

Portsmouth City Council Strengthened Biodiversity Duty Report - January 2026

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1.0 Executive summary

This report documents the policies and actions the council has carried out over the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025 to comply with its Biodiversity Duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This includes actions taken to improve the natural environment, raise public awareness on biodiversity and increase access to nature for local residents, and actions the council intends to take over the next reporting period to ensure it meets its duty over future years. It also includes latest data on implementation of mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) in the borough over the reporting period.

The city council supports a wide range of important habitats and species, many of which occur within council-owned and managed land. The council carries out significant work on its land and within its wider remits, and is proud of its achievements for biodiversity over recent years, with major highlights including:

- expanding efforts in favourable habitat management on our sites;
- contributing to the development and adoption of the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS);
- implementing mandatory BNG within the planning system; and
- the building of strong links and partnership working with the community

It is recognised however that more needs to be done to stem and reverse the decline of nature, particularly in light of ever-increasing pressures such as housing targets, financial limitations, pollution and climate change. This requires action from a wide range of stakeholders and organisations, and we look forward to playing our part, both alone and in partnership, in delivering our aims and aspirations for nature over the coming years. Our Nature Towns and Cities project, Nature Positive Portsmouth, will provide us with the capacity to make some positive changes.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) may have significant implications for the council and its future work on biodiversity over the next reporting period. If LGR goes ahead in the region, the council will ensure it works closely with neighbouring councils and partners to help to encourage the new unitary council that replaces it to deliver for nature in a way that is as closely aligned as possible with the council's current approach.

2.0 Objectives and policies and actions delivered

2.1 Overview of activity in reporting period

This reporting period covers January 2024 to December 2025. The Portsmouth Unitary Authority Area contains a diversity of internationally and locally important habitats that support a wealth of species. Portsmouth City Council's first consideration of the Biodiversity Duty (January 2024) set four objectives.

1. To increase the capacity for conserving and enhancing biodiversity across Portsmouth recognising the need to develop resilience against emerging climate threats
2. To continue to protect and enhance the biodiversity of our protected sites and identify measures to mitigate against future climate threats
3. To make more space for nature across the city and in doing so develop resilience against emerging climate threats
4. To celebrate the nature of Portsmouth and engage residents in playing an increasingly active role in enhancing and monitoring biodiversity

Some of the ways in which these objectives have been met over the last reporting period are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 2: Delivering against our objectives

Objective	Policy / Strategy	Actions
Increase the capacity for conserving and enhancing biodiversity across Portsmouth recognising the need to develop resilience against emerging climate threats	Developed an Urban Forest Master Plan and are working with Forest Research on pests and diseases	Secured funding for a strategic biodiversity officer and the development of a biodiversity strategy through NLHF Nature Towns and Cities programme Conducted an initial climate risk assessment to understand how a changing climate may affect the natural environment
Continue to protect and enhance the biodiversity of our protected (and designated) sites and identify measures to mitigate against future climate threats	Included strong biodiversity policies within the Local Plan Commitment as a supporting authority to the Hampshire LNRS Active support for and involvement with the Solent Mitigation Partnership	Removed invasive species e.g. Holm oak scrub clearance on the vegetated shingle of Eastney Beach (SINC); Manor Ash and Cotoneaster on Portsdown Hill (SSSI) Worked with Southern Water to reduce storm overflows thereby increasing SPA, SAC, SSSI (Portsmouth and Langstone Harbour)
To make more space for nature across the city and in doing so develop resilience against emerging climate threats	Incorporated Green Infrastructure Standards into the Local Plan Reduced pesticides / banned pesticides from our operations as a result of a pesticides policy	Planted 2464 trees across the city in 24/25 season and secured over £500,000 for tree planting projects Identified 2 new SINCS (one which has been approved and one of which is to go to panel) and scoped opportunities for biodiversity net gain across a 12 SINCS and adjacent sites Created 50+ meadows across housing and parks and open spaces land

