

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Statutory Biodiversity Report

Reporting period: 12 February 2024 - 1 January 2026



Hartlepool Borough Council

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Executive Summary

This report sets out how Hartlepool Borough Council has sought to conserve and enhance biodiversity in exercising its functions during the first reporting period under the strengthened biodiversity duty. As the Council is also the local planning authority, the report also summarises how biodiversity net gain has been integrated into development management, from validation and ecological assessment through to conditions, section 106 obligations, approval of biodiversity gain plans and longer-term management arrangements.

Hartlepool is a coastal borough with a distinctive natural environment that includes the Tees estuary and coast, dunes, marshes, wetlands, beck corridors, brownfield habitats of ecological value, green wedges, parks and open spaces, and the more wooded western fringe of the borough. Part of the borough falls within the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA / Ramsar site, alongside nationally and locally designated sites, Local Nature Reserves and local wildlife and geological sites. The Local Plan identifies four priority parts of Hartlepool's ecological network: the coastal fringe; Tees Road / Brenda Road brownfield land; the Dalton Beck / Greatham Beck riparian corridor; and the rural west from Wynyard to Thorpe Bulmer and Crimdon Dene.

The Hartlepool Local Plan, supported by the local validation requirements, biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality guidance, the Trees and Development Guidelines, and the wider corporate direction of Council Plan 2030 and the Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan serves as the principle framework for action. In practice, biodiversity has been addressed chiefly through planning and development management: ecological review of planning applications, the use of conditions and planning obligations, continued application of nutrient neutrality procedures for in-scope development in the Tees catchment, and delivery of the Hartlepool Coastal Mitigation Scheme for the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA / Ramsar site. The appointment of a full-time Ecologist in May 2025 strengthened in-house ecological capacity. Alongside this, the Council has continued to support biodiversity through Local Nature Reserve and countryside management, biodiversity-sensitive management of selected grassland, meadow and wildflower areas, the annual little tern protection project at Seaton Carew, and tree-related work linked to Tree Equity for Hartlepool and the emerging Urban Forest Master Plan.

Mandatory biodiversity net gain is now embedded within Hartlepool's development management process. There were two gain plans in the reporting period, comprising one major and one non-major application. They sit within a wider caseload in which the Council's main work during the period was to embed the new statutory regime through validation, ecological review, conditions, section 106 obligations and discharge processes, with only a smaller number of schemes reaching approved gain plans before the end of the reporting period.

During the next reporting period, the Council will build on the systems established during the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain. This will include continuing to refine validation and assessment processes, reviewing monitoring fees and longer-term monitoring arrangements, improving how biodiversity information is recorded and tracked across the life of a scheme, and keeping local guidance under review. Alongside this, the Council will continue to use planning obligations to secure ecological mitigation, green infrastructure and coastal mitigation; strengthen the biodiversity evidence base for council-managed land and services; progress the Urban Forest Master Plan and related tree work; and take account of the Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy and emerging protected-site work as these are finalised.

Introduction

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by sections 102 and 103 of the Environment Act 2021, requires public authorities in England to consider what action they can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of their functions, to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Following that consideration, an authority must determine such policies and specific objectives as it considers appropriate and take action in the light of them. In carrying out that duty, the Council must have regard to any relevant Local

Nature Recovery Strategy and to any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England.

Section 40A of the 2006 Act requires local authorities and local planning authorities to publish biodiversity reports. A biodiversity report must summarise the action taken to comply with the biodiversity duty, set out the authority's plans for the following five years, specify the period covered by the report, and be published within 12 weeks of the end of that period. As Hartlepool Borough Council is also the local planning authority for the borough, the report must also include biodiversity net gain information: a summary of the action taken in carrying out the Council's biodiversity gain functions, information on biodiversity gains resulting or expected to result from approved biodiversity gain plans, and a summary of how those functions will be carried out in the next reporting period. Current Defra guidance also expects reports to set out the authority's policies, objectives and actions in a clear and accessible structure, and states that the first reporting period should end no later than 1 January 2026.

Alongside these statutory duties, the Council's function as local planning authority is exercised within the national planning policy framework. The current National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, establishing coherent ecological networks, supporting priority or threatened species, and improving environmental conditions such as air and water quality. It also requires plans to identify, map and safeguard wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and priority species, and pursue opportunities for measurable net gains for biodiversity. When determining applications, significant harm to biodiversity should be avoided, adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for; otherwise planning permission should be refused. Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should also be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists, and opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around development should be integrated into site design.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states that biodiversity net gain should be considered early in site selection and design; that ecological surveys and assessments should be proportionate to the development and its likely effects; and that planning conditions, planning obligations and other long-term management arrangements may be needed to secure habitat enhancement and monitoring. PPG also makes clear that the statutory biodiversity net gain framework is the national benchmark for biodiversity gains in planning: local policies inconsistent with that framework should not be given weight, but other local biodiversity policies requiring specific enhancements continue to apply where appropriate.

