

Bristol City Council

# Biodiversity Duty Report

January 2020 – December 2025



**Public authorities must actively consider, plan and take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity...**



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# Executive Summary

**The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty was introduced under the Environment Act (2021). It requires all public authorities in England to consider how they can actively conserve and enhance biodiversity. The purpose of this report is to enable Bristol City Council to meet the requirements of their Enhanced Biodiversity Duty, as per the reporting requirements for the period of 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2025.**

Defra requires all Local Planning Authorities and Local Authorities to publish a report on the actions they have taken during the reporting period, and plan to take over the next five years, to meet the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty. This represents the first reporting cycle, which will continue in five-year cycles going forward.

Biodiversity Net Gain became mandatory under the Environment Act for all 'Major' planning applications 12/02/2024 and became mandatory for 'Minor' planning applications 02/04/2024. As of 31st December 2025, Bristol City Council has approved 7 Biodiversity Gain Plans. The City Council is seeking to register sites for BNG unit creation within the authorities' administrative boundaries, which will develop across the next reporting cycle.

Bristol City Council's Corporate Strategy 2025-2030 identifies 'accelerating climate action and nature recovery' as one of five Council priorities. Continued action for nature recovery and biodiversity will be progressed as outlined in relevant plans across the next reporting cycle – including the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy, Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan, the One City Tree and Woodland Strategy, and the Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy, among others.

Bristol City Council was a collaborating authority for the production and publication of the first Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which was led by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, published in November 2024. Over the next 5 years Bristol will seek to move into delivery of the LNRS, working alongside neighbouring authorities, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA), and the West of England Nature Partnership.



# 1. Introduction

**This chapter provides background context and an overview of Bristol’s significant natural landscapes and wildlife.**

Bristol City Council is a Unitary Authority in the Southwest of England. It sits within the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and is bordered by South Gloucestershire Council, Bath and Northeast Somerset Council and North Somerset.

Amidst its urban surroundings, Bristol has several significant nature sites, stretching from the iconic Avon Gorge and Clifton Downs to Stoke Park Estate, the tranquil Frome Valley, Conham Valley River Park, and the natural beauty of the Western Slopes. These areas play host to peregrine falcons, kingfishers, endemic whitebeams, and otters.

Avon Gorge Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is a European Designated site with Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes, and ravines. It is home to rare and uncommon trees and plants, including small-leaved lime, rare and endemic whitebeams, and green hellebore. Bristol is also home to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ashton Court Estate.

The Bristol Avon Catchment is home to both Atlantic Salmon and the critically endangered European Eel. Both of these species are migratory, with the European Eel completing a quite spectacular lifecycle that spans the rivers and estuaries of the UK and the Sargasso Sea. Other notable fish species in the catchment include Atlantic mackerel, common sole, and sea lamprey, all of which are species of principal importance in England.

Another rare species, the western wood-vase hoverfly, is dependent on rot holes in old trees, especially horse chestnut, and has also only been recorded in three UK locations since 1990. One location is West Bristol’s Tickenham Ridge, which Buglife has now designated as an ‘Important Invertebrate Area’.

In relation to the Biodiversity Duty, Bristol City Council has a variety of service areas with influence over the natural environment. The Local Planning Authority allocates land for development via



the local plan and is responsible for the application of BNG and nature-relevant policies via the development management process. The council also has a broad geographical remit of land management functions, with the parks service and harbour authority covering a large proportion of Bristol’s ecological network, including nature reserves and protected sites. The transport and highways authority also has relevance to our biodiversity duty, where the intersection of land priorities represents an infrastructure interdependency with the ecological network. Built assets on this network can provide solutions to tackling severance issues to species movement.

Beyond these functions, the council may have a more indirect means of supporting biodiversity improvement as a land freeholder, with a corporate estate including council offices, community centres, libraries, sports grounds, social housing estate, and further mixed-use land parcels. The council also collaborates with a range of organisations, communities and residents. This role can support nature recovery via communications, consultations, conservation expertise and training, land permissions, and developing programmes and projects.

The council is governed by a Committee and Leader system. As of 6 May 2024, the council’s committee system is led by 70 councillors, representing 34 wards. One councillor has been appointed by Full Council as the Leader of the Council. There are 8 committees in total. Work related to the Council’s Biodiversity Duty is being reported to the Environment and Sustainability Committee and the Economy and Skills Committee Chair.



