

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Environment & Community Panel		
DATE:	21 st July 2026		
TITLE:	Biodiversity Task Group Recommendations Update Report		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Post Implementation Review		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Climate and Environment		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Claire Wiggs (Senior Ecologist)		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	No

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:
To provide an update to the Environment & Community Panel on the progress made towards the recommendation agreed by the Panel's Biodiversity Task Group.
KEY ISSUES:
The recommendations of the Biodiversity Task Group were as follows: 1. To accept the recommendations of the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group (UWIWG) as set out in paragraph 2.3, save for recommendation 8, which is covered below with the creation of the fixed-term biodiversity project officer role. 2. To agree to the appointment of a Biodiversity Project Officer role, for a fixed period of two years, with funding coming from the climate change budget. 3. That the Council adopts the biodiversity policies and specific objectives set out in appendix 1. 4. To agree the creation of a Pollinator Action Plan, on the basis of the draft attached (appendix 2), with the final wording to be agreed with the Assistant Directors for Environment and Planning and Operations and Commercial, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity. 5. That the community biodiversity competition initiative, detailed in the report, is supported by the Council. 6. Biodiversity Task Group (BTG) has recommended that Cabinet approve the following recommendations and associated comments from the UWIWG. The key outcomes reported are the publication of a Pollinator Action Plan, the delivery of a Wildlife Garden Competition, the appointment of a Biodiversity Project Ranger and the notable success that Officer has made in the first 6 months of appointment through biodiversity projects and community engagement.
OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
No alternatives have been considered as the report is an update only.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
It is recommended that the panel consider the progress towards the Biodiversity Task Group recommendations reported and the future potential of the Biodiversity Project Ranger role.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:
N/a

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

1.1. At the council meeting of 10 September 2020, council agreed the following Notice of Motion:

“This Council acknowledges that climate change is not the only challenge facing our natural environment and has agreed to set up a Cabinet Task Group chaired by the appropriate portfolio holder to work with our partners including Norfolk County Council and the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership.

Any recommendations on relevant issues such as habitat protection and creation, the creation of a pollinator action plan and the creation of wildflower verges will be brought to Cabinet via the Environment & Community Panel before consideration at Council.”

1.2. At further cabinet meetings on the 15 March 2022, and 17 January 2023, it was agreed that the Biodiversity Task Group be set up to be politically proportionate, and that it should also consider the recommendations of the Environment & Community Panel’s Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group (UWIWG).

1.3. On the final meeting of the Biodiversity Task Group held on 27 August 2024 the following recommendations were agreed:

1. To accept the recommendations of the UWIWG as set out in paragraph 2.3, save for recommendation 8, which is covered below with the creation of the fixed-term Biodiversity Project Officer role.
2. To agree to the appointment of a Biodiversity Project Officer role, for a fixed period of two years, with funding coming from the climate change budget.
3. That the Council adopts the biodiversity policies and specific objectives set out in appendix 1.
4. To agree the creation of a Pollinator Action Plan, on the basis of the draft attached (appendix 2), with the final wording to be agreed with the Assistant Directors for Environment and Planning and Operations and Commercial, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity.
5. That the community biodiversity competition initiative, detailed in the report, is supported by the Council.
6. Biodiversity Task Group (BTG) has recommended that Cabinet approve the following recommendations and associated comments from the UWIWG:
 - i. Encourage the use of bird boxes, bat boxes and hedgehog highways in new and existing Borough Council properties.
 - ii. The Council to investigate providing wildflower seeds for redundant allotments and community orchards/gardens and encourage the planting of wildlife seeds in the community.
 - iii. The Council to encourage bird feeding stations and nest boxes in schools.
 - iv. Support a Nest Box Trail in King's Lynn.
 - v. Produce literature advising how residents can help support their urban wildlife and promoting the Nest Box Trail in King's Lynn.

- vi. Engage with local groups to participate in urban wildlife.
- vii. Encourage Councillors to promote Urban Wildlife in their Wards and Parishes where appropriate.
- viii. That Cabinet be requested to provide a budget to deliver the proposals.

1.4. This report aims to outline the actions taken to meet the recommendations that were made by the Biodiversity Task Group.

2. Post Implementation Review

Each recommendation is set out below with a corresponding comment on actions taken in progress towards that recommendation.

