

**REPORT TITLE: Biodiversity Strategy Mid-Term Review (2022 – 2025) and  
Action Plan (2026 – 2031): Pre-decision Scrutiny Update**

**To: Services, Climate & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11 March 2026)**

**Report by:**

Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Manager

Tel: 01223 458532 Email: [Guy.Belcher@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:Guy.Belcher@cambridge.gov.uk)

**Wards affected:**

All

**Director Approval:** Director James Elms confirms that the report author has sought the advice of all appropriate colleagues and given due regard to that advice; that the equalities impacts and other implications of the recommended decisions have been assessed and accurately presented in the report; and that they are content for the report to be put to scrutiny for consideration.

1.	<b>Recommendations</b>
1.1	<p>It is recommended that the Services, Climate &amp; Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p><b>Key Decision</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Notes the progress made in the midterm review of the Biodiversity Strategy (2026 – 2031), including the public consultation</li> <li>2. Reviews and comments on the proposed update to the Biodiversity Strategy (and Action Plan) and recommends it to Cabinet for adoption</li> </ol> <p><b>Non-Key Decision</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Reviews and comments on the proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designations of Fulbourn Road and Church End in Cherry Hinton prior to 24 March 2026 Cabinet consideration of the recommendation to adopt.</li> </ol>

2.	<b>Purpose and reason for the report</b>
2.1	<p>The report is presented for pre-decision scrutiny prior to 24 March 2026 Cabinet consideration of the decision to adopt the revised Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2026 – 2031). Scrutiny Committee feedback will be reported to Cabinet and used to inform the final version of the Strategy prior to adoption.</p> <p>Our current Biodiversity Strategy (2022 – 2030) pledged to undertake a 5-year review of actions and progress to ensure we continue to collaborate to protect, manage and enhance nature in the city.</p> <p>Following December 2025 Cabinet Approval a joint public consultation on the draft Biodiversity Strategy mid term review and a draft new Urban Forest Strategy was run on the City Council Go Vocal consultation portal from 7<sup>th</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> February, with a further one-week extension for emailed responses, as requested by specific groups.</p> <p>The revised Strategy reflects feedback and views from the consultation, retaining similar supported updated vision, themes and objectives, and additional actions and projects to align with our new statutory Biodiversity Reporting Duty, the new Urban Forest Strategy (UFS), and wider initiatives including the statutory Cambridgeshire &amp; Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), the BIG Chalk partnership and an ambition to collaborate with our communities to achieve future Nature City Accreditation. These more recent initiatives are described within the strategy.</p> <p>The strategy action plan includes the proposed designation of two new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), both within Cherry Hinton. These have been supported through the consultation, and if approved we will seek formal declaration through the statutory Natural England process in 2026.</p>

3.	<b>Alternative options considered</b>
3.1	<p><b>1. To not review and allow the current strategy to continue without review through to 2030.</b></p> <p>This option is not recommended as it would fail to consider new initiatives and wider strategies and risk not aligning with future collaborations and associated funding priorities and opportunities.</p> <p><b>2. To not designate the two new proposed LNRs in Cherry Hinton.</b></p> <p>This option is not recommended as it would fail to provide statutory protection, greater recognition and enhanced management of two important sites for nature in the ward</p>
4.	<b>Background and key issues</b>
4.1	<p>The current Biodiversity Strategy was adopted in 2022 and set out a clear vision and actions to address our declared Biodiversity Emergency. This vision has been retained following the 2026 consultation with only minor amendments to strengthen our commitment (shown in <b>bold</b> below):</p> <p><i>‘Our <b>Biodiversity Strategy</b> vision is that over the next 5 years Cambridge will see a “measurable net gain” in biodiversity <b>compared with the 2020 Biodiversity Audit baseline</b>, both within <b>every ward of the city and the surrounding countryside</b>, including the extent and quality of priority habitats and populations of priority species. Wildlife habitats will be protected, enhanced and where possible expanded and linked.</i></p> <p><i>The very best wildlife habitats will form part of a much wider Cambridge Nature Network that will permeate the whole of the city <b>and link to the wider Cambridgeshire &amp; Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b>. Everyone who lives or works within Cambridge will have access to <b>nature rich greenspaces within walking distance of their home or place or work</b>, and there will be a greater awareness and understanding of biodiversity with opportunities to be involved and collaborate in local wildlife</i></p>

*enhancement projects and monitoring.'*

The 7 strategic objections to deliver the vision are retained, with only minor amendments (shown in **bold** below) in response to consultation and the addition of objective 2 referencing the recently adopted Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

1. To secure a measurable net gain in biodiversity across the city **by 2031, compared with the 2020 baseline, in** support of the Natural Cambridgeshire Doubling Nature Vision by 2030.

