

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet

Meeting date: Tuesday, 21 October 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm

Meeting venue: Council Chamber - Municipal Offices

Membership:

Councillors Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis, Izaac Tailford and Richard Pineger

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SECTION 1 : PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1 Apologies

2 Declarations of interest

3 Minutes of the last meeting (Pages 5 - 18)

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

Questions must be received no later than 12 noon on the seventh working day before the date of the meeting

SECTION 2 :THE COUNCIL

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Council on this occasion

SECTION 3 : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this occasion

SECTION 4 : OTHER COMMITTEES

There are no matters referred to the Cabinet by other Committees on this occasion

SECTION 5 : REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS AND/OR OFFICERS

5 Award of rent support grant to voluntary sector (Pages 19 - 34)

Report of Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

6 Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (Pages 35 - 106)

Report of Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

7 Budget Strategy, Process and Timetable 2026-27 (Pages 107 - 120)

Report of Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

SECTION 6 : BRIEFING SESSION

8 Briefing from Cabinet Members

SECTION 7 : DECISIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS

Member decisions taken since the last Cabinet meeting

SECTION 8 : ANY OTHER ITEM(S) THAT THE LEADER DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND REQUIRES A DECISION

SECTION 9 : LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT BUSINESS

9 Local Government Act 1972 - Exempt Business

The Cabinet is recommended to approve the following resolution:-

“That in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 3, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

10 Exempt report: To dispose of the Municipal Offices TO FOLLOW

Report of the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet - Minutes

16 September 2025

6.00 pm - 7.15 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Victoria Atherstone, Paul Baker, Flo Clucas, Mike Collins, Rowena Hay, Peter Jeffries, Alisha Lewis and Izaac Tailford

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Bernadette Reed (Public and Environmental Health Team Leader) and Caroline Walker (Director of Housing, Customer and Community Services)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pineger.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The public minutes of the meeting held on 15 July were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Public and Member Questions and Petitions

There were no petitions. One public question and one Member question had been received. The responses had been published and were taken as read.

1. Public Question from Richard Lawler to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm Open Space, Councillor Izaac Tailford

In Swindon Village, graffiti is a visible issue in our laneways, tunnels, and on public utilities. While enforcement alone may not address the root causes, there is an opportunity to turn this into a positive for the community.

Will the council consider supporting a graffiti artist outreach programme in Swindon Village — one that:

- designates the Windyridge underpass as a safe and legal space for graffiti art;
- encourages artists to contribute to the community by helping residents with projects such as fence painting or mural creation;
- works with local partners to connect interested graffiti artists to apprenticeships, training, or career pathways in painting, decorating, or related trades.

This could help address the appearance of our public spaces, foster positive engagement with young people, and build community pride while creating real opportunities for skills development.

Might the council also consider asking Andy Davis, who runs the street art programme, to advise on the best way to implement this?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank-you, Mr Lawler, for your question and I agree art activities such as those which are undertaken via the Cheltenham Paint Festival are positive in addressing areas of graffiti, contributing to a sense of place and to positively engage communities.

The tunnel you are referring to is managed and maintained by Gloucestershire County Council and any works would need to gain their approval both for the artwork and for health and safety provisions whilst any works are undertaken. To date, the County Council has been supportive and helped facilitate the works of the Cheltenham Paint Festival.

The type of activity you have suggested may be a suitable project funded by neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Windyridge Tunnel actually falls within the Prestbury Parish area, but there is a close relationship with the wider areas of Swindon Village. Both Prestbury and Swindon Village parishes receive CIL funding direct and are responsible for the award of projects for the funds available for the Neighbourhood CIL arising from within their parishes. I would be very happy to make the introduction to enable this conversation.

In areas outside the parished areas for which the council manages neighbourhood CIL receipts, allocations have been made previously to support the work of the Cheltenham Paint Festival. This included an allocation of £45,000 in [July 2023](#) for £15k to be spent per year over three years, together with a further £7,500 in [July](#)

2025 for murals on the Honeybourne Line £7,500. The images below are those funded by the Honeybourne Line project:



Supplementary question:

Based on the council's own records or those of its partners such as Gloucestershire County Council, the police, or the Cheltenham paint festival, how many individuals are thought to be responsible for the repeated graffiti tagging in Swindon Village? Of these incidents, what proportion of offenders have been identified? Does the council, either directly or in partnership, maintain a tagging database to record signature graffiti tags for possible future prosecutions or, equally, to support diversionary programmes that could help prevent reoffending?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for the question. I don't have this information to hand, and feel that the police are best-placed to provide it. I will speak to colleagues in other portfolios and to officers, and get back to you.

2. Member Question from Councillor Beale to Cabinet Member for Planning and building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

I am receiving a lot of feedback from residents about the availability and quality of GP care. It is quite clear to me that Leckhampton Surgery is under extreme pressure and this seems to be leading to an empathy gap between patients and doctor. For elderly patients in Warden Hill, this surgery is one of the nearest to residents following the relocation of many other local surgeries to Swindon Road. On top of this, we have 350+ houses currently in development - which will increase the pressure further.

Please can you assure me that CIL money is being reserved to enable new doctors' surgeries to be built in Cheltenham?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you, Councillor Beale, for your question, for reference I have provided the link to the published [Constituency data: GPs and GP practices](#). My apologies in advance

for the length of response; the funding for health provision in the context of planning is not straightforward.

The Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) plays a central role in monitoring and managing GP capacity. Working with NHS partners and local authorities, the ICB assesses current pressures and future demand to ensure resources are directed to the right locations. This process includes developing business cases for new or extended GP premises, securing developer contributions where appropriate, and embedding primary care within wider community health networks.

Each Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging authority has a statutory requirement to publish annually, as part of its Infrastructure Funding Statement, the document that reports on s106 developer contributions and CIL, a list of specific projects or types of infrastructure that its CIL Infrastructure fund receipts *may* be spent on. The current published Infrastructure list ([Cabinet report 17 December 2024](#)) includes as a pipeline project **NHS GP surgeries**. This was included on the list in recognition of the demands for services across Cheltenham.

The Cheltenham, Gloucester and -Tewkesbury Strategic Local Plan Team and the CIL Strategic Infrastructure Planning Manager are currently working across all parties to review the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) the evidence base document that tracks the infrastructure needs associated with growth, and also separately the content of the Infrastructure List as an update to the Infrastructure Funding Statement that will be considered by Cabinet later this year.

These receipts are not ringfenced for specific purposes in advance. The CIL Joint Committee is the decision-making body in regard to the strategic allocation of CIL from the CIL Infrastructure Fund receipts. This is reliant on the availability of CIL receipts for consideration for allocation to projects, and when a CIL funding bid round is open, the appropriate bodies submitting clear and costed proposals for consideration of allocation of CIL receipts to a project, informed by the assessment process.

There is currently no CIL Funding bid round open. In the event that a future CIL funding bid round is opened, this would not prevent the ICB from submitting a funding bid request. The CIL Joint Committee process would determine if any project were considered for funding support or not, and if it is, to what value. Liaison with the ICB will continue to determine any future bids for funding.

Alongside CIL, the SLP team are preparing a new IDP which seeks to address the issues you have raised through forward planning, ensuring health provision is aligned with planned housing and demographic change. This involves identifying where additional capacity may be required, either through the expansion of existing surgeries or the delivery of new primary care facilities in areas of significant growth.

In respect of planning applications, the local planning authority ensures health infrastructure is properly considered through consultation with the ICB and other health bodies. Where capacity impacts are identified, mitigation is often secured via Section 106 agreements, enabling financial contributions from developers to support the improvement or expansion of GP services, where this can be justified and meets the three statutory tests for securing planning s106 obligations. While CIL receipts can be used to support infrastructure requirements also part funded through planning obligations, in practice s106 agreements and direct NHS funding streams are typically more effective and reliable in delivering the necessary health infrastructure to support growth.

By combining strategic infrastructure planning through the IDP, the ICB's operational role in managing capacity, and the development management system's ability to secure contributions and respond to consultee input, a coordinated approach is achieved. This framework is to help ensure GP surgeries in Cheltenham can continue to meet patient needs as the town grows.

Code	Name	Number of patients from Cheltenham	What percentage of Cheltenham's patients are registered at this practice?	What percentage of this practice's patients live in Cheltenham?
L84033	Weston House Practice	14,989	13.7%	77.6%
L84030	Berkeley Place Surgery	14,318	13.1%	81.1%
L84041	Overton Park Surgery	11,080	10.1%	84.2%
L84040	The Leckhampton Surgery	11,011	10.0%	84.2%
L84003	Underwood Surgery	10,002	9.1%	88.2%
L84015	Sixways Clinic	9,529	8.7%	87.1%
L84008	St. George's Surgery	8,449	7.7%	70.4%
L84058	St. Catherine's Surgery	6,560	6.0%	70.4%
L84049	The Royal Well Surgery	6,232	5.7%	75.2%
L84059	Royal Crescent Surgery	6,067	5.5%	74.2%
L84022	Yorkeleigh Surgery(Ct)	6,065	5.5%	76.1%
Y05212	West Cheltenham Medical	3,444	3.1%	57.8%

Source: [Constituency data: GPs and GP practices](#)

The above shows that 11,011 patients are registered at Leckhampton. To determine capacity/accessibility issues further consultation will be required with the ICB.

5 Civil Penalty Notice Policy under The Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services introduced the report, saying it is important not just as a legal requirement but to make sure that tenants

feel safe in their homes and know that if they have an issue or problem, it will be addressed. This applies not just to council tenants, but also to social landlords and the private sector, and the change in the law means that CBC will take up issues with landlords to ensure that their properties meet legal requirements.

In response to a Member's question, she confirmed that although the council is enacting national legislation, there is currently no additional government funding to deal with it, although this may become available further down the line.

The Director of Housing, Customer Services and Communities undertook to provide written responses to two further questions, namely how well the council is resourced to manage and issue penalties, and where the money it receives from the penalties will go.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services added that new staff are being recruited and it remains to be seen whether this will be enough to carry out the additional required work. She suggested meeting with officers over the next few months to consider this and determine whether any further resource is required.

In debate, a Member thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services for an extremely insightful report, clearly setting out landlords' responsibilities when letting properties. She said it is likely that many tenants aren't aware of their rights, and a readable summary of the policy would be helpful for them, as well as a checklist of legal requirements for landlords. It is a great opportunity to make the rental environment better for both tenants and for landlords.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said this is already being looked at, and another agenda item at the meeting concerns the 'tenant voice', both in the public and private sector, to help them to be aware of their rights and ensure that landlords understand their responsibilities. The Public and Environmental Health Manager added that the policy also provides transparency, making landlords aware of that to expect if they fail to comply.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets welcomed the changes which will enable the council to help and support tenants, but regretted the lack of government action around these issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said that fixed penalties for landlords who failed to comply would make them think twice about what they were doing, and the names of landlords and lettings organisations which don't comply will be available to tenants and tenant organisations when making their choices.

She concluded by thanking officers for all the work they have done, saying the council will continue to do its best to make life better for all tenants.

The Leader felt it worth mentioning that the great majority of landlords are responsible, and that the council is looking to work with the small minority who are not.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **the Civil Penalty Notice (CPN) policy attached at Appendix 3 is approved with immediate effect;**
2. **the Head of Public Protection is authorised to take such actions and decisions as are necessary to facilitate the effective implementation and operation of the Authority's powers referred to in this report.**
3. **the Head of Public Protection is authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services, to approve minor variations to the policy in line with any revised statutory guidance.**

6 Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said the council aims to put tenants and leaseholders at the very heart of all it does, which has not always been the case in the past. Their voice is pertinent to what we do, and inviting them to speak out gives the council the opportunity to act on their behalf, help wherever possible, and explain the reasons why in some cases it cannot. She recommended the report to Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space welcomed the excellent report, and asked what is being done to encourage tenants to participate and engage, which is key to its success. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services confirmed that:

- a group of tenants is already at the heart of what we do, and their important feedback helps the council to build and change;
- community walks have already started and will continue;
- tenants will have a single person with whom to communicate, responsible for linking aspects of the council's housing provision; this will encourage them to bring issues or problems to the council;
- the Tenants' Voice is posted to all tenants, giving them the opportunity to say what they want and to engage with the council. Officers are championing this and working together with tenants to make it happen.

The Leader recalled that some years ago, CBH carried out monthly walkabouts in different parts of the town, and said that if this is to be revived, it would be helpful to make Members aware, allowing them to participate and then provide officers with feedback on what they have found in their wards. Directing issues to the right person at an early stage will help get solve problems quickly as well as reducing the individual caseload for Members.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities complimented the clear plan, which sets out its goals and how they will be achieved. She particularly liked the clear foreword in the Action Plan, and the detail about different types of engagement activity, a lot of which is already happening. She welcomed the new forum for

younger people and older people, and said she would like to this to complement the actions in the Year of Youth Voice Action if possible.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said she would be pleased to work together to help make life better for people.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Tenant and Leaseholder Voice Plan is adopted.**

7 CBC Housing Service - Tenancy Policy and Decant (required move) Policy

The Leader noted that the policies being discussed are not brand new, but updates to existing policies.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services said that when communicating with tenants, it is important to ensure that all information shared is accessible, easy to read and understand, rather than set out in technical or legal language. She was happy to say this guide uses easily-accessible language, and that this is another way CBC is changing the way it does things to ensure that tenants are at the heart of everything.

There were no questions or comments.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services and officers for all the reports today.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the Tenancy Policy is adopted;**
- 2. the Decant (Required Move) Policy is adopted.**

8 Notification of decisions made by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Joint Committee

The Leader presented the report as published, which sets out the decisions made by the Community Infrastructure Levy Joint Committee (CILJC) to support infrastructure projects across Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and Gloucester, as set out in Appendix 5. She said the allocations support the delivery of three strategic infrastructure, aligned with the councils' development priorities, climate goals, and corporate plan objectives, and that the report also outlines the legal, financial, environmental, and equality implications of these decisions. She confirmed that the remaining £901,879 from Cheltenham's share remains unallocated for future consideration.

Members were asked to note the decisions of the CIL Joint Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities asked for assurance that the committee would meet again before the end of the year as stated in the report, to reassess proposals, as there is a project in her ward that she would like to progress. The Leader said it is in the diary but there are a lot of major infrastructure projects coming forward at present, including Junction 10, and allocation of funding will very much be based on need, priorities, and how any proposal sits with the Corporate Plan.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the decisions of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Joint Committee made on 14 July 2025. (Appendix 5) are noted.**

9 Revisions to Sexual Entertainment Venue Policy

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities said licensing of sexual entertainment venues (SEV) is always very challenging, partly due to the absence of decisive action from successive governments, and as a result it remains the job of councils to find the best way to progress. CBC's stance is that it is better to license premises, but recognises that there are strong views around the subject and that many people oppose this view.

The SEV policy is due for review and has undergone consultation and public engagement, but since publication of the report and draft policy, further representations have been made to her, other Members and council officers. As a result, she is now proposing a different set of recommendations to allow further consideration of the policy by a Cabinet working group, who will produce a final version of the SEV policy for approval by Cabinet and Council as soon as possible.

The Leader said Members were aware of this request, and it demonstrates that the Cabinet is listening. She supported the new recommendations, and suggested no further discussion of the paper was needed at this meeting and that it be suspended for the time being.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. revisions to the Sexual Entertainment Venue policy are deferred;**
- 2. a cabinet working group will be established to review the policy, with the terms of reference and composition of the working group delegated to the Leader in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities and Group Leaders**
- 3. the working group will report back to Cabinet on the outcome of their review prior to any revised policy being presented to Council for approval**

10 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring Report Q1 2025-26

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets presented his report as published, which gives a clear picture of the financial position on 30 June, showing some changes from the original budget and highlighting some the pressures and challenges the council is facing. He said the focus remains on maintaining strong financial management and protecting services whilst continuing to deliver on key priorities, and he thanked the finance and property team who work extremely hard to keep the council on track.

In response to a question from the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities, he said the report doesn't include specific detail of where CIL money is coming from or how the parish council share is allocated, but that the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control would be able to provide further information, and he would be happy to be part of any discussion. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control confirmed this, saying that Members need to be aware that adding more detail to this report would result in significant additional work for officers where an off-line conversation would be more useful.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities was particularly pleased to see how S106 money has been allocated to public art, saying she had enjoyed working with the Paint Festival project on the Honeybourne Line and was working with officers to extend that. It was great that housing and investment in the town was improving the town with the public realm and art.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery said she was the responsible Cabinet Member when the budget was set in February – it was extremely ambitious with huge opportunities as set out, and despite a lot of new challenges around housing, recruitment, and additional government requests, it was great to see the budget as it now stands bouncing back with resilience. She was confident that ways and means would be found to reduce the overspend, and congratulated the Cabinet Member and officers on how well the budget has held up in difficult times.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets thanked Members for their comments, saying the council wants to invest as much as it can in the town, through CIL and S106, to provide the best possible services for residents but at the same time remain mindful, resilient and well-managed as we never know what is around the corner, with economic changes regionally, nationally and internationally all having an effect on the council's finances,

The Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space added that some of the challenges the council faces are completely beyond its control – such as the reduction in income from the crematorium, despite significant investment, as a result of lower mortality rates, fewer burials, and people looking for cheaper options. The Leader agreed, saying that with a finite amount of

money, any reduction in income requires the council to constantly monitor what it is delivering and make some difficult decisions.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the contents of the report are noted, including the key projected variances to the general fund and update on the Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets approved by Council on 21 February 2025 and the actions to ensure overspends are reduced as far as possible by the end of the financial year.**

11 Briefing from Cabinet Members

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control said the planning team has been updating existing policies and introducing new ones to improve the, including planning policy and building control. New staff have also been taken on to streamline the allocation of applications and manage S106 collection and follow up. Recruitment is ongoing to strengthen the team and service.

