

The East Herts District Council (EHDC) Ecological and Biodiversity Crisis (EBC) Motion

This Council recognises that there is an ecological and biodiversity crisis, and the natural world is under threat. In our county alone 76 species became extinct in the last 50 years¹. Insect populations have suffered drastic declines, with far-reaching consequences for both wildlife and people. With a third of our food crops pollinated by insects, there is a lot to lose. Much of our wildlife relies on insects for food. Without them, we risk the collapse of our natural world.

This growing ecological crisis is intrinsically linked to climate breakdown which is beginning to seriously affect the health of our environment and the wellbeing of residents.

In East Herts we have special responsibility for valuable wetland areas found in the Stort Valley, and the internationally important, Lea Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site. Our chalk rivers are not yet protected by statutory designations but are under increasing threat from water abstraction and pollution, and so need special protection. A recent chalk stream survey by Salmon and Trout Conservation UK showed that numbers of mayflies, a key indicator species for river health, were down by 44 per cent when compared with 1998 data.

This Council believes that the consequences of biodiversity loss and ecological impacts, alongside the climate emergency, are so severe that one of our top priorities must be to put actions in place that help prevent these impacts from getting worse. We have already started to review what can be done to conserve and enhance biodiversity, as required under the Biodiversity Duty of the Environment Act 2021. Furthermore, the Council has contributed to the formulation of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership's Biodiversity Action Plan and is working with partners across the county on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy which is due to be finalised within the coming 18 months. The council has fully incorporated the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, also introduced by the 2021 Act, into its planning requirements, with detailed guidance available to developers on the Council's website.

Despite the activity, however, this Council recognises it must continue to change practices and both listen to the voices of and use its own voice to advocate on behalf of, our residents, rural and urban communities, businesses, farmers, landowners and our precious species, habitats, and ecosystems to protect our critical natural capital. Across its own estate this Council will lead change, improve resilience, inspire the community and collaborate with all interested parties and organisations to promote the recovery of biodiversity.

This Council reaffirms its commitment to protecting our environment, as follows:

1. This Council declares an Ecological and Biodiversity Crisis (EBC)
2. We commit to embedding nature's recovery at the heart of its strategic plans (including the East Herts Local Plan), policy areas, service contracting and decision-making processes.
3. We support the goal defined by the Wildlife Trusts to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030, in line with national and international commitments to biodiversity

¹ Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust - Hertfordshire's State of Nature 2020 report

4. We commit to tackling the climate and nature emergencies together and prioritising investment in nature-based solutions to climate change.
5. We resolve to use an evidence-based approach to protect critical natural capital, build back and reverse losses to our nationally and internationally important species, habitats and ecosystems including our rare chalk streams
6. We resolve to set up a Biodiversity Forum, consisting of elected members (cross party), officers and co-optees from expert bodies, to examine the ecological and biodiversity needs of the district and put forward proposals for the Council's consideration. The output from the East Herts forum and Hertfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy be used to establish potential delivery mechanisms and to leverage government funding towards achieving the crucial recovery of nature in our area.