

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH OF KNOWSLEY

KNOWSLEY COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORT



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Environment Act 2021 strengthens the biodiversity duty originally set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 requiring public authorities to:
 - Consider what actions they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
 - Agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration; and
 - Act to deliver those policies and achieve objectives.
- 1.2 This report is the first to document actions, future plans and strategic platforms that are in place to enhance the Council's duty for biodiversity.
- 1.3 Key elements to satisfy in the report for the Statutory Duty to Biodiversity are:
 - A summary of actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty;
 - How the Council intends to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period;
 - Actions carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations; and
 - How the biodiversity net gain obligations will be met in the next reporting period.

2. Biodiversity in Knowsley

- 2.1 Knowsley's natural environment and biodiversity is one of the borough's greatest assets and is highly valued by residents and visitors alike. With nearly half (49%) of Knowsley's land being greenspace or greenbelt.
- 2.2 Knowsley today is a borough made up of a series of townships and villages – most notably Kirkby in the north, Halewood in the South, Huyton to the West and Prescot, Whiston, Knowsley Village and Cronton to the East.
- 2.3 Since 2014 Knowsley Council is also one of six Council's that make up the Liverpool City Region, and some of the borough's responsibilities and strategic approaches are now subsumed into the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority take strategic decisions over areas within economic development, transport, employment and skills, tourism, culture, housing and physical infrastructure.
- 2.4 The flora and fauna within Knowsley exist in a range of varying environments, many of which have received environmental designations in recognition of their importance. Knowsley is host to 1 Local Nature Reserve, 64 local wildlife sites and 161 parks and greenspaces of which 20 parks host the prestigious Green Flag award. Important biodiversity and ecology sites cover over 300 hectares of the borough including grasslands, woodlands, and moss lands, and the

Knowsley Safari Park (which is a member of the British & Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums). Knowsley's natural environment and biodiversity are key drivers to Knowsley's economic growth, liveability, resident health improvements, and climate change mitigation.

- 2.5 The Council manages parks, recreation grounds, and public land providing habitats for wildlife and community access to nature. Council operations from estates management to highways decisions are considered under the biodiversity duty to reduce negative impacts and promote enhancement where feasible.
- 2.6 The Council's approach to biodiversity and landscape management aims to protect, enhance, and restore habitats while maintaining safe, accessible, and attractive public open spaces. Management practices are aligned with ecological principles and national biodiversity objectives, with an emphasis on working with natural processes rather than intensive intervention.
- 2.7 Landscape maintenance regimes are tailored to habitat type and ecological value, including woodlands, meadows, wetlands and formal parkland. Measures such as reduced and seasonal mowing, rotational cutting, and habitat-specific maintenance schedules are used to support pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Works are timed to avoid sensitive periods, including bird nesting and peak flowering seasons, and natural features such as deadwood, leaf litter, and understory vegetation are retained where appropriate to provide shelter and food sources.
- 2.8 Biodiversity outcomes are monitored through a combination of site inspections, ecological surveys, and habitat condition assessments. Indicator species, vegetation diversity, woodland structure, and invasive species presence are used to inform management decisions. Monitoring results are reviewed regularly and used to adapt maintenance practices, ensuring continuous improvement and resilience to climate and environmental change.

3. Policies

3.1 Knowsley Council is committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity as part of its environmental responsibilities and in support of national and regional goals. The Council has taken account of national biodiversity duty guidance issued by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to ensure local actions align with national biodiversity goals and conservation frameworks. Consideration has also been given to protected sites and species strategies where relevant to planning decisions and land management interventions. In addition, regional strategies are taken into account during the design and development of projects to ensure biodiversity is appropriately considered. Further details of the policies considered are detailed below.

3.2 **Local Policies**

3.2.1 **The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030**

The council has worked closely with local strategic partners, residents, businesses and other stakeholders to co-produce the Knowsley 2030 strategy. The strategy focuses on five strategic outcomes which set out that, by 2030, Knowsley will be a place:

- Where strong and safe communities can shape their future;
- Where people are active and healthy and have access to the support they need;
- Where people of all ages are confident and can achieve their full potential;
- With a thriving, inclusive economy with opportunities for people and business; and,
- With welcoming, vibrant, well-connected neighbourhoods and town centres.

