

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All		
REPORT TITLE Biodiversity Report			
REPORT OF Director of Recreation and Public Safety			
FOR SUBMISSION TO Culture & Environment Scrutiny Committee	DATE 10th March 2026		
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>A report on the Council's General Biodiversity Duty and update on the biodiversity strategy.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report</p> <p>Contact Officer:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Justin Hill Interim Head of Leisure London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG justin.hill@camden.gov.uk</td> <td>Greg Hitchcock Nature Conservation Officer London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG greg.hitchcock@camden.gov.uk</td> </tr> </table>		Justin Hill Interim Head of Leisure London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG justin.hill@camden.gov.uk	Greg Hitchcock Nature Conservation Officer London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG greg.hitchcock@camden.gov.uk
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<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>That the Committee note and comment on the contents of this report.</p>			

Signed: 
Oliver Jones – Director of Recreation and Public Safety

Date: 20th February 2026

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Council's biodiversity strategy '*Creating space for nature in Camden*' and fulfils the legal requirements of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to publish a report on how the council has complied with its General Biodiversity Duty.
- 1.2 The Environment Act 2021 introduced what is called the General Biodiversity Duty. This duty is "*...the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England through the exercise of functions in relation to England*". The Act states public authorities "*...must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.*" It must determine appropriate policies and objectives and take action in light of those policies and objectives. The Council complied with this when it developed and adopted its biodiversity strategy in 2022.
- 1.3 This legislation also introduced a requirement for Local Authorities to report on how they have complied with this duty and how they intend to comply with it in the future. Our first reporting period is from the 1st January 2023 (when the reporting element of the duty came into force) until the 31st December. As Under the legislation reports must include:
 - a summary of the action which the authority has taken
 - a summary of the authority's plans for complying with those duties in the future
 - any quantitative data required to be included by regulations [there are no such current regulations]
 - A summary of the action taken in carrying out our functions under the planning legislation relating to Biodiversity Net Gain
- 1.4 This report is more comprehensive than the minimum legislated requirements as we have also included case studies, the Camden Nature Recovery Network and how it has informed the London Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and information on our communications and awareness-raising actions. This largely reflects the fact that our biodiversity strategy is an inclusive strategy, not just restricted to the Council's duty. The guidance on reporting against the duty makes it clear that we are free to set out the report in any way we choose.
- 1.5 The full review of the biodiversity strategy will be more comprehensive regarding contributions made by partners and other organisations, but in order to avoid confusion with the General Biodiversity Duty that applies to the Council alone, they have largely been omitted except where delivered in partnership.

2 Background

- 2.1 On the 7th October 2019 the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. As part of that declaration, we committed “...to produce a new ecological plan for Camden to sustain and improve biodiversity in Camden” and to encourage “...all citizens, businesses, and organisations or groups in the borough of Camden to join with the Council to...protect and improve biodiversity, in order to avert impending catastrophe.”
- 2.2 Following discussion on a draft at this committee in July 2021, the Council formally adopted ‘Creating space for nature in Camden’ via a single member decision in January 2022. This overarching document sets out: a vision; principles, measurable objectives and the other elements that will form the Council’s approach, including an Action Plan, and Nature Recovery Network. The strategy is hosted on the Council’s website here: [Creating space for nature in Camden](#).

3 Biodiversity Strategy Update

- 3.1 The following section provides a summary of some of the activities undertaken towards each objective, a specific example or two, and suggestions for the future. Many activities contribute to more than one objective. In doing so it exemplifies how the Council is meeting its General Biodiversity Duty.
- 3.2 **Objective: Designated Sites**
“Protect, maintain and enhance Camden’s designated sites, make the network more resilient by buffering sites and improving habitat connections between them, and increase the proportion of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation managed for biodiversity.”
- 3.3 To *protect* sites, as well as being afforded a level of protection through local planning policy, the Nature Conservation Officer (NCO) has been providing specific advice to the development management team on how impacts from development on designated sites can be assessed, avoided and mitigated.
- 3.4 The Council purchased Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve, part of a larger Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and resolved to transfer ownership to the local community. Since it came into our ownership it has been used by the local school for outdoor education, and the local community have been undertaking surveys and habitat management, with our support. The transfer of ownership to a local community organisation is underway, alongside safeguards to ensure the site is managed as a nature reserve into the future.
- 3.5 SINCs were reviewed in 2023 to check that current designations, citations and boundaries were still valid, and to assess potential new sites. For example, owing to the changes to management and new features added to Talacre Town Green by the local community and council, it was recommended for

designation as a Local SINC, recognising the access to nature it provides. Conversley, approximately 60% of the SINC located on the railway embankment at Chalk Farm has been destroyed by High Speed 2.