This report therefore covers both the Council's wider biodiversity duty across its functions and the more specific statutory obligations that arise through the planning process. The sections that follow set out the policies, objectives and actions through which Hartlepool Borough Council has sought to conserve and enhance biodiversity during that period, the biodiversity net gain outcomes associated with approved development, and the actions the Council intends to take in the next reporting period.

Section 1: Policies, objectives and actions

1. Policies & Objectives

1.1 Hartlepool Borough Council Local Plan (2018)

The adopted Hartlepool Local Plan (May 2018) covers the period 2016-2031 and forms part of the statutory development plan for the Borough. It establishes the objectives and planning policies for the use and development of land in Hartlepool.

The Local Plan is informed by Hartlepool's Ambition 2014, which provides the overarching framework for the Council's priorities, together with the Hartlepool Economic Regeneration Strategy and the Hartlepool Vision. It

takes account of wider Tees Valley strategies, including the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan, Tees Valley Strategic Infrastructure Plan and Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy. The Local Plan vision is that, by 2031, Hartlepool's built, historic and natural environment will have been protected, managed and enhanced.

The Local Plan provides the main planning policy framework for the determination of planning applications in Hartlepool. In summary, it provides for:

- The protection, management and enhancement of the natural environment, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.
- The safeguarding and enhancement of green infrastructure, green wedges, playing fields, incidental open space and landscaping along main transport corridors.
- The maintenance and enhancement of ecological networks and habitat connectivity, including improvements through major development where appropriate.
- The protection of woodland and trees, support for increased tree cover in appropriate locations, and protection of ancient woodland and veteran trees.
- The integration of biodiversity, landscaping, flood risk and sustainable drainage considerations into the design and delivery of development.
- The use of planning obligations to secure ecological mitigation, ecological networks, green infrastructure and mitigation for recreational disturbance affecting the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA.

Because the adopted Local Plan predates the statutory biodiversity net gain regime, mandatory biodiversity net gain is now addressed through the statutory framework and the Council's validation requirements. Those requirements set out national and local validation requirements for mandatory biodiversity net gain and identify the adopted Local Plan policies that continue to provide the local planning policy context for ecology, green infrastructure, trees, design and planning obligations.

Key Local Plan policies are set out in the below table.

Policy	Title	Summary
LS1	Locational Strategy	The development of Hartlepool is based on a strategy of "balanced urban growth", with expansion "concentrated in areas adjoining the existing built up area and adjacent to areas of strong economic growth", but with growth occurring "in a controlled way" and delivered alongside local and strategic infrastructure improvements. The policy states that the introduction of "multi-functional Green Infrastructure" is essential, and that protection will be given to the rural character of the borough by avoiding coalescence between the urban area and surrounding villages. Strategic gaps are "expressly protected", and development is to be focused in areas of lower flood risk where possible.
CC1	Minimising and adapting to Climate Change	The Council will work with partners, developers and the community to "help minimise and adapt to climate change" by encouraging development on suitable brownfield sites and in areas well served by sustainable transport. The policy supports locating development in areas of low flood risk and incorporating measures such as sustainable drainage systems, porous materials, water retention and recycling. It also requires development to "protect, promote and enhance biodiversity", including "maintaining and enhancing habitat networks and green infrastructure", and encourages energy efficiency and the use of renewable and low carbon technologies.

Policy	Title	Summary
CC2	Reducing and Mitigating Flood Risk	All new development proposals must demonstrate how they will “minimise flood risk to people, property and infrastructure from all potential sources”. This includes avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, applying the Sequential Test and, where necessary, the Exceptions Test, ensuring development is safe over its lifetime, does not increase flood risk elsewhere and, where possible, “will reduce flood risk overall”. The policy also requires the full separation of foul and surface water flows and states that “Sustainable Drainage Systems [are] the preferred approach”, with no net increase in surface water run-off over the lifetime of the development.
QP1	Planning Obligations	The Council will seek planning obligations “where viable and deemed to be required to address the impacts arising from a development”. The policy expressly includes obligations for Green Infrastructure, Flood Protection, Ecological Mitigation & Networks, and “Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space and/or Mitigation for recreational disturbance on the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA”. It also makes clear that the list is not exhaustive, and that contributions will be secured through legal agreements or unilateral undertakings where required to make development acceptable in planning terms.
QP4	Layout and Design of Development	The Council will seek to ensure that all development is “designed to a high quality and positively enhance [its] location and setting”. Development should be of an appropriate layout, scale and form, should “reflect and enhance the distinctive features, character and history of the local area”, respect surrounding buildings, structures and environment, and provide adequate and well planned public space. The policy also requires development not to harm the amenity of neighbouring occupiers through disturbance, overlooking, loss of privacy, overshadowing or visual intrusion, and supports innovative design where it satisfies the relevant criteria.
NE1	Natural Environment	The Council will “protect, manage and enhance Hartlepool’s natural environment”. The policy protects designated nature conservation sites through a hierarchy of international, national and local protection, with a precautionary approach to indirect impacts on designated sites and appropriate mitigation secured where needed. It also requires, where appropriate, an “ecosystems services approach”, protection and enhancement of ecological networks and green infrastructure, and application of the sequence of “avoidance, mitigation, compensation”. The policy also protects woodland and trees of amenity and nature conservation value, seeks “an increase in tree cover” in appropriate locations, and protects ancient woodland unless exceptional circumstances apply.
NE2	Green Infrastructure	The Council will “safeguard green infrastructure within the Borough from inappropriate development” and work actively with partners to improve its quantity, quality, management and accessibility. The policy covers strategic green corridors and a wide range of green spaces, including green wedges, parks, children’s playing space, outdoor sport, allotments, amenity open space and natural and semi-natural green space. It supports the development of the North Linear Park, improved rights of way and access to open space and countryside, and green infrastructure initiatives that help alleviate flood risk, including watercourse improvements, wetland creation and the use of SuDS. The loss of green infrastructure components will generally be resisted.

