

Report Title:	Publication of the first statutory Biodiversity Report (2023 -2025)		
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	18 th March 2026
Report of:	Forward Planning	Cabinet Portfolio:	Planning
Cabinet Lead Member:	Councillor A Barnes	Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Integrated Impact Assessment:	Required:	Yes	Attached: Yes
Contact Officer:	Anne Storah/ Nat Davies	Telephone:	01706 252418/ 252415
Email:	annestorah@rossendalebc.gov.uk / nathaeledavies@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report requests approval to publish the first statutory Biodiversity Report by 25 March 2026, as required by Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021 which introduces the publication of mandatory Biodiversity Reports.
- 1.2 The Forward Planning team has worked with the Council's Green Spaces, Economic Development and the Communities teams, in drafting this Biodiversity Report.
- 1.3 The Biodiversity Report considers the following:
 - actions undertaken by the authority between January 2023 and December 2025 to conserve and enhance biodiversity
 - actions planned the next 5 years to further conserve and enhance biodiversity (2026-30)
 - actions to comply with the mandatory biodiversity net gain framework in planning
 - biodiversity gains expected from biodiversity gain plans approved by the local planning authority during the monitoring period
 - plans to continue complying with the biodiversity net gain framework for the next 5 years

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

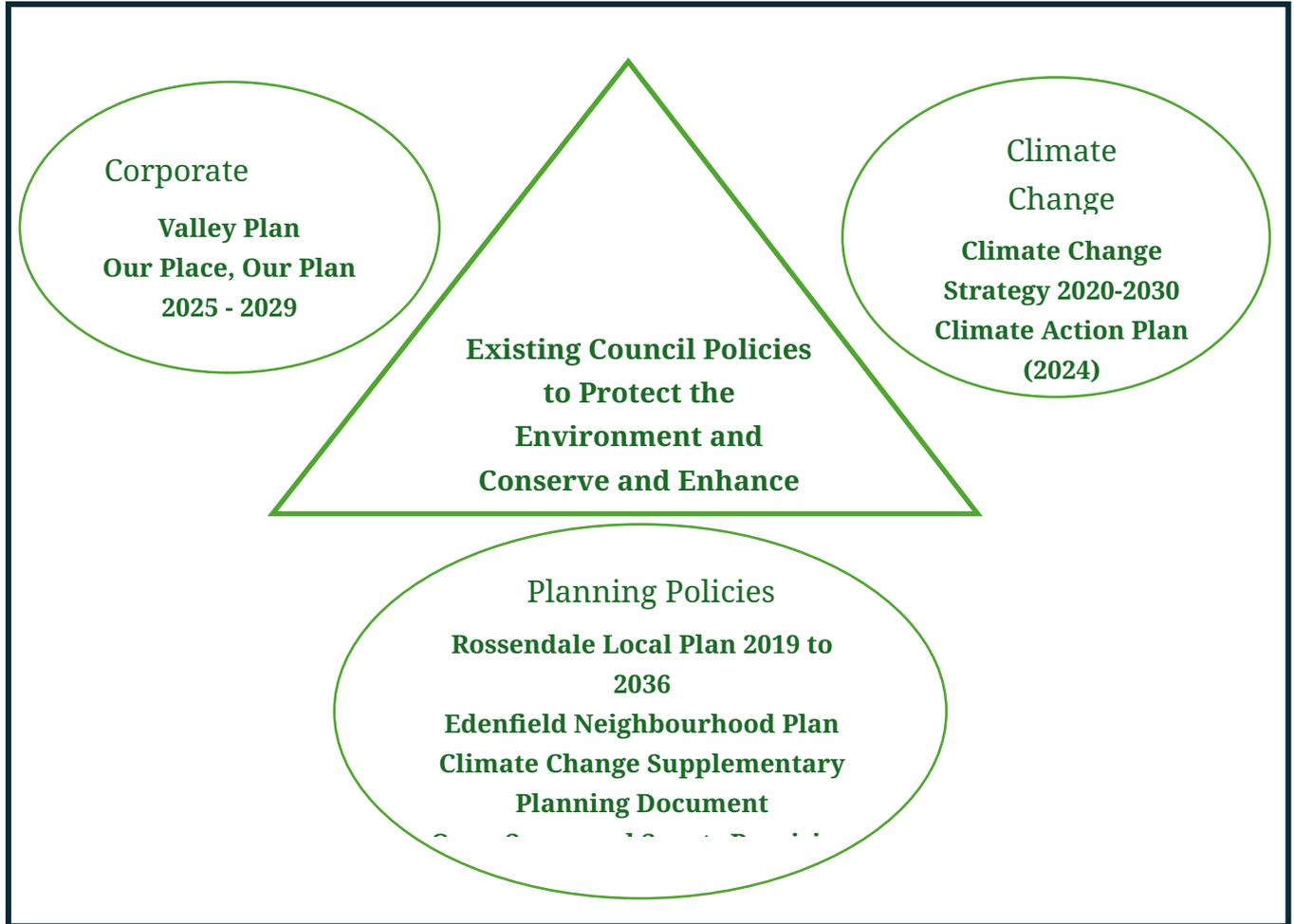
- 2.1 Note the content of the Biodiversity Report 2023 -2025 and agree for its publication by 25 March 2026.

2.2 Delegate minor amendments to the report to the Head of Planning and Building Control.

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 The [Environment Act 2021](#) places new duties on public authorities in England in regard to nature recovery and biodiversity. These duties include:
- the management of biodiversity net gain in planning
 - the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity by setting policies, objectives and actions and reporting on those actions regularly
 - the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies by responsible authorities.
- 3.2 Specifically, Section 102 of the Act sets out the ‘general biodiversity objective’ for public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the exercise of their functions. This means from time to time they must consider what action they can take to progress the general biodiversity objective, create relevant policies and objectives as necessary and undertake actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Clause 1C sets out that the first considerations must be completed within one year from the day on which the Section 102 came into force (1st January 2023).
- 3.3 To comply with Section 102 of the Act, an officer-led Biodiversity Steering Group was established to discuss actions and prepare the first consideration report. This was published on the Council’s website in January 2024 ([First-consideration-report-on-the-biodiversity-duty](#)).
- 3.4 Section 103 of the Act introduces the publication of mandatory Biodiversity Reports. These reports must include the following information:
- a summary of the actions undertaken during the period of the report
 - a summary of actions the Council will undertake to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next 5 years
 - any other information the Council considers important to include.
- 3.5 For local planning authorities, the Biodiversity Report must also include:
- a summary of the actions taken by the Council to comply with the mandatory biodiversity gain framework over the period covered by the report,
 - information about any biodiversity gains resulting or expected to result from biodiversity gain plans approved by the authority during that period, and
 - a summary of the authority’s plans for carrying out those functions over the 5-year period following the period covered by the report.
- 3.6 The Biodiversity Report should cover a period of less than 3 years from the date the Council became subject to the biodiversity duty. This biodiversity report monitors actions between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2025. It must be published within 12 weeks from the end of the monitoring period, so by 25th March 2026.
- 3.7 The Biodiversity Report has been prepared using a template provided by DEFRA (Department for Food, Environment & Rural Affairs). It includes 3 mandatory sections (Section 1 to 3) and 1 out of 7 optional sections (Section 4):
- Section 1: Rossendale Borough Council Priorities, Objectives and Actions
 - Section 2: Rossendale Borough Council Future Actions
 - Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain Information
 - Section 4: Information About Rossendale Borough Council

3.8 **SECTION 1** outlines the Council’s existing policies to improve the Borough’s environment and to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This is summarised in the figure below:



3.9 It reports on the actions carried out by the Council between January 2023 and December 2025. This is split between a summary of the actions undertaken following the publication of the First Consideration Report in January 2024 (in Appendix A of the report) and additional information on activities undertaken since January 2023 (in the main body of the report).

