



Protecting & Enhancing Nature

A Practical Guide for Sport and Physical Activity Organisations

BASIS
British Association for Sustainable Sport

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Introduction

Sport depends on nature.

Whether it is a village cricket ground, a city leisure centre, a rowing club on a river, a parkrun route, a golf course, or a major stadium, every sport relies on healthy natural systems.

Nature provides the clean air we breathe, the water we drink, the soils beneath our pitches, and the landscapes that support our health and wellbeing. Yet across the UK and around the world, nature is under unprecedented pressure.

Wildlife populations are declining. Habitats are being lost and fragmented. Climate change is placing additional strain on already vulnerable ecosystems.

This is a material problem for sport. Biodiversity loss increases flood risk, reduces resilience to extreme weather, affects the quality of playing environments, and undermines the health and wellbeing benefits that sport seeks to deliver.

As with climate change impacts and action, sport is both exposed to biodiversity loss and sport can help to address it.

Collectively, the sport and physical activity sector manages thousands of hectares of land, reaches millions of participants, and has a unique ability to inspire action within communities.

Whether you have a large estate, a small urban facility or simply a few square metres of outdoor space, there are opportunities to make a positive contribution to nature.

This guide is designed to help you understand where to start and how to take meaningful action.



Why Biodiversity Matters

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on Earth. It includes:



Plants



Animals



Fungi



Insects



Microorganisms



The ecosystems they create

Healthy ecosystems provide essential services that support both people and sport:

Cleaner Air: Trees and vegetation filter pollutants and improve air quality.

Better Water Management: Healthy soils, wetlands and vegetation reduce flooding and improve water quality.

Climate Resilience: Nature helps shade and cool urban areas, reduce overheating and adapt to changing weather patterns.

Health and Wellbeing:

Access to nature improves mental health, supports physical activity and strengthens community wellbeing.

Stronger Playing Environments:

Healthy ecosystems contribute to more resilient pitches, facilities and landscapes.



The BASIS Five-Step Framework for Nature

Step 1: Understand Your Place

Before taking action, understand the nature that already exists around you.
Many organisations are surprised by what they discover.

Questions to ask

- > What habitats already exist on our site?
- > Are there trees, hedgerows or wildflower areas?
- > Do we have ponds, streams or wetlands nearby?
- > What species have been recorded?
- > Are there opportunities to improve underused areas?

Top Tip

Don't worry about creating a perfect ecological survey. Getting started is more important than getting everything right.

Practical Actions

Conduct a simple biodiversity audit by walking around your site and recording:

- > Trees
- > Shrubs
- > Grassland
- > Flowering plants
- > Birds
- > Insects
- > Water features

Photographs can provide a useful baseline. Free apps such as iNaturalist, Seek and Merlin Bird ID can help identify species and track progress over time.



Step 2: Protect What Matters

Before creating new habitats, protect existing ones. The most valuable biodiversity action is often avoiding unnecessary damage.

Questions to ask

- > Are we removing habitats unnecessarily?
- > Can we reduce pesticide or herbicide use?
- > Are we disturbing nesting birds?
- > Is our lighting affecting wildlife?



Practical Actions



Review Mowing Practices:

Not every area needs to look like a football pitch or a putting green. Identify areas that can be mown less frequently.



Reduce Chemical Use:

Where possible, minimise use of pesticides, herbicides and artificial fertilisers.



Protect Mature Trees:

Large trees provide habitat, shade and carbon storage. Protect them wherever possible.



Make Lighting Wildlife-Friendly:

Use:

- > Warm-coloured LEDs
- > Motion sensors
- > Timers

Avoid illuminating trees, hedges and watercourses unnecessarily.

Step 3: Create More Space for Nature

Once existing habitats are protected, look for opportunities to create new ones.
This does not require large amounts of land. Even small interventions can make a significant difference.



Option 1: Pollinator Planting

Create areas with nectar-rich flowers.
Suitable locations include:

- > Club entrances
- > Spectator areas
- > Borders
- > Planters
- > Hanging baskets

Choose native species wherever possible. Aim for flowers throughout spring, summer and autumn.



Option 2: Wildflower Areas

Allow selected areas to grow longer during the growing season. Good locations include:

- > Fence lines
- > Field margins
- > Verge edges
- > Unused corners

Maintain a mown edge or pathway to show intentional management.



Option 3: Trees and Hedgerows

Plant native trees and hedges appropriate to your location. Benefits include:

- > Shade
- > Flood reduction
- > Habitat creation
- > Improved appearance

Potential species include:

- > Oak
- > Rowan
- > Hazel
- > Hawthorn
- > Field maple



Option 4: Ponds and Rain Gardens

Water is one of the most valuable habitats for wildlife. Even a small pond can support:

- > Dragonflies
- > Frogs
- > Newts
- > Birds
- > Pollinators

Rain gardens can also help manage surface water and reduce flooding.



Option 5: Bird, Bat and Insect Homes

Install:

- > Bird boxes
- > Bat boxes
- > Bug hotels

These work best when combined with habitat improvements.

