
Biodiversity Duty Report 2026



Date: 26 March 2026



Elmbridge
Borough Council

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1. Background

Introduction

- 1.1 [The Environment Act 2021](#), through amendments to the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, introduced a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' which places a requirement on public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- 1.2 Under the Act, Local authorities / local planning authorities are required to publish a biodiversity duty report which covers:
 - A summary of actions the Council has taken to comply with the biodiversity duty.
 - How we have considered relevant strategies.
 - Our forward plan for continuing to comply with the biodiversity duty over the next five years
- 1.3 The first biodiversity reporting period ends on 1 January 2026, and the report must be published within 12 weeks of the end of that period. The publication deadline is therefore 26 March 2026.
- 1.4 This report is for the period of January 2023 to January 2026, three years after the Council became subject to the updated Section 40 duty. Subsequent reports must cover the next 5 years and be published within 12 weeks of the final day of coverage.
- 1.5 A key effect of the Environment Act 2021 was to strengthen the biodiversity duty set out in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (the NERC Act). The duty was amended from a requirement to “conserve” biodiversity to a requirement to both “conserve and enhance” it. This shift reflects an ambition not only to protect biodiversity in its current state, but to actively improve it.
- 1.6 The Act clarifies that local planning authorities are included within the definition of public authorities and introduces legal requirements for how the duty is reported on.
- 1.7 [The Government guidance](#) (Complying with the biodiversity duty) summarises

what, under the legislation, public authorities must do. Therefore, Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) must:

- Consider it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives.
- Act to deliver its policies and achieve its objectives.

1.8 This document, referred to as the Biodiversity Duty Report, has been prepared to meet the reporting requirements set out in the guidance.

By law the report must include:

1. a summary of the action the Council has taken to comply with the biodiversity duty.
2. how the Council plans to comply with the biodiversity duty over the next reporting period (five years) following the end of this reporting period.
3. set out the actions the Council has carried out to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations.
4. details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from Biodiversity Gain Plans the Council has approved.
5. how the Council plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period.
6. any other information the Council considers appropriate.

1.9 Local Authorities must also report periodically on how they have complied with their biodiversity duty — i.e., taken actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity in carrying out their functions, plus planned actions for the next reporting period ([GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)).

1.10 This report summarises EBC's progress to date and highlights major initiatives, community engagement and strategic partnerships and follows the structure set out in the Government's guidance on Biodiversity Duty Reporting:

Section 1: Your policies, objectives, and actions

- the policies and objectives set to meet the biodiversity duty.
- the actions completed, either alone or in partnership with others, that benefit biodiversity.

Section 2: Your future actions

Explain how EBC plans to fulfil its biodiversity duty over the next 5 years following the end of this reporting period.

Section 3: Biodiversity net gain information

Include the required information on BNG. Explain how the Council has:

- monitored biodiversity gains and the results of this monitoring.
- used its own land as a biodiversity gain site.
- supported the development of a local BNG market.

Include quantitative data to help show how the Council have met the 10% net gain requirement:

the number of biodiversity gain plans approved.

the split between on-site and off-site gains and statutory credits

the net gain in number of units and average percentage gain across approved biodiversity gain plans

The remaining sections of the report are optional, and they are:

Section 4: Information about your authority

Section 5: Your top achievements

Section 6: How you have considered other strategies.

Section 7: How your policies, objectives and actions have helped the environment.

Section 8: How you have raised awareness and educated the community

Section 9: Monitoring and evaluating your actions

Section 10: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

The Council has included these optional sections within this report.

2. Section 1: policies, objectives and actions

- 2.1 The Council declared a climate change emergency in July 2019, pledging to become a carbon-neutral council by 2030. It recognizes the importance of conserving and enhancing local biodiversity and has a series of policies in the adopted core strategy and Development Management Plan for biodiversity, habitats and ecological management. Below are the policies, objectives and strategies the Council has in place to meet its biodiversity duty.

