

# Biodiversity Duty Report

Reporting period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

## Introduction

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) serves as the local planning authority for an approximately 197 square kilometre area in Berkshire, comprising of both urban and rural localities. Characterised by the Thames, RBWM is home to a mosaic of habitats, including ancient woodlands, river corridors, grasslands, urban green spaces and eight designated nature reserves.

As a unitary authority, RBWM holds statutory responsibilities for spatial planning, development control, and environmental stewardship. Its planning functions are currently guided by the Borough Local Plan (2013–2033), which sets out strategic objectives for sustainable development and infrastructure in relation to the social, environmental and economic needs of the borough. As the planning authority, RBWM aims to deliver a cleaner, greener, safer and more prosperous borough—balancing growth with ecological integrity and ensuring that biodiversity remains central to its vision for the future.

The Environment Act 2021 places a ‘biodiversity duty’ on all public authorities, and therefore RBWM must:

1. Consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration.
3. Act to deliver those policies and achieve objectives.

Local authorities must publish a Biodiversity Duty Report to demonstrate and communicate policies and actions taken to fulfil the biodiversity duty. The first reporting period is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025. The next reporting period will cover a maximum of five years.

This document is arranged in three sections. Section 1 covers the agreed policies and objectives identified, and actions taken between 2024 – 2025. Section 2 covers RBWM’s future proposals to fulfil our biodiversity duty. Section 3 includes details of Biodiversity Net Gain processes and approved Biodiversity Gain Plans.

## Section 1: Policies, Objectives and Actions

The following policies and plans have been adopted and enacted to improve the environment and enhance biodiversity within the reporting period.

### **Council Plan 2024 - 2028**

The RBWM Council Plan 2024 – 2028 has set out five strategic aims, of which Aim 2 is related to biodiversity: *“A cleaner, greener, safer and more prosperous borough”*. This is to be addressed through targeted, cross-council collaboration, including: *“2.2 Protect and improve the environment and green spaces, reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity.”*

The improvement and availability of green spaces within the borough also serves to deliver against some other council aims such as *“3.1 Support children and families to life safe, happy and healthy lives”*, *“4.1 A council-wide focus on increasing healthy life expectancy, improving wellbeing and reducing the impact of inequalities”*, and *“5.2 Strengthen partnerships with charities, the voluntary sector, businesses, parishes, health and education partners, statutory bodies, faith groups and others to enable better outcomes for residents.”*

### **Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)**

As part of the Council’s Environment and Climate Strategy, RBWM adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (2021–2026), which outlines targeted actions to address habitat loss, fragmentation, and species decline. This includes commitments to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the creation and positive management of habitats, all with community engagement throughout. Six key habitat types were identified in the borough for conservation actions: woodland, grassland, farmland, waterways, standing water and urban habitat. Each habitat was given a Habitat Action Plan (HAP), and within each HAP is up to 27 targets, some qualitative, some quantitative. The BAP has now been superseded by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), with the work undertaken for the BAP providing a valuable baseline for the more ambitious measures of the LNRS.

### **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**

Commencing in 2023, RBWM took the lead as Responsible Authority for creating the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Working across the county with the other Berkshire Local Authorities, National Bodies and local residents, the document was published on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2025, one of the first 10 out of 48 nationally.

Over 70 engagement events were organised or attended to inform stakeholders about the LNRS, including six bespoke presentations to four different learning difficulty groups. Eleven workshops were run to collect initial ideas from community groups and landowners across Berkshire. Four working groups (Species Recovery Group,

Stakeholder Engagement Group, Farmers and Landowners Working Group and Data Prioritisation Group), as well as a Steering Group, were developed to oversee and provide key information for the project.

As a result of the discussions, seven habitat groupings were identified alongside 88 target species to be targeted for conservation measures as a priority in Berkshire. Potential measures were set out and mapped, thereby identifying areas where these measures would have the most impact for nature. The interactive map is publicly accessible.

A full Public Consultation was run in February - March 2025 and praised nationally for its inclusivity by Natural England. The strategy has been endorsed for publication by the RBWM Executive Leadership Team, each of the Supporting Authorities of Berkshire (the unitary and district councils) and by Natural England.

