Biodiversity Duty Report and Action Plan

Cheshire West and Chester Council

March 2026

Cheshire West and Chester

Contents

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the biodiversity actions that Cheshire West and Chester Council has undertaken since the Environment Act 2021 fully came into force in February 2024 and those that we are working on over the next reporting period.

Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) continues to fulfil and exceed its statutory Biodiversity Duty through coordinated, cross-departmental action, starting with the planning process and expanding into nature recovery strategies across the Council.

The Council manages nearly 3,000 hectares of public open space, leads the Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy, delivers major habitat creation programmes, embeds biodiversity into planning and infrastructure, and works closely with communities, schools, and partners to restore nature across the borough.

In addition to safeguarding and improving opportunities for nature, these biodiversity actions also deliver significant environmental, social, economic, and service efficiency benefits, including reduced long-term maintenance costs, improved climate resilience, enhanced public wellbeing, increased natural capital, and strengthened local economies through tourism, green skills, and investment.

As well as giving an overview of the work done so far, this report provides an indication of what actions the Council could take in the future to improve nature conservation and recovery.

The report covers the period from February 2024 to January 2026. The next reporting period will be January 2026 to January 2029.

2. What is the Biodiversity Duty?

The Statutory Biodiversity Duty was first introduced by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act in 2006 which required that ‘every

public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of these functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. In 2021, the Environment Act (Section Page 2 of 22 102 and 103) strengthened this duty by amending Section 40 of the NERC Act for public authorities to enhance, as well as conserve biodiversity. More specifically, local authorities Section 40 (1)) "must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective." "The general biodiversity objective" is defined as "the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through the exercise of functions".

This means that, as a public authority, we must, in exercising our functions:

- Consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on our consideration.
- Act to deliver our policies and achieve our objectives.

Examples, of exercising of functions and meeting our biodiversity duty are; considering biodiversity in planning decisions, delivering habitat creation and enhancement on council-owned land, using biodiversity-friendly mowing regimes in highways maintenance or using sensitive highway lighting strategies near valuable habitats.

3. The Local Picture

The UK is amongst the lowest 10% of countries for biodiversity in the world. Since the 1990s, there has been an unprecedented decline in nature in the UK with 25% of mammals facing extinction and 43% of bird species at risk.

Cheshire holds the unfortunate record of having lost more species than in any other rural county in England, with 156 species going extinct since 1950. In addition, there has been declines in all priority habitats since 1980, the starkest figure being the loss of 99% of species rich grasslands in Cheshire since the Second World War. In 1976, the county had more hedgerows than any other county in England, which have now declined by two thirds. Cheshire had in the region of 41,000 ponds a century ago, which has declined to only 16,000. Although a modest amount of woodland across

our landscape still exists, many older woodlands have not been positively managed since the 1940's. Pressure on nature from development, intensification of land use as a result of common agricultural policy, pollution and climate change, has led to habitat loss, fragmentation and the landscape not functioning as well as it once did. Factors such as increased flooding, less water entering our groundwaters, greater run-off, soil loss, poor condition of our rivers, fewer pollinators mean that the landscape and the habitats in it are degraded.

Withstanding the woeful backstory, Cheshire West Borough is still host to some important remaining habitats, like the Dee Estuary, River Dee, Mersey Estuary and Meres and Mosses, which are important on an international scale. There is also a network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and Local Wildlife Sites. There are 492 Local Wildlife Sites in the Borough, designated in partnership with Cheshire Wildlife Trust and other partners, to ensure that our locally important habitats are protected and taken into account in development proposals.

4. Existing Plans and Policies

The Council declared in 2019 that the borough is in a Climate Emergency and produced a Climate Emergency Response Plan. Two plans have been produced setting out these challenges and the actions that will be taken to achieve carbon neutrality in the borough. The first is the Climate Emergency Response Plan which focuses on the borough wide response to both the climate and nature crisis. The second is the Carbon Management Plan which focuses on the Council's response. Significant progress has been made in the delivery of these aspirations, with the Council's organisational emissions dropping by 77.1% since the baseline year, 2014-15. Borough-wide emissions have also reduced from 4.3m tons of CO2e in 2019, to 3.2m tons in 2022.

The Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan sets policies to protect and enhance designated sites, habitats and species. Within policies ENV4 and DM44 is the requirement to achieve "no net loss" of biodiversity, and wherever possible, net gains, in development proposals, as well as setting out the protection of designated

sites, habitats and species. Policy ENV3 Green Infrastructure also sets out how urban tree planting can be used in terms of other ecosystem services.

The Council Plan for the Borough 2024-2028 describes six missions, one of which is Greener Communities; Individuals, public services and businesses take action to move to tackle the climate emergency, achieve net zero, protect the natural environment and adapt to the impact of climate change.

The Mersey Forest Plan incorporates the borough and provides a long-term strategic guide for how The Mersey Forest partnership will grow, manage, and protect woodlands and green spaces across Cheshire and Merseyside. CW&C is the lead authority, budget holder, employer of staff, governance coordinator, and central accountable body for the partnership.

CW&C is the accountable body for the national Trees for Climate programme, a DEFRA initiative which in the last 5 years has delivered in excess of 40% of England's tree planting via partnerships with the UK's 15 community forests, the National Trust and Woodland Trust.

The Cheshire West and Chester Land Action Plan is the Council's strategic plan for how land in the borough will be used to help tackle the climate emergency and nature emergency. It focuses specifically on the land use, adaptation, and climate repair theme of the Council's wider Climate Emergency Response Plan.

The plan aims to ensure that, by 2045, all land in west Cheshire actively contributes to:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Produce food sustainably
- Capturing and storing carbon
- Restoring and enhancing nature and biodiversity
- Helping communities adapt to climate impacts such as flooding, heatwaves and droughts
- Supporting biodiversity

- Providing a resilient outdoor recreation and visitor resource; connecting people with nature and promoting wellbeing

The Council acknowledges climate change as a major threat to wellbeing and the economy and recognises that nature recovery and habitat restoration is essential for a healthy, resilient environment.

5. Actions Implemented So Far

5a. Planning Policy and Systems

The implementation of the Environment Act starts with the application of biodiversity net gain in the planning system. Prior to the enactment of the Environment Act, CWAC was already implementing requirement for measurable biodiversity net gain through the “no net loss” policy under Local Plan Policy DM44, so was ahead in terms of implementation in the planning system. In addition to this work already undertaken to safeguard and enhance biodiversity in development management, the Council has since undertaken extensive work to implement the statutory duty enacted under the Environment Act, to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity for all planning applications subject to the biodiversity net gain requirement. This has included the following:

- Upskilling and expanding the Biodiversity Team to implement the new statutory guidance with associated technical application
- Setting up collaborative working processes between Planning Validation Teams, Planning Officers and Biodiversity Officers to ensure the new biodiversity validation requirements for planning applications are met, thereby speeding up the process for developers
- Formulating thresholds for significant biodiversity gains on development sites, to ensure biodiversity gains are recognised and secured, contributing towards the biodiversity enhancement in Cheshire West
- Formulating a biodiversity net gain monitoring fee schedule to ensure those biodiversity net gains are secured, monitored and delivered for the required 30-year period

- Working with Legal and Section 106 teams to create legal agreement templates to secure biodiversity gains, to ensure an efficient process
- Assessing planning applications in detail, to ensure that biodiversity net gain outcomes from development are realistic, measurable and contribute to the wider ecological network of the Borough
- Facilitating a pipeline of biodiversity net gain unit demand for habitat delivery across the borough
- Advising teams across the Council such as Capital Projects, Regeneration, Highways and Property in terms of general biodiversity and biodiversity net gain advice, to ensure projects run smoothly and have the best outcome for biodiversity

In addition, CWAC is using its existing powers in terms of Section 106 agreements to facilitate the early BNG market. This is done to by working with external private landowners to create a system to enable the registering of habitat banks to provide habitats at scale across the Borough. This ensures biodiversity is retained and enhanced in the Borough. Below are the private habitat bank units and hectares secured so far.

Habitat Type	Creation (hectares)	Creation (units)	Enhancement (hectares)	Enhancement (units)
Other neutral grassland	19.6	191		
Orchard	0.7	4.5		
Heathland/Scrub	3	27.67	1.7	2.8
Ponds	0.1	1	0.4	4.55
Woodland	1.9	2.7	5	65
Trees	0.06	0.2	0.05	0.5

The table above shows private habitat biodiversity net gain units created or enhanced.

5b. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) information

The Biodiversity Team have been consulted on 1,444 planning applications from February 2024 to January 2026, of which 416 have been subject to statutory biodiversity net gain. This section of the report reports on all biodiversity gains secured through planning applications from February 2024 to January 2026, which is a small percentage of the applications, due to time periods between developers receiving their planning permissions and being ready to discharge their planning conditions.

