

Eastbourne Borough Council

Biodiversity Strategy

2021 – 2025



STRONGER together



Lewes District Council



Working in partnership with **Eastbourne Homes**

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Executive Summary

In 2019 the council declared a climate emergency and committed to deliver a carbon neutral town by 2030. Nature-based solutions are at the heart of delivering against this target and work programmes are aligned to climate resilience and improving local biodiversity, through:

- the adoption of a pollinator strategy and pesticide policy in 2019.
- ongoing projects to increase valuable ecological habitats through better mowing regimes and tree and hedge planting where feasible.
- continual reviews of management and contracts for council-owned land and property.

The council is committed to supporting measures to help arrest biodiversity losses, restore habitats and species and work for climate resilience to promote healthy and thriving communities. This is recognised through this strategy, with the need to protect and maintain as well as enhance and increase biodiversity and nature across Eastbourne.

The vision for biodiversity set out in ‘Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030 - A plan for action’ is:

Existing green spaces, the coast and the sea have been protected and enhanced where appropriate and new protected spaces have been created to enable animal and plant life to flourish.

Our broad key aims can be summarised as follows:

- To maintain and increase biodiversity on council-owned and managed land.
- To engage and enable community-led nature-based projects and to be involved in partnerships that promote natural capital and biodiversity across the borough.
- To ensure that all developments maximise the opportunities for well-considered gains in biodiversity.

Purpose of this strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to set out ambitious yet achievable principles, aims and actions to better tackle biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation across Eastbourne.

In 2019, Eastbourne Borough Council adopted a Pesticide Policy and Pollinator Strategy. Both should be considered alongside this strategy, as their overall aims and goals are to achieve greater biodiversity across the borough.

What is biodiversity and why is it important?

Biological diversity or biodiversity is the wealth of ecosystems, species and genes on our planet, which underpin our health and our livelihoods.

The definition of biodiversity includes the variability within and between species and within and between ecosystems and so also includes size of habitats and the quantity of plants and animals as well as the number of species.

Why do we need a biodiversity strategy?

Biodiversity losses and climate change are deemed the most critical global environmental threats of our time.

Current rates of species extinction are unparalleled with little dispute within the scientific communities that it is being driven by human activities, namely loss of habitats to urbanisation and agricultural intensification. Population sizes of wildlife decreased by 60% globally between 1970 and 2014¹.

This well-documented deterioration and loss of biodiversity jeopardises the environment at every level including climate regulation and the provision of ecosystem services on which all healthy and thriving communities depend.

For more detail on the council's approach to these issues, [visit our climate change webpage](#).

The Covid 19 pandemic has brought the subject of mental health and wellbeing to the fore, with access to nature paramount to healthy, thriving communities able to cope with such difficult times.

Policy and legislative context

Emerging legislative drivers, namely the UK Government's long-anticipated Environment Bill², alongside the Agriculture Bill³, seek to redress this by providing a framework for the tangible recovery of our natural environment through a natural capital, ecosystems services and biodiversity net gain approach.

The Bills are proposing a substantial legal framework to achieve the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan's ambition to leave our environment in a better state than we found it and to pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future by restoring and enhancing nature and green spaces⁴.

The focal areas

Aligned to Lawton's "Making Space for Nature" principles of '**Bigger, better, more joined up**'⁵, we see the following as the key focal areas for this biodiversity strategy:

- 1. Collaboration through partnership working**
The need for partnership and community involvement, including integrated working, to achieve tangible, meaningful biodiversity aims at a local level.
- 2. Preservation and enhancement of existing habitats**
The need to protect and enhance existing biodiversity resources through biodiversity-led management, including council owned assets, designated sites, buffer zones, corridors and 'stepping stones'.
- 3. Create more and connect up**
The need to achieve Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs) and Ecological Networks dedicating land specifically for biodiversity-rich habitats and wild landscapes, by increasing and creating new and joining up fragmented islands of habitat, such as nature reserves.

¹ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn25645-we-are-killing-species-at-1000-times-the-natural-rate/>

² [The Environment Bill 2020](#)

³ www.gov.uk/government/news/agriculture-bill-to-boost-environment-and-food-production 16 January 2020

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan Published 11 January 2018 with updates May 2019

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-2010>

4. Implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain within development management

The need to implement meaningful, measurable and appropriate biodiversity net gains accurately and transparently in new developments – secured for the long term.

