

The government has issued guidance about the enhanced biodiversity duty for public authorities (introduced by the Environment Act 2021), Complying with the biodiversity duty, which states that Local Authorities must "complete your first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024. You must agree your policies and objectives as soon as possible after this". Given the short timescale for this first requirement, please can you confirm the following:

- 1) Who will be the officer leading this work in your Authority? This has yet to be confirmed, though it will likely involve numerous officers from across council departments including planning, corporate land management, parks and green spaces and climate change.
- 2) How has the Authority been preparing for this requirement? We have been working with the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU), Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) to understand the levels of development that are expected in the borough and the amounts of offsite net gain that therefore may be required. This has included looking at the potential for council owned land to be used for offsetting biodiversity. The council is also working in partnership with LWT to deliver the Wigan Greenheart Landscape Recovery Scheme. The aims of the Landscape Recovery Scheme are to make a long-term step-change to the wildlife of Wigan by creating, expanding and improving habitats and connecting them across the landscape to achieve the recovery of threatened species; increasing opportunities for access and engagement with wilder nature for local people; using nature-based solutions to counter the impacts of climate change and developing Wigan's Greenheart.
- 3) What information will be used to determine the baseline? The information mentioned above in answer to question 2 plus annual SBI condition surveys from GMEU and baseline species records and distributions from GMEU. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will also likely contain a lot of the baseline data. GMEU is also set to appoint a Monitoring Officer to monitor and report on BNG implementation.
- 4) What is the programme of work to meet the government's requirements expected to include? The projects mentioned above will form the bulk of this programme of work and will help us to set our policies and objectives. The council is also preparing a new local plan which will set out our policies and objectives with regards to biodiversity in the borough.
- 5) How will communities be engaged in the programme of work? The Local Nature Recovery Strategy will involve extensive public engagement and will be key to how the council sets its policies and objectives going forward.
- 6) How will communities be kept informed about progress? Through the publication of a Biodiversity Duty Report in line with government guidance with the first to be published no later than 1st January 2026 and then updates within 5 years.