



Biodiversity Reporting Duty Report

1st April 2025

Introduction

Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduces.

This means that, as a public authority, we must:

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

This report outlines our approach to protecting biodiversity and how we intend to meet our Biodiversity reporting duties.

This report covers the period 1st April 2024 to 1st April 2025. Our next report will be published before 1st April 2030.

1.0 Policies, objectives and actions taken to meet Biodiversity Duty

In 2024 St Albans City and District Council declared a Biodiversity Emergency and committed to doing everything we can to protect it can to preserve and enhance local natural biodiversity. Addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency is a key priority in the [2024-29 Council Plan](#) and is being integrated to the 2025-2030 Council Plan.

Our [Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy 2024-27](#) sets out the key actions we have committed to taking to achieve our climate and sustainability objectives. The plan covers five major themes of which Natural Environment and Biodiversity is one. The actions we have committed to can be found [here](#).

Our [Trees and Woodlands Strategy 2024-2029](#) outlines how St Albans City and District Council will manage and develop the treescape throughout the district. The strategy

details all management and planting activities to help ensure that we have a resilient, safe, and robust tree stock, which provides significant benefit to the local population, helps combat climate change and enhances the local environment.

The Trees and Woodlands strategy must enforce and enhance the green infrastructure policies detailed in the Local Plan. This will help ensure that development within the St Albans district is undertaken in a way that promotes and encourages the environment and ecology of the district and adds to the local landscape by softening the impact of the built environment.

The draft [St Albans Local Plan to 2041](#) will be examined by government appointed planning inspectors in 2025. Subject to the outcome of the examination it is anticipated that the Local Plan will be adopted and become part of St Albans' development plan in spring 2026.

Actions to March 2025:

The actions we have taken, by ourselves or in partnership with others, to benefit biodiversity are summarised in the [January 2025 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy Annual Progress report](#) and shown below.

Rewilding our Buildings: All new development projects are assessed for appropriate incorporation of rewilding and biodiversity enhancements during feasibility/pre-planning stage of development. The Abbots Avenue West (HRA) project was assessed for rewilding and enhanced biodiversity in Autumn 2024. The design achieves good ecology and biodiversity improvements, including bird nesting (e.g. review with Herts Swift Group) but was not deemed appropriate for rewilding, due to the relatively limited space for communal soft landscaping. The Drakes Drive/Frobisher Rd garages (HRA) project will be assessed in Spring 2025.

Trees and Hedgerows: The New Tree Strategy has been approved, and implementation is underway. The following actions have been taken:

2023/24.

- 300+ standard trees planted on SADC and HCC land within the District.
- 1,500 young trees planted in February across two green spaces sites in St Albans and Harpenden. The trees are being supplied free of charge by Carbon Footprint.

2024/25

- 11,000 trees were given to residents in the tree giveaway.
- 110 standard trees planted to replace felled trees (90 were funded through the Local Authority Treescaping Fund (LAFT)).
- 2,055 whips planted in hedgerows.
- 560m of hedgerow planted across the 7 sites, and volunteers are provisionally booked to carry out the planting over 6 or 7 sessions in Dec/Jan as required.

Encouraging Volunteering: We have been working with local community groups to encourage volunteering. Over the last year, Countryside Management Service (CMS) mid-week practical conservation volunteer teams have been working across several

sites in the District. CMS volunteers provided 1,377hrs of work. The Friends Groups in the District provided 1,496 hours of work.

Biodiversity: HMWT have successfully introduced water vole to the River Ver. Water vole activity has been seen Verulamium Park and Sopwell Nunnery Green Space

Meadow Enhancement: Officers continue to identify areas of meadow enhancement, tree planting and hedgerow planting. 50,000 sqm of additional meadow has been created in the last 2 years. Annual seeding of flower beds are now planted with perennial seed mix to reduce need for replanting each year and excess watering. Officers continually identify locations to reduce mowing areas especially on Highway land. The old Abbey View Golf Course has been mapped and several areas for habitat creation have been identified. Officers continually identify locations to reduce mowing, areas especially on Highway land, plant trees and hedgerows. Countryside Management Service (CMS) volunteers are visiting areas that were planted in the last couple of years for aftercare.

River Ver Project improvements are underway with the Environment Agency as follows and the below works should be completed by the spring 2025. The work is being funded by £250,000 the Council has obtained from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), £300,000 from the EA and £250,000 from Affinity Water.

