

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Biodiversity Action Plan

2027 - 2032



DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

Introduction

This discussion paper provides background information for the next Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) County Biodiversity Action Plan 2026-2031. It builds on the work carried out under the current Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025.

We want to hear your views on the main issues affecting nature and wildlife in your area. Your feedback will help us decide what the new Biodiversity Action Plan should aim to achieve over the next five years. Please share your thoughts with on:

- What does biodiversity mean to you?
- How do you feel we can restore biodiversity in our county?
- What biodiversity actions do you feel are important for the new county biodiversity action plan?

Everyone has a role to play to address biodiversity loss and the restoration of nature. It is important that we all play our part. Together, we can make a positive difference for wildlife, our communities, and future generations.

What is Biodiversity?

You may have heard the word *biodiversity*, but what does it mean? Simply put, biodiversity is the variety of living things on Earth. It is the diversity of nature, of our habitats, plants, and animals (including us). We are a part of nature and everything in nature is connected. Think of all the different species and habitats on our planet as threads in a net, the more threads that intertwine, the stronger the net. The stronger the net, the better nature can provide for us and cope with threats such as climate change.

A healthy and diverse natural environment is better able to deal with challenges such as climate change, pollution, and extreme weather. It also provides many benefits that people rely on every day. Clean air, clean water, food, and healthy surroundings all depend on nature.

When a species disappears or a habitat is damaged, it can affect many other plants and animals. These effects can spread through the whole natural system. For example, some insects help pollinate crops and wild plants. If these insects decline, it can affect food production and reduce the number of wildflowers. This can then affect birds, mammals, and other wildlife that depend on those plants for food and shelter.

This shows that everything in nature is connected. A change to one species or habitat can affect many others.

When our actions damage habitats or reduce wildlife, nature suffers. This can also have negative effects on people, including higher costs, health impacts, and a lower quality of life. Sometimes these changes happen slowly, and future generations may feel the biggest effects. Climate change is one example. We are already seeing more floods, droughts, storms, and other extreme weather events that affect both people and nature.





Threats to Biodiversity

Extinction rates are increasing with over 25% of species now at threat of extinction. Both locally and globally, biodiversity is facing many threats. Some of the biggest threats faced by our plants, animals, and fungi, include:

- Habitat loss and degradation
- Climate change
- Pollution
- Disturbance
- Overexploitation
- Biological invasions from invasive species

It will require a huge effort to limit the damage from these threats, but it is certainly an effort worth making as we rely on biodiversity for our foods, clothes, medicines, climate control, and many other aspects of daily life.

As an urban county across a relatively small area, DLR experiences many pressures on its resources. Biodiversity loss is a constant reminder that we have work even harder to protect and restore biodiversity where we can, across the county. It also means that our smaller biodiversity areas and habitats become even more important for our county to retain, protect, restore or create habitats, including hedgerows, small wetland habitats, pollinator sites and to also create small biodiversity areas in our gardens.

Without biodiversity we have no clean air, clean water and healthy environments in which to live and enjoy our lives. Biodiversity quietly bridges the gaps in our hard landscapes. Sustaining the natural world ensures that it continues to sustain us in return.

What is a Biodiversity Action Plan?

The new DLR County Biodiversity Action Plan (CBAP) will aim to provide a structured approach to managing biodiversity at the local authority level and continuing the work of our previous Plan (County Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 - 2025). Put simply, it is a practical "to-do list" for nature and biodiversity. It will consist of a list of actions for biodiversity that the LA will implement over the 5 years of the Plan and is reliant on funding and resources in order to implement the actions.



Local authorities play an important role in trying to address biodiversity loss and especially in urban areas such as DLR where land use and space are under a lot of pressure. County Development Plans and Local Development Plans provide statutory protection for our proposed Natural Heritage Areas, County Hedgerows, Locally Important Biodiversity Sites and EU Annex habitats and Species. The Biodiversity Action Plan supports translating these policies into action on the ground.

This is further supported by the National Biodiversity Action Plan, which recognises the key role local authorities play in biodiversity conservation through policy and requires that the objectives of the NBAP are aligned and integrated within statutory land use plans.



At regional level DLR are also partners of the Dublin Bay Biosphere and collaborate with our partners in relation to sustainable living in the biosphere, along with conservation and research for biodiversity.

The new Biodiversity Plan will also provide a coordinated approach for DLR to work with local communities, state agencies, NGOs, educational institutions and landowners to try to restore biodiversity and address biodiversity loss. At local level, communities are progressing their own local biodiversity plans which aim to reflect our County Biodiversity Action Plan and the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

A Biodiversity Working Group of the DLR Heritage Forum has been assembled to collaborate with the Biodiversity Officer in this task. Operating as a non-statutory advisory group, it will provide observations on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Biodiversity Action Plan.

See what actions were included in the previous plan in [Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025](#) or scan the QR code:

Biodiversity of our County

Coastal and Marine

Did you know that there are cold-water reefs in our marine waters.

