ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Biodiversity Duty Report
2026

Summary

The Biodiversity Duty requires St Helens Borough Council (SHBC) to consider what action the authority can take consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective. The general biodiversity objective is the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England through the exercise of government activities in relation to England.

A series of policies have been drafted with the aim of achieving the biodiversity duty. These policies help achieve the government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) and Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) targets as well as targets in other relevant documents.

The approaches and actions presented here will be agreed and then reviewed after, at most, a 5-year period. SHBC has a responsibility to report how it is achieving the Biodiversity Duty, this responsibility is described under Section 40A of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 that was inserted by the Environment Act 2021.

This document aims to ensure SHBC achieves its Section 40A reporting requirement. It contains the current Biodiversity Duty policies and actions on how those policies will be achieved. It will be updated on an annual basis, adding details of progress taken to achieve policy measures, revise recommended actions for the coming year and update the Biodiversity Net Gain report with the latest figures.

Document Explanation

This Document is a "live" document, with designated text being updated on an annual basis and other text being unchanging or static from version to version. Text that is within blue tables should be considered modifiable with all other text being static. The static text generally represents an explanation, providing background information to give context to the data being presented. When reviewing this document only text within blue tables will be updated.

The document has been created to be in line with the following government guidance:

- Complying with the biodiversity duty (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversityduty)
- Reporting your biodiversity duty actions (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reporting-your-biodiversityduty-actions)

Table of Contents

Introduction

What is Biodiversity Duty?

Statutory Biodiversity Duty was first introduced by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act in 2006 which required that 'every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of these functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. In 2021, the Environment Act (Sections 102 and 103) strengthened this duty by amending Section 40 of the NERC Act and by requiring all public authorities in England to take steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. As a public authority, the government guidance requires SHBC to:

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

Local planning authorities (LPA's) are further required to publish a biodiversity report to communicate what they are doing to improve the environment and to show the positive changes that have been made. These reports must be published within a minimum of five years of the previous reporting period. The first reporting period must end by 1st January 2026 and the report must be published within 12 weeks (by the end of March 2026).

To comply with Biodiversity Duty, the Council should consider:

- Relevant strategies and how these strategies affect how SHBC complies with Biodiversity Duty, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), species conservation strategies and protected sites strategies.
- How it can manage its land to improve biodiversity.
- How it can educate, advise and raise awareness of biodiversity loss.
- The review of internal policies and processes which could affect biodiversity, such as transport, waste, water, procurement, and light.
- How it can prepare for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

This is a corporate responsibility that goes across all Council departments, actions and decision making. The Government guidance specifically requires Local Authorities to publish biodiversity reports which contain:

- A summary of action which the authority has taken over the period of the report.
- A summary of the authority's plans for the 5 years following the report.
- Quantitative data and any other information the authority considers is appropriate to be included in the report.

The report has three compulsory sections which are described in the Government guidance as follows:

Section 1: Your policies, objectives and actions. You must include this information in your report and explain:

- the policies and objectives you have set to meet your biodiversity duty; and
- the actions you've completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.

Section 2: How you have considered other strategies. You must include this information in your report and explain how you've taken into account:

- local nature recovery strategies
- protected site strategies
- species conservation strategies

For example, include information about how:

- you've advised or worked in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) partnership in your area
- these strategies influenced your policies, objectives or actions.

Section 3: Your future actions. You must include this information in your report and explain how your organisation plans to fulfil your biodiversity duty over the 5 years following the end of this reporting period.

<u>Purpose of the Biodiversity Duty</u>

To support national biodiversity goals (EIP23): The State of Nature 2023 reported that the UK is the most nature-depleted country in the world and since the 1970s, the UK's biodiversity has halved as a result of human activity. The UK government published the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP23) in January 2023 which sets out the government's plans to significantly improve the natural environment. Public authorities' biodiversity objectives and actions should seek to support the EIP23.

By 2030, the government has committed to:	Halt the decline in species abundance.
	Protect 30% of UK land.
By 2042, the government has committed to:	Increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels.
	Restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
	Reduce the risk of species extinction.
	Restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

Context of Biodiversity in St Helens

St Helens Borough contains a mix of urban areas and countryside, much of which is agricultural land and/or designated as Green Belt. Much of the ecological character of the Borough reflects its traditional industries of coal, glass and chemical production. This legacy can still be seen in the landscape as spoil heaps such as the Burgy Banks and Mucky Mountains, former industrial reservoirs such as Carr Mill Dam and Sutton Dam, and the Sankey Canal, which was the catalyst for the rapid industrial expansion in the late 18th century.

The Sankey Canal uses the Sankey Brook and Blackbrook as its primary water supplies. The Borough is drained by a radial pattern of watercourses that feed into the Sankey Brook, which discharges into the River Mersey at Warrington.

