

SUMMARY

Greener Places

Green Infrastructure Strategy **2021**



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Foreword

As we respond to the challenges of the Climate and Nature Emergency and the Covid 19 pandemic, how we plan, design and manage all things green (our green infrastructure) is right at the heart of our ambition and work for a greener, healthier and resilient future.

We all have a part to play in responding to these challenges. This requires a 'step change' across all areas of our work and lives, from improving how the council manages our green spaces, to greening our high streets, and transforming the role of green infrastructure within new development.

Whilst the scale of the challenge must not be underestimated, it is also important to acknowledge the progress underway and the journey we have already travelled together. Delivering an ambitious vision for green infrastructure is central to our plans for creating thriving, attractive, nature rich, healthy and resilient communities.

This strategy explains our priorities, what we want to achieve and the action we will take to green our places. Working with our partners and residents we will transform the role, creation and management of green infrastructure across our area.

We want to work with everyone who lives in, works in, and visits South Gloucestershire to bring together and deliver a vision now and into the future for **'greener places where people and nature thrive'**.



Toby Savage

Leader of South Gloucestershire Council



1. Introduction

Green infrastructure (GI)

is the term used to describe the natural environmental features of an area and the natural connections (or network) between these features.

Green infrastructure also includes 'blue infrastructure', which are areas of wetland, water bodies and water courses.

1.1 About South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire has a rich and varied landscape. Our area extends from the Severn Estuary, across a historic tapestry of commons, ancient woodlands, rivers and farmland, to the Cotswold scarp and the Bristol urban fringe.

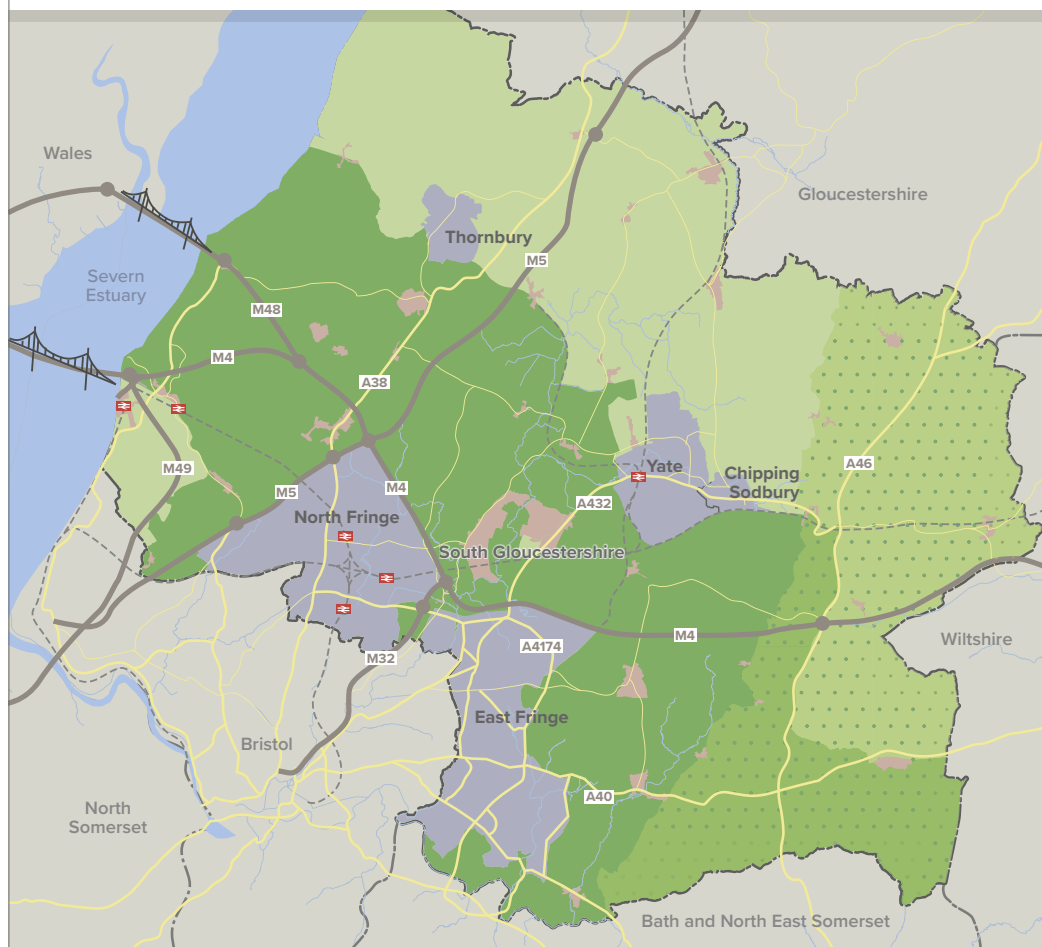
In the heart of the [Western Gateway partnership area](#), South Gloucestershire lies to the east and north of the City of Bristol and connects the West of England with the Midlands and Wales. Our location, environment, heritage, and access to the countryside are important reasons why South Gloucestershire is a great place to live, work and visit.



Highway verge – Tytherington, South Gloucestershire



SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE – OUR AREA



Key

--- South Gloucestershire Boundary

Green Belt

Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Urban areas and market towns

Rural settlements

Motorway

A roads

Railway

With a population of 285,100 in 2019, projected to rise to 354,000 by 2043, this 25% increase is the sixth highest projected population growth in England.

[Office for National Statistics 2018 data published 2020](#)

South Gloucestershire includes three economic enterprise areas at Severnside, Filton and Emersons Green and the South Gloucestershire 'Tec Arc' which includes the Bristol and Bath Science Park.

Our area is also a growing cultural and tourist destination, with traditional attractions such as the National Trust's [Dyrham Park](#), the [Avon Valley Railway](#), [Grimsbury Community Farm](#) and the [Cotswold Way – National Trail](#) reflecting our rich landscapes and heritage. More recent attractions with an environmental focus include [Bristol Zoo's Wild Place](#) and [The Wave](#) surfing lake.

Over 40% of South Gloucestershire is covered by a designated Green Belt which surrounds and separates Bristol and Bath. Tree canopy covers approximately 11% of our area.

South Gloucestershire has a high number of international, national and local nature and geological conservation sites and areas which also contribute to the distinctive landscape of the area. This includes the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Cotswolds National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and 22 nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The rivers Avon and Frome, their tributaries, catchments and the lowland vales of the Severn estuary provide unique wetland habitat and vital corridors for wildlife, supporting the ecological network across our area.

Public Rights of Way and highway verges are a key part of our green infrastructure and provide vital connected networks for people and wildlife across our urban and rural areas.

The council manages 1,257km of Public Rights of Way which is the same distance as walking from Lands' End to John of Groats, depending on which route you take! Across the highway network we manage 2.9 million m² of verges which is an area equivalent to 425 football pitches. We are working to change how our verges are managed to improve and connect habitat for nature, as well as adaptation and resilience to the changing climate.

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1.2 Our purpose and vision

This strategy brings together our vision and plans for improving the environment and green infrastructure across our area. This includes our plans to improve and create more habitat for nature, sustain high quality public open spaces, and contribute to a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The strategy also explains:

- 🌿 how we aim to plan for, design and manage green infrastructure to contribute to adaptation and resilience to the changing climate and support the health and wellbeing of everyone in our communities
- 🌿 how we are working with our partners, communities and residents to restore nature in our response to the nature crisis and 'green' our area
- 🌿 the 'green thread' which links our work to manage green spaces in South Gloucestershire with regional, national and global commitments for the environment



With good planning, design and management, green infrastructure provides a wide range of benefits for people, nature and places. With our partners and residents, we want to strengthen our work together to 'green our places' and achieve a shared vision for:

'greener places where people and nature thrive'

This summary of our Greener Places Green Infrastructure Strategy gives an overview of the information, priorities and commitments which are explained in more detail in the full strategy document.



