

Members' Library Service Request Form

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Originator	Jennifer Lothian
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Document Title	Tackling the Nature Emergency: Update on Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature

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Designation	Head of Infrastructure
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COMMITTEE:	Members' Library Service
MEETING DATE:	August 2025
BY:	Executive Director for Place
REPORT TITLE:	Tackling the Nature Emergency: Update on Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature
REPORT STATUS:	Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the second annual update report on progress with tackling the Nature Emergency, as requested through the Council's Declaration of Nature Emergency in October 2023.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the update on Tackling the Nature Emergency: East Lothian Council's Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature, August 2025, which is summarised below and set out at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Note that future reporting will be aligned with data collection and financial years and be provided in April each year.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The Council's Nature Emergency declaration also recognises the state of nature, its inherent value, and the crucial role its recovery and restoration will play in realising climate targets.

- 3.3 In August 2024 a report was taken to full Council (see links to Background Papers at section 8 below), setting out the alignment of existing Council strategies with the Nature Emergency declaration, and providing an update on the development of East Lothian's Biodiversity Action Plan and actions that had already been undertaken by the Council to tackle the nature crisis. Future reporting was approved by Council to be lodged in the Members' Library Service.
- 3.4 The report at Appendix 1 provides a summary update 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. The report covers the period from August 2024 to August 2025.
- 3.5 The Council has continued to deliver 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.
- 3.6 Details are provided in Appendix 1 of recent actions taken by the Council to protect and enhance biodiversity, by Countryside Services including the Countryside Ranger Service, Amenity Services, Planning Service, Roads Services and others.
- 3.7 Recent work to tackle the Nature Emergency includes:
- Wetland creation at Butterdean Wood and North Berwick Law to enhance habitats;
 - Grassland management at Traprain Law, and continuation of the conservation grazing scheme at Barns Ness, Traprain Law and North Berwick Law to enhance botanical diversity;
 - Partnership and collaboration with local groups and organisations on nature enhancement projects across the county;
 - Continuation and extension of the Nature Networks project across countryside sites as well as parks and amenity greenspaces in towns and villages, in cemetery sites, and on roundabouts and along roadside verges, to create and enhance areas for nature including wildflower meadows, pollinator planting and tree planting;
 - Continuation of the 'Greening the Grey' project in urban areas, to create green spaces in former hard-standing areas in Council Housing areas;
 - Active travel improvement projects that bring multiple benefits including greening and biodiversity enhancement, including along the Active Freeway in East Linton and Tynebank Road in Haddington, and development work for improvements to Cemetery Park in Prestonpans;
 - Establishment of the Lothian Esk Catchment Partnership (LECP) to help restore nature and address climate change in the Lothian Esk River catchment area. LECP comprises the Forth Rivers Trust, East

Lothian Council, Midlothian Council, NatureScot, SEPA, and Scottish Water. A key focus of the LECF will be working with landowners to implement nature-based farming practices and sustainable solutions.

- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 Recently approved strategies, including the Climate Change Strategy 2025–2030, approved in April 2025, and the Tree and Woodland Strategy for East Lothian, embed actions to tackle the nature emergency, and recognise the inherent value of nature and the crucial role its recovery and restoration will play in realising climate targets.
- 3.10 Forthcoming relevant strategies and action plans, including the updated East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan and East Lothian Open Space Strategy, both currently in development, will also align with the Nature Emergency declaration and incorporate actions to protect and enhance nature as central themes for delivery of actions.
- 3.11 The Council’s ‘Climate and Nature Emergency Group’ of officers from across Council service areas will continue to monitor and play an important role in driving and coordinating the work of the Council and our community partners to meet our climate and nature emergency objectives and duties.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report meets obligations set out in the Council’s approved declaration of Nature Emergency, to report on progress with aligning Council strategies with national and global biodiversity frameworks and objectives, and to provide an update on the development of East Lothian’s Biodiversity Action Plan.

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: There are no financial implications as a direct result of this Report.
- 5.2 Human Resources: None.
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None.
- 5.4 Risk: Actions to tackle the Nature Emergency are ongoing, working with our partner agencies, community groups, volunteers and other stakeholders, and we work with partners to draw down funding opportunities where possible. However, there is considerable competition for external funding sources and a risk that sufficient funding

for implementation may not be found for ongoing delivery of nature-based actions.