5. Promotion of biodiversity understanding council wide

The need for understanding and due process to ensure current and future biodiversity duties are being meaningfully met.

1. Collaboration through partnership working

The need to pool knowledge and resources is especially important given severe resource and funding restrictions, and land constraints.

To achieve collaboration and sharing of knowledge, skills, resources and funds we see the importance of working with new and existing partners to sustain and enhance biodiversity.

Strategic Level:

1. Active participation and appropriate representation and resourcing of strategic partnerships including Team East Sussex (LEP), Local Nature Partnerships (LNP), South Down National Park and Sussex Wildlife Trust.
2. Support wider landscape project partnerships such as Changing Chalk, Local Wildlife Sites Initiative and the Eastern South Downs Farm Cluster.
3. Raising awareness and understanding of biodiversity.
4. Knowledge sharing and capacity building.
5. Influencing planning and development.
6. Enabling delivery and project design.

Community:

1. Key to our success is the support of civic groups, residents and local communities.
2. We will continue to work with and support informal groups of residents that actively look for space to plant trees and create more diverse areas within their communities, as well as working closely with [Treebourne](#) and similar more formal organisations.
3. We will build on our links with the community using existing community groups (Friends of Groups etc) to encourage and promote better biodiversity awareness and we will use available tools such as social media, press releases and interpretation/information panels.

2. Preserve and enhance existing valuable habitats

There is an ongoing need to enhance the protection and management of existing biodiversity resources including council-owned assets, designated sites, buffer zones and corridors and help educate and influence regarding those resources outside council ownership.

The borough covers a wide, varied and valued landscape and coast, with those assets under council control consisting of amenity spaces including parks, verges and open spaces, downland, grassland scrub and trees; cemeteries; amenity woodland; and landscaped grounds in and around council housing.

The coastline of Eastbourne Borough Council lies completely within the Beachy Head East Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and partly in the Beachy Head West MCZ and includes parts of the Seaford to Beachy Head Site of Special Scientific Interest within the coastal sections.

The shallow nearshore waters and highly dynamic intertidal environment support a rich diversity of wildlife, including barnacles, anemones, crustaceans and molluscs and protected animals including short-snouted seahorses, blue mussel beds and native oysters. It is also known to be a key nursery and spawning ground for several fish species.

Beachy Head is a nationally important departure and arrival point for many tens of thousands of migratory birds and insects. Nationally protected species such as peregrine falcons hunt and breed along the coastal cliffs.

East of Beachy Head the coastline fronting Eastbourne town is mainly composed of mobile shingle deposits that are prone to erosion and require regular artificial replenishment and wooden groynes to capture much of the material to attempt to prevent it washing away through the process of longshore drift. At Sovereign Park, Eastbourne, an area of 'fossil' shingle ridges that were once storm beaches are protected on the landward side of the modern promenade. Many plants typical of the littoral zone still exist there along with rare spider and unusual lichen species.

The many priority habitats including vegetated shingle, chalk grassland, floodplain grazing marsh, creeks, cliffs and maritime slopes are all important and irreplaceable habitats. Coastal habitats are under threat from development, visitor pressure and coastal protection measures. Some of these habitats such as vegetated shingle are extraordinarily fragile once removed from or protected from natural processes. Sussex vegetated shingle is of high significance due to the proportion of national and European extent and yet it has probably suffered the greatest loss of area due to it being a favourite substrate upon which urban development has taken place.

It has become widely recognised that even the undesignated countryside and other undeveloped areas, due to their location near the coast, are particularly important for a wildlife assemblage not seen just a short distance inland. The local council and community recognise the importance of this and will support the protection and enhancement of coastal areas.

3. Creating more and joining up existing biodiversity habitats

Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs)⁶ create new biodiversity-rich habitats, increasing those existing and joining them up where possible.

Such a network can be understood as a number of core, well connected areas of well-functioning ecosystems, together with those parts of the intervening landscape that are ‘wildlife-friendly’ and which, collectively, allow wildlife to thrive. Opportunities should be taken to deliver benefits for people, such as flood alleviation, recreational opportunities and provide nature-based solutions to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Strategic locations connected or in proximity include Eastbourne to Pevensey Levels and Seaford to Eastbourne Downs.

Building on the Sussex Local Nature Partnership adopted Natural Capital Strategy⁷ we will work with the Sussex Local Nature Partnership, South Downs National Park, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre to identify strategic Nature Recovery Network areas in the local area.

