



Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Biodiversity Strategy 2023 - 2033

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Biodiversity is the term used to encompass the full variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. All these animals, plants and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life.

Foreword

Biodiversity is in crisis. 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction—the highest number in human history. This includes birds like the Common Flycatcher which has almost disappeared from Redcar and Cleveland.

Humans have overfished the oceans, cleared forests, polluted our water sources, and created a climate crisis. These actions are impacting biodiversity around the world, from the most remote locales to our own backyards. The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with wildlife restricted to increasingly fragmented and isolated remnants of habitat. 41% of our species have declined in abundance since the early 1970s, and 15% of our species are threatened with extinction. Given this ongoing threat, it is no longer enough just to protect the wildlife that remains.

Locally and globally, humanity is facing multiple challenges from the collapse of natural systems and a warming climate. There is also evidence of marked declines in the physical and mental wellbeing of some people, particularly in more vulnerable parts of society.

Biodiversity is integral to addressing these problems. Woodland and other natural habitats store carbon and provide a buffer against extreme weather events from heatwaves to floods.

People are the key to nature's recovery. We need nature, yet we are increasingly disconnected from our natural environment. As Sir David Attenborough has said "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

Many people feel unwelcome and unsafe in green spaces or are unable to access wild places close to where they live. Too often, this is associated with other underlying issues of financial deprivation and poor physical and mental health.

This strategy sets out a vision for the protection and restoration of biodiversity across Redcar and Cleveland, seeking to ensure that we work with nature to benefit our climate and the health & wellbeing of all who visit, live or work in our borough.

1 Council vision, values and priorities

The Council's Corporate Plan for 2024-27 includes a priority to keep the borough clean and tidy, with a pledge to do our best to look after the environment. Through delivering upon the priorities within this strategy, which support biodiversity and encourage measures which will enable wildlife and plantlife to flourish, we will have a positive impact on the environment

Tree planting and the restoration of other natural habitats such as grasslands and hedgerows, are a vital part of achieving the council's commitment to making Redcar & Cleveland carbon neutral by 2030.

Changes need to be made to the way the Council manages all the land under its control so that it supports biodiversity, stores carbon and reduces use of fossil fuels and chemicals which might harm people and wildlife

The provision of quality natural greenspaces that are accessible to residents in all parts of the Borough, will be vital to improve long-term physical health and mental wellbeing, and ensure that young people are more active. It should also be recognised that providing nature-rich places does not always

mean that they will be used; people need support to overcome concerns and re-engage them with the natural world.

Preventing further loss of biodiversity and restoring nature cannot be achieved by the council alone. The success of this strategy is dependent on partnership working with a wide range of government agencies, businesses, voluntary groups and the borough's residents.

With the support of the community and other partner organisation such as the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, real change is possible which will benefit biodiversity and the people who live and work in Redcar and Cleveland.



2 Our borough

Redcar and Cleveland is a borough with a rich natural environment. On the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, we have scenic coastlines, attractive, unspoilt countryside and a variety of natural assets. The diversity and beauty of our natural environment must be protected, enhanced and promoted for our communities and future generations to enjoy.

Wetland and coastal habitats including freshwater marshes, sand dunes, intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh and areas of reedbed are all found close to the Tees estuary. South Gare, Coatham Marsh and the coastal strip all the way to Marske have been designated for their international importance as habitats which support populations of water birds. These areas are just the last fragment of the wetland habitats that once existed here – some 73% of this was reclaimed for industry in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland is a precious habitat. It is scarce, irreplaceable and supports a vast diversity of wildlife including many scarce and declining species. Ancient woodland is defined as having supported woodland cover since 1600 as before that time woodland was rarely planted, which means it is likely that it has stood since the last ice age. Redcar & Cleveland has 690 hectares of Ancient Woodland, which at 2.7% of its area is more than double the national average.

Hedgerows are a feature of East Cleveland. Many contain a rich mix of tree and shrub species and ground flora of woodland plants, particularly where they are close to the fringes of ancient woodland. It is likely that many of these hedgerows pre-date 1700.

