



East Cambridgeshire
District Council



East Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Report 2023 to 2025

(as required by s40A of the NERC Act 2006).

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1. An Introduction to biodiversity in East Cambridgeshire

East Cambridgeshire was once one of the most biodiverse areas in the country, with extensive natural wet fenland areas together with ancient woodland, species rich grasslands on the higher grounds and rich heathlands near the Breckland's, together with abundant natural river systems. This has changed significantly, especially over the last 400 or so years.

The [Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust](http://www.wwt.org.uk/discover-wetlands/wetlands/fens) (WWT) (www.wwt.org.uk/discover-wetlands/wetlands/fens) estimates that only 1% of fenland habitat remains in the UK. Not only has this had a dramatic harm to biodiversity in those areas, but as the fens peat dries, vast quantities of carbon dioxide are also released. The loss of fen peat also means land falls further, sometimes well below sea level, increasing our risk to serious flooding.

In East Cambridgeshire, the vast majority of our fen habitats and natural river systems have been lost to land drainage and intensive, albeit highly successfully, food growing agriculture.

We have an exceptionally low amount of tree cover, with the far south of the district being the only location for significant amounts of trees and woodlands.

Nevertheless, pockets of East Cambridgeshire are very nature rich or of very special habitat, so much so that several sites are designated as internationally important for wildlife, though they remain under threat from climate change and increased pressure as nature around them has been depleted over time.

For more details on those internationally important sites, plus national and locally important sites, please see our report entitled [Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity Report \(January 2024\)](http://eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/reversing-decline-nature) (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/reversing-decline-nature).

Despite this rather negative overview we see many positives going forward, and there is genuine prospect of bringing back nature to East Cambridgeshire.

2. East Cambridgeshire District Council's declaration

The council has formally recognised the biodiversity crisis (and the interlinked climate crisis) and is making every effort to reverse the decline in biodiversity in the district and help **Bring Back Nature** to the district.

3. Our biodiversity report

All public authorities, such as East Cambridgeshire District Council (“the council”), must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is known as the ‘biodiversity duty’ as set out in S40(A1) of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/40) (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/40).

This means that, by law, the council must:

- **consider** what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- **agree** policies and specific objectives based on its consideration
- **act** to deliver those policies and achieve those objectives

To demonstrate compliance with the biodiversity duty, the council must publish a biodiversity report covering the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025, and then repeat this process at least once every five years.

That biodiversity report must provide a summary of:

- the actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
- how the council plans to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
- the actions carried out to meet biodiversity net gain (BNG) obligations, together with proposed actions to meet BNG obligations in the future.

This document fulfils our requirement to publish such a biodiversity report.

4. Our biodiversity policies, objectives and actions

East Cambridgeshire is a largely rural district covering an area of 65,000 hectares, with a population of approximately 85,000 and home to the riverside Cathedral City of Ely. Photo below shows Ely Cathedral as viewed from Ely Pitts and Meadows SSSI” (credit ECDC).



East Cambridgeshire District Council is a small, focused council, with the following corporate objectives:

- sound financial management
- cleaner, greener East Cambridgeshire
- sustainable communities

Our [corporate plan for 2023 to 2027](https://eastcamb.gov.uk/about-council/corporate-plan-and-objectives/corporate-plan) (eastcamb.gov.uk/about-council/corporate-plan-and-objectives/corporate-plan) includes a priority to “enhance the natural environment and build on our sustainability goals”.

In our [Conservation and Enhancement of Biodiversity Report \(January 2024\)](https://eastcamb.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/reversing-decline-nature) (eastcamb.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/reversing-decline-nature), we explained in detail all of the options available to the council to take action to help support biodiversity. These options were grouped into three themes.

Theme 1, direct action, meaning undertaking activities ourselves, directly, to conserve and enhance biodiversity, for example on land we own.

Theme 2, our policies, which require other people to comply with them for the benefit of biodiversity. The most obvious example is the council’s planning policy powers, whereby it can require or expect developers to do certain things to help biodiversity as part of a development proposal.

