



# Progress for Nature Update January 2025



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL

## Introduction

England is now widely considered to be one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, given historic and ongoing declines in biodiversity. A recently published analysis by the State of Nature Partnership states that since 1970, UK species have declined, on average, by 19% and that nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction in Great Britain. Furthermore, a recent study by the Wildlife Trust has suggested that 90% of lowland grassland has been lost in the 20th century. This has contributed to a loss or reduction in insects, wildlife and grassland species which are an integral part of the UK's ecological infrastructure.

The compounding impacts of climate change, pollution and land use change are recognised to be the principal drivers of the long-term decline in the health of our natural environment. The encroachment of industrial activity and intensified agricultural management have been identified as the most prominent contributing factors.

Supplementary to South Kesteven District Council's Biodiversity Action Plan, this progress document sets out the action that the Council has already taken to protect and enhance biodiversity in the district since the publication of its First Considerations Report in December 2023. This reporting period covers 01 January 2024 to 31 December 2025.

So far, the Council has facilitated initiatives on Council-owned land, supported external funding opportunities for town or parish councils and community groups, and enhanced staff knowledge of wildlife-friendly open space management.

Moving forward, the Biodiversity Action Plan will outline future priorities for habitats and species in South Kesteven. Ultimately, this will play an important role in the delivery of the Council's plans for climate change mitigation and adaptation, to provide value for wildlife and residents alike.



## **Section 106 Agreement with Boothby Wildland to support nature recovery**

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Unless exempt, new developments must deliver a biodiversity net gain of 10% and result in more better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

There are 3 ways a developer can achieve BNG.

- They can create biodiversity on-site (within the red line boundary of a development site).
- If developers cannot achieve all their BNG on-site, they can deliver through a mixture of on-site and off-site. Developers can either make off-site biodiversity gains on their own land outside the development site or buy off-site biodiversity units on the market.
- If developers cannot achieve on-site or off-site BNG, they must buy statutory biodiversity credits from the government. This should be a last resort. The government will use the revenue to invest in habitat creation in England.

Boothby Wildland, a 617-hectare site owned by nature restoration company Nattergal, sought to create, manage and maintain BNG Units as part of its landscape recovery ambitions. The uplift in biodiversity is measured by the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Defra, 2023) and translated into Biodiversity Units that can then be sold to developers where they are unable to achieve a net gain in biodiversity on-site.

The land which has been identified as dedicated Biodiversity Areas at Boothby Wildland totals 64.6 hectares, comprising four separate parcels of land referred to as Exton's Wood (14 ha), Ark Field (9.6 ha), Witherns (13 ha) & Kirkhill (28 ha).

The habitat enhancements are to be achieved through adherence to a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP). The HMMP is a detailed plan that outlines how the Biodiversity Areas will be monitored and managed for at least 30 years in order to create and enhance habitats for the purposes of achieving BNG. To secure the use of land for biodiversity, a legal agreement was required to legally ensure the highest quality delivery of the habitats.

In September 2024, the South Kesteven District Council Planning Committee unanimously agreed to authorise the Assistant Director of Planning and Growth to enter into a Section 106 Agreement with Boothby Wildland Ltd to create, manage and maintain Biodiversity Net Gain Units for the purpose of satisfying BNG Obligations for developments for a period of 30 years.

It was desirable to have a site within South Kesteven that could provide local BNG units if developers cannot achieve BNG on-site. This would ensure that the BNG and associated benefits arising from new development would remain within South Kesteven, as opposed to being used elsewhere.

Moving forward, it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the obligations set out in the Section 106 agreement are adhered to, through effective monitoring of the site. Monitoring of

the HMMP will be carried out by the Council as the Local Planning Authority, who will review progress of the habitat units against the proposed management objectives.

The HMMP is designed to be an adaptive, 'live' document and should be reviewed and amended regularly to ensure the management objectives remain fit to achieve their intended aims over the 30-year management period.

Monitoring will follow the method set out in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric for conducting condition assessments. A report should be produced after each monitoring visit and will include recommendations for action or alterations to the management prescription set out. Monitoring will be conducted annually for the first five years during June or July before the grass is cut for hay. After year 5, monitoring may be reduced to once in 2 years, and eventually to once in 5 years as habitats become more stable, for the 30-year duration.

