

Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan 2025 - 2030



HEP041 – Health and Environment Policy Committee

- **BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE**
- **3 DECEMBER 2024**
- **REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Kelsie Learney, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency**
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BACKGROUND

Current plan and need for new approach

- The current Bio-diversity Action Plan (BAP) was approved in 2021 and runs until 2026
- The BAP focuses on 4 Habitats (Species-rich grassland, woodland and trees, chalk rivers, and hedgerows and arable field margins) and 22 species.
- The BAP sets the strategic direction for how WCC will respond to the need to protect, enhance and restore key biodiversity across the district, with a particular focus on the council's own operations.
- The Plan was to be reviewed annually; with a more substantial review to be undertaken in 2026.
- The proposal is to bring this review forward to:
 - respond to significant change in national and local policy and approaches to nature recovery and land management
 - align with the council plan periods

BACKGROUND

Changes since the BAP was produced in 2021

National

- Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Species recovery strategies)
- Mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain
- Environmental Improvement Plan
- Strengthened Biodiversity Duty (and mandatory reporting requirement)

Local

- Declaration of Nature Emergency (alongside Climate Emergency)
- Alignment of WCC Sustainability Team with Natural Environment Teams
- Carbon Sequestration and Storage (on council land) Assessment
- Growing opportunities for land transfer/acquisition
- New community groups interested in nature conservation
- Covid pandemic increasing awareness of the value of access to natural greenspace
- Tree strategy
- New Local Plan (Reg 19 stage)
- New National Planning Policy Framework

BACKGROUND

Purpose and role of a Nature Improvement Plan

	1. Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030	2. Annual Nature Improvement Action Plan
Purpose	Strategic approach	Council-based actions
Scope	Wider land within the district	Council owned & managed sites
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partners• Stakeholders• Contractors• Residents• Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Officers• Members

BACKGROUND

Scope for a new Nature Improvement Plan to direct the council's operations

The proposal for a Nature Improvement Plan (NIP), as an update to the existing Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was recommended to HEP in December 2023 (HEP036).

1. Nature Improvement Plan 2025 – 2030

The strategic plan will outline the approach of the council across the wider district, and:

- Align with Hampshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Respond to the national Environmental Improvement Plan and Strengthened Biodiversity Duty (including mandatory reporting).
- Respond to the challenges of the Climate and Nature Emergencies through how habitats are managed and species supported.
- Set targets for taking action to restore nature, reduce pollution and increase prosperity.

2. Annual Nature Improvement Action Plan

The Plan will encompass the council's approach on its own land to:

- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
- Management of council owned ecological sites – by prioritising and rationalising our work
- Nature based solutions and carbon sequestration
- Mitigation of climate impacts through land management
- Council reporting on and assessing risk for impact on biodiversity across its activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy Committee is asked to note and comment on:

1. The proposed scope of the Nature Improvement Plan and the measures for improving the BAP
2. The route to developing the NIP as set out in the timeframe and next steps section.