The following covers all approved planning applications with biodiversity gain plans.

Planning Applications Approved Requiring Biodiversity Net Gain

Consented applications requiring net gains	Number	Proportion
Total number of planning permissions granted that require biodiversity net gain in the reporting period	56	1.98%
Total number of planning permissions granted in the reporting period where an exemption to the biodiversity net gain condition applies	2831	
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period	9	
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through on-site units only	8	89%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through off-site units only	0	0%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through statutory credits only	0	0%
Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period securing BNG through a combination of on-site and off-site units	1	11%
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%
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%
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%

This table shows that of the 2831 Planning applications granted in the reporting period (February 2024 to January 2026), 56 were assessed as being subject to the statutory condition requiring submission of a Biodiversity Gain Plan (1.98%). Biodiversity net gain implementation in Planning is still in the early stages and further analysis on this will be carried out at the next reporting period. Of those 56 applications, 18 have applied to have their Biodiversity gain plan condition discharged and 9 have had their biodiversity gain condition discharged in the reporting period. 89% of those had gains on-site only, with 11% having a mix of on-site and off-site gains and none having off-site units only or buying statutory credits. This demonstrates that the team is working hard to apply the mitigation hierarchy and working with developers to ensure their developments are integrating biodiversity at the site level and retaining and enhancing biodiversity in the Cheshire West Borough.

Overall expected gains and losses across all biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period

Overall expected gains and losses	**Total or Average**		
	Area	Hedgerow	Watercourse
Total number of pre-development biodiversity units approved on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	32.3	5.36	0.9
Total number of post-development biodiversity units approved on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	35.68	6.75	0.98
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, on-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	3.38	1.49	0.08
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, on-site	10.46%	27.79%	8.88%
Total number of baseline biodiversity units approved off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	6.42	0	0.02
Total number of post-intervention biodiversity units approved off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	9.97	0	0.06
Total net unit change in biodiversity units, off-site broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	3.54	0	0.04
Average percentage (%) change in biodiversity units, off-site	55.14%	0%	33.33%

Total number of biodiversity units offset using statutory credits broken down by area/hedgerow/watercourse	0	0	0
Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits)	6.92	1.49	0.12
Average percentage (%) change (including statutory credits)	17.87%	27.79%	13.04%

This table shows from the biodiversity gain plans approved, that the average percentage change in biodiversity on site is 10.46% habitat units, 27.79% hedgerow units and 8.88% watercourse units. This shows that planning applications approved by CWAC are achieving the majority of their biodiversity net gain targets on site, with a small percentage of watercourse units being provided off-site to achieve their overall 10% net gain. This is likely due to the difficulty in enhancing watercourse units on site. In addition, perhaps as predicted, hedgerow unit gains are the easiest to achieve on development sites, likely due to retention of existing hedgerows on site boundaries and requirement for boundary landscape treatments already established in the planning system. In addition, off-site gains look to be easier to achieve, likely due to less restriction in terms of the development footprint itself.

In terms of impacts on irreplaceable habitats, there were no biodiversity gain plans approved that had any impact on irreplaceable habitats.

Location of off-site Biodiversity Units

Location of off-site biodiversity units	**Total**			**Proportion**		
	Area	Hedgerow	Watercourse	Area	Hedgerow	Watercourse
Number of off-site biodiversity units located inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site.	3.54	0	0	100%	0%	0%
Number of off-site biodiversity units located outside LPA or NCA of impact site, but in neighbouring LPA or NCA	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%

Number of off-site number of off-site units located outside of LPA or NCA of impact site and neighbouring LPA or NCA	0	0	0.04	0%	0%	100%

This table shows that of all the off-site area habitat units, all of these were secured in the Borough and of the small fraction of off-site watercourse units, these were all secured outside of the borough and Neighbouring authority. This is due to the lack of availability of watercourse units in registered habitat banks within the Borough and the early development stage of the BNG market.

Results of monitoring biodiversity gains

As the BNG system is in the early stages, the only figure reported here was the number of applications with approved biodiversity gain plans including the delivery of 'significant' on-site gains, which was 7 applications: so, 77.78% of the approved biodiversity gain plans (9 applications). Monitoring results will likely be more available in the next reporting period.

Composition of Biodiversity Gains

The following tables show the composition of biodiversity gain secured by the planning system by area, hedgerow and watercourse units.

Area Units:

Habitat Type – Area	Total BNG units at baseline	Total ha at baseline	Total BNG units post - development	Total ha post - development	Net change in BNG units	Net change in ha
Cropland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grassland	19.69	6.36	22.82	5.32	3.13	-1.03
Heathland and Scrub	7.37	0.94	8.34	0.78	0.98	-0.16
Lakes	0	0	0.2	0.03	0.2	0.03

Sparsely Vegetated Land	0	0	0.02	0	0.02	0
Urban	0.37	3.82	1.63	4.99	1.26	1.18
Wetland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Woodland and Forest	0.41	0.09	0.7	0.09	0.29	0
Intertidal sediment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coastal Saltmarsh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rocky Shore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coastal Lagoons	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intertidal Hard Structures	0	0	0	0	0	0
Watercourse footprint	0	0	0	0	0	0
Individual Trees	11.46	1.41	12.59	2.17	1.13	0.76
Total					**6.98**	**0.77**

This table shows that of the 9 planning applications that discharged their biodiversity gain plan condition, nearly 1ha of habitat was created or enhanced and nearly 7 units of biodiversity gains were secured.

Hedgerow Units:

Habitat type - hedgerows and lines of trees	**Total BNG units at baseline**	**Total km at baseline**	**Total BNG units post - development**	**Total km post - development**	**Net change in BNG units**	**Net change in km**
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Species-rich native hedgerow with trees	2.16	0.18	2.19	0.2	0.03	0.02

Species-rich native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native hedgerow with trees - associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Species -rich native hedgerow	2.42	0.26	3.49	0.38	1.07	0.12
Native hedgerow - associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native hedgerow with trees	0.3	0.04	0.3	0.04	0	0
Ecologically valuable line of trees	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecologically valuable line of trees - associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native hedgerow	0.46	0.12	1.11	0.26	0.64	0.14
Line of trees	0.23	0.02	0.23	0.06	0	0.04
Line of trees associated with bank or ditch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.05	-0.02	-0.02
Total					1.72	0.3

This table shows that of the 9 planning applications that discharged their biodiversity gain plan condition, nearly 2 hedgerow units were secured, equal to approximately 300m of hedgerow.

Watercourse Units:

Habitat type – watercourse	Total BNG units at baseline	Total km at baseline	Total BNG units post - development	Total km post - development	Net change in BNG units	Net change in km
Priority Habitat	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Rivers and Streams	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ditches	0.93	0.26	1.04	0.29	0.03	0.11
Canals	0	0	0	0	0	0
Culverts	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total					0.02	0.11

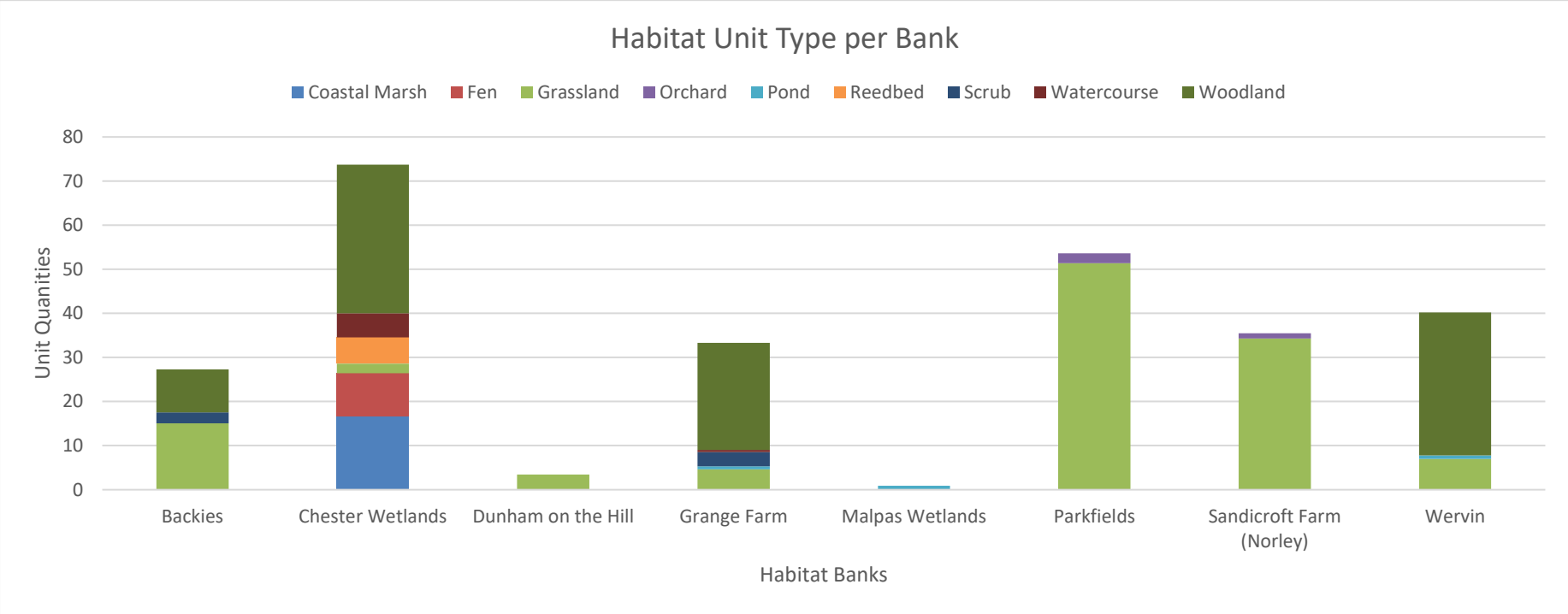
This table shows that of the 9 planning applications that discharged their biodiversity gain plan condition, 110m of watercourse units were secured.

