

2026 Biodiversity Duty Report

Review period: January 2024 to January 2026

Next update: January 2031

Introduction

1. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a proactive duty for public authorities to “from time to time, consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective”. This duty is a corporate responsibility and applies across the Council’s services and decision-making.
2. This report outlines the Council’s approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and explains how the Council will meet its Biodiversity Duty reporting requirements. It covers the period from 2 January 2024 to 1 January 2026.
3. The Biodiversity Duty Report must include the following sections:
 - A summary of the Council’s policies, objectives and actions taken during the monitoring period.
 - A summary of the Council’s plans for the period following this report.
 - Biodiversity Net Gain information.

Section 1: Council policies, objectives and actions

4. This section explains:
 - The policies and objectives the Council has set to meet its biodiversity duty.
 - The actions the Council has taken, either alone or in partnership, that benefit biodiversity.
5. The policies, objectives and actions summarised below are drawn from Maldon District Council’s Corporate Plan, Local Development Plan and Climate Action Strategy/Plan. These commitments may change as plans and strategies are reviewed and updated.
6. The next report, due in 2031, will be prepared by the successor authority, Mid Essex Council, following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Maldon District Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2028

7. The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's priorities for 2025-2028. Protecting the environment is one of the Plan's five priorities.

What the Council is doing:

- Deliver the Annual Climate Action Plan.
- Support communities to take forward climate action.
- Implement measures to improve local air quality.
- Take action to preserve and enhance the environment.

What this achieves:

- Limit the impacts of climate change and improve sustainability.
- Improve the health and wellbeing of residents.
- Preserve and enhance environmental quality.

Our Home, Our Future - Climate Strategy & Action Plan 2025-28

8. The Climate Strategy & Action Plan was updated in 2025. The Strategy includes the objective and actions below that have a biodiversity focus.

Objective 3 Adaptation and Climate Resilience:

9. Strengthen climate resilience by protecting natural ecosystems, mitigating flood and heat risks, and embedding climate adaptation into local planning, infrastructure, and community decision-making.

Actions:

- Protect and restore biodiversity, ecosystems, and natural infrastructure through tree planting, habitat restoration, rewilding, and nature-based solutions that also deliver benefits such as carbon storage, flood management, and improved water quality—aligned with the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Work with partners to explore the feasibility of blue and green infrastructure projects that increase green cover, protect shaded areas, and incorporate permeable features—such as rain gardens—into new and existing developments to enhance climate resilience and environmental quality
- Collaborate with partners in the Maldon District Coastal and Flooding Groups to support and deliver effective flood adaptation projects.
- Continue town greening initiatives and develop greenways using redundant railway lines and canal routes to connect green spaces and promote sustainable travel

- Support sustainable farming by promoting ecological practices and local approaches that are economically viable, environmentally sound, and protective of public health
- Support communities to deliver projects that are 'low carbon and high nature'
- Collaborate with neighbouring councils, regional bodies, and national agencies on shared climate resilience challenges, including flooding, coastal change, and ecosystem restoration.

Maldon District Local Development Plan

10. For many years, through successive Local Plans, the Council has identified and designated Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) for protection due to their wildlife interest.
11. Although it was completed before the Environment Act 2021 introduced the biodiversity duty, the approved Maldon District Local Development Plan (LDP) (2017) includes the following policies to protect and enhance the natural environment:
 - S1 Sustainable development
 - D1 Design Quality & Built Environment
 - D2 Climate Change & Environmental Impact of New Development
 - N1 Green Infrastructure Network
 - N2 Natural Environment, Geodiversity & Biodiversity
12. The Council's planning work is supported by the following assessments and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs):
 - Maldon District Nature Conservation Study 2007, and review 2023
 - Maldon Landscape Character Assessment 2006
 - Maldon District Strategic Environmental Assessment (LDP 2017 and site specific)
 - Maldon District Habitats Regulations Assessment (LDP 2017 and site specific)
 - Maldon District Green Infrastructure Strategy SPD 2019
 - Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) SPD 2020

Parks Management

13. Maldon District Council manages 28 sites, including cemeteries, playing fields and formal parks. These sites are managed for multiple uses, including supporting wildlife. Current parks management actions that support wildlife include:
 - The woodland burial area at Maldon Cemetery is managed as an established wildlife area. Each year, a dedication event enables friends and families to plant a tree in memory of those buried there.