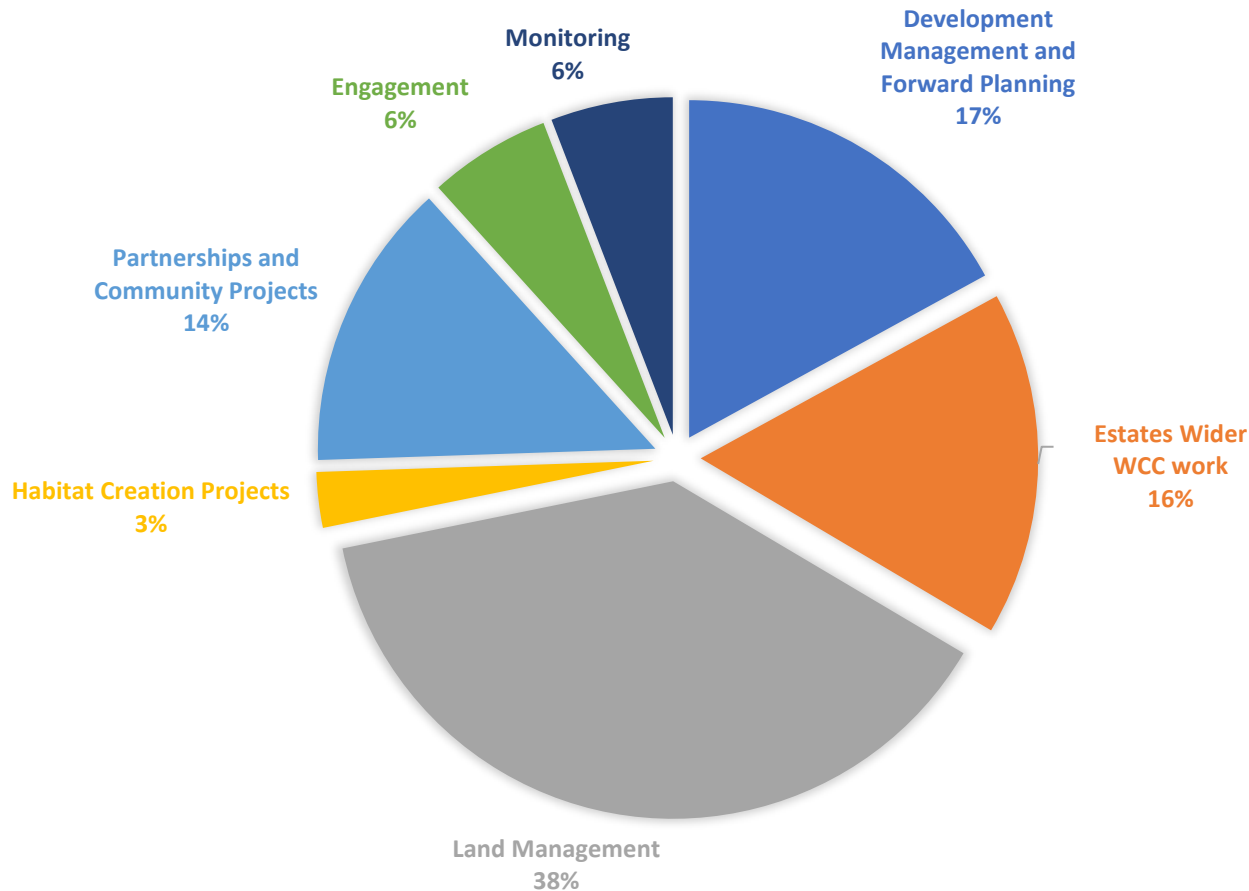
BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

The current BAP has been effective in delivering actions to protect, retain and enhance biodiversity. It considers work across many council teams as well as partnerships and engagement with the public. The action plan is a 'live document' which is used to manage and monitor progress each year. The plan is realistic and achievable, focusing on what the council can deliver with existing resources.

The review has focused on what has been achieved in the first three years of the BAP.

BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

2021-2023 COMPLETED ACTIONS



A total of **188 actions** have been **completed** (an average of 87% of agreed actions).

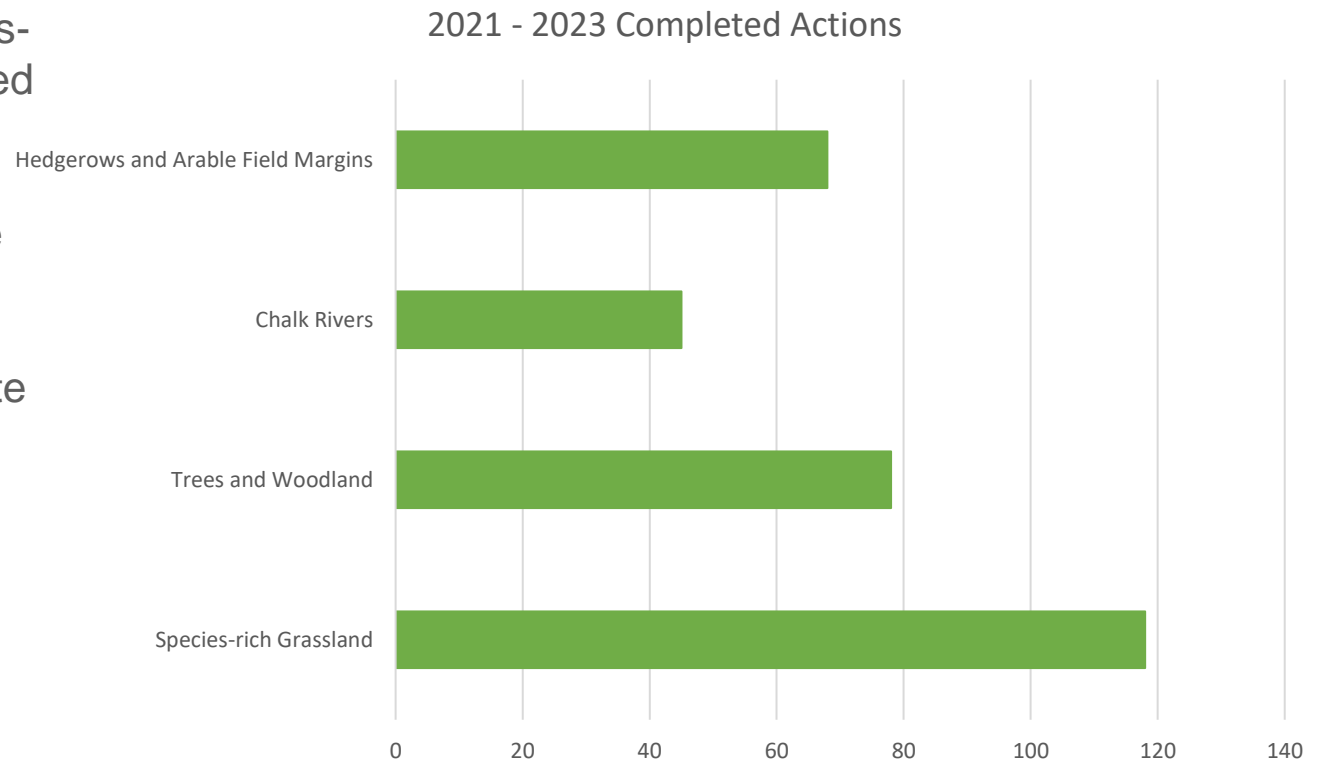
These actions have been spread across various aspects of work:

