CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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 policies [1]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)

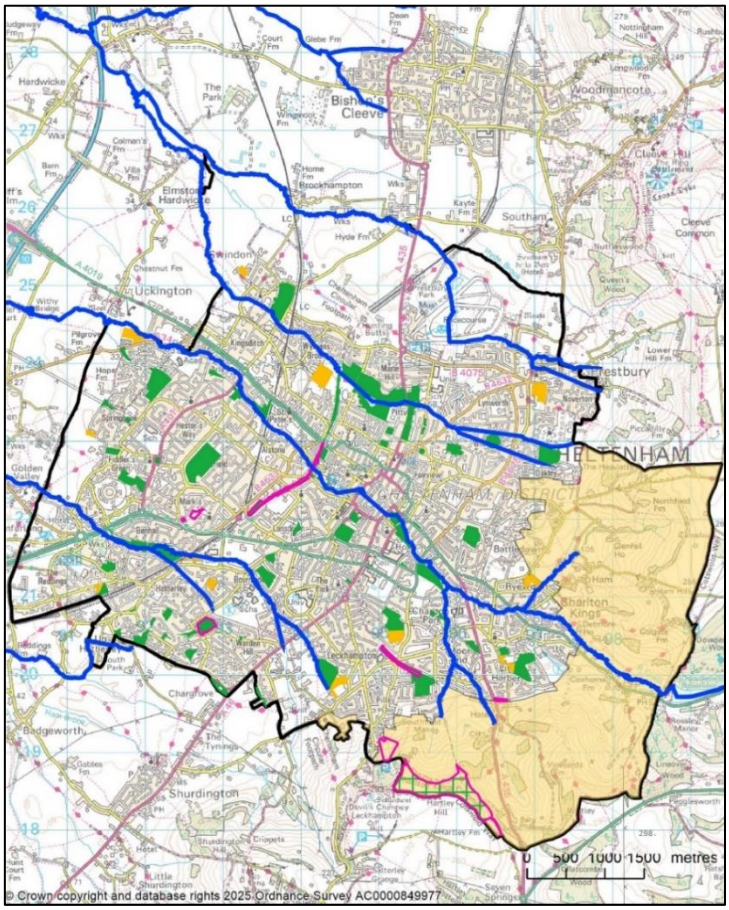


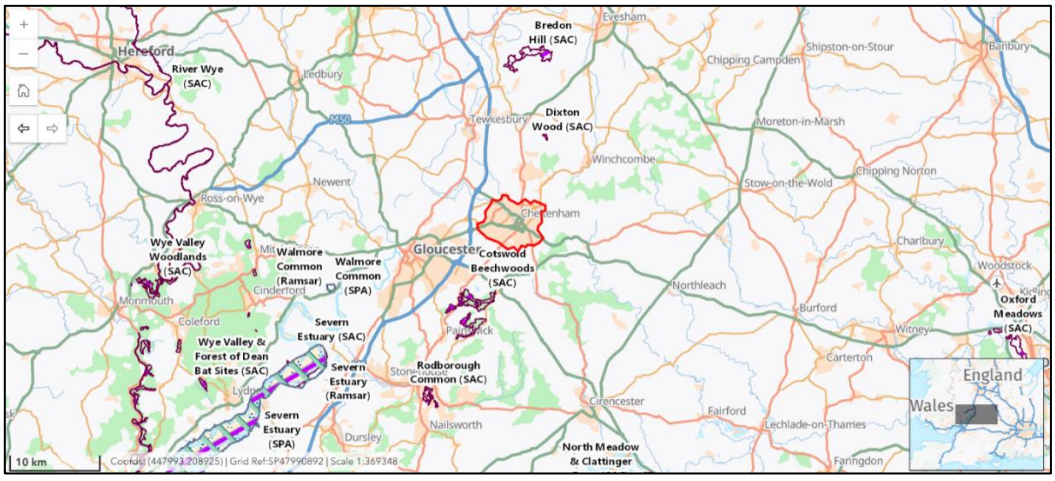
Figure 2. Calcareous grassland on Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham

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

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 UK[4], 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 and[5] 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.