2.1. To accept the recommendations of the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group as set out in paragraph 2.3, save for recommendation 8, which is covered below with the creation of the fixed-term biodiversity project officer role

2.1.1. Recommendations were agreed in the 27 August 2024 Biodiversity Task Group meeting.

2.2. To agree to the appointment of a Biodiversity Project Officer role, for a fixed period of two years, with funding coming from the climate change budget

2.2.1. A Biodiversity Project Ranger was appointed in August 2025. The funds to create the post were allocated from the climate change budget. £3,000 of funding from the Environment Agency was secured by the Biodiversity Project Ranger to facilitate specialist work at the Willows County Wildlife Site. Negotiations for a repeat of that funding are ongoing with the Environment Agency to facilitate further works.

2.3. That the Council adopts the biodiversity policies and specific objectives set out in appendix 1.

2.3.1. [Appendix 1](#) is the Council's first consideration of the enhanced Biodiversity Duty. The policies and objectives made under the Council's first consideration of the Biodiversity Duty were adopted by the Council and have been built on by the first Statutory Duty Report. The [Section 40 Biodiversity Duty Report](#) was published in May 2026. The document covers the reporting period 01 January 2024 – 31 December 2025 and outlines actions undertaken to meet the Biodiversity Duty.

2.4. To agree the creation of a Pollinator Action Plan, on the basis of the draft attached (appendix 2), with the final wording to be agreed with the Assistant Directors for Environment and Planning and Operations and Commercial, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity

2.4.1. A Pollinator Action Plan (PAP) was published on the Council website in October 2025. Actions towards the PAP are being tracked with the intention of reporting annually alongside the Statutory Biodiversity Duty Report. The

Biodiversity Project Ranger has already made notable successes towards the objectives of the PAP and cabinet recommendations.

2.4.2. A number of community projects have been supported which have not only improved the local biodiversity of the sites targeted but have improved engagement with community groups. These projects include:

- Lynnsport Wildflower Meadow
- Fairstead Recreation Park
- The Howdale Pollinator Pot
- Heacham Pond at Station Road
- The Garden Wildlife Competition

2.4.3. Several other projects have been progressed in collaboration with other council departments (Climate Change, Corporate Projects, Property Services) as well as external stakeholders (Environment Agency, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust) in order to improve the Councils land for pollinators and urban wildlife. Two of these projects include works at County Wildlife Sites (CWS) which aligns with the aims of the Norfolk County Wildlife Sites Partnership.

The Willow CWS

The Biodiversity Project Ranger secured £3,000 from the Environment Agency to clear willows which had self-seeded and overtaken the reed beds at the Willows CWS. Removal of willows allows the reedbed to recover and thus more habitat availability for species groups reliant on that habitat (breeding birds, bats, invertebrates). Poplar suckers have also been removed from an area of grassland to improve the diversity of the grassland flora which will ultimately deliver a better resource for pollinators. A programme of monitoring for bats and breeding birds also begun this year and populations of water vole and smooth newts have been identified through those surveys. Works were undertaken in collaboration with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency and Downham Wildlife Group.

The Downham Wildlife Group have a historic interest in the Willow CWS but had disbanded due to lack of support, unfortunately due to a gap in resources at the Council. The specialised Biodiversity Project Ranger Role has provided the resource needed to fill the gap and reinvigorate the groups interest in the Willows CWS.

Florence Fen CWS

Works on Florence Fen CWS begun this year in accordance with the approved management plan and in close collaboration with the Corporate Project Team. The main works progressed have been the creation of scrapes to enhance the sites suitability for breeding birds and reptiles. A programme of ecological monitoring has also begun within and around the site which includes bat, water vole and breeding bird surveys.

A relaxed management regime of the Rookery grassland (which adjoins Florence Fen) has also been implemented by the Woodland Trust this season at the recommendation of the Biodiversity Project Ranger. This recommendation was in response to a local resident suggesting bee orchids are present.

2.4.4. At several other sites across the borough a programme of monitoring is in progress which includes bats, water vole, breeding bird and botanical surveys to assess the ecological baseline of Council owned land. Monitoring is essential to quantitatively measure success and to feed into adaptive management regimes. The survey work also facilitates the transference of survey skills between Officers and between community groups. For example, the Downham Wildlife Group are supporting with bat monitoring surveys at the Willows CWS and Officers with an interest in ecology have also been empowered to develop skills by joining surveys.

2.4.5. The Public Open Spaces (POS) Team continues to support biodiversity through the maintenance and creation of bee lines in North Lynn and Hunstanton. Discrete areas of long grassland under a more relaxed cutting regime in The Walks support a variety of wildflowers and grasses, providing a pollen resource without effecting the formal aesthetic. The beds at St James Swimming Pool have been planted with wildflower seeds this year which adds to the local pollen resource. The 2026 update of The Walks Tree Trail was undertaken by local volunteer group `Friends of the Walks` which were supported by Council expertise. The Tree Trail is a self-guided tour of the diverse tree species within the Walks which encourages public engagement with nature and a free resource to improve species ID.

