

# **Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report**

## **February 2026**

12 February 2024 to 1 January 2026



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## Introduction

1.1 This report demonstrates how North Devon Council (NDC) will meet the requirements of the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty (EBD) for the period of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 – 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026.

1.2 The report brings together existing work including policies, strategies and action plans that NDC have completed or have in progress. It sets out what actions NDC have taken for biodiversity since 2024 and sets out actions to 2031. This report also presents a baseline of the quantity, quality and accessibility of nature across the District.

1.3 Nature is essential for all life on earth including the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. It boosts health and wellbeing, captures and stores carbon and has a vital role to play in climate change adaptation. The conservation and enhancement of nature is key to achieving one of the Council's Corporate Priorities 'to protect and enhance our natural environment and to promote sustainable practices, reduce carbon emissions, tackle climate change and protect biodiversity within the council's jurisdiction'<sup>1</sup>.

1.4 This report will provide key information to Defra to assist in the monitoring of Environmental Improvement Plan delivery and to enable them to evaluate whether public authorities are delivering their EBD. This report will be taken to Committee in February 2026 and subsequently published on the NDC website and provide information to residents to understand what action is being taken for nature in their district.

## The North Devon Area

2.1 NDC covers approximately 419 square miles and has a population of approximately 102,000. It shares borders with Torridge to the west, Mid Devon to the south and Exmoor National Park to the east. North Devon is a largely rural area encompassing many natural and historic features which make it special and distinctive. Most of the land is classified as green space, covering 95% (1035 km<sup>2</sup>) of its total area. The character of the District is shaped by the North Devon Coast National Landscape and neighbouring landscapes of Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks. These protected landscapes, the Heritage Coasts and the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve designation and other designated and non-designated sites, form an important network of habitats across the region.

2.2 The Taw Torridge Estuary is an extensive estuary of approximately 1,300ha in northern Devon<sup>2</sup>. The Estuary is a major geographical feature within the area, with Barnstaple being situated on the eastern reaches of the River Taw. The River Taw provides an important habitat for wintering birds such as Lapwings and is a designated SSSI. There has been wide spread disturbance from recreational activity on the River Taw and the estuary banks.

2.3 The area displays a clear divide in its underlying rocks – a geological boundary roughly follows the Taw-Torridge Estuary, above which lie the resistant Devonian slates and sandstones which form the high land of Exmoor and the North Devon Downs. The northern extent of the wide, rounded ridges of the high downland is marked by a broad ridgeline running parallel to the coast.

<sup>1</sup> [North Devon Council Corporate Plan 2023-27](#).

<sup>2</sup> [North Devon and Torridge - Landscape Character Assessment Update](#)

2.4 This connects all the long 'fingers' of downland running south, divided by steep wooded valleys and coastal combs. The Devonian rocks are displayed in a distinctive jagged coastline of folded strata and pronounced western headlands of more resistant Pickwell Down sandstone.

2.5 The scenery changes dramatically at the mouth of the estuary, where the extensive dune systems of Braunton Burrows to the north and the smaller Northam Burrows to the south stretch low and wide between enclosing headlands. These features are largely the product of rising post-glacial sea levels which deposited estuarine clays and accumulations of marine sand. Onshore winds continue to feed the dune systems with sand blown from the wide beach at Saunton Sands.

2.6 The River Taw flows from its source on Dartmoor across North Devon and into parts of Torridge District on its course to meet the River Torridge at the Taw-Torridge Estuary. The district is also drained by the upper courses of the Tamar and the full length of the Torridge River – both of which rise on high ground just inland of Hartland Point. The high land of Exmoor, like Dartmoor, attracts high precipitation levels, serving as a more immediate source of the district's rivers. These drain south and west from the moorland core, including the Bray and Mole (both tributaries of the River Yeo and, in their lower courses, the Taw). The elevated North Devon Downs, which cover much of the district west of Exmoor, are also dissected by steep wooded valleys containing minor rivers and streams which generally flow southwards to meet the Taw/Torridge estuary.

2.7 The Culm Measures which underlie a large proportion of the landscape consist of dark shales and sandstone ridges, the former weathering into cold, heavy and badly drained soils and the latter into shallow, stony and agriculturally poor soils. Waterlogged gley and brown earth and soils give rise to a predominantly pastoral landscape supporting internationally important tracts of biodiversity-rich Culm grasslands and mires left unimproved for agriculture. The agriculturally poor nature of land within the Culm Measures is also likely to have had an influence over its choice for the location of large blocks of mixed and coniferous plantations.

2.8 The long coastline framing the district is greatly influenced by the prevailing weather conditions. Long exposure to salt-laden winds has produced a wild and windswept quality. Such degrees of exposure have in turn influenced the natural vegetation cover found along the coast. Trees are rare; those which do survive are stunted and pruned by the strong winds into distinctive forms.

2.9 The unique combination of climate, soils, topography, and human interaction has produced a diverse range of semi-natural habitats across the two districts, supporting a rich variety of plants and animals. Reflecting the nature conservation importance of the landscape's semi-natural habitats are

2.10 Particularly associated with the area are the Culm grasslands which are represented extensively across the wet inland moors and valley bottoms of the district. Most of the sites fall within the Culm Grasslands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), representing the remains of what was once a much larger network. The habitat is characterised by tussocks of Purple Moor Grass, interspersed with orchids, rushes, heath, mosses and other rare plants. This rich flora supports a wide range of insects including grasshoppers and butterflies, including the Marsh Fritillary which is classified as 'vulnerable' in Europe.

2.11 Other habitats valued within the farmland landscape are the many hundreds of miles of hedgerows and distinctive species-rich Devon hedge-banks which define the field patterns across the countryside. These support an abundance of wildlife, particularly as pasture and arable farming have intensified over recent decades, squeezing wildlife into smaller refuges. Woodlands cloaking valley sides, much ancient and oak-dominated, along with smaller farm woods and copses scattered throughout also provide important havens for wildlife. The streams and rivers themselves are highly valued for nature conservation - the clean, fast flowing water providing a stronghold for the otter, a UK Priority Species.

2.12 Along the coast are diverse mosaics of maritime grassland, heathland and scrub, combined with sea cliffs, rocky shores, estuarine salt marsh and sand dunes. These form a complex, and in many parts, internationally valuable coastal ecosystem within the North Devon Biosphere Reserve.

## Legal and Policy Context

3.1 The following form the key legislation introducing the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty:

- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006<sup>3</sup> first introduced the Biodiversity Duty, requiring all public authorities in England to consider what action they can reasonably take for the conservation of biodiversity.
- The Environment Act 2021<sup>4</sup> sets statutory targets for four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water and waste, and includes an important new target to reverse the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030. Under the strengthened duty, public authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The Act also introduced Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for conserving and enhancing nature.
- The Environmental Improvement Plan (2003)<sup>5</sup> took forward the delivery of the Environment Act 2021 and sets out legally binding targets and actions needed for protecting, conserving, and enhancing the natural environment. The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) will use EBD reporting to assist in their requirements to monitor the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan.
- Levelling Up and Regeneration (LUR) Act 2023<sup>6</sup> includes a strengthened duty with an onus on Local Authorities to consider how they can “take account” of the LNRS. The EBD provides a clear opportunity for these bodies to articulate how they have or are planning to deliver this duty.

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<sup>3</sup> [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Environment Act 2021](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#)

## Designated Site Network

### International and European Important

4.1 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are strictly protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive to conserve high-priority habitats and species, both terrestrial and marine. They are critical to the Natura 2000 network, aimed at ensuring the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species.