- 38% land management
- 14% partnerships
- 6% engagement.

BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

The actions have benefitted all our key habitats and species, although more actions have focused on species-rich grasslands compared to chalk rivers.

This is influenced by the type of land under the council's control for example we are fortunate to manage Whiteshute Ridge and West Hill Cemetery which are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) because of the priority grassland habitat present.



BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

Examples of successful actions delivered from 2021-2023

- Land Management
 - Established the WCC owned meadow at Topfield, Kings Worthy and introduced appropriate management and monitoring surveys (**Photo 1**).
- Partnerships & Community Projects
 - Supported and contributed to the East Hants Catchment Partnership, the Meon Valley Partnership, North Pond Conservation Group, and the Bird Aware Steering Group.
 - Engaged with community groups such as Wilder Hyde and Highcliffe Community Forum to empower and assist them with the delivery of wildflower projects (**Photo 2**).
- Development Management & Forward Planning
 - Delivered training sessions for the planning team, new homes team and members.
 - Published the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Technical Advice Note.
 - Established an internal group to prepare and progress mandatory BNG

1.



2.



BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

Examples of successful actions delivered from 2021-2023

- Estates / Wider WCC work
 - Published the Tree Strategy.
 - Undertook the “re-roofing and protected species” project to ensure birds and bats were not negatively impacted by the re-roofing program. Many bat roosts for a variety of species have been protected through this project, whilst enabling the works to go ahead.
 - Launched and established the Biodiversity Grass Verge Management project to improve the way the council manages road verges.
 - Delivered targeted habitat enhancement for the striped lychnis moth at Chilcomb Recreation Ground.
 - Published a management plan for St Giles Hill which is managed successfully alongside the Friends of St Giles community group.
 - Erected swift boxes in key population areas with the support of Hampshire Swifts (**Photo 3**).
- Monitoring
 - Introduced an ecological survey programme and published annual reports on key sites (**Photo 4**).



3.



4.

BAP REVIEW 2021-2023

Measures for improving the BAP:

- Prioritising actions (Low-High)
- Setting targets and KPIs other than completing 80% of actions
- Considering biodiversity in all council functions in line with the strengthened biodiversity duty and Nature Emergency.
- Strengthening the link to the CNAP by including carbon sequestration and storage
- Strengthening the link to key habitats and species. It may be beneficial to focus more on the targets and measures coming out of the Environment Improvement Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Separating out “core business” actions to improve the way we report back on nature improvement.