To ensure that the monitoring costs of the Council are covered for the lifetime of the agreement, a monitoring fee of £35,000 was to be provided to the Council.



## Biodiversity Net Gain in Planning – Approved Metrics

The Council is responsible for monitoring the Biodiversity Net Gain resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans that the Council has approved. The below table summarises the planning applications, dated between January 2024 and January 2026, that have been subject to BNG requirements.

<b>Planning approved BNG applications 01/01/2024-13/01/26</b>		Off-site	Off-Site Credits	On-site	Ha
Quantity of Planning applications containing BNG requirements	63	8	0	55	211.52

Planning applications conditions discharged	6
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On-site base Line (units)			On-site post-intervention (units)			On-site net Change (units)					
Habitat	Hedgerow	Wetland	Habitat	Hedgerow	Wetland	Habitat	%	Hedgerow	%	Wetland	%
495.03	90.75	26.82	722.64	139.11	33.78	227.92	144.54	48.23	2809.89	6.96	413.92

For each application and completed biodiversity metric, the impact on biodiversity units has been collated to inform the following data:

- For each application, the on-site base line refers to the existing ecological baseline before any development.
- The on-site post-intervention references the end number of biodiversity units post development.
- The on-site net change describes the additional units being added.



## **Witham Slea Blue Green Corridor Initiative**

SKDC was the lead partner for the £1.2m [Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor initiative](#) which was funded from the European Regional Development Fund, with financial contributions and partnership support from North Kesteven District Council, the Environment Agency and the National Trust. The resulting river restoration and biodiversity project taking in the Witham through Grantham was shortlisted as a finalist for the prestigious UK River Prize 2024.

This Blue/Green project formed a crucial part of the overall, long-term, Upper Witham Restoration, a habitat improvement programme that has been ongoing for more than 10 years overseen by the Upper Witham sub-catchment partnership who submitted the area for the prestigious award.

Work in and around Grantham began in 2019 and ended in Summer 2023, supporting and developing areas alongside the River Witham and River Slea. It saw rivers linked with their floodplains, new habitats created, and existing habitats improved to support a more diverse range of species.

The 14 individual projects of the Upper Witham Restoration, including four in the Sleaford area, were designed to improve the freshwater habitat, support the ecosystem and benefit local communities.



Image – Belton Floodplain Improvements

Examples of work undertaken include tree planting and the introduction of bird boxes and wildflower meadows. Other work included:

- River channel improvements to restore straightened and over widened sections of the river to reinstate natural processes, improving habitat for people, places and wildlife
- Wetland creation, creating rare landscapes and supporting a wide variety of special native species, such as amphibians and water voles previously limited by the lack of habitat
- Wildflower meadow creation, establishing a wide range of flora, and creating habitat for many important species through refuge and food provision, as well as benefiting pollinators
- Flushing meadow creation, creating a spring-fed meadow to support diverse flora
- Tree management to support native species by introducing light and adding woody material for habitat creation
- Footpaths to bring essential transport links throughout the town, making enjoyable riverside walks more accessible

The work on the river was well received and set a good example of how river restoration projects can enhance public green spaces for the benefit of local users whilst also supporting wildlife.

The wider Upper Witham Restoration involved partnership work between the Environment Agency, East Mercia Rivers Trust, Wild Trout Trust, The National Trust, Grantham Angling Association Fly Fishing Section, South Kesteven District Council and the University of Lincoln.



Image – [In-channel Restoration](#) of the Papermill Weir, Grantham

## **Coronation Community Orchards Funding**

New mini-orchards were planted across the district following a Coronation Living Heritage grant awarded to SKDC to celebrate the accession of King Charles III. Parish councils, community groups and parent/teacher associations could apply for funding to plant fruit trees on publicly accessible sites, with protective spirals, information signage and protective fencing as required.

It was recognised that Orchards deliver on several fronts through the provision of organic fruit, engaging the community and helping to withstand climate change, increase carbon sequestration and the filtering of pollutants. The choice of fruit trees was down to local preferences, though successful applicants were required to outline plans for aftercare of the orchard to ensure it is maintained permanently.

## **Green Flag Status – Wyndham Park, Queen Elizabeth Park and Dysart Park**

SKDC manages three formal parks in the district: Wyndham Park, Dysart Park and Queen Elizabeth Park, all of which are situated in Grantham. All three parks have accredited Green Flag status, acknowledging them as among the very best in the East Midlands.

