



**Hampshire &
Isle of Wight**
Wildlife Trust



Local Elections **Guide 2024**

hiwwt.org.uk/local-elections-2024

We want leaders that stand up for nature!

On Thursday 2nd May 2024, people across England will head to the polls to vote for their local representatives, councillors, in England. The local elections are a great opportunity for people to ensure their future local representatives take nature's recovery seriously. We need strong and bold leadership from our political representatives, and most importantly, we need action.

Your councillors have the power to help local people and enable nature's recovery. They make many decisions that impact your community and wildlife locally, including, having a say in what will be built and where, tackling water pollution, improving access to green spaces and they will play a key role in developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Yet despite their importance, around 65% of people do not vote in the local elections, meaning they have no say on who will be representing their community in their local council(s).

IMPORTANT NOTE!

Voters are required to present photo ID to vote at a polling station, under the Elections Act 2022. However, you do not need an ID to vote via post. Find a list of accepted voter ID [here](#). If you don't have an accepted form of ID you can apply for a free voter authority certificate [here](#).



Why do local elections matter?

- Whoever is elected will make key decisions for your local area.
- We need to ensure that nature's recovery and climate action are on our councillors' agendas.
- Councils must lead the way with local action so pressure mounts on national government to do the same.
- Local elections are good opportunity to get public commitments from councillor candidates as they are competing for your vote.
- Local elections are a key indicator for the government and oppositions about how they are performing and what issues people care about.

About your local councils

Local governments in England operate under either a one tier system, where unitary authorities and combined authorities manage all the services, or a two-tier system, where county and district councils divide up the local services.

Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight operate as one-tier unitary authorities, meaning one council is responsible for all the services in their local area.

The rest of Hampshire operates a two-tier system. Hampshire County Council covers the remaining areas of the county and provide many of the public services in the area, including education, transport, waste disposal, public health and social services.

Hampshire is then divided into several districts – each district council, which may also be called borough council or city council, cover much smaller areas and provide local services, including managing parks, waste collection and recycling, housing, planning applications and creating local plans. Although services provided can vary from council to council.

In Hampshire, the local district councils which operate in a two-tier system with Hampshire County Council are:

- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- Eastleigh Borough Council
- Fareham Borough Council
- Gosport Borough Council
- Hart District Council
- Havant Borough Council
- New Forest District Council
- Rushmoor Borough Council
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Winchester City Council

To find out which council(s) represent you and an overview of the services they provide, enter your postcode into the local government search tool [here](#).

Which councils have elections this year?

To find out what elections are happening near you and a candidate list, you can use the Democracy Club's [online tool](#) and type in your postcode. The official full candidate lists should be published on your District, City or County Council websites from Tuesday 9th April.

What can I ask my councillors to do to restore nature?

Councils, and by extension councillors, have a significant direct control over the state of nature locally - many councils own significant amount of land or greenspaces, and control the management practices that take place locally, for example: pesticide and herbicide application. They also have immense indirect influence, for example, through setting stricter planning policies that prevent development in damaging places for nature or stricter nature-focused design requirements.

In the run up to the local elections, you can ask your councillor to take action on any issue that you care about - that could be air or water pollution, pesticides, greenspaces or a damaging development in your area. We've put together a few issues that we need to see councillors commit to taking more action on - feel free to use these when you contact your candidates!

Take local action to improve the state of our rivers

Our rivers and waterways are in crisis. We must secure water supply for all whilst bringing nature back from the brink for rivers and people. To address this crisis, system level change is needed across all sectors and authorities. Alongside, Womens Institute, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Rivers Trust and others we're supporting [River Action's Local Charter for Rivers](#). The charter calls on councillors to restore our rivers to health by ending sewage pollution, preventing agricultural pollution, minimising pollution from new developments and preventing harmful chemicals at source.

Councils can support our rivers by putting in place strong policies in the Local Plans to protect our rivers, for example, by embedding the recommendations of the [Chalk Stream Strategy](#), and ensuring there are adequate buffers between developments and rivers, or strategically direct funding from Biodiversity Net Gain into restoration of rivers and wetlands. They can also place pressure on water companies to stop damaging practices.

Plan and set targets for nature's recovery

Many local councils have declared a climate emergency, setting concrete net-zero targets and action plans to tackle the crisis, you can view a list of those that have [here](#).