The Cabinet Member for Major Development and Housing Delivery said we are in an exciting period, with several big projects underway, and reported on some recent events:

- the recent launch of the Skills Hub at the House of Commons, with MP Max Wilkinson, together with HBD and other stakeholders, a fantastic project which aims create a talent pipeline for the many exciting jobs and opportunities coming in the county;
- the first ten homes at Regents Village are ready, with many more coming soon, providing desperately needed, accessible homes; anyone interested should keep an eye on the portal;
- things are moving at pace at the former Monkscroft School site, with an application progressing well for a very attractive development of 100% affordable homes;
- another affordable housing development at 320 Swindon Road is also moving forward, with a Meet the Builder event for neighbours and plans to bring children and young people to the site when work starts, to see how homes are built and career opportunities in the profession.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Open Space highlighted the following upcoming events and recent activities:

- the *Lions at Large* trail over the summer has been a roaring success and the lions will be auctioned off for charity at the racecourse, 01-05 October;
- a new free exhibition – Material Worlds – Contemporary Artists and Textiles – will open this week at The Wilson and run until 11 January, focussing on textiles and demonstrate how familiar, everyday materials can be transformed into unexpected, radical and bold art;

- with the support of the Pied Piper appeal, the Cheltenham Trust has recently launched SEND soft play sessions at Leisure@ to provide a calm, sensory, friendly space for children under 8 with additional needs;
- Cheltenham BID, with the support of the council and other connected organisations, has financed the renovation of the elephant mosaic in the alleyway between the High Street and Grosvenor Place South, depicting an incident in 1934 when three circus elephants were paraded through the town. The mosaics have been carefully repaired, cleaned, and sealed to significantly improve their appearance;
- thanks to No Child Left Behind, Cheltenham BID and local businesses for the Cambray Festival on Saturday 06 September, an afternoon of free fun activities for older children;
- the Everyman Theatre has recently launched a fund-raising appeal for its Grove Street project, a dedicated creative arts education and community centre due to open Spring 2026.

The Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities also thanked NCLB and BID for delivering the Cambray Carnival, saying the council should aim for more free activities and opportunities in the town centre. She has also been working to combat graffiti, which brings a lot of complaints across the town centre and particularly on the Honeybourne Line and Millennium Bridge; with the help of Max Wilkinson MP, CIL funding, and Cheltenham Paint Festival organiser Andy Dice Davies, some fantastic new murals have been produced on the Honeybourne Line, really lifting the area.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services reported that discussions have started regarding the provision of more homes for veterans; reports will come forward in the future in relation to that. She said that she will be addressing the Mayors' Association of Hungary about the work CBC is doing with young people to bring about equality and encourage their involvement in politics, and has also been invited to join the housing task force of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – which comprises 41 countries and around a million councillors – and will share work done here at CBC to help with housing and ensure all tenants have a real voice. Both of these provide an international showcase for what Cheltenham is doing and she thanked officers for all their hard work.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Services, Recycling, Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space shared several items:

- he recently spent an enjoyable afternoon at the crematorium with ecologist advisers and members of Gloucestershire Badger Group to consider a progressive way forward with the management of badgers at the site;
- the town is blessed with many 'friends' groups, but managing these can place a strain on the small greenspace team, who recently hosted an engaging and useful meeting to consider the best way forward with this;
- Cheltenham also benefits from some excellent volunteer groups, and he joined the excellent Guardians of the River Chelt in picking litter out of the river in St Peter's ward;

- the parks team is looking at traveller incursions at Benhall, with measures going in this year;
- he hopes work will also start this year at Hatherley Park, where the pond has significant issues with dredging.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said it was difficult to share finance and property issues, which involve a high level of negotiation and confidentiality, but he wanted to put on record his thanks to Gemma Bell, Director of Finance, Assets and Climate Change, and wish her well as she starts her maternity leave.

The Leader said much of her time is currently taken up with the corporate governance review of town and parish councils – data is being analysed and a working group will look at the next steps - and also with the Local Government Review process, but she was able to attend the House of Commons reception recently, hosted by Max Wilkinson MP, to launch the new Gloucestershire Skills Hub network to establish the county's position as capital of the UK's security industry.

In addition, she has received some lovely invitations, including one to join the Oriel Singers for their 50th anniversary concert at the Pittville Pump Rooms, and another to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Holst Museum. She said these events are always enjoyable, providing opportunities to meet and talk with residents in different spheres.

12 Cabinet Member decisions since last meeting

Cabinet Members reported on the following decisions taken since the last meeting of Cabinet on 15 July 2025:

1. 15 August 2025: Leader, Councillor Rowena hay

[To enter a contract with Fire Proof Window Company Ltd to supply and install 76 fire-rated windows](#)

2. 18 August 2025: Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

[Planning Policy Manager Roles](#)

3. 02 September 2025: Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Well-being and Public Open Space, Councillor Izaac Tailford

[Grant agreement between Cheltenham Borough Council and Gloucestershire Everyman Theatre Company Ltd for the financial years 2025-26](#)

4. 11 September 2025: Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Councillor Richard Pineger

[To apply to Heat Network Delivery Unit round 15](#)

5. 11 September 2025: Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

[Civica Payments System](#)

13 Corporate Risk Register - update

A briefing note had been circulated for information only.

14 Local Government Act 1972 - Exempt Business

RESOLVED THAT:

In accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

- **Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)**

15 Exempt Minutes of last meeting

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2025 were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 21 October 2025

Award of rent support grant to voluntary sector

Accountable member:

Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Cllr Peter Jeffries

Accountable officer:

Executive Director Finance, Assets and Regeneration, Paul Jones

Ward(s) affected:

Leckhampton

Key/Significant Decision: No

Executive summary:

As part of Cheltenham Borough Council's wider ambitions to support a thriving voluntary and community sector (VCS), the council enables VCS groups to rent its properties through offering a rent support grant scheme.

The current policy was adopted in December 2016 which permits VCS groups to apply for a rent support grant either at the start of a lease or at the time of a rent review. Applications are scored against four criteria with the amount of subsidy awarded being proportionate to the degree to which the applicant meets the criteria.

An application for a rent support grant has been received from Leckhampton Rovers Football Club for Burrows Fields and Pavilion. This report sets out the proposed level of rent support grant to be awarded.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:**1. agrees to the following rent support grant:**

Applicant	Recommended rent support grant
Leckhampton Rovers Football Club, Burrows Fields and Pavilion	A rent support grant of 62% of current market rent, applied to the portion of rent which is not recouped through subletting to the café on site.

-
- 2. delegates authority to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader, in consultation with One Legal to agree the terms of a rent support grant agreement with the applicant.**
-

1. Implications

1.1. Financial, Property and Asset implications

The rent support grant will apply to the portion of rent which is not recouped through subletting to the café on site. The deficit to the general fund will be £3720 per annum for the first year, and is expected to reduce to £2480 in the second and third years.

All usual terms and conditions will be contained within the lease in respect of rent reviews, insurance, repairs, compliance, etc, and will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure compliance.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska, Finance Business Partner,
ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2. Legal implications

Under S123 Local Government Act 1972, leases for a term greater than 7 years must be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable. The only exception to this is where the letting at less than best consideration contributes to the 'social, economic or environmental well-being' of the council's area or residents. Whilst leases for a term of less than 7 years do not have to be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable, the council must still have regard to its general fiduciary duty.

Granting a lease at market rent, whilst implementing a policy of grant support, means that if the tenant at any time fails to meet the grant criteria, there is no complicated legal mechanism for ensuring that the rent is uplifted to market value: the grant is simply suspended. Accordingly, the Policy for Property Lettings and Disposals to the Third Sector,

Voluntary and Community Groups was adopted by Cabinet on 13 December 2016.

When considering the giving of financial assistance, the council must ensure that it is not giving an unlawful subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the Act). The subsidy control regime has replaced state aid which applied before the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

One of the requirements for a subsidy to be present is for financial assistance being given to an 'enterprise' which is defined in the Act as a person (including all legal entities) who is engaged in an economic activity that entails offering goods or services on a market. The Leckhampton Rovers Football Club do not carry out such economic activity as the clubs' primary activities are non-economic (they charge nominal fees, offer free taster sessions, and free memberships for those facing

financial hardship). Although acting as commercial landlord for the Dug Out Café, statutory guidance permits financial assistance where it supports a group's non-economic activities. A partial rent reduction adjusted in proportion to the rent received by the Café will not be considered a subsidy provided the funds are not used to cross-subsidise the Café. Officers will need to monitor the club's income to ensure compliance with the statutory guidance and the council's rent reduction policy.

Signed off by: One Legal: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

1.3. Environmental and climate change implications

There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report, but Leckhampton Rovers Football Club prioritises sustainability as one of its 5 main objectives and has taken numerous measures that will impact positively on climate change and the environment. These include the pavilion using an air source heat pump; solar panels for heating and hot water; a rainwater harvesting irrigation system; cycle stands; new bins and a circular footpath. The club has planted over 2,000 new trees and hedging; planted extensive areas for new wild flowers; a fruit orchard; 2 new ponds with planting to encourage wildlife; new planter boxes which attract lots of insects and a sustainability app will be launched shortly which identifies all of these and more in the park.

Please see appendix 3 for more details.

Signed off by: Maizy McCann, Climate Emergency Officer,
Maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4. Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Quality homes, safe and strong communities
- Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity

1.5. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

There are no direct equality implications from the recommendations, though the organisation will continue to promote equality and diversity in line with its own equality policies.

1.6. Performance management – monitoring and review

The council will put in place a monitoring process whereby recipients of a rent support grant will submit a monitoring form to explain the activities that have been delivered from the premises.

The quality and timeliness of previous monitoring information will be taken into account, if the applicant wishes to re-apply for a rent support grant at the end of the three year period.

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of Cheltenham Borough Council's wider ambitions to support a thriving voluntary and community sector, the council enables VCS groups to rent its properties through offering a rent support grant scheme.
- 2.2 We know that appropriate rent support to community-based organisations and services can support the viability of such organisations and the services they provide to the benefit of the social and economic well-being of the town. However, the Council will continue to encourage voluntary and community sector organisations to become more self-sufficient and less reliant upon financial support from the Council.
- 2.3 A revised rent support grant process was adopted by the council in December 2016. This is based on assessing an application against the following four outcomes:
 - Cheltenham's environmental quality and heritage is protected, maintained and enhanced
 - Sustain and grow Cheltenham's economic and cultural vitality
 - People live in strong and safe communities
 - We will work to strengthen the emotional and physical wellbeing of all Cheltenham residents
- 2.4 The maximum rent support grant that any organisation will be able to apply for will be 80% of their current market rent and that the assessment process will determine the level of grant to be offered up to this maximum and will be staggered incrementally, as follows:

• Meeting one outcome	–up to 20% grant
• Meeting two outcomes	–up to 40% grant
• Meeting three outcomes	–up to 60% grant
• Meeting four outcomes	–up to 80% grant
- 2.5 Each outcome is subject to a stepped discount between 0 and 20% depending upon the impact of the defined sub-elements of each outcome.
- 2.6 Cabinet retains the discretion to award a further grant of 10%, bringing the maximum rent support grant that any organisation could receive to 90%. This will only be in exceptional cases and any such decision will only be taken after detailed consideration of the organisation's financial and business case for the rent support.

2.7 In addition, the council will scrutinise the applicant's financial standing and make an assessment of the following:

- That the reason for applying for the rent support grant is backed up by the organisation's financial health in that the grant award will support the financial viability of the operation of the building
- That the organisation has reasonable longer-term plans in place to be able to sustain activities being delivered from the building beyond the term of the grant.

2.8 The offer of a grant will be for a maximum of three years that will be reviewed at the end of each 12 month period to ensure that the applicant continues to deliver the activities set out in the original application. The council reserves the right to either review the grant amount awarded or withdraw it completely if there are changes to the activities being delivered. In addition, if the organisation is in debt arrears to the council; the grant will be withdrawn.

3. Reasons for recommendations

3.1. The submission from Leckhampton Rovers Football Club has been assessed against the criteria detailed in 1.3.

3.2. Leckhampton Rovers Football Club demonstrated strong evidence of their contribution to the themes assessed against, particularly in terms of protecting the environment through the sustainability initiatives put in place and planting over 2000 new trees and hedging; planting areas for wild flowers, 2 new ponds and planter boxes to encourage wildlife and insects. The club also contributes significantly to the theme of enabling people to live in safe and strong communities through providing 49 youth teams; having revamped the pavilion to include a new café and covered outdoor seating area as well as running regular volunteering dates and recently launching Junior Park Run from the site. The club also engages with local neighbourhood groups and has provided CCTV. **Please see appendix 3** for the assessment of their submission.

4. Alternative options considered

4.1. None

5. Consultation and feedback

5.1. None

6. Key risks

6.1. If the Council is overly generous in subsidising tenancies with grants, this will result in reduced income from assets and cumulative impacts on the Council's medium term financial strategy.

- 6.2. If appropriate and transparent grant agreements are not put in place, tenants may be more difficult to remove if they fail to meet the terms of any subsidised letting arrangement, with the potential for associated adverse publicity for the Council.
 - 6.3. If prospective tenants cannot demonstrate a robust business plan when taking on property commitments from the Council, there is an increased risk of failure and associated financial and reputation impacts for the authority.
-

Report author:

Helen Down, Participation and Engagement Team Leader,
helen.down@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Equality Impact Assessment
- iii. Leckhampton Rovers Football Club Assessment

Background information:

Report to Cabinet 13 December 2016 “Award of rent support grants to Cheltenham’s Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations”

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If appropriate and transparent grant agreements are not put in place, tenants may not understand the consequences if they fail to meet the terms of any subsidised letting arrangement.	Helen Down	2	2	4	Accept	Rent support grant agreement to be put in place, in conjunction with One Legal	Helen Down	November 2025
	If prospective tenants cannot demonstrate a robust business plan when taking on property commitments from the Council, there is an increased risk of failure and associated financial and reputation impacts for the authority.	Jon Whitlock	2	3	6	Accept			
	If the grant expires or is terminated, tenants will remain responsible for payment of rent at market value. This may result in an increase in arrears.	Jon Whitlock	2	2	4	Accept			

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Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

to be included in all Cabinet and Council reports

1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment

Officer responsible: Helen Down

Service Area: Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships

Title: Participation and Engagement Team Leader

Date of assessment: 24.9.25

Signature: H Down

b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?

Policy

If other, please specify:

c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Policy for Property Lettings and Disposals to the Third Sector, Voluntary and Community Groups

Is this new or existing?

Already exists and is being reviewed

Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project

A grant is being made to a new organisation under the rent support policy agreed in December 2016.

d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims:

A fit for purpose property portfolio which drives delivery of our corporate vision and outcomes.

Objectives:

1. To use our assets to sustain and grow Cheltenham's economic and cultural vitality and make a positive contribution to people's lives.

2. To maintain a 'fit for purpose' property portfolio to support service delivery

	3. To make a positive contribution to the Club's financial position.
Outcomes:	Provision of a rent support grant to Leckhampton Rovers Football Club to support the financial viability of the operation of the site.
Benefits:	Supporting the financial viability of the operation of the Burrows Fields and Pavilion by Leckhampton Rovers Football Club.

e. What are the expected impacts?

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.

No

Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?

No impact expected

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

Leckhampton Rovers Football Club has been running the site for a number of years, but the provision of the rent support grant will support their financial viability in the face of increasing maintenance costs.

If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.

f. Identify next steps as appropriate

Stage Two required

No

Owner of Stage Two assessment

Completion date for Stage Two assessment

Please move on to Stage 2 if required ([intranet link](#)).

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Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 21 October 2025

Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document Consultation

Accountable member:

Councillor Mike Collins, Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control

Accountable officer:

Javier Guerrero, Planning Policy Officer

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: No**Executive summary:**

One of Cheltenham Borough Council's priorities, as set out in [Cheltenham Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2028](#), is to create biodiversity. The Council recognises the importance of biodiversity and its crucial role in sustaining ecosystems. Despite its importance, biodiversity is being lost at an ever-increasing rate. Nature recovery is important for many reasons as set out in the SPD. The goal is to create healthier, more resilient environments that can support a wide variety of species on a large scale.

