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**Tackling the Nature Emergency:
East Lothian Council's Actions to Protect and
Enhance Nature**

Update, June 2024



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1. Executive Summary

In October 2023, East Lothian Council unanimously approved a motion to declare a Nature Emergency, recognising that biodiversity is in decline and the impact that climate change is having on wildlife and nature. The motion also stated that urgent action must be taken to reverse the decline in nature.

In its declaration of Nature Emergency, the Council requested a report to Full Council before the summer recess, which outlines how existing Council strategies align with international and national biodiversity frameworks and strategies, and provides an update on the development of East Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Council is already delivering action in East Lothian to tackle the nature crisis through our existing range of strategies, partnerships and projects, working with partner agencies, community groups and volunteers. This report provides a summary of the range of work which has already been undertaken, and is currently underway, to tackle the Nature Emergency and protect and enhance biodiversity across East Lothian.

A range of Council Service Areas, in particular Countryside Services including the Countryside Ranger Service, Amenity Services, Planning Service, Road Services, Property & Capital Projects and Education, have undertaken recent actions to protect and enhance biodiversity, utilising a range of external funding opportunities and working in partnership with others including volunteers, community groups and partner agencies. These include tree planting, a range of nature restoration work to restore and enhance natural habitats at countryside sites, and environmental education.

Through the Nature Emergency declaration, the Council committed to seeking to further embed action to reverse the decline in nature as we update our range of strategies and policies across all our services.

This report outlines how existing Council strategies, specifically the East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Tree and Woodland Strategy, Green Network Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Local Development Plan and Countryside Site Management Plans align with the Global Biodiversity Framework, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact.



All of these Council strategies and plans, particularly the most recent, generally align with the national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives. Opportunities will be taken to ensure that all the relevant Council strategies currently being renewed and updated will align with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein.

In addition, East Lothian’s Biodiversity Action Plan (ELBAP) 2024–2034 is currently in development. The draft ELBAP will take into consideration the Nature and Climate Emergency declarations, and the international, national and local policy context. The draft ELBAP will include a Delivery Plan which supports delivery of actions aligning with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy at a local level. The Delivery Plan will set out a partnership approach to delivering actions, working with key stakeholders in the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership, as well as other community organisations, neighbouring local authorities and Government agencies such as NatureScot, to maximise delivery opportunities.

As set out in the Council’s Nature Emergency Declaration, the progress of work arising from this report will be monitored and discussed on an ongoing basis after this by the cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum (on the understanding that key milestones or changes will also be scrutinised and voted on by Full Council when appropriate).



2. Introduction

In October 2023, East Lothian Council unanimously approved a motion to declare a Nature Emergency¹, recognising that biodiversity is in decline and the impact that climate change is having on wildlife and nature.

The motion approved:

- Notes the body of evidence which outlines the alarming extent of the global nature and biodiversity crisis. Nature is in decline and urgent action must be taken to reverse this.
- Recognises the inherent value of nature, as well as its crucial importance as an integral part of culture and society, and for our health, wellbeing, and economy; this being demonstrated through placemaking, tourism, food, energy, water and air quality regulation, etc.
- Additionally, recognises that the nature and climate emergencies are intrinsically linked and that nature plays a key role in meeting climate targets, particularly for climate change adaptation and resilience.

East Lothian Council's Nature Emergency declaration, akin to the Council declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, recognises the state of nature, its inherent value, and the crucial role its recovery and restoration will play in realising climate targets.

Declaring a Nature Emergency followed, and is intrinsically linked to, the Council's earlier declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019. The Council remains committed to tackling the Climate Emergency but is all too aware of a decline in plant and animal species and reduction of wildlife habitats.

The Council is already delivering action in East Lothian to tackle the nature crisis through our existing range of strategies, partnerships and projects, working with partner agencies, community groups and volunteers. **Section 3** of this report provides a summary of the work which has already been undertaken, and is currently underway, to tackle the Nature Emergency and protect and enhance biodiversity across East Lothian. Further details are provided in **Appendix 2**.

Through the Nature Emergency declaration, the Council committed to seeking to further embed action to reverse the decline in nature as we update our range of strategies and policies across all our services, whilst being mindful of balancing this motion and commitment with the range of other duties and responsibilities of the Council.

The Council also agreed to a range of regular reports on the progress of work arising from the declaration including:

- (1) Outlining how existing Council strategies, such as the Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Tree and Woodland Strategy, Green Network Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Local Development Plan, align with the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)²,

¹ [Council declares Nature Emergency | East Lothian Council](#)

² [COP15: Final text of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework | Convention on Biological Diversity \(cbd.int\)](#)

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy³ and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact⁴, and noting any changes to existing strategies required to deliver against these.

- (2) Providing an update on the development of our Biodiversity Action Plan including specific considerations of how the plan is impacting:
 - (a) The adoption of an ecological coherence approach to effectively identify and target actions required to tackle the nature emergency and deliver the various strategies listed above, including through the further development of the region's Nature Network.
 - (b) The adoption of a partnership approach, working with East Lothian Climate Action Network (utilising its newly-announced Climate Hub), and other community organisations, and also collaborating with neighbouring local authorities, and with Government agencies such as NatureScot, to maximise delivery opportunities for the strategies listed above and to identify further opportunities for nature restoration, nature-based solutions, and protection of biodiversity, both within the county and in connection to larger networks.

Section 4 of this report provides a summary of progress on the work undertaken to address these aspects of the Council's Nature Emergency declaration.



³ [Tackling the Nature Emergency - Scottish biodiversity strategy to 2045 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2024-2045/pages/introduction.aspx)

⁴ [Berlin Urban Nature Pact - CitiesWithNature](https://www.citieswithnature.com/)

3. Summary of work underway to tackle the Nature Emergency

3.1 Delivery of Actions to Tackle the Nature Emergency across Service Areas

All Council services play a role in tackling the Nature Emergency; however, the Council delivers its key biodiversity responsibilities predominantly through the following Services:

- Sport, Countryside & Leisure – includes the Biodiversity Officer, Countryside Rangers and Amenity Services who manage the Council’s estate, deliver educational sessions, support voluntary work relating to the environment and engage with the general public on natural heritage topics;
- Planning – land use planning, development of policy and guidance and determine planning applications which can have a significant impact on our biodiversity;
- Education – through Learning for Sustainability and participation in the Eco-schools programme.

Biodiversity is further considered through the following functions of the Council:

- Flood risk & mitigation – including the consideration of nature-based solutions;
- Environmental health;
- Housing Services;
- Economic Development – tourism development and green skills;
- Road Services – transport planning, active travel & green infrastructure and consideration of biodiversity in roads maintenance;
- Connected Communities – working with Area Partnerships and Community Councils to include biodiversity in local Area Plans and support communities to deliver action for biodiversity.



Along with all Scottish public bodies, East Lothian Council has a duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out its responsibilities. This biodiversity duty is about taking care of nature all around us, not just in specific protected sites and for particular species.⁵

As set out in the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, every public body in Scotland is required to produce a publicly available report every three years on its compliance with the Biodiversity Duty. East Lothian Council’s most recent **Biodiversity Duty Report 2021–2023**, which was submitted to the Scottish Government in December 2023, is on the Council’s website⁶, and provides details of actions taken by the Council to conserve, protect and enhance nature and biodiversity, and tackle the Nature Emergency.

⁵ [Biodiversity Duty | NatureScot](#)

⁶ [East Lothian Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2021 - 2023 | East Lothian Council](#)

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the web of life. It is the variety of all living things and the ecosystems where they live (on land or in water). It comprises the living organisms in a particular space, whether in a window-box, garden, park, meadow, peatland, river, loch, estuary, ocean, beach or mountain top.

Biodiversity refers to the variability among living organisms within terrestrial, marine and aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes they are part of. This includes diversity within species, between species and across ecosystems.

Biodiversity inspires people. It has enormous value in its own right but is also central to our survival as a species. Our economy, jobs, health and wellbeing depend on it and it is an integral part of our culture and way of life.

Source: Scottish Government's [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland](#) (2023)

East Lothian Council's Sport, Countryside and Leisure Service provides day-to-day oversight of biodiversity, including implementing and monitoring the Council's biodiversity duty. A Biodiversity Officer sits within the Countryside Service to lead on biodiversity matters, alongside the Countryside Rangers who continue to manage sites to conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Council area.

The Council's 'Climate and Nature Emergency Group' of officers, including senior managers, from across Council Service Areas, will monitor, oversee and play an important role in driving and coordinating the work of East Lothian Council and our community partners to meet our climate and nature emergency objectives and duties. The group was originally the 'Climate Change Planning & Monitoring Group' but its remit was extended following the Nature Emergency declaration to include responding to the interlinked climate and nature crises.

An internal Council Officer working group, the Green Network Working Group, has been re-convened and is currently underway with reviewing the Green Network Strategy and coordinating delivery of actions across Council Service Areas.