The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 has a clear vision of 'Supporting Knowsley's People and Communities to Thrive' and is focused on three key priorities:

1. Effective support for those in need
2. Encourage growth that benefits everyone
3. Deliver targeted support to encourage fairness and opportunity

The Knowsley Council Plan considers the future opportunities and ambitions for local people whilst dealing with the long-standing challenges facing Knowsley residents and communities.

The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 approaches developing, supporting and growing Knowsley's communities three key priorities, with objectives and results actions that will help Knowsley achieve the Knowsley 2030 strategy.

Under the strategic priority of "Encouraging growth that benefits everyone" Green spaces are recognised as a contributor to building an inclusive economy by providing inclusive green infrastructure for all. The main action is to maintain and enhance Knowsley's excellent Green Infrastructure, with a specific focus on leveraging in external funding to improve and enhance green spaces.

3.2.2 Knowsley Local Plan 2016

Adopted in 2016 The Local Plan Core Strategy sets out the strategic framework for the growth and development of Knowsley up to 2028 and beyond. It provides a core strategic framework that supports additional Supplementary Planning Documents and The Local Plan: Site Allocations and Development Policies document which identifies the Sustainable Urban Developments across the borough.

Within the Local Plan Core Strategy the functions and benefits of green spaces and green infrastructure is laid out within the Knowsley Local Plan – Policy CS8 and Policy CS21 – these policies set out how Green Infrastructure can provide a range of benefits in terms of biodiversity, climate change adaptation, education, local economy and increased property values. It also contributes to health and wellbeing (including allowing people to interact with the natural environment to promote mental wellbeing), historic character, land and water management, landscape value, linkages between places, outdoor recreation, sport and leisure, public accessibility, quality of place, rural enterprise, tourism and waste management.

3.2.3 Net Zero Delivery Plan 2026 – 2030

The Net Zero Delivery Plan 2025-2030 outlines key actions across four strategic priority areas: Transport, Buildings, Clean Energy and Natural Environment that will help Knowsley Council move towards its goal of the Council's functions being Net Zero by 2040.

This features in the management, maintenance and development of our Green Spaces through their importance across all strategic priority areas. The Council contributes to the carbon output through fleet and machinery usage, buildings within the council's portfolio, and energy usage.

However, the Council also plays a key role in providing actions that will help the Council's Net Zero 2040 target, for example the development of Green and Blue

Infrastructure offers opportunities to deliver key actions such as sustainable travel routes, flood resilience and increased tree planting.

3.2.4 Knowsley's Greenspace Action Plan

This action plan builds upon the previous Knowsley Greenspace Strategy documents and provides a reference point for all matters relating to Knowsley's parks and green spaces, providing a framework to inform decisions that will ensure that these important public assets are managed in an accountable, sustained, and consistent manner.

The plan covers each individual ward's parks, gardens, natural spaces, amenity green spaces, outdoor sports areas, allotments, and children's play areas. The priorities of the plan include; retaining existing quality standards and/or to improving accessibility and/or quality standards, ensuring cyclical maintenance is identified and prioritised in a timely manner, to develop and deliver transformative green infrastructure projects to meet community needs, respond to the availability of external funding opportunities and to maximise the use of green space and support green space volunteers.

3.2.5 The North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan

The North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan comprises of 44 habitat and species action plans: each one describing the status of the habitat or species, issues affecting its well-being, conservation objectives & targets and actions to meet them. The aim of the plan is to highlight key habitats and species specific to the regions natural environment and the issues facing them and should be utilised to demonstrate the significance of these habitats and species within the local plan.

3.3 Regional and National Policies

3.3.1 Liverpool City Region Climate Plan

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Five Year Climate Action Plan focuses on actions that will help the Liverpool City Region achieve Net Zero by 2040. The plan is divided into pillars, each with associated actions and outcomes.

Within the Transport and Natural Environment pillars within the plan – several areas of policy delivery are under development that will shape and influence the operational management of green spaces within Knowsley.

These areas include:

- Integrated water management plan
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Spatial Development Strategy
- (Knowsley) Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

3.3.2 Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Local nature recovery strategies are ambitious, England-wide spatial strategies, designed to support the restoration and enhancement of nature. The strategy maps our most valuable existing habitats, agrees priorities for reversing the decline in biodiversity and maps opportunities for nature recovery and wider environmental goals.