- 3.10 Some of the actions undertaken following the First Consideration report include:
- Supporting Lancashire County Council in preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
 - Improvements to parks
 - Woodland and tree management
 - Invasive non-native species management
 - Sharing information contained in the Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Study
 - Organising meetings of the Biodiversity Steering Group.

- 3.11 Additional information is then provided on the following topics:
- **Land and Estate Management**
 - Green Spaces Team projects such as wildflower meadow trails, Japanese Knotweed management, management of trees affected by Ash dieback, tree planting as part of the Rossendale Forest project, parks improvements.
 - Property Services team project including working in partnership with Lancashire County Council on site affected by the Larch disease and investigating site opportunities for biodiversity improvements.
 - **Planning and Development** – securing biodiversity net gains ahead of the mandatory framework using Local Plan policies, commissioning and managing a Biodiversity Net Gain feasibility study, supporting Lancashire County Council in preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- **Raising Awareness** internally and externally – organising Biodiversity Steering Group meetings and advertising a workshop from the Irwell Catchment Partnership on Green Finance Opportunities for Farmers.

3.12 **SECTION 2** then outlines how the Council is planning to meet its biodiversity duty in the next 5 years (2026 to 2030). The future actions have been divided in 4 categories:

- Planning, Development and Economic Regeneration – actions specific to the BNG approach in planning are outlined in Section 3, projects from the Economic Regeneration such as the Rawtenstall Masterplan’s (including one of its aims to reconnect the town with nature) and the Higher Deardengate public realm works in Haslingden aiming to deliver nature alleyways and rain gardens this year have been highlighted
- Land and Estate Management – securing funds for park improvements, continuing woodland and tree management, further investigating opportunities for biodiversity enhancement on Council owned land such as at Staghills Wood and Cribden Moor
- Raising Awareness Internally and Externally – merging the Biodiversity Steering Group with the Climate Change Action group, supporting the work of the Irwell Catchment Partnership and seeking collaborations with other organisation on environmental projects
- Monitoring – continuing the monitoring of actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, preparing Authority Monitoring reports to track progress of local plan policies (including the environmental and biodiversity enhancement policies)

3.13 **SECTION 3** of the report relates to information on the Biodiversity Net Gain approach in planning. Here the biodiversity report summarises:

- the actions carried out to meet BNG obligations – it is estimated that 16 out of 497 (3%) permissions granted between 12 February 2024 and 31 December 2025 were subject to mandatory BNG. This is because the majority of applications submitted are exempt from BNG (e.g. householder applications). Biodiversity enhancement secured via planning conditions on these 16 planning permissions are expected to be delivered on-site or as a combination of on-site and off-site gains.
- details of BNG resulting or expected to result from biodiversity gain plans approved – so far only one biodiversity gain plan has been approved in the monitoring period, The development is expected to deliver approximately: a 10% net gain in area habitats units, a 46% net gain in hedgerow units and 10% net gain in river units.
- how we plan to meet the BNG obligations in the next 5 years – procuring a software to assist with the monitoring of BNG delivery, keeping up-to-date with expected changes in legislation and guidance, considering the published LNRS to inform decisions on planning applications and to guide local plan policies and site allocations

3.14 Finally, **SECTION 4**, refers to the First Consideration Report for information on Rossendale Borough Council and how its activities can affect biodiversity.

SUMMARY

3.15 The Environment Act in 2021 introduced the strengthened biodiversity duty for all public bodies in England to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The first consideration of the actions that the Council needed to undertake for biodiversity was completed as required by 1 January 2024. The Council is now publishing its first Biodiversity Report, which reports on the actions it is undertaking that will help to improve the environment. All non-exempt developments that require planning permission must achieve a 10% net gain for biodiversity and implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is also recorded in the Biodiversity Report.

4. RISK

4.1 The Biodiversity Report is statutory, introduced by Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021. It must include a set of mandatory information and be published within 12 weeks from the end date of the reporting period (in this case 31 December 2025). There is a risk of non-compliance with existing legislation if the report does not contain the mandatory information or is not published within the timeline.

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

5.1 There are no implications to this report.

6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

6.1 The Council's first biodiversity report has been drafted to include the required information set out in Section 40A of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 amended by the Environment Act 2021. It covers a period of less than 3 years from the date the Council became subject to the biodiversity duty (1st January 2023 to 31st December 2025) and is intended to be published within 12 weeks from the end of the monitoring period in accordance with subclause 6 of Section 40A.

7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No implications have been identified for any protected or specific groups.

8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Biodiversity Report 2023-2025 is a statutory report which shows how the Council is meeting its Biodiversity Duty. It has links to a number of other documents including:

- the Environmental Improvement Plan (DEFRA, 2025)
- the Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2026)
- the Valley Plan 2025 to 2029
- the Rossendale Local Plan 2019 to 2036
- the Climate Change Strategy 2020 to 2030 and Action Plan (2024).

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no implications at this stage. The second biodiversity report must be published within five years and at this point it might be published by the new unitary authority.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Draft Biodiversity Report 2023 – 2025 (please see attached)

10.2 First Consideration Report (2024): [First-consideration-report-on-the-biodiversity-duty](#)



Biodiversity Report

2023-2025

March 2026



A High Quality Environment

Contents

Section 1: Rossendale Borough Council Policies, Objectives and Actions.....	3
1.1 Policies and Objectives.....	3
1.1.1 Corporate Plan Policies and Objectives.....	3
1.1.2 Climate Change Policies and Objectives.....	3
1.1.3 Planning Policies.....	4
1.2 Actions.....	7
1.2.1 Summary of Actions Undertaken Identified in the First Considerations Report since January 2024.....	7
1.2.2 Additional Information on Actions Carried Out Between January 2023 and December 2025.....	7
Section 2: Rossendale Borough Council Future Actions.....	15
Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain Information.....	18
Section 4: Information About Rossendale Borough Council.....	19
Appendix A – Monitoring the Actions Identified in the First Considerations Report.....	20

Summary

This is Rossendale Borough Council’s First Biodiversity Report. As required by the Environment Act of 2021, this Report considers:

- actions undertaken by Rossendale Borough Council between January 2023 and December 2025 to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- actions planned in the next 5 years to further conserve and enhance biodiversity (2026 to 2030);
- actions undertaken to comply with the mandatory biodiversity net gain framework in planning;
- biodiversity gains expected from biodiversity gain plans approved by the local planning authority during the monitoring period; and
- plans to continue complying with the biodiversity net gain framework for the next 5 years

Responsible Service	Forward Planning	Version/Status	Version 3
Responsible Author	Forward Planning	Date Agreed/ Agreed At	
Date last Amended	03.03.2026	Due for Review	March 2031

Rossendale Borough Council is committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion to eliminate unlawful discrimination. To support this other format of this document are available upon request. Please contact PeopleandPolicy@rossendalebc.gov.uk.