3.2 Actions Undertaken to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

The Council's **Biodiversity Duty Report 2021–2023** to the Scottish Government, December 2023 (set out at Appendix 2 to this report) sets out details of recent actions taken by the Council to protect and enhance biodiversity, by Countryside Services including the Countryside Ranger Service, Amenity Services, Planning Service, Road Services, Property & Capital Projects and Education.

Appendix 2 also sets out how the Council has incorporated measures to protect biodiversity into its wider policies, plans or strategies. This includes decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.

Specific details are also provided in Appendix 2 of how the Council has integrated biodiversity into actions on the Climate Emergency, through its Climate Change Strategy, Climate Adaptation and Nature-based Solutions.

Public engagement and the crucial role of Countryside Volunteers and other partners and stakeholders in helping to deliver actions to protect, conserve and enhance nature, are also set out

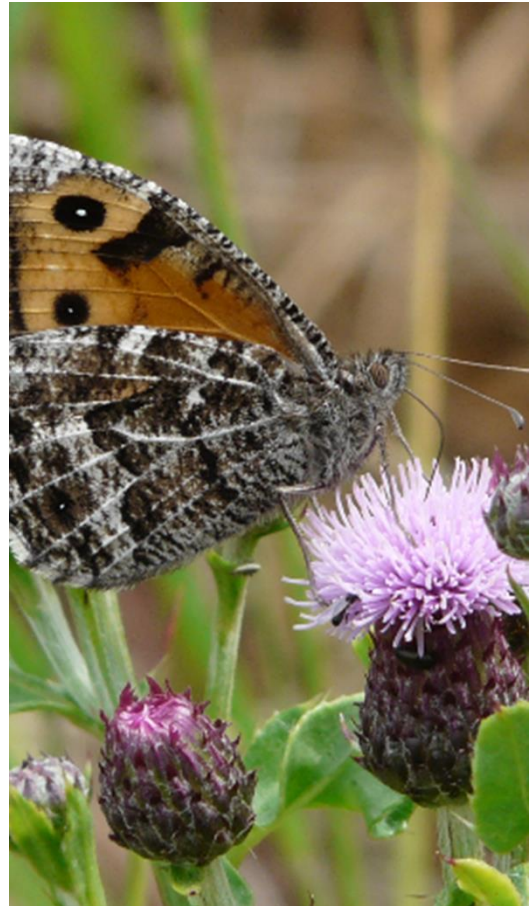
in Appendix 2. Volunteers play an essential role in supporting the delivery and monitoring of conservation tasks. The Council currently has over 400 registered volunteers who undertake a range of tasks including practical conservation tasks and biological surveying.

A range of species surveys and monitoring is also undertaken by the Council's Countryside Ranger Service, including contributing to national recording schemes.

The Biodiversity Duty report at Appendix 2 demonstrates the breadth of activities delivered by the Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity across East Lothian. The East Lothian Council Countryside Ranger Service plays a large role in raising awareness of biodiversity and managing the Council's countryside estate for biodiversity and visitor enjoyment. Funding from the Better Places Fund in the summer months of 2021–2023 provided additional support through Seasonal Rangers to support the delivery of conservation projects and undertake monitoring of our sites to increase the evidence base.

Specific recent highlights include:

- Following the declaration of a Nature Emergency in October 2023, the nature emergency was subsequently included on the Council's Corporate Risk Register as 'Climate & Nature Emergency';
- Approval of the Council's [Tree and Woodland Strategy](#) by Council in May 2024. The Strategy will help the Council address the climate and biodiversity crises and guide the delivery of the East Lothian Climate Forest. This aims to help the Council reach its target of a net carbon neutral East Lothian, whilst also delivering biodiversity, landscape, health and wellbeing, and green network benefits. Working in partnership with communities, landowners and producers this will oversee the planting of two million trees between 2021 and 2031, increase the urban tree canopy and expand the network of hedgerows;
- Completion of nature restoration work at Levenhall Links, Musselburgh, which included the conversion of ash lagoons into wetland habitat to support wading birds, and the planting of over 10,000 trees by the Council's Countryside Ranger Service and local volunteer groups;



- We received funding in 2023 from the Levelling Up Parks Fund provided to the Scottish Government by the UK Government and managed on their behalf by Greenspace Scotland to develop [Nature Network](#) opportunities within our parks and greenspaces. This enabled us to engage with the local community, and start developing and mapping our Nature Network, identifying opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of our parks and greenspaces, which are now being delivered. East Lothian Council’s Nature Networks in Parks & Greenspaces project has been included in the national Nature Networks Toolbox⁷ produced by NatureScot as a good-practice [Case Study](#);



- The Countryside Ranger Service manages a number of nature conservation-based projects, working closely with volunteers and partners including Restoration Forth, East Lothian Countryside Volunteers, Lothians Conservation Volunteers, and The Conservation Volunteers. Many projects were funded through the Nature Restoration Fund allocation provided by Scottish Government, including:
 - [Grassland restoration](#) to restore priority coastal habitats: this project sought to address biodiversity loss, restore habitats damaged through increased visitor pressure during the Covid pandemic and support connectivity on a landscape scale. As a result, 37ha of priority grassland habitat has been enhanced through the purchase of essential cut and lift machinery. Ongoing monitoring of the sites will take place to measure the ongoing success of the project, and identify the need for further management;
 - Dune restoration through the removal of Sea Buckthorn at Aberlady Bay, Gullane Bents and Yellowcraig. This restored over 1ha of dune habitat;

⁷ [Nature Networks Toolbox | NatureScot](#)

- Wetland and pond creation and enhancement, to enhance habitats for amphibians and create new ponds to support water management at Barns Ness, restoring and creating new habitat;
 - Tree planting and woodland management, including the planting of new hedgerows and diversifying woodland structure at North Berwick Glen and Yellowcraig – 8ha of woodland has been enhanced;
 - ELC's Amenity Services have utilised Nature Restoration Funding 2023/24 to expand meadow and grassland areas in parks and urban greenspaces to support pollinators as part of the Nature Networks project. Cut and lift machinery purchased using the 2021 NRF allocation has been used to manage increased areas of naturalised grassland across the county.
- We received an Agri-Environment Climate Scheme funding award to support our conservation grazing scheme of priority grassland habitat at Barns Ness, North Berwick Law and Traprain Law Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to 2027;
 - In 2022, the Council worked with the East Lothian Lieutenancy to deliver the Queen's Green Canopy tree planting initiative to mark the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee. To further support tree planting across the County, the Council partnered with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust in 2023 to launch the East Lothian [TreeTime scheme](#). This allows donors to directly support tree planting and management across East Lothian;
 - The contribution of over 18,500 records to The Wildlife Information Centre;
 - A return to environmental education and public events following a hiatus during the Covid pandemic. Funding awards from the Better Places Fund enabled this to go ahead through increased capacity within the Countryside Ranger Service for 2021–2023;
 - In 2019, the Council issued Supplementary Planning Guidance ([SuDS SPG](#)) encouraging the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems in new developments which also support increased biodiversity and open space, while also providing rainwater retention;
 - When the Council created a new path to the new Rosehill School in Wallyford we re-routed the existing path to avoid additional tarmac and lighting within the woodland, and avoid any impact of known badger setts. A green vegetation retaining wall was installed alongside part of the path;
 - All new Active Travel routes are carefully assessed to minimise their impact on biodiversity and will incorporate additional planting wherever possible.

4. Summary of progress of work arising from the Council’s Nature Emergency declaration

Through the Nature Emergency declaration, the Council committed to seeking to further embed action to reverse the decline in nature as we update our range of strategies and policies across all our services, whilst being mindful of balancing this motion and commitment with the range of other duties and responsibilities of the Council.

The Council also agreed to a range of regular reports on the progress of work arising from the declaration. Progress with the two key aspects identified in the declaration are set out below.

4.1 Review of Existing Council Strategies

The Council’s Nature Emergency declaration requested a report on how existing Council strategies, such as the Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Tree and Woodland Strategy, Green Network Strategy, Open Space Strategy, Local Development Plan, align with the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)⁸, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy⁹ and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact¹⁰, and noting any changes to existing strategies required to deliver against these.

4.1.1 Explanation of terms used in the Nature Emergency declaration:

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (<https://www.cbd.int/gbf/>)

- Agreed at COP15 in December 2022. Presents 23 global biodiversity targets with an overarching vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.
- Goals include maintaining, enhancing or restoring “*the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems, substantially increasing the area of natural ecosystems by 2050*”; and “*Biodiversity is sustainably used and managed and nature’s contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, are valued, maintained and enhanced, with those currently in decline being restored, supporting the achievement of sustainable development, for the benefit of present and future generations by 2050*”.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-2045-tackling-nature-emergency-scotland-2/>)

This refers to the ‘Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland’.

