development Management
Wealden District Council
Council Offices
Vicarage Lane
Hailsham
BN27 2AX

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Need for this Report

The Environment Act 2021[1] introduced a legal requirement for all public authorities in England to consider what action they can take – consistent with the proper exercise of their functions – to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

A key part of this strengthened duty is the new statutory obligation to publish biodiversity reports. Local planning authorities (LPA) are required to prepare and publish a biodiversity report at least every five years. As an LPA, Wealden District Council (herein referred to as 'the Council') is therefore required to produce a biodiversity report.

This document forms the ***'Wealden District Council: Biodiversity Report 2023 to 2026'*** covering the period between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2025[2] (herein referred to as 'the Wealden Biodiversity Report 2026'). This Wealden Biodiversity Report 2026 documents the policies and actions the Council has carried out to comply with our biodiversity duty, as well as what the Council is doing looking forward.

This report is published on the Council's website here: Biodiversity Net Gain - Wealden District Council

1.2 Report Structure

The structure of this Wealden Biodiversity Report 2026 is set out below; which generally follows the structure set out in Defra's guidance[3] (with some reordering and amendments to ensure it is specific to Wealden):

- Section 1: Introduction;
- Section 2: Overview of Wealden District Council;
- Section 3: Strategies, Policies and Plans;
- Section 4: Completed Actions;
- Section 5: Partnership Working
- Section 6 (optional): Raising awareness, educating and working with the community;
- Section 7: Biodiversity net gain;
- Section 8 (optional): Monitoring and evaluating your actions; and
- Section 9: The Council's future actions – 2026 onwards.

[1] Environment Act 2021

[2] It is noted that whilst 1st January 2023 is the start date from when local authorities first became subject to the duty to report, the BNG information will only be from Feb 2024.

[3] Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK

It is noted that Defra differentiates between information that by law (statutory) needs to be included within a biodiversity report, and additional information that is seen as optional. The information required by law is included in **Sections 1 to 5, 7 and 9** of this report. Any optional additional information is referred to as 'optional'.

1.3 Document History

One previous biodiversity report has been published by the Council. In 2023, the Council published their ***'Biodiversity Duty: Wealden District Council First Consideration Report'*** (herein referred to as the 'Consideration Report')[4]. The Consideration Report brought together a number of Council strategies, policies and work areas to see how Wealden were addressing and taking account of biodiversity at the time. The Consideration Report is included as **Appendix A**.

1.4 Next publication

The Council's next biodiversity report is due to be published by March 2031.

[4] Biodiversity Net Gain - Wealden District Council

2. Overview of Wealden Distirct Council

This section of the Wealden Biodiversity Report 2026 provides an overview of the Council, and summarises the role and purpose of the Council, including:

- the demographics of Wealden;
- the geography of Wealden;
- the ecological designations within Wealden;
- a brief description of the Council's functions and structure – including the size of the authority and an outline of its governance and management structures; and
- the Council's governance.

This section also summarises how each of the Council's functions can affect biodiversity, both positively and negatively.

2.1 Demographics

The Council covers an area of 321 square miles – as shown in **Figure 1**. It is the 44th largest out of 317 local authorities in England, the second largest in the southeast region and the largest and most rural local authority in East Sussex.

Figure 1: Council Geographic Jurisdiction



There are 75 defined settlements, ranging from the larger towns of Hailsham, Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield and Polegate to a range of large villages, such as Forest Row and Wadhurst, as well as many other smaller villages and hamlets.

Just over half of residents (55%) live within our towns, with the remainder of our population (45%) living in more rural areas.

The Council is responsible for planning (both plan-making and development management) for 39 out of the 42 Town and Parish Council areas in the district. The South Downs National Park Authority is responsible for planning in the Alfriston, Cuckmere Valley and the East Dean and Friston Parish. Each of our parishes, towns and villages are unique and special in their own way, each with their own communities, character, history and heritage.

2.2 Geography of Wealden

Wealden District is predominantly rural and one of its greatest resources is its distinctive and valued natural environment. Its qualities consist of historic villages and coast, set within attractive countryside and a range of flora and fauna helping to give Wealden its strong sense of place and identity.

The district's natural environment is considerably diverse. It ranges from the highly wooded High Weald National Landscape, to the rolling chalk hills of the South Downs National Park, which is also a nationally designated landscape. In between this, we have the Low Weald landscape and also the internationally important Pevensey Levels.

The presence and distribution of different landscape types, natural habitats and land-use are influenced by underlying geology, soils, landform and drainage.

Land-use across the district is predominantly pasture, with areas of arable cropping. Between the land that is farmed there is a visible distribution of semi-natural land cover. This includes woodlands, heathland, freshwater habitats, wetlands and marshes and grassland habitats. The district is heavily wooded, particularly in the north, within the High Weald.

2.3 Ecological Designations

The district has significant biodiversity resources, with European, national and local designated sites. The ecological designations within Wealden are shown in **Figure 2** below.

Within the hierarchy of sites, European Sites have the greatest level of protection through the Habitats Directive[5] and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017[6]. The importance of this range of habitats for biodiversity is recognised through international, national and local designations covering around 24% of the district.

[5] The Habitats Directive - Environment - European Commission

[6] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Both Ashdown Forest and the Pevensey Levels are internationally designated:

- Ashdown Forest is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated as one of the largest continuous blocks of lowland heath in the southeast of England, and is also a Special Protection Area (SPA), due to its breeding populations of Dartford Warbler and Nightjar; and
- Pevensey Levels is a Ramsar site and also a SAC due to it being one of the largest and least fragmented low-lying wet grassland systems in the southeast, supporting the largest UK population of lesser whirlpool ramshorn snail.

In addition to designated sites, we have one of the greatest concentrations of ancient woodland in the country, with around 3% of England's entire designated ancient woodlands located in the district. Ancient woodlands are home to many rare and threatened species, and they are often described as an irreplaceable resource or considered as 'critical natural capital'.

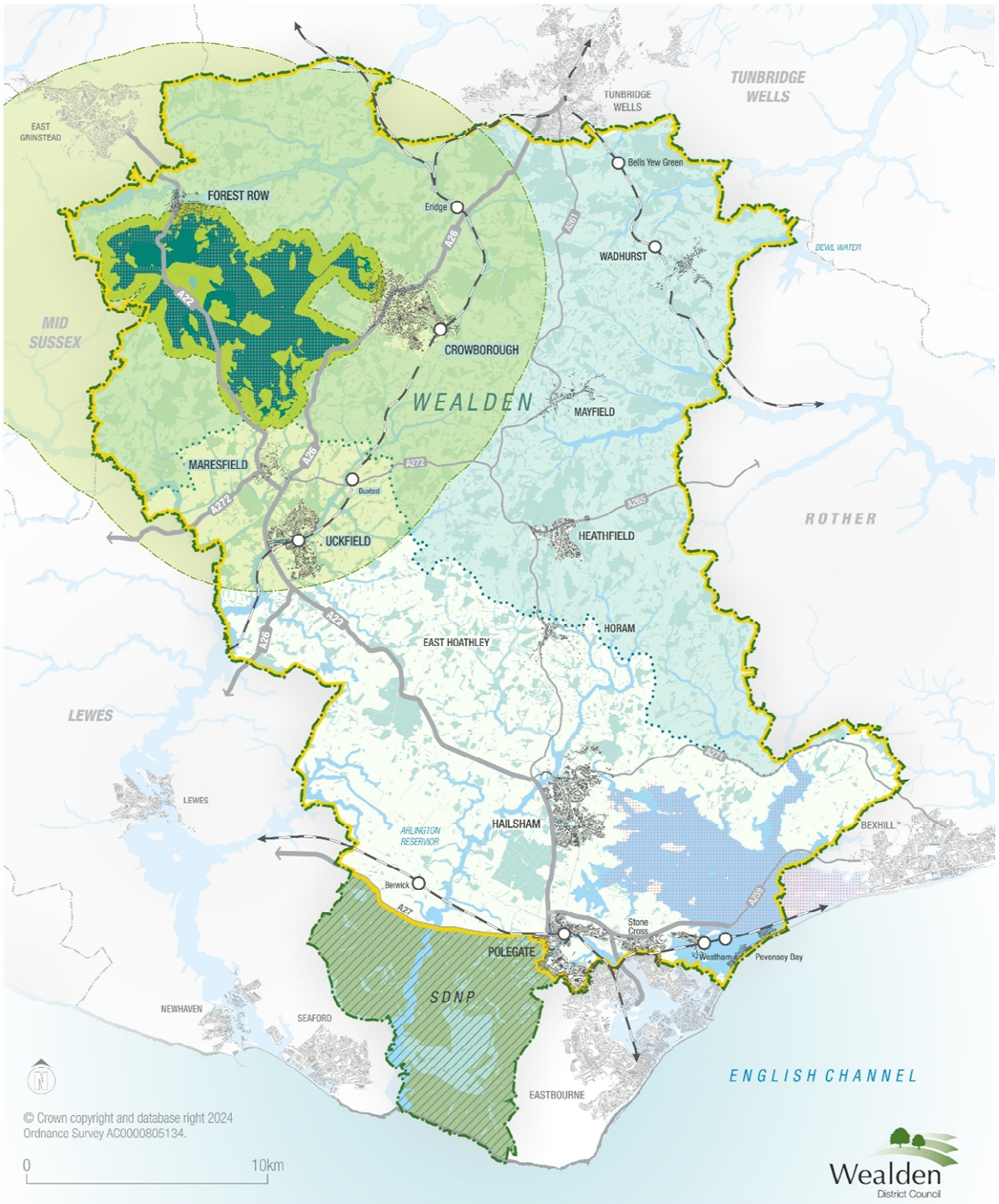
Natural England's woodland inventory shows that 61% of all woodlands in the district are Ancient Woodland.

Within the district there are many trees and woodlands that are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). These trees may have been threatened in the past or be of high amenity value and afforded special protection.

As well as designated sites and habitats, we have an array of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species. Those species are identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). UK BAP priority species are most prevalent in our designated sites, however, many live outside the boundaries of designated sites.

There are numerous BAP habitats present within Wealden and the majority of these areas are identified as Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). Outside of the formally designated sites, these areas are considered the most important areas for habitat enhancement, restoration and creation. These areas will provide us with an opportunity to positively contribute to increasing biodiversity within the district.

Figure 2: Ecological Designations



2.4 Council Structure and Functions

The Council employs 400 to 500 members of staff.

The Council has ten key service areas that have a range of responsibility and jurisdiction, as set out below:

1. **Financial Services:** This service area incorporates strategic finance, accountancy and treasury management and audit and investigations.
2. **People and Organisational Development**: The Service is responsible for elections, equalities, Human Resources, payroll and emergency planning.
3. **Legal and Governance**: Managing legal affairs and governance within the council, including: legal and compliance services, democratic services, data protection and GDPR and information governance;
4. **Planning and Environmental Services**: Overseeing planning applications and environmental input (biodiversity, arboriculture, heritage and drainage);
5. **Planning Policy, Economy, and Climate Change**: Developing and implementing planning policy, community and regeneration and climate change;
6. **Environmental Health**[7]: Ensuring public health and safety through environmental health services, including food safety and health and safety in the workplace;
7. **Digital and Benefits**: Customer contact centre, digital services and the Council's website, Council tax, Business Rates and benefit administration;
8. **Housing**: management of the Council's housing stock and Housing Options and Strategy Service;
9. **Waste and Customer Services**: Managing refuse collection and customer service; and
10. **Assets and Major Projects**: Overseeing major projects and asset management.

Figure 3 shows the Council's departmental organogram by Service area.

