

6. The County Council has a commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment that can be traced back over a number of years and through numerous initiatives. These include long standing support for the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, which is celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2022, work with the Local Nature Partnership, research and preparation of the State of Hampshire's Natural Environment report, publication of the Hampshire Tree Strategy, management of its own estate and establishing the Parish Pollinator Pledge.
7. In July 2021, the County Council committed to prepare an Environment Strategy which will provide an important framework setting out the environmental principles and priorities that would guide its activities, and feed into a wider plan to identify opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and supporting climate change objectives. The Strategy will be informed by a raft of new requirements to protect and enhance the environment introduced by the Environment Act (2021).
8. The Environment Act, and other recent changes, have significant implications for the role, duty and powers of the County Council, the way that it works and its relationship with others, and how it uses its resources. The paper seeks approval for proposed steps to meet these new requirements which will also contribute to the County Council meeting its climate change objectives.

Contextual information

9. Hampshire's 2050 Commission of Inquiry¹ identified that Hampshire's natural environment is a significant and valued asset, helping Hampshire to be an attractive and prosperous place to live, work and visit. The Commission recognised that a healthy and vibrant natural environment is vital in contributing to the long-term sustainability of the county.
10. However, as the *State of Hampshire's natural environment report*² describes "During the latter part of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, there has been a significant decline in the overall health of Hampshire's natural environment, including its diversity and abundance. Such a decline mirrors trends across much of the country." Globally, biodiversity loss is identified as the third most severe risk to economic recovery over the next 10 years³, and of profound importance to human health⁴. Nevertheless, as the report goes on to say, "there are signs of optimism with increasing weight and attention being given by decision takers and policy makers to the overall health of our natural environment."
11. The concept of a "natural capital" approach to protecting and enhancing the environment is at the heart of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan⁵, which was published in January 2018, and the provisions of the new Environment Act which was given Royal Assent in November 2021. Natural

¹ [2050-summaryreport2019.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

² [StateofNaturalEnvironmentReport.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [WEF The Global Risks Report 2022.pdf \(weforum.org\)](#)

⁴ [Biodiversity and Health \(who.int\)](#)

⁵ [25-year-environment-plan.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

capital is defined as the ‘elements of the environment which provide valuable goods and services to people such as clean air, clean water, food and recreation,’ also known as ecosystem services. It accounts for all the different ways the environment benefits society and can inform better decision making.

12. At a local level, the County Council’s 2050 Commission identified the changing climate as the most important driver for change in Hampshire. In 2019, the County Council declared a climate change emergency and, following that, published a Climate Change Strategy and Action plan⁶ that set out a range of strategies, exemplar projects and strategic priorities including for the natural environment “to protect, enhance, improve and develop the natural environment maximising the opportunity to manage and increase habitats, landscapes, and biodiversity which in turn support carbon sequestration and climate resilience” and “to work with partners to understand and develop the value of Hampshire’s natural capital.”
13. This is not a new area of work for the County Council. It’s commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment can be traced back over a number of years and through numerous initiatives.
14. Hampshire is a county of great biodiversity interest with more than 22% of its area covered by nature conservation designations, and 38% as Protected Landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).
15. There is a large body of UK and (previous) European legislation, and planning guidance that requires local authorities and other organisations to take account of biodiversity in order to satisfy a range of statutory and non-statutory duties. These include the National Planning Policy Framework, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and the Environment Act (2021).
16. Recognising that the provision of reliable up-to-date biodiversity information is essential to underpin and inform the response to these requirements, in April 2002, the County Council as Lead Partner helped establish the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC)⁷. Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, the Centre is hosted by the County Council and is funded by a Partnership of more than 30 organisations supplying and requiring data. Among its achievements since 2002, HBIC has carried out detailed ecological surveys of over 6,000 sites; evaluated and recommended the designation of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation bringing the total number of these sites to 4,114 representing 9% of the Hampshire area; screened over 178,000 planning applications to flag potential impact on designated sites, priority habitats and notable species; responded to over 11,000 data requests from consultants, developers, land managers, and community groups; and increased its species data holdings, gathered from over 3000 expert volunteer recorders, to over 8.5 million species records.
17. The County Council is also a member of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership (LNP)⁸. Established in 2012, it is one of 48 strategic local

⁶ [Climate change strategy and action plan | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/council-and-boards/strategy-and-action-plans/climate-change-strategy-and-action-plan/)

⁷ [Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre \(HBIC\) | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/council-and-boards/strategy-and-action-plans/hampshire-biodiversity-information-centre-hbic/)

⁸ [HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF WIGHT LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIP – Working together locally to secure nature’s value \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.secure-nature.org.uk/)

nature partnerships formed in England following publication of the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper. The aims of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight LNP are to:

- protect and improve the natural environment on land and at sea – creating bigger, better and more joined up places for nature – in line with the vision and recommendations of Sir John Lawton’s Making Space for Nature report⁹;
- promote a sustainable green economy – in which economic prosperity and the health of our natural resources sustain each other;
- reconnect people and nature – strengthening the connections between people and nature and improving the health of both; and
- promote the need to invest in nature for the many benefits and ecosystem services it provides and to put its value at the heart of decision making right across the two counties.

