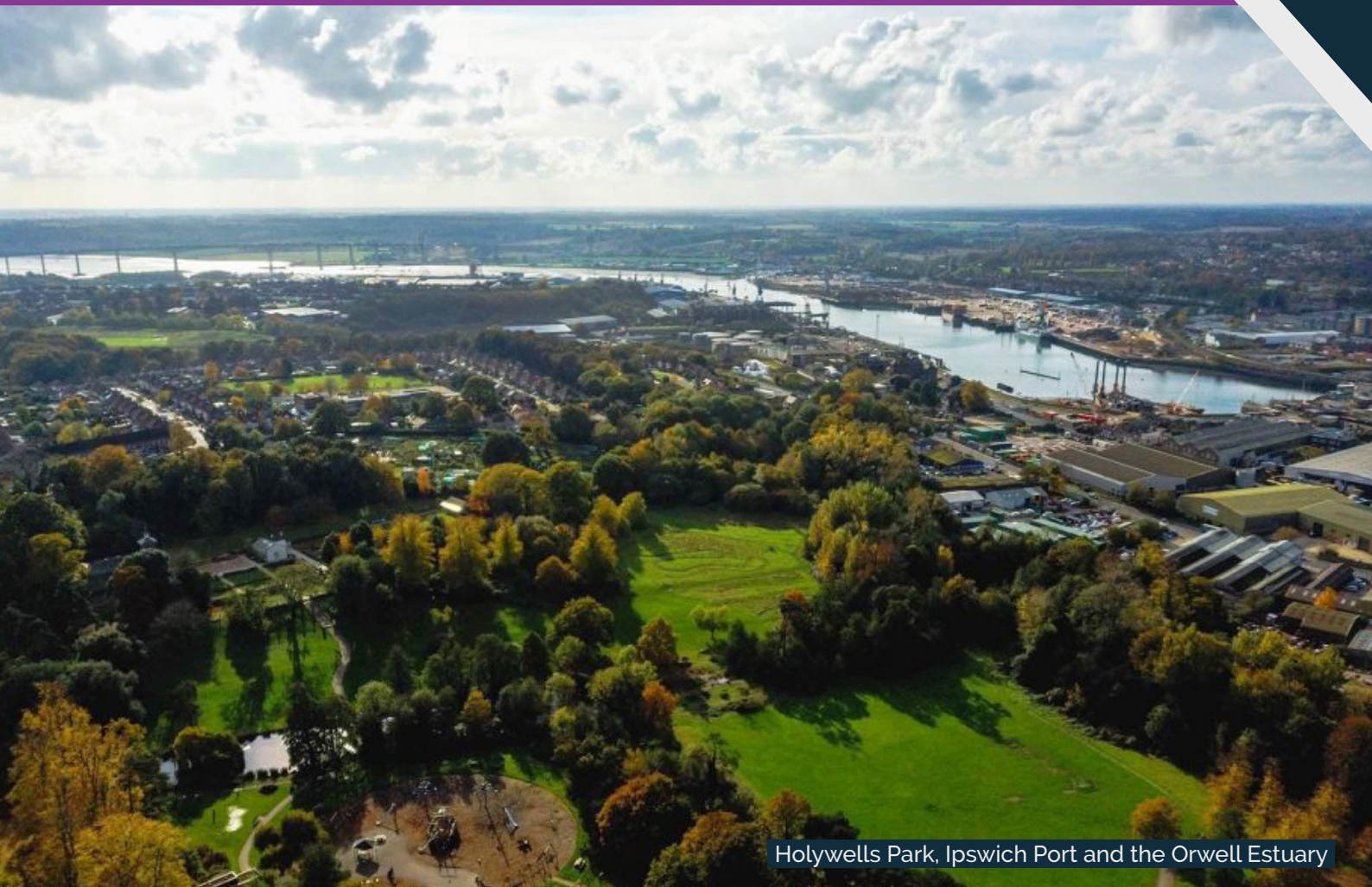


BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Enhancing Urban Life through Access to Nature



Holywells Park, Ipswich Port and the Orwell Estuary

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Foreword

Ipswich is proud of its parks, green spaces and rich natural heritage. From our rivers and wetlands to our heathlands, woodlands and town parks, nature plays a vital role in the character of our town and in the wellbeing of everyone who lives here. This Biodiversity Strategy sets out how Ipswich Borough Council will protect, enhance and restore that natural wealth over the next decade.

We are facing a global biodiversity crisis, and Ipswich is not immune. Like many urban areas, we are a built up town with limited space for nature, and pressures from development, climate change and population growth continue to increase. Yet Ipswich also has a long and proud history of action for wildlife.