2.5 Governance

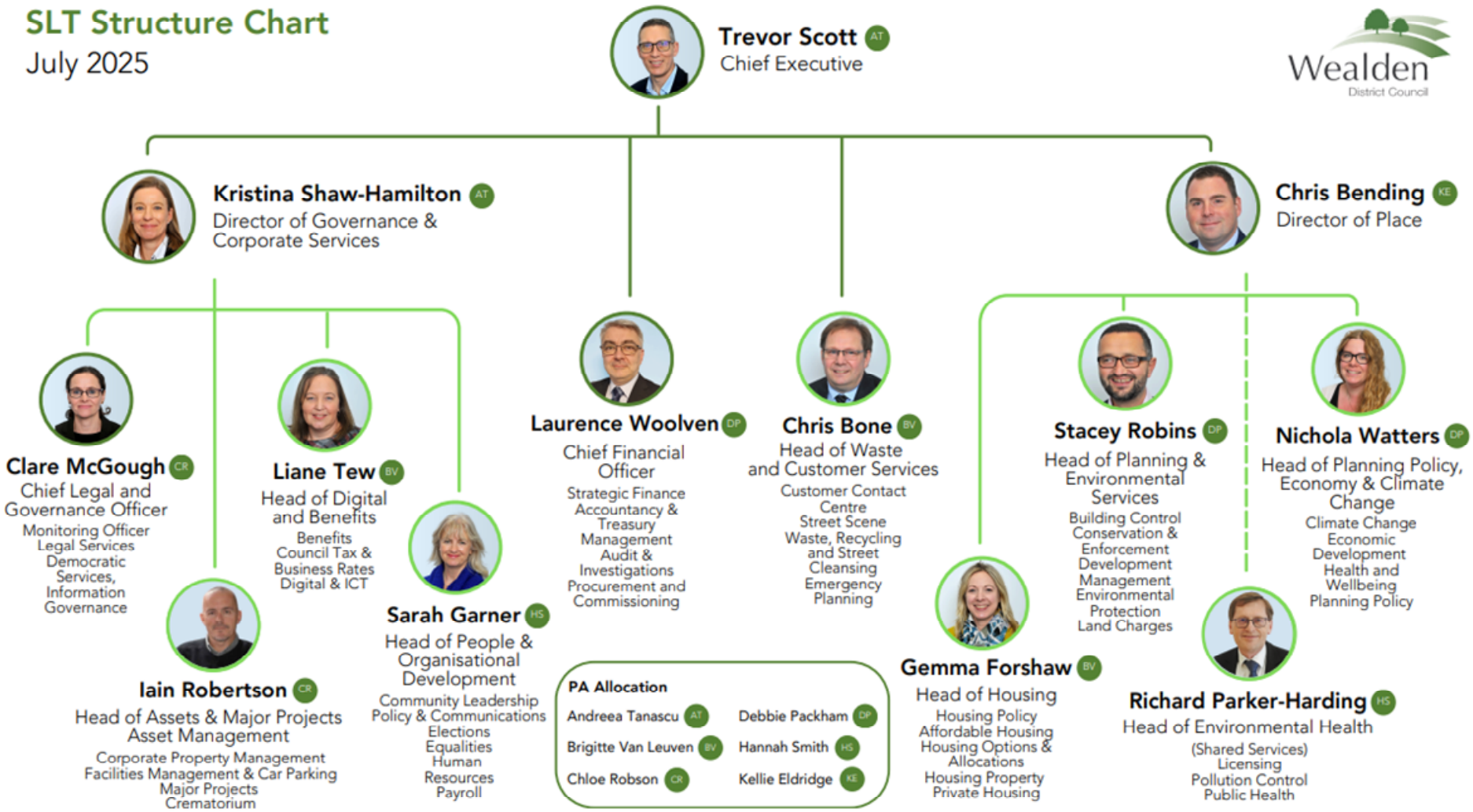
The Council is committed to the effective and efficient delivery of the priorities set out in the Council Strategy to make a better Wealden for all.

The Annual Governance Statement[8] provides an overview of our governance framework. It seeks to provide assurance on the effectiveness of these arrangements and identifies areas for future improvement. This Statement is formally approved by the Council's Audit and Governance Committee on an annual basis.

[7] *Note that Environmental Health is a shared service between Wealden and Rother District Councils*;

[8] Annual Governance Statement - Wealden District Council

Figure 3: Council Structure



3. Strategies, Policies and Plans

As required by the Guidance, this section sets out *'the policies and objectives you have set to meet your biodiversity duty'*. This has been expanded to consider:

- Council strategies; and
- policies and plans.

The strategies, policies and plans relevant to this Biodiversity Report, are set out below.

3.1 Council Strategies

The Council's strategies set out the overall aims for the Council over the medium to long term. The Council strategies relevant to this Biodiversity Report, are:

- Wealden Council Strategy 2023-2027[9]; and
- The Wealden District Council Strategy – Mid-Term Update[10].

Further detail on these strategies are set out below.

3.1.1 Wealden Council Strategy 2023-2027

The Wealden Council Strategy 2023-2027 set out the vision and objectives for the council from 2023 for the coming 4 years. The vision was defined as: '*Wealden is a place where people and nature thrive together'*.

The Council Strategy sets out the three priority areas for achieving the vision:

- the environment and climate change;
- community resilience and wellbeing; and
- the local economy.

The detailed wording of Priority 1 is set out in **Figure 4** below. This first priority – the environment and climate change – demonstrates the Council's commitment to the environment in general, but also specifically biodiversity. By having the environment as the first priority, it signifies the level of importance placed upon the protection and enhancement of the environment, with specific reference to biodiversity.

[9] Wealden District Council Strategy 2023 – 2027 - Wealden District Council

[10] The Wealden District Council Strategy – mid-term update - Wealden District Council

Figure 4: Priority 1 - The Environment and Climate Change

'We are in a climate emergency. We know that residents are deeply concerned about loss of nature, pollution, and extreme weather. It is imperative we act now to radically reduce carbon emissions and restore nature, so that we limit climate change and mitigate its impact, whilst increasing residents' wellbeing. We aim to bring assets under our control to carbon neutrality as fast as possible, whilst enabling our communities to do the same. At the same time, we will prioritise restoration of natural habitats to increase the biodiversity upon which we depend.

CE1. Tackle the Climate Emergency:
We will update our Climate Change Strategy and action plan to deliver change that will lead towards our goal to be a carbon neutral district and ensure that everything we do has the least possible adverse impact on carbon production.

CE2. Countryside and Biodiversity:
We will work with local communities and partners to protect and enhance the district's green infrastructure and biodiversity. We will safeguard local ecosystems and wildlife habitats by restoring nature reserves, wildlife corridors, and enforcing regulations against pollution and habitat destruction providing residents of all ages and abilities the opportunity to enjoy the local countryside for wellbeing and mental health

CE3. Active Travel & Sustainable Transport:
We will work with our county and regional partners to support development of an integrated transport network, prioritising walking, cycling, public transport and electric charging infrastructure.

CE4. Circular no waste economy:
We will develop the foundations of a sustainable circular economy – a system where materials never become waste. We will seek to minimise consumption and therefore reduce amounts sent to energy recovery. We will apply the waste hierarchy; prevent, reduce, reuse, recycle, recover and as a last resort, disposal.

CE5. Renewable energy:
We will increase the proportion of energy generated by carefully located and designed renewable sources in the district, exploring the possibility of community energy projects, and decarbonising existing networks'.

3.1.2 The Wealden District Council Strategy – Mid-Term Update

In 2025 the Council Strategy was reviewed, and a mid-term review produced and published. This sets out an update since the 2023 Strategy, and what has been implemented in the past 2 years.

With respect to Priority 1, the update in relation to biodiversity is set out in **Figure 5** below. This demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to the environment, and specifically biodiversity.

Figure 5: Update on Priority 1 - The Environment and Climate Change

Proud to now be collaborating with the Sussex Wildlife Trust on the Wilder Ouse project, which aims to restore natural processes and create a robust Nature Recovery Network within the Ouse River catchment. So far, over 4,512 trees and 700 metres of hedging have been planted, contributing to carbon capture and enhancing local biodiversity. Three ponds have been created or restored, providing vital habitats for wildlife and improving water quality. The wetlands created by the project capture approximately 4,116 tonnes of carbon annually, while the planted hedgerows capture 38,000 kilograms.

3.2 Policies and Plans

The Council's policies state the principles and rules the Council uses to address and make decisions on particular issues.

The policy context from 2023 is set out in the Consideration Report – which is appended to this Report as **Appendix A**. **Table 1** below provides an update on the Consideration Report, and reflect current policies (as of March 2026). For ease of reference, policies are split by Service area (as shown in Figure 3 'Council Structure' above).

Table 1: Existing Council Policies and Plans

	Service	Policies/Plans
1	Financial Services	There are not currently any specific biodiversity policies or plans for the Council's strategic financial services – this is because this is addressed through other Services within the Council. Noting that there are Finance projects related to biodiversity – as set out in **Table 2**.
		With respect to procurement, the following policies were agreed at Cabinet in 2025: o Wealden Sustainable Procurement Policy, which states '*Wealden District Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and Biodiversity Crisis in 2025. It recognises the vital role in furthering sustainable development, through its procurement of goods, works and services*' and this includes '*Evaluating environmental implications and their relation to Council targets in commissioning, design and procurement processes including qualification and evaluation of bidders'* and *'Building environmental commitments and targets into relevant supplier contracts'*; and o Social Value Policy[11] which states *'Social value considers the environmental, social and economic benefits of a contract, which align with Wealden District Council's priorities'* and *'Some examples of social value opportunities suppliers can offer include:... Supporting the local environment including working with groups to litter pick, rewilding, plant trees and wildflowers, bird/bees/bat box installations'*. These are published on the Council's website and referenced in tender packs for any procurement opportunities at Wealden.
2	People and Organisational Development	There are not currently any specific biodiversity policies or plans within the People and Organisational Development Service.
3	Legal and Governance	The Legal and Governance Service provide key support to other Council Services, including development management, planning policy, climate change, assets and procurement, all of which are directly involved in biodiversity policies and projects.

[11] Wealden Social Value Policy - Wealden District Council

4	Planning and Environmental Services	Development Management assesses planning applications against existing and draft legislative, policy and guidance documents relevant to biodiversity, where relevant. This is closely linked to the work undertaken by Planning Policy – see below. For example, planning applications are assessed against the statutory requirement to provide a minimum 10% of BNG (unless exempt) and negotiate with developer to consider the emerging draft Local Plan's requirement of 20% BNG to achieve better outcomes for development. As required, this information is quantified in Section 7 of this report.
		The Foul Drainage Framework[12] sets out the agreed Wealden and Southern Water framework for foul drainage in constrained catchments. This framework has been adopted to ensure new developments don't further damage Wealden's rivers and seas.
5	Planning Policy, Economy, and Climate Change	The following changes have occurred since the Consideration Report, which are set out below: • the Council published a new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2025[13] which sets a clear framework for tackling climate challenges in Wealden in the short to medium term between 2025 and 2030. *Note: this updates the Climate Emergency Declaration and Climate Emergency Plan referenced in the Consideration Report*; • the Council declared a Biodiversity Crisis in May 2025[14]. The Council recognises the urgent and unprecedented biodiversity crisis threatening our natural environment, ecosystems, and unique wildlife in Wealden and beyond. The decline in biodiversity calls for immediate and decisive action to protect, preserve, and restore nature for future generations. In light of this crisis, the Council has formally declared a biodiversity crisis and supporting nature-first policies. These policies will prioritise the recovery and protection of other region's ecosystems, including ancient and old woodlands, priority habitats, vital river systems, and designated sites such as Ashdown Forest, Pevensey Levels, and the South Downs; and

[12] Foul Drainage Framework - Wealden District Council

[13] Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2025

[14] Biodiversity Crisis

		• the Council declared a Rights of the River motion in July 2025[15]. The Council supports the growing global movement for rights for nature in general and for rivers in particular as a framework for rethinking the relationship between human beings and the rest of the world.
		Wealden District Council is preparing a new Local Plan. The Local Plan will be the key planning document for Wealden District, excluding the area covered by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). Once adopted, the Local Plan will form part of the Development Plan for the District, replacing all existing local plan policies and will be used to assess and make decisions on planning applications. At the time of writing, there is: Regulation 18 draft Wealden Local Plan[16] (March 2024 and February 2026), Habitats Regulation Assessment[17] and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal[18]. Further detail on the draft Local Plan, relevant evidence base documents and relevant polices are included in **Appendix B**
6	Environmental Health	There are not currently any specific biodiversity policies or plans within Environmental Health.
7	Digital and Benefits	The Council has a Digital Strategy[19] for 2025 to 2027. This includes a 'Green Information and Communication Technology (ICT)' section which focuses on the implementation of sustainable and energy-efficient technologies, as well as smarter purchasing and use of ICT assets to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. The opportunities include:

[15] Agenda for Full Council on Wednesday, 16th July, 2025, 10.00 a.m. - Councillors Committees - Wealden District Council

[16] New Local Plan - Wealden District Council

[17] Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Wealden Local Plan

[18] Sustainability Appraisal - Wealden District Council

[19] Digital Strategy 2025 - 2027

		• Reduce Carbon Footprint: Green ICT can help councils minimise their environmental impact by reducing energy consumption and waste; and • Drive Innovation: Leveraging green technologies can spur the development of new solutions to complex local challenges. These measures demonstrate the Council's commitment to the environment in general with respect to ICT, which will also positively impact biodiversity with Wealden.
8	Housing	There are not currently any specific biodiversity policies or plans within Housing; although there are a number of contracts in place that include biodiversity requirements.
9	Waste and Customer Services	There are not currently any specific biodiversity policies or plans within the Waste and Customer Services Service.
10	Assets and Major Projects	The Council own and manage a variety of land and property assets. The Asset Management Plan[20] sets out the Council's arrangements to manage assets efficiently and effectively. The Council leads on development projects in the district – this can include housing, sports facilities, walking trails etc. As required by existing legislation, these projects target a minimum of 10% BNG, but aspire to 20% in line with the emerging draft Local Plan and where possible exceed this. The projects undertaken and proposed are set out below, with the BNG percentage and measures incorporated.

