

Cabinet

3 March 2026

Biodiversity Duty report

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

Report author and job title: Mike Garrity, Corporate Director for Planning, Bridget Betts, Environment, Policy & Partnership Manager

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report presents the biodiversity duty report and its obligations to Cabinet for formal approval prior to its publication and submission to Defra.
- 1.2. Dorset Council has a statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021 to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This duty requires the Council to embed biodiversity considerations into its policies, plans, and decision-making processes, and to publish a Biodiversity Report with an end date of no later than 1 January 2026 (published within 12 weeks of this date).
- 1.2 The strengthened duty builds on the original Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and introduces a requirement for public authorities to take strategic action and report on progress. Dorset Council's approach is being coordinated through the Natural Environment Team, working across departments to identify current activity, address gaps, and future ambitions. This includes aligning with the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which provides a key mechanism for delivering biodiversity enhancement at scale.

- 1.3. Delivering on this duty has wide-ranging benefits, including improved climate resilience, enhanced ecosystem services, and positive impacts on public health and wellbeing. It also supports economic development, community engagement, and the Council's leadership role in environmental stewardship.
- 1.4. Promoting and enhancing biodiversity also delivers against the council plan priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis and the Local Nature Recovery strategy.
- 1.5. Failure to meet the requirements of the biodiversity duty presents legal, reputational, and environmental risks.
- 1.6. Place and Resources overview committee have recommended to cabinet the Biodiversity Duty report 2023 – 25. Comments and actions from the committee have been imputed into the final Biodiversity Duty report 2023-25.
- 1.7. Dorset Council's Biodiversity Duty report 2023-25 be viewed in appendix 1. It captures our policies, objectives, actions between December 2023 to December 2025, as well as our future actions and aspirations to conserve and enhance biodiversity over the next 5 years.
- 1.8. Regular monitoring and reporting will ensure transparency and accountability, while helping to secure future funding and partnership opportunities.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. Cabinet is requested to endorse Dorset Council's Biodiversity Duty Report 2023–25, authorising its publication and subsequent submission to Defra.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To ensure that Dorset Council meets its statutory requirement to prepare, approve and publish a Biodiversity Duty Report for the 2023–25 period and submit it to Defra by the required deadline

4. The report

- 4.1 Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and includes all species of plants and animals and the natural systems that support them. Biodiversity is a core component of sustainable development, underpinning economic development and prosperity, and has an important role to play in developing locally distinctive and sustainable communities.

- 4.2 Conserving biodiversity is essential for addressing climate change and sustaining vital ecosystem services like food production, flood management, pollination, and clean air and water. It also supports species and habitat restoration and protection, while offering broader benefits for tourism, economic growth, health, community development, and social cohesion.
- 4.3 By 2030, the government has committed to halting the decline in species abundance and protecting 30% of UK land. By 2042, it aims to increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030 levels (surpassing those of 2022), restore or create at least 500,000 hectares of diverse wildlife-rich habitats, reduce the risk of species extinction, and restore 75% of the UK's one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition. Dorset Council has built these commitments into its council plan priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis, the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology strategy and the Local Nature Recovery strategy.
- 4.4 Public authorities have a statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021 to consider and take action to enhance biodiversity, building on the original NERC Act 2006 duty to conserve biodiversity. This strengthened duty requires authorities to set strategic objectives, implement actions, and report progress through Biodiversity Reports, including on Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Authorities must also cooperate with Natural England's species and site strategies, aligning with national policy on nature recovery and environmental improvement.
- 4.5 Public authorities must produce a Biodiversity Report for the first reporting period which ends on 1 January 2026. The report must be published within 12 weeks of this date (by 26 March 2026). The report must cover:
 - i. a summary of the action taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
 - ii. plans to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period
 - iii. actions carried out to meet BNG obligations
 - iv. details of BNG resulting (or expected to result) from biodiversity gain plans the LPA has approved
 - v. plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period
 - vi. any other information considered appropriate
- 4.5 Dorset Council have a key role to play in conserving biodiversity, through their work in: developing and implementing external and internal policies and strategies. For Dorset Council (DC) this could involve:
 - i. administering the planning system
 - ii. managing DC land and buildings
 - iii. developing and maintaining infrastructure
 - iv. engaging with business and the public
 - v. conducting research and managing information
 - vi. making decisions about procurement

vii. implementing economic, environmental, and social programmes.

4.7 The timetable and steps for this work is set out in table 1:

Step 1	Consider what can be done by Dorset Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity	By 1 January 2024
Step 2	Agree policies and specific objectives based on the consideration	As soon as possible after 1 January 2024
Step 3	Act to deliver the policies and achieve the objectives and re-consider the actions taken	Within 5 years of the original consideration (by 1 January 2029)
Step 4	Finalise a report of action taken to comply Publish the report	By 1 January 2026 – 26 March 2026 (and then every five years)

Table 1 – timescale and steps relating to the biodiversity duty

4.10 The work is led by the Corporate Director for Planning with the work being coordinated by the Natural Environment Team, working with all relevant teams to ensure that Dorset Council has a robust process where our biodiversity duty is considered across all our services.