Theme 3, encourage and influence others to do certain things such as influencing the policies and activities of parish councils.

We’ve also established a [Climate and Nature Strategy 2024 to 2028](https://eastcamb.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/environment-policy-and-action-plan/our-environment-plans-and-actions) (eastcamb.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/environment-policy-and-action-plan/our-environment-plans-and-actions) which includes the following priorities and actions relevant to biodiversity.

Priorities	Goals by 2028
To make our own land and buildings as nature friendly as possible, progressively enhancing the variety of plants and animal species.	Put in place long term habitat management plans for all our significant public open spaces, and report progress towards delivering them.
To help our communities, through guidance and financial assistance, to undertake nature friendly projects across East Cambridgeshire.	Provide financial or expert assistance to local communities, through grant schemes such as Pride of Place and free tree giveaways, with a target of helping deliver at least 100 nature related community projects across the district.
Utilise our expertise and legislative powers to maximise opportunities for nature recovery.	Successfully deliver biodiversity net gain for all new developments by partnership working with developers and landowners.
Put in place long term frameworks for nature recovery in East Cambridgeshire, including opportunities for nature-based investment.	Be an active supporting authority for the Cambridgeshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and establish East Cambridgeshire's locally determined contribution for nature recovery.

To make progress towards the above Priorities and Goals by 2028, we annually publish a set of Top 20 Environment Actions, many of which are biodiversity related (with others more focussed on climate mitigation and adaptation). Our latest Top 20 Actions (June 2025), together with how we performed on our [previous annual Top 20 Actions](#), are available on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/environment-policy-and-action-plan/our-environment-plans-and-actions).

Specific to planning policy, our [Local Plan \(2014, as amended 2023\)](#) (<https://eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-guidance/adopted-local-plan/local-plan>) contains several policies helping to ensure new development supports biodiversity, headlined by Policy ENV7: Biodiversity and Geology.

The Local Plan is supported by two biodiversity related [Supplementary Planning Documents](#) (SPD) (<https://eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-guidance/supplementary-planning-documents>), namely:

- Natural Environment SPD (2020)
- Hedgehog Recovery SPD (2024)

When taken as a whole, it is clear that the council has a strong commitment to setting policies and actions to help conserve and enhance biodiversity, as is required by the biodiversity duty, and overall we are committed to help **Bring Back Nature** to East Cambridgeshire.



5. Supporting the preparation of other biodiversity action plans

As well as our policies, the council has worked hard to help other organisations further their own policies for biodiversity enhancement.

At the sub-regional level, the council has been an active member of the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Steering Group, providing extensive advice and assistance to its preparation.

The final LNRS, which is the responsibility of the Cambridgeshire Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to prepare, was published in December 2025.

At a much more local level, we support parish councils in our area to prepare their own community based nature recovery plans. Such support includes preparation of a [template local nature recovery action plan](https://eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/community-based-nature-recovery-plans) (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/community-based-nature-recovery-plans) for such parishes or other community bodies to use.



6. Our top achievements January 2023 to December 2025

During the reporting period, we are delighted to confirm positive progress we have made in conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

By way of Top 10 Headlines, we have the following.

Professional support

As of January 2023, we had no professional ecologist support in the council, instead relying on limited help from the local Wildlife Trust. However, we now have 2FTE permanent professional ecologist working in the council, including a senior ecologist (from October 2023) and a more junior ecologist (from May 2025). Having in-house ecologists has dramatically improved the ability of the council to scrutinise planning applications and influence planning decisions, for the benefit of biodiversity, as well as being able to work with landowners and communities on their own plans for nature recovery.

Having in-house ecologists has also meant that we can now represent the district at the Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing committees with Natural England, Local Designated Sites Panel committees with the Wildlife Trust and CPREC, and be an active participant in LNRS discussions.

This additional ecologist support now complements the existing resource in place, comprising two full time tree officers, a climate change officer and a newly created and a Climate Change and Natural Environment Manger.

