Stockport Council – Biodiversity Report 2026

Foreword by Cllr Austin, Cabinet Member for Housing and the Environment

Stockport Council declared a Biodiversity Emergency in 2022, which alongside our declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, signalled our commitment to take action against these existential issues.

We understand that reversing biodiversity decline is essential for the health of our ecosystems, our communities, and future generations. This report sets out the achievements in biodiversity conservation and enhancement over the last 5 years, and our plan to further build on these over the next 5 years.

The achievements documented here are the result of hard work, passion and creativity, not just from council teams, but from collaborative work with partner organisations, volunteer groups, and residents. No single actor can tackle the scale and complexity of biodiversity loss alone. We recognise the importance of our partnerships with Stockport's conservation charities, community groups, private landowners and residents. The Council plays an important role not just as a landowner and service provider, but in engaging and enabling others to play their part. For example, our targets include assisting private landowners to create habitat banks; integrating biodiversity measures into planning guidance; and enabling volunteers and community groups to achieve their ambitions for local nature sites. By working together, we can create a more resilient and connected ecological network, restore nature in the borough, and enhance our green spaces in a way that benefits both people and wildlife.

While the will to set ambitious targets to further enhance biodiversity across the borough exists, the level of funding required is beyond the council's current resources. Current levels of government funding for biodiversity conservation and enhancement are not sufficient to address the biodiversity crisis. This tension between ambition and resourcing underscores the importance of continued advocacy for investment in biodiversity and collaboration. The work described in this report shows that Stockport has the vision, expertise, and community spirit to deliver transformative outcomes.

Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared collaboratively by Stockport Council's Ecology Team and Climate & Nature Team. Thanks also to the many council departments and associated groups and organisations who contributed information on current and planned actions to protect and enhance biodiversity across the borough. Their insights and cooperation have been essential in bringing this report together.

Executive summary

This report demonstrates how Stockport Council is fulfilling its statutory duties required by the Environment Act 2021. This requires public authorities to **conserve and enhance biodiversity and to publish a report outlining achievements and plans.** The statutory requirement states a biodiversity report must be published **at least every five years** with the first statutory reporting period ending **no later than 1 January 2026**, with publication required within twelve weeks (see Ref 1, Ref 2).

Stockport borough has a rich mosaic of semi-natural and green spaces that are ecologically, culturally, and socially significant. Stockport is guided by the Lawton Principles when deciding how to nurture, preserve and enhance biodiversity while also delivering its duties for residents. This means embedding ecological connectivity into spatial planning, supporting nature recovery networks, and working in partnership with landowners, communities, and conservation organisations.

Our approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity responds to statutory requirements as well as local drivers like the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Greater Manchester Environment Plan. It operates within the context of Stockport Council declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 and a Biodiversity Emergency in 2022, signaling a commitment to act on these existential issues.

This report is in two parts. Part 1 details action to conserve and enhance biodiversity from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025 (the date from when local authorities first became subject to the duty to report) covering biodiversity relevant activity across:

- Parks and greenspaces
- Bereavement services
- Highways and street scene
- Flood risk management
- Planning and development
- Estates and housing
- Partner organisations (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, Environment Agency, United Utilities, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Mersey Rivers Trust)
- Community groups

Part 2 sets out Stockport Council's biodiversity targets for the next reporting period, and how progress will be monitored over the five-year period. The actions and targets reflect statutory duties, regional strategies, and local priorities, with the overarching aim of supporting nature recovery, enhancing ecological connectivity, and improving biodiversity outcomes across Stockport.

Introduction

Legislative context

The Council's statutory biodiversity duty is set out under **Section 40 of the NERC Act**, as amended by the **Environment Act 2021**, requiring public authorities to **consider, act and report** on biodiversity (Environment Act 2021).

Local authorities must publish a biodiversity report **every five years**, with the first reporting period ending **1 January 2026** (DEFRA, 2023).

It is important to state that Stockport's biodiversity plans will align with:

- The **Environmental Improvement Plan** (DEFRA, 2005)
- The **Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** (GMCA 2025a)
- Biodiversity Net Gain legislation – mandatory under **Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act** 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of **the Environment Act 2021**) (DEFRA, 2025).

Local context

Stockport's natural character

Stockport is uniquely positioned at the interface of urban Greater Manchester and the rural landscapes of the Peak District, giving rise to a rich mosaic of semi-natural and green spaces that are ecologically, culturally, and socially significant. The borough's green infrastructure includes ancient woodlands, river valleys, canal corridors, grasslands, and urban parks, which support biodiversity and provide vital ecosystem services.

Stockport's woodlands and grasslands, such as those found in Reddish Vale and Etherow Country Park, are key ecological assets. These areas support a wide range of flora and fauna and are valued for their beauty, recreational use, and contribution to local character. Smaller green spaces, including roadside verges, allotments, and cemeteries, also play a crucial role in supporting pollinators and linking larger habitat areas.

Stockport's green spaces are not only ecologically important but also socially valuable, with many located within walking distance of residential areas.

Lawton principles

In response to significant biodiversity loss in the UK, the Lawton Review (2010) proposed an approach to nature conservation, based on the principle of making habitats 'bigger, better and more joined up' (Lawton, 2010).

Local authorities are stewards of the habitats and species found within their boundaries, and as such Stockport is guided by the Lawton Principles when deciding how to nurture, preserve and enhance biodiversity while also delivering its duties for residents. This means embedding

ecological connectivity into spatial planning, supporting nature recovery networks, and working in partnership with landowners, communities, and conservation organisations.

Importance of collaboration

Addressing the biodiversity crisis requires a collaborative approach. No single authority, charity, landowner, or agency can tackle the scale and complexity of biodiversity loss alone. Effective collaboration enables the pooling of resources, knowledge, and expertise, fostering innovative solutions, and ensuring that conservation efforts are strategically aligned. Partnerships between local authorities, conservation charities, community groups, private stakeholders etc. are essential for delivering landscape-scale habitat restoration, implementing nature recovery networks, and achieving biodiversity net gain. Moreover, engaging local communities in biodiversity initiatives builds public support, enhances stewardship of natural spaces, and ensures that actions are socially inclusive and locally relevant. By working together, stakeholders can create a more resilient and connected ecological network that benefits both people and wildlife.

Integration of Biodiversity into Council Policies and Strategies

Stockport Council has declared both a Climate Emergency (2019) and a Biodiversity Emergency (2022), signaling a commitment to act on these existential issues. Taken together, aspects of the emerging Stockport Local Plan and the Stockport Climate and Nature (CAN) Strategy articulate the council's strategic approach to responding to both emergency declarations. These strategies set out a comprehensive approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, responding to statutory requirements under the Environment Act 2021, and additionally supporting delivery of the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (GM LNRS) and the Greater Manchester Environment Plan.

The emerging Local Plan integrates biodiversity across strategic policies and development management policies, ensuring that new development contributes positively to nature recovery, climate resilience, ecosystem services and responds to the declaration of an ecological emergency. The Local Plan is currently being prepared and is expected to be adopted in Winter 2027/28. A summary of the relevant draft policies is shared below which articulate the Council's ambition for biodiversity protection and enhancement across the borough:

- Commitment to protect, enhance and manage the borough's natural environment.
- Establishes our 'ecological network', identifying 'core areas' and 'linear corridors' in line with the Lawton principles, to update and replace our 'green chain' policy designation which has been used successfully for determining planning applications over many years.
- Alignment with the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which identifies a Nature Network for a greener and more biodiverse Greater Manchester. Development within LNRS 'core areas' must protect and enhance existing habitats, while proposals within or adjacent to 'opportunity areas' are expected to improve connectivity of the network through design and habitat creation.

- Requirement for new development to deliver net gains for biodiversity with an aim to achieve a minimum gain of 20% expected for relevant developments, subject to viability testing (exceeding the national statutory requirement of 10% net gain).
- Requirement for major developments to use Natural England's 'Urban Greening Factor' (UGF) tool to measurably integrate green roofs, walls, landscaping, and sustainable drainage systems into new development.
- Landscaping schemes must include at least 60% locally native species and incorporate features such as bat and bird boxes and hedgehog highways to improve habitat connectivity.
- Requirement for tree-lined streets in new developments and compensatory planting on at least a two-for-one basis.
- Promotion of high-quality public spaces that integrate green and blue infrastructure, creating opportunities for native planting, pollinator-friendly landscapes, and SuDS that provide habitat and improve water quality.

Scope of this report

The actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity detailed in this report were reviewed during the first consideration in December 2023 as required by the biodiversity duty.

This report covers biodiversity relevant activity across:

- Parks and greenspaces
- Bereavement services
- Highways and street scene
- Flood risk management
- Planning and development
- Estates and housing
- Partner organisations (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, Environment Agency, United Utilities, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Mersey Rivers Trust)
- Community groups

Governance

Strategic governance is provided by Scrutiny committee. Council governance in relation to any decision making will be in line with the council's constitution and Scheme of Delegation. Progress against the targets set out in the Biodiversity Report's 5-year plan will be monitored as part of the council's Climate and Nature (CAN) strategy, overseen by the CAN Deliver Board, and reported on via the CAN annual report. The CAN Deliver Board, chaired by the Director of Place

Management, will meet three times a year to track progress and identify action needed to address any challenges. Performance will be included in the CAN annual report, which is approved through the council's democratic governance processes and published in Summer.

Additionally, key performance indicators will be added to the council's Portfolio Resources and Performance Agreement and monitored through the Portfolio Resources and Performance Reports.

In line with statutory requirements, we will publish a full report on our action to further the general biodiversity objective every five years following publication of this first report.

Delivery will be supported through ongoing engagement with key strategic partners, including:

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Responsible Body (RB) representatives;
- Mersey Rivers Trust (MRT)
- Environment Agency (EA)
- United Utilities (UU)
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT)

These partners will play an important role in coordination, evidence sharing, and delivery alignment across administrative and catchment scales.

Part 1: actions delivered to 1st January 2026

1.1 Habitat creation and enhancement on council-owned land

1.1.1 Stockport Council services

Designated sites

Designated sites are integral to Stockport's biodiversity strategy and play a key role in meeting statutory obligations under the Biodiversity Duty, and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). These sites provide a foundation for nature recovery, climate resilience, and community engagement, ensuring that biodiversity enhancements are embedded across the borough.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) plays a central role in safeguarding and enhancing designated nature conservation sites across the borough. These sites deliver ecological, educational, and community benefits, while ensuring compliance with conservation legislation and balancing development with environmental protection.

Current Designations
Stockport's designated sites include:

- **2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSIs): Compstall Nature Reserve and Ludworth Intake (the latter designated for Geological interest)
- **4 Country Parks:** Chadkirk, Etherow, Mersey Vale Nature Park, and Reddish Vale
- **14 Local Nature Reserves** (LNRs)
- **68 Sites of Biological Importance** (SBIs) plus 9 candidate sites
- **Green Chain network**, safeguarding ecological corridors and recreational routes

SBI candidate sites currently under consideration include Bramhall Golf Club Ponds, Castle Hill Marsh, Goyt Valley Woodland, and others.

Policy and Strategic Context
Designated sites are embedded within Stockport and Greater Manchester policies. Stockport's retained policy NE3.1 identifies LNRs as key nodes in the Green Chain network, with targets to expand and connect them to improve ecological resilience. The Stockport CAN Strategy (2025–2030) commits to increasing designated sites and integrating them into climate resilience planning. The Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), published in August 2025, sets measurable biodiversity improvement targets, with LNRs as priority delivery sites.

Progress and Biodiversity Benefits
The number of designated sites has grown significantly, with LNRs increasing from 3 in 1999 to 14 today, and SBIs rising from 29 in 1984 to 68 in 2025. These sites provide critical ecosystem services, including pollination, carbon storage, flood risk management, and opportunities for education and community stewardship. The Green Chain designation has strengthened habitat connectivity and improved wellbeing for residents.