5c. Strategic Habitat Delivery

The Council has proactively designated some of its own land for the strategic delivery of habitats across the Borough, supporting the Council's ambition to create woodland, in partnership with Mersey Forest and to provide BNG units to the market as a habitat bank. This allows provision of mitigation for major infrastructure projects and the loss of habitats on development sites, when no other options are available, to be compensated for in a strategic system.

Current development of larger sites (including many not listed below), across a 400-hectare estate enables delivery, at scale, for a more cohesive approach than fragmented habitat compensation on isolated development sites, ensuring the long-term resilience of habitats and species recovery (significantly contributing toward delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy). Collaborative working between the Green Infrastructure and Climate Change teams has allowed a blended funding approach to achieve cross-Council aims for the Climate Emergency and biodiversity delivery.

Habitat Bank	Coastal Marsh	Fen	Grassland	Orchard	Pond	Reedbed	Scrub	Watercourse	Woodland	Total Units
Backies	0	0	15.08	0	0	0	2.44	0	9.76	**27.28**
Chester Wetlands	16.51	9.90	2.15	0	0	5.97	0	5.49	33.69	**73.71**
Dunham on the Hill	0	0	3.41	0	0	0	0	0	0	**3.41**
Grange Farm	0	0	4.63	0	0.70	0.00	3.21	0.49	24.29	**33.32**
Malpas Wetlands	0	0	0	0	0.92	0	0	0	0	**0.92**
Parkfields	0	0	51.39	2.18	0	0	0	0	0	**53.57**
Sandicroft Farm (Norley)	0	0	34.29	1.21	0	0	0	0	0	**35.50**
Wervin	0	0	7.00	0	0.81	0	0	0	32.37	**40.18**



The two charts above show the habitat types and BNG unit amount planned or being delivered on small proportion of Council-owned habitat bank estate. These do not include 300ha of sites acquired and where some works have commenced 25/26.

Cheshire West and Chester Council have a strong background in woodland establishment, tree planting and habitat creation and continues to be the host authority for The Mersey Forest, Cheshire and Merseyside's Community Forest.

Before this last planting season, a number of new woodlands have been created across Council and community land in many of our urban centres and at rural locations such as Wervin, Picton, Mickle Trafford and Barrow, most thanks to funding support via the national Trees for Climate programme, helping to boost biodiversity and contributing to Cheshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Newly planted trees

This winter, four new sites (At Picton, Saughall, Ledsham and Dutton) have been planted on approximately 300ha of Council owned land, with an estimated 200,000 trees going in the ground in phase one. Picton (Ash Heys Forest), next to the M53, includes riparian planting along a brook on the site, plus a series of natural flood management interventions, which will decrease the risk of flooding on the site and in the wider catchment. Other sites at Saughall (Shotwick Park) and Dutton (Union Forest) will buffer and extend resilience to existing woodland and historic parkland. Whilst the site at Ledsham will provide a much-needed percentage of wet woodland, very rare in the borough.

Sequoia sempervirens, the Coast Redwood, which is under threat from wildfires in its native America, and the native Common Ash resilience program - using natural colonisation to select specimens resilient to Ash Die Back, have been introduced on some sites. The aim is to preserve these two species from disease and climate change (1 in 3 tree species is under threat of extinction). The Picton and Saughall sites include planting to help with noise and traffic pollution in the area as they mature.

The new woodlands are part of a strategy to create a ‘safe space for nature’, incorporating a wide range of complimentary habitats such as wetlands and bodies of water (ponds, ephemeral ponds and scrapes), grassland and wood pasture with a diverse species of flora, hedgerows and protection of veteran/aging trees.

Existing woodlands have been incorporated within the designs and will be managed for disease and climate resilience using established silvicultural systems. The combination of the diverse habitats and ecotones will maximise opportunities for flora and fauna to occupy, flourish and disperse along habitat corridors.

A system of monitoring species, changes in floristic composition, invertebrates, bird populations and mammals is established will be part of the Biodiversity Net Gain Habitat Monitoring and Management Plan for all sites. All woodlands and forests created will contribute towards new priorities under the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Many of these sites are important strongholds for Great Crested Newt, and some are even contributing towards initiatives to help species like Water Voles recover in the county (a priority in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy).

All the small woodlands that have been planted to date are showing increases in fauna, with invertebrate populations improving in diversity and numbers, especially dragon and damsel flies and butterflies. Barn Owls have also been spotted at some the woodland sites and surveying is underway before Barn Owl reintroduction is considered across other appropriate sites. Other protected sites are also present.

Carbon Sequestration

The woodlands are part of the Cheshire West and Chester Council's climate strategy and the combined areas will sequester approximately 76,000 tonnes of carbon by year 30.

Linking People and Nature

Linking people with nature is an important part of aim of the woodland creation. We work in close liaison with all Parish Councils where our sites are located. The sites have an all-year program of volunteering and educational opportunities that allow

volunteers to enhance and maintain the woodlands and be part of species monitoring.

A Friends Group is being formed to help with the development and management of Shotwick Park, as the largest site, closely positioned next to a large village, representing well over a third of our habitat estate. Many sites are also being used to aid Forestry and Ecological training of staff, volunteers and partner organisations.

Sustainable Silviculture

The woodlands are managed by a continuous cover silvicultural system with small parcels of high quality of timber and forest products. By selective felling and long-term rotations (60 -100 years) within sub compartments and combined with a 15-year coppice regime, the woodland will provide revenue for management. The silvicultural system used will eventually create a diverse age and canopy structure vital to support biodiversity across the sites. The forest designs have been carefully considered to be able to respond to future tree diseases and climate threats, allowing species changes without compromising the woodland as a whole.

Community Orchards

Over the last 4yrs, the Green Infrastructure Team have supported more than 12 communities to create new community orchards, including a couple as part of our habitat banks, bringing back old Cheshire and other heritage varieties, with pruning training for volunteers to help people take care and make use of these spaces, strengthening a sense of community and pride. Funding from Mersey Forest ‘Trees for Climate’ fund have helped to provide the trees across many of these sites.

Networks for Nature

Cheshire West and Chester Council are a partner in Networks for Nature. Networks for Nature is a large, landscape-scale conservation project led by Chester Zoo and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Its core purpose is to restore, connect, and enhance wildlife habitats across approximately 60 square miles of Northwest Cheshire, stretching from the River Dee to the River Mersey, including Chester and Ellesmere Port.

Key aims of Networks for Nature

- Drive nature recovery by creating and connecting diverse habitats
- Make nature accessible and inclusive to improve wellbeing
- Empower communities through volunteering, school programmes, and Wildlife Champion training
- Establish long-term partnerships supporting conservation and stewardship

The Council is responsible for delivering new habitats and growing local use and community involvement in caring for nature. The Backies at Lache is being turned into a nature reserve for local people to enjoy, a large-scale wetland restoration project is planned to re-naturalise a tributary of the Dee, providing new wetland habitats, providing a new carbon sink and increasing local flood resilience – Chester Wetlands. There are other projects to improve species rich grassland within urban and urban fringe areas, plus initiatives for ‘green subscribing’ and to grow wider volunteering to record and care for nature. These projects will answer priorities set in the LNRS, in relation to the following themes: Watercourses, Grasslands, Nature-based Solutions and Urban.