'The Tortworth chestnut'. This majestic ancient tree is one of the oldest and most famous sweet chestnut trees in the country. At well over 600 years old, with legend dating the tree back to 800 AD, this chestnut and other ancient trees across South Gloucestershire provide inspiration for our work now to plant a legacy for future generations.



1.3 Our values

The values of our [Council Plan](#) and [Sustainable Community Strategy 2016 - 2036](#) explain the values for all our work. This includes the values of the Greener Places Strategy and how we will deliver it.

We are committed to:

- Working together
- Being equality focused
- Committed to our communities
- Being ambitious and adaptable
- Being resourceful
- Encouraging responsible growth



1.4 Our response to the Climate and Nature Emergency

Our [Council Plan](#) sets out the priorities for all our work across the council.

We recognise the need to work together to act in response to the challenges of the Climate and Nature Emergency, to reduce the inequalities gap, improve health and wellbeing and deliver value for money. These are linked challenges which need to be addressed urgently and require a holistic approach and co-ordinated action.



'Action on the climate and our environment is a fundamental challenge which must inform and influence all our priorities and commitments.'
South Gloucestershire Council Plan 2020 - 2024

Well designed, connected, and managed green infrastructure is important to help us meet these challenges, and contribute to regional, national, and global priorities including the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

'Our approach is to embed tackling the ecological emergency within and alongside the broad Climate Emergency agenda as it is a critical aspect of the wider environmental crisis and to make it clear that we need to act holistically.'
South Gloucestershire Climate Change Strategy

This strategy for greener places sets out why and how our commitment to respond to the Nature Emergency will be implemented and contributes to the following commitments and Action Plans of Priority 3 of the [Council Plan](#):

Council Plan Priority 3: [Promoting sustainable inclusive communities, infrastructure and growth.](#)

- **Action Plan 12** – We will clean streets and maintain roads effectively.
- **Action Plan 13** – We will lead the response to the climate emergency and deliver on our commitments.
- **Action Plan 14** – We will promote clean, affordable, high quality design of new and existing communities.
- **Action Plan 15** – We will plan to join up housing and the appropriate infrastructure such as schools and transport networks that make it easier for people to get around, prioritising sustainable and low carbon travel choices.
- **Action Plan 16** – We will enable people and business to recover and thrive within cohesive communities that value diversity.



1.5 Our outcomes

Our outcomes for green infrastructure in South Gloucestershire have been shaped by our engagement work and contribute to the priorities and outcomes of the West of England [Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020 \(JGIS\)](#) and [South Gloucestershire Council Plan 2020 - 2024](#).

By putting this strategy into action, the outcomes we strive to achieve 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 working together

The next section introduces each of our outcomes, why they are important, and our commitments to take action.

Our overall commitment for green infrastructure:

Consistent with our Council Plan commitment for the need to apply an integrated approach on the climate and the environment, we will lead, enable and inspire action on our green infrastructure priorities across all areas of council work, decision making and influence.



1.6 The role and benefits of green infrastructure

The natural environment provides the water, food, clean air, shelter and other resources upon which all life on earth depends. Even though many of us live in towns and cities, people are part of and depend on nature too.

A thriving environment and green infrastructure network are essential to provide the many resources and functions of the natural environment which we need. These benefits are known as 'ecosystem services'.

Ecosystem Services are all the many 'services' which nature provides.

Natural components including rocks, soil, water, plants and animals provide a wide range of functions or 'ecosystem services' which are vital for people and nature to live and thrive. 'Ecosystem services' provide resources, regulate the environment, and support all life processes and our culture.



When green infrastructure is well planned, designed and managed, it helps to maximise the many vital and linked benefits of 'ecosystem services' which the natural environment provides for people and for nature.

Some of the benefits of high quality green infrastructure include:

- natural flood management
- improving air and water quality
- spaces for recreation to support our health and wellbeing
- space for nature to thrive
- habitat for pollinating insects who we need to pollinate our crops and fruit trees
- locking in carbon to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere
- cooling and shading to help adaptation and resilience to the changing climate
- growing spaces to produce food
- enabling the movement of people and wildlife through green corridors and networks



- social spaces where we can come together outdoors
- greening our communities so they are more attractive and healthier places for us to live
- greening our high streets and business areas to make them more attractive for customers and to support our economy.



Credit: West of England Combined Authority – 'Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy'

1.7 Our 'green thread'

This strategy highlights the '**green thread**' which links our work managing green spaces and planning for new green infrastructure in South Gloucestershire to regional, national and global commitments to protect the environment, including the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [UN Paris Agreement](#).

This '**green thread**' supports and informs our work on the ground by highlighting how the actions and work of the council, our partners and residents contribute to wider shared goals for the environment and links to the bigger picture.





1.8 The UK 25 Year Environment Plan

The government's [25 year Environment Plan 2018](#), presents a 25 year national vision, ambition, priorities and action for the environment across the UK.

The Environment Plan highlights the impacts of the changing climate, land use pressures and biodiversity loss on the natural environment, people and the economy.

The plan introduced measures for the restoration of nature across the UK including the establishment of 'Local Nature Partnerships'. Locally, this is the [West of England Nature Partnership \(WENP\)](#) through which the council works with partners to restore the natural environment and our 'Nature Recovery Network' across the West of England.

The Environment Plan is due to be enacted by the UK parliament through a new [Environment Bill](#) in 2021 to require specific considerations for and improvement of the environment. This is anticipated to include:

- **Strengthened biodiversity duty** – strengthening of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 \(NERC\)](#) under which local authorities and all public bodies will have a duty to ‘**conserve and enhance biodiversity**’.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** – a new requirement to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies which will include a statement of biodiversity priorities for the area and a local habitat map identifying opportunities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** – Biodiversity net gain in development requires an overall increase in natural habitat and ecological features. The Environment Bill will introduce new legal requirements and targets to enhance and improve biodiversity (biodiversity net gain) in all development. This includes the construction of new housing, roads, businesses and services.
- **New monitoring and reporting requirements** – Local authorities will have a duty to monitor and report on biodiversity net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy

1.9 Restoring our ‘Nature Recovery Network’ – bigger, better, more and connected

Creating ‘bigger, better, more and connected’ habitat for nature – our ‘Nature Recovery Network’, is right at the heart of the vision for restoring nature of the [25 year Environment Plan 2018](#).

By improving the size, quality, and connectedness of habitat for nature, we can create stronger and bigger natural networks. This enables wildlife to move, thrive and be more resilient to climate change and other pressures, compared to when habitat is isolated and unconnected.

A stronger and healthier Nature Recovery Network and natural environment also supports the health and wellbeing of people.

The [West of England Nature Partnership \(WENP\)](#) has mapped Nature Recovery Network gaps, opportunities and priorities for **woodland, grassland and wetland** habitat across the West of England.

Restoring, increasing and connecting our Nature Recovery Network is central to our plans and work to respond to the Nature Emergency and restore nature.

Hedgerows, dry stone walls, our highway verge networks and residential gardens also play an important role in providing habitat and connecting larger areas of nature. We all have a part to play in work to restore nature across our area.