Policy	Title	Summary
NE3	Green Wedges	The Council will seek to “protect, maintain, enhance and, where appropriate, increase the number of green wedges” to provide a wide range of benefits for the town. Development within the green wedges shown on the Policies Map is to be “strictly controlled”. Approval is only given for limited forms of development, including extensions to existing premises, facilities ancillary to compatible recreation, leisure or sporting uses, or development that “relate[s] to the provision, enhancement or management of areas of biodiversity value”, and only where there is “no significant adverse effect on the overall integrity of the green wedge”. The policy also expects landscape design, planting and long term maintenance to be addressed.
NE4	Ecological Networks	The Council will seek to “maintain and enhance ecological networks throughout the Borough”. The policy identifies priority sections of the network as the coastal fringe, Tees Road/Brenda Road brownfield land, the Dalton Beck/Greatham Beck riparian corridor, and the rural west from Wynyard to Thorpe Bulmer and Crimdon Dene. It also provides for working with the Tees Valley Local Nature Partnership and adjoining partnerships “at a landscape scale across the Borough boundary”. Where appropriate, developments are required to maintain and enhance ecological networks in the vicinity of the proposal, and off-site contributions may be sought where enhancements cannot be incorporated within the site.
NE5	Playing Fields, Tennis Courts and Bowling Greens	The Council will “protect existing playing fields, tennis courts and bowling greens”. Loss of these facilities is only acceptable in limited circumstances, including where there is replacement provision that is at least comparable in terms of facilities, amenity and location, where a small part of the site is redeveloped to retain and enhance the remainder, or where robust evidence demonstrates an excess of provision or better dispersal. Where facilities are lost, the Council will seek a planning obligation or condition to secure replacement or enhancement, and additional facilities required for new housing development should be concentrated together as a hub to support effective community use.
NE6	Protection of Incidental Open Space	The loss of incidental open space will be “resisted” except where it can be shown that the space is detrimental to amenity, too small or difficult to maintain, or does not contribute significantly to visual or recreational amenity and its function is met elsewhere in the locality. Where incidental open space is lost, the Council will impose conditions and/or seek obligations to secure compensatory provision of an alternative site or enhancement of nearby open space, in addition to any green infrastructure contribution required by other policies.
NE7	Landscaping Along Main Transport Corridors	The policy states that main road and rail corridors are “an integral part of the green infrastructure network” and requires “a particularly high standard of landscaping, tree planting and design” from developments adjoining the main communication corridors. It applies to the borough’s principal transport approaches, including the A179, A1086, A178 Tees Road, A689, B1276/B1277, Hart Lane and the main coast rail line.

Key Objectives

- **Objective 11:** To protect, promote and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the Borough’s natural, rural and built environment.
- **Objective 12:** To protect and enhance the Borough’s unique historic environment, cultural heritage and coastline.

- **Objective 13:** To reduce the causes and minimise the impacts of climate change.
- **Objective 15:** To reduce the causes and minimise impacts of climate change in particular through the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy development.

1.2 Hartlepool Council Plan

The Council Plan 2030 sets out Hartlepool Borough Council's vision for Hartlepool in 2030 and the priorities it will focus on over the next five years.

The Plan is structured around four themes: People, Place, Potential and Organisation. Within that framework, the Place priority is that Hartlepool will be a place that is connected, sustainable, clean and green. The Council Plan recognises the Council's broad place-shaping role through services including local roads and transport infrastructure, parks and open spaces, waste and recycling, culture, regeneration, sport and leisure, and community hubs. Under the Place priority, the Council has committed to delivering the Net Zero Strategy and reducing carbon emissions by the Council, increasing recycling rates, improving transport connectivity across the borough, and ensuring that Hartlepool's parks and coastline are welcoming, community-led and thriving green and blue spaces.