5d. District Level Licensing for Great Crested Newts

Cheshire West and Chester Council are the Habitat Delivery Body for District Level Licencing (DLL) in Cheshire West. DLL is a landscape-scale scheme run by Natural England, that aims to improve great crested newt (GCN) populations across England by restoring and creating ponds that are connected to suitable terrestrial habitat. The scheme is funded by payments from developers, with the aim being that rather than small, isolated pockets of habitats provided on individual development sites, the funds are better spent on a larger landscape scale approach. The locations of the ponds are determined by Strategic Opportunity Area (SOA) modelling, which have been mapped as ‘Core’ and ‘Fringe’ areas based on distance from known GCN records. Over 54% of Cheshire is within a SOA - 19.35% within a Core area, 35% in a Fringe area.

The county of Cheshire once had more than 41,000 ponds, but this has reduced to 16,000 ponds over the last century, as ponds have become overgrown and filled in.

This reduction reduces flood resilience, increases run off, soil loss and compromises the ability of the landscape to hold water and more slowly release it to our groundwater reserves and rivers, to help maintain water quality and year-round availability for public water, industrial and agricultural abstraction.

DLL was first introduced in 2017, with Cheshire being one of the pilot areas for the scheme. Since then, we have worked with landowners, including farmers, homeowners, Parish Councils and local wildlife groups, across the borough to create and restore over 180 ponds, with the hope of reaching over 200 by the end of the 2026-27 delivery year.

Strict criteria must be adhered to in order to make ponds suitable for GCN; a minimum size of 200m2, at least 60% of the south side of the pond to be kept free from shade, fenced off from livestock, free from invasive plant species, and no fish or waterfowl introduced or encouraged. Habitats such as scrub, hedgerow, woodland or good quality grassland must also be present within 100m to ensure that there are opportunities for GCN foraging, commuting and hibernation when they are not in the pond to breed.

Following delivery, the ponds are monitored by trained staff within the Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure team to ensure that they are maintained to a good standard. In the 2025 Monitoring Year (April – June), 56% of DLL ponds in Cheshire West tested positive for GCN, higher than the national average (approximately 39%).

An additional benefit to the Council being a habitat delivery body for DLL in Cheshire West is the relationships built with landowners and the farming community. Since the scheme has started, we have found that many landowners are keen to know the monitoring results and go above and beyond the minimum criteria requirements to improve their land for GCN and other wildlife. Council ecologists often advise and support these biodiversity enhancements where possible.

5e. Tree & Woodland Strategy

Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Tree and Woodland Strategy treat over 200,000 trees as a £7 billion asset. The trees around Grosvenor Park in Chester

have a capital value of £10 million alone, and are vital to the urban park, historic and tourism setting.

The Tree & Woodland Strategy provides a framework for how the Council manages, protects, and enhances its woodland and tree assets across the borough. It sets consistent standards for safety, maintenance, planting, planning, and long-term stewardship. A new Tree Risk Management Plan has recently been developed to update priorities, policies and practices to manage tree management risks.

With recent planting CW&C have well over 400,000 trees under the Council's ownership when including the full estate.

These assets form a major part of the borough's green infrastructure and local identity.

Trees deliver key benefits including:

- Improved air quality, habitat creation, and ecological network support
- Flood risk reduction and climate mitigation through carbon storage
- Urban cooling and heat regulation
- Recreational and wellbeing value for residents
- Economic gains such as enhanced property values, repeat visits, longer dwelling time and greater spending in retail areas.

The strategy commits the Council to:

- Safe Management of Trees and Woodlands
- Systematic inspections, risk-based zoning, and consistent monitoring to reduce hazards while maintaining tree health.
- High Standards for all Council-Owned Trees
- Clear management principles to ensure consistent planting and replacement.

The plan aims to double woodland cover by 2045 and involves major planting projects, including "Trees for Climate" initiatives.

Action – Although a selection of native and more resilience non-native species is being advocated as part of recent design guidance being developed, the Tree and Woodland Strategy needs to be updated as a matter of urgency to plan for greater resilience to changing weather and climate, pathogens and diseases that risk affecting the valuable settings and services trees provide both in urban and rural environment.

Action – Cheshire West and Chester need to explore the potential to bring more of its woodlands back into positive management with Woodland Grant Scheme supported by the Forestry Commission.

Opportunity – Greater promotion and understanding of the value of trees to the environment, place-making and economy may help encourage more positive stewardship, and the appropriate provision of suitable resources to maintain and replace them, in both public and private sector, particularly in urban areas.

Opportunity – The Cheshire Local Nature Recovery strategy highlights the need to encourage greater citizen science to record and celebrate ancient and locally distinctive trees in both urban areas and rural landscape (under 400 trees are currently recorded for their importance), providing information to encourage their positive management. Supported community and volunteer activity may be extended to collecting seed with local provenance, growing on in community tree nurseries, recording historic orchards, the condition, structure of hedgerows, including ancient hedgerows.

5f. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a set of new spatial strategies that look to develop upon the concept of the nature recovery network to reverse the decline of nature across England.

Cheshire West and Chester Council took on the role of the ‘Responsible Authority’ to produce the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Cheshire West, Cheshire East and Warrington Council’s and appointed a LNRS Officer to help co-ordinate the process.

The Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy is the county's first comprehensive, evidence-based framework aimed at reversing decades of ecological decline. It was developed over more than two years and is now fully published.

It aims to restore habitats, strengthen nature networks, support climate resilience, and guide environmental investment across West Cheshire, East Cheshire, Warrington, and parts of the Peak District National Park.

The LNRS was published on 17th November 2025. There is a new duty to have regard to relevant local nature recovery strategies, as stipulated by Section 40 (2A) of the NERC Act, which means that the strategy and its habitat map included in it must be considered in proposed developments.

The full strategy, along with the Local Habitat Map and appendices, is available via the Cheshire Local Nature Partnership website, which can be found here.

Mapped and unmapped priorities respond to the following main challenges: -

Significant Long-term Biodiversity Decline

Cheshire is identified as one of the most species depleted counties in England, reflecting decades of habitat loss and environmental degradation. Reversing this decline is a central challenge for the LNRS.

Fragmented and Degraded Habitat Networks

The region suffers from heavily fragmented habitats that prevent nature from recovering at landscape scale. Notably:

The county now has only one-third of its 1976 hedgerow network, undermining ecological connectivity.

The LNRS highlights the need for **"bigger, better and more joined up"** habitats to support species movement and resilience.

Water Quality decline, reducing Water Availability and increased Flood Risk

The LNRS identifies serious concerns in catchments such as Weaver–Gowy, where water quality and availability of water for industrial and public water consumption are currently under pressure, with increasing risk that availability is likely to reduce further through predicted drier summers and reduced abstraction levels, likely to result from licence reviews and reductions commencing from 2028.

With the identified risks of reduced water availability and increased flood risk, a feasibility study was funded by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington alongside Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Council. The feasibility study aimed to find whether financing and supporting farmers and landowners to use nature-based interventions in the landscape to slow and hold more water in the landscape could help improve the resilience of the infrastructure, economy and society to future climate change. Following 6 months of work, WildNatured (the consultancy commissioned) have identified that it is economically feasible to utilise nature-based solutions to ensure water security and flood risk mitigation. Subject to securing necessary resources, a delivery scheme will be developed with WildNatured and other key stakeholders, including the Future Farmer Group, for a Weaver-Gowy Water and Wildlife scheme.

A large proportion of Cheshire is very unusual, that it’s economy, especially the chemicals industry, and society draw most of its water supply from surface waters, rather than groundwaters. Modest groundwater reserves in many areas are the result of an increasingly featureless and often compacted clay landscape, where water runs off quickly and penetration is limited. The level of industrial abstraction significantly outweighs public water utilisation, then very modest agricultural consumption.

Some important industries in the area have already altered their processes and are continuing to reduce the volume of water they need, as water availability becomes more challenging. Restoring species rich meadows, other habitats, our hedgerow network and incorporating more natural features in the landscape could significantly aid penetration of water through clay surface layers, increasing groundwater

availability. These features will also slow the flow and hold water longer in the landscape, aiding more sustained summer recharge of our surface waters.

Towns and major infrastructure (main roads/rail etc) also face greater risk of flooding with warmer, wetter winters, increasing soil run-off and loss, and an increase in predicted severe weather events.

Loss of Species Rich Grasslands

Widespread loss of traditional grassland habitats is impacting:

- Pollinators
- Soil health
- Carbon storage
- Access to quality greenspace

> The LNRS prioritises species-rich grassland restoration across both rural and urban landscapes.

Pressures on Farming Viability and Land Use Transition

The region faces challenges in shifting to profitable, nature positive farming.
The LNRS recognises that current land management systems do not deliver sufficient outcomes for nature and farming and proposes a Future Farmer Group to test, showcase and promote improved approaches.

Climate Change Stress on Ecosystems

Local habitats are increasingly vulnerable to climate driven impacts such as extreme weather and declining ecological resilience.