Objective	Policy / Strategy	Actions
To celebrate the nature of Portsmouth and engage residents in playing an increasingly active role in enhancing and monitoring biodiversity	N/A	Achieved 24,000 conservation volunteer hours Set up a community green forum to increase involvement with nature and support community groups deliver nature improvements Delivered nature engagement events to support more people to connect with nature Made plans to incorporate nature as a key strand of our Portsmouth 100 celebrations to include opportunities for residents to engage with nature

2.2 Narrative report on progress

2.2.1 Strategies and policies

Local plan policies

In this reporting period Portsmouth City Council has included **biodiversity policies** in its Local Plan which has now been consulted on and will become operational in 2027.

In support of the Local Plan PCC appointed AECOM to undertake the Habitat's Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Local Plan. The HRA was first produced in 2021. The HRA has been updated as the Local Plan has developed with further HRA work being undertaken to In summer 2024 an updated HRA was produced for the Regulation 19 Local Plan, and this included a section on Derogations for Policy PLP3: Tipner West & Horsea Island East. An HRA Supplement, was produced in October 2024 and intended for submission to the Secretary of State alongside the submission version of the Local Plan. Since the October 2024 HRA Supplement was produced the Council has made amendments to some Local Plan policies. This will be consulted upon as part of a Local Plan Addendum. The 2025 update to the HRA was produced to assess the changes to those aspects of the Local Plan which are being consulted upon as part of the Addendum.

Biodiversity net gain is operational within the council. More information on Biodiversity Net Gain within the authority area can be found in Section 4.0. The authority has continued to be part of the Solent Mitigation partnership, supporting the Solent Nutrient Neutrality Scheme. 112.83 credits were purchased in January 25-Dec 25.

The local authority has used Natural England's Green Infrastructure framework to develop **green infrastructure policies** which will be supported by implementation guidance, developed in the next couple of years. We anticipate that these policies will aid urban nature recovery.

Other policies and strategic actions

The authority has a **pesticides policy** which has led to a notable reduction in pesticide use. In this reporting period an evidence based **Urban Forest Master Plan** has been developed, with the approaches set out within the master plan being approved by the portfolio holder for Climate and the Natural Environment. Development of the master plan involved internal and external stakeholders. The authority can now work with stakeholders to drive forward delivery.

The authority has been involved in the development of the **Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy** which has identified sites of importance for biodiversity and sites that could be important for biodiversity as well as a number of key measures specific to the Portsmouth authority area. Additionally, the authority has supported the **Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (2024)** and is now updating data across the council and supporting staff in awareness of sites.



Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy



Solent Waders and Brent Goose Steering Group
October 2024



2.2.2 Actions

The local authority has worked hard during the reporting period to deliver actions that improve biodiversity, build collaborations and connect more people with nature. This section reviews activity that has supported protected habitats and species and presents a range of case studies to illustrate the breadth of work across the council.

2.2.2a Protected sites

Portsmouth is surrounded by SSSIs, SACs and SPAs. The bulk of these sites relate to inter-tidal and marine environments.

SSSIs Two terrestrial SSSIs which Portsmouth City Council has responsibility for are Farlington Marshes (121 ha) and Portsdown Hill (65 ha). The Local Authority owns both of these SSSIs. In this reporting period we have continued to work with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to support positive management of Farlington Marshes. We have a strong management regime for Portsdown Hill with activity increasing the resilience of the chalk grassland found here.

The Harbours - the harbours that surround Portsmouth (Portsmouth, Langstone) as well as the Solent are SPAs, SACs and SSSIs. The Local Plan due to be published in 2027 has considered requirements through Habitats Regulation Assessment. The council works actively within the region e.g. nutrient mitigation, recreational disturbance, to maintain the special quality of these areas.

2.2.2b Species conservation strategies

The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy extends across the Portsmouth Local Authority Area. During the reporting period this strategy has been updated. Portsmouth City Council accounts for sites within it's Local Plan and has continued to deliver actions including recreational disturbance mitigation.