FUTURE APPROACH

Proposed council-wide approach for the NIP focusing on council's own operations with aims & objectives as in the BAP reviewed annually

1. Decide on targets – based on the Environmental Improvement Plan.
2. Liaise with council teams on potential delivery of targets (Housing, Estates, Procurement, Planning, Special Maintenance, Legal, Finance).
3. Convert and prioritise actions – linked to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy measures.
4. Develop KPIs to report back on actions and measure success of nature improvement (in the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan style)
 - Direct actions e.g. West Hill Cemetery species-rich grassland management
 - Indirect actions e.g. St Giles Hill Friends of Group Management Plan
 - Influencing actions e.g. Meon Valley Partnership and Local Planning Authority Ecology Group
5. Report back on actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty and actions to meet biodiversity gain obligations.

FUTURE APPROACH

Environmental Improvement Plan (National Targets)

- **Access to nature** - everyone lives within 15 mins of green/blue space
- **Peatland restoration** - 280,000 ha restored by 2050
- **Water quality** - restore 75% of water bodies to good ecological status
- **30x30** - protect 30% of land and sea for nature recovery by 2030
- **Hedgerows** - support farmers to create and restore 30,000 miles of hedgerow by 2037
- **Woodlands** - manage for biodiversity, climate and sustainable forestry
- **SSSI** - restore 75% to favourable condition by 2042, with 50% on track to achieve it by 2028.
- **Climate Change Adaptation** - ensure priorities for nature are adaptive to climate change (in particular wetland and coastal habitats)
- **Flood Risk** - employs Nature-based Solutions to improve flood risk management
- **Marine** - achieve Good Environmental Status in seas through creating/improving habitat at the coast or inter-tidal. Improve water quality in rivers.
- **Air Quality** - reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides by 73% and ammonia by 16% by 2030 (e.g planting of tree belts to shield sensitive habitats).
- **Invasive & Non Native Species** - reduce introduction/establishment by >50% by 2030

Defra EIP 2023 – “Our delivery plan for the environment, building a greener, more prosperous country”

- National targets are shown at a broad level in the EIP. The majority of WCC’s BAP/NIP aligns with this.
- All of these issues are being dealt with via teams within the council, aligning the NIP with National Targets

FUTURE APPROACH

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY (LNRS)

- Introduced by the Environment Act 2021, a new system of plans for nature recovery.
- Hampshire County Council as the 'responsible body' has developed the LNRS for Hampshire by working closely with 'supporting authorities' including Winchester City Council as well as other stakeholders.
- Through a series of mapping outputs, the aim of the strategy is to identify locations to create, restore and enhance habitats, providing the best opportunities to deliver nature's recovery.
- The strategy also seeks to identify where these actions have wider environmental benefits, such as flood protection, cleaner water, better air quality, carbon capture, and enhanced health and wellbeing.
- LNRS ultimately provides guidance for organisations and individuals on where to focus their efforts, and what actions to take, and incentivises these actions to achieve nature recovery.

FUTURE APPROACH

LNRS – habitat priority list and the NIP

The LNRS identifies many important habitats and lists measures that can be taken to ensure their preservation and recovery.

One such example habitat identified within the LNRS is Species Rich Grasslands.

The measure within the LNRS with regards to species rich grasslands is:

‘Safeguard existing sites and seek to expand habitat to improve connectivity’.

Therefore, a potential action and priority within the NIP could be to continue to undertake appropriate management of existing sites in terms of species rich grassland and wildflower areas. Such as at Magdalen Hill Cemetery and West Hill Cemeteries and Whiteshute Ridge.

FUTURE APPROACH

Developing the NIP using LNRS to direct Nature Improvements

A LNRS “Measures” Mapping layer allows WCC to focus where nature improvements should occur. WCC should have this from HCC following July submission to Defra.