The LNRS emphasises scaling up nature-based solutions as a core pathway to address economic, climate and ecological pressures. Investment, restoration and more positive management of wetland and grassland across the landscape is

identified as a priority (e.g. species-rich grasslands, ponds, meres and mosses, peatland, high moor etc).

Insufficient Public Connection with Nature

The strategy identifies a need to improve people's access to and engagement with nature, recognising that public connection supports wellbeing, stronger, more cohesive communities, pride in place, stewardship, and long-term conservation outcomes. Despite the recent Greenspaces report by the UK government, identifying 80% of English citizens being able to access green space, the main issues are surrounding quality green space, which is in lack of supply especially in areas of deprivation. The LNRS identifies this with a focus on the need to improve tree cover and access to semi-natural quality green space. In the new Cheshire West and Chester Council design code, there will be emphasis on the need for good quality place making in every ward.

Inequalities access to nature and eco-system services

Some urban wards have an acute lack of access to nature, tree cover or other green/blue infrastructure. Communities and individuals in these areas often suffer with higher heat stress, surface water flooding, levels of air pollution, lower business and residential values, health and economic inequalities.

LNRS Engagement and Education

In 2024, the Council put out a video and a "Call for Sites" to invest in nature, to inform the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and to establish the amount and type of land available for delivery of habitats in the Borough for biodiversity net gain. Farmers, landowners, residents submitted their sites and chose biodiversity actions for their land. As a result of the LNRS consultation, landowners responding pledged more than 30,000 hectares where they would be interested in exploring opportunities to integrate nature. In addition to this, a Pledge for Nature map was created alongside the Call for Sites map to highlight the positive steps residents and businesses are doing for nature across Cheshire and Warrington. 177 pledges were created during the LNRS development process.

5g. Lead Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Partnership

Cheshire West and Chester Council as ‘Responsible Authority’, facilitates and leads the Cheshire Local Nature Partnership. This Local Nature Partnership (LNP) is a cross-sector partnership of more than 20 organisations that work across the whole Cheshire and Warrington area, with the aim to champion nature, environmental recovery, and the integration of environmental priorities into local decision-making.

They bring together local authorities, environmental organisations, businesses, landowners, public bodies, local environmental records centre, Chester Zoo, water companies and community groups to coordinate action for nature. At present, the co-chairs of the LNP are Annette Macdonald, representing Tatton Estate and broader landowner community and Charlotte Harris, Chief Executive of Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

The partnership was formed after the UK Government’s 2012 Natural Environment White Paper, which encouraged the creation of Local Nature Partnerships nationwide. It has been officially recognised by government since 2012.

The LNP takes a strategic overview of the natural environment across Cheshire and Warrington, identifying opportunities to:

- Restore habitats
- Enhance biodiversity
- Coordinate nature-based solutions
- Integrate environmental priorities with economic and social goals

The LNP played a key role in helping to develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) — a legally required spatial strategy for reversing nature's decline. The LNP was essential in shaping LNRS priorities and mapped actions.

As well as taking a strategic overview, the partnership acts as a voice for nature, promoting the importance of:

- Healthy ecosystems
- Nature-based economic growth
- Natural capital as an asset for wellbeing and prosperity

The LNP supports and co-ordinates many of the actions under development to deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

There are 4 working groups to develop and coordinate joint action, projects and programmes to aid natures recovery across Cheshire & Warrington, these cover: -

- **Species recovery co-ordination and projects**, plus collective action to control non-native invasive species
- **Investment in nature**
- **Joint communications**
- **Lawton Principles** (projects, joint initiatives and programmes that deliver more, bigger, better and joined up habitats for nature and people)

The Local Nature Partnership has a website, and this is being improved and in time will include a platform of investable projects, communications and new initiatives that could go ahead, if funders and resources are found.

Species record collection across Cheshire and Warrington is modest in comparison to other counties in England. This can lead to an incomplete picture of the presence and health of populations of species across the county. The Local Nature Partnership will encourage more people to download apps. like ‘iNaturalist’ to their phones to help increase records of specie sightings and help people develop their skills and interest in specie recording. CW&C should also share, where possible records for all species across their own sites.

Examples of more strategic initiatives currently development or implemented as a result of the LNRS and LNP priorities (a combination of these approaches will be needed): -

Hedgerow Recovery Fund

With the loss of 2/3^{rds} of our hedgerows across the landscape since 1976 (when Cheshire had more hedges than any other county in England), many landowners are starting to realise the benefits they are no longer receiving from a healthy network of hedges. Most of the landowning community indicated that hedgerows, as part of the LNRS process, was the habitat they were most willing to restore and recreate.

Now recognised for the wide range of benefits for livestock and to improve yields, protecting crops from pests and wind damage, the majority of landowners are keen to help put back this iconic feature across our Cheshire landscape. Established hedgerows have deep roots (3 metres), acting as barriers and enabling water to penetrate our clay soils, slowing and filtering surface water, reducing run-off, helping protect and rejuvenate soils, also helping to recharge our groundwater reserves.

With preference from our landowning community for local payments to restore and create hedges under 10 – 15year agreements, the LNP and RA are exploring the development of a local fund to complement national government support available to help drive greater restoration of our hedgerows with blended finance from businesses, partners and public bodies.

Weaver-Gowy Water & Wildlife Scheme

Like the Hedgerow Recovery Fund, work is underway to develop an investment model to encourage nature based interventions and improvements to land management to help the landscape operate better, slow the flow, increase natural flood capacity, reduce the likelihood of flooding for major settlements and infrastructure, reduce soil loss and increase penetration of soil after rainfall to recharge our groundwaters. Many businesses and public bodies have expressed interest in investing in eco-system services from the landscape to help with resilience. When combined with grant schemes and BNG it could mean that £36M is invested in 20% of the catchment over 10-15yrs to dramatically reduce many of the risks currently faced.

Future Farming Group

Cheshire and Warrington's landscape is predominantly farmland (>75%). The rich, fertile soils of the Cheshire provide a suitable environment especially for grass pastures and dairy production and other mixed farming enterprises. The stewardship of our landscape is delivered by dedicated farmers and landowners. It is important that farm businesses in Cheshire remain financially viable and continue to contribute to the national food security strategy whilst delivering other landscape priorities.

A resilient landscape with adequate water resources, less prone to flooding and drought, with healthy productive soils, flourishing nature and biodiversity is a critical to achieving high yields, continuing viability of farming and rural businesses, but also to provide communities and businesses with the products and eco-system services they need from the landscape.

Maintenance and improvement of the quality of our landscape character is essential to how Cheshire is marketed, regarded by visitors and tourism of the area, vital if it wishes to continue to attract businesses and new skilled employees to the sub-region to support continued growth.

A Future Farming Group for Cheshire is being planned, to be led some of our best farmers, supported to identify, promote and showcase innovation, good practice and help more farmers across the sector adapt to the pressures facing the industry. Through pilots, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange, more farmers will be encouraged to take up and realise opportunities others have already proven to make their businesses more effective and profitable (e.g. new technology, better management practices - combining crops, winter cover, benefits of soil management and water batteries, collaboration on anaerobic digestion, diversification, timber cooperatives, to more coordinated Cheshire branding that could aid farming and other supporting rural business viability and success, whilst benefiting nature and contributing towards a better quality, better functioning and a more resilient landscape.

It is likely that the group will be supported by the newly formed Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority, reporting to a Rural Board, providing comms, R&D

pilots, case studies, events and training open to all NFU, CLA and Small Landowner Association members to trial and lead new innovation, improve skills, land management practices and resilience across the sector and landscape into the future.

Wilder Cheshire Awards

New annual awards planned for Cheshire and Warrington to capture, celebrate and promote the successes of individuals, communities, businesses in their impact for nature. These awards are planned to inspire others, capture great case studies/share stories of activity being undertaken to help nature's recovery across the county.

10 categories across different sectors will be open for nominations this summer, for awards in October.

5h. Environmental Commissioning, Streetscene & Waste

Cheshire West and Chester Council manages approximately 2,946 hectares of land classified as public open space.

Chester Locality: 83 total parks/green spaces, with 15 priority sites.

Northwich and Winsford: 223 total parks/green spaces, with 14 priority sites.

Rural Locality: 168 total parks/green spaces, with 11 priority sites.

There are 10 sites with Green Flag status:-

- Caldy Nature Park
- Castle Park
- Grosvenor Park
- Rivacre Valley
- Northwich Woodlands
- Stanney Fields Park
- Westminster Park

- Whitby Park
- Helsby Quarry
- Wirral Way Country Park

Cheshire West and Chester's public open spaces comprise a diverse range of environments, from sandstone ridges to coastal estuaries, supporting several rare and nationally significant species.

