



Delivering climate & nature action

South Gloucestershire Council

# Biodiversity Duty Report

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## REPORTING PERIOD

1 January 2023 to 1 January 2026

## PUBLICATION DUE BY

26 March 2026

## **Executive Summary**

The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty introduced under the Environment Act (2021) requires all public authorities in England to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity. All public authorities are required to produce a report on the action they have taken during the reporting period and plan to take over the next 5 years.

South Gloucestershire's landscape includes a multitude of designated nature sites, with international, national and local designations for nature. Together these spaces form the backbone of the West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), the first LNRS to be published in England.

Over 40% of South Gloucestershire is covered by green belt which surrounds and separates Bristol and Bath. The coastal county has a rich and varied landscape, extending from the Severn Estuary across commons, ancient woodlands, rivers, and farmland, to the Cotswold scarp and the Bristol urban fringe.

The council has delivered significant biodiversity related work and improvements, including policy changes, physical nature-based asset improvements, and developed strong partnerships across the region for landscape scale biodiversity interventions.

Securing the future management of the new Aust Nature Reserve, alongside dedicating further council land holdings to the development of a new nature reserve at Frampton Cotterrell, and a new woodland at Pucklechurch, shows how strongly the council is committed to its responsibilities under the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty.

The successful landscape scale project, Common Connections is coming to an end this Summer, having delivered an impressive range of biodiversity improvements along the Bristol South Glos urban fringe across over 100 sites including 15 schools, with 1000s of people engaged and over 6,000 new trees planted.

The council continues to build up a pipeline of nature recovery projects across the region, looking strongly now at several water catchment-based programs. The Thriving Waters project at Siston and Warmley Brooks has started consultations with the public and potential partners to progress restoration of an urban waterway. Our Linking the Levels Project is preparing a portfolio of nature recovery projects to restore habitat and protect priority species across the Lower Severn Vale, Levels and Shore in South Gloucestershire.

The council places great value on consulting with communities and will continue its strong track record of working with partners across the region to restore nature including the West of England Nature Partnership, Forest of Avon Trust, Western Forest, Avon Wildlife Trust, Bristol Zoological Society and Bristol Avon Rivers Trust.

Over the next 5 years the council will continue to lead and work with partners and communities to deliver at scale nature restoration across South Gloucestershire. The council will continue to monitor and report on this work ready for the next Biodiversity Report in 5 years.

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# 1. Introduction

## Report Purpose

1.1 To enable South Gloucestershire Council to meet the requirements of the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty <sup>1</sup>(EBD), a report must be submitted to DEFRA. The reporting period must cover 1st January 2023 – 1st January 2026.

1.2 The report must include policies, strategies and action plans that South Gloucestershire Council have completed or have in progress. The council must set out what actions it has taken during the reporting period for biodiversity and what actions it will take over the next 5 years.

## What is Biodiversity and Why Is It Important

1.3 Biodiversity is the whole variety of life on Earth, all species of plants and animals, their genetic variation and the habitats and ecosystems they are part of. It includes not just the rare or the threatened but also the wildlife that is familiar to us in the places where we live and work.

1.4 Biodiversity is important for its own sake, along with the many benefits we derive from the natural environment – products like food, fibre, wood, and water; services like pollination, nutrient cycling, soil formation, water purification, flood defence and opportunities for reflection and recreation – all are critical for our wellbeing and survival.

1.5 Managing and restoring our natural assets is key to achieving one of the Council's five core goals in the South Gloucestershire Council Plan 2024 – <sup>2</sup> to 'Respond to the climate and nature emergency'. Recognising that the Climate Emergency and Nature Emergency are strongly linked, have complementary outcomes and require integrated action.

## South Gloucestershire

1.6 South Gloucestershire is largely rural with most of its population living within the urban fringe of Bristol. Over 40% of South Gloucestershire is covered by green belt which surrounds and separates Bristol and Bath. South Gloucestershire covers an area of 536.5km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 290,423 as of the 2021 census. The coastal county has a rich and varied landscape, extending from the Severn Estuary across commons, ancient woodlands, rivers, and farmland, to the Cotswold scarp and the Bristol urban fringe. South Gloucestershire is bordered by Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bristol, and Bath and North East Somerset.

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<sup>1</sup> [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Council Plan 2024 to 2028 | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

## South Gloucestershire Council

1.7 South Gloucestershire Council is the local authority for the district of South Gloucestershire; it is a unitary authority providing both district and county level functions. The district of South Gloucestershire and its council was formed in 1996 with the abolishment of Avon County Council.

1.8 Since 2017 the council has been a member of the West of England Combined Authority<sup>3</sup>(WECA), with Bristol City Council and Bath and North East Somerset Council.

The West of England Combined Authority partners work together to plan and deliver key regional strategies including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Growth Strategy.

1.9 South Gloucestershire is separated into 28 electoral wards that are represented by 61 councillors. Following the May 2023 local elections, South Gloucestershire Council is run by a Liberal Democrat and Labour coalition.

1.10 There are also 50 Town Councils and Parish Councils across South Gloucestershire who work closely with South Gloucestershire Council and other partners in the areas<sup>4</sup> they serve<sup>5</sup>.

## 2 National Policy Context

### The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

2.1 The Biodiversity Duty was introduced via the NERC Act 2006<sup>6</sup>, placing new requirements on all public authorities in England to consider what action they can reasonably take for the conservation of biodiversity.

### The Environment Act 2021

2.2 The Environment Act 2021<sup>7</sup> strengthened the Biodiversity Duty and amended the NERC Act 2006. Under the strengthened duty, public authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The Act also introduced Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), amongst other key instruments for conserving and enhancing nature.

2.3 The Environment Act 2021 also introduced Protected Species Strategies and Protected Site Strategies. South Gloucestershire does not have any such schemes, nor has any proposed, therefore these will not be referred to again in the report.

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<sup>3</sup> [The West of England Combined Authority - Home](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Town and parish councils | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Environment Act 2021 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

## The Environment Improvement Plan 2025

2.4 The Environment Improvement Plan<sup>8</sup> sets out legally binding targets and actions for the Government to deliver on Biodiversity. The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will use these reports to monitor national delivery on these targets.

## The Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended)

2.5 This Act<sup>9</sup> set up the governance structure for requirement and reporting including the Climate Change Risk Assessment 3 (CCRA3) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) which sets out the links, risks and issues for nature and biodiversity of the changing climate, and also the role of nature and nature based solutions for mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

## Wider policy context

2.6 In addition to the above legislation and policy which directly relates to biodiversity and the natural environment, there is other national legislation which has significant requirements, considerations and implications for biodiversity in South Gloucestershire. This includes the **Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025**<sup>10</sup>, **Natural England's Strategy: Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security**<sup>11</sup> and forthcoming updates to the **Policy Framework (NPPF)**<sup>12</sup>.

2.7 Key international commitments and legislation with implications for biodiversity in South Gloucestershire includes **the European Union Water Framework Directive, European Marine Site (EMS) designations** (including the Severn Estuary EMS), and **the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** which is governed by the Conference of the parties (COP).

# 3. State of Nature

## Environmental Data Technical Advisory Group

3.1 Due to resource constraints (shared also with other councils and partners locally and nationally), and the complexity of environmental data gathering, assessing the status of such a complex and diverse asset as the natural environment is a challenge. There is not currently an authoritative understanding and tracking of the state of nature across our district or our region. The Council is reliant on national statistics and the work of its local environmental records office, Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC).

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<sup>8</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Climate Change Act 2008](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Natural England's Strategy: Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>12</sup> [National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

3.2 Through the regional partnership work of the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP), supported by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), the Council is part of a regional 'WENP Environmental Data Technical Advisory Group'.

3.3 It is the purpose of this regional group to ensure the region is aligned and supported in bringing together a regional Wildlife Index. The West of England Wildlife Index will provide a baseline of the state of nature in the region and have monitorable metrics to inform a State of Nature report<sup>13</sup> for the region, to track and evidence if biodiversity work across the region is indeed delivering nature recovery.