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority have been appointed by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the Liverpool City Region. With support from Natural England and local authority partners, the LNRS takes an evidence-based and locally led approach and was drafted in collaboration with local stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Council is a supporting authority for the emerging Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy serves as the first step of urgent action to reverse biodiversity decline and restore the natural environment, benefitting people in the Liverpool City Region and helping improve air and water quality, achieving Net Zero, and accessibility to green spaces. The LCRCA have also drafted a Statement of Biodiversity Priorities which details the vision for biodiversity priorities, why we need a nature recovery strategy, the natural environment in Liverpool, what's currently being done, what needs to be done in the future, and the local habitat map with instructions on how to use it.

3.3.3 Catchment Partnership Plan

The Alt Crossens Catchment Partnership is part of the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA), an inclusive civil society-led initiative that works in partnership with national and local government, water companies and other businesses, agriculture, and communities to support the management of the water environment in England and deliver more integrated water management. There are CaBA partnerships in all the river catchments across England, and cross-border with Wales.

The Alt Crossens Catchment Partnership focuses on collaborative water management for a healthier environment, tackling urban/rural pollution through

projects like weir removal (improving fish passage) and habitat restoration (new channels, grasslands) to boost biodiversity, manage flood risk, and create community assets within the River Alt and the River Crossens catchment.

3.3.4 The Mersey Forest Plan

The Mersey Forest plan is a long-term strategic guide to the work of the Mersey Forest and its partners aimed at establishing multipurpose woodlands across Merseyside and North Cheshire to create better environments for people to live in, work in and enjoy, extending to 2050 and beyond. The plan is underpinned by evidence, with the work monitored and mapped to demonstrate its impact on people, nature and the climate.

The plan aims to reach 15% tree cover across Cheshire and Merseyside by 2050 (from a 2025 baseline of 13.7%), pushing beyond this, if possible, towards a long-term ambition of 30% tree cover. This will be achieved by tailoring establishment schemes to meet landowner's objectives, benefit residents, nature and climate, following the UK Forestry Standard. The plan also makes provisions for appropriate aftercare and monitoring to ensure new trees and woodlands thrive in the long-term, taking opportunities to deliver at scale in priority areas.

The Council has integrated biodiversity considerations into planning and land management decisions through our Local Plan and planning policy processes. As a supporting authority the Council has aided the development of the emerging Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to identify key areas for habitat protection and restoration across the region.

Aligning with the Council's climate emergency declaration and Net Zero Delivery Plan, which includes commitments to increase biodiversity value in parks, green spaces and council-owned estates.

3.3.5 The Environment Act 2021

The Environment act makes provisions for targets, plans, and policies for improving the natural environment, statements and reports about environmental protection, the Office for Environmental Protection, waste and resource efficiency, air quality, the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards, water, nature and biodiversity, conservation covenants, and the regulation of chemicals.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced a 'strengthened' biodiversity duty for public bodies, including local authorities, building on the original duty introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The aim of the

extended duty is to provide for the enhancement and improvement of biodiversity, going beyond the maintenance of biodiversity in its current state.

The Environment Act also introduced a mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% on development sites to be calculated using the statutory biodiversity metric. Biodiversity net gain is an approach to development that aims to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before development took place. The aim of BNG is to ensure that development projects are carried out in a way that supports the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, while also meeting the needs of society and the economy. By delivering a net gain in biodiversity, developments can contribute to the wider goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss and support the delivery of ecosystem services that are essential to human well-being.

3.3.6 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA 1990) addresses environmental protection through several key areas: Section 215 for cleaning up unsightly land, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations (via sections 97, 102 and Sch 9) for large projects, and newer provisions like Schedule 7A for mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), ensuring developments enhance nature, alongside general duties for public bodies to conserve nature, all integrating environmental concerns into planning decisions.

3.3.7 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

This act places a duty on local authorities in England and Wales to regard conserving and enhancing biodiversity, to which plan-making and policy making is an integral part of.