Key Objective:

- **Place Priority:** Ensuring our parks and coastline are welcoming, community led and thriving green and blue spaces.

1.3 Hartlepool Rural Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031

The Hartlepool Rural Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory development plan for the rural parishes and provides a locally specific framework for how those communities should develop over the plan period. It seeks to maintain the quality of life and distinct identity of the villages. In biodiversity terms, the Rural Plan identifies more detailed priorities for the rural area, including the protection and enhancement of designated sites, local wildlife sites, woodlands, hedgerows, watercourses and wildlife corridors, together with habitat creation and improved ecological connectivity. In particular, supporting the creation of an integrated network of habitats, including wetland creation and opportunities to de-culvert parts of Greatham Beck and its tributaries.

Key Objectives:

- **Section 8.106, Natural Environment Objectives:**
 1. Protect and enhance the network of habitats that are important for biodiversity and geology including designated sites of international, national and local importance and priority habitats.
 2. Support the enhancement of the biodiversity potential of the rural area as a whole, and in particular its woodlands including ancient woodlands and wildlife corridors."
 3. Safeguard and enhance the landscape character of the rural area through the planting of trees and restoration of hedgerows.

1.4 Climate Pledge and Net Zero Strategy

In 2021, Hartlepool Borough Council adopted its Climate Pledge, committing to take a leading role and work with partners across the borough to act on the causes and impacts of climate change. This commitment was developed further through the Council's 2023 Climate Change Response and Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan, which provides the corporate framework for Hartlepool Borough Council to become a net zero emissions local authority by 2050. The strategy targets a 30% reduction in emissions every five years and is structured around five aims: reduction of local authority CO2 emissions; resource maximisation and waste reduction; domestic energy and sustainable warmth; the natural environment; and climate resilience and adaptation. Of particular relevance to the biodiversity duty, the strategy includes objectives to maintain good local air quality, protect existing natural habitats, expand and connect natural habitats, increase tree cover, and adapt the built and natural environment to current and future climate change impacts.

Key Objectives:

- **Objective 10: Protect existing natural habitats**
 - o Focuses on the protection and ongoing management of existing habitats across the Borough, including through the implementation of Place-based Management Plans and the adoption of fit-for-purpose maintenance regimes for open spaces and roadside verges to benefit local wildlife.
- **Objective 11: Expand and connect natural habitats and increase tree cover**
 - o Focuses on habitat enhancement, habitat connectivity and increasing tree cover, including improving the quality and value of existing green spaces, strengthening the evidence base through a borough-wide tree survey, revising the Tree Strategy, introducing a tree replacement standard, and supporting woodland creation and planting projects through the Trees on Tees programme.
- **Objective 13: Adapt the built and natural environment to current and future climate change impacts**
 - o Looks to improve climate resilience and adaptation in the built and natural environment, including through the development of a climate risk register, review of the Borough's flood risk management strategy, investigation of improved drainage and sustainable drainage systems in future urban planning schemes, and a fabric-first approach to future development.

1.5 The Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Development Plan

The Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Development Plan was prepared jointly by the five Tees Valley authorities and forms part of the development plan for Hartlepool in relation to minerals and waste matters. Potential effects on internationally important habitats sites were considered at plan-making stage, through the Habitat Regulations, so safeguards for those sites were built into the strategy, policies and allocations from the outset. As a result, minerals and waste proposals brought forward under the plan, particularly around the Tees Estuary, must demonstrate that they will not adversely affect the integrity of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA/Ramsar site and other relevant habitats sites. The plan also requires impacts on environmental assets to be addressed through design, operation, management and restoration.

Key Objectives

- **Strategic Objective J:** To ensure that minerals and waste developments protect and enhance the quality and diversity of public amenity and the natural, historic and cultural heritage of the Tees Valley.
- **Strategic Objective K:** To ensure the highest standards in the operation, environmental management and restoration of existing and new minerals extraction and landfill sites.

2. Actions during the reporting period

Below is a summary of actions that HBC has undertaken to move towards the objectives listed in the Local Plan, as well as additional actions that benefit biodiversity, through partnership working and individually as a council.

2.1 Planning and development management actions

Biodiversity is addressed through Hartlepool's development-management process from validation onwards. Officers check whether mandatory biodiversity net gain applies, review claimed exemptions, and require the relevant ecological, nutrient neutrality and BNG information at validation stage where triggered by the Council's published local requirements. Applications are then reviewed with input from the Council's Ecologist and, where necessary, Natural England. This process is used both to address statutory biodiversity net gain and to secure wider ecological mitigation, enhancement and protected-site safeguards, including nutrient neutrality, Habitats Regulations Assessment requirements and other enhancements, such as the provision of nest bricks and bat boxes.