Agricultural land surrounds the urban core and outlying settlements such as Rainford and Billinge. The former mosslands in the northwest of the Borough are of particular importance both in terms of agricultural quality and ecological importance. Areas such as Reeds Moss and Catchdale Moss are important areas for farmland birds such as yellowhammer, corn bunting and tree sparrow.

Internationally Important Sites

There are no sites of international importance designated under the European Union (EU) Habitats Directive within St Helens Borough.

There are a number of internationally important sites in neighbouring areas, such as the Mersey Estuary, Ribble Marshes and the Manchester Mosses, which may be affected indirectly by development in St Helens, for example through loss of functionally linked land (see below) to development, through impacts on air quality or increased disturbance levels caused by recreational pressure.

Functionally Linked Land in St Helens

Whilst a range of important species such as Golden Plover and Lapwing could be displaced across the Borough, of particular note are Pink Footed Geese, which forage in fields around Rainford and Billinge in flocks often numbering around 10,000 individuals during the autumn and winter. These birds are part of the population which is a qualifying feature of the Ribble and Alt Estuary and Martin Mere Special Protection Areas.

Nationally Important Sites

Two designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lie wholly or partly within St Helens.

A small area (0.14 hectare) of Highfield Moss SSSI, which straddles the boundary with Wigan Borough lies within St Helens. The site is designated for its mixed valley mire communities and acidic grassland habitats and is classified by Natural England as being in “Unfavourable, Recovering” condition.

Stanley Bank Meadows SSSI is the only designated site of national importance which lies wholly within St. Helens. The site is designated primarily due to its wet neutral lowland grassland and is sensitive to changes in hydrology. It is classified by Natural England as being in "Favourable" condition.

Local Nature Reserves

Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, local authorities can, in consultation with Natural England, declare areas as Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) for the study and protection of the natural environment.

As of October 2020, there are seven LNRs in St Helens Borough which collectively cover an area of 11.27 hectares. These are listed in table 1 below.

Table 1) Local Nature Reserves in St Helens

LNR Name	O/S Grid Reference	Principle Habitats
Stanley Bank	SJ534,971	Neutral Wet grassland, Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland
Siding Lane	SD463,020	Broadleaf Woodland
Thatto Heath Meadows	SJ508,936	Neutral grassland, Stream, Hedgerows
Parr Hall Millennium Green	SJ527,961	Marshy Grassland, Wetland Reedbed, River
Colliers Moss Common (North)	SJ543,939	Lowland Heath, Raised Bog, Reedbed, Wetland, Scrub
Clinkham Wood	SJ515,980	Broadleaf Woodland
Mill Brow consisting of: • Mill Wood • Mill Brook Parish Nature Reserve	SJ486,955 SJ488,957	Wet Woodland, River, Marshy Grassland, Wetland, River

Local Wildlife and Geological Sites

St Helens Borough currently includes 116 Local Wildlife Sites; however, new information may require that further sites be designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Conversely, a site may be deselected if it no longer meets the selection criteria and there is no likelihood of restoration. There are a further 11 sites that are of Local Geological Importance.

The active register of Local Sites will be maintained on the Council's website https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/5060/Local-wildlife-sites. The location of these sites and other natural assets can be found at http://www.activenaturalist.org.uk/lcren/ and https://www.magic.gov.uk.

Protected Species

Some species recognised as being rare or threatened within a European context are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010). Of

these, the species most likely to be encountered in St Helens are Great Crested Newts and bats including Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, Brown Long-eared and Daubentons.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended) provides protection for a number of species including Bats, Eel, Water vole, English Bluebell and Barn owl. All of these species are present in St Helens. The Act also protects all species of wild birds, their eggs and nests whilst in use.

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and occur in low numbers in St Helens.

The presence of protected species on or close to a development site will normally constitute a material consideration which must be addressed by developers and land managers. The presence or possible presence of protected species should be factored into all development proposals and plans.

Priority Species and Habitats

Priority Species and Habitats[1] are identified in three distinct ways:

- Internationally important habitats and species that are listed under Annexe 1 and Annexe II and IV respectively of the Habitats Directive[2] ;
- Nationally important habitats and species of principle importance that are listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and which may be within or outside designated sites; and
- Habitats and species set out in North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan[3].

A list of Priority Species and Priority Habitats relevant to St Helens is provided in appendix A.

Brownfield land biodiversity.

The emerging St Helens Borough Local Plan[4] encourages the re-use of previously developed land for housing and other forms of development; however, some brownfield land can have a high biodiversity value.