- Following consultation on the draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy in 2022, this is the updated version of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: Tackling the Nature Emergency in Scotland, which takes into account responses to that consultation.
- The Strategy sets the ambition for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045. The Strategy sits within a framework that will include 5 year delivery plans, an investment plan, monitoring and reporting framework, and a Natural Environment Bill to be tabled before Parliament in 2024 that will put in place statutory targets for nature restoration.

⁸ [COP15: Final text of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework | Convention on Biological Diversity \(cbd.int\)](#)

⁹ [Tackling the Nature Emergency - Scottish biodiversity strategy to 2045 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹⁰ [Berlin Urban Nature Pact - CitiesWithNature](#)

The Berlin Urban Nature Pact (<https://berlinpact.iclei-europe.org/>)

- An initiative by cities to build on and partner with the Edinburgh Process¹¹ to progress targets and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in the urban environment.
- More relevant for cities, but includes a plan of action for Local Authorities to lead on biodiversity action at a local level.

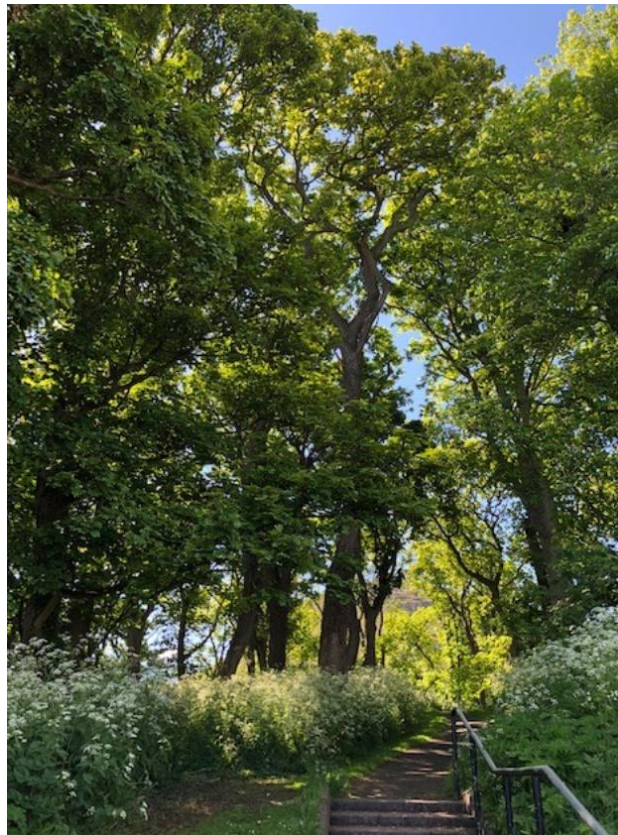
4.1.2 Alignment of existing Council strategies with the national and international policy framework

Table 1 below sets out how relevant existing Council strategies align with the Global Biodiversity Framework, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, and notes any changes to these existing strategies required to deliver against these.

Two 'tiers' of Council strategies have been identified through this process:

'Tier 1' – the primary strategies and policies which set out the objectives and specific actions to protect and enhance nature, green & blue networks and biodiversity;

'Tier 2' – additional Council plans and strategies which can also deliver biodiversity enhancements and connectivity, however are not the principle strategies for tackling the Nature Emergency but will reference those strategies in 'Tier 1'.



¹¹ [Global biodiversity framework: Edinburgh Process - information - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Table 1: Alignment of existing Council strategies with the Global Biodiversity Framework, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, and any changes to these existing strategies required to deliver against these.

‘Tier 1’ key Council strategies delivering actions to tackle the Nature Emergency:

Council Strategy	Alignment with national and international global biodiversity frameworks	Any changes required to strategy to deliver against these
Green Network Strategy (2018)	The Green Network Strategy Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) informs development and enhancement of green and blue networks across East Lothian, and cross-boundary green network connections, and is a statutory consideration under the current Local Development Plan (LDP) which developers must adhere to. It aligns well with national requirements in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy for developing Nature Networks and will inform the basis of East Lothian’s Nature Network. It sets out specific local actions to protect and enhance nature and biodiversity through protection and enhancement of natural habitats, including green infrastructure in urban areas. It aligns well with national and international global biodiversity frameworks and obligations referenced in the Nature Emergency declaration.	The next East Lothian Local Development Plan is currently in development. It is the intent to renew and update the Green Network Strategy SPG to align with National Planning Framework 4 outcomes and requirements ¹² . We will ensure it also aligns with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein. An internal Council Officer working group, the Green Network Working Group, has been re-convened and is currently underway with reviewing the Green Network Strategy.
East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan (ELBAP)	East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan is currently being renewed and updated in line with national strategy. A stakeholder group (the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership) is inputting into the drafting of the new ELBAP. We will ensure that it aligns with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration.	N/A – currently underway.
Tree & Woodland Strategy (2024)	The Council’s Tree & Woodland Strategy was recently approved (May 2024). It sets out the strategic basis for development of the East Lothian Climate Forest and includes actions for the protection and enhancement of trees and woodland across East Lothian, including cross-border connectivity and trees and woodland in urban areas. It has a strong focus on community involvement, benefits to society including	Recently approved (May 2024). Meets the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein.

¹² [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

	the local economy and ‘green skills’ development, and climate mitigation and adaptation, in addition to biodiversity benefits. As such it meets the objectives and requirements of the national and international global biodiversity frameworks and the Nature Emergency declaration.	
Open Space Strategy (2018)	The current East Lothian Open Space Strategy recognises the importance of parks and greenspaces to green networks, community health and wellbeing, the local economy, tackling climate change, and natural heritage: protecting and enhancing places where biodiversity, diverse habitats and wildlife can flourish, through sensitive management of public access. It generally aligns with national requirements in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy for developing Nature Networks and aspects of the international global biodiversity frameworks and obligations. The Open Space Strategy is currently being renewed and updated.	The Open Space Strategy is currently in the process of being renewed and updated. Whilst the strategy update is being led by Amenity Services, there will be considerable input from Planning Service, the Biodiversity Officer, and others in the Council’s Green Network Working Group, to ensure that the principles and objectives of the national and international biodiversity frameworks referenced in the Nature Emergency declaration are prominent in the updated Open Space Strategy.
Climate Change Strategy (2020–2025)	The Council’s Climate Change Strategy includes recognition of the Ecological Emergency and its interrelationship with the Climate Emergency. Outcomes of the strategy include A Healthy and Resilient Natural Environment. Specific targets and actions in the Climate Change Strategy relate to protection and enhancement of biodiversity and green & blue networks, to ensure healthy and diverse natural ecosystems and greenspaces that support biodiversity and the wellbeing of communities. It generally aligns with the objectives and requirements of the national and international global biodiversity frameworks and the Nature Emergency declaration, but as the next Climate Change Strategy is currently in preparation, we will ensure it is updated to meet these objectives and requirements.	The next Climate Change Strategy is currently in development. The Council’s Climate and Nature Emergency Group of officers, including senior managers, from across Council Service Areas, will oversee the development and preparation of the next Climate Change Strategy, and will ensure it aligns with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein.
Local Development Plan (2018)	The current East Lothian Local Development Plan (LDP) recognises that protecting, conserving and, where appropriate, enhancing the natural heritage is an important aspect of sustainable development; and that the LDP has an important role in protecting sites designated for their biodiversity or geodiversity interest at international, national or local	The next East Lothian Local Development Plan is currently in development. It will align with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) outcomes and requirements, which include the cross-cutting outcome of improving biodiversity, as the nature crisis

	level. The LDP also ensures protected species and other natural heritage interests beyond designated sites are taken into account in planning decisions, including the potential for enhancement, and refers to the East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan in considering planning applications where relevant. Work is currently underway on the next East Lothian LDP.	underpins the spatial strategy of NPF4. We will ensure the next LDP also aligns with the requirements of the Nature Emergency declaration and the national and global biodiversity frameworks referenced therein. Officers across relevant Service Areas, including the Biodiversity Officer, are involved with the process of developing the next LDP.
Countryside Site Management Plans	The Management Plans developed by Countryside Service for Council owned and managed coast and countryside sites set out the principles of protecting and conserving natural habitats and biodiversity and promoting awareness and understanding. They consist of ongoing action plans and are subject to continuing monitoring and evaluation by Advisory Groups of key stakeholders. In general they align with national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives.	Countryside Site Management Plans generally align with national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives. They are subject to cycles of ongoing review and updating and will align with the new East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan.

‘Tier 2’ – The following Council plans and strategies are also important in delivering biodiversity enhancements and connectivity and will reference the Nature Emergency declaration when updated or renewed, however they are not the principal strategies for tackling the Nature Emergency: these will reference and link to the ‘Tier 1’ strategies set out above.