2. To ensure designated sites and priority habitats are in good / favourable Condition, **wherever feasible, and that by 2031 no Council-managed LNR, Common or County Wildlife Site remains in poor condition without a management plan in place. Thus, enhancing habitat and species** resilience to a changing climate and **contributing** to the Cambridge Nature Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy

3. To **engage and** promote awareness of biodiversity and wellbeing, supporting coordinated action in our communities, businesses, and institutions **through embedding Natural England's Green Infrastructure strategies and principles, with particular focus on wards with high social disadvantage or poor access to natural green space**

4. To ensure that biodiversity **protection and enhancement** is considered by all council service functions and projects **in line with our statutory Biodiversity Duty**

5. To maximise the potential of our buildings, parks, open spaces, allotments and community gardens, watercourses and tree stock to support biodiversity, whilst balancing their multifunctional needs

6. To harness the wealth of local professional and amateur knowledge and experience in identifying and solving local issues.

7. To **work with partners to** establish long term, species and habitat monitoring to

	<p>measure the impact of activities and identify new threats and opportunities across the city and <b>publish an annual report on progress</b></p> <p>Since adoption of the current strategy, we have delivered many diverse projects and initiatives across services and in collaboration with partners and communities. These have been summarised in the accompanying Cabinet approved Biodiversity Duty Report (2022 – 2025) and associated case studies, the submission of which is a new statutory requirement for all local authorities established within the Environment Act, 2021.</p> <p>Since 2022 several new initiatives and partnership have arisen that require capturing in an updated plan:</p> <p>The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), adopted December 2025, is a new statutory strategic document that sets out the County wide sites, species and habitats priorities for action. These actions have been captured within the revised City Strategy and action plan to ensure we are coordinated with adjoining authorities within the remaining lifetime of the strategy, and that our plans are aligned for future Local Government Reorganisation.</p> <p>Our existing cross-boundary Cambridge Nature Network and Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project have been formally recognised by BIG Chalk, a major landscape scale alliance of over 150 organisations working to restore nature across 20% of England focuses on chalk and limestone landscapes.</p> <p>A key new ambition within the revised strategy is to seek Nature City Accreditation through a recognised process of increased collaboration for nature recovery with our communities, which has received significant support through our 2026 consultation.</p>
<p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>Corporate plan</b></p>
<p>5.1</p>	<p>The Biodiversity Strategy review seeks to address the following corporate priorities (2022 – 2027):</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Responding to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and creating a net zero council by 2030</b>  Through collaboration with communities and partners to deliver strategic nature recovery in the city and beyond. Nature based solutions including increase canopy cover, sustainable urban drainage and restoration of urban chalk streams will help mitigate the impacts of climate change on both communities and nature.</li> <li>• <b>Tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need</b>  Seeking to ensure everyone living or working in Cambridge has easy access to safe, high-quality, nature rich, natural green spaces, promoting wellbeing and social inclusion.</li> <li>• <b>Building a new generation of council and affordable homes and reducing homelessness</b>  Ensuring new council homes meet our ambition of delivering 20% Biodiversity Net Gain</li> <li>• <b>Modernising the council to lead a greener city that is fair for all</b>  Ensuring that we meet our Biodiversity duty through seeking opportunities to protect and enhance nature across all services and partnerships</li> </ul>
6.	<p><b>Consultation, engagement and communication</b></p> <p>The current Biodiversity Strategy was adopted in 2022 following a public consultation held in 2021.</p> <p>To inform the midterm review we promoted a public consultation on a draft revised strategy between 6<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2026 on our consultation portal. The public consultation undertaken jointly for the Biodiversity Strategy Mid-Term Review and the new Urban Forest Strategy generated a strong and constructive level of engagement. A total of <b>256 respondents</b> participated, with 83% choosing to comment on both strategies together, supporting the intention to present these interrelated documents as a coordinated package.</p> <p>On request officers approved a one-week extension of the consultation for local groups to collate and submit emailed responses by the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026. These responses do</p>

not appear within the Consultation summary report but have been provided in full within the supporting papers.