© WENP Flood Zone 2: © NERC (CEH). High tide roosts © Natural England. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2018
Ordnance Survey 10024198

Key

Grassland

Grassland connectivity opportunities

Existing grassland

Grassland strategic network

Woodland

Woodland connectivity opportunities

Existing grassland

Woodland strategic network

Woodland network (model)

Wetland

High tide roosts

Wetland connectivity opportunities

Severn Estuary

Rivers and streams

Wetland strategic network

Floodzone 2 (indicative wetland)

Map: West of England Nature Recovery Network (NRN):

South Gloucestershire NRN for woodland, grassland and wetland habitat including gaps in the network (indicated by dots) which represent strategic priorities to improve connectivity where we need to join up the network.

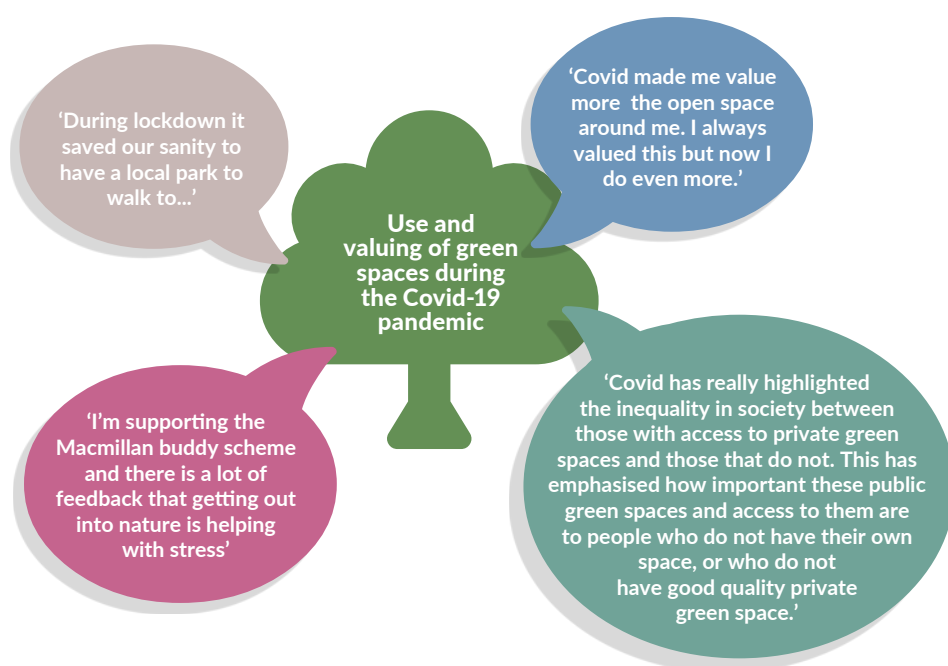
www.wenp.org.uk/nature-recovery-network



2. What you have told us

We have listened to the views, needs and ideas of residents and our partners to shape this strategy and our commitments. This includes talking with a wide range of groups as well as holding a Viewpoint survey and an engagement survey for residents in 2019.

In our engagement survey people told us about how they use and value green spaces, and how this may have changed during the Covid 19 pandemic:



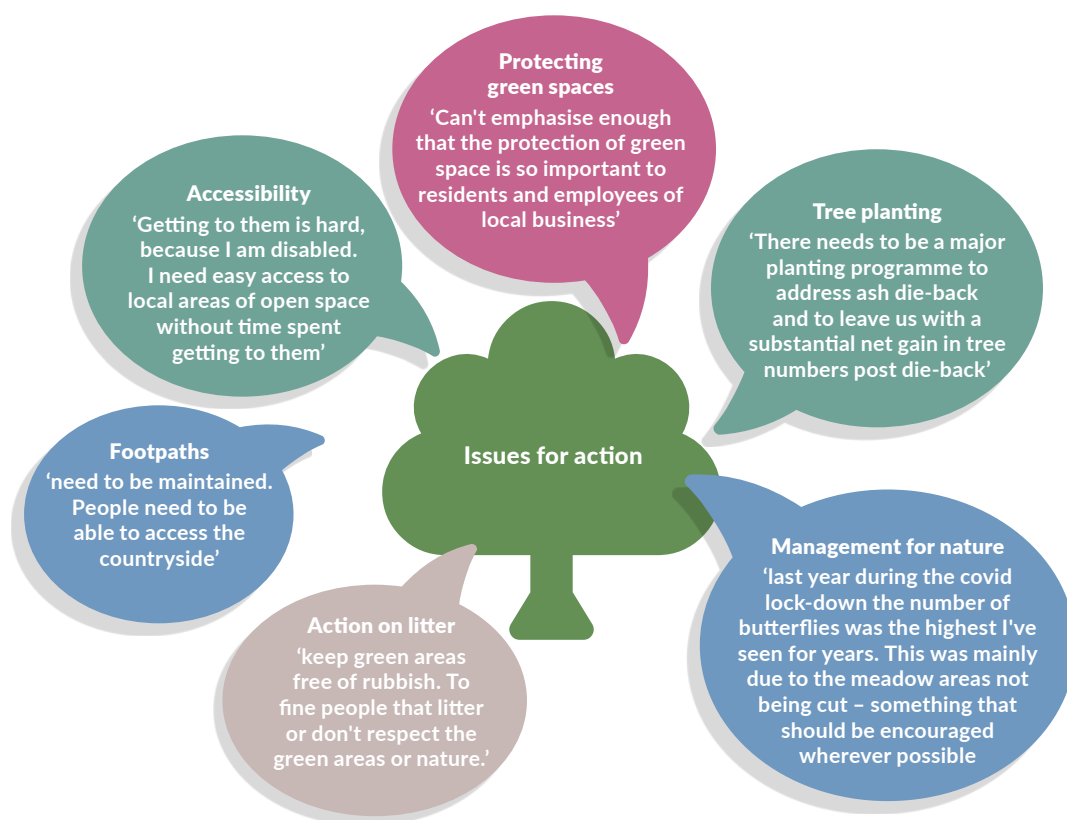
People also told us about the wider benefits of green spaces they experience for their health and wellbeing including:



Some of the barriers and issues for action highlighted by engagement survey respondents include:



Understanding these barriers and finding solutions together to improve access to and use of green spaces, continues to be at the heart of our engagement work. This will continue as we implement the strategy. Some of the issues highlighted for action include:



Steps we are taking to reduce inequality and work with everyone in our communities are explained further in our Equality Impact Assessment and Action Plan.

3. Our outcomes



3.1 Protected and restored nature

Our commitment:

We will take action to respond to the Nature Emergency by protecting, restoring, connecting, and increasing nature.

This includes action to:

- always consider protection and gain for nature and the environment in all our work, plans and how we make decisions
- deliver the requirements of the [Environment Bill](#) including preparation of a 'Local Nature Recovery Strategy', biodiversity net gain in development and action to increase biodiversity and protect land for nature
- set and achieve our goals to restore nature
- improve, connect and increase our woodland, wetland and grassland Nature Recovery Network [West of England Nature Partnership](#)
- prepare and deliver a 10 year Action Plan for Nature for the land we are responsible for
- change how we manage land and water to restore nature
- work with our partners on a Pollinator Strategy for South Gloucestershire
- plant more trees to double our tree cover [The Forest of Avon Plan](#)
- reduce pollution, litter and environmental crime [Resources and Waste Strategy 2020 and Beyond](#)
- work with residents, partners and other landowners to lead, enable and inspire action to protect and restore nature across our area



Our goals to restore nature include:

- 🌿 A 'bigger, better, more and connected' Nature Recovery Network for woodland, grassland and wetland habitats
- 🌿 more land better protected and managed for nature as required by the [Environment Bill](#)
- 🌿 doubled tree cover
- 🌿 restored and improved pollinator networks
- 🌿 restored rivers with better water quality and biodiversity
- 🌿 reduced pollution, litter and pesticides
- 🌿 improved water, soil and air quality
- 🌿 increased populations of insects and other wildlife
- 🌿 net gain for nature in all we do

Why this matters

Globally and locally, we are facing a dramatic decline in nature because the natural environment is under growing pressure from a range of factors. This includes pressure from development, intensive agriculture, the changing climate, pollution, changes in land and water use.