- Council Plan
- Active Travel Improvement Plan
- Local Transport Strategy
- Local Economy Strategy
- Local Housing Strategy
- Area Partnership Plans
- Asset Strategy & Management Plan
- Burial Ground Strategy
- Play Sufficiency Assessment

4.2 Update on the development of East Lothian’s Biodiversity Action Plan

The Council’s Nature Emergency declaration also requested an update on the development of East Lothian’s Biodiversity Action Plan including specific considerations of how the plan is impacting:

- The adoption of an ecological coherence approach to effectively identify and target actions required to tackle the nature emergency and deliver the various strategies listed above, including through the further development of the region’s Nature Network.
- The adoption of a partnership approach, working with East Lothian Climate Action Network (utilising its newly-announced Climate Hub), and other community organisations, and also collaborating with neighbouring local authorities, and with Government agencies such as NatureScot, to maximise delivery opportunities for the strategies listed above and to identify further opportunities for nature restoration, nature-based solutions, and protection of biodiversity, both within the county and in connection to larger networks.

East Lothian’s Biodiversity Action Plan (ELBAP) 2024–2034 is currently in development. The draft ELBAP will take into consideration the Nature and Climate Emergency declarations, and the international, national and local policy context including the revised draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.

The draft ELBAP will aim to:

- embed landscape scale ambition of restoration, conservation and protection for East Lothian’s priority natural habitats;
- ensure that habitats are connected and in good condition;
- expand and enhance East Lothian’s Nature Network;
- ensure healthy and resilient ecosystem services;
- support and conserve priority species populations to aid recovery and resilience to environmental changes;
- raise awareness of local biodiversity across East Lothian.

The draft ELBAP will include a Delivery Plan which supports delivery of actions aligning with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy at a local level.

A key stakeholder group, **East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership**, has been re-convened and the Partnership is underway with preparing the draft East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan, facilitated by Countryside Service, East Lothian Council. Membership of the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership steering group is shown in the text box on the right.

East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership

The East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership consists of a steering group that includes:

East Lothian Council – Countryside Service
East Lothian Council – Countryside Ranger Service
East Lothian Council – Planning Service
East Lothian Council – Amenity Services
Scottish Seabird Centre
Woodland Trust
East Lothian Countryside Volunteers
NatureScot
Forth Rivers Trust
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
National Farmers’ Union
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust
East Lothian Climate Action Network
The Wildlife Information Centre
Buglife
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Scottish Water

The Partnership also has a list of wider consultees who are informed of updates about the LBAP process but are not directly involved in the first phase of creation and delivery.

The draft ELBAP Delivery Plan is currently in development, however it will set out a partnership approach to delivering actions, working with key stakeholders in the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership, as well as other community organisations, neighbouring local authorities and Government agencies such as NatureScot, to maximise delivery opportunities including identifying further opportunities for nature restoration, nature-based solutions, and protection of biodiversity, both within the county and in connection to larger networks.

Further updates on the draft East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan will be provided as this process progresses.

5. Next Steps

Progress with delivering actions to tackle the Nature Emergency will be reported on an ongoing basis to the cross-party Climate Change and Sustainability Forum for monitoring and discussion, with key milestones or changes being scrutinised and voted on by Full Council when appropriate. This includes the relevant key Council strategies and plans which are currently under development or renewal as described above.

6. Contact for Further Information

Report compiled by East Lothian Council's Countryside Service and Amenity Services, with input from officers in East Lothian Council's Green Network Working Group, representing Service Areas across the Council.

Contact: naturenetworks@eastlothian.gov.uk

June 2024





Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Appendix 2:

East Lothian Council's Biodiversity Duty Report 2021–2023, submitted to the Scottish Government, December 2023

This report is also available on the Council's website via this link:

[East Lothian Council Biodiversity Duty Report 2021 - 2023 | East Lothian Council](#)

THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY REPORTING TEMPLATE: LEVEL ONE ORGANISATIONS

Public bodies that own or manage land, regulate land use, or have responsibilities linked to biodiversity

Report Outline

Bodies are encouraged to use the following structure for their report. This is set out in the template below, which you can either type directly into, or copy into a separate document.

Section 1: Introductory information about your public body

Section 2: Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity

Section 3: Mainstreaming biodiversity

Section 4: Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity

Section 5: Public engagement and workforce development

Section 6: Research and monitoring

Section 7: Biodiversity highlights and challenges

Completion Notes

These completion notes offer guidance to support your public body to complete your Biodiversity Duty Report. Taken together with the associated hyperlinks, they provide suggestions on the breadth of actions that could be included in your report. They may also assist with forward planning on how biodiversity can be taken into account in future.

While they incorporate the key elements on which you may wish to report, they are not an exhaustive list and it is likely that there will be a range of additional work that your organisation carried out in support of biodiversity on which you may also wish to report. To find out more on the Biodiversity Duty see the [NatureScot website](#).



SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC BODY

Please describe your organisation’s role and purpose, including any particular environmental responsibilities

<p>Text Field</p>	<p>East Lothian Council (ELC) is a Scottish local authority established under the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. In common with other Local Authorities, under this Act the Council is a unitary authority responsible for a range of statutory, regulatory and service functions including: education & social work; economic development & recreation services; and, trading standards, environmental health & licensing. The Council provides further services including, but not limited to roads, waste & recycling collection, housing, property management, planning, and greenspace & countryside management. The Council area is 679.1km².</p> <p>The Council has 22 elected Councillors representing six Wards. The Councillors are responsible for agreeing policies about provision of services and how the Council’s money is spent. Over the course of this reporting period the Council has been a minority Labour administration. The Council operates on a committee and sub-committee basis for decision making, with some decisions delegated to officers where appropriate. The Cabinet Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing and Sport, Countryside and Leisure has oversight of biodiversity. In August 2022, the Council established a Cross-Party Sustainability forum with Elected Members to discuss a range of sustainability and climate change issues, including biodiversity. This Forum meets on a quarterly basis. Any issues requiring political approval or involving policy change are considered by elected members at Cabinet, or full Council where appropriate.</p> <p>East Lothian Council Elected Members have been involved with the following external bodies during the reporting period with a remit which incorporates biodiversity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr John McMillan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust (2017 - 2022) ○ CoSLA Board: Environment & Economy (2022 – 2023) ○ Tyne/Esk Leader Local Action Group (2022 – 2023) ○ Haddington Garden Trust (2017 – 2022) • Cllr Normal Hampshire – CoSLA Board: Environment & Economy (2017 – 2022) • Cllr Jim Goodfellow – North Berwick Trust (2017 – 2022)
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The Council's Executive team is accountable for the overall strategic leadership and management of services and resources. The current executive team are:

Chief Executive – Monica Patterson

- Executive Director for Council Resources – Sarah Fortune
- Executive Director for Education and Children's Services – Lesley Brown
- Executive Director for Place – Douglas Proudfoot
- Director of the East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership – Fiona Wilson

All Council services play a role in tackling the nature emergency; however, the Council delivers its key biodiversity responsibilities predominantly through the following Services:

- Sport, Countryside & Leisure – includes the Biodiversity Officer, Countryside Rangers and Amenity Services who manage the Council's estate, deliver educational sessions, support voluntary work relating to the environment and engage with the general public on natural heritage topics
- Planning – land use planning, development of policy and guidance and determine planning applications which can have a significant impact on our biodiversity
- Education – through Learning for Sustainability and participation in the Eco-schools programme

Biodiversity is further considered through the following functions of the Council:

- Flood risk & mitigation – including the consideration of nature-based solutions
- Environmental health
- Housing Services
- Economic Development – tourism development and green skills
- Road Services – transport planning, active travel & green infrastructure and consideration of biodiversity in roads maintenance
- Connected Communities – working with Area Partnerships and Community Councils to include biodiversity in local Area Plans and support communities to deliver action for biodiversity



	<p>Sport, Countryside and Leisure provide day-to-day oversight of biodiversity, including implementing and monitoring the Council's biodiversity duty. A Biodiversity Officer sits within the Countryside Service to lead on biodiversity matters, alongside the Countryside Rangers who continue to manage sites to conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Council area.</p>
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SECTION 2: ACTIONS TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY

Please describe and explain any actions that your organisation has undertaken alone or as part of a partnership to benefit biodiversity directly, to tackle the main drivers of biodiversity loss, or to achieve wider outcomes for nature and people