Large waterbodies are found at Scaling Dam, Lockwood Beck and Margrove Ponds. These are important wintering grounds for water birds and also provide a stopover for them to feed and rest, supporting birds such as osprey during their migratory journeys.

The coastline from Marske to the border with North Yorkshire is a priority habitat and forms part of the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Heritage Coast. Horizontal ledges on the cliffs support seabird colonies, including kittiwake, fulmar, cormorant and razorbill. The upper cliffs, hold dense breeding populations of smaller birds including whitethroat, yellowhammer and linnet. Fragments of maritime grasslands occur along the cliff slopes and tops.



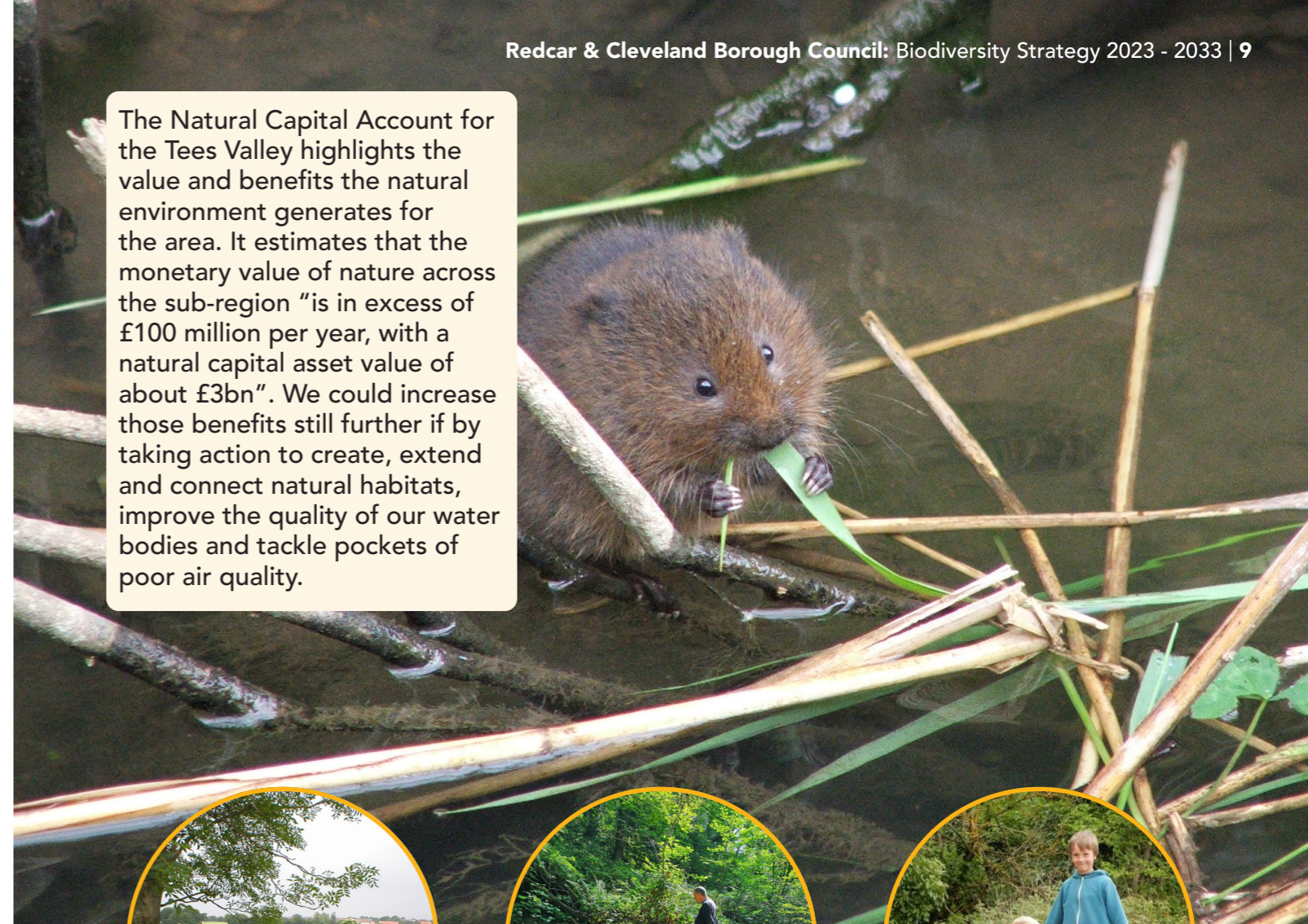
Redcar Rocks support a vast range of marine life with many seaweeds, molluscs and crustaceans. When exposed at low tide the rocks and adjacent sands provide important feeding grounds wading birds, particularly knot, turnstone purple sandpiper and sanderling

