

**REPORT TO CABINET
DATE 14th MAY 2026**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Environment, Leisure and Culture - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Nigel Cooke

Stockton-on-Tees Statutory Biodiversity Duty Report 2026

Summary

As part of the Environment Act 2021, all Local Authorities and Local Planning Authorities within England are required to demonstrate how they have met the enhanced Biodiversity Duty. This ensures that Local Authorities are working towards the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan for England, with government commitments to halt the decline in species abundance and protect 30% of UK land and sea by 2030, with greater commitments to be met by 2042.

A requirement to produce and publish a Biodiversity Duty Report every 5 years has been issued by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This report includes actions undertaken within the current reporting period, commitments to deliver within the next reporting period and Biodiversity Net Gain data from the Local Planning Authority.

Reasons for Decision

This report and commitments within it have been discussed with Officers to deem them achievable and appropriate to each service.

As a statutory report, the Local Authority must report on its actions from the previous reporting period and actions committed to the next reporting period. This must be published by the Local Authority.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approve the draft Biodiversity Duty Report, including commitment to future actions, for publication.

Detail

The draft Biodiversity Duty Report presented highlights how biodiversity improvements have been made across the Council, including capital projects, policy changes and operational improvements. These have been used to showcase the excellent work being

undertaken to demonstrate our commitments to enhance biodiversity within the borough.

A requirement of the Biodiversity Duty Report is to identify commitments the Council will endeavour to deliver within the next 5 year reporting period. In this instance, delivery of these commitments should be demonstratable before January 2031 (please note: reporting periods are set in calendar years by DEFRA). The following opportunities have been identified to be delivered within the next reporting period:

1. The Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy is due for publication in 2026. As a Supporting Authority, policies and initiatives will be amended and developed to reflect the areas of benefit for local nature recovery which will be highlighted within this publication.
2. Introducing battery operated machinery and hand tools within our green space operations to build upon existing successful pilots within the Borough
3. Review canopy cover across the borough and produce a strategic tree planting plan to target the most impactful locations for tree planting.
4. Explore opportunities for expanding our green wedges and green corridors through public and privately owned land, including alignment with the Business Coalition.
5. Continued working with key organisations, Defra arm's-length bodies and partnerships within the Tees Valley to continue best practice and opportunities for investment, examples include Tees Valley Nature Partnership, Tees Estuary Recovery Partnership, Your Tees Catchment Partnership, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Environment Agency, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Forestry Commission.
6. Continue to prioritise native tree planting and/or appropriate climate resilient varieties which support local ecosystems and provide wider ecosystem services to Stockton-on-Tees.
7. Continue reduced use of herbicides and peat within our public realm and green spaces, whilst also trialling best practice to eliminate use where suitable.
8. Ensure we are leaving dead standing hard wood in woodland areas, where suitable. Where public safety deems this not suitable, alternative provisions should be made to keep this on site.
9. Working with partners to reduce prevent spread and reduce abundance of invasive species and plant disease, including Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed, Ash Dieback.
10. Expand our 'Better for Nature' initiative to include all formal parks, giving all residents access to engage with nature and providing pollinator corridors through traditionally amenity grassland areas.
11. Continue proactive woodland thinning programme to ensure healthy thriving existing woodlands for flora and fauna
12. Increase land managed for biodiversity in Stockon-on-Tees.

13. Review procurement and internal project management templates to ensure consideration for biodiversity and environmental impact is included, where possible.
14. Continue to follow biodiversity improvement plans for Preston Park, including 110m of hedge, 12 fruit trees, 500 new trees planted to enhance and hedge laying
15. Expand Citizen's Science and green space volunteering offer to increase education and awareness of the environment and biodiversity
16. Explore opportunity to establish a habitat bank and alternative green finance models to support our investment into habitat creation.

As a Local Planning Authority Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council are required to also provide planning data held on local Biodiversity Net Gain data, to show Biodiversity Units which have been created from new developments.

Community Impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

17. An EPIA has not been undertaken for this report, however will be undertaken for individual changes outlined within the committed actions, as they come to fruition, to mitigate against impacts to those with protected characteristics.

Corporate Parenting Implications

The report does not contain any direct corporate parenting implications.

Financial Implications

18. Committed actions within this report have been developed in line with existing strategies, policies and operational objectives, including input from relevant Council Officers to deem these reasonable and achievable within current departmental budgets.

Where commitments have been identified to deliver capital enhancements or increased activation/education initiatives, Officers will seek to work with partners and grant funders to deliver these improvements.

Where practicable, Council Officers will explore alternative green finance models to develop a sustainable method of investing in green spaces within the borough.

Legal Implications

19. The Biodiversity Duty report is a statutory report that must be published at a minimum of every 5 years. Therefore this report must be revised and republished in 2031 to comply with the Biodiversity Duty. The report must cover the actions delivered within previous reporting period. Failure to publish this report and identify delivery of actions towards the Environmental Improvement Plan will result in failure to comply with the Biodiversity Duty.

Risk Assessment

20. Risks associated with this report

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/Councillors (refer to Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members)

21. This report covers all wards within the borough.

22. Additional consultation with ward members will be undertaken where projects are to directly impact wards within the borough

Background Papers

23. Draft Biodiversity Duty Report

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