

Biodiversity Duty Report

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

January 2026

1.0 Background and introduction

- 1.1 The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. The *State of Nature* report (2023) - a comprehensive scientific study of species and habitats trends - showed that UK species have declined by an average of 19% since 1970, with nearly one in six species at risk of extinction, including much-loved wildlife such as hedgehogs and water voles. The study also showed that most wildlife habitats in the UK are in poor condition and this is one of the major drivers of species decline, as well as habitat loss and fragmentation, climate change, pollution and invasive species.
- 1.2 A healthy, biodiverse natural environment is not a 'nice-to-have' – it plays a critical role in human health and wellbeing. Functioning ecosystems provide essential services such as climate regulation, water and air filtration and food security. Economic growth and stability is dependent on these services. The value of the UK's natural capital was estimated at £1.8 trillion in 2022, providing a £48 billion annual flow of services (excluding oil and gas) to the economy. Chronic climate and nature degradation could reduce UK GDP by 4.7% this decade. Access to nature is also linked to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 1.3 Nature recovery efforts in the UK are underpinned by 'The Lawton Principles', which originate from Making Space for Nature (2010), an independent review led by Professor Sir John Lawton for the UK Government. The review concluded that England's ecological network was too fragmented to sustain biodiversity under pressures such as climate change, land-use change, and habitat degradation. It summarised what must be done in four words: More, Bigger, Better, Joined.
On the ground, this means creating new nature sites ('More'); expand existing wildlife habitats ('Bigger'); restoring degraded habitats with targeted management ('Better') and creating 'stepping stones' or corridors of restored habitat to link up larger habitat areas ('Joined'), which allows species to move more easily across the landscape.
- 1.4 As a direct response to the threats to our natural ecosystems, the UK Government has committed to a series of legally-binding environmental targets, including halting the decline in species abundance by 2030, and restoring 30% of land to support nature by 2030. For Local Authorities, statutory requirements are set out in the Environment Act 2021, and include a strengthened Biodiversity Duty (including the publication of a regular report into progress), a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement on the majority of development, and the introduction of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for all regions in England.

- 1.5 The strengthened Biodiversity Duty goes beyond simply protecting or maintaining biodiversity; it introduces a proactive obligation to assess opportunities for nature recovery, set policies and objectives, and take action to achieve these objectives. LAs must publish a report into how they have fulfilled this duty by March 26 2026, and review their approach at least every five years.
- 1.6 Government guidance (DEFRA) states that by law the report must include:
- a summary of the action the council has taken during the reporting period to comply with the Biodiversity Duty
 - the policies and objectives the council has set to meet the Biodiversity Duty
 - the actions the council has completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity
 - An explanation of how the council has taken account of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, protected site strategies and species conservation strategies
 - how the council plans to comply with the Biodiversity Duty in the next reporting period (five years)

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) also need to include the following in their report:

- the actions carried out to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations
 - details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from any biodiversity gain plans that have been approved
 - how the council plans to meet its BNG obligations in the next reporting period
 - any other information the council considers appropriate
- 1.7 The reporting period being covered by this report is 1 January 2024 – 1 January 2026. Data relating to BNG delivery begins from February 2024 for major developments and April 2024 for small sites, when BNG became mandatory.

This report follows DEFRA's template report structure - [Reporting your biodiversity duty actions - GOV.UK](#)

2.0 Section 1: The council's policies, objectives and actions

Local Policy and objectives

- **The council's Corporate Strategy 2024 – 28:** One of the City's priorities is 'A Greener City'. Under this theme, there is an objective to 'Strengthen biodiversity and opportunities to engage with the natural environment'.
- **Draft Local Plan 2020 - 2040:** Includes policies to protect and enhance biodiversity, as follows:
 - i. Policy NA1 – new developments are expected to increase the functionality and secure new green infrastructure, which accords with Building with Nature standards.

