

Warwick District Council

Biodiversity Duty Report (Environment Act 2021)

Reporting period: 1 January 2024 - 1 January 2026

Future plan period: 2 January 2026 – 1 January 2031

1. Introduction

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' for all public authorities operating in England. The duty requires authorities to:

1. Consider what actions they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on those considerations.
3. Act to deliver those policies and achieve their objectives.

Local authorities must also publish periodic biodiversity reports. These reports must include:

- A summary of the actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
- Plans for complying with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
- Any other relevant information

As a local planning authority, Warwick District Council (WDC) must also report on biodiversity net gain (BNG), including:

- Actions taken to meet BNG obligations
- Details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from approved biodiversity gain plans
- Plans for meeting BNG obligations in the next reporting period

This report outlines the actions taken by WDC during the first reporting period (1 January 2024 - 1 January 2026) and sets out our plans for the next five-year period (2026–2031).

2. Policies, objectives and actions

Warwick District Council (WDC) declared an Ecological Emergency in October 2022, recognising the ongoing decline in biodiversity and the need for urgent, coordinated action. In response, WDC launched a new Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in April 2024. The BAP provides a long-term strategy to 2050, supported by a shorter-term action plan running to 2030, setting out a vision for a district rich in nature that benefits both wildlife and people.

The BAP is built around three key themes, reflecting WDC's different roles:

1. WDC as a landowner and land manager – managing council-owned land and assets in ways that deliver better outcomes for biodiversity.

2. WDC as a strategic partner and community enabler – working with residents, communities, land managers and partners to enable and amplify local action for nature.
3. WDC as the local planning authority – using planning policy and decision-making to protect, enhance and prioritise nature across the district.

The plan includes several objectives, including a commitment to manage at least 30% of WDC-owned land for nature by 2030, in line with national and international “30 by 30” biodiversity targets. The BAP aligns with, and supports, wider strategic programmes such as the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP), and ongoing collaboration with Warwickshire County Council (WCC) on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Green Infrastructure Strategy and Natural Capital Investment Strategy.

The BAP is WDC’s primary strategy for meeting its biodiversity duty. The following sections summarise the key actions taken during the first reporting period under each of the three BAP themes.

2.1 Warwick District Council as a landowner and land manager

WDC has a long history of managing its parks and open spaces to support biodiversity. The launch of the BAP in 2024 has helped to formalise, coordinate and expand this work. Building on the work of the Green Spaces Team, a wide range of nature-friendly management and enhancement activities have been carried out on WDC-owned land during this reporting period.

Key actions include:

- Seasonal and pollinator-friendly planting – extensive spring bulb planting across parks and public spaces (almost 300,000 bulbs planted in 2024 and 2025).
- Habitat creation and enhancement – establishment of scrapes, enhancement of ponds and wetland features, wildflower verge trials, and installation of features such as hibernacula and other wildlife refuges.
- Hedgerow and tree management – hedgelaying to maintain and enhance hedgerows as habitats and wildlife corridors, alongside tree planting and care to support canopy growth.
- Nature-friendly maintenance practices – tailoring mowing regimes, managing grassland for pollinators and other wildlife, and adopting approaches that allow habitats to develop higher biodiversity value over time.

A visual summary of achievements from the first year of the BAP is provided in Figure 1 below with a further update to be produced at the end of Year 2.

Through this work, WDC has already achieved two significant milestones identified in the BAP:

- Over 30% of WDC-owned land is now managed for nature, meeting the national 30 by 30 commitment; and
- Reaching 17% tree canopy cover across the district, exceeding the Government’s 16.5% target set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan.

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN - 2024/25 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

This Infographic highlights the key successes and ongoing efforts from Warwick District Council's Biodiversity Action Plan in its first year. From habitat restoration to tree planting and community engagement, these efforts are helping to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity across the district.

30% of council land under active management for biodiversity*



Over 162,000 bulbs planted including daffodils, crocus, wild garlic and snowdrops**



4 new hibernation sites created for species like amphibians and reptiles**



130 linear metres of new hedgerow planted**



Over 15,000 new trees planted

In Warwick District with support from Warwick District Council

20% reduction in pesticide use in Warwick District Council parks and open spaces***



651 linear metres of hedgerow traditionally laid**



4 biodiversity newsletters

published with updates on local biodiversity efforts and how to get involved



4.25 hectares of new permanent grassland meadows created (the same size as 164 tennis courts)**



Creation and extension of **10** scrapes (temporary and shallow wetland habitats)**



3 ponds protected and enhanced**



4 bite-sized videos



produced, explaining meadow management, traditional hedgelaying techniques, and more

1372 subscribers to the biodiversity newsletter



9,784 views of bite-sized videos

*Based on 2019 land registry data and 2025 grounds maintenance data **On Warwick District Council land ***Compared to pesticide use in 2023/24



2.2 Warwick District Council as a strategic partner and community enabler

WDC works closely with local communities, partners, and landowners to support and encourage local action for nature. Over the reporting period, a range of initiatives and projects engaged residents, provided funding and delivered benefits for both wildlife and people.

