

Eastbourne Borough Council

# Biodiversity Strategy

2021 - 2025



# STRONGER together



Lewes District Council



Working in partnership with **Eastbourne Homes**

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## Eastbourne Biodiversity Strategy

### Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

Our broad key aims can be summarised as follows:

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

### Purpose of this strategy

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

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

### What is biodiversity and why is it important?

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

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

### Why do we need a biodiversity strategy?

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

Current rates of species extinction are unparalleled with little dispute within the scientific communities that it is being driven by human activities, namely loss of habitats to urbanisation and agricultural intensification. Population sizes of wildlife decreased by 60% globally between 1970 and 2014<sup>1</sup>.

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

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

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

### Policy and legislative context

Emerging legislative drivers, namely the UK Government's long-anticipated Environment Bill<sup>2</sup>, alongside the Agriculture Bill<sup>3</sup>, seek to redress this by providing a framework for the tangible recovery of our natural environment through a natural capital, ecosystems services and biodiversity net gain approach.

The Bills are proposing a substantial legal framework to achieve the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan's ambition to leave our environment in a better state than we found it and to pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future by restoring and enhancing nature and green spaces<sup>4</sup>.

### The focal areas

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> [The Environment Bill 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/agriculture-bill-to-boost-environment-and-food-production](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/agriculture-bill-to-boost-environment-and-food-production) 16 January 2020

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan) Published 11 January 2018 with updates May 2019

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

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### 4. Implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain within development management

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

### 5. Promotion of biodiversity understanding council wide

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

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## 1. Collaboration through partnership working

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

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

### Strategic Level:

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

### Community:

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

### 2. Preserve and enhance existing valuable habitats

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. Creating more and joining up existing biodiversity habitats

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

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

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

Building on the Sussex Local Nature Partnership adopted Natural Capital Strategy<sup>7</sup> we will work with the Sussex Local Nature Partnership, South Downs National Park, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre to identify strategic Nature Recovery Network areas in the local area.

#### 3.1 The importance of trees and tree planting

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup>[SussexLNP.org.uk/Natural-Capital-Investment-Strategy\\_ADOPTED\\_Final\\_Dec2019.pdf](https://sussexlnp.org.uk/Natural-Capital-Investment-Strategy_ADOPTED_Final_Dec2019.pdf)

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

### 4. Implement biodiversity net gains within development management

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

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

The BNG process will require developers to provide a quantitative account for biodiversity losses and gains resulting from development or land management changes through the use of DEFRA's / Natural England's Biodiversity Metric tool<sup>8</sup>. The metric provides an evaluation to be undertaken by suitably qualified, experienced and competent personnel (i.e. ecologists) to ensure habitats for wildlife are measurably left in a better state than they were pre-development.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **5. Promoting biodiversity understanding**

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

## **Eastbourne Biodiversity Strategy**

### **Appendix 1: List of Partner Groups**

#### **Strategic Partners - working on policy/strategy direction etc.**

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

#### **Development Planning partners**

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

#### **Land management partners**

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

#### **Natural history information partners**

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

#### **Community engagement partners**

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

#### **Misc.**

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