Now, we need councils to do the same for nature, by setting targets for nature's recovery locally by 2030 and creating a strategy and action plan to make that happen. As part of this, we need councils to embed the upcoming [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) into their plans and wider strategies, to ensure nature is considered in all decisions.

What can I ask my councillors to do to restore nature?

Ensure development is good for people and for nature

Councils decide what gets built where, as well as determining how it gets built to minimise the environmental impact. There are many policies that councils can put in their local plan to create more nature-friendly developments; we are urging all councils to go beyond the minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain and instead require all developments to deliver at least 20% net gain, and strategically direct improvements to where nature and people need it the most. This is already being delivered effectively by ambitious authorities and developers across the country.

Everyone should have access to nature close to home. New developments should integrate high quality and accessible natural green and blue space, managed to increase wildlife into urban areas through innovative design. We encourage councils to introduce local planning policies to require low-cost biodiversity enhancement measures, such as swift bricks, bat boxes and hedgehog highways as standard in new development.

Support Team Wilder and encourage communities to take action

We need councils across the two counties to empower communities to take action for nature. In particular, we want councils to support Team Wilder, a growing movement of people driving local efforts for nature's recovery. Team Wilder encourages people to focus on the issues that matter to them and puts power in the hands of the local community - we want to see this approach embedded across all councils.

How can I make sure nature has a voice in the local elections?

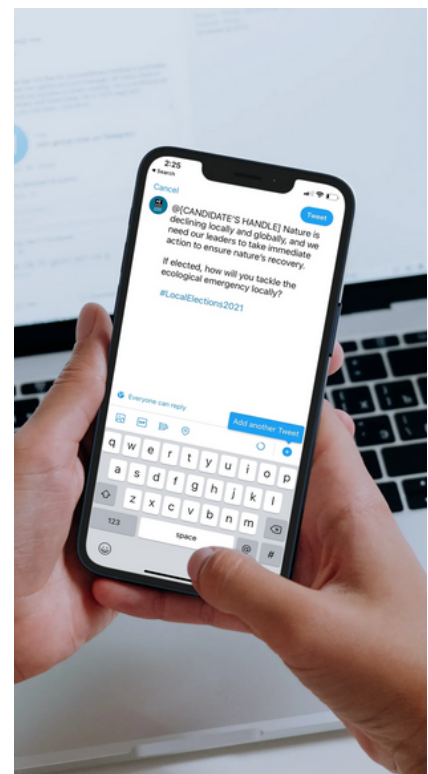
1. Tweet your council candidates

Many local councillor candidates will be campaigning on Twitter, so why not ask them directly how they intend to tackle the ecological emergency?

Don't worry if your local councillor candidates are not on Twitter, there are plenty more actions you can take below!

**@[CANDIDATE'S HANDLE] Nature is declining locally and globally, and we need to take immediate action to ensure nature's recovery. If elected, how will you tackle the nature emergency locally?
#LocalElections2024**

**@[CANDIDATE'S HANDLE] Our precious rivers and waterways are in crisis. We need to prevent pollution and bring back wildlife. If elected, will you commit to cleaning up local rivers for people & nature?
#LocalElections2024 #SaveOurChalkStreams**



2. Write to your local councillor candidates

Writing to your local councillor candidates is a good way of communicating your priorities as a community member, and a voter, to ensure the matters you care about are taken seriously by your local candidates.

You can use our template below to write to your local council candidates to ask them how they will take action for nature's recovery.

It's worth noting that the best and most effective emails are always the personal ones, so try to add in some reasons why you want your councillors to take action locally, and perhaps a few examples locally of what needs to improve.

Dear [INSERT CANDIDATE NAME HERE],

As you are a candidate in the upcoming local elections, I am writing to you today to ask how you plan to support nature's recovery in my local area if elected as a councillor.

I am greatly concerned about the decline of nature in my community, and the state of rivers locally. [INSERT WHY NATURE AND CLEAN RIVERS ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOU]

We know that nature's recovery is also vital for tackling the climate crisis and that nature underpins a healthy and thriving society and economy.

Rivers are nature's lifeblood yet every river in the UK is polluted. Locally Hampshire and Isle of Wight is renowned for its world-famous chalk streams. Their crystal-clear waters are home for salmon, water voles, white-clawed crayfish and kingfishers, making them our equivalent to the Great Barrier Reef or the Amazon Rainforest. Now they are under threat from sewage, agricultural and chemical pollution and over abstraction. The Government says our dirty rivers won't be clean and in good overall health until 2063. We can't wait that long, and neither can our rivers.