The Green Flag Award is the benchmark international standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces in the United Kingdom and signifies that a park is well-maintained and welcoming. In addition, the award acts as a tribute to SKDC staff and community volunteers who give their time freely to help maintain the parks to a standard befitting Green Flag status.

## **Biodiversity Officer Working Group**

An internal working group was formed to help steer the Council's biodiversity plans. This working group includes officers from a range of departments and meets monthly to achieve the following objectives:

- Understand the current health of the natural environment in the district and identify areas of improvement.
- Set out the council's remit to influence the natural environment and improve biodiversity.
- Consider the council's role as a local planning authority and the new expectations for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for new developments.
- Consider the council's role as a local authority and the specific actions and projects we intend to implement to improve biodiversity.
- The working group will provide regular updates on the council's biodiversity plans to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Summer 2025 Biodiversity Consultation**

Residents were asked for their views on South Kesteven District Council's approach to wildlife habitat, nature and biodiversity in a four-week consultation which opened early June 2025. The consultation illustrated SKDC's commitment to setting aside land for nature and provided an opportunity to identify what support other organisations would like to help promote biodiversity. Responses were sought from residents, landowners, organisations and other stakeholders to help it refine and develop its future direction and actions.

Stakeholders were encouraged to provide feedback on existing rewilding and wildflower sites and suggest areas of Council owned land that could be suitable for a biodiversity scheme. The Council was also keen to establish how best it can support other organisations and community and voluntary groups to set aside areas of their own land for the benefit of nature.



## **Biodiversity Training for Council Staff**

### Establishment and Management of Wildflower Areas in Amenity Turf

In May 2025, the Council organised a training day course at Boothby Wildland, a Nattergal rewilding project situated here in South Kesteven. The course, which focused on the successful establishment of wildflower areas in amenity turf, was delivered by Dan Carne of Woodmeadow Makers, supported by the Boothby Wildland team.

The desired outcomes of the course were:

- For staff to have the relevant knowledge and skills to successfully turn areas of amenity turf into wildflower areas that a) look attractive and b) provide benefit to wildlife.
- For example, equip staff with the knowledge to evaluate diverse site conditions and tailor techniques for varying soil types, microclimates, and other local factors.
- For staff to learn how to mimic ecological processes to achieve outcomes a) and b) in the long term with minimal cost.

The outline of content delivery covered:

- Site assessment and planning
- Preparation and establishment
- Management and maintenance

### Arboricultural Knowledge Training Course

To ensure that Officers can make informed decisions regarding tree-related issues in their work and align tree-related decision-making across departments to improve service delivery and consistency, training was provided by local Arboricultural consultant, Andrew Belson.

The course focused on providing a foundational understanding of tree biology, identification and best management practices. The training was directed to Grounds Maintenance staff, Climate and Sustainability Officers, and Officers from Planning and Planning Enforcement.

### Basic Tree Inspection

As a follow up to the foundational Arboricultural Knowledge training course, a follow-up day was dedicated to Basic Tree Inspection so that staff were equipped with the skills to recognize hazardous trees and assess risk. Delivered in SKDC's very own Wyndham Park, the content supported Officers in the early identification of potential tree-related safety issues, reducing the need for reactive interventions.

## **Make Space for Nature Biodiversity Projects Scheme**

In August 2024, the Council announced its Make Space for Nature scheme. Following a successful bid to the South Kesteven UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Council was awarded £54,490 to support town and parish councils implement biodiversity initiatives.

A 'Rewilding Menu' guide was developed by SKDC to support town and parish councils in their endeavour to tackle local biodiversity loss and improve the health and wellbeing of residents. It presented a menu of rewilding options with projected costings that could provide inspiration for new rewilding initiatives within the district. Ideal sites were identified as areas of open space with existing public access that were underutilised within residential areas. It was the responsibility of the town or parish council to identify areas of interest within the district and manage the organisational element of project work, although Officers were on hand to provide advice and shape new project ideas.

The Council has also developed a Tree Planting Guide to provide practical advice to town and parish councils and other partners who are intending to plant new amenity trees in their area. This document guides the reader through the process of planning, site assessment, species selection, procurement of nursery stock, the practical act of planting the trees, and post planting maintenance. Considering each of these elements in turn will provide a new planting scheme the best chance of success.