For more than 30 years, the Council has invested in skilled staff, protected key sites, worked with partners and communities, and taken a leading role in urban nature recovery. This Biodiversity strategy builds on that strong foundation while recognising that we must now go further.

Biodiversity matters not only for wildlife itself, but for people. Access to nature supports physical and mental health, helps to reduce the impacts of flooding and extreme heat, improves air and water quality, and makes our neighbourhoods more attractive and resilient places to live. A greener Ipswich is a healthier, fairer and more sustainable Ipswich.

This strategy sets out clear priorities and practical actions. It focuses on maintaining and enhancing habitats, strengthening wildlife networks, making the most of our parks, cemeteries and council owned land, and meeting new legal responsibilities such as Biodiversity Net Gain. Just as importantly, it recognises that the Council cannot achieve this alone. Success will depend on collaboration with partners, community groups, volunteers, residents and developers, and on encouraging everyone to play their part.

I am proud of the work already taking place across Ipswich and of the commitment shown by our staff, partners and communities. This strategy provides a clear, ambitious and realistic framework to guide our actions from 2026 to 2036, helping nature to recover and ensuring that future generations can enjoy a town that is rich in wildlife and opportunity.

Councillor Lucy Trenchard

Parks and Climate Change



Biodiversity and the biodiversity crisis

Biodiversity

Biodiversity means all living things - plants, animals, insects, fungi - and the ecosystems they create. These living systems give us the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. They include both common species and rare ones.

What is the biodiversity crisis?

Nature in Ipswich, the UK, and globally is under serious pressure. The UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with around 15% of native species at risk of extinction. The Dasgupta Review (2021) says that our economies and wellbeing depend on nature, but we are using it faster than it can renew itself.

Why biodiversity is declining

Some of the main causes are:

A growing population (Ipswich's population increased by almost 5% in the last 10 years)
Increased demand for land, food and energy
Loss, damage, and fragmentation of habitats — meaning wildlife has fewer places to live..



Landseer Park



Heathland at Piper's Vale

Biodiversity in Ipswich

Ipswich is a very built-up town with not much open countryside left. This makes it harder to stop the loss of local wildlife.

Local councils must think about how their decisions affect nature and reduce any harm they cause.

For more than 30 years, Ipswich Borough Council has been working to protect and improve wildlife habitats. They do this by:

- Managing parks and open spaces in ways that help wildlife
- Employing trained wildlife experts
- Setting aside land as Local Nature Reserves
- Mapping habitats and wildlife networks
- Working with nearby councils and community groups.

Ipswich has often been ahead of the curve in trying new ideas.

For example:

- One of 8 "Urban Buzz" cities in 2018 — helping improve pollinator habitats
- Worked with Butterfly Conservation to boost silver-studded blue butterflies
- Took part in plans to become a "Swift City" with the RSPB

Even with all this work, biodiversity is still declining, so more action is needed. This strategy looks at the current situation and sets out new ways of working to help nature recover. A healthy natural environment helps create healthy, happy and thriving communities.

The 'Nature' of Ipswich

Ipswich may be a small town, but it has many important places for wildlife.

These include:

- The Orwell Estuary, which is extremely important for birds that breed and spend the winter here.
- Heathland at Piper's Vale and Bixley Heath.
- Ancient woodland like Braziers Wood.
- Wetland areas such as Belstead Brook Park.

Ipswich is home to many protected species, including hazel dormice, otters, water voles, lizards, grass snakes, adders, great-crested newts, and the silver-studded blue butterfly.

Because wildlife areas can become cut off from each other, the Council mapped out the Ipswich Ecological Network to show how habitats connect. The latest version was updated in March 2022.