Section 1: Rossendale Borough Council Policies, Objectives and Actions

1.1 Policies and Objectives

1.1.1 Corporate Plan Policies and Objectives

Rossendale Borough Council's Corporate Plan, the Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan 2025-2029

This plan¹ aims:

“To have a thriving economy, built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life chances of all those living and working in our borough.”

Providing a high quality environment is one of the Council's four priorities.



Figure 1 - Valley Plan 2025-29 Key Priorities

The Council is committed to protect and enhance Rossendale's green spaces and Pennine landscapes to create a greener, healthier and more sustainable borough.

1.1.2 Climate Change Policies and Objectives

Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

Rossendale Borough Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' in September 2019 and pledged to take action. The Strategy² seeks to promote energy efficiency consumption, sustainable transport

¹ Valley Plan – Our Place, Our Plan 2025 -2029. Available to view at:
<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/19111/valley-plan-2->

² Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030. Available to view at:
https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/16648/rossendale_council_climate_change_strategy

options, focus on waste and the wider environment (including enhancing biodiversity and increasing tree coverage) and work with partners to achieve its goals.

The Climate Change Action Plan revised in July 2024 includes the following actions for biodiversity:

- Implement the Biodiversity Net Gain approach in planning;
- Explore opportunities for the Council to be a biodiversity and carbon offset provider on Council owned land
- Increase tree cover of Rossendale Forest by 2 hectares per year



Figure 2 - Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030

1.1.3 Planning Policies

Rossendale Local Plan 2019 – 2036

The Rossendale Local Plan³ designates land for development and areas that should be protected for community uses, their environmental or heritage value. It also set out policies for how development should look like and how it should fit with its surroundings.

Chapter 4 of the Local Plan focusses on the environment, Strategic Policy ENV1: High Quality Development in the Borough aims to:

- Protect existing landscape features and natural assets;
- Seek no adverse impact to the natural environment, biodiversity and green infrastructure unless suitable mitigation measures are proposed and the Council will seek biodiversity net gain consistent with the current national policy;
- Ensure designs are adaptable to climate change, incorporate energy efficiency principles and adopt principles of sustainable construction including Sustainable Drainage Systems

³ Rossendale Local Plan (2019 to 2036). Available to view at:

<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/17076/rossendale-local-plan-2019-to-2036-written-statement>

Policy ENV4: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Ecological networks introduces the sequential approach to development to avoid harm and where possible enhance biodiversity, and where not possible, to provide appropriate mitigation and, as a last resort, on and off-site compensatory measures to offset the impact of development. It makes clear that “*all development proposals should seek to protect and enhance biodiversity, and will be requested to quantify any net gains*”.

The Policies Map identifies sites of importance for biodiversity including:

- 4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Lower Red Lees Pasture; Lee Quarry; Hodge Clough and the West Pennine Moors) of national importance
- 1 Local Nature Reserve (Healey Dell)
- 56 Biological Heritage Sites of county importance
- 8 Local Geodiversity Sites of county importance
- 34 Important Wildlife Sites of district importance

The Policies Map designates green and blue infrastructure. Green infrastructure includes woodland and grassland ecological networks as well as ‘Greenland sites’ (identified in previous Local Plans). Blue infrastructure comprises ditches, streams, rivers, ponds, lodges and lakes.

Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure Networks encourages new developments to:

- Retain and replace the function and connectivity of the green infrastructure (including the blue infrastructure)
- Provide new or enhance existing green infrastructure
- Avoid any unacceptable impact on amenity, surface water or nature conservation

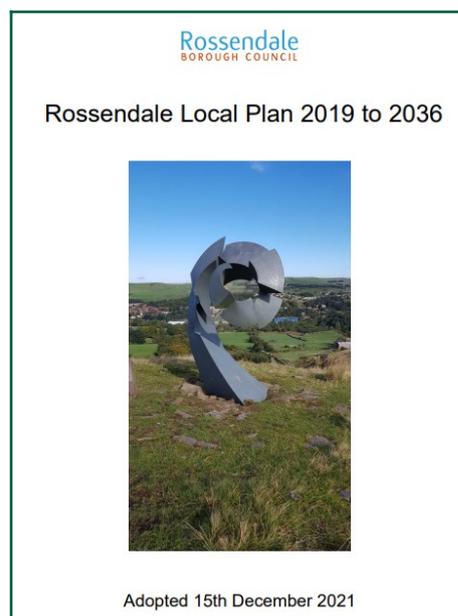


Figure 3 - Rossendale Local Plan 2019 to 2036

Edenfield Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan for Edenfield⁴ was made in April 2025 following a local referendum. It introduces Local Green Spaces designations and sets out how development should look like in the Edenfield Neighbourhood Area.

Its Policy D1 (Design and amenity standards and village character) sets out that developments will be supported if they include “landscape design and green infrastructure that contribute to a sustainable sense of place, such as wild areas for outdoor play, shelters, biodiversity buffers and wildlife corridors, and which softens the impact of the built form and is reflective of distinctive local landscape features”.

Policy NE3 (Development and landscape and topography) highlights that development will be expected to provide for biodiversity net gain in line with national policies. It reiterates the legislation requirements to demonstrate a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain as mandated by the Environment Act 2021.

Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document

The Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document⁵ adopted in December 2022 seeks to:

- Reduce the dominance of fossil-fuelled vehicles via encouraging sustainable transport and active forms of travel
- Improve energy efficiency of existing and new properties and promote the provision and use of renewable energy
- Ensure development is resilient to current and future flood risk considering the effects of Climate Change
- Encourage the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and the green infrastructure in new developments

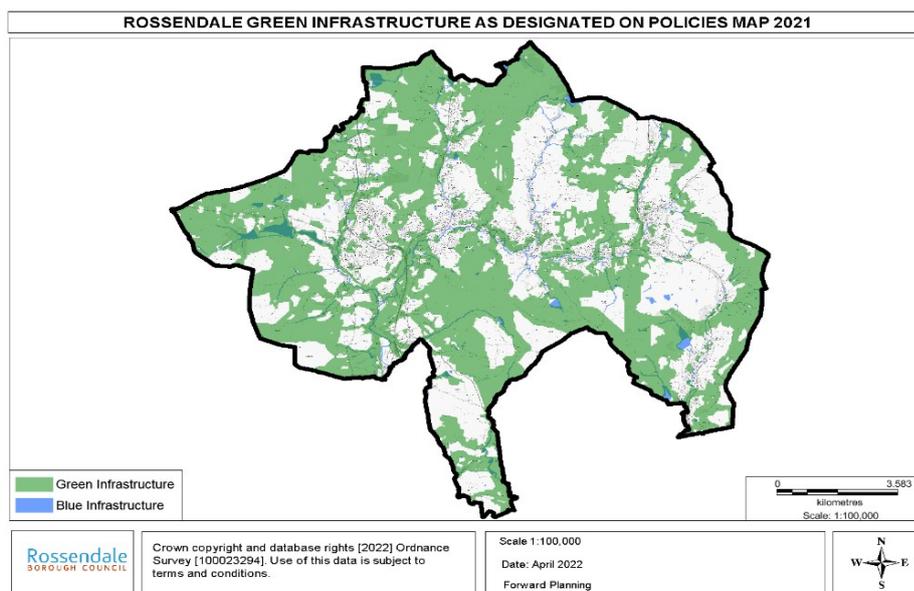


Figure 4 - Rossendale Green and Blue Infrastructure

⁴ Edenfield Neighbourhood Plan. Available to download at: <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/neighbourhood-plan/3>

⁵ Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (2022). Available to download at: https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/11615/climate_change_spd

Open Space and Sports Provision Supplementary Planning Document

The Open Space and Sports Provision Supplementary Document⁶ was adopted in November 2024. It sets out the methodology to calculate open space and sports provision requirements for major residential development. Within the design section of the SPD, it encourages developers to consider the National Design Guide for guidance on well-designed natural environment and public spaces as well as Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. The voluntary use of the Urban Green Factor is also introduced.

1.2 Actions

Monitoring actions undertaken by the Council have been split into two categories:

- Actions identified in the First Considerations report since January 2024
- Additional information on actions carried out between January 2023 and December 2025

1.2.1 Summary of Actions Undertaken Identified in the First Considerations Report since January 2024

The Council's First Considerations Report⁷ was published in January 2024 and included a table of potential biodiversity actions. [Appendix A](#) reports on the actions undertaken between January 2024 and December 2025.

Following the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in February 2024 for major applications and April 2024 for other non-exempt applications, a total 12 of planning applications were approved between September 2024 and December 2025 that were subject to mandatory BNG. One Biodiversity Gain Plan was approved.

Other actions included supporting Lancashire County Council in preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which was published on 16 January 2026.

The Appendix provides details of where the Council has protected and enhanced biodiversity on Council land, such as habitat enhancement works at play areas, and eradicating diseased trees and replanting with native broad leaf on unmaintained sites across the Borough. Other actions include improving and sharing knowledge of the biodiversity value of Council owned land, helped by the BNG Feasibility Study. An officer Biodiversity Group was established, closer ties established with the Climate Change Group, and Biodiversity Impact Assessments were reintroduced to allow the assessment on biodiversity of new Council policies and strategies.

1.2.2 Additional Information on Actions Carried Out Between January 2023 and December 2025

⁶ Open Space and Sports Provision SPD (2024). Available to download at:

https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10810/open_space_and_play_equipment_contributions

⁷ Rossendale Borough Council's First Consideration Report on the Biodiversity Duty. Available to view at:

<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18394/first-consideration-report-on-the-biodiversity-duty>

This section provides more detailed updates of work carried out by the Council, between these dates.

Land and Estate Management

Wildflower Meadow Trials

The Green Spaces Team carried out Wildflower Meadow Trials in 2023 and 2024 on 14 Council owned sites using a wildflower seed mix containing Yellow Rattle. Unfortunately, the germination was not as successful as expected due to the competing existing grass. Since then the Green Spaces Team is not using any weed killer in order to reduce pollution and prevent harm to habitats and species, and equipment will be needed to remove existing grass prior to seeding to allow for a better outcome.

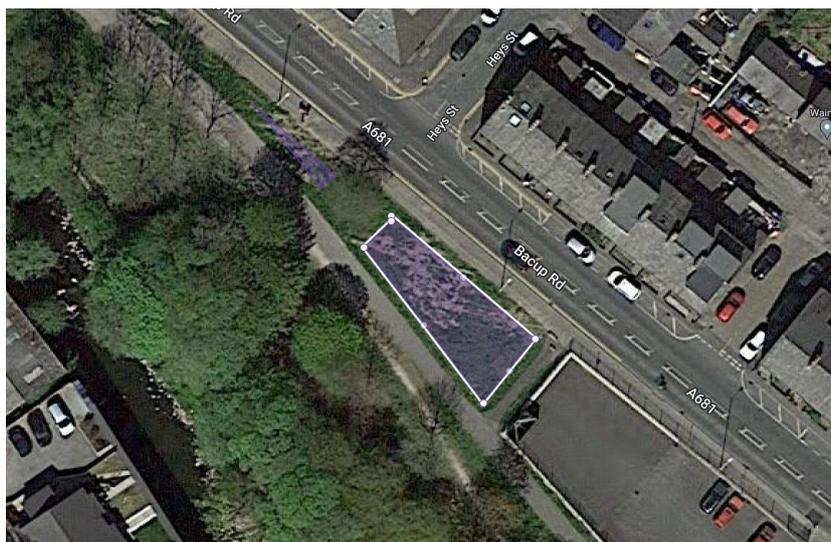


Figure 5 - Example of wildflower meadow trial location (Backup Road)

Invasive Non-Native Species Management

The Council is seeking to eradicate Japanese Knotweed discovered on a number of Council owned sites. Table 1 overleaf shows the number of sites where contractors applied treatments to remove Japanese Knotweed. The number of sites treated has reduced since 2024, meaning the species has been eradicated on some sites.

Table 1 - Number of Council owned sites treated for Japanese Knotweed

Year	Number of sites treated for Japanese Knotweed
2025	66
2024	82
2023	72

Tree Management

The Council owns various woodlands, parks and green spaces with mature trees. Several Ash trees have been affected by ash dieback and the Green Spaces Team has prioritised pruning and felling such trees in public open space or near public rights of way. There were 177 trees identified with

Ash dieback, 33 needing urgent work and 76 a high priority. The Council is commissioning contractors to assist with this work.

Another site between Britannia and Shawforth has been affected by the Larch disease and the Forestry Commission issued a tree felling order. The Property Services Team is working in partnership with Lancashire County Council who is leading on the tree felling and replanting project.

Tree planting

The Council's Rossendale Forest project started in 2021. It pledged to plant a tree for every child in the Borough over three years. In partnership with other organisations, including the Ribble River Trust, a total of 10,834 trees were planted, covering an area of 3,329 m². Species planted included Quick thorn, Rowan, Hazel, Common Oak, Silver Birch, Goat Willow, Common Alder, Bramley Apple, Plum Czar, Conference Pear, Apple Katy, Plum Victoria and Pear Beth.