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

This report is an annual update on actions already undertaken over the past year in relation to the previously agreed Council declaration of Nature Emergency (October 2023).

7 APPENDICES

- 7.1 Appendix 1: Tackling the Nature Emergency: East Lothian Council's Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature, Update, August 2025.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 Tackling the Nature Emergency: Update on Actions to Protect and Enhance Nature: report to Council, August 2024:
https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/17330/east_lothian_council
- 8.2 The full update report is published in the Members' Library Service, Ref: 85/24, August 2024 Bulletin:
https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/17185/members_library_service

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

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Date	26 August 2025

Head of Service Approval

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Designation	Head of Infrastructure
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	Yes
Approval Date	29/8/25

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

Update, August 2025



1. 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 also stated that urgent action must be taken to reverse the decline in nature.

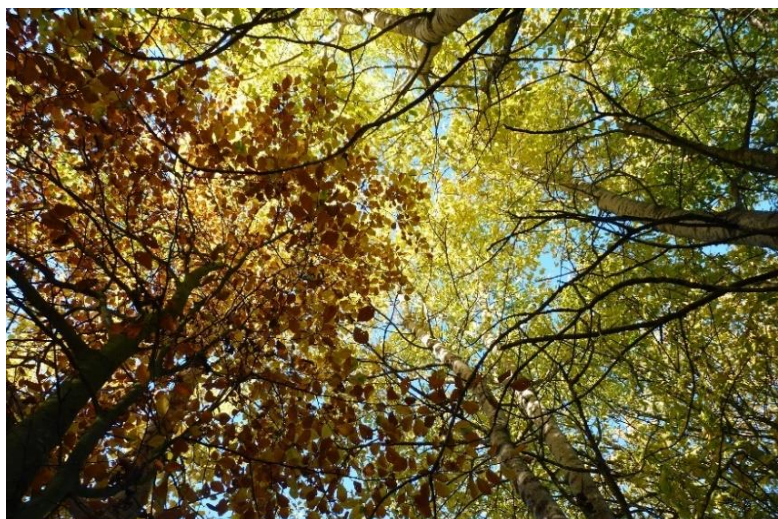
East Lothian Council's Nature Emergency declaration, akin to the Council declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, recognises the state of nature, its inherent value, and the crucial role its recovery and restoration will play in realising climate targets.

In its declaration of Nature Emergency, the Council requested a report to Full Council before the summer recess in 2024, 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 report can be viewed via the following link:

https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/17330/east_lothian_council (report 09).

A range of Council Service Areas, in particular Countryside Services including the Countryside Ranger Service, Amenity Services, Planning Service and Roads Services, 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.

The following report provides a summary of progress on the work undertaken over the last year (August 2024 to August 2025) to address the aspects of the Council's Nature Emergency declaration.



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

2. Summary of work undertaken to tackle the Nature Emergency

2.1 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;
- Roads 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.

The Council’s ‘Climate and Nature Emergency Group’ of officers, including senior managers, from across Council Service Areas, monitors, oversees and plays 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.

2.2 Actions Undertaken to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

Strategic Delivery

East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership and East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan

In autumn 2023, East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership was reconvened to commence the process of updating East Lothian’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). During 2024, stakeholders and members of the Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group collaborated to produce targets and actions for delivery to 2035. The LBAP is currently in draft and has been presented to East Lothian Council’s Climate and Nature Emergency Group, and consultation has taken place with the East Lothian Biodiversity Partnership. A public consultation on the Draft LBAP will be undertaken in 2025.

Tree and Woodland Strategy for East Lothian and East Lothian Climate Forest

The [Tree and Woodland Strategy for East Lothian](#) was approved by Council in May 2024. The strategy sets out a long-term vision and policies for trees and woodland, identifying how trees will

play a key role in addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies in East Lothian. The aim for biodiversity within the strategy is to work towards a more natural tree and woodland cover with thriving native flora and fauna, protecting, maintaining and connecting our distinctive native woodland types, and enhancing and connecting nature in our urban areas. Actions within the Tree and Woodland Strategy that are currently being delivered include planting an estimated 3433 trees across Countryside sites and Amenity sites across East Lothian during 2024-2025, helping to deliver East Lothian's Climate Forest.