3.4 South Gloucestershire is an area of major economic growth and development, so progress on protecting and improving biodiversity is rightly recognised as a priority in these plans, however, remains a significant challenge.

## Designated Site Network

3.5 South Gloucestershire's landscape includes a multitude of designated nature sites, with international, national and local designations for nature. Together these spaces form the backbone of the **West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**<sup>14</sup>. The designated sites network and LNRS are set out in Appendix 2 & 3.

## Statutory Designations (International and National)

3.6 The Severn Estuary running along South Gloucestershire's western shoreline is a **European Marine Site**<sup>15</sup> with multiple designations. This includes a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protected Area (SPA) and a RAMSAR site.

3.7 The Severn Estuary also has a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation, recognised for its internationally important populations of waterfowl, invertebrate populations of considerable interest and large populations of migratory fish.

3.8 South Gloucestershire has 15 SSSIs across its district which are of national importance, covering such habitats as Ancient Woodland and Unimproved Calcareous Grasslands.

3.9 The condition of the SSSIs is set out below:

- Favourable – 77.4%
- Unfavourable recovering – 6.8%
- Unfavourable no change – 9.8%
- Unfavourable declining – 6.0%

## Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

3.10 South Gloucestershire has 10 LNRs, totalling 111.86 hectares, there are ambitions to register another 5 by 2030.

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<sup>13</sup> [Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Toolkit \(LNRS\) - West of England Combined Authority](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Background – ASERA](#)

## Non-Statutory Designations

3.11 There are 275 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) designated across South Gloucestershire, together with neighbouring WECA Unitary Authorities SNCIs, they form the backbone of the LNRS.

## National Landscapes

3.12 National Landscapes are designated primarily for their landscape interest rather than their ecological interest, however subject to management plans agreed they can still play a part in restoring nature at landscape scale. The **Cotswold National Landscape** includes land within South Gloucestershire covering 20-25% of the county along the eastern border with Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and B&NES; including the villages of Hawkesbury Upton, Little Sodbury, Badminton, Dodington, Tormarton and Marshfield.

3.13 Within the Cotswold National Landscape, South Gloucestershire Council sits on the board of the South Cotswold Farm Cluster Advisory Group, a group of over 60 farm owners covering more than 22,000 hectares of agricultural land across 4 counties. The group exists to support and direct farmers towards sustainable farming initiatives, funding opportunities for natural feature creation, education and courses to support sustainable business practices, with the aim of co-ordinating and improving the nature value across the farming cluster area at a landscape level.

# 4 Policies, Objectives and Actions

## The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty (EBD)<sup>16</sup>

4.1 The EBD introduced under the Environment Act 2021, requires all public authorities (excluding Town and Parish Councils) to report on action they have taken and plan to take to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The First consideration was due by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, and the first report is due 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

4.2 Under the EBD, the report **must** include:

- Policies and objectives of the reporting authority that have been set to help them meet the EBD, including actions that have been completed in the reporting period
- How the reporting authority plans to continue to meet the EBD during the next reporting period of 5 years
- Actions the reporting authority has taken to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations including details of gains resulting, or expected to result, from BNG plans they have approved

4.3 The report can choose to include other desirable information such as:

- Information about the reporting authority and the area it administrates
- Top achievements it would like to highlight

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<sup>16</sup> [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK](#)

- How the reporting authority have considered other strategies
- How actions taken have helped the environment
- How the reporting authority has raised awareness, educated and engaged with the public about biodiversity
- The reporting authorities monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with regards to biodiversity action
- An opportunity to raise challenges the reporting authority has faced in meeting its EBD

The above information has been disseminated throughout this report.

## First Consideration

4.4 Under the requirements of the EBD, by January 2024, all reporting authorities had to produce a 'First Consideration', detailing the interim actions they would take on the run up to the first reporting period.

4.5 South Gloucestershire Council issued its 'First Consideration' in response to the Environment Act 2021, outlining the rationale for its approach, the obligations involved and the Council's intended biodiversity outcomes.

4.6 This full report expands on that initial response by offering more detail on progress and planned actions, aligning them with national, regional and local targets.

## Policies

### Council Plan 2024 – 2028

4.7 The Council Plan 2024-2028 is the overarching strategy for South Gloucestershire Council. It sets out the key goals and actions the Council will take over its 4-year period to achieve the best for the residents and communities of South Gloucestershire.

4.8 The Council Plan aims to achieve 'a fairer, greener future' for all South Gloucestershire residents and 'a healthier and more resilient natural environment', by delivering action on the Council Plan goal to 'respond to the climate and nature emergency'.

### South Gloucestershire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2021 and Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Plan to 2030<sup>17</sup>

4.9 The **South Gloucestershire Green Infrastructure Strategy** (Greener Places Strategy) adopted in 2021 sets out the Councils vision and plan for green infrastructure to improve the environment and our area, by creating 'greener places where people and nature thrive'

It includes how the Council will:

- Create more habitat for nature
- Have quality public open spaces

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<sup>17</sup> [Green Infrastructure Strategy – summary | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

- Manage green infrastructure to adapt to the changing climate and support health and wellbeing
- Have green infrastructure at the heart of new development planning
- Work with its partners, communities, and residents to have more, improved and better-connected green infrastructure

The objectives of the strategy are:

- Protected and restored nature
- Greater resilience to the changing climate
- Sustainable water management
- Improved health and wellbeing for all
- Sustainable places
- Valued healthy landscapes
- Sustainable and local food production
- A green and resilient economy
- Stronger partnerships

4.10 The **Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Plan to 2030** sets out how the council plans to deliver the objectives of the GI Strategy 2021. The Plan includes 77 actions, all of which deliver and support outcomes for nature recovery and biodiversity. An annual report on progress to deliver this plan and the South Gloucestershire Nature Recovery Goals is published, and previous reports can be viewed at [Climate and nature emergency in South Gloucestershire | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

4.11 The Green Infrastructure Strategy supports the Council and regional commitments and work to restore nature by contributing to the **West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020<sup>18</sup> (JGIS)**.

## South Gloucestershire New Local Plan<sup>19</sup>

4.12 South Gloucestershire Council has prepared a new Local Plan which was submitted on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and is currently with inspectors.

4.13 The new Local Plan includes an evidence base, and new strategy and policies to guide and manage growth and change in the South Gloucestershire area, over the next 15 years; it is an important opportunity to:

- Shape the places that residents live, work and socialise in
- Have a direct impact on quality of life, the natural and built environment
- Have positive impacts on climate change, inequalities and encourage a green economy

4.14 The New Local Plan is supported by a raft of supplementary planning documents that will support our nature recovery efforts, examples include:

- Biodiversity and Planning SPD

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<sup>18</sup> [Joint-Green-Infrastructure-Strategy---June-2020..pdf](#)

<sup>19</sup> [South Gloucestershire New Local Plan | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

- Green Infrastructure SPD
- Trees and development sites SPD
- Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD

## South Gloucestershire Climate Emergency Strategy<sup>20</sup>

4.15 South Gloucestershire Council declared a Climate Emergency on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019 aligned with the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended) and related national and international legislation, frameworks and goals. Since 2019 the Council has produced yearly Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plans and a report on progress for each year which can be viewed on the council website at [Climate and nature emergency in South Gloucestershire | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#) . Through these plans South Gloucestershire Council has been working to:

- Protect, restore and enhance nature
- Prepare for the local impacts of climate change and nature loss
- Reduce carbon emissions and the use of fossil fuels

4.16 Through this strategy The Council has pledged to:

- Provide the leadership to enable South Gloucestershire to become carbon neutral by 2030
- Prepare for the local impacts of a changing climate
- Set out an area wide Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan each year until 2030

4.17 One of the most influential actions following the emergency declaration, has been the adoption of a corporate Climate and Nature Decision Wheel in April 2023. This decision-making tool is ensuring that social and environmental implications are always considered and that improving social and environmental outcomes are prioritised when the Council makes decisions, including for all projects with a value of £100,000 and above.