Figure 6 - Volunteers at a Tree Planting Event

Park improvements

Three of the Borough's green spaces have been awarded the internationally accredited Green Flag Award for 2025:

- Rawtenstall Library Gardens
- Whitworth Memorial Garden
- Stubblelee and Moorlands Park



Figure 7 - Green Flag Award Photos

One of the criteria considered for the Green Flag Award is the appropriate management of natural features, wild fauna and flora.

In addition, the Council is working in partnership various groups such as Civic Pride, Friends of groups and Proffitts CIC to deliver parks and green spaces improvements. Below are some of the projects carried out between 2023 and 2025.

- Tricketts Memorial Park

Civic Pride Rossendale, Proffitts CIC and a group of volunteers worked on enhancing the features of the Park between 2016 and 2024. This included work to trees and to facilitate access to the Park (e.g. steps leading up to the site entrance, handrail, steps to the memorial stone, a memorial bench, information boards and picnic tables).

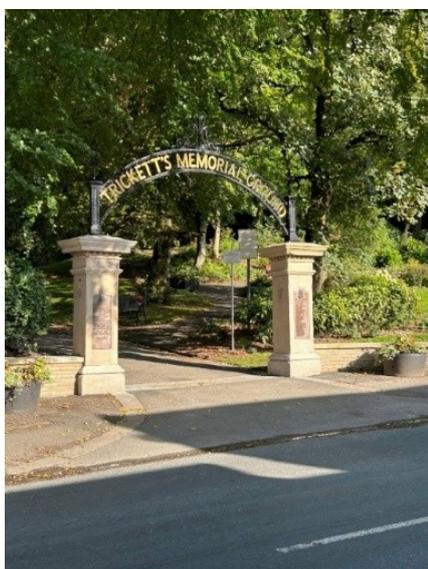


Figure 8 - Trickett's Memorial Ground Enhancements (Source Proffitts CIC)

- Lane Head Lane, Bacup

In partnership with Proffitts CIC, Bacup Pride and Newground Together the Council is assisting with a project to improve Lane Head Lane. A masterplan has been drawn and consulted on in 2025 to add history information boards for visitors, ledger stones, new pathways, planting native wildflowers and hedgerows as well as carrying out tree works and woodland surveys.



Figure 9 - Lane Head Lane Masterplan

- Stubblee Park, Bacup

The Council, with Proffitts CIC and the Friends of Stubblee Park, has drafted and consulted on several versions of a masterplan in 2025 to guide the next phase of improvements. This include creating new wetland habitats, planting fruit trees and shrubs to the mini orchard, increase biodiversity in and around the pond, selective tree felling and replanting to diverse both the age range and species mix, new woodland understorey planting in the Dell including fens, bulbs and shade tolerant shrubs. The next step is to start looking for funding to deliver the proposed works.



Figure 10 - Third version of Stubblee Park's Masterplan (<https://www.proffittscic.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Stubblee-Masterplan-v3.pdf>)

- Whittaker Park, Rawtenstall

In 2023, the Council in partnership with Proffitts CIC prepared and consulted on a masterplan for Whittaker Park. The proposed enhancements include the creation of a bog garden where the former pump track is as a sustainable urban drainage system and the delivery of a wildflower meadows to the north of the Bowling Green and along the eastern boundary of the park.



Figure 11 - Volunteers at Plug Planting Event (Source Proffitts CIC)

- Weir Play Area

In May 2024, children from Northern Primary School, staff and parents helped plant hundreds of wildflower plugs at Weir Play Area. This project was delivered in partnership with Proffitts CIC.



Figure 12 - Plug Planting Event at Weir Play Area (Source Proffitts CIC)

- Haslingden Graveyard

Working with Proffitts CIC, Rossendale Borough Council carried out enhancement to the graveyard by clearing weeds and debris, refreshing seating areas and plating new trees and wildflowers. Children from Haslingden Primary School participated to the project by design signs at the entrance of the graveyard. This urban greenspace enhancement was carried out as part of The Big Lamp

Project lead by the Economic Regeneration Team at the Council and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Figure 13 - Haslingden Graveyard Prior to the Enhancement Works

Planning and Development

- Decision-making

As stated in Section 1, the Rossendale Local Plan has a planning policy seeking biodiversity net gain (BNG) for new developments. As such before the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in 2024, natural habitat enhancements and measures to support wildlife were already being sought for new development.

Six planning applications submitted prior to the mandatory BNG and granted approval between January 2023 and December 2025 were required to provide biodiversity net gain. More information is provided in the table below.

Table 2 - Planning permissions granted between January 2023 and December 2025 seeking biodiversity enhancements prior to mandatory BNG

Planning Application Reference No.	Site Address	Biodiversity Enhancements to be delivered on-site, off-site or both	How have they have been secured?
2021/0275	Haweswater Aqueduct Valve House, Haslingden Road, Rawtenstall	Subject to Biodiversity Impact Assessment (probably both)	S106
2024/0085	Land off Lee Road, Stacksteads, Bacup	On-site	Condition
2022/0543	Fieldfare Way, Bacup	Both	S106
2023/0396	Development adj Pinfold and Blackburn Road and Development adj Burnley Road, Edenfield	Both	S106
2023/0462	Land South of Hardman Avenue, Rawtenstall	On-site	Conditions
2022/0451	Land West of Market Street, Edenfield	Both	S106

- BNG Feasibility Study

The Forward Planning Team commissioned a study in 2023 to assess 20 council-owned sites in the borough. The study provided the following outcomes:

- Understanding of existing biodiversity value on the 20 sites,
- Options to improve the biodiversity value on those sites (one option looking at maximising biodiversity uplift and another looking at maximising wider environmental benefits),
- Habitat enhancements and management needed to sustain the biodiversity enhancement for at least 30 years and associated cost estimates

The study was shared with the Green Spaces Team and Property Services Team to inform their projects. Information is also provided on request to developers wishing to consider the use of Council owned land to deliver mandatory BNG for new developments.

- BNG Monitoring fees

Fees for monitoring BNG were introduced in the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023-2024⁸ and updated in the 2024-2025 report. These are to ensure the Council has the resources to monitor the delivery of BNG secured by Section 106 Agreements or by planning conditions.

- Planning Policies

The Forward Planning Team has worked with Lancashire County Council to support the preparation of the Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Geospatial information was shared regarding the designation of local wildlife sites in Rossendale as well as Local Plan designations, including the green and blue infrastructure and allocations for development. Officers attended Steering Group meetings and workshops to shape the priorities and objectives of the strategy. Consultation responses to the draft strategy and to the pre-publication notice were also sent to influence and support the strategy.

Raising Awareness Internally and Externally

A Biodiversity Steering Group was created in 2023 to discuss policies, objectives and actions that would enable the Council to meet its biodiversity duty. The group comprises officers from various teams in the Council, including Green Spaces, Climate Change, Economic Development, and Communities. It met 8 times between 2023 and 2025.

