

Appendix B: Evaluation of SCDC Biodiversity actions 2021-2025

On our own estate and through our operations

1. Add a step to the Housing Estates Inspection process to identify and take forward opportunities for tree-planting and other wildlife-friendly initiatives in appropriate locations.

Achievements

- Approximately 320 trees and hedge whips planted on 12 areas managed for nature, including on Housing Estates
- Out of those, 262 trees and hedge whips were planted on two areas of HRA land with a three-year maintenance programme in place
- All Council-owned housing estates audited; 19 parcels suitable for potential ecological improvements identified.

On-going work and future plans

Monitor initiatives that offer free trees to Council (The Conservation Volunteers, I Dig Trees).

2. Complete the audit of trees on Council-owned housing estates and undertake recommended maintenance work.

Achievements

- First estate-wide tree survey completed in 2022.
- High priority and a significant number of medium priority tree works completed across the district
- Replanting two trees for every one removed, resulting in 60 new trees planted.

On-going work and future plans

Second tree survey is underway as we remain proactive in our approach. Benefits from the first survey already being seen in the reduction of highest priority tree works.

3. Identify appropriate locations and set up three pilot schemes to establish wildflower strips or patches on Council housing estate land.

Achievements

Areas managed for nature identified – new maintenance approach adopted to reduce mowing and allow establishment of wild grasses and flowers in 6 locations.

On-going work and future plans

- Monitoring of these areas required to see if wildflowers have established, and if not then why.
 - Continue to assess future opportunities for wildflower enhancements.
4. Review management of awarded watercourses with a view to action to improve biodiversity.

Achievements

- Supported community groups by supplying staff and equipment, and waiving consent fees for nature projects including Wild Trout Trust, Cambridge Sports Lake Trust, Histon & Impington
- Supported the installation of an osprey nesting raft at Milton Country Park
- Working with Friends of the River Shep on maintenance of the local chalk stream network
- Funded a small placement of gravel into Angle Lane to facilitate wild trout breeding
- SCDC watercourse staff trained in water vole habitat identification.

On-going work and future plans

Continue supporting landowners and nature groups with biodiversity initiatives.

Through Planning

5. Progress planning policies related to doubling nature as part of wider work on green infrastructure on the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Preferred Options consultation and work on the draft plan.

Achievements

- Greater Cambridge Local Plan First Proposals 2021 consultation identified the outline of six biodiversity / green spaces policies in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, along with 14 strategic green infrastructure initiatives
- Greater Cambridge draft Local Plan 2025 consultation has developed these outlines of policies into detailed wording and has also started to identify projects delivering the strategic green infrastructure initiatives within the draft plan infrastructure delivery plan.

Ongoing work and future plans

- The councils will prepare a final version of the plan for consultation and then submit the plan to government for independent examination, following which the plan will be adopted and used to assess planning applications.
 - Following the draft plan consultation the councils will refine these policies and explore further opportunities to deliver green infrastructure.
6. Draft and adopt a Greater Cambridge Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to update and strengthen guidance in the SCDC Biodiversity SPD (2009)

Achievements

- New Biodiversity SPD adopted in 2022
- Preferred Option of 20% BNG for all new developments embedded into Biodiversity SPD

Ongoing work and future plans

- Consultation for Local Plan
- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) BNG to be introduced next May

- Possible revision of biodiversity SPD reflecting scaled requirements

7. Promote good practice in securing benefits to biodiversity through development

Achievements

- Promote use of correct metrics for biodiversity – Mycelia, working with the company to improve it
- Increased size of ecology team to ensure systems and processes are followed and monitored across the district
- Facilitated creation of 7 BNG offset sites. Offset procedure has been put in place.
- Trained planners in BNG and ecology
- 2023 – Eddington biodiversity training for planners
- Supporting Huntingdon DC and Bedford Borough to implement BNG

Ongoing work and future plans

- Continue to work with other districts in the county
- Member training on BNG updates (where applicable)
- Train planners once per year

By working with partners

8. Work with Highways England to ensure positive environmental legacy from A428 Improvement works

Achievements

- Feasibility study for BNG completed
- Fieldtrip with project manager to look at ecology, drainage, biodiversity
- Regular contact with A428 project officer