The SPD not only provides an overview of biodiversity and nature recovery but provides practical examples of measures that should be considered, and at what stage of the planning process. The SPD will need to be consulted on for a minimum of four weeks, in accordance with the relevant Regulations. Following consultation, the main issues will be summarised including how these issues have been addressed. Council approval to adopt the SPD will then be sought.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. approves the draft Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix 4) for consultation for a period of 4 weeks under Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).**
 - 2. delegates authority to the Director of Community and Economic Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control to make any necessary minor amendments, corrections and additions to the document prior to publication for consultation.**
-

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

None arising from this report.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska – Finance Business Partner **Date:** 10.09.2025
Ela.Jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

The recommendations and options set out in this report are reasonable and in compliance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) regulations 2012 (the Regulations). The Report specifically seeks authority from Cabinet to allow for a period of public consultation for the SPD referred to in the report; this requirement is in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations which sets out that consultation is a specific requirement to allow for the validation of an SPD.

Public consultation and subsequent adoption of the SPD should be undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out within the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(as amended\)](#).

Signed off by: Charlotte Lockwood, Locum Senior Lawyer,
Charlotte.Lockwood@onelegal.org.uk **Date:** 19.09.2025

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

This guidance aims to ensure that development across the borough avoids the degradation of habitat and biodiversity, encouraging sustainable land use and improving ecosystem services. This will have further associated positive impacts for climate adaptation and resilience through carbon sequestration, natural flood

management and reducing urban heat island effect.

This SPD provides clarity and consistency to ensure developers are aligning to the corporate priority to increase biodiversity in our borough and is how we can fully utilise our planning system to encourage developers to enhance our natural environment and mitigate the impact of new buildings.

A Climate Impact Assessment tool has been completed, as set out in Appendix 3.

Signed off by: Maizy McCann – Climate Officer,
Maizy.McCann@cheltenham.gov.uk **Date:** 19.09.2025

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This SPD will contribute to Key priority 3: Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity. It aligns with the following actions:

- We will drive increased biodiversity in our borough and fully utilise our planning system to encourage developers to enhance our natural environment, mitigating the impact of new buildings.
- We will fulfil our biodiversity net gain (BNG) obligations within the planning system.

The SPD will do this by setting out our Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations, providing guidance on nature recovery to developers, and assuring coherence with our emerging Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) Action Plan and the emerging Tree Strategy.

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

A full equality impact assessment of the SPD will be undertaken once consultation on the SPD has been completed, the main issues identified through the consultation, and how these main issues are intended to be addressed prior to the SPD being considered for adoption.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

Through normal service delivery and [reporting on our Biodiversity Duty](#).

2 Background

2.1 A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a document, which details and guides the policies already within the Development Plan. The Development Plan includes the Joint Core Strategy, adopted in 2017, and the Cheltenham Plan adopted in 2020. Those documents were produced in the context of the National

Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at the time of their production. Since then, there have been various policy changes, including the strengthening of the biodiversity duty; the introduction of the Biodiversity Net Gain framework, and the requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies to be produced.

2.2 The production of the Nature Recovery SPD is a Corporate priority. The SPD is intended to be used by a wide variety of different stakeholders, including the development industry, by providing guidance practical which should be followed.

3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 The SPD explains what biodiversity and nature recovery are, and why they are important. Biodiversity refers to the variety of life forms within natural capital. It is inherently valuable and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystem services. Despite being fundamental to our existence, the world is losing its biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate.

3.2 Nature recovery refers to the process of restoring and revitalising ecosystems that have been degraded or lost due to human activity, climate change, or other factors. It involves regenerating natural habitats, creating new ones and protecting them (and the species they support) from degradation. The goal is to create healthier, more resilient environments that can support a wide variety of species on a large scale. Nature recovery is important for a number of reasons, as set out in the SPD, including:

- i) Biodiversity Conservation;
- ii) Climate Change Mitigation;
- iii) Ecosystem Services;
- iv) Resilience to Natural Disasters;
- v) Human Well-Being, and
- vi) Sustainability.

3.3 In essence, nature recovery is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance between human progress and environmental health, ensuring a sustainable future for both people and the planet.

3.4 The [Environment Act \(2021\) \(as amended\)](#) mandates that new development must achieve a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity. The SPD provides guidance about how the mandatory BNG policy needs to be considered throughout the planning process. A flowchart is included which seeks not only to capture the various steps but also who is responsible at every stage of the process.

3.5 The Environment Act also set out the requirement for Local Nature Recovery

Strategies (LNRS) to be produced. The responsible authority for producing the LNRS is Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), who are working with Gloucestershire Nature Partnership. Cheltenham Borough Council are one of the partners. The LNRS is still in the process of being produced but the SPD sets out how it will need to be used. LNRS' contain:

- i. A list of priorities for habitats and species across the area they cover, and
- ii. A collection of maps showing where these priorities should be applied in the area they cover.

3.6 Cheltenham Borough Council is also in the process of producing a Tree Strategy. The strategy will play a vital role in supporting the Borough's wider ambitions for nature recovery, such as seeking to increase tree canopy cover. The SPD signposts key elements of the tree strategy.

3.7 The SPD also provides examples of practical guidance about how nature recovery should be incorporated into development at the different stages of the planning process. It gives an overview of legal agreements and how long-term management, and monitoring will be undertaken, as well as briefly setting out where enforcement action may be undertaken. Finally, a nature recovery checklist is provided to help guide applicants.

4 Alternative options considered

4.1 An alternative option would be not to produce an SPD. However, this would be contrary to Cheltenham Borough Council's Corporate Plan evidencing its commitment to nature recovery.

5 Consultation and feedback

5.1 The development of the SPD has been informed by informal consultation with various specialists across the Council, including those from planning, climate change, trees and open space. Input from Members has been garnered. The draft SPD has also been informed through engaging with the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership, who are experts in the field of nature and biodiversity.

5.2 This SPD was subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessments (HRA) screening in consultation with Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. Appendix 5 contains the Statement of Reasons and Determination that was completed for this process.

5.3 This report seeks Cabinet approval for a 4-week public consultation in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). Consultation on the SPD will also need to comply with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement 2023. Representations (comments) on the SPD will then be reviewed. The main issues will be

summarised including how these issues have been addressed. Council approval to adopt the SPD will then be sought.

6 Key risks

6.1 The key risk is set out in the risk register at Appendix 1.

Report author:

Javier Guerrero, Planning Policy Officer, javier.guerrero@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
- iii. Climate Impact Toolkit Assessment
- iv. Draft Nature Recovery SPD
- v. SEA/HRA Statement of Reasons and Determination from screening

Background information:

[Statement of Community Involvement 2023](#)

[Cheltenham Corporate Plan \(2025 – 2028\)](#)

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If the SPD is not produced, Cheltenham Borough Council will be in a weaker position in terms of seeking to ensure that applicants consider biodiversity and nature recovery.	Director of Communities & Economic Development	4	2	8	Accept	Consultation with various stakeholders including development industry in the preparation of the SPD	Director of Communities & Economic Development	Cabinet decision 21 October 2025

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment

Officer responsible: John Spurling	Service Area: Planning
Title: Planning Policy Manager (Interim)	Date of assessment: 28 July 2025
Signature: John Spurling	

b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?

Strategy

If other, please specify:

c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Is this new or existing?

New or proposed

Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project

In line with the Corporate Plan

d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims: To ensure that nature recovery is fully considered throughout the planning process.

Objectives: Providing guidance and examples of how nature recovery can be addressed.

Outcomes: Improvements to nature recovery, through the production of the SPD.

Benefits:	As above

e. What are the expected impacts?

Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.

No

Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?

No impact expected

Please provide an explanation for your answer:

At this stage, the SPD is in draft form. Following consultation on the SPD and the consideration of representations (comments) made, the expected impacts will be reviewed prior to progressing to the next stage of the SPD process, which will be to consider adopting the document.

If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.

f. Identify next steps as appropriate

Stage Two required

No

Owner of Stage Two assessment

N/A

Completion date for Stage Two assessment

N/A

Please move on to Stage 2 if required ([intranet link](#)).

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Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)



Key

	Significant and/or long-term positive impact identified. No changes needed.
	Slight or short-term positive impact identified. No changes needed but could be reviewed to improve.
	Not applicable or no cause for concern.
	Slight or short-term negative impact identified. Review to identify possible improvements.
	Significant and/or long-term negative impact identified. Changes needed before proceeding.

This summary of the CIAT should be used to aid your decision making. Please note that red/amber segments simply mean that mitigations and changes should take place not that the project cannot go ahead.

Environmental	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
GHGs	4	Research suggests that 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is a minimum to prevent further decrease, and not all BNG will necessarily provide carbon sequestration for the linked construction works. Therefore, we took a conservative approach and assessed this impact as slightly positive.	0
Air quality	8	An increase in vegetation species is linked to pollutant absorption and humidity regulation. Therefore, we tag it as significantly positive.	0
Sustainable Transport	4	Networks of connected green infrastructure could stimulate people going outside and use these routes for walking, but behaviour change has multiple causes. Therefore, we classified it as slightly positive.	0
Land use change	8	Statutory minimum 10% BNG is a novel legislation worldwide, that has heavily changed the planning system, the ecology sector, and it is opening promising opportunities for nature recovery across majority of new development. BNG alongside this SPD ensures that nature recovery is integrated into the planning process. These policies embed positive land use change through within the borough.	0

Biodiversity	8	This SPD sets out why biodiversity and nature recovery are important, the current planning policies related to nature recovery, what Cheltenham Borough Council expects to be delivered for nature recovery in planning proposals, and how this will be secured long term to deliver for nature. This document is targeted at those who intend on making the most out of the biodiversity components of their planning schemes and therefore, the SPD's main purpose is to restore nature and biodiversity.	0
Soil and waterway health	8	One of the components of BNG are water courses ecosystems and the SPD delves into Sustainable Drainage Systems guidance. Nature recovery restores critical ecosystem services like water purification, soil fertility, and pollination.	0
Climate Change Adaptation	8	Nature recovery makes habitats more diverse thus more resilient to environmental issues, allowing the restoration of their self regulation characteristics. Healthy ecosystems, such as forests, wetlands, and grasslands, act as carbon sinks absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Restoring these environments can help mitigate the impacts of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas concentrations. Restoring ecosystems like riparian zones, wetlands, and forests enhances natural buffers against flooding, storms, and erosion. Healthy landscapes are more resilient to extreme weather events and provide safer, more stable environments for communities.	0
Energy Use	2	The tree component of BNG could increase canopy cover providing shade, decreasing the need for cooling systems and could coexist with renewable energy schemes.	0
Sustainable Materials	0	0	0
Waste	0	0	0

Social	Scores	Justification	Recommendation
Food	0	Nature recovery restores critical ecosystem services like water purification, soil fertility, and pollination. These services are essential for food production.	0

Health	4	Evidence shows that a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both physical and mental health. People with nature on their doorstep are more active, mentally resilient and have better all-round health, access to nature provides spaces for recreation, relaxation, and connection with the natural world. Nature recovery is in the public interest as can create more green spaces in urban areas, improve quality of life and promote social cohesion.	0
Housing	-1	BNG is one of the factors contributing to viability of development schemes, thus it could impact negatively on developer costs	0
Education	0	0	0
Community	2	There are many opportunities to protect, enhance, and grow the biodiversity in Cheltenham, and for developers to incorporate these aims into their development plans. Nature recovery is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance between human progress and environmental health, ensuring a sustainable future for both people and the planet.	0
Culture	0	0	0
Accessibility	4	Interacting with nature is mostly an accessible experience. We will take necessary steps for the document to be as accessible as possible.	0
Local Economy and Jobs	0	0	0
Safety	0	0	0
Equity	1	The SPD will include a sort of "nature justice" related to Tree Equity Score and nature-deprived areas of the Borough.	0
Democratic Voice	2	It will have public consultation. Not sure about the scope of the delivery	0

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Draft Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

July 2025

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1. Introduction

What is this document?

- 1.1 A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a document which details and guides the policies already within the local authority's Development Plan. In this context, the Development Plan for Cheltenham Borough comprises the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy 2011 – 2031 (the JCS, adopted December 2017), the Cheltenham Plan (adopted July 2020) and remaining, yet to be replaced 'saved' retail policies¹ of the Cheltenham Plan Local Plan Second Review (adopted June 2006). Although not part of the Development Plan, this SPD is a material consideration for schemes linked to the topics of its contents, including biodiversity, BNG, ecology, nature recovery, trees, sustainable drainage, and green infrastructure.
- 1.2 The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and the Cheltenham Plan were produced in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at the time of their production. There were relevant changes to nature legislation afterwards, such as the strengthening of the biodiversity duty, the introduction of the BNG framework, and the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) through the Environment Act 2021. Therefore, this SPD forms part of Cheltenham Borough Council's response to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the environmental objectives of the NPPF, the Environment Act 2021 and the emerging Gloucestershire LNRS.
- 1.3 This SPD sets out why biodiversity and nature recovery are important, the current planning policies related to nature recovery, what Cheltenham Borough Council expects to be delivered for nature recovery in planning proposals, and how this will be secured long term to deliver for nature. This document is targeted at those who intend on making the most out of the biodiversity components of their planning schemes. This document assumes that you have previously read the relevant parts of the Development Plan. This SPD should also be read in conjunction with the [Climate Change SPD](#).

¹ There is also one policy (GE 1 Public Green Space), which is 'saved'

Cheltenham's biodiversity

- 1.4 Cheltenham is a spa town and Borough on the edge of the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire. The town is home to a variety of green spaces and nature reserves, ranging from formal gardens to Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). All these spaces are important for maintaining biodiversity. Seven formal parks in Cheltenham have achieved Green Flag awards indicating their high quality in terms of public access and biodiversity conservation, and Cheltenham is home to two LNRs; Pilly Bridge LNR and Griffiths Avenue LNR (see Figure 1). Cheltenham's most important green asset for biodiversity is Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill, which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the biological interest of the unimproved calcareous grassland found on the sites, and their geological exposures (see Figure 2).
- 1.5 Cheltenham Borough Council believes it is vital that we **protect, enhance and grow the biodiversity throughout our urban and rural environments**. Cheltenham is drained by several small rivers and streams which flow through the town, most notably the River Chelt. The watercourses in Cheltenham eventually contribute to the Severn River which lies 8km to the east of Cheltenham.

Figure 1. Map of Green Spaces, Parks, LNRs, SSSI, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and rivers in Cheltenham (River Chelt labelled specifically)

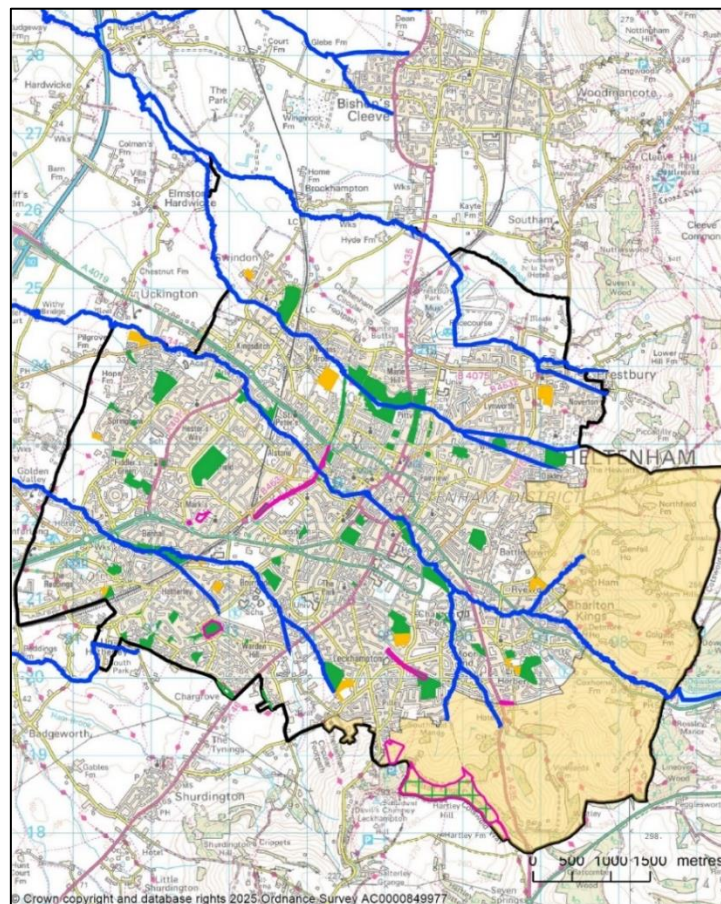
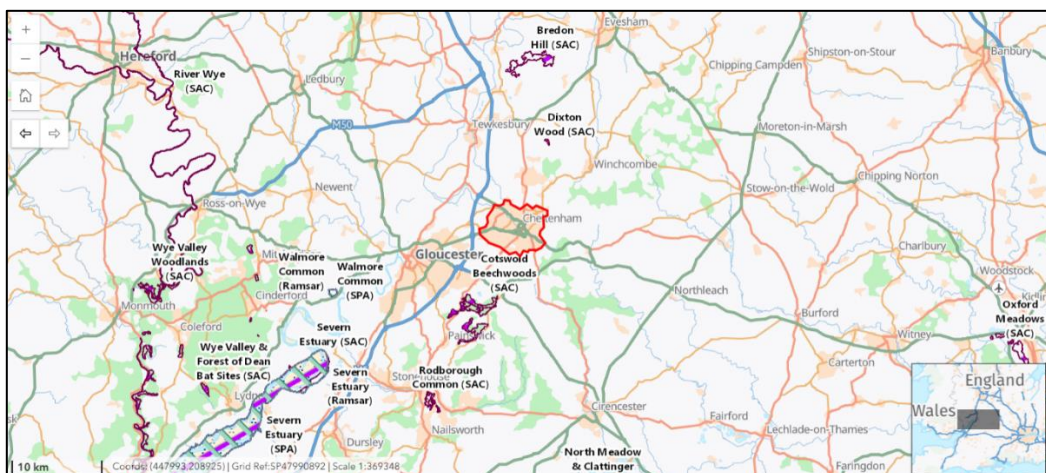


Figure 2. Calcareous grassland on Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham



- 1.6 The Cotswolds National Landscape Area (previously called the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) lies to the east and south of Cheltenham. The Cotswolds are primarily formed of Jurassic limestone and the soils in Cheltenham area are therefore typically slightly alkaline, derived from the underlying limestone conditions. The type of grassland found in and around Cheltenham, given its limestone geology and soils, is calcareous grassland, also known as limestone grassland or Cotswold grassland. This is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat which is important for biodiversity and maintaining the ecological character of Cheltenham.
- 1.7 There are multiple internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance, or Natura 2000 sites surrounding Cheltenham (see Figure 3). These are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar convention sites. These are:
 - i. The Severn Estuary Ramsar/SAC/SPA;
 - ii. Cotswolds Beechwoods SAC;
 - iii. Rodborough Common SAC;
 - iv. Dixton Wood SAC;
 - v. Bredon Hill SAC, and
 - vi. Walmore Common RAMSAR/SPA.