Key actions include:

- Supporting strategic initiatives – working with WCC on the development of the LNRS, contributing to the Natural Capital Assessment Partnership (formerly the Habitat Biodiversity Audit) and using data from the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre to help identify priorities for nature recovery across the district.
- Community-led nature projects – supporting local groups and residents with practical projects such as spring bulb planting, tree planting, wildflower seed sowing, and creation of wildlife-friendly spaces.
- Partnership schemes – working with partners including Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Warwickshire's Sustainable Farming Groups and the Heart of England Forest to support tree and hedge planting, habitat creation and community-led projects across

the district, including initiatives such as Free Trees for Farmers and Wilder Communities.

- Community orchards – working with WCC and local communities to plant small-scale community orchards on WDC-owned land, increasing access to nature and supporting biodiversity.
- Raising awareness and engaging the community – organising nature-related events, providing information and connections for groups, and publishing seasonal biodiversity newsletters filled with updates on local biodiversity work, simple ways to help nature at home, and opportunities for community participation.

2.3 Warwick District Council as the local planning authority

As the local planning authority, WDC plays a key role in conserving and enhancing biodiversity across the district through planning policies, decision-making, and development guidance. During the reporting period, a number of actions have strengthened the consideration of nature in planning processes and supported nature-friendly development.

Key actions include:

- Introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – new BNG requirements integrated into the planning system, building on the previous Warwickshire Biodiversity Offsetting approach, ensuring new development contributes measurable biodiversity benefits.
- Access to ecological expertise – continuing collaboration with WCC ecologists to assess planning applications and secure appropriate biodiversity enhancements.
- Development of the SWLP – ongoing work to strengthen policies that better protect existing wildlife and habitats, while promoting nature-positive development for people and wildlife.

3. Future actions and strategic priorities (2026–2031)

From 2026 to 2031, Warwick District Council (WDC) will continue implementing the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and building on the progress made so far. Over the next five years, we will ensure biodiversity continues to be considered in our planning, land management and day-to-day council work. We will also continue improving how we collect information, monitor our progress and work with partners. These priorities outline how WDC will continue to meet its biodiversity duty in the years ahead.

3.1 Strengthening the strategic framework for nature recovery

Several major projects and strategies will guide our work over the next five years:

- South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP):
As the SWLP moves through consultation, submission, examination and adoption, we will work to make sure it contains strong policies for protecting wildlife, improving green spaces and supporting nature-friendly development.

- Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS):
WDC will use the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull LNRS to help identify the best places for new or improved habitats, including opportunities on WDC-owned land.
- BAP review in 2027:
WDC will complete a mid-way review of the BAP in 2027 to check progress, update actions and reflect any changes in national policy or new evidence.
- Links with wider strategies:
We will continue working with partners on Natural Capital, green infrastructure and other environmental programmes that support nature recovery.

3.2 Embedding biodiversity into everyday council work

WDC will continue strengthening how biodiversity is considered in all council decisions and services. Key actions include:

- Designing and introducing a Climate and Biodiversity Impact Assessment Tool
- Using the tool in cabinet and committee reports to highlight environmental impacts
- Providing staff training to increase understanding of biodiversity duties
- Continued collaboration between services such as Planning, Green Spaces, Housing, Assets and Climate Change
- Continuing to manage and enhance WDC-owned land for nature, building on the progress made so far

These actions will help ensure nature is consistently considered across the organisation.

In addition, a new 49-hectare country park will be created in the south of the district, providing opportunities to enhance biodiversity through habitat protection, improvement and creation, while also strengthening connections between people and nature.

3.3 Supporting communities, landowners and partners

WDC will continue to support and encourage local action for nature. Planned work includes:

- Continuing partnership schemes such as Wilder Communities and Free Trees for Farmers (subject to funding)
- Supporting towns and parishes to prepare Local Nature Action Plans
- Providing advice, guidance and practical resources for community-led biodiversity projects
- Creating opportunities for residents to get involved through events, volunteering and citizen science programmes

This work will help maintain strong community involvement across the district.

3.4 Ensuring continuity during Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2028 will bring changes to how councils are structured. WDC will work to make sure biodiversity work continues during and after this transition. Key priorities include:

- Continuing to manage WDC-owned land for nature
- Safeguarding long-term commitments made through the BAP and the planning system
- Keeping ecological data, knowledge and expertise within the new authority
- Making sure biodiversity duties are built into the governance and policies of the new organisation

These steps will help protect the progress made so far and support long-term nature recovery.

4. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Warwick District Council (WDC), as the local planning authority, has a statutory duty to secure biodiversity net gain (BNG) for new developments in line with the Environment Act 2021. This section summarises actions taken to meet BNG obligations during the first reporting period, the biodiversity gains resulting from approved Biodiversity Gain Plans (BGPs) and plans for continuing BNG delivery over the next five years.