Community grants

Our Pride of Place Grant scheme (launched June 2023, project spend by March 2025) has been hugely successful, with 31 community groups benefitting from 100% grant funds to help transform a local area for the benefit of both nature and people. The scheme has resulted in animal boxes, tree planting, green space creation, flower planting and pond restoration projects spread right across the district. [Further details](#) can be found on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/environment-grants-and-initiatives/pride-place-grants).

Free orchard and oak trees

During 2023, we committed to giving away 75 English oak trees to communities, parish councils and schools in celebration of the coronation of King Charles III and his 75th birthday in November 2023. Twenty different locations across the district planted one or more of our free oak trees, with [further details](#) on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/coronation-oaks-communities).

The coronation oak tree project followed an equally successful free orchard tree initiative which ran in 2021 and 2022, creating 27 new orchards across the district, comprising 300 orchard trees. For winter 2025 to 2026, we have launched a third wave of free orchard tree giveaways, with trees to be provided in January 2026.

More [details on our 'create an orchard' project](#) are on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/community-orchards-district).

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The council welcomed the introduction of BNG and worked hard to establish procedures to successfully implement the new legislation. We also held workshops with developers, local councillors, planning agents and our internal planning staff (including validation teams), and published several webpages of advice. We are very pleased with the successful implementation of BNG to date (further details on BNG implementation in the next section of this report).

Prepare habitat management plans

With funding assistance from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, in 2025 we commissioned the local Wildlife Trust to help the council prepare 20 habitat management plans for public open spaces across the district, the vast majority of which are open spaces the council manages and are committed to implementing the measures contained within them. We selected a mix of sites, including some already important for wildlife and other sites that have low current biodiversity and require improvement. The initial baseline survey evaluated each of the sites' current condition and use. Preparation of the plans explored opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and ways to engage local communities. The new management plans will be published in early 2026 and implementation commences thereafter. We look forward to reporting on what we have achieved at the next monitoring period.

Whilst preparing the plans over 2025, we found that some of our sites are ecologically more important than we were initially aware of, with two sites having potential to achieve County Wildlife Status, one for the importance for hibernating bats and the second due to being floristically diverse following a recent careful management and reseeded initiative from a nearby Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

We are also exploring ways to help inform the public about their local habitats and how they can get involved.

Enhanced grass cutting

We continue to strive to improve the way we manage our parks and open spaces for the benefit of wildlife, especially the way we cut our grass. A report published in 2022 (before the reporting period for this document) explained how we had recently changed management practices for the benefit of wildlife, and we have continued to implement and enhance such measures since. [Report available on our website](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/parking-open-spaces-and-toilets/parks-and-open-spaces/grass-cutting) (eastcambs.gov.uk/parking-open-spaces-and-toilets/parks-and-open-spaces/grass-cutting).

Habitat Bank creation

We have already supported local landowners to set up two habitat banks in 2024 and 2025, both of which are actively selling units. The banks should deliver a minimum of 254 units to serve the district and three National Characteristic Areas. The banks offer a range of habitats to aid nature recovery, including creation of ponds, species diverse grasslands, native hedgerows, tree planting, traditional orchards and enhancements to existing habitats to better conditions for wildlife. In addition to the two live sites, we are

currently supporting additional sites to become BNG providers in 2026 or beyond. In all cases, the council signs a s106 legal agreement to ensure the banks deliver what they say they will and we will do regular checks (and enforcement if necessary) for at least the next 30 years. It is worth noting that many local authority areas do not have any habitat banks in their area, so to have two already, and potentially more to come, puts East Cambridgeshire as a leading area nationally for habitat bank creation, which is not only great for nature but is providing a valuable business and farming diversification opportunity. [Further details](#) are on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-xx/biodiversity-advice-developers/habitat-banks).