Figure 3. Cheltenham (outlined in red) in relation to Natura 2000 sites (Source: MAGIC Map, DEFRA, 2025)



- 1.8 There are many opportunities to protect, enhance, and grow the biodiversity in Cheltenham, and for developers to incorporate these aims into their development plans. The basis of this lies in national and local context, as well as the global biodiversity and climate crisis.

The National Context of Improving Biodiversity

- 1.9 In response to the universally recognised need to reverse biodiversity loss, the UK Government published a 25-year Environment Plan (25YEP), ‘A Green Future’² in 2018, to:
- “Champion sustainable development, lead in environmental science, innovate to achieve clean growth and increase resource efficiency to provide benefits to both our environment and economy, and keep our pledge to hand over our planet to the next generation in a better condition than when we inherited it”.*
- 1.10 In looking to achieve this, the 25YEP emphasised a number of themes, three of which will be the focus of this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD:
- i. Net gains in biodiversity,
 - ii. High quality green infrastructure provision and standards, and
 - iii. Delivering for wildlife.
- 1.11 The 25YEP laid the foundation for:
- i. the Environment Act (2021) to tackle biodiversity loss and recover nature through a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) planning policy,
 - ii. and for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) which will deliver more habitat; in better condition; in bigger patches that are more closely connected.
- 1.12 The most recent State of Nature report (2023)³ for the UK suggests there has been a steep decline in the abundance of wildlife in the UK since the 1970s. The abundance of 753 terrestrial and freshwater species has on average fallen by 19% across the UK since 1970. The UK distributions of 4,979 invertebrate species have on average decreased by 13%, the distributions of 54% of flowering plant species and 59% of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) have decreased across Great Britain (see Figure 4). 2% (151 species) are extinct in Great Britain and a further 16% (almost 1,500 species) are now threatened with extinction here.

² 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) UK Government:
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ab3a67840f0b65bb584297e/25-year-environment-plan.pdf>

³ State of Nature Report (2023) The State of Nature Partnership: [TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf](https://www.stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf)

Figure 4. Source: reproduced from the State of Nature Report (The State of Nature Partnership, 2023)



- 1.13 The State of Natural Capital Report (2024)⁴ shows that all of England's ecosystem assets have been degraded by land and sea-use change, pollution, natural resource overexploitation and climate change. They are therefore less able to cope with the impact of future change and both the assets themselves and the benefits they provide to our society are all at high-risk of further degradation. The report identifies priority actions for policy areas and ecosystem assets (see Figure 5).

⁴ State of Natural Capital Report (2024) Natural England: [NERR137 Edition 1 State of Natural Capital Report for England 2024 - Risks to nature and why it matters.pdf](#)

Figure 5. “Priority actions for reducing risks to natural capital”. Source: reproduced from the State of Natural Capital 2024 report (Natural England, 2024)



The Local context of improving biodiversity

- 1.14 Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and published the [Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\)](#) in 2022, setting out Cheltenham Borough Council’s ambitions for all developments within the borough and how they should respond to the climate change and biodiversity crisis. Gloucestershire is a nature-depleted county like much of the UK⁴, and Cheltenham has a host of opportunities to protect, restore and enhance its biodiversity.
- 1.15 All public authorities have a Biodiversity Duty, meaning to deliver plans, partnerships and actions to conserve and⁵ enhance biodiversity. A baseline for this duty is set out in

⁵ Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (2024). Create a wilder Gloucestershire with us: <https://www.gloucestershiREWildlifetrust.co.uk/campaign-wildergloucestershire-us-0>

Cheltenham Borough Council's [First Consideration Report \(2024\)](#), which includes delivering this SPD as one of our commitments.

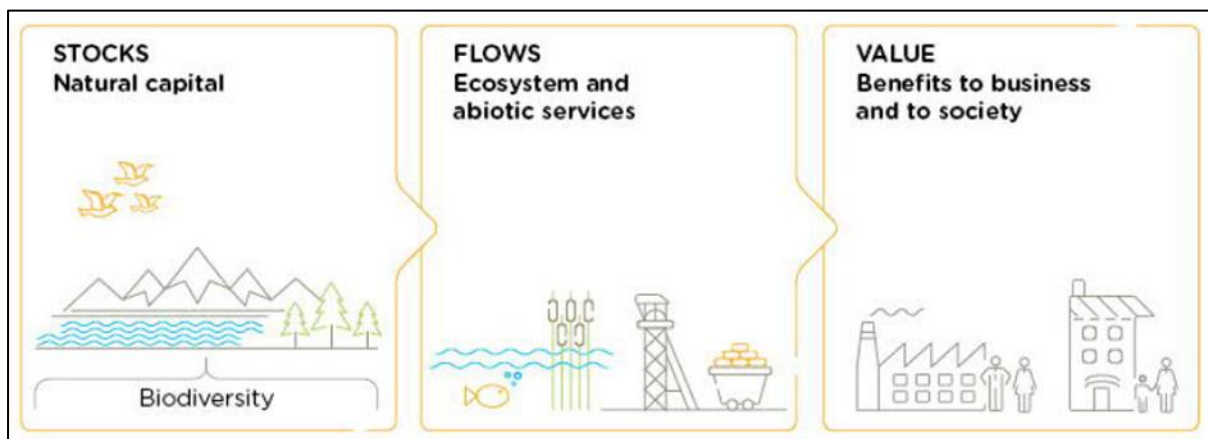
- 1.16 To address biodiversity degradation, [Cheltenham Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027](#) sets the task to '*Develop an Ecology and Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to further support sustainable development*'. Key Priority 2 states that '*we can position ourselves to offer advice and share best practice, signposting to other leaders along the way, making it easier for others to follow.*'

2. What is Biodiversity and Nature Recovery, and why are they important?

What is biodiversity?

- 2.1 To understand the importance of biodiversity, we must understand and have an appreciation for natural capital and ecosystem services. Natural capital encompasses the Earth's stock of both renewable and non-renewable natural resources, including plants, animals, air, water, soils, and minerals. Ecosystem services are the benefits that humans derive from these natural resources. These services include essential functions such as pollination, flood risk mitigation, and air purification. Essentially, ecosystem services represent the value that humans gain from the natural environment and properly functioning ecosystems (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Natural Capital, ecosystem services and biodiversity



- 2.2 Biodiversity refers to the variety of life forms within natural capital. It is inherently valuable and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystem services. The quantity and quality of biodiversity can serve as indicators of the health of natural capital stocks and the effectiveness of the ecosystem services they provide.
- 2.3 Despite being fundamental to our existence, the world is losing its biodiversity at an ever-increasing rate. It is vital that we maintain and increase biodiversity in order to maintain the scale and resilience of ecosystem service delivery and the benefits communities receive as a result.

What is Nature Recovery?

- 2.4 Nature recovery refers to the process of restoring and revitalising ecosystems that have been degraded or lost due to human activity, climate change, or other factors. It involves regenerating natural habitats, creating new ones and protecting them (and the species they support) from degradation. The goal is to create healthier, more resilient environments that can support a wide variety of species on a large scale. Nature recovery is important for a

number of reasons, all of which contribute to the overall health of the planet and the well-being of its inhabitants. These reasons are:

- i. **Biodiversity Conservation:** Many ecosystems and species are threatened by habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Nature recovery helps restore these ecosystems, providing a safe haven for endangered species and ensuring a rich diversity of life;
 - ii. **Climate Change Mitigation:** Healthy ecosystems, such as forests, wetlands, and grasslands, act as carbon sinks absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Restoring these environments can help mitigate the impacts of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas concentrations;
 - iii. **Ecosystem Services:** Nature recovery restores critical ecosystem services like water purification, soil fertility, and pollination. These services are essential for food production, clean water, and overall human health, making nature recovery vital for sustainable development;
 - iv. **Resilience to Natural Disasters:** Restoring ecosystems like riparian zones, wetlands, and forests enhances natural buffers against flooding, storms, and erosion. Healthy landscapes are more resilient to extreme weather events and provide safer, more stable environments for communities;
 - v. **Human Well-Being:** Access to nature improves mental and physical health by providing spaces for recreation, relaxation, and connection with the natural world. Nature recovery is in the public interest as can create more green spaces in urban areas, improving quality of life and promoting social cohesion, and.
 - vi. **Sustainability:** Nature recovery helps balance the needs of development with the preservation of natural resources. By restoring ecosystems, we ensure that future generations can continue to rely on healthy, functioning ecosystems to meet their needs.
- 2.5 In essence, nature recovery is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance between human progress and environmental health, ensuring a sustainable future for both people and the planet.

3. Legislation and planning policy

- 3.1 A comprehensive framework of international, national, and local policies and legislation exists to protect and enhance biodiversity. These emphasise the importance of safeguarding existing biodiversity, implementing enhancements, and achieving a measurable net gain in biodiversity through the planning process. This commitment is reinforced by a robust legislative framework that includes protections for species and sites of ecological significance, the requirement for 10% BNG, and the establishment of LNRS.

Legislation

- 3.2 The primary pieces of legislation relating to biodiversity and nature conservation in England are:
- i. [The Environment Act 2021 \(as amended\)](#)- This made provision for the introduction of the mandatory 10% BNG policy, to ensure developments covered by the Town & Country Planning Act (1990) deliver an increase in biodiversity value post-development. This Act also introduced a statutory requirement for LNRS' to be produced by responsible authorities appointed by the Government;
 - ii. [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act \(NERC\) 2006 \(as amended\)](#) - Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a statutory duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity insofar as it is consistent with the discharging of their normal duties;
 - iii. [The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](#) (often referred to as the 'Habitat Regulations') – This is the mechanism by which the European Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (otherwise known as 'the Habitats Directive 1992') is implemented in the UK, and
 - iv. [The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 \(as amended\)](#) – Protects all hedgerows meeting the criteria for 'importance' from removal with certain exemptions.

National policy

- 3.3 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) sets out how the Government intends the planning system to operate when determining planning applications and in preparing Local Plans. The NPPF has a range of requirements relating to biodiversity in Chapter 15 that are relevant to this SPD.

Local policy

- 3.4 Cheltenham Borough Council has development policies relating to nature recovery and green infrastructure in both the JCS and the Cheltenham Plan (CP). Figure 7 below presents a summary of the guiding principles of Cheltenham's local biodiversity policies, and the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) that can be used.

Figure 7. Nature recovery policies from the Development Plan

Policy	Source	Guiding principles	GIS framework
SD7	JCS, page 54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan • Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan 	Interactive Landscape Character Map
SD9	JCS, page 59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected urban network • Coordination with multi-purpose green infrastructure • Design with habitat in mind • Consideration of protected sites 	A link will be provided here to the updated GIS project for biodiversity sites in Cheltenham (in progress, to be finalised Autumn 2025)
INF2	JCS, page 80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion and consideration of ponds • Sustainable Drainage Systems and ensuring rainwater permeability • Avoid discharges into the public system • Integration of watercourses • Control of the Himalayan Balsam invasive species 	Flood maps including groundwater flooding
INF3	JCS, page 84	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection of strategic assets such as the Cotswolds National Landscape, River Severn and its washlands, rivers, floodplains, pedestrian and cycle routes. • Connection of local assets such as parks, private gardens, recreation grounds, amenity space, play space, allotments, woodlands and orchards • On site first • Maintenance commitments • Living roofs and green walls 	Public Rights of Way (PROW), green space study map, allotments, TPOs, cycle routes
GI 2	CP, page 84	Cheltenham Tree Strategy	Tree Protection Orders (TPOs)
GI 3	CP, page 86	Cheltenham Tree Strategy	Tree Protection Orders
BG 1	CP, page 44	Cheltenham Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) Action Plan	Map in November
BG 2	CP, page 45	Cheltenham Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) Action Plan	Map in November

4. Biodiversity Net Gain

The Environment Act 2021 (as amended) mandates that new development must achieve a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity (also referred to as Biodiversity Net Gain⁶) calculated using the [DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric](#). How this will be achieved is detailed through an approved Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP). It also mandates the use of the BNG User Guide and the trading rules.

- 4.1 For the purposes of calculating BNG, biodiversity ‘units’ are calculated in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, using habitats as a proxy for biodiversity. Species present on a site do not factor into the BNG calculation, though protected species legislation still applies separately to the requirements of BNG. This means that species afforded legal protection under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act \(1981\) \(as amended\)](#) must still be protected and or potential harm to them adequately mitigated, under license where necessary, regardless of the BNG requirements for a development site. See chapter 9 “Building biodiversity and nature recovery into development” for guidance on how the provision of ecological enhancements on development sites can be made for species, in addition to delivering any measures required under protected species legislation.
- 4.2 In the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, habitats are split up into three groups:
 - i. Area habitats (e.g. grassland, woodland, or scrub);
 - ii. Linear habitats (e.g. hedgerows and lines of trees), and
 - iii. Watercourse habitats (e.g. rivers and streams).
- 4.3 Biodiversity units are calculated within each group. If all three habitat groups are present on a site, 10% BNG has to be achieved in all three groups to achieve an overall 10% net gain in biodiversity.
- 4.4 Specialist BNG pre-application advice is available for applicants who wish to discuss the specific requirements of their development proposals with Cheltenham Borough Council before submission of a planning application. This can cover any of the topics on the Government’s information page on [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK](#). 10% BNG can be achieved on site (within the red line boundary of a planning application) by retaining, enhancing or creating habitat, or off-site via offsetting (see Chapter 6 of this SPD).

BNG Exemptions

- 4.5 There are a small number of developments which are exempt from the BNG regulations. BNG exemptions include:
 - i. Development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than:
 - ii. 25 square metres of on-site habitat;

⁶ ‘Biodiversity Net Gain’ and ‘biodiversity gain’ are used interchangeably by central government. Both refer to the mandatory 10% biodiversity gain policy and its regulations, introduced by the Environment Act 2021.

- iii. 5 metres of on-site linear habitats such as hedgerows;
 - iv. Householder applications;
 - v. Self-build and custom build applications;
 - vi. Biodiversity gain site (a habitat bank);
 - vii. Other exemptions;
 - viii. High speed rail transport network;
 - ix. urgent crown developments, and
 - x. developments that are granted planning permission by a development order (including permitted development rights).
- 4.6 These developments are however still required to meet Cheltenham Borough Council's Development Plan policies which relate to biodiversity, green infrastructure and open space.