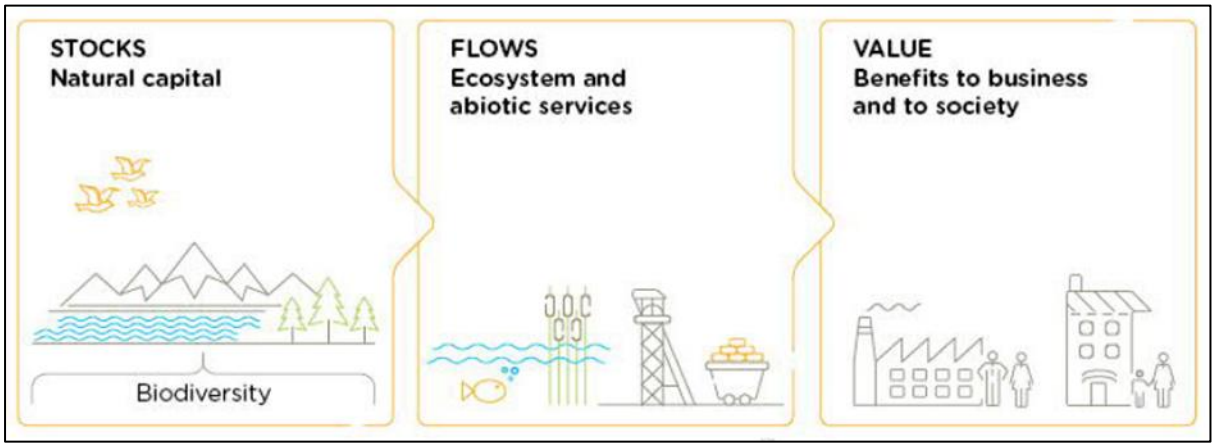
1.16 To address biodiversity degradation, Cheltenham Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 sets the task to '*Develop an Ecology and Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to further support sustainable development*'. Key Priority 2 states that '*we can position ourselves to offer advice and 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	• Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan • Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan	Interactive Landscape Character Map
SD9	JCS, page 59	• 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	• 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	• 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 Gain[6]) 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 (EcIA) 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:

