

Biodiversity Duty Report
26th March 2026

Environment and
Regeneration Directorate

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1: Introduction

1.1 Under the Environment Act 2021 the Biodiversity Duty was strengthened, requiring public authorities in England to document their actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

1.2 To fulfil the biodiversity duty, Halton Borough Council (HBC) must:

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

1.3 The Environment Act 2021 introduced Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to the local planning system which requires developers to not only compensate for the loss of habitat on their development but to also increase that habitat by 10% and maintain the net gain for a mandatory 30-year period.

1.4 Across the two towns of Widnes and Runcorn and surrounding villages, the council is responsible for 985 hectares of parks and open spaces including a RAMSAR site (the Upper Mersey Estuary) along with local nature reserves and local wildlife sites.

1.5 This report fulfils Halton Borough Council's reporting requirements under the biodiversity duty set out in section 40A of the natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by the Environment Act 2021. The report covers the period from 12th February 2024 to 31st December 2025.

1.6 The report sets out how the council has met the biodiversity duty over the reporting period 12th February 2024 to 31st December 2025 and how the council plans to meet the duty in the next monitoring period. As a Local Planning Authority, the council must also report on actions taken to meet Biodiversity Net Gain obligations, details of Biodiversity Net Gain results or expected results such as approved Biodiversity Gain Plans and how Biodiversity Net Gain obligations may be met in the next reporting period.

2: Policies, Objectives and Actions

2.1 Policies and Objectives

This section sets out the policies and the objectives that Halton Borough Council consults in order to deliver appropriate Biodiversity protection and enhancement. You can find the documents outlined in the below summary table (Table 1).

Table 1

Policy Document	Initiatives and Strategies within Policies	Summary
Corporate Strategy	Priority 5 Working Towards a Greener Future	We will make it easier for people to play their part through the choices they make about their home, transport and waste and work with communities to keep neighbourhoods clean and tidy. Examples include: • ‘The Big Halton Forest’ initiative will continue to work towards the goal of planting a tree for every person in Halton by 2030. • Further develop our Solar Farm, increasing our use of renewable energy. • Continue our electric vehicle roll out, alongside investment in electric vehicle charging points. • Invest in new cycling routes and walkways across the borough. • Aim to achieve net-zero by 2040
Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022) (DALP)	CS(R)1: Halton’s Spatial Strategy	Brownfield Focus (beneficial and efficient use of existing sites), for both residential and ecological benefits. Working with the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Recreation Mitigation Strategy, residential development within 5 km of protected accessible coasts will be required to make a financial contribution towards avoidance and mitigation schemes in the LCR area.
	Policy CS(R)6: Green Belt	Within the Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, except in very special circumstances, in accordance with national policy.
	CS(R)19: Sustainable Development And Climate Change	All new development should be sustainable and be designed to have regard to the predicted effects of climate change including reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions and adapting to climatic conditions. The BREEAM ‘Very Good’ standard will be encouraged as a minimum standard for new non-residential development.
	CS(R)20: Natural And Historic Environment	One of the overarching aims of the policy is to conserve and enhance the historic environment for the enjoyment of the assets and retaining the local character and distinctiveness of Halton. Encouraging opportunities to enhance the value of Halton’s natural assets should be taken including restoring or adding to natural habitats and other landscape features, and the creation of habitats. The landscape character and condition as informed through the Halton Landscape Character Assessment will be promoted and sustained. A hierarchical approach will be given to the protection,