## 2. Our Commitment to Nature

**This chapter outlines the key strategies, policies and objectives we have set out to meet our Biodiversity Duty, and the collaborative partnerships involved in progressing these objectives.**

In recognition that many of the city’s challenges can’t be met by the council, or individual business alone, a ‘One City’ partnership was formed which guides how the city tackles the climate and biodiversity crisis. This work is coordinated by the One City Environment Board which meets quarterly to provide scrutiny and strategic oversight for delivery against the City’s adopted climate and ecological targets.

In February 2020, Bristol City Council came together with One City partners to declare an Ecological Emergency in response to the decline in wildlife. The same month, the city also adopted the [One City Climate Strategy](#), which identifies specific objectives for the natural environment that help us to adapt to the changing climate. In September 2020, One City partners agreed the [One City Ecological Strategy](#) as a co-ordinated effort to confront the ecological decline we face and put forward solutions that match the urgency and scale of the issue.

### **This contained four key strategic goals:**

- **Space for nature:** At least 30% of land in Bristol to be managed for the benefit for wildlife by 2030.
- **Pesticides:** Reduce the use of pesticides by at least 50% by 2030.
- **Pollution:** 100% of Bristol’s waterways to have water quality that supports healthy wildlife by 2030.
- **Our wider footprint:** People and businesses to reduce consumption of products that undermine the health of wildlife and ecosystems around the world.

In response to these declarations and strategies Bristol City Council launched its own [Ecological Emergency Action Plan](#) and [Climate Emergency Action Plans](#) the following year. These plans set out the action the council will take to contribute to the aims of the relevant One City strategies. More recently a further strategy, the One City Tree and Woodland Strategy, was approved in February 2024 and sets a target to increase canopy cover from 18% to 20% of the city by 2040 – representing an additional 224ha canopy city wide and a doubling of canopy cover in the 3 wards with lowest cover.



In publishing the Ecological Emergency Action Plan, the council adopted the below performance indicators to help measure progress:

- At least 30% of council land to be managed for the benefit of wildlife by 2030.
- Reduce the use of pesticides for council operations by 50% by 2030.
- 100% of Bristol’s waterways to have water quality that supports healthy life.
- Tree canopy covers at least 20% of the Bristol area by 2035.



Bristol City Council is committed to nature recovery across its corporate functions. The Bristol City Council Corporate Strategy 2022 – 2027 contained policy ENV2: Ecological Recovery, which committed the council to taking action that would “Increase space for nature, reduce the use of pesticides, make waterways cleaner and reduce everyone’s use of products that undermine the health of wildlife and wider ecosystems.” Our updated Corporate Strategy 2025 – 2030 identifies ‘accelerating climate action and nature recovery’ as one of five Council priorities. An objective set out under this priority is to improve the management of land, water and buildings in the city for nature. Our delivery commitment states we will improve management of natural green spaces, create new wildlife friendly habitats and improve wildlife friendly practices to boost the amount of council land managed for nature.

Further council policies and strategies that we have developed to help us meet our biodiversity duty include the [Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2024 – 2039](#), which contains a range of commitments, including actions on improving the management and maintenance of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, and relevant [Local Plan Policies](#) which compliment statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), seeking to conserve, protect and enhance the nature network within development considerations.

Complimentary to the One City partnership, wider collaborative working is a crucial part of how we are delivering nature recovery. Bristol City Council is a funding and active member of the [West of England Nature Partnership \(WENP\)](#), which is an active, ambitious and diverse coalition of non-government organisations (NGOs), local authorities and many other partners from across sectors, working together to support nature’s recovery across the West of England. Other key partnerships in which the council contributes to progressing biodiversity goals include the [Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership \(BACP\)](#), and the [Natural History Consortium \(NHC\)](#). We work with neighbouring Local Authorities, the West of England Combined Authority, local charities, businesses, communities, and landowners on nature recovery.

Participation in landscape, catchment and regional partnerships as outlined above is key to maximising our progress against our objectives for Biodiversity. The partnerships have produced commitments and evidence to aid nature recovery via strategies and plans since 2020, including: [The West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(2024\)](#), which outlines focus areas for nature recovery, and the priority actions to protect and enhance biodiversity in these areas; The [Forest of Avon Plan \(2021\)](#), which set out a collective vision for trees and woodland in the Forest of Avon and helped secure millions of pounds of trees for climate funding for the region, used to create new woodlands, wood pasture, orchards, and hedgerows; The [Bristol Avon Catchment Plan 2022 – 2027](#), which aims to improve water quality and restore biodiversity and ecological connectivity across our rivers and freshwater habitats; and the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership [Fish Recovery Strategy \(2023\)](#), which sets out how we can restore the health of our rivers and bring back thriving fish populations across the catchment.