18. With these aims in mind, in 2015, HBIC was contracted by Natural England to produce a detailed Ecological Network Map for Hampshire¹⁰ on behalf of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight LNP. The map represents the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, plus other priority habitats and, importantly, areas identified for habitat restoration or creation. An ecological network is a group of habitat patches where species can move easily between, maintaining ecological function and conserving biodiversity. Through appropriate habitat restoration and re-creation, ecological networks can provide a connected collection of refuges for wildlife. Establishing the network will enable biodiversity to recover from recent declines and create a more resilient natural environment. The creation of the Ecological Network Map for Hampshire means that the County is well prepared to respond to key requirements of the Environment Act in particular the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSSs).

19. In order to further inform the understanding of Hampshire’s natural environment, in 2020 the County Council published the State of Hampshire’s Natural Environment report¹¹. The report provides a high-level ‘snapshot’ of the key trends and emerging issues facing the county’s natural environment under the following headings: Air Quality, Noise, Water, Soil, Coastal, Landscape, Biodiversity (Woodland, Farmland birds, Notable species and habitats, Designated sites, Insects and pollinators) and the Recreational use of the natural environment. As set out earlier in this paper, the report records the “significant decline in the overall health of Hampshire’s natural environment.” The report is intended to be the first of a series of regular ‘State of Hampshire’s Natural Environment’ reports, with the intention that it is supplemented with a more detailed report setting out the findings in greater depth. The report should be read in conjunction with the County Council’s Climate Change Strategy and

⁹ [Making Space for Nature: \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk)

¹⁰ [Microsoft Word - Mapping the Hampshire Ecological Network Updated March 2020 \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk)

¹¹ [StateofNaturalEnvironmentReport.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk)

Action Plan, and the Climate Change Annual report¹² which sets out the progress being made to tackle climate change including in protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

20. Also published in 2020, the Hampshire Tree Strategy¹³ sets out the key principles the County Council will follow to achieve the target of planting one million trees by 2050, one of its key actions in addressing carbon reduction and climate change resilience together. Over the course of the last year, the County Council planted more than 6,000 trees, with the potential to absorb nearly 20,000 tonnes of carbon over the next 20 years. The number of trees to be planted next year is forecast to increase to more than 20,000. The County Council has also been successful in bidding for £300,000 funding from the Forestry Commission's Local Authority Treescapes Fund which will support new tree and woodland planting on the Highway network and in sites in four districts in the next 12 months. As part of its commitment to protecting the county's ecological diversity and cultural heritage, the County Council has signed an agreement with the Woodland Trust, working with Natural England and all the District and Unitary Councils, to produce an updated ancient woodland inventory over the next 2 years.
21. In light of the loss of more than 50% of bees, butterflies and moths studied over the last 50 years, and the launch of The National Pollinator Strategy for England¹⁴, the County Council has launched a Parish Pollinator Pledge¹⁵ to improve habitats for vital pollinator insects. Working with local councils and community groups, the project will encourage initiatives to improve the environment for pollinators and help raise awareness of the importance of pollinators. This scheme complements the long-established Road Verges of Ecological Interest (RVEI) project¹⁶ which, since the 1980s, has identified the location and management requirements of wildlife rich road verges in Hampshire. The County Council is also working closely with Districts, Parishes and other partners such as the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership, Natural England and the Forestry Commission on a range of other initiatives including carbon storage mapping and the preparation of a natural capital plan. The County Council is currently implementing a further £1.2million investment to protect and enhance the natural environment, and tackle climate change, including projects such as rewilding and creating a propagation unit at Sir Harold Hillier Gardens to nurture plants at risk from rising temperatures.
22. With responsibility for managing over 3,000 hectares of Hampshire countryside, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and maintenance of 4,500km of Rights of Way network, the County Council has recorded significant success with species recovery and reintroduction. For example, through good conservation management, working with others, and as part of Farmer

¹²[Climate Change Annual Progress | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

¹³[tree-strategy.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁴[The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵[parish-pollinator-pledge-introduction.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁶[Road Verges of Ecological Importance \(RVEI\) | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

Clusters¹⁷, rare field crickets at Shortheath Common, sand lizards on Broxhead Common, and turtle doves at Martin Down have all benefitted.