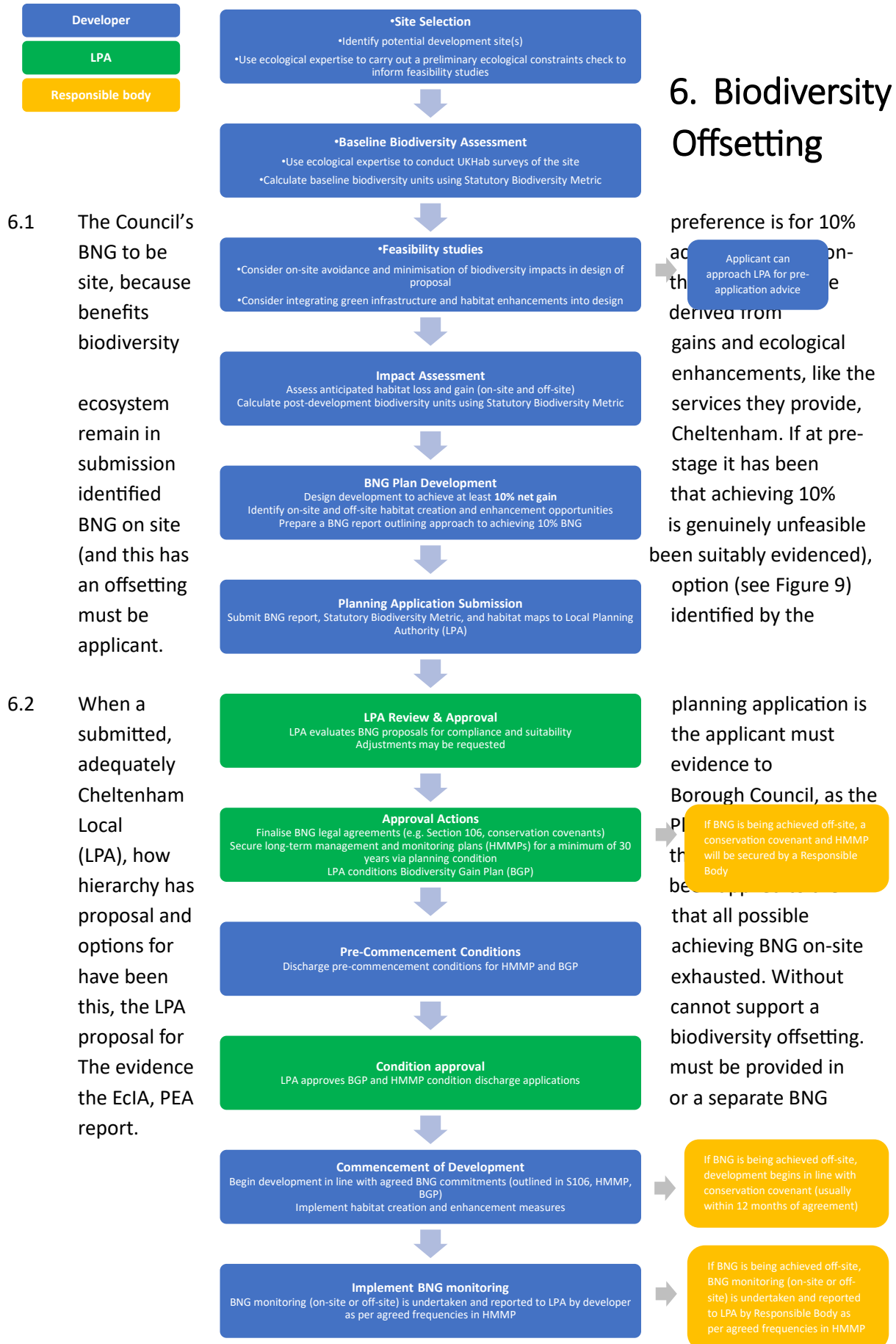
BNG "Small sites"

- 4.7 A development with 9 dwellings or fewer, on less than 1 hectare of land is considered a "small site" under the BNG regulations. The development of small sites still falls under the requirements of the BNG policy, e.g. they still have to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity, but their BNG calculations can be made on a simpler version of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric called the "Small Sites Biodiversity Metric". This can be completed by a 'competent person'. The DEFRA guidelines on 'competent persons' with regards to BNG must be used.

5. Biodiversity Net Gain and the Planning Process

- 5.1 The mandatory BNG policy needs to be considered in development plans at site-selection/viability stage with the input of suitably qualified ecologists (see Chapter 9 for more information on this).
- 5.2 Pre-submission, the following must be prepared alongside the planning application with regards to BNG:
 - i. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) or Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) with all baseline habitats present on the site (within the red line boundary of the planning application) mapped using [UKHab mapping](#); and
 - ii. A completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric completed by a 'competent person'.
- 5.3 Pre-commencement, the following will be required:
 - i. A Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP),
 - ii. A 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), and
 - iii. A legal agreement to secure the details of the HMMP and the delivery of 10% BNG.
- 5.4 Please refer to the planning process diagram below (Figure 8), which sets out how the mandatory BNG policy must be considered and applied from development site selection through to development commencement, by the developer, applicant, and the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Figure 8. BNG in planning process



6. Biodiversity Offsetting

6.1 The Council's BNG to be site, because benefits biodiversity

ecosystem remain in submission identified BNG on site (and this has an offsetting must be applicant.

6.2 When a submitted, adequately Cheltenham Local (LPA), how hierarchy has proposal and options for have been this, the LPA proposal for The evidence the EcIA, PEA report.

preference is for 10% gains and ecological enhancements, like the services they provide, Cheltenham. If at pre-stage it has been that achieving 10% is genuinely unfeasible been suitably evidenced), option (see Figure 9) identified by the

planning application is the applicant must evidence to Borough Council, as the that all possible achieving BNG on-site exhausted. Without cannot support a biodiversity offsetting. must be provided in or a separate BNG

Figure 9. BNG offsetting options

Applicant uses their own Habitat Bank (land within their ownership)	Applicant uses another Habitat Bank (can be public or private landowner)	As a last resort Applicant purchases Biodiversity Credits from central government
Applicant owns a habitat bank (see Figure 10) which is registered on the NE Biodiversity offsetting site register. Management can be passed to third party. Proof of habitat bank registration and HMMP of the habitat bank setting out how 10% BNG will be achieved is submitted to the LPA. Secured by legal agreement (see chapter 10).	Applicant approaches other Habitat Bank with offsetting requirements to achieve 10% net gain. Proof of habitat bank registration, HMMP, proof of purchase of units (see Figure 11) is submitted to LPA. Secured by legal agreement (see chapter 10).	Applicant as a last resort, and after demonstrating that on-site net gains and any of the other available offsetting options are not viable for their proposal, purchases statutory biodiversity credits (see Figure 11) from UK government.
Or a combination of the above		

Figure 10. What is a habitat bank?

What is a habitat bank?

A habitat bank is an area of land where habitat creation or enhancement has achieved an uplift in biodiversity unit value of the land. The units created can be sold to developers and allocated to their development proposal on a national register, to meet a developer's BNG requirements.

Figure 11. The difference between biodiversity units and credits

The difference between biodiversity UNITS and CREDITS

Biodiversity units are a measure of natural habitat that is used to assess biodiversity net gain. They are what the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculates and are a proxy for biodiversity (they do not include protected species).

When achieving 10% BNG on site is not achievable, biodiversity units can be purchased from habitat banks (see Figure 10) to off-set the loss of biodiversity units on a development site.

Biodiversity credits are what can be purchased from central government as a last resort to offset the loss of biodiversity units on a development site. They have not been calculated from a specific site using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Central government will use the funds from the sale of biodiversity credits to invest in habitat creation or enhancement – see [Statutory biodiversity credits - GOV.UK](#).

- 6.3 The primary objective for delivering off-site BNG is to locate new habitats as close as possible to the development site, ensuring they are functionally accessible for the species they aim to support.

The National Biodiversity Gain Site Register

- 6.4 Habitat Banks used to offset biodiversity losses must be registered on the national biodiversity gain site register and the registered gains allocated to the specific development in question. These are two separate processes. Achievable biodiversity gains will be secured via a binding legal agreement (see chapter 10), and this will be a pre-requisite to registering for the BNG site register.

7. The Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

- 7.1 LNRS' propose how and where to recover nature and improve the wider environment across England. The requirement to produce an LNRS is set out in the [Environment Act 2021 \(as amended\)](#).
- 7.2 Each LNRS sets out priorities for nature recovery and proposes actions in locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. DEFRA has appointed 48 responsible authorities to lead on preparing a LNRS for their area. Gloucestershire County Council is the responsible authority working with Gloucestershire Nature Partnership who have prepared the Gloucestershire LNRS. Cheltenham Borough Council is one of the supporting authorities for the Gloucestershire LNRS.
- 7.3 LNRS' contain:
- i. A list of priorities for habitats and species across the area they cover, and
 - ii. A collection of maps showing where these priorities should be applied in the area they cover.
- 7.4 With regard to BNG, the LNRS will be the determining factor for setting the strategic location of a habitat in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (whether this is pre or post-development). If the habitat is within the LNRS, then it will have "high" strategic significance because it is of particular importance for Gloucestershire. If it is not within the LNRS then it will have "low" strategic significance. This incentivises the creation of habitats which have been identified as priorities for the local area in the LNRS on development sites, or on habitat banks if these banks are within a priority area on the LNRS map, as a small multiplier (x1.15) will be added to them in the statutory Biodiversity Metric, thus increasing the overall BNG calculation by a factor of 15%.
- 7.5 The LNRS must be used by developers to plan site-selection, site design, landscaping design, and ecological enhancement plans for their development proposals. The LNRS will be used by Cheltenham Borough Council to inform responses to development proposals. It will be used to secure provision of ecological enhancement for species which the LNRS shows will be impacted by a development proposal, and compensation for the loss of habitats of importance to Gloucestershire which the LNRS also shows will be impacted by a development proposal.

8. Cheltenham Borough Council's Tree Strategy

- 8.1 Cheltenham Borough Council's Tree Strategy plays a vital role in supporting the borough's wider ambitions for nature recovery, as outlined in this SPD. By embedding principles of sustainability, biodiversity, and community engagement, the strategy sets out a proactive and evidence-based approach to managing Cheltenham's trees—recognising them as a critical part of the town's natural capital. At its core is the principle of planting the right tree in the right place, ensuring long-term benefits for wildlife, people, and the urban environment alike. This strategic approach helps safeguard existing tree stock, promotes species diversity, and ensures that both public and private trees are managed and protected in ways that reflect their ecological, social, and climate value.
- 8.2 The Tree Strategy directly supports Cheltenham's nature recovery goals by aiming to increase tree canopy cover, particularly in areas of greatest need, using data-driven insights such as tree equity mapping. In doing so, it enhances local biodiversity by providing habitats for a wide range of species and improving ecosystem resilience. Trees planted and maintained through this strategy will also contribute significantly to Cheltenham's climate mitigation efforts—sequestering carbon, regulating urban temperatures, and reducing flood risk. Furthermore, by improving air quality and providing accessible green space, the strategy contributes to public health and wellbeing. The Tree Strategy also recognises the importance of community involvement and education in supporting long-term environmental stewardship, making it a key pillar of Cheltenham's broader vision for a greener, healthier, and more resilient future.
- 8.3 The aims of the Tree Strategy are to:
- i. **Increase Tree Canopy Coverage:** One of the primary aims is to address the disparity of canopy cover across Cheltenham. This involves looking at a broad range of data including tree equity data and inspection data etc to better inform the location and planting of trees in spaces where they make a social, environmental and economic contribution. This will help to expand canopy cover and contribute to environmental health. This aim will also inform decisions in the planning process to better protect trees on private land. This should be achieved through diversity of species and characteristics of Cheltenham's tree stock.
 - ii. **Enhance Biodiversity:** Trees support a wide range of plant, animal, fungi and bacteria species. A key aim of this strategy, feeding into our Nature Recovery Strategy Supplementary Planning Document, is to increase biodiversity by planting a broad range of tree species, which provide habitats for wildlife and contribute to ecological resilience.
 - iii. **Help Mitigate Climate Change:** Trees are important for absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂). Cheltenham has a commitment to carbon net zero by 2030. By maintaining and increasing the number of trees that can sequester carbon, and reduce heat island effects in our urban area, we can help mitigate climate change and help regulate our local climate.

- iv. **Improve Air Quality and Mitigate Flood Risk:** Trees act as natural filters, improving air quality by collecting pollutants and releasing oxygen. They also help manage water runoff and reduce the risk of flooding by slowing the flow of rainwater into drains, streams and rivers.
- v. **Enhance Health and Well-being:** Trees are important to our communities. They support both our mental and physical health. Urban trees help create attractive areas, whilst trees in our green spaces enhance these spaces, create areas for recreation, reducing stress, and encouraging outdoor activities.
- vi. **Protect and Maintain Existing Tree Stock:** A key part of any tree strategy is the preservation of existing trees. This involves robust inspection and maintenance, good biosecurity measures and ensuring we plant the right tree for the right place so that full crown potential can be achieved.
- vii. **Promote Education and Awareness:** This aim will help to engage local communities with the broader understanding and a sense of ownership of their environment, and
- viii. **Maximise Funding:** This trees strategy can be used as a lever for funding for future tree management.

9. Building nature recovery into development

- 9.1 This chapter sets out how nature recovery should be integrated into the planning process, regardless of the scale of a development or whether the mandatory biodiversity gain condition applies to it. Nature recovery can be proactively planned into new development of all kinds and all scales, from individual houses, barn conversions, to masterplans for large residential or road schemes. Building nature recovery into development must be seen as an opportunity not a constraint, because of the environmental benefits derived from increasing natural capital and improving ecosystem services.
- 9.2 There are three key stages prior to the submission of a planning application (or prior to works starting for permitted development projects) where nature recovery must be considered. These are:
- i. Feasibility study;
 - ii. Impact assessment, and
 - iii. Scheme design.

Feasibility study

- 9.3 Feasibility assessments concerning ecological impacts must be a priority from the outset of any proposal, ideally before design and planning application submission. This proactive approach aligns with Cheltenham's Development Plan and ensures compliance with planning application validation requirements. The [CBC validation checklists](#) set out what is required to be submitted with planning applications regarding ecology, trees, and BNG. A planning application will not be validated without meeting these requirements.

Engaging Ecological Expertise

- 9.4 Assessing the feasibility of a project from an ecological perspective requires specialist knowledge. Engaging a qualified ecologist is vital, as comprehensive surveys and assessments will need to be conducted, and appropriate mitigation, compensation, net gain, and enhancement measures integrated into the proposal prior to submission. Utilising professional ecological services can prevent costly delays and facilitate a more efficient planning process. The Chartered Institute for Ecologists and Environmental Managers (CIEEM) have a directory of Ecological and Environmental practices which are registered with CIEEM, found here [Registered Practice Directory](#), which can be used to find a suitably qualified ecologists to undertake survey work.
- 9.5 It is also essential that the post-development plans for the provision of green infrastructure/soft landscaping/habitat creation are assessed for their feasibility before these aspects of development proposals are submitted. This must involve assessing the type, condition and/or quality of the soil on a site.
- 9.6 Measures may need to be taken prior to construction to prepare the soil on some sites to make it more suitable for certain habitat creation. For example, a field which has been used for arable purposes (crop production) will have a high nutrient load. This is not suitable for species-rich grassland creation as these habitats require low nutrient loads. The nutrient

load of the soil on site will have to be degraded over time in preparation for habitat creation, and this must be factored into the plans for a development proposal.

Pre-Application Advice

- 9.7 Seeking pre-application advice can clarify information required, including potential specialist input (if applicable) at an early stage, thereby supporting a formal application and reducing the likelihood of delays later in the planning process.
- 9.8 Cheltenham Borough Council can provide pre-application advice to developers planning projects of any size, subject to the mandatory Biodiversity Gain condition or not. [Pre-application advice fees](#) are dependent on the size and type of development planned.

Consulting Natural England

- 9.9 For developments potentially impacting European Protected Species (EPS) or nationally or internationally designated sites (e.g., SSSIs, Natura 2000 sites), early consultation with Natural England is advisable. In such cases, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) may also be necessary. Some impacts on EPS can be mitigated through district-level licensing schemes, such as for Great Crested Newts (see Figure 12). Alternatively, a bespoke licence from Natural England may be required.