# 3. Meeting the Biodiversity Duty

**This chapter outlines how Biodiversity Net Gain has been implemented through the development management process.**

## BNG monitoring through development management

Whilst BNG has been a legal requirement since early 2024, there is a lag time between development proposals being submitted, and the approved schemes being built out biodiversity measures being delivered. As such, at the time of writing, the majority of BNG activity at Bristol City Council has been focussed on ensuring the organisation is BNG ready, putting in place internal procedures and upskilling colleagues across Development Management to ensure planning applications are appropriately assessed against BNG principles.

Biodiversity gains within the BNG regime within Bristol have therefore not yet required statutory monitoring, however 5 Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans (HMMPs) have been received and approved, and monitoring of these HMMPs will be required by Officers as per the terms set out therein.

To ensure the additional burden associated with the monitoring of HMMPs and the implementation of BNG measures, BCC is in the process of procuring the industry-leading specialist software package Mycelia, from Verna. This software has been developed and successfully adopted by many LPAs, with the specific capability of managing the complex datasets and forecasting resource requirements which will come with post-permission BNG burdens.

## The use of land as a biodiversity gain site

We recognise that enabling a sufficient supply of biodiversity units from projects within Bristol increases the likelihood that mitigation and enhancement from development would remain in the area.

This is work in progress. The sites remain unregistered while a viable solution to procuring a legal agreement is worked towards. Officers in BCC Parks Service are at the scoping stage, putting together a portfolio of sites to take through the committee process.

The habitats present at these sites comprise grassland, scrub, trees and hedgerows. A review of the habitat types and habitat conditions within these parcels of land is underway. An evaluation of how these habitats can



be enhanced through bespoke management, to improve their condition in accordance with the BNG metric criteria is in progress. Through bespoke management, these habitat enhancements will generate an uplift in biodiversity units. Opportunities to create new habitats (e.g. individual trees, orchards) and hedgerows are also being reviewed.

Once optioneering stage is complete and following successful passage through democratic pathways, the necessary legal steps will be made to register these units on the Biodiversity Gain Site.

## **Supporting the development of a local BNG market**

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In instances where applicants have satisfactorily evidenced that a minimum of 10% BNG uplift cannot be delivered solely within the red line boundary, applicants/developers have committed to securing their BNG uplift through off-site measures; most often, off-site measures have been the purchase of BNG units, from registered BNG unit providers.

Whilst there are no Biodiversity Gains Sites within the boundary of Bristol City Council, there are registered providers within the Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges National Character Area (NCA118) in which BCC is situated.

Bristol City Council Officers have forged working relationships with those providers, and had the opportunity to undertake visits, to view many of the habitats being created through the local BNG market. In addition, BCC officers have guided applicants through the off-site options available to applicants, signposting applicants to BNG unit providers within Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges National Character Area (NCA118), to promote the implementation of biodiversity gains in the local area.

## **Optional quantitative data**

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Biodiversity Net Gain became mandatory under the Environment Act for all 'Major' planning applications 12/02/2024 and became mandatory for 'Minor' planning applications 02/04/2024.

The Environment Act requires the local planning authority to report on:

- Actions carried out to meet BNG obligations.
- Details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved.
- How it plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period.

Quantitative data has been included below to further inform the Statutory Biodiversity Report. The reporting period for this optional quantitative data analysis aligns with the statutory biodiversity reporting period defined by Defra, and considers all applications received by BCC between BNG becoming mandatory (see 3.4.1) and 31/12/2025.

Excluded from the reported data below is all BNG being delivered on a voluntary basis across the city by applications received during the development of the legislation leading up to the mandatory dates quoted in 3.4.1. A number of significant Major site applications are currently being considered within Development Management as reserved matters applications, having been granted outline planning prior to BNG becoming legislation. The delivery of measurable gains for biodiversity for these developments is, in many cases, still being negotiated, and these are not represented in the figures below.

The Nature Conservation Officer is consulted on all planning applications, with the exception of householder applications, where there are planning considerations regarding nature conservation.

Of the planning applications where the Nature Conservation Officer has been consulted, the following types of planning application are within the scope of BNG:

- Full applications.
- Full applications where BCC are the applicant.
- Outline planning applications.
- Reserved Matters applications, where the application for outline permission was validated after the mandatory dates stated above in paragraph 3.1.1 above.

