

Introduction



The South Gloucestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been drawn up collaboratively with a range of partners, including nature conservation organisations, parish councils, local wildlife groups and members of the public.

Its main aim is to contribute towards safeguarding and benefiting the species and habitats making up the Plan and to provide an identity and focus for nature conservation work throughout South Gloucestershire.

It will be used internally within the Council – in making planning decisions, in formulating policy and in all other relevant areas of the authority's work – and externally, working cooperatively and in partnership with other organisations and the wider community of South Gloucestershire.

The BAP will also help inform the production of South Gloucestershire Council's Local Development Framework in the coming years: and provides a mechanism in which to contribute towards meeting both Local Agenda Agreement targets, national policy and legislation, including the recent Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.



Introduction



“

My vision for South Gloucestershire in 2015 is that the challenges have been faced and the opportunities seized, to ensure that those who live and work in South Gloucestershire are enjoying, respecting and contributing to a rich and growing biodiversity.

”

*Quote from Councillor Brian Allinson
Executive member for Planning Transport and Strategic Environment 2007*





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References and Acknowledgements



Introduction

Vision:
**An environment
that is protected
and enhanced
for future
generations.**

*Our Area Our Future
- Community Strategy*

Introduction

In South Gloucestershire biodiversity is all around us: from urban parks and gardens to the Cotswold Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the internationally protected Severn Estuary.

The wildlife in South Gloucestershire ranges from the critically rare to the commonplace. It also contains a diverse array of types of habitats, including ancient woodland, to rivers, to coastal saltmarsh to hay meadows, with a wide range of underlying geology.

At the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio, the UK Government signed up to the Global Biodiversity Convention and promised to provide action for our threatened UK plants and animals to significantly reduce the decline of biodiversity.

The UK government has also signed up to 'Countdown 2010' and joined the global pledge to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

The Biodiversity Action Plan will help meet these pledges at a local level and sets out the action required to protect, enhance and restore our biodiversity between now and 2015.

The targets set out in this document will not be easy and will require cooperation from everyone – local residents, landowners, businesses, nurseries, contractors and wildlife organisations.

Conservation work has, of course, been going on for many years now in South Gloucestershire, undertaken by a wide range of people. The Biodiversity Action Plan will provide a framework to coordinate and prioritise this work to conserve and enhance our invaluable natural heritage.

“ The purpose of Local Biodiversity Action Plans is to focus resources to conserve and enhance biodiversity by means of local partnerships, taking account of both national and local priorities **”**

UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report 1995



The Biodiversity Partnership

This Biodiversity Action Plan has been drawn up by South Gloucestershire Council in partnership with a range of local wildlife organisations, national experts and knowledgeable local enthusiasts.

Two groups meet regularly and make up the biodiversity partnership.

- 1. Wider Partnership**
- 2. Topic Group**

The Wider Partnership is made up of organisations with a wider perspective on biodiversity, both regionally and nationally:

- Avon Biodiversity Partnership
- Avon Wildlife Trust
- Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre
- Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Board
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
- Forestry Authority
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
- Forest of Avon
- RSPB
- South Gloucestershire Council

The Topic Group is open to anyone and includes local wildlife enthusiasts, interested residents, parish councils and others.

A full list is available in Section 4, References and Acknowledgements.

New members are always welcome.



Introduction



Biodiversity - What is it?

“ Biodiversity is the Variety of Life **”**

...Which includes mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, fungi and plants – and the woodlands, grasslands, rivers and seas on which they all depend including the underlying geology..

Why is it important?

We are of course part of this ‘web of life’ and depend on it for our existence.

Food shelter and a place to breed are the basic requirements for life. Geology provides fuel (coal, oil and peat), building materials (bricks, stone etc) and the terrain for woodlands and pasture, which in turn provide fruit, crops and grazing.

Biodiversity also enriches our lives, be it a spring walk along a flower filled lane, or a robin in full song in an urban garden.