4.18 Through reviewing management of Council assets and application of the **Climate and Nature Decision Wheel**, the council is delivering a natural capital led approach to asset management and green finance through stacking benefits for emissions, flood and heat risk, health, and biodiversity. Examples of this work includes the projects summarised in section 5 such as Common Connections, Resilient Frome, Linking the Levels, large-scale tree planting and projects in our funding pipeline for Investing in Climate and Nature (ICaN).

4.19 The Council recognises the fundamental role of thriving nature and natural/green infrastructure for a healthy and thriving economy in the **South Gloucestershire Economic Regeneration Strategy 2025**. This principle is also reflected regionally in the goals and commitments of the **West of England Growth Strategy 2025** which states ‘Embedding nature-based solutions and green infrastructure to the way we grow will be crucial to our green growth ambitions’.

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<sup>20</sup> [Climate Emergency Strategy](#)

## West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy<sup>21</sup> (LNRS)

4.20 South Gloucestershire Council is a supporting authority for the West of England LNRS alongside Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council and North Somerset Council who are also supporting authorities. The responsible body is the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.

4.21 An online LNRS toolkit<sup>22</sup> has been produced and is held on the WECA website to help landowners across the region find nature restoration measures relevant to their location and needs.

## 5 Delivering Action

### Council Strategies and Policy

5.1 Through the Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Action Plan the Council has developed and is preparing and implementing new biodiversity related policies across the organisation. The new policies which have been prepared to date include:

- Hemlock Water Dropwort Policy
- Pesticide Policy
- Hedgerow Policy
- Pollinator Action Plan
- Plant Biosecurity Policy
- Conservation Grazing Policy
- Updated Council Allotment Regulations, terms and conditions and guidance

### Land and Corporate Estate Management

5.2 South Gloucestershire Council is currently reviewing all its land holdings and assessing them for climate or biodiversity opportunities aligned with the Council Plan goal to respond to the climate and nature emergency. This will enable the council to best use its assets to help restore biodiversity and build climate resilience. To date over 300 opportunities have been identified which are being taken through a business case development process to further refine the options for nature recovery and climate resilience on council land including through the Investing in Climate and Nature (ICaN) portfolio.

### New Nature Reserves

5.3 Aust Nature Reserve is a new nature reserve on council owned land now entering its next phase as the council seeks to secure Countryside Stewardship funding for continued management and partnership work to manage the reserve and restore nature across the site at scale. The reserve is 55 hectares in size and consists of floodplain grazing marsh being restored through conservation grazing.

5.4 Funding from WECA has enabled South Gloucestershire Council to purchase almost 56 hectares of land around an existing council held farm to enable the creation of a

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<sup>21</sup> **West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

<sup>22</sup> [The Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Toolkit \(LNRS\) - West of England Combined Authority](#)

second wetland reserve – Frampton River Reserve. The council is currently working with partners to take the new reserve to the next stage of development including securing further funding, leading to a big win for biodiversity in the region.

5.5 South Gloucestershire Council has committed 30 hectares of land to plant the biggest new woodland ever planted on South Gloucestershire Council owned land. Once completed, Pucklechurch Wood will be a mixture of woodland, grassland, and freshwater habitats

5.6 A new Local Nature Reserve has been designated at Woodwell Meadows, which is a small but very important species rich grassland site. This will protect it for nature and the local community now and into the future.

## Council Nature Projects

### Annual Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan Projects

5.7 The Council has prepared, delivered and reported progress on our annual **Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plans** since 2019. This annual action plan includes cross cutting and specific actions, projects to protect and restore nature, reports progress on the council's **Nature Recovery Goals** and the 77 actions of the **Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Plan to 2030**.

5.8 Some of the current key nature recovery and biodiversity projects are summarised in this section (section 5) of this Biodiversity Report, and the full plans and reports from current and previous years can be viewed in more detail at [Climate and nature emergency in South Gloucestershire | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#).

### Roadside Nature Reserves

5.9 The council has been managing 19 Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR) for over 10 years now and is always looking for resources to manage more. These are spaces within our highway asset that present with an important mix of floral species. Some of which are being investigated for their national importance such as one RNR which is an SNCI and home to the regions only Lizard Orchid population.

### LiveLabs GreenPrint

5.10 Over the last 4 years, the council has taken part in the DEFRA funded LiveLabs through its GreenPrint project, looking to turn grass clipping from verge site management into biofuel, to offset the council's carbon footprint and restore biodiversity along its road verges. This project is nearing completion; the council is now exploring how to keep this project going and share what has been learned with other Local authorities across the nation.

## Investing in Communities, Climate and Nature (ICaN)

5.11 ICaN promotes and raises money for projects that deliver nature recovery, climate resilience and social value in South Gloucestershire, ensuring spaces and places work better for nature, people, and the local economy.

5.12 ICaN uses a natural capital valuation tool which provides robust, monetized assessment of the benefits and value unlocked by projects which are funded and delivered. ICaN cost-benefit analysis typically shows a 10:1 return for all projects over the 15-year period we maintain project outputs. For example, a £10,000 contribution generates £100,000 in benefits. The ICaN website will be launching spring 2026.

5.13 ICaN provides a new mechanism for funders to deliver Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environment Social and Governance (ESG), and other non-statutory objectives and commitments regarding Biodiversity Net Gain, Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and nature recovery objectives, providing an important new root for funding and delivery for biodiversity and nature recovery in South Gloucestershire.

## Common Connections

5.14 **Common Connections** is a four-year project to restore, improve and connect greenspaces across the east Bristol fringe area of South Gloucestershire. Working with local communities, volunteers and schools to restore green spaces and ponds across 100 sites, the project has had impact and strong legacy across 375 hectares. The project has been funded by the West of England Combined Authority and South Gloucestershire Council and has been delivered working in partnership with Avon Wildlife Trust, Town and Parish councils and local volunteers and schools. The project is due to end in Summer 2026 and to date has achieved:

- 19.2 hectares of wildflower meadow restored
- 6,393 trees planted including 17 community orchards
- 220m of hedgerow laid involving volunteer training
- 18 ponds created or restored
- 386 wildlife boxes installed, including 6 swift colonies
- 29 new benches installed to aid accessibility to nature
- 2,220m (1.4 miles) of new footpath to connect people to nature
- 84 school biodiversity activities carried out
- 2,816 children engaged in biodiversity activities
- 2,067 volunteers engaged, offering training to volunteers and enabling groups and individuals to undertake their own conservation activities

## Linking the Levels

5.15 **Linking the Levels** is a landscape-scale nature recovery project working to restore, connect and create habitats across the Lower Severn Vale, Levels, and Shore in South Gloucestershire. The project area covers 17,230 hectares along the Severn Estuary and aims to enhance the ecological health of the area and community engagement, benefiting protected species and the local community within the SPA, SAC, RAMSAR and adjacent land.

5.16 The project is led by South Gloucestershire Council, in collaboration with Bristol Zoological Society and Bristol Avon Rivers Trust. Linking the Levels has received project development funding from the West of England Combined Authority through the Green Recovery Fund, totalling £370,000, with additional match funding from project partners.

5.17 The primary objectives of the Linking the Levels project include:

- **Data gathering and engagement:** during the current two-year funded development project the following data and engagement has been delivered to date:
  - 100km riparian habitat surveyed for invasive non-native species and management underway
  - 33.7km riparian habitat surveyed for fish including critically endangered European eel, fish passage barriers, pollution hot spots and natural flood management opportunities
  - 31 eDNA sample sites – fish and signal and white clawed crayfish
  - Surveys and monitoring of birds, water vole, glow worm across the project area in 2024 and 2025
  - 18km of coastal SPA/SAC surveyed for visitor impact
  - 20 landowners engaged
  - 491 days equivalent of ecology student sandwich placements
  - 2,067 volunteer hours
  - Plus, engagement and work with Town & Parish Councils, Internal Drainage Board, Environment Agency and other partners
- **Restoration of Habitats:** The project aims to improve habitats for internationally important wildfowl and wading birds, as well as support critically endangered species such as the European eel and water vole.
- **Community Engagement:** A strong focus on increasing community awareness and participation, involving local groups and volunteers in conservation activities.
- **Climate Resilience:** The project seeks to enhance the resilience of the natural environment to climate change, through engagement with landowners and partners including the Internal Drainage Board to improve sustainable management of the landscape.
- **Full Delivery Programme** - A Full Delivery Programme is being prepared of projects which are delivery ready for seeking implementation funding.