Of the applications received by BCC which fall within these parameters, 116 applications have been granted planning permission (up to 31/12/2025). Of these, 66 have been granted planning permission and deemed exempt from BNG, the vast majority claiming on the grounds of either ‘De Minimis’ or ‘Custom and Self-Build’ exemption criteria. Of the remaining cases, 43 awards of planning permission have been granted, and have assessed as requiring a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, either through on-site measures, off-site units, or statutory credits.

A total of 7 Biodiversity Gain Plans have been submitted and approved. A further 4 have been received and are awaiting review.

**Table 1: Summary of the BNG measures stipulated in the approved BGPs:**

	No. of Approved BGPs	No of Units post-intervention	Average % net gain
<b>On-site BNG only</b>	3	2.56	275%
<b>Off-site BNG only</b>	1	2.09	
<b>A combination of On-site and off-site BNG</b>	3	3.56	
<b>BNG Credits</b>	0	n/a	n/a

Off-site units have largely been secured from Biodiversity Gain Site providers within the boundary of Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges National Character Area (NCA118). A small number of applicants are exploring options to deliver net gains for biodiversity elsewhere within the landownership (‘blue line’ land), with legal terms agreed via either Conservation Covenants or Section106 planning obligations.

Where the appropriate number or type of BNG units have not been available to purchase within the Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges National Character Area, units have been purchased from registered BNG unit providers elsewhere in the country (and accordingly subjected to the spatial risk multiplier).

Within Development Management in Bristol City Council, no statutory credits have been bought through the statutory BNG regime. Applicants/developers have followed the mitigation hierarchy, and have been able to either secure BNG delivery within the red line boundary, or instances where this hasn’t been possible, appropriate off-site units have been secured.

No Irreplaceable Habitats have yet been adversely impacted. No bespoke compensation for the mitigation of such losses has therefore been agreed within the realms of BNG.

Whilst procurement processes are in place, the implementation of a BNG support software package is not yet in place. The production of future Statutory Biodiversity Reports will be facilitated significantly by using Mycelia data management software to generate a more expansive dataset, which can include:

- The number of, and net change in, biodiversity units and area split by habitat type, for example, grassland.
- The results of monitoring activity at a habitat level.

## 4. Taking Action for Nature

**This chapter outlines the actions that Bristol City Council has taken for nature, across all departments, through the delivery of its functions and duties since 2020 and outlines how our strategies and objectives are translated into delivery of programmes and projects on the ground.**

### Hallen Marsh

The Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) is a joint project by Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and the Environment Agency. The project has delivered 17km of tidal flood defence at the Severn Estuary. The Severn Estuary is internationally recognised for its importance to overwintering and migratory waterbirds, holding designations as a Ramsar Site, a Special Protection Area (SPA), and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As part of the ASEA project, two compensatory habitat sites have been created: Hallen Marsh in Bristol and Aust Reserve in South Gloucestershire.

The completed project now provides 80+ hectares of a mix of grassland, woodland and wetland to provide habitat for Severn Estuary bird species and to continue to provide good habitat for water voles. Regular bird surveys conducted by the Bristol Ornithological Club help monitor and assess the ecological success of these sites.



## Floating Ecosystems

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Floating ecosystems are an interlocking floating planter system that can be configured to suit a variety of on-water sites, providing habitat creation and water quality management. An initial phase of floating ecosystem habitat was installed in 2024 at Capricorn Quay, during the Festival of Nature. A total of 700 square metres of habitat was delivered, incorporating over 6000 native plants and 24 trees contributing to rich, diverse habitat. An additional 5580 square metres is planned as part of the Bristol Harbour place shaping strategy. The Council is working on a funding and delivery plan for this upscale of floating ecosystems in Bristol Harbour.

This type of innovative floating habitat creates wetland ecosystem for harbour wildlife. The plant roots provide nursery habitats for fish, while integrated pools provide access for diving birds and otters. It creates a wildlife corridor for invertebrates and pollinators, including butterflies and bees. To support successful establishment, a maintenance contract is in place for the initial years. Long-term care is managed by the Harbour Master's office in collaboration with a local volunteer group.



## Managing Space for Nature

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Managing for Nature is Bristol City Council's strategic initiative to enhance the ecological value of parks and green spaces across the city. Rooted in ecological principles, the project seeks not only to protect nature—but to actively support and restore it. The initiative uses ecological data to guide

land management, focusing on habitat creation and connectivity. By improving wildlife and pollinator corridors, it strengthens Bristol's ecological network and contributes to the broader West of England Nature Recovery Network and strategy. This includes land managed under active habitat management plans and nature conservation specifications.



