Draft
Nature Improvement Plan
2025-2030

Winchester City Council
Natural Environment Team
September 2025

i. Contents

ii. Foreword

iii. Executive Summary

The Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) 2025-2030 sets out the council's strategic approach to nature improvement both on council owned land and across the entire district.

The Nature Improvement Plan will align and respond to both the local and national drivers including the council's own Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP), the Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS), and the Tree Strategy. There will also be a strong link between the emerging Hampshire Nature Recovery Strategy (HNRS) which will inform the priority locations for habitat creation, restoration and enhancement. The NIP will also provide the mechanism for reporting back on the enhanced biodiversity duty and Biodiversity Net Gain, as required under the Environment Act 2021. The main aim of the NIP is to promote and achieve nature improvement and recovery across the Winchester district and the council has identified five pathways to deliver this:

1. Protect and manage land for nature
2. Create new spaces for nature
3. Deliver nature-based solutions for tackling climate change
4. Prevent and control pollution
5. Connect people to nature

These pathways provide a mechanism for setting measures and prioritising actions. This supersedes the Biodiversity Action Plan (2019-2025) which focused on specific habitats and species. Instead, the focus is on the measures and species included in the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. These pathways also have a stronger link to the Council Plan and CNAP and set the parameters for achieving the overarching aim of nature improvement and recovery across the district.

There will be two sets of measures for 2025-2030, one for council-based actions on council owned and managed land, and one for district wide actions. The measures and actions delivered on council owned land directly contribute to the district wide measures.

The council has set numerical measures where possible for each of the five pathways. The measures are ambitious but achievable. They are also in accordance with national measures set out in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023 (Appendix B). The measures have defined the 2025/2026 annual action plans (Appendix C).

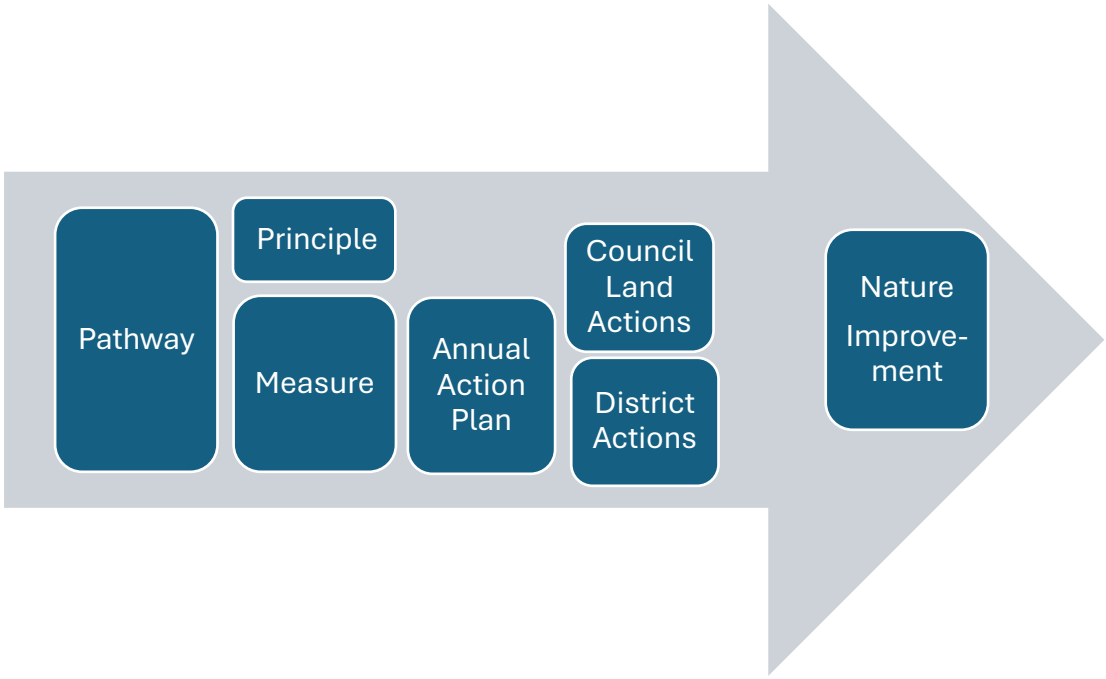
A set of guiding principles for all council functions in relation to biodiversity have also been developed. These provide clarity on the council's position and standards which the council will follow, and expects partners to follow, particularly for areas of work where numerical measures are not applicable.

iv. How to use this document

This NIP provides a framework for improving the natural environment and biodiversity within the Winchester district. This updates the previous BAP and aligns with ambitious and critical updates in national and local legislation as detailed in section 1.2. It outlines where we have got to and what we have achieved up to this point, via the BAP and sets out how we will advance on this work to improve nature in the district.

The NIP sets out the hierarchy of designated sites in Winchester as an all-important factor in nature improvement, and how we can achieve gains on the district's most important sites, including SACs and SSSIs, through a combination of direct delivery, collaboration, enabling, influencing others, and reporting. The reporting and monitoring of nature improvement work is also a vital part of this plan and is now recognised as a priority.

The NIP is based on five Pathways to promote and achieve nature improvement and recovery across the Winchester district. These pathways lead to measures with numerical actions that facilitate the delivery of Annual Actions for nature improvement, which have been split into Council Land Actions and District Actions. The NIP is also based on a set of guiding Principles as set out in section 4.3 which are of high importance but for which it is difficult to set numerical measurables against. These should be applied in all aspects of the council's work and provide clarity on the council's position and standards which will be followed.



1. Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

Nature refers to the physical world and all the living and non-living things that exist within it including wildlife, plants, soil, water, air and landforms. The interactions between these vital components create a dynamic and sustainable ecosystem. Which in turn provides essential services including water purification, air quality improvement, carbon storage, flood management and pollination. Nature is also vital for physical health and mental wellbeing, sense of place, recreation, spiritual connection, inspiration, knowledge and learning.

The Winchester district is known for its natural beauty and biodiversity value. This includes 40% of the district which forms the South Downs National Park (SDNP). We are lucky enough to have internationally important chalk streams and the Upper Hamble Estuary, ancient woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and an exceptional range of rare and declining species. However, Winchester's natural environment is under pressure and has substantially deteriorated, as highlighted in the Winchester City Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 (BAP). This Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 supersedes the existing BAP and focuses on the council's proactive approach to delivering measurable nature improvement across the entire district.

This document will outline the council's ambitious yet achievable measures and guiding principles for enhancing biodiversity, both on council-owned land and across the wider district. These measures will align with national biodiversity goals and, where possible, exceed them—reflecting the district's rich natural assets and ecological potential.

The council is committed to restoring nature, safeguarding essential ecosystem services, and implementing nature-based solutions to help address the impacts of climate change.

1.2 Why do we need a Nature Improvement Plan?

There have been significant national and local changes relating to nature recovery in the last four years since publishing the council's Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 (BAP). The Environment Act 2021 places a strengthened duty on local authorities to consider biodiversity in all functions and the Environment Improvement Plan 2023 sets out new national targets. The council's declaration of a nature emergency signifies the importance of nature locally and the need for action to address this. This has initiated a new approach by the council to ensure the delivery of nature improvement across the district.

The council has undertaken significant efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity across the district, as outlined in its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). However, these initiatives have not always been systematically measured or widely communicated.

The Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) presents a valuable opportunity to highlight the council's existing achievements and to outline its future commitments. The NIP establishes guiding principles for all council functions in relation to biodiversity and sets measures for the next five years.

To ensure transparency and accountability, annual action plans will be developed for both the council and the wider district. These plans will follow the structure of the council's Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, promoting consistency and ease of understanding.

1.3 Council ambition

One of the council's priorities in the 2025-2030 Council Plan is 'Greener, Faster' which includes the ambition of the Winchester District becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and reversing the long-term decline in nature and biodiversity.

Achieving nature improvement ambitions alongside competing priorities of meeting housing targets, supporting the local economy and ensuring a wide range of services and facilities are available to our residents, is a considerable challenge for the council, however this plan shows what is achievable within the next five years.

Climate change is accelerating the degradation of the natural environment, damaging habitats and disrupting ecosystems. Yet these very ecosystems have the potential to store carbon and help mitigate rising global temperatures. The council recognises this vital connection and is committed to addressing both the climate and nature emergencies in tandem. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity is not only a moral imperative but also a practical solution to climate resilience.

This Nature Improvement Plan (2025–2030) outlines a strategic approach to restoring nature across the whole district. It brings together targeted actions designed to deliver measurable improvements to biodiversity and ecosystem health, while fulfilling the council's strengthened biodiversity duty.

1.4 National driving documents and legislation

This section highlights some key areas of legislation and policy which have shaped the council's Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030. Many of which have been introduced or progressed since the council produced its Biodiversity Action Plan in 2021.

- Environment Act 2021
    - Enhanced biodiversity duty
    - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
    - Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)
    - Species Recovery Strategies
    - Protected Site Strategies

- Environment Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP)
- Environmental Land Management (ELMs)

Further explanation on these documents and why they are important is provided in Appendix B.

The Hampshire LNRS and EIP in particular are key driving documents for nature improvement and development of this plan. The council will ensure that all work contributes towards the delivery of the Hampshire LNRS by prioritising opportunities included within the strategy and associated mapping. This will provide a guide for where and how to deliver improvements for nature on a landscape scale, and create bigger, better, more joined up spaces for nature irrespective of administrative boundaries.

1.5 Regional and Local driving documents

The South Downs National Park, also known as a Protected Landscape, is an important part of the district and vital to nature improvement both nationally and locally. The council must seek to further the statutory purposes of this Protected Landscape under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA).

1.5.1 Planning Mitigation Schemes

Nature improvements delivered through development management also need to be considered particularly when determining the impacts on the whole district.

This section highlights the strategic partnerships and mitigation schemes within the district, aimed at protecting biodiversity and delivering improvements on a landscape scale.

Further explanation of them and why they are important is provided in Appendix B.

- Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH)
- Bird Aware Solent
- Nutrient Mitigation
- Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS)
- Great Crested Newt District Level Licencing
- Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

1.5.2 Partnership Schemes

The council works closely with key environmental partnerships, including the Meon Valley Partnership and the East Hants Catchment Partnership, to support and enhance biodiversity across the district. These collaborations enable a coordinated approach to landscape-scale conservation, water quality improvements, and habitat restoration.

Actions delivered through these partnerships contribute to nature improvement across the district and therefore reporting back on these collaboration actions will be an important part of the plan.

In addition to wider arching partnerships the council works with local community groups to deliver nature improvement on council owned land. For community groups to work on our land they must have the necessary insurance, risk assessments and licence agreements with the council.

A list of the current partnerships and community groups are provided below.

Partnerships

- Meon Valley Partnership
- East Hants Catchment Partnership
- Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership
- Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH)
- NatureSpace and Newt Conservation Partnership
- Bird Aware Partnership
- Solent Forum Natural Environment Group
- Solent Wader and Brent Goose Steering Group
- Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC)
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT)
- Hampshire Amphibian and Reptile Group (HIWARG)
- Butterfly Conservation
- Hampshire Swifts

Community Groups

- Friends of St Giles
- Hyde Abbey Gardens
- Wilder Hyde
- North Pond Conservation Group
- St Giles Graveyard
- St Faiths Graveyard
- Teg Down Nature Group
- New Leaf Alresford
- Worthy Conservation Group
- Hampshire Magnificent Meadows

1.6 The Council's driving documents

The Nature Improvement Plan has been informed by various important existing council documents, as well as national documents and legislation, including:

- The Council Plan
- Winchester District Local Plan
- Carbon Neutrality Action Plan
- Green Economic Development Strategy
- Tree Strategy
- Open Space Assessment
- Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025

Particularly the Biodiversity Action Plan 2021, of which the successes and lessons learnt over the last four years (as detailed in section 2) have shaped this next step and helped determine the aims and objectives of the Nature Improvement Plan.