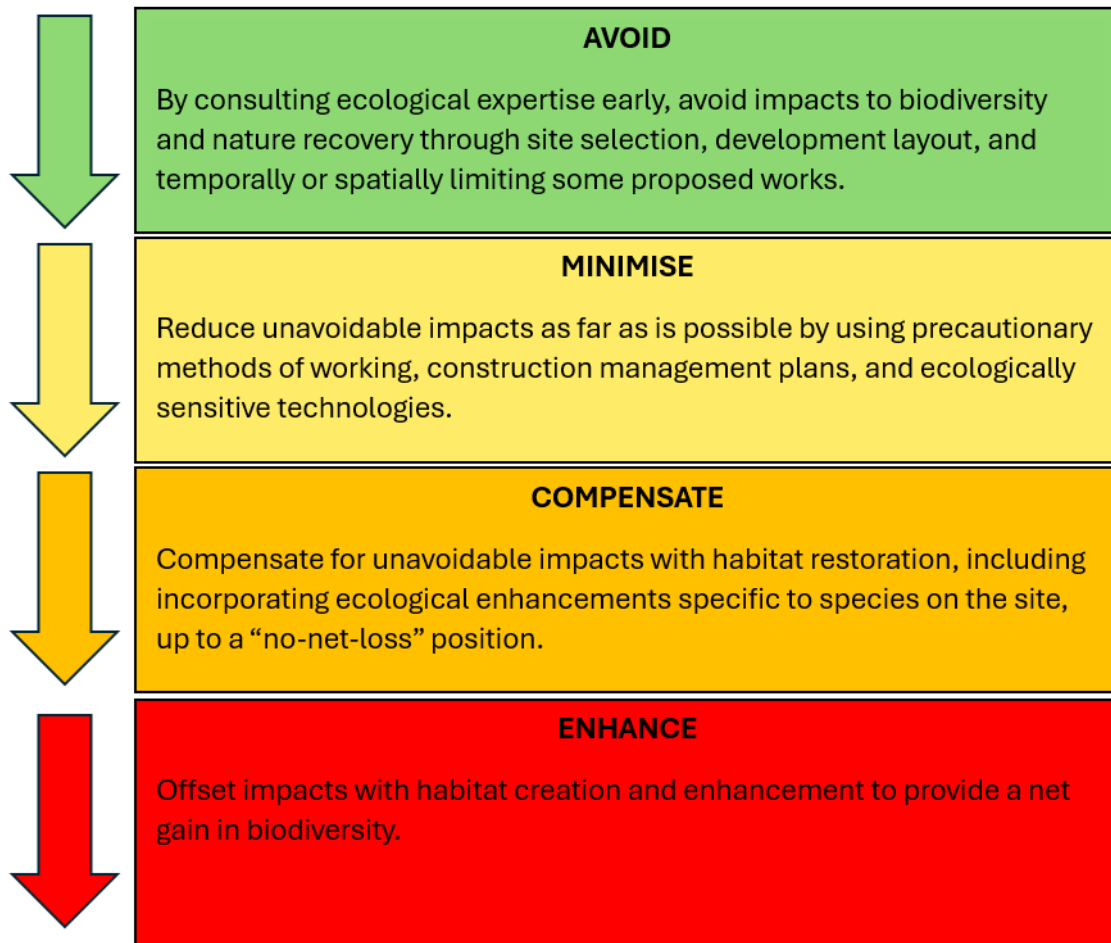
Figure 12. District Level Licensing for Great Crested Newts in Cheltenham

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>District Level Licensing for Great Crested Newts in Cheltenham</u></p> <p>NatureSpace operate a District Level Licensing Scheme in Gloucestershire About us - NatureSpace Partnership Limited. This is an option for developers whose surveys of waterbodies on or near to their sites carried out, which indicate Great Crested Newts (GCN) are present and may be impacted by development. Developers must consult their ecologist as to the best course of action under these circumstances, in order to deliver the best possible outcome for biodiversity and this protected species.</p>

Impact assessment

- 9.10 If a proposed development might impact designated sites or protected species, the applicant's ecological consultant must conduct appropriate surveys and impact assessments. These assessments should precede any design work or planning application submission and go beyond PEA and BNG evaluations. The findings must detail necessary mitigation or compensation measures to address adverse impacts. All proposals must adhere to the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy, which is set out in Figure 13.

Figure 13. The mitigation hierarchy





Scheme design


- 9.11 Development design must be informed by ecological surveys and impact assessments, including BNG calculations. The applicant and ecological consultant must ensure that ecological impacts, along with the mitigation hierarchy and BNG requirements, have informed scheme design. Design work should commence only after completing all relevant ecological surveys. Practical guidance on incorporating ecology into development design, with examples, is provided in Figure 14.



Figure 14. Practical guidance on incorporating ecology into development

Ecological enhancement in development	Example	Supporting Development Plan policy
<p><u>Pollinator friendly and biodiverse planting</u></p> <p>Urban and suburban planting schemes must incorporate a mix of native shrubs, trees, and plants to provide year-round nectar and pollen for pollinators such as bees, hoverflies, butterflies, and other beneficial insects.</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD</i></p>	<p>Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>
<p><u>Green roofs and living walls</u></p> <p>Urban and suburban development proposals should incorporate green roofs and living walls where possible. The type of green roof or wall should be chosen dependent on the context (e.g. ecological, garden, park) and using guidance from organisations like Livingroofs.org, the leading UK green roof website and the Green Roof Code of Practice grocode2014.pdf</p>	 <p><i>Photo sources: livingroofs.org</i></p>	<p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy:</p>

<p><u>Boundary treatments and boxes for hedgehogs</u></p> <p>Incorporate wildlife-friendly fencing with a 13cm x 13cm gap at ground level or a 150mm clearance between the fence and the ground to facilitate movement for hedgehogs and other small mammals. Additionally, consider installing hedgehog boxes in quiet, shaded areas under shrubs or thick vegetation, with the entrance facing away from prevailing cold winds. These features should be indicated on the landscape or ecological plans.</p>	  <p><i>Photo sources: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD</i></p>	<p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>
<p><u>Bird box provision in open spaces</u></p> <p>Where there is access to adequate public and private open space (including gardens), and mature trees capable of supporting them, install appropriate nest boxes for garden birds</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD</i></p>	<p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>

<p><u>Bird box provision integral to buildings</u></p> <p>To support species such as swallows, house martins, sparrows, swifts, starlings, barn owls, and kestrels, integrate nesting and roosting features into building designs.</p> <p>When installing external boxes, ensure they are positioned at least 5 metres above ground, facing north or east to avoid direct sunlight. Maintain a clear flight path and protect from predators by avoiding proximity to trees or climbing plants. For swift boxes, placement under eaves or soffits is ideal to provide shade and shelter.</p> <p>Utilise materials like woodcrete or woodstone for durability and insulation. Where direct integration into the building is not feasible, external boxes can be mounted securely, adhering to manufacturer guidelines.</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD</i></p>	<p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>
<p>Incorporate Bee Bricks and other invertebrate features built into developments</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD</i></p>	<p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>

<p><u>Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)</u></p> <p>Chapter 6 of the CIRIA SuDS Manual 2015 'Designing for Biodiversity' explains the design criteria that must be followed to deliver the objective of designing SuDS with biodiversity benefits.</p> <p>Chapter 8 of the Gloucestershire SuDS Design & Maintenance Guide 2015 'SuDS, Biodiversity and Amenity' also provides guidance and good practice on how to protect and enhance biodiversity with SuDS installations.</p> <p>DEFRA recently released updated the national standards for SUDS – available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-sustainable-drainage-systems</p> <p>The standards/requirements for biodiversity can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-sustainable-drainage-systems/national-standards-for-sustainable-drainage-systems-suds#standard-6-biodiversity</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: Cheltenham Borough Council</i></p>	<p>Policy INF2 'Flood Risk Management' of the Joint Core Strategy</p> <p>See also: Chapter 10 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Cheltenham Plan</p>
<p><u>Specific measures for tree provision</u></p> <p>To come from the CBC Tree Strategy when finalised – see section 8</p>		<p>Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>

<p><u>Hedgerows</u></p> <p>Create a successful hedgerow by starting with careful planning and site preparation, then planting a mix of native species, ensuring proper spacing and protection. Maintaining the hedgerow through appropriate management practices is crucial for its long-term health and biodiversity. Guidance on planting new hedgerows can be found here BN11: Planting new hedges - GOV.UK</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: Suffolk Wildlife Trust</i></p>	<p>Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy</p> <p>Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>
<p><u>Grassland</u></p> <p>Creating species-rich grassland involves careful preparation, appropriate species selection, and ongoing management to encourage a diverse plant community. Key steps include choosing suitable sites, preparing the soil, selecting appropriate seed mixes or green hay, and implementing a targeted management plan focused on cutting and grazing. Guidance on creating and restoring species rich grassland can be found here: Create and restore species-rich grassland – Farming</p>	 <p><i>Photo source: Cheltenham Borough Council website</i></p>	<p>Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy</p>

The Building with Nature Green Infrastructure Standards

- 9.12 Cheltenham Borough Council strongly encourages developers to follow the Building with Nature Standards (and demonstrate how they have done so). Building with Nature awards are available for development projects which demonstrate exceptional use of the standards (assessed independently of Cheltenham Borough Council) and achieving this recognition promotes long-term value of a development by improving the resilience of the built environment to climate change, and ensuring healthier, more attractive spaces for people and wildlife alike. For more information visit the [Building with Nature](#) website.

Noise, vibration, light and air pollution impacts on wildlife

- 9.13 Scheme design must include measures to prevent non-physical disturbances to wildlife during and post-construction. These disturbances can include noise, vibration, light and air pollution.
- 9.14 Noise and vibration pollution generated by construction machinery and traffic can impact wildlife by disrupting communication, altering foraging, burrowing and nesting behaviours, and causing habitat avoidance. These impacts can cause long-term stress, leading to reduced reproductive success
- 9.15 Light pollution from construction activities can impact wildlife by causing disorientation, altered behavioural patterns and disrupting circadian rhythms. These impacts can lead to increased predation risk and reduced foraging success.
- 9.16 Air pollution generated by construction activities (for example from dust and vehicle/machinery emissions) can impact wildlife by causing respiratory problems from direct inhalation, habitat degradation from pollutant build-up in soils and water bodies, and food-chain alterations from the air pollution particulates settling on soil and plants before these enter the food chain.
- 9.17 Non-physical disturbances like these must be reduced as far as is practicable. Measure to address this will be secured by the LPA in suitably worded conditions for the provision of Construction Environment Management Plans (CEMPs).

10. Legal agreements

- 10.1 If planning permission is granted for a proposal that is subject to the mandatory Biodiversity Gain condition, this will usually be subject to a legal agreement such as a Section 106 or Conservation Covenant, which secure the details of the BGP and HMMP.

Legal agreement options

- 10.2 For a developer who is offsetting biodiversity losses either on-site (or off-site but within the LPA boundary) a S106 will be required to both secure BNG delivery and enable the developer to register the site on the National BNG sites register. The S106 would be agreed between the landowner of the site and the LPA.
- 10.3 For a developer who is offsetting biodiversity losses off-site, on a habitat bank outside the LPA boundary, a Conservation Covenant will be required to both secure BNG delivery and enable the developer to register the site on the National BNG sites register. The Conservation Covenant would be agreed between the landowner of the habitat bank and a [Responsible Body](#). Responsible bodies have been designated as such by central government. Their role is to legally secure land and its associated conservation objectives⁷. Cheltenham Borough Council and Responsible Bodies need to be satisfied that the developer and the landowner will meet their biodiversity obligations before entering into a legal agreement.

⁷ [Responsible Bodies and Conservation Covenants | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

11. Long-term management, monitoring, and enforcement

- 11.1 Cheltenham Borough Council will require most developments in Cheltenham to be managed long-term to secure the ecological and environmental benefits of the green infrastructure provision, soft landscaping, and habitat creation and/or enhancement that forms part of the development long-term.

What is the difference between management and monitoring?

- 11.2 **Management** is the execution of the activities outlined in a management plan to control the progression of the targets in the management plan. These management plans will either be a Landscape Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) or a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) for BNG applications.
- 11.3 **Monitoring** is observing and collecting information about the management to track progress and identify whether the targets of the management are being met or not. This may result in slight changes in management.
- 11.4 It is important to note that if an EPS licence (see chapter 9) is required for a development to be lawful, monitoring will form a key component and condition of the licence and will require the employment of an ecological consultant to take this forward.
- 11.5 **Monitoring reports** are required as part of long-term management under a HMMP. These monitoring reports must be submitted to the LPA at agreed frequencies. These frequencies are agreed in the contents of the approved HMMP when this is submitted to the LPA and should be proportionate to the scale of the development.
- 11.6 Management and monitoring feed-back into each other over time. The information gathered during monitoring can inform ongoing management, and the results of the management activities provide the information gathered during monitoring
- 11.7 The council may require a fee to be paid to review monitoring reports. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis and secured by a S106.

What is the difference between a LEMP and a HMMP?

- 11.8 A **LEMP** is a long-term management plan which may be secured for developments which are not subject to the biodiversity gain condition, but do include the provision of green infrastructure, soft landscaping, and habitat creation and/or enhancement (which can include ecological enhancements for species). The period of time covered by a LEMP is determined proportionately to the development which it is attached to.
- 11.9 A **HMMP** is a 30-year management plan which will be secured for most developments which are subject to the mandatory biodiversity gain condition. It must contain explicit management prescriptions for all the habitats created, retained or enhanced which contribute to the BNG calculation for a development. Natural England has developed a standard template for HMMPs which is available online, here: [Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan Template - JP058](#)

- 11.10 LEMPs and HMMPs are usually conditioned, or form part of a legal agreement (especially where a fee is required for the council to review monitoring reports) but these can be provided up-front within a planning application's submission documents. Standard condition wording is used for HMMPs, and the wording is varied for LEMPs, proportionate to the development.

Roles, responsibilities, and enforcement

- 11.11 It is the role of the developer/landowner to make sure the management plan is delivered by a suitable organisation and that this organisation complies with the details of the management plan, including submitting monitoring reports according to the agreed reporting schedule.
- 11.12 Monitoring the delivery of a management plan sits with the party who has conditioned a management plan on a development to secure the delivery of its contents, e.g. an LPA for planning obligations and conditions, or the responsible body for Conservation Covenants.
- 11.13 Non-compliance with a management plan which has been conditioned or secured with a legal agreement between the LPA and the developer/landowner will result in enforcement or other legal action. Enforcement action stemming from breach of a planning condition cannot be appealed. Action taken following breach of a S106 can be appealed. However, if an appeal is lost, the appellant will be subject to fines. Enforcement action will be taken where breaches of conditions and legal agreements are within the public interest and expedient.
- 11.14 Proactive monitoring will take place from Cheltenham Borough Council's enforcement team. Breaches of conditions or legal agreements will be reported to enforcement by those who identify the breach (this may be members of the public or Officers working within CBC), followed by the CBC enforcement team liaising with the planning team and establishing enforcement action in a collaborative manner.

12. Nature Recovery Checklist

- 12.1 This chapter contains a checklist for developers to use to check for the inclusion of best practice for nature recovery in their development proposal. This is intended to be applied in addition to Cheltenham Borough Council's [validation list requirements](#) and is a more qualitative assessment of whether their proposal meets expectations and requirements for nature recovery as set out in this SPD.

Figure 15. Nature Recovery checklist

Check	Policy / NPPF /validation hook	When is this required?	✓ / x
Have you engaged ecological expertise as early in the scoping/design of your development proposal as possible?		Scoping/site selection and pre-design if possible	
Have you sought pre-application advice from the development management team at CBC to help guide your development proposal with regard to biodiversity and nature recovery?		Pre-application	
Have you had ecological and arboricultural (where relevant) surveys carried out for your proposed development by a suitably qualified professional?	CBC planning application validation requirement	Pre-application, validation and determination	
Have you had an ecological report completed with the findings of completed surveys contained within it?	CBC planning application validation requirement	Pre-validation and determination	
Have you had a BNG assessment (a report and a completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric) completed for your proposed development by a suitably qualified professional?	NPPF / Environment Act 2021	Pre-validation	
Have you identified all possibilities to achieve 10% BNG, calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, on your proposed development site, demonstrating how the mitigation hierarchy has been applied?	NPPF / Environment Act 2021	Pre-validation	

Have you read the relevant biodiversity policies in the Development Plan and applied these to your proposed development?		Pre-determination	
Have you used the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) to inform your on-site and/or off-site biodiversity gain provision for your proposed development?		Pre-determination	
Where relevant, have you consulted Natural England regarding potentially impacting EPS or nationally/internationally designated sites?	NPPF	Pre-determination	
Where relevant, have you consulted NatureSpace with regards to district level licensing for Great Crested Newts (GCN)?		Pre-determination	
Have you incorporated pollinator-friendly and biodiverse planting in the landscaping scheme for your proposed development?	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy	Pre-determination but can be conditioned	
Have you incorporated ecological enhancements such as boundary treatments and boxes for hedgehogs, species-specific bird boxes in open spaces or integrated into buildings, and bee bricks and other invertebrate features on buildings in the landscaping scheme for your proposed development?	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy	Pre-determination but can be conditioned	
Have you incorporated biodiverse Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) solutions in your proposed development?	Policy INF2 'Flood Risk Management' of the Joint Core Strategy See also: Chapter 10 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the	Pre-determination	

	Cheltenham Plan		
Have you followed the guidance in the CBC Tree Strategy with regards to tree protection and provision in your proposed development?	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy CBC Tree Strategy	Pre-determination but can be conditioned	
Has your design for hedgerows and grassland included locally sourced biodiverse and native species where possible?	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy	Pre-determination but can be conditioned	
Have you engaged with local contractors to implement, monitor and report on a long-term management plan (LEMP or HMMP) for your proposed development post-completion?		Pre-commencement	



Draft Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment

Statement of Reasons and Statement of Determination

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes
Regulations 2004

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

September 2025

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Appendix 1: Screening Report issued for consultation

Appendix 2: Emailed responses from SEA/HRA consultation bodies

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Cheltenham Borough Council is preparing a Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). In accordance with legislation, we needed to assess if the SPD could have potential significant effects on the environment and European protected sites, thus requiring a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).
- 1.2. To assess these, during July 2025 we developed our opinion through a Screening Report, which was based on the draft SPD contents. During August 2025, we consulted the three consultation bodies: Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency on the screening opinion to obtain their views. The Screening Report can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.3. During consultation, the three statutory bodies concur with our Screening Report, meaning that the SPD will not have potential significant effects on the environment nor European sites, thus not requiring further assessment. Their answers can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.4. Therefore, this document contains our Statement of Reasons and Statement of Determination produced by Cheltenham Borough Council concluding the process and explaining how we reached this decision.