In alignment with Bristol’s Ecological Emergency target — to have at least 30% of land managed for wildlife by 2030 — the project, funded through the Green Recovery Fund (WECA), is delivering:

- 40 hectares of improved grassland, maintained with nature-friendly mowing regimes.
- 20 hectares of species-rich meadow, created through hay cuts and yellow rattle sowing.
- Stream restoration along the Malago and Pigeonhouse in South Bristol, in partnership with Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART) and local groups.
- Habitat restoration across 10 woodland Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).
- Creation of 5 new wildlife ponds.
- A grazing feasibility study exploring conservation grazing opportunities.

This activity will bring us to 18% of council land managed for nature. In 2025 new grass-cutting regimes were introduced in several sites to support meadow health and biodiversity, while maintaining public access and amenity. Read more here: [How we manage our grasslands](#). Additionally, a new pond was created in Oldbury Court, with support from the Friends of group ARAG, Park Work volunteers, and Avon Wildlife Trust. Local communities are central to the success of this initiative. The Parks team works closely with Friends of Groups—volunteer-led organisations that champion Bristol’s parks and green spaces. Public input helps shape how nature is managed.

## One Tree Per Child and TreeBristol

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Bristol has several [tree planting programmes](#) that plant and manage the tree canopy across parks, streets and verges, schools and other public spaces. One Tree Per Child (OTPC) and [Trees for Streets](#) are initiatives funded through private and corporate sponsorship, planning obligations, grants, and direct support from organisations.

During 2023-24 winter planting season we planted 7,918 trees which raised the percentage of Bristol tree canopy cover to 17.6%. Any trees that had to be replaced are not included in the final figure.

In January 2024, OTPC planted our 100,000th tree at Henbury Open Space, a special event was held, attended by 30 children from Blaise Primary School, volunteers, and project partners. OTPC works with Your Park Bristol and Bath to run volunteer opportunities for tree planting. Volunteering days are essential to the project – they ran 72 Sessions in the planting seasons from April 2023 March 2024. The initiative includes educational programming supporting local primary school children to plant care for and learn about trees in their local communities.



## Community Climate and Nature Action Programme - Really Wild Lockleaze

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Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust is a local organisation that participates in the Community Climate and Nature Action Programme (CCNP). CCNP is a key initiative led by the [Bristol Climate and Nature Partnership](#), with active support from Bristol City Council. Designed to empower local communities, CCNP enables residents to co-create and deliver climate and nature-based activities in their neighbourhoods and city-wide communities, such as the community of disabled people. Through collaborative projects, the programme helps remove barriers to grassroots action and supports community-led transformation of local spaces.



Really Wild Lockleaze is the Trust's community-led project transforming their local area for nature. As well as improving neighbourhoods and community connection, they are showcasing the possibilities of what can be done across housing greens, verges and marginal land. Through a collaborative approach with the council and residents the project has created a replicable model for increasing nature on public land. This work demonstrates how council systems can support the community stewardship of soft landscaping.

As a result of this collaboration, we have worked with the group to amend mowing regimes to support wildflower meadows and hedgerows across Lockleaze. Really Wild Lockleaze have planted 1600m<sup>2</sup> of woodland, 2947m<sup>2</sup> of wildlife meadow, 172.5m of hedgerow and created five ponds on public spaces. Read more about their work from their [2025 summary report](#).

## Partnership projects

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Some of the highlights of the results of our partnership working since 2021 are:

- River Frome Reconnected partnership involving Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and the Environment Agency, which is delivering some natural flood management measures, a riverside enhancement project, and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) retrofits.
- Together with the Forest of Avon Trust, a successful bid enabled the [Western Forest](#) to be chosen as England's second National Forest, with £7.5 million of funding for more trees and woodland across the West of England, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The Western Forest will result in the creation of at least 2,500 hectares of new woodland and other tree habitats (such as agroforestry and orchards) in the first five years.
- The council recently secured £1m funding from the Nature Towns and Cites grant programme for a Bristol wide partnership programme exploring new ways of working between the council, VSCE organisations and residents to make it easier for communities to take action for nature in their local area on council owned land.
- The West of England Nature Partnership published a Nature Recovery Prospectus in 2022, setting out the projects and programmes that would be the most strategic contributions to delivering the Nature Recovery Network. In 2024, this was followed by nine thematic [Priority Programmes](#), informed by the LNRS, that would deliver the most impact and could become investment-ready.