Core Strategy

- 2.2 Adopted in 2011, the Core Strategy provides a delivery strategy for sustainable development in the borough including maintaining and enhancing the borough's biodiversity network. The policies set out in the core strategy that support the duty are.

Policy and Objectives	Description
<p>CS13 - Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area: This policy requires new residential development which is likely to have a significant effect on the ecological integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) to demonstrate that adequate measures are put in place to avoid or mitigate any potential adverse effects. based on the following principles:</p>	<p>a) A zone of influence set at 5km linear distance from the SPA boundary</p> <p>b) Within this zone of influence, a 400m "exclusion zone".</p> <p>c) Where development is proposed outside the exclusion zone but within the zone of influence, mitigation measures such as SANG provision SAMMs will be delivered prior to occupation and in perpetuity.</p>
<p>CS14 - Green Infrastructure: seeks to protect, enhance and manage a diverse network of accessible multi-functional green infrastructure by;</p>	<p>a) Maintaining a high level of protection for the Borough's green infrastructure, including Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANG) and sites designated for biodiversity value, while seeking opportunities for enhancement.</p> <p>b) Strengthening green links within and</p>

Policy and Objectives	Description
	<p>across borough boundaries by supporting the Green Arc initiative, expanding the SANG network, and identifying and protecting green corridors.</p> <p>c) Promoting access to and delivery of SANG, including Brooklands Community Park and part of Esher Common, in line with the Council’s latest mitigation strategy for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.</p> <p>d) Safeguarding important trees, woodlands and hedgerows, and secure high-quality soft landscaping in new development, prioritising native species and reinforcing connections to the wider green infrastructure network.</p>
<p>CS15 – Biodiversity: seeks to avoid loss and contribute to a net gain in biodiversity across the region and the objectives of the Surrey Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). It aims to:</p>	<p>a) Protect and enhance designated biodiversity sites, priority habitats and species, including woodland (ancient and other), ensuring like-for-like replacement where loss is unavoidable.</p> <p>b) Support Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, the Regional Forestry and Woodland Framework, and habitat management across Council land in line with the Elmbridge Countryside Strategy.</p> <p>c) Work in partnership to restore and enhance the Thames Basin Heath SPA, Brooklands Community Park and Esher Commons SSSI.</p> <p>d) Ensure development delivers no net loss and, where possible, a net gain in biodiversity.</p>

Development Management Plan

2.3 Adopted in 2015, the decision-making tools used by the Council to protect and enhance biodiversity from development proposals in the borough are.

Policy and Objectives	Description
DM6 - Landscape and trees	development proposals should contribute to conserving existing wildlife habitats, creating new habitats and providing links to the green infrastructure network
DM13 - Riverside development and uses	development proposals and uses will be considered acceptable if they provide Protection, conservation and active enhancement of the landscape and biodiversity of the river and must not adversely affect water or ecological quality in the area.
DM21 - Nature conservation and biodiversity	all new development will be expected to preserve, manage and where possible enhance existing habitats, protected species and biodiversity features. The Council will work in partnership to explore new opportunities for habitat creation and restoration.

Strategies

2.4 [Tree Risk Management Strategy](#) – The Council’s Tree Risk Management Strategy sets out a proactive framework for managing trees under its control, balancing public safety with environmental stewardship.

2.5 The strategy recognises the significant ecological value of trees, woodlands, and hedgerows as:

- Wildlife corridors that connect fragmented habitats
- Essential infrastructure for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience
- Contributors to public health, climate resilience, and local character

- 2.6 Actions under the strategy integrate Health and safety management, Tree protection and retention and Biodiversity enhancement.