Parks and Countryside sites include the Council's sites include several primary habitat types:

Meres and Mosses: Unique glacial "kettle hole" lakes and peat bogs, particularly in the Northwich area (e.g. Marbury Country Park).

Lowland Heath: Rare acidic grasslands and heaths found at sites like Little Budworth Common.

Ancient Woodland: Pockets of historic forest, such as Stanney Woods, which provide stable ecosystems for specialized fungi and flora.

Sandstone Ridges: Exposed Triassic sandstone areas like Helsby Quarry that support specific rock-dwelling plant life.

Wildflower Meadows: Sites like Rivacre Valley and Whitby Park are specifically managed to restore traditional grasslands, which have declined in Cheshire by 99% since the 1930s.

Estuaries and Saltmarshes: The Dee and Mersey estuaries offer globally important feeding grounds for migratory birds.

SSSIs managed or hosted by the Council

The following SSSIs are integral parts of the Council's managed green spaces:

Little Budworth Country Park, Tarporley

Managed as a Country Park, this site is a designated SSSI for its rare lowland heath, acidic grassland, and woodland.

Marbury Country Park

Includes reedbed as part of the **Budworth Mere SSSI**. It is specifically managed to support bird populations.

Castle Park has areas, protected for its exposed Triassic sandstone.

Witton Lime Beds, Nature Reserve, Northwich

Part of the Northwich Woodlands managed by the Council; these former industrial settling ponds are now a biological SSSI hosting rare lime-loving plants.

River Dee

Parts of the riverbank managed by the Council, such as **The Meadows** in Chester, fall under the wider **River Dee SSSI** designation.

Wildflower and Grassland Strategy

Cheshire West and Chester Council is currently delivering a five-year Wildflower and Grassland Strategy designed to reverse the loss of 99% of Cheshire's meadows since the 1930s. The Land Action Plan, Wildflower and Grassland Strategy. The Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy highlights the importance of wildflowers and wildlife friendly gardening practices. Together these actions can help both nature's recovery and contribute to the borough's carbon net zero ambitions, set out in our Climate Emergency Response Plan.

Core Objectives

- **Pollinator Recovery:** Creating habitats to support bees and other insects, aligning with the National Pollinator Strategy.
- **Climate Resilience:** Using grasslands for carbon capture and flood mitigation.
- **Connectivity:** Developing "wildlife highways" by linking parks, roadside verges, and nature reserves.

Key Initiatives and Projects

- **Mini Native Meadows:** The Council creates a minimum of **45 new mini native wildflower meadows** each year—one for every ward in the borough. As of early 2023, 101 meadows had been established.

- **Rewilding Scheme:** In 2023, a major rewilding scheme in Winsford added 43,000 square metres to the National Nature Recovery Scheme, allowing natural species to grow unaided.
- **The "Cheshire Mix":** A bespoke native seed mix was developed with the **Eden Project's National Wildflower Centre**. Residents can purchase this same Cheshire Mix from Boston Seeds to create meadows in their own gardens.
- The Council uses specialised machinery to prepare soil and expand meadow sites, including a target to create 24 football pitches' worth of new meadows across parks, countryside sites, greenspaces and highway verges.

Maintenance and Management

- **Slow Mow May:** The Council participates in "Slow Mow May," pausing grass cutting on selected verges and parks to allow first nectar-rich flowers to emerge.
- **Cut and Collect:** To prevent grass from outcompeting wildflowers, meadows are cut between August and October. The cuttings are left for 7–10 days to allow seeds to drop before being collected and baled.
- **Winding Pathways:** To balance public use with nature, "StreetCare" teams mow winding paths through the long-grass areas so residents can still walk through them.

The Council encourages residents to take the **Pollinator Pledge** to make small changes at home, such as:

- Planting pollinator-friendly pots or window boxes.
- Creating a "Bee Hotel" for solitary bees.
- Using the Cheshire Wildflower Seed Mix in your own garden

Wildflower Guardians

Wildflower Guardians are community volunteers who take responsibility for managing and maintaining the mini wildflower meadows that have been identified

and established through Cheshire West and Chester Council's Wildflower and Grassland Strategy. Once these meadow sites are created, volunteers support regular weeding, monitor plant and insect diversity, and help strengthen and regenerate the habitats over time. By caring for these areas after their initial creation, Wildflower Guardians play a vital role in ensuring wildflower species become established and that the meadows continue to thrive as part of the borough's long-term biodiversity work

Pesticide Reduction: The Council is actively phasing out the use of glyphosate (weed killer) in public parks and sensitive areas, opting for mechanical weeding or "living mulches" to protect insect health.

Integrated weed management: compost/repurpose green waste; invasive species protocols.

Green Waste: Investigate securing suitable free volume of grass cuttings from specie rich meadows as part of future green waste contract to aid viability of delivery.

5i. Transport & Highways

Highway Maintenance

Community-Led Verge Management

Local groups often take over "enhanced" maintenance tasks—such as weeding, litter picking, or wildflower sowing—that go beyond the Council's standard safety-cut regime.

Frodsham and Helsby: The Frodsham Town Council and local Civic Pride volunteers actively manage verges and gateway sites. For example, volunteers maintain the verges on the A56 (opposite Chinese Delight) and Frodsham Station Approach.

Hoole (Chester): The Narrows Wildlife Connections Group manages the borders and verges near Narrows Park, where they have established community wildflower meadows and bulb displays to support pollinators.

Norley: The Norley Wildflower Memorial Walk is a community-driven project that manages a specific linear verge/walkway for biodiversity.

Blacon: The Council's "ecological restoration area" along Blacon Avenue and Saughall Road involves community input to transition amenity grass into high-quality wildflower verges.

Hedgerows (mainly along roads)

While Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) performs standard mechanical maintenance on over 30 miles of hedges, traditional hedge laying is primarily delivered through volunteer groups and conservation partnerships on Council-managed countryside and habitat bank sites.

Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) have installed "Migratory Toad Crossing" signs (Highway Code sign 551.1) to protect toads during their spring migration at Norley (typically January to April). This is complimented local volunteer TOAD PATROL who help thousands of toads across the roads around the start of the breeding season.

Wildlife Friendly Lighting

The Council's environmental policies show a clear intention to balance human needs with ecological protection:

- Lighting should be targeted, not blanket.
- Brightness and timing should be controlled to reduce disturbance.
- Sensitive habitats should remain dark zones.
- Public spaces should be safe and welcoming, but without unnecessary light pollution.

This approach is consistent with the Local Plan's emphasis on protecting the natural environment while supporting sustainable development. This will be further enhanced by the creation of a new Dark Skies strategy, as a result of the Cheshire and Warrington LNRS.

Maintaining Culverts and Underpasses

Very important to enable safe passage of mammals and other species across the landscape, our programme of culvert and underpass maintenance aims to encourage and keep clear corridors for specie to move under our highways and other infrastructure.

Road Improvements

There is huge potential to reduce future Highway maintenance cost with Biodiversity priorities considered and integrated up front e.g. new verges with sub-base of crushed limestone or sandstone aggregate could provide attractive county wildlife standard specie rich grassland (with only light vegetative growth that may only need cutting and removal once or twice a year), whilst suppressing nutrient build up, woody growth and slow succession to woodland that requires a costly maintenance and control once left to establish.

Climate Change Team

Cheshire West and Chester Council's climate change work is tightly linked with biodiversity protection. Their Climate Emergency Response Plan (2025–2030) treats nature recovery as a core pillar of climate action, and the Council's wider environmental teams deliver much of the on the ground biodiversity work. In the context of the Council's biodiversity protection responsibilities, the climate change team's role is mainly to coordinate, drive, and embed biodiversity into climate policy, land-use planning, and community action.

The Council hosts and supports events such as *West Cheshire's Green Future: Communities Powering Climate and Nature Action*, which bring together residents, conservation organisations, and climate specialists to collaborate on biodiversity and climate projects.

This community focused work helps:

- Build local capacity for habitat restoration.
- Encourage citizen science and wildlife monitoring.
- Support community-led rewilding and green space projects.

This team helps to encouraging communities and individuals to take local action, including actions to aid biodiversity that contribute towards a better more sustainable environment.

Why biodiversity is strongly aligned to their climate work.

Biodiversity underpins climate resilience in Cheshire West and Chester by:

- Reducing flood risk through natural water management.
- Improving carbon storage in peatlands, woodlands, and soils.
- Supporting beneficial invertebrates (pollinators, predators and decomposers) essential for local agriculture.
- Enhancing community wellbeing and green infrastructure.

The climate change team's role is to make sure these benefits are recognised, funded, and embedded in policy.