- **Braunton Burrows SAC<sup>7</sup>** is also the Core Area of the North Devon Biosphere Reserve
- **Culm Grassland SAC<sup>8</sup>** is at Hare's Down, Knowstone and Rackenford Moors SSSI
- **Exmoor Heaths SAC<sup>9</sup>** although the majority of this SAC is within Exmoor National Park a small part is outside the National Park within North Devon
- **Lundy Marine SAC<sup>10</sup>** is also a Marine Nature Reserve

### Nationally Important

4.2 The Bideford to Foreland Point Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)<sup>11</sup> was created in January 2016 and covers an area of 104 km<sup>2</sup>. This site protects a wide range of habitats, from beaches of intertidal sand, to subtidal sediment and rock habitats. This site is important for creating connectivity between sites along the north coast of Devon and Cornwall.

4.3 North Devon is also a 'Marine Pioneer'; one of four pioneers that will be used to test innovative ideas for governance of the environment and to inform the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

4.4 Northern Devon has 59 SSSIs, with three (Taw-Torridge Estuary SSSI, Arlington SSSI and Dean Steep) of these assessed as having the majority of their units in unfavourable condition with showing no change or declining. Therefore, there are 56 SSSIs in Northern Devon that are in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. Of these 55 SSSIs, 35 are favourable condition and 21 are unfavourable recovering condition.

### Non-Statutory Designations and other Reserves

4.5 North Devon contains many other areas that are valued either locally or on a County wide basis for their wildlife or geological interests. Many of these locally important areas have been identified by the Devon Wildlife Trust as either confirmed or unconfirmed County Wildlife Sites including ancient woodlands, culm grassland and neutral and acidic grasslands

4.6 North Devon has 459 County Wildlife Sites covering 5219 hectares and 1301 Unconfirmed Wildlife Sites covering 7996 hectares<sup>12</sup>. Six Local Nature Reserves are designated under the Wildlife

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<sup>7</sup> [Braunton Burrows - Special Areas of Conservation](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Culm Grasslands - Special Areas of Conservation](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Exmoor Heaths - Special Areas of Conservation](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Lundy - Special Areas of Conservation](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Marine Conservation Zones: Bideford to Foreland Point - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Devon Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Monitoring Framework 2009-2022](#)

and Countryside Act. Other locally significant sites include Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) that are defined by the Devon RIGS Group. In addition a series of key network features were identified within the wider biodiversity network. These key network features are areas of semi-natural habitat likely to make a significant contribution to the overall movement/dispersal of species within the local landscape as wildlife 'stepping stones' or conduits.

4.7 North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve<sup>13</sup> is based on the catchment area of the Rivers Taw and Torridge and extending offshore beyond Lundy. It was designated by UNESCO in 2002 and consists of three distinct zones centred on Braunton Burrows SAC. The spatial implications and opportunities arising from the Biosphere Reserve include: utilising ecosystem services in the design and delivery of development; recognising the inter-relationship of the land, estuarine and marine environments; enhancing green infrastructure networks at a landscape scale; and supporting local food production and local supply chains.

4.8 North Devon World Surf Reserve<sup>14</sup> was first designated in 2022. Covering 30km of coastline is located within the UNESCO Biosphere, with many of the surf spots to the south within National Landscape and the surf spots to the North within Exmoor National Park. The coastal ecosystem surrounding the surf spots includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation, and a Marine Conservation Zone just offshore. The myriad of riparian ecosystems and estuaries as well as vitally important sand dunes support an abundance of wildlife. Not only do these ecosystems provide essential habitat for biodiversity, they protect the coastline from the impacts of climate change and produce the sand that shaped the waves of Croyde Beach and other outstanding waves in the North Devon region.

### National Landscapes

4.9 The North Devon Coast National Landscape<sup>15</sup> covers 171 square kilometres (66 square miles) of mainly coastal landscape from the border with Exmoor National Park at Combe Martin, through the mouth of the Taw-Torridge Estuary and beyond to the Cornish border at Marsland Mouth. It was designated in 1959 through the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) on merit of its outstanding coastal scenery and rich cultural, agricultural and maritime heritage. There are also two Heritage Coasts within the National Landscape; Hartland Heritage Coast and North Devon Heritage Coast.

## **The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty**

5.1 The EBD<sup>16</sup> was introduced under the Environment Act 2021. It requires all public authorities in England to consider, set policies/objectives, and act to conserve and enhance biodiversity. First consideration was due by 1 January 2024. As an LPA, North Devon must publish a biodiversity duty report, with the first reporting period ending no later than 1 January 2026, and at least every five years thereafter.

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<sup>13</sup> [North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#)

<sup>14</sup> [North Devon World Surf Reserve](#)

<sup>15</sup> [North Devon Coast National Landscape](#)

<sup>16</sup> [The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty](#)

The report must include;

- The policies and objectives they have set to meet the biodiversity duty and the actions completed to date.
- What strategies (including the LNRS for Devon) have influenced their policies, objectives, and action and how they have contributed to their preparation.
- How they plan to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period.
- Any other information they consider appropriate.

Reports from local planning authorities must also include

- Actions to meet BNG obligations.
- Details of gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans they have approved.
- Plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period.

## First Consideration

5.2 In March 2024, NDC produced a first consideration report which supported the requirement of the EBD. It detailed the reasons for recommendation, the requirements, and implications of meeting the duty and the biodiversity objectives of the Council. This report builds on that consideration, providing further detail on actions and achievements, whilst framing these using national, regional, and local targets and metrics.

## Local Plan

5.3 The first joint North Devon and Torridge Local Plan (2011-2031)<sup>17</sup> was adopted on the 29th October 2018. One of the strategic aims of the plan is to make Northern Devon 'A World Class Environment - where important assets are valued and enhanced for future generations', which includes the following objectives:

- the undeveloped coastline, estuarine and important countryside assets of northern Devon are protected and enhanced;
- important wildlife habitats, protected landscapes, and our distinctive heritage are conserved and enhanced and the decline of biodiversity is reversed;
- land is used efficiently and effectively - optimise how ecosystem services provide and result in productive living landscapes and townscapes that adapt to our changing needs.

5.4 Other policies in the Plan relevant to biodiversity and nature recovery include:

Policy ST14: Enhancing Environmental Assets which states that: 'The quality of northern Devon's natural environment will be protected and enhanced by ensuring that development contributes to:

- providing a net gain in northern Devon's biodiversity where possible, through positive management of an enhanced and expanded network of designated sites and green infrastructure, including retention and enhancement of critical environmental capital;
- protecting the hierarchy of designated sites in accordance with their status;
- conserving European protected species and the habitats on which they depend;

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<sup>17</sup> [North Devon and Torridge Local Plan \(2011-2031\)](#)

- conserving northern Devon's geodiversity and its best and most versatile agricultural land;
- conserving the setting and special character and qualities of the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty whilst fostering the social and economic well being of the area;
- conserving and enhancing the robustness of northern Devon's ecosystems and the range of ecosystem services they provide;
- (k) meeting the Nature Improvement Area's strategic objectives; and
- (l) improving failing water bodies and preventing deterioration of water quality.

Policy DM08A: Landscape and Seascape Character

- Development should conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance biodiversity and geodiversity interests and soils commensurate with their status and giving appropriate weight to their importance.
- The highest level of protection will be given to potential and existing Special Protection Areas, candidate and existing Special Areas of Conservation and listed or proposed Ramsar sites
- Development will only be supported where any necessary mitigation is included such that, in combination with other plans or projects, there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of European Nature Conservation Sites.
- Development proposals within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest or Marine Conservation Zone which would be likely to affect the designation adversely, either individually or in combination with other developments, will not be supported unless the benefits of the development at this site clearly outweigh both the adverse impacts on the site and any adverse impacts on the wider network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Marine Conservation Zones
- Development likely to affect adversely locally designated sites, their features or their function as part of the ecological network, including County Wildlife Sites, County Geological Sites and sites supporting Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species, will only be permitted where the need for and benefits of the development clearly outweigh the loss, and the coherence of the local ecological network is maintained.
- Adverse impacts on European and UK protected species and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species must be avoided wherever possible
- Development must avoid the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland and veteran trees, unless the need for, or benefits of development on that site clearly outweigh the loss
- Development should avoid adverse impact on existing features as a first principle and enable net gains by designing in biodiversity features and enhancements and opportunities for geological conservation alongside new development.