These are causing the collapse of the natural ecosystems which all life on earth is part of and depends on, including people.

The [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services 2019 \(IPBES\)](#) reports that 60% of the world's wild animals have been lost since 1970 and 75% of human food crops rely on insect pollination. However, insect numbers are plummeting at alarming rates with significant implications for the health of natural systems and human food supply.

In the UK, the [UK State of Nature Report 2019 – National Biodiversity Network NBN](#) identifies that 15% of UK species are under threat of extinction. For example, there has been a 46% decline in butterflies across the UK and in the West of England a devastating 95% decline in our hedgehogs, swifts and swallows.

We need to act now to ensure we have a healthy, natural environment, now and for future generations where people and nature can thrive.



We are working together across the council, with our partners, businesses, local landowners and residents to protect and restore nature across South Gloucestershire. As set out in our [Climate Emergency Strategy](#) we are taking action to ensure that 'nature in our local area is more protected, connected and healthy and that biodiversity is increased'.



21 'The truth is the natural world is changing. And we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have, and we need to defend it.'

Sir David Attenborough, BBC 2020



Tree planting at Warmley Forest Park during Tree Week 2019





3.2 Greater resilience to the changing climate

Our commitment:

We will respond to the Climate Emergency by strengthening the role of green infrastructure to support adaptation and resilience to the changing climate.

This includes action to:

- deliver the green infrastructure and nature recovery priorities of our [Climate Emergency Strategy](#) and the actions set out in our annual [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#)
- manage land the council is responsible for to adapt and be resilient to the changing climate
- work with our partners to deliver green infrastructure priorities to support community and infrastructure adaptation and resilience to the changing climate' across our area
- prepare and launch a 'Green Investment Scheme' to optimise investment in our Climate and Nature Emergency priorities
- work with our partners to improve and increase the green infrastructure network for local walking and cycling [Joint Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan](#) and [Joint Local Transport Plan 4](#)

Why this matters

Average UK temperatures have increased by nearly 1°C since the 1980s with rising impacts for nature and people, including flooding, heat and drought. Globally, 30% of species may be at risk of extinction if the climate warms by an average of 1.5°C and most ecosystems will struggle if the planet warms by more than 2°C. [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2020](#).

We also know climate change is disproportionately impacting those of us already experiencing inequalities, and action is needed to achieve the [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) central commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

Green infrastructure plays an important role in capturing and storing carbon and provides natural solutions to help people and nature adapt and be resilient to the changing climate.



Natural capture and storage of carbon:

Green (including blue) infrastructure plays a vital role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere, through the natural life processes of trees, vegetation, algae and plankton. This process is called carbon sequestration.

Captured carbon is stored in plant materials, soils, sediment, rocks and 'fossil fuels'. When green and blue infrastructure is lost, particularly carbon rich habitat such as peaty soils, salt marsh and sea grass meadows, carbon is released back into the atmosphere which is a big cause of climate change.

We need to protect carbon already locked into the natural environment and create more opportunities for capturing and storing carbon through habitat restoration and creation.

Natural solutions for climate change adaptation and resilience:

Climate change adaptation involves making changes across all aspects of our work and lives to prepare for and be more resilient to the impacts of the changing climate.

High quality green infrastructure helps adaptation to a changing climate by supporting:

- **Resilient communities** – well designed and managed green infrastructure can provide natural rainwater drainage and storage, shading and cooling to help protect our built infrastructure and communities from flooding, drought, heating and other impacts of a changing climate.
- **Resilient nature** – well-connected and nature rich green infrastructure helps wildlife and nature to be more resilient to future risks including flooding, heat, new pests and diseases from the changing climate,.
- **Cooling and shading** – summer cooling of businesses by trees and greenspace is worth at least £3.63 million annually in the West of England: [The Forest of Avon Plan – A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England](#)
- **Car free travel, local recreation and healthier lifestyles** – green and blue spaces within our communities boost local recreation and provide networks for walking, cycling and wheeling to help everyone live zero carbon and healthier lifestyles.

Through a holistic approach to protecting, designing and maintaining green infrastructure, we can work together to achieve our goals for climate change resilient places, healthier lives and zero carbon communities where nature can flourish.





3.3 Sustainable water management

Our commitment:

We will take action to respond to and manage flood and drought risk, improve water quality, restore our rivers, and connect wetland habitat.

This includes action to:

- work with our partners to improve water quality, restore and reconnect our river catchments, reduce pollution and flood risks by delivering the [River Frome Reconnected catchment management plan](#) and the [Bristol Avon: Catchment flood management plan](#)
- identify gaps and take action to connect and restore wetland habitat in our Nature Recovery Network, including the 'String of Pearls' project to connect and restore wetland habitat across the Severn Vale
- plan and design green infrastructure to help respond to and manage flood and drought risk through our Local Flood Risk Management Strategy action plan
- work with nature to apply sustainable drainage guidance and requirements in our planning policy for new development as set out in our [Supplementary planning documents](#)
- deliver the [Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area \(AESA\) Ecological Mitigation and Flood Defence Project](#)

Why this matters

In South Gloucestershire, the rivers Avon and Frome, their tributaries and catchments provide vital wetland habitat and networks for wildlife. There are also many ponds, lakes, streams, drainage ditches and watercourses across our area.

The low lying vales and coast of the Severn Estuary is a protected [Ramsar](#) site due to the international importance of this unique wetland area for wildlife. The [Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area \(AESA\) Ecological Mitigation and Flood Defence Project](#) is a major infrastructure programme to reduce the risks of flooding, protect communities and infrastructure, and create new wetland habitat to help protect this area for nature and for public amenity.



Locally and globally our river catchments, lakes, ponds, coastal areas and wetlands are under growing pressures from pollution, development, agriculture, unsustainable fishing, and climate change.

[The World's Forgotten Fishes Report, World Wildlife Fund, 2021](#) highlights that nearly a third of freshwater fish are threatened with extinction and populations of migratory fish have fallen by three-quarters in the last 50 years.

The UK government aims to ensure all waterbodies in England meet good ecological status by 2027 under the [European Union's Water Framework Directive](#). Locally, only 11% of the Bristol Avon catchment is classified as having 'good ecological status'. This is typical of other catchments in the UK, demonstrating the significant scale of the challenge to restore our rivers.

Increased incidents of extreme weather events including flooding and rising sea levels are some of the effects of the changing climate which are already affecting us locally. The South Gloucestershire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy action plan sets out the steps we are taking to respond to and manage flood risk in our area. This includes making the most of green infrastructure to provide natural and sustainable flood management in new developments, as set out in our [Supplementary Planning Documents](#).