Active management and volunteer engagement have delivered tangible biodiversity gains. Examples include:

- **Happy Valley LNR:** Riverbank stabilisation (2024) led to increases in woodland birds and amphibian breeding sites.
- **Poise Brook LNR:** Meadow restoration boosted butterfly populations.
- **Reddish Vale LNR/SBI:** Bat surveys show rising pipistrelle and noctule numbers.
- **Goyt Valley SBIs:** Increased sightings of kingfisher and dipper along river corridors.
- **Etherow Valley/Compstall:** Hedgehog and amphibian populations strengthened through connectivity projects.

Parks and green spaces

Stockport Council manages a diverse portfolio of parks and green spaces, ranging from relatively new sites to well established sites over a century old. These spaces vary in size and often feature mature natural elements such as hedgerows and trees, which provide valuable habitats for a wide range of species. Parks deliver multiple benefits including opportunities for sport and recreation, connection with nature, carbon sequestration, and provision of food and shelter for wildlife (Natural England, 2023; Forestry Commission, 2023). While opportunities for traditional expansion are limited, these spaces present significant potential for biodiversity enhancement through targeted management and habitat improvements (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2025a).

Recent investment through government funding for the **Mersey Way River Walk** has enabled nature recovery initiatives along the Stockport section of the River Mersey. Key interventions include installation of a swift tower, a sand martin nesting wall, 45 new woodcrete bird, bat, and insect boxes, a nature trail comprising 30 posts with rubbing plaques, and new interpretation panels focused on nature-based themes. These measures aim to enhance habitat diversity, support priority species, and improve public engagement with biodiversity (DEFRA, 2025).

Trees

Native woods in England support a fifth of the UK's priority species for conservation, but the UK has one of the lowest levels of woodland cover in Europe.

The Greater Manchester LNRS includes a target for tree canopy cover to increase from 15% to 17% across the city region by 2035. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025 includes an interim target for Tree Canopy and Woodland Cover setting a goal to increase England's tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.33 percentage points by December 2030, based on a 2022 baseline of 14.9%, equating to approximately 43,000 hectares of new tree cover

The council's tree planting initiative aims to significantly increasing Stockport's tree cover, planting at least 11,500 standard trees in parks and along highways by 2030. New spaces were sought that could be reclaimed or repurposed for environmental enrichment, and development of habitats, through tree planting. Planting outside of existing woodland creates vital habitat, as well as creating corridors to help wildlife spread across the local landscape and creating opportunities for tree-dependent species to adapt to the climate and biodiversity crises.

The 5,000+ trees planted since 2020 are providing clean air, storing carbon, and offering protection from flooding. Species of tree selected for the scheme were chosen to provide variety in locally native species. By prioritising species variety, biodiversity is further enhanced, while safeguarding against loss of tree cover from existing tree diseases like ash dieback.

Verges

Grass verges are one of the most undervalued habitats in the UK, despite collectively covering an area equivalent to twice the size of London (Plantlife, 2019). These linear green spaces offer significant potential for biodiversity enhancement, acting as corridors for pollinators and other wildlife, and providing daily contact with nature for millions of people (Plantlife, 2019).

Traditionally, grass verges in Stockport have been managed by frequent mowing during the growing season (April to October), with cuttings typically left in place due to cost constraints. However, this approach can lead to nutrient enrichment of the soil, favouring vigorous grasses, and reducing wildflower diversity (Wildlife Trusts, 2019).

Evidence from other local authorities shows that conservation mowing—cutting vegetation and removing arisings at appropriate times—can significantly increase botanical diversity over time (Plantlife, 2020).

Stockport's Pilot Conservation Mowing Scheme

Stockport Council launched a pilot conservation mowing scheme in April 2025. The pilot site, on **Bramhall Lane South** has local support from councillors and the community group *Sustainable Bramhall*.

The pilot involves a modified mowing regime:

- **One spring cut in April**, with all arisings removed
- **One autumn cut in September**, with all arisings removed
- **No herbicide use** within the pilot area

Cuttings are collected and provided to a local farmer for hay, and the cut-and-collect mower used in the first year was loaned free of charge by the manufacturer for trial purposes.

Biodiversity Benefits and Monitoring

Botanical surveys were conducted prior to the first autumn cut and will continue annually to monitor changes in species richness. As soil nutrient levels decline through the removal of arisings, it is anticipated that wildflower diversity will increase, providing a model for broader implementation across the borough.

LNRS alignment

The pilot conservation verge scheme in Stockport makes a meaningful contribution to the targets set out in the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). By enhancing grass verges with ecologically sensitive management, the scheme supports the restoration and expansion of **priority grassland habitats** identified in the LNRS, turning underused vegetation into wildlife-supporting habitat (GMCA, 2025a; GMEU, 2025). These enhanced verges will function as vital **ecological corridors and stepping-stones**, improving connectivity between fragmented habitats and reinforcing the strategic Nature Network (GMEU, 2025; Data.gov.uk, 2025). In doing so, the initiative directly contributes to delivering the LNRS's ambitious target of **restoring or creating 1,800ha of wildlife-rich land** across the city-region (GMCA, 2025b). Furthermore, by actively managing and enriching these verges for biodiversity, the scheme helps advance the LNRS goal of bringing more designated nature sites under **ecologically sensitive, active stewardship** (GMCA, 2025b).

Management and control of invasive species

The spread of invasive non-native species by humans can cause harm or even the breakdown of indigenous ecosystems and is now recognised as a significant global issue. In the UK legislation on invasive non-native species, rooted in retained EU Regulation 1143/2014 and enforced through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019, prohibits their release, transport, sale, or breeding to protect biodiversity, with offences punishable by fines or imprisonment.

Stockport Council manages invasive nonnative species (INNS) through early identification, public reporting, and targeted treatment of high-risk plants. Reported sightings in parks, open spaces, and highways are investigated and controlled using herbicide spraying and other control measures, supporting the borough's wider ecological network and helping maintain safe, biodiverse public spaces. This local, practical approach aligns with the GB INNS Strategy 2023–2030, which provides the national framework for prevention and rapid response. Stockport delivers the on the ground weed control and public engagement that put national policy into practice. native species (INNS) through early identification, public reporting, and targeted treatment of high-risk plants. Reported sightings in parks, open spaces, and highways are investigated and controlled using herbicide spraying and other control measures, supporting the borough's wider ecological network and helping maintain safe, biodiverse public spaces. This local, practical approach aligns with the on-the-ground weed control and public engagement that put national policy into practice.

- **Targeted species**: Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam, Rhododendron ponticum, and New Zealand pygmyweed are prioritised for control.
- **Methods**: Herbicide spraying and other treatments are used, particularly on highways, parks, and open spaces.
- **Community role**: Residents are encouraged to report sightings via council channels, enabling rapid investigation and management.

- **Integration with ecology planning**: INNS control is embedded in Stockport's ecological network studies, aiming to protect biodiversity corridors and maintain safe public spaces.
- Smarter recording techniques so we can monitor performance more effectively and accurately.

Current INNS treatment methods

Stockport's INNS management focuses on targeted treatment for priority species. **Japanese knotweed** and **giant hogweed** are treated primarily with GallopXL herbicide, with knotweed managed borough-wide by TLC and hogweed treated reactively by SMBC. **Himalayan balsam** is controlled through volunteer-led pulling and bashing events, while **American skunk cabbage** is removed manually by volunteer groups. Other species such as **Rhododendron ponticum** and **New Zealand pygmyweed** currently have no formal treatment plans in place. Delivery methods include mapping infestations, coordinating volunteer action, and applying herbicide where necessary, supported by council policies such as the Japanese Knotweed Procedure Policy (2013).

Biodiversity Benefits

Removing invasive nonnative species (INNS) restores ecological balance by allowing native plants and animals to thrive, improving habitat quality, strengthening ecosystem resilience, and safeguarding biodiversity against long-term decline.

- **Improved habitats for wildlife across Stockport**: INNS often form dense monocultures that suppress native plants. Their removal frees space, light, and nutrients, enabling wildflowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees to recolonise. By restoring native vegetation, removal supports pollinators (bees, butterflies), seed-eating birds, and small mammals that rely on diverse plant communities.
- **Aquatic ecosystem health across Stockport's rivers and waterways**: The greatest gains are seen in riparian zones, where knotweed removal improves both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Giant hogweed often invade riverbanks, destabilising soil and shading waterways. Removal reduces erosion, improves water quality, and restores habitats for fish and amphibians.
- **Resilient ecosystems**: Diverse native communities are more resistant to pests, diseases, and climate change impacts compared to knotweed-dominated monocultures.
- **Soil and nutrient cycling**: Native plants re-establish balanced nutrient cycling and microbial diversity, which invasive species often disrupt.
- **Reduced pesticide reliance creating a healthier environment to live in**: Innovative chemical-free removal methods are being developed to avoid herbicide use, further protecting soil organisms and non-target species.
- **Economic and cultural value**: Healthy ecosystems provide ecosystem services—pollination, flood protection, recreation—that are undermined by INNS. Removal helps sustain these benefits.

- Japanese knotweed is potentially very destructive to infrastructure. Removal avoids damage to property.

Allotments

Allotments provide significant benefits for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Research indicates that allotments can host a higher diversity of pollinators than many parks and private gardens, making them important refuges in urban landscapes (Smith et al., 2014). These sites act as green islands, offering food and habitat for pollinators and serving as stepping stones for commuting species such as birds, hedgehogs and foxes (Royal Horticultural Society, 2023). In addition to supporting wildlife, allotments contribute to climate mitigation by reducing food miles through local food production and enhancing carbon sequestration via planting and healthy soils (DEFRA, 2025).

Stockport has over 30 allotment sites, mostly managed by allotment associations, with more than 1,700 plots.

The scale and distribution of allotment sites provide significant opportunities to support and enhance biodiversity, particularly where management approaches are aligned with wider ecological objectives (GMCA, 2025a).

Cemeteries

Stockport's Bereavement Services manage five large cemeteries and sixteen closed churchyards, many of which have been established for over two centuries. These sites range in size from 1 acre to approximately 35 acres and often feature mature natural elements such as hedgerows and trees that provide valuable habitats for a variety of species. While opportunities for traditional expansion are limited, these spaces present significant potential for biodiversity enhancement and the introduction of environmentally sensitive burial options.

At Borough Cemetery, meadow corridors were created with support from St George's School, drawing positive feedback from visitors. The site has also introduced four beehives, the first step in a plan to place at least one hive in each of the five main cemeteries by 2027. Highfield Cemetery is next, supported by its natural burial area and good nectar resources.

Sustainability work continues through composting leaf litter from Mill Lane and Borough Cemetery into mulch for gardens, with a goal to extend this across all sites by 2027. This will boost onsite recycling, provide material for topping older graves, and create hedgehog habitat piles.

Future plans include tree planting for woodland burial areas. Highfield already offers a natural burial ground, and Bereavement Services intend to introduce natural burial options at at least one additional cemetery within five years.

Lighting

Lighting intersects with biodiversity when artificial light at night, particularly from streetlights, disrupts natural behaviours and ecological processes—altering plant phenology, inhibiting insect activity (especially pollinators), and disorienting nocturnal species such as bats and amphibians (Owens & Lewis 2018; Evans 2023; Meng et al. 2022). It can also change predator–

prey dynamics and ecosystem functioning, fragmenting habitats and reducing ecological connectivity (Evans 2023; Hale et al. 2015).

In the UK, street lighting represents a substantial source of nighttime artificial illumination. Ordnance Survey has mapped over 6.5 million streetlights nationwide, covering roads and paths in urban and suburban areas (Ordnance Survey 2025). Major towns and cities have densities around 400 lights per km^2 (Ordnance Survey 2025).