- 3.6 To *maintain* and *enhance* sites actions have primarily involved habitat management. There is a lot of overlap here with the 'Habitats' objective, so this is covered in more detail below in paragraphs 3.10-3.14.
- 3.7 Making the network more resilient through buffers and connections has involved both the planning pathways mentioned above, and proactively designing networks through the Camden Nature Recovery Network. The former involves influencing masterplans to benefit adjacent sites and the wider network and is more challenging as indirect impacts and outcomes are less tangible. The Camden Nature Recovery Network, as a core output of the strategy, is covered in section 4 of this report.
- 3.8 The proportion of SINC's managed for biodiversity has not changed. This largely reflects differences in ownership of these sites, as we are only in control of the management of sites under our ownership or management.
- 3.9 Looking to the future, the Council has strengthened the policy in the draft new local plan to ensure that we continue to have the tools to minimise impacts on designated sites from development and be more ambitious regarding the opportunities it can bring. We will look at how we can increase our influence on management of those sites that are outside of our ownership. It is expected that actions around habitat management within designated sites will continue largely unchanged.
- 3.10 **Objective: Habitats**
"Protect, maintain and improve priority habitats and increase the area of species-rich grassland, woodland and reedbed."
- 3.11 The majority of priority habitats are within designated sites, and such habitats are also a material consideration in development management decisions, so there is some overlap with the objective above and the actions taken to achieve it. Otherwise, the focus has been on the management of existing habitats in those designated areas, as well as seeking to create new, and improving existing, habitats outside of designated sites.
- 3.12 Examples include Adelaide Local Nature Reserve (LNR), where management activities were reviewed, and increased. Here, the proportion of the meadow that is cut on rotation each year was increased, and scrub cutting also increased to reduce its encroachment on that meadow. At Belsize Woods LNR, the focus has been on establishing a more diverse ground flora in the woodland through clearing some of the ivy, and supplementary planting.



The meadow at Adelaide Local Nature Reserve in May 2025

- 3.13 Across parks and green spaces there has been an increase in areas managed for grassland biodiversity. The delivery of many of these has been led by community organisations working in partnership with the Council. The length of native-species hedgerows has also increased. Quantitative data will be collated and included in the full review of the strategy. To achieve this objective we have been strengthening habitat management knowledge amongst our community groups and partners. A successful workshop on managing urban grasslands for biodiversity, held at Waterlow Park is one example



Grassland management workshop

3.14 Looking to the future, there is more work to be done to increase the biodiversity in the areas of relaxed mowing within our parks, which will mainly involve increasing cutting outside of the flowering period. While we have not managed to identify areas for new woodland creation owing to the constraints on existing green spaces, we will continue to investigate this. However, we have increased the diversity of existing woodland areas through appropriate management techniques, and these programmes will continue. We will also organise more habitat management training for grounds maintenance staff and community partners.