A protected area continues to be provided for brent geese at Tangiers Field, in alignment with the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy 2024 with Tangier Field identified as a core area within the network.



At Baffins Dipping Pond, put in by the Baffins Pond Association, the edges were reprofiled in by volunteers in October 2023 and have naturalised. Volunteers have also been pulling up the blanket weed, which will allow for the expansion of the pond plant life.



2023



2025

2.2.2c Case studies - action for nature

Case study 1: Milton Common - Improving the condition of SINC

Milton Common comprises rough grassland, amenity grassland, scrubland and wetland/reedbeds and includes a good diversity of species. There are over 140 bird species (including transient visitors), over 22 species of butterfly and many invertebrates including types of wasps, damselfly, grasshopper and cricket and hundreds of moths. There are also reptiles such as the common lizard and slow worm. Mammals at the site include hedgehog, shrews, voles, foxes, rabbits and bats.

Over one hectare of scrub was removed in 2025 and grassland reclaimed, allowing other plants such as pyramidal orchids to thrive. Managing the bramble also creates differing age structure for the benefit of nesting birds. Positive feedback has been received from residents regarding the scrub reduction, as people feel safer since the area is more open. A skylark has also been seen by the team and members of the public. The work at Milton Common has been made possible due to the Milton Common Framework and developer payments arising for mitigation against recreational disturbance.



Case study 2: Biodiversity enhancement within the urban landscape

Working at 46 locations across the city in Parks and Open Spaces to create pollinator patches, the urban countryside ranger has built up a strong knowledge of how to deliver wildflower rich grassy places, and importantly how to gain the support of residents.

This activity is complemented by the efforts of the Housing Estates Team, who have worked to depave housing estate and bring in wildflower rich spaces that weave across the housing estate. The result is that wildflowers are increasingly being seen and enjoyed across Portsmouth. Further efforts will see the expansion of measures on land owned by Portsmouth City Council as well as support provided to other asset owners within Portsmouth to adopt such measures.



Species rich grassland provide vital habitat for an abundance of wildlife. Relaxed mowing regimes are leading to wildflowers flourishing

Case study 3: Nature positive nature-based solutions

The education estate is distributed across the city and provides significant stepping stones for biodiversity and developing connections with nature. Funding for SUDS schemes across a number of schools provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity, including wildflower rich swales. Additionally, the council has supported schools develop woodland areas, including ground cover planting and access grants and volunteer effort to bring plans into fruition.

Case study 4: A resilient treescape

An Urban Forest Master Plan has been created for the city, setting out the vision for a resilient treescape with deliverable short- and long-term actions. Drawing on data from the i-Tree Eco Survey 2024, the master plan supports all landowners in managing their tree planting and mature trees to maximise the benefits for biodiversity, climate resilience and health & wellbeing.

Funding of £25,400 has been secured from a Tree Council grant to plant 78 trees and 660m of hedgerow in the 2025/26 planting season. Sourced from Plant Healthy Certified nurseries, the trees and hedgerow plants will be a mixture of native species, providing new habitat and food sources for a host of wildlife. Planting took in inner city areas where existing habitat is often lacking or fragmented. This funding brings the total external funding granted in the reporting period for tree planting to over £400k. Much of the planting has been delivered by community and volunteer groups, emphasising how important collaboration is.

The local authority is now scoping plans for successional planting to identify and enable the planting of new trees before existing trees are lost due to pests & disease, age or climate impacts, ensuring habitat provision is maintained.

As part of our work, we are identifying opportunities for enhancing woodland management across a network of sites identified on the National Forest Inventory with a view to developing woodland habitats.

Case study 5: Working in partnership with infrastructure / utilities

At an SSSI - Portsdown Hill SSSI occupies a strategic position in the network of mostly utility firms due to siting of pipes, cables and other infrastructure. Late 2024 saw three separate SSE projects in operation at the same place at the same time. Close liaison prevented site damage and ensured contractors delivered habitat management objectives for the site. Active management prevents the hill being taken over by non-native invasive species (e.g. holm oak, cotoneaster shrub, manna ash) and native species, to meet the biodiversity objectives of this calcareous grassland site.