<p>Text Field</p>	<p><u>Countryside Services</u></p> <p>The Countryside Ranger Service manage a range of sites on behalf the Council. This includes coastal sites such as Longniddry Bents, Aberlady Bay, Gullane Bents, Yellowcraig and Whitesands/Barns Ness; active travel routes including the Pencaitland and Haddington Railway Paths; upland sites including North Berwick and Traprain Laws; woodland and wetland at Levenhall Links, Woodhall and Butterdean. The East Lothian Coastline is designated almost in its entirety as the Firth of Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area. Both of the Laws and Barns Ness are also designated SSSI for grassland and geological features. We also manage one Local Nature Reserve, one Country Park and 14 Local Biodiversity Sites (Local Nature Conservation Sites).</p> <p>In 2021, Scottish Power in partnership with East Lothian Council began the restoring the final two ash lagoons at Levenhall Links into habitats for wildlife. Historically, this site was used as an infill site for fly ash from Cockenzie Power Station but now benefits from a variety of habitats including wetland, woodland and grassland. Ash Lagoon 8, part of the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area, has been converted into wetland habitat to support wading birds. This now consists of two shallow water areas with islands, protected by fencing, scrub planting and a 4m wide moat. Five viewing hides have been created, alongside an artificial Sand Martin bank. To the east of the lagoon, the area has been landscaped and planted as successional scrub habitat with species including Holly, Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Gorse. Over 10,000 trees have been planted as part of this development. Ash Lagoon 6 has been landscaped and planted as a wet meadow to support pollinators and other invertebrates. It also features south facing rocky bunds and a shallow scrape. This variety of habitat will support a range of invertebrates, as well as Lapwing and other ground nesting birds including Skylark and Meadow Pipit. The Levenhall Links restoration was completed in 2023.</p> <p>Many of our countryside sites have Advisory Groups in place to guide management. These are attended by relevant stakeholders including Community Councils, local landowners, and biodiversity experts to identify and monitor measures to enhance biodiversity. The Ranger Service further work in partnership with adjacent</p>
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landowners to support cross boundary collaboration and increase the scale of conservation efforts. Recent collaborations include working with Tarmac to consider sustainable water management at Barns Ness and undertake invasive species control with a particular focus on Pirri-pirri-bur. The Biodiversity Officer is also a member of the Torness Land Management Advisory Group.

The Council has successfully applied for Scotland's Beach Awards in each year of this reporting period. These awards are facilitated by Keep Scotland Beautiful and have three areas which are judged, one of which is 'Local Environmental Quality'. This includes criteria relating to the protection of designated sites and protected species, and evidence that climate change adaptations are in place for the beach and surrounding coastal habitat. Eight Council managed beaches have received the award in 2021 – 2023.

The Ranger Service manage a number of conservation-based projects, working closely with volunteers and partners including Restoration Forth, East Lothian Countryside Volunteers, Lothians Conservation Volunteers, and The Conservation Volunteers. Some of this work was curtailed due to the continuing challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic during 2021 but resumed from 2022. Many projects were funded through the Nature Restoration Fund allocation, including:

- [Grassland restoration](#) to restore priority coastal habitats: this project sought to address biodiversity loss, restore habitats damaged through increased visitor pressure during the pandemic and support connectivity on a landscape scale. As a result, 37ha of priority grassland habitat has been enhanced through the purchase of essential cut and lift machinery. Ongoing monitoring of the sites will take place to measure the ongoing success of the project, and identify the need for further management.
- Dune restoration through the removal of Sea Buckthorn at Aberlady Bay, Gullane Bents and Yellowcraig. This restored over 1ha of dune habitat.
- Wetland and pond creation and enhancement, to remove encroaching Bulrush, enhance habitats for amphibians and create new ponds to support water management at North Berwick Law, Barns Ness and John Muir Country Park, restoring and creating over 3ha of habitat.
- Tree planting and woodland management, including the planting of new hedgerows and diversifying woodland structure at North Berwick Glen and Yellowcraig – 8ha of woodland has been enhanced.



- Salt marsh restoration at John Muir Country Park to manage recreational impacts on this sensitive habitat.

The long-standing conservation grazing scheme continues at Aberlady Bay, Barns Ness, North Berwick Law and Traprain Law. These sites are all designated as SSSI for their grassland habitat, and this project aims to improve the condition of this habitat using sheep and Exmoor ponies. In 2022 we successfully applied for Agri-Environment Climate Scheme funding to support the grazing of these sites by sheep and Exmoor ponies for the benefit of the grassland habitat. The success of this project is monitored on an annual basis by staff with support from volunteers, and the results have a direct impact on the management of these sites.

Volunteers play an essential role in the design, delivery and monitoring of biodiversity conservation. This includes a network of 'Friends of' groups, path wardens and conservation volunteers who undertake practical work and monitor specific species and/or habitats including plant surveys, bumblebee and butterflies. This has developed into a registered charity, the East Lothian Conservation Volunteers (ELCV), who partner with East Lothian Council to deliver projects. In particular, ELCV have worked with landowners along the River Tyne to map and treat [Giant Hogweed](#). The management of the Giant Hogweed involves spraying plants in Spring and Summer and deadheading/digging up small plants before they set seed. Treated sites are then inspected to confirm absence of the plant. In 2023, the project introduced a GIS mapping tool to support surveying areas known to have had Giant Hogweed present. This project has been successful, with the River Tyne now free of any plant that has the potential to flower. The project has now expanded to map and treat Giant Hogweed along the River Esk, working across Mid- and East Lothian.

The Biodiversity Officer works to deliver local priority actions which have been identified in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. This includes monitoring of Northern Brown Argus across East Lothian in partnership with Butterfly Conservation East Scotland Branch. The Biodiversity Officer and Landscape team review and comment on all Scottish Forestry Felling Licence, Woodland Creation and Forest Plan applications with regard to landscape and biodiversity impacts.

In Autumn 2023, ELC convened the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership to drive forward the delivery of a refreshed Local Biodiversity Action Plan which considers the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy within a local context. This Partnership includes Officers from across Council Services, with external stakeholders



representing National Agencies, Landowners, environmental NGOs, community groups and special interest groups.

Amenity Services

Our Amenity Services team are responsible for most of the public open space in East Lothian including:

- Parks and Greenspace
- Trees and woodlands
- Play areas
- Gardens
- Sports Pitches
- Cemeteries and burial grounds

The Council's Amenity Depot Managers have been working for many years across East Lothian and continue to lead the way in changing how we manage amenity open space to ensure positive benefits for both nature and people:

- In many of our public parks and greenspaces we have actively planted wildflower areas to enhance parks and greenspaces for nature including pollinators such as bees and butterflies;
- We leave areas of amenity grass long, until the wildflowers have flowered and produced seeds before cutting at the end of the season; this is part of our active management to encourage wildflower growth in subsequent years, and we aim to expand these areas with community support;
- Amenity Depot Managers undertake nature-friendly grassland management options, including use of the plant Yellow Rattle, which naturally parasitises grass reducing grass growth, encouraging wildflower growth, benefitting nature including pollinators, and reducing maintenance requirements. They also advise private developers on these types of measures to encourage others to participate and enhance nature networks.



In 2023, the team successfully applied for funding to develop [Nature Network](#) opportunities within our parks and greenspaces. This was part of the Levelling Up Parks Fund provided to the Scottish Government by the UK Government and managed on their behalf by Greenspace Scotland. The objective was to identify suitable areas to for habitat enhancements, engage with the local community and produce an action plan to deliver these enhancements in the coming years. This will bring a wide range of benefits to nature and people. Ultimately these local nature enhancements can help to create better places for people, and create connected spaces for nature, which will help East Lothian to play its part in tackling the global nature and climate emergencies.

The delivery of the project included:

- Design of engagement materials.
- Public consultation.
- Creation of Report and Action Plan.
- Purchase of native wildflower seed and native trees.

Actions prescribed through the project that have commenced since the action planning process include:

- Mapping existing and developing habitat connectivity in parks and greenspace by Amenity Services, and the wider countryside sites managed by Countryside service. This project has commenced winter 2023 and will continue as habitats are created, restored, and enhanced. There is ambition to train staff to be able to map these networks as they develop over the coming years.
- Planting of trees purchased with Capital funding from the project autumn 2023.
- Creation of new wildflower meadow areas with Capital funding from the project autumn 2023.

Amenity Services have utilised Nature Restoration Fund 23/24 to expand meadow and grassland areas to support pollinators as part of the Nature Networks project. Cut and lift machinery purchased using the 2021 NRF allocation has been used to manage increased areas of naturalised grassland across the county.

Amenity Depot Managers regularly work with local community groups to identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancements from wildflower meadows to tree planting. The Local Amenity Services team have supported the Friends of Ormiston Park to enhance the biodiversity of this important local greenspace. Friends of Ormiston were awarded a Green Flag Community Award in 2021, 2022 and 2023.



The Amenity Services team have also been working closely with Council Housing Assets colleagues to develop proposals to green paved/concreted areas around Council owned housing to benefit both people and wildlife, and support climate adaptation and resilience. Areas include walkways, pathways and general open space that could be grassed over with wildflower mixes, planters with pollinator friendly plants or food growing opportunities and tree planting. This project is currently underway.