2.2 Net Zero Progress

The Net Zero Strategy is supported by ongoing action to reduce emissions and improve environmental performance across Council operations and the borough.

Progress recorded in the Council's [2023 Net Zero Strategy](#), before this reporting period, included:

- In 2022/23, HBC's reported emissions were 5,503 tCO₂e, representing a 4.8% reduction on the previous year.
- HBC had converted 100% of its street lighting to energy-efficient LED bulbs and secured £272,500 through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for energy efficiency improvements at four buildings: the Civic Centre, Town Hall Theatre, Brierton site and Masefield Centre. Works included LED lighting improvements and an air source heat pump at the Masefield Centre.
- Through the Sustainable Warmth Scheme, the Council had secured £2,476,000 to deliver home energy efficiency improvements, processed over 600 applications and delivered over 244 improvement measures in more than 140 homes.
- Climate action is also being linked with nature recovery through measures including green corridors, wildflower meadows, herbicide-free zones and enhanced air quality monitoring.

2.3 Partnerships

The Council works with a range of partnerships to support biodiversity conservation and enhancement in Hartlepool and across the wider Tees area. This helps align local action with wider work on habitat restoration, ecological connectivity, the water environment and strategic nature recovery.

- [Your Tees Catchment Partnership](#)

Your Tees Catchment Partnership (YTCP) brings together organisations working across the River Tees catchment to support the protection, enhancement and improvement of the water environment. Hartlepool Borough Council's involvement is through collaborative activity and steering group input alongside other stakeholders and interested parties from across the Tees catchment, helping to shape and support joined-up work on water and habitat issues.

- [Tees Valley Nature Partnership](#)

Tees Valley Nature Partnership (TVNP) is the Local Nature Partnership for the Tees Valley and was approved by the government in 2012. Hartlepool Borough Council works with TVNP and other partners across the area to support habitat creation and restoration, contribute to nature recovery across local authority boundaries, and promote sustainable development and community engagement.

- [Tees Estuary Nature Recovery Partnership](#)

The Tees Estuary Nature Recovery Partnership (NRP) is a Natural England-funded partnership working across the wider estuary to coordinate habitat restoration, ecological connectivity, climate resilience and access to nature at a landscape scale. Hartlepool Borough Council is one of the partners involved, participating through engagement with collaborative works and steering groups. The partnership supports practical delivery for priority habitats and species and helps link borough-level biodiversity work with wider estuary-scale nature recovery.

2.4 Infrastructure Funding Statement 24/25

The Council's 2024/25 Infrastructure Funding Statement shows that in the reported year, 12 section 106 agreements were completed for permissions covering 2,605 homes and associated development, and the contributions secured included £119,824 for green infrastructure, £125,335 for ecology and biodiversity, and £450,000 for coastal mitigation linked to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA/Ramsar. The statement also records non-monetary obligations including off-site biodiversity net gain works and suitable alternative natural greenspace. During the year, £70,216 was received for green infrastructure and £57,799 for ecology-related measures, while spend included green infrastructure works.

2.5 Staff Appointments & Training

HBC appointed a full-time Ecologist in May 2025. That appointment improved the Council's in-house capacity to review ecological material, advise on biodiversity net gain, support the protection of designated and priority habitats, and contribute ecological expertise more consistently across planning work. The Ecologist has also attended training during the reporting period on The Biodiversity Metric, GIS mapping & a number of other accredited courses.

2.6 Trees for Cities

Tree Equity for Hartlepool is underway with Trees for Cities and partner organisations, and an Urban Tree Masterplan is being developed. During the first planting season, work at Bishop Cuthbert and the Phoenix Centre delivered 4,000 whips and 44 standard trees across more than five hectares of land. The project has also had a strong community focus, with nearly two hundred volunteers taking part, including school children, Scouts and various other groups. Positive signs of community ownership have already been observed, including members of the public putting tree wraps back in place. Site selection for the next planting season is now underway, supporting the wider aim of planting trees across at least ten hectares in nature-deprived areas over the next two years.

2.7 Council-managed land, planting and community activity

Hartlepool Borough Council has committed to maintaining green spaces across the town to a high standard while supporting biodiversity and sustainability. This approach includes meadow management in low-use areas, delayed cutting around naturalising spring bulbs, and leaving wildflower areas uncut until after the first frost. No borough-wide monitoring or outcome data has yet been developed.