Ongoing work and future plans

Maintain regular contact to ensure delivery

By supporting community action

9. Review and relaunch the Wildlife Enhancement Grant (WES) scheme

Achievements

- Community Chest Grant Biodiversity stream funded 22 projects between 2021-2025, contributing a total value of over £33,000 towards biodiversity initiatives
- Grant recipients have said projects, such as wildflower gardens, rain barrels, community orchards etc, have brought both ecological, social and community benefits as people get involved in establishing and stewarding the projects

Ongoing work and future plans

Around £10,000 is ring-fenced for biodiversity projects in each round of the fund which will continue indefinitely

10. Provide six free trees to every parish

Achievements

758 native trees planted in South Cambridgeshire

Ongoing work and future plans

- Continuation of the Six Free Trees Scheme
- Survey to parishes and towns that have and have not participated to identify opportunities and support needed to participate in the scheme

11. Explore options for delivering support for parish councils and community groups to create and deliver Local Nature Recovery Plans

Achievements

- Natural Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Toolkit available for guidance
- Case studies published to encourage idea-sharing & peer to peer support

Ongoing work and future plans

Provide workshops and webinars based on the outcomes of the (currently draft) Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

12. Continue to support volunteers to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local trees and woods through our role as registered Tree Warden network co-ordinator for this area with the Tree Council.

This program is currently on hold. SCDC to explore options for the future provision for a Tree Warden network.

13. Run a second Climate and Environment fortnight of online events highlighting successful community action and inspiring and encouraging further action.

Achievements

- Climate Fortnights hosted in 2021 and 2022, with 11 climate and nature themes delivered in total
- Three local climate action conferences (2023, 2024, 2025), each with around 70 attendees
- Approximately 4 climate and nature webinars per year for parishes and the public

Ongoing work and future plans

- Climate conference to continue annually.
- Webinars will continue to be offered seasonally, and as needed for grant funding guidance

14. Promote gardening for nature to our residents to increase awareness and better enable residents to preserve and enhance nature within their own spheres

Achievements

- Four seasonal 'gardening for nature' articles published in South Cambs Magazine
- Help a hedgehog video produced and shared on SCDC social media
- Climate Change Gardening group funded by Zero Carbon Communities Grant

Ongoing work and future plans

- Produce guides for residents on managing their gardens for nature (Climate and Nature Strategy Draft).

15. Deliver communications campaigns around climate change and the protection and enhancement of nature through communication routes including tenants and leaseholders' newsletter and the parish clerks' newsletter.

Achievements

- Alternating monthly newsletters sent to clerks and parishes, promoting biodiversity schemes and events
- Quarterly South Cambs Magazine regularly features climate and environment news and knowledge to promote engagement and behaviour change
- Monthly tenant and leaseholder newsletters highlight biodiversity initiatives on the estates such as No Mow May, installation of bird and bat boxes

Ongoing work and future plans

- Following positive feedback from parishes and clerks, e-bulletins will continue to be sent out.
- Housing team will continue highlighting ecological initiatives in the tenant/leaseholder newsletter.

Ongoing Community Engagement Actions and Achievements

Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme

- Very well subscribed, with double the number of applications than funding available per year.
- Other local authorities have taken inspiration to create similar grants in their districts.
- End of project reports reveal an excellent level of completion of projects applied for

Zero Carbon Communities Newsletter

- 600 + people have signed up to receive the newsletter
- Consistent viewership – more than 300 views per newsletter

Community Chest Biodiversity Grant

22 projects completed with the following themes

Tree planting - 5

Wildflowers/ Native species planting - 7

Other Wildlife features - 6

Recreational amenities - 4

Education & outreach - 3

Food growing – 5

Ecological survey - 1

Local Climate Action Conference

- Conferences held in 2023/2024/2025 each with 70 attendees and brought together 50+ local organisations.
- Through this networking and knowledge-sharing event, attendees have learned from other examples of what can be achieved in their village/parish, and opportunities for collaboration.

Biodiversity Duty Webinar

- 26 Parish representatives attended the webinar on May 28, 2025; Feedback indicates increased understanding of the biodiversity duty as well as possible approaches to fulfil the duty.

Promotin good practice via published case studies

- Several case studies published to highlight community involvement in nature recovery and biodiversity projects, including in Swavesey, Cottenham, Girton, Willingham and Bassingbourn.