- ii. Policy NA3 – all development is expected to follow the mitigation hierarchy (prioritising the avoidance of harm to the natural environment, followed by the mitigation of harm, followed by compensation to offset harm.) Development that results in harm to, or loss of biodiversity, wildlife or geology will not be permitted unless benefits clearly outweigh the harm; it restores or enhances biodiversity, provides buffers and links to wider ecological networks; it incorporates features to support priority or threatened species.
 - iii. Policy NA4 – there is an expectation that there will be no net loss of trees from any new development, and any tree or hedgerow removed will be replaced on a 1-1 basis. The council will not support development that leads to total loss or damage to irreplaceable habitats or ancient and veteran trees.
- **Green Space Strategy (reviewed 2021):** The Green Space Strategy includes assessments of the quantity, distribution, and quality of green spaces across Stoke-on-Trent. The strategy evaluates greenspace against a range of criteria such as proximity to communities, amenity value, footpaths, appearance and safety, rather than ecological value.
 - **Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** The council is a ‘Supporting Authority’ in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The LNRS is being led by Staffordshire County Council and jointly developed by local authorities in partnership with Natural England and a wide range of other stakeholders including local nature conservation organisations, species experts, landowners and farmers, businesses and community groups.

The LNRS, which is due to be published in autumn 2026, will comprise of:

- A strategic map identifying the most valuable habitats for wildlife and the best opportunities for future habitat creation and improvement
- A set of priorities and actions for nature recovery across the area

Because the LNRS maps priority areas and sets clear recovery actions, it helps local authorities target resources (such as the delivery of BNG) where they will bring the greatest ecological benefits. The LNRS is akin to a ‘Local Plan’ for nature – it outlines the optimal locations for habitat creation and restoration, improving ecological connectivity, and nature-based solutions to increase climate resilience.

A draft of the LNRS is due to be shared with local authorities for a 28-day pre-consultation period at the start of February 2026.

2.1 Actions the council has taken to benefit biodiversity during the reporting period

Land management

The council's landholdings include allotments, amenity greenspaces, churchyards and cemeteries, formal parks and gardens, green corridors, playgrounds, semi-natural greenspaces and road verges. All of these areas have the potential to support biodiversity.

Designated Sites

The council owns a number of sites that have been designated for their biodiversity value: 1 National Nature Reserve (NNR) [Park Hall Country Park], 2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest [Park Hall Country Park and Whitfield Valley] and 12 Local Nature Reserves (LNR) [Bagnall Road Woods, Berryhill Fields, Bridgett's Pool, Coyney Woods – Weston Sprink, Coyney Woods – Weston Sprink Grasslands, Coyney Woods – Birch Woods, Coyney Woods – Ransome Wood, Florence, Hartshill Park, Holden Lane Pools, Smith's Pool, Westport Lake and Whitfield Valley.]

Work is currently underway to secure an agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to lease Wetley Moor Common, which is jointly owned by the council and SMDC, to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

A significant portion of the site (around 70 hectares) is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest because it is lowland heathland – a rare and internationally important habitat.

The council also owns a number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), which are designated areas with locally-significant conservation value.

The scope for delivering conservation management on designated sites is influenced by the current staffing levels within the Countryside Sites Team (3.5 FTE). Fee-earning work, ie. the management of sites which are in an agri-environment scheme, is prioritised.

All of the designated sites have the potential to support increased biodiversity with additional habitat management. For example, Chatterley Whitfield Country Park is a stronghold for the rare dingy skipper butterfly. This species thrives on the old spoil heaps on the site, but habitat management is needed to remove scrubby vegetation which is out-competing bird's-foot trefoil, a foodplant of the dingy skipper caterpillar. In the past the site has also supported white-letter hairstreak butterflies and six-belted clearwing moths, a species which mimics a wasp to deter predators.

Other habitat management activities that could be carried out to improve biodiversity include but are not limited to:

- Heathland restoration and creation work at Chatterley Whitfield Country Park, Scotia Valley and Bagnall Road Woods
- Reedbed management at Holden Lane Pools
- Grassland management at Holden Lane Pools, Smyths Pool
- Woodland management at Coyney Woods, Trent Mill, Holden Lane Pools, Bagnall Road Woods
- Wetland/pond restoration – Hartshill Park, Holden Lane Pools

Some habitat management work is carried out with the assistance of a regular weekly volunteer group and ad hoc groups who are on Corporate Volunteering Days. The Countryside Sites team hosts around 10 corporate volunteering days per year, but is keen to host more – potentially up to one per week - particularly during November to March, when the majority of habitat management work is carried out.