The River Action UK Local Charter for Rivers has actions especially for local political leaders. The Local Charter has been supported by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, W.I, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Rivers Trust, among others.

If elected as a local councillor, you will play a vital role in restoring nature and tackling the climate crisis locally. As a constituent, I am clear that these are key issues when considering who to vote for in the upcoming local elections.

Therefore, I am writing to ask what are your plans to put nature into recovery in our local community?

In particular, I would like to see you commit to:

- Improving our rivers by putting the recommendations in the Local Charter for River into action
- Developing strategic plans and targets for nature
- Embedding the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategies into all plans, functions, and strategies, including the Local Plan
- Scaling up investment in nature-based solutions locally, like natural flood mitigation
- Ensure new development are good for people and for nature
- Supporting communities to take action to create a Wilder future

Kind regards,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE] [INSERT ADDRESS AND POSTCODE]

3. Meet your local council candidates

Meeting your local council candidates is a good way to understand their priorities and identify how committed they are to acting on the climate and ecological emergency.

We recommend contacting a councillor candidate from each major political party who is standing your ward and asking them for an online meeting. Many candidates will also be going door to door to get support, you could also use this as an opportunity to ask some questions.

Spend a bit of time researching the candidate online to understand more about who they are and what they stand for, and think through how you might tailor the conversation to the candidate's interests.

If you would like to meet with your local candidates, you can use the letter template above and insert the following:

I would like the opportunity to hear how you intend to prioritise action for nature's recovery. I'd be grateful if you would please advise me of your availability for a meeting. Questions you can ask your candidates:

- What are your plans to reverse the decline of nature in my local community?
- If elected, how will you tackle the nature emergency?
- If elected, will you set out a clear strategy, targets and an action plan for nature's recovery locally?
- How will you support and increase access to nature-rich green spaces in our local area? We know that we need to join up fragmented habitats into a 'Nature Recovery Network', how will you work to put this into place?
- How will you support the local community to take action for nature locally?
- Will you embed the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategies into all plans, including Local Plans?
- Will you support local planning policies that help nature recovery locally?
- Will you fight for better protections for chalk streams, such as policies for protective green buffers between developments and chalk streams?
- How will you take action to stop untreated sewage reaching freshwater and coastal habitats?
- Will you reduce the use of harmful pesticides on council owned land, pavements, and highways?
- If you are a Portsmouth City Council resident, we would also like you to ask local councillor candidates to only support an option for Tipner West that does not cross red lines for nature.

4. Ask a question at a Hustings

A hustings is a nonpartisan event bringing together electoral candidates in the run up to an election. It's an opportunity for voters to hear the views of candidates on a range of issues and in turn, voters can raise issues that matter to them by asking questions during the event.

They usually feature candidates from all major parties, are most frequently organised by local organisations or community groups and held in the ward where the candidates are standing for election.

How to find a hustings near you?

Some places where you can find where hustings will be advertised include:

- Local hustings may be registered with Democracy Club:
<https://democracyclub.org.uk/>
- Council website
- Local newspaper and newspaper website
- Library
- Social media pages and websites of the candidates
- Ask people on a local social media group if they know of any hustings
- Search online the words "hustings" and the name of your ward

Ask a question at a local hustings

Once you have found a hustings near you, you can submit a question to ask the candidates. We have a few suggested questions below, but you can ask a question to the candidates about any issues that affect you locally.

Suggested questions:

- If elected, how will you tackle the ecological emergency?
- What are your plans to recover nature in my local community?
- We know that we need to join up fragmented habitats into a 'Nature Recovery Network', how will you work to put this into place?
- If elected, will you pledge to table a motion for council to declare an ecological emergency, setting out a clear strategy, targets and an action plan for nature's recovery locally?
- How will you support and increase access to greenspaces in our local area?
- Will you support more ambitious planning policies to help nature locally?
- How will you support the local community to take action for nature locally?
- How will you ensure better protections for all chalk streams?
- What are your plans for tackling sewage pollution?
- Will you commit to reducing pesticide on our streets and council owned land?

5. Organise a hustings

Can't find a Hustings near you? Why not organise one?

Hustings can cover a whole range of topics or be specific about a particular issue e.g. the climate and ecological crisis. All Hustings will need to be held online this year.