In 2022, East Lothian Council worked with the East Lothian Lieutenancy to deliver the Queen's Green Canopy. This was a tree planting initiative to mark the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The aim of this initiative was to create a network of individual trees, avenues, copses and woodland in honour of the Queen's service to benefit people, wildlife and the climate. To further support tree planting across the County, the Council partnered with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust in 2023 to launch the [TreeTime scheme](#). This allows donors to directly support tree planting and management across the County. Over 18,213 native trees have been planted by East Lothian Council during this reporting period. This includes tree planting as part of the Queen's Green Canopy project, planting on East Lothian Council sites by the Countryside Rangers and the Tree Officer and community planting, for example in school grounds.

Planning Services

The Planning Service Development Management, in their role of determining planning applications. The Biodiversity Officer has been consulted on 250 planning applications during this reporting period, further providing recommendations for appropriately worded conditions and secure positive effects for biodiversity following the adoption of National Planning Framework 4. This includes the delivery of Biodiversity Enhancement Plans, in accordance with NatureScot's 'Developing with Nature Guidance' securing bird and bat boxes, hedgerow planting and the creation of hedgerow highways. Major developments have been supported to deliver significant enhancements for biodiversity, using DEFRA's Biodiversity Metric where appropriate to demonstrate quantifiable gains for biodiversity. The Biodiversity Officer has, for example, worked with SSE Renewables to secure seabird compensation as part of the Berwick Bank Offshore Wind development. ELC has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) to maintain a biological records database for East Lothian, providing information to support planning decisions and site management. TWIC further provide a weekly planning screening service to support the consideration of biodiversity within planning.



Local Biodiversity Sites were designated as part of the Local Development Plan, replacing the former Local Wildlife site system. In partnership with TWIC and the Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group, ELC has been developing a new monitoring methodology to take forward site assessments including reviewing site boundaries, habitat condition and presence/absence of priority species. Through a contractor, three of these sites were assessed in 2023. These sites play an essential role in our Nature Network, providing connectivity between designated sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

In response to the Climate Change Strategy, the [Climate Evolution Zone Supplementary Planning Guidance](#) has been produced. A multi-disciplinary team from East Lothian in partnership with Scottish Government, the Lothian Drainage Partnership, SEPA, Scottish Water & NatureScot prepared the ClimatEvolution Vision and Action Plan for the communities of Tranent, Prestonpans, Cockenzie, Port Seton, Longniddry and Macmerry. Theme 4 of the strategy is 'Greenspace and Biodiversity' with habitat networks, climate resilient planting and inclusion of blue-green infrastructure identified as priorities for the area.

Road Services

The Road Services team have been working to create Journey Hubs to encourage sustainable travel, create a sense of place and improve travel choices. An overarching principle within this is to green the grey, to integrate green infrastructure wherever possible to enhance biodiversity and deliver opportunities for play and learning. At the Brunton Hall pilot site, ELC worked with local environment group Fidra to include biodiversity features in the concept design including green roofs on bus stops and integrating rain garden and street trees with sustainable urban drainage. The lessons learned from this will be applied in future Journey Hubs as they expand across East Lothian.

Biodiversity enhancements and green infrastructure are included in the planning and development of active travel routes, the expansion of EV charging points and across Council car parks. For example, close working with the Countryside team on the [Cross East Lothian Active Free](#) way project has minimised the impact on biodiversity and identified opportunities for native planting and habitat creation along the route, including green verges with wildflowers, trees and hedges to contribute to the nature network.

Property & Capital Projects



Where required, ecological surveys have been undertaken on the Council's buildings and wider estates prior to development or restoration. These surveys provide information on protected species; habitats and vegetation; and the treatment and eradication of invasive species. Notable ecological surveys have been undertaken for the following projects:

- Preston Tower Restoration Project
- Herdmanflat Hospital redevelopment
- Haddington Railway Walk extension
- Cockenzie power station site redevelopment

Education

Environmental education is delivered in schools, supporting the Curriculum for Excellence. East Lothian schools have continually engaged with the Eco-Schools programme, though in 2021 the focus was on the recovery and nurture following the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic. The Countryside Rangers, Outdoor Learning and external partners support the delivery of environmental education and enhancement of school grounds. Thirteen primary schools have participated in the John Muir Award each year, and many of our schools have been awarded the Green Flag Award, recognising their achievements in ten areas including biodiversity.



SECTION 3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY

Please outline any steps your organisation has taken to incorporate measures to protect biodiversity into its wider policies, plans or strategies. This should include decision-making structures and staff and organisational roles and responsibilities.

Text Field	<p>The Biodiversity Officer and Graduate Intern – Climate Change provide advice on how to protect and enhance biodiversity to staff across a range of services, Elected Members and the local community. This includes Road Services, Amenity Services, Flooding, Housing, Environmental Health, Property, Planning Policy & Development Management.</p> <p>Biodiversity is further embedded within the following policies, plans and strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Recovery and Renewal Plan was approved in 2021. This set out eight key priorities which included the climate and ecological emergencies to support a green recovery from the pandemic. A multi-agency approach was taken to deliver this plan and the actions it contained. This Plan was closed in 2023, with ongoing actions incorporated into the 2022-27 Council Plan.• The Council Plan was adopted in 2022. One of the three overarching objectives in the Council Plan is to respond to the climate and ecological emergency, thus recognising the need for the Council to embed these twin emergencies in all of its strategic priorities to protect and enhance our environment. One of the key actions identified in the Plan is to work to deliver a Climate Forest, to maximise biodiversity and deliver Climate targets.• The Council adopted a Sustainable Procurement Policy in 2020 which was embedded within the Procurement Strategy 2023 – 2028. This includes a requirement to consider climate change adaptation and mitigation through procurement processes and support the Council to deliver opportunities to tackle the climate emergency. The procurement team work to deliver best value procurements alongside Community Benefits that provide added social, economic or environmental value to the local community in addition to the main contract in place. ‘Protecting and Improving Our Environment’ is one of six Community Benefit categories that ELC seek to deliver.• East Lothian played a key role in the development of the Regional Prosperity Framework Delivery Plan for the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region. The Regional Prosperity Framework (RPF), its
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Delivery Plan and Prospectus provide a vision for regional economic recovery post pandemic; resilience through the ongoing cost crisis; and a future programme of major projects and investment that can support inclusive green growth and a just transition to net zero. Four key programmes emerged from this framework, including green regeneration with an action to establish a Nature Recovery Plan and Project Fund to support cross-border Other Area Based Conservation Measures and net benefits for biodiversity.

- Nature Conservation and habitat connectivity are key considerations in land use planning and development. The East Lothian [Local Development Plan 2018](#) identified preferred areas for new development and included specific policies for the conservation of biodiversity. These include:
 - NH1: Protection of Internationally Designated Sites
 - NH2: Protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Geological Conservation Review Sites
 - NH3: Protection of Local Sites and Areas
 - NH4: European Protected Species
 - NH5: Biodiversity and Geodiversity Interests, including Nationally Protected Species
 - NH7: Protecting Soils
 - NH8: Trees and Development

The next Local Development Plan for East Lothian (LDP2) is in the early stages of preparation. This involves information gathering, research, and engaging with the public, key agencies, developers, landowners and other interested parties. The nature crisis is a central theme in the ongoing discussions.

- Biodiversity was further embedded in [Supplementary Planning Guidance](#) including the Countryside and Coast, Green Network Strategy, Special Landscape Areas, and Sustainable Urban Drainage.
- A [draft Tree and Woodland Strategy](#) has been produced, as required by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The overarching vision of the TWS is “Expanded and sustainably managed networks of woodland and trees across East Lothian contribute to addressing climate change, and provide healthy and resilient environment, nature recovery, a strong sustainable economy and enhanced quality of life for local communities”. The Strategy will help the Council address the climate and biodiversity crises and guide the delivery of the East Lothian Climate Forest. The draft Strategy was consulted on during Summer 2023 and has been subject to both Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Appraisal to consider impacts on biodiversity and ensure that no adverse impacts on European sites are anticipated. This strategy will go to full Council in 2024.



- Many of ELC's Service Plans incorporate biodiversity. The Service Plan for Sport, Countryside & Leisure, which includes the Biodiversity Officer, Countryside Ranger Service, Outdoor Learning and Amenity Services identifies work to be undertaken to address the climate and nature crisis.
- The Countryside Sites all have management plans in place with biodiversity conservation a central priority for all sites.
- Strategic Environmental Assessments and Integrated Impact Assessments have been undertaken to consider potential environmental impacts, including biodiversity, for Council plans and documents.

ELC declared a [Nature Emergency](#) on 31st October 2023 which significantly raised the profile of biodiversity across the Council. The motion proposed by Council Leader, Norman Hampshire, recognised that biodiversity is in decline and the impact that climate change is having on wildlife and nature.