2.4.6. Funding for a community orchard in South Lynn was secured in December 2024 by the Climate Change Team. The project involved planting 34 fruit trees alongside one oak and six field maples, community planters and hedgerows. The project was implemented in early 2025 and hedgerow planting in November 2025 was led by the Biodiversity Project Ranger and POS Arboriculture Officer with the support of Harding's Pits volunteers. The expected benefits from this Project are an increase in tree canopy cover, a source of free food for the local community, additional outdoor space as well as enhanced habitat and biodiversity. The project aligns closely with the Norfolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy unmapped areas for urban habitats.

2.5. That the community biodiversity competition initiative, detailed in the report, is supported by the Council

2.5.1. The Garden Wildlife Competition was implemented in 2025. Thirty-nine entries were received across five categories:

- Large Garden (23 entrants)
- Small Garden (15 entrants)
- Childs garden (0 entrants)

- Window box garden (1 entrant)
- Longest pollinator line (0 entrants)
- Most pollinator friendly parish/ward (Downham market)

2.5.2. The competition ran with the support of the Wildlife Trust who offered a membership prize for the child's competition and the Men's shed who built the winners plaques. There were some lessons learned which have shaped this year's implementation but the competition was generally well received and there was good attendance at the awards ceremony by the Public, Councillors and Officers. The Climate Change Team are running the competition this year with categories for large and small gardens.

2.6. Biodiversity Task Group (BTG) has recommended that Cabinet approve the following recommendations and associated comments from the UWIWG.

2.6.1. Bird boxes, bat boxes and hedgehog highways

- The Council's Parkway residential development includes a range of species enhancements across the site which can be summarised as 14 bird boxes (small hole/open fronted/crevice), 15 sparrow terraces, 2 tawny owl vertical boxes, 226 swift bricks, 12 bat boxes (six crevice/six cavity) and a log pile. 177 bird boxes and 48 bee bricks have been installed to date. A management plan was created for Florence Fen, a site 250m east (located at Grid Reference TF63819) of the development, to improve the area for nature and recreation for local community and future Parkway residents. Florence Fen is a newly designated County Wildlife Site.
- 16 bee bricks and 51 bird boxes have been installed in the Council's Valentine Park (Lynnsport 1) development.
- The Biodiversity Project Ranger has identified approximately 22 Council owned sites where bat and bird boxes will be installed. Timber has already been purchased and sent to the Men's Shed for creation of these boxes. Consideration has also been given to installation of hibernacula, creation of scrub and relaxation of cutting regimes. Hibernacula have been scoped out of all sites due to the potential for theft and vandalism following lessons learned from work at Florence Fen CWS.
- The Local Plan, which is used to guide development principals, includes policies to support the delivery of green infrastructure and ecological enhancements. LP 18 includes prescriptions for the provision of built-in nesting boxes (e.g. boxes for migratory bird species, bats, or bee bricks) and/or safe road crossing methods (e.g. for hedgehogs), wherever possible. Where appropriate a condition for reasonable enhancements is applied to planning consents to secure ecological enhancements.

2.6.2. Investigate providing wildflower seeds for redundant allotments and community orchards/gardens and encourage the planting of wildlife seeds in the community

- The South Lynn Community Orchard Project includes community planters and a wildflower meadow. The meadow will be managed under a sensitive regime and will contribute to Biodiversity Net Gain. A botanical survey undertaken in May this year identified 26 species of grasses and flowers at the site.
- Seeding community spaces is being investigated through opportunities at specific sites for disc seed planting, plug planting and green hay. The likely areas will include Lynnsport Meadows and Fairstead Recreation Park.
- The Planning Arboriculture Officer and Ecology Officer have provisionally agreed to hand out free trees as part the County Council's One Million Trees Project.

A relaxed cutting regime is already in place at Lynnsport meadows to allow wildflowers to thrive. This site was originally seeded in some areas with a wildflower mix under previous schemes which provides a good baseline position to start from. Disc seeding is proposed to further improve the floral diversity. Green hay and plug planting are proposed for an area of Fairstead Recreation Park in collaboration with Marthas Meadow. It is anticipated that at least one of the two sites will act as a seed bank and source of green hay going forward, thus creating a long-term self-sustaining resource for the borough.

More sites could only be brought forward where funding is available to support cut and collection which is a key principle of meadow management. Currently resources and machinery to cut and collect are a clear limitation to how many sites can be targeted for enhancement.