Great crested newts are found across the area with important populations to the north of Guisborough, and other clusters across East Cleveland. Otters are present in all the beck valleys; they are regularly seen at the mouth

of Kilton Beck in Skinningrove and at Coatham Marsh near Redcar. An extensive population of purple milk-vetch occurs on the sand dunes of South Gare with smaller populations and scattered plants at Coatham and along the Stray at Redcar.

3 Why is biodiversity important?

The natural world is an incredible wonder that inspires us all. It underpins our economy, our society, indeed our very existence. Forests, rivers, seas and soils provide us with the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we irrigate our crops with. We also rely on nature for numerous other goods and services that we depend on for our health, happiness and prosperity.



The Natural Capital Account for the Tees Valley highlights the value and benefits the natural environment generates for the area. It estimates that the monetary value of nature across the sub-region "is in excess of £100 million per year, with a natural capital asset value of about £3bn". We could increase those benefits still further if by taking action to create, extend and connect natural habitats, improve the quality of our water bodies and tackle pockets of poor air quality.



Pollinators such as bees and other insects are estimated to be responsible for a third of the world's crop production. Agriculture is also reliant on invertebrates which maintain soil health and release the nutrients for crops to grow.



As well as cleaning the air that we breathe, trees, shrubs, wetlands and wild grasslands naturally slow down water and help soil to absorb rainfall. When they are removed it can increase flooding.



Peatlands and native woodlands have the greatest capacity to store carbon, but many other habitats including permanent grasslands, saltmarshes and sea grass beds also have a significant ability to remove and store atmospheric carbon dioxide.



It is important to protect traditionally managed habitats such as hedgerows, hay meadows, heathlands and old orchards, which already hold carbon stores. Heathlands and grasslands store more carbon than modern agricultural landscapes; protecting these old, established habitats is important for biodiversity, as well the carbon stocks they hold, as both may have taken centuries to accumulate.



Spending time in nature is increasingly understood to lead to improvements in people's physical and mental health. Simply having green spaces and trees in urban areas has been shown to decrease hospital admissions, reduce stress and lower blood pressure.



Evidence shows that a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both physical and mental health. People with nature on their doorstep are more active, mentally resilient and have better all-round health.

4 The biodiversity emergency

The UN's 2019 Global Assessment Report warned the world that nature is in freefall, with biodiversity declining faster than at any other point in human history. This ecological crisis, and the resulting collapse of vital life-support systems that nature provides, also threatens the human race. The 2019 State of Nature Report published similarly distressing news that here in the UK, the biodiversity crisis is accelerating. Since 1970, 41% of species have seen their populations decline, with 15% of species under threat of extinction.

Despite this dark picture, there is hope. Action by Redcar and Cleveland Council and a wide range of local partners can make a difference and begin to reverse this crisis. We know that nature is resilient, and we know that given the right conditions, it can recover.

International Response

The United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) ended in Montreal, Canada, on 19 December 2022 with a landmark agreement to guide global action on nature through to 2030. The plan includes concrete measures to halt and reverse nature loss, including

- A new Global Biodiversity Framework which enshrines the target of protecting 30% of land and sea for nature in international law
- A new commitment to reducing the risk from invasive species and pesticides by 50% by 2030
- An increase in blue-green spaces in cities and supporting nature's role in combatting climate change.



National Response

The Environment Act, which became law in 2021, acts as the UK's new framework of environmental protection and provides the Government with powers to set new binding targets, including for air quality, water, biodiversity, and waste reduction.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be established across England to identify locations where action can be taken to reverse the decline of nature as a whole. The local strategy will integrate the measures in any site specific strategies relevant to the local area and will form part of a wider landscape-scale plan for nature

Planning Policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and R&CBC's Local Plan gives protection to international, national and locally important wildlife sites. It also enables developments to contribute to a net gain in biodiversity.