Policy DM08A: Landscape and Seascape Character

- Development should be of an appropriate scale, mass and design that recognises and respects landscape character of both designated and undesignated landscapes and seascapes
- Great weight will be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of designated landscapes and their settings

- Proposals within or affecting the setting of the AONB should be informed by, and assist in the delivery of, the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan

## Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

5.5 Devon County Council (DCC) was appointed as the Responsible Authority for Devon LNRS under section 105 of the Environment Act 2021. Responsible Authorities are responsible for preparing, publishing, reviewing and republishing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy following the process set out in The Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023.

5.6 LNRSs must be produced in collaboration with Supporting Authorities and all other relevant stakeholders. A Supporting Authorities Officer Group was set up and has met regularly throughout the preparation of the LNRS. NDC is a Supporting Authority for the LNRS, along with other local authorities and Natural England.

5.7 Devon's LNRS<sup>18</sup> has been developed by a wide range of organisations and experts, led by Devon County Council under the umbrella of the Devon Local Nature Partnership. People who've been involved include ecologists, farmers and other land managers, educators, community groups, local authorities, protected landscapes, government agencies and the general public. In October and November 2025 the draft strategy went out to public consultation and the LNRS is due to be finalised by March 2026.

5.8 The LNRS includes a long list of species that are identified as needing action called Devon Species of Conservation Concern. A short list of species from the long list that are in need of particular action are called Devon Special Species. A few Devon Special Groups have been identified where there is a group of rare species for which Devon is a stronghold. Some of the groups may have one or more Devon Special Species within them. Species Opportunity Areas have been mapped on the viewer to show where actions need to be targeted for some Devon Special Species, particularly for those that are more mobile and need large areas of connected habitats.

5.9 The LNRS provides detailed guidance including a list of High Opportunity Areas and Species Opportunity Areas where actions to manage, restore and create habitats are most needed.

## North Devon Carbon, Environment and Biodiversity Plan

5.10 In February 2019, Devon County Council declared a 'Climate Emergency'<sup>19</sup>. NDC has also declared a climate emergency and signed 'The Devon Climate Declaration' which commits to collaborating to engage Devon's residents, businesses and visitors to develop and implement a plan to achieve a 45% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and by 100% by 2050 or at the earliest credible date supported by emerging research.

5.11 The Council's approach to climate change, including the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, is integrated with its work with nature. The Carbon, Environment and Biodiversity Plan was

<sup>18</sup> [Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Devon County Council Climate Emergency](#)

first published in 2022 and is reviewed annually. This report also includes emphasis on climate resilience and its interdependence with nature.

5.12 NDC has developed a Member Climate Action Team who meet regularly to discuss environmental matters, feed into projects and provide a sounding board and feedback on actions and priorities before these are discussed at formal Committee. Specific actions that have informed the Carbon, Environment and Biodiversity Plan<sup>20</sup> will be taken forward by us and in partnership include:

- Work with partners to develop a County wide carbon reduction plan to comply with international targets
- Work with our communities on developing new practices that protect the environment
- Work to enhance green spaces and recognise and use the links with health enhancement
- Encourage and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives.
- Adopt a policy for regulating energy efficiency in private rented properties.
- Explore investment opportunities in renewable energy generation and storage from the installation of renewable energy on Council buildings and land.

### National Landscape Management Plan

5.13 The Statutory Management Plan for the AONB (2019-2024)<sup>21</sup> includes objectives and policies for planning development in the protected landscape including:

To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity of the AONB, in terrestrial, aquatic and marine habitats

- B1 Support and promote approaches to conserve and enhance habitats and species, increase wildlife richness and ensure the resilience of the landscape
- B2 Identify and address actual and potential impacts on biodiversity from invasive species, disease and climate change
- B3 Encourage actions to enhance, maintain and promote the geodiversity of the AONB through appropriate site management and public awareness

### North Devon Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan

5.14 The Biosphere Reserve Nature Recovery Plan 2021-25<sup>22</sup> sets out the priority actions required from 2021-25 to move towards the 2030 Vision for nature's recovery across northern Devon. It covers the terrestrial, freshwater and the intertidal habitats of the Biosphere's core area, buffer and transition zones, while actions for the marine environment are set out in the Biosphere's Marine Natural Capital Plan.

5.15 The plan presents actions to support communities and businesses, and particularly farmers and landowners/managers to be at the heart of nature's recovery. Responsibility for promoting delivery of the actions lies with the Biosphere's partners through its Nature Improvement Group

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<sup>20</sup> [North Devon Carbon, Environment and Biodiversity Plan](#)

<sup>21</sup> [National Landscape Management Plan](#)

<sup>22</sup> [North Devon Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan](#)

which will monitor and report on implementation. Progress will be assessed annually and an evaluation will take place in 2025, when the plan will be fully updated for 2026-30.

5.16 The five action plans; coast, grassland and arable, towns and villages, trees, woodland and hedges, and wetlands and waterbodies, detail the priorities for the key land types in the Biosphere. Priority actions within each plan include:

- safeguarding and enhancing existing areas of wildlife-rich habitats and restoring / wilding /creating new areas to make larger and better connected habitat networks;
- actions to enhance populations of priority or declining species (including Devon Special Species) and to reintroduce species that have been lost (subject to detailed feasibility studies and licensing);
- enabling actions through policies, regulations, incentives and community engagement;
- monitoring and research.

## Habitats

5.17 The whole of northern Devon is situated with Southwest Forest covering the area between Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Moor. One of the objectives for the South West Forest is to enhance landscape and nature conservation by increasing biodiversity and the protection of the physical, archaeological and cultural environment. The aim is to increase tree cover from 10% to 15% by encouragement and financial support.

5.18 North Devon is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> nationally for woodland creation opportunity. North Devon existing woodland cover is approximately 10% with further opportunities identified to increase this by 34,745 hectares. This would result in 32% of North Devon being covered in woodland.

5.19 In 1998 the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)<sup>23</sup> was published in 2001 the North Devon BAP was completed. This document identified the 9 main habitats found within the North Devon District. The initial revision of The Nature of Devon: a Biodiversity Action Plan was undertaken in 2004 with a further review in 2009. The Biosphere Reserve BAP covers the 13 main habitats of the reserve which include; broadleaved woodland, coastal heathland, culm grassland, enclosed farmland, estuary, marine environment, parkland and wood pasture, rivers and streams, rocky intertidal, sand dunes, species rich hedgerows, traditional orchards, and towns and villages.

## Green Infrastructure

5.20 Part of Exmoor National Park, which spans a total of 693km<sup>2</sup>, lies within the North Devon District boundary. The National Park provides a multitude of opportunities for recreation, containing over 1,000km of footpaths and bridleways. Long distance walks connect North Devon and Exmoor National Park, including the National Cycle Network, Macmillan Way and the South West Coast Path.

5.21 The South-West Coast Path<sup>24</sup> runs along the coast through North Devon and Torridge. The total coastal path is 630 miles long of which 90 miles of the route runs through the plan area.