# 5. Looking ahead for Nature

**Future actions we plan to take are captured in the refreshed Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2026 – 2028. This three-year action plan sets out how the council will continue to meet its biodiversity duty and work towards achieving the targets that it set back in 2021.**

## Examples of actions include:

- Establish procedure for delivering BNG uplift on council owned land.
- Develop a pipeline of fundable business cases that will help the council to achieve its Managing Space for Nature aspirations and deliver on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Commission a report to identify suitable reptile receptor sites on Council owned sites and non-council owned sites. Report to be undertaken with other landowners including Network Rail and Highways England.
- Identify, implement and monitor ecological enhancements, including delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain and Urban Greening Factor, in new capital and corporate projects.

This work is further supported by a series of recent policies, strategies and projects that will be delivered by the council and it's partners over next 5 years; these include:

- The new Bristol Local Plan (due for adoption 2026) which contains policies related to biodiversity net gain and maintaining the connectivity and integrity of the nature recovery network.
- The Bristol City Council Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- Bristol Tree and Woodland Strategy.
- Bristol City Council Managing Space for Nature Project (to 2027).
- Bristol Nature Together Project (to 2027).
- Bristol Harbour Place Shaping Strategy Waterspace Plan 2025–2030.

As outlined by our Managing for Nature project, one of our current areas of focus is managing more of the land on the Council's estate for nature; this will require seeking public and private funding to enhance our existing habitats and create new ones. Our ambition is to manage 30% of our estate for nature by 2030, which will require managing more of our woodlands, improving grassland management, bringing new sites into positive management for nature, and working with tenants. We have secured two years' worth of funding which has helped make progress towards this ambition and will be seeking further funding through public (e.g. Countryside Stewardship) and private (e.g. biodiversity net gain) sources.



Finally, as mentioned above, the council are onboarding software which will improve data management processes for BNG information within development management. This should provide an enriched understanding for the next reporting cycle and assist in managing the increasing number of plans received, as the lag time closes between the inception of BNG requirements and the pre-commencement approvals for plans that have been approved during this timeframe.

# 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

**The council started monitoring its progress against key performance indicators following the publication of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan in 2021. Baseline data was captured and progress has been reported annually.**

## Since baseline data was captured, we have:

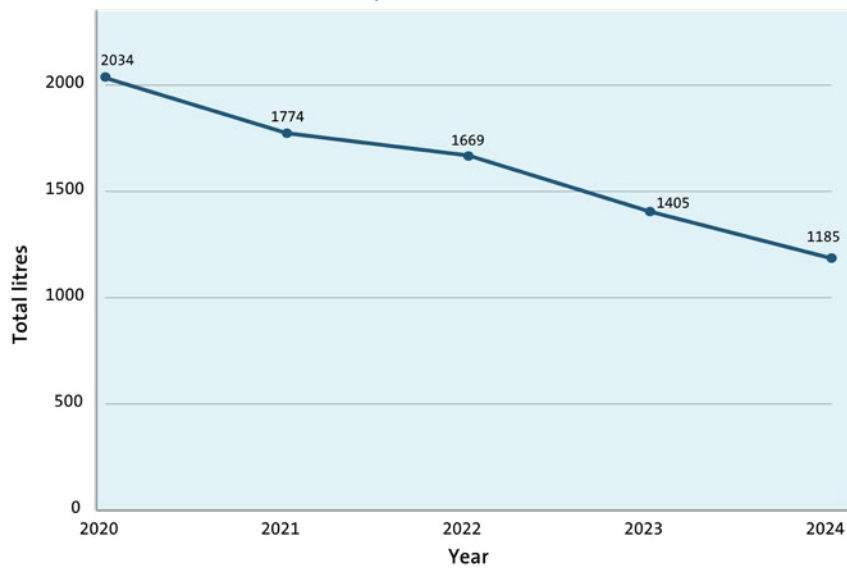
- Reduced the use of pesticides by 42% (figure 1) and have made excellent progress in moving towards our target of 50% reduction by 2030. In November 2025, the council published its first Weed Management Policy which sets out how the council will manage weeds, including how it will minimise the use of glyphosate. This new action plan (which sits within the main Ecological Emergency Action Plan) contains steps that will further help the council's progress towards this target.
- Planted 43,523 trees and contributed to a canopy cover increase of 145 hectares, taking the total cover for the city to 18.2% (figure 2).
- Added 145 hectares — an area equal to over 200 football pitches — of council land to our Managing for Nature project, since 2022, bringing the total to 878 hectares (17.2%) (figure 3). This initiative involves actively implementing habitat management plans to enhance biodiversity, including on most council-managed SNCLs and other green spaces.
- All rivers in Bristol are still achieving 'moderate' for ecological health from the Water Framework Directive (monitored by the Environment Agency).
- There has been a 15% increase (to 68%) of residents reporting that they have created space for nature in the city through the Quality-of-Life Survey (figure 4).