Agri-environment schemes

These involve managing land to provide significant environmental benefits, focusing on habitat, landscape, and historic features, in return for payment from DEFRA.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements are in place on three of the council’s designated sites: Whitfield Valley, Park Hall and Berryhill Fields. The three schemes are in place until 2028 and the intention is to extend the agreements after this.

A Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) agreement is in place for Florence, until January 2028. This site was previously in Countryside Stewardship (Mid Tier).

The table below provides details of each agreement:

| Site name | Area of land managed under agri-environment agreement/ type of agreement | Conservation management activities |
|------------------|--|--|
| Berryhill Fields | 41.88 Ha/ HLS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of hay meadow which is cut and baled annually • Hedgerows of high environmental value managed (min height and width) • Two areas in heathland management • Managing grassland areas for target species – great crested newt and dingy skipper butterfly • Management of scrub margins for great crested newt • Reedbed management • Educational access visits |
| Whitfield Valley | 12.35 Ha/ HLS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reedbed management • Grassland management for target species including great crested newts, dingy skipper and barn owl • Scrub management • Management of invasive species • Educational access visits |

| | | |
|--|---------------|---|
| Park Hall | 40.63Ha/ HLS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heathland management – restoration and creation • Woodland management and coppicing • Management of invasive species • Educational access visits |
| Florence | 24.01 Ha/ SFI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of scrub and grassland (working to create scrubland mosaic) • One meadow being managed as hay meadow |
| Total area of land in agri-environment scheme: 118.87Ha | | |

Actions to improve biodiversity in parks

Grass-cutting

Grassed areas within the council's formal parks (Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Central Forest Park, Fenton and Longton) are cut every two to three weeks during the growing season. Residential parks are cut every three to six weeks.

The parks team are, however, exploring a reduced mowing regime in some of the harder to cut areas (eg. sloping ground), which will increase species diversity and benefit pollinating insects. The council also took part in 'No Mow May' for the first time in 2025, allowing the grass to grow in designated areas of Hanley Park during May to support pollinators.

Planting schemes

Bedding plants, which tend to have low value for biodiversity, have been largely replaced with herbaceous perennials in planting schemes.

Herbicide and pesticide use

Glyphosate use is limited to specific localised treatments to control weeds. Pesticides are not used.

Tree-planting

A number of small-scale tree-planting initiatives have been delivered across the council's parks since January 2024, including at Hanley Park and Newstead Park, where 30 fruit trees were planted by volunteers in 2025.

Other landholdings

The council's grass-cutting programme across other landholdings, such as amenity green space, greenway corridors and road verges, does not currently incorporate any management practices aimed at improving biodiversity.

2.3 Biodiversity projects that the council has been involved in during the reporting period

Transforming the Trent Headwaters (TTTH)

TTTH is a partnership project lead by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) that is exploring opportunities to work with local partners, stakeholders and

communities on projects with a natural and cultural heritage focus based around the headwaters of the River Trent, the majority of which flow through Stoke-on-Trent. The council is a key partner in the scheme.

In January 2024, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) awarded SWT £250,000 for a feasibility phase. During this phase, an active partnership was established, a series of audits undertaken and a masterplan developed. An EOI was submitted to The NLHF in November 2025. This was declined, but following feedback from the panel, a new EOI will be submitted in January 2026. The scheme is aiming to attract c. £10million of lottery funding, which will be used on a series of projects which will improve biodiversity across Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, and provide opportunities for local people to engage with the natural environment.

Trent Renew

Ford Green Brook

Working in collaboration with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Environment Agency, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's Trent Renew project will see a range of enhancements to improve biodiversity along Ford Green Brook and its floodplain. The changes will create new wetlands as well as variety in the current habitats which will support a greater array of species, without impacting flood risk in the surrounding area.

Channel infilling and widening will help reconnect the brook with its floodplain. The brook channel will be completely infilled at strategic locations. The infilling 'resets' the river, giving water a chance to form new paths with interesting meanders, shallows, and pools. This will increase the amount and variety of habitats.