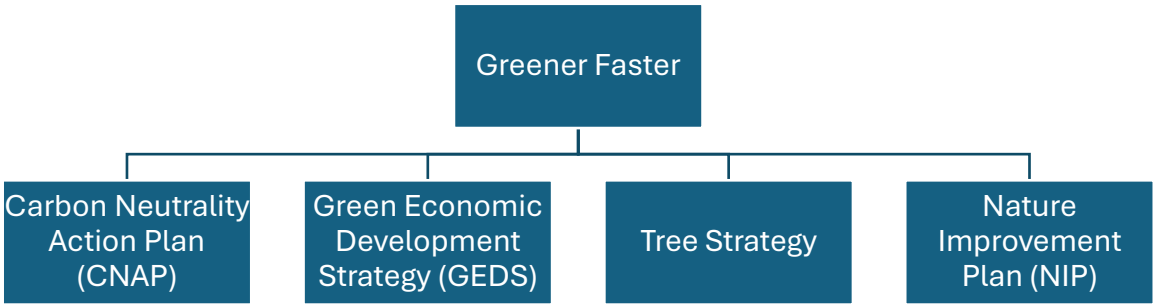
The Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) identifies 5 pathways to achieve emission reductions and work towards the target of being carbon neutral across the district by 2030:

1. Reduce energy consumption
2. Reduce transport carbon emissions
3. Increase renewable energy generation / purchase
4. Carbon sequestration through nature-based solutions
5. Support creation of local carbon credits

Pathway 4 is inextricably linked to the actions the council undertakes for biodiversity, and therefore the Nature Improvement Plan will include measures and actions to sequester carbon through nature-based solutions.

Other driving council documents include the 2022 Open Space Assessment and Winchester District Local Plan 2020-2040 (emerging). The council values the role of open spaces in supporting both people and wildlife. Ensuring these areas remain accessible, welcoming, and where possible ecologically rich is an integral part of this plan.

The Nature Improvement Plan will sit alongside the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP), Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) and Tree Strategy to deliver the Council Plan priority of Greener Faster.


Greener Faster
Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP)
Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS)
Tree Strategy
Nature Improvement Plan (NIP)

2. Biodiversity Achievements 2021– 2025

2.1 Winchester's Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 (BAP)

The council's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) set out the strategic direction for how the council would respond to the need to protect, enhance and restore biodiversity across the district with a particular focus on the council's own operations.

The BAP identified several key habitats and species which provided a focus for the work of the council.

These key habitats included:

- Species Rich Grasslands
- Chalk Streams
- Woodland and Key Individual Trees
- Hedgerows and Arable Field Margins

22 key species were included in the BAP such as Hazel Dormice, Hedgehog, Swifts, House Sparrow, White-clawed Crayfish, Chalk Hill Blue Butterfly and Bee Orchids.

Using the identified list of key habitats and species, an annual action plan was produced which included a series of actions and outcomes which sought to protect and enhance those habitats and species. Subsequent reports have been produced on the progress of those actions and outcomes.

The BAP demonstrated how the council was meeting its obligations under the biodiversity duty in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, but it did not deliver measurable nature improvements across the entire district.

2.2 Biodiversity Action Plan Review

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

This review focuses on what was achieved in the first three years of the BAP. A total of 188 actions were completed (an average of 87% of agreed actions). These actions were spread across various aspects of work as shown below in Figure 1, with Land Management for example accounting for 38% of the actions.

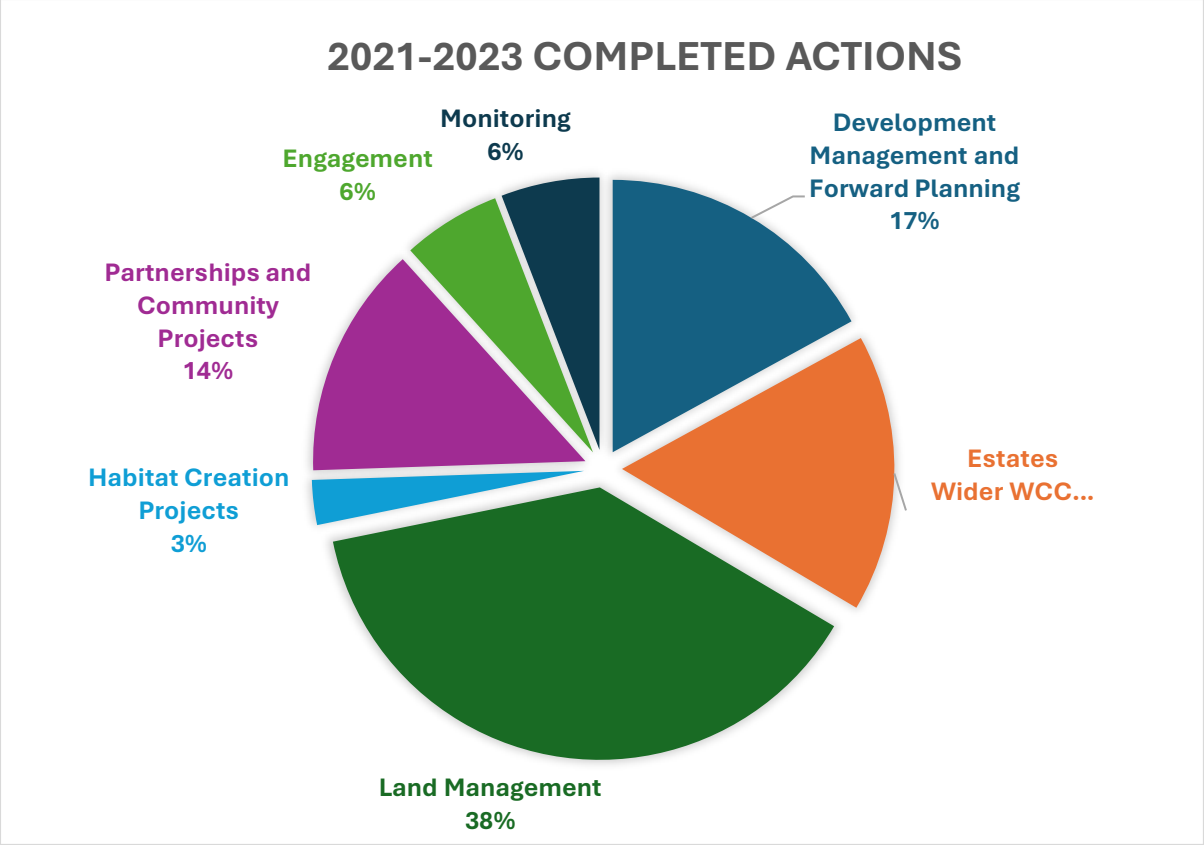


Figure 1 - Pie chart illustrating types of BAP actions completed between 2021 and 2023.

The actions benefitted all the key habitats and species identified within the BAP, although more actions focused on species-rich grasslands compared to chalk rivers, as shown in Figure 2 below.

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

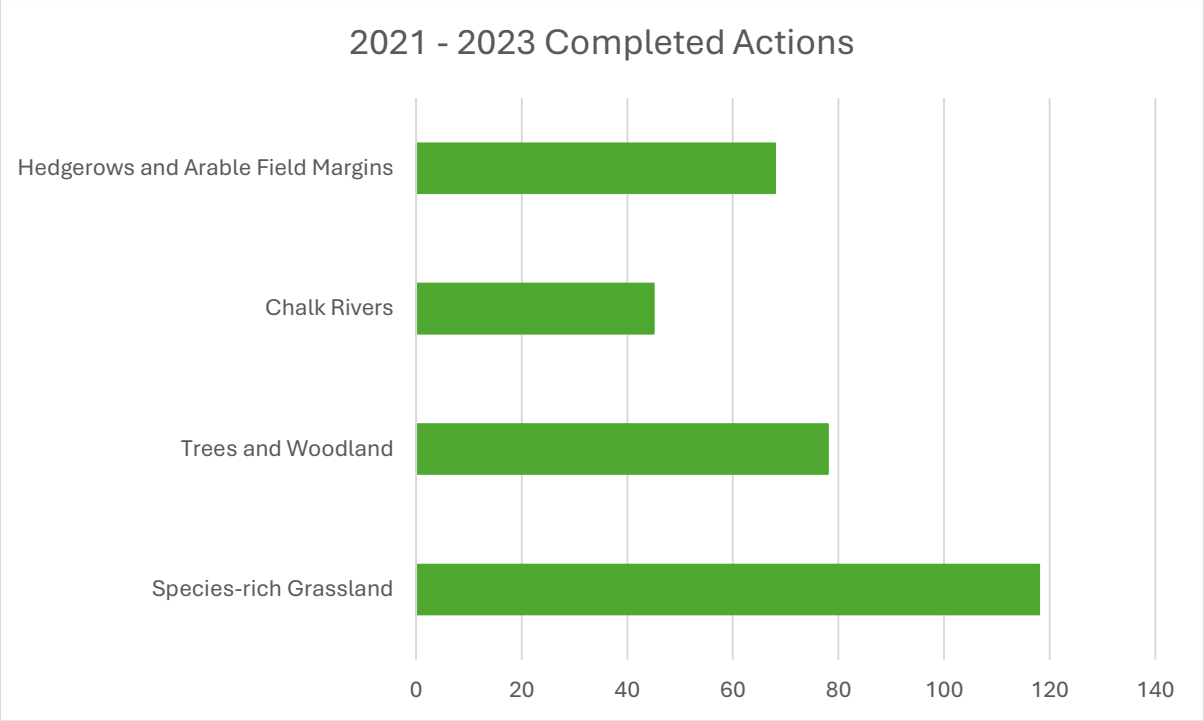


Figure 2 - Bar graph showing the habitats associated with BAP actions completed between 2021 and 2023.

2.2.1 Successes in separate areas of council work

Land Management

Through the BAP the council-owned meadow at Topfield, Kings Worthy (Figure 3) was established from an inaccessible scrubland, and management and monitoring surveys were implemented.

Figure 3 - Photograph of newly established meadow at Topfield, Kingsworthy.

Partnerships & Community Projects

Through the BAP, the council supported and contributed to the East Hants Catchment Partnership, the Meon Valley Partnership, North Pond Conservation Group, and the Bird Aware Steering Group. The council engaged with community groups such as Wilder Hyde and Highcliffe Community Forum to empower and assist them with the delivery of wildflower projects.

Development Management & Forward Planning

The council delivered training sessions for the planning team, new homes team and members in relation to biodiversity. The council published the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Technical Advice Note to be used by planners, agents and residents both internally and externally to provide some certainty and set expectations in relation to delivery of nature improvement. Following on from this, as part of the BAP, the council established an internal group to prepare for and progress BNG as a mandatory aspect of the planning process.

- The council published the Tree Strategy which has been widely praised.
- We undertook the “re-roofing and protected species" project to ensure birds and bats were not negatively impacted by the council’s re-roofing program. Many bat roosts for a variety of species have been protected through this project, whilst enabling the works to go ahead, and avoiding impacts on nesting birds.
- The council launched and established the Biodiversity Grass Verge Management project to improve the way the council manages road verges.
- We delivered targeted habitat enhancement for the striped lychnis moth, in partnership with the Butterfly Conservation Trust, at Chilcomb Recreation Ground.
- A management plan was published for St Giles Hill park, which is managed successfully alongside the Friends of St Giles community group.
- Swift boxes in key population areas on council and private homes ??with the support of Hampshire Swifts.

Monitoring

We introduced an ecological survey programme and published annual reports on key sites. These can be found???

2.3 Measures to improve the BAP

The proposal to update the Biodiversity Action Plan to a Nature Improvement Plan was taken to the Health and Environment Policy Committee on 3 December 2024 (HEP041). The committee was asked to comment on the measures proposed to improve the BAP and the scope and development of the Nature Improvement Plan.

The Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 seeks to improve upon and supersede the BAP by:

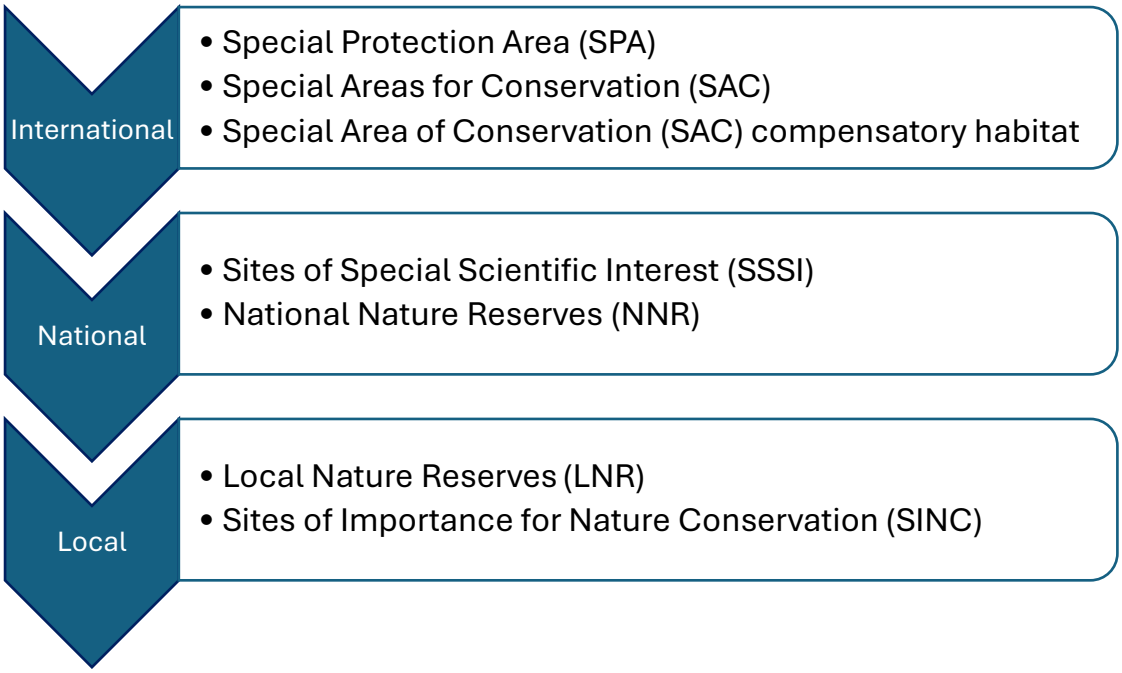
- Responding to significant national and local changes since 2021
- Setting specific measurable targets where possible
- Strengthening the link between nature improvement and other co-benefits such as carbon sequestration and storage, and health and wellbeing
- Separating out “core business” actions to improve the way we report back on nature improvement.
- Covering district and council actions separately
- Improving the way the council reports back on nature improvement

3. Our District's Biodiversity

The Winchester district has a rich natural environment including internationally important chalk streams, ancient woodlands, priority grassland and wetlands habitats, and an exceptional range of rare and declining species. The council recognises the importance of the district's biodiversity not just for wildlife but also for ecosystem services, nature-based solutions, and health and wellbeing. This section sets out the current baseline for biodiversity within the district to track measures set by the council and record any changes to nature at a local level.

3.1 Designated sites

There is a hierarchy of designated wildlife sites across the district ranging from international and nationally designated sites through to locally designated sites. International and nationally designated sites receive the highest form of legal protection whilst locally designated sites are protected by policies in Local Plans.



Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** are internationally designated sites which conserve the most valuable and threatened habitats and species across the UK. SPAs are specifically aimed at protecting rare and vulnerable birds, as well as regularly occurring migratory species. SACs on the other hand, are specifically aimed at protecting rare and important animals, plants, and habitats like rivers or sand dunes. Many SPAs and SACs are also designated as SSSIs.

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) compensatory habitat is a new or restored natural area created to make up for damage or loss to an existing SAC. This is required when a project is allowed to go ahead even though it will harm a protected site. In such cases, the law says that the damage must be balanced by creating or improving habitat elsewhere to ensure that the overall network of protected areas remains strong and effective. The River Meon in the district is being designated as a compensatory habitat for the River Itchen SAC due to Southern Water's increased abstraction from the Itchen during droughts. This means that the River Meon receives the same level of protection as a normally designated Special Area of Conservation site.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are nationally designated areas in the UK that are important for conserving wildlife, plants, or geology. These sites are chosen because they have rare species, special habitats, or unique land features that are valuable for science and nature. SSSIs can include woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, or even cliffs and rock formations.

Table 1 - The number of designated wildlife sites within the Winchester District in 2025.

Internation/National Designations	**Number of Sites**
Special Protection Areas	1
Special Areas for Conservation	3*
Site of Special Scientific Interest	17
National Nature Reserves	2
	23
*includes Special Area for Conservation compensatory habitat (River Meon)	
Local Designations	**Number of Sites**
Local Nature Reserves	9
Site of Importance for Nature Conservation	690
	699

The Majority of the internationally/nationally designated sites in the district are under private or other ownership.

The SPA and SACs in the district are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Natural England monitors and reports on the overall condition of SSSIs which also act as an indicator for the overall condition of SPAs and SACs. The table below shows the overall condition of SSSs in the district taken from the Natural England website. Those SSSIs with an asterisk next to them are also an SPA or SAC or both. It should be noted that some of the SSSI's in the district are split up into several 'units'. The condition of some of the units within the SSSIs differ and where this occurs, the average condition is presented to show the overall state of the SSSI.

Table 2 – Condition of SSSIs within the Winchester District in 2025.

SSSI Name	
Crab Wood	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Favourable
Beacon Hill	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Favourable
CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND - Lowland	Favourable
Peake Wood	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Favourable
Old Winchester Hill	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Unfavourable - No change
CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND - Lowland	
Galley Down Wood	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Favourable
The Moors, Bishop's Waltham	
FEN, MARSH AND SWAMP - Lowland	Unfavourable - Declining
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Unfavourable - Recovering
BUILT UP AREAS AND GARDENS	destroyed
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND - Lowland	
Waltham Chase Meadows	
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND - Lowland	Favourable
Botley Wood and Everett's and Mushes Copses	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Unfavourable - Recovering
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND - Lowland	

Upper Hamble Estuary and Woods	
BROADLEAVED, MIXED AND YEW WOODLAND - Lowland	Favourable
LITTORAL SEDIMENT	Favourable
Cheesefoot Head	
Population of nationally scarce butterfly species - Hamearis lucina, Duke of Burgundy	Unfavourable - Declining
Scrub	Unfavourable - Recovering
Hook Heath Meadows	
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND - Lowland	Favourable
Lye Heath Marsh	
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND - Lowland	Unfavourable - Recovering
Alresford Pond	
FEN, MARSH AND SWAMP - Lowland	Unfavourable - Declining

Of the 23 internationally/nationally designated sites, 2 parcels are within Winchester City Council's ownership. These two sites form part of the wider River Itchen Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest. The condition of these SSSI parcels is listed in the table below.

Table 2 shows that 88% of SSSIs units in the district are achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition, and table 3 shows that 100% of SSSI units on council land are achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition. This is above the national EIP target of 50% of SSSIs on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.

Table 3 - The condition of SSSIs within the Council's land ownership in 2025.

SSSIs on WCC Land	**Overall Condition**
St Faith's Meadow (River Itchen)	Unfavourable - Recovering
Winnall Moors (River Itchen)	Unfavourable - Recovering

There are also 4 sites designated for Solent Waders and Brent Geese (SWBG) in the district. They are located in the upper reaches of the River Hamble. SWBG sites are categorised by their importance to sustaining Brent Geese and Wading bird species. At

present, there is 1 Primary Support Site, 2 Low Use Sites and 1 Candidate Site. There is a dedicated website for further information and a map of the SWBG sites[1].

Local Sites are sites designated locally for their substantive nature conservation importance, either for wildlife or geology, these are referred to as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Hampshire. Sites in positive conservation management are defined as those sites which are being managed to conserve their nature conservation interest. Assessing the extent of positive management can help to identify sites where such management is lacking. This will help to concentrate the efforts of local partnerships in ensuring sites are managed appropriately, and their nature conservation value is maintained or enhanced.

Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC), a key partner, has been recording condition on SINCs it has surveyed over the past 10 years. SINCs known to be in poor condition will be included in the LNRS mapping for biodiversity improvements.

Table 4 – The number of SINCs under positive, negative or unknown management in the Winchester District in 2025. SINCs surveyed prior to 2015 are recorded as unknown management.

Management	**Number of SINCs**	**Area**	**% SINCs**	**% SINCs where management is known**
Positive	96		14%	61%
Negative	61		9%	39%
Unknown	533		77%	
	690	**6398ha**		

Of the 690 SINCs in Winchester, three SINCs are under council ownership and management. Whiteshute Ridge although last surveyed by HBIC in 2013 is subject to a detailed management plan and was subject to a detailed botany survey in 2015 and 2023 which showed that the positive management is benefiting the condition of the site. Recent botany surveys have also been carried out at West Hill Cemetery confirming that the management is having a positive impact on the priority grassland habitats present on site. Bramdean Common is managed by the council in a beneficial way, however there are other management options such as grazing which could further improve the condition of the site. No detailed botany surveys have been carried out at Bramdean Common in the last 10 years and negative uses such as unauthorised vehicle access, trampling and fly tipping are thought to be having a detrimental impact, and as such the management of this site is recorded as 'unknown' in recognition of an update survey being required.

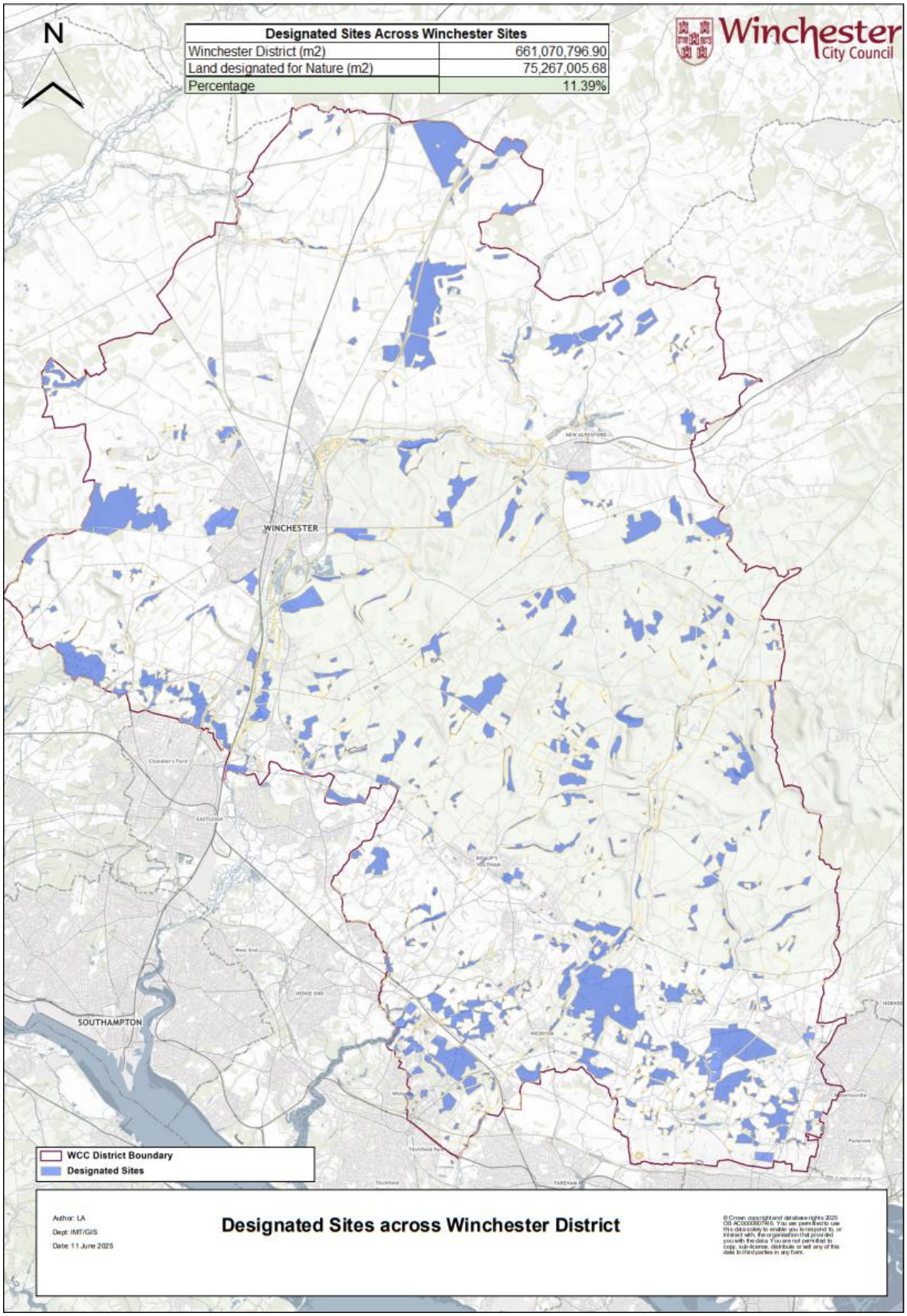
[1] Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy – coastal bird conservation, waders and brent geese data and mapping

Table 5 – Management of SINCs under Council ownership in 2025.