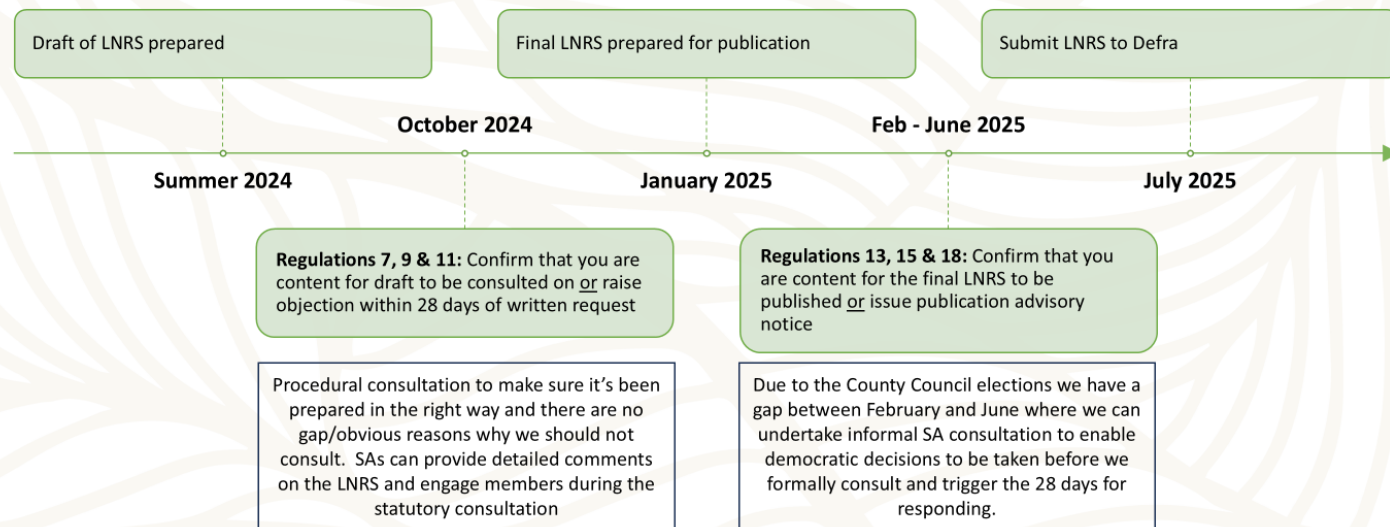
By matching WCC-owned land with the sites identified in the LNRS mapping, we can:

- initiate and undertake **DIRECT** actions for nature improvement on our land.
- identify areas where **INDIRECT** actions can be implemented.
- identify areas where **INFLUENCING** actions can be implemented.

TIMEFRAME & NEXT STEPS

Below is the indicative timescale to produce the LNRS for Hampshire.

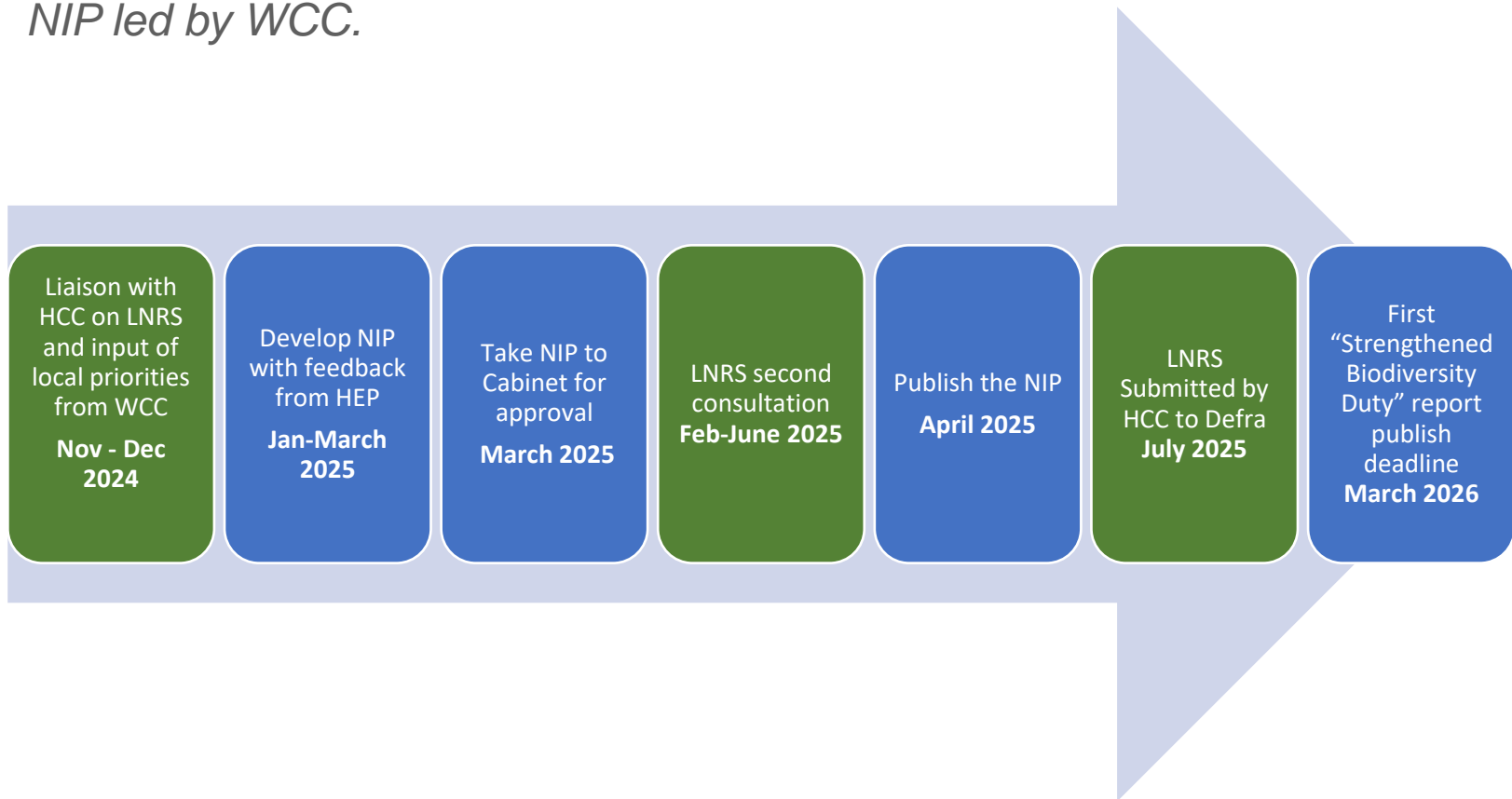
Key actions for Supporting Authorities as outlined in the LNRS Regulations