Open mosaic habitat can support important invertebrates, ground-nesting birds such as Little Ringed Plover and Skylark as well as grassland, scrub, marsh and wetland habitats. St Helens has a considerable stock of previously developed land. Prospective developers should investigate the ecological value of their site, even

[1] Each type of priority habitat and species is assessed against a series of selection criteria for international, national and local importance. The levels of importance may overlap dependant on habitats and species presence.

[2] European Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, European Council 21 May 1992.

[3] See www.merseysidebiodiversity.org.uk for further details

[4] https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/media/4315/St-Helens-Borough-Local-Plan-up-to-2037/pdf/Local_Plan_Written_Statement_-_FINAL_adoption_version.pdf

where the site has been identified (for example by inclusion on SHBC's Brownfield Land Register[5]) as being suitable in principle for development.

Invasive Non-Native Species

The spread of some non-native invasive species is a major threat to environmental and economic wellbeing with the cost of controlling them in Britain estimated as being £1.7billion annually. Some of these plants and animals such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam are controlled under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 14 Schedule 9.

Where invasive species are present on a development site, the Council may require a control or eradication plan to be agreed and implemented, as part of any planning permission.

[5] https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/3778/Evidence-and-monitoring

National Nature Recovery Goals

The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23), published in January 2023, sets out government plans for significantly improving the natural environment. By 2030, the government has committed to:

1. Halt the decline in species abundance.
2. Protect 30% of UK land.

By 2042, the government has committed to:

1. Increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels.
2. Restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats.
3. Reduce the risk of species extinction.
4. Restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term.

The success of any actions implemented due to this document should be assessed against the objectives described above from a national context.

Other Relevant Strategies/Documents

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

LNRS are ambitious, England-wide spatial strategies, designed to support the restoration and enhancement of nature. The strategy maps our most valuable existing habitats, agrees priorities for reversing the decline in biodiversity and maps opportunities for nature recovery and wider environmental goals.

With support from Natural England and our local authority partners, the strategy takes an evidence-based and locally-led approach and was developed in collaboration with local stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The document is an evidence based document that will identify constraints, opportunities and priorities for nature recovery. Mapping areas where funding and efforts would provide the most benefit for nature and people.

The Liverpool City Region (LCR) LNRS has been produced by a Technical Group of experts and through public engagement in Autumn 2023, with two rounds of stakeholder interaction in 2025.

Deliverable opportunities for nature recovery across the LCR have been identified and mapped along with a draft strategy, that sets out strategic priorities and overarching goals for nature recovery.

In short, the LNRS will:

- Agree priorities for nature's recovery
- Map the most valuable existing areas for nature
- Map specific opportunities for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals
- Identify areas where funding and efforts would provide most benefit for nature and people

The LNRS comprises two elements:

- A statement of biodiversity priorities (the strategy document)
- A local habitat map (which identifies specific areas of opportunity for nature recovery)

LCRCA officers secured full approval of the LCR LNRS at the Combined Authority meeting on 6 March 2026.

St Helens Local Plan

St Helens Local Plan was adopted in July 2022. It has policies for the determination of planning applications which include:

- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geodiversity, including safeguarding designated sites and Nature Improvement Areas, as set out in the plan's appendices on biodiversity and geodiversity importance.
- Strengthening green infrastructure networks, such as new greenway routes and open-space enhancements, to support ecology, recreation, and climate
- Managing water quality and flood risk, including strategic approaches like the Sankey Catchment Action Plan to mitigate environmental effects.
- Minimising environmental impacts of development through integrated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which ensure environmental considerations are embedded throughout plan preparation.
- Sustainable resource use, including consideration of mineral resources, waste management, and efficient land use, as highlighted in plan appendices.
- Promoting low-carbon, sustainable travel via transport and green infrastructure policies that encourage walking, cycling, and modal shift.

St Helens Borough Strategy

This strategy sets out our vision for St Helens Borough, the themes that identify our place, the priorities we will focus on and the outcomes we will strive to achieve. We have developed this strategy by listening and engaging with people and this is starting point for resetting our relationship with residents, neighbourhoods, businesses and partners.

In order for the borough to remain a great place to live, work in and visit we must strive to deliver a green recovery. The greatest threat the borough faces is climate change;

we have set an ambitious target to achieve our Net Zero target by 2040 and have committed to the delivery against the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Biodiversity Action Plan

The North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan was published in September 2001 by the Merseyside Biodiversity Group which is chaired by MEAS. A five year progress review undertaken in 2006 highlighted where progress has been made and where it has been lacking. In accordance with national strategy, a review of the Species and Habitat Action Plans (SAPs and HAPs) was undertaken to ensure that they remain relevant and useful to circumstances and conditions on the ground today and over the coming years.