Hedgehog Recovery

We held a series of public votes in July and August 2023, in Bottisham, Littleport, Soham and Ely, and the public decided that it was hedgehogs above all other animals they thought were most in need of support. The vote kick started a council commitment to help the recovery of hedgehog numbers in the district. As well as general advice to the public, specific measures include a national first hedgehog recovery Supplementary Planning Document and a special afternoon training event for the entire parks and open spaces team of the council, together with some local landscaping contractors, run by Hedgehog Street and delivered by the renowned hedgehog author Hugh Warwick. We have also

taken particular attention to make grass cutting regimes more hedgehog friendly and form part of our habitat management plans. [Further details](#) available on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/climate-change-and-nature/bring-back-nature/hedgehog-recovery).

Volunteer days

In 2025, the Council introduced a new staff volunteering day, including a focus on volunteering activities to help the local natural environment (though other volunteering opportunities are also permitted). Bulb planting and litter picking have been two activities organised to date, with more to come in 2026.

The council's voluntary staff 'green team' has also actively helped achieve biodiversity gains at the council's headquarter building, including installing swift boxes and creating a more wildlife friendly courtyard garden with a new small pond, compost area and nature friendly planting.

Lake View Bereavement Centre

Over the past few years, the Council has been developing plans to convert the redundant Mepal Outdoor Centre into a new Bereavement Centre. The site is a County Wildlife Site (CWS), so the Council has worked with the Wildlife Trust to ensure plans for the site have nature conservation in mind. Construction began in 2025, with opening due in 2026. Once opened, the council is committed to maintaining the site to a high ecological standard and offering the opportunity for people to enjoy the CWS aspect of the site in a nature friendly way.

7. How we've raised awareness and educated the community

As a small council, our resources need to be directed as efficiently and effectively as possible to make the greatest impact.

We've therefore focussed efforts on providing grants to community groups (Pride of Place and free tree giveaways), as well as providing templates to make it as easy as possible for local communities to prepare their own nature recovery plans.

The council's communications team has taken opportunities where it can to promote biodiversity awareness, especially using the hedgehog as way to engage and catch people's attention, through our social media streams (below is an example of a press release by the communications team).



Remember hedgehogs this autumn

As the clocks change and the colder nights draw in residents are being asked to remember hedgehogs this autumn. Numbers of hedgehogs in rural areas have declined between 30 and 75 per cent since 2000. To help halt this decline we're asking residents to do what they can to help our prickly friends.

Date 30 October 2025

We also produced a Hedgehog highway template, to help people create the correct size highways for hedgehogs.



Meet Prickles

Hedgehogs are officially East Cambs local animal of choice.

Residents have voted and we promise to do everything we can to reverse the terrible decline of hedgehogs and protect them for future generations.



 East Cambridgeshire District Council

Did you know hedgehogs can wonder for more than 2km a night?

Good access to gardens keeps them from wondering onto dangerous roads.

If you have any ideas of how we can help hedgehogs or want to get more involved please email climatechange@eastcambs.gov.uk



Find out how to get your garden ready for hibernation time
www.hedgehogsteelf.org



You can use this template to cut a little door in your fence to create a hedgehog highway (please ask your neighbour first)

The district is famous for its wetland birds, and the council seeks opportunities to raise awareness with the public on important wildfowl issues, with the following two posters/leaflets being published.

Let's Quack Down

on unhealthy feeding

Please do feed me:
Porridge oats, peas, sweetcorn, and seeds.
These have lots of nutritional value for us!



Please don't feed me:
Food such as bread, crisps, and crackers.
These lack nutritional value for us! They fill our tummies meaning we won't forage for healthy foods.



! Please don't throw food in the water, as this can cause water pollution

Scan me for more wildfowl ID and East Cambridgeshire nature recovery information or visit eastcamb.gov.uk/ducks

Mallard Coot Mute swan Greylag Heron



Can you spot them all?



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Bird Flu be aware



The main cause of bird flu is contact with faeces from infected birds.