To future-proof the borough's treescape, the Council promotes species and age diversity in planting schemes. A broad mix of native and non-native species is prioritised to:

- Increase ecological resilience
- Strengthen resistance to pests and diseases
- Support long-term biodiversity adaptation to climate change

- 2.7 The Council is currently updating its *Trees and Woodland Strategy*, which will further strengthen biodiversity outcomes and contribute to a more resilient and biodiverse treescape across Elmbridge. Key priorities will include:

- **Biodiversity Support:** Enhancing habitat provision for birds, mammals, insects, fungi and other species, supporting wider ecosystems and food webs.
- **Ecological & Climate Connectivity:** Strengthening wildlife corridors to connect fragmented habitats and support pollinators and migratory species.

- 2.8 [Carbon Management and Reduction Plan](#) - The aim of the plan is to ensure targets are in place to reduce carbon emitting activities within our operational assets, to become carbon neutral by 2030 helping reduce climate stress on habitats, species migration or decline and enhance biodiversity.

- 2.9 [Sustainable Elmbridge Communication and Engagement Strategy](#) - Sets our thematic areas, one of which is biodiversity, for community engagement to move forward the target of becoming a carbon neutral borough by 2030.

- 2.10 [Development Management Advice note](#) (DM Advice Note 7) has been published to guide applicants and developers on encouraging nature-positive outcomes in all forms of development, ahead of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements introduced in late 2023.

- 2.11 [Countryside Strategy \(2023 - 2028\)](#) – aims to support carbon reduction and create the best possible environment for wildlife and biodiversity across our open spaces. It focuses on improving and sustainably managing around 625 hectares of countryside, which includes many different landscapes, habitats and species. The strategy's goal is to protect and enhance the area's ecological value and to promote best practice in nature conservation.

Actions and partnership workings that benefited biodiversity.

- 2.12 EBC actively contributes independently and in partnerships to the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of species populations and habitats across the borough. The Council implements dedicated habitat projects and sustainable management practices, which supports biodiversity and fosters resilient ecosystems within the borough:
- 2.13 Following commencement of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain under the Environment Act 2021 (2024), the Council has:
- Issued biodiversity-focused Development Management advice Note and implemented mandatory biodiversity net gain requirements.
 - Adopted biodiversity validation requirements and ecological survey expectations.
 - Secured biodiversity net gain through planning conditions and s106 agreements and collaborated with applicants to secure on-site and off-site ecological enhancements.
 - Applied biodiversity protection policies in development decisions maintaining policy alignment with the National Planning Policy Framework and emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities.
 - Protected ancient woodland and designated sites and required ecological surveys and mitigation where necessary
 - Worked with NatureSpace Partnership to implement the [district licensing for Great Crested Newts](#) to safeguard the protected species.
 - Carried out forestry works at Oxshott Heath and Heathland reclamation works at Warren Lane in collaboration with Rangers and Volunteers.
 - Identified and enabled tree planting and biodiversity improvement /enhancement within council owned greenspaces. We have planted 91 standard trees in 8 locations, completed works at Stompond Lane Open Space to improve biodiversity. Created new grassland areas to improve biodiversity at Rydens Road Open Space.
 - Maintained and improved Council owned countryside estate to develop and provide a mosaic of habitats and a rich variety of wildlife and delivered the agreed targets in the Countryside Stewardship agreement.
 - Worked in partnership with the Forestry Commission, Natural England, Rangers and volunteers (Elmbridge and Lower Moles) in woodland

management at Oxshott Heath, heathland reclamation at Warren Lane, pond maintenance, and heathland mowing.

- Additional activities comprise woodland management at Ditton Common, scrub clearance at Fairmile Common and Oxshott Heath (with support from volunteers including Lower Mole), and bracken control through cutting and bruising across Esher and Fairmile Commons.

Partnerships to promote biodiversity

2.14 The Council has been involved in several key longstanding partnerships that support biodiversity, recognising collaboration as a central part of its work program. We work with the following organisations on biodiversity and ecological matters:

- Surrey Wildlife Trust
- Surrey County Council
- Wild Capital
- Lower Mole Partnership
- Cross Boundary Management
- Local and Regional Wildlife Conservation Organisations
- Surrey Coalition of Disabled people / Surrey Nature Partnership
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- Elmbridge Common Volunteers

2.15 Officers will continue to look for any other opportunities for partnership working, or shared resources, across organisations or other Local Authorities on projects that protect and promote biodiversity and ecology.

