



Biodiversity Action Plan

2025 - 2028

choice-housing.org



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What is a BAP?

A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a strategic framework developed by organisations to protect and enhance biodiversity environments which they have control over and acts as a roadmap to model conservation efforts.

A BAP is a valuable way of targeting conservation at a local level. For Choice, it will provide a clearer overview of areas where species and habitats are at schemes, identifying threats and outlining steps to be taken to protect and improve our environment, enabling preservation and enhancing biodiversity for the future.

By introducing a BAP, with actions identified, we will have a clear direction going forward for biodiversity conservation efforts. Monitoring improvements and reporting on progress will help us to recognise the good work being done across the Choice Group, and by our stakeholders, and help us to identify any gaps and challenges that can be addressed.

Our BAP aligns with our strategic priorities, as outlined in our Corporate Strategy to 2027, by including biodiversity initiatives in new and existing homes, informing tenants of the issues surrounding biodiversity and supporting communities to thrive, and by collaborating with stakeholders and staff to deliver improved outcomes and services.

Our Sustainability & Energy Strategy recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing biodiversity, particularly linked to our strategic priority of supporting communities to thrive. Our Strategy identifies the need to create a BAP, alongside a commitment to invest in resources to manage biodiversity improvements and continue our engagement with tenants and staff.



Structure of our BAP

The BAP for Choice Housing will cover a three-year period, which allows time for initial baseline data to be collated, further resources to be committed and partnerships to be developed.

Whilst a range of specific actions have been identified, further improvements will continue to be considered, based on periodic reviews, and aligned to our future Corporate Strategy and Sustainability & Energy Strategy.

By implementing a BAP, Choice Housing can make a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation, enhancing the natural environment for current and future generations.

The Biodiversity Crisis



Biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth including plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi. Its importance is significant for a range of reasons, including maintaining ecological balance, economic value, and scientific and educational value. The 'Biodiversity Crisis' refers to the accelerated loss of species and habitats around the world, which is occurring at an unprecedented rate due to human activities. An increasing number of species are facing extinction with others in significant decline. Climate change, pollution, over exploitation of resources and invasive species can all negatively impact biodiversity. This crisis poses significant threats to ecosystems and human well-being. Damaged ecosystems



exacerbate climate change, undermine food security, and put people and communities at risk.

The need to protect biodiversity is crucial for species and human health. There are many benefits to enhancing biodiversity, some of which include increasing carbon sequestration, supporting pollination and crop production, and ensuring the provision of essential ecosystem services such as clean air, water, and fertile soil, which are fundamental for human health and survival.

Our Mission is to enrich the lives of our tenants and communities through the provision of great homes and services. We recognise the importance of going beyond 'bricks and



mortar' and understanding the connection between our tenants' homes and the environment they live in. The benefits for our tenants and local communities are clear as improving biodiversity can have an overall positive impact on human health and happiness. Contact with natural environments has been shown to improve mental health, reduce stress and enhance physical well-being.

Taking positive action to alleviate the biodiversity crisis therefore aligns closely with many of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Enhancing Biodiversity at Choice

Our Impact

As one of the largest Social Housing providers in the country, with over 13,000 homes, we recognise that we have a significant impact on biodiversity. We own and maintain a large amount of land, develop new homes to meet housing need, and have the opportunity to positively influence tenants, staff, and stakeholders. We are committed to minimising our impact on the environment and enhancing biodiversity where possible, through a range of initiatives including habitat creation and conservation, litter picking events (waste management events) and educational awareness, including school engagement. This includes promoting native species, supporting habitats, and stabilising declining populations.

Types of Action we can take!

Protecting: Choice have implemented improvement measures in the design of new and existing schemes to safeguard existing biodiversity, such as, installing bird boxes, swift bricks into walls, bat boxes, and hedgehog homes. With the BAP, we will review improvements undertaken and monitor a range of these habitats, to understand how effective they have been and to identify any improvements we can make, including ongoing maintenance and management.