Signs of Bird flu:

- swollen head
- closed and runny eyes
- breathing difficulties
- unresponsiveness
- lack of coordination
- dropping of wings, dragging of legs



Protect yourself:

- do not touch or pick up the bird- report it immediately
- wear a mask and gloves
- don't touch surfaces with wild bird feathers or bird droppings
- wash hands thoroughly



Prevent the spread:

- clean and disinfect equipment regularly
- clean and disinfect vehicles
- clean and disinfect footwear regularly

(Do not apply disinfectants close to drinking water supplies such as reservoirs, or surface water such as streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands.)

Where to report suspected cases

If you suspect bird flu in any wild bird, you must report it immediately by scanning the QR code or:

- calling: 03000 200 301
- online: www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds
- call the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Bring back butterflies!



This area is being renovated to create a climate resilient habitat for butterflies, following reports that numbers of most UK species have declined by up to 50% since 1976!

Works to create nectar rich flowering slopes and bare ground will help butterflies and other invertebrates survive the challenging changing climate giving cool and warm areas to feed and rest.

We hope that when works are complete, you will be able to not only enjoy watching butterflies but be able to walk amongst them again.



East Cambridgeshire
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8. Biodiversity net gain information

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. It is a national initiative established by the Environment Act 2021 and we are fully committed to supporting its successful implementation.

Put very simply, from 12 February 2024 (for Major developments) and from 2 April 2024 (for Minor developments), new development must achieve a minimum of a 10% BNG. This means a development will result in more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

East Cambridgeshire District Council reconfirmed in November 2022 its acknowledgement of the global biodiversity emergency we face. BNG is one way to help nature recover and will complement other policies we have in place in East Cambridgeshire, including our Natural Environment Supplementary Planning Document which establishes wider policies developers must follow to help support nature in our district.

We recognise that implementing BNG successfully will require considerable new ways of working both by developers seeking planning permission and by the council making decisions on those planning applications and making sure the minimum 10% BNG is achieved.

We want to make the process as smooth as possible for all parties and are committed to helping all developers through the process. The minimum 10% BNG must not only be achieved but must also be maintained for a minimum 30 years thereafter. The council has put in place internal monitoring arrangements to make sure all BNG achieved via new development is monitored for the full 30 years. Where it is not being achieved or maintained properly, we will endeavour to work with landowners to help identify what needs to be done to meet their obligations. However, ultimately, we will use our enforcement powers where it is clear a landowner is failing to meet their BNG commitments.

9. A summary of the action taken by the authority in carrying out its BNG functions

Pre-mandatory BNG action. The council worked hard pre-mandatory BNG to get the council in the best possible position to implement what is a complex new statutory requirement. This included recruiting an ecologist, advice internal staff (especially the planning department) and advising local agents and developers (through the Agents Forum network).

Mandatory go live date. As the two mandatory dates approached, we published a series of guidance notes for developers and consultees, to help everyone navigate through the procedures and explain what to expect from the council. At the same time, further training of staff took place, with a special focus on the validation team that receive planning applications. The validation team are the first contact between applicants and the council, checking that a planning application (including BNG requirements) have been submitted correctly. The [full suite of webpages](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-xx/biodiversity-advice-developers) can be found on our website (eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-xx/biodiversity-advice-developers).

Post Mandatory go-live date. The council has a robust procedure in place to ensure all relevant applications submit the correct BNG related information (including checking whether any exempt applications are indeed correctly identified by the applicant as being exempt).

Once validated, the team of two full time ecologists fulfil the necessary statutory duties, such as checking and agreeing that the baseline habitats are correctly recorded in the metric (and seeking corrections where they are not agreed).

All relevant planning applications have had the appropriate standard biodiversity gain condition applied, and we are starting to reach the phase whereby such conditions are starting to be discharged by applicants. For a small number of applications, a s106 is being secured to ensure a greater degree of control over implementation of significant gains (and subsequent monitoring of such gains).

Information about any biodiversity gains resulting or expected to result from biodiversity gain plans approved by the council

Of the very few biodiversity gain plans approved to date, the focus of them are predominantly for area units, together with some hedgerow units and fewer still watercourse units.