SINC on WCC land	Last surveyed by HBIC	Management according to HBIC survey	WCC Management
Whiteshute Ridge	2013	Unknown	Favourable
West Hill Cemetery	2023	Positive	Favourable
Bramdean Common	2005	Unknown	Unknown

Figure 4 shows that 11.39% of the district is covered by nature conservation designations. Whilst this is below the national EIP target for 30% of land to be protected, this is specific to certain designations. Inclusion of the South Downs National Park (which is likely to contribute to the national target) was not considered appropriate at the local scale because there are large areas within the national park which are comprised of hardstanding and buildings and are not 'protected for nature' in the same way as other designations. The council has therefore set a measure based on sustaining this baseline figure for 'land designated for nature'.

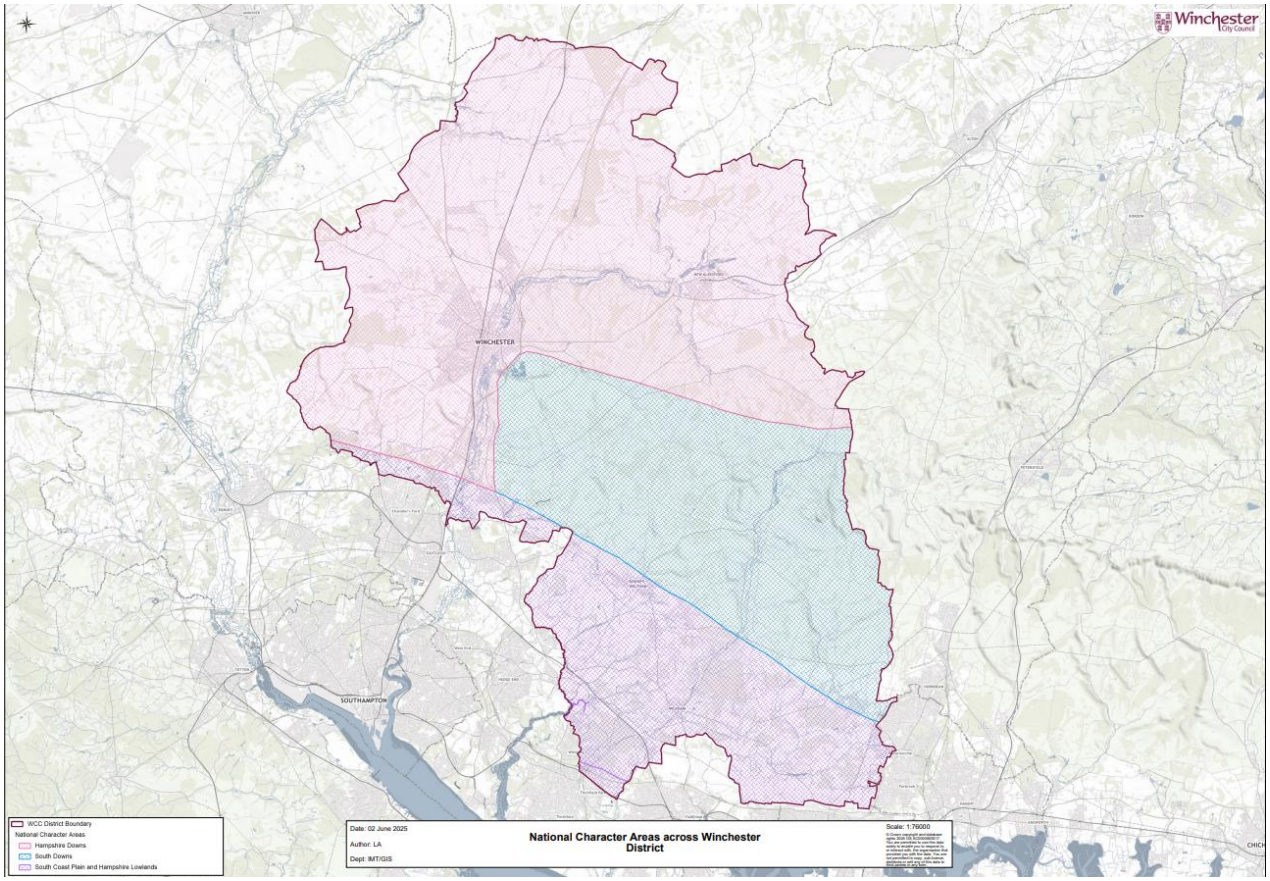
Figure 4 – Map of the designated sites within the Winchester District. This includes Ancient Woodland, LNR, NNR, Ramsar, SAC, SPA, SWGBS, SINCs and Road Verges of Ecological Importance (RVEI).


N
Designated Sites Across Winchester Sites
Winchester District (m2) 661,070,796.90
Land designated for Nature (m2) 75,267,005.68
Percentage 11.39%
Winchester City Council
WINCHESTER
SOUTHAMPTON
WCC District Boundary
Designated Sites
Author: LA
Dept: IMT/GIS
Date: 11 June 2025
Designated Sites across Winchester District

3.2 Landscape features

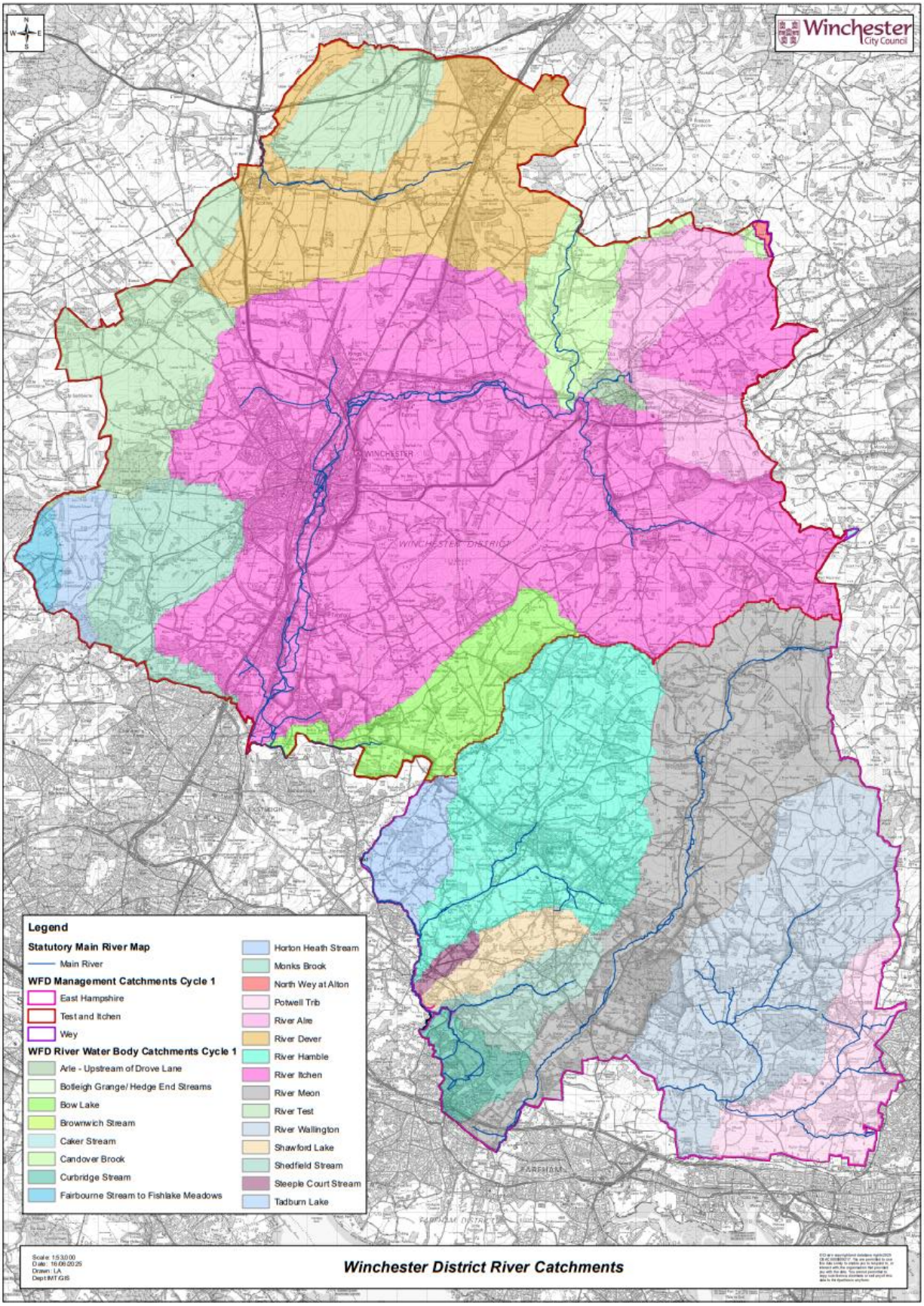
National Character Areas (NCAs) are distinct regions in England that share similar landscape features, wildlife, geology, and cultural history. There are 3 NCAs in the district as shown in Figure 5, reflecting the district's varied landscapes, from chalk downlands (Hampshire Downs and South Downs) to river valleys (South Coast Plain and Hampshire Lowlands). The boundaries of NCAs are based on natural features rather than administrative lines. The NCAs are used to support conservation including the LNRS, plan development, and promote sustainable land use by providing detailed information about the character and natural value of each area.

Figure 5 – Map of the National Character Areas in the Winchester District.



The chalk rivers in the district are rare and ecologically important freshwater habitats. They are fed by underground chalk aquifers, which filter the water and keep it clear, cool, and rich in minerals. This creates ideal conditions for a wide range of wildlife, including species like brown trout, water voles, and mayflies. The chalk rivers also support unique plant life and are important for biodiversity. Because they are so rare globally and sensitive to pollution and overuse, protecting the chalk rivers in the district is vital for both nature and clean water supplies.

Figure 6 – Map of the main rivers and river catchments within the Winchester District.



3.3 Priority Habitats

Priority habitats are those that have been identified by government as being of principal importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity, under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). They are a key part of the ecological network across the district by supporting rare and threatened species and providing valuable wildlife corridors or stepping stones. Many of the priority habitats in the district, as shown in Figure 7, were identified in the council's BAP and will form part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire. This presents opportunities to restore and recreate lost areas of priority habitat for the benefit of nature. The table below demonstrates the type and number of priority habitats that exist currently in the Winchester District.

Table 6 – The quantity of priority habitats in the Winchester District in 2025.