- At Promenade Park (Prom Park), St George's Playing Fields, Oak Tree Meadow and Elms Farm, areas are being managed for rewilding. Following positive feedback from park users, this approach will be expanded across the wider estate.
- The grass cutting regime is reviewed annually across the estate to balance the needs of visitors and wildlife.
- Trees are actively managed to maintain tree health and public safety. Where trees are removed, replacements are planted. Replanting schemes are determined on an area-by-area basis to ensure appropriate species selection.
- At the Marine Lake in Prom Park, measures are being taken to encourage wildlife and increase biodiversity. The lake also has a growing population of freshwater fish; the origin of this population is not known.
- Through sympathetic management, some areas of Prom Park have developed into important habitats for wildlife. The park contains almost 1,000 trees and shrubs across more than 65 species, contributing to its character and providing benefits such as improved air quality, cooling, noise reduction, and food and shelter corridors for wildlife.
- The Promenade Park Management Plan was approved by the Strategy & Resources Committee in June 2025. The plan provides for a range of projects across the park, including projects that support biodiversity. During the public consultation, access to wildlife and nature was rated as the most important aspect of Prom Park. Although delivery of these projects is planned for 2026/27, the commitment to deliver them was made during this reporting period.

Partnership working

14. The Council is involved in key partnerships that support biodiversity, including:

Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) partnership

15. Bird Aware Essex Coast is the brand name of the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) partnership. The partnership comprises 12 local councils, Essex County Council and Natural England and was established to address the cumulative impacts of residential development on birds and their habitats along the Essex coast. Bird Aware Essex Coast raises awareness so that people can enjoy the coast and its wildlife without disturbing feeding, roosting and breeding birds.
16. An annual report summarising delivery up to April 2025 is available here: [Essex Coast RAMS Report April 2025](#). Since rangers were introduced in late 2022 (to April 2025), they have undertaken 1,284 site visits along the Essex coast, totalling 2,770 hours on site, and have engaged with 10,802 people.

17. RAMS activities within the Maldon district are summarised below.

18. The Bird Aware Essex Coast team provides mitigation for the in-combination effects of increased recreational disturbance arising from housing growth across Essex. The project employs a RAMS Delivery Manager, a Lead Coastal Ranger and three Coastal Rangers who cover the Essex coast. A core element of the mitigation is visitor engagement, providing information on the protected nature of the coastline and how people can enjoy it responsibly without disturbing overwintering and breeding birds and their habitats.

19. The table below summarises the engagement activities undertaken in the Maldon District area:

	Achievement	Notes
Site visits undertaken by BAE team in Maldon District Area	486 Site Visits	
Total number of hours rangers spent on site visits in Maldon District Area	1,442 hours on site	
Total number of visitors engaged with on visits within the Maldon District Area	Approx, 4,454	Not all event engagements captured
Number of leaflets distributed in Maldon District Area	Approx. 4,875 leaflets	Doesn't include posters or Share Our Shores leaflet distribution

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

20. The Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is a statutory framework introduced by the Environment Act 2021. It forms part of the national Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and is intended to help reverse biodiversity decline by identifying and prioritising opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement across the county.

21. The LNRS sets out nature recovery priorities, informed by mapping that highlights where interventions can deliver the greatest benefit. It emphasises protecting and enhancing priority habitats (such as ancient woodland, wetlands and grassland) and improving habitat condition, alongside wider benefits including carbon capture, flood risk reduction, soil protection and access to nature. Further information is available at [Local Nature Recovery Strategy – The Essex Local Nature Partnership](#).

Essex Biodiversity Net Gain Officer Collaboration Group

22. Officers from the Council's planning team attend the Essex Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Officer Collaboration Group to share best practice and learning from

implementation. The group is hosted by the Essex Biodiversity Officer. The post is jointly funded by Essex local authorities through the Biodiversity Duty grant.

Neighbourhood Plans

23. The Council supports Parish and Town Councils in their preparation Neighbourhood Plans. Made and emerging Neighbourhood Plans normally have a strong environmental focus and include policies to protect and enhance nature and wildlife within their plan areas.

Section 2: Future actions

24. This section sets out how the Council will fulfil its biodiversity duty over the next five years (January 2026 to January 2031).