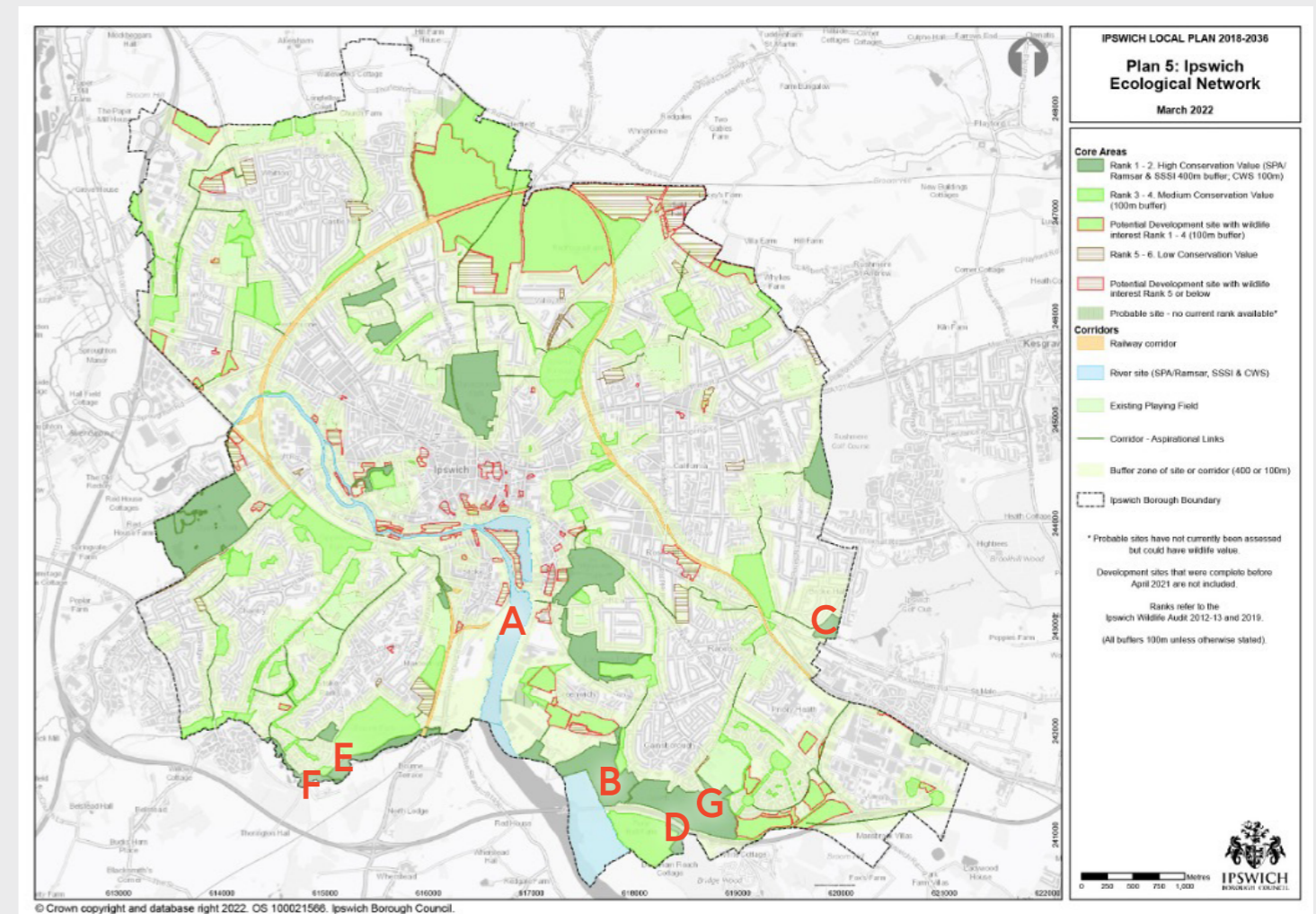
This idea comes from the Lawton Report (2010), which said the UK needs nature areas that are "bigger, better and more joined up."

There isn't much space in Ipswich to make new large wildlife areas, but we can improve what we already have and make the links between them stronger. Even though the global biodiversity crisis is huge, we can still make a real difference locally. Ipswich's wildlife is special, and local people care about it.

To stop wildlife from declining, things must change — and the community has a big part to play.

Sites of Interest

The Ecological Network map below taken from The Local Plan 2018 – 2036 has been update to reference sites of biodiversity and ecological interest.





Bluebell Walk, Holywells Park



Wildflower Meadow, Former Tooks Bakery Housing Development

Why Biodiversity Matters for Ipswich

Biodiversity — a rich variety of plants, animals and habitats — improves life for everyone in Ipswich.

Here's how:

- Natural spaces help people stay healthy and reduce stress.
- Improving parks and open spaces means that all communities can enjoy safe, welcoming places.
- Wildlife-rich areas help cool the town, absorb rainwater and reduce flooding.
- Activities and events in nature give people chances to learn new skills and get involved.
- Protecting nature helps make Ipswich a greener, more sustainable town.
- Acting now protects the environment for future generations.