Creating riffles is done through adding gravels into the channel. The shaping and mix of gravels hold back some water, creating a pool upstream with a shallow flow navigating its way over the gravels. Riffles oxygenate the water as the water bubbles over its surface supporting riffle beetles and breeding fish. Works are due to start in June 2026.

River Trent at Staffordshire University (Leek Road campus)

Under the Trent Renew project, proposals have been drawn up for further improvements which build on work completed through the SUNRISE Project in 2020 to re-naturalise the river. The new proposals build on the previous interventions and include the creation of further backwaters, chutes, riffles, and the addition of large woody material into the floodplain. These will further add to the variety of habitat niches available to aquatic wildlife.

Rediscovering the Trent Valley Way in Stoke-on-Trent

The Council allocated £189,993 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to Trent Rivers Trust. The funding has been used to connect local people to the River Trent, through the creation of an attractive and accessible walking route alongside the river, a walks programme and a range of activities designed to educate, engage and energise people about the River Trent, to improve the wellbeing of local people and the river. The project is due for completion in March 2026.

Placemaking and the arts

The Canal and River Trust received £109,633 from Stoke-on-Trent City Council through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for a community-led project aimed at attracting new visitors to the Trent and Mersey and Caldon Canals. As part of the 18-month project, volunteers planted 271 native trees in Hanley Park to increase biodiversity and improve wellbeing of visitors. In total, 3500 m² of green or blue space was created or improved under the scheme.

Restoring habitat for the dingy skipper

The Council allocated £10,600 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to restore vital habitat for the rare dingy skipper butterfly at Chatterley Whitfield Country Park. A former coal mine which has been transformed into a council-owned nature reserve, the site's old spoil heaps now provide ideal conditions for the species. The funding supports volunteer sessions being delivered by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, where local volunteers remove overgrown woody vegetation from the mounds. This targeted management creates the open, sunny conditions needed for bird's-foot trefoil to thrive - an essential food plant for dingy skipper caterpillars. The project is due for completion in March 2026.

Volunteering with community groups along the Trent Valley Way footpath

Trent Rivers Trust are delivering volunteer activities and events to engage communities with nature alongside the Trent Valley Way footpath. The project has been supported by the council through the allocation of £9,276 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Sessions are focussed on enhancing biodiversity, improving access to nature, and engaging local people in the natural world.

3.0 Section 2: Future actions

This section details how the council plans to comply with the Biodiversity Duty in the next reporting period (1 January 2026 – 1 January 2031).

During 2026, the council will publish a Sustainability Strategy, which will include a section on biodiversity. As part of this, the table below summarises future actions which have been identified for further consideration within this Strategy. Inclusion at this stage does not signal a commitment to action, as further work will need to be undertaken to identify funding, resources and the necessary policy changes. Inclusion in the table indicates that these areas will be reviewed as part of the development of the forthcoming Sustainability Strategy.

| Area | Future actions to be considered as part of Sustainability Strategy |
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| Policy: Ensuring council policy protects and considers impacts on the natural environment | Actively contribute to the development of the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and ensure the council's new Sustainability Strategy aligns with LNRS |

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| | <p>Ensure that the LNRS is understood across the whole council and embedded within our policies, strategies and actions</p> |
| | <p>Ensure biodiversity impacts and enhancement opportunities are incorporated into new or updated strategies and plans where appropriate</p> |
| | <p>Ensure any Local Plan updates take into account the LNRS and seek to maintain a commitment to conserving and enhancing biodiversity</p> |
| <p>Land management: Increasing the amount of council-owned land that is managed for nature</p> | <p>Increase habitat management activities on all council-owned designated sites, via mechanisms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional resources for Countryside Sites team to increase habitat management activities • increasing the number and scope of conservation volunteers • explore external funding and partnership opportunities for the delivery of nature conservation work |
| | <p>Explore options to increase the amount of land that is managed for nature on other council-owned land, including parks, amenity greenspaces and road verges via mechanisms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the number of naturalised areas within parks and amenity areas such as such as mini wildflower meadows and woodlands • Ensure any externally-funded bedding schemes within parks include plants for pollinating insects grown in peat-free compost • Review management of road verges with a view to supporting biodiversity, eg. reducing number of cuts in areas where it is safe to do so to encourage growth of wildflowers |
| | <p>Explore opportunities to improve ecological connectivity across Stoke-on-Trent, via mechanisms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designating new nature reserves and wildlife corridors on council-owned land that falls within areas of strategic significance in the LNRS |
| | <p>Investigate ways of working with tenants of council-owned land to promote biodiversity enhancements and the adoption of environmental land management schemes</p> |