At the regional level, we are part of multiple initiatives to improve our understanding of the state of nature in the West of England, including developing a Wildlife Index that enables us to better understand how different species are faring in the West of England, and producing a comprehensive State of Nature Report for the region.

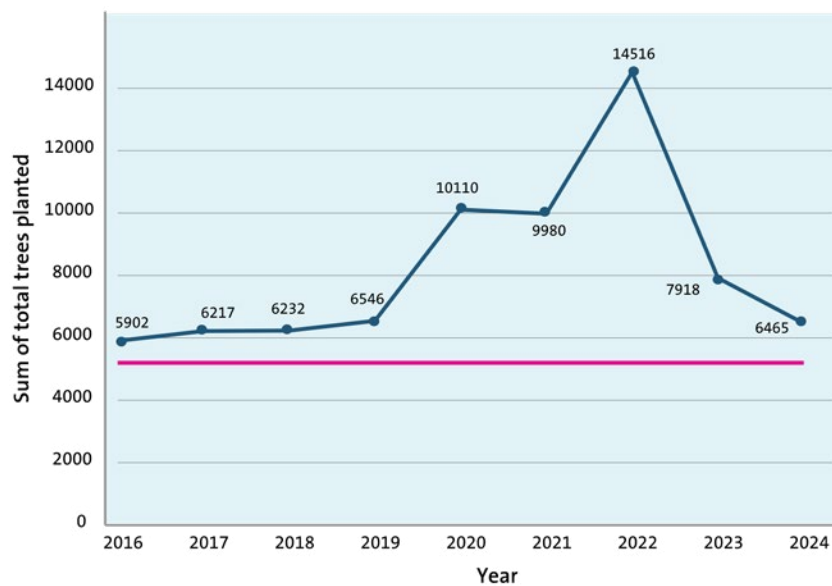
At the local level, there is also a lot to be gained from citizen science initiatives and species monitoring received from local groups. Reports are regularly created by such groups to report on wildlife sightings and trends in specific localities or for specific species. Bristol has active citizens that care for biodiversity, and ongoing work could be progressed to ensure this local knowledge is captured as part of the city wide monitoring approach within the next reporting cycle.



**Figure 1: BCC pesticide use in litres**



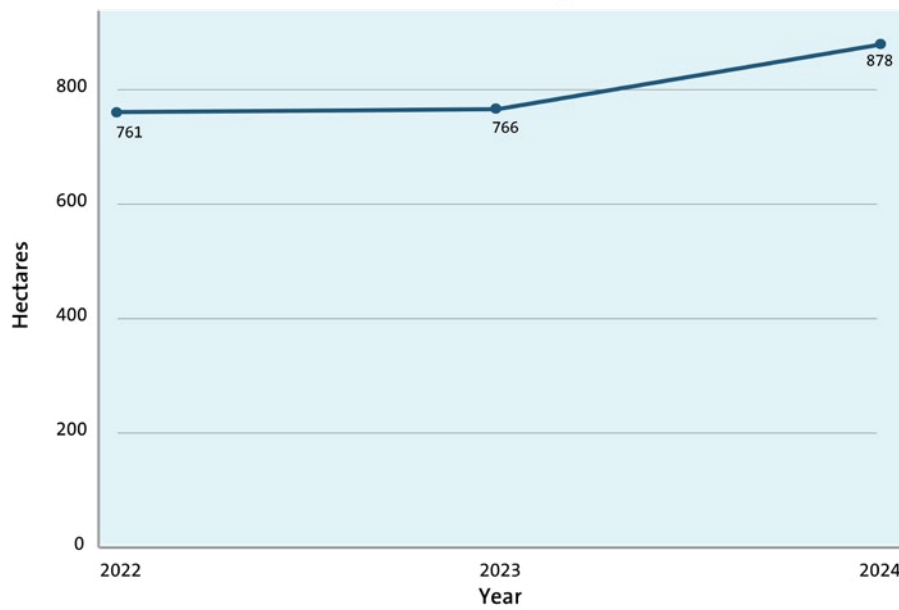
**Figure 2: Number of trees planted by BCC per year**



The blue line shows the number of trees planted and the red line is the target of 5000 trees per year, which has been exceeded every year since 2016 and has increased since the declaration of the Ecological Emergency. The numbers of trees planted in a given year fluctuates depending on a number of factors including the weather. A peak in 22/23 can be seen due to a fruit tree programme in schools. The number of tree planted each year contributes to overall canopy cover of the city which currently sits at 18.2%. There is a target in the Bristol Tree and Woodland Strategy to increase canopy cover for the city to 20%. The council contributes towards this through its tree planting programme on council land. More information available in further reports: [One Tree Per Child](#).