Enhancing: We will continue to improve habitats through activities such as planting of native trees and wildflowers, and restoring degraded areas. We would like to improve our mapping of schemes to have a better understanding of the sites and spaces available for biodiversity improvements, in a clear and easily accessible manner.

Engagement: We will continue to collaborate with stakeholders, including tenants, local communities, and conservation organisations, in biodiversity initiatives. To achieve this, Choice will implement a Stakeholder Mapping system to identify stakeholders, including partner organisations, community groups, staff, and tenant network groups, to facilitate improved communication, relationships, and engagement.

Areas of Action

To successfully address biodiversity, we have identified four areas where we plan to take action:

- Managing and improving existing biodiversity
- Developing new homes and communities
- Tenant and Stakeholder engagement
- Delivering our Action Plan

Each of these areas cannot be addressed in isolation and must be viewed together as an integrated approach to achieve meaningful outcomes. As an example, when planting wildflower areas at new housing developments we need to ensure these will be appropriately managed through our grounds maintenance contract, with adequate budget allocation, and we must also engage with residents so they are aware of the purpose of this initiative.

TAKING ACTION!



Managing and Improving Existing Biodiversity

Choice owns a significant amount of land, and we recognise that we have a responsibility to effectively and appropriately manage land to deliver environmental and social improvements.

Land can have varied positive uses, including supporting local wildlife and habitats, improving air quality, managing water courses and flood risk, growing sustainable food, and alleviating climate change. Access to nature and green spaces has also been shown to improve both physical and mental health, which delivers social, environmental and economic value. Green spaces can offer communal areas for social interactions, reduce urban heat and support local biodiversity.

Land can be used in many different ways, and we understand that there can be competing priorities and different viewpoints. Improving knowledge of the spaces we own, and engaging with residents and stakeholders is vital. Much of the land we own forms communal gardens and landscaping across our housing schemes, with tenants and residents able to enjoy these spaces. We therefore understand the importance of ensuring these areas are aesthetically pleasing, whilst also maintained to support biodiversity. We also understand that biodiversity is not defined by land ownership boundaries and so there may be opportunities to collaborate with neighbours and partner organisations to deliver wider community improvements.

Over the next three years we will:

- Review data on the land we own and identify opportunities for improving biodiversity.
- Engage with our grounds maintenance contractor to target improvements at a minimum of 5 specific sites and larger areas of land each year.
- Review our existing annual grounds maintenance budget and opportunities to improve spending on biodiversity within budgets.
- Review a range of specific biodiversity measures, including typical costs, savings, and management or maintenance requirements.
- Trial 'No Mow May' at 3 schemes in 2025 and 5 schemes in 2026, seeking to roll this out further in 2027.
- Continue to appropriately manage invasive species.
- Review our existing grounds maintenance contract and make recommendations for future procurement and contract management.
- Complete biodiversity projects in Ballymena and Belfast.
- Identify a pipeline of new biodiversity projects and initiatives.
- Review opportunities for sustainable food projects e.g. community growing.
- Install a minimum of 100 additional bird and/or bat boxes.
- Reduce use of weed-killers and herbicides, particularly Glyphosate.
- Increase wildflower planting.
- Plant a minimum of 500 additional native trees, collaborating with partner organisations.
- Consider measures to monitor existing biodiversity improvements e.g. how bird boxes are used.

Developing New Homes and Communities

When considering new developments, it is vital that we review and protect existing biodiversity and habitats where possible. Through effective design and planning we can often preserve and enhance the existing characteristics of the local environment. Biodiverse environments and shared green spaces provide opportunities for communal activities and engagement, whilst offering educational benefits and raising awareness.

