

## Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2024/25

### Theme areas:

Education and Awareness theme.

Policies and Strategies theme.

Land Management theme

	Issue / Decision / Action required	Responsibility	Review Period	Due Date	Outputs	Status
1	Commit to the continuous development and engagement with partners and stakeholders in the delivery of landscape scale programmes.	<b>Environmental Services; Environment &amp; Design</b>	01/03/2024	ongoing	<p>Working with National Trust on Durham City Green Corridor Project and consulting other landowners in the area. Currently signing of Partnership Agreement, to give clarity of roles and relationships including land holding opportunities.</p> <p>Seascapes programme successfully ended December 2024 and council now engaged with legacy provisions, continuation of legacy board to oversee project commitments.</p> <p>Heritage Coast successful in being awarded £975k of NLHF Species Survival Fund and now appointed team of 3 to lead in restoration of grassland habitats from Blackhall to Noses Point.</p> <p>Skerne Wetlands Landscape Recovery (Great North Fen) is a key outcome of Brightwater project and central to legacy provisions being delivered following project wrap up in March 2025.</p>	Progressing
2	Development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy with the County Durham Partnership	<b>Environmental Services; Ecology</b>	01/03/2024	on-going	<p>Webpage active. First consultation process completed including landowner workshops. Regional; Ecological Records Centre (ERIC) is producing LNRS mapping. Schools engagement with CYPS and OASES completed. Sub-Groups have been working up the Priorities and Measures for the LNRS, most of the Priorities are complete and work on the Measures progressing, almost complete. Ongoing regional meetings between the 4 NE LNRS groupings and regular update meetings with Natural England are being undertaken.</p> <p>Completion deadline now pushed back to March 2025.</p> <p>First draft of the template for the Statement of Priorities complete (with Natural England for comment)</p> <p>First draft of National Character Area descriptions complete (with Natural England for comment)</p> <p>ERIC working on the models to determine connectivity / buffer zones around baseline priority areas. Two models being put forward for use.</p> <p>Meeting between Woodland Sub-Group and ERIC held in order that ERIC can produce draft opportunity mapping for discussion. Further meeting with sub-groups for other habitats to be confirmed.</p>	Progressing
3	Produce a Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), concentrating on delivery of biodiversity within urban and industrial developments.	<b>Environmental Services; Ecology &amp; Planning and Housing; Spatial Policy</b>	01/03/2024	01-Sep-23	<p>All relevant legislation and guidance now in place and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) now mandatory for major developments. Work has now been completed on draft Biodiversity SPD and agreed by Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> November. Second and final round of consultation going out till January 2025 and then looking at Spring 2025 for adoption.</p>	Progressing
4	Investigate a model that enables developer contributions for BNG to be delivered, where appropriate, on currently available Council land.	<b>Environmental Services; Ecology &amp; CPaL; Asset Strategy</b>	01/03/2024	01-Mar-24	<p>Ecology/Countryside and Clean and Green, working on a draft model for those sites which they have management responsibility for. A draft model and discussion document has been circulated by Ecology for decision by senior management in December '24 that highlights the key work areas needing to be addressed in order to fully develop a system to sell biodiversity units.</p> <p>Climate Change needs to be factored into BNG. Implementation of sites following identification.</p>	Progressing