3.1 The importance of trees and tree planting

The council is committed to protecting, improving and developing the borough’s tree stock in public places, in accordance with the principle of the right tree for the right place. This will be achieved by seeking a continuous improvement in the quality and quantity of trees on public land where it is practicable to do so, developing a suitable palette of native trees, and to retain the council’s own tree stock where we can. In addition, encouraging natural regeneration of woodland, ancient woodland restoration, maintenance of existing trees, and connecting habitats where we have the influence to do so.

A high priority and preference will always be given to native species, including fruit-bearing trees, and a conscious effort will be made to plant more native hedge mixes to assist or replace fences, providing living barriers with ecological value. Resilience to pests and diseases will be achieved by varying species diversity wherever possible and where appropriate with locally, or at least UK & Ireland, sourced & grown plants, for biosecurity. The sad experience of ash dieback and other pests and diseases demonstrates why this matters.

The value of street trees and urban greening lies in improving climate resilience: they provide shelter and shade, urban cooling and contribute to natural drainage. They also have immense value for human wellbeing, absorbing pollution and improving mental health. An additional vital role played by urban trees and hedgerows is to provide connectivity between habitats, and this is another reason that native tree species are important, because other natives species (birds, bugs, fungi, small mammals, etc) rely on them as part of complex ecosystems.

For more information, [visit the Woodland Trust website](#).

In terms of carbon capture, it is established woodland, in particular woodland soil, that has the greatest value, as the recent [Natural England study on carbon and habitats](#) confirms.

⁶[Wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network](https://wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network)

⁷[SussexLNP.org.uk/Natural-Capital-Investment-Strategy_ADOPTED_Final_Dec2019.pdf](https://sussexlnp.org.uk/Natural-Capital-Investment-Strategy_ADOPTED_Final_Dec2019.pdf)

We will work closely with partners such as East Sussex County Council and local community and tree groups, to identify suitable planting locations.

4. Implement biodiversity net gains within development management

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development and/or land management that aims to leave nature in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Following public consultation, the government confirmed the forthcoming Environment Bill will be used to mandate BNG within planning – meaning the delivery of much-needed infrastructure, housing and development is not at the expense of vital biodiversity.

In advance of biodiversity net gain becoming mandated we ask that development proposals incorporate BNG principles and to support this requirement we will be publishing a Biodiversity Technical Advice Note to inform planning applicants of the council's expectations at an early stage, so the necessary integration of biodiversity can inform the design of schemes from the outset.

The BNG process will require developers to provide a quantitative account for biodiversity losses and gains resulting from development or land management changes through the use of DEFRA's / Natural England's Biodiversity Metric tool⁸. The metric provides an evaluation to be undertaken by suitably qualified, experienced and competent personnel (i.e. ecologists) to ensure habitats for wildlife are measurably left in a better state than they were pre-development.

They must assess the type of habitat and its condition before submitting plans, and then demonstrate how they are improving biodiversity – such as through the mitigation hierarchy of retention and protection of valuable habitats, mitigation and compensation required and appropriate measures such as habitats creation, improvement, and inclusion of green corridors, or forming integrated local nature spaces in-situ.

Biodiversity improvements on site would be encouraged, but in circumstances where they are not possible, developers will need to pay a levy for habitat creation or improvement elsewhere.

Linking to the NRN's (in section 3 above) – the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) says that plans should: “identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation”.

Paragraph 170 states; Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (among other criteria) minimising impact on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

We commit to working towards the British Standard and will achieve this by:

1. Publishing our TAN to clearly state what is expected of developers in line with the emerging legislation, British Standard and policy.

⁸ [publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/The Biodiversity Metric 2.0 \(JP029\)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/The+Biodiversity+Metric+2.0+(JP029))

2. Ensuring developers provide ecological information, proportionate to scale and impacts, showing how the mitigation hierarchy has been applied and also to evidence how net biodiversity gains are to be achieved and integrated into the development.
3. Upskill our Planning staff by way of training and briefings, and knowledge sharing sessions.
4. Work closely with partners including SDNP etc adopting shared goals such as BNG and a landscape scale approach to planning and development.
5. We will work with local partners to ensure that Nature Recovery Network areas described in section 3 will inform off site BNG delivery.

5. Promoting biodiversity understanding

As reflected throughout this strategy and the accompanying action plan, there is a need for coherent and integrated understanding and due process to ensure current and future biodiversity duties are being meaningfully met. Communication and engagement, internal and external, will be key to the success of this strategy.