During the reporting period, management at Summerhill, Hartlepool's 100-acre Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site, focused on restoring habitats in line with the original management plan and responding to pressures such as ash dieback and climate change. Works included significant restoration of grassland verges through the removal of bramble encroachment and self-seeded trees, clearance of around half an acre of bramble and self-seeded hawthorn to recreate meadow habitat, with selected trees retained as roosting and perching features, and scalloping of woodland edges to create a more varied habitat structure. Wetland improvements included the selective removal of around 25% of vegetation and some trees to improve water retention, creation of a woodland carr through scrapes and trenches in seasonally flooded woodland, maintenance of three existing ponds through vegetation removal and the excavation of deep refuge scrapes, and the creation of four new ponds for great crested newts. These measures are already showing positive results, including the return of orchids to the restored meadow area in summer 2025. The tawny owl nest box programme also continued, with one breeding pair producing three owlets, which were ringed. This work was delivered by a two-person Outreach Team supported by six regular volunteers, who contributed 1,203 hours during the year, representing an estimated £18,045 of value to Hartlepool Borough Council.

2.8 Tees Tidelands

Tees Tidelands is an estuary-wide programme to restore estuarine habitat, reconnect tributaries to tidal influence and improve climate resilience across the Tees estuary. In October 2025 the Environment Agency confirmed that construction had started on the £4 million Greatham Marsh Restoration Project, delivered in partnership with The Greatham Foundation and Northumbrian Water. The scheme will restore the historic alignment of Greatham Beck, enable fish passage and create or enhance over twenty hectares of saltmarsh and mudflat, together with 1.5 kilometres of species-rich native hedgerow and ecologically valuable treeline, with benefits for water quality, nutrient retention and internationally important bird species. Works are already several months underway at time of writing.

2.9 Little Terns

Hartlepool Borough Council continued to support the Little Tern project at Seaton Carew, working with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, wardens and volunteers to help safeguard a key breeding area within the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA/Ramsar, for which little tern is a qualifying feature. In 2025, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust took over wardening of the colony which had previously been handled by Durham Wildlife Trust. Protective fencing has been used since 2022. With Council support, fencing and signage were put in place from 16 April for the 2025 season in response to early bird arrivals. The site was then managed by a lead warden, three night wardens, four day wardens and volunteers throughout the season. Despite significant predation pressure from fox and kestrel, the colony reached 83 nesting pairs, produced 211 chicks and fledged 67 young. This work helped drastically reduce disturbance and improve the conditions needed for breeding success, while demonstrating the value of coordinated partnership working to protect one of Hartlepool's most sensitive coastal bird interests.

Section 2: Consideration of other strategies

2.1 Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Tees Valley Combined Authority is the responsible authority for preparing and publishing the Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Hartlepool Borough Council is a supporting authority in that process, working alongside the other Tees Valley authorities, the North York Moors National Park Authority and Natural England.

At the end of the reporting period, the strategy had not yet been published. However, work on the LNRS is ongoing and, once adopted, it is expected to provide an important strategic framework for nature recovery across the Tees Valley, including agreed priorities and measures for biodiversity, habitat enhancement and restoration, and the identification of areas that could make a significant contribution to nature recovery.

2.2 Protected Site Strategy

Natural England is developing a Protected Site Strategy for the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA and the wider Tees estuary area. This is highly relevant to Hartlepool because of the extent and sensitivity of protected coastal and estuarine habitat in and around the borough.

For Hartlepool, the significance of this strategy is not only ecological but also practical. It has the potential to influence how recreational pressure, access management, mitigation, monitoring and wider site resilience are understood across the estuary and coast.

2.3 Environmental Improvement Plan

The Environmental Improvement Plan 2025, published by the UK Government on 1 December 2025, sets out the national framework for improving the environment in England over the period to 2043. It revises the previous plan and establishes updated interim targets intended to support delivery of the long-term statutory targets under the Environment Act 2021. The Plan is structured around 10 goals, grouped within five broad themes: restored nature, environmental quality, circular economy, environmental security and access to nature. Together, these provide the strategic direction for action on issues including biodiversity recovery, air and water quality, waste and resources, climate resilience and public access to green space.

For Hartlepool Borough Council, the Environmental Improvement Plan provides additional national context for local action. The Council will have regard to this framework in exercising its relevant functions and in shaping future work on biodiversity, habitat enhancement, green infrastructure, and nature recovery within the borough. Where relevant to local circumstances and responsibilities, the Council's actions will seek to support the wider aims of the Plan and contribute to the delivery of national environmental improvements in a way that reflects Hartlepool's own places, habitats and communities.

Section 3: Our future actions

3.1 Collaboration

The Council will continue to work collaboratively with environmental charities, partner organisations, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders during the next reporting period to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity across the borough. This will include maintaining and strengthening existing partnerships, while also developing new opportunities for joint working where these can help deliver practical biodiversity benefits.

Relevant activity is expected to include measures such as the delivery of wildlife ponds on Council-managed land with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and The Conservation Volunteers, the continuation of work associated with the Little Terns project at Seaton Carew, and other collaborative projects that contribute to habitat creation, species recovery and public engagement with nature.

3.2 Urban Forest Master Plan 2026-2050

During the next reporting period, the Council will complete consultation on the draft Urban Forest Master Plan 2026-2050 and consider its finalisation. The draft Plan sets out a long-term framework for growing, protecting and managing trees and green spaces across Hartlepool, with the aim of improving tree canopy coverage, supporting biodiversity and securing wider benefits including cleaner air and cooler streets.