5	Examine the need to develop or change systems and policies so that the system for identifying and allocating land for biodiversity purposes is optimised.	<b>CPaL; Asset Strategy</b>	01/03/2024		<p>Cross service Land Use Change Working Group now in operation to review land use change opportunities and identify and resolve any potential issues with proposed uses.</p> <p>Established with GIS team, a Land Use Change layer on the intramap which allow officers to review changes that have been agreed and are under consideration e.g. identification of BNG sites and tree planting sites and report to Corporate Property Board (February) which agreed in principle the development of model facilitating sale of BNG units: policies and systems to be developed to establish procedures to facilitate the sale of BNG units.</p> <p>Initial enquiries have been made to DCC project teams to begin to establish the scale of BNG units that may be required internally for upcoming projects.</p> <p>Property management liaising with IT to upload a layer which will identify all land use change proposal's agreed including BNG.</p>	Progressing
7	Examine the potential to include ecological impact implications alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and Council reports.	<b>Resources; Democratic Services</b>	01/03/2024	01/09/2023	<p>Democratic Services agreed to update reporting guidance and provide outline guidance on Ecological Emergency implications following briefings to Exec Support and Extended Management teams.</p> <p>Process is to be part of wider review of corporate implications in all decision-making reports.</p> <p>Aim for web posting and guidance for managers to be in place by Spring 2025.</p>	Progressing
9	Produce a strategy document to define the approach to biodiversity interventions on public open spaces managed by Clean & Green and identify constraints to delivery as the programme continues to be rolled out across the county.	<b>Environmental Services; Ecology &amp; Technical Services</b>	01/03/2024	01-Jun-23	<p>Production of a strategic green space document to define council approach to rolling out biodiversity enhancements of open space underway (as a Measure in the LNRS). Early work has been done on this action by Ecology and Clean &amp; Green, but no further work is proposed until LNRS is completed (to determine whether this action has a spatial element within the LNRS).</p>	Progressing
10	Engage with partners, especially Natural England, to assist in developing a strategic solution for Nutrient Neutrality. Investigate possibilities of delivering a strategic mitigation approach to NN on DCC land	<b>Housing and Development; Spatial Policy</b>	01/03/2024	ongoing	<p>Natural England (NE) delivering a mitigation scheme (based on land use change/selling credits to developers) in partnership with Durham Wildlife Trust. Round 4 of NE's credit bidding round was launched in February 2024.</p> <p>The role of DCC in delivering mitigation for either our own development or private development is being considered alongside delivery of BNG on DCC land – pending Corporate Property Board decision.</p> <p>Spatial Policy organised baseline surveys on CPaL owned land using grant funding to understand the potential to deliver Nutrient Neutrality mitigation and BNG. The assessments have been completed and checked by Ecology (September 2025) and the information provided to CPaL for consideration.</p> <p>Support funding acquired to buy credits on 3 sites, but all have issues and challenges such as illegal grazing. Land Use Change Group to assess these.</p>	Progressing
11	Undertake condition assessments of designated sites (i.e., Local Wildlife Sites) within the estate.	<b>Environmental Services; Countryside Service</b>	01/03/2024	Ongoing	<p>Countryside Team leading on identification of 20 LWS (Local Wildlife Sites) sites within the Countryside Estate, located previous citations and will look to carry out condition assessments against all 20 over the next few years. Having confirmed the 20 sites, we will carry out assessments reviewing current condition against original citation. This is currently ongoing, with target to review and assess 11 sites this year (2024). Sites have been assessed and the habitats found are broadly in accord with the habitats within the citation. Criteria for assessing whole LWS yet to be agreed at regional level through the LWS partnership (NE Councils plus third sector). Once agreed, we can assess against agreed criteria, aim: Spring (2025).</p> <p>Subject to Ecology Team resource being available to carry out full assessments during spring/summer 2025 and results reviewed, updated management prescriptions to deliver agreed outcomes aiming to be in place by Winter 2025. We will then balance available resource with requirements and prioritise accordingly.</p>	Progressing

12a	Run trials on reduced cutting regimes on amenity grassland with a view to reducing cutting and encouraging a greater floral diversity on sites where ceasing management or a single annual cut is not a viable option.	<b>Environmental Services; Clean &amp; Green Service</b>	01/03/2024	ongoing	Clean and Green Service now maintaining 45 areas of meadow and wildflowers across the county (excluding the countryside estate). No new areas are currently planned until the biodiversity strategy is in place for the service. When this is complete, a more strategic and outcome-based approach can be taken in the selection of new sites. This will also partner with the LNRS and BNG policies.	Progressing
12b	Run trials on non-herbicide use in conjunction with Councillors who have expressed an interest in this subject.	<b>Environmental Services; Clean &amp; Green Service</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	Trials undertaken in 23/24 and 24/25 on reducing herbicide use on open spaces in select wards around the county. The trials were a success with no complaints about weeds around obstacles. As part of MTFP 15 (subject to the financial settlement from central government), a reduction of herbicide use was agreed. As such the above approach will be undertaken around the county	Progressing
12c	Develop standard site signage to use when undertaking biodiversity interventions on public open space	<b>Environmental Services; Clean &amp; Green Service</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	Underway, Technical Support team leading – biodiversity management across the county being informed by BNG strategy and fledging LNRS strategies. No new biodiversity sites planned on amenity land until these two are published, signage will be postponed until then to ensure that it is inclusive of those priorities.  New study undertaken by Durham University around residents' perceptions of green space will be used to help how we communicate our biodiversity aims in the future including signage. The study is to be announced at January's ESCOSC meeting.	Progressing
13	Consolidate and build on current activity to ensure Council woodlands assets are managed and maintained through current project development with a view to robust legacy and renewal provisions being in place following existing projects	<b>Environmental Services; Environment &amp; Design</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	Legacy provisions now Durham Woodland Revival has ended. Woodland Management Plans in place. Prioritisation of 18-month extension to Durham Woodland Revival Project - Woodland Community Volunteers, to deliver community volunteering in woodland projects. North East Community Forest is progressing; expecting to plant 17.22 ha of new woodland from drawdown of approx.. £250k.(Previous year saw planting of 16.37 ha with £210k from NECF.	Progressing
14	Introduce and promote the Ecological Emergency within the CERP Marketing Plan under the theme Nature, Adaptation and Land. Determine the extent to which relevant articles relating to the Ecological Emergency can be hosted on the Climate Change website Investigate the potential to include an Ecological Emergency icon and relevant links within the Intranet page.	<b>Env Services; Net Zero team</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	Progressing opportunities for linkages between Climate and Ecological Emergencies through publicity, promotion and awareness raising e.g. Members CERP event included links to LNRS site development. Launch event for CERP3 was held on 17 <sup>th</sup> October 2024. Low Carbon Team identified elements that contribute to ecological emergency priorities.  Development of phase 2 of CERP website incorporating eco-emergency and habitat impacts. Now live. Needs to be linked to corporate County Durham website.	Progressing