Overall, feedback demonstrated very high levels of support for the strategic direction of the Biodiversity Strategy. Over 92% of respondents either strongly supported or supported the Strategy's vision, with fewer than 4% expressing opposition. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of restoring priority habitats, enhancing ecological connectivity, and embedding biodiversity considerations across Council services.

A recurring theme throughout the consultation was the need to provide more space for nature, with 62% stating that current provision in parks is not sufficient and calling for increased wildflower meadows, wetlands, ponds, long grass, and deadwood habitats.

Respondents also highlighted the need for ongoing maintenance and monitoring, noting that newly planted trees and habitats require consistent aftercare to ensure their success.

Comments also strongly supported the Strategy's focus on designated site management, nature-based solutions, and the ambition to secure Nature City Accreditation, with over 76% of respondents in favour of Cambridge pursuing accreditation.

Respondents felt the Nature City accreditation framework could strengthen collaborative delivery, improve accountability, and help celebrate positive progress on biodiversity.

Several themes emerged consistently across long-form answers. These included:

- Reducing pesticide and herbicide use, with strong calls to reinstate or strengthen herbicide-free commitments.
- Integrating biodiversity into all new development, with requests for stronger enforcement of Biodiversity Net Gain and greater on-site delivery.
- Improved access to nature, particularly for communities with low canopy cover and limited green space; 59% of respondents supported prioritising resources for communities with the poorest access.

- A focus on wetlands, chalk streams, rivers, and water management, reflecting local concerns over siltation, pollution, and habitat fragmentation.
- Greater support for community involvement, volunteering, citizen science, and environmental education, particularly involving schools and families.

Feedback also aligned strongly with the Strategy's emphasis on addressing climate risks, with respondents expressing clear support for diversifying new tree species selection, enhancing tree canopy in heat-vulnerable neighbourhoods, and creating more shade, water features, and drought resilient planting.

Overall, respondents expressed a clear desire for ambitious, practical and measurable action, and asked that the Council continue to demonstrate transparency and strong communication around evidence, decisions, and trade-offs.

The revised Strategy has been updated to directly reflect this feedback.

Key amendments include:

- Integration of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework, to support Nature City Accreditation ambition
- Commitment to core site habitat condition enhancements by 2031
- Commitment to publish an annual progress review
- Reinsertion of herbicide reduction promotion into the Action Plan
- Moving technical details into appendices to reduce overall length of the document

The consultation has therefore played a significant role in shaping the revised Strategy and ensuring it remains evidence-led, community-supported and aligned with emerging regional and national policy frameworks.

7.	<b>Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact</b>
7.1	<p>Adoption of the revised Biodiversity Strategy following the mid-term review is expected to deliver the following outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved plan quality: insights from stakeholders and communities will help ensure the Biodiversity Strategy is both deliverable and widely supported, with projects refined in response to feedback.</li> <li>2. Increased participation and engagement: the consultation will raise awareness of the Biodiversity Strategy and encourage greater involvement of residents, community groups, developers, and landowners in its delivery.</li> <li>3. Clearer accountability: the introduction of condition targets for core nature sites will allow progress to be monitored transparently over the remaining lifetime of the strategy.</li> <li>4. Greater recognition: seeking Nature City Accreditation will ensure shared goals and new collaborations that can be celebrated.</li> </ol> <p><b>What does good look like?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A Biodiversity Strategy that is accessible, evidence-based, and widely supported.</li> <li>2. Broad public awareness of and engagement with the Biodiversity Strategy and wider Cambridge Nature Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy</li> <li>3. A clear route to achieve Nature City Accreditation in recognition and celebration of our shared vision, collaboration and delivery partnerships.</li> </ol>