4.11 The Biodiversity Duty report 2023-25 can be viewed in appendix 1

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 There are no other alternative options for this as we have a statutory duty to comply with the biodiversity duty.

6. Legal considerations

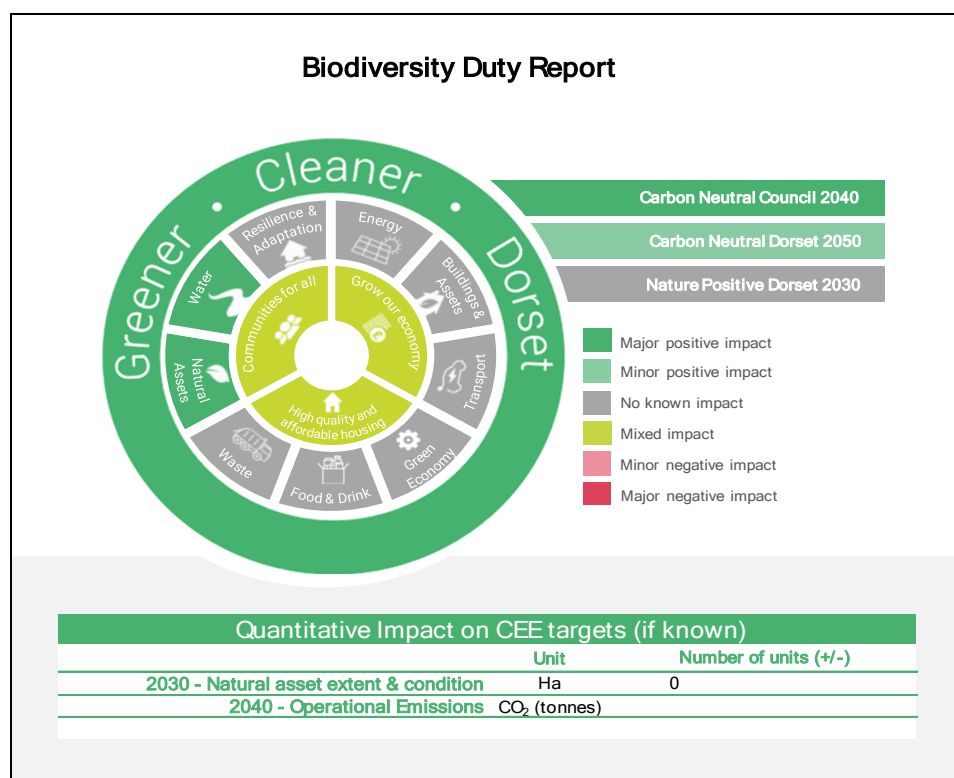
6.1 The legal considerations for Dorset Council in relation to the biodiversity duty include a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021 (amending the NERC Act 2006) to not only conserve but also enhance biodiversity through strategic planning and action. This includes setting and implementing biodiversity objectives, finalising a Biodiversity Report by 1 January 2026 (and published within 3 months – by 26 March 2026). It needs to be reviewed every five years thereafter and having regard to Natural England's species conservation strategies and protected site strategies. Failure to comply may result in legal, regulatory, and reputational risks.

7. Financial implications

7.1. Not applicable

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 Carrying out Dorset Council's biodiversity duty has important implications for the natural environment, climate, and ecology and supporting nature recovery. It also directly delivers against one of the four council plan priorities, responding to the climate and nature crisis.



9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, delivering actions set out in the Dorset Council's biodiversity duty has positive health and well-being and implications by increasing access to nature-rich environments, which are proven to reduce stress, improve mental health, encourage physical activity, and support social cohesion.
- 9.2 Enhancing and recovering biodiversity contributes to cleaner air and water, climate resilience, and more attractive, liveable communities - all of which support long-term public health outcomes.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 There are no other specific implications contained in this report.

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Low

- 11.2. Due to the known high level of public interest in the nature emergency agenda and the commitment to show the public our commitment to biodiversity, to not do endorse and support this should be considered a high reputational risk to Dorset Council.

12. Equalities

- 12.1 There are no specific equalities implications for this report itself.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix 1 - Biodiversity Duty Report 2023-25

Appendix 2 – Accessible table showing impacts

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS	
Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	major positive impact
Water	major positive impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	neutral
High-quality and affordable housing	neutral
Communities for all	neutral

13. Background papers

- 13.1 Not applicable

14. Report sign-off

- 14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)