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<sup>23</sup> [Devon Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

<sup>24</sup> [South West Coast Path](#)

Several other important walking routes include Northan Burrows Wildlife Trail, Cultural Trail- Abbotsham & Westward Ho! Cultural Trail- Brownsham and Clovelly, Torridge Cultural Trail, Heritage Trail Hartland and easy Access Trail- Hartland and Pattard Wood

## National Context and Progress

### Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

6.1 The EIP 2025<sup>25</sup> sets binding national targets for habitat restoration, species recovery, tree cover, and protected area expansion. Key commitments include restoring or creating 500,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042, halting species decline by 2030 and protecting 30% of England's land and sea for nature by 2030.

6.2 NDC contributes to the EIP through delivery of the LNRS, Protected Landscape Management and Nature Recovery Plans, local planning policy and other relevant strategies outlined in this chapter. Habitat creation and enhancement projects within the Council's estate support the national ambition of wildlife rich habitat restoration, while provisions in the Local Plan contribute to halting species decline.

### Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

6.3 The PLTOF 2024<sup>26</sup> sets the national nature recovery targets for all protected landscapes. Each Protected Landscape has apportioned these targets to their local context. Targets are set for habitat restoration and creation, tree canopy cover, SSSI conditions and 'action on tracks', favourable management and nature friendly farming. North Devon contributes to these targets through working in collaboration with the National Landscape and Exmoor National Park within its borders to deliver on their management strategies and nature recovery plans.

## Local Actions

### Corporate Plan

7.1 NDC will deliver nature recovery through securing biodiversity enhancements through the planning process, better managing public open space, incorporating nature recovery into Council projects and engaging with the community to help create and maintain wildlife rich habitat.

7.2 To protect and enhance our natural environment and to promote sustainable practices, reduce carbon emissions, tackle climate change and protect biodiversity within the council's jurisdiction.

- Promote clean energy infrastructure and maximise the economic and environmental benefits that arise from this.
- Improve the energy efficiency of council assets and to actively consider the use of council assets to generate renewable energy.

<sup>25</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2025](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#)

- Support increased biodiversity through implementation of the Devon Local Nature recovery Strategy and the Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan and through management of council assets.
- Work with partners to actively improve our natural environment and take a lead on issues affecting it.
- Progressively reduce the council's carbon footprint to meet our net zero targets and explore carbon offsetting initiatives.
- Work with partners to improve and promote active travel and sustainable transport and to implement the local cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- Promote the reduction of waste generated by households and businesses and increase the proportion of waste that is reused or recycled.
- Work with partners to promote more sustainable methods of land management.
- Promote schemes that will improve the fuel efficiency of homes within the area.
- Implement the Coastal Management Plan

### [North Devon Council Environmental Policy 2021](#)

7.3 The purpose of this Policy<sup>27</sup> is to establish NDC's environmental commitment for the next 10 years. It covers all the Council's activities and estate. Our flagship commitment is to reduce carbon emissions from our own estate and operations to net zero by 2030 at the latest, and to work with partners to develop and implement a plan to reduce Devon's carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. We will aim to reach a negative carbon emissions position for North Devon beyond this date.

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero carbon by 2030 - We will adopt technologies and practices which "Avoid Reduce Replace Offset" emissions of greenhouse gases from our estate and operations, including our property and fleet and employee travel.
- Adapting to climate change - We will plan and adapt North Devon to build resilience to both the current effects of climate change and predicted future impacts. We will support the most disadvantaged in our community to respond to the challenges of climate change.
- Using water efficiently in the Council's buildings and operations - We will save water by reducing demand, harvesting rainwater and improving efficiency in existing and new buildings, and in our operations
- Reducing waste - We will minimise the production of waste from our own activities and end our consumption of single use plastics. We will support our communities to reduce waste.
- Preventing pollution - We will improve our performance to prevent pollution, whether in the; air, land or water.
- Protecting the natural and built environment - We will protect, conserve and enhance the environmental value of our District's high quality natural environment, biodiversity and heritage.

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<sup>27</sup> [North Devon Council Environmental Policy](#)

## Local Plan

7.4 The 2011 Natural Environment White Paper announced Defra's intention to trial an approach to biodiversity offsetting. A two-year national biodiversity offsetting pilot began in April 2012. Devon was one of six areas taking part in this pilot and Strategies were produced for South Devon and the North Devon Biosphere Reserve. This early pilot paved the way for the current mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations, with the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan now incorporating these strategies into development management.

7.5 The current Local Plan has a number of policies that support the protection and enhancement of habitats and species, and their adaptation to climate change. NDC will actively seek to meet our obligations as a local planning authority with respect to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and ensure that development proposals deliver a minimum of 10% by the approved means.

7.6 NDC is exploring the potential to adopt [Building with Nature version 2.0](#) standards and best practices through the update to the Local Plan and subsequently apply to appropriate. Habitat enhancement such as integrating bat-friendly lighting measures, boxes for bats, swifts and house martins, and hedgehog highways will be considered through the Local Plan. Set out below are the actions NDC will take in order to inform the Biodiversity Duty Report going forward:

- NDC will continue to apply Local Plan environmental policies to planning applications and will continue to review and update guidance and practice to inform the emerging Local Plan.
- North Devon Council and Torridge District Council will continue to prepare a new joint local plan and the early stages of its preparation.
- The Council will review and report on BNG achieved since 2023 both on and off site and monitor mandatory BNG as it develops.
- The Council will consider opportunities to identify and develop sites for the provision of offsite BNG on council owned and third-party land.
- The Council will work with DCC and landowners to secure the provision of offsite BNG through appropriate legal agreements.
- The Council will continue to support and work with relevant partnerships to deliver wildlife conservation activities, environmental education, landowner advice, community engagement and conservation volunteering.
- Through internal discussions the Council will review procedures and practices across the Council to ensure that any reasonable opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity are identified and actioned.
- The Council will engage with key stakeholders to review current partnership working on biodiversity and look to new opportunities to improve outcomes for biodiversity.

Commented [DS1]: Ian to come up with revised wording .

## Managing Council Owned Land to Improve Biodiversity

7.7 As of January 2026, NDC manages approximately 16 hectares of land as wildflower meadows, 4 Local Nature Reserves, Hillsborough and The Cairn in Ilfracombe, Yeo Valley Woodland<sup>28</sup> (also a Green Flag Award site) in Barnstaple and joint management of Fremington Local Nature Reserve<sup>29</sup> (with the Parish Council). The council also manage one at Whiddon Valley<sup>30</sup>, Barnstaple.

7.8 The Cairn<sup>31</sup> and Yeo Valley Woodland have been in Higher Level Stewardship agreements since January 2024. There are community groups at The Cairn, Hillsborough, Yeo Valley and Fremington LNR all supported by the Parks Team.

7.9 In 2020 the council purchased a further 15.5 hectares of land adjacent to Yeo Valley Woodland and planted 24,000 trees between November 2022 and February 2024. This involved hundreds of school children and volunteers as well the Parks Team and contractors. Funding was provided through the EWCO grant scheme from the Forestry Commission. The site has also been registered with the Woodland Carbon Code where the new woodland will sequester 3500t of CO<sub>2</sub> over the next 100 years.

7.10 The Parks Unit is currently undertaking a survey of their sites to establish what biodiversity improvements would be suitable for each site, this follows a desktop assessment in late 2023. This predominantly includes meadow establishment, tree planting, sustainable herbaceous planting to encourage pollinators and nestboxes where appropriate. The survey should be completed by early summer 2026.

7.11 NDC has eliminated the use of peat compost on its own land and are also introducing changes to the cutting approach on parts of some sites. Where changes can be made without affecting recreational uses, and where short grass is not necessary, we will reduce and change our approach to grass cutting, and there will be longer grass as a result. Approximately 17 hectares (41 acres) of land are managed as wildflower meadows where the grass is cut and removed each autumn, reducing fertility and allowing native perennial wildflowers to thrive.