Well designed and managed green and blue infrastructure is central to sustainable water management. Working with nature and natural processes helps us respond to and manage flood and drought risks, create resilient communities, improve water quality, amenity, recreation and benefits for nature of enhanced, connected wetland habitat.



The River Frome





3.4 Improved health and wellbeing for all

Our commitment:

We will improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities by creating and maintaining greener places which boost the health and wellbeing of everyone.

This includes action to:

- work with South Gloucestershire Equality and Diversity groups to identify how we can plan, design and manage green infrastructure to be more accessible for everyone
- manage green infrastructure the council is responsible for to improve access, and health and wellbeing benefits for residents
- address inequalities of access to high quality green space through how we manage our green infrastructure, plan for new communities and make decisions [Council Equality Plan](#)
- maximise the role of green infrastructure to support healthy lives as set out in the commitments of the [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
- work with our partners to connect nature and health and increase 'green social prescribing' as set out in [Healthier Together](#) and the West of England Nature Partnership [Mainstreaming Green Care Plan](#)
- make the best of our green infrastructure to support children and young people to have the best start in life [Children, young people and families partnership](#) and [Early Help Strategy 2019-2024](#)

Why this matters

A healthy environment is essential for our health and wellbeing. At a basic level this includes the quality of water, air and soil and the natural systems they support and on which all life depends. Green infrastructure has a central role to play in improving the quality of our air, water, soil and biodiversity.



Locally, we have two [Air Quality Management Areas](#) in Staple Hill and Kingswood/Warmley, which were identified due to high levels of nitrogen dioxide mainly from vehicle emissions. Green infrastructure, including tree planting to reduce air particulates and 'green routes' for walking and cycling are important actions in our plans to improve air quality for these areas alongside other benefits for people, places and nature.

Our green spaces provide vital places for recreation, play, sport, relaxation, connection with nature, and food growing within our communities. Green infrastructure networks across our area include routes for walking, wheeling and riding which support active healthier lifestyles and car free travel.

Green spaces are important for good mental health and research by the University of Exeter 2019 shows that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing – a weekly 'dose of nature' [University of Exeter 2019](#)

Our Greener Places Equality Impact Assessment explains the needs, challenges, and solutions which people have told us to improve green infrastructure, so it is accessible and welcoming for everyone.

We want everyone to be able to access and enjoy local, high quality green spaces and infrastructure within our communities and to feel welcome, inspired and empowered to get involved.

Continuing to work with Equality and Diversity groups to put these findings into action to reduce the inequality gap is central to our work to achieve greener places which enable 'health and wellbeing for all'.

The importance of nature and green spaces for our health and wellbeing has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Greening our places' is at the heart of our response to the Climate and Nature Emergency and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic to achieve our vision for everyone in our communities across South Gloucestershire to have access to local, **'greener places where people and nature thrive'**.





3.5 Sustainable places

Our commitment:

We will maximise the multiple benefits of green infrastructure in both new and existing communities to create nature rich, resilient places where people and nature thrive.

This includes action to:

- manage the green spaces and networks that the council is responsible for in line with our Green Infrastructure outcomes
- implement our [Supplementary Planning Documents](#) which include requirements and guidance for new developments to reinforce our existing planning policy [Core-Strategy](#).
- update the council's [Planning Policy](#) to ensure our policies are in keeping with latest requirements of the [Environment Bill](#) and best practice
- consider green infrastructure and biodiversity at the start of design for all new projects
- lead by example to apply the mitigation hierarchy and biodiversity net gain for new council infrastructure and transport projects
- plan and design new development in line with national requirements, our [Local Plan 2020 priorities and principles](#) and our Green Infrastructure outcomes including our response to the Climate and Nature Emergency.

Why this matters

According to the [United Nations Department of Social and Economic Development](#), 68% of people across the world will be living in urban areas by 2050. In South Gloucestershire around 63% of our population live in the suburban areas around Bristol, 17% in the market towns of Yate, Chipping Sodbury and Thornbury and the remaining 20% in villages and rural areas: [Office for National Statistics 2018 data published 2020](#)

The West of England is a significant region for growth. Meeting the needs of our growing population over the next decade and beyond is a substantial area of both challenge and opportunity. We need to balance the need for new housing and infrastructure with the pressures this growth places on our natural environment.



As we respond to the Climate and Nature Emergency, the role of green infrastructure is increasing to support new and existing communities to adapt and be resilient to the changing climate and to restore nature alongside other priorities.

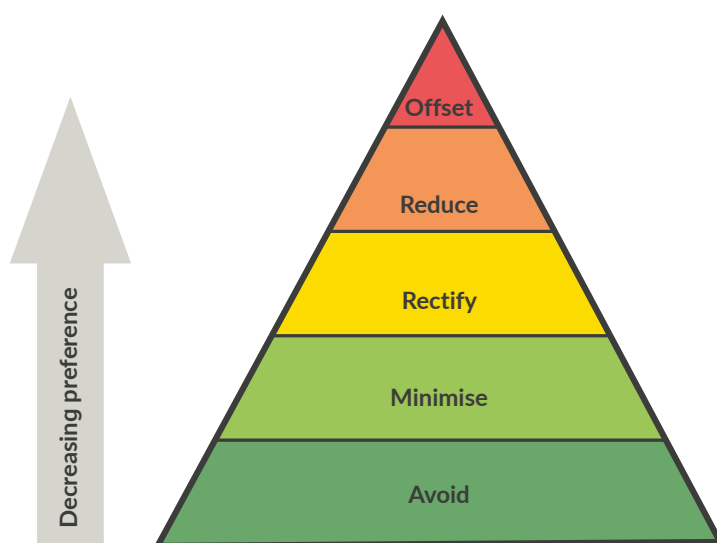
Create sustainable places:

In our [Local Plan 2020](#) and [Local Plan Core-Strategy-2006-2027](#), we recognise and highlight that our future prosperity and well-being depends on the health and 'services' of the natural environment. We need to ensure the true value of the environment and how it supports our way of life is recognised, protected and enhanced in the creation and maintenance of sustainable places.

By considering green infrastructure at the start of planning for new places, we can create thriving, nature rich greener places which achieve benefits across our priorities for the environment, people and communities.

In our [Supplementary Planning Documents](#), we encourage use of standards such as [Building with Nature accreditation](#) and [BREEAM Certification](#) which include environmental considerations at the start and heart of design.

By providing clear guidance and standards of 'what good looks like' and how development can fulfil requirements, applying these standards can support the planning process to be more efficient and more effective to deliver high quality sustainable development.



Mitigation hierarchy

The mitigation hierarchy starts with the most beneficial method of mitigation (avoid) and following a set process, only where appropriate, goes on to adopt the least beneficial method of mitigation (offset).

1. Avoid 2. Minimise 3. Rectify 4. Reduce 5. Offset



Maintain sustainable places:

Our **Green Space Asset Management Plan** sets out our approach to the management of all things green the council is responsible for. This includes assessing the condition of our green spaces and networks alongside requirements, costs, and priorities.

Applying an asset management approach, we use this information to identify priorities, make decisions and achieve our green infrastructure outcomes and vision for 'greener places where people and nature thrive.'



Lyde Green





3.6 Valued healthy landscapes

Our commitment:

We will create and manage green infrastructure to conserve and enhance our landscapes, heritage, sense of place and culture.