Climate Response Plan

SHBC declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. In 2021, SHBC published 'Pathway to Net Zero by 2040', our Climate Response Plan. This document set out SHBC's vision: To be a Net Zero Borough by 2040. Biodiversity plays an important part in meeting net zero. One initiative highlighted in the Climate Response Plan is the 'Leaky Dams' project, which uses natural dams made from tree trunks to help enhance local biodiversity areas, by supporting fish, amphibian and invertebrate populations.

Figure 1 Leaky Dams Photograph. Project expected to be completed Summer 2026 (Climate Response Plan, 2021)

Climate Action Plan

In 2023, SHBC published the Climate Change Action Plan, a detailed plan for how SHBC will play its part in the fight against climate change. Each year, this document is reviewed, amended and considered for approval by Cabinet.

The Climate Action Plan sets out an initial list of 134 activities that will help the Borough to achieve its ambitious target of net zero carbon by 2040 - cutting emissions as close to zero as possible and achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases emitted and removed from the atmosphere.

Climate action is embedded across SHBC. In 2025, the Council's Climate Action Plan includes 173 actions across a range of departments, demonstrating a whole-Council approach to climate change.

The following points on the 2025 Climate Action Plan relate to biodiversity:

1. Environment, Climate and Operations: Finalise Open Space Strategy - including details of management, type and location of open space within the Borough. Implement an open spaces strategy to improve ecosystem services, to protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment in ways which mitigate and adapt to a changing climate across St Helens. Evaluate the additional benefits provided by our open spaces in terms of carbon sequestration, air pollution and flood management.
2. Planning: Update of existing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) considered as priority 1: Biodiversity SPD.
3. Planning: Encourage new developments to achieve the highest possible sustainability goals with high percentages of renewable energy and heat, alongside promoting biodiversity net gain in accordance with Local and National Planning Policy.

Action Plan 2025					
Identifier	Department	Service	Emissions Source	Action	Timescale
1.01	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Council	Development of Masterplan for Hardshaw Brook Depot ensuring modernising the council depot is aligned with the carbon neutral ambition.	Medium Term
1.02	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Council	Commission new substation at Hardshaw Brook to facilitate further EV fleet procurement	Medium Term
1.03	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Council	Investigate the potential of carbon offsetting as both a way to reduce carbon emissions from council work, and a potential way of driving private investment towards decarbonisation and open spaces. Develop specific sites for BNG and quantify carbon offsetting associated to investigate	Medium Term
1.04	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Council	Design a systematic programme of school engagement on climate action, utilising platforms like Let's Go Zero to support this work.	Medium Term
1.05	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Borough	Put together an engagement programme on the low carbon agenda, including at least one large scale festival style event per year.	Medium Term
1.06	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Borough	Engage with local businesses and organisations of all types and encourage them to develop their own action plans for the climate emergency.	Medium Term
1.07	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Council	Submit motion to divert council pension investments from fossil fuels.	Medium Term
1.08	Environment, Climate & Operations	Place	Borough	Develop a consultation for residents on the Climate Action Plan.	Medium Term

Figure 2 Screenshot of actions (Climate Action Plan, 2025)

Open Spaces Strategy

The Open Spaces Strategy is a 10-year plan approved by Cabinet and published in November 2025. It is a significant document, recognising that more than half of the Borough is green, open space. St Helens has many large parks such as Taylor Park, Mesnes Park, Sutton Park, Victoria Park and Sherdley Park as well as country parks like Clock Face and Sankey Valley.

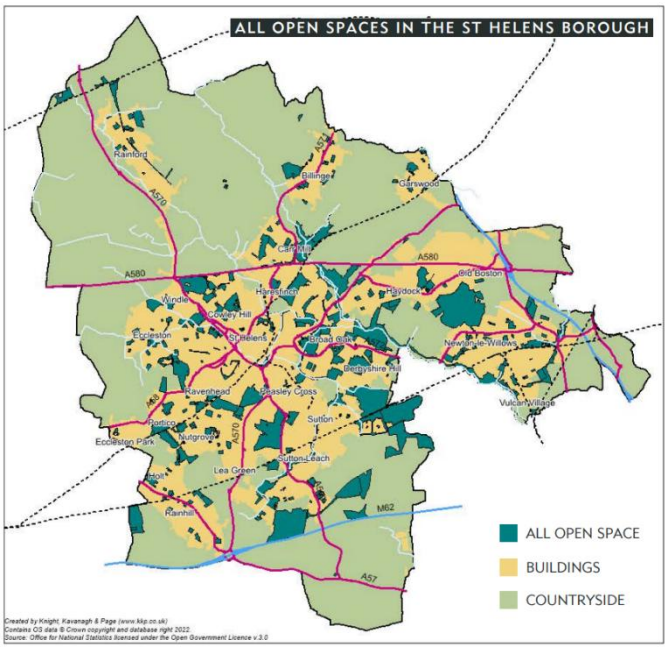


Figure 3 Open Spaces in St Helens (Open Spaces report, 2025)