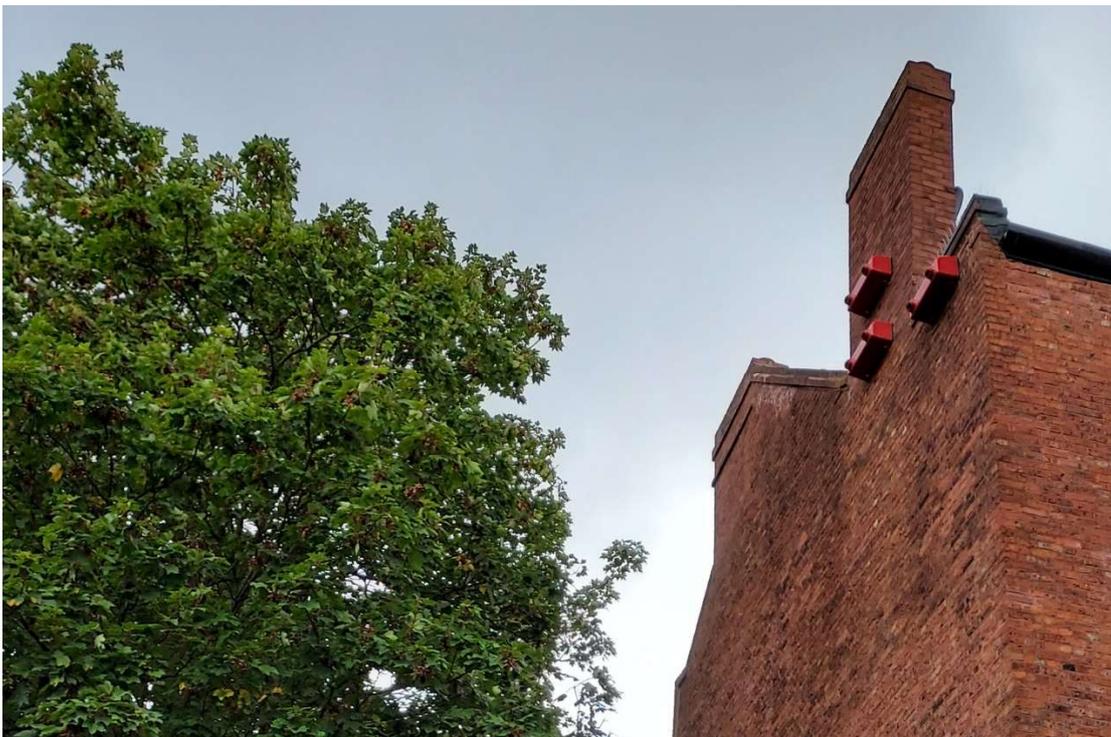
3.15 **Objective: Species**
“Protect, monitor and increase populations of key priority species through conservation action.”

[A list of priority species](#) – species of principal importance for England and/or Species of Conservation Concern for London – that had been recorded in the borough 1980-2020 was published alongside the biodiversity strategy. Work on these has been a mix of research and direct conservation activities. It should be noted that work undertaken under the Designated Sites (SINCs), Habitats, and Parks and Green Spaces objectives will also benefit many of these species. Some examples of species-specific (or species-group specific) work is provided here.

3.16 The NCO has been undertaking monthly moth surveys at nature reserves from April to September (some of these were also run as ‘Moth Morning’ public events), as none of the priority species recorded since 1980 had been recorded from 2012 to 2020. While many new moth records have been

generated for these sites, none of the priority species recorded have been rediscovered this way, though the Cinnabar *Tyria jacobaea*, a day-flying moth, was seen. This is a common species but under surveillance owing to significant population decline nationally. More comprehensive invertebrate surveys were undertaken in the nature reserves in 2024, and the habitat management recommendations from those are being implemented.

- 3.17 Hedgehogs are also an important species in the borough, with key populations in Hampstead Heath and The Regent's Park. There are scattered records across the borough, and the Council worked with the Zoological Society of London and volunteers in 2023 to undertake hedgehog surveys in some nature reserves. None were found. Elsewhere, the NCO has been seeking to support community groups improving their neighbourhoods for hedgehogs, though Camden Green Gym tasks and, through planning application responses, seeking 'hedgehog holes' where new or replacement fencing is installed.
- 3.18 Swifts are a species of principal importance for England, a Species of Conservation Concern for London, and 'Red Listed' owing a severe population decline. Through planning conditions, we seek swift boxes in appropriate locations, and have also erected boxes ourselves during building repair work.



Swift nest boxes installed in the Lissenden Gardens Estate.

- 3.19 The actions taken under this objective are likely to continue to be dynamic, responding to our changing knowledge of these species, and the opportunities that arise through wider work, but is likely to include a mix of species specific interventions for the species mentioned above and habitat management to benefit a suite of species. A review of species of focus will be undertaken as part of the strategy revision.

3.20 Objective: Trees

“Increase tree canopy cover and promote tree species diversity. Make planting decisions that are informed by their potential to support wildlife and resist the loss of ancient and veteran trees.”

3.21 The first part of this objective supports the Council’s Tree Planting Strategy, recognising the role that tree planting can have in supporting biodiversity. That strategy was reported to Culture & Environment Scrutiny Committee in November 2025. The NCO has been working with the Tree Planting Officer, including providing advice on species selection and inputting into the new draft Tree Planting Strategy. As with other objectives, the latter part of this objective relates to the council’s regulatory powers through planning and related legislation.