		nature conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity including sites of international importance (SPA SAC Ramsar), sites of national importance including (SSSI) and sites of local importance (LNR, LGS, LWS, Cheshire BAP habitats and ancient woodland). Conservation of biodiversity, it is also important to explore opportunities for enhancement, including restoring or adding to networks of natural habitats and other landscape features. This is essential for the mitigation, dispersal and genetic exchange of species.
	CS(R)21: Green Infrastructure	Green infrastructure is the network of multifunctional green space in both urban and rural areas, which can deliver a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for the local community. Resisting the loss and ensuring that new development maximises opportunities to make provision for high quality and multifunctional green infrastructure. Sustaining the protection afforded to internationally important sites for biodiversity by managing recreational impacts. Supporting the delivery of programmes and strategies to protect, enhance and expand green infrastructure across the borough. Using developer contributions to facilitate improvements to the quality, connectivity and multi-functionality of the Borough's green infrastructure network
	HE1 Natural Environment and Nature Conservation	Any development which may affect a designated natural asset will be considered in line with the mitigation hierarchy. When considering development proposals, appropriate consideration should be given to improving the quality, linkages and habitat within the Liverpool City Region Ecological Network. Protection of priority habitats are 'habitats of principal importance' for the conservation of biodiversity in England. Development should be designed to ensure the health and future retention of existing trees, including veteran trees, and hedgerows are not compromised. Creation of LCR Ecological Framework has been developed to support Local Planning and inform land management in the City Region and comprises ecological and biodiversity information on the City Region's natural assets.
	HE2: Heritage Assets and the Historic Environment	Heritage assets and areas within a conservation area should be conserved and where possible enhanced for current and future generations and to ensure a strong sense of place and improve local distinctiveness. Halton Borough Council has a duty to conserve and enhance the significance, character and appearance of the Borough's historic environment. Development proposals will be required to safeguard or enhance listed buildings. All proposals affecting heritage assets should be accompanied by an analysis of the asset's significance.
	HE3: Waterways and Waterfronts	The natural habitat and setting of the waterways and associated banks will be protected and enhanced. Public access, continuous green infrastructure links, towpaths and heritage value along the waterfront shall

		be maintained, improved and extended for the purposes of nature conservation, leisure, recreation, tourism, education and economic activity. To protect the benefits the water environment provides, it is essential to prevent it deteriorating people's health and well-being. HBC will expect all development to take into consideration the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and the relevant River Basin Management Plan.
	HE4: Greenspace and Green Infrastructure	All development where appropriate will be expected to incorporate high quality green infrastructure that: - Creates and/or enhances green infrastructure networks and provides links to green infrastructure assets. - Addresses climate change and reduces the risk of flooding. - Protects and enhances biodiversity and heritage assets. - Encourages physical activity, enjoyment, education, and social interaction. - Improves access for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse-riders. - Encourages local food production. - Increases investors and visitors by enhancing the quality of the landscape and townscape. Green Infrastructure has a potentially important role to play in mitigating the impacts of extreme weather events, particularly extended heat waves. In addition, Green Infrastructure helps support biodiversity and makes an important contribution to the quality of the environment.
	HE5: Trees and Landscaping	Woodlands, trees, and hedgerows are an important visual and ecological asset; they provide a significant contribution to areas distinctiveness as well as playing an important role in mitigating and addressing climate change. There will be a presumption in favour of the retention and enhancement of existing tree, woodland and hedgerow cover of Arboricultural, landscape and/or visual amenity value on site, HBC will operate a presumption in favour of retaining and enhancing all existing tree, woodlands and hedgerow cover All development will be required to conserve and where appropriate enhance the character and quality of the local landscape.
	Policy GB2: Safeguarded Land (Green Belt)	Safeguarded Land is not allocated for development at the present time. Development will only be permitted where it is essential for agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation or for other purposes appropriate to a rural area and it is a temporary use that would retain the open nature of the land.
Climate Change Strategy	Climate Change Action Plan 2022 - 2027	Key Aims are to HBC to become: - Climate friendly - having transformed the way it delivers services, works with businesses and other partners, uses buildings, land, and energy to decarbonise and encourage sequestration. - Climate ready - with plans and projects having increased the resilience of Halton Council's operations in the communities and the economy it serves to help minimise the impacts from unavoidable climate change; - Climate Just - ensuring that all of Halton and its environment has benefited from this transition.

		Underpinning our vision, are four core areas of climate action that will guide the Council: • Cutting emissions / decarbonisation, this is called climate change mitigation. • Adapting to the physical changes of climate change (climate change adaptation). • Actively removing greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere (such as by tree planting or direct capture of flue gases) – carbon sequestration. • Securing local economic benefits and social value from the Council moving to net zero carbon.
Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation SPD	Principal 5: Mitigating Biodiversity	Halton BC declared climate emergency in October 2019. The State of Nature 2019 reported that climate change is one of the most significant threats to global biodiversity. The importance of mitigating biodiversity loss and enhancement is recognised in DALP Policies
Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	Liverpool City Region LNRS (2026)	LCR council representatives and partners are developing a LNRS to coordinate a response to biodiversity loss across the city region. LNRS are ambitious, England-wide spatial strategies, designed to support the restoration and enhancement of nature. It will identify existing priorities and plans from across core sectors to agree priorities and measures that can be delivered alongside or in support of existing measures.
Partnerships	Conservation partners with The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), Mersey gateway Environmental Trust (MGET), Trans Pennine Trail (TPT), Mersey Forest, LCR Combined Authority, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS)	Rejoining the Mersey Forest Group. Conservation projects throughout Runcorn in connection with TCV and MGET. Land managers of sections of the TPT, providing a maintenance role for users. Conservation projects with LCR Combined Authority and MEAS.
Asset Management		Acquiring and Disposal of Land The Council has several tenancy agreements in place for a range of land uses, including agricultural tenancies. When tenancies are being issued and reviewed, consideration should be given to incorporating biodiversity practices into the terms of the agreement where appropriate.
HBC Planning Services		The Council is reviewing specific planning software, linked to the planning applications database, to facilitate the monitoring and reporting of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in planning applications. This will be used to develop the monitoring and reporting approach to include in the Biodiversity Report.
Environment Services		Updated the Tree Strategy in October 2024 to include updated strategies and targets for canopy cover, the health of trees, and increasing their biodiversity value. References added to the Tree Strategy to outline HBC's approach to new burdens under the Environment Act 2021 including BNG and Duty to Consult on Street Trees.