4.1 Actions taken to meet BNG obligations

During the reporting period, WDC has established processes to ensure that applicable developments deliver measurable biodiversity benefits:

- Integration of BNG requirements into planning processes - all new qualifying developments are required to submit a BGP at the pre-commencement stage. Applicants are encouraged to use the BGP template and complete as much as possible at the planning application stage.
- Assessment and approval – submitted BGPs are reviewed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) ecologists to ensure proposed biodiversity gains meet national and local standards.
- Monitoring and recording – WDC maintains a BNG recording spreadsheet to track planning applications, approved BGPs, planned habitat creation and enhancement, and expected biodiversity units.
- Guidance and engagement – pre-application advice is available to developers via WCC. Staff training has been provided as needed to support understanding of BNG processes.
- Enforcement of BNG obligations: Planning conditions and legal agreements are used to secure the long-term delivery of approved BGPs.

4.2 Biodiversity gains resulting or expected from approved Biodiversity Gain Plans (BGPs)

Data collated during the reporting period demonstrates measurable biodiversity benefits from approved BGPs as follows:

- Total planning permissions granted requiring BNG: 28 (2% of all permissions)
- Biodiversity Gain Plans approved: 5
- Plans securing BNG through on-site units only: 4 (80%)
- Total net biodiversity units¹ gained (on-site and off-site combined): 1.51 units, representing an average increase of 11% compared to baseline levels
- No statutory biodiversity credits were purchased during this period

Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of planning permissions and expected biodiversity gains.

4.3 Plans for meeting BNG obligations (2026–2031)

Building on the achievements and processes established during the first reporting period (2024-2026), WDC will continue to strengthen the delivery of BNG across all qualifying developments. The following priorities have been identified to maintain and improve BNG outcomes over the next five years:

- Continued integration of BNG into planning processes – all new qualifying developments will continue to be required to submit a Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) at the pre-commencement stage, with applicants encouraged to complete as much of the plan as possible at application stage.
- Assessment and approval - WCC ecologists will continue to review BGPs to ensure that proposed biodiversity gains meet national and local standards. WDC planning officers will support this process where necessary.
- Monitoring and reporting - WDC aims to transition from the current spreadsheet-based system to a dedicated software solution to record and monitor BNG delivery, track planning applications, and report on habitat creation, enhancement, and biodiversity units.
- Monitoring of significant on-site gains – WDC will continue to meet its responsibility to monitor significant on-site biodiversity gains secured through Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMPs) within S106 agreements.

¹ A biodiversity unit is a standard metric used to assess the ecological value of a habitat under the BNG regulations. It quantifies the biodiversity value of a habitat based on several factors including habitat type, condition, distinctiveness, location and significance. The BNG metric tool calculates the number of biodiversity units a site has before development and how many will remain or be created after development. Developers must achieve at least 10% net gain in units post-development to meet the BNG requirement.

- Guidance and engagement - pre-application advice will continue to be available to developers through WCC. WDC will provide training where required to ensure planning staff are confident in BNG requirements.
- Enforcement of BNG obligations - planning conditions and legal agreements will continue to ensure the long-term delivery of approved BGPs. WDC will maintain oversight to ensure compliance with agreed BGPs, and work with partners to address any issues in delivery.
- Continuity through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) – WDC will work to maintain BNG processes and responsibilities during the transition to the new local government structure in 2028, ensuring ongoing delivery and monitoring of biodiversity gains.

Appendix A: Summary of Eligible Planning Permissions and Expected Biodiversity Gains

Description	Number	Proportion
Total planning permissions granted that require BNG	28	2%
Total planning permissions granted where an exemption applies	1280	98%
Total planning permissions granted	1308	N/A
Total biodiversity gain plans approved	5	N/A
Approved Biodiversity Gain Plans securing BNG through on-site units only	4	80%
Approved Biodiversity Gain Plans securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0%
Approved Biodiversity Gain Plans securing BNG through statutory biodiversity credits only	0	0%
Approved Biodiversity Gain Plans securing BNG through a combination of methods	1	20%

Overall expected gains across all approved Biodiversity Gain Plans	Number or %
On-site	
On-site biodiversity units pre-development (baseline)	13.55
On-site biodiversity units post-intervention (including habitat retention, creation, enhancement)	14.96
Net change in on-site biodiversity units	1.41
Average % change in on-site biodiversity units	10%
Off-site	
Off-site biodiversity units (baseline)	0.09
Off-site biodiversity units post-intervention	0.19
Net change in off-site biodiversity units	0.10
Average % change in off-site biodiversity units	111%
Total net change	
Total net change in biodiversity units (on-site and off-site)	1.51
Average % change (on-site and off-site)	11%
Total statutory biodiversity credits purchased	0.00