Since 2017, Stockport Council has undertaken a borough-wide upgrade of its street lighting infrastructure, replacing approximately 35,000 traditional lanterns with energy-efficient LED units (Stockport Council 2022). This initiative was driven by Public Health guidance and energy reduction targets, aiming to cut carbon emissions and operational costs while improving lighting quality. The new LED fixtures emit a warmer 3,000K light compared to the previous 4,500K lamps, significantly reducing brightness and light spill. By directing light more precisely and minimizing upward glare, the scheme helps to limit light pollution across the borough (Stockport Council FAQs 2022).

Beyond energy and climate benefits, the project incorporates biodiversity considerations. By following the Bat Conservation Trust's Guidance Note 08/18 on artificial lighting, the design choices—such as warmer colour temperatures and the absence of ultraviolet components—are likely to reduce ecological impacts. Research indicates that LEDs with low UV output attract fewer invertebrates, and wavelengths above 550nm (~3,000K) are less disruptive to bats and other nocturnal species (Bat Conservation Trust 2018; Owens & Lewis 2018).

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) manage surface water by mimicking natural processes, reducing flood risk and improving water quality. Unlike traditional piped drainage, SuDS slow runoff, allowing water to infiltrate, evaporate, or be stored. Features such as wetlands, ponds, swales, and rain gardens create diverse habitats that support plants, invertebrates, amphibians, and birds. By integrating SuDS into urban and rural landscapes, we enhance ecological connectivity, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and contribute to climate resilience—making SuDS a vital tool for both water management and biodiversity gain.

Stockport Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority and Local Planning Authority, works to embed nature-based solutions in development. Through planning policy and guidance, engineers encourage surface-based SuDS features—such as ponds, wetlands, and vegetated swales—rather than buried assets. Incorporating SuDS into new developments creates blue-green corridors and pockets of habitat that offset the biodiversity loss from hardstanding. These measures improve water quality, strengthen ecological networks, and help mitigate climate change impacts.

Key successes from planning policy requirements include green roofs and walls in the town centre, urban landscape enhancements, and major SuDS installations at Woodford Garden Village. Stockport Council has also delivered several SuDS projects in partnership with Mersey Rivers Trust and other stakeholders at Bruntwood Park, Crown Edge Way, Lavington Avenue Recreation Ground and Torkington Park. See Appendix B for SuDS case studies.

1.1.2 Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes Group (SHG) is an arm's length management organisation (ALMO) managing housing on behalf of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. Through its housing developments, estate management, and green space improvements, SHG presents valuable opportunities to maintain and enhance biodiversity, supporting the Council's wider ecological and climate objectives.

Tree planting

In conjunction with SHG's Estate & Neighbourhood management policy, tree planting sites are identified as part of 3 yearly tree inspections and scheduled site monitoring from Greenspace Officers.

Trees of a suitable size and species are selected for sites and subject to grant specification and British Standards technical regulations. Each year a different committee is selected. The winter 24/25 selection was for the planting of 168 trees in 24 locations in Offerton & Marple.

Over the 20/21, 21/22, 22/23 and 23/24 selections a target of a minimum of 50 trees to be planted was set and met each year.

Aftercare of Planted Urban Trees
Effective aftercare is essential to ensure the survival and long-term benefits of newly planted urban trees. This includes watering during the establishment period and monitoring pests, diseases, or physical damage. Structural pruning may also be required to promote healthy growth and prevent future hazards. By embedding these practices into Stockport Homes' tree planting programme, the organisation can safeguard the success of its planting targets and maximise biodiversity gains, ensuring that new trees deliver the intended ecological and social benefits over the long term (Tree Council, 2025; Forestry Commission, 2023).

Low Maintenance and wildflower areas

In conjunction with SHG's grounds maintenance contract with an external contractor 25 low maintenance areas have been selected at which grass habitat (around 6,000m2) is not subject to regular mowing, allowing it to grow long. Two areas are being managed as wildflower grasslands (800m2) and other sites are managed by mulch mowing (9,000m2).

These low maintenance areas were identified through site monitoring and management and have been part of a low maintenance regime since 2009.

A further 5 sites (1,000m2) have been identified within SHG's housing stock for wildflower maintenance with enhancement works to begin spring 2026.

Scheduled inspections will be quarterly with a minimum of 2 maintenance cuts with arisings removed to encourage growth and additional seeding if required.

Allowing public grass areas to grow long increases structural diversity, providing shelter and foraging opportunities for invertebrates, small mammals, and ground-nesting birds (Plantlife 2021). Cut-and-collect management of urban grasslands reduces soil fertility, encouraging wildflower diversity, and supporting pollinators (JNCC 2020). Mulch mowing returns organic matter to the soil, improving soil health and microbial communities

while maintaining some habitat complexity (Natural England 2022). Together, these approaches enhance plant diversity, boost pollinator abundance, and create resilient urban ecosystems that support a wider range of species.

Over the next five years enhancement work will begin on the current newly selected wildflower sites and a further 10 sites will be selected over this period for wildflower grassland enhancement.

SHG will continue to identify areas for change in grounds maintenance whilst balancing housing stock areas and service charge paying customer expectations.

Customer engagement

An annual gardening competition for SHG residents is held each year, and points are awarded for actions which enhance biodiversity, and customer planting activities are carried out each year to selected areas.

Opportunities for further benefits to biodiversity as part of wider SHG engagement with customers (E.g. roadshows, surveys, newsletters etc.) have been identified as offering potential to provide biodiversity enhancement guidance for customers to enhance their gardens and contribute to local planting projects, allotments or events.

A new feature is to be included in the next customer newsletter, published monthly on the SHG website, comprising hints, tips and guidance on enhancing gardens with minor adjustments such as bird tables, bird boxes, bug hotels, bee baths, fence gaps and leaf mulching.

Small changes in domestic gardens can significantly boost urban biodiversity. Adding bird boxes and baths provides nesting sites and water sources for birds, supporting breeding and hydration (RSPB 2025). Bug hotels create microhabitats for pollinators and decomposers, enhancing invertebrate diversity (Buglife 2024). Hedgehog gaps in fences enable safe movement, improving habitat connectivity for mammals (PTES, 2023). Leaf mulching enriches soil, fostering fungi and invertebrates while reducing waste (Royal Horticultural Society 2025). Together, these actions create a mosaic of resources that sustain wildlife, strengthen ecological networks, and increase resilience in urban ecosystems.

Bird & Bat Boxes

Installing bird boxes, including swift boxes, on council-managed homes, woodlands, and individual trees provides essential nesting opportunities in urban areas where natural cavities are scarce (RSPB 2025). These structures support cavity-nesting species such as tits, sparrows, and swifts, improving breeding success and population stability (British Trust for Ornithology 2024). Swift boxes are particularly valuable for a species in decline, offering safe, elevated nesting sites that mimic traditional eaves (Swift Conservation 2023). By reducing competition for nesting spaces and enhancing habitat diversity, bird boxes strengthen urban ecological networks and contribute to the conservation of vulnerable species.

In the absence of a formal SHG policy on bird boxes, this provides an opportunity for biodiversity enhancement over the next reporting period.

78 woodcrete swift boxes have been installed so far in 25/26 roofing programme, with a further 84 properties expected to have woodcrete swift boxes installed this year.

From 2026, all annual reviews of SHG roofing programmes will include consideration of installing integrated swift and bat boxes during re-roofing, roof repairs, and upgrades. Opportunities identified will be documented, and progress reported annually to ensure alignment with biodiversity objectives.

SHG have set a target to produce and install 20 bird boxes each winter from 2025 for the next 5 years. The bird boxes in trees target will be included in contractor annual social value KPI which is set against tender submission proposals.

Based on current installation across the remaining roofing programme, a further 84 properties will have woodcrete swift boxes installed.

1.2 Habitat creation and management on private spaces

1.2.1 Planning applications

Stockport Council's Planning Services handle a wide range of development proposals. The Council's Nature Development team are consulted on any planning applications which have potential to impact nature and biodiversity to ensure due consideration is given to protected sites, protected species, and priority habitats and species, in the planning decision process.

In addition to the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain required under the Environment Act (2021) (refer to the BNG section), legislation and planning policy provide a robust framework for securing biodiversity enhancements within development. This framework includes the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Natural England Standing Advice and Local Planning Policy. The NPPF requires planning decisions to minimise impacts on and provide measurable net gains for biodiversity through provision of ecological networks and incorporation of features to support priority and/or threatened species. Natural England's Standing Advice states that biodiversity enhancements should be provided in addition to any mitigation requirements. At a local level, Stockport's Core Strategy is used when determining planning applications and requires protection of the borough's nature conservation value and creation of new wildlife habitats to improve connectivity and support biodiversity. Developments are expected to make a positive contribution to protecting and enhancing the borough's natural environment. A new Local Plan for Stockport is currently being prepared to replace the Core Strategy and saved UDP policies. This will contain revised and updated policies to maximise delivery of enhancements for biodiversity within developments within the borough. The new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Greater Manchester (published August 2025) complements local policy by directing enhancements towards priority areas for nature conservation.

Requirements for biodiversity enhancements are outlined in Stockport Council's Application Validation Checklist. A variety of planning conditions are routinely used to help secure delivery of biodiversity enhancements, and these are primarily based on the British Standard for Biodiversity (BS42020). Conditions are used where appropriate, such as a Biodiversity Enhancement Strategy (BES) and a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) or Habitat Creation/Enhancement and Management Scheme (HCEMS). Such conditions require submission of details of long-term management and monitoring of created habitats or features (up to 30 years and/or for the lifetime of the development). The condition(s) may also require specification and installation of species-specific enhancements such as bat and bird boxes, hedgehog gaps and/or Green Infrastructure features such as green walls, green roofs,

native/wildlife friendly planting and wildlife-pond/SuDS installation. Using planning conditions helps secure beneficial outcomes for nature within development—from design stage through implementation and long-term maintenance - creating an enforceable pathway for delivering biodiversity enhancements.

Nonetheless, a recent study looked at 42 housing developments across England and found that only 53% of the ecological features referred to in planning conditions were found to be present (Wild Justice, 2024). Many of the agreed ecological enhancements were missing/had not been installed, with 83% of hedgehog highways, 100% of bug boxes, and 75% of both bat and bird boxes found to be missing from new developments. In terms of plant life: 39% of the trees detailed on planting plans were missing or dead, 82% of woodland edge seed mixes were found to be absent, 59% of wildflower grasslands were found to be sown incorrectly or otherwise damaged and nearly half of the native hedges that were supposed to be planted did not exist. The size or location of the development was not found to affect findings, and so the study suggests a systemic issue with condition compliance relating to nature conservation and biodiversity. In response, Stockport Council will review condition wording to require evidence of compliance and revise guidance for developers, as detailed below.

In addition to the planning function, the Habitats Directive also applies when local authorities (as decision-maker) grant consent through other regimes for which they are responsible – this includes demolition notices which often fall under permitted development rights. Ecological advisory information is issued to ensure applicants are aware of their legal obligations in respect of biodiversity, and this helps to minimise impacts to wildlife (including protected species such as bats and nesting birds).

Current Actions

- Ensure that biodiversity enhancements are incorporated into developments wherever possible, to accord with national and local planning policy as part of the planning application process via Application Validation Requirements guidance and as part of planning consultation responses and with consideration of relevant biodiversity strategies and action plans
- Recommend planning conditions to secure delivery of biodiversity enhancements
- Issue biodiversity guidance to applicants applying for demolition consent under permitted development rights, advising of obligation to abide by relevant wildlife legislation.

Biodiversity benefits from actions

Table 1 below shows the number of planning applications where biodiversity enhancements have been recommended within developments over the past 3 years (when records began). Note that the 2025 data do not comprise the whole year and are for 1 Jan – 30 November 2025 (which is until the end of the reporting period of this report). The ecology team at the council works alongside applicants and planning case officers to encourage integration of appropriate biodiversity features within design proposals where possible. The implementation and long-term management of these features can be secured by condition with the aim that this system, along with monitoring and enforcement, will be improved considering the findings of the Wild Justice (2024) report.