Climate Change Strategy 2025–2030

East Lothian Council's updated [Climate Change Strategy 2025–2030](#) was adopted by Council in April 2025. The strategy sets out how East Lothian Council will respond to the climate emergency, adapt to climate change and continue reducing its emissions to work towards reaching Net Zero by 2045. The key theme of 'Place' sets out how through partnership working the Council will enhance nature and our built environment and includes the focus area 'Green and Blue Networks', recognising the importance of nature and biodiversity in our response to the climate emergency, and the importance of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure for climate resilience.

Mainstreaming Biodiversity

Corporate Risk Register

The Nature Emergency is now embedded within the Council's Corporate Risk Register. This provides an overview of existing and planned measures to mitigate risks associated with failed compliance with the statutory duties set out in the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and actions to tackle the Nature Emergency. The Risk Register is updated on an annual basis.

Actions to Protect and Enhance Biodiversity

The Countryside Service exists to protect East Lothian's biodiversity and promote sustainable management, responsible use and the access and enjoyment of the countryside and operates throughout the County. The Service delivers a number of Statutory Duties, together with a number of local and national targets.

The Service raises awareness of the importance of biodiversity, implementing the East Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan, assessing Local Biodiversity Sites, conserving wild plants and animals, and promoting land management that benefits wildlife.

Wetland creation at Butterdean and North Berwick Law

In autumn/winter of 2024 three ponds at North Berwick Law and three ponds at Butterdean Woods were created for the benefit of wildlife. These were designed to increase the areas of wetland habitat in these areas with a view to support a wider diversity of both amphibian and invertebrate species. The ponds were shaped within Butterdean Woods to help with water management while also providing wet woodland habitats which is a priority habitat in East Lothian.

Traprain Law grassland management

The management of gorse on countryside sites can be a delicate balance between retaining it as a habitat for several bird and invertebrate species and for the gorse encroaching on areas of sensitive

grasslands. At Traprain Law, there is the added factor to consider regarding the fire risk that gorse can pose to the integrity of the site. In winter of 2025, after consideration of these factors, 0.7ha of gorse was removed from the northwestern flank of the Law. The removal of the gorse will allow for areas of sensitive SSSI grassland and several protected lichen species to reestablish in the area.

Pollinator projects

Action for pollinators continues across the county following Buglife’s John Muir Pollinator Way. This is delivered through our Nature Networks in Parks and Greenspaces project, habitat creation across our Countryside Sites, utilising car parks for invertebrate bunds with wildflower mixes, restoring post-development sites such as the old caravan park at Barns Ness with invertebrate basking bunds and rockrose planting for priority species of Northern Brown Argus butterflies and moths.

A partnership project highlight was an orchid and rockrose planting project with BEAR Scotland, enhancing grassland on road verges on the A1 near Dunbar. This was achieved with rockrose plug planting and new cutting regime to promote orchid species. This project continues and we hope to expand the rockrose pollinator network in the future.



Seafield Pond, West Barns

In partnership with West Barns community, 300 broadleaf and conifer trees were planted to create a community native woodland; the goal is to plant 1400 trees. There will also be an ephemeral scrape created and change to grassland cutting regime to increase biodiversity on the west side of the pond, to support populations of invertebrates, birds and plant species.

‘TreeTime East Lothian’ Tree Planting

The Council has continued its partnership project with Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust on the [TreeTime East Lothian](#) tree planting scheme, launched in 2023. This enables donors to directly support tree planting and management across East Lothian, with ELGT working closely with the Council’s Tree Officer in Amenity Services to plant trees in our parks and urban greenspaces that contribute towards the East Lothian Climate Forest, and help to meet targets for increasing urban tree canopy cover in the Tree and Woodland Strategy for East Lothian.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

Management of Invasive Non-Native Species continues across East Lothian for plant species such as Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam, *Rosa rugosa*, pirri-pirri bur. In 2024, *Spartina anglica*, a salt tolerant invasive grass, was recorded across Tynninghame to Belhaven Bay. This species dominates estuaries and saltmarsh habitat, outcompeting other saltmarsh plants and, where it is left to spread, can result in tall, dominant stands, reducing the feeding and roosting areas for waders. 2024 saw an effort to monitor and tackle the spread of the species with mapping and trials of management techniques. This has continued through to 2025 and efforts are being monitored. Currently, the techniques are performing as expected on the species.