### Actions Taken 2024 – 2025

Actions taken within the borough within the reporting period include direct conservation management of nature reserves, public engagement and teaching, co-ordination of volunteer groups, and development of strategies involving nature-based solutions.

### **Spaces for Nature**

The RBWM Natural Environment Team manages 23 sites for nature conservation and public enjoyment, totalling 153 hectares. The most notable sites are Ockwells Park Local Nature Reserve, Braywick Park Local Nature Reserve, Battlemead, and Sutherland Grange Local Nature Reserve. Conservation activities taken since 2024 include hay cutting to increase grassland diversity, traditional hedge laying to improve connectivity, tree planting to increase canopy cover, pond management to improve wetland diversity, and community benefits including management of pathways, gates, fences, and installation of interpretation boards and signposts for the enjoyment of nature by the public.

### **Nature Engagement**

The council runs multiple nature engagement events through Braywick Nature Centre, including Braywick Nature Festival, PlasticBlitz, Dawn Chorus wellbeing walks, and the Night Forest.

- Braywick Nature Festival has been running annually since 2020, comprising a week's worth of free events including nature talks, walks, crafts, stalls, live music and food, with events including pond dipping, tractor rides and storytelling. Early quiet sessions are reserved for those with sensory needs. It is an increasingly popular event reaching a broad audience.
- The Younger People with Dementia group runs once a week in the summer months encouraging nature-connectedness through outdoor activities such as tree tours in Braywick Arboretum, pond dipping, and sensory woodland walks.

- Healing Grief through Nature was a grant-funded programme of weekly sessions which ran in 2025 at Braywick Nature Centre, led by psychotherapists and Braywick nature guides, to support those experiencing bereavement through access to nature, involving creative walks and art.
- PlasticBlitz events are held in conjunction with Thames21 and local volunteers to litter pick and assess water quality along the Cut between Braywick Park and Maidenhead.
- Dawn Chorus walks are free events organised in early spring to identify and appreciate birdsong at Braywick Nature Reserve, in conjunction with local volunteers.
- The Night Forest is an annual evening event in October aimed at children, involving pumpkin carving, fireside storytelling and a lit pumpkin walk through the woods.

### **Schools & Young People**

The Natural Environment Team based at Braywick Park undertake a variety of engagement activities for young people including hosting school groups, Scout groups, holding activities during school holidays, and attending schools to deliver talks. An average of 25 school groups attend the centre each year, with many schools returning year on year.

### **Corporate Volunteering**

Through the Council's environmental education hub, Braywick Nature Centre, RBWM has welcomed over 363 corporate volunteers from local businesses to national and international companies since 2023. Most notably, in 2025 we led 11 groups from Centrica PLC, totalling 137 volunteers performing conservation tasks such as tree planting, tree guard removal and coppicing at Ockwells Park Local Nature Reserve.

### **Ecological Monitoring**

In 2025, the Ecology Team at RBWM undertook ecological monitoring of RBWM reserves including botanical surveys of grasslands at Braywick Park, Battlemead and Ockwells Park, skylark surveys at Allen's Field SANG, and reptile surveys at Braywick Park to establish ecological baselines, provide advice on management, and monitor effectiveness of conservation interventions.

### **Environment and Climate Strategy**

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead's Environment and Climate Strategy (2026–2035) embeds biodiversity as a core component of climate mitigation and adaptation, one of the strategic priorities is Natural Environment. The strategy recognises that nature underpins climate resilience, with wetlands, woodlands, and green corridors helping to manage flood risk, reduce heat, and absorb carbon. Actions delivered to date include expanding areas managed for nature which is now 26.4% of borough land and progressing towards the national 30% by 2030 target, supported

through the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and local rewilding and tree-planting programmes.

Looking ahead, the Environment and Climate Strategy commits to further integrating nature-based solutions across planning, flood management, and health and wellbeing. Key planned actions include embedding biodiversity net gain within new development, improving the quality of green spaces accessible to all residents, and strengthening partnerships through the Climate Partnership and LNRS to coordinate habitat restoration and nature recovery at scale. The strategy also sets out the development of two five-year Climate Action Plans and an engagement strategy that will help deliver biodiversity-positive behaviours across communities.