It is proposed that the NIP will align as closely as possible with the timescales of the LNRS.

TIMEFRAME & NEXT STEPS

The development of the NIP aligns with the new National EIP, National mandatory Strengthened Biodiversity Duty reporting and Regional LNRS. *Green steps indicate LNRS progress led by HCC and blue steps indicate NIP led by WCC.*



TIMEFRAME & NEXT STEPS

Developing the NIP

Ensuring the NIP aligns with the new national EIP, national mandatory Strengthened Biodiversity Duty reporting and Regional LNRS

Once HCC have consulted with us on the LNRS, we will use the mapping to direct the council's practical management of nature and environmental sites. This practical approach to management will be:

1. Achieved via a **“whole council”** approach ensuring all services consider their impacts.
2. Reported to Defra via the Strengthened Biodiversity Duty and we will aim to report on deliverables such as (but not limited to):
 - Condition of Designated sites
 - Hectares of habitat improved/created/restored
 - BNG
3. Linked to nature-based solutions and carbon targets via deliverables such as:
 - Trees planted
 - Metres of hedgerow planted
 - Carbon sequestered (woodland and grassland management)
 - Rainwater harvested

DELIVERY RESOURCES

The development of the NIP will be undertaken with current resourcing within the ecology team and no further resources are required at this point.

The current staffing resource consists of a *Principal Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer* and an *Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer*.

The ecology team will need to consider how to resource the increase in ecological workload due to monitoring work associated with mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the increased biodiversity duty requiring the council to report on annually. At present the number of planning applications consulted on with BNG implications is low and therefore additional workload cannot be predicted at this time, but we will continue to monitor and review this.

DELIVERY RESOURCES

Potential funding for delivery of Nature Improvement

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

Provides a route for chargeable services in the validation, assessment, analysis and consultation of a planning application. The council-wide approach to the NIP will facilitate the coordination of works between the Planning team and the Ecology team in the assessment of BNG. Pre-Application Advice fees can be set, as well as Monitoring fees to ensure successful and meaningful habitat enhancement for the minimum (statutory) period of 30 years.

This process of monitoring BNG can then be reported on, in line with the Strengthened Biodiversity Duty.

The council can also look at its own land holdings and the option of BNG via the enhancement of current habitats. Developers could then pay the council to provide their BNG with the council taking payment to enhance biodiversity on specific selected site habitats for the 30-year period.

CONCLUSIONS

- Provide strategic approach to nature improvement across the district
- Build on existing BAP and update the actions annually for council sites
- Take in new policy
- Improve how we report on Nature Improvement

END



Winchester
City Council

Background documents

1. Previous Committee Reports

previous HEP report ref.

1. Other Background Documents

BAP

CNAP

Other options considered and rejected

1. **Keep the existing style of the Biodiversity Action Plan**
 - This would not tie in with recent local and national changes.
 - It would not comply with the mandatory biodiversity duty.
 - It would not improve the way we prioritise actions or report back on biodiversity.