3. Section 2: Your future actions

3.1 For the next reporting period, Elmbridge will:

1. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks focused on development offsetting of BNG both on-site and off-site with measurable KPIs to track biodiversity outcomes. Examples include;
 - Percentage increase in biodiversity units delivered after 5, 10 and 30 years
 - Habitat condition score improvements compared with baseline assessments

- Area (hectares) of new or enhanced priority habitats successfully established
 - Survival rates of planted or restored habitats (e.g., trees, hedgerows, wildflower meadows)
 - Compliance rate with management and monitoring plans over the required 30 year period
 - Extent of connectivity improvements between habitats (e.g., new wildlife corridors)
 - Reduction in invasive species cover across restored or offsetting sites
2. Continue rollout of biodiversity net gain and ecological enhancement measures within planning and development processes.
 3. Enhance integration of biodiversity considerations in broader corporate policies (e.g., climate action, asset management).
 4. Continue use of integrated LNRS mapping in planning policy and site allocation processes.
 5. Expand habitat creation opportunities on Council land by working in partnership with SCC to identify potential EBC & SCC owned sites within the Borough that could be used for offsetting.
 6. Strengthen BNG monitoring and compliance enforcement.
 7. Improve GIS-based habitat data tracking to support reporting transparency.
 8. Expand community engagement and volunteer conservation capacity.
 9. Enhance strategic partnerships to leverage funding, data, and technical expertise.
 10. Plant 260 trees in 2025-2026 in the Council's greenspace site.
 11. Continue management of 49 hectares of heathland on annual basis.
 12. Ensure that the woodland is managed and maintained to improve biodiversity over a 10-year woodland management programme.

4. Section 3: Biodiversity net gain information

What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

- 4.1 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains that *Biodiversity net gain is a way of creating and improving biodiversity by requiring development to have a positive impact (net gain) on biodiversity.* The aim is for development to

deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value compared with the value of the habitat before development takes place. This uplift can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

- 4.2 Under the Environment Act 2021, most planning permissions granted in England under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are required to deliver a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This requirement has applied to major developments since 12 February 2024 and to small sites since 2 April 2024 (subject to limited exemptions). Any significant on-site habitats and all off-site biodiversity gains must be secured and managed for at least 30 years.
- 4.3 In this section, the Council explains how we have monitored biodiversity gains and the results of this monitoring, used Council land as a biodiversity gain site, and supported the development of a local BNG market.