The approved motion:

- Noted the body of evidence which outlines the alarming extent of the global nature and biodiversity crisis. Nature is in decline and urgent action must be taken to reverse this.
- Recognised the inherent value of nature, as well as its crucial importance as an integral part of culture and society, and for our health, wellbeing, and economy; this being demonstrated through placemaking, tourism, food, energy, water and air quality regulation, etc.
- Additionally, recognised that the nature and climate emergencies are intrinsically linked and that nature plays a key role in meeting climate targets, particularly for climate change adaptation and resilience.

The nature crisis is now embedded within the corporate risk register. This provides an overview of existing and planned measures to mitigate to risks associated with failed compliance with the statutory duties set out in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The risk register is updated on an annual basis.



SECTION 4: NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

How has your organisation integrated biodiversity into actions on the climate emergency such as through Nature based Solutions?

<p>Text Field</p>	<p><u>Climate Change Strategy</u></p> <p>East Lothian Council’s Climate Change Strategy 2020–2025 includes Outcome 6: ‘A Healthy and Resilient Natural Environment and the route to Carbon Neutral’ and Outcome 7: ‘East Lothian’s Communities are places encouraging a Low Carbon Lifestyle and are prepared for the effects of Climate Change’. Key priorities in the Climate Change Strategy include protecting and enhancing our natural environment and biodiversity, planning for new developments to include green networks, other green infrastructure and places for nature, and enhancing natural habitats and landscape features to promote and facilitate the adaptation of the natural environment.</p> <p>The Climate Change Planning & Monitoring Group (CCPMG) plays a critical role in driving and co-ordinating the work of East Lothian Council to meet their key objectives under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and ensuring compliance with the Council’s Climate Change Duty. All relevant Council services are represented in the CCPMG.</p> <p><u>Climate Adaptation</u></p> <p>Key Priority Area 2 in the Climate Change Strategy is ‘Climate Adaptation and the Natural Environment”. East Lothian has the most intense (number of visits and extent of designation) coast in Scotland. Adaptive management and working with natural processes and nature-based solutions have become increasingly important in our response to climate change, including supporting the natural development of dune systems, saltmarsh evolution and where appropriate in line with our Shoreline Management Plan adopting principles of planned retreat.</p> <p>In 2021, East Lothian Council proposed a 10-year plan to delivery tree planting and carbon sequestration actions through planting a ‘Climate Forest’ of at least 2 million trees across the Council area. The aim of this tree planting is to sequester over two million tonnes of CO2e over the next 40-50 years, as well as restore</p>
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habitats and enhance tree and woodland networks. As noted above, ongoing tree planting across the county has been progressing and all are contributing to the Climate Forest. The draft Tree and Woodland Strategy that was consulted on in Summer 2023 will support the ongoing delivery for the Climate Forest and identifies appropriate tree planting locations and climate resilient species.

In 2022, a Climate Emergency graduate Intern was employed to work closely with East Lothian Council's Countryside Services to identify opportunities for emissions reductions whilst undertaking their duties, but also to understand how climate change is impacting biodiversity in East Lothian. A key output from this post was a collection of case studies where climate change had impacted species and/or habitats and what mitigation and/or adaptation was applied (if applicable). Case studies included the impact of Storm Arwen woodlands and dry and hotter summers impacting wetland habitats. These case studies were informed by a series of interviews with stakeholders, opening up dialogue on the interlinked nature of the climate and ecological emergencies and identifying challenges and opportunities. The information gathered contributed to the 'Scotland Adapts: A Capability Framework for a Climate Ready Public Sector' and informed a workshop with representatives from across service areas.

Nature-based Solutions

The Green Network Working Group, comprising Officer's from Biodiversity, Countryside, Amenity Services, Landscape, Flooding and Planning oversee the implementation of the Green Networks Strategy and support the implementation of nature-based solutions in Council projects such as in the design of SuDS and surface water management.

The Council is progressing the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme after the 2015 feasibility study which determined that Musselburgh is at risk of flooding. Within all flood studies, an appraisal of the most suitable and sustainable set of actions to mitigate flood risk is undertaken. This appraisal includes computerised hydraulic modelling, which identifies the flood risk at different levels of risk called "return periods". Each flood study will follow SEPA's modelling guidance and include at least 3 scenarios that include an allowance for climate change (e.g. 1 in 200 years plus climate change flood risk). The Council has considered the best ways to incorporate natural flood management and nature-based solutions into the final scheme design, working with partners to consider and apply this at a catchment scale.



Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main climate change related challenges for biodiversity over the next three years?

Text Field	<p>The main climate change related challenges for biodiversity in East Lothian are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A changing climate is impacting the maintenance requirements for our parks and greenspaces. This has a cost implication as a longer growing season requires more management.• Increased frequency and strength of storms leading to increased erosion of our coastline, loss of habitat, pollution and littering.• Limited funding for technical work to inform nature restoration projects to adapt to a changing climate, and both capital and revenue funding challenges to implement and manage these projects thereafter. <p>The Council's Corporate Risk Register has included risks relating to the climate and nature emergencies. These include the unknown costs of the transformational change required to adapt to climate change; strategic risk of failing to respond to these emergencies and the associated public duty requirements; and the increased risk of flooding and coastal erosion in East Lothian. The Council has the following measures in place to address these challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flooding and drainage issues are considered when processing planning applications.• The Severe Weather Response Plan has been developed and ensures a coordinated and consistent multi-agency response across the county.• A Shoreline Management Plan has been produced, a National Flood Risk Management Strategy has been produced, and a Local Flood Risk Management Plan for the Forth Area has been published to meet the requirements of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 which includes specific actions to be discharged by the Council. The Council is further looking to deliver a Coastal Change Adaptation Plan in 2024.• Continue to seek external funding and partnership opportunities to undertake biodiversity project work
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SECTION 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Public Engagement

<p>Text Field</p>	<p>A core duty of the Ranger Service is to provide information to the general public on wildlife and countryside matters, in order to enhance enjoyment of the countryside, increase awareness and understanding of how important our natural heritage is and the need to conserve it for future generations. During this reporting period, ELCRS provided 87 school sessions, delivered 26 public events, and supported 61 community events. In total, they engaged over 4,500 individuals.</p> <p><u>Countryside Volunteers</u></p> <p>A noted in Section 2, volunteers play an essential role in supporting the delivery and monitoring of conservation tasks. ELC currently has 415 registered volunteers who undertake a range of tasks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical conservation tasks such as habitat creation and management • Biological surveying such as botanical surveys, bumblebee and butterfly transects, and bird surveys • Pony/Sheep Checking – animal welfare monitoring to support the conservation grazing <p>In 2023, ELCRS started two new volunteer groups, the Wild Out West group and the Longniddry/Gullane Volunteer Squad, to complement the five existing ‘Friends Of’ groups. ELCRS also lead a Junior Rangers programme for 11 – 16 years who undertake practical conservation tasks and survey work. Volunteers contribute over 10,000 hours annually to the work of the Countryside team.</p> <p><u>Outreach & Public Events</u></p> <p>The Countryside Rangers also provide a range of opportunities for public to get involved through public and private events, guided walks and other activities. The programme of events offers activities for adults and families from rock-pool rambles to bat walks and river dipping.</p>
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The Ranger Service work with local community groups and organisations to undertake practical conservation, awareness raising activities and monitoring, such as BioBlitz events. Examples of partners and community groups include:

- Scotland's Rural College
- Connect Women's Group
- Charles River Laboratories
- Green Team
- U3A
- Changes East Lothian
- Low Impact Living CIC
- NHS Lothian
- DadsWork SCIO

Outdoor Learning

Section 2 summarises the work of the Education service in embedding biodiversity within the Curriculum for Excellence. Both the Ranger Service and Outdoor Learning team provide educational sessions for schools and young people to inspire and educate pupils on nature, their local environment and responsible access within schools, in their local greenspaces and on countryside sites. The John Muir Award is offered to all P5 pupils, supported by the Ranger Service.