Biodiversity Net Gain will require developers to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand, and demonstrate this through the planning process.

5 Key objectives

Protecting biodiversity and restoring nature across the Borough can lead to real benefits for the lives of residents, attracting visitors and growing a green economy. New and emerging mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain, habitat banking and carbon credits will drive change and provide funding for restoring nature.

It will be vital to engage communities in this work, to raise awareness and ensure support for the changes that need to be made and also to ensure that people in the borough benefit from the health and wellbeing gains that come from improved natural environments and are able to engage in green economic growth.

The restoration of biodiversity in Redcar and Cleveland will be recorded and promoted as part of national and global action for nature's recovery.

1 Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity

Increase biodiversity in parks and greenspaces

- Make changes to the parks and greenspaces, reducing grass mowing with meadow-like habitats that support pollinators.
- Plant new wildlife woods and hedges in some of the parks and greenspaces

Support the recovery of rare species of wildlife

- Support initiatives which help to recover rare species
- Require features for birds and bats in all new developments

Agree a Local Nature Recovery Strategy

- Contribute to the development of the Tees Valley Nature Recovery Strategy

Protect and improve natural sites

- Produce conservation management plans for the Council's Local Nature Reserves
- Work with partners to improve the condition of nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the borough
- Ensure that the borough's best habitats are protected as Local Wildlife Sites and deliver positive conservation management on those which are Council owned
- Support others (the National Trust, Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust) to provide nature reserves across the borough

Improve the borough's rivers and streams

- Ensure new housing developments do not increase nutrient contamination in the Tees Estuary
- Restore nature in the borough's rivers and streams
- Work to return other waterways to a more natural state, by de-culverting some of the borough's buried becks



2 People Active for and benefitting from nature

Get communities engaged

- Support the Friend's Groups which help to care for the borough's nature reserves, parks and greenspaces
- Develop a communications strategy to raise awareness of the threats to biodiversity and the need to make space for nature in parks and greenspaces
- Provide opportunities for Corporate Social Responsibility and employee volunteering on wildlife sites and greenspaces

Ensure that people benefit from nature

- Support environmental education provision at nature reserves, parks and greenspaces
- Investigate opportunities to make better use of biodiversity sites to improve the physical and mental health of residents

Make sure nature is accessible and enjoyable to all

- Ensure quality natural greenspaces are distributed equitably across the borough and are accessible to all communities
- Carry out access audits on natural greenspaces to ensure they are available to people of all abilities
- Provide and maintain paths, steps, gates, signage and offsite information
- Address the issue of ash die back along paths and roadsides
- Deal with litter, fly tipping, crime and anti-social behaviour
- Produce a design guide to ensure that new trees and woodlands are selected and planted in the right places



3 Reducing the Council's Ecological Footprint

Reduce the council's ecological impact

- Review all the Council's policies and operations to ensure they comply with best practices for biodiversity and comply with the new Environment Act
- Review the Council's procurement to ensure it does not harm biodiversity, for example by using peat or tropical hardwoods
- Set out how the Council will record and report on the recovery of biodiversity, including under the new reporting requirements under the Environment Act

Reduce threats to biodiversity

- Find alternatives to the current use of herbicides by the Council to reduce the risk of harm in the management of parks and greenspaces
- Investigate the use of LED lighting at sensitive sites where it might harm the lifecycles of moths and other pollinators
- Adopt measures to ensure effective biosecurity particularly in operations on water courses
- Give public advice on the safe disposal of unwanted pond plants, which can result in damage by Invasive Non-Native species
- Support work to address the problem of non-native invasive species such as floating pennywort on The Fleet and signal crayfish on Skelton Beck



4 Working with Nature to Tackle the Climate Crisis

Capture and store carbon

- Review all land management and restoration projects to ensure they are delivered using low-carbon methods and are designed to record their carbon sequestration benefits
- Use mechanisms such as the Woodland and Hedgerow Carbon Codes to support the cost of creating and managing new habitats
- Promote these mechanisms with other landowners to help increase the planting of new woodland and hedges across the borough

