Fleet Town Council
Biodiversity Statement

Policy and Finance Approved:	December 2023
Last Reviewed:	October 2026
Due for Review:	October 2029

1. Purpose and Legislative Background

Fleet Town Council recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing the natural environment and the benefits that biodiversity provides to the local community, including supporting wildlife, improving green spaces, addressing climate change and contributing to the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Environment Act 2021 strengthened the biodiversity duty contained within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. As a public authority operating in England, Fleet Town Council must:

- consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration; and
- act to deliver those policies and achieve those objectives.

The Council will consider biodiversity as part of its relevant functions, including the management of Council-owned and managed land, buildings, open spaces, planning consultations, procurement and community engagement.

2. Council Commitment

Fleet Town Council is committed to conserving and enhancing biodiversity within the areas it manages and through the decisions and activities it undertakes.

The Council will seek to:

- protect and enhance existing habitats and biodiversity;
- identify opportunities to create new habitats and improve ecological connectivity;
- manage its land and open spaces in ways which support wildlife and biodiversity, where appropriate;
- consider biodiversity alongside other environmental, social and financial considerations when making decisions;
- work with partners, community organisations and residents to support local nature recovery; and
- raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and encourage positive action within the community.

The Council will take a proportionate and practical approach, recognising that biodiversity measures must take account of the purpose, use, accessibility, safety and maintenance requirements of its land and facilities.

This Statement complements the Council's Climate Change Policy by addressing the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment.

3. Planning and Development

Fleet Town Council is not the Local Planning Authority but has an important role as a statutory consultee and through its involvement in neighbourhood planning.

The Council will:

- consider biodiversity and opportunities for nature recovery when responding to relevant planning applications and planning policy consultations;
- have regard to the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain framework when considering relevant development proposals;
- support the protection and enhancement of existing habitats and locally important sites through its planning responses;
- seek to ensure that biodiversity considerations are appropriately reflected in the Fleet Neighbourhood Plan and other relevant planning work; and
- work with the Local Planning Authority and other relevant bodies, where appropriate, to support effective delivery of biodiversity objectives.

The Council will have regard to current national planning policy and guidance when considering Biodiversity Net Gain and will not seek to duplicate or conflict with the statutory framework.

4. Council Land and Open Spaces

The Council manages a range of parks, open spaces and other land which can provide important habitats for wildlife. Where appropriate, biodiversity opportunities will be considered as part of the development and review of individual Park Development Plans.

The Council will:

- manage its open spaces with appropriate consideration of biodiversity;
- protect and enhance locally important habitats and sites, including the Council's Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs);
- support appropriate habitat creation, restoration and enhancement;
- consider opportunities to establish or improve wildlife corridors and ecological connectivity;
- use ecological surveys, local environmental data and specialist advice where appropriate to inform land management decisions;
- consider the use of native and appropriate species in planting schemes;
- support measures which benefit pollinators, birds, insects and other wildlife;
- consider the timing and methods of maintenance works to minimise unnecessary disturbance to wildlife; and
- seek to use maintenance practices which minimise adverse impacts on biodiversity, where operationally appropriate.

Biodiversity objectives will be balanced with the Council's responsibilities for public access, recreation, sports provision, play areas, safety, amenity and effective management of its open spaces.

5. Trees, Planting and Habitat Management

Trees, hedgerows, shrubs, grassland, wildflower areas and other vegetation can provide important habitats and contribute to the character and environmental quality of Fleet.

The Council will consider biodiversity when managing existing trees and vegetation and when planning new planting or landscaping schemes.

Where appropriate, the Council will seek opportunities to:

- increase habitat diversity;
- improve the quality and resilience of existing planting;
- provide suitable areas for pollinators and other wildlife;
- retain suitable natural features and habitats; and
- incorporate biodiversity improvements into new or renewed landscaping schemes.

The Council's Tree Policy and other relevant open-space management arrangements will support this approach.

6. Buildings and Council Operations

The Council will consider opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the management, maintenance, development and improvement of its buildings and associated land.

Where appropriate, this may include:

- considering biodiversity when undertaking building and landscaping projects;
- reducing unnecessary disturbance to wildlife during maintenance and construction;
- considering opportunities for wildlife features such as bird or bat boxes where suitable;
- considering the impact of external lighting on wildlife;
- considering water use and pollution risks; and
- considering biodiversity requirements, where relevant and proportionate, when procuring works and services and managing contractors.

7. Local Nature Recovery and Partnerships

The Council will have regard to relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other applicable biodiversity, species conservation and protected site strategies when considering its functions and the management of land within its control.

The Council will work, where appropriate, with:

- Hart District Council and Hampshire County Council;
- Natural England and other relevant environmental organisations;
- local environmental and community groups;
- Friends groups and volunteers;
- neighbouring councils; and
- residents and local businesses.

The Council will seek to share information and good practice and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

8. Community Engagement and Awareness

The Council recognises that local residents, community groups, schools, businesses and landowners can all contribute to biodiversity and nature recovery.

The Council will seek to raise awareness through its communications and, where appropriate, support or participate in community initiatives which promote biodiversity and environmental improvement.

Where appropriate, the Council will consider opportunities for residents and community groups to become involved in biodiversity projects on Council land.

9. Funding and Resources

The Council will consider opportunities to secure external funding, grants and partnership contributions for projects which conserve or enhance biodiversity.

Biodiversity considerations will be taken into account alongside other relevant environmental, social, operational and financial considerations when determining priorities and allocating Council resources.

10. Decision Making and Review

Biodiversity considerations will be incorporated into relevant Council decision-making processes, policies, projects and service planning.

Where appropriate, reports to Council or its Committees will identify significant biodiversity impacts or opportunities arising from a proposal.

The Council will maintain a record of relevant biodiversity actions and initiatives to support monitoring and future reviews.

This Statement will be reviewed at least every five years, in accordance with the statutory biodiversity duty, and may be reviewed sooner where there are significant changes to legislation, national guidance, Council responsibilities or local environmental priorities.

The Council will use each review to reconsider the actions it can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity and to identify appropriate policies, objectives and actions for the future.