[20] https://www.wealden.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-land-and-property/

4. Completed Actions

As required by the Guidance, and linked to Section 3, this section sets out *'the actions you've completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity'*.

4.1 Ways of Working and Project-Work

Building on the strategies and policies identified, a summary of the ways of working and project-work are set out in **Table 2** below. These are split by Service area, and summarise the action the Council has taken to comply with their biodiversity duty.

Table 2: Overview of Existing Council Ways of Working and Project-Work

	Service	Department	Council Projects
1	Financial Services	Accountancy and Treasury Management	**Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme:** A new community grant funding scheme has been implemented by the Council; Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme. This is an initiative to give each elected Councillor a budget of £10,000 to support community projects, events and organisations within their ward[21]. The first Phase of the Scheme is running from August 2025 until 31 March 2026; this has been included both in this section and the 'Future Actions' section of the report, as the project extends past 1st January 2026. The scheme is open to non-profit community and voluntary organisations to apply for a grant of up to £5,000 in support of projects that will benefit Wealden residents and help deliver the Council's strategic priorities. Successful application are given 12 months for the project to be completed and for the money to be spent. The Biodiversity Applications that have been approved up to 1 January 2026, are included in **Appendix C**. These include: signage and seating at a Community Orchard, educational boards, tools and signs for LNR in Crowborough, tree planting and foliage clearing equipment.
		Procurement	**Procurement Service:** The East Sussex Procurement Hub (ESPH) is the shared procurement service, based at Wealden District Council, for Wealden District Council, Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council[22]. This includes environmental contracts. A register of contracts for Hastings, Rother and Wealden Councils is available to view online[23].
2	People and Organisational Development	Human Resources	**Training:** The Human Resources (HR) department have a Learning Pool of training modules. As part of this, there is a Corporate Induction which provides context the services and activities provided by the Council, and an overview of the Council Strategy (referenced above). There is not currently any mandatory training on biodiversity at Wealden. There is a training programme, and staff can request training related to biodiversity through their managers, as appropriate.
3	Legal and Governance		The Legal and Governance Service provide key support to other Council Services, including development management, planning policy, climate change, assets and procurement, all of which are directly involved in biodiversity policies and projects.
4	Planning and Environmental Services	Development Management	**Local Planning Authority/Development Management**: When determining planning applications, the Council (as the LPA) considers the impact the environment. As required by existing legislation, planning applications are required to target a minimum of 10% BNG. The emerging draft Local Plan is looking to increase this to 20% through Policy NE2 Biodiversity Net Gain. Development Management utilises Mycelia software. This assists with: • automate analysis and reporting – which is also sense checked by officers; and • Mycelia catches risks and issues, to help ensure proposals are feasible and maximise benefits. Mycelia has been used to provide the BNG data in Section 7 of this Biodiversity Report.
			Built and Natural Environment Team: The Built and Natural Environment Team (B&NE) Team contribute to achieving good planning outcomes – with a particular focus on biodiversity, arboricultural, heritage and landscape matters – which in turn ensures that the priorities of the Council's Strategy are being delivered, including: supporting tackling climate change, protecting the countryside and biodiversity. With respect to this Biodiversity Report, the B&NE Team includes two Biodiversity Officers and two Arboriculture Officers – one senior and one officer level. These officers:

[21] Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme - Wealden District Council

[22] The East Sussex Procurement Hub - Wealden District Council

[23] Contracts Register

			• Provide input to the draft Local Plan – specifically in relation to policies related to biodiversity (see **Appendix B**). • Review and comment on planning applications – including ecological reports, tree work applications, tree preservation orders, BNG and conditions; and • Provide support to the enforcement team, when needed. During the reporting period, the Council also committed significant officer and legal resource to the protection of irreplaceable habitats through development management, appeal and court work. This included major housing appeals at Downlands Farm and Bird in Eye Farm, where proposals were dismissed following findings of harm to ancient woodland and, at Downlands Farm, deterioration of irreplaceable habitat. It also included the redetermined Wellshurst Golf appeal, following the quashing of an earlier decision, where the proposal was dismissed after development within the ancient woodland buffer was found capable of causing deterioration. These outcomes form an important part of the Council's biodiversity work and are not fully reflected through biodiversity unit reporting alone.
			Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group: The Council co-ordinates the Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group[24] which includes representatives from more than 20 councils across the south east, spanning from Folkestone and Hythe to the New Forest. Its main objective is to act as a platform for local authorities to come together across political party lines, to hold Southern Water (and their regulators) to account for the poor quality of our waterways and coastline. It was set up in the aftermath of a catalogue of issues including flooding, sewage seeping into people's homes, gardens and roads, the ongoing problem of discharges into rivers and waterways and the inability to deal with additional development.
5	Planning Policy, Economy, and Climate Change	Planning Policy	**Local Plan:** The ongoing work on the emerging draft Local Plan is referenced in **Table 1**, and further detail provide in **Appendix B.**
		Climate Change	**Community Orchard Funding Programme:** In March 2024, launched the Community Orchard Funding[25] programme. This grant programme offers funding for projects that create, restore, or enhance community orchards in Wealden. Projects can be small or large and might include: • New community orchard planting. • Expanding or enriching existing orchards. • Bringing neglected orchards back into community use. • Hosting orchard-related community events. • Educational activities, e.g. pruning workshops, forest school. • Adding biodiversity features such as wildflower areas or habitat improvements to support wildlife and ecological value. The aim is to help communities develop shared outdoor spaces that support nature, climate action, food growing, and social wellbeing.
			Wilder Wealden: The Council approved the Wilder Wealden project in November 2025[26]; a 5 year partnership project with Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) to support nature restoration projects in the district. The five-year partnership between Wealden District Council and Sussex Wildlife Trust will create a connected network of habitats, helping wildlife thrive while supporting local communities. Wilder Wealden aims to reverse biodiversity decline, restore ecosystems, and embed nature recovery principles into council policies and planning. This new initiative builds on the successful Wilder Ouse project, which focuses on restoring the River Ouse catchment, a partnership project with Sussex Wildlife Trust and other partners. Wilder Wealden expands this approach across the entire district, creating a long-term partnership to protect and enhance nature for current and future generations.

[24] Southern Water Stakeholder Group - Wealden District Council

[25] Grants available for communities to grow orchards - Wealden District Council

[26] Partnership with Sussex Wildlife Trust aims to enhance Wealden district - Wealden District Council

			To support delivery, the council has committed £1,195,039 of funding, which was agreed by Wealden councillors at a recent Full Council meeting, with Sussex Wildlife Trust contributing additional 'in-kind' support. A dedicated project board will oversee progress, and outcomes will be regularly reviewed and reported.
			Staff events: The Climate Change Team and Workplace Health Group organise events to engage staff with nature. For example, a seed planting session to plant seeds in small pots which staff can then take home and grow at home.
		Leisure and Wellbeing	**REPF WDC Community Infrastructure and Spaces Programme[27]:** The England-wide initiative is a £110million, two-year capital fund from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It has enabled councils to support projects in rural areas of the district: • In Round One, the Council's Community Spaces Grants programme allocated £15,850.76 towards seven projects to help improve local rural green spaces. The grants programme was launched on Friday 29 September 2023 and projects were completed by June 2024. Whilst six of the projects were not primarily focused on biodiversity, these projects do aim to improve and encourage access to green space, as an important resource for the community and biodiversity e.g. benches/footpaths etc. The seventh project was with **Rotherfield St Martin** which created a friendship garden predominately for older people to enjoy nature and work in the garden. The garden has many possibilities for growing, working with local groups such as school children, learning and friendship. • In Round Two, the Council's Community Spaces Grants programme allocated £42,878.86 towards twelve projects to help improve local rural green spaces and community infrastructure. The grants programme was launched in May 2024 and projects were completed by March 2025. Whilst eleven of the projects were not primarily focused on biodiversity, these projects do aim to improve and encourage access to green space, as an important resource for the community and biodiversity e.g. benches/footpaths etc. The seventh project was with **Wadhurst Parish Council** which included the installation of 26 bird and bat boxes in total.
			Wealden Community Lottery[28]: The Wealden Community Lottery is an online fundraising platform established by Wealden District Council and managed by external lottery provider Gatherwell. It is designed to help local not-for-profit organisations, such as charities, community groups, sports clubs, village halls, PTAs and residents' associations, raise money year-round in a simple and sustainable way. The lottery was officially launched in early 2023, with ticket sales opening on 1 March 2023 and the first draw taking place on 25 March 2023. 117 good causes actively benefiting from the lottery. Many include climate change and environmentally focused groups, that are benefitting from raising funds through the lottery to deliver valuable projects and services across Wealden including: • **Pevensey and Westham Community Forest Garden:** The Forest Garden, entirely run by volunteers, is about local people growing food in a sustainable way that allows wildlife to flourish too. It was created in 2016, with the help of a start-up grant from Wealden District Council, on an old allotment site that had been abandoned and unmanaged for many years. Volunteers have created clearings for beehives, planted many fruit and nut trees, created a herb garden, built a wildlife pond, and run community workshops on site. The Forest Garden follows sustainable principles, and volunteers have cleared away areas of dead undergrowth and pollarding many overgrown trees and shrubs. Pathways and clearings were made to house the hives. The flora and fauna on the site is now abundant and provides good foraging for the bees and other pollinators.

[27] https://www.wealden.gov.uk/information-for-businesses/economic-development-and-growth/rural-england-prosperity-fund/community-spaces-projects/.

[28] https://www.wealdencommunitylottery.co.uk/

			Some mature apple trees have survived from the old allotment days. Volunteers have recently planted a variety of fruit trees including apple, plum, medlar and walnut, which are thriving.
			
			• **East Hoathly and Halland Community Garden:** East Hoathly and Halland Community Garden provides a safe space for people to come together and garden. They focus on promoting good mental health and well being by being outdoors and growing fruit and veg to support our local foodbanks. It is a fun and sociable place surrounding by ancient woodlands.
			
			• **Maresfield Conservation Group:** raises funds for the village and is involved in many projects, including the following that are biodiversity focused:
			  • annual bulb planting
			  • installation and maintenance of flower beds and planters
			  • regular clean-up days
			  • maintaining footpaths by clearing fallen trees & overgrown hedges and replacing sign-posts
			  • Autumn leaf clearing
			
			• **Manor Park & Hempstead Fields Residents' Association -** Part of their lottery pot is about to be spent on refurbishing a large planter which is planted and maintained by one of their members.
			
			• **Ashdown Forest Foundation -** Covering over 10 square miles, Ashdown Forest is one of the largest open access areas in Southeast England. Situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, its lowland heathland and deciduous woodland habitats are home to many rare and threatened species.
			
			The Ashdown Forest Foundation is an independent charity and is not involved in the day-to-day management of the Forest. Instead, the Foundation raises vital funding needed to protect the Forest. The mission is to raise awareness and funds to conserve and enhance the Forest for enjoyment, education, health, and recreation for now and generations to come.
			
			• Many other local organisations signed up to the lottery improve and encourage access to green space, as an important resource for the community and biodiversity e.g. benches/footpaths etc.

			In addition to the above, there are a number of projects that are not primarily biodiversity focused, but include biodiversity components:
			• A new community sports hub in Hailsham[29] will be opening in late summer 2026. Whilst the project is delivering a new sports hub, it was also designed in line with the Council Strategy and included:
			  ▪ 273 mature and semi mature trees (3m high when planted);
			  ▪ 8,300 whips (600mm to 1.7m high). These will grow to 1.5m to 3m high;
			  ▪ Reptiles & amphibians: Brash/refugia piles and five hibernacula;
			  ▪ Breeding birds: 20 new bird boxes installed on retained trees;
			  ▪ Bats: Sensitive lighting and ten maternity-suitable bat boxes;
			  ▪ Badgers: Maintain 30m buffer and enhanced woodland/hedgerow corridors;
			  ▪ Invertebrates: 1 stag beetle log pile and 1 insect hotel; and
			  ▪ General: Ecological briefings, pollution control, habitat buffers, annual checks.
			