Adapt to the impacts of climate change

- Maintain and replace trees in streets, parks and other public places to reduce the direct impacts of heavy rain and help modify surface water run-off during storms
- Develop a design guide to ensure new Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes include biodiversity benefits wherever possible
- Investigate the potential to reduce the threat of flooding using new woodland, woody debris dams and other natural features
- Investigate the management of sand dunes and other coastal habitats to make the area between South Gare and Marske more resilient to the erosion and coastal flooding impacts of climate change
- Investigate the use of artificial sea grass and kelp beds to absorb carbon and protect the coast from erosion



6 Biodiversity action plan 2024 - 2027

The following three year action plan has been agreed by departments across the council in line with their individual priorities. The Action plan will be managed by the Climate & Environment Strategy Board and progress will be reported back to Climate & environment Scrutiny on an annual basis.

No	Action	Timescale
Communication & Engagement		
1	Develop a Communication Strategy including Webpage, Signage, Interpretation boards including an identity and signage design for sites and online resources/information	Year 1
2	Commit to taking part in National campaigns to support awareness raising of Biodiversity and similar environmental impact	Year 1
3	Work with community groups on an approach to community greenspace management that supports biodiversity	Year 2
4	Develop a campaign to educate and consult with residents on the use of glyphosate, links to community pride and people taking ownership of maintenance outside their properties - N.B. Generation Climate Action	Year 2
Neighbourhoods		
5	Work with members to identify/scope biodiversity projects at a ward level - lead by mapping work/historic data	Year 1
6	Conduct a review of glyphosate use across the borough and identify areas where it is safe and practical to cease and reduce spraying	Year 1
7	Explore feasibility of adopting a rewilding approach in some locations	Year 2
8	Work with partners, schools and community groups to deliver South Gare to Marske Wildflower Restoration Project focussed on native local priority species	Year 2
9	Review beach cleaning procedures to identify whether more wildlife friendly processes can be implemented	Year 1
10	Explore the feasibility of adopting Plantlife's road verge management guidelines to transform verges into wildlife habitats	Year 2
11	Create opportunities for nature play in parks and public open spaces, linked to the Play Strategy	Year 3
12	Explore partnership opportunities to deliver biodiversity benefits on rail side verges/embankment	Year 3
13	Consider changes to the management of cemeteries to benefit wildlife and enhance biodiversity	Year 2/3
14	Explore the feasibility of formal park management to support wildlife & biodiversity	Year 2

Highways & Engineers		
15	Explore feasibility of installing wildlife warning signs on highways close to sites where priority species may be affected by road kills	Year 3
16	Consider the incorporation of sustainable drainage solutions where appropriate	Year 1

Place Development		
17	Ensure green spaces within PDI projects incorporate features to support biodiversity that are sympathetic to local species and habitats.	Year 1

Public Health		
18	Explore opportunities for green social prescribing on Council sites and projects, e.g., allotments, parks, orchards, microwoodlands	Year 3

Climate		
19	Allotments - Raise awareness around biodiversity and encourage wildlife friendly gardening with allotment holders	Year 2
20	Explore the feasibility of implementing wildlife friendly features, e.g., hedgerows on allotment plots	Year 3
21	Review management of ponds and explore feasibility of enhancing ponds for wildlife and the creation of new wildlife ponds	Year 3
22	Explore opportunities within countryside sites for projects to support biodiversity and provide education on the topic, including interpretation and more formal education offer	Year 1/2
23	Support schools to improve school estates to support biodiversity - links to nature parks, orchards, etc.	Year 1
24	Assess the biodiversity value of Council buildings and structures and explore the feasibility of supporting biodiversity with the installation of green roofs, green walls, bird boxes, bat boxes, bee bricks.	Year 2
25	Work with partners to support Local Nature Recovery Strategy development	Year 1
26	Explore feasibility of restoration projects linked to historic species and habitats, with special consideration of those on the priority lists	Year 3

All		
27	Ensure available data on species, habitats and designated sites is utilised to inform project feasibility, project scoping, and management plans.	Year 1
28	Review and agree actions for 2027 – 2030	Year 3