Conservation grazing scheme

2024-2025 represented the 12th year of the conservation grazing scheme at Barns Ness and Traprain Law, and the 11th season at North Berwick Law. Two of the sites received annual grazing by Exmoor Ponies, whilst the third site, Barns Ness, received its scheduled grazing by sheep during the winter, extended on a trial basis to North Berwick Law north-east paddock for a limited period. A fourth site within Aberlady Bay also received winter grazing.

At all localities, regular welfare checks of the animals were undertaken by countryside volunteers together with Countryside Rangers. Annual monitoring of bumblebee populations together with botanical surveys were also undertaken at these sites by volunteers, to indicate changes to the botanical structure and diversity at each location. It is proposed that after the 5th year of surveying, an assessment will be undertaken as to the relative benefits of the grazing scheme at each location, with modifications to this scheme being implemented as and where necessary. Members of the public were largely supportive of the presence of grazing animals on-site.

Delivery of Nature Networks East Lothian

Nature Network enhancements and connectivity

East Lothian's Countryside Service and Amenity Services continue to embed Nature Networks through their roles, responsibilities and projects, delivering actions prescribed through the [Nature Network Action Plan](#) generated through responses to the Nature Network public consultation delivered in 2023.



These actions include continuing to explore areas to transform traditional amenity grassland to more biodiverse naturalised grassland, sowing of wildflower meadows across public parks and greenspace, enhancing and expanding East Lothian's wetland network through pond creation, engaging in hedgerow workshops to help connect and improve condition of East Lothian's hedgerows and enhancing habitats within John Muir Pollinator Way.

Nature Networks in Parks and Greenspaces

Working in partnership with local community groups, including Friends of parks groups, In Bloom groups and other local organisations and volunteers, Amenity Services have continued to deliver

[Nature Network](#) enhancements within our parks and greenspaces, in line with our Action Plan in our Nature Networks in Parks and Greenspaces report.



Wildflower planting in Ormiston Park with Nature Networks East Lothian signage

Nature Network enhancements have been developed and created across East Lothian, particularly wildflower meadow areas and pollinator planting in parks and amenity greenspaces, often ‘re-wilding’ areas in suitable locations that were formerly closely-mown grass. Amenity Services’ Depot Managers across the county have led the delivery of this work with their local Amenity teams, working closely with Biodiversity team colleagues and local community groups. Delivered projects include:

- Wildflowers and pollinator planting on roundabouts and roadside verges across East Lothian;
- Edenhall park in Musselburgh: creation of extensive wildflower area with mown pathways;
- Nature Network enhancements in Winterfield Park in Dunbar, Polson Park in Tranent, Lodge Grounds in North Berwick, Ormiston Park and numerous other locations across East Lothian’s towns and villages, promoted with Nature Networks East Lothian signage on site;



Wildflower area in Polson Park, Tranent

- Sensory Trail in Lauderdale Park in Dunbar aimed at children and young people, within an area of trees and shrubs in the park, to complement the new play area and encourage children to play in and enjoy nature;
- Ongoing development of the community orchard at Forresters Park and the Pollinator Parklet at Lindores Drive in Tranent, with Tranent Wombles local community group.



Nature Network enhancements of wildflowers and naturalised grasses have also been created in some of our cemeteries, including in St Michael’s Churchyard at Inveresk Cemetery in Musselburgh, in suitable locations.



Nature Network in Ashfield Park, Dunbar

Nature Restoration (Natural Flood Management)

The Council has allocated funding in its budget for Nature Restoration - Natural Flood Management project delivery. For the current year 2025/26 this includes development of a nature restoration project which is underway in Lewisvale Park in Musselburgh to naturalise a wet area on the southern side of the park and enhance it for nature by creating a Bog Garden. This will deliver nature-based solutions and enhance the park for people and nature.