Local Plan Review

25. Work began on a review of the Maldon District Local Development Plan in 2021. Since then, the Council has undertaken public consultation, updated the evidence base and completed a call for sites.
26. The Government's revised methodology for calculating housing need was published in December 2024. Under this methodology, Maldon district's housing requirement nearly doubled, which required a fundamental review of potential site allocations in the emerging Local Plan.
27. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduced a new approach to plan-making, based on shorter timescales, a more proportionate evidence base and clearer project management requirements. Secondary legislation for the new system was published in March 2026.
28. The Government has set a limited transition period for plans prepared under the legacy system, including a deadline of December 2026 to submit a plan for examination. The previous work to replace the Maldon Local Development Plan would not have met that deadline.
29. The Council has appointed consultants to prepare a Project and Resourcing Plan and a Project Initiation Document (PID) for a new Local Plan for Maldon district under the new system. These documents will set out how existing work will be carried forward, alongside the proposed governance, resourcing and key milestones. An update will be reported to Full Council in summer 2026.
30. A core principle of the planning system is delivering sustainable development, balancing social, economic and environmental needs. The precise details of the policies in the new Local Plan will depend on any changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and on the scope and legal status of National Development Management Policies.

Parks Management Plans

31. The Council has received grant funding through the Rural England Prosperity Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. A proportion of this funding has been allocated to parks management. Future parks management projects that will benefit biodiversity include:
- Riverside Park, Burnham-on-Crouch: install a butterfly green roof on the existing toilet block.
 - Millennium Wood, Maldon: develop a nature trail, and a Saltmarsh Trail, to improve access to natural areas by avoiding the need to cross the main road (subject to funding).
 - Promenade Park: increase tree planting.
 - Create designated biodiversity areas (subject to funding).

Community Groups

32. The Friends groups at Maldon and Heybridge Cemeteries currently have a limited role. In partnership with the CVS, the Council will trial a new approach to supporting the cemeteries, involving both routine tasks and longer-term projects. Subject to the outcomes of the trial, a Friends group for Promenade Park will be established.
33. There are three independent, community-level climate action partnerships in the district that undertake local environmental activities: Tollesbury Climate Partnership, Heybridge and Maldon Climate Action Partnership and Dengie Climate Action Partnership. These partnerships are supported by the Council's Sustainability and Environmental Manager.

Partnerships

34. The Council will continue to work with Essex local authorities and other partners to support RAMS, Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) delivery and the development of habitat banks in the district.

Next Biodiversity Duty Report

35. The next Biodiversity Duty monitoring period runs for five years and ends in January 2031, in line with Defra guidance.
36. Council priorities and resourcing may change over time; therefore, the future actions set out in this report may be updated. This includes changes arising from local government reorganisation, including the creation of Mid Essex Council on 1 April 2028.

Section 3: Biodiversity net gain information

37. This section summarises Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) activity during the monitoring period, including the number of BNG plans received and approved.

BNG Plans received/approved

38. The Environment Act 2021 requires certain developments to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value compared with the site's baseline value. It uses a standardised biodiversity metric and long-term habitat management and monitoring to ensure outcomes are measurable and maintained over time. The approach encourages early ecological input and nature-positive design that avoids and minimises impacts, alongside habitat creation and enhancement.
39. This requirement has applied to major development (10+ dwellings or sites over 0.5 hectares) since 12 February 2024, and to small sites (1-9 dwellings) since 2 April 2024.
40. Exemptions include certain Reserved Matters applications for outline permissions submitted before BNG came into force; development with a de minimis impact on biodiversity; self-build homes; householder applications; and variations to existing planning permissions. National policy changes, including the 2026 consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), may affect the scope of exemptions over time.
41. Not all applications require a full BNG plan. Many small sites can meet requirements through proportionate biodiversity enhancement measures, and some proposals fall below the thresholds for BNG. There is also a time lag between the grant of planning permission and the submission and approval of documents to discharge conditions.
42. As the BNG regime is still in its early stages, it is not yet possible to report meaningfully on the long-term outcomes of habitat creation and enhancement.
43. BNG information from metrics submitted with planning applications and applications to discharge conditions during the monitoring period is summarised in Appendix A.

Supporting the development of a local BNG market

44. The BNG market enables developers who cannot deliver the required Biodiversity Net Gain uplift on site or within the local area (e.g., on other land in their ownership) to purchase habitat units from a registered habitat bank to meet their BNG obligations.
45. The development of habitat banks is led by landowners. Habitat banks must be formally registered with Natural England and are supported by a 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. Habitat banks within the district can contribute to local biodiversity outcomes even where habitat units are purchased to meet requirements arising from development outside the district.