The draft Plan responds to Hartlepool's low tree equity by proposing further work on canopy assessment and target setting, directing planting and management to areas of lowest canopy cover and greatest need, strengthening community engagement, and improving how trees are protected and provided for through development management, including future review of the Trees and Development Guidelines SPD.

3.3 Staffing

The Council will establish a dedicated coastal ranger function to support the ongoing management of the borough's coastline. This role will contribute to visitor management, seasonal disturbance mitigation, monitoring and public engagement, particularly in relation to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA / Ramsar site and associated habitats. The role will form part of the Council's wider coastal mitigation and green infrastructure activity, with funding supported by the Hartlepool Coastal Mitigation Scheme.

3.4 BNG Monitoring Fees

During the next reporting period, the Council will review its approach to biodiversity net gain monitoring fees to ensure that charges remain proportionate, robust and better aligned with the practical demands of long-term monitoring.

The current flat fee is increasingly unlikely to reflect the officer time, technical review, site inspection, reporting and compliance work associated with monitoring habitat delivery and management over the required 30-year period, particularly as costs rise over time. A revised fee structure would help support a more sustainable and transparent approach to monitoring, enabling the Council to resource ongoing oversight of approved schemes, respond to underperformance where necessary, and provide greater confidence that biodiversity gains secured through the planning process are properly monitored and maintained in the long term.

3.5 Digital Support

During the next reporting period, the Council will explore whether additional digital tools could help support the practical delivery of biodiversity net gain monitoring. As the number of schemes secured through the planning process grows, and as monitoring, reporting and compliance requirements build over time, there may be value in using software to improve how information is recorded, tracked and reviewed across the full monitoring period. This could help provide a more consistent and efficient approach to managing monitoring data,

identifying key actions and deadlines, and supporting statutory reporting, while informing any future decisions on how best to resource long-term oversight of biodiversity gain delivery.

3.6 Tees Bay Dunes Management

During the next reporting period the Council will continue discussions with Natural England and other stakeholders through the emerging Tees Protected Sites Strategy, with a view to supporting the development of a long-term management plan for the Tees Bay dunes system. The Protected Sites Strategy is intended to provide a collaborative, evidence-led framework for the Tees estuary's internationally important protected sites, bringing together environmental bodies, industry and local stakeholders to support nature recovery alongside wider place-based priorities.

For Hartlepool, this would provide an important opportunity to help shape a coordinated approach to the dunes north and south of Tees Bay, which are a notified feature of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SSSI and perform an important role in biodiversity, coastal resilience and wider ecosystem services.

3.7 Little Terns Project

Hartlepool Borough Council will continue to work with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Natural England, wardens, volunteers and other stakeholders to strengthen protection for the Little Tern colony at Seaton Carew. Priorities will include exploring whether temporary fencing measures can be refined or enhanced, improving signage and public messaging, and providing additional practical support for wardens during the breeding season. In response to recent predation pressures, the Council and its partners will also consider whether diversionary feeding for avian predators, alongside other evidence-led management measures, could form part of the management toolkit, subject to assessment, permissions and partner agreement. Hartlepool Borough Council will continue to work with partners to identify areas within the wider coastal area where habitat can be protected, enhanced or created should the colony shift location, helping to ensure that future management remains flexible, coordinated and responsive to changing conditions.

3.8 INNS

Hartlepool Borough Council will continue to explore partnership opportunities to support the control and management of invasive non-native species across council-owned land. This includes discussions with Tees Rivers Trust regarding collaborative action to address INNS, building on previous joint working on INNS issues within the borough. Through this approach, the Council aims to support practical, funded delivery where opportunities arise, while helping to reduce the spread of invasive species, improve habitat condition and protect the ecological value of affected sites and potentially building a scalable model for community-led management. Future work will be considered in liaison with relevant internal services and delivery partners.

Section 4: Biodiversity net gain information

4.1 Biodiversity net gain

Mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) was introduced by the Environment Act 2021 through the insertion of Schedule 7A into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This established the statutory framework for BNG, which now applies to most new planning applications through the general biodiversity gain condition, subject only to a limited number of exemptions.

Under this framework, non-exempt development must secure at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value. Biodiversity value is measured using the statutory biodiversity metric, and where gains are delivered off-site, or where on-site habitat creation or enhancement is considered significant, those gains must be secured and managed for a minimum of 30 years.

4.1.1 Meeting biodiversity net gain obligations

To comply with biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements, local planning authorities must ensure planning applications include appropriate documentation. In Hartlepool, this work begins at validation stage. Officers check whether mandatory BNG applies to a proposal and, where applicants seek to rely on an exemption, require the information and evidence needed to confirm that position before validation. Where BNG applies, documents are requested accordingly, typically: a statement on BNG, Statutory BNG Metric tool, and scaled habitat plans. HBC utilises a validation checklist aligned with government guidance to verify that these documents are properly submitted and recorded. Additionally, officers consult national planning resources to support their approach.