2.6.3. The Council to encourage bird feeding stations and nest boxes in schools and produce literature advising how residents can help support their urban wildlife and promoting the Nest Box Trail in King's Lynn.

- No progress made on nest box trail or with schools. However, the Biodiversity Project Ranger will be installing bird boxes across sites in Kings Lynn which will support urban wildlife.
- The Garden Wildlife Competition was implemented this year which advertised links to resources to help homeowners maximise opportunities for wildlife in their gardens.
- Both the Project Ranger and Ecologist are working on producing literature for the Council website to collate advice in a single location.
- The Climate Change Competition continues to encourage schools to engage with issues around climate change issues

It is worth noting that a new evidence review by the RSPB, has highlighted the hazards of feeding garden birds. They found strong evidence that bird feeding promotes the spread of diseases. This includes trichomonosis, a disease caused by the parasite, *Trichomonas gallinae*. This disease has caused serious declines in our populations of greenfinches and chaffinches. The key advice is to feed seasonally, avoid bird tables and flat feeders, keep feeders clean and focus on creating natural food sources.

2.6.4. Encourage Councillors to promote Urban Wildlife in their Wards and Parishes where appropriate

- No progress has been made on delivery of this recommendation. However, the Biodiversity Project Ranger has attended several events across the borough.

A members briefing or newsletter to members could be implemented to deliver towards this target. This could promote current projects to help encourage engagement with biodiversity in Councillors wards/parishes.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider

- 3.1. Firstly, the panel are asked to consider the work that has been undertaken to deliver the recommendations outlined within Section 1 of this report and the positive outcomes for biodiversity and community that have resulted from that work. Please consider if the panel are happy with the work and progress outlined within this report.
- 3.2. Secondly, the panel are asked to consider the potential for extending the Biodiversity Project Ranger and making the role permeant. The continued success of the progress and objectives outlined in this report have a high reliance on the ongoing input of the Biodiversity Project Ranger. As Members will be aware the this is a two-year fixed role and there is no Officer to hand over to at the end of the two-year fixed contract, in which case projects are could easily fall to fall into decline and volunteer groups may be lost (i.e. Downham Wildlife Group). A permeant role could ensure the longevity of the work reported.

4. Corporate Priorities

Promote growth and prosperity to benefit West Norfolk and Support our communities

- 4.1. There is a close overlap between supporting communities and promoting growth and prosperity through training and transference of skills. Engagement with community groups on local projects is facilitating the transference of skills as well as empowering the community to take ownership of local public land. Examples include:
 - The Public Open Spaces (POS) Arboriculture Officer undertook tree health checks and removal work at Lynnsport Meadows with students from the College of West Anglia (COWA) to promote arboriculture skills. This collaboration with COWA and upskilling of the students is ongoing.

- The Biodiversity Project Ranger is undertaking bat and breeding bird surveys with members of the Downham Market Wildlife group which promotes ecological survey skills and connection with place and nature. The survey work is also empowering Council Officers to explore areas of interest outside of their everyday roles.
- The Biodiversity Project Ranger and POS Arboriculture Officer were supported by volunteers to lay the hedge at South Lynn Community Orchard, facilitating the transference of skills. The project will eventually be handed over to the management of Harding's Pit volunteer group, promoting ownership of public land by the community.
- There are plans to facilitate training for volunteers and community groups to empower them to continue undertaking conservation work and become self-sufficient. Planned training includes first aid, working at height, risk assessment and health and safety training.
- The Walks Tree Trail was updated in 2026 by The Friends of the Walks in collaboration with the Council arboriculture experts. This resource promotes self-learning and development of tree ID skills within the public. It also promotes a pride of place by fostering connection with nature.

4.2. Some of the areas of focus for biodiversity projects have a history of anti-social behaviour (i.e. Florence Fen). Bringing these areas into management and having a regular visible presence could help to reduce the anti-social behaviour problems at such sites.

Protect our Environment

4.3. The Biodiversity Project Ranger has been working collaboratively with several departments such as Property Services, Corporate Projects and Development Management to improve services for biodiversity. An example of this is being present when contractors are working in sensitive areas to ensure sensitive working *practices* are being implemented. Another is advising on species mixes grasslands on Council developments to ensure the right habitat is created and can be realistically maintained once handed over to POS. Advice is also offered through the Planning Ecologist, where requested, to advise on risk to protected species from any planned works. The projects being implemented by the Biodiversity Project Ranger are delivering enhanced biodiversity, increased visibility of biodiversity and are increasing engagement with biodiversity through community groups. The Garden Wildlife Competition encourages residents to do more for nature and showcase what they might already be doing in their gardens. In an increasingly urbanised environment, gardens can become the last refugia for local species by providing resources and acting as stepping stones between inhospitable landscapes.