23. In July 2021, the County Council committed to prepare an Environment Strategy¹⁸ which will provide an important high level framework setting out the environmental principles and priorities that would guide its activities, and feed into a wider plan to identify opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and supporting climate change objectives. The Strategy will be informed by a raft of new requirements to protect and enhance the environment and be underpinned by the concept of “natural capital,” introduced by the Environment Act.
24. The first dedicated Environment Act for 30 years, the Act includes important legally binding targets, including a 2030 target to halt species decline, enforced by a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations. Although further clarification and detail will be provided by the Secondary Legislation that will be introduced in due course, it is clear that the Act has significant implications for the role, duty and powers of the County Council. The following are considered likely to have the most impact on our approach to protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
25. Schedule 14 of the Act makes mandatory provision for biodiversity (net) gain to be a condition of planning permission in England. National consultation is now taking place on the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Regulations and its implementation, however, it will be mandatory for housing and development, including new roads, to achieve at least a 10% net gain in value for biodiversity either on-site or off-site secured through planning obligation or conservation covenant for at least 30 years after the completion of the works. A register of biodiversity gain sites will be set up by the Secretary of State, Natural England or another person and will be accessible to members of the public.
26. Under the Act, the general duty on public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity as set out in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 is strengthened to include ‘enhance’ as well as ‘conserve.’ Within the period of one year beginning with the day on which section 95 of the Environment Act 2021 comes into force, public authorities must determine such policies and specific objectives as it considers appropriate for taking action to further the general biodiversity objective, take such action as it considers appropriate in the light of those policies and objectives, and report on its activities. The authority must in particular have regard to any relevant local nature recovery strategy, and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England.
27. The Environment Act introduces a requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) for England to be prepared and published by “Responsible Authorities.” The Strategies will identify the opportunities and priorities for enhancing biodiversity and supporting wider objectives such as mitigating or adapting to climate change in an area. The strategies will have a key role in the

¹⁷ [Farmer Clusters - For farmers, facilitators and advisors](#)

¹⁸ <https://democracy.hants.gov.uk/documents/s78061/Report.pdf>

land use planning system and be an important source of evidence for local planning authorities to use in the preparation of their Local Plans. They are also intended to support the delivery of wider environmental objectives and each Strategy will map specific opportunities for taking priority action for nature recovery and the use of “nature-based solutions.” The County Council has expressed its strong interest in leading the preparation of the Strategy for its area in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders and, if appointed, has acknowledged that as a “responsible authority” it would become responsible for the review and republication of the Strategy from time to time. Of all the provisions of the Environment Act, the preparation of LNRs is expected to have the most significant impact on planning for the natural environment at a strategic level and, through the participation of partners, process and outcomes, be particularly influential on the development of the County Council’s proposed Environment Strategy.

28. Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies are also introduced by the Environment Act as targeted tools to protect and restore species and habitats at risk whilst enabling development. The Species Conservation Strategy is a new mechanism for improving the conservation status of any species of fauna or flora. A local planning authority in England must co-operate with Natural England in the preparation and implementation of a Strategy in so far as it is relevant to the authority’s functions. Protected Site Strategies provide a strategic approach to mitigation or compensation that is wider than individual project level. For example, the nutrient mitigation strategy to unlock housing delivery in the Solent region which aims to reduce and reverse the impact of nitrates and other nutrients reaching Protected Sites within the Solent.
29. In July 2021, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England set out what local planning authorities will require with regard to trees when setting local policies and considering planning applications for all developments. The NPPF states that: ‘Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined and that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments’¹⁹. This is supported by the National Model Design Code which says: ‘All schemes will be expected to follow national policy by achieving a 10% net gain in biodiversity. All new streets should include street trees.’²⁰ The Environment Act continues this emphasis on the value of street trees by including a provision for Highway Authorities to consult the public before felling a tree on an urban road (a “street tree”). The County Council recognises the importance of street trees and the need to protect them. It also recognises the importance of the public awareness of, and support for, effective highway tree management that ensures that trees remain safe and healthy and, where trees have to be removed, the requirement is understood. Hampshire Highways is committed to replacing these trees where there is enough space above and below ground.

¹⁹ [National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94421/nppf-2021.pdf) - paragraph 131

²⁰ [National Model Design Code: Part 1 - The Coding Process \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94421/nmdc-part-1.pdf) - section 60
Nature