2. Legal background

- 2.1. Under the requirements of the [European Union Directive 2001/42/EC \(Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) Directive\)](#) and [The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations \(2004\) \(as amended\)](#), plans or programmes that are prepared for certain uses, including town and country planning or land use may be subject to an environmental assessment.
- 2.2. The need for HRA is set out within the [EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC](#) and transposed into British Law by the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](#), to determine whether a plan or programme would have significant adverse effects upon the integrity of internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance, or Natura 2000 sites. These are Special Areas of

Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), proposed SACs, potential SPAs and Ramsar convention sites.

3. Statement of Reasons

- 3.1. The contents of the Nature Recovery SPD were assessed in relation to the criteria set out in these legal requirements. According to legislation, if the three consultation bodies determine that an SEA and a HRA are not required, the statement must include the reasons for this.
- 3.2. **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA):** The screening concluded that the Nature Recovery SPD is unlikely to have significant effects on any Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or programmes. The SPD promotes biodiversity net gain, and the mitigation hierarchy aims to prevent physical damage to habitats. It includes provision for managing non-physical disturbances (e.g. noise, light, vibration), air pollution, recreational pressures, and hydrological changes through planning conditions and Construction Environment Management Plans (CEMPs). For developments near Natura 2000 sites, site-specific HRAs will be required to assess and mitigate any potential impacts.
- 3.3. **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):** The SEA screening determined that the SPD does not set a new framework for development or allocate resources but instead provides technical guidance to support existing policies in the Development Plan. It does not influence other plans in a hierarchical way, nor does it introduce new environmental risks. The SPD is designed to enhance biodiversity, green infrastructure, and sustainable drainage, aligning with the local and strategic nature priorities such as the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Its effects are expected to be positive and limited to Cheltenham Borough, with no transboundary or cumulative impacts. Since the SPD does not trigger significant environmental effects under the SEA Directive criteria, and the Development Plan has already undergone SEA, a new SEA is not required.
- 3.4. The three consulted bodies agreed with our Screening Report, as the SPD does not directly propose development but rather provides guidance within the context of existing policy, no significant adverse effects are anticipated, and therefore, an Appropriate Assessment is not required. This report can be found in Appendix 1.

4. Statement of Determination

- 4.1. Due to reasons stated above, the contents of the draft SPD will not have a significant effect on the environment and/or habitats conservation, therefore not triggering the requirement for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) nor a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) respectively. Hence, the Nature Recovery will now be taken into public consultation.

Appendix 1: Screening Report issued for consultation

Cheltenham Borough Council
Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment

Screening Report

July 2025

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1. Background

Purpose of this report

- 1.1. Cheltenham Borough Council has prepared a draft Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The purpose of this report is to determine whether the contents of the draft SPD may have a significant effect on the environment and/or habitats conservation, therefore triggering the requirement for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) respectively.
- 1.2. Section 2 explains the legislative background, Section 3 delves deeper into the HRA component, Section 4 on the SEA component, whereas Section 5 summarises the conclusions.
- 1.3. This report was produced by the planning policy and development management teams and after assessing the different criteria, concludes the emerging SPD does not require a SEA nor an HRA.

Cheltenham Nature Recovery Strategy Supplementary Planning Document

- 1.4. An SPD is a document which provides additional guidance to those policies already in the Development Plan. Although the SPD is not part of the Development Plan, it is a material consideration for schemes linked to the topics of its contents, which will include biodiversity, biodiversity net gain, ecology, nature recovery, trees, sustainable drainage, and green infrastructure.
- 1.5. The current Development Plan¹ for Cheltenham Borough comprises of the Joint Core Strategy (adopted in 2017) and the Cheltenham Plan (adopted 2020), and they were produced in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at the appropriate time. Both documents were subject to Sustainability Appraisals incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- 1.6. There have been relevant changes to nature legislation since 2020, such as the strengthening of the biodiversity duty, the introduction of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) framework, and the production of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) as set out by the Environment Act 2021. To address this, [Key Priority 2 of the Cheltenham Borough Council Corporate Plan 2023-2027](#) sets out that an Ecology and Biodiversity SPD would be developed in response to the biodiversity crisis, the environmental objectives of the NPPF, the Environment Act 2021 and the

¹ The Development Plan also comprises of the 'saved policies' (including Policy GE1 Public Green Space) in the Cheltenham Borough Local Plan Second Review (adopted in July 2006) produced by Cheltenham Borough Council, as well as Mineral and Waste Plans produced by Gloucestershire County Council.

emerging Gloucestershire LNRS. This Ecology and Biodiversity SPD has been renamed Nature Recovery SPD.

- 1.7. The SPD's main purpose is to provide guidance to amplify policies SD7 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, SD9 Biodiversity and Geodiversity, INF2 Flood Risk Management and INF3 Green Infrastructure of the Joint Core Strategy, and policies GI2 Protection and replacement of trees and GI3 Trees and Development within the Cheltenham Plan.

2. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Background

- 2.1. An HRA is a three-stage process to determine whether a plan or project would have significant adverse effects upon the integrity of internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance, or Natura 2000 sites. These are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), proposed SACs, potential SPAs and Ramsar convention sites.
- 2.2. The first stage is screening, the stage which determines if the proposed plan or project is likely to have significant effects, either on its own or in combination with other proposals on the conservation objectives of a European site.
- 2.3. If the proposed plan or project is likely to have significant effects on the conservation objectives of a European site, the HRA proceeds to the second stage. This is the Appropriate Assessment, which involves a detailed analysis of the potential impacts on the site, including assessing the magnitude and duration of effects and any cumulative impacts from other plans or projects. It also explores ways to avoid or minimise any adverse effects.
- 2.4. If the plan or project is found to have an adverse effect on the European site, the HRA proceeds to the final stage which is Derogation. This stage considers whether the project qualifies for an exemption under specific conditions. This includes assessing if alternative solutions exist and if there are imperative reasons of public interest that override the potential harm to the site.

Legislation

- 2.5. The need for HRA is set out within the [EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC](#) and transposed into British Law by the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](#).

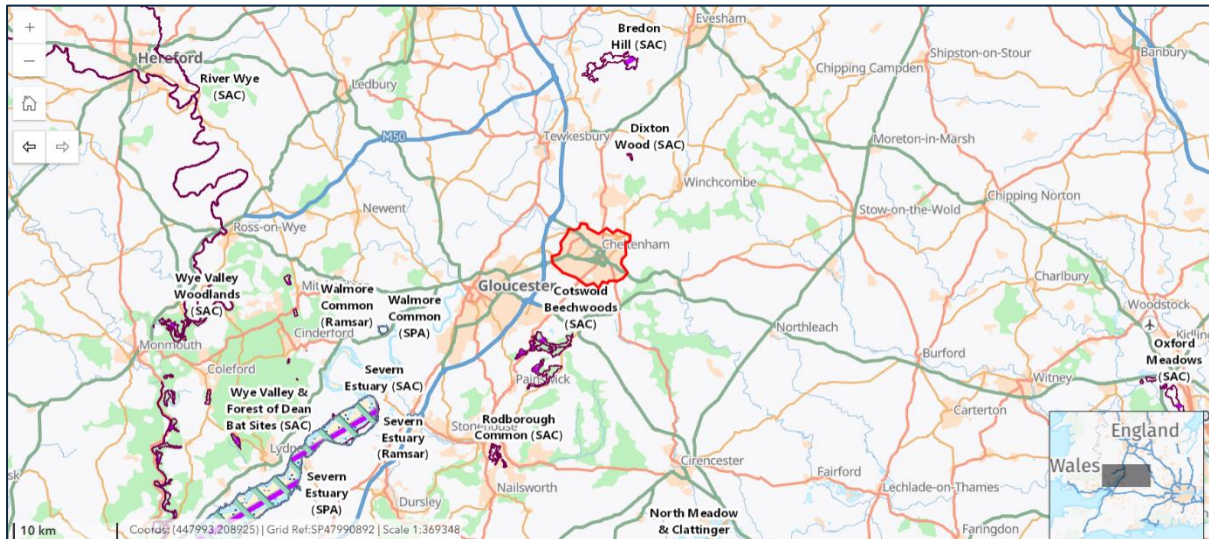
Natura 2000 sites

2.6. Natura 2000 sites with potential impact pathways between the site and Cheltenham are:

- The Severn Estuary RAMSAR/SAC/SPA;
- Cotswolds Beechwoods SAC;
- Rodborough Common SAC;
- Dixon Wood SAC;
- Bredon Hill SAC, and
- Walmore Common RAMSAR/SPA.

Figure 1: Cheltenham (outlined in red) in relation to Natura 2000 sites.

(Source: MAGIC Map, DEFRA, 2025)



HRA screening

2.7. The following criteria are assessed (within Table 1) for this SPD with their potential to cause significant adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites:

- Physical loss or damage to habitat;
- Non-physical disturbance e.g. noise, vibration or light pollution;
- Air pollution;
- Increased recreational pressures;
- Changes to hydrology, such as water quantity and water quality, and
- In-combination effects.

Table 1: Habitats Regulations Assessment screening

Criteria	Assessment	Are the potential effects significant?
Physical loss or damage to habitat	The Nature Recovery SPD advocates for providing a net gain in biodiversity and habitats on development sites both through regulatory and voluntary routes. It sets out how these can be secured via legal agreements or planning conditions. It also emphasises the use of the mitigation hierarchy in all development proposals so that physical loss or damage to habitats is reduced and/or prevented. Physical loss or damage to habitats in or linked to Natura 2000 sites is therefore not anticipated, as a result of the Cheltenham Borough Council Nature Recovery SPD.	No
Non-physical disturbance e.g. noise, vibration or light pollution	The Nature Recovery SPD outlines the impacts that non-physical disturbances like noise, vibration and light pollution can have on wildlife, and how these must be reduced as far as is possible for a development in the interest of local wildlife. It also sets out how mitigation measures will be secured via conditions for Construction Environment Management Plans (CEMPs). For development sites near Natura 2000 sites, an assessment of whether non-physical disturbances will have a potentially significant effect on these sites will be provided in a development-specific Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and any mitigation or compensation measures will be secured via planning condition. Based on the principles set out in the Nature Recovery SPD and the regulatory measures in place for developments in close proximity to Natura 2000 sites, non-physical disturbances to Natura 2000 sites are not anticipated as a result of the Nature Recovery SPD.	No
Air pollution	The Nature Recovery SPD outlines the impacts air pollution can have on wildlife, and how this must be reduced as far as is possible for a development in the interest of local wildlife. It also sets out how mitigation measures will be secured via conditions	No

	for Construction Environment Management Plans (CEMPs). For development sites near Natura 2000 sites, an assessment of whether air pollution will have a potentially significant effect on these sites will be provided in a development-specific Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and any mitigation or compensation measures will be secured via planning condition. Based on the principles set out in the Nature Recovery SPD and the regulatory measures in place for developments near Natura 2000 sites, air pollution to Natura 2000 sites is not anticipated as a result of the Nature Recovery SPD.	
Increased recreational pressures	The Cheltenham Borough Council Nature Recovery SPD neither endorses the use of Natura 2000 sites as recreation sites, nor discourages the use of existing recreational sites in Cheltenham Borough within the context of nature recovery. Increased recreational pressures on Natura 2000 sites are not anticipated because of the Nature Recovery SPD.	No
Changes to hydrology, such as water quantity and water quality	<p>The Nature Recovery SPD advocates for providing a net gain in biodiversity and habitats on development sites, including any with watercourses on or adjacent to them, both through regulatory and voluntary routes. It sets out how these can be secured via legal agreements or planning conditions. It also emphasises the use of the mitigation hierarchy in all development proposals so that watercourses with hydrological links to Natura 2000 sites are not impacted.</p> <p>For development sites with hydrological links to Natura 2000 sites, an assessment of whether the development will have a potentially significant effect on these sites will be provided in a development-specific Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and any mitigation or compensation measures secured via planning condition. Based on the principles set out in the Nature Recovery SPD and the regulatory measures in place for developments in close proximity to Natura 2000 sites, changes to water quantity and quality are therefore not anticipated as a result of the Nature Recovery SPD.</p>	No

In-combination effects	The Nature Recovery SPD is unlikely to have any potentially significant effects on Natura 2000 sites with regards to the above criteria. It will therefore have no in-combination effects with any other proposed plans or projects.	No
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- 2.8. In conclusion, it is considered that the Nature Recovery SPD is unlikely to have significant effects on European (Natura 2000) sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Cheltenham Borough Council Nature Recovery SPD is not required.

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Legislation

- 3.1. Under the requirements of the [European Union Directive 2001/42/EC \(Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) Directive\)](#) and [The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations \(2004\)](#) (as amended), specific types of plans that set out the framework for future development consent of projects must be subject to an environmental assessment.
- 3.2. To screen, it is necessary to determine if a plan will have significant environmental effects using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations. A determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted: The Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England. Within 28 days of making its determination the authority must publish a statement setting out its decision. If it determines that an SEA is not required, the statement must include the reasons for this.

Screening

- 3.3. Table 2 presents a review of the criteria to determine if the emerging SPD could have significant environmental effects.

Table 2 : Strategic Environmental Assessment screening

Criteria	Assessment	Are the potential effects significant?
Characteristics of the plan or programme		
a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regards to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	<p>The framework is set by higher level policies in the Joint Core Strategy and Cheltenham Plan.</p> <p>The SPD will provide further guidance to support the implementation of these biodiversity policies already in the Development Plan. This SPD will not set a framework for the allocation or levels of development within the borough over the Development Plan period, nor does it allocate resources.</p>	No
b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The SPD amplifies policies, which already exist in the Development Plan. It does not create new policy, just technical guidance.	No
c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,	The SPD purpose is to guide the biodiversity criteria of developments. It is an implementation tool for the policies contained in Development Plan.	No
d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	The SPD provides guidance on biodiversity provision, tree planting, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage of developments. Moreover, it draws from the priorities set out in the emerging Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	No
e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment	The SPD has no direct impact on Community legislation. The principle of development is considered through the	No

(e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	Development Plan which has already been subject to an HRA/SEA	
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected		
a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The SPD will not bring projects forward. It will set out guidance that trigger the requirement for biodiversity.	No
b) the cumulative nature of the effects	The SPD provides case by case guidance. The cumulative effects of developments are assessed through the Development Plan policies.	No
c) the transboundary nature of the effects	The SPD applies within the administrative boundaries of Cheltenham Borough only. It is not expected to have any negative effects outside of this area.	No
d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	The SPD will not increase any risks to human health or the environment. On the contrary, it will strive to guide beneficial nature recovery and open space provision.	No
e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The SPD will cover the entire Cheltenham Borough, but it will be mostly triggered for new developments subject to mandatory BNG, thus covering a smaller part of the Borough.	No
f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use.	The anticipated effects on the sustainability of the borough are expected to be positive by providing guidance to support nature recovery policies on the Development Plan and the environmental quality of local spaces, therefore not exceeding ecosystemic limits. Regarding land-use, it is focused on conserving and enhancing nature	No

	and not maximising production from it.	
g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, community or international protection status.	Development Plan policies restrict development in the Cotswold National Landscape and the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. The SPD will not lead to new development within such areas. As the SPD focuses on the enhancement of nature, it could have a positive effect on the protected landscape in those areas.	No

- 3.4. In conclusion, it is considered that the emerging SPD will not have significant effects on the environment, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Therefore, an SEA for the Cheltenham Borough Council Nature Recovery SPD is not required.

Appendix 2: Emailed responses from SEA/HRA consultation bodies

Historic England:

From: Torkildsen, Rohan <Rohan.Torkildsen@HistoricEngland.org.uk>
Sent: 12 August 2025 10:22
To: Javier Guerrero
Subject: RE: Requests Historic England's SEA opinion for draft Nature Recovery SPD

Hi Javier. Thank you for consulting Historic England.

We have no reason to dispute the conclusion of your SEA Screening.

However, might I also take the opportunity to raise the issue of the relevance of the historic environment and Nature Recovery Plans in the preparation of your SPD, mindful of the recent guidance [Nature recovery and the historic environment, Natural England, 2023](#) where protecting and enhancing the historic environment is considered a defined outcome of nature recovery. Might your SPD reflect this?

Many ecologically important sites are heritage assets and may include for example, ancient and veteran trees within historic parks and gardens which serve as important natural resources for foraging opportunities and associated habitats, supporting impressive amounts of wildlife. Historic moats, lakes and other defensive or ornamental water bodies as well as ditches, leats and other modified watercourses provide a range of aquatic habitats; and historic ornamental and functional structures can provide shelter and breeding opportunities for protected species.

It may therefore be appropriate for you to acknowledge links between nature recovery sites and heritage assets esp where projects are being considered; indicating how those assets including their setting and character may be affected, both positively and negatively.

