

REPORT TITLE: ENHANCED BIODIVERSITY DUTY

25 FEBRUARY 2026

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Kelsie Learney – Cabinet Member for the Climate and Nature Emergency

Contact Officer: Nick Cutler Tel No: 07818 096121 Email ncutler2@winchester.gov.uk

WARD(S): ALL

### PURPOSE

This report sets out Winchester City Council's approach to embedding the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity within its functions and decision-making processes. It provides an account of measures implemented and progress made for strengthening biodiversity outcomes across the council's operations for the period 1st January 2024 – 31st December 2025 and outlines future priorities for the next reporting period.

The report is to meet the council's statutory obligation under the Environment Act 2021 to publish a biodiversity report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Policy Committee are asked to note the content and comment on the proposed Biodiversity Duty Report prior to publishing by the deadline of 26th March 2026.

## 1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 1.1 The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Reporting will be completed within existing resource within the Ecology and Biodiversity team in the Sustainability and Natural Environment team (SANE). The Ecology and Biodiversity team consists of 1 FTE *Principal Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer* and 1 FTE *Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer*.

## 2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

### 2.1 Background

- 2.2 The Environment Act 2021 places a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' on local authorities to consider biodiversity in all functions of the council from service delivery and planning, through to estate management. The Act also requires public authorities to produce a report on actions taken to meet the biodiversity objective, ensuring transparency and accountability.

- 2.3 Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduced.

- 2.4 This means that, as a public authority, the council must:

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

- 2.5 The council must publish a report every five years (and submit it to Defra) and make this report publicly available by issuing it on our website. Appendix 1 includes the draft Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report. This is the first biodiversity report of the council under this duty and the next one will be required in 5 years' time (in 2031).

### 2.6 Details of proposal

- 2.7 Section 1 of the Report: Completed/on-going actions

- 2.8 To comply with the duty to report every 5 years on how the council is considering biodiversity in all its functions, the council will continue to implement the approved Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) 2025 – 2030.

- 2.9 Following on from the council's published Biodiversity Action Plan, the council produced and published a new Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) in November 2025. The NIP outlines a new approach to ensuring the delivery of nature improvement across the district replacing the existing Biodiversity Action Plan. The NIP establishes a guiding set of principles for council functions in relation

to biodiversity and sets measures to be achieved for the next five years. The NIP and more detailed information is available on the council website. The NIP sets out how the council meets and continues to meet the biodiversity duty and will provide future evidence and data to feed into the 5-yearly Biodiversity Reporting under the strengthened Biodiversity Duty.

#### 2.10 Section 2 of the Report: Future actions

2.11 As well as reporting on actions that the council have completed between January 2024 and December 2025 (inclusive), the report sets out potential future actions, that are also part of the Nature Improvement Plan. These potential future actions sit under the NIP's five pathways:

- a) Protect and manage land for nature
- b) Create new spaces for nature
- c) Deliver more nature-based solutions
- d) Prevent and control pollution better
- e) Connect more people to nature

#### 2.12 Section 3 of the Report: BNG

2.13 The report also covers Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and how the council has taken certain measures to ensure the implementation of mandatory BNG and report on this. This has included making changes to procedures and processes in the planning system, tracking, monitoring and reporting BNG secured by eligible development in the district. The report also covers how the council will continue to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period of 2026-2031.

2.14 Appendix 1 includes the BNG Reporting 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2025 template required alongside the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report.

#### 2.15 Conclusion

2.16 The report (Appendix 1) covers the three elements of the council's Enhanced Biodiversity Duty that have to be reported on, under the Environment Act 2021:

- a) Biodiversity measures implemented
- b) Progress made
- c) Future priorities

2.17 In publishing this report, the council will comply with the duty to produce a report on actions taken to meet the biodiversity objectives, ensuring transparency and accountability.

### 3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 3.1 WCC could not report on the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty, but this would be in contravention of the Environment Act 2021 and so has been rejected as an option. There is no statutory alternative to producing this report. With the details included in this report, the council have shown comprehensive cross-service evaluation, monitoring and reporting via the Nature Improvement Plan.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

##### Previous Committee Reports:-

HEP043 Nature Improvement Plan – 3 July 2025

##### Other Background Documents:-

Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan: [Nature Improvement Plan - Winchester City Council](#)

#### APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Winchester City Council Biodiversity Duty Report January 2024  
– December 2025 (including BNG Reporting 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2025)