In 2024 we reviewed our Design Requirements for new homes which included additional requirements on native tree planting and a range of options for biodiversity improvements. Additionally, Choice

worked with Ulster Wildlife to provide supporting biodiversity information to our design teams and contractors, and we targeted specific improvements at a sample of our new schemes. Looking forward we will continue to regularly review our design requirements and also work closely with partner organisations, including engaging with local Government and other Housing Associations on potential improvements to standards across our sector.

Over the next three years we will:

- Review previous targeted improvements to new schemes to identify progress and make recommendations.
- Review all schemes in our development pipeline and identify opportunities for biodiversity improvements, subject to financial viability. This will include assessing the viability of a requirement for an ecology report for all new schemes.
- Explore the principle of biodiversity net gain and opportunities to adopt this where feasible.
- Consider opportunities to enhance our engagement with our consultants and contractors.
- Review and progress proposals for our new development at Rosses Gate.
- Complete biodiversity works at our new scheme in Altona, Lisburn, and review the outcome.
- Review specific biodiversity measures for new homes and assess their viability e.g. swift bricks and any impact these may have on wall insulation.
- Make biodiversity recommendations for the refurbishment of our office in Belfast, as part of our wider ambition to achieve BREEAM Excellent.
- Conduct a further extensive review of our Design Requirements for new homes, identifying further improvement measures which must be incorporated across our new build pipeline.



Tenant and Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging with stakeholders brings together a variety of perspectives and expertise which can lead to more effective and innovative solutions for biodiversity conservation. When stakeholders engage in local biodiversity initiatives, it increases the legitimacy and support for these projects, which can lead to better compliance with conservation measures and stronger implementation.

In 2024 we held our first biodiversity engagement week within Choice, and we will continue this as an annual event to promote positive action that has been undertaken, and to inspire continued biodiversity improvement. Alongside this focused week we will continue to review literature and support events and activities to offer information and advice to our tenants and partner organisations.

Over the next three years we will:

- Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise and engage with each Council to identify biodiversity initiatives we can support.
- Create a calendar of annual events and activities we can promote, and carry out 3 initiatives per annum.
- Engage with external partners to support their biodiversity related activities and events.
- Continue to build biodiversity into our existing community development and engagement activities.
- Continue to hold an annual biodiversity engagement week.
- Launch our Biodiversity Action Plan in 2025.
- Update our website to include biodiversity information and guidance.
- Promote biodiversity initiatives on social media.
- Continue to engage and support our staff.
- Work with other Housing Associations and NIHE to improve biodiversity initiatives.

Delivering our Action Plan



The BAP offers a collaborative approach among various stakeholders to effectively deliver biodiversity initiatives and improvements. Given the extent of our ambition we recognise that additional resources are required to manage biodiversity, and so will invest in a Biodiversity Co-ordinator. This role will allow us to build on the work already undertaken, draw together work carried out across various parts of the organisation, and effectively manage the BAP. The Biodiversity Co-ordinator will establish and lead an internal working group to focus on delivery of our actions.

We will also review existing budgets to ensure adequate financial resources are in place to deliver our actions and wider environmental improvements. This is particularly important as our maintenance and improvement costs are typically passed on to our tenants through rent or service charges, and so we must ensure all of our activities deliver value for money. It is important to understand that introducing biodiversity measures may at times align with cost savings e.g. planting slower growing native trees may require reduced maintenance in the long term.

Over the next three years we will:

- Invest in a Biodiversity Co-ordinator to support delivery of our BAP and wider biodiversity management.
- Hold an initial internal stakeholder workshop to support development of our BAP.
- Establish an internal biodiversity working group and agree terms of reference.
- Create a breakdown of all proposed annual BAP activities, with clear timeframes and responsibilities.
- Review our existing annual grounds maintenance budget and consider opportunities to allocate or ring fence spending.
- Review opportunities for financial support.
- Consider opportunities across the Choice Group, including potential for support from Choice Services Ireland Ltd.
- Identify training opportunities for staff.
- Monitor progress and report on the success of our various projects and initiatives.
- Identify a range of improvements and recommendations for a future Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Consider involvement in wider initiatives, such as the 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan'.