3.3.8 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

These regulations implement the European Union's Habitats Directive and Birds Directive in the UK. They provide protection for a range of habitats and species of European importance, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

3.3.9 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Section 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires that any exercises of public access rights under the Act must have regard for the

conservation of natural beauty and the flora, fauna, and geological or physiological features of the land. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act also helped establish the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), which is responsible for advising the government on matters relating to the conservation of biodiversity and the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

3.3.10 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The act provides protection for certain species of animals and plants, as well as their habitats. Under this act it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy, or disturb a protected species or its habitat. The Act also established Sites of Species Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are nationally important protected areas with exceptional ecological or geological features.

3.4 Policy Integration

- 3.4.1 Council policies and actions have contributed to improved habitat protection and enhancement, with the ecological condition of parks and woodlands strengthened through targeted habitat works and tree planting. Climate and biodiversity outcomes have been jointly advanced by embedding biodiversity objectives within the Net Zero Delivery Plan, supporting both climate resilience and ecological recovery. The Council has also encouraged nature-positive practices through community and stakeholder engagement, including consultations and the development of friends of groups. In addition, the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has strengthened ecological planning outcomes and secured long-term biodiversity benefits through the development process.

4. Actions

4.1 During this reporting period, the Council has undertaken a range of actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

4.2 The Council supports and delivers tree planting and green infrastructure improvements across the borough's parks and open spaces. Maintenance and enhancements have been undertaken on existing green spaces to improve ecological value and access for nature. Examples of projects within the reporting period include:

- **Natural Flood management** - Natural Flood management interventions have been introduced at 9 parks and greenspaces within the River Alt catchment to store water in the catchment and slow the rate at which water runs into the rivers to help reduce flooding downstream. Natural Flood Management is designed to slow down the flow of water through river systems and increase storage reducing flooding and protecting our rivers. In partnership with The Mersey Rivers Trust 31.34 hectares of catchment woodland management, leaky dam creation, floodplain restoration, online attenuation wetlands and paleochannel restoration have been introduced at a number of the Council parks and greenspaces to increase flood mitigation and enhance biodiversity.
- **Halewood Triangle Park** – Biodiversity improvement project was undertaken in January 2025 to improve the biodiversity of the site by enhancing the ditch and pond networks within the park. Vegetation management improvements aided water movement between the network of ponds on site with additional pond enhancements and wetland scrapes introduced to create a new wet woodland area. The areas were enhanced with the introduction of marginal wetland plants and tree planting.
- **Headbolt Lane Biodiversity Net Gain Projects** - Six public parks in Kirkby benefitted from biodiversity improvements as a result of the Headbolt Lane Rail Station project. Project partners involved in the delivery of Headbolt Lane have worked with Mersey Rivers Trust to ensure that the new station provides a “net positive” biodiversity gain. Sites in the area benefitted from the creation of wildflower meadows, wetland and pond habitats.

The biodiversity work is helping to improve habitats for birds, insects, fish and mammals, improve water quality and reduce flooding from the River Alt. It will also help to control invasive non-native species.
- **Woodland Creation** – Knowsley Councils commitment to creating new woodland across the borough has seen the creation of 11 new woodland

sites since 2024. Woodland creation and management are key themes in the Council's Net Zero Delivery Plan (2026-2030) which focuses on working in partnership with the Mersey Forest to develop new woodland planting schemes and updating the Woodland Management Plans for Knowsley's existing woodland sites.

4.3 **Strategic Actions**

- 4.3.1 The Council employed an Ecologist prior to the implementation of the Biodiversity Net Gain legislation to aid the Councils delivery of biodiversity and nature-based initiatives. The ecologist advises on how to protect and enhance wildlife across a range of Council services including landscape architecture, property, public engagement, Parks and Greenspaces and major development.
- 4.3.2 A Biodiversity net gain working group was set up comprising of planning and greenspace officers from the Liverpool City Region local authorities and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, to prepare for the implementation of BNG, provide training sessions and share experiences.

5. Partnership Working

- 5.1 The Council works with a number of key stakeholders and partners to aid biodiversity delivery including:
- Local Authorities
 - Environment Agency
 - Natural England
 - Forestry England
 - National Highways
 - Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS)
 - Merseyside Biobank
 - The Mersey Forest
 - Mersey Rivers Trust
 - Utility Companies
 - Major Developers
 - Academia
 - Voluntary and Community Sector
- 5.2 Over the reporting period the Council provided continued support to the Merseyside Biobank Ecological Record Centre ensuring that data were kept up to date and reliable. In return Biobank continued to provide information to assist the Council in making decisions on nature conservation and land use and in contributing to biodiversity action plans.