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| | Promote wildlife-friendly gardening practices to council tenants and allotment holders |
| Data and monitoring: Understand the condition of our habitats and species to inform management activities | Review and update Loal Plan biodiversity evidence |
| | Establish a programme of species and habitat surveys to record the ecological baseline for designated sites in council ownership. Update management briefs following on from surveys |
| | Ensure regular monitoring regimes are in place on all designated sites in council ownership |
| Planning: Ensure ecologically-valuable areas are protected and new nature sites created through the planning system | Ensure council has access to county's ecological database (Staffordshire Ecological Record) to inform the assessment of planning applications |
| | Explore the provision of offsite Biodiversity Units on council-owned land funded through developer contributions (Biodiversity Net Gain) |
| | Identify/allocate council-owned sites for the delivery of offsite Biodiversity Net Gain within the new Local Plan |
| | Explore the available options for monitoring and enforcement of mandatory BNG |
| | Explore options for BNG investment on a cross-boundary basis with neighbouring authorities where benefits can be identified in a strategic context |
| Community: Engage with communities to champion positive action for nature across the city | Explore funding opportunities for community-led nature engagement, volunteering and citizen science projects |
| | Investigate opportunities for cross-sector working to link nature-related activities with wider strategic objectives such as improved health and wellbeing, eg. green prescribing initiatives |
| | Use council's communications channels to promote nature recovery initiatives within communities, such as wildlife gardening and community greenspace adoption, and promote external campaigns such as RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch and City Nature Challenge |
| | Explore opportunities for engagement of schools in environmental activities |
| | Explore opportunities for engagement of businesses in nature-related activities |

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| | |
| <p>Improving access to nature: Enhance visitor experience at council-owned nature sites and create opportunities for communities to connect with nature on their doorstep</p> | Create new promotional materials for council-owned nature reserves, including updated web pages and leaflet |
| | Improve interpretation and signage at all council-owned nature reserves |
| | Develop a programme of events to engage community members with natural environment and local nature reserves |
| | Create series of self-led walks for council-owned nature reserves |
| | Identify areas lacking accessible greenspace and explore options for establishment of new nature reserves in these areas (Natural England recommend an accessible natural greenspace of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes' walk) from home) |
| <p>Climate change mitigation and adaptation: Utilise council-owned land to deliver nature-based solutions to climate change</p> | Explore opportunities for using council landholdings for increased carbon sequestration and offsetting, eg. through tree-planting and other habitat restoration activities |
| | Review use of city's green and blue infrastructure to provide nature-based solutions to climate change, eg. wetland restoration to reduce flooding impacts on communities, increasing green infrastructure in areas of highest heat stress during extreme temperatures |
| | Review council's tree management policies to ensure any trees removed are appropriately replaced, veteran and important trees are protected and any tree-planting activities align with 'right tree, right place' principles |
| <p>Workforce: Ensure benefits of improving the natural environment are understood across the council</p> | Provide training for Councillors and Council employees to improve understanding of biodiversity across the Council |

Next steps

It is important to note that resources have not yet been identified to enable the delivery of the future actions listed in the above table. As such, a fully-costed delivery plan must be produced as part of the development of the wider Sustainability Strategy, to clarify how the future actions suggested above will be resourced within the next reporting period.

4.0 Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain Information

This section summarises:

- the actions we have carried out to meet BNG obligations
- details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans we have approved
- how we plan to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period

Background

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was introduced under the Environment Act 2021 and is an obligation on developers to ensure that development has a positive impact on the natural environment. BNG became mandatory for major developments from 12 February 2024 and for minor sites on 2 April 2024. It is expected to become mandatory for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in May 2026. All planning permissions (aside from exempt developments) must result in a 10% increase in natural habitat (a Biodiversity Net Gain), maintained for at least 30 years.