The strategy focuses on six key priorities: improving the quality and safety of open spaces; providing inclusive opportunities for recreation, play and physical activity; protecting and enhancing biodiversity; supporting nature recovery and climate resilience through measures such as tree planting and habitat creation; strengthening community involvement through volunteer and "friends of" groups; and developing funding and commercial opportunities to sustain long-term investment. Biodiversity is a core theme that runs through this document. Objectives include:

- **Helping nature grow and stay healthy** - The council will make sure parks and green spaces have lots of trees, plants, and wildlife so people can enjoy nature while living, working, and playing nearby.
- **Looking after nature for the future -** Looking after nature: Our green spaces can help fight climate change by keeping the air clean and cutting down on pollution. This supports our climate goals and helps to protect the environment and reduce the effects of climate change.

The strategy document highlights a range of case studies that a commitment to biodiversity. These include the Northern Forest tree planting project at Sherdley Park, which benefited biodiversity, people and the environment. Another example is the consideration of sites like Sankey Valley Country Park for Biodiversity Net Gain units.

Implementation of the Biodiversity Duty

How the Biodiversity Objective can be achieved:

Approach 1: Through the activities of the Planning Service

Policy and decision making within the Planning Service provides a direct and statutory way of SHBC influencing the creation of biodiverse areas. Currently the Planning Service has several policy documents that refer to the council's approach on biodiversity:

- St Helens Local Plan (July 2022) has various policies seeking to achieve biodiversity, protect species and habitats and promote landscaping and habitat improvements.
- The LNRS integrates opportunities for nature recovery into the planning system, ensuring that the local authority has regard for the relevant local nature strategies. The LNRS proposes actions in locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those identified priorities.
- The Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan promotes restored landfill to improve biodiversity and long-term ecological management;
- Biodiversity Net Gain – The implementation of the general biodiversity objective on all applicable planning applications, requiring a 10% net gain in biodiversity units compared to baseline levels.
- Protected Species & Habitats – The Wildlife and Countryside Act and The Water Environment Regulations places a responsibility on all LPA's to ensure they are protected from harm due to development
- All statutorily designated areas will be protected from new negative impacts of developments.

It will be assumed as a default that all existing policies will continue to apply. This document gives SHBC an opportunity to further efforts towards the National Nature Recovery Goals on top of the statutory requirements.

The Council is supported by Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) in this approach. MEAS have a team of experienced ecologists who provide expert advice and comments on planning applications, including reviewing biodiversity metrics and habitat plans submitted with applications Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) plans to evidence how BNG will be achieved from a development after permission is granted.

Approach 2: Through Management of Council Land and Assets

St Helens Borough covers 136 square kilometres, with more than half of this area made up of green and open spaces. Within St Helens there are 67 children's play areas, 10 country parks, 15 allotment sites and 5 parks with Green Flag status and 1 community award.

The grounds maintenance team manages the majority of these spaces including parks, cemeteries, and roadside verges, with a strong focus on enhancing local biodiversity.

The Council is exploring opportunities to use its open spaces to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain. This future project would involve further improving habitats and ecological value within parks and open spaces.

Figure 4 Infographic on open space in St Helens (Open Spaces report, 2025)

A range of biodiversity measures are already in place across the Borough. Examples include deadwood intentionally retained on site to create habitats for invertebrates and fungi; designated areas of long grass and wildflower meadows to support pollinators and other wildlife. Examples of wildflower meadows in St Helens include Carr Mill Road, Queen's Park, Mesnes Park, Moss Bank Open Space and the Duckeries.

Where possible, the Council incorporates nature-based solutions into land management. Examples of salience include the Leaky Dams project and the Grow Back Greener project.

SHBC currently has five Green Flag Award–winning parks, as well as a Community Green Flag Award earned by the Friends of St Helens Cemetery. Biodiversity considerations form a part of the management plans submitted for these awards.

<u>Approach 3; through communications and activities educating about biodiversity.</u>

SHBC is committed to promoting and supporting biodiversity. This commitment is embedded throughout our key plans and strategies, including the Climate Change Action Plan, the Open Spaces Strategy and the Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Council works closely with 'Friends Of' groups who help care for our community gardens, parks and green spaces. Regular meetings between the Council and these groups ensure ongoing collaboration and support.