		Reduction in the use of pesticides and herbicides in favour of other methods. Invasive Species Management scheme is in place for any Japanese knotweed or Giant hogweed found on HBC owned land. Big Halton Forest project, large scale tree planting scheme across the borough to aid carbon offsetting. Creating management strategies for HBC owned Local Wildlife Sites to improve the habitat quality. Using council greenspace assets to promote conservation and learning. Review of current management practices on greenspace and land adjacent highways to promote biodiversity. Officers' reports on planning applications for determination either by planning committee or by the Head of Planning under delegated powers refer to all material considerations including national and local policy. As a matter of course, Local Plan policies including those relating to biodiversity and the natural environment, are addressed as appropriate. The Council is currently reviewing its own landholdings to identify opportunities to deliver mandatory off-site biodiversity net gain in the district. Opportunities for biodiversity net gain and habitat banking should be investigated when considering disposal of land assets, depending on the wider priorities for the land in question.
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2.2 Actions Completed

Key completed actions include:

- Joining Mersey Forest Partnership (August 2025)
- Delivering conservation projects with partners. See Sections 5 and 7. (2025)
- Updating the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy (October 2024)
- Big Halton Forest tree planting (Ongoing until 2030)
- Achieving Tree City of the World Status 2025 (March 2026)
- Funding achieved for Halton Nature Watch project (November 2025)
- Partnership working with The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) on their wet willow project (2025)
- The implementation of a biodiversity Net Gain software which will simplify management of the Net gain's that are submitted with planning applications.

3: Consideration of Other Strategies

3.1 HBC aligns with national biodiversity objectives including the Environment Act 2021 requirements.

3.2 Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Halton Borough Council actively contributes to the development and implementation of the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy by aligning its biodiversity actions, planning policies, and conservation priorities with the emerging regional framework.

Through ongoing habitat enhancement projects, strategic planning updates, and collaboration with regional partners, the Council supports a coordinated city-region approach to restoring nature and improving ecological connectivity.

3.3 Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022) (DALP)

Halton's Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) embeds biodiversity as a core element of its long-term planning strategy. See Table 1 for list of DALP policies considered in relation to the council's biodiversity duty.

3.4 A Strategy for Halton's Trees and Woodlands

This strategy aims to guide the management, conservation, and enhancement of the trees and woodlands within the Borough. Additionally, it aims to promote sustainable practices, protect existing trees and woodland, and encourage the creation of new planting. The Tree and Woodland Strategy outlines the Council's aims and actions to ensure the future of the treescape, as well as the benefits it will provide to the environment, public health, communities, and wildlife.

4: Future Actions

4.1 Future actions include:

- Renewing the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) by June 2028.
- Implementing mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain monitoring.
- Integrating the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Updating Halton Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in line with LNRS.
- Updating Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMP) for all sites in the borough
- Implementation of the Halton Nature Watch programme
- Implementation of habitat banks on council owned land
- Continuation of networking across wildlife organisations, councils and the general public.

5: Biodiversity Net Gain

5.1 HBC has purchased a planning software to monitor and report on Biodiversity Net Gain. Mandatory BNG is embedded into planning decisions and linked with council-owned land and habitat banking opportunities.

As a Local Planning Authority HBC have approved three Biodiversity net gain plans between the reporting period.

HBC is in the process of creating a habitat bank using council owned land.