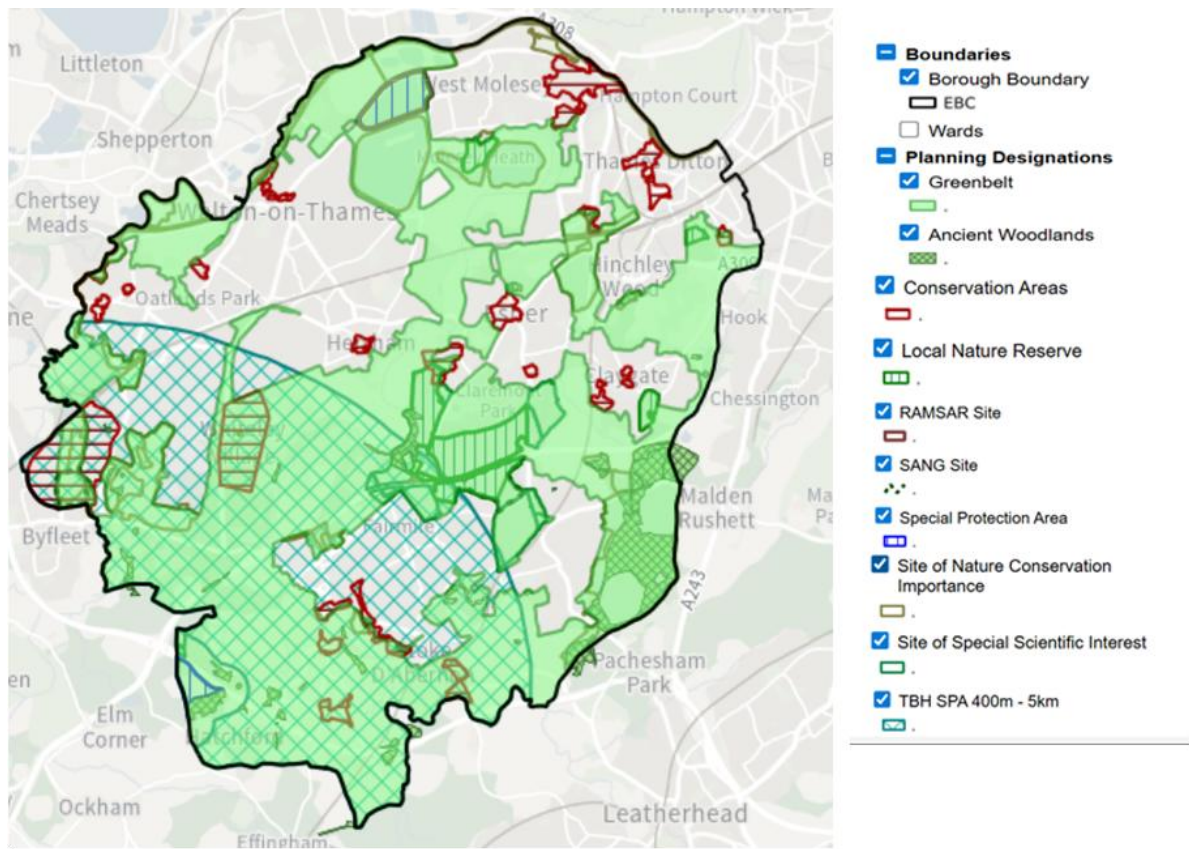
Reporting Requirement	Elmbridge Position / Evidence
Monitored biodiversity gains	<p>Policy requires submission of pre/post biodiversity metric and gain plans.</p> <p>Monitoring is enforced through planning obligations.</p>
Use of land as a biodiversity gain site	<p>Habitat bank in Cobham now registered for off-site BNG units.</p> <p>Council-owned nature reserves, although not currently registered as BNG sites, contribute to ecological benefit.</p>
Supporting the local BNG market	<p>Council’s planning policy and validation requirements drive BNG delivery.</p> <p>The Cobham habitat bank offers local supply of BNG units.</p> <p>Strategic use of BOAs helps align demand/supply.</p>

- 4.4 Since 2023–2025, the Council has approved 48 Biodiversity Gain Plans. Of these, 32 achieved the required 10% uplift, 7 delivered less than 10%, and the remaining 9 exceeded 10%. Overall, this equates to an approximate total net gain of 708.9%, with an average uplift of 14.8% per development.

5. Section 4: Elmbridge Borough Council

- 5.1 Elmbridge is a Surrey borough situated in the Southeast region, approximately 17 miles southwest of Central London. The borough lies almost entirely within the M25 corridor, with the River Thames forming its northern boundary and separating it from the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. While the River Mole runs north–south through the borough.
- 5.2 Covering roughly 95 km² (about 37 square miles), Elmbridge has an estimated population of around 141,926. The borough includes the towns of Walton-on-Thames and Weybridge; suburban settlements of Esher, Hersham, East and West Molesey, Hinchley Wood, and the Dittons; semi-rural areas of Cobham, Oxshott, Stoke D’Abernon; and the suburban village of Claygate.
- 5.3 57% of the land within Elmbridge is designated as Green Belt, which extends into neighbouring authorities and parts of the borough (such as Chatley Heath and the Ockham and Wisley Commons) fall within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).
- 5.4 Elmbridge Borough Council embeds biodiversity delivery within its Vision for a Sustainable Elmbridge and climate emergency response. The Council’s strategic aims include protecting, maintaining, and enhancing green and blue infrastructure across the borough, alongside community engagement and sustainability initiatives.