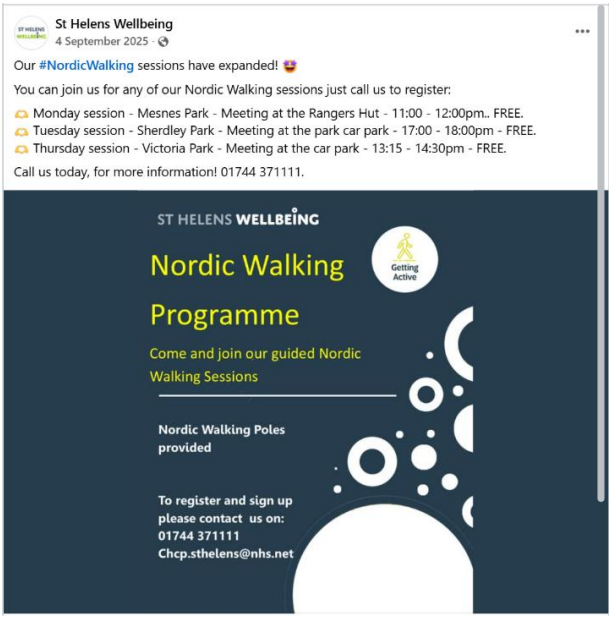


Figure 5 Nordic walking in St Helens (St Helens Wellbeing)

The St Helens Wellbeing Service provides guided walks across parks, open spaces and countryside locations throughout the Borough (St Helen's Wellbeing). While these walks primarily focus on health and fitness, they also give residents the opportunity to appreciate the natural environment. A recent and popular addition to the programme is Nordic Walking, which has been well received by participants.

SHBC hosts three annual Climate Commissions each year, alongside a Youth Climate Commission. These events bring together a range of stakeholders to explore environmental topics. Previous themes have included sustainable business case studies (who have created biodiversity gardens) and an overview of the LNRS in November 2025. Each commission includes a question and answer session which gives businesses and residents the opportunity to engage with how they can improve their local environment.

Figure 6 Powerpoint from St Helens Climate Commission (2025)

In 2024, the Council held a VCSE Climate Commission with local residents and 'Friends Of' groups in attendance. Participants shared the work they had undertaken in the parks and we discussed how the Council can further support them.

Biodiversity has been incorporated into our Climate Change Training to help staff better understand its benefits and strengthen overall environmental awareness. Team Managers can also request Climate Training, in-person or online, to their teams and this has been well received.

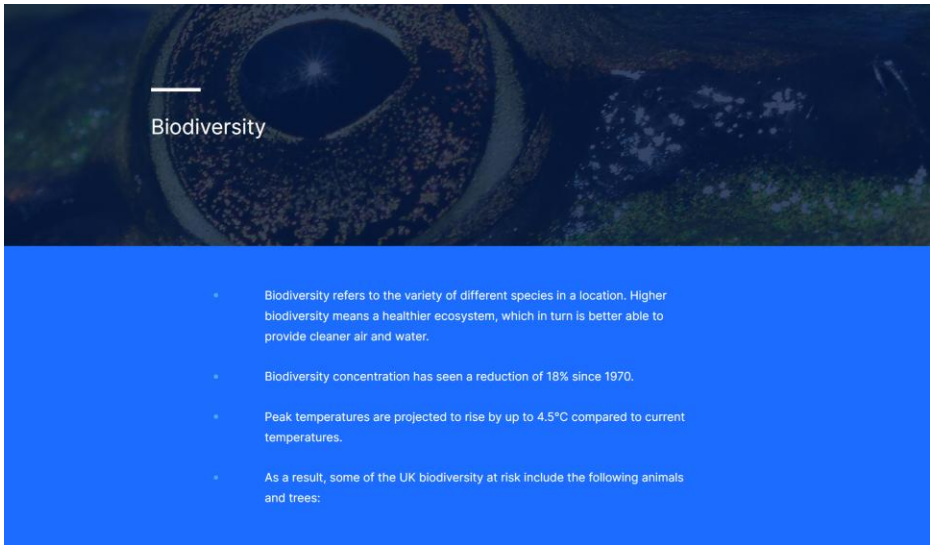
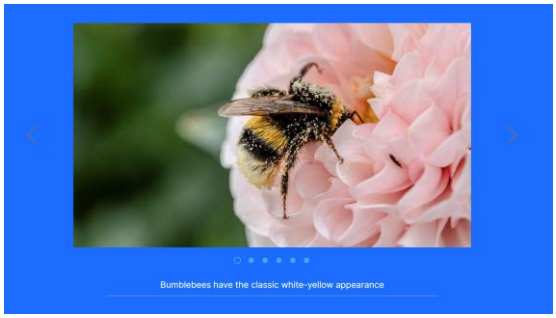


Figure 7 Screenshots from Climate Change Training for staff (2025)



To support our Net Zero ambitions and reduce energy costs, solar photovoltaics have been installed on two leisure centre buildings and invested in a fleet of 33 electric vehicles. These vehicles are used by staff to carry out work-related site visits, helping to cut emissions from operations.