6: Information about the Authority

6.1 Halton Borough Council (HBC) is the unitary local authority serving the Borough of Halton in Cheshire, encompassing the towns of Runcorn and Widnes as well as surrounding villages. Established in 1974 and operating as a unitary authority since 1998, it is responsible for the full range of local government services, from education and transport to housing and social care. The council is a member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. 6.1 Halton Borough Council (HBC) is the unitary local authority serving the Borough of Halton in Cheshire, encompassing the towns of Runcorn and Widnes as well as surrounding villages. Established in 1974 and operating as a unitary authority since 1998, it is responsible for the full range of local government services, from education and transport to housing and social care. The council is a member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

6.2 Halton Borough Council acts as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for the borough, with statutory responsibilities spanning planning policy, development management, environmental services, asset management, and climate strategy.

6.3 As LPA, the Council ensures that planning decisions incorporate national and local biodiversity policies, including the mitigation hierarchy, protection of priority habitats, and the integration of Biodiversity Net Gain into the planning process. The council's role also includes reviewing landholdings for habitat enhancement opportunities and aligning planning functions with wider environmental priorities such as climate resilience and nature recovery.

7: Top Achievements

7.1 Top Achievements

- Rejoining Mersey Forest Partnership (August 2025)
- Delivering conservation projects with partners (Various dates 2025)
- Updating the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy (October 2024)
- Big Halton Forest tree planting (Ongoing until 2030)
- Achieving Tree City of the World Status for 2025 (March 2026)
- Worked closely with the volunteer group Halton Moth Group who won the volunteer group of the year award (October 2025)

8: Consideration of other strategies

See Sections 2 & 3.

9: Positive impact from policy and action.

9.1 Policies have helped protect habitats, enhance greenspace, support climate resilience, increase canopy cover, and promote sustainable development across the borough.

10: Raising Awareness and Education

10.1 HBC uses greenspace assets for conservation learning and works with partners on community engagement projects across the borough.

10.2 In 2025 Halton:

- Delivered new hedgerow planting at Wigg Island Local Nature Reserve alongside The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) (November 2025)
- Created a new community orchard at Halebank Allotments alongside volunteers (October 2025)
- Carried out a volunteer tree planting event with Norton Priory in Runcorn (February 2026)
- Ran a heathland restoration day at Runcorn Hill with volunteers from private enterprise (March 2025)
- Ran an engagement stall staffed by Halton BC Park Rangers, Tree Officers and Ecologists at Halton Fest (June 2025)
- Ran an engagement stall staffed by Halton BC Park Rangers and Ecologists at Water Safety Awareness events in partnership with Cheshire Fire and Rescue, Royal Life Saving Society and Halton Lifeguards in Runcorn (June 2025) and Widnes (August 2025)
- Continued to run a volunteer group at Runcorn Hill which has been running weekly since 2015 carrying out woodland and heathland management tasks.
- Secured capital funding in 2025 and commenced planning for “Halton Nature Watch”. This project will run in 2026 with 22 events (11 public and 11 school events) scheduled. The project focus in 2026 will be invertebrates and include citizen science engagement days with partners.
- Participated in the annual “City Nature Challenge” under the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority monitoring area.

11: Monitoring and Evaluation

11.1 Halton BC has procured Mycelia by Verna software to aid in the monitoring and delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain. The platform offers end-to-end support across the entire BNG workflow including validation, assessment, long-term monitoring, and statutory reporting. The software is used by in-house Planning and Ecology officers to manage the data and legal obligations associated with BNG.

11.2 In September 2024 the Council signed a Section 106 agreement with GREEN EARTH (WESTON) LIMITED and GREEN EARTH BIODIVERSITY BANK LIMITED to monitor Habitat Works in relation to the Weston Quarries site and the management and maintenance of the same, which will be fulfilled through reliance on Habitat Monitoring Reports.

12: Biodiversity Highlights and Challenges

12.1 Highlights include successful conservation partnerships, major tree planting progress, and biodiversity-focused planning policies. Challenges include addressing climate change impacts, implementing BNG, and updating strategic planning frameworks.

- 55,000 trees were planted between October 2024 and March 2025 as part of the Big Halton Forest Project
- Halton Moth Group, a volunteer conservation group led by HBC Ecologist Siobhan Royle, were awarded Volunteer Group of the Year at The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside's Supporters Day 2025 in October 2025.
- External funding was secured to run an educational Halton Nature Watch project and planning commenced ahead of project delivery in 2026.
- Officers from Halton Borough Council contributed to the development of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).