Figure 1: Elmbridge Green Infrastructure Network



5.5 The Council recognises the unique natural environment in the borough and its importance to residents. The Borough supports a diverse range of habitats despite its largely urban character. Its ecological network is shaped around river corridors, heathland and common land, woodland, historic parkland, and green spaces within the built environment. These features collectively contribute to its biodiversity value, ecological connectivity, and local character.

River Corridors

5.6 The River Thames forms the borough’s northern boundary, while the River Mole runs north–south through the borough. These river systems provide important riparian habitats including wet woodland, marginal vegetation, backwaters, and floodplain grassland. They function as key ecological corridors, supporting species such as kingfisher, heron, otter, bats, and a range of aquatic and invertebrate species. These corridors play an important role in the borough’s biodiversity connectivity and it is an important consideration for BNG and nature recovery mapping.

Heathland and Commons

- 5.7 Areas such as Esher Commons contain remnant lowland heath and grassland, which are nationally scarce priority habitats. These areas support reptile species, ground-nesting birds, and a diverse invertebrate assemblage. Heathland and common land are strategically important both for biodiversity conservation and in the context of mitigation associated with the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

Woodland and Landscape

- 5.8 Elmbridge contains areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland, particularly around Esher, Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon.
- 5.9 The Borough features significant historic 18th-century landscapes, most notably Painshill Park in Cobham, a 158-acre landscape garden with lakes, follies, and a vineyard and Hampton Court Palace with gardens covering an area of 26.7 hectares, the wider estate being 304 hectares. Other important sites include Claremont Landscape Garden and areas associated with former 18th-century estates like Burwood Park and Esher Place.
- 5.10 The Council manages approximately 625 hectares of countryside, much of which is common land. The "central block" of 360 hectares, which includes Arbrook, Esher, Fairmile, Oxshott Heath, West End, and Winterdown Woods, is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 5.11 Private Estates & Residential Landscapes: Elmbridge is known for exclusive private estates, including St George's Hill (Weybridge), Blackhills, Esher Park, and the Fairmile Estate. These areas often feature large, mature landscaped gardens.

Urban Green Infrastructure

- 5.12 In addition to designated sites, Elmbridge's biodiversity resource includes urban gardens, tree-lined streets, allotments, railway corridors, and other green spaces. The Urban habitats play an important role in supporting species such as hedgehogs, bats, and birds, and contribute to overall habitat connectivity across the borough. These areas support protected and priority species and form an integral part of the borough's green infrastructure network.

Designated Sites

- 5.13 Elmbridge Borough contains a range of nationally and locally designated sites which contribute significantly to the borough's biodiversity resource. These include:
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) - Esher Commons SSSI (including Oxshott Heath) and Thames Ditton to Sunbury SSSI
 - Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) – 12 sites comprising a range of habitats such as floodplain grassland, wet woodland, reservoirs, parkland, secondary woodland, and species-rich grassland.
 - Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) - West End Common (Heathland, woodland, and scrub habitats), Hersham Riverside (River corridor habitat along the River Mole), Stoke Wood (Ancient and semi-natural woodland).
 - Proximity to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) - parts of Elmbridge fall within the 5km Zone of Influence around the SPA and a small area of Elmbridge is within the 400m SPA buffer where no net gain of dwellings is allowed..
- 5.14 Collectively, these habitats and designations provide the foundation for the Council's biodiversity duty. They inform policy development, development management decisions, and partnership working to conserve, enhance, and restore nature across the borough, including Appropriate Assessment where necessary, and the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and other mitigation measures.