Ipswich already has lots to be proud of, including:

- Wildlife corridors in new housing areas
- "Tree Cities of the World" status
- Green Flag Awards for several parks
- Over 20,000 trees planted in two years
- A high ranking for wildlife conservation



Parks Overview

- 12** Parks and Garden sites, of which 2 are English Heritage listed
- 50** Amenity Green Spaces
- 94** Play Areas
- 4** Conservation Areas
- 3** Green Flags



Countryside & Wildlife Overview

- 19** County Wildlife sites
- 8** Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- 19** Allotment fields
- Undertake tree inspections and tree protection

The Planning process and Biodiversity Net Gain

Local councils now have a stronger legal duty to protect and improve nature, not just maintain it. This comes from the 2021 Environment Act, which builds on earlier rules from 2006. This strategy is part of Ipswich Borough Council's work to meet that duty. It explains the actions the Council will take to help improve biodiversity.

The Council is helping to develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Suffolk and Norfolk. As part of this, Ipswich will highlight the importance of nature in towns and the benefits it brings to large numbers of people.

A key new rule called Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) means that most new developments must deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity, compared with the state of the site before building starts.

Sometimes, developers cannot achieve this increase on-site, so improvements may need to happen elsewhere. This can be done using biodiversity gain sites or biodiversity credits.

Ipswich Borough Council will look at how best to keep these benefits within the local area, possibly using Council-owned land for habitat improvements. Some land that is not suitable for development could be ideal for long-term habitat creation.

The Ipswich Local Plan includes the Ipswich Ecological Network map and policies that protect wildlife sites and the corridors that connect them. These policies help improve biodiversity in Ipswich and beyond.

10 Tree Planting

Across most of Ipswich's nature reserves, parks and green spaces, the tree cover is already close to the best level for wildlife. But where there is space to add more trees without harming other important habitats, the Council will plant more. The current tree canopy cover is 18.4%, and the UK aims for 19% by 2050, with 20%+ encouraged for better cooling, shade and wildlife benefits.

To grow new trees, the Council will use the most natural, low-impact methods first:

- Natural regeneration — letting new trees grow from local seeds by stopping cutting and keeping grazing animals out.
- If this isn't possible, the Council will try to move naturally seeded young trees from other areas or grow new ones from local seed with community volunteers.
- Buying trees will be a last resort, and only from local, UK-grown stock, with no peat used in their cultivation.

These steps help trees grow better, reduce maintenance costs, and avoid bringing in new pests and diseases..



IPSWICH TREE CHARTER



Protection and correct maintenance of our existing trees and woodlands in the town



Protection of our irreplaceable characterful trees



Utilise natural regeneration for local provenance



Always plant trees under the "Right tree, right place, right reason" ethos



Endeavor to explore new opportunities for tree planting and urban greening



Make trees, woodland, tree planting and engagement with the natural world accessible to all



Create futureproof resilient woodlands for future generations whilst retaining local landscape character



Support the fight against climate change with natural net zero solutions



Ensure all developments support existing trees and plant for the future



Qualified staff and volunteers will support trees within the town

The Role of Trees

Trees are a vital part of local nature. They support many insects, animals and fungi. Ipswich Borough Council has created a Tree Charter to highlight the benefits trees provide and to promote a "Right Tree, Right Place" approach.

Ipswich has been recognised as a 'Tree City of the World' for several years, and the Council aims to keep this status. Woodlands

Ipswich has several types of woodland, including:

- Ancient woodland at Spring Wood and Braziers Wood
- Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site at Bridge Wood
- Other secondary and self-sown woodland areas

The Council manages these woods using best practice to support as many species as possible.

Old and Veteran Trees

Older trees are especially valuable for wildlife because they provide more habitats for a wider range of species.

These trees are recorded in the Council's tree-management system and are checked for safety and general condition.

The Council also encourages the community to get involved in caring for old trees through the Tree Wardens scheme..



Millenium Wood



"The Ancient Oak" in Bridge Wood, Orwell Country Park

Water & Wetlands

Wildflower bank, Sproughton Enterprise Park

Open water in parks or nature reserves greatly increases biodiversity. It creates a different type of habitat and also provides drinking water for wildlife.

Rivers

Ipswich has two important river corridors: the Gipping/Orwell and the Belstead Brook.

Rivers act like continuous wildlife highways, even through towns.

The Council does not manage the rivers themselves, but it owns some land beside them, which is important for supporting wildlife. The Council will work with the Environment Agency and others to help improve these corridors.

The River Gipping has poor water quality and low biodiversity. This is mainly because much of its water is taken at Sproughton and piped to Alton Water for drinking supplies. The Council will work with partners to find ways to improve the flow, though this is a big challenge.

Growing local populations will increase pressure on already limited water resources.