Relevant applications are then considered in consultation with the Council's Ecologist and, where necessary, Natural England. Biodiversity considerations are also addressed more widely across the planning caseload, with the Council seeking proportionate enhancements where appropriate, from universal nesting bricks on suitable proposals (which includes 100% of new homes) along with bat and bird boxes, together with any other agreed mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures. The Council has continued to strengthen its approach through live casework and close working between Development Management, Ecology and Legal services.

4.1.2 Validation checklist and local guidance

Hartlepool's validation requirements and associated checklist provide a clear local mechanism for screening what biodiversity information is needed and when. Updated in December 2025 to keep the local list aligned with national requirements for BNG and relevant planning practice guidance and includes up-to-date requirements for ecological survey assessment and mitigation, protected species surveys, nutrient neutrality statements and, where necessary, the Tees catchment Nutrient Neutrality Budget Calculator. It also requires supporting evidence where applicants rely on the self-build exemption from mandatory BNG.

The Council provides online guidance for developers, explaining how BNG is measured, the exemptions that may apply, the information that must accompany an application, the preference for on-site delivery, the role of registered off-site biodiversity gain sites, and the need to consider BNG early in site selection, design and pre-application discussions. The same validation framework also supports Habitats Regulations Assessment. Officers use the Council's screening approach to identify when Stage 1 screening and, where necessary, Stage 2 appropriate assessment are required, particularly in relation to nitrate pollution and recreational disturbance affecting the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA/Ramsar site. Relevant information is requested at validation stage and applications are then considered with the Council's Ecologist and Natural England, with mitigation secured through planning conditions and/or legal agreements. For nutrient neutrality, the Council's agreed approach with Natural England provides embedded mitigation for most urban development draining to the Seaton Carew or Billingham wastewater treatment works, with further detail set out in the Council's published guidance.

4.1.3 Planning conditions, legal agreements and long-term management

Monitoring costs for the ongoing monitoring of BNG are currently a flat fee (Typically £500). This enables long-term monitoring of BNG sites. This fee will be reviewed during the next reporting period.

4.2 BNG data summary

4.2.1 Introduction

As part of its biodiversity duty reporting, Hartlepool Borough Council must publish information on the actions taken to comply with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations, details of BNG resulting or expected to result from approved biodiversity gain plans, and how it intends to meet those obligations in the next reporting period. Mandatory BNG has applied since 12 February 2024, with small sites from 2 April 2024, and the first reporting period must end no later than 1 January 2026. This section therefore covers the period 12 February 2024 to 1 January 2026.

Biodiversity value is measured using the statutory biodiversity metric. Net gain can be achieved through on-site habitat retention, enhancement and creation, through off-site biodiversity units, or through a combination of both, with statutory credits used only as a last resort.

4.2.2 Details of Biodiversity Gain Plans approved and BNG outcomes

During the reporting period, two biodiversity gain plans were approved and are reported below. Several additional permissions granted within the reporting period are also subject to biodiversity gain plan conditions; however, these were not determined within the reporting period or have not yet been submitted for discharge and are therefore not included within the totals below.

Route for achieving net gain

The routes taken to meet BNG for the approved gain plans are:

How 10% net gain has been achieved	Number of gain plans
10% net gain achieved on-site only	1
10% net gain achieved through a combination of on-site and off-site measures	0
10% net gain achieved off-site only	1

Total net change in biodiversity units

The overall change in biodiversity units for the approved gain plans is:

Unit type	Total net gain	Percentage net gain
Habitat	0.47	19.1%
Hedgerow	0.54	N/A (0 baseline units)

On-site biodiversity units

The overall change in on-site biodiversity units for the approved gain plans is:

Unit type	Total post-development change in on-site units	Overall percentage change on-site
Habitat	0.15	6.0%
Hedgerow	0.54	N/A (0 baseline units)

Off-site biodiversity units

Only one of the two approved gain plans relied on off-site biodiversity units.

Unit type	Units purchased
Habitat units purchased	0.32
Other (Hedgerow & Watercourse)	0

Off-site unit biodiversity gain site locations

The only approved off-site unit purchase in the reporting period is identified as being within Hartlepool LPA. On that basis, all off-site units used in the reporting period were sourced from within the local planning authority boundary.

Statutory monitoring of on-site habitat

Of the two approved gain plans, one includes significant on-site enhancements requiring long-term habitat management and monitoring. For this proposal, the approved biodiversity gain plan identifies significant on-site enhancements through the implementation of urban trees and native hedgerow. A Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan has been submitted, and the HMMP provides for management and monitoring for at least 30 years post-development.