In partnership with Southern Water - To reduce surface water runoff into the combined sewage network Southern Water, with the local authority, are exploring opportunities for SUDS including rain gardens. Through the installation of SuDS, such as rain gardens, the variety and diversity of planting will be increased, which will provide a greater amount of habitat.

Detail of the work at Portsdown Hill SSSI

1. Continued management of 10 ha of former amenity grassland and agricultural sites on Portsdown hill to increase biodiversity and to address legacy of historic nutrient enrichment

Detail: Grazing or cut and clear operations to maintain species rich grassland, augmented with distribution of seed gathered from elsewhere on the hill to ensure optimal ecological suitability.

2. Contribution to LNRS

Detail: Mapped and described areas of existing biodiversity and potential biodiversity improvement on Portsdown escarpment, forwarded to LNRS Hampshire

3. Biological recording

Detail: Two UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) transects. Bumblebee Conservation trust Bee Walk transect. Entered surveys and Ad Hoc biological records on to Portsmouth iRecord account.

4. SSSI grazing and scrub clearance

Detail: Winter grazed SSSI with cattle. Cleared further 1 Ha of scrub aiming for target of 60% of site managed as grassland. Suppressed scrub growth from 20 ha of previous scrub clearance works.

5. Mapped ecologically significant trees on Portsdown Hill SSS

Detail: Produced a GIS layer from ground-truthed GPS data showing location of Oak, Ash, Elm, Juniper, also invasive species Holm Oak and Manna Ash

6. Established DED resistant elm trees and facilitated natural regeneration of hedgerow-companion scrub blocks with out the use of plastic tree guards

Detail: Diversified the tree and scrub network on Portsdown Hill. Planted donated elms to assist White Letter Hairstreak butterfly. Translocated species such as hawthorn, buckthorn and holly produced by scrub clearance operations. Designated areas for scrub to grow and encouraged it by distributing Portsdown-collected seed

7. Assisted adjacent land owner create new habitats on re-developed Portsdown site

Detail: Advised and assisted factory owner in their aspiration to create appropriate wildlife habitat in grounds of new industrial unit. Assisted with hedge planting (60m) and spread green hay collected from species-rich sites on Portsdown, 4000sqm.

8. Engagement

Detail: Wildlife themed guided walks and talks programme in collaboration with Friends of Portsdown Hill. 6000 hours of conservation volunteer time

2.3 Review of reporting period

2.3.1 What has gone well?

Authority commitment - The commitment of the local authority to the natural environment across all of its services is clear and importantly efforts are welcomed by residents. Working with Hampshire County Council on the LNRS has supported cohesion across the council and the information provides an excellent platform from which to build a local biodiversity strategy and action plan. Involvement with the Solent Mitigation Partnership has continued to deliver benefits for the marine and coastal environments.

Funding success - Funding successes include investment from the Nature Towns and Cities Programme as well as levels of investment secured through the DEFRA Climate and Environment Programme for tree planting. The council has demonstrated leadership and is increasingly supporting others at varying scales.

Stakeholder engagement and public support -The councils' countryside team are heavily involved in delivering volunteering opportunities and a range of public engagement events. They do so in collaboration with Adult Social Services and the Museums Teams.

The Inner-City Countryside Officer coordinates contributions from all the Countryside Officers in the Parks team managing a social media account on Instagram, Nature of Portsmouth. The social media account is now in its third year and there are now 440 followers (last year, 316 followers).

A Green Community Forum was established in 2025 and meets quarterly, supporting knowledge exchange across community groups. The business community are becoming increasingly involved with Portsmouth's natural environment, in part through the recognition of the importance of nature-based solutions. For a densely populated city like Portsmouth galvanising the action of all stakeholders is an important component of nature recovery.

Partnership for South Hampshire (working collaboratively)- The council has worked with Hampshire County Council and the Partnership for South Hampshire to explore opportunities for off site biodiversity net gain.