7.12 The Council runs a Climate and Environment Grants<sup>32</sup> scheme open to smaller Town and Parish Councils. To date we have funded over £10,500 improvements, including planting of trees and wildflower meadows; bat and owl boxes; hedgehog feeding stations and wetland creation.

7.13 The Council is involved in a number of key longstanding partnerships that support nature recovery and is a funding partner of the Biosphere and National Landscape:

- North Devon Biosphere Reserve Partnership
- North Devon Coast National Landscape
- Devon Local Nature Partnership

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<sup>28</sup> [Yeo Valley Community Woodland](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Fremington Local Nature Reserve](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Whiddon Valley Community Woodland](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Hillsborough and the Cairn Local Nature Reserve](#)

<sup>32</sup> [North Devon Council Climate and Environment Grants](#)

- North Devon Biosphere Nature Recovery Partnership
- Devon Wildlife Trust
- Devon Biodiversity Records Centre

## National Landscape Management

7.14 Finding Nature’s Footprints<sup>33</sup> is a three-year National Lottery Heritage Supported project working with communities to survey, map and take action for the fantastic wildlife of the North Devon Coast National Landscape Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. All wildlife records and information will be used to support action by communities, volunteers, landowners, and local agencies to develop community-led nature recovery plans and take action for habitat enhancement and nature conservation.

7.15 The final year of the Finding Nature’s Footprints project will be focusing on developing community-led nature recovery plans for target areas around the North Devon Coast. Three initial workshops in Hartland, Croyde and Combe Martin have begun the process of community-led nature recovery by speaking with local people about their hopes and concerns surrounding wildlife conservation. Year 2 of the project has seen over 1,421 people engaging in nature themed events around the North Devon Coast. Over a dozen County Wildlife Sites have been surveyed and wildlife recorded all around the North Devon Coast on during 16 Site Audits.

7.16 Farming In Protected Landscapes (FIPL)<sup>34</sup> supports farmers and land managers to carry out projects that address nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. A further 3 years of funding to March 2029 has recently been confirmed. To date the project has helped to catalyse 1000ha of habitat restoration and creation and includes:

- 50 wildlife boxes
- 27 leaky dam
- 4ha of woodland creation
- 9ha of woodland coppicing
- 14ha of scrub management
- 132 fruit trees
- 695ha of dune restoration
- 231ha of coastal heath
- 1800m of access improvements
- 109ha of grassland restoration

7.17 Sustainable Development Fund provides grants from £100 up to £4000 to support local projects that deliver actions and objectives in the 2019-24 Management Plan. Projects must contribute to the environmental, community, economic or social benefit of the National Landscape and are open to community groups, parish councils, agencies, farmers and businesses. Projects supported in 2025-26 include:

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<sup>33</sup> [Finding Nature’s Footprints](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Farming In Protected Landscapes](#)

- Surf and Conservation Film Festival – Earth Action North Devon & World Surfing Reserve
- Ilfracombe Shelter Murals – Silk Crystal
- Wish You Were Here – Photography and Arts Project
- Community Orchard, Brimlands Playing Field – Ilfracombe
- Green Fingers Allotment Carpentry Club – CEET
- Refresher and further Environmental Educational teacher training – Environmental Educational Consultancy

## Biosphere Reserve Nature Recovery Plan

7.18 Over the 2021–2025 period, the Biosphere has delivered significant progress toward its 2030 vision for nature’s recovery, with action implemented across all five priority land types defined in the Nature Recovery Plan<sup>35</sup>. The Biosphere Partnership has coordinated district wide activity to restore habitats to good condition and improve ecological connectivity, focusing on reversing long term species decline and addressing failing ecological and chemical standards in the Taw and Torridge catchments.

7.19 Delivery partners have advanced nature positive land management across farms, communities, and public spaces, supported by the growing number of organisations and residents signing the Nature Recovery Declaration, demonstrating widespread local commitment to biodiversity enhancement. Coastal nature recovery has also advanced through targeted action informed by the Biosphere’s dedicated coastal and marine plans, improving habitat resilience and supporting the recovery of key species along the North Devon coast. Together, these achievements show a coordinated, landscape scale approach that embeds biodiversity recovery into local land use, policy, and community action across the district.

### Towns and Villages

7.20 The Biosphere’s Pledge for Nature project was a community-led project. The project successfully supported individuals, schools, businesses and partners across the whole area to take action for the Nature Recovery Plan. At least 5,675 individuals made 1,325 Pledges on the Map.

7.21 The Nature Recovery Declaration was signed by 590 individuals, 36 businesses, 29 organisations, 7 local authorities and 9 schools. Key achievements in Towns and Villages included improving nature in 328 gardens, 15 school grounds, creation/improvement of 12 community orchards, and work to improve conditions for priority species like swifts and hedgehogs.

7.22 The Biosphere Business Partner Eco-Accreditation Scheme has been running since 2020, allowing businesses across the biosphere to commit to a number of different actions in the categories of Conservation, Local Development and Awareness Raising. 96 members have committed to helping nature improve, whether on their land or around their buildings.

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<sup>35</sup> [Biosphere Reserve Nature Recovery Plan](#)

### Wetlands and Waterbodies

7.23 The North Devon Biosphere Foundation and Westcountry Rivers Trust have developed the smart Biosphere by adding sensors to the network of live telemetered river data to complement the Environment Agency's statutory work. This has included deploying sondes at the base of the Taw and Torridge catchments and the Mole and Upper Torridge.

7.24 Northern Devon Natural Solutions (NDNS) is a Devon Wildlife Trust project working across northern Devon's to engage with landowners and managers to improve water quality, increase biodiversity, sequester carbon and mitigate flood risk. NDNS has delivered advice and interventions that have enhanced 15km of river/riverside land including watercourse fencing, riverside tree planting, 30m bankside protection & restoration, 116 leaky dams and sediment ponds as well as 412 farm advisory visits.

### Grassland and Arable

7.25 In 2022, the National Trust announced that through the North Devon Grasslands Project, they are looking to create 1,200 hectares of species-rich grassland in northern Devon. Over the next 8 years the aim is to create pockets of species-rich grassland across 70 miles of North Devon, from Torridge to West Exmoor.

7.26 Northern Devon Natural Solutions (NDNS) is a Devon Wildlife Trust project working with northern Devon's farmers, land managers, communities, volunteers and schools. This focuses on interventions targeting the four project pillars: improving water quality, reducing flood risk, sequestering carbon, and increasing biodiversity. Up to September 23 the project had provided advice covering 4,943 ha, enabled 601 ha of pasture and woodland to be protected, enhanced or restored, 83 ha of new species rich grassland, and 104km of hedges enhanced or restored.

7.27 Coordinated Response for Intertidal Taw Torridge Estuary Restoration (CRITTER) is a North Devon Biosphere project running from 2022 – 2027 and consists of working with landowners to undertake two complementary strands, freshwater and saltwater marsh habitat creation and land management work. To date the project has delivered 274m<sup>2</sup> of wetland creation, 1,427km of watercourse fencing and 4.63ha of trees planted.

7.28 Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) SW helps farmers understand the environmental value of their land and make the most of the agri-environment options available. The project is currently working with 15 farms covering approximately 600ha (with about 500ha of that within an Agri environment scheme, designated 11ha of Culm Grassland and supported a further 25 hectares into options leading to species rich pasture, 10ha of land has gone into herbal leys, and 2 sites are in the process of creating wood pasture ( low density planting within pasture fields)

### Coast

7.29 The National Trust has launched a programme to create a network of wildflower grasslands along the coastal strip in northern Devon. In an area totalling more than 1,200 hectares by 2030, the programme will increase biodiversity and nature recovery. The first batch of sites, covering 86 hectares, were sown in autumn 2022, producing wildflowers in spring and summer 2023.