Table 1: Number of planning applications with recommended biodiversity enhancements (not including mandatory BNG) From 1 January 2023 to 30 November 2025.

Biodiversity enhancement feature	2023	2024	2025
At least one bat box	76	77	74
At least one bird box	94	78	75
Native tree planting	32	24	24
Native hedgerow planting	38	27	19
Hedgehog access gaps in fencing	35	22	18
Wildflower grassland area	17	17	13
Native scrub planting	20	11	15
Pond creation or enhancement	1	1	3
Green roof	5	6	3
Green wall	2	2	0
Hedgehog house	3	2	2
Invertebrate house/bee bricks	8	7	4
Amphibian/reptile refugia	3	3	2

1.2.2 Domestic gardens

Residential gardens play a vital role in supporting local biodiversity providing microhabitats and forming a significant habitat network for wildlife. Moreover, gardens contribute to climate resilience by improving soil health, storing carbon, and mitigating urban heat.

Trees, shrubs, flower borders, vegetable patches, grassland, ponds, compost heaps and hedgerows all provide food, shelter and breeding habitat for a wide range of species, including birds, small mammals, amphibians and pollinators such as bees and butterflies and hoverflies, and countless other beneficial invertebrates.

Gardens are important stepping stones for wildlife, offering refuge and providing connectivity between fragmented natural areas. Several studies have identified the importance of connectivity between gardens and that the mosaic of garden habitats helps species move and disperse through the urban landscape, particularly when located near to parks, nature reserves and other green spaces. Relatively simple measures such as incorporating hedgehog gaps in boundary fencing and planting hedgerows instead of fencing, therefore help facilitate connectivity of wildlife.

As habitat loss increases due to urban development and intensive agriculture, gardens are becoming an increasingly important resource for wildlife. Research has shown that gardens with a variety of flowers and vegetables can support around 8000 insect species (Davies et al,

2009). Studies also suggest that a significant proportion of bird species rely on garden habitat (Canon et al 2005).

Research has revealed that only 50% of an average garden in Greater Manchester is greenspace – with the remainder manmade features such as patio or astroturf grass (Greater Manchester State of Nature, March 2024). There is therefore scope to do more to sympathetically manage gardens within Stockport and maximise the biodiversity benefits that residential gardens deliver and help support nature recovery.

Current Actions

- Information on the Council's website that raises awareness of gardening for wildlife and to encourage residents to incorporate biodiversity friendly measures within gardens
- Collaborative working with partner organisations such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust in delivery of their Wild Stockport project which included creation of five 'swift streets' and five 'hedgehog highways' within the borough (link in with Working with Organisations section)
- Support residents with delivery of projects to benefit wildlife in residential spaces e.g. Ginnel Garden project in Edgely and Webb Lane in Offerton
- Secure biodiversity enhancements within gardens within proposed developments via planning conditions – including wildlife-friendly landscaping schemes and tree planting, bat and bird boxes and hedgehog gaps in fencing (link in with Biodiversity Enhancements in Planning section)
- Via development control, ensure permeable materials and/or soak aways are incorporated into driveways to support drainage and alleviate potential flood risk (link in with Drainage section).

1.2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Legislation

Under the Environment Act 2021, Stockport Council, as a Local Planning Authority (LPA), must ensure that all applicable developments must achieve a minimum 10% uplift in biodiversity units, calculated using the statutory biodiversity metric and maintained for 30 years. We require submission of pre- and post-development biodiversity metric calculations to evidence compliance.

BNG requirements are also embedded in our local planning application validation checklist, ensuring applicants have included baseline biodiversity data, habitat mapping, and confirmation of BNG requirements.

DEFRA requires that a Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) be approved prior to commencement to confirm delivery of the required uplift (DEFRA, 2023). Our ecology team assesses all BGPs before development begins, and planning officers are trained to ensure consistent understanding of BNG processes.

BNG gains must be legally secured for 30 years, typically through Section 106 agreements or conservation covenants. We define "significant on-site BNG" locally and calculate monitoring

fees, secured via Section 106 agreements. For off-site BNG, applicants must evidence procurement of biodiversity units during submission.

Monitoring and enforcement

Stockport Council has developed an in-house system to strengthen its ability to monitor, enforce, and validate BNG commitments. This system supports two core functions:

1. Monitoring and reporting of habitat banks, and
2. **Validation and compliance checking** of BNG submissions associated with planning applications.

The system adopts a **spatial-first approach**, integrating data within the Council's internal GIS databases. This enables accurate geographic analysis, visualisation of habitat creation progress, and generation of outputs aligned with the statutory Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan template. By leveraging spatial data, the system ensures that monitoring is precise and transparent.

To enhance compliance checking, the system cross-references spatial data with submitted biodiversity metric documents. Additionally, the statutory biodiversity metric has been recreated within the Council's automation framework, allowing ecologists to verify calculations against an independent in-house assessment. This dual-check process provides a robust mechanism for ensuring accuracy and consistency in BNG delivery.

The development of this system reflects Stockport's commitment to meeting statutory obligations under the Environment Act 2021 and to maintaining high standards of accountability in biodiversity enhancement. We provide comprehensive, locally relevant BNG guidance on our website, helping applicants understand requirements at every stage.

Supporting Private Habitat Banks in Stockport

We have developed and published our own habitat bank criteria on the council website to ensure transparency and consistency. Landowners interested in creating private habitat banks can access guidance from us throughout the process. Where appropriate, private habitat banks in Stockport can enter into a Section 106 agreement with the council to register Biodiversity Net Gain units.

BNG delivery on council-owned land

Stockport Council is actively preparing to create BNG units on its own land to meet statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021 and support nature recovery across Greater Manchester. There are several routes to creating units: following legal, technical, and cost analysis, the preferred route is to enter into a conservation covenant with a Responsible Body approved by DEFRA, securing land for biodiversity enhancement and enabling registration of BNG units on the national habitat bank register (DEFRA, 2023a).

Stockport Council Cabinet has given approval in principle to utilise the Responsible Body route offered by the GMCA for the purpose of creating and selling BNG units on council-owned land. The Director of Place Management, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Environment, will determine when it may be viable to proceed with creating BNG units on council-owned land, following financial and legal appraisal.

This approach will ensure that development within the borough can access off-site BNG units where on-site delivery is not possible, while generating ecological and financial benefits and contributing to Greater Manchester's nature recovery objectives (DEFRA, 2023; Local Government Association, 2025, GMCA, 2025).

Details of BNG resulting from biodiversity gain plans approved in Stockport

BNG became mandatory in February 2024, so the data on implementation gathered so far should be viewed as a snapshot of the initial phase, rather than indicative of long-term trends. It is expected that the situation will evolve rapidly as processes mature and more applications progress through determination.

This data covers applications on which the ecology team were consulted on, for the period **12th February 2024 to 30th November 2025**, reflecting the timeframe since BNG requirements came into force. During this period, **1,989** planning applications have been made to the Local Planning Authority to which BNG legislation applied. The following details account for these applications:

- **1,695 applications** have been granted which were **exempt from BNG** (this includes 1,642 House Holder applications, the remaining 53 comprising applications exempt under *de minimis* and Self-build exemptions).
- **19 applications** have been granted where **BNG applied**.
- A further **275 applications** remain **undetermined**, including those pending consideration, refused or returned, subject to appeal, withdrawn, or invalid.

To date, **two Biodiversity Gain Plans** have been approved:

- One major application delivering all BNG on-site.
- One minor application delivering all BNG off-site via a habitat bank.

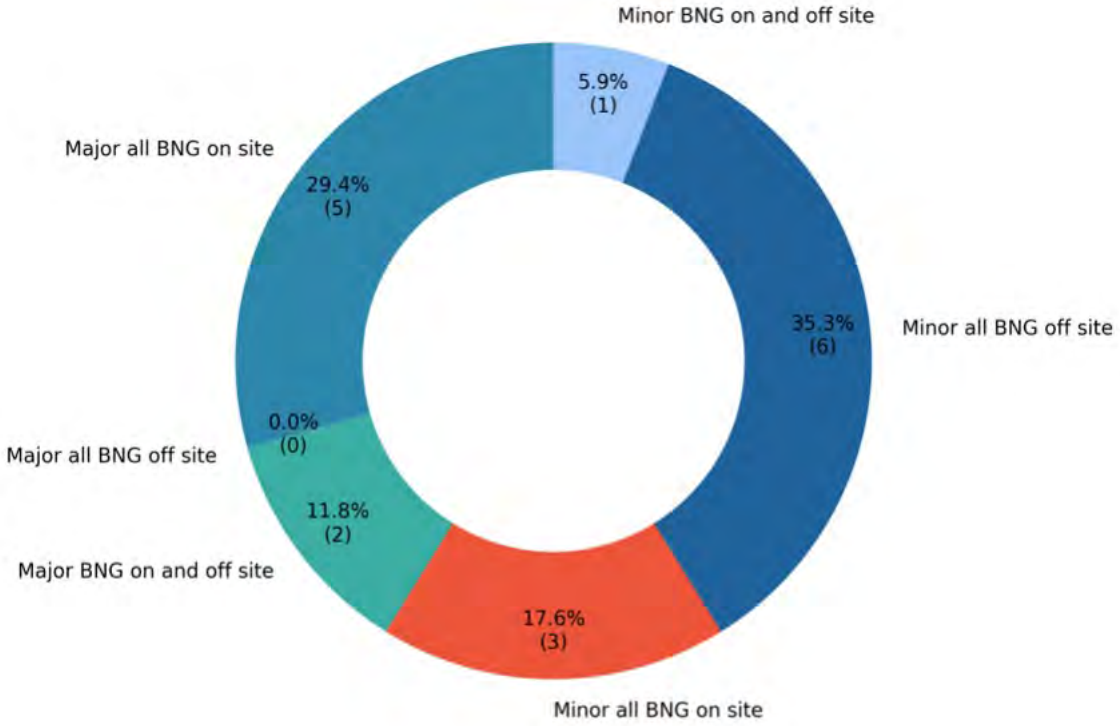
Therefore, of the 19 applications which have been granted, a further 17 Biodiversity Gain Plans will be submitted for approval to discharge the pre-commencement Biodiversity Gain condition.

Indicative Trends

Among undetermined applications where BNG applies, indicative post-application proposals suggest:

- Approximately **one-third** are major applications anticipating **all BNG on-site**.
- Approximately **one-third** are minor applications proposing **all BNG off-site**.
- The remaining **one-third** comprises a mix of minor applications anticipating all BNG on-site and major or minor applications proposing a **combination of on-site and off-site delivery**.

Figure 1. Indicative trends in progress planning applications.



Most applications are proposing to deliver at least some BNG on site, and just under half (9 of 19) propose to deliver **all** BNG on site. This shows that the BNG hierarchy is being followed as required. Stockport applicants are asked as standard to provide information on how the BNG hierarchy is followed, to inform ecological determination advice to planning officers.

Minor applications show a tendency towards requiring offsite units, more so than major applications. This is not surprising as minor application sites will typically be more constrained in opportunities to provide onsite BNG (CIEEM, 2025).

1.2.4 Joint working with partners

Volunteer groups

Volunteer groups across Stockport continue to play a vital role in enhancing biodiversity through grassroots action, habitat creation, and community-led stewardship. Their contributions span a variety of sites and demonstrate a strong commitment to ecological improvement and public engagement. These groups demonstrate the power of community-led action in supporting nature recovery, often involving creative partnerships and resourceful use of limited funding.

Works carried out by volunteer groups in Stockport over recent years include:

- Invasive species control
- Tree planting
- Grassland, pond, and other habitat creation
- Hedge planting

- Orchard management
- Introduction of wildlife friendly mowing regimes
- Pollinator friendly planting schemes
- Bat/bird box installation
- Knowledge sharing between groups
- Identification of potential new wildlife sites

The *Marbury Road Edible Garden* group has adopted wildlife-friendly mowing regimes at **Marbury Park**, leaving the borders of the back field unmown to encourage habitat diversity.