46. Within Maldon district, three sites are progressing through the legal processes required to establish habitat banks. One of these sites is included on the Biodiversity Gain Sites Register:

- Braxted Park (BGS-200825001) is a 70-hectare habitat bank spanning three local planning authority areas (Braintree, Colchester and Maldon). The site will create and enhance hedgerows, heathland, woodland, ponds and grassland habitats, including habitat for turtle dove and nightingale (listed as critically endangered and vulnerable species, respectively). Both species are included on the Essex LNRS priority species shortlist.

Appendix A - BNG Plans approved 2-1-24 to 1-1-26

10 BNG Plans have been approved

Application No	Address	Description	Consent Date	Biodiversity Net Gain Plan Metric Results								Ecology / Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy / Plan approved	Notes
				BNG Plan Approved	on site/ off site	Habitat Units net change	Hab % Change	Hedgerow units net change	Hedgerow % change	Watercourse Units net change	Watercourse % change		
21/00415/FUL & 24/00440/FUL	Land North Of Orchard Way Mope Lane Wickham Bishops	Erection of a dwelling (4 bedroom)	12-Aug-24	Y	on site	0.43	14.12 %	1.13	74.24 %	0	0	Y	BNG Plan and BES approved
24/00562/FUL	Land At Broadfield Farm Braxted Park Road Great Braxted	Erection of an agricultural storage building	30/09/24	Y	on site	0.44	18.44 %	0.32	n/a	0	0	n/a	BNG Plan & HMMP
24/00742/FUL	Land Adjacent Eastholm Latchingdon Road Purleigh	Erect 1 dwelling 4 bed	17-Jan-25	Y	on site	2.29	17.61 %	0.34	14.23 %	0	0	Y	BNG Plan, HMMP, BES approved
24/00744/FUL	Land Adjacent To Fieldway Station Road Wickham Bishops	Vineyard building with first floor offices	28/02/25	Y	on site	0.26	10.23 %	30	32.32 %	0	0		HMMP submitted, pending consideration

Biodiversity Net Gain Plan Metric Results

Application No	Address	Description	Consent Date	BNG Plan Approved	on site/ off site	Habitat Units net change	Hab % Change	Hedgerow units net change	Hedgerow % change	Watercourse Units net change	Watercourse % change	Ecology / Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy / Plan approved	Notes
24/00906/FUL M 25/05084/DET	Great Hayes Business Park Lower Burnham Road Stow Maries Essex	Winery building	23/05/25 28/08/25	Y	on site	3.73	72.57 %	0.78	43.79 %	0	0	n/a	
24/01005/FUL	(S2(i) Land Between Chandlers And Creeksea Lane Maldon Road Burnham-On- Crouch Essex	Additional 5 units connected to strategic site S2(i) in lieu of 2 dwellings approved on 14/00356/FU L	29-May- 25	Y	on site	0.1	12.36 %	0.11	54.46 %	0	0	Y	BNGP Plan approved. HMMP and BEL approved
23/01236/FUL M 24/05211/DET 25/05058/DET	Land To The South Of Keelings Road Dengie Essex	Solar array	12/03/25 05/06/25	Y	on site	167	247%	10.56	17.71 %	0	0	n/a	
24/00399/FUL 24/05174/DET	High House, Old Heath Road Althorne Chelmsford Essex CM3 6EW	Replacement of marquee with orangery	13/08/24 18/07/25	Y	on site	0.67	15%	0.12	12.27 %	0	0	n/a	

Biodiversity Net Gain Plan Metric Results

Application No	Address	Description	Consent Date	BNG Plan Approved	on site/ off site	Habitat Units net change	Hab % Change	Hedgerow units net change	Hedgerow % change	Watercourse Units net change	Watercourse % change	Ecology / Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy / Plan approved	Notes
25/00404/FUL	Land at 19 Ludgrove, Latchingdon	Erection of 1 dwelling (2 bed)	29-Aug-25	Y	on site/ off site	0.02	10.02 %	0	0	0	0		Off site BNG units purchased. BES required

The dataset published at [the Council's Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\) webpage](#) lists sites with approved BNG plans and/or Biodiversity Enhancement Strategies.