In terms of raising awareness externally, the Council took part in and advertised a 'Green Finance Opportunities for Farmers' workshop, which was organised by the Irwell Catchment Partnership, of which RBC is a member. The event took place at Cowpe Community Hall on 22 October 2024.

The Council also advertised the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy public consultation on its website in summer 2025 and provided a response to the consultation.

Section 2: Rossendale Borough Council Future Actions

⁸ Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023-2024. Available at <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18852/infrastructure-funding-statement-2023-to-2024>

The Council is intending to fulfil its biodiversity duty over the next five years by undertaking the following actions set out below.

Planning, Development and Economic Regeneration

Please see [Section 3](#) of this report for the actions to be undertaken by the local planning authority.

The Economic Development Team is leading on several town centre improvement projects and masterplans. They are considering environmental and biodiversity enhancements where possible.

The Higher Deardengate Project in Haslingden will deliver a dedicated events space and public realm improvements including two nature alleys with shade tolerant planting, rain gardens and tree planting. Works on the landscaping element of the project are expected to start in 2026.

The Rawtenstall Masterplan prepared in 2024 by Planit outlines the following objectives:

- Bring Communities Together
- Have Safe and Vibrant Streets and Spaces
- Be a Welcoming Town
- Re-stitch the Town and
- Reconnect the Town with Nature

One of the proposed actions is a new 'Green Spine' on St Mary's Way to enhance biodiversity, create a series of pocket parks, and improve accessibility with new pedestrian routes, crossing points, and install a new bus stop.

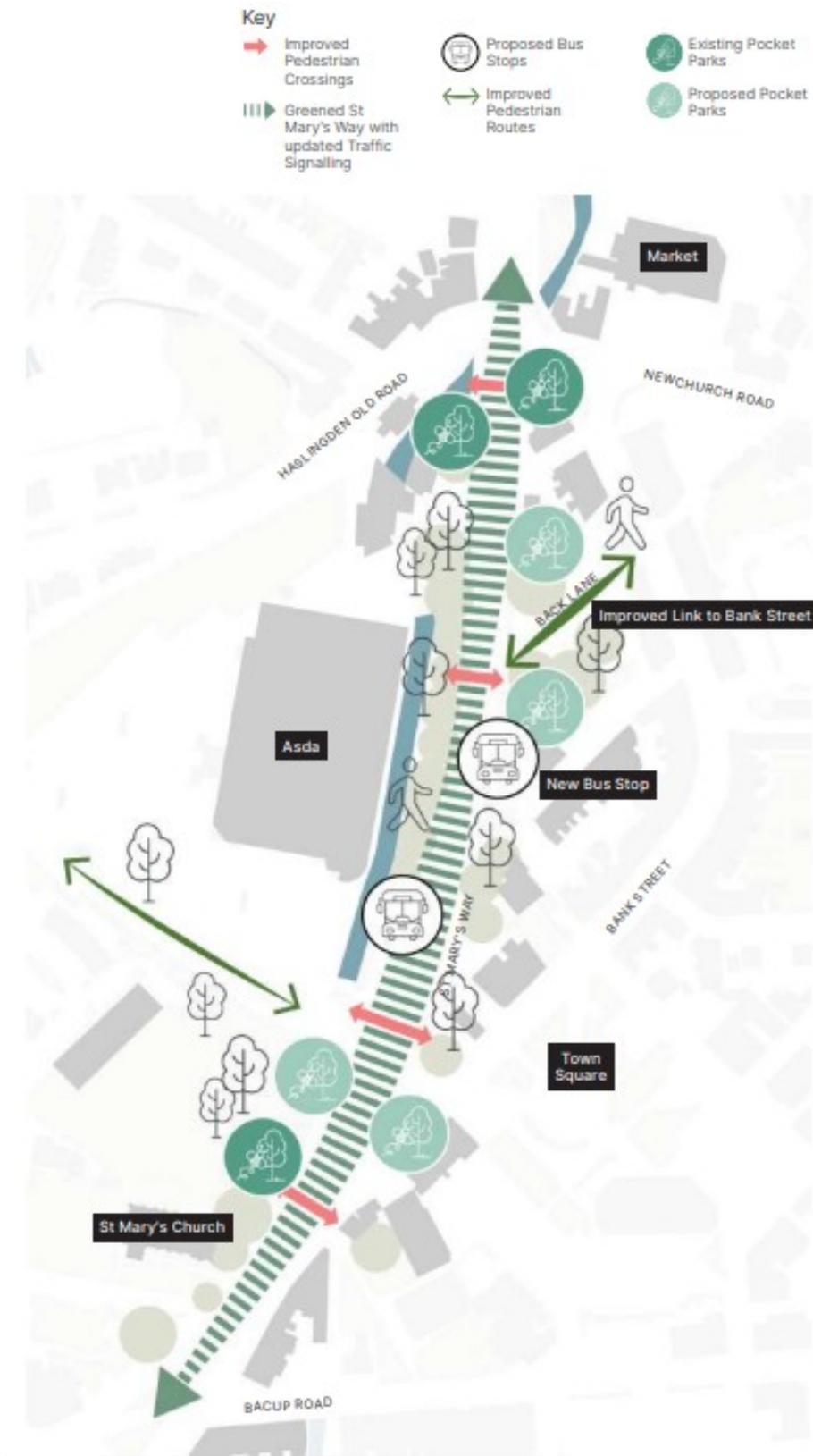


Figure 14 - A New Green Spine (St Mary's Way) - Vision Diagram from the Rawtenstall Spatial Masterplan (Planit 2024)

Another action involves 'drawing in nature' by enhancing the connection of the town's green spaces to the wider moorland and also improving the public realm alongside the town's rivers. These actions will be explored in the coming years.

Land and Estate Management

The Green Spaces team aims to secure funding to continue works on park improvements to enable the implementation of the masterplans for Whittaker Park, Stubblelee Park and Lane End Lane.

In addition to this, monitoring of trees affected by ash dieback will continue, prioritising the pruning and felling of those identified in public open space or near public rights of way.

The Property Services Team and the Green Spaces Team are also working with Lancashire County Council regarding a tree felling and replanting project on a site affected by larch disease. The felling of the diseased trees is expected in 2026 followed by a replanting scheme using broad leaf species.

The Council is also investigating opportunities to provide biodiversity enhancements on Council owned land such as woodland improvements at Staghills Wood (through the biodiversity net gain framework in planning) and degraded blanket bog restoration at Cribden Moor (via an application to the Scout Moor habitat Enhancement Fund).

Raising Awareness Internally and Externally

Due to the close alignment between the Biodiversity Steering Group and the Climate Change Action group, a proposal was made to merge these two groups. The first Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Group met in December 2026 and it is intended that the meetings will continue every quarter.

The Council will continue to support the Irwell Catchment Partnership. This also entails attending general meetings and specific sub-group meetings.