Finally, we sometimes find that particular care needs to be taken when planning significant tree planting in historic environments due to the potential impact on designed views, or below ground archaeology; our guidance may therefore be a useful [Planting Trees for the Future Whilst Protecting the Past](#)

Sincere regards

Rohan Torkildsen
Partnerships Team Leader South West.
Historic Environment Planning Advisor South West.
Regions Group
Historic England, 1st Floor, Fermentation North, Finzels Reach, Hawkins Lane, Bristol BS1 6LQ
0117 975 0679 x 2279 / 0791 705 0513



Ensuring our heritage lives on and is loved for longer.
historicengland.org.uk

Natural England:

From: Celia Fallon <Celia.Fallon@naturalengland.org.uk>
Sent: 15 August 2025 13:44
To: Javier Guerrero; SM-NE-Enquiries (NE)
Cc: John Spurling; Fern Kenyon-Hamp
Subject: RE: Requests Natural England's SEA/HRA opinion for draft Nature Recovery SPD

Dear Javier,

Thank you for your email and sharing the Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document.

I have read through both documents. Could I just check where the SANG map is mentioned on pg 11, is this currently in preparation?

My only other comment would be that as part of the LNRS they have a measure that covers 'all new development and green and blue infrastructure' which may be worth mentioning.

I do not think that there would be any potential significant effects to the environment and the European protected habitats based on the SPD received.

Kind regards,

Celia Fallon
Senior Officer – West Midlands

www.natural-england



Environment Agency:

From: Ruth Clare <ruth.clare@environment-agency.gov.uk>
Sent: 18 August 2025 17:46
To: Javier Guerrero
Cc: Fern Kenyon-Hamp; John Spurling
Subject: RE: Requests Environment Agency's SEA opinion for draft Nature Recovery SPD

Dear Javier

Thank you for your email relating to SEA Screening of the Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). We have reviewed the information and, noting that the SPD does not allocate sites for development, and seeks to bolster existing policies aimed at enhancing nature recovery, we concur with your opinion that SEA (and HRA) are not required in this case.

Kind regards,
Ruth.

Ruth Clare BA (Hons), MSc, MRTPI, PIEMA

She/Her - [\(Why is this here?\)](#)

Planning Specialist – Sustainable Places

Environment Agency - West Midlands Area (Gloucestershire)

Incident Role: Area Engagement Officer

Direct contact: 07500 608427 ruth.clare@environment-agency.gov.uk Team email:

westmidsplanning@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency, Riversmeet House, Northway Lane, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, GL20 8JG.

[Environment Agency: Meeting net zero by 2030](#)

**Creating a better place
for people and wildlife**



Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet 21 October 2025

Budget Strategy, Process & Timetable 2026-27

Accountable member:

Cllr Peter Jeffries, Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets

Accountable officer:

Jon Whitlock, Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to propose a broad strategy and outline a process for setting the budget and council tax for 2026-27. It outlines several principles that need to be established at this stage to enable budget preparation to commence.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. approves the budget setting timetable at Appendix 2 and outlined in section 3 of this report.**
- 2. approves the outline budget strategy outlined in section 4.**
- 3. notes the £295k overspend reported to Cabinet in September 2025 and the large amount of work which will be required to close this gap and deliver the required savings and efficiencies in 2025/26.**
- 4. notes the intention for this Council to remain working together with the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool in 2026-27 as outlined in section 7 if applicable.**

- 5. requests that the Section 151 Officer, Deputy Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets consider suggestions from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in preparing the interim budget proposals for 2026-27.**
-

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

This report sets out the budgetary process for 2026-27 and the general financial parameters under which the budget will be prepared.

There are no property/asset implications arising from the content of the report or recommendations.

Signed off by: Jon Whitlock, Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer), jon.whitlock@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

None specifically arising from the report recommendations. The budget setting process is governed by the Budget and Policy Framework Rules (contained in the Council Constitution) and the process recommended in this report is designed to meet the requirements of those Rules.

Signed off by: One Legal, legalservices@onelegal.co.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The annual budget aims to deliver the outcomes defined by the Council's corporate business plan, including the priority to be carbon neutral by 2030, and resourcing should be aligned to the delivery of corporate plan priorities.

Signed off by: Maizy McCann, Climate Officer maizy.mccan@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Key priority 1: Securing our future
- Key priority 2: Quality homes, safe and strong communities
- Key priority 3: Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity
- Key priority 4: Reducing inequalities, supporting better outcomes
- Key priority 5: Taking care of your money

2 Background

- 2.1 The responsibility for preparing the budget in line with the Council's policy framework, taking proper account of technical and professional advice and presenting proposals to Council for approval, lies with the Cabinet.
- 2.2 It is customary for the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, at this time of year, to present a report on the budget process. Accordingly, this report aims to outline a process designed to arrive at an acceptable budget.
- 2.3 The budget and policy framework requires that the Council publish a timetable setting out the key dates in the budget setting process. A draft budget timetable, attached for approval at Appendix 2, sets out the sequence of events leading up to the setting of the budget and council tax level for 2026-27. The timetable allows sufficient time to consider alternative budget proposals or amendments put forward to the budget proposed by the Cabinet.

3 The Budget Setting Timetable and Process

- 3.1 The proposed key stages in the process for setting the budget for 2026-27 are summarised in the timetable at Appendix 2 and are detailed below. The timing of events may change as the process develops.

Budget Preparation

- 3.2 Between October and December 2025 the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets and officers will work with the Cabinet towards the creation of 'interim budget' proposals which will make the following assumptions:
- The projection will be for a standstill budget, prepared under a general philosophy of no growth in levels of service.
 - Budgeted for employee pay inflation and an increase in member's allowances for 2026-27 which will include contingency for any pay award.
 - An inflationary increase of the relevant costs in the base budget.
 - The impact of prevailing interest rates on the investment portfolio will be assessed in preparing the budget. The Treasury Management Panel will consider the position in respect of treasury management activity during the budget setting cycle.
 - An assessment of the charges made to Cheltenham Borough Homes and the Housing Revenue Account will be incorporated in the budget proposals, including assessing the impact on the General Fund of the change in activity for 2025-26 and beyond following the transfer of housing services back in-house.
 - A council tax increase of 3% will be used for modelling purposes.

Publication of Initial Budget Proposals

- 3.3 The Cabinet will present its initial budget proposals and publish them for consultation in line with the advertised plan. The initial budget proposals will include all general fund revenue, capital and housing revenue account estimates to meet a balanced budget, together with assumptions made on future council tax and rent levels.
- 3.4 The Budget Scrutiny Working Group will also support the budget process during this consultation period by considering options for addressing any funding gap. The consultation process is outlined in more detail in Section 10. This also provides an opportunity for alternative budget proposals to be submitted to the Director of Finance & Assets assessment.
- 3.5 The Autumn Statement has been confirmed for Wednesday, 26 November 2025, later than usual due to procedural delays in notifying the Office for Budget Responsibility and the need to address complex fiscal challenges. This delay has a knock-on effect for local government, with the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26 now expected to be published in late December, after the Council will have already submitted our initial budget proposals. We expect to receive an initial indication of the settlement once the policy statement is published, which should help inform initial budget decisions.

Final Budget Proposals and Council Approval

- 3.6 At the end of the consultation period, the Cabinet will draw up firm budget proposals having regard to the responses received. In drawing together its budget proposals to Council the report will reflect the comments made by consultees and the Cabinet's response. The firm budget proposals will be presented to Council at the budget setting meeting for decision in February 2026.

Housing Revenue Accounts

- 3.7 Draft proposals for the Housing Revenue Account will also form part of the same process for considering the General Fund revenue and capital budgets.

4 Cabinet Budget Strategy

- 4.1 The 2025-26 budget monitoring report presented in September 2025 reported a forecast net overspend against the budget of £295k for the current financial year. The variances will continue to be monitored through the year, in particular the progress on at risk saving targets.
- 4.2 Our current financial position demonstrates that even with the financial planning decisions taken by Officers and Members over recent years, we are still facing significant uncertainty and volatility in managing the resources available to the Council to deliver services to our residents and communities.
- 4.3 The proposal to fund the projected overspend using balances and reserves will

provide the council with a short term solution. However, the at risk savings for 2025-26 will still need to be delivered in 2026-27, this is not a sustainable funding mechanism.

4.4 Balances and reserves have reached their lowest levels in years and we cannot continue to rely on finite resources to meet the budget gap without restoring reserve levels closer to their 2019/20 levels. To continue providing high-quality services to residents, decisions need to be taken about savings and efficiencies in order to replenish the resources used since 2020/21.

4.5 The 2026/27 budget proposal and Medium Term Financial Strategy need to set out how the council will balance these long and short term pressures, ensure levels of reserves are maintained appropriately whilst also continuing to focus resources on our key priorities. This is a huge challenge and Officers and Members will need to continue to be proactive in reviewing efficiencies and prioritising resources to bridge the budget gap.

4.6 In 2025/26 a four-year savings strategy was approved which was weighted towards delivering £1.130m of base budget savings in year one. This is an ambitious target, particularly in the current economic environment and officers and Members have been working together to review options for re-aligning our resources.

4.7 Some proposals have already been implemented and key decisions taken where applicable in line with the constitution. Further proposals are being developed in consultation with the Cabinet to build a four-year plan to balance the budget gap. The four-year proposal will be available as part of the draft budget for consultation in December 2025.

5 Business Rates Retention – Pooling Arrangements

5.1 In October 2012, Council approved the principal of Cheltenham joining the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool, subject to a thorough assessment of risks and rewards and agreement of satisfactory governance arrangements.

5.2 Continuation within the pool was delegated to the Section 151 Officer and Chief Executive and this is reviewed on an annual basis.

5.3 The Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool was set up in 2013/14 to maximise the business rate income retained within the County and to support economic growth within the area of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

5.4 The current membership of the Gloucestershire business rates pool is being reviewed on annual basis to benefit Gloucestershire as a whole, with a commitment that whatever the membership, all authorities would continue to receive a share of any pooling gain. However, it is likely that business rate pooling will end in 2026/27 because the government is planning a full reset of the business rate retention system from April 2026 which would remove the pooling arrangements to redistribute growth.

6 Reasons for recommendations

6.1 The Council is required to agree a budget process and timetable as part of the Financial Regulations set out in the council's constitution.

7 Alternative options considered

7.1 It is important that any political group wishing to make alternative budget proposals should discuss them, in confidence, with the Head of Finance (preferably channelled through one Group representative) to ensure that the purpose, output and source of funding of any proposed change is identified.

7.2 Given the financial pressures and the potentially very difficult decisions which will have to be made, it is very important that there is time for members to carefully consider and evaluate any alternative budget proposals. Political groups wishing to put forward alternative proposals are not obliged to circulate them in advance of the budget-setting meeting, but in the interests of sound and lawful decision-making, it would be more effective to do so, particularly given that they may have implications for staff.

8 Consultation and feedback

8.1 The formal budget consultation period will be no less than four weeks and will take place during 16 December 2025 to 16 January 2026. The Cabinet will seek to ensure that the opportunity to have input into the budget consultation process is publicised to the widest possible audience. During the consultation period all interested parties will be welcome to provide feedback on the initial budget proposals. Groups, businesses, tenants, residents, staff and trade unions will be encouraged to comment on the draft budget proposals at this time. They will be asked to identify, as far as possible, how alternative proposals complement the Council's Corporate Plan, how they will be financed, and how they will help the Council to achieve best value. Presentations will be made to key business groups as part of the consultation process.

8.2 The Budget Scrutiny Working Group and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be invited to review the interim budget proposals in the meetings scheduled for 7 January 2026 and feed any comments back to the Cabinet.

8.3 Whilst the Cabinet will be as flexible as possible, it is unlikely that any comments received after the consultation period can be properly assessed to consider their full implications and to be built into the budget. Accordingly, if alternative budget proposals are to come forward, this should happen as early as possible.

8.4 All comments relating to the initial budget proposals should be returned to the Head of Finance by the end of the consultation period for consideration by the Cabinet in preparing their final budget proposals. Consultation questionnaires will be available in key locations and for completion on line via the Council's website. Comments can be e-mailed to moneymatters@cheltenham.gov.uk.

9 Key risks

9.1 The key risks are set out in Appendix 1.

Report author:

Jon Whitlock, Head of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer),
jon.whitlock@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. Risk Assessment
2. Budget Setting Timetable

Background information:

Budget Monitoring Report 2025-26 - Q1

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
52	If the Council is unable to come up with long term solutions which close the gap in the medium term financial strategy then it will find it increasingly difficult to prepare budgets year on year without making unplanned cuts in service provision.	Cabinet	5	4	20	Reduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commercial strategy & activities - Quarterly budget monitoring - Cabinet engagement - budget proposals - Increased capacity in the finance team - Cabinet Away Day challenge and decisions Ongoing monitoring of targets for workstreams/service s	ED Finance and Assets	Ongoing
403	Prioritisation of capital resources – If CBC are unable to prioritise medium term projects and programmes which require significant capital financing, then it will increasingly have to rely of borrowing to fund service investments increasing	Cabinet	5	4	20	Reduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing review and alignment of the capital programme with the Corporate Plan - Quarterly budget monitoring - Cabinet engagement - budget proposals 	ED Finance and Assets	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	the pressure on our revenue budgets to fund repayments.						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gateway reviews of all projects through the Corporate Programme office - Cabinet Away Day challenge and decisions Business case and approval for all new projects, including allocation of resource and budgets		
53	If General Balances are not strengthened then insufficient reserves will be available to cover unanticipated spend or deficits resulting in the levels which will consequently fall below the minimum required level as recommended by the Section 151 Officer in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy	Director of Finance & Assets	5	3	15	Reduce	The MTFs is clear about the need to enhance reserves and identifies a required reserves strategy for managing this issue. In preparing the budget for 2025/26 and in ongoing budget monitoring, consideration will continue to be given to the use of fortuitous windfalls	ED Finance and Assets	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
							and potential future under spends with a view to strengthening reserves whenever possible.		
199	If the Government review concludes significant changes to business rate retention, Government grant funding or Council Tax generation for Cheltenham then the MTFS budget gap may increase, requiring greater savings than already planned.	Director of Finance & Assets	5	4	20	Reduce	<p>The Council joined the Gloucestershire pool to share the risk of fluctuations in business rates revenues retained by the Council.</p> <p>The Gloucestershire S151 Officers continue to monitor business rates income projections and the performance and membership of the pool / pilot.</p> <p>Work with members and Gloucestershire LEP to ensure Cheltenham grows its business rate base.</p>	ED Finance and Assets	Ongoing

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	ED Finance and Assets	Ongoing

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Date	Action
10 October 2025	Deadline to submit CTB1 return to MHCLG .
21 October 2025	Cabinet approve the budget strategy - guidelines, timetable and estimated funding gap for 2026/27 and the Cabinet's approach to the budget / MTFS
October and November 2025	Leadership Team work with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Assets to identify options for efficiencies and additional income.
10 November 2025	Treasury Management Panel to consider budget estimates for treasury management budget assumptions.
26 November 2025	Government Autumn Statement announcement.
3 December 2025	Deadline for preparation of the draft budget, including proposals for savings / income and growth to be identified for the council and its partner organisations.
5 December 2025	Calculate taxbase figure for Section 151 Officer. Sign off under delegated powers and production of briefing note for Lead Member after council decision on 16 December re council tax support scheme
15 December 2025	Council approves council tax support scheme.
16 December 2025	S151 Officer to sign off the Council tax base
16 December 2025	Cabinet present interim budget proposals for consultation incorporating partner organisations budgets including proposals for growth, savings and levels of fees and charges.
16 December 2025 to 16 January 2026	Cabinet consult on interim budget proposals including the public and the business community
Throughout January 2026	Trade Union meetings on draft budget proposals.
	Budget Working group - review consultation and make recs to O&S committee on budget
	O&S Committee consider recommendations from budget working group and forward to Cabinet/Council
	Treasury Management Panel – consider final recommendations to Cabinet in respect of treasury management activity
20 January 2026	Deadline for submission of alternative budget proposals to Financial Services for validation.
20 January 2026	Deadline for preparation of final council budget incorporating final proposals for savings / income and growth from partner organisations.
27 January 2026	Deadline for Cabinet/Council papers on final budget proposal and consultation exercise
30 January 2026	Approve final NNDR1 estimate and advise County Council and DLUHC
3 February 2026	Police & Crime Panel notify level of precept
18 February 2026	County Council due to approve budget and set Council Tax level

Date	ActiPage 120
24 February 2026	Cabinet present final budget proposals including response to consultation exercise
27 February 2026	Council meet to approve Cheltenham Borough Council budget - approve proposed Cabinet or alternative budget (approved in principal) and the Council tax resolution (includes GCC and police tax)
27 February 2026 – 2 March 2026	Council tax bill processing
3 March 2026 - 13 March 2026	Council tax bills printed/packed
By 16 March 2026	Council Tax Bills to be issued (14 days notice required before first payment - some payments due on 1st April)