However, in the last century, 100 UK species have become extinct. 1,200 species are currently on the UK priority list and the effects of these losses could be dramatic.

Think, for example, of what would happen if we lost our bee populations. Crops and flowers would not be pollinated and food supplies would start to fail.

South Gloucestershire is one of the fastest growing economic areas in the country with a population growth of 20% in the last 20 years. This pressure of growth continues, with the draft Regional Spatial Strategy proposing c.30,000 new dwellings in South Gloucestershire by 2026. Continued rapid development is undoubtedly a major threat to biodiversity. However, sustainable development is a core policy of the UK Government and this includes the protection and enhancement of wildlife within development.



Planning and the Law

As well as moral obligations, there are legal duties towards biodiversity.

There is a raft of legislation and planning guidance to help ensure that wildlife is protected. Among the key pieces of legislation are:

The Habitats Directive

EU Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna, implemented in Britain by the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994. This identifies and gives legal protection to sites of European significance (e.g. Severn Estuary) and protection to species under Annex 2 (e.g. otters, bats, great crested newts etc).

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Amongst other things, this identifies and gives legal protection to SSSIs and key species such as bats.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000

This updates and strengthens many of the elements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Section 74 covers 'species of principal importance for conservation of biological diversity'.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

Section 40 states: "Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity". This means that, in law, local authorities have a responsibility towards wildlife in discharging their duties.

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

This sets out the legal framework for the protection of biodiversity in the planning and development process.

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National Planning Policy

Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9) outlines the Government's objective to ensure the conservation of the abundance and diversity of Britain's wildlife: to minimise the adverse effects on wildlife where a conflict of interest is unavoidable; and to meet its international responsibilities and obligations for nature conservation. PPS9 sets out how internationally, nationally and locally important habitats and species of biodiversity importance should be protected in the planning and development process, including those species and habitats of principal importance for biological diversity under Section 74 of the CROW Act 2000.

Regional Planning Policy

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy sets out planning policy for South West England. This will replace Regional Planning Guidance Note 10 for the South West and the Joint Replacement Structure Plan when adopted.

Local Planning Policy

Policies L6, L7, L8 and L9 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan relate to nature conservation. Policy L9 of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan includes a commitment to preparing a BAP and sets out the Council's policy on biodiversity:

'Development which would directly or indirectly have an adverse effect on a nationally or internationally protected species of flora or fauna, or species or habitats listed in national, regional or local Biodiversity Action Plans, will not be permitted unless any damaging effects are capable of being avoided, overcome or offset by mitigation measures'.

This is supported by planning guidance on the natural environment including:

- Trees
- Biodiversity and the Planning Process

The South Gloucestershire Local Development Framework will incrementally replace the Local Plan in the coming years.



Sustainability and Climate Change



It is now widely acknowledged that climate change may at least in part be caused by the misuse and overuse of the world's natural resources. One element in countering these changes is to live more sustainably and biodiversity can be one of the key indicators for sustainable development.

Sustainable development is at the centre of decision-making in South Gloucestershire Council. It underpins all other goals, policies and processes and provides a framework for integrating economic, social and environmental concerns.

The sustainable management of farm land in South Gloucestershire plays an absolutely vital role in the action for biodiversity. DEFRA's Environmental Stewardship Agreements provide financial incentives for wildlife-friendly measures and has a range of benefits for the local landscape and biodiversity. There are a variety of different schemes including Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) and Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) (www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes). Uptake in South Gloucestershire has already been high.

The aim of the Entry Level Scheme is to encourage a large number of farmers across a wide area of farmland to deliver simple yet effective environmental management.

- The scheme requires a basic level of environmental management
- Five year agreements provide payment of £30 per hectare, per year across the whole farm
- There is a wide range of over 50 options to choose from (e.g. hedgerow management, stone wall maintenance, low input grassland, buffer strips, and arable options) to cover all farming types (DEFRA)

The National Farmers Union (South West) said; "Every farmer is encouraged to join the entry level scheme. The local and national initiatives in local food and procurement are also to be encouraged for the benefits they bring for biodiversity and a balanced appreciation of the countryside".