Appendix 1: List of Partner Groups

Strategic Partners - working on policy/strategy direction etc.

Sussex Wildlife Trust
Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (inc. Local Wildlife Sites initiative)
Sussex Local Nature Partnership
ESCC (Rights of Way)

Development Planning partners

Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre
ESCC
South Downs National Park
Eastbourne Eco Action Network

Land management partners

South Downs National Park (Volunteer Ranger Service)
Eastern South Downs Farm Cluster
ESCC Dutch Elm Disease
Marine Conservation Society

Natural history information partners

Sussex Botanical Recording Society
Sussex Ornithological Society
Sussex Moth Group
Bat Conservation Trust
Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group
Sussex University
British Bryological Society (Sussex group)

Community engagement partners

South Downs National Park
Sussex Moth Group
Treebourne
Bat Conservation Trust
National Trust (Changing Chalk)

Misc.

Seaford Natural History Society
Tenant Farmers (Eastbourne)
Eastbourne Archaeology and Natural History Society
Whitbread Hollow Bird Ringing Station
Sussex Ornithological Society
Sussex Botanical Society
Sussex Peregrine Group
South Downs Society
Woodland Trust

Appendix 2: Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan – Eastbourne Borough Council#

| Focal Area | ACTION | DETAIL | TIMEFRAME | RESOURCES NEEDED |
|------------|---|--|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 | <p>Commit to finding and applying “Nature Based Solutions”, such as natural regeneration and re-naturing and re-wilding opportunities, as one of our key principles.</p> <p>Maintain and expand partnership working with existing and new partnerships to ensure we are making the best use of resources, finance, grant funding and knowledge to achieve our biodiversity goals.</p> | <p>Partnerships include Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, Sussex Local Nature Partnership, SDNP, Treebourne and local community groups.</p> | <p>Short term / ongoing</p> | <p>Officer time</p> |
| 1 | <p>Identify areas where the community could take on management of land to create local biodiversity assets at the heart of communities. This will also help in nature education for local people.</p> | <p>Existing sites / groups with community involvement include Edible Eastbourne, Treebourne and ‘Friends of’ groups. Existing sites can be reviewed to see if they are suitable for “local management” if the local community is keen.</p> | <p>Short / medium term</p> | <p>Officer time in set up and oversight</p> |
| 2 | <p>Maintain and improve existing biodiversity friendly management of land owned or managed by EBC</p> | <p>This includes nature & Downland sites, parks, open spaces, housing areas and cemeteries.</p> <p>Sites will be managed in line with this Biodiversity Strategy. Where work is to be carried out by a contractor, these elements will be built into any work specification.</p> | <p>Short term</p> | <p>Existing staff and budgets</p> |

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| 2 | Where possible, ensure that our commitment to biodiversity is passed to third parties when and if our land is leased to them. | EBC land can be leased to third parties such as sports clubs and community groups. We will ensure that compliance to our Biodiversity Strategy is built into any legal agreements. | Short term / ongoing | Officer time |
| 3 | Review the management of 1-3 sites per year that are owned and managed by EBC that are not currently managed for biodiversity and develop plans to increase biodiversity on those sites. | Working with parks/estates/housing teams and where applicable local groups, identify three new areas per year to bring in more favourable biodiversity management. | Medium term | Officer time |
| 5 | Engage with all areas of the council to identify and review where adjustments and improvements can be made for biodiversity. Set up due process for taking account of biodiversity in all council decisions. | As and where relevant, facilitate and / or provide training and briefings to staff at team meetings or as standalone sessions. Internal and external communications including the website, to signpost and promote standard guidance and information on biodiversity. This to ensure up to date guidance and information is readily available for colleagues and residents. The over-arching aim is to increase biodiversity on all council-owned estate, to stimulate natural habitats, such as: identifying verges / areas that would benefit from reduced mowing and wildflower management regimes; reduction in hedge cutting; maintenance of our woodland stock; maintaining chalk grass lands and understanding and educating that nature rich and ecologically productive areas are not always neat and tidy. | Medium / long term | Officer time |