Image: Wyndham Park Biodiversity Paddock, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund under South Kesteven's 'Make Space for Nature' scheme.

## **South Kesteven's Trees and Woodland Strategy**

Lincolnshire has some of the lowest levels of tree cover in England, although this is expected given the agricultural land use in the County. SKDC's Trees and Woodlands Strategy will inform how the Council can protect and enhance the district's tree population, with specific reference to tree preservation orders, development control and tree canopy cover increase through public and partnership engagement. In doing so, the Strategy will play a key role in the Council's ambitions to increase biodiversity and represents a significant opportunity to increase tree cover and help tackle the effects of climate change.

The Strategy was developed with the support of Treeconomics, who have worked with other local authorities, in recognition of the pivotal role trees and woodland play in cutting carbon emissions.

The public consultation on the Strategy closed in February 2024, with approximately 900 responses. 99% of these respondents agreed that trees and woodlands were valuable assets, and 96% agreed that planting, maintaining and protecting trees was a worthwhile investment. This demonstrated a clear desire from residents for the Council to develop a strategic approach to the management of its tree assets.

The Council appointed a dedicated Tree Project Officer whose role will involve securing funding opportunities and engaging with local communities.



## **Rewilding Trial Sites**

SKDC's commitment to increase wildlife habitat and improve biodiversity is a key strand of the Council's Corporate Plan, which seeks a Sustainable South Kesteven and following the 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency, states: "We will protect and enhance the natural environment and wildlife habitats, working to actively restore and rehabilitate damaged ecosystems."

Rewilding involves the restoration of healthy ecosystems, aimed at increasing biodiversity and reversing the loss of our wildlife. By developing and protecting existing habitats, we can build towards a more resilient landscape that is better positioned to adapt to the effects of climate change. Furthermore, rewilding serves a dual purpose of reconnecting people with nature, at minimal cost. By altering our approach to the management of our open spaces, we can provide better habitats for wildlife, improve biodiversity, and increase amenity value. This is especially important as many people are spending a significant amount of time indoors where a busy, technology-mediated life leads to a disconnect with nature. The incorporation of green space within our environment can foster a deeper sense of connection to nature, reduce stress and promote healthier living. Encouraging people to spend more time moving in nature-focused environments can also help lessen the effects of mental and physical illness.

To align with biodiversity initiatives, specific pocket sites across the district can be maintained differently to attract a diverse range of beneficial species. The creation of rewilding areas may be complemented by regularly mown sections and pathways, maintaining the visually appealing environment of South Kesteven whilst supporting local wildlife populations. By considering the environment, wildlife species and need of local people in individual locations, a tailored approach can be taken to ensure maximum benefit across the wider community.

New community rewilding areas have been and are still being identified across South Kesteven to enable pockets of land to go back to nature. New locations will be proposed with guidance from SKDC ward members, parish councils, and the Council's Sustainability and Climate Change team and its grounds maintenance staff. The idea is that these areas would receive minimum essential maintenance and be allowed to grow as nature intended. The Council acknowledges that not everywhere is appropriate for rewilding initiatives, as the recreation use of green space and safety aspects to each site must also be considered.

Proactive work has already taken place in key locations across South Kesteven. An area of the Foxglove Road playing field at Rutland Heights in Stamford has already been allowed to go back to nature. Grasses and other plants flourish there as a haven for wildlife, insects, birds and mammals. Similarly, Tattershall Drive, in Market Deeping, is blooming thanks to an area which is building a sustainable balance between recreational use and conservation in a public open space. Lastly, the Grantham rewilding site is part of the Blue Green Corridor project in Queen Elizabeth Park, to restore and reconnect the river and river corridors through the urban area of Grantham. The initiative has shown the way to restore, protect and increase local biodiversity.



Image: Wildflower Bund down Tattershall Drive, Market Deeping

More recently, the Council developed a Biodiversity Paddock in Wyndham Park, Grantham. Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund under South Kesteven's 'Make Space for Nature' scheme, the project incorporated native tree planting, wildflower segments and several benches for residents and visitors to sit and enjoy the space.



Image: The 4,000sqm paddock is located on the east side of Wyndham Park, adjacent to Sandon Road.

Each site is marked with an information board advising the public why some strips and pockets of open space are left unmown, and to ask people to refrain from walking on the natural environment.



Image: The Council's standard rewilding site signage

