

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 17 March 2026

Biodiversity Report

Accountable member:

Councillor Mike Collins, Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control

Accountable officer:

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director of Planning and Building Control

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: No

Executive summary:

This report seeks to adopt Cheltenham Borough Council's Biodiversity Report for the period 2026–2031, fulfilling the strengthened statutory biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021. The report sets out

- the borough's key habitats, species,
- designated sites and green infrastructure,
- summarises the actions undertaken across planning, land management and community programmes, and
- outlines the progress made since the Council's first consideration of the duty.

It establishes a clear ecological baseline, identifies the Council's adopted actions (including Biodiversity Net Gain implementation), and sets out future priority actions aligned with the [Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), [the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan](#) and the forthcoming Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document.

The report is required to meet statutory reporting obligations and provides an evidence

base for the Council's ongoing work to conserve and enhance biodiversity across Cheltenham.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. agrees that the biodiversity report (2026- 2031) be adopted.**
 - 2. delegates authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control, 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.**
-

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from adopting the Biodiversity Report. Any future actions identified within the report that require funding will be subject to separate approval processes. The report does not itself commit the Council to new expenditure, changes in asset holdings or additional property related responsibilities.

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

1.2 Legal implications

The Council must comply with the strengthened biodiversity duty contained in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as amended by Sections 102–103 of the Environment Act 2021. This duty requires public authorities to consider, take and report on actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Adoption and publication of this Biodiversity Report fulfils the requirement to report at least every five years. Any future biodiversity related actions that require legal agreements, such as Biodiversity Net Gain delivery mechanisms, will follow separate legal processes.

Signed off by: Alison McKane, Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer,
Alison.McKane@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The Biodiversity Report complements the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and contributes towards achieving Net Zero by 2030. Enhancing biodiversity supports climate resilience through improved habitat quality, natural flood management, increased tree cover and sustainable land management. The report identifies biodiversity actions that help reduce carbon emissions (e.g., tree planting, reduced mowing, habitat restoration) and improve ecological connectivity. A Climate Impact

Assessment will accompany the final version of the report as required.

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

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity.

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The Equality Impact Assessment (Stage 1) screening identifies no negative equalities impacts arising from the adoption of this report. Improvements in green space quality, biodiversity and nature access may have positive impacts for residents, particularly those with limited access to natural environments.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

- Through normal service delivery and reporting on our [Biodiversity Duty](#).
 - Monitoring of biodiversity actions will take place through service plans, the Climate and Environmental reporting framework, and statutory biodiversity reporting requirements. The next report reviewing the Council's biodiversity duty will be published within five years (2031).
-

2 Background

2.1 The Environment Act 2021 strengthened the biodiversity duty applying to all public authorities, requiring them to consider, take and report actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Cheltenham Borough Council published its first consideration report to establish an initial baseline of actions. The new Biodiversity Report (2026–2031) updates this baseline.

2.2 The report highlights several positive outcomes, including;

- strengthened integration of biodiversity considerations into decision making processes,
- enhanced management of Council owned land,
- expanded tree planting and habitat improvements, and
- growing partnerships with local environmental organisations.

2.3 The Council has also successfully delivered mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), supported by increased ecological capacity and updated planning processes. During the reporting period, seven approved biodiversity gain plans

have collectively delivered measurable ecological gains, including **1.09 habitat units and 0.56 hedgerow units**, demonstrating early effectiveness in embedding BNG requirements.

2.4 In addition to meeting the immediate statutory deadline, the Council must also prepare for ongoing requirements. Under the Environment Act, authorities must publish subsequent Biodiversity Duty Reports at least every five years. The next full report will therefore need to be produced and published no later than March 2031, although the Council may choose to report earlier to align with other strategic planning and monitoring cycles. Together, these requirements ensure that the Council maintains a transparent, evidence-based approach to biodiversity enhancement, and that progress continues to be monitored and embedded across all service areas.

3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 Adopting the Biodiversity Report (2026–2031) is necessary to ensure Cheltenham Borough Council complies with the statutory biodiversity duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021. The Biodiversity Report establishes a robust evidence base that underpins the Council's strategic planning functions. It supports the development of the Strategic and Local Plan, informs the forthcoming Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document, and aligns with national frameworks including mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Gloucestershire. By summarising Cheltenham's ecological assets, designated sites, habitat networks and species, the report enables the Council to make informed policy decisions and target future action where it will have the greatest ecological value.

3.2 The report also consolidates the work already undertaken across multiple services, including planning, green spaces, climate and sustainability, enforcement and community engagement. It evidences the Council's commitment to biodiversity through initiatives such as tree planting programmes, preparation and approval of the recent Tree Strategy, reduced mowing regimes, wildflower meadow creation, habitat restoration, ecological assessments and the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain mechanisms. Adoption will strengthen transparency and accountability.

3.3 The Biodiversity Report provides a publicly accessible summary of how the Council is delivering nature recovery in line with local, regional and national priorities. As environmental legislation and planning requirements continue to evolve, adopting this report ensures Cheltenham Borough Council remains compliant, proactive and aligned with best practice. It provides clarity and direction to officers, councillors, stakeholders and residents regarding the Council's biodiversity commitments and the actions it intends to pursue between 2026 and 2031.

4 Alternative options considered

4.1 Not applicable as the publication of the Biodiversity Report is a legal requirement.

5 Consultation and feedback

5.1 Preparation of the Biodiversity Report involved internal consultation across Planning Policy, Development Management, Green Spaces, Climate and Sustainability, Trees, Enforcement and Legal services. Relevant officers provided input on current actions, policy alignment and future priorities.

6 Key risks

6.1 Failure to publish the Biodiversity Duty Report by the statutory deadline (12 weeks after the end of the calendar year) would place the Council in breach of its legal obligations under the Environment Act 2021. Non-compliance could lead to reputational damage, increased external scrutiny, and potential challenge from stakeholders or regulatory bodies. This risk is mitigated through timely preparation of the report and Cabinet approval ahead of the publication deadline.

Report author:

Emma Bazill, Graduate Planning Policy Officer, emma.bazill@cheltenham.gov.uk

John Spurling, Planning Policy Manager (Interim), john.spurling@cheltenham.gov.uk

Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
- iii. Biodiversity Report 2026

Background information:

For reference: [Biodiversity duty first consideration report](#), [Environmental Act 2021](#).

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 Biodiversity Report is not produced or published, Cheltenham Borough Council will have failed to fulfil its Biodiversity Duty.	Director of Planning & Building Control	5	1	5	Accept	Informal, internal consultations with specialists in relevant fields	Director of Planning & Building Control	Cabinet decision 17 th March 2026 And publication by 26 th of March 2026

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: 17 th February 2026
Signature: <i>John Spurling</i>	

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

Other

If other, please specify: report

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

Biodiversity report

Is this new or existing?

New or proposed

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

Legal requirement

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

Aims: The aim is to fulfil the Biodiversity Duty for local authorities as set out in the 2021 Environment Act, and to follow Key priority 3 in the Cheltenham Corporate plan.

Objectives: The objectives are to highlight key plans, partnerships and biodiversity net gain information from Cheltenham borough council; as well as delivering biodiversity related policies.

Outcomes: Delivery of biodiversity related policies

Benefits:	To improve, maintain and preserve Cheltenham’s biodiversity.
-----------	--

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:

No identified impacts

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 Two if required – see below – or delete if not required.