

Appendix 1 Biodiversity – Ongoing Work Programme

Table 1: Biodiversity – Ongoing Work Programme

Project	Status
<p>Recruitment of Biodiversity Officer</p>	<p>A further Biodiversity Officer is now successfully in post and supporting work streams in conjunction with existing Biodiversity Officer and Open Space and Streetscene Service.</p>
<p>Local Biodiversity Plan (LBAP) for Belfast</p>	<p>Members approved funding last financial year to support the development of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Belfast. Development is statutory responsibility of Council and will provide a mechanism for local delivery on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity across the city. It will set out local priorities for action, along with targets for priority habitats, species, and locally important wildlife sites.</p> <p>ARUP Consulting were successfully appointed in January to lead on the project. Our newly appointed Biodiversity Officer is working closely with their project team on the development of the draft plan, including an ongoing biodiversity data audit and assessment and associated stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>At this point it is envisaged that a further update on the LBAP and the planned consultation will be presented to Committee in June. It is anticipated that public consultation on the draft plan, hosted on the Your Say platform, will run for 14 weeks between July and September and will include drop-in events, with the final plan expected to be in place later in the Autumn.</p>
<p>Habitat Surveys – data collection for a baseline</p>	<p>Work to establish up-to-date ecological baseline for Council’s open space sites ongoing following Members agreement of funding. In addition to informing the development of the LBAP and the Nature Town and Cities (NTC) project – recommendations emerging from these surveys will help shape future management plans and capital development proposals.</p> <p>Sites where extending opening hour and park lighting are being considered through our Capital Programme, as well as on our existing 23 Green-Flag accredited sites are being prioritised, to ensure site-specific ecological recommendations can be considered within relevant management plans.</p> <p>Extended Phase 1 habitat surveys have been completed for nine sites: Ormeau, Botanic, Belmont, Falls, Glencairn, Musgrave and Dunville Parks and Grove Playing Fields. Recommendations identified include measures relating to protected species and the management of invasive species. Site manager engagement to review and agree next steps is now planned.</p>

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<p>‘Breaking Through Barriers to Connect People and Nature’ - Nature Towns and Cities Project</p>	<p>Members will be aware that at the People and Communities Committee in August they were advised of the award of £850,514 funding towards a revenue project ‘Breaking Through Barriers to Connect People and Nature’ to support nature recovery (total project cost £924,41). (See Appendix 3 – ‘Heritage Lottery Nature Towns and Cities Funding Award’– P&C report 5th Aug 2025)</p> <p>As part of the UK-wide Nature Towns and Cities programme (NTC) and funded by Lottery Heritage Funded, the new revenue project which is being delivered in partnership with Ulster Wildlife – was officially launched at City Hall by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Paul Doherty on 10th March.)</p> <p>Project governance arrangements are being established and recruitment of NTC project team (Project Manager, Conservation and Evidence Officer and Engagement Officer) has been successfully completed and all will be in post later this month.</p> <p>The project’s 4 key elements include: strengthening evidence base; enhancing existing open spaces for biodiversity; identifying opportunities to ‘green the grey’; and enhancing organisational sustainability and volunteering.</p> <p>Over the next two years the project will work to strengthen connections between people and nature across the city by collaborating with stakeholders and communities to co-design a shared vision - including plans and mechanisms for nature’s recovery for Belfast and surrounding areas. This will include including exploring practical ways to bring more nature into everyday spaces.</p>
<p>‘Belfast is Making Space for Nature’ – DAERA funded project</p>	<p>Members were advised at the People and Communities Committee on 7th October of the successful award of £472,000 from the DAERA Challenge Fund for this capital project, with a total value of £522,500 and a Council contribution of £50,500. (See Appendix 4 – DAERA Funding Award and Update on the NoM on Urban Meadows, P&C report, 7th Oct 2025.)</p> <p>Over the next two years, the project will create a landscape-scale Nature Recovery Network across Belfast, improving habitat extent, condition, and connectivity. Progress to date includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with key partners to identify current and future collaborative project opportunities. • Purchase of essential machinery for managing existing and new meadow areas. • Procurement of 200m of fencing as part of a wider conacre fencing project to support grazing at Lagan Meadows and Cave Hill.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gorse removal on Cave Hill to restore heathland and reduce wildfire risk (Climate Programme funded). <p>Priorities for this financial year include developing Conservation Management Plans, delivering staff and stakeholder training, creating demonstration sites, and progressing recommendations from Habitat Surveys, including identifying funding opportunities.</p>
<p>Belfast Tree Strategy</p>	<p>Council's has delivered a series of tree planting and hedgerow initiatives across the city during the recent tree planting season (November to March) in support of the One Million Trees initiative, and a new Community Orchard Project, which will be rolled out city wide over the next number of years, with support of new Woodland Officers, was launched in March 2026 at Shaw's Bridge. In total 12,000 native trees, 1179 linear metres of hedging have been planted. Thirty-six tree related events have also been facilitated, involving more than 325 participants from community and corporate groups, schools, and international student organisations.</p> <p>Partnership working also continues to strengthen through collaborative tree planting initiatives with the Woodland Trust and the National Trust in line with the aspirations of the Belfast Tree Establishment Strategy.</p> <p>As part of ongoing Tree Risk Management work- and supported by dedicated funding secured in the last year financial year - diseased Ash trees have been removed from identified sites, including Lyric Wood and Waterworks Park and replaced with native trees with further planting planned.</p>
<p>Urban Meadows Project – capital work for meadow habitat creation</p>	<p>Members will recall that, at the People and Communities Committee meeting on 7th October, they received an update on plans to utilise the recently allocated £50,000 budget to deliver the Notice of Motion on Urban Meadows. Under this Notice of Motion, it had been agreed to <i>"identify a suitable site for wildflower cultivation in each quadrant of Belfast."</i> Following a prioritisation process, the four selected sites were Glencairn Park, Ormeau Park, Belmont Park, and Brook Leisure Centre. (See Appendix 4 – DAERA Funding Award and Update on the NoM on Urban Meadows, P&C report, 7th Oct 2025)</p> <p>Following further assessment of site-specific factors, it has been agreed that project delivery will now take place during the Autumn/Winter 2026–27 growing season. A tender is currently being developed via the Council's capital planning processes for contractors to implement the works.</p>

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	<p>Associated resource requirements to ensure project sustainability - including additional machinery and staff training on the establishment and management of species-rich grassland- are being progressed through parallel project workstreams.</p>
<p>Replacement Fencing at Conacre Grazing Sites</p>	<p>A total of £117,00 of funding in place to deliver replacement fencing at our key grazing sites at Lagan Meadows and Cavehill to accommodate our improved management of priority habitats through grazing in line with site management plans. Fencing works are scheduled for September post bird-nesting season.</p> <p>This project is being facilitated through internal funding and funding secured through 'Belfast is Making Space for Nature' – DAERA funded project to purchase fencing materials for both sites.</p>
<p>Climate Action Programme - funded projects</p>	<p>Work on key Climate Action Programme funded biodiversity projects complete and further works ongoing and planned for this year. Delivery will contribute to key partner funded projects this year, i.e. gorse removal on Cave Hill to restore priority heathland habitat and reduce the risk of wildfires contributing to climate resilience as part of Belfast is Making Space for Nature project.</p>
<p>Herbicide Reduction</p>	<p>In response to a Member NOM a Herbicide Reduction Protocol is currently in being drafted by officers. In the final stages of completion this internal document will outline our commitment to reduce the use and reliance on herbicides across the council estate, in line with best practice. Final trialling of alternative weed control methods and engagement with operational managers is ongoing.</p>