

## **Consultation Response on The Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland**

**18<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland and looks forward to working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on delivery.

Belfast City Council has a significant number of corporate Plans and Strategies which support and contribute to the protection of the natural environment. These include but are not limited to the Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan, Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan, Open Space Strategy, Tree Strategy and Climate Action Plan. Council is also in the process of developing the new Belfast Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

### **Background and Comments**

In 2021 and 2023 DAERA requested input from BCC in relation to the development of a new NI Biodiversity Strategy. The Council responded and made suggestions to assist with Strategy development and implementation.

The draft Strategy in its current form lacks a framework, targets, lead delivery agents and identified funding sources. As such the strategy will not achieve the Mission or Vision outlined. BCC reiterates the previous suggestion to adopt the four goals and 23 targets identified in the Global Biodiversity Framework at the Northern Ireland level.

To halt and reverse biodiversity loss across NI, Council reiterates the following requirements.

1. Robust Legislation and policies for example in terms of protection of priority habitats and species outside designated sites.
2. Baseline data – the dearth of ecological data across most habitats and taxa prevents informed decision making and facilitates short term decisions over long term societal benefits. It is impossible to monitor trends across most taxa and biodiversity indicators especially at a local level due to this data deficiency.
3. Cessation of incentives which are damaging the natural environment. The Environmental Audit Committee found that all too often, governments spend more on practices that exploit the natural environment than conserving it.

4. Resources – Lack of investment in the natural environment is simply storing up costs for future generations for example on invasive alien species which is currently estimated to cost £4 bn to the UK economy annually previously £1.8bn in 2021.
5. Resources – ecological skills development in particular across all areas of Central and Local Government but also across within the ecological sector. There is a significant skills gap recognised by the sector which needs addressed.
6. For the new Nature Recovery Strategy to succeed it needs to identify existing pressures and constraints accompanied with detailed actions to address these. There needs to be SMART Targets with interim milestones and monitoring accompanied with resources both skilled professionals and revenue which can be accessed by environmental organisations and Local Authorities.
7. Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Collaboration across all sectors is required to deliver the outcomes needed in Central and Local Government, Environmental NGOs but also, all public bodies including the Health and Education sectors.
8. We welcome the proposal to convene a Nature Recovery forum but repeat that structures should be reinstated including the NI Biodiversity Group and the Habitat and Species Action Plan Groups.