3.22 Into the future, this objective will continue to be led by the Tree Planting Strategy. The new draft Tree Planting Strategy has been informed by the biodiversity strategy and draft Nature Recovery Network, so the council’s tree planting activities will increase their contribution to improving biodiversity across the borough.

3.23 Objective: Parks and Green Spaces

“Manage Camden’s parks and green spaces to maximise opportunities for space for nature alongside space for people, and continue to provide an increase in inclusive and welcoming areas for people to enjoy wildlife and for wildlife to thrive.”

3.24 While there is some overlap here with the habitats objective, this objective is focused specifically on public parks and green spaces, and more formal areas such as flower beds and shrubbery.

3.25 Much of this work has been led by the Grounds Maintenance team, working with community groups and other volunteers. Activities have included planting early spring bulbs within grasslands and supplementary planting within flower beds and woodland areas. As an example, in 2023, working with the ‘Friends of’ group, a prairie-style border was planted in Waterlow Park, which included many species of value to pollinating insects.



Prairie border at Waterlow Park

- 3.26 Delivery of this objective has also included the Green Space Investment Programme (GSIP). One example would be Swiss Cottage Open Space improvements, which included new areas of wildflowers and several new bird boxes, but most GSIP projects have included planting that benefits biodiversity.



New wildflower areas in Swiss Cottage Open Space

3.27 As stewards of green spaces, it is logical that the Council continues to improve biodiversity within these areas as part of fulfilling our biodiversity duty through the biodiversity strategy. It is therefore anticipated that these actions will continue into the next biodiversity strategy and include quantitative measures of change for GSIP projects and ongoing management reviews. Further work is needed to put in place monitoring of the outcomes of these actions regarding the species objective.

3.28 **Objective: Access to Nature**

Increase opportunities for Camden's residents to experience and learn about the natural environment through volunteering, engagement, access, communication and inclusive and welcoming natural spaces.

3.29 Camden Green Gym, organised by The Conservation Volunteers, has been running for 17 years, and has undertaken much of the management of nature areas over the reporting period on behalf of the Council. West Hampsted Green Gym similarly looks after two of the Council's nature reserves in their area. There are a number of 'Friends of', resident and community groups who do similar work across the borough.



Camden Green Gym volunteers creating an invertebrate hotel.

3.30 The Council is reliant on, and grateful to, volunteers for management of nature reserves and several nature areas in parks. We recognise that the benefit to these volunteers is paramount. We are committed to this approach, an approach that recognises the dual benefits to nature and the physical and mental well-being of the volunteers.

- 3.31 The Council has increased the number of nature events it runs in our parks and nature reserves over the period. This has included ‘Moth Mornings’, (tied in with the species monitoring), butterfly walks, and the management workshop mentioned above. We have also supported other groups to run their own nature events.



Butterfly Walk

- 3.32 Most events were tied in with national ‘citizen science’ surveys, such as the Big Butterfly Count, with our communications focusing on encouraging people to join in at their local park. An annual communications plan for nature, ranging from this sort of sustained messaging with calls to action, to simple awareness raising, has been supported by the Council’s communications team and libraries.
- 3.33 Towards the end of 2025 the Council recruited a Community Nature Officer (CNO), a new three-year post that will be focusing on this objective, including diversifying the audiences with which we engage through community outreach and seeking to increase resident’s nature connectedness for well-being. The CNO has already increased our engagement, communications and events output.
- 3.34 Our Local Nature Reserves have been made available to schools, nurseries and community groups for environmental education and outdoor learning. While these opportunities remain popular, there has been a slight decline in demand owing to the reduction in school-age children in the borough.
- 3.35 Looking to the final year of the current strategy and beyond, the new CNO will enable us to further increase opportunities for engagement and outreach over the next few years, while building confidence and knowledge among

community groups to enable them to run their own nature events. A Big Garden Birdwatch event was run in Lincoln's Inn Field in January, and events planned for 2026 include bat walks, butterfly walks and more. We will continue to promote the outdoor education opportunities provided by our parks and nature reserves and look to support those childcare settings and schools that would otherwise struggle to take up those opportunities.