## Hedgerow Heroes

5.18 Working in partnership with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and volunteers, South Gloucestershire has restored hedges across our region.

- 300m of hedgerow has been laid at Westerleigh Common
- 200m of hedgerow has been planted creating new hedgerows or gapping up existing hedges
- 100m of hedgerows have been planted with understorey wildflowers
- Cutting of hedges on this common has been reviewed and is now on a rota enabling the hedgerow to provide increased biodiversity opportunities.

## Bioacoustics Surveying

5.19 Working with local volunteers, three bioacoustics monitors were used for one year on Westerleigh Common. This has gathered over one million records of bird calls on the common in open grassland, woodland and orchards. This provides a baseline for measuring bird life on the common and assessing changes in relation to management works on site and the council has plans to replicate at other sites.

## Community Bulb Planting

5.20 Early Spring flowering bulbs were planted in partnership with volunteers, town and parish councils to increase biodiversity of grassed areas across the region, providing nectar sources early in the year when many plants are not flowering. Over 10,000 nectar rich bulbs were planted across 26 sites.

## No Net Loss Project - Conham River Park and Network Rail

5.21 In partnership with Network Rail, South Gloucestershire Council has delivered over 6.2ha of active woodland management, 0.5ha new wildflower meadow, 2ha of new Woodland edge planting and restored 0.02ha of traditional orchard. This project came to an end in 2024 and resulted in:

- Over 1000 trees and native shrub species have been planted by the public and volunteers, including oaks grown from acorns collected locally.
- Over 1000 wildflower and woodland understory plugs planted by a 'Friends of' group.
- 2000 native bulbs were planted by volunteers (bluebells, snowdrops, wild garlic)
- 4 new unique apple varieties discovered by DNA testing and named, (Avon, Volunteer, Ferryman's and Conham Redcoat).
- Old orchard restored and planted with 20 plus rare and traditional varieties of fruit trees.

## Jubilee Park Improvements, Cadbury Heath

5.22 A £500,000 council funded project led by South Gloucestershire Council to transform council owned land which was previously a pitch and putt site into a green space for residents and biodiversity. The aim of the project was to improve 4.5 hectares of amenity green space, to benefit local wellbeing and nature. This project also ended in 2024, resulting in:

- 1Ha of new wildflower meadows created and seeded.
- 0.5Ha of new orchard planted, with traditional and rare varieties of apples, pears, and soft fruits
- One new wildlife pond created
- Establishment of grassland Common Vole habitat 0.075ha
- Creation of 2 hibernaculum
- Erection of 2 number swift nest box towers
- Installation of 15 bee and insect post homes

And the planting of:

- 260,000 native species of bulb (bluebells, snowdrops and wild-type daffodils)
- Over 5,000 wildflower plugs
- Over 100m of new mixed native hedge
- 167 heavy standard specimen trees
- 300 native whips and shrubs
- 0.035 ha across two areas of hazel coppice

## Blakeney Mills Park Improvements, Yate

5.23 This project resulted in the planting of 11 standard trees, the creation of 3 new shrub beds with pollinator friendly species, and over 5,500 bulbs including native bluebells, daffodils and tulips.

## Tree Canopy Project

5.24 South Gloucestershire council secured £1.1 million funding from WECA for a **Tree Canopy Project** which planted 3,734 heavy standard trees alongside a similar number of whips during the period of 2023-25 in council managed verges and green spaces across the county including street trees in urban areas.

## Partnership working for nature

5.25 South Gloucestershire Council recognises that partnership working is critical to achieving nature recovery at scale. The Council is a funding and active member of the **West of England Nature Partnership<sup>23</sup> (WENP), the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership<sup>24</sup> (BACP), the Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP), The Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities<sup>25</sup> (ASERA)**, and a member of other partnerships including the Cotswold National Landscape. We work closely with neighbouring Local Authorities, the West of England Combined Authority, local charities, businesses, communities, landowners and farmers on nature recovery.

5.26 The council works with the **Forest of Avon** and **Western Forest** partners to help align our tree planting ambitions and those of the region as set out in the Forest of Avon Plan.

5.27 Complementing strategic partnership work with Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership, South Gloucestershire Council works with **Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART)**, to develop and deliver river restoration works, and citizen science across the area including the Resilient Frome project and Linking the Levels.

5.28 Through pioneering partnership Community Nature Reserve engagement work and larger River Reserve ambitions The Council works closely with **Avon Wildlife Trust**.

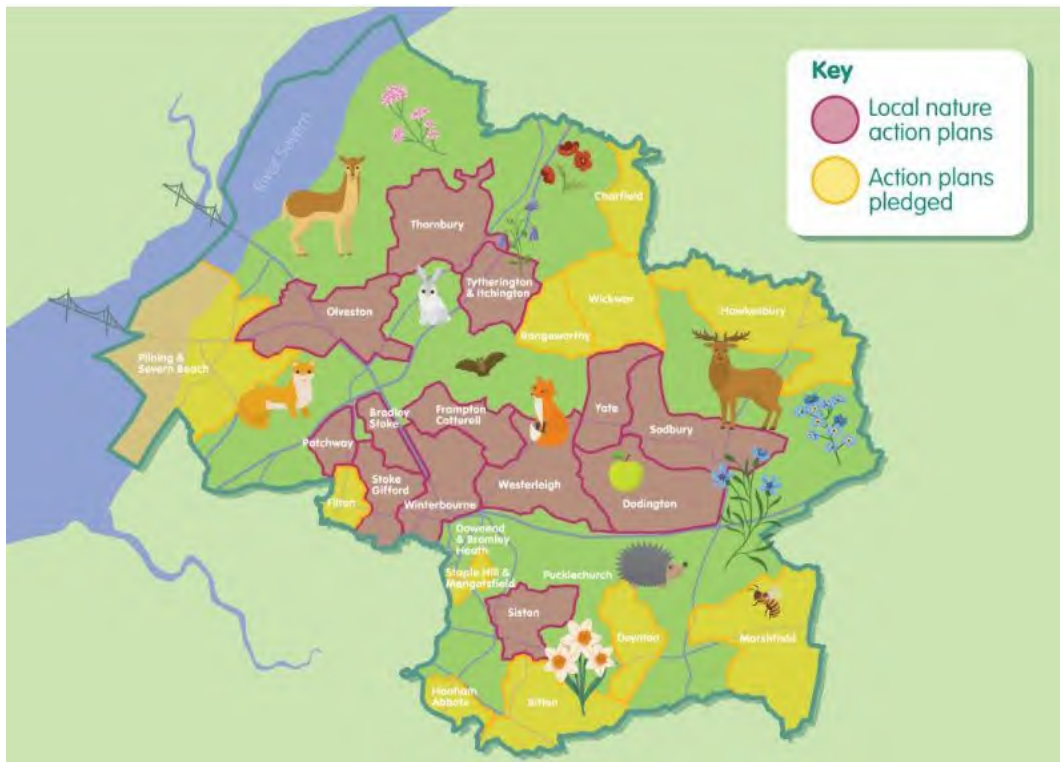
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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.wenp.org.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.bristolavoncatchment.co.uk/>

<sup>25</sup> [ASERA Website](#)

5.29 **Town and Parish Councils** – The council works closely with Town and Parish Councils across our work and launched the award-winning Local Climate Nature Action Plans<sup>26</sup> and guidance which have been taken up by over 17 Town and Parish Councils in South Gloucestershire who have published plans, as well as by other councils around the country. These toolkits have been designed for Town and Parish councils to use to enable them to take positive action for nature and climate on land that they own or manage. Business Climate Nature Action Plans (BNAPS) templates and resources have also been prepared and adopted for local businesses replicating this model.