Like warm-water corals, cold-water ones can form huge reef structures on which many animals depend. Unlike warm water reefs which need the light from the sun to make food and grow, our cold-water reefs don't need the sunlight to make food so they are found much deeper in the sea. As there is no sunlight, the water is cold. Cold-water reefs survive by trapping plankton and other tiny food particles in the water, and they can take a very long time to grow. The cold-water reefs off our DLR coastline comprise starfish, brittle star, sea urchins and red encrusting algae. Our biodiversity surveys of the intertidal and coldwater reefs has also been shared with National Parks and Wildlife Services and the Department of the Marine.



Marine mammals such as harbour porpoise, common seal and grey seal can be seen around Dalkey Island and in the Dún Laoghaire harbours. Bottlenosed dolphins and common dolphins, minke, fin and killer whales have all been recorded in the marine waters off our coastline. The three species that regularly occur in our marine waters are harbour porpoise, grey seal and bottle-nosed dolphin.

Seabirds feed in the marine waters including our protected tern species of Dalkey Island and other birds such as great-crested grebes, gannets, guillemots to name a few.

Some interesting habitats occur on Dalkey Island including coastal grasslands, rock outcrops, wet grassland, dense bracken, sea cliffs, rocky shores, inter-tidal and submerged zones. All of these habitats contribute to the unique wild and isolated character of the islands that everyone enjoys. A number of rare plants have been recorded from the grassland on the islands in recent decades. Dalkey Island is also such an important area for our protected seabirds, mainly terns but also for wintering birds including brent geese.

Boooterstown marsh is one of the only saltmarsh habitats in our county. It is an important area for foraging and roosting for many wintering birds and waterbirds including dunlin, redshank, oystercatcher, brent geese and black-tailed godwit. Over a thousand black-tailed godwits were noted in Boooterstown marsh during our winter bird surveys. Boooterstown marsh is one of our most significant sites for these bird species. Currently, the greatest threat to Boooterstown marsh is the presence of an invasive species that we are currently treating and hope to manage before it takes over the marsh.



QR Code for previous Biodiversity Plan
2021-2025

Native Woodlands

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) is home to three remaining native woodlands that are of exceptional importance for biodiversity, wildlife, and the habitats they support. These woodlands are among the most valuable ecological sites in the county and are designated as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs).

All three woodlands are surrounded by urban development and residential areas, making them particularly vulnerable to human pressures and the impacts of urbanisation. Without active management and protection, these important habitats face ongoing decline. Each woodland has been surveyed by a specialist woodland ecologist, and a comprehensive Woodland Management Plan has been developed for each site. These plans identify a range of actions aimed at restoring and enhancing the ecological health of the woodlands.



These woodlands will be a key focus of future restoration efforts under the EU Nature Restoration Law and Ireland's National Nature Restoration Plan 2026. Through targeted conservation and restoration measures, DLR aims to protect these irreplaceable natural assets and ensure they continue to support biodiversity for generations to come.

Our DLR Ecological Network

There are many other habitats and species including those that are important and protected, these are spread across the county. Some habitats and species are fragmented and isolated, this is why the DLR Ecological Network was mapped in the previous biodiversity plan to help show where connectivity for habitats and species currently exists and where we can do more to provide connectivity through our parks, green spaces, and working with our staff and communities. Also, by including the DLR Ecological Network in our planning, policies and projects, it can help to ensure that planning development and increasing urbanisation considers our wildlife corridors. The network includes our wildlife corridors, important and protected areas, pollinator sites, parks and green spaces, hedgerows, treelines, rivers and streams.



[Learn more about our habitats and species of DLR](#) or scan the QR code.

QR Code for Habitats and Species
Leaflet

The role of the DLR Biodiversity Officer

DLR's Biodiversity Officer plays a central role in protecting, restoring, and promoting biodiversity across the county. DLR's Biodiversity Officer is part of the Local Authority Heritage Programme known as Ceangal, which includes Heritage Officers, Biodiversity Officers, Archivists and Architectural Conservation Officers working in Local Authorities across the country.

Key Responsibilities

- 1. Developing and Implementing Biodiversity Plans:** Leading the development of DLR Biodiversity Action Plans, including the 2026-2031 Plan, is a key responsibility of the DLR Biodiversity Officer. Coordinating the delivery of biodiversity actions with council departments, community groups, businesses, residents, and partner organisations. Ensuring the continuation of recurring biodiversity actions from the previous biodiversity plan, including habitat management, ecological surveys, pollinator initiatives, and public awareness programmes. There are 65 actions in the previous biodiversity plan, of which 40 actions are recurring actions and will be carried into the next plan.
- 2. Biodiversity Conservation and Restoration:** DLR's biodiversity officer also works with specialist ecologists to restore and protect habitats, species, and ecosystems throughout the county with input from partners and communities. Implementing the long-term habitat management plans and projects in important areas for biodiversity, such as Killiney Hill Wood, Fitzsimons Wood, Dalkey Island and Dingle Glen and important species such as red squirrel, while also contributing to wider national nature restoration objectives.