			In October 2024, Beacon Academy opened its resurfaced hockey pitch and in October 2025, Hailsham Academy opened the school's newly renovated all weather hockey pitch. Funding from Wealden District Council was provided to contribute to these projects. Improvements to lighting to make the pitches more energy efficient and sustainable were made.

[2929] Wealden Community Sports Hub | Let's Talk Wealden

		Grant Funding	**Community-Led Infrastructure Fund:** The Community-Led Infrastructure Fund (CLIF)[30] launched by the Council in 2025, is a capital grant programme designed to support community-led projects that address local needs and align with the Council Strategy. It is funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Climate Emergency Reserve, with a budget of £2 million allocated for capital grants ranging from £5,000 to £200,000. The programme prioritises projects that deliver long-lasting benefits to community spaces, infrastructure, and facilities, operating on a rolling basis over three years starting in September 2025. The fund aims to contribute to the Council Strategy goals, 'Climate Change and Environment', with the aim of advancing the district's carbon neutrality, protecting biodiversity, and enhancing sustainable transport options such as walking, cycling, and electric vehicle infrastructure. As part of this, relevant organisations can apply for grants with the aim of greening the district, through enhancements to recreation grounds, nature reserves, trails, community gardens, and implementation of nature-based climate resilience solutions like rain gardens and pollinator plantings. Successful projects will be required to collect baseline and post-project data aligned with Council Strategy aims, with monitoring and evaluation included in the Grant Funding Agreement. No applications have been received for biodiversity grants to date – but this is likely due to the programme only commencing in September 2025.
6	Environmental Health		There are no recent projects linked to biodiversity for this Service.
7	Digital and Benefits		**GIS mapping:** The Council has purchased new GIS mapping software to more mapping around conservation. This will provide more reliable and clear information on ecological mapping - which can be used both with the council (e.g. planning officers determining planning applications), but also will be front facing so that the general public have more and improved access to ecological mapping data within Wealden.
8	Housing		There are two projects that have included bio-diversity measures. The first was Cart Barn, Heathfield and the other Coronation Place (formerly Streatfeild House), Uckfield. Both of these have included Ecology Enhancement Strategies.
9	Waste and Customer Services		There are not currently any specific biodiversity projects within the Waste and Customer Services Service. There are however a number of environmental measures implemented by the Waste and Customer Services Service that will have secondary beneficial impacts on biodiversity: • The Council has transitioned their diesel-powered waste and street cleansing fleet of vehicles to using HVO, reducing CO2 emissions by up to 90% but also helping tackle air pollution by reducing emissions of carbon monoxide, NOx and particulate matter; • The Street Scene Team have replaced their two diesel powered vans with fully electric vans. • Through maximising recycling and using energy from waste for non-recyclable materials, the Council will minimise the use of landfill. Less than 0.5% of the waste the Council collects goes to landfill.
10	Assets and Major Projects		**Crematorium[31]:** Until 2018, Wealden did not have its own crematorium. Instead residents relied on the increasingly busy crematoriums in neighbouring towns outside the district. After consultation and assessment, the new crematorium opened in the spring of 2019. The crematorium includes 25 acres of grounds, which includes carefully planned gardens, woodland areas, grazing/pasture and wildflower meadows, over recent years the following has been implemented: • new hedgerows have been planted together with nearly 8,000 trees and more than 4,500 shrubs and 4,700 herbaceous plants;

[30] Wealden Community Led Infrastructure Fund (CLIF) - Wealden District Council

[31] wealdencrematorium.co.uk/about-us/

		• bat and bird boxes have been installed across the site; and The use of chemicals is a policy with the Council's contract – this included clauses such as '*The use of any herbicide, fungicide or insecticide is prohibited anywhere on the crematorium site unless specifically authorised by a senior manager*'.
		Horsted Green Park: Horsted Green Park[32] is a 74 acre open space just off the A22 near Uckfield. This site is managed by the Council, and includes orchards, a pond and wildlife. This project: • Planted 1,500 Whips all British Native, to form a hedge that will effectively divide the park into three areas for easier management; • Planted 25 softwood trees and a further 10 to replace those that have died to increase bio diversity; and • Installed nine bird and bat boxes and one Owl box.
		Walshes Park: Walshes Park[33] a 70 acre park off the Alderbrook Estate in Crowborough. Wealden District Council acquired the site late in 2015. The reason being to provide a SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) to mitigate the effects of development in Crowborough and provide a recreational area for local residents. The site had previously been used for horse grazing for many years. This site is managed by the Council, and the Council have worked with landscape and ecological experts to retain the character of the site whilst making it an accessible and pleasant environment to visit and spend time at. This project: • Installed nine bird and bat boxes and one Owl box; • Cut back of 800 m of hedges part of annual maintenance; • Strimmed out 600m of brambles; and • Planted 25 softwood trees all British native.
		The Cuckoo Trail: The Cuckoo Trail is a picturesque, mainly off-road route running for eleven miles from Polegate to Heathfield. The Council was awarded £645,000 in funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to enhance it Cuckoo trail[34]. There are 3 key themes to the approach: People, Place and Nature. Biodiversity focused projects implemented within the reporting period are as follows: • Only diseased/unsafe trees felled. Most which have felled have had ash dieback. Trees monolithed where possible to retain standing deadwood/habitat for bats, birds/inverts. All cordwood and arisings left on site to provide additional habitat. This will continue for future works; • 10 train-themed bird boxes and one hedgehog box installed along the length of the trail. Made by the local men's shed. Installed in 2025; • Commencement in 2024 of cut and collect regime for the twice yearly verge cut to promote wild flowers and reduce dominance of rank grasses; • Laurel (invasive species) removal at Horam Hub in 2025; and • Three new panels have been installed that feature wildlife/landscape information; installed 2024. Additionally, there are also some non-biodiversity focused projects – whilst these projects do not explicitly include any biodiversity elements, the overarching aim of the project is to protect and maintain the Cuckoo trail, as an important resource for the community and biodiversity: • The Artists' Bridge in Hailsham, East Sussex (Eastwell Place Bridge) was opened on September 9th 2023[35] ; • Signage and wayfinding; improvements to the signage and wayfinding were delivered in early 2024; • Heathfield picnic area; Improvements to the accessibility and layout of the Heathfield picnic area; and • Summerhill outdoor gym; he trail and has seen eleven pieces of outdoor gym equipment.
		Grounds Maintenance Contract and Tree Work Contract: The Council has a grounds maintenance contract and a tree work contract.

[32] Horsted Green Park - Healthy Wealden

[33] Walshes Park - Wealden District Council

[34] Improvements to the Cuckoo Trail | Let's Talk Wealden

[35] The Artists' Bridge | Hailsham Festival

		The Grounds Maintenance Contract covers all areas of amenity grounds maintenance, and was contracted in 2020. The contract includes grass cutting, maintaining flower beds and borders, weeding / maintaining hard standing i.e. carparks, alleyways and footpaths, hedge cutting and keep some ditches and streams clear. Many biodiversity measures were written into the contract. Specific biodiversity measures carried out through this contract are: o Installed bird boxes around our retirement living sites; o Cleaned out waterbutts; o Installed and planted up a raised planter/spring bulbs; o Removed invasive bamboo from residents' gardens'; o Planted up a new garden area; and o Maintained a wildflower meadow. The Tree Work Contract manages the trees on HRA Land, this includes trees in the woodland, as well as trees on amenity land and gardens. Specific biodiversity measures carried out through this contract are: o Assisted in clearing fly tipped waste from streams and ditches; o Planted additional fruit trees in an orchard established in 2022. Planted two broad leaf trees; o Planted a Liquidambar styraciflua 'Lane Roberts' at East Hoathly; and o Stacked logs in woodlands to act as habitats for wildlife.

5. Partnership Working

The Council prioritises partnership working with stakeholders.

5.1 Wealden as a Consultee

The Council comments on forthcoming/draft Government legislation, standards, policy and guidance, when required.

An example of this is in 2024, the Council's arboriculturist's provided comments and attended a workshop on the draft BS 5837 consultation. The Council's comments focused on improving areas of potential confusion, lack of clarity, unproven methodology, lack of enforceability. and aligned with current planning policy and guidance. Many of the proposed changes introduced an increased level of protection for trees and hedges and a more cautious approach to information gathering at an early stage; beneficial for biodiversity.

5.2 Working Collaboratively with Stakeholders

The Council works closely with a number of other organisations on project that promote and protect biodiversity in the district, including:

- East Sussex County Council (ESCC) – it is noted that the ESCC will be producing their own Biodiversity Report;
- NatureSpace Partnership;
- Sussex Wildlife Trust;
- Southern Water;
- the Environment Agency;
- OFWAT (Office of Water Services) – the water services regulation authority; Surrounding local authorities; and
- Authors of Neighbourhood Plans.

Projects examples are set out below - there which are being led by other organisations, but the Council is a key stakeholder are set out below:

- **Great Crested Newts District License:** ESCC holds a great crested newt District Licence, granted by Natural England, under which developments can now be authorised. The ESCC are therefore responsible for the District Licence scheme for great crested newts, which covers the Wealden district. NatureSpace Partnership are the delivery vehicle for the Sussex wide GCN district licence.

  Working in collaboration with the Newt Conservation Partnership and supported by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust and the Freshwater Habitats Trust, the scheme funds creation, restoration and management of ponds, terrestrial habitat, and connectivity features. The scheme is currently creating eight high-quality new newt ponds for every one lost, providing net gain not only for great crested newts but also a wide range of other biodiversity.

Within the reporting period, 46 compensation ponds have been created or restored in East Sussex and over 130ha of terrestrial habitat has been made available.

- **Sussex Nature Partnership Local Authority Network:** The ESCC hosts the Sussex Nature Partnership and its constituent Local Authority Network, delivering monthly information sharing webinars to all LPAs across Sussex and developing coordinated responses to key consultations. The Council attends and input into this where appropriate.

- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRSs) are a new legal requirement arising from the Environment Act (2021). They are spatial strategies covering the whole of England, intended to drive more coordinated, practical and focused action on nature recovery. They will support the delivery of BNG and provide a focus for the strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. ESCC has been appointed as the Responsible Authority to develop and publish a LNRS for East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

  LNRS for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove was drafted and out for public consultation from October-November 2025[36]. Its development has been supported by West Sussex County Council as the Responsible Authority for the neighbouring West Sussex LNRS, with key aspects of the two Sussex strategies developed together under the banner of Sussex Nature Recovery.

  A report, summarising consultation feedback will be shared early 2026.

- **Wilder Ouse[37]:** In July 2024 the Council became a formal partner of the 'Wilder Ouse' project which brings people and organisations together across the Ouse catchment to restore natural processes a create a nature recovery network. (Wilder Ouse item 4[38])

  The project was hosted by Sussex Wildlife Trust, and supported by the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Environment Agency, and Lewes District Council.

- **Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group:** As noted above, the Council co-ordinates the Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group which includes representatives from more than 20 councils across the south east, spanning from Folkestone and Hythe to the New Forest.

[36] East Sussex and Brighton & Hove LNRS - Help shape your Local Nature Recovery Strategy | Your Voice West Sussex

[37] Wilder Ouse | Sussex Wildlife Trust

[38] Agenda for Cabinet on Monday, 15th July, 2024, 10.00 a.m. - Councillors Committees - Wealden District Council

Various meetings have taken place since the Group's inception (some of which have included special speakers from Southern Water, the Environment Agency and most recently OFWAT) which have all been well received and continue to be ongoing.

- **Neighbourhood Plans**: The Council is consulted on Neighbourhood Plans, which include biodiversity elements. Specifically: Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review (update), Fletching Neighbourhood Plan (new) and Hellingly Review NP (update). The Neighbourhood Plans are reviewed by the Biodiversity Officer, and comments provided, as needed.

6. Raising Awareness, Educating and Working With the Community (optional)

This section of the report sets out the actions taken by the Council to help the public understand biodiversity and why it's important to conserve and enhance it.