Businesses commit to a nature positive Portsmouth at the Climate Ready Conference, November 2025

2.3.2 What has gone less well and why?

Funding impacts delivery - The funding environment for delivering biodiversity remains challenging as does the dynamic legislative environment.

The pressure on limited space within the authority area remains a challenge - with limited opportunities for mitigation and biodiversity net gain.

Effective management of invasive non-native species - The countryside team work hard to support the removal of non-native invasive species. There is an opportunity for greater public engagement on non-native invasive species management.

2.3.3 Understanding future threats and challenges

Over the next few year's the authority will need to:

- Navigate new legislation
- Transition to a new authority
- Rapidly understand the localised impacts of climate change on its natural assets and biodiversity
- Ensure data and information management is robust to gain a strong sense of impactful action
- Continue to balance the needs of nature and people

2.3.4 Monitoring and evaluating our actions

We:

- Have an SLA with Hampshire County Council (HBIC) ensuring that we review the condition of our SINCS
- Carry out specific site-based monitoring

Where monitoring efforts are in place we have been able to demonstrate that land management practices are supporting nature recovery, for example the presence of Lizard Orchids at Paulsgrove Chalk Pit.

3.0 Future activity

3.1 Summary

During the next 5 years (2026-2031) Portsmouth City Council will be part of devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR). Sustaining our support for nature and biodiversity whilst navigating transition will be a focus.

3.1.1 Our objectives, first outlined in 2024, remain the same:

1. To increase the capacity for conserving and enhancing biodiversity across Portsmouth recognising the need to develop resilience against emerging climate threats
2. To continue to protect and enhance the biodiversity of our protected sites and identify measures to mitigate against future climate threats
3. To make more space for nature across the city and in doing so develop resilience against emerging climate threats
4. To celebrate the nature of Portsmouth and engage residents in playing an increasingly active role in enhancing and monitoring biodiversity

3.1.2 How we will do that will be through

1. Developing resources (capital and revenue) to deliver for nature including actions and opportunities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy - *a measure of success will be an increase in the amount of capital and revenue supporting biodiversity enhancement and habitat management as well as the number of sites (and new sites) identified within the LNRS where action is taking place*
2. Working collaboratively within Portsmouth to ensure that biodiversity is seen as an essential part of Portsmouth and influence stakeholders to deliver action on their own land or through their operations - *a measure of success will be the delivery of a biodiversity strategy and action plan; involvement of stakeholders within that plan and clear nature first principles and guidance for green infrastructure and development. We will also continue to measure BNG credits*
3. Ensuring that focus is provided on understanding the risks to the natural environment on climate change - *a measure of success will be climate change impacts increasingly being incorporated into site management plans; the way in which we continue to inspire all residents and businesses about nature and the role of nature in developing climate resilience*
4. Delivering against current policies and actions whilst navigating transition - *a measure of success will be enduring ambition within the new local authority.*

3.2 Detail

Figure 3 outlines detail around policy and actions to help achieve objectives.

Figure 3: Policy and actions to help achieve objectives

Objectives / Method	Policies	Actions
Developing resources (capital and revenue) to deliver for nature including actions and opportunities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Nutrient neutrality Local Plan Policies	By 2028 we will have a clear report detailing off-site biodiversity net gain opportunities on land identified within the LNRS. Nature Positive Portsmouth We will review all opportunities for nature finance through working with a consultant. Nature Positive Portsmouth We will continue to secure funding through Countryside Stewardship Agreements to manage our SSSI Portsdown Hill. PCC Parks and Open Spaces (Countryside) We will secure funding for a project to deliver resilience in our freshwater / wetland habitats and protect these against the impacts of climate change. Exploring funding routes
Working collaboratively within Portsmouth to ensure that biodiversity is seen as an essential part of Portsmouth and influence stakeholders to deliver action on their own land or through their operations	N/A	In 2026 we will celebrate Portsmouth's natural environment through our centenary activity, raising the profile of the terrestrial and marine habitats. This activity will encourage others to take action. Portsmouth 100 In 2027 we will support residents and business take action for nature through a wildlife gardening campaign, working with groups such as Friends of the Earth Nature Positive Portsmouth We will work with our PFI contractor for highways to review the landscape management plan ensuring that our highways green infrastructure plays an important role in connecting habitats. Nature Positive Portsmouth