In May 2025, we launched a nature trail designed to highlight local biodiversity and raise awareness of how wildlife is affected by the climate crisis. Five species identified as being 'at risk' from climate change were featured along the trail, with parks displaying posters and a quiz for children.

Figure 8 Nature Trail around St Helens (2025)

We regularly share biodiversity related communications across our social media channels and the news page on our website. Recent features have included wildflower meadows, tree-planting initiatives and the nature trail. Queens Park has recently undergone a wildflower meadow transformation. These meadows not only support pollinators and wildlife but also enhance the visual appearance - Wildflowers transform Queens Park in St Helens - YouTube

Tree planting has also been shared across Social Media and our news channel. As part of phase 1 across 2023-

2024, funding has been granted to plant 246 heavy standard trees and a further 8,325 smaller trees during the winter period - Grant funding secured to grow borough back greener - St Helens Borough Council. Across 2024-2025, as part of phase 2, SHBC approved planting a 169 heavy standard trees (roughly 3m in height) and an additional 5,573 smaller trees.

Approach 4; Through implementation of highways projects that do not go through the planning process.

Highways projects often are not required to go through the regular planning process, yet due to their nature and scale they have the potential to create significant impacts on biodiversity. Ensuring biodiversity is considered at the outset of scheme development could help to ensure that schemes consider not just statutory requirements for biodiversity but also voluntary biodiversity measures.

In particular, ensuring biodiverse habitats along linear habitats e.g. the length of a road or cycle path has a particularly high potential to aid in the biodiversity objective through connecting existing habitats together. SHBC could further consider how to develop schemes to maximise the potential benefits.

Delivering on Objectives

Through the Planning Service					
Objective	**Actions**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Team/Service**	**Future Actions**
Objective 1A – Report on Biodiversity net gain from developments in the borough as required by statutory Biodiversity Duty.	Procure software to manage and monitor BNG which is secured and delivered in developments.	Jan-26	Number of applications reported on through BNG reporting requirements.	Planning	Reviewed with each BD reporting period.
	Establish monitoring fee regime to provide resource to monitor delivery of significant on-site gains for habitats in developments as required by Environment Act.	Jan-26	Number of management report received and reviewed and verified on sites.	Planning	Review monitoring fees against time demands of monitoring on-site habitat to ensure they are adequate.
Objective 1B – support the delivery of biodiversity gains from developments within the borough.	Determine applications in accordance with the National Planning Practice Guidance Net gain hierarchy which seeks to achieve on site gains first.	Jan-26	Amount of habitat delivered on site from developments in the borough.	Planning	Review percentage of gains secured on site against off-site delivery and biodiversity credits.

Through Management of Council Land and Assets					
Objective	**Actions**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Team/Service**	**Future Actions**
Objective 2a – Natural enhancement of existing open spaces	Grow Back Greener & tree planting - planted 246 heavy standard trees and 8,325 smaller trees across the borough – and continue to support tree planting where possible.	2024-2025	Number of trees planted.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Removal of plastic tree shelters once saplings have matured.
	Sowing wildflower meadows at Queens Park to aid invertebrate populations.	2025	Amount of seed mix sown.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Review where may be appropriate to expand this project.
	Green Flag Award – enhancement of Parks and Open Spaces to Green Flag quality. 6 Green Flag Awards (including 1 Community Green Flag Award).	2021 onwards	Four additional Green Flag awards since 2021	Environment, Climate and Waste	Review further park management strategies.
Objective 2b – Implementation of nature based solutions.	Tree Planting - creates cool spaces within parks and open spaces to aid wildlife and local communities.	2024-2025	Number of trees planted in open spaces	Environment, Climate and Waste	General tree maintenance.
	Leaky Dams- Put in place at Sankey Valley as a form of natural flood prevention. Biodiversity	2021 to present	Amount of water retained as a result of leaky dams	Environment, Climate and Waste	General maintenance and oversee where this may be applicable elsewhere.

	enhanced as a biproduct.				
Objective 2c – Expansion of knowledge of council owned land and implementation of strategies for enhancement.	Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) - Cooperating with Liverpool Combined Authority to develop the LNRS.	2021 to present	Delivery of LNRS	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continued communication with the combined authority.
	Update of St Helens Borough Tree Policy - outlines best practice and timelines for tree management within the borough.	2021	Website views.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continued use of up-to-date best practice principles for future tree management.
	Climate Action Plan.	2021	Reduction in carbon emissions.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Net Zero
	Open Spaces Strategy.	2025-2035	Increase in biodiversity and improve parks/open spaces.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue to improve the quality of our parks and open spaces in line with the Open Spaces Strategy.