## Nature Recovery Network

### Resilient Frome

5.30 Whilst much of the above focusses on terrestrial improvements, South Gloucestershire Council also has multiple large and long-term aquatic habitat projects focussed on improving our waterways and freshwater catchments. The £6.5 million DEFRA funded Resilient Frome project is a partnership project between Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, and Bristol Avon Rivers Trust, delivering £350,000 of natural flood management and around £850,000 of sustainable drainage systems (**SuDS**) projects across the Bristol Frome catchment.

5.31 One Resilient Frome project includes **SuDS designs** which have been provided for installation at three “quads” at Chipping Sodbury School. With the use of rain planters, raingardens and infiltration beds, these features are designed to deliver an attenuation

<sup>26</sup> [Local communities take climate and nature action | Newsroom](#)

volume of 86m<sup>3</sup>. Two have been constructed and the third will finish construction in 2027.

5.32 In partnership with our neighbouring authority Bristol City Council, Resilient Frome has helped to develop the proposal of SuDS including **rain planters, raingardens, permeable paving, and filter strips**/drains at Glenfrome School and Briarwood School (within the Bristol authority region). In combination, these SuDS measures are designed to deliver an attenuation volume of 51m<sup>3</sup> and 75m<sup>2</sup> respectively.

5.33 **Natural Flood Management** through the Resilient Frome project has delivered 162 leaky wood dams and brushwood berms engaged 6 farms with riparian land and created attenuation ponds capable of storing 1450m<sup>2</sup> across 24 locations over the last three years.

5.34 **An innovative funding workstream** created by Resilient Frome, plus related projects within the council, continue to unpick and explore tangible ways in which local authorities can access the investment and insurance sector and other private funding (see paragraphs 5.11 to 5.13 for more information).

5.35 Resilient Frome has also produced detailed designs for the **retrofit of eel passes** at Three Brooks Nature Reserve, ready for delivery. The work looked at 3 weir structures accessing 3 tributaries of the Bristol Frome, currently a major barrier to eel migration in the upper Frome catchment. The Nature reserve sits at the confluence of the Hortham, Stoke and Bradley brooks, and is a heavily used and appreciated local community asset for recreation and nature access. By the end of 2025, a concept design was also completed for the culvert on Hortham brook, which also forms an adjacent fish barrier.

5.36 Alongside technical design and scoping, Resilient Frome has also involved **community engagement**. The Frome forum and volunteer work has enlisted 9 town and parish councils across the county in the [Wessex Water “watermark” scheme](#), helping integrate local governance into further water quality/biodiversity objectives within the county council.

## Little Avon River

5.37 Through the councils 2025-26 Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan, £20,000 was allocated to progress assessment and improvement of this high biodiversity value river in the north of the county. The project **conducted baseline surveying** on the previously under studied sections of the Little Avon between Lower Woods Nature Reserve and the county boundary just north of Charfield.

5.38 These surveys included walkovers with Bristol Avon Rivers Trust to identify unmapped barriers and to inform an ‘opportunities for improvements’ report. **eDNA surveys** were also completed in 2025 for 13 sections for the river to understand the impacts of identified barriers in the river and investigate the presence of historically recorded rare migratory species.

5.39 As of 2026, plans for the use of the remaining moneys include improving river **resilience against agricultural pollution** by planting riparian buffer hedges and improving the geomorphology of straighter sections of the river by managing riverside trees to increase light access and introduce large woody debris to the watercourse. Funding is also being sought through ICan for more ambitious fish passage improvements and barrier removal across the catchment.

## Mobilising Nature

5.40 Through partnership work with the West of England Nature Partnership the council is the lead organisation for the regional Mobilising Nature programme. Regionally it has been recognised that to have nature recovery at scale, then nature needs to be able to move at scale across the landscape. There are significant transport networks in place, and plans for more housing and infrastructure for human homes and mobility, but limited plans regarding improving mobility for nature.

5.41 This programme has involved research into the impacts of transport severance on nature, how it effects all types of wildlife differently and reduces the regions' ability to restore nature at scale. Barriers to wildlife movement have been mapped, existing Nature Connectivity Infrastructure (NCI) has been mapped and opportunities to improve or provide new NCI to enable nature mobility are being identified.

5.42 Highlights from our research so far includes:

- There are 975 miles of roads in South Gloucestershire, with 2.62 billion vehicle miles travelled across them yearly.
- The (Motorways, A, B and C class) and rail infrastructure break South Gloucestershire into 209 parcels of land.
- Motorways and A roads receive traffic levels of over 10,000 vehicle journeys a day; research shows this makes them impossible to cross for most wildlife.
- There are 736 crossing points for people to get across the transport infrastructure in South Gloucestershire whilst there are only 27 crossing points for wildlife.

## Education and Raising Awareness

### Warmley Community Nature Reserve

5.43 In partnership with Avon Wildlife Trust, the [Warmley Community Nature Reserve](#) project has been developed and delivered over the past two years to strengthen nature connectivity and foster a love of urban wildlife. The initiative has centred on deep community engagement—bringing local residents together, building a network of passionate nature champions, and working closely with the council to fund habitat improvements and hands-on workshops.

5.44 Over the course of the project, 1115 people were engaged, with 186 residents registering formally as a member of the project across 11,630m<sup>2</sup> of garden and private spaces contributing to the project. 296 trees were planted, 6 ponds created and almost 2000 native wildflower packs and bulbs planted.

5.45 While the funded phase of the project comes to an end in March 2026, the spirit of the initiative continues to thrive. Local residents who first joined through project activities have now taken the lead, forming The Warmley Flock, an emerging unincorporated community group dedicated to supporting neighbours to take action for nature in their own gardens and shared spaces.

## Common Connections

5.46 Alongside the impressive roster of landscape improvements generated by the Common Connections project, an integral part of the project involved working with schools and community groups. From meadow creation and plug planting to hedge and orchard establishment, in total 84 school activities were delivered, engaging 2,816 children across 15 different schools. The project provided improved outdoor learning resources to 15 schools and installed features that spark ongoing engagement: swift colonies at 6 locations (54 boxes); 156 habitat/nesting boxes in public green spaces; and 224 boxes supplied to residents for private gardens. Nine “nature passageways” were opened in school fencing, improving connectivity and giving pupils live examples of wildlife friendly design.

5.47 This project coupled learning with action to ensure a sustained legacy of participation and action: 2,063 volunteers contributed to habitat creation and site improvements, while 468 trees were distributed through community giveaways and 14 households joined our Community Nature Reserve initiative.

5.48 Work is currently underway to develop the Thriving Waters programme which is a Common Connections legacy project to take forward work to protect, restore and enhance the Siston and Warmley Brook catchment in the Common Connections project area, and the adjacent River Boyd catchment.

## Communications and Public Engagement

5.49 We have increased our communications and public engagement on climate and nature over the 2023–2026 reporting period. With the climate and nature emergency embedded as a council priority in the Council Plan, our communications, campaign activity and education programmes have become more visible, more proactive, and wider reaching.

### A multichannel approach to reaching our communities

5.50 Our communications include using digital channels, local media, onsite engagement, printed materials and community partnerships. This includes regular updates through the council website, social media, e-newsletters, local media, and targeted campaigns supporting projects such as tree planting, river restoration and Local Nature Action Plans.

## Communication Statistics

5.51 Between January 2023 and January 2026, the [council’s climate and nature webpage](#) received 3,652 views.

Recent climate and nature press releases issued by the council have also seen strong engagement:

- [Climate & Nature Emergency – annual report received](#) [11 December 2025] 1,105 views
- [First trees planted in Pucklechurch Wood received](#) [28 November 2025] 1,123 views
- [A-rating for climate action & Festival of Nature received](#) [5 June 2025] 3,637 views

There was also significant media coverage from BBC, Bradley Stoke Voice and the Gazette Series, amplifying our reach at regional and national level:

- [Council hails progress on climate and nature emergency - Bradley Stoke Voice](#)
- [New woodland planted as South Glos boosts nature efforts | Gazette Series](#)
- [Festival of Nature starts in South Gloucestershire | Gazette Series](#)
- Radio coverage: [Planting of first new national forest in decades starts - BBC News](#)

## Empowering residents to take action for nature

5.52 Through the Community Nature Reserve initiative, over 300 households signed up to manage their gardens for wildlife. We also promote volunteering widely.