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A healthy landscape that can support a rich diversity of wildlife requires a well connected network of habitats. Linking habitats, such as hedgerows allow species to move and are often referred to as 'wildlife corridors'. Species are thus able to disperse and colonise new habitat, avoid hazards, mix genes and move with potential changes to the climate.

South Gloucestershire Council has a Climate Change Action Plan
www.southglos.gov.uk/climatechange

Enhancing and linking habitats at a landscape scale is being promoted regionally via the South West Nature Map initiative. The key areas suggested for South Gloucestershire can be viewed at
www.swenvo.org.uk

Designated Sites for Nature Conservation in South Gloucestershire



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Looking towards the future

The BAP is an on-going process. It may take many years to reach our vision and it is thus important to monitor both the action for biodiversity across South Gloucestershire and its effectiveness.

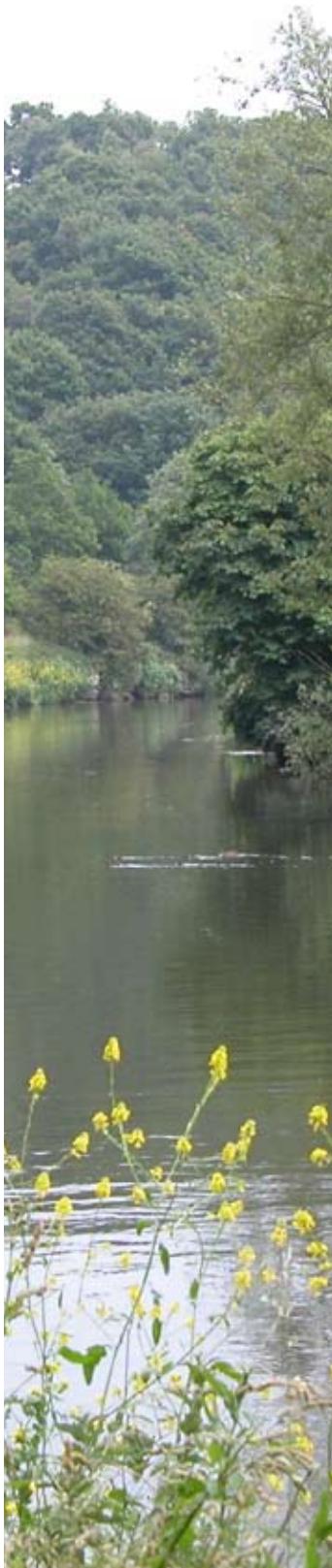
The Biodiversity Partnership will need to review the Action Plan throughout its lifetime. New habitats and species may need to be added and sections may need to be edited or removed. The partnership will also need to continue to utilise existing funding and explore new funding opportunities to deliver the actions set out in this Plan.

This is likely to include opportunities from:

- Local Authority grants
- Sponsorship and support from business
- DEFRA incentives including Environmental Stewardship
- Aggregates Levy
- Lottery Funding
- Natural England grants
- Landfill Tax
- Section 106 Agreements with developers
- Volunteer help

BARS Action towards meeting the targets set out in the Plan can be reported to Regional and National lead partners through the on-line Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) which is publicly available.

BRERC The Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre holds all biodiversity records for the former Avon area. All members of the Biodiversity Partnership share data with BRERC.



SGC South Gloucestershire Council has a range of targets and indicators to monitor biodiversity in South Gloucestershire.

- Indicators within the Local Development Framework
- 'Quality of Life' indicators
- Local Area Agreement indicators 2006-2009 www.southglos.gov.uk
- The NERC Act 2006 will require an audit of local authority action for biodiversity
- National performance indicator on biodiversity

NE Natural England (formerly English Nature) monitors the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within South Gloucestershire.

The South Gloucestershire Biodiversity Action Plan has information, targets and action tables on seven key habitats, seven UK priority species and eight locally important species.