Volunteers at **Poppy Passageway** have created a biodiversity corridor by planting perennials along the path edge and sowing wildflowers in unmown grass areas.

Sustainable Living in the Heatons have laid and continued to manage a 150-metre wildlife hedge near **Heaton Mersey Common**.

The *Friends of Mile End Meadow* have created two ponds at **Mile End Meadow** — one clay-lined and one pre-formed — to introduce aquatic habitat.

Stockport Quakers have enhanced biodiversity around their meeting house at **Cooper Street**, through sensitive management of green space.

The *Friends of Chadkirk* help maintain a 52-acre site at **Chadkirk Chapel & Country Estate**, comprising semi-improved agricultural land, meadows, pasture, and woodland.

In **Mellor Memorial Park**, the *Mellor War Memorial Garden Volunteers* have created bee and butterfly friendly planting schemes in the Cenotaph triangle, supported by council funding and local donations.

Sustainable Living Romiley is enhancing a grassland area of **Romiley Park** into wildflower meadow through a conservation mowing regime.

At **Tangshutt Fields**, the *Friends of Tangshutt Fields* help maintain a Local Nature Reserve that includes meadow and woodland. Meadow management has shifted from regular mowing to a more wildlife-friendly regime, with mown paths for access. Volunteers monitor species and submit records to the Greater Manchester Records Centre, with orchids and kestrels among the species recorded.

In **Carr Wood, Bramhall**, the *Friends of Carr Wood* carry out invasive species control, focusing on Himalayan balsam and laurel, and are planning to tackle giant hogweed with support from the council's Countryside Officer.

At **Highfield Orchard in Cheadle Hulme**, the *Friends of Highfield Orchard* have installed three bat boxes, around ten mixed bird boxes, and an owl box - all of which are actively used.

In **Bramall Hall and Park**, the *Friends of Bramall Hall and Park* have identified a floodplain area on the bank of Carrwood Brook upstream of the park's main drive for enhancement. They hope to plant water-tolerant trees in this area to enhance floodplain habitat and support biodiversity.

More information about the work of volunteer groups in Stockport can be found in Appendix C.

Public education and awareness-raising initiatives

Raising public awareness about biodiversity decline is essential for reversing current trends and safeguarding ecosystems. Biodiversity loss affects everyone, and ultimately impacts health, food security, and quality of life. As a local authority, we represent our residents and have a responsibility to ensure that their environment remains a healthy, flourishing, and biodiverse space for them and for future generations.

Public education initiatives help bridge the gap between scientific understanding and everyday behavior, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and encouraging participation in local conservation projects. By making biodiversity relevant to people's lives and highlighting practical steps they can take, these initiatives play a critical role in building a sustainable future for our communities, their children, and grandchildren.

Current Public Engagement in Stockport

Stockport is already taking significant steps to ensure residents are informed, involved, and engaged in biodiversity issues:

- Council Website Resources

Dedicated wildlife and biodiversity pages provide accessible information on practical actions residents can take to support nature.

- **Climate and Nature (CAN) Summit**
  Biodiversity featured prominently at the Climate And Nature Summit held annually by the council to promote community engagement with climate and nature action. This year included a session with a local farmer discussing rewilding at a Stockport-based farm and the role of community involvement in restoring nature, plus plans to green the town centre.

- **Youth Climate Assemblies**
  CAN organizes assemblies where children and young people submit ideas to tackle climate and biodiversity challenges. Since CAN's rebrand to acknowledge the dual crises, nature-based ideas have been a strong focus. In March, these ideas will be debated in the council chambers, with one of the five shortlisted proposals being nature related.

- **The Green Network**
  This collaborative forum brings together residents and community groups to share knowledge and discuss biodiversity and related environmental topics.

- **Greenstock Annual Event**
  Co-developed with the Green Network, Greenstock celebrates nature and climate action through stalls, talks, and activities that inspire community engagement and practical action.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) is a regional conservation charity working across Cheshire, Greater Manchester, and Merseyside, including Stockport. As part of the national Wildlife Trusts movement, CWT plays a vital role in protecting semi-natural habitats, restoring ecological networks, and empowering communities to take action for nature. Their work in Stockport contributes directly to nature recovery through habitat creation, species support, and public engagement.

One of CWT's flagship initiatives in the borough is **Rewilding Stockport**, a landscape-scale project aiming to create 1,000 spaces for nature. The project supports individuals, schools, businesses, and community groups to take practical steps for biodiversity, with a particular focus on hedgehogs, swifts, and pollinators. It also seeks to transform underused or neglected areas—referred to as "wasted spaces"—into thriving wildlife habitats.

The project has delivered impressive results:

- **104 swift boxes** installed (75 by CWT)
- **147 hedgehog holes** created (52 by CWT)
- **154 pollinator patches** recorded, with over 1,000 wildflower seed packets distributed
- **22 wasted spaces** transformed
- **168 participants** recording swifts and **90 recording hedgehogs**
- A growing online community of **700+ Facebook members**

CWT also supports local groups through **The Wild Network**, which hosts events across Stockport such as the Swift Networking Event and Fungi ID Guided Walk, helping to build ecological knowledge and community connections.

Through the **Trees for Climate** programme, CWT has delivered four tree planting schemes in Stockport, creating 12.4 hectares of native broadleaf woodland and planting approximately 8,500 trees in partnership with Manchester City of Trees. These efforts contribute to carbon sequestration, habitat connectivity, and urban cooling.

In 2024, CWT delivered the **Lost Wetlands Project** in Offerton, working with Stockport Council's *Opportunities Together* service to restore wetland features at an adult disability centre—demonstrating how biodiversity projects can be inclusive and socially enriching.

CWT also maintains a regular presence at **Greenstock**, Stockport's annual sustainability event, where they have hosted a stall for the past three years as part of the Stockport Green Network.

Mersey Rivers Trust

Mersey Rivers Trust (MRT) is a key partner in delivering river and wetland restoration projects across Stockport, working collaboratively with Stockport Council, the Environment Agency, United Utilities, and a range of local community groups. Their work is rooted in a catchment-based approach, combining ecological restoration with natural flood management and community engagement to deliver long-term benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience.

In 2025/26, MRT is leading a number of funded projects that will significantly enhance aquatic and riparian habitats. Among these is the **Lady Brook Restoration Project**, supported by the Environment Agency, which aims to improve fish passage along Micker Brook through a series of

weir modifications and removals. These include the installation of a rock ramp at Weir 14, the reinstatement of a secondary channel to bypass Weir 15, and the removal or modification of structures at Weirs 16 and the Carr Brook confluence. As riparian landowner, Stockport Council's support is essential to enable these works.

Elsewhere, MRT is delivering habitat and flood management improvements through the **Happy Valley** and **Hazel Grove Golf Club** projects. Both are funded via the Environment Agency's Greater Manchester Quick Wins programme, with the former focused on creating a backwater channel to enhance wet woodland and attenuate floodwater, and the latter involving the installation of leaky dams along Poise Brook to slow flows and reduce downstream flood risk.

MRT also recognises the importance of engaging communities in river stewardship. The **Meet Me at the River** project, developed in partnership with the Royal Northern College of Music, invites local groups to explore the River Tame through sound and photography, transforming these experiences into music and visual art.

In addition to these active projects, MRT is progressing a number of initiatives at earlier stages of development. These include the design of a bypass channel at **Harrison's Weir** in Reddish Vale Country Park, which would create new wetland habitat and improve fish passage, and the development of a wetland and pond restoration scheme in **Reddish Vale**, supported by an Enforcement Undertaking donation. This project aims to restore hydrological connectivity and prevent scrub encroachment, with feasibility studies and landowner engagement currently underway.

Further upstream in the Poise Brook catchment, MRT is exploring opportunities for natural flood management at **Andrew Lane**, where leaky dams and an attenuation pond are proposed on farmland. With landowner support already secured in principle, the next step will be to develop detailed designs and secure funding.

Looking ahead, MRT is also preparing to expand its **Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)** control programme along the River Tame. Building on a successful volunteer-led model piloted by the Friends of Tame Valley, the strategy involves training local groups to manage species such as Japanese knotweed, with support from United Utilities and the Environment Agency. There is potential to replicate this model in Stockport from 2026 onwards.

Across all of these projects, the biodiversity outcomes are wide-ranging. They include the creation and restoration of wetland and river habitats, improved fish passage and aquatic connectivity, and enhanced conditions for species such as amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, and fish-eating birds. Monitoring and citizen science are embedded in many of the projects, alongside a strong emphasis on community involvement and education.

Mersey Rivers Trust's work is made possible through close collaboration with a wide network of partners, including Stockport Council's Flood Risk and Greenspaces teams, the Environment Agency, United Utilities, Groundwork, and a number of local Friends groups such as those for Happy Valley, Bramhall Park, Lady Brook, and Carr Brook. Together, these partnerships are helping to restore the ecological health of Stockport's rivers and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing (DLL)

Great crested newts (GCN) have experienced significant population declines over the past six decades, despite strict legal protection under UK and EU legislation. To address this, District Level Licensing (DLL) offers a strategic, landscape-scale approach to mitigation. Instead of piecemeal measures on individual development sites, DLL enables developers to fund the creation and long-term management of multiple high-quality ponds in areas most suitable for newts. These ponds are monitored and maintained for 25 years, improving habitat connectivity and resilience while streamlining the licensing process for developers. This approach delivers both biodiversity gains and planning certainty, supporting sustainable development alongside species conservation.

Recent DLL initiatives in Greater Manchester have focused on large-scale pond creation and restoration to support great crested newt populations. Key Stockport projects include:

- **Henbury Lane, Cheadle** – creation and restoration of 4 ponds.
- **Chadkirk Meadows, Romiley** – creation and restoration of 6 ponds.
- **Abney Hall, Cheadle** – creation and restoration of 8 ponds.

These interventions aim to deliver high-quality aquatic habitats that are maintained and monitored for 25 years, ensuring long-term ecological benefits.

Biodiversity Outcomes
The biodiversity gains from pond creation and restoration are significant. Ponds provide essential habitat for a wide range of species, including invertebrates, amphibians, mammals, and birds. At all three sites, great crested newt breeding has been confirmed, demonstrating the effectiveness of DLL in enhancing species resilience and connectivity.

Partnerships
Delivery of DLL in Greater Manchester is coordinated by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) as the habitat delivery body for Natural England. The scheme operates across council-owned land and in collaboration with private landowners, Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, and National Trust. These partnerships are critical to achieving landscape-scale conservation outcomes.

SUEZ

Stockport's recycling and waste management sites, operated by SUEZ, are increasingly contributing to biodiversity enhancement in the borough. These initiatives demonstrate how operational sites can integrate nature recovery measures alongside core service delivery, supporting wider ecological and community objectives.

- **Pollinator-Friendly Planting:** Installation of 17 planters at Bradbury Parkway Transfer Loading Station filled with drought-resistant, pollinator-friendly species to provide low-maintenance habitats and visual impact.
- **Grassland Management and Habitat Features:** At Rosehill Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), mowing frequency has been reduced from fortnightly to monthly, creating areas of longer grass that support flowering plants and pollinators. Impact areas have been established with bird boxes and bug hotels, complemented by signage to engage and educate visitors.

- **Glyphosate Alternatives:** Trials of non-chemical weed control methods are underway, with monitoring supported by trained staff using SEEK and iNaturalist for species identification and recording.
- **Wellbeing Garden:** A dedicated wellbeing garden has been created at Adswood HWRC, providing green space for staff and visitors.
- **Community Compost Distribution:** 39 tonnes of peat-free compost have been donated to local projects over the past 12 months, supporting habitat creation and planting schemes.
- **Tree Planting:** City of Trees has undertaken planting at the rear of Bredbury Parkway HWRC, contributing to habitat connectivity.