Local planning authorities (LPAs) play a central role in BNG, as it is consented and enforced through the planning regime. LPAs can also legally secure off-site gain sites on behalf of local landowners using Section 106 agreements. LPAs are responsible for reviewing BNG in planning applications. A Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted as part of a planning application that is subject to BNG requirements, and must be approved before development can commence.

If the development will require significant on-site biodiversity enhancements or use of off-site biodiversity gains, further information may be required by the LPA, including a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), which sets out the proposals for the delivery, maintenance and monitoring of habitats over 30 years.

4.1 Actions carried out by the council to meet BNG obligations during the Reporting Period

The BNG requirement is included in the Local Validation List, with applicants signposted to Government guidance for further information.

The council has used DEFRA BNG burdens funding to pay for Mycelia, a software tool which error-checks submitted BNG metrics to support the work of the Senior Planning Officer responsible for BNG. Mycelia also helps the council manage BNG requirements by tracking monitoring data, responsibilities, and deadlines for each case.

Ecological consultants were appointed to conduct a desk-based audit of council landholdings and identify the most appropriate sites for the provision of Biodiversity Units for off-site delivery. A draft report has been completed and a list of nine sites identified as potential habitat banks.

4.2 Details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from Biodiversity Gain Plans that have been approved during the reporting period

The tables below show details of how Biodiversity Net Gain requirements are being met in Stoke-on-Trent during the reporting period.

Table 1: Eligible planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requiring Biodiversity Net Gain

| ID | Consented applications requiring net gains | Number | Proportion (%) |
|----|--|--------|----------------|
| A | Total number of planning permissions granted that require Biodiversity Net Gain in the reporting period | 26 | Not applicable |
| B | Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the Biodiversity Net Gain condition applies | 753 | Not applicable |
| C | Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period | 1 | Not applicable |
| D | Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only | 1 | 100.00 |

During the reporting period, there have been no Biodiversity Gain Plans approved that secure BNG through off-site units or statutory credits.

Table 2: Overall expected gains and losses across all Biodiversity Gain Plans approved in the reporting period

| Overall expected gains and losses | Area habitat | Hedgerow | Watercourse |
|--|--------------|----------|-------------|
| Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site | 1.25 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site | 3.75 | 1.03 | 0.00 |
| Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site | 2.50 | 1.03 | 0.00 |
| Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site | 200.69 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits) | 2.50 | 1.03 | 0.00 |
| Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits) | 200.69 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

There have been no Biodiversity Gain Plans approved in the reporting period where the on-site change negatively impacts irreplaceable habitats.

4.2 How the council plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period

As shown in Table 1 above, during the reporting period, the council has approved one Biodiversity Gain Plan which secures a net gain on site, within the development itself, on a site at Forge Lane, Etruria. To date, the council has not approved any Biodiversity Gain Plans that secure BNG through off-site units or statutory credits. However, it is likely that demand for off-site units will steadily increase as more permissions are granted.

There are currently no off-site biodiversity units available for developers within Stoke-on-Trent, and the council is seeking to address this. A roadmap has been set out, including the establishment of a BNG Working Group, to progress work in this area.

A timeline, and more detailed breakdown of suggested actions, is included below. However, it should be noted that resources have not yet been identified to enable the delivery of this work. As such, initial next steps should include the development of a fully-costed delivery plan, which should be produced as part of the development of the council's wider Sustainability Strategy.

Suggested actions to meet BNG obligations (subject to resources being identified):

Phase 1

A BNG Working Group is established to ensure appropriate governance in this area. The Group will comprise representatives from relevant service areas across the council including but not limited to: Planning, Greenspace Management, Climate and Natural Environment, Finance, Legal, Estates, Housing. The Group's first task will be to undertake a feasibility assessment of how offsite biodiversity units are delivered by the council.

Pilot scheme

Running alongside the feasibility assessment, the BNG Working Group will explore the progression of a pilot scheme in order to ensure a supply of offsite biodiversity units to meet current demand from developers. A fully-costed project plan must be developed as a first step. Following this, working with an external partner, a suitable pilot site would be identified and progressed to provide a more immediate solution which will avoid funding for biodiversity improvements being lost to a neighbouring authority.