Strategic Projects

Cockenzie Levelling Up

The former Cockenzie Power Station site was acquired by East Lothian Council in 2018 to support its ambitions for promoting economic growth in the local area and creating employment opportunities. A significant amount of technical work has been taking place to fully understand and plan for the necessary infrastructure and environmental, economic and sustainability work that will be required

for this key site to be delivered. Biodiversity is a key consideration at this site, and the Biodiversity Officer is a key consultant in all stages of the project.

Establishment of the Lothian Esk Catchment Partnership

A new partnership has been formed to help restore nature and address climate change in the Lothian Esk River catchment area. The Lothian Esk Catchment Partnership (LECP) comprises the Forth Rivers Trust, East Lothian Council, Midlothian Council, NatureScot, SEPA, and Scottish Water. Together, the LECP aims to harness collective expertise, collaborate and co-ordinate resources to build resilience against climate change and biodiversity loss, creating a healthier, more sustainable future for the catchment's communities, wildlife, and habitats.

A key focus of the LECP will be working with landowners to implement nature-based farming practices and sustainable solutions. The creation of wetlands, leaky dams, and agroforestry could combat flooding, biodiversity loss, and water quality issues while delivering diversified income streams and enhanced resilience to climate change.

Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme

The Council is progressing the Musselburgh Flood Protection, which is projected to reduce flood risk to around 3000 properties at a 1 in 200 year (0.5%) plus climate change (2100) flood event.

In 2015, the Council commissioned a Flood Study to support the need to input into the National and Local Flood Risk Management Strategy being advanced under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 (the FRM); this determined that Musselburgh was at flood risk. In 2016, ELC approved the inclusion of a flood protection scheme within the Forth Estuary Local Flood Risk Management Plan.

Within any flood study undertaken or commissioned by ELC, 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 year plus climate change flood risk).

The Council has considered the best ways to incorporate natural flood management (NFM) and nature-based solutions (NbS) into the final scheme design, including a Lessons Learned report published in August 2023. In October 2023, a Council motion was agreed which stated that the Council would "encourage and support the formation of a new independent body or equivalent... for the River Esk catchment, which would be capable of advancing both NFM and NbS for the relevant local authorities [and others]". This has developed into the Lothian Esk Catchment Partnership.

The Scheme incorporates elements of sustainable flood risk management to the Outline Design presented in March 2024. This includes upland reservoir management, a debris catcher and a wetland park.

Start-up of Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) – continuing into 2026

Coastal erosion and natural processes shape our coastlines. Climate change and sea level rise will increase the impact of these changes but by preparing proactively, we can adapt and build resilience into our future plans. East Lothian Council are developing the CCAP to identify risks associated with coastal change and create a long-term plan for adapting and managing our coastline.

The CCAP will provide actions which will improve resilience and adaptability along the coast and within coastal communities and give the local authority a clear process for managing coastal assets and decision making.

Green Infrastructure Delivery Projects

'Greening the Grey' projects in Council Housing areas

This project, involving Amenity Services, Housing and Roads Services, creates green amenity greenspaces from formerly 'grey' areas of hard-standing slabs and concrete within Council Housing areas in various locations across East Lothian. To date, Greening the Grey projects have been delivered in Council Housing areas in North Berwick and West Barns with more to follow. The outcomes of the project are multi-functional, enhancing our communities by providing improved amenity value and place-making, nature network benefits for biodiversity, and reducing water run-off during periods of heavy rainfall.

The Greening the Grey example illustrated below is from Forth View in West Barns:

BEFORE:



AFTER:



BEFORE:



AFTER:



Active & Sustainable Travel improvements with green infrastructure delivery

Roads Services are underway with a range of active and sustainable travel projects around the county, which incorporate green network and biodiversity enhancements, including the following projects:

- [Cemetery Park, Prestonpans](#) – a collaboration between Active Travel, Amenity Services, Sports Development, Landscape and Connected Communities, to improve path connections while also undertaking biodiversity enhancement and landscape improvements. Designs complete and works to take place over the next few years. The proposals include introducing wildflower meadow, allowing some areas of grass to grow long, and planting a variety of trees, including fruit trees, to provide both varied amenity spaces and support wildlife. Rain gardens will help manage surface water while enhancing planting variety and biodiversity.
- [Active Freeway](#), East Linton – widened footway into carriageway to shared-use path and implemented new grass verge, to reduce traffic speeds and support walking and cycling.