4.4. Continued engagement by the Biodiversity Project Ranger/Arboriculture and Ecology Officers with other departments is essential to protecting environmental assets and promoting environmentally sensitive working methods for all and any works undertaken by the Council. Not only does this reduce the legal risks to the Council but also protects its reputation.

Efficient and effective delivery of our services

- 4.5. Presence of the Biodiversity Project Ranger during works at sensitive sites ensures contractors are delivering work to the standard expected and working at low risk in terms of potential breaches of environmental legislation.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. None

6. Any other Implications/Risks

- 6.1. None

7. Equal Opportunity Considerations

- 7.1. Pressure on natural environments threatens human health. Processes such as climate change, resource depletion and loss of biodiversity contribute to the increasing frequency of extreme events, threaten ecological collapse and affect food systems. Environmental change is also resulting in conflict and the displacement of people, with consequent health impacts.
- 7.2. Nature provides the basic conditions for human health. The natural environment provides inspiration and settings for healthy lifestyles and social contact. Collectively, these provisions are known as ecosystem services. By enhancing the biodiversity of Council owned land all groups could be set to benefit from the ecosystem services that deliver spaces that enable physical activity and improve mental health and well-being. The key benefits include community, social interaction and relaxation as well as potential future benefits as places to educate. These benefits could be particularly impactful in low economic areas where access to nature is not so readily available. The value of these services was clearly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. Environmental Considerations

- 8.1. The progress reported is highly beneficial as detailed in the main text of the report.

9. Consultation

- Chris Walker (Biodiversity Project Ranger)
- Claire Thompsett (Operations Manager)
- Stuart Ashworth (Assistant Director Environment and Planning)
- Councillor Micheal de Whalley (Portfolio Holder for Climate and Biodiversity)

10. Conclusion

- 10.1. Early success indicates good progress towards the recommendations made by the Biodiversity Task Force. It is recommended that members note the details in this report and consider the future delivery of the recommendations of that Task Force.

11. Future opportunities

- 11.1. Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Plan Policies are embedded into the planning system which should ensure some longevity of biodiversity enhancement across the borough in relation to development. Major Housing are embedding large species enhancement into large residential scheme which biodiversity is an ongoing consideration within the Councils own development. The adoption of the Pollinator Action Plan also ensures that embedding pollinator benefits across Council functions.

11.2. As discussed above the Biodiversity Project Ranger is a fixed position of two years. Currently target biodiversity projects must necessarily be limited in scope to allow meaningful delivery within the lifetime of that role. The longevity of those and future projects is therefore not assured. An extension or permanent role could perpetuate and build on the early success` outlined within this report.

11.3. The works being delivered under the Statutory Biodiversity Duty and by the Biodiversity Project Ranger should act as a foundation to boost biodiversity and community engagement. This foundation has the scope to promote the growth of longer term benefits. Those benefits could include:

- **Places to educate:** The curriculum of the new Natural History GCSE will include elements of mandatory field work and practical skills. Fostering biodiversity projects in the heart of communities will provide places for students to make direct observations, undertake monitoring and surveys as well as honing species ID skills.
- **Increased pool of local skills:** In our borough there is a relatively small pool of `green professionals`. This is evident in the number of contractors available to undertake habitat works and the difficulty in recruiting to green roles (climate, ecology, arboriculture). Fostering relationship with volunteer groups provides opportunities to develop employable skills without a financial cost. To go further the Council could foster relationship with schools and colleges to provide work experience and access to mentors to promote green careers.
- **Inhouse skills:** Developing local people and fostering green skills both within the community and the Council workforce could reduce the reliance on contractors who are often expensive and deliver low quality work by expanding the pool of resources available. The creation and development of inhouse teams with specialised skills could help the Council manage their land more sensitively and deliver wider community outreach.
- **Volunteer Days:** Volunteering is a great way to develop new skills and support something that's worthwhile. The council have an employee leave volunteering scheme that allows an employee to get involved in activities that benefit individuals, clubs, charities, faith groups and the environment. This scheme lets employees take up to two days (up to 14.8 hours in total) (pro-rata for part-time employees) paid time off work to volunteer. Specific work/projects could tap into this resource i.e. collecting grass cuts at meadow sites which would benefit employees mental and physical health as well as the environment.

12. Background Papers

- Pollinator Action Plan
- Biodiversity Project Ranger Presentation.