

# Newsletter Summer 2025

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## ✿ Nature Summit 2025 ✿

We're delighted to share that our **Nature Summit on 23rd June was a fantastic success**, thanks to the incredible support and participation from our community of partners and supporters. We had 75 attendees, 12 fantastic speakers, 3 interactive workshop sessions, and 10 brilliant display stands!

The event showcased the power of partnership working, bringing together a wide range of local organisations from across **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes**, creating a vibrant space for collaboration and learning. The morning featured a series of informative presentations, including updates from the NEP and our partners, followed by an afternoon of engaging and hands-on workshop sessions.

A key theme throughout the day was the importance of aligning our work with the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – ensuring that our shared goals and actions are coordinated, impactful, and future-focused.

It was truly inspiring to see so many people coming together with a shared passion for nature and the environment. A huge thank you to everyone who attended, presented, led a workshop, or hosted a display stand – your contributions were invaluable.

**Next steps:** We'll be pulling together all the information captured throughout the day – from presentations, discussions, and workshops – to develop a collaborative **action plan** that reflects the priorities and ideas shared at the summit.



Following the conclusion of the LNRS public consultation phase, the LNRS team has been very busy analysing and responding to consultation responses. Buckinghamshire Council's Business Insight's Team performed the initial analysis on the consultation responses, which highlighted key trends in the public's response to consultation questions. The LNRS Core Team has since taken up this analysis and used it to directly address consultation responses. The consultation response process has thoroughly investigated responses and has included collaboration with our neighbouring Responsible Authorities and specialist and expert groups organised to help address remarks, including the: LNRS Steering Group, Priorities and Measures Thematic Groups, Species Specialist Groups, Technical Specialist Group and Mapping Group.

The public consultation response process is now drawing to a close, relevant changes are being made to all LNRS draft documents and maps and the LNRS team anticipates the launch of the final publication in September.

In other news, the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes LNRS was one of 12 strategies selected as part of the Office for Environmental Protection's report, "A review of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and their role in contributing to nature recovery commitments in England". We are proud of our contribution to this report, which wouldn't have been possible without the NEP's oversight and collaboration.

To view the full report, please follow the link:

[Local nature recovery has an important part to play in helping government deliver its 'win-win' for the environment and economic growth, says OEP report | Office for Environmental Protection](#)

### Bringing Back the Water Vole: A Comeback in Progress 🐾

The River Thames Conservation Trust is leading a heartening effort to restore one of Britain's most beloved native species – the water vole. Once widespread, water voles have vanished from 94% of their former habitats due to habitat loss and predation by the invasive American mink. But hope is on the horizon...

In 2023, the Trust partnered with the **Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)** to launch a large-scale mink control programme under the Joining the Dots project. This initiative is already showing promising results.

#### 🌿 Project Highlights:

- **65 mink monitoring rafts** deployed across 29 farms and 11 riverside sites
- **61 volunteers trained**, including local landowners
- **45 mink removed** since March 2024
- **Camera monitoring** introduced to track wildlife activity



Excitingly, possible water vole footprints were spotted in 2024 – a hopeful sign of their return. River Thames Conservation Trust is keen to carry out full water vole surveys in 2025 but is currently seeking funding to make this possible. You can support this effort via their [donation page](#).



## **Spotlight on Place Shaping: NEP at the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) Conference**

On 16th June, the NEP team had the pleasure of attending the BMKALC conference, where the theme of the day was **Place Shaping**—exploring what makes each community truly unique and how we can harness that identity to enrich the lives of local residents.

The morning was packed with inspiring talks from a diverse range of speakers, each offering fresh perspectives on how to identify and celebrate an area's unique selling proposition (USP). These insights set the stage for an afternoon of interactive workshops.

Equally valuable were the conversations held during the refreshment breaks. It was a fantastic opportunity to connect with parish and town councillors from across the region, sharing the work of the NEP.

A big thank you to BMKALC for hosting such a great event!




## **Vacancy!**

Buckinghamshire Council is currently recruiting a Local Wildlife Sites Surveyor, closing date 6<sup>th</sup> July, see link for more info....

[https://jobs.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/job\\_detail/330639/](https://jobs.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/job_detail/330639/)

**If you have any news/events/interesting info you would like us to include in our next newsletter, please email us at [nep@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:nep@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)**

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In Milton Keynes, the city's 6,000 acres of parks, lakes and landscapes are cared for by an independent charity - The Parks Trust. The Trust funds its stewardship of this landscape, and the work it does for nature conservation and recovery, mostly from the income it generates from its endowment investments.