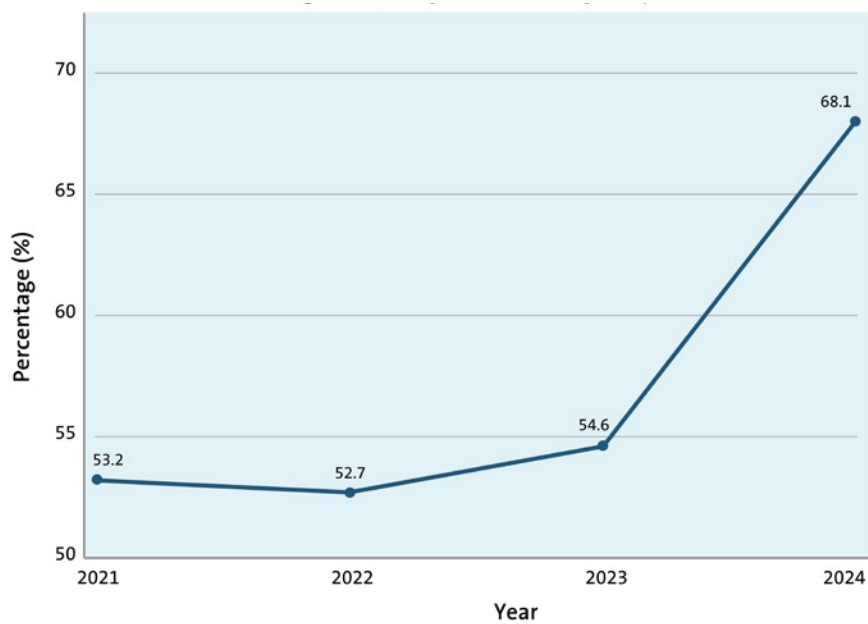
**Figure 3: Hectares of BCC land managed for nature**

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**Figure 4: The Percentage of Quality of Life Survey Respondents who have “Created Space for Nature”**

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# Conclusion

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Wildlife on a global and national scale remains in crisis, and our city is no exception. Our habitats continue to be under multiple, intensifying, and interconnected pressures. Species continue to decline.

Funding and resources remain a major obstacle to doing more for nature as a local authority. Budgetary pressures, caused by a combination of previous funding cuts from central government and increasing demand on statutory services (including adult and social care), has meant that resources available to deliver nature recovery are limited.

This is particularly problematic for the management of parks and green spaces, and for monitoring and enforcing planning requirements on developments. With the new requirement for developments to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and improved Green Infrastructure standards, the need for resources to monitor and enforce compliance with these requirements will be even more pressing.

We have made use of a range of funding sources, including grants from the West of England Combined Authority and from National Lottery funding, to deliver much of our work on nature recovery over the past five years and enable our current work. BNG funding from DEFRA has funded our BNG officer post – doubling our capacity for assessment and approval of BNG requirements. We are exploring alternative sources of income, such as from BNG, to continue to deliver our ambitions for nature.

While the logic behind BNG is that development results in a greater amount of biodiversity than there was beforehand, ensuring this is delivered will continue to be a significant challenge due to, among other factors, the potential lack of resources for monitoring and compliance.

We will also need to work in partnership to ensure that recreational pressure on existing habitats is appropriately managed and mitigated; as well as working with developers and regulators to minimise other potential impacts of development on biodiversity that aren't considered by BNG (e.g. pollution resulting from construction, disturbance, and severance of habitats etc.).

Increasingly, adaptation to a changing climate is becoming more of a challenge both to biodiversity itself, with species unable to adapt to the speed of climate change, and to how we deliver nature recovery. In the next five years, we will need to be increasingly conscious of the impacts of flooding and droughts on the habitats that we and partners manage, as well as the risk of wildfire and how we mitigate this. The need to rapidly adapt to a changing climate does also present opportunities to deliver nature recovery via nature-based solutions (e.g. for natural flood management, water storage, and reducing heat stress).

We have interconnected strategies, plans, policies and projects driving action for nature recovery and biodiversity – and will continue to progress work to reverse the decline.