BEFORE:



AFTER:



- [Tynebank Road, Haddington](#) – enhanced biodiversity alongside new path.
- [Markle Level crossing](#) – tree and hedge planting alongside new road.

Public Engagement and Workforce Development

East Lothian Council prides itself in creating partnerships to deliver and support meaningful biodiversity action. Some examples of partnership working over the past year include:

Partnership projects and engagement with East Lothian Climate Action Network and East Lothian Climate Hub

Over 2024-2025, East Lothian Council's Biodiversity team and Countryside Service have collaborated with East Lothian Climate Action Network and East Lothian Climate Hub to build partnership projects and support local biodiversity action. East Lothian Council attended East Lothian Climate Hub's Green Futures Festival promoting biodiversity and networking with local environmental organisations, individuals and businesses.

Nature Networks have been promoted through East Lothian Climate Hub, creating promotional media and supporting members in biodiversity projects. A highlight of this partnership was attending

People’s Trust for Endangered Species healthy hedgerow workshop exploring how pilot projects for hedgerow restoration can be delivered across the county. This workshop was completed with a hedge laying demonstration by our Countryside Ranger Service that was attended by members of the public and local landowners.

Collaboration and support for local community groups

Biodiversity action would not be achieved to the current extent if it was not for the vast network of community groups across East Lothian and we continue to support and collaborate with community efforts to deliver actions for nature. This includes action through In Bloom groups, local environment groups such as Sustaining Dunbar, Tranent Wombles, Pencaitland Wombles and Friends of the River Tyne.

In service collaboration and Working Groups

Following East Lothian Council’s Nature Emergency Declaration, biodiversity was mainstreamed into East Lothian Council’s Climate and Nature Emergency Group of officers from across Council Service Areas, delivering for both climate change and biodiversity. Services are encouraged to present and showcase projects and efforts that help deliver climate change and biodiversity targets within national and local strategies and policies.

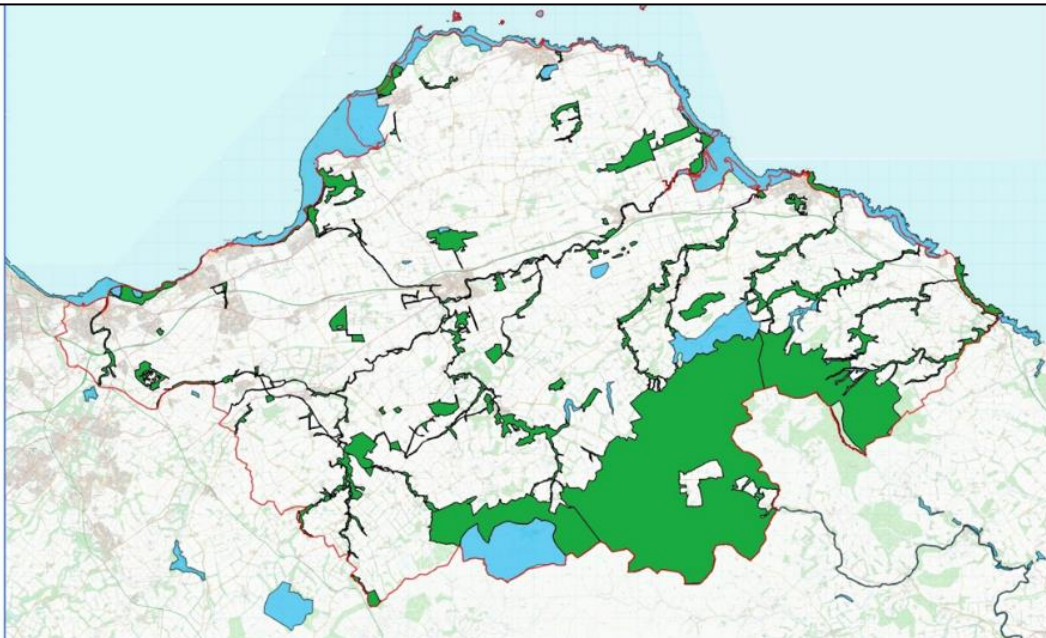
Research and Monitoring

East Lothian Council delivers a wide range of biodiversity recording and monitoring across the Local Authority area. These range from annual surveys to project specific research and monitoring. Examples of surveys delivered during 2024-2025 include:

Local Biodiversity Site Monitoring

Local Biodiversity Sites were designated as part of the Local Development Plan, replacing the former Local Wildlife site system. In partnership with the Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust Lothians Group, ELC developed a new monitoring methodology in 2023 to take forward site assessments including reviewing site boundaries, habitat condition and presence/absence of priority species.

The distribution of Local Biodiversity Sites (green) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (blue) across East Lothian.



Through a contractor, three of these sites were assessed in 2023. In 2024, ELC alongside an ecological consultant, trained volunteers on the established methodology. During the 2024 survey season 24 sites were completed. Volunteers will continue surveying Local Biodiversity Sites in 2025. These sites play an essential role in our Nature Network, providing connectivity between designated sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Grassland Monitoring

Many of East Lothian Council's Countryside Sites host important grassland habitats, notably at North Berwick Law, Traprain Law and Barns Ness, where annual vegetation surveys are delivered by East Lothian Council Countryside Rangers and East Lothian Countryside Volunteers. These grasslands are grazed by Exmoor ponies and sheep annually, to ensure diversity of grassland species. These surveys help us to monitor the condition of the grasslands while they undergo conservation grazing but also provide opportunities for our volunteers to practise and expand their skillset in botanical identification and recording.

Eider Monitoring

Common Eider ducks (*Somateria mollissima*) are a feature of the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area and have a nationally important population along East Lothian's coastline. Each year, the Countryside team and East Lothian Countryside Volunteers survey the number of males, females and ducklings along North Berwick's coastline, as the Leithies and Seacliff Carr Rocks have important breeding populations of Eiders. They also monitor disturbance incidents from recreational use and predation. In addition to volunteers surveying, there are two annual nest surveys completed by Countryside Service staff in May and June. These surveys include counting the number of females sitting on nests, helping to understand the productivity of breeding on the islands and to assess if disturbance impacts affect this.

iRecord

Historically, East Lothian Council's Countryside Rangers record sightings of species through their notebooks and diaries. An updated format to record important species sightings has been adopted to enable efficient recording and submission to national data schemes. This allows mapping of sighting locations to help advise management, future conservation projects and planning consultations.

Planning Update

The Council's Planning Service have refused a number of planning applications in order to protect biodiversity. In addition, it is now practice requiring the protection of certain species and to have proportionate biodiversity enhancement included within applications. In addition, the following has taken place over the past year:

- Submitted the Evidence Report for the next Local Development Plan (LDP2) to the Gateway. This is a necessary step in producing LDP2. This included the evidence on which the Council will base the Spatial Strategy, site selection and policies of the next LDP. This included a section on the Natural Environment, identifying the key issues for biodiversity related to planning, as well as identifying existing sources of background information on trends, species and habitat.

- Site assessment for sites submitted through the LDP2 Call for Sites process has started, with initial appraisal of whether the proposed site would conserve biodiversity and facilitate the creation of nature networks and improve ecological connectivity carried out. The site assessment also includes consideration of how the proposal would affect designated and non-designated habitat (trees, hedges, woodland, species rich grassland) and protected species.
- Objected to the Newlands Hill windfarm proposal, partly on the grounds of its potential to impact mountain hare.
- Continue to support the Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) through a service level agreement, and to screen every planning application received against their records of Notable Species, designated sites and valued habitat such as ancient woodland.
- Continued habitat and species monitoring of Local Biodiversity Sites to inform LDP2, with the Countryside Ranger Service and volunteers.

3. 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 Climate and Nature Emergency Group, representing Service Areas across the Council.

Contact: naturenetworks@eastlothian.gov.uk

August 2025