### **Local Flood Risk Management Strategy**

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are developing an updated Local Flood Risk Management Strategy which aims to be adopted later in 2026. This strategy will set out the principles and objectives for the borough to mitigate the risk of flooding from local sources of flooding – surface water, groundwater and the risk from ordinary watercourses.

The draft updated strategy includes recommendations which will have positive impacts on biodiversity in the Borough. These would require and encourage further implementation of Sustainable Drainage measures such as rain gardens, swales and attenuation basins and discourage residents from paving green space around their own homes. An extensive communication and engagement plan will be essential to change mindsets around landuse in urban settings throughout the borough for the benefit of flood risk, but additional opportunities such as prevention of biodiversity loss will be an additional benefit.

The Strategy will be implemented over the next 15 years, also allowing for greater pipelining of projects which can be implemented in the borough which require external funding such as Flood Defence Grant in Aid, all of which include opportunities to provide space for nature.

## Section 2: Future Actions

RBWM intends to continue delivering biodiversity improvements within the borough, including public engagement activities and development of relevant strategies, in the next five-year reporting period (1st January 2026 – 31st December 2030). This is summarised below.

### **Local Nature Recovery Strategy Delivery**

The Borough is continuing its leadership of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire as this national initiative progresses into its 'delivery' phase.

Draft guidance from Natural England and DEFRA has focussed on four key functions of delivery as the 'pillars' that will support nature recovery across the county:

1. Building a delivery partnership. We aim to reboot and revitalise the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP), assuming an executive function within the group, to create a sound and credible governing structure for the work.
2. Embedding nature recovery in local policy making. We foresee a significant advocacy role for the LNP in raising the profile of biodiversity among those with influence across Berkshire.
3. Creating a pipeline of projects. We will work with partners to drive up ambitions for nature recovery on the ground, aggregating and scaling up restoration projects, building their investment-readiness and connecting conservation work with nature finance opportunities.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation. Over time we will need to gather 'action data' about what is happening and 'impact data' on how work is affecting biodiversity in Berkshire. National guidance has so far focussed on action data, with more clarity expected over the coming months.

We look forward to continuing to lead this work and collaborating with our partners in Berkshire's other unitary authorities to maximise the impact of this national opportunity for our wildlife and our people.

### **Spaces for Nature, Engagement and Volunteering**

The RBWM Natural Environment Team will continue to maintain and enhance biodiversity across the 23 sites totalling 153 hectares. The most notable sites are Ockwells Park Local Nature Reserve, Braywick Park Local Nature Reserve, Battlemead, and Sutherland Grange Local Nature Reserve where there are ongoing plans for tree/hedge planting, coppicing, meadow and pond management. RBWM will continue to support the Natural Environment Team in its programme of community engagement and nature education for schools, continuing events such as the Nature Festival well into the future.

Building on the successful partnerships developed in 2025, RBWM will continue to promote and support corporate volunteering opportunities with the Natural

Environment Team within our Spaces for Nature with the emphasis on maintaining and enhancing biodiversity including tree and hedge planting, coppicing, hedge laying, meadow & pond management.

### **Ecological Monitoring**

The Ecology Team at RBWM will continue to conduct ecological monitoring of RBWM reserves, through identifying suitable indicator species to measure (such as bird assemblages, invertebrate assemblages, bat activity, botanical diversity, and reptile populations) at RBWM reserves to assess the effectiveness of conservation interventions, including strategies such as the LNRS, and to guide further management and volunteering opportunities.

### **Environment and Climate Strategy**

The council is developing a new Environment and Climate Strategy for 2026–2035, supported by the emerging Climate Action Plan. This updated framework uses evidence-based foundations and inclusive engagement to shape a comprehensive response to the climate and nature emergencies. The strategy continues to recognise the essential role of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems in strengthening climate resilience and supporting community wellbeing. Building on existing achievements such as extensive tree planting, expanding land managed for nature, and progress delivered through local partners the next phase will further integrate nature recovery into climate action.