7.30 During 2022, a stream-erosion project was trialled at Ilfracombe Torrs aiming at restoration of eroded gullies and rewetting of drained coastal grassland. Some 33,000 trees were planted during winter 2022/23 at NT sites around Woolacombe, resulting in the creation of new woodland, wood pasture and hedgerows.

7.31 Dynamic Dunescapes is a project run with Natural England and National Trust which ended in 2024. The objective was to improve dune habitats on Braunton Burrows and to increase populations of rare species such as Water Germander, Petalwort, Round-headed Club Rush, Amber Sandbowl Snail, Sand Lizard and Great Crested Newt. This restoration is being achieved by major works to reduce scrub, including removal of invasive species, and by scraping large areas back to bare sand. These works create dynamic processes leading to more open successional habitat and wetter slacks. 30ha of scrub and 23ha of scrapes have been cleared. In early 2023 nine notches were formed – six in the foredune and three inland to increase wind-blown sand mobility.

7.32 The use of Horsey Island by large flocks of overwintering waders such as Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew, as well as other species such as Shelduck, Wigeon and Teal, makes this nature reserve very attractive to visitors. Occasional sightings of Marsh Harrier and Osprey hint at further potential for eco-tourism within the immediate area which includes Braunton Burrows and Marsh.

7.33 Devon Wildlife Trust has placed Braunton's Horsey Island at the core of the Caen Wetlands project, focusing on opportunities to deliver the Trust's objectives across a wider area of the estuary and building a collaborative partnership with landowners across a landscape of more than 200 ha. In 2017 the structural failure of a tidal sluice allowed seawater to flood the entire site, with the consequent loss of hundreds of animal and plant species unable to tolerate salt water. Within months, new saltmarsh species such as Samphire and Sea Purslane germinated and started to create a new habitat. Saltmarshes are under threat from development and other pressures all around the UK, and Devon Wildlife Trust, with the help of a generous local donor, stepped in to purchase Horsey Island to create a nature reserve.

7.34 'West Country Buzz' covers the whole of the North Devon coast and focuses on two of the rarest bumblebees in the county; the Brown-banded carder bee (*Bombus humilis*) and the Moss carder bee (*Bombus muscorum*). West Country Buzz is a front-runner project, aiming to restore these priority bumblebee species and their key habitats, having been largely lost from the wider countryside. It is working in partnership with landowners, farmers and volunteers to create and restore well-connected flower-rich habitat throughout the project area to safeguard the future of these threatened species.

7.35 Between April 2022 and March 2023, 30 landowners received in-depth management advice, across 40 different sites. A total of 574.6 ha of new land was advised on, plus ongoing advice given to 1,148.59 ha of land on existing sites (totalling 1,723.19 ha). Land management advice focuses on promoting the importance of flower-rich habitats, particularly wildflower grasslands and their management. Just over 150 ha of new habitat has been created since the start of the project. As a result of targeted habitat creation, new sightings of Brown-banded carder bees have been made from a number of locations in the project area over the last two years.

7.36 Plastic Free North Devon's (PFND) initial visitor campaign, launched in 2021 with the support of North Devon AONB, supplies free resources to over 180 signed-up businesses and aims to encourage all visitors to help 'protect our playground' whilst on holiday. The 'Ocean Explorer' education programme in 2022/23 engaged 96 secondary students on a six-week programme, involving 34 sessions and over 230 person-hours of service to local conservation partner organisations, in the form of pollinator surveys, tree-planting, gorse and bramble clearing, habitat box production and marine egg-case collection and survey completion, as well as summer trips to Lundy and other parts of our coast.

7.37 The 'cleanse and clean' campaign covers all of PFND's community clean-up activities, with regular events planned at Saunton and Instow, and support provided for many others. In 2022 the campaign mobilised 600 volunteers, ran 22 clean ups, removed over 1500 kg of rubbish, and made citizen science contributions to SAS and the Marine Conservation Society.

#### Trees, Woodland and Hedges

7.38 Through a combination of natural regeneration areas and tree planting the National Trust across North Devon is aiming to establish approximately 750000 trees by 2030. Approximately 210000 trees have already been planted across North Devon in a mix of wood and wood pasture and allowed space for further natural regeneration to occur which is predicted to be around 75000 trees in areas around Woolacombe, West Exmoor, Arlington and Hartland.

7.39 Devon Woods riparian planting follows on from the Biosphere Foundation's "Woods for Water" project to direct planting in catchments that have particular phosphate issues. The riverside planting is designed to have multiple benefits for biodiversity as well as improving the water quality and the project has initiated 84 ha of planting in the Biosphere area alone.

7.40 Devon Woods is a North Devon UNESCO Biosphere project running from 2021 until 2027. The project area covers 49 water body catchments in North Devon. The primary objective of the project is to improve water quality and to design and create woodland and install natural flood management features which focus on keeping soil and water on the land. Over 28,000 trees have been distributed into 16 catchments, 9.24 hectares of woodland created, 3.2 km of hedges planted 1.25 kilometres of hedges gapped up and restored, and 67 farm visits conducted.

7.41 Devon Wildlife Trust are leading the 'Saving Devon's Treescapes' project, in partnership with the Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum. Running until 2025, the project aimed to protect, enhance, restore and replace Devon's iconic treescapes, aiming to plant 250,000 trees outside of woodlands across Devon as well as increasing knowledge and raising awareness of the cultural significance of ash trees in the region.

7.42 Further Countryside Stewardship funded planting above and beyond these initiatives have resulted in 116,000 trees planted since 2021. This collectively equates to 226 Ha of nature rich woodland. An additional 8.3ha of traditional orchards has also been created since 2017.

7.43 Under Countryside Stewardship some 20 km of new hedge have been created each year across the Biosphere since the Nature Recovery Plan was initiated in 2021. Further hedges will have been created with funding from other sources such as the Woodland Trust and The Tree Council,

through the Farming in Protected Landscape (FIPL) scheme, and by private initiatives carried out without external funding. Additionally, some 400 km of hedge have been laid and 100 km coppiced since 2021, a total of 500km.

7.44 A campaign led by PlantLife<sup>36</sup> to safeguard the oceanic oak woodlands and their lower plant communities has been gathering pace and indicates the Biosphere reserve as a key location. Plantlife, in partnership with other conservation organisations and woodland owners are committed to improving the health of this important habitat.

## Species

7.45 The Taw Torridge Estuary SSSI is notified for its intertidal mud and saltmarsh habitat and overwintering bird interest (aggregations of overwintering Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew, more than 20,000 Non-Breeding Water birds). In 2018 Natural England, RSPB, North Devon National Landscape, and both Local Authorities commissioned a report<sup>37</sup> to identify the location of wintering water bird high tide roosts and the effects of disturbance arising from recreational activity on wintering water birds.

7.46 The findings of this project have helped to inform coastal footpath developments around the estuary; mitigation measures for potentially disturbing activities; appropriate avoidance/ mitigation for development around the estuary; condition assessment for the features of the SSSI. North Devon and Torridge have recently produced guidance to inform estuary users of the importance of the high tide roosts and the risks of disturbance.

7.47 The second largest population of Greater Horseshoe Bats in the UK is found around Braunton. In order to protect the important foraging areas and commuting routes for these bats, a Bat Sustainance Zone within 4 kilometres of the important maternity roost at Caen Valley Bats SSSI is shown on Local Plan maps. Development proposals affecting foraging habitat, including river valleys, hedgerows and scrub land, or access to these foraging areas within the Bat Sustainance Zone will be considered against relevant policies relating to impacts on habitats and increase in lighting.

7.48 In March 2022, a summer roost-site in a Combe Martin barn was repaired, and radio tags were fitted to four bats in a mine at Great Hangman. Follow-up searches were conducted a few weeks later, in late April and early May, aiming to detect the tagged bats and – potentially – to identify new roost sites as a result.