Our social media campaigns have generated strong interest, including:

- RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch:
  - Facebook reach: 2,052, Instagram reach, 327 and X impressions: 612.
- Tree Week (including voucher scheme and volunteer promotion):
  - Facebook reach of voucher scheme: 5,928.
  - Facebook reach on volunteer planting post: 7,484.
  - LinkedIn reach: 452.
  - X: 334 impressions.
- Wild Summit
  - Facebook reach 1,180, LinkedIn reach 997, and LinkedIn overview message reach 512.

These particular campaigns helped in planting, habitat creation and community-led nature enhancement.

## Working with schools and young people

5.53 Education is central to our approach and through the Common Connections project, we delivered:

- 84 free school biodiversity activities
- Engaging 2,816 children
- Involving 15 schools in hands on learning

Activities for this project included outdoor learning, habitat creation (ponds, meadows, hedgerows), biodiversity surveys and practical conservation skills. Schools also received swift boxes, wildflower planting and orchard areas to support long-term curriculum-linked learning.

## Community events, guided activities and public workshops

5.54 Community learning through events has been a core success in projects such as Common Connections and Linking the Levels, achievements from these include:

- 2,067 volunteers contributed to the common connections project
- 18 ponds created or restored
- 386 wildlife boxes installed
- 2,220 metres (1.4 miles) of new footpath
- 29 new benches installed

Events at Kingswood Park, including the *Celebrate With Me* festival which attracted more than 12,000 attendances and offered nature focused activities and workshops.

These events give residents direct opportunities to understand and experience nature recovery in their communities.

## Promoting biodiversity projects through campaigns and storytelling

5.55 We have increased the visibility of biodiversity and climate resilience projects through storytelling, digital campaigns and regular updates. Our highlights include:

- 7,275 trees planted through Common Connections and the new Western Forest programme.
- Meadow creation (equivalent of 27 football pitches).
- New wildlife habitats, ponds and hedgerows.
- Volunteer achievements and local landowner partnerships.

## Educating through libraries and local facilities

5.56 Libraries have become hubs for climate and nature learning, including loaning thermal imaging cameras, hosting biodiversity displays, and signposting residents to nature volunteering and sustainable gardening.

## Supporting Town & Parish Councils to lead locally

5.57 Our communications have supported 25 Town and Parish Councils to develop Local Climate and Nature Action Plans, ensuring strong local ownership of nature recovery and wider dissemination of best practice.

## Internal communications and staff awareness

5.58 We continue to ensure our staff understand how biodiversity supports policy, service delivery and long-term decision making through intranet updates, briefings and cross council collaboration.

## 6 Our Plan / Looking Ahead

### Annual Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plans

6.1 The Council will continue to prepare, deliver and report progress on its annual **Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan** which includes cross cutting and specific actions and projects to protect and improve biodiversity in South Gloucestershire and delivery progress on the council's **Nature Recovery Goals**.

6.2 The annual action plan includes projects which contribute to the 77 actions of the **Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Plan to 2030**. Some of the current key projects in the 2025/26 Action Plan and forthcoming 2026/27 Action Plan are summarised in this section (section 6) of this Biodiversity Report, and the full plans and reports from current and previous years can be viewed in more detail at [Climate and nature emergency in South Gloucestershire | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#).

### 10% Non-Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

6.3 South Gloucestershire Council has committed to exploring how to instigate a BNG expectation on any projects the council is responsible for that fall outside of statutory BNG requirements, to deliver at least 10% BNG. This involves engagement with funders and discussions with various council departments to ensure this is practicable, affordable and will deliver real biodiversity gain for our area. A policy/guidance document is being prepared by the council for delivering non-statutory BNG and associated maintenance and monitoring.

### Biodiversity and Highways Policy

6.4 Colleagues across council highways departments regularly seek guidance for biodiversity related matters affecting assets and understand that through the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty the council has a statutory requirement to protect and enhance existing biodiversity assets. To this end the council is exploring the development of a Biodiversity and Highways Policy document to set out what and how the council will conserve and enhance biodiversity across our highways asset.

### Investigating new designs for roadside verges – Sedum

6.5 The Council has been investigating prescription options for climate resilient road verges, noting that grass verges may not survive in future climate conditions. A trial sedum verge project started in 2025 where a verge was planted with sedum instead of grass. Outcomes of this trial are being monitored to inform future management and potential wider application.

6.6 Monitoring includes tracking maintenance requirements, ability to resist foot traffic or vehicular traffic damage, heat resilience and chemical resilience from road gritting activities.

## Improving SNCI Governance

6.7 Across the region the value of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) has been recognised, especially to inform preparation of the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). The council will be surveying all the SNCIs across South Gloucestershire to ensure the information held is up to date, to enable better protection of these sites and to support local and regional nature recovery projects.

## Deliver 2nd phase of Pucklechurch Woodland

6.8 During the planting season of 2026/27, the Council will work with partners to complete the second phase of woodland planting at Pucklechurch Wood. Once complete, the project will have planted 30 hectares of new woodland including around 5 hectares of wildflower rich rides.

## Deliver 2nd phase of Frampton River Reserve

6.9 The council is working with partners to develop, deliver and run this exciting new wetland reserve. Over the next few years, a partnership agreement for the running of the new reserve, designs will be further prepared, and further funding sought for the next phase of delivery.

## Declare 4 new Local Nature Reserves

6.10 South Gloucestershire Council aims to identify a minimum of four sites to declare as new Local Nature Reserves, giving these sites stronger status and recognition to help draw in resources for their management and to help protect them within an increasingly pressured landscape.

## Launch of ICaN and secure £1million

6.11 Over the next 5 years our ICaN portfolio of ready to deliver projects which include quantified natural capital uplift, will be expanded. ICaN enables businesses, individuals and other backers to fund projects in the portfolio aligned with their own commitments, values and goals. This includes providing an internal route for other departments in the council to fund nature recovery and climate resilience across our area. Over the next 2 years the scheme aims to secure over £1million in contributions. Read more about ICaN in section 5.

## Mobilising Nature Regional Program

6.12 The Council will continue to develop this program across the region, looking to gather mapping data for the whole of the WECA region. Funding will be sought to take this programme forward, engaging a project manager to continue research and development. Over the next 5 years key green bridge locations will be identified and have feasibility studies put in place and funding sought, alongside installation of minor Nature Connectivity Infrastructure (NCI) across the region.

## Thriving Waters Program

6.13 The council has been working with Bristol Avon Rivers Trust to identify opportunities for river restoration projects within key river catchments across our area. Through the climate and nature emergency fund, walk over surveys have been

carried out on the Siston Brook, River Boyd, Oldbury Naite Catchment (Thornbury) and the Little Avon.

6.14 The council will produce strategic vision plans for each of these catchments, that identify the partnership work and funding opportunities needed to bring these projects to full business case.

## 7 Biodiversity Net Gain

### Meeting statutory BNG requirements

7.1 South Gloucestershire Council has implemented requirements for statutory BNG for major applications (from February 2024) and minor applications (from April 2024), applying the statutory metrics, biodiversity gain hierarchy, and long-term management obligations ( $\geq 30$  years). The council's BNG Technical Advice Note<sup>27</sup> sets validation and discharge requirements, clarifies on-/off-site expectations, and references statutory credits only as a last resort.