Priority Habitats	**Area (Ha)**
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	349
Lowland Dry Grassland	9
Lowland Meadow	296
Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture	91
Lowland Heathland	2
Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland	35
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	5,945
Wet Woodland	242
Wood-Pasture and Parkland	116
Arable Field Margins	2.2
Hedgerows	3,036
Rivers	121
Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh	914

Tree canopy cover or woodland cover is included in the EIP national targets with the aim of having a national coverage of 16.5% by 2050. Figure 8 shows that in the Winchester District this is currently 8.33% coverage, this may be lower than national targets because of the large quantity of downland. It should also be noted that individual trees have not been mapped and therefore this is likely to better reflect woodland cover than tree canopy cover.

Figure 7 – Map showing priority habitat coverage across the district.

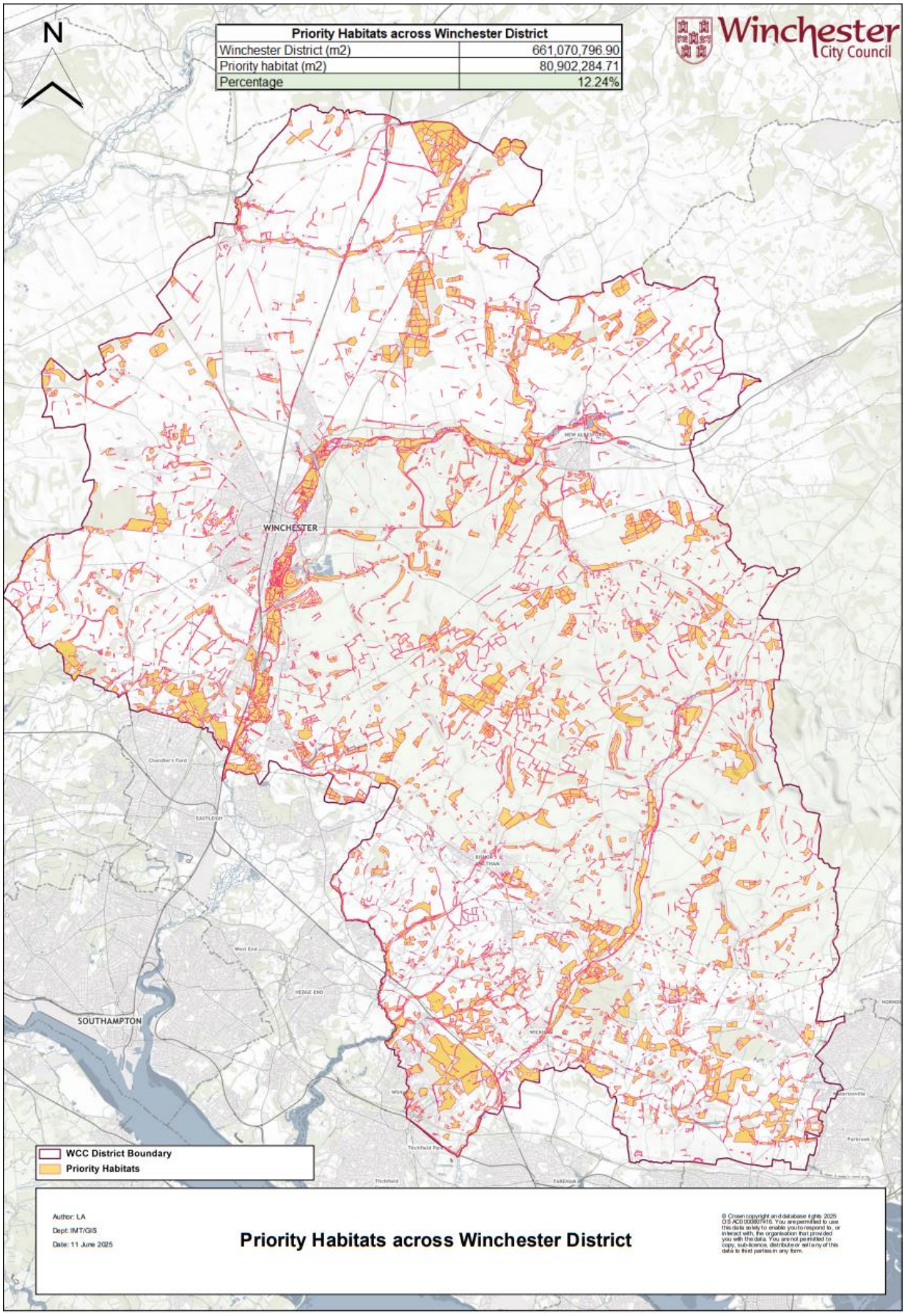


Figure 8 – Map showing tree/woodland canopy cover across the district. *This includes data for ancient woodland, TPOs, conifer, broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland habitat layers and the National Forest Inventory England 2023.*

3.4 Council land

The council owns and manages a variety of sites from housing, commercial property, car parks, sports facilities and play areas to natural green space, parks and sites specifically managed for biodiversity such as Winnall Moors.

Figure 9 shows that 27.61% of the land under the council's ownership is managed for nature. This includes sites managed for biodiversity, TPOs, Natural Green Spaces, Locally Registered Parks and Gardens, SSSIs, Road Verge of Ecological Importances (RVEIs), SINCs and Public Open Spaces (with sports/play/allotments removed). Whilst some open spaces may not necessarily be managed solely for nature they provide value for wildlife, particularly within an urban setting. These spaces also provide access to nature and the benefits associated with urban greening. This figure of 27.61% is close to the national EIP target for 30% of 'land to be protected', and whilst not all of this land is designated or protected the council has set a measure to sustain this level of land as 'managed for nature' which means that it will be maintained to provide value for wildlife and access to nature.

Figure 10 shows that 6.08% of the council land ownership is covered by trees/woodland. This is lower than the EIP national target of 16.5% but it should be noted that the council is limited by the type of land under its ownership. For example, important wetland and grassland sites are vital for biodiversity and would not be appropriate for tree planting. This figure is also lower than expected because individual trees could not be included.

The council is also responsible for 42 Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTWs) including cesspools and Package Treatment Plants (PTPs). Management of these sites is done in accordance with legislation and requirements set by the Environment Agency. The council has already updated three of these sites to reduce pollution and create nitrate and phosphate credits for development management. The continuation of this work is a key part of this plan.

3.4.1 Carbon sequestration baseline

A desktop study was undertaken by Arcadian in July 2024 to analyse the carbon storage and sequestration across the land owned by the council.

The existing habitats across the council land ownership (excluding built-up areas) have a minimum defensible carbon flux of approximately **-125 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year (tCO2e y-^{1})**. The value 'carbon dioxide equivalent' enables us to take other greenhouse gases into account in the overall total, based on their impact relative to carbon dioxide. This is seen as the most defensible calculation and is based on recommended figures from an extensive literature review by Thom and Doar (2021) undertaken for The Wildlife Trusts. In terms of the overall amount of carbon stored across these habitats, this has been calculated at 28,322 – 126,926 tCO2e, equating to 7,646 – 34,270 tonnes of carbon (tC). Going forward, changing management practices to allow

habitat transitions would enable greater carbon sequestration and therefore climate mitigation.

Figure 9 – Map showing the land managed for nature under Winchester City Council ownership.

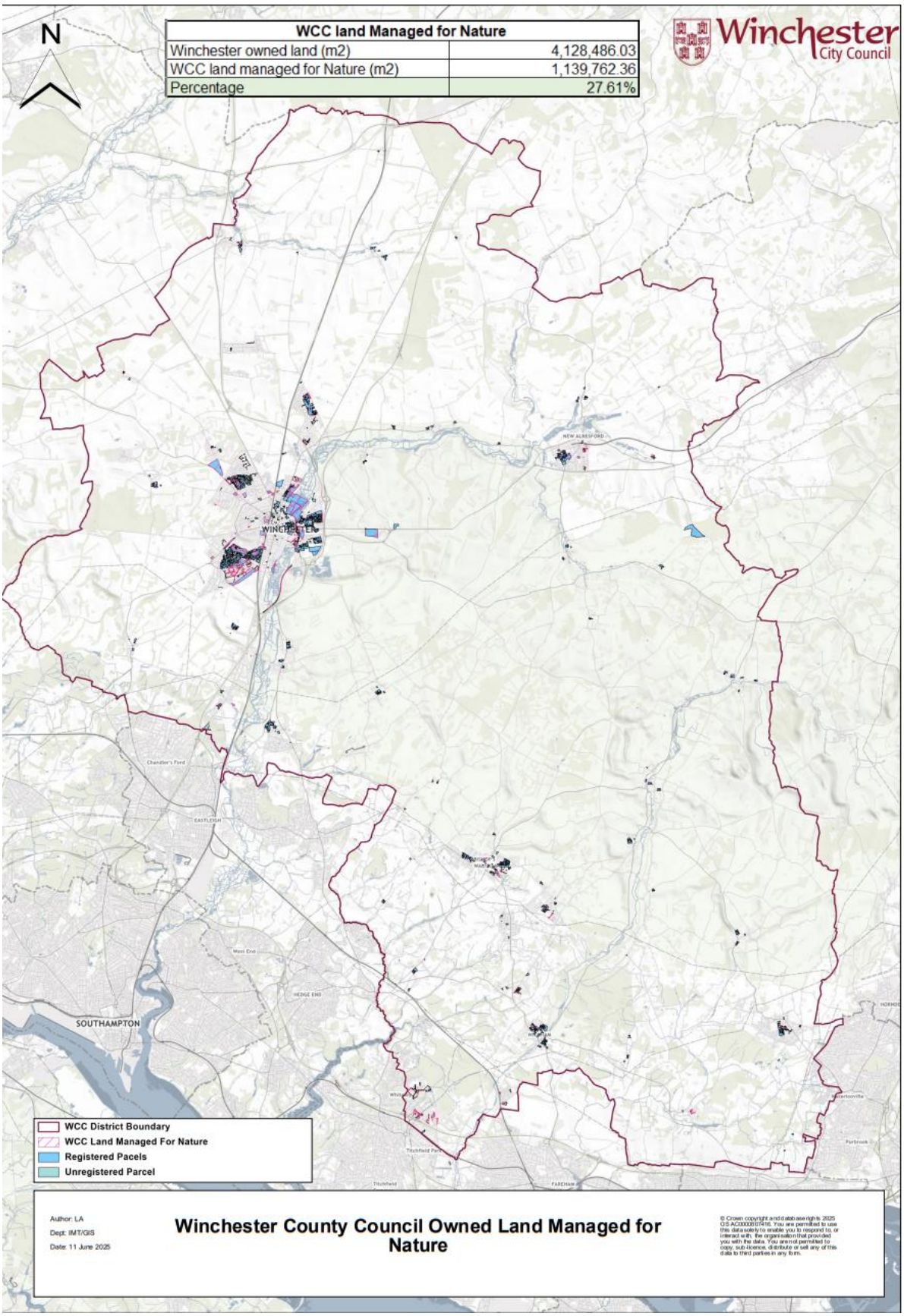
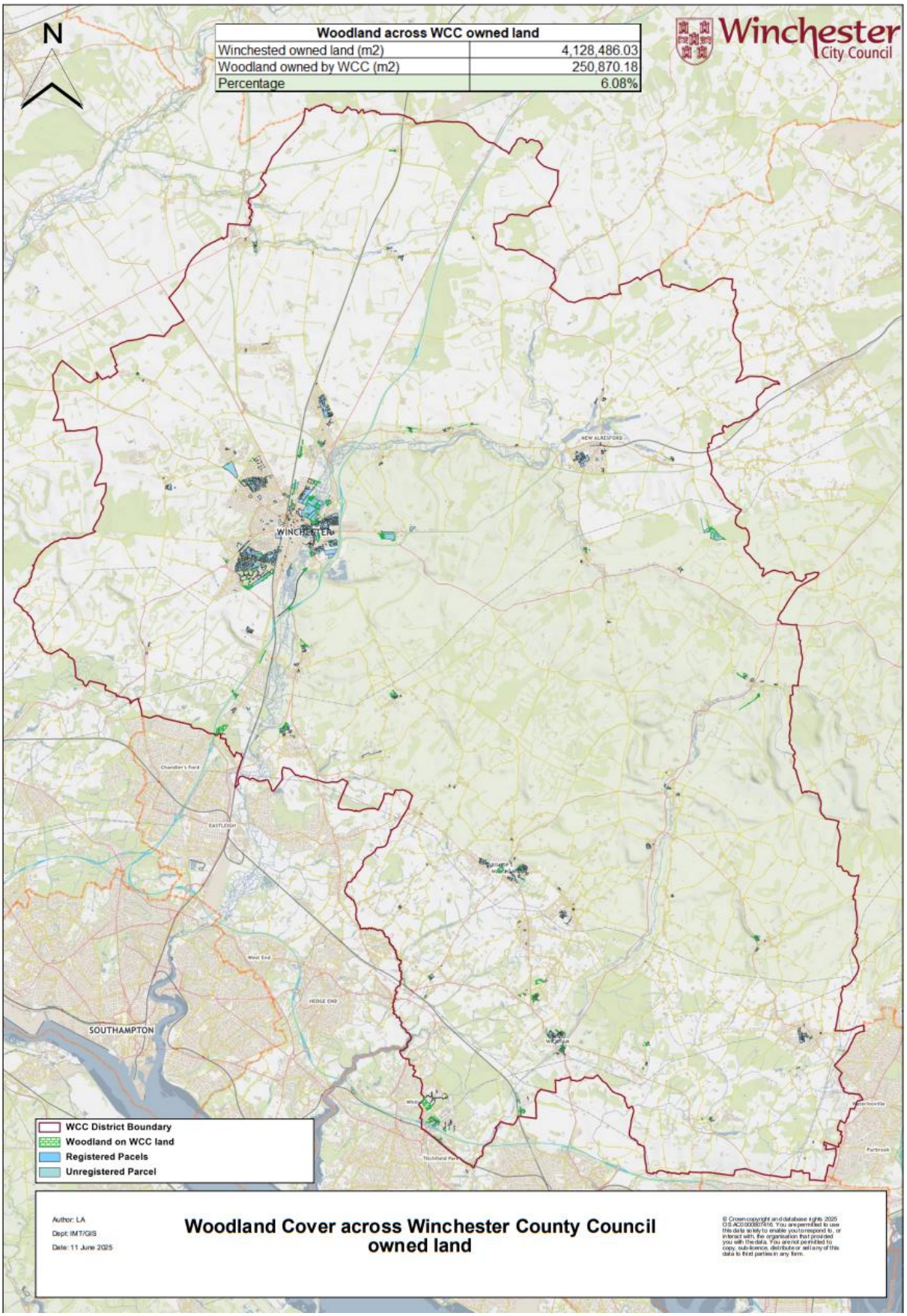