30. The value of green infrastructure like street trees, access to green space, strong connections with nature and enabling investment in nature-based solutions, underpin the emerging *Towards 2050 - a framework to guide the future of Hampshire's built infrastructure and natural environment*. Working closely with a range of partners, the County Council is preparing a Hampshire-wide spatial framework shaped around strategic environmental and infrastructure requirements for the period up to 2050. The framework seeks to encourage policy and behaviours across the county to accommodate future sustainable growth in a way which secures improvements to key infrastructure and protects and enhances the role and function of the natural environment. It will do that by identifying key strategic opportunities including: creating a 'wild belt', a nature recovery network that stretches across the county, providing more space for nature, and setting a target of ensuring that 30% of land and sea within Hampshire is managed for nature recovery by 2030; designating a National Marine Park to put the Solent back on a more sustainable and resilient footing; restoring river corridors and providing a nature-based solution to the poor state of water quality and flood risk identified in the County; and enabling nature restoration and reform at scale via the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
31. It is intended that the *Towards 2050 Framework* will form a 'live' resource and will be updated with new evidence and opportunities as these emerge. It is the County Council's desire to work closely with stakeholders to realise the opportunities and continue to make connections between projects and partners. It is critical that this way of working, the response to the new requirements imposed by recent legislative and other changes, and relevant local, regional and national initiatives are matched by the appropriate resources.
32. As highlighted by the *Towards 2050 Framework* strategic opportunities of targeting 30% of land and sea within Hampshire managed for nature recovery by 2030, and designating the Solent as a National Marine Park, coastal and marine ecosystems are integral to the County Council's approach to the natural environment and meeting the challenge of climate change. A healthy ocean is fundamental in regulating the global climate system. The ocean absorbs more than 90% of the excess heat in the climate system as well as absorbing around 20% of annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions generated by human activity. As set out in the previously presented Chichester and Langstone Harbours - Natural Capital Plan report²¹, as a member of the Solent Forum, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Langstone Harbour Board, the Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, and Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, and as the River Hamble Harbour Authority, the County Council has an important role in the planning and management of the coastal and marine environments. Through its involvement in these, and other organisations, it is committed to helping to conserve the unique qualities of these environments, and realising a clean, healthy and productive ocean and all of the direct economic, health and wellbeing benefits it will bring. The County Council will work with partners to ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy supports

²¹ [Chichester and Langstone Harbours - Natural Capital Plan-2021-06-17-EMETE Decision Day \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/news/chichester-and-langstone-harbours-natural-capital-plan-2021-06-17-emet-decision-day)

the objective of ocean recovery and promoting a joined-up approach to terrestrial and marine environments.

Finance

33. The Autumn 2021 Budget and Spending Review included a settlement on the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)²² to help deliver the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan for nature's recovery and the new legally binding target to halt biodiversity loss by 2030. This includes more than £250 million in public investment over three years to support the implementation of the Environment Bill including biodiversity net gain for development and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The details of how the national funding arrangements will help to meet these new burdens at the local level has yet to be determined.
34. Notwithstanding the above, it is intended to utilise strategic frameworks and existing internal resources to meet the requirements of the Environment Act (2021) and other policy changes necessary to protect and enhance the natural environment.

Consultation and Equalities

35. The purpose of this report is to set out the actions taken by the County Council to protect and enhance the natural environment, to describe its key current activities in this important area, to outline recent and forthcoming changes, including in national legislation, and to seek approval for the approach to address these new requirements. The County Council's involvement in this area of work has been, and will continue to be, informed through engagement and consultation with key partners and organisations. The activity covered by this decision is considered to be neutral for groups with protected characteristics.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

36. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

²² [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 \(HTML\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100222/Autumn-Budget-and-Spending-Review-2021-HTML.pdf)

37. The tools to assess specific impacts on climate change adaptation and mitigation were found not to be applicable to the matters covered in this report on the grounds that the decision relates to proposed actions to meet the requirements of the Environment Act (2021) and other policy changes necessary to protect and enhance the natural environment.

Conclusions

38. Protecting and enhancing the natural environment is of the highest importance to the County Council and a fundamental part of its commitment to tackling climate change in Hampshire.
39. The County Council has a commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment that can be traced back over a number of years and through numerous initiatives. However, it is now facing a raft of new requirements imposed by recent legislative changes, in particular the Environment Act, and a greater need to engage with relevant initiatives, projects and partners at the local, regional and national level.
40. It is therefore proposed that the Executive Member for Climate Change and Sustainability approves the approach to enable the County Council to meet its obligations effectively, to capitalise on the unique opportunities afforded by the new circumstances to benefit the natural environment and address the challenge of climate change, to demonstrate leadership, and to drive forward a collaborative approach with partners and stakeholders.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Environment Strategy Executive Member Decision Day Report Template (hants.gov.uk)	29 July 2021
Chichester and Langstone Harbours - Natural Capital Plan- 2021-06-17-EMETE Decision Day (hants.gov.uk)	17 June 2021
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Environment Act 2021 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted	9 November 2021

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The purpose of this report is to set out the actions taken by the County Council to protect and enhance the natural environment, to describe its key current activities in this important area, to outline recent and forthcoming changes, including in national legislation, and to seek approval for the approach to address these new requirements. The County Council's involvement in this area of work has been, and will continue to be, informed through engagement and consultation with key partners and organisations. The activity covered by this decision is considered to be neutral for groups with protected characteristics.