7.49 One of the AONB-funded radio tags led directly to the discovery of a new roost at Bradwell (between West Down and Woolacombe), whilst follow-up analysis and further visits confirmed additional roosts located in buildings at Saunton (where more than 200 bats were counted in June 2022) and at two sites near Ilfracombe, only one of which could be entered due to serious concerns about the structural safety of the second building. In addition, tracking confirmed linkages, already established from ringing, between the Hangman mines and the main known roost-site at Braunton (Caen Valley Bats SSSI).

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<sup>36</sup> [Plantlife](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Identification of Wintering Wildfowl High Tide Roosts & Recreational Disturbance Impacts on the Taw Torridge Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest \(SSSI\)](#)

7.50 Following many recent Beaver sightings in the Taw, surveys have been completed with good coverage across the Taw Catchment. Data is currently being processed by the University of Exeter and report writing coordinated by the Beaver Trust. Options are being explored for setting up a North Devon Beaver Management Group (BMG) following the release of the report from Natural England.

7.51 The Riverscapes Partnership (The Rivers Trust, National Trust, The Woodland Trust and Beaver Trust) "Woodlands for Water" project will plant hundreds of hectares of woodland within the Taw and Torridge Catchment Areas to help manage flood risk and improve water quality and wildlife habitats.

7.52 Following a feasibility study and extensive consultations, a partnership led by Devon Wildlife Trust, has recently launched a project to formally reintroduce the pine marten to the area. The Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting the Two Moors Pine Marten Project for the controlled release of 40 pine martens on Dartmoor and Exmoor and their subsequent monitoring.

7.53 The Devon Hedge Group has produced a document on the distinctive hedge types found throughout Devon, including an indicative distribution map, details on their contribution to landscape character, heritage, ecological characteristics, and their varying management requirements.

7.54 Under the sponsorship of the Woodland Trust, the Biosphere, North Devon National Landscape, DCC and others, Devon Biodiversity Record Centre has created a refreshed Ancient Woodland mapping layer that now includes sites smaller than 1 Ha. This new data will be used to support expansion of woodlands around the small but important sites to build resilience across the landscape.

### Council Habitat Banks

7.55 NDC have commissioned the North Devon Biosphere Reserve to undertake baseline ecological surveys and produce BNG metrics on Council owned land belonging to the north of Brynsworthy Environment Centre and at Hillsborough Local Nature Reserve.

7.56 The reports provide suggestions on management requirements to give an uplift of 7.15 biodiversity units at Brynsworthy and 62.97 BU at Hillsborough. It should be noted that half of the biodiversity increase at Hillsborough is for the woodland where tree planting will not be possible as the site is a scheduled monument and will not be allowed by Historic England. Some of the bracken areas are on steep ground and may be difficult to manage although the Parks Team now have a remote-controlled mower and access to a more powerful mower through the National Landscapes team/ National Trust.

7.57 Both sites will require a budget to bring into a good condition. Hillsborough is likely to be eligible for Higher Level Stewardship funding which will help offset some, but not all of the costs and some areas are already being managed by the Parks Team and volunteers. Estimate £3000 per annum for bracken control/ meadow management and some limited work in the woodland.

7.58 Brynsworthy will require funding to carry out initial scrub clearance and hedge construction/ planting and then ongoing meadow management by a contractor. Estimate £5000 for the initial scrub clearance and hedgerow creation/ planting and then £1000 per annum for the meadow management.

7.59 No formal decision on the creation of a Habitat Bank at either site has been reached as of January 2026.

### Council Resources

7.60 The Council has continued to work on developing internal skills, providing formal and informal internal training and knowledge sharing across departments:

- Building with Nature Approved Assessor accreditation
- Devon County Council BNG Training for Development Management Officers
- Devon County Council BNG Presentation to all Councillors
- Planning Agents Forum BNG soft launch for agents
- Strategy and Resources presentations
- Freeths Legal BNG training for NDC/TDC/ENPA Planning and Legal Officers
- BNG Metric training for Development Management Officers and Validation teams
- BNG Development Management Process Mapping
- BNG Legal requirements for Habitat Banks and developer owned sites
- BNG Monitoring and Enforcement with Development Management Officers
- BNG Monitoring discussions with third party software solutions e.g. Verna, AiDash, Joesblooms, Map Info
- Collaboratively funded Strategic BNG officer co-ordinating the Devon Local Authority BNG Steering Group
- Successfully secured DLUHC funding for use of specialist BNG monitoring software

### **Biodiversity Net Gain**

8.1 Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) in Feb 2024. BNG is a process of assessing biodiversity value measured in standardised biodiversity units. A habitat will contain a number of biodiversity units, depending on its size, quality, location and type. Biodiversity units can be lost through development or generated through work to create and enhance habitats. Developers must deliver a BNG of 10% which means a development will result in more or better quality natural habitat than there was before development.

### Actions Taken to Meet BNG Obligations

8.2 The Council collaborates with all Devon Authorities on the Devon County Council hosted [BNG guidance](#) which contains planning guidance, validation statements, offsite habitat bank criteria, monitoring fees and draft s106 agreements.

8.3 BNG is predominantly a planning matter with the assessment, processing and approval of planning applications requiring BNG a responsibility of the planning team and officers. NDC uses

Mycelia software to assess, record and monitor BNG delivery. Officers attend Mycelia webinars and training modules. Consultants were brought in at the outset to support the training of staff, and in particular the legal elements.

ID	Consented applications requiring net gains	Number	Proportion (%)
A	Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	131	N/A
B	Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	577	N/A
C	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	34	N/A
D	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	31	91.18
E	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0.00
F	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0.00
G	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	3	8.82

## Legal Agreements

8.4 NDC secures BNG delivery through primarily through conditions and Section 106 (S106) agreements.

- S106 agreements can be set up between developers and NDC to ensure that works related to offsite and significant onsite BNG are undertaken and those habitats are secured for 30 years using a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan.
- NDC charges a fee for the monitoring of S106 agreements based on the Devon County Council monitoring calculator.

## BNG Habitat Banking

8.5 The National Biodiversity Gain Site Register (DEFRA) lists all legally secured biodiversity gain sites in England. As of January 2026, one site has been registered within NDC and has units available for sale. Brayford Habitat Bank (BGS-221024001) is located within the Exmoor National Character Area and is mainly focused on a large area of lowland meadow enhancement. Another key feature of the bank includes a central watercourse that has had encroachment removed, the addition of sensitive riparian planting and a series of pools and dams created to hold back the water, which form a series of diverse pockets of habitat supporting an abundance of life. The site covers 29.18ha.

8.6 NDC has also entered a s106 with Mornacott habitat bank for a landscape-scale project covering over 300ha, and that will see the generation of over 1,000 biodiversity units across the estate. The site is within the Culm National Character Area and habitat creation will focus on grassland, woodland, heathland and scrub and individual trees.

## Next Steps

9.1 Over the next five years, opportunities exist to work across all Council functions to deliver for biodiversity, use the LNRS to guide and drive forwards nature recovery, increase land managed by local community groups for and to assist the Local Nature Partnership to further explore private investment/ funding in nature. These actions can help NDC not only meet local, regional and national targets but also ensure long-term resilience of its parks, grasslands, woodlands and waterways.