Through communications and activities educating about biodiversity.					
Objective	**Actions**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Team/Service**	**Future Actions**
Objective 3a – Communication with local community groups.	Climate Commissions held quarterly to highlight innovations within the climate and environmental sector.	2023-ongoing	Businesses/ residents supported.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue Climate Commissions highlighting work in different sectors.
	Formation of an informative nature trail to engage the general public with open spaces.	2025	Number of people engaging in the trail.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Encourage further engagement with activities in open spaces.
Objective 3b – Communication with schools and youth groups to emphasise the importance of biodiversity to younger generations.	Youth Climate Commission – Intended to be an annual event to highlight important environmental issues to young people and show how their actions can make a difference.	2025	Attendance at the Youth Climate Commission.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue to run and expand the Youth Climate Commission.
	Offer to teach biodiversity and climate sessions at schools across the borough.	2023 onwards	Number of schools that participate.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue to offer and advertise lessons. Expand selection of session available.
3c – Communication with staff of SHBC.	Updated climate training module within eLearning content.	2025 onwards	Number of staff that engaged with the course.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue to develop online learning for staff.
3d – Advertising changes in the borough and expanding communications with local	Wildflower Meadow publicised on St Helens social media accounts to	2023-ongoing	Number of views across social media accounts and good feedback	Environment, Climate and Waste and Communications	Continue to highlight projects and show positive differences.

communities through use of social media.	highlight the beauty and utility of such habitats.		from local communities.		
	Litter/fly tipping campaign.	2025	Reduction in instances of fly tipping.	Environment, Climate and Waste	Continue to address instances of fly tipping.
	Compost awareness week.	Ongoing	N/A	Environment, Climate and Waste	To promote compositing and the opportunities for nature.

Through implementation of highways projects that do not go through the planning process.					
Objective	**Actions**	**Timescale**	**KPI**	**Team/Service**	**Future Actions**
A voluntary commitment to seek to achieve biodiversity on development and works which do not require planning permission.	Minimise negative biodiversity impacts on highway works and seek to achieve positive impacts through increasing planting and landscaping in highway works, such as verges, active travel routes, etc.	Jan 2027	Number of Highway work schemes which have achieved positive biodiversity measures.	Highways with support from Climate and Biodiversity Team.	Record any positive biodiversity measures achieved from highway work schemes.

Biodiversity Net Gain Reporting

Biodiversity duty reporting requires reporting of biodiversity delivery from across the St Helens local authority area. The following information relates to outcomes from BNG on planning applications for the period from 1 January 2024 to 1 January 2026.

Total Number of Net Gain Plans Approved by St Helens Local Planning Authority – 2

This is the number of developments when BNG has been applicable, permission has been granted and the applicant has then submitted the required net gain plan for approval to the LPA and it has been approved.

Overall Expected Gains and Losses in St Helens Borough from Biodiversity Gain Plans approved thus far.

Overall expected gains and losses	Area Habitats	Hedgerows	Watercourses	Total
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	3.54744	0.1518	0	3.69924
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	4.0572394	0.229	0	4.2862394
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0.5097994	0.0772	0	0.5869994
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	0.143709097	0.5085639	0	0.652272997
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0	0	0	0
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0	0	0	0
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0	0	0	0
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	0	0	0	0
Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0	0	0	0
Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	0.5097994	0.0772	0	0.5869994
Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	14.37%	50.86%	0	15.87%

Consented applications requiring net gains	Number	Proportion
Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	30	not applicable
Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	1042	not applicable
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	2	not applicable
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	2	100%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	0	0%
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%
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%
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%

Appendix A: Priority Species and Habitats

Priority Species

Annexe II and IV Priority Species in St Helens – international importance

Great Crested Newt	Common Pippistrelle
Soprano Pippistrelle	Noctule Bat
Daubenton's bat	Brown Long-eared Bat
Common Lizard	Whiskered Bat

Examples of Protected and Priority Species to potentially be found on or near development sites in St Helens - International and National Importance

Amphibians including Great Crested Newt
Barn Owl
Common Lizard
Water Vole
Bats
Pink Footed Goose
European Eel
Red Squirrel

North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species in St Helens – local importance

Corn Bunting	Common lizard
Lapwing,	Great crested newt
Grey Partridge	Bats
Skylark	Bluebell
Water vole	Brown hare
Urban birds	Dragonflies
Song Thrush	Purple Ramping Fumitory.

Priority Habitats

Priority habitats in St Helens – national importance

Lowland raised bog	Reedbed
Lowland heath	Wet woodland
Lowland meadows	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

BAP Priority habitats in St Helens – local importance

Canal	Ponds
Field Boundaries	Wet woodland
Urban trees	Lowland mixed broadleaf woodland
Reedbeds	Lowland acid grassland
Urban green infrastructure	Urban grasslands