

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 14 April 2026

Adoption of Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document

Accountable member:

Councillor Mike Collins, Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control lead

Accountable officer:

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director of Planning & Building Control

Ward(s) affected:

All

Key Decision: Yes

Executive summary:

This Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides clear guidance to ensure development in Cheltenham protects and enhances biodiversity, in line with the Environment Act 2021, mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), and the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Although not part of the statutory Development Plan, it is a material consideration for all proposals affecting biodiversity, trees, or green infrastructure. It is one of the Council's priorities - Key priority 3: Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity

The SPD establishes that early ecological assessment and nature-led design are essential to ensuring development avoids harm and delivers meaningful ecological enhancement. It concludes that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) should be delivered on-site wherever feasible, with off-site provision used only where this has been clearly justified against the national mitigation hierarchy. Long-term habitat management is identified as critical to securing durable ecological outcomes, and the SPD confirms that this must be secured through enforceable mechanisms and proportionate monitoring arrangements.

The SPD further concludes that integrating green and blue infrastructure offers a

practical and achievable way for all scales of development to contribute to nature recovery. This includes measures such as biodiverse Sustainable Drainage Systems, (SuDS) species-rich grassland, native tree planting, hedgerows, green roofs, and enhancements for priority species. Aligning development with the [Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), which was adopted by Cheltenham Borough Council on 11 March 2026, is identified as essential to strengthening ecological connectivity and delivering nature recovery at a landscape scale.

Finally, the SPD highlights that strengthened monitoring, reporting and enforcement are necessary to ensure that commitments made through the planning process are delivered in practice. Overall, it provides a robust framework ensuring that development contributes meaningfully to nature recovery and supports Cheltenham's response to the climate and ecological emergencies and supports our commitment to the [Biodiversity Duty](#) introduced by the Environment Act 2021.

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. agrees that the Nature Recovery Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix 4) be approved for adoption;**
- 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 or corrections to the document prior to adoption.**

1. Implications

1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

None arising from this report.

Signed off by: Ela Jankowska – Finance Business Partner, 23.03.2026

Ela.Jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk

1.2 Legal implications

- 1.2.1 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.
- 1.2.2 The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026 came into effect on 2 March 2026 ("the Commencement Date"). Under Schedule 1 para 6(2) an authority may continue to prepare and make arrangements for the adoption of a proposed supplementary planning document on or after the Commencement

Date, provided that the supplementary planning document is adopted no later than 30th June 2026.

Signed off by: Alison McKane, Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer

alison.mckane@cheltenham.gov.uk **Date:** 24.03.2026

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: 19.03.26

1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

Key Priority 3: Reducing carbon, achieving council net zero, creating biodiversity

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

A full equality impact assessment of the SPD has been undertaken, please see Appendix 2.

1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

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

2 Background

2.1A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a document, which details and guides the policies already within the Development Plan. The Development Plan includes the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury [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. Consultation took place from 7 November 2025 to 7 December 2025. A total of 19 responses were received

3 Reasons for recommendations

3.1 To allow the Nature Recovery SPD to be adopted to support the delivery of the key priorities in the adopted corporate plan and ensure the securing of Nature Recovery in the Borough. To manage our spaces and enhance our biodiversity and approach to development in a way which leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state.

4 Alternative options considered

4.1 An alternative option would be not to approve the SPD. However, this would be contrary to the councils’ corporate objective related to biodiversity and nature recovery, would not help improve outcomes in the planning process.

5 Consultation and feedback

5.1 The development of the SPD has been informed by informal consultation with various specialist Officers, including those from Planning, Climate Change, Tree Specialists and Ecologist. Input from lead Cabinet Members was garnered early on to help inform and steer the SPD.

5.2 Informal consultation was undertaken with external partners such as the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership and their input sought as experts in the field of nature and biodiversity.

5.3 Consultation on the SPD took place from 7 November 2025 to 7 December 2025. Representations (comments) on the SPD have been reviewed as set out in Table 1: Main Issues Raised, including from organisations such as the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Historic England as well as from Councillors. This table summaries how the comments have been addressed.

Table 1: Main Issues Raised

Main Issues Raised	How they have been addressed
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Embedded awareness of built heritage and veteran trees, protecting historic parks as part of the plan to protect ancient/ veteran trees	The SPD has now been changed to reflect the importance of the relationship between nature and historic environment.
SPD should require protection of important hedgerows, veteran and notable trees and the six local wildlife sites identified by the Gloucestershire wildlife trust	This has not been directly addressed in the SPD as it is present in the Cheltenham tree strategy, approved by Cabinet on 24 February 2026. However, more guidance has been included on green infrastructure.
Concern that existing local policies are too vague to refuse development	Some wording has been changed. However, the document acts as guidance and not policy. With every heading a link to a relevant policy has been made.
Concerns on enforcement capacity and mechanism particularly around Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	The BNG section has been rewritten to make the enforcement process clearer.
Issue raised regarding the SPD stating that habitats within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) have high strategic significance and those outside of LNRS have low strategic significance. The wording should reflect that significance applies to habitats mapped within areas that could become of particular importance under the LNRS.	This wording has been changed and corrected to reflect that significance applies to habitats mapped within areas that could become of importance under the LNRS.
Lack of strong green infrastructure requirements.	Additional guidance on green infrastructure has been added.
Tree strategy should have target % for planting, calculating lost trees and tree canopy.	The approach for this SPD is to target tree retention and planting based on more subtle data points as canopy would be enhanced / optimised as a result. For example, we can look at the percentage of large-growing species per ward and look to increase that category of trees in the next planting season. The tree strategy is a separate document approved by Cabinet on 24 February 2026.

6 Key risks

6.1 Failure to adopt the SPD would limit the Council's ability to apply a consistent and robust framework for nature recovery in planning decisions, resulting in weaker ecological outcomes. For the risk assessment please see Appendix 1.

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. [Climate Change Impact Assessment](#)
- iv. Nature Recovery SPD
- v. Consultation Statement

Background information:

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

[Cheltenham Tree Strategy February 2026](#)

[Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

[The Environmental Act 2021](#)

[The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#)

[The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](#)

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 Planning & Building Control	4	2	8	Accept	Consultation with various stakeholders including development industry in the preparation of the SPD	Director of Planning & Building Control	Cabinet decision 14 th April 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: 12th of March 2026

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.

As above

Benefits:

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:

Following consultation on the SPD, the main issues have been identified and the Council proposes making a number of changes to the draft SPD as set out within the report. The SPD is guidance, rather than policy, and therefore no impact is expected.

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

Appendix 3: Climate Change Impact Assessment

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
Greenhouse gases GHGs	4	Research suggests that 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) 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. 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 deliver for nature recovery, 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	0

		biodiversity.	
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	0

		systems and could coexist with renewable energy schemes.	
Sustainable Materials	0	0	0
Waste	0	0	0

Social	Scored	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 it 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
Accessiibility	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 Services	2	A public consultation was undergone and 19 responses were received.	0