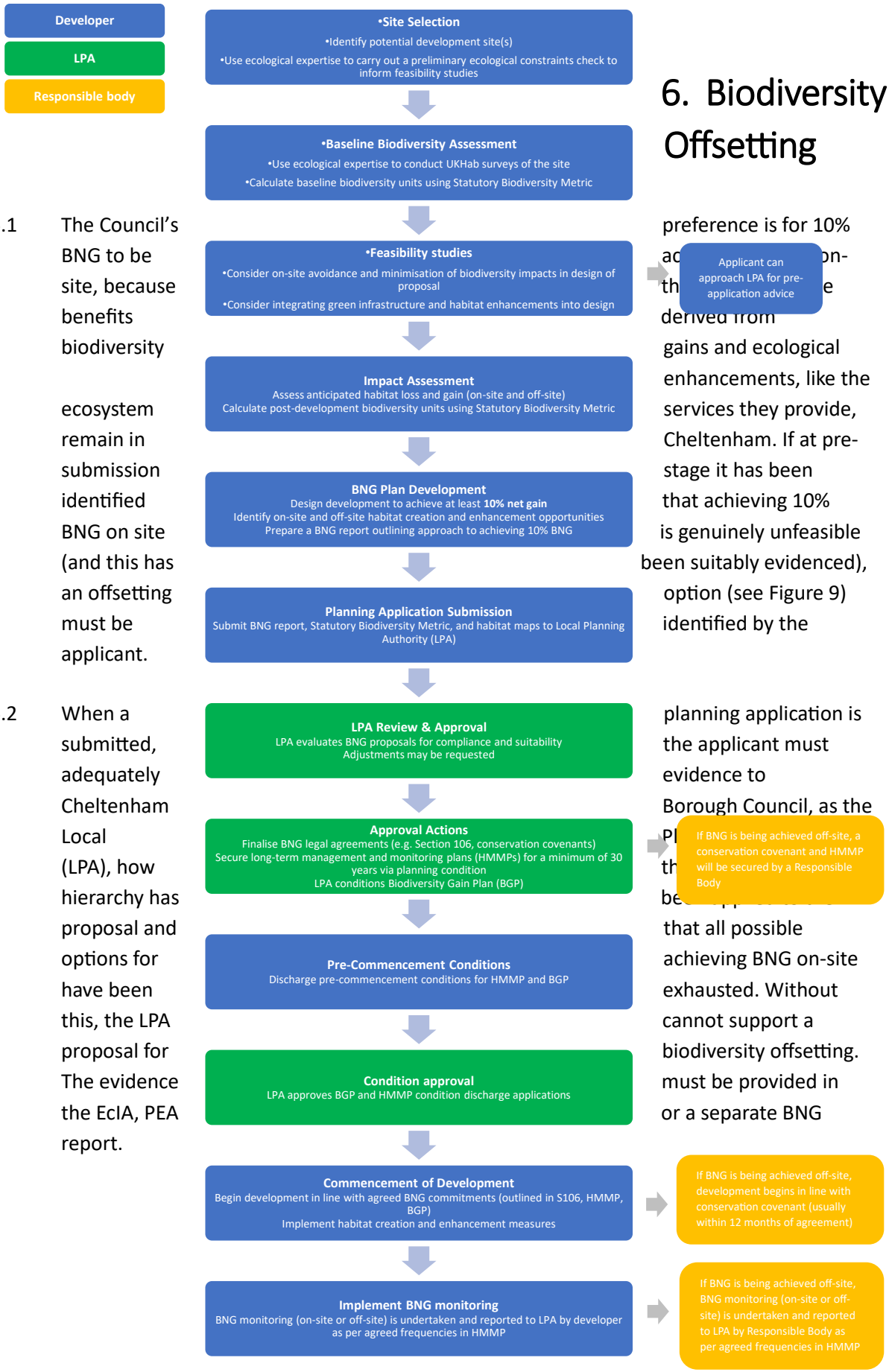
i. A Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP),

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 preference is for 10% BNG to be ac on-site, because th e benefits derived from biodiversity gains and ecological enhancements, like the ecosystem services they provide, remain in Cheltenham. If at pre-submission stage it has been identified that achieving 10% BNG on site is genuinely unfeasible (and this has been suitably evidenced), an offsetting option (see Figure 9) must be identified by the applicant.

6.2 When a planning application is submitted, the applicant must adequately evidence to Cheltenham Borough Council, as the Local Pl (LPA), how th hierarchy has be that all possible proposal and achieving BNG on-site options for exhausted. Without have been cannot support a this, the LPA biodiversity offsetting. proposal for must be provided in The evidence or a separate BNG the EcIA, PEA report.