Figure 10 – Map showing the tree canopy cover within Winchester City Council's land ownership.



4. Vision & Goals - 2025-2030

4.1 Purpose of the Nature Improvement Plan

The Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 sets out the council's strategic approach to nature improvement both on council owned land and across the entire district, which will be embedded in the whole council ensuring a strong connection with the delivery of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP) and helping to deliver the Council Plan priority of Greener Faster.

The Nature Improvement Plan will align and respond to both the local and national drivers highlighted in Section 1 (and explained further in Appendix B). There will be a strong link between the emerging Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which will inform the priority locations for habitat creation, restoration and enhancement, so that actions set in the NIP contribute to the delivery of the Hampshire LNRS. The Plan will also provide the mechanism for reporting back on the enhanced biodiversity duty and Biodiversity Net Gain, as required under the Environment Act 2021.

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

a. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
b. Prioritising and rationalising management of council owned ecological sites
c. Nature based solutions and carbon sequestration
d. Mitigation of climate impacts through land management
e. Council reporting on and assessing risk for impact on biodiversity across its activities.

4.2 Aims and Pathways

Promote and achieve nature improvement and recovery across the Winchester district.

The council has identified five pathways to deliver this:

1. Protect and manage land for nature
2. Create new spaces for nature
3. Deliver nature-based solutions for tackling climate change
4. Prevent and control pollution
5. Connect people to nature

These pathways provide a mechanism for setting guiding principles, measures and prioritising actions. Rather than focusing on specific habitats and species as in the BAP, these pathways have a stronger link to the Council Plan and CNAP and set the parameters for achieving the overarching aim of nature improvement and recovery across the district.

Pathway 1 is crucial for the protection, maintenance and improvement of our international, national and local sites designated for nature conservation. It also includes

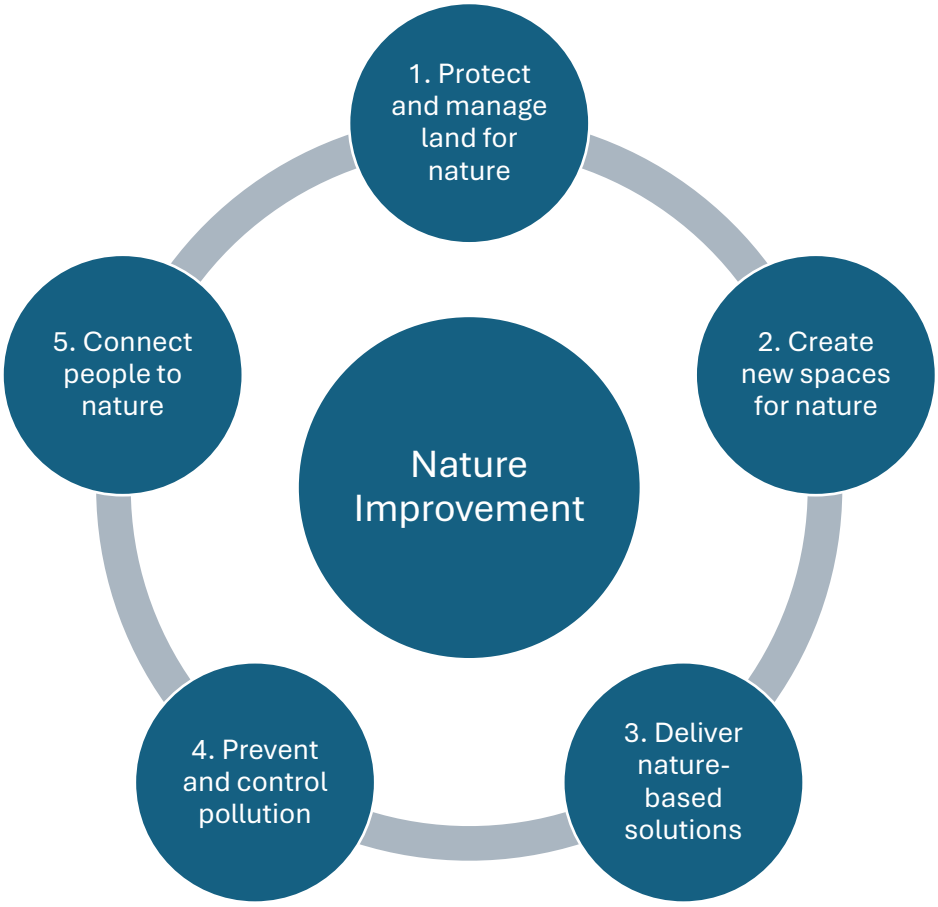
non-designated sites such as open spaces or buildings where we have existing biodiversity projects or features which are valuable to wildlife.

Pathway 2 includes all initiatives which create new areas for wildlife for example wildflower meadow creation, tree planting, installation of bat bricks/bird bricks and bee hotels or on a larger scale the creation of habitat banks and delivery of BNG.

Pathway 3 links directly to pathways 4 and 5 of the CNAP. This ensures that we are considering the co-benefits of nature improvement and tackling climate change. This incorporates tree canopy cover, urban greening and carbon sequestration.

Pathway 4 includes the work being undertaken to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading within our Rivers, particularly the River Itchen Special Area of Conservation (SAC) such as the upgrade to council owned Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTWs) to Package Treatment Plants (PTPs)to generate nitrogen and phosphorous credits. Other areas of pollution prevention include limiting the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers.

Pathway 5 recognises communication and engagement as crucial parts of the strategy. Ensuring members of the public understand, appreciate and feel connected to their local natural environment is of the up most importance and is essential for the long-term delivery of nature improvement across the district.



4.3 Principles

A set of guiding biodiversity principles are set out below. They provide clarity on the council's position and standards of working, particularly where it is not possible to apply numerical targets. These will be followed by the council in all its functions.

The principles are all of equal importance and will be applied to council work as appropriate and in accordance with relevant legislation and other policies. The council expects all partners and contractors to follow these guiding principles and actively consider and promote biodiversity in all activities related to council buildings, land or projects.

Principles 7, 8, 9 and 10 show how we will adhere to our principles and standards and how we will deliver according to these principles.

PRINCIPLE 1	BIODIVERSITY DUTY
	Consider biodiversity and nature improvement and recovery in all functions and decisions in accordance with the strengthened biodiversity duty in the Environment Act. The council expects all partners and contractors to consider biodiversity in all their actions relating to council buildings, land or projects.
PRINCIPLE 2	HIERARCHY OF SITES
	We will endeavour to follow the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites (as described in section 3.1), and prioritise actions which improve sites of greatest importance. The council will pursue opportunities for nature improvement and recovery on un-designated sites, but the priority will be to protect, maintain and enhance important designated sites.
PRINCIPLE 3	CHEMICAL USE
	Pesticides and herbicides will only be used on biodiversity sites where considered absolutely necessary, for example to remove invasive species. Strive to reduce herbicide, pesticide and non-organic chemical fertiliser use, on all council owned sites by 2030.
PRINCIPLE 4	WATER USE & WATER QUALITY
	Minimise water use and introduce water recycling methods and sustainable drainage solutions where possible, as part of projects, development or land management practices. Recognise the importance of appropriately managing land within buffer zones (5m to ditches and 10m to rivers) and controlling activities within these buffer areas which have the potential to cause pollution to watercourses.

PRINCIPLE 5	BIOSECURITY
	Follow biosecurity best practices guidelines and remove invasive and non-native species (INNS) from council owned land. The removal of other species (not included on the INNS list e.g. Hogweed or nettles) will not be a priority and will only be undertaken where considered a health and safety risk, or their removal is necessary in accordance with the relevant management plan.
PRINCIPLE 6	MULTIPLE BENEFITS
	Consideration will be given to the combination of benefits which can be delivered through land management, development or specific projects, including: • Improvements to nature • Health and wellbeing • Access to nature, open space and recreation • Nature based solutions (such as carbon sequestration, urban greening and flood alleviation) Where possible these benefits should be stacked to ensure the best outcomes are delivered.
PRINCIPLE 7	PARTNERSHIP WORKING
	The council will work in partnership with external stakeholders and established community groups to meet the 2030 measures.
PRINCIPLE 8	HAMPSHIRE NATURE RECOVERY
	Ensure that all work contributes towards the delivery of the Hampshire Nature Recovery Strategy by prioritising opportunities included within the “measures map”. This will provide a guide for where and how to deliver improvements for nature on a landscape scale, and create bigger, better, more joined up spaces for nature. (Local Nature Recovery Strategies are explained further in Appendix B).
PRINCIPLE 9	PROTECTED SPECIES
	Support the delivery of species recovery strategies, referenced in the Environment Act 2021 and LNRS, as they emerge. Species will be considered and mitigation and enhancements sought in all areas of relevant work from management of biodiversity sites and open spaces to property maintenance and development management. This will be in accordance with relevant legislation including the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
PRINCIPLE 10	PLANTING FOR BIODIVERSITY
	Prioritise use of native, fruiting, and pollinator-friendly species for planting schemes. Flower beds will be created using sustainable planting.

	Soil health will be considered when designing and implementing planting plans and all compost used will be peat-free. Green waste such as wood chippings will be re-used where possible for example for mulch.

4.4 Measures

There will be two sets of measures for 2025-2030, one for council-based actions on council owned and managed land, and one for district wide actions. The measures and actions delivered on council owned land directly contribute to the district wide measures. The district wide actions will be undertaken by a range of stakeholders, partners and residents, as well as the council.