- Continue to apply Local Plan environmental policies to planning applications and to review and update guidance to inform the emerging Local Plan.
- Consider opportunities to identify and develop sites for the provision of offsite BNG on council owned land.
- Continue to work with DCC and landowners to secure the provision of offsite BNG through appropriate legal agreements.
- Continue to support and work with relevant partnerships to deliver wildlife conservation activities, environmental education, landowner advice, community engagement and conservation volunteering.
- Review procedures and practices across the Council to ensure that any reasonable opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity are identified and actioned.
- Engage with key stakeholders to review current partnership working on biodiversity and look to new opportunities to improve outcomes for biodiversity.
- Continue to deliver nature restoration works on SSSIs to reach the EIP target of 'by 2028 50% of SSSIs with actions on track to reach favourable condition'.
- Deliver improved green infrastructure within new developments
- Creation of wildflower rich habitats to provide large areas of pollinator habitats.
- Focus on upskilling current council staff with biodiversity and ecology training
- Consult with key stakeholders to seek views on the work the Council currently does for biodiversity and how that might be improved in the future.
- Take account of the LNRS over the next five years by integrating the priorities and measures proposed in the LNRS into the delivery of policies and plans. Including targeted actions to reverse losses and restore the priority species outlined in the Devon LNRS

## Monitoring

10.1 As part of the actions noted above the Council will consider how both existing and new actions will be monitored.

10.2 BNG as part of planning has its own monitoring requirements set out in legislation and guidance which NDC will follow. In addition the Council publishes an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for the Local Plan policies. The relevant content of these reports will form part of the Biodiversity Report.

10.3 Most partnerships that form part of the Councils commitment to biodiversity already have reporting requirements which can be captured for the Biodiversity Report.

10.4 In devising monitoring proposals NDC will have to be mindful of the resources available and will seek to avoid duplicating work done elsewhere so that where monitoring is already being done this will be incorporated into the Biodiversity Report ahead of publication on the Council's web site.

10.5 The next enhanced biodiversity report is due five years from the submission date of the previous report. This will be January 2031.

**APPENDIX ONE**  
**Biodiversity Net Gain Information**

North Devon Council LPA

12 February 2024 to 1 January 2026

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<b>Table 1. Eligible planning permissions granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requiring biodiversity net gain</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>Consented applications requiring net gains</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>	
A	Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	131	Not applicable	
B	Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	577	Not applicable	
C	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	34	Not applicable	
D	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	31	91.18	
E	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0.00	
F	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0.00	
G	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	3	8.82	
H	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00	
I	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of off-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00	
J	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site, off-site units and statutory credits	0	0.00	

<b>Table 2. Overall expected gains and losses across all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>Overall expected gains and losses</b>	<b>Area habitat</b>	<b>Hedgerow</b>	<b>Watercourse</b>
A	Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site	58.84	11.02	1.29
B	Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site	66.46	16.63	1.85
C	Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site	7.63	5.61	0.56
D	Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	12.96	50.87	43.36
E	Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site	0.40	0.00	0.00
F	Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site	1.42	0.00	0.00
G	Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site	1.02	0.00	0.00
H	Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	255.79	0.00	0.00
I	Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	8.65	5.61	0.56
K	Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	14.60	50.87	43.36

<b>Table 3. Impact on Irreplaceable Habitat</b>			
<b>ID</b>	<b>Impact on irreplaceable habitat</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>
A	Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period where the on-site change negatively impacts irreplaceable habitats	0	0.00

<b>Table 4. Location of off-site biodiversity units</b>			
<b>ID</b>	<b>Location of off-site biodiversity units</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>
A	Number of off-site biodiversity units located inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	1.07	75.23
B	Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside LPA or NCA of impact site, but in neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.35	24.77
C	Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside of LPA or NCA of impact site and neighbouring LPA or NCA	0.00	0.00

<b>Table 5. Results of monitoring biodiversity gains</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>Results of monitoring biodiversity gains where the LPA is part of the legal agreement</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>	
A	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans including the delivery of 'significant' on-site gains	3		
B	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements and habitat delivery expectations for 'significant' on-site gains	3		
C	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements but not meeting habitat delivery expectations for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A		
D	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are failing to meet monitoring requirements for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A		
E	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans where the status of monitoring requirements is unknown for 'significant' on-site gains	N/A		
F	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans including the delivery of off-site gains, where the LPA are responsible for monitoring.	6		
G	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements and habitat delivery expectations for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	6		
H	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are meeting monitoring requirements but not meeting habitat delivery expectations for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	0		
I	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans that are failing to meet monitoring requirements for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	0		
J	Number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans where the status of monitoring requirements is unknown for offsite gains where the LPA is responsible for monitoring	0		
<b>ID</b>	<b>Enforcement actions taken in the reporting period</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Proportion (%)</b>	
L	Number of enforcement actions taken during the reporting period associated with Biodiversity Net Gain policy	0		
<b>ID</b>	<b>Tracking monitoring of biodiversity gains</b>	<b>Free Text</b>		
K	Please describe how you have collected information on monitoring (e.g., use of digital software to collect and analyse monitoring data/ manual checking of monitoring reports/ internal monitoring system etc.	Mycelia		

<b>ID</b>	<b>Habitat Type - Area</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units at baseline</b>	<b>Total hectares at baseline</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units post - development</b>	<b>Total hectares post - development</b>	<b>Net change in biodiversity units</b>	<b>Net change in hectares</b>
A	Cropland	1.34	0.67	0.00	0.00	-1.34	-0.67
B	Grassland	53.14	16.54	56.92	13.63	3.78	-2.91
C	Heathland and shrub	0.75	0.19	1.32	0.24	0.58	0.06
D	Lakes	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.37	2.00	0.37
E	Sparsely vegetated land	0.30	0.09	0.25	0.04	-0.05	-0.04
F	Urban	0.28	1.29	0.81	4.50	0.53	3.21
G	Wetland	0.36	0.05	0.00	0.00	-0.36	-0.05
H	Woodland and forest	0.45	0.11	0.45	0.11	0.00	0.00
I	Intertidal sediment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Coastal saltmarsh	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
K	Rocky shore	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
L	Coastal lagoons	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
M	Intertidal hard structures	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
N	Watercourse footprint	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00	Not applicable	0.00
O	Individual trees	2.62	0.26	6.12	1.55	3.50	1.29
	<b>Total</b>	<b>59.23</b>	<b>19.19</b>	<b>67.88</b>	<b>20.45</b>	<b>8.65</b>	<b>1.26</b>

<b>ID</b>	<b>Habitat type - hedgerows and lines of trees</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units at baseline</b>	<b>Total kilometres at baseline</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units post - development</b>	<b>Total kilometres post - development</b>	<b>Net change in biodiversity units</b>	<b>Net change in kilometres</b>
A	Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	2.06	0.13	2.19	0.16	0.13	0.03
B	Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
C	Species-rich native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0.82	0.07	1.91	0.17	1.09	0.10
D	Native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.76	0.04	0.76	0.04	0.00	0.00
E	Species-rich native hedgerow	0.00	0.00	2.80	0.40	2.80	0.40
F	Native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	5.85	0.53	7.03	0.84	1.18	0.31
G	Native hedgerow with trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
H	Ecologically valuable line of trees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
I	Ecologically valuable line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
J	Native hedgerow	0.62	0.12	0.80	0.20	0.18	0.08
K	Line of trees	0.56	0.12	0.79	0.31	0.24	0.19
L	Line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
M	Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.35	-0.01	-0.01
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11.02</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>16.63</b>	<b>2.46</b>	<b>5.61</b>	<b>1.11</b>

<b>ID</b>	<b>Habitat type - watercourse</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units at baseline</b>	<b>Total kilometres at baseline</b>	<b>Total biodiversity units post - development</b>	<b>Total kilometres post - development</b>	<b>Net change in biodiversity units</b>	<b>Net change in kilometres</b>
A	Priority habitat	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
B	Other rivers and streams	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
C	Ditches	1.29	0.16	1.85	0.16	0.56	0.00
D	Canals	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
E	Culvert	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	<b>Total</b>	1.29	0.16	1.85	0.16	0.56	0.00