Monitoring and Outcomes
Monthly review forms and photographic records are used to monitor grassland changes and assess the effectiveness of glyphosate alternatives. Longer mowing intervals have allowed plants to flower, increasing food sources for insects, and improving opportunities for biodiversity audits. Data is recorded via iNaturalist, supporting citizen science and ecological evaluation.

Partnerships and Engagement
The biodiversity trial is delivered in partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), with discussions underway with Salford University to explore research opportunities for postgraduate students. Community engagement is being strengthened through educational signage and plans to expand volunteer support under SUEZ's 'A Day a Year to Volunteer' initiative.

Part 2: Targets 2026-30

2.1.1 Narrative on overarching aims for next 5 years

This section outlines Stockport Council's biodiversity targets for the next reporting period. It provides the narrative summary that precedes the detailed **Targets Table**, which should be consulted for full specifications, delivery timeframes, and the commitments that will shape governance and monitoring over the five-year period.

The actions and targets presented reflect statutory duties, regional strategies, and local priorities, with the overarching aim of supporting nature recovery, enhancing ecological connectivity, and improving biodiversity outcomes across Stockport.

Designated Sites

Stockport Council will strengthen its network of Sites of Biological Importance (SBI), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) by increasing the proportion of designated sites under active management. This aligns with the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which seeks to bring 50% of priority sites into active management by 2035.

Over the next five years, the Council aims to:

- Bring **25% of designated sites** into active management through new Habitat Management Plans.
- Identify and designate additional sites to expand the LNR and SBI network.
- Strengthen the Green Chain by improving connections between high-value habitats to enhance ecological corridors.

These actions will contribute to restoring and creating wildlife rich land, meeting LNRS priorities, and ensuring compliance with statutory biodiversity duties.

Formal Parks and Green Spaces

Delivery of the new **National River Walk** forms a key target for the next reporting period, supporting national Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) ambitions to establish one such walk in each region of England.

Additional actions include:

- A boroughwide grassland enhancement review to classify grassland types and management regimes.
- Collaboration with Totally Local Company (TLC) and local volunteers to implement new grassland management where appropriate.
- Updating council forest school guidance.

These measures support LNRS objectives to broaden access to high quality green space and strengthen ecological connectivity.

Tree Planting

Trees previously planted will continue to be maintained through the arboricultural inspection and maintenance programme. Over the next reporting period (March 2026–January 2031), the Council plans to plant a **minimum of 5,719 additional trees**. To achieve the wider target of **11,500 standard trees in parks and highways by 2030**, planting rates of approximately **1,150 trees per year** will be required.

Long-term funding for the maintenance of new trees needs to be assured, including cost zoning of planting location types - to include all the non arboricultural costs such as enquiry management and processing (exponential curve for enquires received against planting distance form property), risk management frequency multiplier and traffic management add on costs for maintenance and decommissioning. External grant funding sources for tree maintenance can provide additional sources of financial support, but it by no means guaranteed income.

Progress will be tracked through annual reporting, with planting numbers adjusted to address any shortfalls.

Grass Verges

During the next five years, Stockport Council will continue monitoring the conservation mowing pilot site at Bramhall and expand the scheme to at least one additional location. A refined

process for selecting future sites will be developed, alongside an expansion plan for the subsequent reporting period.

The long-term ambition is to roll out conservation mowing to multiple areas boroughwide from year five onwards.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

The Council will continue surveying and mapping INNS, prioritising high-risk sites, especially waterways. Treatment methods will follow a strategy of reducing herbicide use and strengthening biosecurity requirements for contractors.

Targets for this period include:

- Creating a public facing INNS reporting webpage.
- Updating the Japanese knotweed strategy.
- Introducing and monitoring integrated herbicide reduction methods.
- Demonstrating measurable biodiversity recovery, including increased native plant richness and pollinator activity.
- Establishing a Himalayan balsam baseline and reducing monitored site cover by **25%**.
- Running regular volunteer balsam control days and encouraging native planting for bank stabilisation.
- Producing a glyphosate reduction plan targeting a **50% reduction** in use by Year 5.
- Creating strategies for Giant hogweed and New Zealand pigmyweed.

Allotments

Working more closely with allotment groups, the Council will support biodiversity improvement by offering guidance, sharing data, and identifying opportunities for collaborative enhancements. A Biodiversity Champion scheme will recognise allotment groups where sufficient uptake of wildlife friendly practices is achieved.

Guidance materials will be published on the council website, and groups will be supported in submitting biodiversity records to the Local Records Centre.

Cemeteries

Bereavement Services will deliver biodiversity improvements across all cemeteries. Key targets include:

- Installing **at least one beehive** in each large cemetery.
- Expanding composting to all sites.
- Introducing natural burial options to at least one additional cemetery.

- Enhancing at least **five** areas for species rich grassland.
- Establishing a working group to identify the first woodland burial site.

Monitoring will be supported through a structured wildlife recording programme involving cemetery staff and local friends of groups.

Council Owned Buildings

The Council will review its building portfolio to identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, including installing bat and bird boxes, creating hedgehog access points, and integrating green roofs, green walls, and wildlife friendly planting.

Targets include:

- Reviewing council owned and council managed buildings to identify opportunities for swift and bat boxes.
- Installing **at least five** bird or bat boxes each winter.
- Reviewing exterior lighting schemes to ensure compliance with Bat Conservation Trust guidance.
- Reviewing existing biodiversity features and identifying new opportunities subject to funding.

Lighting

While the Council acknowledges the potential for biodiversity friendly lighting measures such as adaptive or directional lighting and bat friendly designs, no further work is planned in this area during the next reporting period due to resource limitations.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

The Council will continue strengthening policies to ensure SuDS deliver biodiversity benefits. Targets include publishing updated design guidance for developers, forming an internal working group between engineering and ecology teams, and working with United Utilities and the Environment Agency to align funding with priority sites.

Stockport Homes Group (SHG)

SHG has set targets for:

- Annual urban tree planting and aftercare.
- Managing existing and new low maintenance wildflower areas.
- Enhancing an additional **10 sites** for wildflower grassland.

- Supporting customer engagement through guidance on garden biodiversity, newsletters, and biodiversity friendly features.
- Incorporating swift and bat boxes into roofing programmes.
- Installing **20 bird boxes** each winter from 2025 for five years, with inclusion in contractor social value KPIs.

Planning Applications

Over the next reporting period, the Council will:

- Continue applying planning policies to secure biodiversity enhancements in line with LNRS actions.
- Revise condition wording to improve evidence of implementation.
- Prepare "biodiversity specification" guidance for developers.
- Support Local Plan delivery of biodiversity enhancements beyond the Biodiversity Metric.
- Review demolition informatives to ensure legislative compliance.

Domestic Gardens

The Council will promote wildlife friendly gardening through guidance, improved web content, collaborative projects with partners such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust, and integration of biodiversity measures into planning guidance. The focus will be on supporting behavioural change, such as reducing mowing, limiting pesticide use, and creating wildlife habitat features.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Government legislation introduced in February 2025 will have a big impact on biodiversity enhancement in the borough. The developing Local Plan proposes a minimum BNG requirement exceeding the national statutory 10%, by seeking 20% biodiversity net gain for development within Stockport.

Given the early stage of BNG delivery the next reporting period is expected to see a huge increase in Biodiversity Gain Plans approved for non-exempt developments. By 2030, the Council must report on actions taken, outcomes achieved and plans for the subsequent period.

The Council will continue operating its in-house monitoring system, tracking habitat banks, onsite BNG delivery, validation, compliance, and outcomes. The ecology team will ensure that all qualifying applications deliver at least **10%** BNG and will review internal guidance annually.

Alongside these internal processes, the Council will continue to collaborate closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and partner districts to support a consistent, strategic approach to BNG delivery across the city-region. This includes ongoing engagement with the proposed GM Responsibility Service.

Volunteer Groups

Volunteer groups remain central to delivering biodiversity improvements. Over the next five years, the Council aims to match site specific needs with volunteer capacity and deliver regular biodiversity enhancement sessions through the ecology team and existing networks.

A key target is to identify a method for delivering biodiversity sessions and hold the first session by the end of Year 1, followed by quarterly sessions.

Public Education and Awareness

The next reporting period will build on existing engagement channels—including the Climate and Nature (CAN) platform, the Green Network, and Neighbourhood Officers—to raise awareness of biodiversity issues.

A Biodiversity Engagement Steering Team will be formed to review current initiatives, address gaps, and prioritise actions. Initiatives such as workshops, citizen science, interpretation boards, and social media campaigns will be rolled out in phases, with annual reviews to support continuous improvement.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT)

A strengthened partnership with Cheshire Wildlife Trust will be pursued through a joint working group aimed at identifying collaborative biodiversity projects and developing a draft collaboration agreement to streamline procurement and funding.

District Level Licensing (DLL)

Further pond creation and restoration opportunities will be explored through DLL, with candidate sites analysed and engagement maintained through quarterly GM working group meetings.

Staff Engagement

Staff engagement will be expanded through a biodiversity volunteer programme supported by a Staff Engagement Biodiversity Working Group. Each department will be invited to appoint a biodiversity champion, and an annual schedule of biodiversity workdays will be devised. A biodiversity section will be added to staff induction materials to increase awareness of statutory responsibilities and opportunities for involvement.

2.1.2 Targets table

Area	Subject	Targets	Responsible team/department
Designated sites	Create new designated sites	Year 1: Site surveys, GIS gap analysis, community engagement, draft candidate list. Year 2: Secure funding, submit designation proposals. Year 3: Formal designation, expand volunteer programmes, begin habitat restoration. Year 4: Consolidate habitat creation, strengthen corridors. Year 5: Achieve target number of new sites, report outcomes.	Neighbourhoods
Parks	National River Walk & Grassland review	Year 1: Complete the new National River Walk in line with the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) target to establish one in every region of England (DEFRA, 2025). In line with LNRS targets on access to quality green space Undertake a grassland enhancement review to categorise grassland types and existing regimes across council-owned green spaces, identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, and secure funding for a cut-and-collect mower to support low-nutrient grassland management. All works will ensure a peat-free supply chain (Forestry Commission, 2023). Year 2: Collaborate with Totally Local Company (TLC) and voluntary groups to implement new grassland management regimes at selected sites.	Neighbourhoods

		Identify sources of green hay for species-rich grassland creation. Years 1–5: Continue supporting forest school initiatives in line with EIP commitments to reduce barriers to access, boost children's connection with nature, and increase understanding of the natural world, while ensuring adherence to the 'leave no trace' principle (DEFRA, 2025). Review and update council forest school guidance.	
Trees	Tree planting	Plant a further minimum of 5,719 trees during the next reporting period.	Neighbourhoods
Grass verges	Pilot conservation mowing scheme	Year 1: Identify and secure funding for a cut & collect mower before spring 2026	Neighbourhoods
INNS	Japanese knotweed	Year 1–2: Baseline mapped by site / severity, priority score, reduce 20% cover at Pr. Site. Year 3: Secondary sites. Introduce integrated methods (herbicide reduction, trialing stem injection, etc.). Reduce 35% cover mon. sites. Year 4: Consolidate Pr / Sec site treatment. Increase nonchemical methods to min 40% of interventions. Reduce 50% cover v baseline. Year 5: Regrowth monitoring. Reduce 60% cover across borough sites. Dem. measurable biodiversity recovery (native plant richness, pollinator activity) in restored areas.	Neighbourhoods
Allotments	Guidance	Year 1:	Neighbourhoods

	Biodiversity champion scheme Biological recording	Prepare guidance on biodiversity-friendly practices to encourage allotment holders to adopt nature-sympathetic management and increase engagement with biodiversity. Years 1–5: Launch a support programme to help allotment holders maximise opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. Introduce a 'Biodiversity Champion' scheme, offering recognition to allotment associations where a sufficient number of plot holders adopt biodiversity-friendly practices. Develop associated information for the council website, including guidance, details of the champion scheme, and the wider importance of allotments for biodiversity. Support allotment holders and groups in recording biodiversity on their sites, encouraging submission of records to the Local Records Centre, focusing on key target species aligned with LNRS priorities. Provide ecological advice where requested, such as identifying suitable locations for bird and bat boxes or hedgehog access points.	
Cemeteries	Borough-wide beehive inclusion scheme	Install at least one hive in each of the five large cemeteries by 2027.	Bereavement services
	Composting	Extend practices across all cemetery sites by 2027.	Bereavement services