8.	<b>Implications</b>
8.1	<b>Relevant risks</b>
	<p><b>Risk 1: Risks if the decision is made (approve the mid-term Biodiversity Strategy review)):</b> Approving the BS carries a low level of strategic risk, primarily relating to deliverability and expectations rather than policy intent, as progress towards long-term biodiversity outcomes will depend on sustained funding, cross-Council coordination, engagement on private land, and external factors such as climate impacts, development pressures and tree disease. There is a risk that targets are perceived as guaranteed outcomes rather than long-term ambitions, that delivery capacity varies year to year due to funding constraints and local government reorganisation, and that some decisions on site management may attract challenge from user groups; however, these risks are mitigated through realistic long-term targets, a proportionate, evidence-led approach, alignment with existing statutory duties and corporate strategies, and monitoring and reporting to enable adaptive management.</p> <p><b>Risk 2: Risks if the decision is not made:</b> Not approving the BS carries a higher strategic risk, including loss of policy direction for managing and growing the city's core sites for nature, weaker alignment with the Climate Change and Urban Forest Strategy, reduced ability to influence development and partner activity, and increased exposure to ad hoc or inconsistent decision-making in high-risk areas such as, development pressure, tree protection and asset management. This would weaken the Council's ability to secure external funding and achieve the aspired Nature City Accreditation.</p>
8.2	<b>Legal Implications</b>
	<p>There are no direct legal implications arising from the proposed decision to adopt the revised strategy.</p> <p>The Council already has statutory duties to consider biodiversity in all its services and report to national government. The strategy will help ensure these duties are met within a clear framework.</p>

	<p><b>Equalities and socio-economic Implications</b></p> <p>Assessment found that the strategy and associated actions will have overall positive equality impacts across Cambridge’s communities.</p> <p>The actions promote equitable access to nature, health and wellbeing benefits, and inclusive community engagement. No negative or disproportionate impacts were identified, and equality outcomes will be monitored through annual reporting.</p>
8.3	<p><b>Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications</b></p>
8.4	<p>The overall impact of the Biodiversity Strategy midterm review is assessed as being moderately positive in terms of reducing impacts of climate change and enhancing biodiversity.</p> <p>Healthy nature green spaces, wetlands, waterways and tree canopies form a vital part of climate mitigation and adaptation. The strategy sets out a proactive approach to protecting, maintaining, expanding and enhancing natural habitats, contributing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Carbon storage and sequestration, supporting the Council’s net zero targets.</li> <li>● Urban cooling and shade, reducing the impacts of extreme heat.</li> <li>● Stormwater management, helping reduce local flood risk.</li> <li>● Biodiversity enhancement, contributing to Biodiversity Net Gain and habitat connectivity.</li> </ul> <p>The Strategy complements and aligns with the Council’s draft Climate Change and Urban Forest Strategies.</p>

	<b>Procurement Implications</b>
8.5	There are no procurement implications arising directly from this decision to approve the midterm Biodiversity Strategy review
	<b>Community Safety Implications</b>
8.6	<p>There are no community safety implications arising directly from this decision to approve the midterm Biodiversity Strategy review</p> <p>The strategy supports public safety through developing natural solutions to mitigating the adverse impacts of climate on our communities.</p> <p>Following adoption of the revised strategy any specific site project design or management reviews will consider community safety audits to ensure that the sites continue to be safe, inviting and accessible to all.</p>
	<b>Financial</b>
8.7	<p>Revised Local Nature Reserve, Common and watercourse management will be delivered within existing budgets.</p> <p>Future delivery of the strategy may require external funding, building on the Council's track record of securing over £900K (excluding Cambridge Canopy Project) of external funding since 2022.</p> <p>A proposed 0.5 FTE post to support engagement delivery is included in the February 2026 Budget Setting Report and, if approved by Full Council, would help accelerate elements of the revised Biodiversity Strategy.</p> <p>Actions without identified funding are included in the strategy as aspirational and will only be taken forward if resources become available.</p>

9.	<p><b>Background documents</b></p> <p>Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985</p>
10.	<p><b>Appendices</b></p>
10.1	<p>Appendix 1 - Biodiversity Strategy (2026 – 2031)  <a href="#">Biodiversity Strategy 2022-2030 - Cambridge City Council</a> (current)</p> <p>Appendix 2 - 2026 Biodiversity Strategy midterm Review - Consultation Report</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Cam Valley Forum Response</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Friends of St Matthews Piece Response</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Biodiversity Duty Report (2022 – 2025)</p> <p>Appendix 6 – Biodiversity Project Case Studies (2022 – 2025)</p> <p>Appendix 7 – Equalities Impact Assessment for Biodiversity Strategy midterm review</p> <p>Appendix 8 – Climate Change Rating Tool for Biodiversity Strategy midterm review</p>
	<p>To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Manager, tel: 01223 458532, email:  <a href="mailto:Guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk">Guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk</a></p>