Water and Energy Reduction

The Climate team's work on energy and utilities management directly supports biodiversity by reducing pressures on local ecosystems and creating the conditions for nature recovery. By improving energy efficiency across the estate, cutting carbon emissions, and expanding renewable generation, the Council helps to mitigate climate impacts—such as extreme heat, flooding, and habitat loss, that threaten species and ecological resilience. Working with stakeholders to encourage careful planning of energy infrastructure helps ensure that operational decisions both protect and enhance ecological networks across the borough.

At a wider scale, the team's housing retrofit work retrofit reduces demand on energy infrastructure and land for new generation, helping preserve natural areas.

Ocean Health

Cheshire West and Chester Council recently advanced its commitment to environmental protection by passing a "Motion for the Ocean," a notice of motion focused on improving ocean and waterway health. Councillors voted unanimously to support the initiative, recognising the growing concerns about pollution, sewage

discharges, and biodiversity loss raised by local residents and advocates. The motion, commits the Council to taking practical steps to support cleaner rivers and seas, integrating ocean health into local planning, and improving water quality across the borough. It also aligns Cheshire West with a national movement of Councils adopting the Motion for the Ocean framework, which provides a structured approach to supporting marine recovery and addressing the broader impacts of inland activities on the marine environment. With this vote, Cheshire West and Chester became the 35th UK council to adopt the motion, demonstrating environmental leadership and acknowledging that even inland communities play a critical role in protecting ocean health

Dark Skies Motion

During the Cheshire West and Chester Council meeting on 11 December 2025, councillors considered several Notices of Motion, including Agenda Item 18: “Notice of Motion: Dark Sky” was formally introduced and debated.

The need to introduce measures to reduce light pollution, protect of natural dark sky environments for wildlife, health, and astronomy were discussed.

It was suggested that the council should develop a Dark Sky Strategy, potentially reviewing or updating lighting policies, such as street lighting, planning guidance, or environmental impact standards.

Climate Adaptation

Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) acts as the **Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)** and actively encourages Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage flood risk, improve water quality, and boost biodiversity.

Requirements for Developers

The Council has adopted a comprehensive SuDS Guidance document (Volumes 1 & 2) that sets specific expectations for all new developments:

- **Mandatory Inclusion:** All development proposals must include a site-specific surface water drainage strategy following SuDS guidelines.
- **Hierarchy of Discharge:** Developers must prioritise non-potable reuse (e.g., rainwater harvesting) and ground infiltration before considering discharge to watercourses or sewers.
- **Four Pillars of SuDS:** Projects are evaluated on their ability to manage **water quantity**, **water quality**, **biodiversity**, and **amenity value**.
- **Maintenance Responsibility:** The Council currently does **not adopt** new SuDS; the developer must provide a long-term management and maintenance strategy for the lifetime of the site.

Community and Resident Initiatives

The Council encourages smaller-scale, nature-based drainage solutions through community projects and funding:

- **Rain Gardens:** CWAC has supported "retro-fit" rain garden projects, such as the

  Castle Community Centre Rain Garden

in Northwich. This project uses water butts and excavated gardens to divert roof runoff away from combined sewers.

- **Green Infrastructure in Towns:** In Northwich, the Council and partners have planned new rain gardens and street trees to improve water flow and aesthetics in the town centre.
- **Funding for Local Action:** The Cheshire West Crowd and the **Climate Change Emergency Fund** provide opportunities for residents to pitch and fund ecological projects, including planters and green spaces that reduce surface runoff.
- **Community Hubs:** Small-scale features like **sedum roofs** (green roofs) on community garden tool stores (e.g., Grozone in Northwich) are used as demonstration sites for sustainable water management.

Practical SuDS Components Encouraged

- **Permeable Paving:** Encouraged for driveways and paths to allow water to percolate into the ground.
- **Swales and Ponds:** Shallow channels (swales) and attenuation ponds that store water during heavy rain and create new habitats.
- **Water Butts:** A simple way for residents to collect and reuse rainwater for gardening, reducing pressure on the drainage network.

Tree Management

The Council's **Tree Team** (part of the Highways and Environment service) acts as the professional guardians of the borough's arboreal assets. Their work is a balance between **public safety**, **legal protection**, and **environmental expansion**.

Safety & Risk Management

The team's primary duty is managing the risk posed by the over 220,000 trees on Council land, with a duty to survey a further 600,000 privately owned.

- **Inspections:** They conduct cyclical surveys using Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) to identify structural defects or diseases (like Ash Dieback). Then use the **Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA)** system to determine whether the level of risk from an identified hazard is unacceptable to be placed on the public.
- **Emergency Response:** Colas help the team provide a 24/7 service to deal with fallen trees or dangerous branches during storms and high winds.
- **Maintenance:** They specify and oversee essential pruning, "crown lifting" (clearing space for high vehicles), and the removal of dead or dying trees.

Planning & Legal Protection

The team includes **Tree Officers** who handle the statutory side of tree preservation:

- **TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders):** They assess TPO tree work applications, and issue TPOs, to protect trees on private land that provide significant public amenity.

- **Conservation Areas:** They process notifications for any works to trees within the borough's many Conservation Areas.
- **Planning Advice:** They review planning applications to ensure developers follow **BS 5837 standards**, protecting existing trees during construction and ensuring high-quality new planting.

Specialist Advice & Biosecurity

Disease Monitoring: They track the spread of pests and pathogens, specifically managing the significant impact of Ash Dieback across the Cheshire landscape.

Subsidence & Claims: They investigate insurance claims related to tree root damage and provide technical reports.

Public Queries: They handle thousands of resident enquiries regarding light blockage, overhanging branches, and bird lime (though they generally do not prune for these "nuisance" reasons unless safety is at risk).

Sustainable Transport

Bee-Friendly Bus Stops: You may notice "Living Roofs" (or **Bee Bus Stops**) appearing across the borough. These shelters are topped with sedum and wildflowers to provide extra foraging space in busy town centres.

5j. Education

While there is no single official count of every school incorporating these practices to encourage a healthy connection with nature from an early age, at least **30+ schools and early years settings** in the Cheshire West and Chester area explicitly market "Forest School" or "Outdoor Learning" as part of their core curriculum or onsite facilities for the huge benefits to improving skills, attainment and academic performance.

A love for and healthy connection to our natural environment amongst future generations is key to the stewardship of our biodiversity into the long-term, but it also provides a gift to individuals who embrace it for the rest of their lives, particularly greater mental and physical health resilience.

The Council area contains more than **150 schools** in total, including nursery, primary, secondary, and special schools. Many of these utilize the Cheshire West and Chester Council's Live Well directory to list their specific provisions.

Schools with Dedicated Forest School/Outdoor Learning Programs

A wide variety of schools in the borough have established their own onsite woodland areas or formal outdoor education leads:

- **Primary Schools**:

Mill View Primary School

(Upton, Chester): Every child works in their onsite forest school or kitchen garden weekly.

Christleton Primary School

Features an established forest school, orchard, and outdoor library.

Frodsham CE Primary School

All children from Nursery to Year 6 attend 2–3 full-day forest school sessions per half-term.

Weaverham Primary Academy

Shares a dedicated forest school facility with Weaverham Pre-School.

Scholar Green Primary School

Integrates outdoor learning across all curriculum areas from EYFS to Year 6.

- **Special Schools**:

Archers Brook School

(Ellesmere Port): Provides a specific Forest Schools program and tailored outdoor education sessions for pupils with SEMH needs.

- **Early Years & Nurseries**:

Farndon Day Nursery and Forest School

Combines high-quality childcare with early education in a natural setting.

Wolverham and Stanney Pre-School (WASPS)

Features two outdoor areas leading directly to a forest school and schoolfield.

Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School

A local authority-maintained nursery school with a well-established forest school program.

Edsential a Cheshire West and Chester supported CIC, Cheshire West and Chester Health Rangers and Mersey Forest all promote the benefits of Learning Outside the Classroom (Outdoor Learning).

Edsential have **Residential Centres**: They operate outdoor education centres (such as Tattenhall) and Conway Centres) for school trips and family adventure days.

K. Major developments & infrastructure projects

Cheshire West's Major Projects Team supports biodiversity and nature by embedding ecological recovery into the way large developments, regeneration schemes, and infrastructure projects are planned and delivered. Their role sits within a wider Council-led push to reverse nature loss across the borough, and their work connects directly to several strategic programmes.

The team helps integrate features like:

- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) that double as wildlife habitats.
- Urban greening to support pollinators (e.g. Northgate Green Wall & Chester Bus Station and Roodee Car Park moss/green roofs etc)
- River restoration or natural flood management.

All developments are delivered to high sustainability standards, such as BREEAM, with procurement systems ensuring supply of materials from sustainable sources.

It is important that were possible Cheshire West and Chester Council trial and demonstrate to others how new technologies and solutions can be integrated to aid

nature's recovery and to provide other important eco-system services as part of new development.