Communication

The Council Corporate Communications lead on promoting and publicising the positive conservation work and biodiversity enhancements that are underway across the county, informing both staff within the Council and the general public in a variety of ways. This includes:



- [The Council's website](#): provides information relating to biodiversity, locations to connect with nature and details on project work, such as the Nature Networks programme. This also includes ways people can be involved in supporting nature recovery.
- [The Council's Facebook page](#) and the [East Lothian Council Countryside Ranger's Facebook page](#): provides information and promotes projects undertaken by the Council and our partners. These pages are used to share stories and images of our wildlife and habitats, promote volunteering opportunities and share information on projects and events.
- [Mud in Your Eye newsletter](#): a newsletter written by ELCRS with articles on nature, access, countryside, and climate change.
- Regular columns in East Lothian Life and the [East Lothian Courier](#): these are written by a Countryside Ranger to highlight particular species or projects
- East Lothian Countryside Volunteers network: the Countryside team maintain a database of volunteers and supporters. They receive regular emails giving information and invitations to events and training courses. An annual 'Volly Jolly' is held to provide networking opportunities, talks and activities on biodiversity topics.
- School projects: Schools and pupils involved in projects will often communicate about these to parents/carers and the wider community through their own websites, blogs and newsletters
- Inform Green Corner: ELC's internal staff newsletter has a new 'Green Corner' section to create awareness and provide tools and ideas to support biodiversity and climate friendly behaviours
- Site interpretation: each countryside site has a noticeboard containing interpretation and information



Workforce development

Text Field	<p>Training activities have been undertaken to support the development of the workforce, particularly in relation to skills and capacity building relevant to biodiversity, nature, outdoor learning and community engagement.</p> <p>ELC strongly encourages all employees to undertake Climate Literacy training, which includes consideration of biodiversity. The Biodiversity Officer worked with the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer to develop a climate crisis e-learning module which includes a section on the nature crisis. This was made available on the Council's e-learning website in January 2023.</p> <p>Staff have attended the following training events and conferences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Park Manager's Forum (quarterly)• Beach Manager's Forum (annual)• APSE Parks and Greenspaces National Advisory Group• APSE Scotland Parks, Grounds, Street Services Advisory Group (quarterly)• Scottish Biodiversity Officer's Network (quarterly)• Scottish Countryside Ranger Association Ranger Rendezvous (annual)• Forth River's Trust Conference (April 2023)• RSPB Recreational Disturbance Conference (February 2023)• EIA Conference (October 2023) <p>Staff have further had training on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lichens• Biodiversity Net Gain• Nature Networks• Making space for nature in burial grounds
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Capital • Bats • Bumblebee ID • Northern Brown Argus • Eco-Schools CPD • Woodland creation <p>Countryside Rangers and the Outdoor Learning Service also provide Career-Long Professional Learning training courses and qualifications for both East Lothian Council and non-ELC staff. This includes the following courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Learning Outdoors • Teaching using the Natural Environment • Habitats for early years <p>These courses promote an understanding of biodiversity and the outdoor environment and support teachers to deliver learning. During this reporting period the Countryside Rangers have supported professional development of young people through hosting seven Kickstart Apprentices and a trainee Countryside Ranger over 2021-22. They also provide ad hoc work experience placements.</p>
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Identify any opportunities that are available to your staff to take part in practical actions

Text Field	<p>The Countryside Rangers and Amenity Services undertaken practical actions as a core part of their duties. The Countryside Rangers are members of the Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association and have participated in knowledge exchanges with neighbouring services, such as the Pentland Hills Regional Park. These sessions enabled each service to share best practice, experience different landscapes and habitats and build knowledge in practical conservation techniques.</p>
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SECTION 6: RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Describe any research activities that your organisation has undertaken to help develop understanding and awareness of biodiversity

Text Field	<p><u>Species & Habitat Monitoring</u></p> <p>The Council’s Ranger Service currently coordinates and assists with a wide range of species surveys and monitoring on its sites, including contributing to national recording schemes. The following monitoring is undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetland Bird Survey • Low Tide Wader Counts • Butterfly Transects • Bumblebee transects • Breeding Bird Survey • National Plant Monitoring Scheme • Eider nest counts • Kittiwake nest counts <p>The Countryside Team also contributed to the BSBI’s Plant Atlas 2020 project.</p> <p><u>Avian Influenza</u></p> <p>The Countryside Rangers, with support from the Environmental Health team have been collecting and recording birds affected by avian influenza. This data was submitted to NatureScot as part of the national monitoring scheme to monitor the spread and impact of Avian Influenza on bird populations.</p> <p><u>Local Biodiversity Sites</u></p>
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	<p>As noted in Section 2 above, the Planning Service have worked with TWIC and SWT to develop a new methodology to monitor the condition of our Local Biodiversity Sites. Three pilot sites were surveyed in 2023, with the intention to monitor all sites on a rolling basis from 2024 onwards.</p> <p><u>University Research Projects</u></p> <p>The Council actively seeks to work with universities to undertake research, providing topics and projects for students to study as part of their undergraduate or masters' dissertations. Research areas we have participated in include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Glasgow – the role of native ponies in conservation grazing (2021) • University of St Andrews – policies for managing deer in and around towns (2021) • University of Hull – British Carnivore Project (2022)
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What follow-up actions or monitoring have you undertaken to assess the impacts of the actions you have taken? How have you measured this? If you do not carry out any monitoring activities, please explain why.

<p>Text Field</p>	<p><u>Grassland Management</u></p> <p>Areas of naturalised grassland have been monitored by the Council's Ranger Service to understand the impact this change in management has had on species diversity. This is undertaken through a mix of walkover surveys, transects and quadrats.</p> <p><u>Grazing Scheme</u></p> <p>The conservation grazing schemes at Barns Ness, North Berwick Law and Traprain Law are monitored on an annual basis by Countryside staff and volunteers. Monitoring has been undertaken alongside the grazing project since 2012 to reveal changes to the site including diversity and/or habitat improvements. The methodology broadly follows the JNCC Common Standards Monitoring Guidance, as used by UK nature conservation organisations. This monitoring directly influences the grazing scheme, by identifying where</p>
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	<p>further action is required. The data from these surveys was also used to inform our successful Agri-Environment Climate Scheme funding application in 2022 to continue this grazing programme.</p>
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Does your monitoring show any significant trends or highlight any areas of concern?

Text Field	<p>Monitoring of the grazing programme has seen some fluctuations but the overall trend is positive, with all three grazed sites moving towards favourable condition.</p> <p>Single species plant monitoring has seen an increase in locally rare plant populations – this includes Bee Orchid and Maiden Pink.</p> <p>We have seen increases in certain butterfly species – particularly Holly Blue and Small Skipper. Wall Brown butterflies have been increasing in number every year since they were first recorded in East Lothian over 10 years ago. There has also been an increase in the number of sightings of Brimstone butterflies, though their distribution matches the known distribution of Alder Buckthorn (their caterpillar food plant) across the county.</p> <p>A long-term decline in wintering wading birds is evident at our sites – particularly at Levenhall Links, Aberlady Bay and John Muir Country Park, which are all designated as part of the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area for an assemblage of waterfowl and wading birds.</p>
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Have you added any data collected to the National Biodiversity Network or your Local Records Centre?

Text Field	<p>The East Lothian Countryside Team sends all data to The Wildlife Information Centre on an annual basis. During this reporting period, they have contributed over 18,500 records.</p>
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SECTION 7: BIODIVERSITY HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Describe your organisation's main achievements for biodiversity over the reporting period and what you are most proud of (this can include processes, plans, projects, partnerships, events and actions).

Text Field	<p>This report demonstrates the breadth of activities delivered by the Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity across East Lothian. The East Lothian Council Countryside Ranger Service plays a large role in raising awareness of biodiversity and managing our countryside estate for biodiversity and visitor enjoyment. Funding from the Better Places Fund in 2021 – 2023 provided additional support through Seasonal Rangers to support the delivery of conservation projects and undertake monitoring of our sites to increase the evidence base.</p> <p>Specific highlights during 2021 – 2023 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declaration of a Nature Emergency in 2023 and subsequent inclusion of the nature emergency on the Corporate Risk Register. This is an opportunity for East Lothian to further embed biodiversity into corporate and service plans, policies and opportunities and create a Biodiversity Duty Delivery Plan for all areas of East Lothian Council.• Completion of the Levenhall Links restoration.• Receiving funding from Greenspace Scotland to undertake our Nature Networks project. This enabled us to engage with the local community, and start developing and mapping our Nature Network, identifying opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of our parks and greenspaces.• The continued input from our conservation volunteers, supporting the work of the Countryside Rangers and Biodiversity Officer.• The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme funding award to support our conservation grazing scheme to 2027.• The contribution of over 18,500 records to The Wildlife Information Centre.
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- A return to environmental education and public events following a hiatus during the Covid pandemic. Funding awards from the Better Places Fund enabled this to go ahead through increased capacity within the Ranger Service.

Looking ahead, what do you think will be the main challenges over the next three years?

Text Field

Challenges moving forward:

- Capacity and resource to tackle the nature and climate emergencies, including delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy within the County and the effective delivery and monitoring of positive effects for biodiversity in line with NPF4
- Lack of baseline data to inform the development of ecologically meaningful Nature Networks
- Lack of revenue funding to secure long term management of biodiversity enhancements and maintain nature-rich greenspaces as the council's estate continues to grow
- Locating suitable space for food growing within communities
- Identifying and implementing appropriate habitat enhancements within areas of competing priorities
- The unprecedented funding gap currently facing the council. This means that resources will need to be directed to safeguarding frontline statutory services
- Maintaining and improving condition of designated sites