The council has set measures where possible for each of the identified pathways. The measures are ambitious but achievable and were determined through internal officer engagement and understanding the baseline figures detailed in Section 3. They are also in accordance with national targets set out in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023. The measures have defined the 2025/2026 action plans provided in Appendix C.

It should be noted that numerical measures are not always applicable or feasible for determining nature improvement. Nevertheless, the council aims to be transparent and report back on nature improvement and recovery in the Winchester District by 2030.

Table 7 – Winchester City Council Measures 2025-2030 for council-based actions on council owned and managed land. These contribute to the district wide measures.

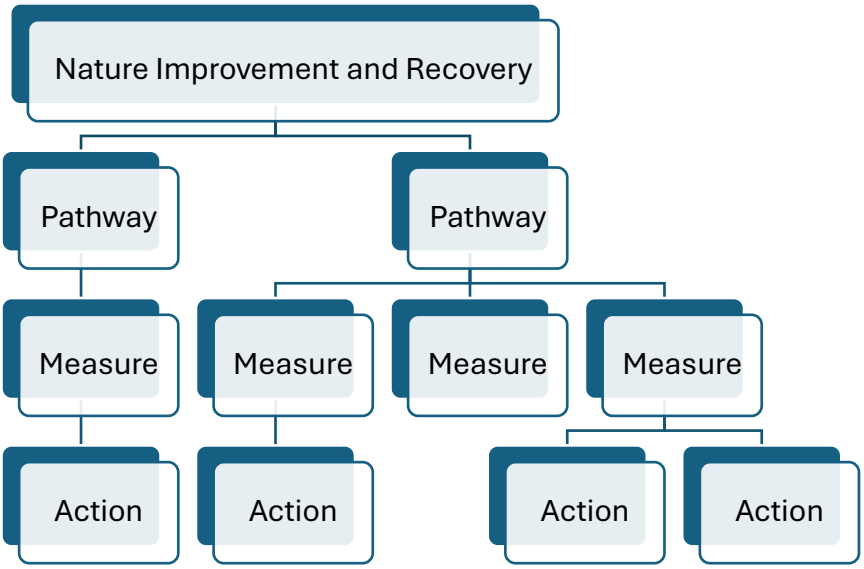
Council Land 2030 Measures			
1	Protect and manage land for nature	1.1	Sustain 100% of SSSI units achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition
		1.2	Sustain 100% SINCs in favourable management
		1.3	Sustain 27.61% WCC land managed for nature
2	Create new spaces for nature	2.1	1 ha new habitat created or improved for nature
		2.2	500m hedgerow planted for nature
		2.3	250 swift boxes and 50 bat roost features installed on council properties
3	Deliver nature-based solutions	3.1	Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 6.08% across WCC landownership
		3.2	An additional 50tCO2e sequestered on council land
4	Prevent and control pollution	4.1	10 Wastewater Treatment Works on council land upgraded to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading
5	Connect people to nature	5.1	10,000 volunteer hours of nature conservation activities on our land
		5.2	20 events on WCC land which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing)

Table 8 - Winchester City Council Measures 2025-2030 for the entire Winchester district.

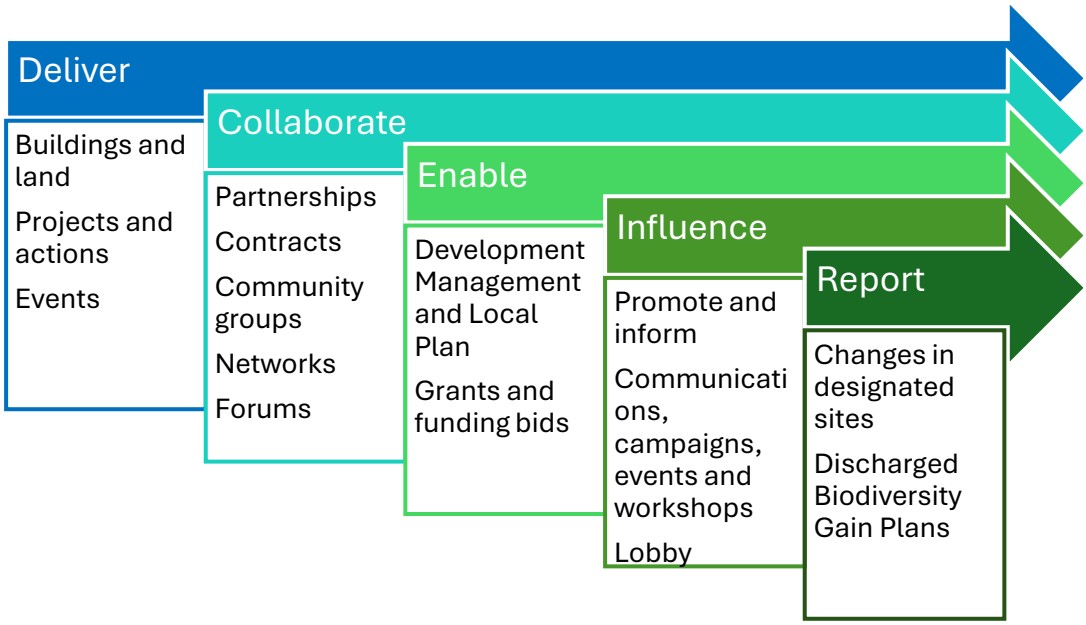
District 2030 Measures			
1	Protect and manage land for nature	1.1	Sustain SWBG site area and status
		1.2	Sustain 88% of SSSIs units in the district achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition
		1.3	Sustain 61% SINCs (surveyed in last 10 years) under positive management
		1.4	Sustain 11.39% land designated for nature
2	Create new spaces for nature	2.1	500 biodiversity units secured through habitat creation and enhancement through discharged Biodiversity Gain Plans
		2.2	100 biodiversity units secured through signing agreements with habitat banks
		2.3	10ha of Natural Green Space created
3	Deliver nature-based solutions	3.1	Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 8.33%
4	Prevent and control pollution	4.1	Continue to deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy.
5	Connect people to nature	5.1	50 farmers and land managers supported with nature-friendly practices
		5.2	5 businesses supported with nature-based projects
		5.3	6 nature events/forums delivered
		5.4	Grants given to nature conservation groups to create spaces for nature and connect people to nature
		5.5	4 partnerships collaborated with to deliver 5 restoration projects
		5.6	10 community groups collaborated with to deliver nature conservation activities
		5.7	10 event/programmes delivered through partners which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing)

4.5 Annual Nature Improvement Action Plan

A Council Land Nature Improvement Action Plan and District Nature Improvement Action Plan will be developed each year to track progress against the five-year measures. 2025/2026 versions of the two action plans are provided in Appendix C.



Actions will be planned and prioritised each year to enable proactive delivery of measures. There are five key levers for delivery of the plan. For each particular action the council will either deliver, collaborate, enable, influence or report depending on the council's role and input. Success will be determined by reporting back on the delivery of measures which contribute to identified pathways.



Delivery of nature improvement across the district will involve various stakeholders including landowners, partnerships, businesses, developers, consultants, community groups, and parish councils, and will not solely be dependent on the council. By setting measures and identifying actions we hope that stakeholders will take action, collaborate and be able to demonstrate impact and improvement.

4.6 Reporting

This five-year Nature Improvement Plan and subsequent reports will ensure the council is complying with the enhanced biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021 including reporting on the details of approved Biodiversity Gain Plans.

Appendix A – Glossary

Term	Description
Favourable management	Management practices that preserve of enhance biodiversity including improvements to habitat condition, mitigating threats such as invasive species or creating areas to benefit certain species.
Biodiversity site	An area of land or water that the council recognises for its biodiversity value and therefore implements favourable management.
Open space	Area of green space owned by the council including recreation grounds and sports pitches which have different management priorities to biodiversity sites but provide opportunities for nature improvement.
Biodiversity units secured	Total 'post site intervention' BNG units delivered through the statutory biodiversity metric, not just the net change or 10% uplift.
Habitat banks	A conservation strategy where landowners enhance biodiversity, and the resulting habitat creation or improvement is sold as "credits" to developers or other parties needing to offset biodiversity loss from their projects
Ecosystem services	The benefits that humans receive from natural ecosystems such as food, water, climate regulation, recreation and nutrient cycling.
Nature-based solutions	Actions that protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems to address societal challenges while simultaneously benefiting people and nature.
Carbon sequestration	The process of capturing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases and help mitigate climate change. This process can occur naturally through forests, soils, and oceans or artificially via technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS).

Abbreviation	Meaning
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
CNAP	Carbon Neutrality Action Plan
EIP	Environment Improvement Plan
ELMs	Environmental Land Management
GEDS	Green Economic Development Strategy
HBIC	Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre
HIWARG	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian and Reptile Group
HIWWT	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LURA	Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
NCA	National Character Area
NIP	Nature Improvement Plan
NNR	National Nature Reserve
PfSH	Partnership for South Hampshire
PTP	Package Treatment Plant
RVEI	Road Verge of Ecological Importance
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SDNP	South Downs National Park
SINC	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SWBGS	Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy
WwTWs	Wastewater Treatment Works

Appendix B – Regional and National Driving Documents

i) National Driving Documents and Legislation

Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021 brings in new targets, tools and requirements for nature recovery, some of which are still in development at the time of writing the NIP. The work areas most closely linked to the NIP are, the wider government Nature Improvement Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Net Gain, Species Conservation and Protected Sites Strategies, and the strengthened biodiversity duty.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land. New legislation brought forward by the Environment Act. 2021, requires all new developments, that are not covered under specific exemptions, to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than it was before. Habitats can be created or enhanced on the development site, off-site, or through a combination of both. Biodiversity Net Gain became mandatory for many developments in 2024.

The Statutory Metric

A Statutory Biodiversity Metric is used to calculate the biodiversity value of habitats in 'biodiversity units' on a site. It is used as a proxy for nature for the purpose of BNG. The statutory metric can calculate different types of 'biodiversity units' and is comprised of three modules. These are:

- Area habitat units,
- Hedgerow units,
- Watercourse units.

It compares proposed changes in the extent, distinctiveness, and condition of habitats on a site before and after development to determine if there is a loss or gain in biodiversity.

There are four key factors that underpin this comparison:

- habitat size
- habitat quality
- habitat location
- habitat type

As set out in the Environment Act, development that is subject to BNG, has to provide as a minimum, a 10% uplift in the existing baseline biodiversity value of a site after it has been developed. This 10% requirement applies to habitats, linear features (trees and

hedgerows) as well as water courses (ditches, rivers and streams) that might be present on a site.

The Government's National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) provides additional support for all those involved with BNG (Local Authorities, Landowners and developers) to ensure BNG is administer as effectively as possible. There is also a Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide which helps those filling out the biodiversity metric and those reviewing it afterwards to ensure the metric is completed correctly.

As explained earlier, Biodiversity Net Gain and the way it is assessed using the biodiversity metric is only a proxy for nature and therefore it can never be 100% certain that a permitted landuse change will result in the predicted 10% uplift in biodiversity. It is also not a substitute for assessing impacts on designated sites or protected species. However, and the additional benefits it brings such as, increased climate resilience and mitigation and improved health and well-being means it is a useful tool to use.

Biodiversity Net Gain is also a mechanism that can enable the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Hampshire. Providing BNG in areas which have been identified in the LNRS for nature recovery serves to benefit developers and landowners whilst also ensuring the LNRS delivers its aims and objective as well. This is recognised in the Biodiversity Metric used to calculate BNG, where if the specific BNG measure is included within the LNRS, it benefits from an additional uplift in BNG units. This makes it an incentive for landowners who are providing BNG to tie their work closely into that of the LNRS.

Offsite solutions to provide BNG

The council in managing its estate and working in partnerships, has the opportunity to create and facilitate habitat banks for BNG which can provide offsite solutions for council owned and/or private development. Offsite BNG solutions can be delivered through the use of conservation covenants with responsible bodies.