Feasibility assessment:

The assessment should include the following:

1. An estimate of how many offsite biodiversity units developers may require over the next five years and 10 years, taking into account the Local Plan and housing targets, forthcoming planning applications and major development plans. It will require an estimation of:

- Estimated development area (ha) and expected dwelling numbers
- Average biodiversity units likely to be lost / ha
- Proportion likely to be met through onsite BNG delivery (%)

2. Evaluate different options for delivery of biodiversity units on council-owned land. Each option will require different levels of input from the council, regarding the management, maintenance, ongoing surveys and monitoring, and enforcement of the agreement. Options to be explored:

- Deliver in-house via a wholly-owned Special Purpose Vehicle
- Deliver via Special Purpose Vehicle owned by collective of local authorities
- Lease land to a third-party (commercial or charity) who take on full responsibility for delivery
- Lease land to a third party (commercial or charity) and split delivery responsibilities between council and third party

The pros and cons of each option need to be assessed against the following criteria:

- Financial implications (costs and revenue generation potential)
- Legal implications
- Risks (eg. financial, reputational)
- Resource and expertise requirements
- Timescales for set up and delivery
- Strategic alignment

Timeline

| | | 2026 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2027 | | | | | | |
|-------|--|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phase | Task | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | M | A | M | J | F |
| | | a | e | a | a | a | u | u | u | e | c | o | e | a | e | a | a | a | u | e |
| | | n | b | r | r | y | n | l | g | p | t | v | c | n | b | r | r | y | n | b |
| 1 | Step 1: Create BNG roadmap | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Step 2: Set up BNG Working Group to include reps from relevant service areas. Establish TOR and identify budget for Group. | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Step 2a: With external advice, select site for pilot project and commission BNG Assessment | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | |
| | Step 3: BNG Group to input into feasibility assessment into how offsite biodiversity unit provision is delivered in SOT by the council – may require consultancy support | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Step 4: Results of feasibility assessment put forward for approval | | | | | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | |

Phases 2 and 3

Further to the feasibility assessment, should the council determine that it wishes to participate in the provision of off-site biodiversity units on council land, the subsequent steps would be as follows.

Site selection

BNG Working Group to carry out review of results of BNG audit and refine shortlist of sites to ensure join up between different service areas and alignment with council-wide strategic objectives. Alternative sites, such as the council's Countryside Sites and Local Wildlife Sites should also be considered and may be included if justifications exist. It is proposed that the shortlist is reduced to approximately two to four sites for further detailed assessment.

Areas for BNG Working Group to consider:

| Consideration | Description |
|--|---|
| Likely areas of land-use change | Identify which parts of the local authority area are most likely to experience significant land-use change. |
| Need for enhanced natural infrastructure | Identify areas that are most in need of new or improved natural infrastructure. |
| Inclusion of council greenspaces | Consider whether council-owned greenspaces (e.g., LNRs, parks) should be included in the shortlist to maximise public benefit. |
| Inclusion of Local Wildlife Sites | Consider whether Local Wildlife Sites should be included to support improvements in ecological condition. |
| Alignment with LNRS | Assess whether sites align with the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and fall within priority areas for nature restoration. Sites mapped in the LNRS receive a 15% uplift in biodiversity units, increasing cost-effectiveness for developers. |
| Minimum site size | Determine whether a minimum size threshold is required for practical delivery. |
| Practical access | Assess whether sites are accessible to machinery needed for BNG delivery |
| Range of habitat types | Ensure shortlisted sites include a variety of habitats to meet developer demand (eg. woodland, grassland). |
| Legal viability | Evaluate whether sites are viable from a legal standpoint, including any restrictions, land charges, or constraints. |

Biodiversity Unit calculations

Following agreement on the shortlist, an ecologist should be appointed to undertake ecological baseline surveys for each site. This will include assessment of habitat types, condition, extent, and location. The ecologist will also be required to calculate existing Biodiversity Units using the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric and to identify opportunities for habitat creation or enhancement, together with the potential number of units that each site could generate.