3.36 Objective: Greening the Grey

Achieve net gain in biodiversity through planning decisions that are supported by policy and guidance, and identify and deliver opportunities to increase biodiversity in urban areas.

3.37 This objective acknowledges that in a heavily urban area the greatest opportunities for biodiversity come through redevelopment, applying planning powers to ensure creation of habitats where previously there were none. The NCO provided advice to the planning policy and development management team on applying local, London and national planning policy to policy development and planning applications, and as previously mentioned the new Local Plan proposes strengthened policies around biodiversity enhancement.

3.38 The objective has also been delivered pro-actively through the GSIP and Highways Greening projects. A great example of the former would be the Greening Compton Close project, which involved de-paving an area of the Regent's Park Estate and replacing with planting that included many plants of value to biodiversity.



Greening Compton Close

3.39 Highways Greening projects are often multi-functional green infrastructure, contributing to transport, climate resilience and biodiversity ends via 'nature-

based solutions', such rain gardens and Sustainable Urban Drainage installations such as those on Goldhurst Terrace.



Goldhurst Terrace Sustainable Urban Drainage

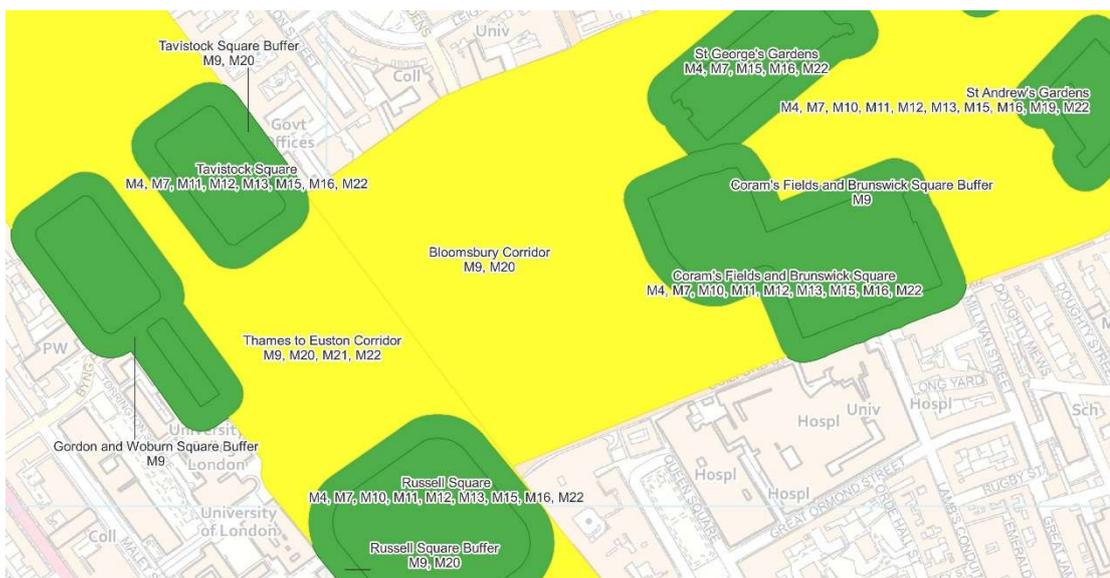
3.40 Looking to the next biodiversity strategy, it is likely that greening the grey through redevelopment and regeneration is going to become even more important owing to the need for nature-based solutions to meet green infrastructure and climate resilience aims, not just for biodiversity's sake. The Nature Recovery Network and emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy provide additional synergy for this work.

4 Camden Nature Recovery Network (CNRN)

- 4.1 A nature recovery network map identifies core areas for wildlife, and measures to make them 'better, bigger, and more joined up.' It is a tool to help answer questions about the best locations for a particular action, or the best actions for a particular location. It is designed to work at any scale and makes no assumptions about who might use or deliver elements. Some of the measures have been and are being carried out under existing Council programmes, but as there is no specific budget for delivery of the network the CNRN is intended to help prioritise and inform these existing programmes and decision making, and influence others.
- 4.2 As well as influencing green space and biodiversity work, the CNRN has also fed into the London Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), the draft of which therefore reflects our spatial priorities for nature. The LNRS will influence planning decisions, as well as the CNRN being directly referenced

within the draft Local Plan and being used in the emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy due for consultation and publication this year.