### BNG that has or is being delivered within the reporting period

Criteria	Number
No. of applications that were BNG eligible	94
Percentage of applications that are BNG eligible	5.34%
Number of gain plans approved	15
Number and type (habitat) of units approved in gain plans	<p>Total net gain in habitat units: Onsite: 1.41 Offsite: 2.23 Statutory: 0</p> <p>Total net gain in hedgerow units: Onsite: 9.06 Offsite: 0.24 Statutory: 0</p> <p>Total net gain in watercourse units: Onsite: 0 Offsite: 0.19 Statutory: 0</p>

### How we plan to meet BNG obligations over the next reporting period

As set out in the South Gloucestershire Council BNG Technical Advice Note<sup>27</sup>, the council will:

- Maintain strong **validation** and **condition discharge** processes.
- Prioritise **onsite** delivery; where needed, source **local offsite** units aligned with LNRS priorities.

<sup>27</sup> [Biodiversity Net Gain Technical Advice Note May 2025](#)

- Strengthen **monitoring and enforcement** to evidence habitat trajectories over 30 years.
- Work with neighbouring authorities to explore opportunities for reciprocal S106 agreements.

## 8 Delivery Challenges

South Gloucestershire Council continues to innovate and adopt climate sensitive projects for the future, from increasing floodplain connectivity and offline storage of major waterways to limit flood impacts, to selecting more climate resilient tree species for planting or ensuring natural shade sources in schools and towns to reduce urban heating effects. But these projects come with a number of challenges at the development, delivery and post-delivery stages.

### Funding

8.1 Funding for biodiversity work/projects is still lacking locally and across the UK. Grant and funding application opportunities when available, often have very short notice and stringent requirements, which makes development of bids and securing funding a significant challenge.

8.2 It is often a challenge for Council officers who already have high workloads to allocate time for often long and complicated funding applications, which can result in funding opportunities being missed or ignored.

8.3 Many grants and funders seek fundable projects which are 'delivery ready' and often lack funding for project development work which is essential to ensure that projects are evidence based, engagement with stakeholders is undertaken, and permissions are in place.

8.4 Grants and funding for biodiversity projects can lack revenue elements to cover staff time, maintenance or monitoring and evaluation of the project.

### Development pressures

8.5 National policy sets ambitious targets and requirements for Local Planning Authorities for house building and development in the UK. The South Gloucestershire New Local Plan which has been submitted to inspectors prior to examination in public, includes an evidence base, new strategy and policies to guide and manage growth and change in the South Gloucestershire area, over the next 15 years.

8.6 Whilst proposed allocations for development in the New Local Plan prioritise sites of lower value for biodiversity, careful assessment of designs, construction management plans and monitoring of compliance with planning conditions regarding biodiversity including mitigation and net gain will be required particularly for major sites.

## Accelerating impacts from biodiversity loss and climate change

8.7 Adaptation and resilience to the accelerating impacts of the changing climate and degradation of natural habitats and biodiversity continues to be a key and rising challenge with impacts for local communities, the economy and nature, as highlighted in a 2026 IPBES report<sup>28</sup>.

8.8 Whilst the council considers adaption and resilience to climate and nature loss impacts in our work and decision making, the scale of this challenge continues to grow and is the defining challenge of our time and for the future of all life on earth.

## Wetland Habitats

8.9 There are many challenges around wetland habitat restoration including funding, permitting, and requirements of national schemes. Unlike tree planting or ‘post-code’ funding for habitat improvements, rivers typically cover tens of kilometres, traversing parish and county boundaries which can make securing funding and coordinated work across a catchment a challenge. The lack of statutory funding for catchment level work (which typically includes expensive capital works) means that river restoration projects are typically split into feasibility, design and delivery phases and seek separate funding for each stage. This creates continuity issues for projects and can result in higher expense long term.

8.10 Gaining permissions for river restoration can be challenging due to various/many landowners along riparian corridors and aims of projects conflicting with existing land use such as intensive agriculture. These challenges require a diverse range of partners and specialists to resolve, including hydro-morphologists, specialist design specifications, community organisations, and specialist contractors. As a result, river projects will often cost a lot more to deliver and may be seen as less of a ‘win’ than a tree planting scheme which can be easier and cheaper to achieve, particularly when metrics for river restoration success are less geared towards natural capital and therefore less ‘valuable’ in the eye of the investor. This bias may cause more neglect of river restoration at a time when they require intervention now more than ever.

## National legislation and policy changes

8.11 As tensions between developers and the ecology industry mount, there is a risk of weakening BNG policy as amendments are considered by national government. As of January 2026, a bill has been proposed to increase the site size for BNG exemption to 0.2Ha. Whilst good news for developers of small sites, this change represents an exclusion of up to 82% of planning applications<sup>29</sup>. This means that most planning applications will not have to compensate for lost biodiversity, resulting in a net loss for nature. Policy changes like this represent a threat to nature recovery.

8.12 Underfunding of key government bodies also compromises the LA’s ability to regulate and enforce planning conditions of medium and large sites. In South

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<sup>28</sup> [Methodological assessment of the impact and dependency of business on biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people \(business and biodiversity assessment\) | IPBES secretariat](#)

<sup>29</sup> <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/BNG-Market-Report-eftec-260625.pdf>

Gloucestershire, silt run off from major developments into fragile rivers such as the Hazel Brook have been challenging and lengthy to investigate and enforcement action is slow to occur. This causes tensions between developers and the local authority, local communities and eNGOs, who all want such pollution incidents dealt with swiftly and effectively.

## Local Nature Recovery Strategy delivery

8.13 Following the support provided to Responsible Authorities to prepare a LNRS, government funding has to date not been provided for co-ordination, delivery and monitoring of the strategy. This lack of funding for ongoing management, delivery and monitoring of LNRS presents a significant challenge for Responsible Authorities and Supporting Authorities to deliver the strategy objectives for nature recovery and biodiversity.

## Nature and Growth

8.14 A 2025 cross-party<sup>30</sup> report by the Government's Environment Audit Committee has concluded that nature is not a blocker to development, however this is not reflected consistently across national policy, legislation, plans and communications. This inconsistency has led to a confusing 'environment' for discussions around growth and biodiversity. There needs to be greater clarity, awareness and agreement across government departments on the role and stance of nature and growth, and the importance of thriving nature and functional natural/green infrastructure to underpin resilient places and the economy. A shift to a nature positive narrative is key to prioritise funding at the pace and scale needed to deliver strategic natural infrastructure, nature-based solutions and biodiversity projects to benefit people, places, nature and the economy.

# 9 Monitoring and Evaluation

## Annual Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Governance

9.1 The Council will continue to prepare, deliver, monitor and report progress on its annual **Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan** which includes cross cutting and specific actions and projects to protect and improve biodiversity in South Gloucestershire to deliver progress on the 77 actions of the **Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Plan to 2030**, and the council's **Nature Recovery Goals**. The full plans and reports from current and previous years can be viewed at [Climate and nature emergency in South Gloucestershire | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council](#)

9.2 Governance on monitoring and reporting of the council's work and progress on delivering its plans and goals for nature recovery is overseen by the GI and Nature Recovery Board which meets monthly and includes senior officers from across council

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<sup>30</sup> [Nature not a "blocker" to housing delivery, MPs find in new report - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

service areas. This board reports on progress to other internal boards, elected members, council Cabinet and Full Council, and regional partnership boards where appropriate

9.3 Monthly updates on work and progress are reported to the Climate and Nature Emergency Lead Member, and monitoring and progress is reported to the quarterly cross party Scrutiny Commission Climate and Nature Emergency Standing Group. Annual reports on monitoring and progress are brought to the council Cabinet and full Council in December of each year.