6. Section 5: Top achievements

- 6.1 EBC has made strong progress in advancing and strengthening its biodiversity agenda across the borough. Key achievements include:

Surrey's First Habitat Bank (Cobham)

- 6.2 One of Elmbridge's flagship achievements which sets an important precedent as a strategic, plan-led approach to biodiversity delivery aligned with national policy, has been the delivery of [Surrey's first and only Habitat Bank](#) located in Cobham within the River Mole Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) and

developed in partnership with Wild Capital. This initiative has:

- Secured legal agreement and registration on the national BNG register
- Created and restored priority grassland, hedgerows, and wetland habitats
- Provided a locally deliverable off-site BNG solution

Greenspace Management & Habitat Restoration

6.3 Across the borough's parks and open spaces, the Council manages approximately 625 hectares of countryside and greenspace. The Council has:

- Replaced seasonal bedding with pollinator-friendly perennial planting.
- Expanded the wildflower meadow areas by introducing long grass and mini wildflower meadows areas.
- Reduced mowing regimes in selected parks.
- Reduced herbicides use where operationally feasible.
- Heathland restoration and woodland management.
- Planted 98 trees in Council -owned greenspace sites and improved 2 acres of grass maintained for biodiversity.
- Committed to a 10-year woodland management programme to ensure that the woodland is managed and maintained to improve biodiversity.
- Managed 49 hectares of heathland annually.
- Ongoing management of Molesley and Claygate Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

Volunteer Contribution

6.4 Council countryside staff and volunteer groups have played a vital role in ecological conservation with thousands of volunteer hours supporting habitat management. Local conservation groups in Esher, Claygate and Oxshott contribute regular habitat management and improvement activities. At Weybridge Heath volunteers aim to restore open heathland and increase biodiversity resilience.

7. Section 6: Consideration of other strategies

7.1 EBC has had regard to relevant biodiversity strategies to ensure its approach is not developed in isolation. Instead, it responds to established national, County and thematic strategies and evidence frameworks, helping to secure

alignment, synergy and strategic coherence in the delivery of local biodiversity objectives.

7.2 The Council has:

- Aligned its BNG delivery with county-wide strategic frameworks such as the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRs) to guide habitat recovery across the county, and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) to inform local biodiversity actions such as Cobham habitat bank.
- Integrated national BNG policy and metrics into local planning requirements and prepared to exceed national minimums where evidence justifies it.
- Adopted best practice from national and regional habitat restoration plans in countryside and woodland management strategies.
- The management of 20 sites for conservation of which Esher Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the largest continuous area made up of a number of commons: Esher Common, West End Common, Arbrook Common, Fairmile Common and Oxshott Heath and cover 360 hectares.
- Embedded biodiversity considerations into planning guidance and validation processes to improve application outcomes.
- Linked biodiversity strategy to wider sustainability ambitions within corporate visions and climate response plans.

8. Section 7: How policies, objectives and actions have helped the environment

8.1 Elmbridge Borough Council's policies, objectives, and actions have delivered measurable environmental benefits by embedding biodiversity protection, habitat enhancement and climate resilience across planning, land management, and corporate strategy functions.

1. Strengthened Protection Through Planning Policy

EBC has reinforced environmental protection through its Core Strategy and emerging Local Plan policies, requiring development to conserve and enhance biodiversity, protect designated sites, and deliver Biodiversity Net

Gain (BNG). By incorporating national BNG requirements into its validation checklist and development management processes, the Council ensures that development contributes positively to habitat creation and ecological connectivity reducing harm to designated sites and priority habitats.

2. Delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Through planning obligations and support for locally registered habitat banks, EBC has helped establish mechanisms for off-site habitat creation where on-site delivery is not achievable resulting in strategic habitat delivery in priority areas to maximise ecological value.

3. Active Management of Council-Owned Land

Under the Countryside Strategy 2023–2028 and Countryside Stewardship agreements, EBC manages its countryside estate to create a mosaic of habitats which has enhanced biodiversity value resulting in improved condition of priority habitats and climate adaptation capacity.