The Council raises awareness on biodiversity through a variety of means. Some of the ways the council has raised awareness and educated the community are set out below:

- **Webpages:** The Council's website includes webpages dedicated to biodiversity and the natural environment, designed to raise awareness and engage the public. These pages provide information on biodiversity (including BNG), highlight local projects, strategies, and practical guidance on how individuals can support biodiversity at home and in their local area alongside suggestions for exploring nature across the district. For example, the Council raises public awareness of how their gardens can support biodiversity, through 'Gardeners Corner'[39] which provides advice on gardening and supporting wildlife.

- **Draft Local Plan Exhibitions:** The most recent stage of the emerging Local Plan (known as Regulation 18 stage) sets out the Council's draft policies and proposed growth strategy and was an important stage in the plan-making process. It provided an early opportunity for communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners, and stakeholders to 'have a say' and comment on the draft Local Plan before it is considered further. The draft Local Plan was subject to consultation between the 15 March 2024 and the 10 May 2024. Nine drop-in consultation events that were held throughout the district.

  In December 2024, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated as well as the calculation on housing need, known as the 'standard method' which results in increased housing need within Wealden District compared to that in the March 2024 draft local plan. Subsequently, the Council determined that a further consultation stage was needed to address those national planning changes and to consider whether further changes to the spatial strategy are required. The consultation ran from 6 February to the 30 March 2026[40]. Ten drop-in consultation events that were held throughout the district.

- **Men's Sheds**[41] encourage people to come together to make, repair and repurpose, supporting projects in their local communities. Improving wellbeing, reducing loneliness and combatting social isolation. In Wealden, Men's Sheds have been building and putting up bird boxes along the Cuckoo Trail.

[39] Gardeners Corner | Let's Talk Wealden

[40] Draft 'Focused' Local Plan (Regulation 18) | Let's Talk Wealden

[41] Home | Men's Sheds Association | UKMSA

- **School outreach programme** – teaching young people about respecting the Cuckoo Trail and wider environment. This summer, over 300 primary schoolchildren from across Wealden are delving into the natural world of the Cuckoo Trail through a series of free art workshops provided by the Council. The initiative is part of an Arts and Heritage outreach programme linked to the Cuckoo Trail and being delivered as part of Wealden's allocation from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. The creative workshops, which are designed to educate and inspire young minds, are based on a new Cuckoo Trail activity booklet. This educates children about the wildlife and vegetation along the Cuckoo Trail, explaining its evolution from a busy railway line to the popular greenway it is today. Schools have been able to choose from several workshop options including 'Nest Building and Flower Pressing'; 'Drawing with Ink'; and 'Creating a Cuckoo Trail Collage'. Children then use twigs, leaves and flowers collected from the Cuckoo Trail to produce their own wildlife or landscape art pieces, replica birds' nests or drawings of those who lived and worked along the former railway line. Children's book illustrator and art facilitator Giulia Casarotto has collaborated with Prowse & Co. Ltd to create the new children's activity booklet and deliver these workshops, which are planned to be rolled out to older Wealden residents too.

- **Green Gym** – The Council includes the public in projects to improve biodiversity, through introducing the district's first 'green gym' along the Cuckoo Trail and at the Wealden Crematorium. Volunteers can help with activities such as tree clearing, vegetation management and improving environmental infrastructure.

- **Smoke Free Beach** – working with East Sussex to create a voluntary smoke free beach at Pevensey Bay.

- **Information Boards** – The Council has installed information boards in green spaces e.g. Cuckoo Trail. These provide details on the local area, including (in some instances) biodiversity.

- **Careers Fairs and Enterprising Days** – The Council dedicates officer time each year to attend Careers Fairs and Enterprising Days at local schools and colleges. This offers students valuable insights into different career pathways and post-16 opportunities.

7. Biodiversity Net Gain

As part of this report, the Council is required to report on the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), including:

- The number of planning permissions requiring BNG;
- Details of approved biodiversity gain plans, including expected biodiversity unit gains or losses (on-site, off-site, or via statutory credits); and
- Monitoring and enforcement activity associated with BNG delivery.

7.1 Reporting Period and Software Utilised

This report summarises the Council's BNG activity for the reporting period 12 February 2024 to 31 December 2025, including all eligible planning permissions requiring BNG, the composition of expected biodiversity gains across habitats, hedgerows, and watercourses, the location of off-site units, and current monitoring and enforcement status.

To efficiently meet national reporting requirements, the Council has used Mycelia software by Verna, which automates the extraction, analysis, and reporting of BNG data. Mycelia is specifically designed to support LPAs in processing biodiversity metrics and generating statutory BNG reporting. Mycelia was not able to provide data for all planning applications processed, specifically applications where BNG was not mandatory, instead, MasterGov was used to extract this information.

7.2 Planning Applications that Require BNG

Table 4 sets out the 'Eligible planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requiring biodiversity net gain' as extracted from Mycelia. In summary, the Council have received 54 planning applications that require BNG within the reporting period; with 2,050 planning applications being exempt.

Of the 54 planning applications that require BNG within the reporting period, 11 have had biodiversity gains plans approved:

- 10 out of these 11 secured BNG through on-site units only; which accounts for 90.91%; and
- 1 out of these 11 secured BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units; which accounts for 9.09%.

No planning applications secured BNG through:

- off-site units only;
- statutory credits only;
- a combination of on-site units and statutory credits only; or
- a combination of on-site, off-site units and statutory credits.

Table 4: Eligible planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requiring biodiversity net gain

ID	Consented applications requiring net gains	Number	Proportion (%)
A	Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	52	Not applicable
B	Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	2050	Not applicable
C	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	11	Not applicable
D	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	10	90.91
E	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0.00
F	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0.00
G	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	1	9.09
H	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00
I	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of off-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00
J	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site, off-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00

7.3 Details and Composition of Approved Biodiversity Gain Plans

Table 5 sets out the 'Overall expected gains and losses across all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period' as extracted from Mycelia.

Under the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, all biodiversity gains and losses must be measured using one of three distinct unit types; Habitat Units, Hedgerow Units and Watercourse Units. These unit types cannot be mixed, traded, or converted between one another, and each must independently demonstrate at least a 10% net gain. These unit types include:

- Habitat Units measure the biodiversity value of area-based habitats, such as grasslands, woodlands, heathlands, wetlands and other terrestrial or aquatic vegetated habitats;
- Hedgerow Units measure the biodiversity value of linear hedgerow features, including native species-rich hedgerows, lines of trees acting as hedgerows, and woody linear features defined within the metric; and
- Watercourse Units measure the biodiversity value of linear water features, such as rivers, streams, canals and heavily modified watercourses.

During the reporting period:

- there has been an average percentage increase in on-site biodiversity units of:
    - 16.82% of area habitat;
    - 18.61% of hedgerow; and
    - 86.72% of water course.
- there has been an average percentage increase in off-site biodiversity units of:
    - 367.80% of area habitat;
    - 46.56% of hedgerow; and
    - No change to water course.
- there has been 0 biodiversity units offset using statutory credits.

In total, this has resulted in a total net increase in biodiversity units of:

- 2.3 of area habitat – an increase of 19.03%;
- 1.45 of hedgerow – an increase of 19.25%; and
- 0.12 of watercourse – an increase of 86.72%.

The detailed breakdown of the three habitat types, and the species contained within these are included in:

- **Table 9:** Composition of biodiversity gains – Areas(Habitat Units)
- **Table 10:** Composition of biodiversity gains – Hedgerow and Lines of Trees (Hedgerow Units)
- **Table 11:** Composition of biodiversity gains – Watercourse (Watercourse Units)

Table 6 sets out the 'Impact on Irreplaceable Habitat' as extracted from Mycelia. This confirms that there have been no biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period where the on-site change negatively impacts irreplaceable habitats.

Table 7 sets out the 'Location of off-site biodiversity units'. 100% of the off-site biodiversity units are located inside the Council boundary or National Character Area (NCA) of impact site.

7.4 Monitoring and Enforcement Activity Associated with BNG Delivery

7.4.1 Monitoring BNG

There have been no permissions within the reporting period with legal agreement for BNG start on site, and therefore the Council does not have any sites within the 'monitoring' phase. As such there is no data to present on monitoring.

With regards to tracking permissions that require monitoring, the Council is reviewing how this is logged and tracked within Mycelia for the future.

7.4.2 Enforcement

One enforcement case was reported within the reporting period, but was not enforced until after the reporting period, and therefore has not been included.

While not part of the formal BNG monitoring dataset for this reporting period, the Council's biodiversity work has also included the protection of irreplaceable habitats, particularly ancient woodland, through development management, appeal and legal processes. This reflects the fact that some important biodiversity outcomes secured by the Council do not sit within biodiversity unit reporting alone.

Table 5: Overall expected gains and losses across all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period

ID	Overall expected gains and losses	Area habitat	Hedgerow	Watercourse
A	Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	11.14	7.34	0.13
B	Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	13.01	8.71	0.25
C	Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	+1.87	+1.37	+0.12
D	Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	16.82%	18.61%	86.72%
E	Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.07	0.17	0.00
F	Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	0.33	0.25	0.00
G	Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	+0.26	+0.08	0.00
H	Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	367.80%	46.56%	0.00%
I	Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	+2.13	+1.45	+0.12
K	Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	19.03%	19.25%	86.72%

Table 6: Impact on Irreplaceable Habitat

ID	Impact on irreplaceable habitat	Total	Proportion (%)
A	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period where the on-site change negatively impacts irreplaceable habitats	0	0.00

Table 7: Location of off-site biodiversity units

ID	Location of off-site biodiversity units	Total	Proportion (%)
A	Number of off-site biodiversity units located inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	0.58	100.00
B	Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside LPA or NCA of impact site, but in neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.00	0.00
C	Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside of LPA or NCA of impact site and neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.00	0.00

Table 9: Composition of biodiversity gains - areas

ID	Habitat Type - Area	Total biodiversity units at baseline	Total hectares at baseline	Total biodiversity units post - development	Total hectares post - development	Net change in biodiversity units	Net change in hectares
A	Cropland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
B	Grassland	5.65	1.80	7.08	1.63	1.44	-0.17
C	Heathland and shrub	0.02	0.00	0.41	0.07	0.39	0.06
D	Lakes	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.03	0.20	0.03
E	Sparsely vegetated land	0.11	0.02	0.02	0.00	-0.08	-0.01
F	Urban	0.49	1.29	0.36	1.37	-0.13	0.08
G	Wetland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
H	Woodland and forest	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.00	0.00
I	Intertidal sediment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Coastal saltmarsh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
K	Rocky shore	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
L	Coastal lagoons	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
M	Intertidal hard structures	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
N	Watercourse footprint	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00
O	Individual trees	4.94	0.53	5.26	0.74	0.32	0.21
	Total	11.21	3.68	13.34	3.89	2.13	0.20

Table 10: Composition of biodiversity gains - hedgerows and lines of trees

ID	Habitat type - hedgerows and lines of trees	Total biodiversity units at baseline	Total kilometres at baseline	Total biodiversity units post - development	Total kilometres post - development	Net change in biodiversity units	Net change in kilometres
A	Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
B	Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	4.50	0.41	4.50	0.41	0.00	0.00
C	Species-rich native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
D	Native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.82	0.05	0.82	0.05	0.00	0.00
E	Species-rich native hedgerow	0.00	0.00	1.25	0.18	1.25	0.18
F	Native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
G	Native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
H	Ecologically valuable line of trees	0.97	0.16	0.67	0.09	-0.30	-0.07
I	Ecologically valuable line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Native hedgerow	0.29	0.07	0.92	0.22	0.63	0.15

K	Line of trees	0.83	0.21	0.77	0.19	-0.06	-0.02
L	Line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
M	Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.10	0.10	0.03	0.03	-0.07	-0.07
		7.51	0.99	8.96	1.16	1.45	0.17

Table 11: Composition of biodiversity gains - watercourses

	Habitat type - watercourse	Total biodiversity units at baseline	Total kilometers at baseline	Total biodiversity units post - development	Total kilometers post - development	Net change in biodiversity units	Net change in kilometers
	Priority habitat	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Other rivers and streams	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Ditches	0.13	0.03	0.25	0.03	0.12	0.00
	Canals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Culvert	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total	0.13	0.03	0.25	0.03	0.12	0.00

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATING YOUR ACTIONS (optional)

8.1 Local Plan

Once the Local Plan is adopted, the indicators will be reported through the Council's Authority Monitoring Report (AMR), which is usually published on an annual basis at the end of the calendar year.