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

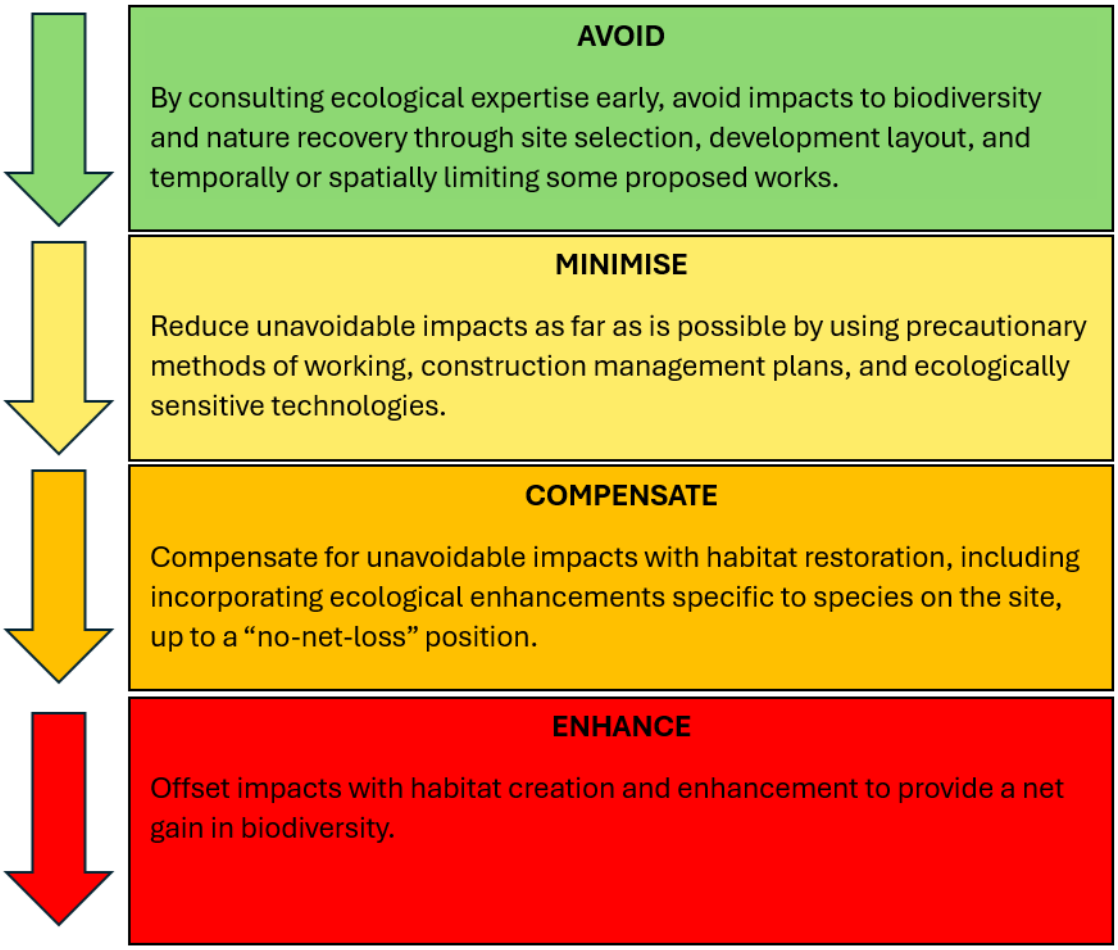
District Level Licensing for Great Crested Newts in Cheltenham

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.

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



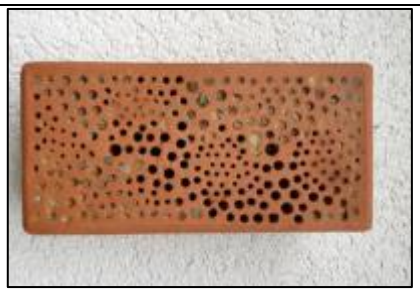
Scheme design

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**
<u>Pollinator friendly and biodiverse planting</u> 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.	 *Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD*	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure ' of the Joint Core Strategy
<u>Green roofs and living walls</u> 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	  *Photo sources: livingroofs.org*	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy:

<u>Boundary treatments and boxes for hedgehogs</u> 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.	  *Photo sources: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD*	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy
<u>Bird box provision in open spaces</u> 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	 *Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD*	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy

<u>Bird box provision integral to buildings</u> To support species such as swallows, house martins, sparrows, swifts, starlings, barn owls, and kestrels, integrate nesting and roosting features into building designs. 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. 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.	 *Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD*	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy
Incorporate Bee Bricks and other invertebrate features built into developments	 *Photo source: South Gloucestershire Biodiversity SPD*	Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy

<u>Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)</u> 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. 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. DEFRA recently released updated the national standards for SUDS – available here: **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-sustainable-drainage-systems** 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	 *Photo source: Cheltenham Borough Council*	Policy INF2 'Flood Risk Management' of the Joint Core Strategy See also: Chapter 10 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Cheltenham Plan
<u>Specific measures for tree provision</u> To come from the CBC Tree Strategy when finalised – see section 8		Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure' of the Joint Core Strategy

Hedgerows 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	 *Photo source: Suffolk Wildlife Trust*	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure ' of the Joint Core Strategy Policy SD9 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' of the Joint Core Strategy
Grassland 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	 *Photo source: Cheltenham Borough Council website*	Policy INF3 'Green Infrastructure ' of the Joint Core Strategy

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 objectives[7]. 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	