- Reaches 1,2,3 - tree-work on both riverbanks stretching from St Michaels Street to the Cottonmill allotments. This work will reduce shading which is currently preventing much natural light reaching the river to the detriment of the general environment.
- Reach 2 and 3 - EA to undertake wetland restoration work by restoring the meadow adjacent to Westminster Lodge, to its original state and undertaking in-channel works. The wetlands will improve the park's biodiversity by providing a habitat for a wide range of wildlife, such as wading birds, and different plant species. It will also connect with the river on this part of the flood plain, preventing stagnant pools of flood water from building up as can happen at present.
- Reach 3 – improving footpath between Holywell Hill to Cottonmill Lane and replacing footbridge.

We are working with independent consultants to complete a full review and design for Reach 1 including Bell Meadow, to determine the best use of the Council's limited budget. This element of the project will take 2-3 years to complete.

Alternative Verge Management sites agreed by SADC/HCC with reduced mowing across (around 30 streets). HCC are taking ownership of the process of identifying suitable verges. Hertfordshire Butterfly Conservation Trust are monitoring/ surveying low mow areas.

Community Right to Grow (Pilot) scheme: was launched in Feb 2025. We currently have a number of community growing plots in the District. Incredible Edibles maintain the plots behind Russel Avenue Car Park and Civic Square. Francis Avenue Open Space is being managed by a local community group. Volunteers are working with JOC on Municipal Gardens in Charter Close. Section 106 funded tree and path works. working with Grow Sopwell and Sopwell Allotment Inclusive Garden project.

Allotments: We work with the Joint Allotment Management Group to educate allotment holders to reduce use of pesticides. Community pay back team have been to Sandridge road and Folly Lane Allotment sites to help with clearing rubbish off vacant plots as well as carrying out vegetation management. Community payback team have visited Camp and Cottonmill Allotments to help bring plots up to a manageable and lettable state.

2.0 How we have considered other strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): Hosted St Albans and Dacorum Public and Stakeholder Engagement Session in 2024. A Priority Species Longlist has been created (~1000 species) which has been reviewed by County Recorders. GIS teams have started mapping sites of biodiversity importance. Key SADC Officers and Councillors attended an LNRS consultation workshop led by Herts County Council (HCC) in January 2025 to help shape the strategy

St Albans District Council Tree Strategy was aided by referencing The Woodland Trust Tree Strategy Template, The Tree Council website, The Arboricultural Association website, The English Tree Strategy Consultation 2020 and Hertfordshire County Councils Trees and Woodlands Strategy.

3.0 Our Future Actions

We will continue to undertake the actions we have committed to taking to enhance and protect the natural environment and biodiversity, as detailed in our [2024-27 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy](#). In 2026 we will work to develop our Phase 3 action plan covering the period 2027-2030.

4.0 Biodiversity Net Gain Information

Information about biodiversity net gain is set out in the Government's National Planning Policy Guidance at www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain. In its introduction to biodiversity net gain, it explains that:

"Biodiversity net gain is a way of creating and improving biodiversity by requiring development to have a positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity.

Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, [subject to some exceptions](#), every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition"). This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development”.

This is achieved by requiring local planning authorities to only grant permission for development, where the requirement applies, subject to the Biodiversity Gain Condition to ensure that the biodiversity net gain objective is met.

The Biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition that requires the local planning authority to approve a biodiversity gain plan before development can start.

4.1 The actions St Albans City and District Council has carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations

Biodiversity Net Gain has been a requirement for developments approved since 12 February 2024 (or 2 April 2024 for minor developments). Council planning staff continue to undertake training on how to implement biodiversity net gain and assess biodiversity gain plans. Initial training was arranged by Hertfordshire County Council in March 2024 and delivered to Hertfordshire Authorities. Additional internal training has been provided to the Planning and Technical Support teams to ensure that the BNG requirement is fully embedded in the Council's functions. A summary of some of the key training events undertaken is set out in the table below:

Officers from the Council's planning service also attend a monthly meeting of Hertfordshire County Council ecology officers and District Council planning officers to share best practice across Hertfordshire and understand issues that have arisen and that others can learn from. Continual training and development takes place within the teams to respond to new advice and material considerations.

4.2 Details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved

To date (19/03/2025) only one application to discharge the Biodiversity Gain Condition has been approved.

This application resulted in an on-site 10.97% net gain in area habitats and a 17.65% net gain in hedgerows.

4.3 How the Council plans to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period

The Council will continue to apply the Biodiversity Gain condition on applicable planning permissions.

Further training for officers will continue to take place to respond to new guidance and material considerations, to ensure that applications are determined in accordance with best practice.

The draft St Albans Local Plan to 2041 contains a policy on biodiversity net gain, which upon adoption (expected to be in 2026) will be considered when determining planning applications made to the Council.

The Council will also work with colleagues at Hertfordshire County Council in delivering and applying the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, currently in preparation, and which will set priorities for biodiversity gain in the county.