This includes action to:

- contribute to regional commitments for green infrastructure for valued, healthy landscapes as set out in the [Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020 \(JGIS\)](#)
- review and update our [Planning Policy](#) through our Local Plan, to improve the protection and care of our historic, archaeological, natural and cultural heritage and designated features and landscapes
- protect, conserve and celebrate the historic, archaeological, natural, and cultural heritage features and landscapes the council has responsibility for
- protect and maintain our Heritage Routes, National Trails, and Public Rights of Way
- work with our partners in the [Cotswolds National Landscape Partnership](#) to implement the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan and Cotswold Nature Recovery Plan
- deliver the 10 year Countryside Stewardship funded programme to restore and improve management of Hawkesbury and Inglestone common
- deliver our strategic landscape scale green infrastructure programmes, including Common Connections and the River Frome Reconnected programmes to restore and enhance our valued landscapes

Why this matters

The distinctive landscape character, views and unique historic, archaeological, and natural heritage of South Gloucestershire are integral to our sense of place, identity, local culture, and our communities.

This includes protected sites, historic parks and gardens, hillforts and commons. Our iconic landscape areas including the [Cotswolds National Landscape \(AONB\)](#) and the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC).



Our landscapes and heritage are facing rising pressures from the changing climate and nature loss, land use pressures and rising maintenance costs. There are also legal requirements and duties to protect and manage many of these features, sites and areas.

We want our heritage, culture, archaeological features, and landscapes in South Gloucestershire to be protected, enhanced, enjoyed, cherished and celebrated. We want to conserve these features through planning, design, and management of green infrastructure as well as enhance their role and value within our communities as highlighted in our [Local Plan 2020](#): 'to protect and enhance the character, distinctiveness, quality and intrinsic features of the local landscape'.

We also want to widen engagement in our natural and built heritage so that everyone in our communities feels a sense of connection to their heritage, which positively supports their wellbeing and brings communities together.



Neptune (The 'Warmley Giant') at Warmley Heritage Gardens is a Grade 2 listed statue, claimed to be the largest garden statue in Britain and the oldest concrete statue (erected by William Campion c. 1750)





3.7 Sustainable and local food production

Our commitment:

We will protect the best agricultural land and enhance our pollinator network alongside increasing opportunities for local food production and local food markets.

This includes action to:

- take into account the importance of protecting the best soils and agricultural land as we prepare our Local Plan for new development across our area
- prepare a Pollinator Action Plan to protect and improve habitat for bees and insects
- review our grazing policy on council owned land to support local food production, biodiversity enhancement and carbon sequestration
- review our allotment regulations to support Climate and Nature Emergency priorities
- prepare a hedgerow management policy for the hedges we manage which we will share through local networks with other landowners
- work with local farmers and landowners to support the introduction of [Environmental Land Management Schemes \(ELMS\)](#) to secure investment for sustainable land management
- work with local food producers, businesses, our partners and residents to support local food production and markets as set out in the [South Gloucestershire Food Plan](#) and [South West Food Hub](#)
- plant fruit trees and new community orchards and restore existing orchards and fruit trees on council owned land.

Why this matters

In South Gloucestershire agricultural land use covers approximately half of our area and includes land managed for pasture, crops and mixed farming. There is also a rich heritage of orchards and market gardens as well as allotments and vibrant community food growing networks.



Soil health underpins the health of our green infrastructure, the quality of our water and air as well as providing a vital role as a carbon 'sink'. A single hectare of soil has the potential to store and filter enough water for 1000 people for one year! 1000 people for one year! Yet soils can take hundreds of years to form.

Globally around 75% of the food crops grown by humans require pollination by insects. Yet insect numbers are plummeting due to a range of factors which are causing the Nature Emergency. This is placing rising pressures on nature, our food production and economy.

Since World War 2, policy, new machinery, and intensive food production has caused overgrazing, pesticide use and removal of hedgerows. These factors alongside climate change and habitat loss have degraded our soils, environment, and landscapes.

In response to the environment crisis, priorities are changing and the [Agriculture Act 2020](#) introduces a new Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS) to support sustainable land management.

Sustainable local food production and land management are vital for a thriving future including:

- improving soil health and water quality
- restoring hedgerows, woodlands and species rich meadows
- increasing pollinator habitat and networks
- storing carbon
- delivering our vision for net zero South Gloucestershire
- improving our health and economy
- bringing people and communities together through local food growing and markets

Working with our partners in South Gloucestershire and the West of England, we will take action to:

'Increase opportunities for local food production in urban and rural areas and increase food sovereignty by, for example, protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land and enhancing our pollinator network.'
[Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020 \(JGIS\)](#)





Conservation grazing at Parkway North Park and Ride car park with our partners [Street Goat](#) to help manage the site for the small blue butterfly





3.8 A green and resilient economy

Our commitment:

We will optimise the role and contribution of green infrastructure to support a green and resilient economy.

This includes action to:

- work with our partners to green our high streets and town centres to improve quality of life and attract customers and business investment as part of our regeneration plans
- work with our partners to optimise the role of local green infrastructure to boost local recreation, tourism, jobs and business
- invest in the green spaces and networks we manage, recognising that to achieve the best value for money for our priorities they need to be effectively cared for
- secure external funding to restore Kingswood Park as part of our plans for the regeneration of Kingswood
- work with our partners to expand and develop opportunities for green skills training, work experience, apprenticeships and placements in green space management including training for community volunteers
- establish a tree nursery alongside contract growing to fulfil our tree planting plans and resilience to the rising demand for and cost of trees
- progress our portfolio of green infrastructure projects for funding including rolling out changes to management of highway verges for biodiversity
- put forward council owned sites for improvement through implementation of biodiversity net gain to invest in green infrastructure and Nature Recovery Network priorities.

Why this matters

Globally

- over half the world's annual gross income, of around £31 trillion (£31,105,000,000,000) depends on nature and the resources and services nature provides [World Economic Forum New Nature Economy Report 2020](#)



Nationally

- 'The cooling shade of trees and water saved the UK £248 million by maintaining productivity and lowering air conditioning costs on hot days in 2017.' [ONS natural capital accounts 2019](#).
- '£2.1 billion per year could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to greenspace, due to increased physical activity in those spaces' [Public Health England – improving access to green space 2020 review](#)

Locally

- [The Forest of Avon Plan – A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England 2021](#) highlights provisional figures from the Environment Agency which estimate that woodland in the West of England is worth £717 million in carbon capture, air quality improvements and hazard regulation alone.

High quality green infrastructure has a key role to play in contributing to a green and resilient economy. Greener places support health and wellbeing and reduce pressures and costs on health and social care alongside increasing natural, social and wellbeing 'capital'.

Attractive, well connected, greener places are more attractive to businesses, customers and investors. Greening our highstreets is key part of our regeneration plans to restore their role in the heart of our communities and economy.

Adapting and improving our resilience to the changing climate is vital to protect our communities, businesses, environment and infrastructure. Taking action now to improve and increase green infrastructure 'natural solutions' is important to reduce risks and costs now and in the future.

Delivering value for money is an overarching theme of our [Council Plan](#) and is a primary function and role of the council. This involves identifying how we can make best use of our resources to optimise levels of satisfaction with our work and services to progress our priorities.