Local planning authorities must publish information at least annually that shows any information collected which relates to indicators in the plan, and any commentary on the implementation of policies. The regulations set out what information the AMR must contain. If it appears that policies are not being effective or are no longer appropriate in light of more recent national policies or local circumstances, than the Council will review the policy or policies concerned, which may lead to a review/partial review of a Local Plan. A local plan is required to be reviewed within 5 years of adoption to check that policies are not out-of-date.

This information will be used to inform the monitoring information contained within the next Biodiversity Plan.

8.2 Procurement

As part of '*Wealden Sustainable Procurement Policy*' prospective suppliers may be asked to provide evidence of their environmental policy and standards at the tender stage and contract delivery stages. Depending on the procurement, failure to provide these may result in lost scoring opportunities or exclusion from pre-qualification or tender stages.

The Council recognise that not all suppliers will currently be able to provide data, credentials, plans or commitments to environmental initiatives due to multiple reasons, such as environmental maturity or size. As a result, the Council will aim to work collaboratively with these organisations to understand what options may be taken to support the supplier and improve any environmental considerations, both during the tender process and progressing through the lifetime of the contract.

The Council will aim to set performance measures that are proportional and relevant to the contract.

9. The Council's Future Actions - 2026 Onwards

This section sets out how the Council plans to fulfil our biodiversity duty over the next 5 years following the end of this reporting period. This section will be used to inform the next reporting period, as part of the Council's monitoring and evaluation.

9.1 Strategies, Policies and Plans

Looking forward, the following strategies, policies and plans will be implemented (in addition to the existing):

- **Adoption of the New Local Plan:** The Council's Local Development Scheme[42] (LDS) (2026) sets out the timetable for the planning documents. The next stage in the Local Plan known as 'Regulation 19' is due to be published later in 2026, before being submitted formally to the Planning Inspectorate at the end of the calendar year. The new Local Plan is due to be adopted at the end of 2027.

- **Health and Wellbeing Strategy**: A refresh to the existing Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2025 will be published in Spring 2026. Priorities will remain as mental health, positive health choices, social isolation and loneliness and active communities. As part of this, the Council will be recommending the production and implementation a new Green and Blue Wellbeing programme. This will look to build on the many health and wellbeing benefits of being outdoors in open spaces and look to link with other Council workstreams including an increased focus on the environment and biodiversity.

9.2 Partnership Working

Future projects which are being led by other organisations, but the Council is a key stakeholder are set out below:

- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** A report, summarising consultation feedback will be shared early 2026.
- **New District Licensing for hazel dormice:** Naturespace are looking to set up a new District Licensing for hazel doormice (similar to GCN). Sussex is the pilot scheme for this proposed licensing scheme – and therefore Naturespace will be working closely with the Council on this project.

9.3 Ways of Working and Project-Work

Future and/or ongoing ways of working and project-work that are set out in **Table 12** below. These are split by Service.

- [42] Wealden District Council Local Development Scheme January 2026

Table 12: Future Council Projects

	Service	Department	Future Council Projects
1	Financial Services	Accountancy and Treasury Management	**Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme (ongoing):** The Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme will continue until 31 March 2026, supporting projects that will benefit Wealden residents and help deliver the Council's strategic priorities, including biodiversity focused projects. At the end of the scheme period (31 March 2026) a summary of all decisions made will be published on the Council's website.
2	People and Organisational Development	Human Resources	The HR department will continue their current training programme – refer to **Table 2**.
3	Legal and Governance		The Legal and Governance Service will continue to provide key support to other Council Services, including Development Management, planning policy, climate change, assets and procurement, all of which are directly involved in biodiversity policies and projects.
4	Planning and Environmental Services	Development Management	**Mycelia:** The Development Management department are expected to utilise Mycelia software for at least the next 3 years. Continue to secure biodiversity protection and enhancements in new development as well as secure statutory BNG.
			The Council will continue to commit officer and legal resource, where necessary, to the protection of irreplaceable habitats through development management, appeal and litigation work. This includes ongoing Planning Court proceedings in relation to Pickly Wood, concerning alleged harm to ancient semi natural woodland. In March 2026, permission was granted for linked claims to proceed to a full hearing.
5	Planning Policy, Economy, and Climate Change	Climate Change	**Community Orchard Funding programme:** Following on from Section 4, Round 2[43] of the Community Orchard Funding programme was open for applications until 30 July 2026* (*subject to change).

[43] Wealden Community Orchard Fund: Round Two | Let's Talk Wealden

			Following the success of Round One, this next round of funding continues our support for community and voluntary groups, schools, charities, and town/parish councils to plant and care for community orchards across Wealden. These shared green spaces help to strengthen community connections, support biodiversity, and contribute to climate resilience.
			Wilder Wealden: As noted in Section 4, the Wilder Wealden project is a 5 year partnership project with Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) to support nature restoration projects in the district. An update on this project will be provided in the next Biodiversity Report.
		Leisure and Wellbeing	**Wealden Community Grants Programme[44]:** A total of 25 grants have been awarded to support services and community activities between April 2025 – March 2028. 21 of the 25 projects were not primarily focused on biodiversity, these projects do aim to improve and encourage access to green space), as an important resource for the community and biodiversity. The following four (of the 25) projects are primarily focused on environmental priorities: • Furnace Brook CIC: to deliver a 'Greening Herstmonceux' community forum, adult learning workshops, carbon literacy training and wellbeing workshop and family/Community days. Grant Awarded: £5,000 (per annum) from April 2025 – March 2028; • Groundwork South: Supporting young people to engage with nature and green spaces within the Wealden area. This project will teach these young people valuable green skills but impart knowledge through fun and engaging nature-based activities co-produced with them based on their interest. Grant Awarded: £5,000 (per annum) from April 2025 – March 2028; • The Conservators of Ashdown Forest: To look after Ashdown Forest – To protect, conserve and enhance the nature and culture of Ashdown Forest as

[44] : https://www.wealden.gov.uk/community-and-safety/information-on-grant-funding/community-grants-awarded-in-this-financial-year/

			the largest biodiverse heathland and open space in Sussex for the enjoyment, education, health and recreation of all. • Activities include promotion and assistance to those who visit the forest, a five day a week visitor centre, managing health and safety across a large countryside location, providing onsite information, managing forest events, delivery of free walks and managing the volunteer programme. Grant Awarded: £10,000 (per annum) from April 2025 – March 2028.
			In addition to the above, there are future projects that are not primarily biodiversity focused, but include biodiversity components: • **Leisure Facilities Operator and Community Based Outreach Service:** The Council is commencing a procurement process for a new Leisure Facilities Operator and Community Based Outreach Service. The Council has three leisure centres within its portfolio and the contract is expiring 31 March 2027. The centres are located in Crowborough, Uckfield, and Hailsham. Whilst the primary function of the contract will be the successful operation of the leisure centres, the contract will align with the Council Strategy and therefore require the successful candidate to support the implementation of environmental measures such making the centres more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. • **3G football pitch:** An allocation of up to £350,000 from Wealden District Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will support the development of a new 3G football pitch at Victoria Pleasure Ground, which is being funded in partnership with Uckfield Town Council and The Football Foundation. Whilst the primary aim is the delivery of a new 3G football pitch, the project will align with the Council Strategy and therefore require the successful contractor to implement environmental measures in line with industry and Sport Governing Body guidance. • **Uckfield Rugby Football Club:** £1.35 million of CIL will be invested to improve the facilities and clubhouse at Uckfield Rugby Football club to make it more accessible and inclusive. The community hub will provide enhanced ancillary provision and

			introduce several new sports. Whilst the primary aim is the improvements to the rugby pitch and enhanced club house, the project will align with the Council Strategy and therefore, working in partnership with URFC, will require the successful contractor to provide local facilities and implement environmental measures in line with industry and Sport Governing Body guidance.
			Winnie the Pooh Centenary[45]: This project is to celebrate 100 years of the first Winnie the Pooh books. The Council is working with Ashdown Forest Foundation to deliver the project. The events will celebrate the work of AA Milne which support the conservation messages of the Forest and will serve to not only mark this milestone but launch the next 100 years of forest conservation.
		Grant Funding	**CLIF (ongoing):** As noted above, the CLIF will operate on a rolling basis over three years starting in September 2025. This is therefore included in both this section, and Section 4 actions. The monitoring data collected through CLIF will be published in the next Biodiversity Report.
6	Environmental Health		At the time of writing, here are no known forthcoming biodiversity-focused projects identified for this Service.
7	Digital and Benefits		The Digital Strategy will continue to govern ICT changes within the Council going forward, noting the importance placed on Green ICT.
8	Housing Services		At the time of writing, here are no known forthcoming biodiversity-focused projects identified for this Service.
9	Waste and Customer Services		There are a number of future environmental measures to be implemented by the Waste and Customer Services Service that will have secondary beneficial impacts on biodiversity: • The Council's waste contractor, Biffa, will be replacing six diesel powered vans with fully electric vans within the next couple of months; and • From April 2026 the Council will be introducing a separate collection for food waste from all households in Wealden. This will further increase the amount of

[45] Ashdown Forest presents The Big One Hundred The next chapter for Ashdown Forest - Wealden District Council

		waste we recycle, the material collected being sent to in-vessel composting within Wealden to produce soil improver that will be used by local gardeners and farmers, helping reduce the need for chemical fertilisers.
10	Assets and Major Projects	**Walshes Park:** As noted above, Walshes Park is a 70 acre park off the Alderbrook Estate in Crowborough. In the coming year the Council aim to: • Carry out extensive tree and woodland planting; • Create Standing Dead trees or Monolith trees to preserve much needed standing deadwood to provide microhabitats for a huge range of native species[46]; • Create seasonal grass paths and leisure areas; • The 'Alder Brook' passes through the site, it feeds into the River Medway near Groombridge. The Council are looking to open up the area to encourage more wildlife[47] and provide informal paths and bridges over the brook; and Encourage brown trout back into the river.
		The Cuckoo Trail: As noted above, works to the Cuckoo Trail are ongoing. Vegetation enhancement and management opportunities to improve the biodiversity of the trail are regularly explored. The following specific projects are planned: • Removal invasive species between Heathfield and Horam including laurel, bamboo, snowberry, Wilson's honeysuckle and garden escapes such as crocosmia. Species to be dug out where possible. No herbicides will be used. Shrubs will be shredded and regrowth cut back annually. Follow up planting in suitable areas with native trees and shrubs. 2026/27 and onwards;

[46] Walshes Park Standing Dead Trees - Wealden District Council

[47] Walshes Park Riverbank - Wealden District Council

		• Installation of bird and bat boxes and insect hotels in the nature trail area at Horam Hub . Planned for 2026; and • Landscaping works at Horam Hub: replanting areas containing laurel with native shrubs and trees inc. encouraging natural regeneration. 10 mature standard trees to be planted including ornamental cherry, birch, hawthorn and rowan plus 250 native shrubs. Gapping up of 10m of boundary hedge with hawthorn and dogwood. 500sq m wildflower/soil mix to be spread. Works to be completed in 2026.
		The Council is working with the arboriculture contractor Chaffin Works at Wilmington Common to plant 16 privet shrubs planted to replace dead trees and 15 disease resistant elms to replace the loss of Ash Trees to Ash Dieback.

Appendix A: Considerations Report

Biodiversity Duty: Wealden District Council First Consideration Report

Date of first consideration: 21/12/23

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' requiring all public authorities in England to:

- 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.

This means as a local planning authority, Wealden District Council must:

- Complete first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1st January 2024.
- Agree policies and objectives as soon as possible after this.
- Reconsider the actions you can take within 5 years of when you complete your previous consideration, or more often (e.g. quarterly, annually, or every 5 years).

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. This includes Government commitment to:

- Halt the decline in species abundance and protect 30% of UK land by 2030.
- Increase species abundance by at least 10%, restore and create 500,000ha of wildlife rich habitats, reduce the risk of species extinction and restore 75% of our protected sites to favourable condition by 2042.

This first considerations report brings together a number of Council strategies, policies and work areas to see how we are currently addressing and taking account of biodiversity. This includes the recent The Wealden District Council Strategy which demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to the environment, with a vision of a district where people and nature thrive together, working with local communities and partners to protect and enhance the district's green infrastructure and biodiversity.