Summary of Actions

	Managing and Improving Existing Biodiversity
1.1	Review data on the land we own and identify opportunities for improving biodiversity.
1.2	Engage with our grounds maintenance contractor to target improvements at a minimum of 5 specific sites and larger areas of land each year.
1.3	Review our existing annual grounds maintenance budget and opportunities to improve spending on biodiversity within budgets.
1.4	Review a range of specific biodiversity measures, including typical costs, savings, and management or maintenance requirements.
1.5	Trial 'No Mow May' at 3 schemes in 2025 and 5 schemes in 2026, seeking to roll this out further in 2027.
1.6	Continue to appropriately manage invasive species.
1.7	Review our existing grounds maintenance contract and make recommendations for future procurement and contract management.
1.8	Complete biodiversity projects in Ballymena and Belfast
1.9	Identify a pipeline of new biodiversity projects and initiatives.
1.10	Review opportunities for sustainable food projects e.g. community growing.
1.11	Install a minimum of 100 additional bird and/or bat boxes.
1.12	Reduce use of weed-killers and herbicides, particularly Glyphosate.
1.13	Increase wildflower planting.
1.14	Plant a minimum of 500 additional native trees, collaborating with partner organisations.
1.15	Consider measures to monitor existing biodiversity improvements e.g. how bird boxes are used.

	Developing New Homes and Communities
2.1	Review previous targeted improvements to new schemes to identify progress and make recommendations.
2.2	Review all schemes in our development pipeline and identify opportunities for biodiversity improvements, subject to financial viability. This will include assessing the viability of a requirement for an ecology report for all new schemes.
2.3	Explore the principle of biodiversity net gain and opportunities to adopt this where feasible.
2.4	Consider opportunities to enhance our engagement with our consultants and contractors.
2.5	Review and progress proposals for our new development at Rosses Gate.
2.6	Complete biodiversity works at our new scheme in Altona, Lisburn, and review the outcome.
2.7	Make biodiversity recommendations for the refurbishment of our office in Belfast, as part of our wider ambition to achieve BREEAM Excellent.
2.8	Conduct a further extensive review of our Design Requirements for new homes, identifying further improvement measures which must be incorporated across our new build pipeline.

	Tenant and Stakeholder Engagement
3.1	Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise and engage with each Council to identify biodiversity initiatives we can support.
3.2	Create a calendar of annual events and activities we can promote, and carry out 3 initiatives per annum.
3.3	Engage with external partners to support their biodiversity related activities and events.
3.4	Continue to build biodiversity into our existing community development and engagement activities.
3.5	Continue to hold an annual biodiversity engagement week.
3.6	Launch our Biodiversity Action Plan in 2025.
3.7	Update our website to include biodiversity information and guidance.
3.8	Promote biodiversity initiatives on social media.
3.9	Continue to engage and support our staff.
3.10	Work with other Housing Associations and NIHE to improve biodiversity initiatives.

	Delivering our Action Plan
4.1	Invest in a Biodiversity Co-ordinator to support delivery of our BAP and wider biodiversity management.
4.2	Hold an initial internal stakeholder workshop to support development of our BAP.
4.3	Establish an internal biodiversity working group and agree terms of reference.
4.4	Create a breakdown of all proposed annual BAP activities, with clear timeframes and responsibilities.
4.5	Review our existing annual grounds maintenance budget and consider opportunities to allocate or ring fence spending.
4.6	Review opportunities for financial support.
4.7	Consider opportunities across the Choice Group, including potential for support from Choice Services Ireland Ltd.
4.8	Identify training opportunities for staff.
4.9	Monitor progress and report on the success of our various projects and initiatives.
4.10	Identify a range of improvements and recommendations for a future Biodiversity Action Plan.
4.11	Consider involvement in wider initiatives, such as the 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan'.



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