The Council is keen to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver environmental enhancements in the borough. To this effect, organisations were invited to a first meeting Rossendale Nature Resource Group meeting expected to take place in February 2026.

Additional communications are also planned in summer 2026 to raise awareness of the Scout Moor Habitat Enhancement Fund⁹, which is available to farmers and land managers to improve upland habitats as well as moorland fringe habitats that could benefit upland birds. Applications to the Fund for improvement projects located within the grant area, which covers Rossendale and neighbouring areas, are considered on a regular basis.

Monitoring

The monitoring of the actions identified within the First Considerations Report and in this Biodiversity Report will continue.

The annual Authority Monitoring Report¹⁰ which outlines the progress of the Local Plan against a number of indicators will also provide relevant information on the effectiveness of the environmental policies of the Local Plan, including those aiming to protect and enhance biodiversity.

⁹ Scout Moor Habitat Enhancement Fund. https://gmlrc.org/scout_moor_habitat_enhancement_fund/

¹⁰ Rossendale Borough Council Authority Monitoring Reports. Available to view at:

https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10832/authority_monitoring_reports

Section 3: Biodiversity Net Gain Information

Actions carried out to meet BNG obligations

The Council has embedded mandatory BNG requirements within its planning decision-making since it came into force on 12 February 2024 for major applications and on 2 April 2024 for non-major applications.

Between 12 February 2024 and 31 December 2025, in total 497 permissions¹¹ were approved by Rossendale Borough Council. Of these, 16 (or 3%) were subject to mandatory BNG (Figure 1).

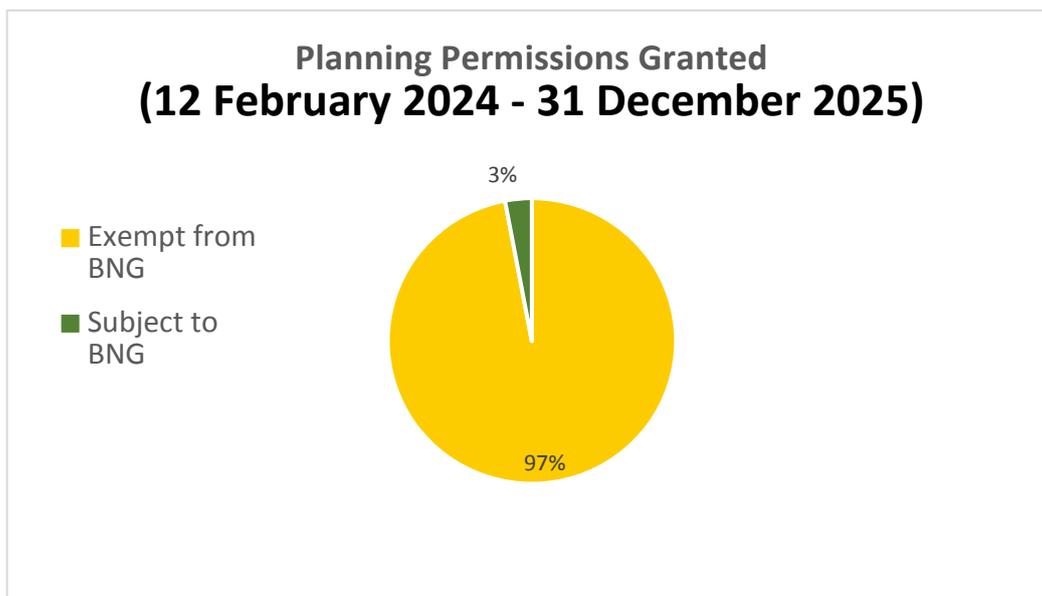


Figure 15 - Percentage of Permissions Subject to BNG between 12 February 2024 and 31 December 2025

The bulk of permissions granted by the Council are for householder developments and these are exempt from BNG requirements. There are also other types of development which are exempt from BNG. More information on the permissions approved between 12 February 2024 and 31 December 2025 is available in Table 3 below.

Table 3 - Number and Percentage of Planning Permissions Exempt or Subject to BNG

Planning Permissions Granted (12 February 2024 – 31 December 2025)	No. of Permissions Granted	Percentage
Subject to BNG	16	3
Exempt - Householder	183	37
Exempt - Permitted Development (Prior Notification, Lawful Development Certificate)	129	26
Exempt - De minimis	84	17
Others Not subject to BNG (Variation of Conditions, Permission in Principle, Submitted before 12 February 2024)	33	7
Exempt - Transitional arrangements for non-major	29	6
Exempt - Retrospective planning permission	12	2
Exempt - Self-build	11	2
	497	100

¹¹ These exclude permissions for works to trees, applications for discharge of conditions reserved by conditions, non-material amendments and listed building consents etc.

Total		
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The largest proportion of exempt planning permissions were householders, followed by permitted development and the *de minimis* exemption.

The 16 permissions subject to mandatory BNG secured biodiversity enhancements via planning conditions. The enhancements are expected to be either on-site or as a combination of on-site and off-site improvements. None of the permissions are expected to rely on buying Statutory Credits from the Government to achieve a 10% gain. More information on the expected gains will be available through the submission of Biodiversity Gain Plans.

Details of BNG resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved

One Biodiversity Gain Plan was approved in 2025. This is expected to result in the following net gains:

- Area Habitats: 2.74 units or 10.01%
- Hedgerows: 1.33 units or 46.93%
- Rivers: 0.23 units or 10.56%

The first monitoring report for this application is due in summer 2026.

How we plan to meet BNG obligations in the next five years

As set out in Section 2 of this report, the Planning Unit will continue to implement BNG in its decision-making process. Further changes to BNG are expected in 2026 such as the start of mandatory BNG for National Significant Infrastructure Projects, further exemptions for sites of less than 0.2 hectares and a consultation on a proposed exemption for brownfield sites. The team will ensure it continues to implement BNG according to existing and upcoming legislation and guidance.

Focus will also move towards monitoring the delivery of BNG secured by Section 106 Agreements that the Council is a party to and enhancements secured via planning conditions. The Council is intending to procure a software to assist with the monitoring of BNG delivery.

Now that the Lancashire Local Nature Recovery Strategy has been published on 16 January 2026, it must be considered to inform decisions on planning applications as well as on site allocations and local plan policies. The LNRS geospatial information will be added to the corporate mapping system to ensure adequate consideration of the strategy.

Section 4: Information About Rossendale Borough Council

Information about Rossendale Borough Council and how its activities can affect biodiversity is available in Section 1 of the First Considerations Report¹² (2024).