Wealden District Council Strategy, Plans Policies and functions relevant to the Biodiversity Duty

Plans, Strategies and function	Current contribution to Biodiversity Duty	Additional policies/objectives to consider
The Wealden District Council Strategy	The Wealden District Council Strategy • The strategy sets out three areas we will prioritise in achieving our vision: the environment and climate change; community resilience and wellbeing; and the local economy. Within the strategy, there are a number of key objectives under each area set out above. Those which play a particular contribution to the biodiversity duty are; o CE2. Countryside and Biodiversity: We will work with local communities and partners to protect and enhance the district's green infrastructure and biodiversity. We will safeguard local ecosystems and wildlife habitats by restoring nature reserves, wildlife corridors, and enforcing regulations against pollution and habitat destruction providing residents of all ages and abilities the opportunity to enjoy the local countryside for wellbeing and mental health. o CE1. Tackle the Climate Emergency: We will update our Climate Change Strategy and action plan to deliver change that will lead towards our	• CE3. Active Travel & Sustainable Transport: We will work with our county and regional partners to support development of an integrated transport network, prioritising walking, cycling, public transport and electric charging infrastructure. • CE4. Circular no waste economy: We will develop the foundations of a sustainable circular economy – a system where materials never become waste. We will seek to minimise consumption and therefore reduce amounts sent to energy recovery. We will apply the waste hierarchy; prevent, reduce, reuse, recycle, recover and as a last resort, disposal. Consideration of East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste & Minerals Plan (2013). • CE5. Renewable energy: We will increase the proportion of energy generated by carefully located and designed renewable sources in the district, exploring the possibility of community energy projects, and decarbonising existing networks.

	goal to be a carbon neutral district and ensure that everything we do has the least possible adverse impact on carbon production.	
Development Management	Determination of planning applications in accordance with current wildlife legislation, policy and guidance.	• Ensure relevant developments deliver minimum 10% BNG or apply small sites BNG metric when applicable. • Provide specialist feedback to the Forestry Commission & Natural England on the standing advice and its interaction with planning system.
Emerging Wealden Local Plan	Currently in development, including up-to-date and robust biodiversity policies, taking account of the updated NPPF 2023, Env Act, biodiversity net gain provision, protected sites and local nature recovery. The Regulation 18 draft new Local Plan is due to be considered by Full Council on 8th February with a view to going out to full public consultation shortly after.	• Consideration of draft local Plan in Feb 2024. Progression to regulation 18 consultation. Consideration will be given to whether there is a need for the creation of relevant biodiversity related SPDs. • Take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies within and connecting to the District and County.
Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013	Policy WCS12 Biodiversity: The Council will prevent a net loss of biodiversity, ensure a comprehensive network of habitats, and work with partners to maximise opportunities to ensure habitats, biodiversity features and ecological networks are maintained, restored, enhanced and, where possible, created to achieve a net gain in biodiversity and sustain wildlife in both rural and urban areas.	WCS13 Green Infrastructure: The District's existing network of green infrastructure will be protected, improved and enhanced by the implementation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, ensuring a multifunctional, accessible network which maintains and improves biodiversity and landscape character, increases opportunities for healthy living and contributes to healthy ecosystems and climate change objectives.

	EN15 Safeguard designated nature conservation sites.	
Wealden District Council Local Plan 1998 - saved policies	Wealden District Council Local Plan 1998 (saved policies): EN12 Trees & Woodlands. Protect trees and woodlands. EN13 Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands. The Council will resist development proposals that involve the clear felling or otherwise prejudice the ecology of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands.	n/a
Climate Emergency Declaration and Climate Emergency Plan	Climate Emergency Declaration and Climate Emergency Plan Wealden District Council (WDC) declared a climate emergency in 2019. The Council also resolved to develop an initial evidence-based Climate Emergency Plan that would identify key actions and intervention measures and takes account of biodiversity.	• Annual report on delivery of Climate Emergency Plan. • Investigate the potential for nature-based solutions including habitat creation for carbon reduction. • The new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan due to be developed in 2024.
Estate/Land Management	The Council owns and manages a number of landholdings that contribute to biodiversity. The Council has created two 70 acre SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) parks and 30 acre crematorium site, including BNG enhancement.	• Ensure that the Council's land and property assets are utilised to support the aims and objectives of the Corporate Strategy. • Continue to manage existing SANGS, parks, disused railway lines and other assets to maximise their biodiversity value and support access to nature in line with Corporate Strategy. • Consider whether non-countryside properties can be enhanced/managed for biodiversity.

		• Integration of biodiversity net gain into new projects. • The Council has and will continue with its commitment to use and installation of solar PV on Council property and EV charging infrastructure.
Wealden District Council Asset Management Plan	Wealden District Council Asset Management Plan To acquire property or land where this better supports the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan	• Assets policy will be reviewed in line with publication of a new Asset Management Plan in 2024.
Housing Planning Protocol Rural Affordable Housing Schemes 2008	Rural Affordable Housing Schemes 2008: Principle: Work together to maximise the provision of affordable housing within the District to meet need, as well as protecting and enhancing the environment.	• Continue with biodiversity provision on WDC delivered housing schemes including habitat creation and native tree planting.
Other strategies	Identify other Council strategies or actions which could impact on biodiversity, either positively or negatively.	• Review Council strategies and plans to ensure they take account of the biodiversity duty, and identify opportunities to deliver elements of local nature recovery where possible.
Local Nature Recovery Strategy	WDC is within the East Sussex County Council LNRS responsible authority area. Continue to work with other East Sussex local authorities to contribute to the LNRS creation and delivery.	
Species Conservation Strategies	WDC holds a District Licence for great crested newts, administered on our behalf by NatureSpace. The scheme provides for investment in the creation and long-term management of new and restored aquatic and terrestrial habitat for the species.	• Continue to work with NatureSpace and other local authorities to target the delivery of new habitat in the most appropriate locations.

Local Wildlife Sites	WDC undertook review of all LWS in 2016. WDC is a partner of the Sussex Local Wildlife Site Initiative and continue to provide ongoing contribution and support.	• Continue to support the SxLWSI to ensure the suite of LWS are reviewed to give a robust evidence base for protection through the planning system and to ensure they are taken account of in development of LNRS.
Internal staff policies		• Review to identify those that are relevant.
Natural Capital	WDC is a contributor and partner of the Sussex Nature Partnership (SxNP). The SxNP published a Natural Capital Investment Strategy in 2019 and report annually on implementation of the strategy.	• Continue to support the work of the SxNP.

Appendix B: Wealden Local Plan

Summary

The Council is preparing a new Local Plan. The Local Plan will be the key planning document for Wealden District, excluding the area covered by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). The SDNPA has planning powers for its own area.

The emerging Wealden Local Plan looks ahead to 2042; it will provide a vision for the district, a long-term spatial strategy for growth, including the locations where development will take place. It will provide a range of both strategic and non-strategic policies that will guide development across the district contributing to social, environmental, and economic (sustainability) goals. Once adopted, the Local Plan will form part of the Development Plan for the District, replacing all existing local plan policies and will be used to assess and make decisions on planning applications, as well as to inform investment and the provision of infrastructure. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that "*for the purpose of making any determination under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise*".

The Council recently adopted its Local Development Scheme (LDS) (2025) that identifies and sets out the timetable for the planning documents that we will prepare to plan for development in our administrative area. The document provides information for our local communities and stakeholders to find out about the planning policy documents being prepared within the next three-year period. The LDS covers the period 2025-2028.

The LDS was approved at a Full Council meeting on 29th January 2026[48].

Following on from the decision to adopt the LDS, the Council has and will continue to progress with an update to the emerging Wealden Local Plan through developing its evidence base and revising its development strategy following the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024. A further draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) underwent consultation in February-March 2026 as outlined in the LDS. Final planning policies will be presented in the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan which will be prepared in Quarter 2 of 2026/2027.

Biodiversity Policies

Policies that refer to biodiversity are include in **Table B1**.

[48] Full Council Meeting on Thursday 29th January 2026.

Table B1: Draft Local Plan Policies referencing Biodiversity

Policy number	Policy or Supporting Text	Text
Policy SS10: Green Infrastructure	Within the Policy	*'Secure improved access to green infrastructure for residents of all ages and abilities. This may include improving rights of way, walking and cycle routes and networks and providing informal access, where this will not cause harm to biodiversity, landscape or heritage assets'*
Policy CC4: Carbon Sequestration	Within the Policy	*'Opportunities are taken to improve soil health and minimise disturbance to soils in order to protect soil biodiversity and carbon storage'*
Policy CC8: Sustainable Drainage	Within the Policy	*'Be designed and implemented to be 'multi-functional' and contribute to wider Council objectives including enhancing biodiversity and biodiversity net gain (where appropriate), recreational opportunities, landscape character and improving the green/blue infrastructure network'*
Policy NE1 Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery	Policy and supporting text – noting only the Policy text is included in column 3 of this table.	*'The district's biodiversity resource will be protected, restored and enhanced. This will be achieved by: a) Giving appropriate weight to the statutory purposes and special qualities of the hierarchy of international, national, regional and local sites, priority habitats, priority species and irreplaceable habitats; b) Considering biodiversity at an early stage in site identification and design and ensuring that the location and / or use of development will not undermine designated sites, priority habitats and species and irreplaceable habitats, either directly or indirectly; and c) Ensuring that any biodiversity net gain is in addition to any mitigation or compensatory measures64 . 2. Development proposals affecting biodiversity and geodiversity (including designated sites, priority habitats and species and protected species) will be required to apply the mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation. The Council will not support development proposals where harm is not adequately avoided, mitigated or compensated for or where a proposal would result in loss or damage65 . The only exception to this is where: a) There is no suitable and alternative location for the development; b) The adverse effects are unavoidable; c) The benefits of development clearly outweigh the adverse effects including both the impacts it*

		is likely to have on the features of the site or the national network of sites66; and d) Appropriate mitigation and compensation measures are agreed to ensure that the development results in a net benefit for biodiversity. Local Wildlife sites, Geological Sites and Local Nature Reserves 3. The mitigation hierarchy of avoidance, mitigation and compensation will also apply to Local Wildlife Sites, Geological Sites and Local Nature Reserves. Planning 63 ODPM Circular 06/2005 provides further guidance in respect of statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation and their impact within the planning system 64 BS8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing BNG; BNG - Principles and Guidance for UK construction and development, CIRIA 2019. 65 NPPF 2021. Paragraph 180 (a) 66 NPPF 2021. Paragraph 180 (b), (c) and Paragraph 181 Chapter 6 Natural Environment 143 permission will not be supported where significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided. 4. Where planning permission can be granted having followed the mitigation hierarchy of avoidance and mitigation first, the remaining area of the site will be protected by a planning condition or obligation and opportunities should be taken as appropriate to provide satisfactory compensatory measures in this area for any harm caused. Where compensatory measures are required, these should be provided onsite however where this is not possible, offsite compensation will be required. Biodiversity and Nature Recovery 5. Relevant development proposals will be expected to apply the following measures: a) Conserve, restore, enhance and/or create priority habitats and the habitats that support priority species; b) Protect, conserve, restore, enhance and strengthen wildlife-rich habitats, ecological corridors and stepping stones to help wildlife populations grow and move; c) Extend and buffer designated sites, irreplaceable habitats, priority habitats and where applicable support and implement measures within priority areas that could become of particular importance for nature recovery (as identified in the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy); d) Improve resilience to climate change by accounting for and sustaining ecosystem services including protecting geological value and good quality soils that support sites or habitats of biodiversity value; e) Ensure soil sustainability issues are identified at the earliest stage of scheme design to protect, and where possible enhance, soil quality within the site and its functions for food production (if relevant), biodiversity and carbon storage. These issues

		should be carried through to become part of the environmental programme for the construction phase; f) Minimise any indirect adverse effects on habitats and species including those relating to recreation, lighting, disturbance, water quality, pollution or invasive species; g) Maximise opportunities to deliver additional ecological and biodiversity features and support biodiversity enhancement through scheme design; and h) Secure the long-term management and maintenance of biodiversity and ecological features as relevant to a scheme and in line with priorities and measures identified in the forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy. 6. The loss of existing wildlife rich corridors and stepping stones should be avoided. Where this is not possible, appropriate mitigation and suitable compensatory measures, as relevant to the status of the habitat affected, will be required to protect and enhance the ecological network. 7. Planning applications will be expected to be supported by relevant environmental information, including protected species and habitat records, which is informed by appropriate and up-to-date ecological data/surveys. Any ecological surveys should be undertaken by suitably qualified professionals and in line with best practice / guidance and Government standing advice. Scheme design should be informed by an Ecological Constraints and Opportunities Map'.
Policy NE2 Biodiversity Net Gain	Policy and supporting text – noting only the Policy text is included in column 3 of this table.	*'Qualifying development proposals70 are required to deliver a minimum overall net gain in biodiversity of 20% above the ecological baseline. Biodiversity net gain will be calculated and assessed using the appropriate DEFRA published biodiversity metric and UK Habitats Classifications. The biodiversity net gain calculation and assessment should be completed by a suitably experienced and qualified ecologist and be submitted in full with the application for development. 2. Development will need to demonstrate that the mitigation hierarchy has been followed. 3. Proposals for biodiversity net gain must follow the spatial hierarchy of net gain provision. This requires biodiversity net gain to be provided as part of the development. Only where it can be demonstrated that biodiversity net gain cannot meaningfully be achieved on site will the Council consider the potential for local enhancements and off-site biodiversity net gain. 4. Qualifying development proposals must be supported by a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan and supporting information to demonstrate how biodiversity net gain will be achieved.This should also include information on habitat management and monitoring for retained, enhanced or newly*