The Trust is also looking to secure funding from other sources, to do more for nature and to play its part in delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This includes launching a Biodiversity Net Gain scheme later this year, and securing a large-scale Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreement (pending Defra opening the CSHT scheme to applications). These will enable the charity to deliver more action for a range of habitats within Milton Keynes, including grasslands, especially floodplain grasslands, the conservation management of which is enabled through the Trust's grazing livestock and farming enterprise.

As well as its work for nature delivery, the Trust is also engaging with developers in the fast-paced growth and development of Milton Keynes. In this, the Trust seeks to use its influence to encourage the provision of strategically planned, well-designed, and nature-rich green infrastructure. Ultimately positioning the Trust as the preferred adopting body for new green spaces, under its endowment model of stewardship. Increasingly, discussions with developers over new green spaces are including discussion of BNG obligations that will come with the land, where developers are looking to meet their BNG requirements through onsite delivery.

Another aspect of The Parks Trust's work is providing opportunities for community engagement with nature. A key element of this is the Trust's volunteering programme, which benefits from the support of almost 250 dedicated volunteers, many of whom are helping the team to survey, manage and improve the city's biodiversity. Seasonal activities are in full flow, here's some highlights:

#### Installation of new Barn Owl boxes

As natural owl nesting sites such as hollow trees and old buildings are rare in Milton Keynes, alternatives are more important than ever – installing Barn Owl boxes provide a safe, dry, and secure environment to raise young, and offer essential protection from predators and the elements.

One of the Trust's practical conservation volunteers used their woodwork skills to make 4 new owl boxes, which have now been installed by the charity's Operations Team on suitable trees in carefully selected locations in the parks.

Carla Boswell, a Biodiversity Officer at The Parks Trust said "By monitoring these nesting sites to understand breeding success, we can make informed decisions to protect and enhance the spaces these birds rely on. From leaving long rough grass and wide field margins to providing suitable habitat for field voles (and other small mammals) as a critical food source and hunting habitat for the local population to thrive. It's a privilege to contribute to the conservation of Barn Owls, and our work ensures that these beautiful birds remain a part of our landscape for generations to come."





Each year, various wildlife surveys record and monitor species found in the city's green spaces, from trees and grasslands to butterflies, birds and bees. In last year's survey for The Parks Trust, licenced specialist at the Barn Owl Conservation, Paddy Jackson, recorded 8 owlets!

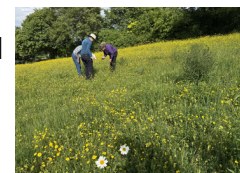
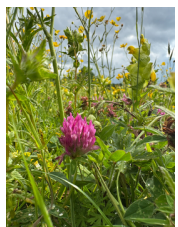


### Grassland surveys

Work is well underway to monitor the critical habitats of Milton Keynes' wildflower meadows. Conservation volunteers are supporting The Parks Trust to carry out grassland surveys across 30 meadow sites. The Trust's team of 4 biodiversity experts are joined by 11 dedicated volunteers who've been trained and equipped with the skills to identify wildflowers and grasses, which is expected to total around 200 hours of surveying this summer.

One square metre (quadrat) at a time, they're looking closely at the shape, colour and texture of plants and grasses. They're recording the sward height and species present, identifying indicator species such as Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Knapweed, and Orchids as well as any "rough" species like Hogweed. The survey findings influence landscape management decisions including hay cutting schedules, use of grazing animals, and seed sowing.

Baseline surveys across the city have highlighted the two richest sites with an average of 12 species per square metre, with the highest individual species count in a plot containing 18 species! Additionally, the Trust uses a lot of yellow rattle to establish and enhance wildflower meadows. The data collected by volunteers and analysed by the biodiversity team showed that when yellow rattle was present in a patch, it was likely that the number of species found increased by 3.7!



### Community Volunteering

For members of the community keen to give a helping hand, the Trust hosts public volunteering tasks throughout the year. Upcoming tasks include:

- Weeding out cow parsley at Meadow Makers on 9<sup>th</sup> Aug in Stanton Low Park.
- Heritage Heroes will help restore the historic limestone at Great Linford Manor Park on 13<sup>th</sup> Sep.
- Plus monthly litter picks across the parks network.

Earlier this year, people of all ages came together to build some new bug hotels too.