- 5.3 Monitoring of designated habitats such as Local Wildlife has been undertaken on our sites by Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, on behalf of the Council and makes the findings available to support monitoring of biodiversity.
- 5.4 The Council has acted as a supporting authority in the development of the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy, helping align local action with regional biodiversity priorities.

5.5 **Community Engagement**

- 5.5.1 The Council raises awareness of biodiversity and nature recovery narratives through public events, consultations and engagement on nature recovery priorities.
- 5.5.2 The Council supported communities to enhance biodiversity in their local area through engagement with community groups, schools and members of the public, including small scale native woodland planting, invasive non-native species control, and support for community friends groups.
- 5.5.3 The Council has a network of 56 friends of parks groups supported by parks greenspaces staff comprising volunteers who work closely with the Council and play a key role in enhancing and protecting local parks, woodlands and greenspaces.
- 5.5.4 Biodiversity is taught as part of the school curriculum and the ranger service supplements this formal education through woodland school initiatives and engagement activities within our parks and greenspaces educating the public on nature within urban spaces.

6. Future Actions

6.1 Knowsley Council's priorities for the next five years include:

- **Delivering Local Nature Recovery Objectives** – Working to embed the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy into local action plans. Identifying priority sites for habitat creation, enhancement and restoration.
- **Strengthening Biodiversity Planning** – Refining planning validation requirements and guidance to ensure biodiversity net gain (BNG) outcomes are secured and monitored effectively.
- **Council Land and Estate Management** – Increasing the biodiversity value of council-owned land, including tree planting, pollinator habitat creation and reducing mowing regimes where appropriate as well as developing potential habitat banking opportunities.
- **Monitoring & Reporting** – Enhancing monitoring systems to better capture biodiversity outcomes across council activities and planning decisions.
- **Community Engagement & Education** – Expanding community programmes to raise awareness of biodiversity and nature-friendly practices.

7. Key Achievements

7.1 Notable achievements during this reporting period include:

- Integration of biodiversity into the Council's climate emergency and green space strategies, linking nature recovery with decarbonisation and resilience.
- Completion of improvement works in multiple parks and woodlands enhancing habitat structure and species opportunities.
- Active engagement in the development of the Liverpool City Region Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Progressing biodiversity considerations within planning policy and enforcement frameworks.

8. Biodiversity Net Gain Information

- 8.1 As the Local Planning Authority, Knowsley Council is required to report on the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations. During the reporting period, the Council implemented the mandatory requirement for qualifying developments to achieve a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain in accordance with the Environment Act, including the revision and monitoring of planning conditions to ensure biodiversity gain plans are submitted, approved and delivered in line with statutory requirements.
- 8.2 Biodiversity Gain Plans are not agreed until the developer submits an application to discharge the statutory biodiversity gain condition. To do this, the applicant must submit a Biodiversity Gain Plan supported by a completed metric, final habitat plans and details of offsite units or credits that have been purchased. The condition is required to be discharged before work can begin on site, and it is advisable for the Biodiversity Gain Plan to be submitted just before this happens.
- 8.3 During the reporting period the following biodiversity net gain information was approved:
- Total number of biodiversity gain plans approved in the reporting period: **3**
 - Total net unit change in biodiversity units (including any units offset using credits): **0.63 units**
 - Percentage of net gain achieved (average): **18.6%**
 - Split of on-site vs. off-site biodiversity units: **100% on-site**
- 8.4 Ongoing monitoring and compliance are supported through continued engagement with developers to secure long-term biodiversity enhancements, including the use of planning conditions and legal obligations to ensure delivery and management over a minimum period of 30 years where off-site units are involved.
- 8.5 It is anticipated that for the next reporting period a significantly higher number of Biodiversity Gain Plans will have been approved and there will be greater levels of data on trends in biodiversity outcomes as a result of development. This will enable the Council to identify gains or losses in specific habitats as well as identify where offsite gains are being achieved.