		created habitats. 5. When granting permission for any proposals that include Biodiversity Net Gain, the Council will impose conditions or seek planning obligations or Conservation Covenants that secure appropriate management and monitoring regimes to deliver biodiversity net gain for at least 30 years after the completion of works'.
Policy NE3 Woodland, Trees and Hedgerows	Policy and supporting text – noting only the Policy text is included in column 3 of this table.	*'Woodland, tree and hedgerow protection and creation 1. Development proposals will be supported where they protect, restore, manage and enhance existing woodland, trees and hedgerows and their features in accordance with best practice guidance and relevant standing advice. 2. New trees, woodland and hedgerows should be located to enhance and restore biodiversity, landscape character, visual amenity, contribute to the green infrastructure network, facilitate climate change mitigation and adaptation and enhance biodiversity. Any planting should be characteristic of the local area, in keeping with the site surroundings, including any historic context, and comprise of predominantly native species.Where possible and identified, planting should contribute to local ecological networks. 3. Development proposals will be supported where existing woodland, hedgerows and trees are taken account of and integrated into the design of development with long-term sustainable relationships being achieved. Sufficient measures, with allowance for future growth and maintenance requirements, must be provided to ensure protection from any likely impacts from development, including access. 4. Proposals should incorporate trees within the design and layout of development within both urban and rural areas, including tree-lined streets, to enhance the amenity of the public realm as well as providing climate change adaptation and mitigation benefits. 5. Proposals will need to demonstrate that sufficient measures can be implemented to protect trees, woodland and hedgerows both during and for the lifetime of the development to achieve current and long-term sustainable relationships. 6. Development proposals will not be permitted where they result in, or have been subject to, the unjustified loss of, or threaten the long-term retention of trees, woodland or important hedgerows that contribute to urban or rural landscape character, the green infrastructure network, visual amenity, the historic environment or wildlife importance unless: a) The proposal is supported by sound Arboricultural reasons for the loss/harm, taking account of British Standard BS5837-2012 (and any subsequent revisions) and demonstrated through work undertaken by suitably*

		qualified professionals; b) The baseline biodiversity value of the site has been established and taken account of in biodiversity net gain requirements in accordance with legislation, government guidance and best practice standards; c) The development has significant benefits which outweigh the loss of/harm to the trees, woodlands or hedgerows concerned, where it is demonstrated retention is not possible; and d) Suitable replacement trees and/or hedgerows at an appropriate ratio to demonstrate suitable compensation, mitigation and enhancement are provided on site, or if necessary and justified, off site. Chapter 6 Natural Environment 153 7. Where trees are lost through development, an appropriate number of suitable replacement trees, in terms of species and size, that replaces or exceeds that which is lost will be required to be planted on-site at appropriate locations. This does not necessarily replace the requirements of other policies with regard to net gain for biodiversity or green infrastructure but may contribute to those objectives. In addition, all development will be expected to increase tree cover. This should be to a level of one tree per dwelling or per 100sqm of floorspace (for non-residential developments) on-site and will comprise predominantly native species. Where it can be clearly demonstrated and justified that onsite provision is not possible, provision should be made off-site within the district. 8. An appropriate buffer, must be provided for woodlands and trees, commensurate with its ecological and arboricultural value, that will: a) Ensure long-term retention and future growth requirements of trees and woodlands; b) Not prejudice ecological or arboricultural processes including natural succession of biodiversity value, development of mature or veteran trees and/or features; c) Allow for tree and deadwood retention and accommodate tree risk management requirements, including windfall trees; and d) Take account of, minimise and where possible avoid the impacts from tree and woodland shading, over-dominance, seasonal debris, increased property maintenance requirements and perception of risk. Implementation and management 9. Development proposals, where relevant, will be required to provide a landscape and ecological management (LEMP) plan that accords with best practice standards and regulatory and legislative requirements, to ensure the successful establishment, retention, restoration and enhancement of new and existing woodland, tree or hedgerow planting'.

Policy NE4 Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees of the Natural Environment	Policy and supporting text – noting only the Policy text is included in column 3 of this table.	'D*evelopment proposals for sites that are adjacent to, contain, or impact ancient woodland must: a) Be accompanied by appropriate Ecological and Arboricultural surveys that identifies and plots the location of ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees. Ecological and Arboricultural surveys will be to recognised industry standards and best practice. b) Provide suitable and adequate buffers. All buffers are sacrosanct and should be clear of any development or ancillary infrastructure including new footways, cycleways, boardwalks and upgrading/widening/intensification of existing routeways; and c) Ensure that buffer zones consist of semi-natural habitat that protects, reduces and prevents against direct and indirect impacts on ancient woodland and contributes to biodiversity net-gain, ecological networks and green infrastructure. 2. In the absence of site surveys and detailed assessments that demonstrate a 25m buffer is not required, the Council will assume a minimum buffer of 25m from the edge of the woodland, which allows for the presence of veteran trees and the fall height of mature trees. 3. Development resulting in the direct or indirect deterioration or loss of ancient woodland, ancient, aged or veteran trees will not be permitted unless there are wholly exceptional reasons demonstrated86 . 4. Mitigation and compensation will be required in such circumstances in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy. 5. The existing condition of ancient woodland or veteran trees likely to be impacted by development will not be an accepted reason to grant planning permission. Nor will development be permitted that relies on a final mitigation/compensation strategy that seeks to address loss or deterioration of ancient woodland during development phase where exceptional reasons have not been demonstrated'*.
Policy NE6: Landscape Character	Within the Policy	Sets out the Council's preferred policy approach to the landscape character of the district, and requires that '*Development proposals will need to demonstrate that they have considered the following in respect of their potential impact on the landscape, including any cumulative impacts:…d) Landcover, biodiversity and ecological character; e) Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and/or other sites designated for their environmental importance; f) Ecosystem services96 such as food production, the regulation of the climate, the purification of air and water, flood protection, soil formation and nutrient cycling';*

Policy NE9: Agricultural Land	Supporting text (paragraph 6.138)	'*The National Planning Policy Framework expects local planning authorities to take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land, which is land in Grades 1, 2, and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), Grade 1 being the highest. Agricultural land which falls into these categories is considered to be the most flexible, productive, and efficient in response to inputs. Grades 3b and 4 are not considered BMV agricultural land. In addition, soils are considered a finite resource that provide other important 'ecosystem services'; for example, as a store for carbon and water, as a reservoir of biodiversity, and as a buffer against pollution'*.
Policy NE10: Light Pollution and Dark Skies	Supporting text (paragraph 6.146)	Supporting text states: '*Lighting becomes a problem where it is excessive, poorly designed and located, badly installed or poorly maintained. It is also an issue where it is located near to sensitive receptors, such as dark sky areas or areas with specific habitats and species. For example, artificial light can negatively impact on nocturnal species, particularly bats through causing disturbance at the roost, affecting feeding behaviour, their avoidance of lit areas and also increasing chances of bats being preyed upon. It is important to ensure that lighting associated with new development does not harm the quality of dark night skies, does not contribute to sky glow, glare and light spillage or impact biodiversity and local character'*.
Policy NE12: Air Quality	Supporting text (paragraph 6.164)	Supporting text states: '*Poor air quality, caused by harmful pollutants, can have a significant negative impact on both human health and biodiversity. Air quality in the district is generally good and at present there are no areas in Wealden where people are exposed to levels of pollutants in excess of the UK Air Quality Objectives. There are also no Air Quality Management Areas within the district. However, air quality issues have the potential to arise from developments that may generate significant levels of traffic, introduce a new source of air pollution or expose people to existing sources of air pollution'* and *'the Council recognises and acknowledges the potential impact of poor air quality on human health, biodiversity, and local amenity and will ensure that unacceptable levels of poor air quality and odour does not result from new development. To achieve this, applicants will need to satisfactorily demonstrate that there is not an unacceptable impact on air quality from the development proposal'*.

Policy NE14: Contaminated Land and Land Stability	Supporting text (paragraph 6.204)	Supporting text states: *'Planning permission will only be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the development can proceed as proposed without causing pollution to controlled waters, including groundwater; harm to the natural environment and biodiversity or pose significant risks to human health as a result of land contamination or instability'*.
Policy DE1: Achieving well designed and high quality places	Supporting text (paragraph 10.15)	Supporting text states: '*The economic benefits of good design range from the benefits to the individual of a well-designed building such as reduced heating bills, to the economic benefits to the whole community of a well-designed redevelopment scheme or increased property values. In terms of the environment, good design will promote sustainable design and the use of sustainable materials thereby reducing the effects of climate change. It can also enhance the natural environment in many different ways, such as increasing biodiversity levels on site and beyond'*.
Policy DE3: Spaces for people, nature and the public realm	Policy	*'Development proposals will be supported where they: a) Incorporate existing natural features and high-quality landscape design; b) Deliver new natural features that support and enhance the quality of place, local distinctiveness, biodiversity, water management and climate change mitigation and resilience'*.
Site Allocations	N/A	Biodiversity referenced in relation to: Landscape sensitivity and Biodiversity and Green/Blue Infrastructure

Appendix C – Project Approved through Councillor Ward Budgets Scheme - Biodiversity Applications

No	Requestor Organisation	Description	Category	Cllr(s) applied to	Councillor ward	Approved Amount	Date Decision of Award
19	Fords Green Management Committee	To make safe the trees at Fords Green in Nutley	Outside maintenance	Cllr Tysh	Maresfield	2,000.00	05/09/2025
20	Crowborough Community Orchard	Signage and seating at the Community Orchard	Outside improvements	Cllr Andrew Wilson	Crowborough South East	3,100.00	03/10/2025
21	The Uckfield Millennium Green Trust	Tree cages for 30x 3/4 year Trees	Outside maintenance	Cllr Ben Reed	Uckfield Ridgewood & Little Horsted	300.00	09/10/2025
26	Heathfield & Waldron Millennium Green Trust	Outside Educational Boards	Outside improvements	Cllr Gad, Cllr Benton, Cllr Collins, Cllr Gould	Heathfield South	375.00	08/10/2025
26	Heathfield & Waldron Millennium Green Trust	Outside Educational Boards	Outside improvements	Cllr Gad, Cllr Benton, Cllr Collins, Cllr Gould	Horam & Punnetts Town_1	375.00	09/10/2025
26	Heathfield & Waldron Millennium Green Trust	Outside Educational Boards	Outside improvements	Cllr Gad, Cllr Benton, Cllr Collins, Cllr Gould	Horam & Punnetts Town	375.00	17/09/2025
26	Heathfield & Waldron Millennium Green Trust	Outside Educational Boards	Outside improvements	Cllr Gad, Cllr Benton, Cllr Collins, Cllr Gould	Heathfield North	375.00	09/10/2025
37	Green Transition Crowborough	Local Nature Recovery in Crowborough	Hand tools and signs	Cllr Clark	Crowborough Central	500.00	17/09/2025
38	Green Transition Crowborough	Local Nature Recovery in Crowborough	Hand tools and signs	Cllr Arthur	Crowborough South West	1,000.00	21/10/2025

38	Green Transition Crowborough	Local Nature Recovery in Crowborough	Hand tools and signs	Cllr Everitt	Crowborough St Johns	1,000.00	29/09/2025
71	Laughton Greenwood	Comminity Tree Planting	Comminity Tree Planting	Cllr Wilson	Arlington	980.00	29/10/2025
72	Berwick Produce Association	Berwick Produce Show 2026	Berwick Produce Show 2026	Cllr Wilson	Arlington	1,000.00	29/10/2025
88	Cross In Hand Amenities Society	Foilage clearing equipment	Foilage clearing equipment	Cllr Newton	Framfield & Cross-in-Hand	1,500.00	21/11/2025