15a	Identify ecological improvement opportunities for County Durham schools and settings through the Department for Education Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy	<b>Childrens &amp; Young People; Specialist Advice; Sustainability</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>In discussion with Ecology regarding schools and young people consultation on LNRS working with OASES.</p> <p>Outreach LNRS contract agreed with OASES, 47 schools (primary and secondary) to be engaged across county. Recruitment has begun with activity taking place summer and Autumn terms 2024 for targeted schools across the County.</p> <p>Initial feedback highlighting some disconnect between pupils and their understanding of nature/ species/ habitats. Further consultation will take place when the draft strategy is produced.</p> <p>Working with OASES, an LNRS consultation target of forty-seven schools has now been agreed. 36 schools involved to date.</p>	Progressing
15b	Monitor available funding opportunities with a view to taking advantage of any new funding streams that become available.	<b>Childrens &amp; Young People; Specialist Advice; Sustainability</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>Biodiversity improvement grants announced Up to £10k per setting, to be spent on biodiversity improvements and outdoor learning equipment. All eligible schools have been contacted by CYPS lead and RHS supporting bids.</p> <p>Approx 40 schools taking up funding, progress being monitored and reviewed with further support offered to increase uptake and encourage interest. Two network sessions have been held to encourage schools to apply.</p> <p>Teacher sessions with eligible schools completed with lead RHS Officers, with further engagement with RHS team. Awaiting final take up numbers.</p> <p>Awaiting new round of funding to be announced. Eligible schools that didn't apply can apply again for the £10k and successful schools from first round can apply for an additional £2k for future work. Decision to be made soon on whether additional schools will be added to eligible list from Department Further Education.</p>	Progressing
16	Corporate Environmental Statement – to be revised and approved by Cabinet. Investors in Env Green Awards	<b>Environmental Services; Environment &amp; Design</b>	01/04/2024	on-going	<p>Reference to Ecological Emergency actions starting to be referred to as national measure through the 'Investors in the Environment' (IiE) audit process.</p> <p>Ecological Emergency now integral strand of corporate Environmental Statement as agreed by Net Zero Board.</p> <p>September: 2024 Audit completed with retention of top level of accreditation (green standard) achieved.</p>	Progressing
17	Delivery of Park and Countryside Awareness (new investment)	<b>Environmental Services; Countryside Service</b>	01/04/2024	ongoing	<p>Active promotion of volunteering is being undertaken through a new comms plan, with volunteer numbers still rising, particularly from corporate volunteering, includes uptake from Amazon, Northumbrian Water, Home Office, Siemens, and Northern Power Grid.</p> <p>The volunteer guided walks programme completed: 26 walks held to end of August, with new autumn/winter season of walks now in progress. Community engagement work prioritised around Shotton and NCN1, e.g. regular community clean ups and targeted projects – including with Shotton Youth Group, Shotton Primary School, and Shotton Cree Group (older members of the community).</p> <p>Waldridge Fell targeted activities with Dog's Trust, fire service and community to tackle anti-social behaviour, activities spanning butterfly counts, bioblitz events and local poetry events.</p> <p>Work continuing with Durham City Youth Project and Durham Action Against Crime at Pity Me and Wharton Park.</p> <p>Summer photography competition held for children and young people across the countryside estate until September. X2 temp posts now extended to April 2026, with a potential to be permanent subject to further budget discussions.</p> <p>Programme delivery; recently secured NWL funding for wetland improvements at Ferryhill Carrs. Volunteering provision continues to be strong with 3385 hours delivered over Q2 = 140 vols signed up.</p> <p>Building on legacy of env project working with Sedgefield Community College for a whole year with yr7 SEND group. Associated with LNRS work, continued work with several schools delivering workshops around climate change, sustainability and environmental conservation. Aligned with this are student surveys assessing how much they understand about the environment. School workshops continue to be popular with most sessions booked into the new year.</p>	Progressing

19	Another visit of overview and scrutiny next year - DC.	<b>Environmental Services; Countryside Service</b>	01.03.24		<p>Visit carried out at Hardwick Park for ESCOSC saw myriad of ways to manage more formal areas for the benefit of biodiversity in more formal settings. Visit, presentations and follow-up meeting was well received; including letter of support by committee for the retention of the P&amp;C temporary staff.</p> <p>Next presentation is 16<sup>th</sup> January with Countryside and Tech Services leads to co-present; follow-up review of work since last report - no site visits proposed.</p>	Progressing
20	State of Nature report as a valuable learning tool.	<b>Childrens &amp; Young People ; Specialist Advice; Sustainability (R Hurst)</b>	01.03.24		Useful learning tool. Aim to ensure any new information is considered. Already responding as far as we are able.	Progressing