Ponds, lakes and wetlands

Ipswich has many ponds and wetlands in parks and nature reserves. Some suffer from poor water quality, for example the canals at Alderman Road and Holywells Park.

The problems come from:

- Little or no water flow
- A build-up of leaves and food thrown for ducks
- This adds too many nutrients, causing:
 - Thick growth of surface plants like duckweed
 - Less light reaching underwater plants
 - Water becoming unhealthy

To fix this, ponds sometimes need de-silting — removing the build-up of rotting material. The Council will try to reduce nutrient inputs, carry out de-silting when needed, and look for grant funding for bigger jobs.

Wetland habitats such as reedbeds, wet meadows and wet woodlands are rare and declining in the UK, so they are a priority for management. But they are often hard and expensive to look after because machinery can't easily access wet ground.



Colchester Road Allotments

Other critical habitats

Grassland

Areas of long grass or meadow are very important for wildlife. They support far more plants and insects than regularly mown grass. Ipswich Borough Council has been increasing long-grass areas in parks and cemeteries for many years and will continue to expand them where suitable.

Lowland Heathland

Heathland is rare across the UK, but Ipswich still has some important patches, especially on the eastern side of the town. Many of these areas are protected as SSSIs or County Wildlife Sites. Looking after them is a top priority. Climate change is making this harder — for example, invasive gorse now grows almost twice as fast as it did 25 years ago.

Scrub, open mosaic and urban habitats

Mixed habitats — such as grassland, scrub, bare ground and log piles — can support a huge variety of species. Many parks and open spaces in Ipswich already include these types of areas.

Allotments

Ipswich has 16 allotment sites with around 2,500 plots. Although their main purpose is growing food, allotments still provide wildlife benefits. Most have hedges, orchard areas and wildlife plots, so they act as important green spaces within the wider ecological network.

Cemeteries

Cemeteries also support wildlife because they have long grass, trees, hedges and ponds. They are usually quiet and undisturbed, which makes them valuable places for nature.



Guided wildlife walk, The Dales Local Nature Reserve

Engagement and Collaboration

The Council has a strong history of giving residents and local people chances to get involved in looking after wildlife habitats. This is mainly through the Wildlife Ranger team and the Greenways Countryside Project.

Regular volunteering sessions give people:

- Fresh air and exercise
- Good company
- A sense of achievement
- Time spent in nature

The Council also runs many wildlife-themed events and activities — from building wildlife homes, to guided walks, pond-dipping and other educational sessions.

The Council knows that it cannot reverse biodiversity decline alone. To make a real difference, it needs to work with:

- Existing and new partners
- Community groups
- Residents across the town

Even small actions matter. For example, if every garden in Ipswich had a stag beetle log pile, it could transform the future of that species.

Balancing wildlife needs with the needs of local people can be difficult. Some important habitats might need to become “no-access” areas, while others may be strong enough to be more multi-functional and open to public use.

Core Aims and Actions

Biodiversity is extremely important for its own sake, but equally in the services that it provides for us. Biodiverse habitats where we live will help mitigate some of the issues associated with our changing climate, such as moderating temperatures, slowing flood waters, cleaning the air and providing shade. Whilst the Council cannot solve the Biodiversity Crisis alone, we can take steps to maximise diversity and help avoid species extinctions in Ipswich.

The Biodiversity Strategy 2026 to 2036 is built around three core aims:

Engaging and promoting awareness – we work in collaboration, engaging, developing, and encouraging participation

- Work with partners to increase understanding of the current situation and learn new skills for biodiversity improvement.
- Continue to engage with local people through public events and offering a wide range of relevant volunteering opportunities.

Preserving and Maintaining Biodiversity – maintaining habitats and enhancing biodiversity

- Continue to employ wildlife professionals to maintain our habitats and advise the Council on appropriate measures to enhance biodiversity.
- Where trees are removed for reasons other than good biodiversity management, we will replant 2 trees for each one lost.
- Continue to strive to remove peat from the tree and plant supply chain and minimise the use of pesticides across our land.
- To maximise the potential of our buildings, parks, open spaces, watercourses and tree stock to support biodiversity, whilst balancing their multifunctional needs.
- Contribute where possible to the delivery of the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Learning and evaluating – monitoring, learning and exploring opportunities and technology

- Explore new ways to increase biodiversity and wildlife security across the town.
- Repeat the town-wide ‘Wildlife Audit’ to help monitor the state of our natural capital and inform decision making for the Local Plan and other policies.
- Invest in machinery and technology to assist with management of semi-natural habitats.



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