At the time of writing, we are not aware of any units being bought outside of the local area and no statutory credits have been purchased. No irreplaceable habitats have been impacted from applications with mandatory BNG requirements.

As mentioned in the 'highlights chapter', we have undertaken extensive work to assist the establishment of a local BNG market, with agreement on two habitat banks and working towards agreement on more. This is in line with best practice and gives the greatest opportunity to ensure all BNG gains, whether on-site or off-site, take place within the district.

The council has decided not to charge habitat bank set up fees to encourage private landowners to set up habitat banks in our area to boost nature recovery. Instead, we have opted to only minimal legal and habitat monitoring fees.

We have also successfully secured significant onsite gains for some developments prior to the BNG plans being submitted.

The council is a small landowner itself but no site on our own land has been identified to deliver viable BNG units at this stage.

10. Our future actions

This section focuses on what priority actions we intend to take over the coming 5 year period (1 January 2026 to 31 December 2030).

However, there is a significant risk of an early review and update of these proposed actions well before the expiry of the five-year period as a consequence of Local Government Reorganisation. That reorganisation is presently forecast to see East Cambridgeshire merge with one or more other district councils into a large unitary council, with a 'go-live' date of April 2028 (with a transitional 'shadow' unitary council in place from May 2027).

Nevertheless, the following establishes our intended set of Top 10 Actions for the coming five-year period.

Biodiversity Action 1, implement habitat management plans for our own estate

As reported earlier, at the time of writing we are close to publish a set of 18 to 20 'habitat management and monitoring plans' for our main open spaces that the council owns or long-term manages.

Over the coming 5 year period, the task is now to implement them. Each Plan has its own set of individual actions and programmes, reflecting the uniqueness of each site, and include improved grass cutting, new planting and other wildlife friendly improvements, whilst at the same time making sure such sites are people-friendly to continue to enjoy.

Implementing each plan will not be an over-night task. Some elements can be delivered quickly, whilst others may take many years, perhaps decades, to fully achieve. We will regularly report progress and keep our communities informed of what we are doing and why.

Biodiversity Action 2, supporting communities with grants and expertise

We have committed to continue to provide financial or expert assistance to local communities, through grant schemes such as Pride of Place and free tree giveaways, with a target of helping deliver at least 100 nature related community projects across the district between 2024 to 2028.

The precise programmes will evolve each year, but for 2026 the first such programme is the giving away of up to 100 orchard trees (plus stakes) to community groups in January 2026.

Biodiversity Action 3, successfully implement BNG

BNG is a golden opportunity for a district council like ours to make sure new development delivers meaningful opportunities for nature to recover, rather than the pre-BNG era where biodiversity was often very low down the agenda of negotiating planning applications.

But the onus is now on councils like ours to grasp that opportunity and make sure all the requirements of BNG are successfully sought and, where necessary, enforced. We are committed to doing this, including making sure we have the right amount of resources to do it successfully (including ecologists, trained planners, legal support and enforcement capabilities).

Biodiversity Action 4, support the successful implementation of the LNRS

The Cambridgeshire-Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was brought into force on 24 December 2025 by the combined authority for the area. Our council was a ‘supporting authority’ during its preparation.

Over the next 5 years, it’s unlikely a revised LNRS will be put in place, so the task now for our council is to support its implementation.

We will do this primarily via our role as local planning authority, having full regard to the LNRS when making planning decisions (both planning applications and formulating planning policy). But we will also have regard to the LNRS whilst undertaking our wider biodiversity duties.