A conservation covenant agreement is a private, voluntary agreement to conserve the natural (or heritage) features land. The parts of a conservation covenant agreement which set out what a landowner and responsible body must or must not do to help conserve the land become legally binding. Importantly, they can be used secure income and funding for the conservation activities carried out. The responsible body who is party to the Conservation Covenant is an independent organisation who would essentially be responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of the activities covered by the covenant. Therefore, should the council wish to enter into a conservation covenant to sell BNG units on its own land, it will need a separate independent organisation to sign up and be the responsible body.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) are county-scale spatial strategies to recover nature across England. Together, they will cover the country in a Nature Recovery Network. Hampshire County Council is leading the development of the Hampshire LNRS.

The plan is being developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders including Winchester City Council as a Supporting Authority. The result will be a strategic plan with mapped priorities and actions for nature recovery. It is anticipated it will be published in December 2025.

The actions developed in this Nature Improvement Plan will align as much as possible with the list of measures contained within the LNRS for Hampshire to ensure that nature recovery is central to the work the council undertakes.

The LNRS maps will allow the council to focus where nature improvements should occur.

Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies

Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies are designed to provide a more strategic approach to the complex challenge of protecting and restoring species and habitats. Both strategies aim to safeguard the future of species/habitats at greatest risk. They are designed to avoid the need to identify individual specific solutions which can be difficult, time-consuming and costly to implement. The strategies will feed into Local Nature Recovery Strategies, support local planning authorities in discharging their duty in respect of biodiversity. They will also help in developing Local Plans and complement plans for biodiversity net gain. Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies are still in their development and pilot phases.

Enhanced Biodiversity Duty and Reporting

The Environment Act. 2021 introduces a strengthened 'biodiversity duty' which requires public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means that, as a public authority, you must:

1. Consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on your consideration.
3. Act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives.

In addition to the above, the Environment Act also requires Local Authorities to produce a report on what they are doing and how they are complying with this biodiversity duty. By law, the report must include the following:

- a summary of the action taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
- A plan how to comply with the biodiversity duty in the next reporting period

Linked to Biodiversity Net Gain, the report must also include:

- the actions carried out to meet biodiversity net gain obligations
- details of biodiversity net gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved
- Plan how to meet biodiversity net gain obligations in the next reporting period

The Nature Improvement Plan will be the reporting framework which demonstrates how the council is meeting the strengthened Biodiversity Duty, including reporting back on the work the council undertakes for Biodiversity Net Gain.

Environment Improvement Plan

In 2023 the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) was published. In accordance with the Environment Act 2021, the EIP23 represents the first review of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) which was published in 2018. The EIP continues to use the 10 goals set out in the in the 25YEP and sets out the progress made against these goals and further plans and targets to deliver on the goals. The ten goals in the 25YEP and EIP23 are:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife
- Goal 2: Clean air
- Goal 3: Clean and plentiful water
- Goal 4: Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- Goal 5: Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- Goal 6: Using resources from nature sustainably
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Goal 8: Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- Goal 9: Enhancing biosecurity
- Goal 10: Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment

Example of targets within the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023:

- Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, and then by the end of 2042 increase abundance so that it is greater than in 2022 and at least 10% greater than in 2030.
- Restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites, compared to 2022 levels, by the end of 2042.
- New interim target to restore or create 140,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2028, compared to 2022 levels.
- Improve the GB Red List Index for species extinction by 2042 compared to 2022 levels.
- 50% of SSSIs on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.
- Increase tree canopy or woodland cover from 14.5% to 16.5% of total land in England by 2050 (interim target is 0.26% = 34,000ha by 31 January 2028).
- Reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment pollution from agriculture into the water environment by 40% by 31 December 2038, compared to a 2018 baseline.
- Reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment pollution from agriculture into the water environment by at least 40% by 2038 (against a 2018 baseline). Interim Target 1: reduce by 10% by 31 January 2028. Interim Target 2: reduce by 15% in catchments containing protected sites in unfavourable condition due to nutrient pollution by 31 January 2028.

- Reduce phosphorous loadings from treated wastewater by 80% by 31 December 2038, against a 2020 baseline (interim target - reduce by 50% by 31 January 2028, against a 2020 baseline).
- 65% to 80% of landowners and farmers will adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10-15% of their land by 2030.
- Support farmers to create or restore 30,000 miles of hedgerows a year by 2037 and 45,000 miles of hedgerows a year by 2050, returning hedgerow lengths in England to 10% above the 1984 peak (360,000 miles).

The work that Winchester City Council undertakes, can and does contribute towards the achievement of these goals. It is therefore important that this is recognised, quantified and documented which is the purpose of this Nature Improvement Plan.

Environmental Land Management

The government has undertaken a significant reform of agricultural policy and spending in England. Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes pay farmers and land managers to provide environmental goods and services alongside their principal activities such as food production. Measures that payment can be made for include protecting, restoring and creating wildlife rich habitats, improving water quality, increasing resilience to floods and droughts, increasing tree and woodland cover and storing carbon.

ii) Regional Planning Mitigation Schemes

Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH)

Winchester City Council is a member of the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH). PfSH is a collaboration of twelve local authorities around the Solent region, working together to promote sustainable economic growth, environmental stewardship, and cultural development across South Hampshire. PfSH aims to address shared challenges and opportunities that transcend individual council boundaries. Its key areas of focus include housing and infrastructure planning, environmental initiatives such as nutrient mitigation and flood risk assessment, and support for the creative and digital sectors.

District Level Licence

The council has joined the District Level Licensing (DLL) scheme for great crested newts—a streamlined approach introduced by Natural England to improve species protection while supporting sustainable development.

Traditionally, developers were required to carry out site-specific surveys and apply for individual mitigation licences if their projects affected great crested newts. Under the DLL scheme, developers instead make a conservation payment, which funds the creation, restoration, and long-term management of high-quality newt habitats off-site.

This approach enables a more strategic, landscape-scale method of conservation, ensuring that development and biodiversity enhancement go hand in hand.

Bird Aware Solent

The council is a member of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership, also known as Bird Aware Solent. This partnership works collaboratively to develop and implement a mitigation strategy that addresses the impacts of increased recreational activity resulting from residential development. The strategy focuses on protecting internationally important coastal sites within the zone of influence, ensuring that wildlife, particularly overwintering birds, can continue to thrive alongside responsible public access.

Nutrient Mitigation

The council has entered into agreements with local landowners to deliver nutrient mitigation through land-use changes that reduce nutrient runoff into sensitive water bodies. This approach typically involves taking agricultural land out of intensive use, thereby significantly lowering nitrogen and phosphorus inputs.

This mitigation helps offset the nutrient pollution associated with increased wastewater and surface runoff from new housing developments. By reducing nutrient loads at a landscape scale, the mitigation schemes play a vital role in protecting freshwater and coastal ecosystems from harmful effects such as algal blooms and biodiversity loss.

Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy

The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (SW&BGS) is a non-statutory, evidence-based framework designed to protect and manage the network of sites used by overwintering wading birds and brent geese across the Solent coast, particularly within and around Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar wetlands. There are several of these Solent wader and brent goose sites in the district and council has adopted the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy to ensure they are protected from inappropriate development.

Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

The council is also facilitating the role out of Biodiversity Net Gain and the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire through development management. Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are explained in greater detail in Appendix B. The LNRS will also enable the council to prioritise locations for habitat creation, restoration and enhancement outside of development management.

Appendix C - Action Plans for 2025/2026

Council Land - Nature Improvement Action Plan 2025/2026				
Pathway		**2030 Measure**	**2025/2026 Actions**	**Delivery**
1	Protect and manage land for nature	1.1 Sustain 100% of SSSI units achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition	• Deliver the agreed annual actions within the management plan for SSSI land	Collaborate
			• Complete an annual report and rapid condition assessment on SSSI land	Collaborate
		1.2 Sustain 100% SINCs in favourable management	• Deliver the annual actions within the management plans for SINCs	Deliver
		1.3 Sustain 27.61% WCC land managed for nature	• Deliver the annual actions within the management plans for biodiversity sites	Deliver
			• Scope and research the River Management Plan	Collaborate
			• Continue to deliver biodiversity management of 'non biodiversity open spaces'	Deliver
2	Create new spaces for nature	2.1 1 ha new habitat created or improved for nature	• Improved management of 0.1 ha of council owned verges/grassland	Deliver
			• 0.1ha of tree planting (according to BNG metric calculator)	Deliver
		2.2 500m hedgerow planted for nature		
		2.3 250 swift boxes and 50 bat roost features installed on council properties	• Install 50 Swift boxes on council properties	Deliver
			• Install 10 bat features on council properties	
3	Deliver nature-based solutions	3.1 Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 6.08% across WCC landownership	• Deliver the Tree Strategy with regards to replacement tree planting	Deliver
		3.2 An additional 50tCO2e sequestered on council land	• Explore potential for woodland management to both sequester more carbon and improve biodiversity	Collaborate

4	Prevent and control pollution	4.1	10 WWTWs on council land upgraded to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading	• Upgrade 2 WWTWs	Collaborate
5	Connect people to nature	5.1	10,000 volunteer hours of nature conservation activities on our land	• Enable 2000 volunteer hours on our land	Collaborate/ Enable
		5.2	20 events on WCC land which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing)	• Enable 2 nature/health and wellbeing events and deliver 2 reoccurring programmes on council land	Deliver/ Collaborate/ Enable

Winchester District - Nature Improvement Action Plan 2025/2026					
Pathway		**2030 Measure**		**2025/2026 Actions**	**Delivery**
1	Protect and manage land for nature	1.1	Sustain SWBG site area and status	• Continue to apply the SWBG mitigation guidance	Report
		1.2	Sustain 88% of SSSIs units in the district achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition	• Report any degradation concerns to NE and understand when condition assessments will be undertaken	Report
		1.3	Sustain 61% SINCs (surveyed in last 10 years) under good management	• Continue to deliver SINC survey programme through HBIC	Collaborate Deliver
		1.4	Sustain 11.39% land designated for nature	• Maintain the existing extent of designated land by ensuring that any development impacts to SINCs are adequately compensated	Enable
				• Report back on SINC amendments, creation and deletion	Report
				• Report back on TPO and HRNs served	Report
2	Create new spaces for nature	2.1	500 biodiversity units secured through habitat creation and enhancement through discharged BGPs	• Continue to assess BGPs through Development Management	Enable
				• Report back on discharged Biodiversity Gain Plans	Report
		2.2	100 biodiversity units secured through signing agreements with habitat banks	• Determine council position to habitat banks. Assess 1 habitat bank proposal	Deliver
				• Report back on amphibian habitat delivered through the District Level Licensing scheme	Report
		2.3	10ha of open space created	• Continue to deliver the Local Plan and assist with land transfers	Enable
3	Deliver nature-based solutions	3.1	Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 8.33%	• Ensure appropriate replanting plans for development and TPO applications	Enable
4	Prevent and control pollution	4.1	Continue to deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy.	• Report back on the number of credits provided through the council scheme	Enable

5	Connect people to nature	5.1	50 farmers and land managers supported with nature-friendly practices	• Engage with 10 farmers and land managers through cluster work	Deliver
		5.2	5 businesses supported with nature-based projects	• Support 1 business to deliver a nature-based project	Enable
		5.3	6 nature events/forums delivered	• Deliver NIP launch event	Deliver
				• Deliver nature engagement as part of Green fair	Collaborate
		5.4	Grants given to nature conservation groups to create spaces for nature and connect people to nature	• Provide grants to appropriate nature conservation groups	Deliver
		5.5	4 partnerships collaborated with to deliver 5 restoration projects	• Deliver 1 restoration project through a partnership group	Collaborate
		5.6	10 community groups collaborated with to deliver nature conservation activities	• Support 2 community groups	Enable
		5.7	10 event/programmes delivered through partners which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing)	• Enable 2 nature/ health and wellbeing event/programmes across district	Enable