3. **Species and Habitat Research:** Gathering scientific evidence to guide conservation and management decisions is an important part of the biodiversity officer's job. This includes managing ecological surveys of habitats and species across the county, including protected species such as bats, otter and kingfisher, and protected habitats including woodlands, wetlands and heathlands. The role also involves collating ecological data, producing biodiversity mapping, and collaborating with research institutions to advance biodiversity knowledge and conservation efforts.
4. **Managing Invasive Species in Sensitive Biodiversity Areas:** Developing and implementing the DLR County Invasive Species Action Plan is also a key part of the biodiversity officer's role. Coordinating the treatment and management of invasive species in sensitive biodiversity areas for example the treatment of; Giant Hogweed in the Carrickmines River Catchment, Japanese Knotweed in Ballyman Glen, Spartina on Booterstown Marsh and Mink on the River Dodder. Working with neighbouring local authorities and national agencies on regional invasive species projects such as the Feasibility study of the management of grey squirrel at landscape level.
5. **Supporting Pollinators and Nature-Friendly Land Management:** Supporting pollinator projects with DLR staff and local communities is an important aspect of the Biodiversity Officer's role, contributing to the wider goal of the AIPP pollinator plan. Since 2020, the Biodiversity Officer has developed and managed the local seed harvesting programme, promoting the use of locally sourced native seed to restore existing meadow habitats and create new ones. The role also involves overseeing nature-based land management initiatives with Parks staff, including ecograzing projects using rare-breed cattle and Old Irish Goats.
6. **Collaboration and Community Engagement:** DLR Biodiversity Officer works closely with organisations including: The Heritage Council, An Taisce, Dublin Bay Biosphere, Universities, NPWS, Coillte, Old Irish Goat Society, Biodiversity in Schools, the PPN, Community groups and local residents. Promoting public understanding of biodiversity through events, research projects, and awareness campaigns. Each year biodiversity events are held monthly for the public and other training and workshops organised for our staff. Information on events are advertised through our social media, website and DLR events.
7. **Delivering Wider Environmental Strategies and Plans:** The Biodiversity Officer contributes to the implementation of biodiversity-related actions across a range of local, regional, and national strategies. These include the Dublin Bay Biosphere Conservation and Research Strategy, DLR Climate Action Plan, Killiney and Roches Hill Wildfire Management Plan, National Biodiversity Action Plan, All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, and the forthcoming Draft National Nature Restoration Plan. The Biodiversity Officer also provides biodiversity expertise and input into DLR plans, policies, and strategic documents, including the County Development Plan.

Figure 1 Illustration of our ecological network



CASE STUDY

Biodiversity Restoration of Fitzsimons Woods



FitzSimons Wood is a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) and one of the few remaining important native woodlands in the county. The woodland is also significant for its population of protected species, including mammals, birds, and amphibians such as the Smooth Newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*).

Recognising its ecological importance, the development of a management plan for the habitats and species of FitzSimons Wood was identified as a priority action in the DLR Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025. The plan was prepared by a woodland ecologist in 2024 and contains a number of recommendations that are now being implemented.

In 2025, with support from DLR Communities and Parks, we organised a series of tree seed collection workshops to demonstrate how local residents and gardeners can sustainably collect seeds from native tree species. Participants were encouraged to grow at least one native tree from the seed we collected, in a pot at home. Once established, these young trees will be returned to the woodland, under the guidance of a woodland specialist, to help enhance and strengthen the native woodland habitat.

A related project to restore the newt ponds and improve water retention was completed in 2025 by an amphibian specialist in collaboration with the Herpetological Society of Ireland. The project was co-funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) through the Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) for local authorities. Monitoring of the restoration works has now commenced and will play an important role in assessing whether the ponds retain water for longer periods and in tracking any changes in the newt population over time.

The restoration of the ponds involved carefully reducing vegetation that had become overly dense and was shading the ponds. To carry out this work in a sensitive and sustainable manner, DLR enlisted the support of the Old Irish Goat Society (OIGS), whose goats and goatherd helped manage vegetation in targeted areas around the ponds. Grazing was carefully controlled through the use of GPS collars, electric fencing, and ongoing supervision by the goatherd. The work was planned and monitored in consultation with ecologists and the amphibian specialist to ensure that other sensitive habitats, including the surrounding woodland, were protected.



Given the challenging terrain and limited access for machinery, as well as the potential for mechanical interventions to cause damage to habitats and wildlife, conservation grazing provided a low-impact and highly targeted management approach. This method minimised disturbance to the wider woodland ecosystem.

A bat specialist was commissioned to carry out bat surveys of Fitzsimons Woods and surrounds in 2026 which will also provide more information and recommendations regarding the management of habitats at Fitzsimons Woods. It is hoped that the restoration of the ponds may also benefit bats and other species, as invertebrates are likely to increase with the presence of more permanent ponds and wet areas which also adds to the mosaic of habitats and biodiversity of this pNHA.