Biodiversity Action 5: Prepare updated policies to help Bring Back Nature

During the coming five years, we will take opportunities to update our policies for the benefit of nature recovery. The precise programme of policy updates will evolve over time but could include:

- updated Local Plan, reinforcing our commitment to biodiversity and potentially seeking 20% BNG policy requirement (rather than the national mandatory minimum 10%)
- updated Supplementary Planning Documents, building on our existing Natural Environment SPD and Hedgehog Recovery SPD
- updated Trees and Woodlands policy, so all parties are clear on what we are seeking from applicants wanting to manage trees on their own land
- updated procurement policies, making sure the natural environment is taken into account, where relevant, when we purchase goods and services

Biodiversity Action 6, supporting the creation of ‘habitat banks’

We are very fortunate to already have two strategically significant ‘habitat banks’ in the district (most districts have none). Each one has a long term (at least 30 years) programme of delivering significant new habitat gains, with ‘habitat units’ created then being offered for sale to developers, thereby meeting the dual aim of supporting growth and delivering gains for nature in our district.

We are working hard to establish more habitat banks in the district. We will do so by supporting landowners interested in setting up such a bank and helping establish with them the legal agreements necessary for such banks to trade.

Our aim is to have at least four operational Banks in place by the end of the five year period.

Biodiversity Action 7, engage with communities

To Bring Back Nature to East Cambridgeshire requires efforts from everyone, no matter their land ownership, wealth or expertise. From landscape scale nature recovery to window box habitat creation, everything counts.

Over the coming five-year period we will continue to work with our residents and community groups with advice on what they can do to help nature recover, with a particular focus on people's back gardens (an extremely valuable resource within an otherwise almost entirely intensively farmed landscape).

Biodiversity Action 8, invasive species awareness raising

A key threat in our fight to Bring Back Nature is the destructive power of invasive species, both invasive plants and invasive animals. Numerous non-native species cause considerable damage in our district, with the potential for further increasing severe damage if not managed well.

We will establish a programme of education, helping homeowners and developers to identify invasive species and help prevent their spread. We will also train our parks and open spaces team to be more aware of species to look out for and what to do when they are found.

Biodiversity Action 9, water conservation and flood prevention

Water is a crucial ingredient for a thriving natural environment, especially so in a fen landscape such as ours. Sadly, the vast majority of our wetlands have been lost, but there is considerable potential to recreate some (whilst respecting the fact that fenland is a critical source of food production for the country). Water, of course, is also critical to human life and wellbeing, and economic growth of the area will not happen without significant water infrastructure upgrades.

Overall, this council fully support the need for a wide range of water related actions to take place, including water efficiency, water storage and flood prevention. When undertake activities around these themes, we will ensure that gains for nature also take place (for example, a new reservoir can provide a vital new home for wetland birds and aquatic life).

Biodiversity Action 10, training our own staff and volunteering opportunities

In order to successful implement all of these actions, as well as ensure we comply with the law, we will undertake as wider training as necessary of our own staff (and councillors). Such training will cover the legal minimum requirements through to best practice.

As part of this training, we will provide 'volunteer day' opportunities for all staff (started late 2025), whereby all staff can take 1 day a year to undertake voluntary service provided it has a community benefit in doing so. We will establish a series of nature related opportunities for staff to volunteer to, such as bulb planting, tree planting, litter picks and general habitat maintenance. We will aim to extend this voluntary programme to wider community volunteers as well.

Photo below shows staff members on volunteering day, planting bulbs and installing bird boxes, Newnham Street, Ely, November 2025.



Biodiversity challenges

Achieving our aspirations to Bring Back Nature to East Cambridgeshire has a number of uncertainties and challenges. These include:

- uncertainty around Local Government Reorganisation and the priorities of the newly formed Unitary Council for our area (from April 2028)
- climate change, and the severe challenge that we face as a consequence on the land we manage (hotter, drier summers and milder, wetter winters)
- development pressures on land, and pressures on developers to deliver viable growth
- apathy from (or lack of viable opportunity for) communities to engage in nature recovery
- resource pressures, limiting the ability for the council to fund grant schemes or other non-statutory support services
- recruitment challenges, especially experienced ecologists and planners, both of whom are vital to the successful implementation of biodiversity gains in the built environment
- changing political priorities, both national and local, which may affect the ability to achieve what we set out in this report

End of document.