As the first five-year Climate Action Plan evolves, it will guide a coordinated approach across habitats, urban greenspaces, water environments and partnerships with landowners. While details are under development, the direction of travel includes strengthening ecological connectivity, embedding nature-based solutions in planning and flood management, and widening opportunities for community participation. The strategy and Climate Action Plan together aim to ensure that biodiversity, access to nature, and climate resilience remain central pillars of the borough's long-term environmental ambition.

### **Local Flood Risk Management Strategy**

The Council will be taking additional steps to mitigate the risk of flooding through mitigation works. These include small scale schemes such as retrofit sustainable drainage in urban areas and larger attenuation features which store flood water.

The Council are currently seeking planning permission for a scheme to store 5500m<sup>3</sup> of flood water at Desborough Park in Maidenhead to store surface water during storm events. This scheme is majority funded by external funding from DEFRA and the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. In addition to the proposed flood benefits, the scheme also aims to provide a 30-40% biodiversity net gain to the recreational space of the park. This work includes vegetation enhancements and bug hotels to make the space more habitable for biodiversity.

The Council are also looking at how the widespread implementation of green and blue infrastructure can be undertaken within the borough. External funding bids are being sought for a number of locations across the borough to reduce surface water flood risk across Maidenhead, Windsor and Ascot which will also aim to provide green spaces in what are currently very grey, built-up areas. Further work will be undertaken over 2026 to develop an implementation and maintenance plan for these features to ensure their long-term sustainability.

## Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain

Under the Environment Act 2021, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became a statutory requirement for most planning permissions in England from 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Local planning authorities, including RBWM, must ensure that all qualifying developments deliver a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity value, calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric.

### Actions Taken

RBWM has embedded BNG into its planning processes by:

- Setting up processes and procedures for planning applications requiring biodiversity net gain, including procuring software to manage large datasets for accuracy and quality assurance.
- Providing guidance and support to developers and landowners to meet BNG requirements.
- Requiring developers to submit Biodiversity Gain Plans prior to commencement of development.
- Ensuring all plans use the Statutory Biodiversity Metric or Small Sites Metric to assess baseline and post-development biodiversity value.
- Ensuring developers demonstrate how proposals have adhered to the mitigation hierarchy, through prioritising on-site biodiversity enhancements, while allowing off-site gains or statutory biodiversity credits where necessary.
- Securing biodiversity monitoring for at least 30 years through Section 106 legal agreements.

### Biodiversity Gain Plans

During the reporting period, RBWM has:

- Approved nine statutory Biodiversity Gain Plans (BGPs) that collectively deliver measurable biodiversity improvements across the borough. Of these approved BGPs, five comprise 'significant enhancements' for which long-term management and monitoring has been secured through S106 agreements with RBWM, though no monitoring reports were due within the reporting period.
- Agreed a bespoke solution for two sites due to the presence of irreplaceable habitat within the site (Wood-Pasture and Parkland), which is to be temporarily impacted and no lasting negative effects are anticipated, compensated for by the planting of new parkland trees intended to provide new stock for the maintenance of wood-pasture and parkland at the site into the future.

- Approved 21 Biodiversity Gain Plans from applications submitted prior to the statutory implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain, where a “measurable net gain” was required by planning policy, though not necessarily 10%.
- Started the process for the creation of a council-owned habitat bank at Battlemead, contributing to borough-wide ecological connectivity. This will involve grassland enhancement, floodplain grazing marsh management, and tree, scrub and hedgerow planting to restore the site for nature.
- Supported the registration of off-site biodiversity gain sites in line with Natural England’s national register.

### **Future Actions**

In the next reporting period, RBWM will continue to:

- Implement BNG policies in line with developing government guidance.
- Monitor compliance with BNG commitments through post-development ecological assessments, assisted by tracking on Mycelia.
- Finalise the Habitat Bank at Battlemead to enable off-site habitat delivery to be localised within the borough.
- Expand its support for landowners and developers, including pre-application services.
- Integrate BNG into broader nature recovery strategies, including working with landowners as part the LNRS and Local Nature Partnership (LNP).