5l. Facilities

Energy & water: Rainwater harvesting for estate irrigation; look at opportunities to retrofit rain gardens/planters; permeable paving in refurbishments.

Planting is designed and maintained to consider climate adaptation to drier summers and warmer wetter winters (e.g. drought tolerant planting at Portal)

5m. Procurement

Wood & plant products: adopt **peat free** and **bio secure** plant procurement with local provenance where feasible.

Ensure local provenance of trees, other plants and wildflowers are native, but where necessary, incorporating others for greater resilience to climate adaption.

Ensure soils moved or imported are screened for invasive and non-native species that may compromise local wildlife.

6. Future Actions

These will aim to be completed by the next reporting period (i.e. January 2029).

Planning Policy and Systems

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Policy	New Local Plan Policies for Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure and LNRS	To align with updated legislation and national policy, as well as delivery of the Environment Act,	LNRS, Biodiversity, Planning Policy, Development Management

		Biodiversity Duty and LNRS actions	
Policy	Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance Note	To assist developers in the biodiversity net gain process	Biodiversity, Planning Policy, Development Management
Policy	Local Nature Recovery Habitat Map Guidance	To assist planners, habitat banks and developers in implementing LNRS actions	LNRS, Biodiversity, Planning Policy, Development Management
Policy	Biodiversity baseline study to allocated development sites	To ensure developers are aware of the biodiversity value of their sites early in the process to encourage early integration of biodiversity into development design and to inform habitat delivery.	Biodiversity, Planning Policy, Development Management
Systems	Local Validation List	To ensure developers provide supporting information early in the planning process and to avoid delays	Biodiversity, Development Management
Systems	Biodiversity pre-application service	To ensure developers integrate biodiversity into their design early in the planning process and to avoid delays by resolving queries in the initial planning stages	Biodiversity, Development Management
Systems	Private Habitat Bank Engagement	To expand the engagement of private habitat banks in the Borough, to facilitate development, the BNG market and a strategic approach to biodiversity	Biodiversity, Legal

		enhancement in CWAC.	
Systems	Operate biodiversity pre-application service (with fees)	Front-load ecological design; reduce delays and appeals	Biodiversity; Development Management
Systems	Standardise legal templates and monitoring fee schedule	Secure delivery for 30 years; fund monitoring and enforcement	Biodiversity; Legal; S106/CIL

Strategic Habitat Delivery

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Habitat Bank	Maintain and expand Council habitat bank sites; register eligible sites and units	Provide local supply of on- and off-site units; retain investment within borough	Green Infrastructure; Biodiversity; Estates; Legal
Habitat Bank	Develop, maintain and review progress of HMMPs for each site	Transparent delivery; adaptive management; investor confidence	Biodiversity; Green Infrastructure
Funding	Develop blended finance offers (Trees for Climate, S106, BNG, corporate/partner contributions)	De-risk long-term delivery and maintenance	Climate; Green Infrastructure; Finance
Woodland Creation	Complete phase-two planting at Picton, Saughall, Ledsham, Dutton; expand wet woodland where suitable	Increase habitat diversity, carbon sequestration and flood resilience	Green Infrastructure; Mersey Forest; Climate
Silviculture	Implement continuous cover and coppice regimes; biosecurity protocols	Improve resilience to pests/disease and climate change; generate revenue	Green Infrastructure; Tree Team

District Licensing for Great Crested Newts

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
DLL – GCN	Deliver additional ponds to exceed 200 by end of 2026–27; maintain 5-year monitoring	Landscape-scale species recovery and water storage benefits	Biodiversity (DLL); Landowners; Natural England

Tree & Woodland Strategy

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Woodlands	Update Tree & Woodland Strategy; bring more sites into grant-aided positive management	Resilience to pests/disease; sustainable timber/products	Tree Team; Green Infrastructure

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Watercourses	Implement the Weaver-Gowy water and wildlife scheme, and ensure SuDS is embedded wherever possible	Improve water quality/ Mitigate flood risk/ Ensuring water security	LNRS; DMT, Local Flood authority, Highways, developers
Hedgerow Network	Pilot Hedgerow Recovery Fund with landowners; 10–15-year agreements	Rebuild connectivity; soil/water benefits; pollinators	LNRS; LNP; Landowners

Species rich grasslands	Help to develop the renewal of the wildflower strategy. Engage with communities, town and parish councils and developers	Pollinators; Pride in place, Health and wellbeing, soil/water benefits	LNRS, LNP, Environmental Commissioning, Green Infrastructure
Local Plans	Help to embed the LNRS into the Local Plan & Design Codes (e.g. Consider introduction of urban greening factor in areas with severe inequalities in access to greenspace/nature)	Better placemaking, rebuild connectivity, raising awareness	LNRS, Local Plans, DMT

Cheshire & Warrington Local Nature Partnership

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Leadership & Partnership	Develop and 'Action Plan' of joint priorities the partnership will work on to help deliver the LNRS and aid nature's recovery across Cheshire & Warrington	More, Bigger, better and joined up habitats. Specie recovery and encourage greater connection and stewardship of nature.	LNRS (in association with LNP)
Citizen Science	Community based ancient/veteran tree recording; hedgerow and orchard surveys; scion and seed provenance projects	Evidence for management; community stewardship	LNRS; Tree Team; Volunteers
Comms & Engagement	Annual "Wilder Cheshire Awards" and case-study library	Celebrate and scale citizen action; build social licence	LNP; Communications; Biodiversity

Environmental Commissioning, Streetscene & Waste

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Pesticides	Progressive glyphosate reduction with mechanical alternatives and living mulches	Reduce impacts on invertebrates; support pollinators	StreetCare; Parks
Waste & Pollution	Integrated Weed Management Plan; green-waste composting and reuse; invasive species control protocols	Cut herbicide use, improve soils, tackle INNS	StreetCare; Parks; LNP
Waste & Pollution	Integrated Weed Management Plan; green-waste composting and reuse; invasive species control protocols	Cut herbicide use, improve soils, tackle INNS	StreetCare; Parks; LNP

Transport & Highways

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
SuDS	Apply LLFA SuDS guidance and discharge hierarchy to all capital schemes; require lifetime maintenance plans	Manage water quantity/quality; create habitats and amenity	LLFA; Capital Projects; Planning
Highways Ecology	Design verges for species-rich grassland using low-nutrient substrates; maintain culverts/underpasses for wildlife passage	Reduce long-term maintenance; enhance connectivity	Highways; Biodiversity
Lighting	Apply wildlife-sensitive lighting (targeted, timed,	Reduce disturbance while maintaining	Highways; Community

	dimmed, dark zones near sensitive habitats)	safety. Aid people's health/wellbeing and community safety.	Safety; Biodiversity

Education

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Schools & Youth	Expand Forest School/outdoor learning partnerships and site access (advocacy & facilitation funded externally)	Build lifelong connection with nature; improve wellbeing	Education; Edsential; Green Infrastructure (with LNP)

Major developments & infrastructure projects

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Major Projects (schools, civic buildings etc)	Consider applying 'building with nature' or similar standards' as part of major schemes, plus wildlife and people friendly lighting	Becoming an exemplar, proving benefits to good placemaking	Major developments; Green Infrastructure & biodiversity staff
Major Projects (schools, civic buildings etc)	Ensure team keeps up to date with new green and blue infrastructure technology and solutions coming to market (e.g. moss concrete wall render etc)	Integration of more solutions that benefit nature and good placemaking as they become easier and more affordable. Demonstrate to others cost effective, impactful solutions.	Major developments; Green Infrastructure & biodiversity staff

Facilities

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Energy & Water	Rainwater harvesting for estate irrigation; retrofit rain gardens/planters; permeable paving in refurbishments	Reduce potable demand; relieve sewers; add urban habitat	Facilities; LLFA; Capital Projects
Biodiversity	Explore more habitat boxes, species rich grasslands and other adaptations to buildings and grounds to aid nature	Encourage and support local wildlife; improve working and public environment for employees and visitors; save money.	Facilities; Green Infrastructure; Climate Change

Procurement

Element	Action	Aim	Teams Responsible
Procurement	Introduce biodiversity and LNRS alignment as evaluation criteria in relevant tendering processes (e.g. plant passports, screening of soils and aggregate for invasive species etc) Encourage local provenance, where appropriate and feasible. Preference for locally sourced timber, FSC certified	Leverage supply chain to deliver net gain and nature-positive outcomes	Commercial/Procurement; Biodiversity

Tree & Plant Products	Bio secure plant procurement with local provenance where feasible	Avoid peat extraction impacts; reduce pest/disease risk	Procurement; Parks; Suppliers

7. Reporting and Review

This Action Plan will be reviewed regularly with progress reported alongside Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy monitoring. The next statutory reporting period is January 2026 to January 2029.