- 4.3 Development of the CNRN has been based upon the principles of 'better, bigger and more joined-up.' However, given the constraints within an urban area, it has also considered areas of potential change (positive and negative). It is an iterative process; indeed, there are gaps between core sites that we're not yet sure the best way to fill, such as linking sites north and south of the Euston Road, and it will be influenced as other strategic projects evolve, like the Euston Area Plan for example, and as opportunities arise.
- 4.4 Several different layers of information were used to inform the map. These include:
- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (the designated sites)
 - Infra-red vegetation maps
 - Council green space assets
 - Habitat distinctiveness mapping (a habitat's biodiversity)
 - Habitat pathways calculated from the habitat distinctiveness
 - Street tree planting gaps and priorities
 - Opportunities and 'threats' (areas of potential change, such as allocated development sites)
- 4.5 The map also incorporates networks that have been developed by community groups, such as elements of the 'Camden Nature Corridor' that is now supported by the draft Local Plan, and some Neighbourhood Plan work.
- 4.6 Each of the polygons in the CNRN map has one or more associated actions, such as tree planting, grassland improvement, woodland management etc, that link back to the objectives in the biodiversity strategy. A 'snapshot' of a section of the map is provided below.



A section of the Camden Nature Recovery Network map. The M numbers refer to particular actions, for example M9 = Tree Planting and M20 = Green Roof Creation

5 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.1 The Environment Act 2021 amended the Town and Country Planning Act such that certain developments are required to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity. While not a part of the biodiversity strategy, as a Local Planning Authority we are required to include a section on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in our General Biodiversity Duty reports.
- 5.2 In the run up to implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain in early 2024, the NCO and planning managers arranged training and briefings for planning officers. A report into our BNG readiness and further guidance was also commissioned. Considering BNG requirements has been a part of the Council's development management processes, from validation to the approval of the pre-commencement Biodiversity Gain Plans, and the NCO has provided additional input alongside that on local and national policy.
- 5.3 Biodiversity Net Gain is not well designed for urban areas and as legislated is inflexible. As one of the aims of the legislation was to create a market for biodiversity, and owing to other legal safeguards, the Council is currently unable to deliver 'off-site' biodiversity net gain. There is also a lack of BNG providers in London. The result of this is that a large amount of the biodiversity gain generated is delivered a significant distance from London. Most of this tends to be generated by trees lost to development. However, BNG is in addition to local policies on biodiversity and tree planting, not instead of, and in some cases, it has resulted in higher quality landscaping submissions. The most positive BNG outcomes tend to be for larger re-development sites, particularly industrial to residential, where a very low biodiversity baseline is replaced by areas of new green space, particularly things like green roofs. These outcomes are mediated by the Council's local policies and the Urban Greening Factor, and it is probable that they would have been delivered regardless of BNG.
- 5.4 Changes to BNG legislation have been announced by the Government, including exempting sites less than 0.2ha and possible exemptions for residential brownfield development. These changes are likely to significantly reduce the number of planning applications that deliver BNG, though our processes are likely to remain unchanged. Further training for planning staff will be arranged as necessary.

6 Next steps

- 6.1 The Council's current biodiversity strategy, '*Creating space for nature in Camden*' is in its final year. Plans are in place to provide a full review of the strategy, expanding on what has been summarised here, including much more work undertaken by other organisations within the borough, and including quantitative data where it is available.
- 6.2 Some suggestions have been included in this report as to what activities may form part of the next strategy, but there will be internal and external

engagement regarding these, and the objectives, commencing in summer 2026. The review and revised strategy for 2027-2031 will be published in early 2027, and will be the Council's second 'consideration' under its General Biodiversity Duty.

7 Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

- 7.1 This report provides an update on the Biodiversity Strategy and the Council's General Biodiversity Duty. There are no significant financial implications resulting from this report.

8 Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 8.1 This report provides an update on the Biodiversity Strategy and the Council's General Biodiversity Duty. Legal Services have been consulted and have no additional comments.

9 Environmental Implications

- 9.1 The essence of the Biodiversity Strategy and General Biodiversity Duty is to improve the environment, including actions that will ameliorate the effect of climate change, and the overall effect on the environment, and for the citizens of Camden will be positive.

REPORT ENDS