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| 2/3 | Continue to manage the EBC Downland to increase and improve biodiversity. | The EBC downland sites need to be managed to ensure that different areas of habitat are created. This needs to be done by managing grass at different heights, creating glades, prevention of scrub areas becoming too dominant where there are areas suited to other habitats, management of chalk grassland etc | Short / ongoing | Officer time |
| 2 | Allow and encourage re-naturing in suitable areas within parks and open spaces wherever possible, to include the development of wildflower / wildlife borders and the sowing of pollinator friendly species. | Ascertain suitable sites for re-naturing and promote and encourage feedback from residents as to where these areas could be, thereby encouraging community buy-in to new management regimes of local sites. We will continue the existing programme of maintaining existing, and introducing new wildflower areas each year into parks, open spaces and verges. | Short – long term | Officer time |
| 2 | Adopt a policy within parks and open spaces where the use of pollinator friendly / biodiversity rich planting is used as a “first choice” where appropriate. | When landscaped areas within existing sites are renewed or renovated, pollinator friendly plants grown in peat free soils will be used in any new scheme as a first choice where this is possible and appropriate. Ensure that biodiversity is key when developing any new contract for the grounds maintenance of our land, and to existing contracts wherever possible. | Short – medium term | Officer time |
| 2/3 | Encourage and support tree planting, and other natural habitat creation measures, to improve biodiversity, store carbon, protect against flooding and generally enhance the environment | Develop tree planting programmes with our partners to increase tree planting on council-owned land where feasible and appropriate | Ongoing | Officer time / funding |

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| | which can benefit our physical health and mental well-being. | and explore options of tree planting on third party land where available. | | |
| 5 | Support the objectives of the Black Robin Farm project, to encourage biodiversity and ecological learning and experience. | Potential works at Black Robin Farm would be subject to future external funding being secured. | Long term | External |
| 3/4/5 | Produce a Biodiversity Net Gain Technical Advisory Note and a sustainability checklist to reflect and incorporate BNG in the interim. | This Technical Advisory Note will be to advise developers on our requirements. It will need to be promoted by the planning team who will need training in Biodiversity requirements. We will need to engage with Planning First to identify existing practices and opportunities for better decision making for biodiversity. | Short term | Officer time |
| 3 | Create wildlife friendly parks and open spaces. | Manage our parks and open spaces in a way that encourages and promotes wildlife. Develop mini-projects to make our parks and open spaces a haven for wildlife, such as creating wilder areas for birds to nest and feed; wild flower and grass-rich habitat for butterflies; also to encourage hedgehogs (which are becoming extinct) we will provide suitable areas for hibernation, ensure areas are checked prior to clearing leaves, make operatives aware of the risks of strimmers and other machinery to create hedgehog-friendly parks. The banning of pesticides and use of some slug pellets has already helped our wildlife. | Medium term | Officer time |

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| <p>2/4/5</p> | <p>Review planning applications for new and existing developments to meet net biodiversity gains and ensure regulation with wildlife laws.</p> | <p>These need to be reviewed by a qualified and experienced ecologist.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will enter into transparent, open and honest discussions with developers at the earliest stage to help guide and influence them to achieve multifunctioning biodiverse development design. 2. Ensuring developers provide ecological information, proportionate to scale and impacts, showing how the mitigation hierarchy has been applied and to evidence how net biodiversity gains are to be achieved and integrated into the development. This will be by way of submission of the Metric and / or by submission of an ecological Impact Assessment Report measured and assessed in line with the current industry best practice including British Standards on Biodiversity and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's guidance. | <p>Short – medium term</p> | <p>Officer time</p> |
| <p>3</p> | <p>Look at options for re-naturing selected road and highway verges.</p> | <p>Highway verges and grass areas are owned by ESCC. Grass cutting is currently carried out by EBC. Work has already started to look at areas where the grass cutting regime can be changed to encourage more biodiversity.</p> | <p>Short – medium term</p> | <p>Officer time</p> |

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| 2 | Carry out a continuous review of available herbicides, with a view to stopping the use of Glyphosate as soon as it is practical to do so. | Although Glyphosate is no longer used in our parks and open spaces (except in exceptional circumstances) it is still used for highway weed spraying at present, due to the lack of a viable alternative. (See EBC Pesticide Policy for further details) Promote and share good practice / knowledge using social media, networks and other communication channels. | On going | Available alternatives becoming available |
| 1/5 | Encourage academia to view council assets as a learning and research resource. | For example, by inviting the University of Sussex to consider our sites for student research into flora and fauna. Also encourage schools to use the assets for nature study, science, art and wellbeing projects. | Medium term | Officer time |

Focal Areas:

- 1 Collaboration through partnership working
- 2 Preservation and enhancement of existing biodiversity
- 3 Creation of more / connecting habitats
- 4 Implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain
- 5 Promotion of biodiversity understanding