¹² Rossendale Borough Council First Considerations Report (2024) Available at: <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18394/first-consideration-report-on-the-biodiversity-duty>



Appendix A – Monitoring the Actions Identified in the First Considerations Report

FUNCTION	OBJECTIVES FOR CONSIDERATION	OPPORTUNITIES	TIMEFRAME	Actions Undertaken (January 2024 - December 2025)
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT	Protecting and seeking biodiversity net gain through planning and development, including regeneration projects	Embedding biodiversity enhancement in local planning policies and requiring biodiversity net gains in new development proposals in accordance with national and local planning policies	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 planning applications subject to mandatory BNG were granted between September 2024 and December 2025 • 1 Biodiversity Gain Plan approved
	Protecting and improving biodiversity	Assisting Lancashire County Council (LCC) in preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing with the LNRS Team at LCC • Attending Steering Group meetings and workshops • Responded to public consultation and notification of publication • LNRS published on 16 January 2026 by LCC



FUNCTION	OBJECTIVES FOR CONSIDERATION	OPPORTUNITIES	TIMEFRAME	Actions Undertaken (January 2024 - December 2025)
LAND AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT	Protecting and enhancing biodiversity through the management of the Council's land and properties	Improving biodiversity through the management of maintained land (natural play areas, grass verges, parks, cemeteries and other open spaces) including rewilding opportunities, tree planting, reducing the spread of invasive non-native species and plant diseases, making sites available for off-site biodiversity net gain, limiting the use of pesticides and using peat-free soil.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat enhancement works at Trickett's Memorial Park, Moller Ring Play Area, Weir Play Area and Haslingden Graveyard • Tree planting through Rossendale Forest project which started in 2021 and finished in 2024 (10,834 trees planted in partnership with other organisations) • From 82 to 66 sites treated to eradicate Japanese Knotweed • No weed killer or peat used for green spaces management • Wildflower meadow trials on 14 sites
		Management of unmaintained land, including woodland management, moorland restoration and considering making sites available for off-site biodiversity net gain	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering a Council owned site to provide BNG, using information from the BNG Feasibility Study • Working in partnership with LCC regarding felling trees affected by Larch disease and replanting broad leave species • 177 Ash trees identified with Ash dieback that require pruning or felling
		Considering the biodiversity value of sites prior to agreeing their disposal or lease	April 2024 (New financial year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information regarding ecological designations are available on the internal mapping system
		Consider findings of the BNG Study and promote specific Council-owned sites where measurable BNG can be achieved from Council-led and other developments	April 2024 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results from the BNG study have informed discussions with developers looking for biodiversity off-site
RAISING AWARENESS INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY	Continuing and formalising a biodiversity steering group meeting bi-annually/quarterly	Discuss and agree corporate actions to protect and enhance biodiversity	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 meetings held between January 2024 and December 2025

FUNCTION	OBJECTIVES FOR CONSIDERATION	OPPORTUNITIES	TIMEFRAME	Actions Undertaken (January 2024 - December 2025)
	Re-introducing a Biodiversity Impact Assessment checklist/statement for reports to CMT and Committee Meetings	Assessing and mitigating the impact on biodiversity of new/amended Council strategies, policies and projects	April 2024 (New financial year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Biodiversity Impact assessment submitted alongside reports introducing new policies
	Incorporating biodiversity enhancement and nature-based solutions into the updated Climate Change Action Plan	Consider tree planting as well as other habitat enhancement/restoration (e.g. grassland and blanket bog) to help absorb more carbon dioxide and reduce flood risk	April 2024 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action Plan (revised in July 2024) includes the aim to identify areas for the enhancement of biodiversity and climate change mitigation schemes • It also includes the following actions: implement BNG approach in planning; explore opportunities for the Council to be a biodiversity and carbon offset provider; increase tree cover by 2 hectares per year
MONITORING	Reviewing actions undertaken	Preparing biodiversity reports in accordance with Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021	By March 2026 and then every 5 years thereafter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing Biodiversity Report to be published by March 2026

Integrated Impact Assessment

The council carry out Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA) to analyse the effects of our decisions, policies or practices. Throughout this document, policy refers to any policy, strategy, project, procedure, function, decision or delivery or service. The IIA should be undertaken/started at the beginning of the policy development process before any decisions are made. Policies are developed and reviewed using a consultative approach involving relevant internal and external stakeholders. Officers must consider what action needs to be taken to help overcome or minimise any disadvantages that people who share a protected characteristic will experience in compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and socio-economic disadvantage.

Name of policy:	Biodiversity Report for Rossendale (2026)
Lead officer name	Anne Storah / Nathaele Davies
Job title	Principal Planner / Senior
Service area	Planning
Telephone contact	01706 252418 / 252415
Email contact	annestorah@rossendalebc.gov.uk ; nathaeledavies@rossendalebc.gov.uk
Date Assessment commenced	15.12.2025
Date assessment completed	10.02.26

The main aims/objectives of this policy are:

The Biodiversity Report 2023-2025 The Biodiversity Report considers the following:

- actions undertaken by RBC between January 2023 and December 2025 to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- actions planned the next 5 years to further conserve and enhance biodiversity (2026-30)
- actions to comply with the mandatory biodiversity net gain framework in planning
- biodiversity gains expected from biodiversity gain plans approved by the local planning authority during the monitoring period
- plans to continue complying with the biodiversity net gain framework for the next 5 years

Indicate the status of the policy or decision

New/proposed Modified/adapted Existing

Indicate protected characteristics have been assessed

Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gender reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Religion/belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy/maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marriage or civil partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Indicate socio-economic disadvantage has been assessed

1. Identify any positive or negative impacts on protected characteristics and socio-economic disadvantage

Protected characteristic	Positive/Negative	How does it impact?
Age		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Disability		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Gender reassignment		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Marriage and civil partnership		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Pregnancy and maternity		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Race		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Religion or belief		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Sex		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people
Sexual orientation		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any protected group in a different way to other people

Socio-economic		Biodiversity Report will not impact on any socio-economic group in a different way to other people
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2. Explain and provide examples of any evidence/data used (add additional rows if needed)

Evidence	How does this have an impact on the protected characteristic?
	The document reports on actions previously identified and sets out new actions for the next 5 years. It also discusses how Biodiversity Net Gain is being introduced in Rossendale. As such it will have no impact on any group more than any other.

3. Outcome of IIA

What course of action does this EIA suggest you take?	Please indicate
Outcome 1- The IIA has not identified any potential for negative impact on the protected characteristics. Progress to EIA approval – section 5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 2- The IIA has identified a possibility for negative impact on the protected characteristics. An IIA Action Plan must be completed to mitigate the negative impact – section 4 before approval section 5	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. IIA action plan

Based on the above impact assessment, findings/evidence and outcomes identified, please complete the Action Plan below. The action plan should address:

- Any gaps in findings/evidence research including any consultation or engagement regarding the policy and its actual/potential impacts
- How you will address any gaps
- What practical changes/action that will help reduce any negative impacts identified
- What practical changes/action that will help enhance any positive contributions to equality

Negative impact identified	Action required	Lead officer	To be completed

Monitoring and reviewing the effect of the policy

Please state how you will monitor the impact and effect of this policy

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5. IIA approval (to be completed by the relevant Head of Service/Director)

- Outcome of IIA agreed/approved by Management Team: (date)
- Published on council website: (date)

Signed: (Head of Service/Director) (date)