Step 4: Bring People With You

The greatest impact of sport may be its ability to inspire others.
Biodiversity projects work best when they become community projects.

Involve Participants

Ask players, members and volunteers to contribute ideas and support activities.

Engage Young People

Nature projects can provide excellent opportunities for youth engagement and education.

Work With Local Partners

Potential partners include:

- > Wildlife Trusts
- > Local authorities
- > Schools
- > Conservation groups
- > Universities

Organise a BioBlitz

A BioBlitz is a community event where participants record as many species as possible. These events are:

- > Fun
- > Educational
- > Low cost
- > Excellent for engagement

Tell Stories

Celebrate success by sharing photos, species sightings, volunteer stories and before-and-after comparisons.

People protect what they value.
They value what they notice.

Key resources

[How to Organise a Bioblitz](#)



Step 5: Measure and Celebrate Progress

You do not need complex scientific monitoring.
Simple measurements can demonstrate progress.

Track

- Trees planted
- Area managed for nature
- Species recorded
- Volunteers engaged
- Community events delivered

Repeat Surveys

Repeat your baseline survey annually and look for trends rather than perfection.

Celebrate Success

Every action matters. Whether you create a pond, plant a hedge or simply allow part of a site to grow naturally, these actions contribute to a wider movement for nature recovery.



Biodiversity in Urban Spaces

Many organisations assume biodiversity action is only relevant to rural sites. In reality, urban sport may have some of the greatest opportunities. Cities often contain fragmented habitats where even small interventions can provide valuable stepping stones for wildlife.

Five Actions for Urban Sites



Green the Grey

Introduce:

- > Planters
- > Green walls
- > Green roofs
- > Climbing plants



Create Pollinator Pathways

Link flower-rich areas across your site.



Use Every Edge

Transform boundaries, fence lines and verges into wildlife-friendly areas.



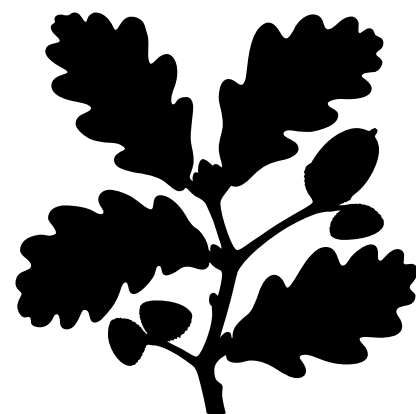
Relax Perfection

Allow some areas to be less intensively managed.



Make Nature Visible

Install interpretation boards, species information and biodiversity trails.



Case Study: **National Trust**

The National Trust's first green corridor project achieved:

- > 150 hours of community engagement
- > 60 individual site visits, talks and meetings with local stakeholders
- > 230m of hedgerow laid, and 400 trees planted
- > £120,000 of funding secured

The trust's green corridor programme is an excellent example of multiple partners and communities working towards large-scale biodiversity improvements.

Lesson

Green corridors can also be small scale.



Case Study: **Whalley Range Cricket & Lawn Tennis Club**

This community club in Manchester has adopted nature-friendly management practices including:

- > Reduced mowing
- > Tree planting
- > Increased habitat diversity
- > Improved water management

The result is a more resilient site that supports both biodiversity and sport.

Lesson

Small changes can deliver significant benefits.



Case Study: **Tottenham Hotspur Training Centre**

Tottenham Hotspur have enhanced biodiversity through:

- > Wildflower meadows
- > New ponds
- > Tree planting
- > Bat houses
- > Insect habitats

Lesson

Elite sport facilities can successfully integrate biodiversity alongside world-class sporting environments.

Common Myths

**We don't have
enough space.**



**Even small interventions
can support biodiversity.**



It will cost too much.



**Many biodiversity
actions are low-cost
or cost-neutral.**



It will look untidy.



**Well-designed nature
areas can enhance the
appearance of facilities.**



**We're a sports
organisation, not a
conservation charity.**



**Even small interventions
can support biodiversity.**



Getting Started

If you do nothing else this year:



Good

Carry out a biodiversity walkaround of your site.



Better

Create one new area for nature.



Best

Develop a simple biodiversity action plan and engage your community in delivering it.



Conclusion

The bad news is that sport cannot thrive on a depleted planet.

The good news is that every organisation, regardless of size, has opportunities to contribute to nature recovery.

You do not need a large estate, a dedicated sustainability team or a significant budget to get started. You simply need to begin. Every tree planted, every wildflower grown, every pond created, every person inspired - each of these can help create a healthier future for nature, for communities and for sport.

Key Resources

[Benches Biodiversity for Sport Assessment Tool](#)

[Sport for Nature Framework](#)

[Biodiversity and Physical Activity](#)

[How to Organise a Bioblitz](#)

Case Studies

[Whalley Range Cricket & Lawn Tennis Club](#)

[National Trust; enhancing biodiversity](#)

[Abbey Hill Golf Course](#)

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