If you are interested in hosting a hustings, [Friends of the Earth](#) and [The Electoral Commission](#) have useful online guides for organising hustings during local elections and how to ensure it is nonpartisan and fair event for all candidates.

6. Vote for the candidates that stand up for nature

On Thursday 2nd May 2024, you can vote for the councillors who will represent you at your council(s). Your polling station address should be printed on your polling card, which is delivered by post before an election.

The deadline to register to vote in the local elections is the 16th April 2024:
<http://gov.uk/register-to-vote>

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Want to make a difference for nature locally?

Join our Wilder Campaign Leaders program!

Our Campaign Leader programme is designed to give you the skills and confidence to push for change to protect the nature locally. We will provide advice and training through our dedicated platform so you can develop the most effective techniques and tools to start your own campaign. You'll have exclusive access to our campaigns team to get information and advice on campaigning and influencing.

Our Campaign Leader Programme can help you build the skills, confidence and experience needed to become a powerful advocate for the natural world. [Find out more.](#)

Appendix: Nature Cheat Sheet

Quick and easy facts to get you started on talking about the nature emergency locally, great to add to your email or have to hand when attending a hustings. Knowing facts and stats about the decline of nature locally and nationally can help you build confidence when speaking with a local councillor and help you to back up the issues with evidence.

Nature is in crisis

The UK has become one of the most nature depleted nations in the world, with over 15% of species now at risk of extinction.

Nationally, since 1970 more than 41% of species have decreased in population.

48% of Hampshire's 50 most 'notable species' are in decline such as Nightingales, Turtle Doves, Great Crested Newts and Duke of Burgundy Butterflies.

20% of Hampshire's insect and pollinator species are classed as rare, threatened or declining.

19 of the 46 butterfly species found in Hampshire are declining.

Nightingale populations have declined by 78% in Hampshire and 33% on the Isle of Wight since 2012

Between 1986 and 2012 we have seen significant declines in many farmland bird species in Hampshire, including, Skylark (-14%), Starling (-19%), Linnet (-21%), Yellowhammer (-27%), Bunting (-36%), Lapwing (-47%), Turtle Dove (-75%), Grey Partridge (-79%), Corn Bunting (-80%), Tree Sparrow (-100%) and Yellow Wagtail (-100%).

What is causing nature's decline?

The main causes of biodiversity loss in the UK are: agricultural management, climate change, urbanisation, pollution, woodland management, fisheries, invasive and non-native species and freshwater management.¹

In Hampshire, decades of nitrate pollution from wastewater, urban runoff and agricultural discharges have caused the Solent to reach crisis point. The high input levels of nitrogen and phosphorus to the Solent's water environment are causing eutrophication.

62% of river stretches failed because of activities attributed to agriculture & rural land management (pollution from fertiliser or livestock)

54% of river stretches failed because of activities attributed to the water industry (including treated and untreated sewage discharge, and abstraction of groundwater)

26% of river stretches failed because of activities attributed to the urban and transport sector

Nature's recovery is vital for tackling climate change, research suggests that nature-based solutions such as rewilding and restoring damaged ecosystems, can provide over one-third of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed between now and 2030 under the Paris Agreement.

Water

Every river in England is polluted

Only 15% of rivers meet good ecological health status

In 2019, every single river assessed in England failed the chemical health standards

In 2023 untreated sewage was discharged for a total of 3.6 million hours through storm overflows – more than double what it was in 2022

In England, 2023 was the worst year for sewage discharges since monitoring began.

British Atlantic Salmon populations have declined by 30-50% since 2006 and are projected to decline by 50-80% between 2010-2025

IUCN Classifies Atlantic Salmon in Great Britain as Endangered

The River Loddon has one of the highest phosphate concentrations of all rivers surveyed nationally

Friends of the Itchen Estuary found that samples taken from the River Itchen had E. coli levels more than ten times higher than a "satisfactory" level.

Nature, health and wellbeing

Portsmouth and Southampton are both high on the green space deprivation index. In Southampton, 14 of the 32 neighbourhoods are rated as 'E' – the category most lacking in green space. While Portsmouth has a similar proportion, 12 out of 25 neighbourhoods.

A BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) person is more than twice as likely as a white person to live within an area deprived of green space (rated E).

For every £1 spent on green spaces in England an estimated £7 in additional value for health and wellbeing and the environment is generated.

Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing.

WILDER



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