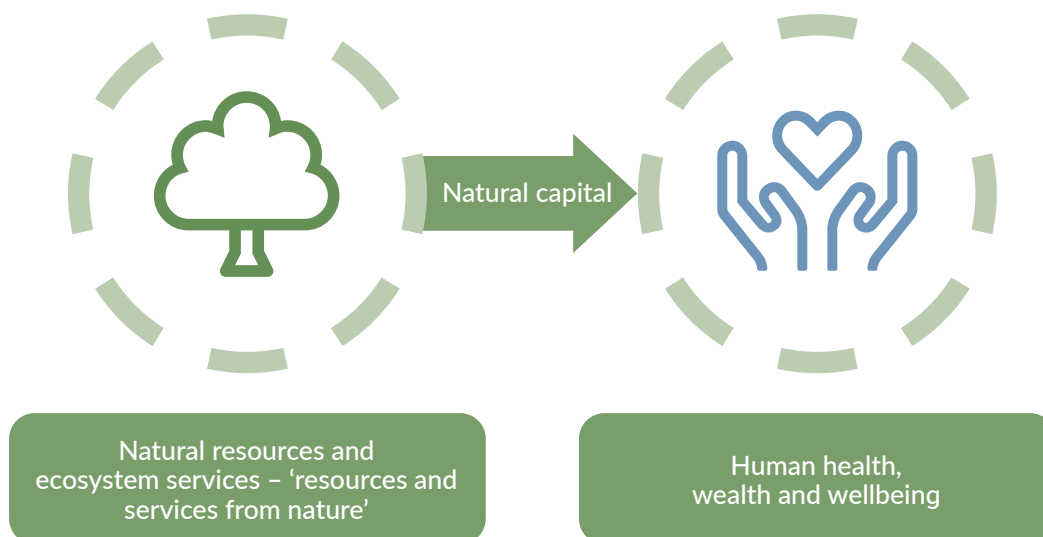
A newly published UK government report, the [HM Treasury Dasgupta Review 2021 – The Economics of Biodiversity](#) highlights the urgent need to consider nature in all we do and sets out a road map for a green economy and a sustainable future including to:

- only use resources and make demands on nature which we can replace and increase
- change how we measure the success of society to guide us on a more sustainable path
- transform our finance, education and other institutions and systems to enable these changes now and for future generations



To address these priorities, we need to consider and value the full contribution and many benefits of nature across all areas of our lives and when we make decisions.

The benefits, resources and 'ecosystem services' that nature and green infrastructure provide which people value is known as 'natural capital'. Natural capital is fundamental to human health, wellbeing and to our economic activity.



38 The Climate and Nature Emergency has highlighted the link between our health, economy, and the health of our environment. To respond to our priorities, transforming how we value and take action for nature, the environment and green infrastructure is a defining challenge and opportunity of our time.



Page Park, Staple Hill



3.9 Stronger working together

Our commitment:

We will work with residents, communities, and our partners to deliver our commitments for green infrastructure to achieve shared goals for '**greener places where people and nature thrive**'.

This includes work with:

- **Residents** – including the [South Gloucestershire Equalities Forum](#), equality and diversity groups, residents and our partners to involve everyone, improve access to green infrastructure, restore our environment and help reduce inequalities
- **Regional partnerships** – work with our partners across the West of England to deliver progress on the shared green infrastructure outcomes and priorities of the [West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy 2020](#) , [West of England Nature Partnership \(WENP\)](#) , [The Forest of Avon Plan](#) , [Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership](#) and [Cotswolds National Landscape Partnership](#)
- **Town and parish councils** – to support our work together to agree and deliver shared priorities and goals for green infrastructure including preparation of Local Nature Action Plans to restore nature across our area
- **Community groups and volunteers** – including community spaces Friends groups, local nature groups and Public Rights of Way volunteers to engage, empower, build capacity, and inspire our work together.
- **Businesses and employers** – work with our partners in the [Local Strategic Partnership](#) to deliver our shared commitments and prepare our action plans to respond to the Climate and Nature Emergency and a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic
- **Local farmers and landowners** – work together to support local sustainable food and land management and new funding opportunities

Why this matters

Working together is right at the heart of the council's values, work and approach. This is how we will understand the issues, find the best solutions and share our expertise and resources to achieve well designed, connected and thriving greener places.



We want everyone to be able to have their say, get involved and be empowered to take action, as individuals and part of their community and to know that their contribution is recognised and valued.

We all have a part to play to achieve our goals for the environment, our health and a green economy and working together is how we will deliver our vision for 'greener places where people and nature thrive.'



4. Our strategic green infrastructure priorities and programmes

4.1 Our priorities for strategic green infrastructure

Identifying and mapping the main green infrastructure assets, features, landscapes, areas, gaps and opportunities across our area is at the heart of our work to achieve our priorities for the environment, and help us meet requirements for new housing and development through our [Local Plan](#).

We recognise that green infrastructure networks operate across boundaries and at multiple scales for people, landscapes and nature, so working with our partners across the region and understanding how our green infrastructure links to the wider network is also important.

Our [Local Plan](#) will set out a new green infrastructure policy for South Gloucestershire. The [Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document 2021](#) provides information about the anticipated requirements from the [Environment Bill](#) which will inform our future planning policy.

Work has started to update our evidence so we can identify green infrastructure corridors and areas in line with our green infrastructure outcomes. This will help identify priorities to protect and enhance existing assets, whilst improving connectivity and extending our green infrastructure and Nature Recovery Networks to achieve our nature recovery goals.

Building on the evidence available, nine potential strategic green infrastructure corridors are being investigated for South Gloucestershire which take in the majority of the identified significant green infrastructure assets and areas.

The method and evidence to inform further detailed identification of these corridors is being prepared so decisions about green infrastructure, particularly to support our response to the Climate and Nature Emergency, are a central part of our work as we plan for new places in our Local Plan.

It is important to highlight that these potential corridors will be defined by their landscape and environmental contribution (or potential), have a different purpose to green belt land and are not additional green belt.

This evidence will inform decisions and support a vision where both built and green infrastructure are effectively planned through an integrated approach which aligns with our planning policy and commitments to deliver 'greener places where people and nature thrive'.



Potential Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridors within South Gloucestershire



Key

Nature Recovery Network: 9 Strategic Primary GI Corridors

A Severn Estuary and Levels

B Western scarp/Severn
Ridges

C River Frome corridor;
Frome Re-connected
Project

D Westerleigh Vale and
Oldland Ridge/East Fringe

E Cotswold Scarp

F Avon Valley

G Ladden valley

H Boyd Valley

I Little Avon River

Urban areas

**South Gloucestershire
Boundary**



4.2 Our strategic Green Infrastructure programmes and projects

Introducing our strategic green infrastructure programmes

To focus work, action and investment to achieve our green infrastructure priorities and outcomes, we are working with our partners to prepare, fund and deliver a portfolio of strategic green infrastructure programmes for South Gloucestershire. This portfolio includes two broad categories of programmes:

1. **Location specific programmes** – in a particular area/location, such as the River Frome Reconnected and Kingswood Park restoration programmes.
2. **Network scale programmes** – for a particular type of green infrastructure asset group or habitat type across South Gloucestershire, such as our programmes to change highway verge management and doubling of tree canopy cover.

For each programme, a detailed suite of projects is being prepared to deliver green infrastructure investment on the ground, within a specific area, or across the network.