4. Integration with Climate and Sustainability Objectives

Following its Climate Emergency declaration and Vision 2030 commitments, biodiversity enhancement has been integrated with wider sustainability actions such as tree planting resulting in increased tree canopy cover and urban greening, strengthened climate resilience and improved air quality and public wellbeing through accessible quality green space.

5. Partnership and Strategic Alignment

By working with Surrey County Council on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and aligning with Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, EBC has ensured that local action contributes to county-wide ecological recovery resulting in a more coherent habitat networks and efficient use of resources through coordinated delivery.

9. Section 8: Community awareness and education

- 9.1 The Council has increased awareness and understanding of biodiversity through community engagement, accessible information, and support for local environmental action. The Council has:

- 9.2 Between 2024 and 2025, organised a minimum of 14 biodiversity events / walks / talks, including tree-planting events, conservation volunteering sessions, and guided walks to provide residents with practical, knowledge on local habitats and species.
- 9.3 In addition, EBC has supported community-led initiatives, including projects funded through the Elmbridge Community Climate Action Fund (ECCAF), helping residents actively contribute to nature recovery.
- 9.4 Encouraging allotment ownership and community garden participation to support nature and create wildlife havens for local biodiversity.
- 9.5 The Council runs the “Elmbridge’s Biodiversity Boost” campaign, which includes downloadable posters, social media banners, and a video to educate the public on biodiversity issues and how to support nature locally and encourages wildlife-friendly gardening and habitat creation at home.

10. Section 9: Monitoring and evaluation

- 10.1 EBC requires applications to present detailed metric calculations and descriptions of habitats and proposed management at the application stage to establish baseline and predicted post-development gains.
- 10.2 We require confirmation that the submitted details align with statutory BNG requirements. If this information is not provided, the council will refuse to validate the application, effectively preventing a planning decision until satisfactory monitoring information is submitted.
- 10.3 On council owned land certain species (birds, reptiles, and insects) are monitored by volunteers and data is collected by the Surrey Biodiversity Record Office. This data is used to inform practical management works.
- 10.4 The Council’s Local Validation Checklist has been updated to require biodiversity information with planning applications, including metric submissions and evidence of habitat value. This means ecology data is not only collected but evaluated as part of the planning process.
- 10.5 The Council regularly evaluates the condition and management of its countryside estate through ongoing programmes and stewardship

agreements, such as:

- Woodland management works assessed through annual planning (e.g., thinning, invasive removal) to improve woodland structure and biodiversity. Outcomes are implicitly monitored through adaptive management and planned follow-up works.
- Volunteer-supported habitat restoration work is periodically summarised in Council news, noting habitat improvements and volunteer hours dedicated to biodiversity tasks like maintaining heathland and supporting target species.

11. Section 10: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

11.1 Elmbridge Borough Council considers that during the reporting period 2023–2025 it has had regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity in exercising its functions and has taken proportionate steps to enhance biodiversity within its remit.

The highlights include:

- Countryside Stewardship Agreement.
- Successful application in partnership with SCC to LATFA Tree planting fund 2024-2025 delivered planting of 52 trees.
- Volunteer hours for Countryside volunteers in 2024-2025 totalling 2122 hours.
- Provision of successful education or public engagement activities including organising volunteer days.
- Organisation of walks and talks on countryside activities and nature conservation delivering 14 countryside events / walks / talks.

The main challenges are:

- Increased resource pressures for countryside team and for Oak Processionary Moth and other invasive species.
- Conflict between site usage, biodiversity conservation and between site users (i.e. walkers, cyclists, horse riders).
- Demand for recreation and access, population increases / increase of use – more pressure on resources and infrastructure maintenance.

- Challenge of securing BNG through planning applications. Challenge of monitoring Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans requires ecologists to review the monitoring information. Elmbridge does not have ecologists in-house.

Opportunities include:

- Positive management of habitats and habitat creation – tree planting, heathland / wetland restoration.
- Consultation and working with the local community