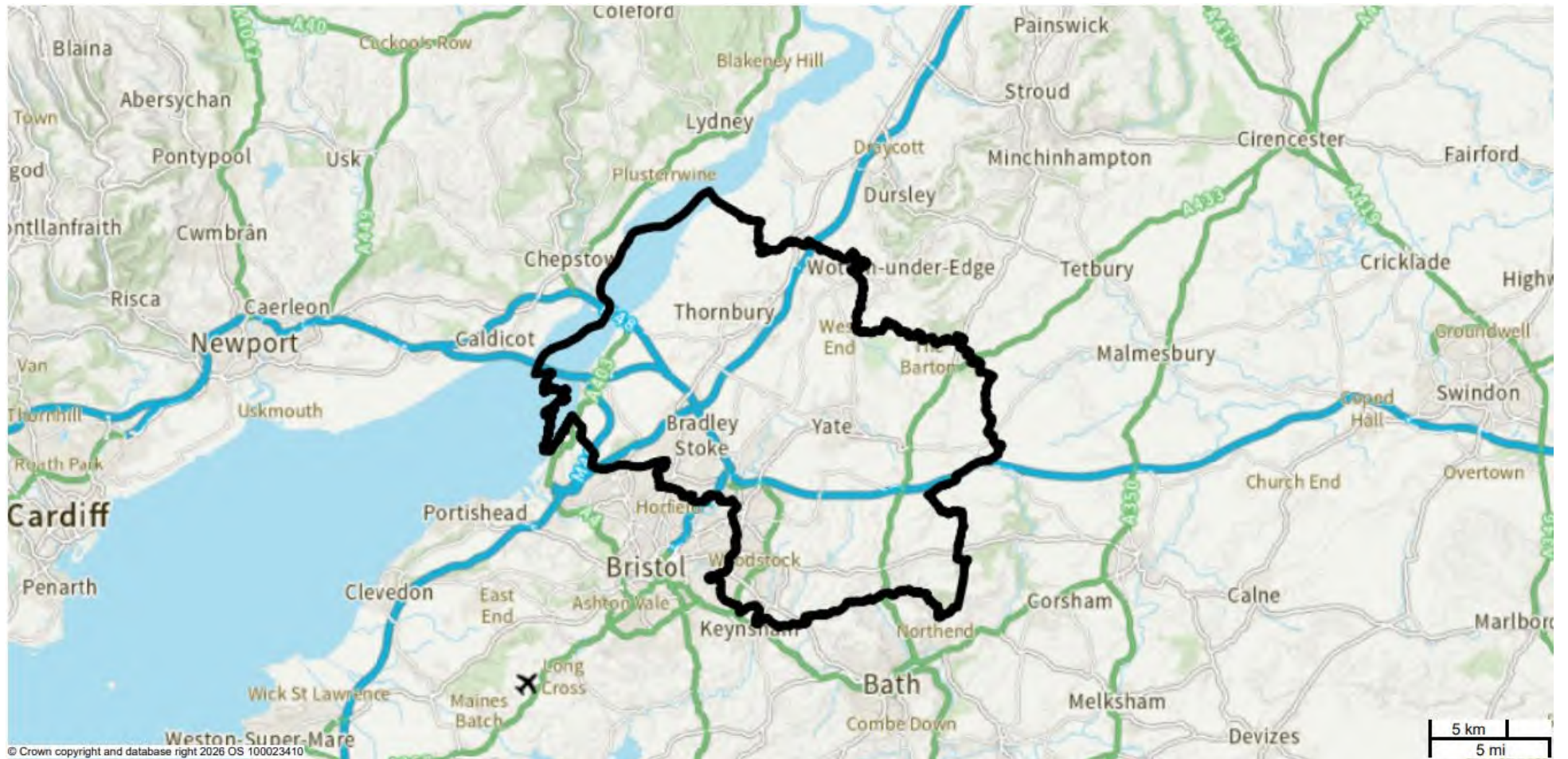
9.4 Where appropriate, monitoring reports and updates are provided to the West of England Combined Authority Committee and Environment Board including regarding reporting progress on agreed outcomes and monitoring to deliver the West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

### Monitoring of progress on this Biodiversity report

9.5 The Council will monitor and evaluate progress on the work set out in this statutory Biodiversity Report for South Gloucestershire and provide reports on progress as required to feed into national monitoring, evaluation and reporting on biodiversity to meet the requirements of the Environment Act 2021 and the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty.

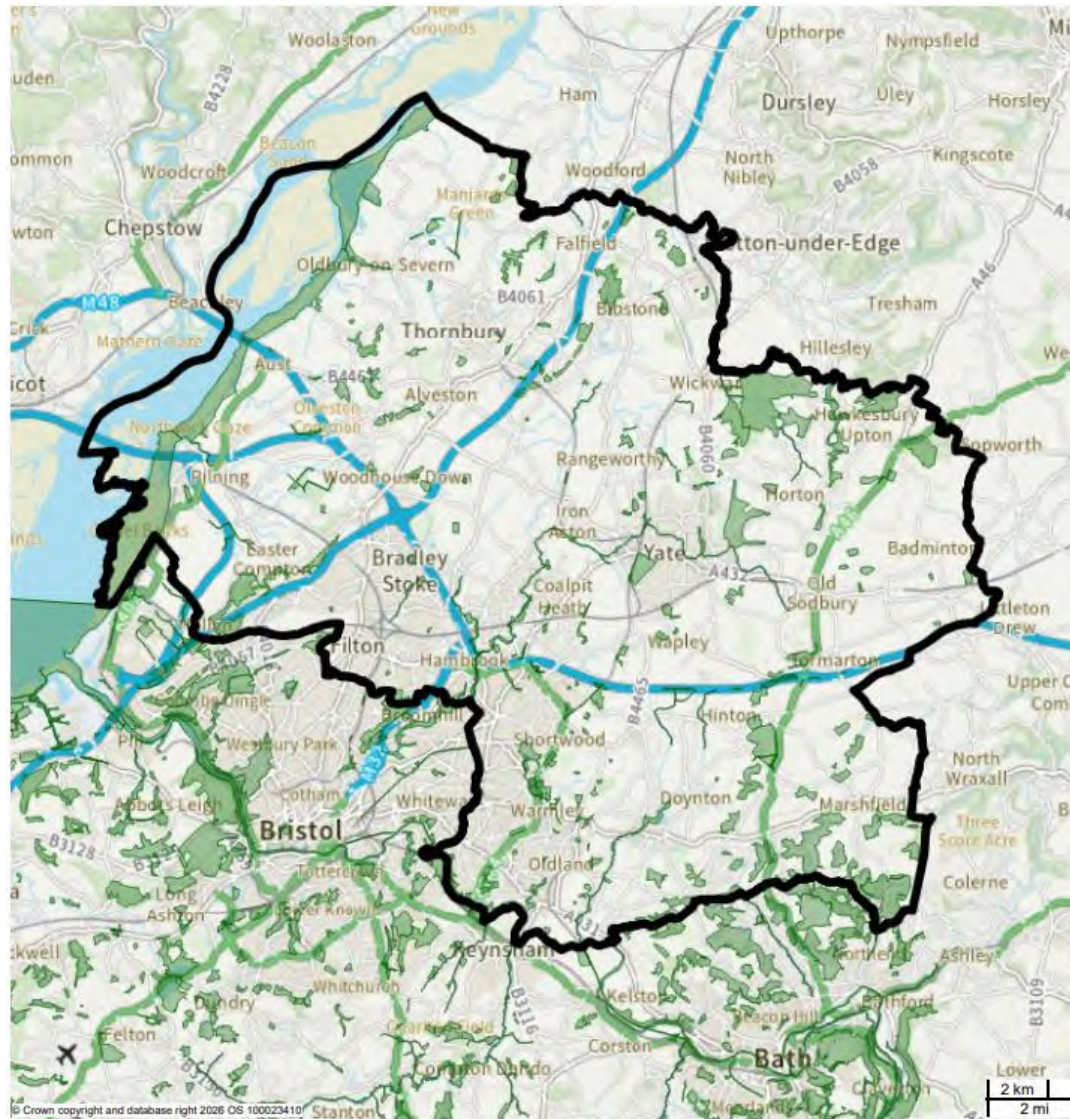
## Appendix 1

### South Gloucestershire Administrative Boundary



## Appendix 2

### South Gloucestershire Non-statutory Nature Sites (SNCl)s





Appendix 4

Cotswold National Landscape Areas within South Gloucestershire