Objectives / Method	Policies	Actions
		We will continue to support the school estates to enhance biodiversity on their own land. Dfe SUDS funding We will optimise biodiversity enhancement across our estate (housing and Parks, Open Spaces and cemeteries)Nature Positive Portsmouth We will work with Havant Borough Council to ensure management our estate within their authority area aligns with their biodiversity strategy. Nature Positive Portsmouth
Ensure that focus is provided on understanding the risks to the natural environment on climate change		We will communicate plans for a resilient treescape and work with key stakeholders such as the MOD and University to ensure a net gain in trees and canopy cover resilient to the impacts of 2 Celsius increase in global warming levels. Nature Positive Portsmouth Through our climate resilience work we will work collaboratively to enhance our understanding of the impacts of climate change on natural habitats and species at a local level. We will ensure that climate resilience is embedded within our Biodiversity Strategy. Nature Positive Portsmouth Using National Forestry Inventory data, we will explore opportunities to enhance woodland management on our holdings for resilience and enhanced biodiversity.

Objectives / Method	Policies	Actions
Deliver against current policies and actions whilst navigating transition and ensuring alignment and no loss of momentum	We will ensure that policies are reviewed and updated as legislation changes and incorporate those into our Biodiversity Strategy due by 2027. - Nature Positive Portsmouth We will develop implementation guidance for our green infrastructure standards by 2027. Nature Positive Portsmouth	Work with neighbouring authorities as part of devolution and LGR

4.0 Biodiversity net gain information (for local planning authorities only)

The City Council is promoting the delivery of BNG through two main mechanisms. The first is the investigation of PCC landholdings for their BNG potential. The second is working as part of wider sub regional groups on a joint approach to BNG habitat.

4.1 BNG on Council Land

The Council worked with the Partnership for South Hampshire. The strategic environmental planning team undertook a piece of work to inform the potential for BNG on council owned land. This work assessed a long list of sites from across Portsmouth before focusing on two sites. The results of the work showed that sites put forward by the city would struggle to be able to create BNG credits at a cost price that would be competitive on the open market.

The decision was made to focus offsite BNG provision in the city on those areas with the greatest potential. The areas that were identified as having the most potential were the Council's Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) sites which were identified as being in unfavourable condition. Results of this work have shown that some of the sites have limited potential to accommodate BNG. The surveys have identified that some of the SINC's can be improved but have indicated that BNG would need to be considered alongside other approaches to achieve the desired gains.

4.2 Ongoing BNG Partnership work

The City Council is working with the Solent Mitigation Partnership to bring forward BNG on sites across South Hampshire. The SMP team are leading on a cross-authority officer group focusing upon the delivery of BNG on Council owned land. The group includes officers from Eastleigh, Gosport, Fareham, Havant, Portsmouth, Southampton and Test Valley. This group meets regularly to promote the delivery of BNG on council land.

The council is also in early discussions with the authorities which will form the Post LGR South East Hampshire Local Authority (Gosport, Fareham and Havant). These discussions will cover HRA matters including:

- Green Infrastructure
- Mitigation measures
- BNG
- Nutrient Neutrality
- Bird Aware

4.3 BNG Monitoring

The city council has been requiring BNG as part of Planning applications since early 2024.

The city council has approved a total of 9 biodiversity gain plans to date. The sites have all met or exceeded the minimum 10% biodiversity net gain requirement. A total of 24.29 BNG units have been secured, these are as follows:

- Onsite Habitat Units – 13.33
- Onsite Hedgerow Units – 1.05
- Offsite Habitat Units – 9.91
- Offsite Hedgerow units- 0