	Woodland burial areas	Establish a working group with Stockport's tree officers to identify suitable sites, species, and planting schedules for the first woodland burial project, before the end of the next reporting period.	Bereavement services
	Natural burial	Enhance at least five areas for species-rich grassland by 2030.	Bereavement services
Council owned buildings	Bird and bat boxes Lighting GIS review	Bat and bird boxes Years 1–5: Ecology and Estates teams will review council-owned buildings, and buildings managed by the council to identify opportunities for installing swift and bat boxes. • Buildings managed but not owned by the council will require contact with the building owner to request permission to install wildlife boxes. Install a minimum of five bird or bat boxes each winter. Collaborate with Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU), Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), and Manchester Swift Group to ensure local expertise informs placement and design. Lighting Years 1–2: Review exterior lighting schemes on council buildings as part of maintenance programmes, ensuring compliance with Bat Conservation Trust guidance to minimise light pollution impacts on nocturnal species (Bat Conservation Trust, 2023). Other Ecological Opportunities	Council owned buildings

		Years 1–2: Review existing biodiversity-friendly features (e.g., green walls, roofs, bee hives, planters, trees) and identify new opportunities where funding allows. Use GIS to prioritise buildings near high-quality habitats, designated sites, or within LNRS core and opportunity areas, ensuring enhancements deliver maximum ecological benefit (GMCA, 2025a).	
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)	Design code/guidance Working group Maintain collaborative working	• Publish the new Design Code/guidance by the end of the next reporting period, embedding SuDS best practice and biodiversity-enhancing features for developers. • Year 1: Form an internal working group with representatives from engineering and ecology teams to identify opportunities for biodiversity-enhancing flood alleviation schemes (e.g., leaky dams, SuDS in parks), meeting at least twice annually. • Years 1–5: Continue collaborative working with United Utilities and the Environment Agency to match funding opportunities with priority sites identified by the working group.	Transportation
Stockport Homes	Tree planting Wildflower areas	• Tree planting: o Winter 25/26 minimum of 50 trees to be planted. o Winter 26/27 minimum of 50 trees to be planted. o Winter 27/28 minimum of 50 trees to be planted. o Winter 28/29 minimum of 50 trees to be planted. o Winter 29/30 minimum of 50 trees to be planted. • Wildflower areas:	

	Customer engagement Bird & bat boxes	o Year 1: A further 5 sites (1,000m2) to be put into a conservation wildflower maintenance regime. o Years 1-5: A further 10 sites to be selected for wildflower grassland enhancement. • Customer engagement: o Year 1: New feature included in customer monthly newsletter (hints, tips and guidance on enhancing gardens). • Bird & bat boxes: o Years1-5: All annual reviews of SHG roofing programmes to include consideration of installing integrated swift and bat boxes during re-roofing, roof repairs, and upgrades. Years 1-5: Produce and install 20 bird boxes each winter.	
Enhancements through planning applications	N/a	• Year 1: Liaise with planning enforcement team to develop a formalised system for monitoring compliance of biodiversity enhancement planning conditions and to consider options for enforcement action where appropriate • Years 1-2: Prepare Biodiversity Specification guidance and publish on the council's website. Review every 6 months • Year 1-5: Continue to attend and contribute to the fortnightly GMCA LNRS working group to identify and encourage measures which deliver LNRS targets within developments and thus will support delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy actions for Greater Manchester.	

		• Prepare new Design Code/guidance by the end of the next reporting period.	
Domestic gardens	Website content CWT working group Design code/guidance Reviews	Launch new biodiversity content on council website. Update every 6 months. Establish joint working group with Cheshire Wildlife Trust (see Joint working with external partners target). Publish new design code/guidance, embedding biodiversity friendly standards for residential gardens in planning policy. Track delivery of LNRS actions through annual reviews.	Neighbourhoods Planning policy Ecology, Climate and Nature
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	Guidance review	Years 1-5: Carry out an annual review of BNG internal guidance to ensure it is up to date and relevant.	Neighbourhoods
Joint working with external partners	Volunteer groups	Year 1: Identify an appropriate method to deliver biodiversity sessions for volunteer groups and deliver the first session with quarterly sessions scheduled thereafter.	Neighbourhoods
Public education & awareness-raising initiatives	Coordination group	Year 1 – Form a Biodiversity Engagement Steering Team. Years 2–5 – Implement and Monitor Initiatives.	Neighbourhoods
Joint working with external partners	Cheshire Wildlife Trust	Year 1: Establish a joint working group between Stockport Council and Cheshire Wildlife Trust, with quarterly meetings scheduled. Year 1-3: Identification and initiation of at least two collaborative biodiversity projects. Year 3: Development of a draft collaboration agreement to streamline procurement and funding processes.	Neighbourhoods

Joint working with external partners	DLL	Year 1. GIS analysis: Analysis of candidate sites for new DLL ponds informed by strategic opportunity areas. Years 1-5. Working group: Continue to engage with quarterly GM working group for DLL.	
Council Staff Engagement	Biodiversity volunteer programme	Year 1: Form a Staff Engagement Biodiversity Working Group. Year 2: Match volunteer groups with identified sites to schedule biodiversity workdays. Years 2–5: Run a rolling annual schedule of biodiversity volunteer actions.	Neighbourhoods
Private Landowners	Biodiversity Enhancement / NBS for Climate Adaptation / Resilience	Engage and encourage / assist private landowners to manage land for enhancing biodiversity. YR1 Develop template business plans for habitat banking combining with other grant opportunities for nature-based solutions for flood alleviation from organisations such as EA, UU, Peak District National Parks.	Neighbourhoods, Climate and Nature, Flood Team, MDC & Regeneration

2.2 Monitoring and reporting

Strategic governance is provided by Scrutiny Committee. Progress against the targets will be monitored as part of the council's Climate and Nature (CAN) strategy overseen by the CAN Deliver Board and reported on via the CAN annual report. The CAN Deliver Board, chaired by the Director of Place Management, will meet three times a year to track progress and identify action needed to address any challenges. Performance will be included in the CAN annual report, which is approved through the council's democratic governance processes and published in Summer.

Additionally, key performance indicators will be added to the council's Portfolio Resources and Performance Agreement, overseen by the portfolio holder, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environment. Performance is monitored through the Portfolio Resources and Performance Reports, prepared twice annually and scrutinised by the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

In line with statutory requirements, we will publish a full report on our action to further the general biodiversity objective as a minimum every five years following publication of this first report.

Delivery will be supported through ongoing engagement with key strategic partners, including:

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Responsible Body (RB) representatives;
- Mersey Rivers Trust;
- Environment Agency (EA);
- United Utilities (UU).
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust

These partners will play an important role in coordination, evidence sharing, and delivery alignment across administrative and catchment scales.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates Stockport Council's commitment to fulfilling its **strengthened Biodiversity Duty** under the Environment Act 2021. The duty requires public authorities not only to conserve biodiversity but to actively enhance it, embedding nature recovery into decision-making and service delivery. Through the actions and initiatives outlined in this report, Stockport has taken significant steps toward meeting this statutory obligation and contributing to the wider goals of the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The achievements documented here are the result of **hard work, passion, and creativity** from council teams, partner organisations, volunteer groups, and residents. Their dedication reflects a shared understanding that reversing biodiversity decline is essential for the health of ecosystems, communities, and future generations. From meadow restoration and tree planting to innovative drainage solutions and community engagement, these efforts showcase what can be achieved when people work together for nature.

However, current levels of government funding for biodiversity conservation and enhancement are not sufficient to address the biodiversity crisis. While the will to set ambitious targets to further enhance biodiversity across the borough exists, the level of funding required is beyond

the council's current resources. Many initiatives have relied on ingenuity and doing more with less—mobilising volunteers to stretch limited budgets. This creativity has enabled progress, but it cannot fully compensate for the funding gap. As a result, some areas of the council have less ambitious targets than is required to address the biodiversity crisis, while others have set bold goals that are as yet unfunded and therefore at risk of non-delivery.

This tension between ambition and resourcing underscores the importance of continued advocacy for investment in biodiversity and collaboration. Without adequate funding, the ability to meet statutory duties and achieve meaningful nature recovery will remain constrained. Yet, the work described in this report proves that Stockport has the vision, expertise, and community spirit to deliver transformative outcomes.

Looking ahead, the next reporting cycle will span five years, culminating in the 2030 Biodiversity Report. That report will share what has been achieved and set out priorities for the future. In the meantime, Stockport will keep building on the foundations outlined in this report - strengthening monitoring, supporting partnerships, and finding practical ways to turn ambition into action. Progress will depend on creativity and collaboration, but also on securing the resources needed to match our aspirations. With continued effort and shared commitment, we can make Stockport a place where nature thrives for generations to come.

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Appendix A: First Consideration

First Consideration of Biodiversity Duty

Council officers completed a first consideration of actions to support biodiversity in December 2023. This initial review aimed to identify existing and potential activities across council operations that contribute to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

To structure this process, five broad categories were used to assess areas of influence:

1. Management practices of council-owned and private spaces
2. Actions available within the planning application process
3. General council infrastructure and management practices
4. Collaborative actions with other partners (internal and external to the Local Planning Authority)
5. Relevant regional and national policies

Within these categories, **17 key activities** were identified for further investigation. These will inform the development of appropriate policies and objectives to embed biodiversity considerations across council functions:

Management Practices of Council-Owned and Private Spaces

- Biodiversity-sensitive management of council-owned cemeteries
- Enhancing biodiversity in formal parks
- Supporting biodiversity in domestic gardens
- Management of council-owned allotments
- Wildlife-friendly management of roadside grass verges
- Strategic tree planting
- Management of Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and Green Chains
- Biodiversity considerations in council-owned buildings

Planning Application Process

- Securing ecological enhancements through planning applications

Council Infrastructure and Management

- Biodiversity-sensitive lighting strategies
- Management and control of Schedule 9 invasive species

Collaborative Actions with Partners

- Biodiversity considerations in recycling and waste management
- Engagement with the Local Records Centre
- Joint working with external partners
- Public education and awareness-raising initiatives

Policies

- Integration of biodiversity into council policies and strategies

- Implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements

This first consideration provided a foundation for embedding biodiversity into council decision-making and service delivery. It marks a proactive step towards fulfilling statutory duties and contributing to nature recovery across Stockport.

Appendix B: SuDS Case Studies

Case Study 1: Bruntwood Park (2022–2023)

***Overview*:**
Implemented in two phases, this project introduced **11 leaky dams** and a **wetland** along Tributary No. 2. Phase one (August 2022) installed five dams and the wetland; phase two (October 2023) added six more dams downstream and reinforced the originals.

Key SuDS Features:

- Leaky dams constructed from onsite logs and willow planting
- Wetland created in a natural depression with a boardwalk for public access

Biodiversity Benefits:
Native riparian species (e.g., water mint, purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris) were planted to create habitats for invertebrates, birds, and mammals. The wetland and dams provide breeding grounds and food sources, enhancing ecological connectivity.

Community Impact:
New blue spaces and improved access promote recreation and wellbeing. The site also serves as an educational resource on SuDS and climate resilience.

Case Study 2: Lavington Avenue Recreation Ground (March 2024)

***Overview*:**
Stockport Council led the design and delivery of a **swale**, **detention basin**, and **filter strip** to reduce flood risk on playing fields.