Current location specific programmes:

- **Common Connections** – Bristol Eastern fringe
A landscape scale habitat restoration project to restore and connect habitat including linking registered common land, unimproved grasslands, woodlands and associated habitats along the South Gloucestershire urban fringe
- **River Frome Reconnected** – River Frome catchment
A partnership programme to restore and improve the health and resilience of the Bristol Frome river and its catchment, to provide multiple benefits including to make sure the river can be accessed and enjoyed by all.
- **String of Pearls** – Severn vale and estuary
At concept stage, this programme aims to connect and restore wetland habitat of the protected Ramsar area of the low lying vales and coast of the Severn Estuary, support resilience of the area and improve public amenity.
- **Water Space** – River Avon catchment
A partnership programme of work to improve the green spaces and rights of way along the River Avon



- **Lower Woods and vale** – increasing woodland connectivity
At concept stage, this programme aims to create additional buffer habitats around Lower Woods and improve links to Cotswold woodland. Lower Woods is the most extensive area of ancient woodland in the West of England. However, it is isolated from other woodland which may help explain the recent loss of breeding nightingales from the area.
- **Kingswood Park** – Our Park at the Heart of Our Community
To restore and enhance the heritage, landscape and facilities of Kingswood Park to create an accessible green space which is resilient to the changing climate and where people can come together. The project will also link to the Kingswood Town Centre regeneration programme, making Kingswood a better place to live, work and visit.
- **Grimsbury Community Farm** – Centre for nature restoration and climate change adaption
A council owned and managed community farm, providing a key public open space resource and facilities for play and recreation, reducing health inequalities, farming education, skills and training and a showcase for sustainable land management.
- **Hawkesbury and Inglestone Common** – Countryside Stewardship Scheme
Assley, Hareley, Inglestone and Hawkesbury Commons are managed under a Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship scheme which enables the council to continue to work with commoners and the local community to manage these commons for the benefit of all who use them. They will be enhanced for nature through tree planting, scrub management, grassland and pond enhancements.

Current network scale programmes:

- **Tree planting** – doubling of tree canopy cover
- **Nature Recovery Network** – working with our partners locally and regionally through the West of England Nature Partnership to achieve a bigger, better, more and connected ecological network across our area.
- **Highway verges for Nature** – changes to management of highway verges and council owned green spaces
- **Retrofit for nature** – making space for nature within existing built assets and infrastructure
- **Greener communities** – greening our priority neighbourhood communities to optimise the role of green infrastructure to reduce inequalities and improve the environment for people, place and nature



5. Our Green Spaces Asset Management Plan

5.1 Our Green Space management mission

Parks, nature reserves and other public open spaces provide vital green space for people and nature, right in the heart of our communities. The Public Rights of Way (PROW) network connects our green spaces and communities, providing important ‘highways for people and nature’ across our green infrastructure network and area.

The council is responsible for over 11,000 areas of green space and teams from the council’s StreetCare service work with other council services, our partners, and residents to care for these spaces. Our parks and open spaces come in a wide range of shapes and sizes from urban parks, play areas, and allotments, to extensive woodlands, commons, and nature reserves.

Managing and maintaining these green spaces is essential to meet legal requirements and achieve healthy and sustainable communities for people, places, and nature.

We need to manage our green spaces, so they are attractive, safe and welcoming for everyone. This includes improving accessibility, reducing litter and providing rich habitat for nature.

We want everyone to be able to access and enjoy local, high quality green spaces within our neighbourhoods and be welcome, inspired and empowered to get involved.

Our mission to manage the green spaces we are responsible for is to:

‘To lead by example, working towards creating and maintaining high quality green spaces at the heart of places where people, communities and nature thrive.’



5.2 Our green space asset groups

Our green space asset groups bring together sites and assets which have similar purposes and management requirements which supports our work to care for and improve them.

Our green space asset groups		
Formal Parks	Small amenity green space	Outdoor sports facilities
Historic Parks and Gardens	Trees and woodlands	Allotments
Community farm	Community orchards	Cemeteries (operating)
Neighbourhood recreation parks	Hedgerows	Closed churchyards and other burial grounds
Local community open spaces	Green corridors	War memorials
Countryside parks	Green roundabouts	Picnic sites
Local Nature Reserves	Blue infrastructure	Car parks
Commons	Play and activity areas	Civic spaces and high streets

5.3 How we manage our green spaces

We use an asset management approach to review and manage our green spaces. To do this we assess the priority and condition of our assets in line with required standards, the priorities of the council and our green infrastructure outcomes. This helps us to focus resources where it is needed most and to plan our budgets.

The multiple benefits, contribution, and value of our green spaces for people, places and nature has been highlighted in recent years. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased use of green spaces, and shone a light on their role, value, and the need for investment in maintenance and improvement.

There are a range of tools the council and our partners use and are investigating to identify and calculate the 'natural capital' contribution and value of our green spaces.

Between 2016-2021 over **£2.7million** of external funding has been secured by the Council and our partners to improve our green spaces

The cost to the Council of managing our green spaces is around **£12** per resident per year



Volunteers contribute many hours of vital work each year to help us manage and care for green spaces and nature across South Gloucestershire, with a value of well over £125,000 value of volunteer hours per year.

Our [Community Spaces Network](#) includes voluntary groups and individuals who work with the council and our partners to care for local green spaces. This includes Friends groups, public rights of way volunteers, local nature groups, wildlife special interest groups and 'In Bloom' groups.

People from all walks of life find volunteering to care for green spaces and nature in their community enjoyable and rewarding. Volunteering offers many benefits including the chance to meet new people, learn new skills and boost health and wellbeing.

To find out more about helping look after your local environment or to find a local community group visit [Friends and conservation groups](#) or sign up for our [Community Spaces newsletter](#).

Through our engagement work to prepare the Greener Places Strategy, members of the South Gloucestershire Community Spaces Network have provided suggestions which are being considered in our action plan.

Our public open spaces also play an important role in providing a venue for a wide range of local businesses and community events which bring social, health, economic and cultural benefits. This includes community events, educational visits, Forest Schools, personal trainers and film locations.

The latest information about hiring open public space is available at [Hire of Public Open Spaces](#).

For more detail about how we manage our green spaces, see the Greener Places Strategy full document.



6. Our Action Plan

This strategy brings together our priorities, ambitions and commitments for green infrastructure across our area to achieve a shared vision for **'greener places where people and nature thrive'**.

Working together, good communication and a co-ordinated approach are at the heart of how we will deliver our vision across the council, with our partners and residents.

An action plan is being prepared to accompany this strategy to set out in detail how we will lead, enable and inspire work to deliver these plans. The action plan will be published by the end of 2021 and will include these actions:

- across all council decision making, strategies, policies and plans
- in the management of the green infrastructure we are responsible for
- through our planning for new development and design of new green infrastructure
- working together with our partners, communities and residents.

We will provide annual updates of progress on our action plan together with updated reviews of this strategy in 2024, 2027 and 2030.



View from the Cotswold Way National Trail



7. Looking to the future

We are living in a fast-changing world. The pace and scale of these changes requires us to be resourceful, proactive and creative.

Responding to the Climate and Nature Emergency, reducing health inequalities and the drive for a green and sustainable economy have all placed a spotlight on the role and importance of green infrastructure.

This strategy presents why and how well designed and managed green infrastructure can help transform our response to these challenges. It sets out our plans to create thriving, inclusive, nature rich and resilient communities over the next decade and beyond. This includes transforming how we think and what we do in our work and everyday lives to value nature and the environment.

There is great work underway across our area, and significant opportunities to share knowledge, raise awareness and learn from what is already working, to 'bring everyone with us'.

We all have a part to play to support the changes we need to make and preparing this strategy is a key step on our journey. The council will work with our partners and residents to lead, enable and inspire action to achieve our shared goals and vision for 'greener places where people and nature thrive'.

'We must not give up hope. We have all the tools we need, the thoughts and ideas of billions of remarkable minds and the immeasurable energies of nature to help us in our work'

A Life on Our Planet – My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future
Sir David Attenborough