Key SuDS Features:

- Swale and basin store surface water during heavy rainfall
- Filter strip slows runoff and directs water into the swale
- Excavated material reused to create an earth mound seeded with wildflowers

Biodiversity Benefits:
Wildflower planting and wetland vegetation attract pollinators, birds, and amphibians. The new habitats provide breeding grounds and food sources, increasing ecological resilience.

Community Impact:
Improved drainage protects sports facilities and enhances access. The earth mound offers natural play opportunities and a vantage point for visitors.

Case Study 3: Crown Edge Way (May 2023)

***Overview*:**
Five leaky dams and two secondary channels were installed to manage flood risk and improve habitat.

Key SuDS Features:

- Leaky dams slow water flow during storms
- Secondary channels divert excess water into adjacent depressions for temporary storage

Biodiversity Benefits:
Planting Short Rotation Coppice willow and riparian species boosts habitat complexity, supporting aquatic plants, insects, and birds. These interventions create blue-green corridors and improve water quality.

Community Impact:
Enhanced greenspace and improved pedestrian and cycle links encourage outdoor activity and mental wellbeing.

Case Study 4: Torkington Park (November 2023)

Overview:
Six leaky dams were installed upstream of Poise Brook to manage flood risk and improve habitat.

Key SuDS Features:

- Leaky dams constructed from logs and willow planting
- Features slow water flow and promote infiltration

Biodiversity Benefits:
Riparian planting and woody debris provide shelter and food for invertebrates, birds, and small mammals. The project strengthens ecological connectivity within the park.

Community Impact:
Enhanced blue spaces and improved access encourage recreation and wellbeing.

Overall Benefits Across Case Studies

- **Flood risk reduction:** All projects slow and store stormwater, reducing downstream flooding.
- **Water quality improvement:** Vegetation filters pollutants, benefiting aquatic ecosystems.
- **Biodiversity gain:** Creation of wetlands, swales, and vegetated channels supports diverse species and strengthens ecological networks.
- **Community engagement:** Projects improve amenity value, promote wellbeing, and provide educational opportunities on nature-based solutions.

Appendix C: Further detail on the work of volunteer groups in Stockport

Volunteer groups across Stockport continue to play a vital role in enhancing biodiversity through grassroots action, habitat creation, and community-led stewardship. Their contributions span a variety of sites and demonstrate a strong commitment to ecological improvement and public engagement.

At **Marbury Park**, the *Marbury Road Edible Garden* group have adopted wildlife-friendly mowing regimes, leaving the borders of the back field unmown to encourage habitat diversity. These areas support a rich mix of fruiting trees and shrubs, including apples, plums, hazel, sloes, and rosehips. In 2022, additional orchard blocks were planted and seeded with wildflowers. Volunteers maintain the orchards through regular community sessions, which also serve as training opportunities for other groups to learn pruning techniques and orchard care.

Adjacent to one orchard block, an overgrown area has been sensitively managed to retain its wild character. Bramble is cut by scythe to maintain an informal 'adventure path', with log seating added to encourage exploration and engagement with nature.

At the **Marbury Park Farm site**, the same group have dedicated half an acre entirely to nature. Hand-dug, clay-lined ponds have created wetland habitat now supporting smooth newts and attracting visiting foxes. A small orchard of rare fruit trees was planted following vandalism at the main park orchard, demonstrating resilience and continuity of habitat creation. Two hawthorn hedgerows have been established, and ground-nesting birds are protected through seasonal signage and public education. Grassland areas are managed through scything and wildflower seeding, while new woodland and willow scrub habitats support invertebrate populations.

At **Poppy Passageway**, volunteers have created a biodiversity corridor by planting perennials along the path edge and sowing wildflowers in unmown grass areas. Bramble scrub has been retained near the brook where kick sampling is carried out, supporting invertebrates and providing habitat structure.

In **Heaton Moor Park**, the *Friends of Heaton Moor Park* have introduced wildflower margins around a tennis court and allowed natural regeneration in under-managed corners of the park, increasing floral diversity and habitat heterogeneity.

The group *Sustainable Living in the Heatons* have laid and continue to manage a 150-metre wildlife hedge near **Heaton Mersey Common**. Monthly task days involve pruning, weaving, and invasive species control, maintaining the hedge as a valuable corridor for birds, small mammals, and insects. The group also planted and care for a small orchard of 15 fruit trees on grassland in Heaton Chapel, enhancing structural diversity and food resources for wildlife.

At **Mile End Meadow**, the *Friends of Mile End Meadow* have adopted a low-intervention approach to site management that supports natural processes and habitat diversity. The site is not formally maintained, but the group mows a perimeter path twice a year and cuts back bramble to maintain access. Each autumn, one-third of the grassland is mown, while a designated 'wild patch' dominated by great willowherb is left unmanaged to support pollinators and other wildlife.

Scattered fruit trees are maintained as a community orchard, and bramble and raspberry scrub around the site's edges provide valuable habitat structure. A small copse of native trees is present, with additional planting carried out by the council. Mature oak trees are also found within the grassland, contributing to canopy diversity.

The group has created two ponds — one clay-lined and one pre-formed — to introduce aquatic habitat. They have also installed bat boxes (2019) and bird boxes (dating from 2010 and more recent years), and have planted wildflowers, trees, and shrubs to support biodiversity. A key aim of the group is to ensure that food sources are available for insects throughout their life cycles, supporting a healthy and resilient ecosystem.

At **Cooper Street**, *Stockport Quakers* have enhanced biodiversity around their meeting house through sensitive management of green space. A 36m^2 area at the rear of the building is set aside as a wild area, occasionally scythed to maintain structure. At the front, a 60m^2 area is managed as semi-natural habitat, with late-season mowing and an unmown section left specifically to support insects and other wildlife. These small but meaningful interventions demonstrate how even modest urban spaces can contribute to biodiversity when managed with care and intention.

At **Chadkirk Chapel & Country Estate**, the *Friends of Chadkirk* help maintain a 52-acre site comprising semi-improved agricultural land, meadows, pasture, and woodland. Two meadows are designated Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs), one of which was among the first 60 to be designated as a Coronation Meadow. Meadow management is carried out in partnership with a local farmer, using hay and silage cutting followed by cattle grazing to reduce soil fertility and support native species. The site also includes SBI woodland and two ponds managed by GMEU, supporting populations of great crested, smooth, and palmate newts. The group maintains the formal gardens at the chapel with successional flowering plants for pollinators and monitors bat boxes installed around the site, including a maternity roost of brown long-eared bats in the hay barn.

In **Mellor Memorial Park**, the *Mellor War Memorial Garden Volunteers* help maintain flowering borders along the War Memorial Garden, allowing wildflowers to flourish. They have created bee and butterfly friendly planting schemes in the Cenotaph triangle, supported by council funding and local donations. The group is keen to install bat and bird boxes to further enhance biodiversity.

The *High Lane Residents Association* works across several sites including **Brookside Park, High Lane Park, Windlehurst Park**, and **Hartley Wood**. In Brookside Park, areas of grassland are left unmown to support wildlife, while Hartley Wood contains semi-natural habitats and installed bird boxes. The group also maintains the Ladybrook Interest Trail and has identified unused areas, such as a disused football pitch and roadside verge, as opportunities for future biodiversity enhancement.

At **Marple Memorial Park**, the *Friends of Marple Memorial Park* help maintain areas of semi-natural habitat including a 400m^2 wildflower area and 4,000m^2 of grassland and trees. Around 12 bat and bird boxes are installed on site, with plans to update them. The group is cultivating additional wildflower beds, creating a leaf mould area, and planning underplanting in woodland areas using donated funds.

In **Romiley Park**, *Sustainable Living Romiley* is enhancing a grassland area into wildflower meadow through a conservation mowing regime. Native wildflower species have been

introduced, and the site is regularly monitored. Additional unmown patches are left in amenity grassland to support bulb die-back and wildflower growth. The group has identified the installation of bat and bird boxes as a future enhancement goal.

At **Tangshutt Fields**, the *Friends of Tangshutt Fields* help maintain a Local Nature Reserve that includes meadow, woodland, and former sports pitches. Meadow management has shifted from regular mowing to a more wildlife-friendly regime, with mown paths for access. Volunteers monitor species and submit records to the Greater Manchester Records Centre, with orchids and kestrels among the species recorded. The woodland includes a newly classified Ancient Woodland, and the group carries out invasive species control. Bird and bat boxes have been installed, and the group has secured funding for wildlife survey equipment, interpretation boards, and community engagement. They are currently preparing a funding bid to support public participation in wildlife surveying and promote the health benefits of nature connection. The group is keen to collaborate more closely with council staff and has ambitions to add ponds to the site.

In **Brabyns Park**, the *Brabyns Bike Track* group works within a largely unmanaged semi-natural landscape bordered by the River Goyt. The group carries out invasive species control, has sown wildflower seed in meadow areas, and raises awareness during toad spawning season. They are interested in collaborating with the council to identify areas for biodiversity enhancement, including the restoration of the park's pond and the installation of bat and bird boxes.

In **Carr Wood, Bramhall**, the *Friends of Carr Wood* have been active for five years, working to enhance the ecological value of the site. In partnership with Mersey Rivers Trust, they have installed and now maintain leaky dams in the brook to support natural flood management and habitat creation. The group also carries out invasive species control, focusing on Himalayan balsam and laurel, and is planning to tackle giant hogweed with support from the council's Countryside Officer. A bare area of ground has been identified for enhancement through native grass seeding.

At **Highfield Orchard in Cheadle Hulme**, the *Friends of Highfield Orchard* have collaborated with Cheshire Wildlife Trust to install three bat boxes, around ten mixed bird boxes, and an owl box—all of which are actively used by species including robins, blue tits, nuthatches, and tawny owls. The group has also added large insect hotels and hedgehog homes and regularly monitors and logs species observed on site. They carry out litter picks and wildflower planting, and have maintained Green Flag status for four consecutive years. Restoration of the onsite pond is a priority, pending council approval, and the group intends to seek further funding to support biodiversity enhancements.

In **Hesketh Park and Mellor Green**, the *Friends of Hesketh Park & Mellor Green* have installed three bird boxes and one bat box. An area of approximately 1,200m^2 is managed as wild grassland, and the group continues to sow and plant wildflowers to improve the site's biodiversity value.

The *Bramhall Community Orchard Group* has focused its efforts on planting spring-flowering bulbs at the base of trees, with plans to expand tree and bulb planting as funding allows. Their work contributes to seasonal habitat diversity and supports pollinators.

At **South Park in Cheadle Hulme**, the *Stockport and District Society of Model Engineers* help maintain an area of approximately 4,000m^2 within the miniature railway circuit. This area has been left to grow wild for the past two years, with only the edges mown regularly. Although bat

and bird boxes are not currently installed, a variety of bird species have been observed, indicating potential for future biodiversity enhancements.

The *Friends of Ladybrook Valley Cheadle Hulme (FOLBVCH)* have undertaken invasive species control along the river corridor and playing field, targeting Himalayan balsam. Their efforts have enabled native wildflowers such as great willowherb and hedge woundwort to recolonise the area. By reducing the seed load upstream, their work also benefits downstream habitats. The group has also created log piles from dead wood to serve as refuges for wildlife.

Finally, in **Bramall Hall and Park**, the *Friends of Bramall Hall and Park* have identified a floodplain area on the bank of Carrwood Brook upstream of the park's main drive for enhancement. They hope to plant water-tolerant trees in this area to enhance floodplain habitat and support biodiversity.

The breadth and depth of biodiversity enhancement work carried out by volunteer groups across Stockport is both impressive and inspiring. From meadow restoration and pond creation to invasive species control and wildlife monitoring, these groups demonstrate the power of community-led action in supporting nature recovery. Their efforts span formal parks, woodlands, orchards, and green corridors, often involving creative partnerships and resourceful use of limited funding.

Looking ahead, there are numerous opportunities to build on this work and support further biodiversity gains over the next five years. Many groups have already identified areas for improvement or expansion, and with the right support, these ambitions could deliver significant ecological benefits.