



Community Biodiversity Toolkit

Overarching Guidance

March 2022





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Introduction

Welcome to the South Somerset 'Community Biodiversity Toolkit'

It is packed with information, ideas and helpful resources to enable you and your community (including town and parish councils, community groups and schools), to respond positively to key national policy and legislation.

Our communities can make a real difference to their own local areas that, when joined up, will help to create a landscape scale network of habitats rich in biodiversity that will support nature recovery and all of the essential and varied benefits and services that our natural environment provides. Our [South Somerset Environment Strategy](#) provides the district level structure and a starting point for how your community can realise its role in restoring nature with the widest benefits.

This toolkit is designed to provide you and your community with information that, when combined with your enthusiasm, skills and energy, could deliver projects that will have the greatest environmental benefits. The landscape around you is already home to plants and animals that could be vital to the local ecosystem, so understanding what you already have is the first step to knowing how best to improve it. Even the smallest project in the right place, that improves things for local species and important habitats, could make a huge difference.

Much has been done by our South Somerset communities already, and this toolkit is designed to both build on existing work and help town and parish councils, along with our communities, to start from scratch.



Community tree planting group at Yeovil Recreation Centre



Reimagining the Levels, Tree planting event



What does it cover?

This *Community Biodiversity Toolkit* will help you to create a community biodiversity plan and deliver it. The overarching guidance in this section offers tips on what you should consider when developing your plans, as well as summarising the five key areas where town and parish councils, alongside our communities, could make the biggest difference for local wildlife and the environment.

The toolkit is then split into three appendices, providing additional guidance that will help you with **planning** (*Appendix 1*), **developing** (*Appendix 2*), and **implementing** (*Appendix 3*) your community biodiversity plans. It covers:

1. *Planning and engagement* (*Appendix 1*):

- Ideas for engaging your communities and identifying skills, knowledge and capacity;
- Understanding your local environment and the resources that can help; and
- How to survey your community area.

2. *Developing your plans* (*Appendix 2*):

- Identifying what you can do for biodiversity, including policies, action plans, as well as practical projects;
- Developing your community environmental plans and linking them to regional networks; and
- Resources available, funding opportunities and the people who can help.

3. *Delivery, implementation and practical tips* (*Appendix 3*):

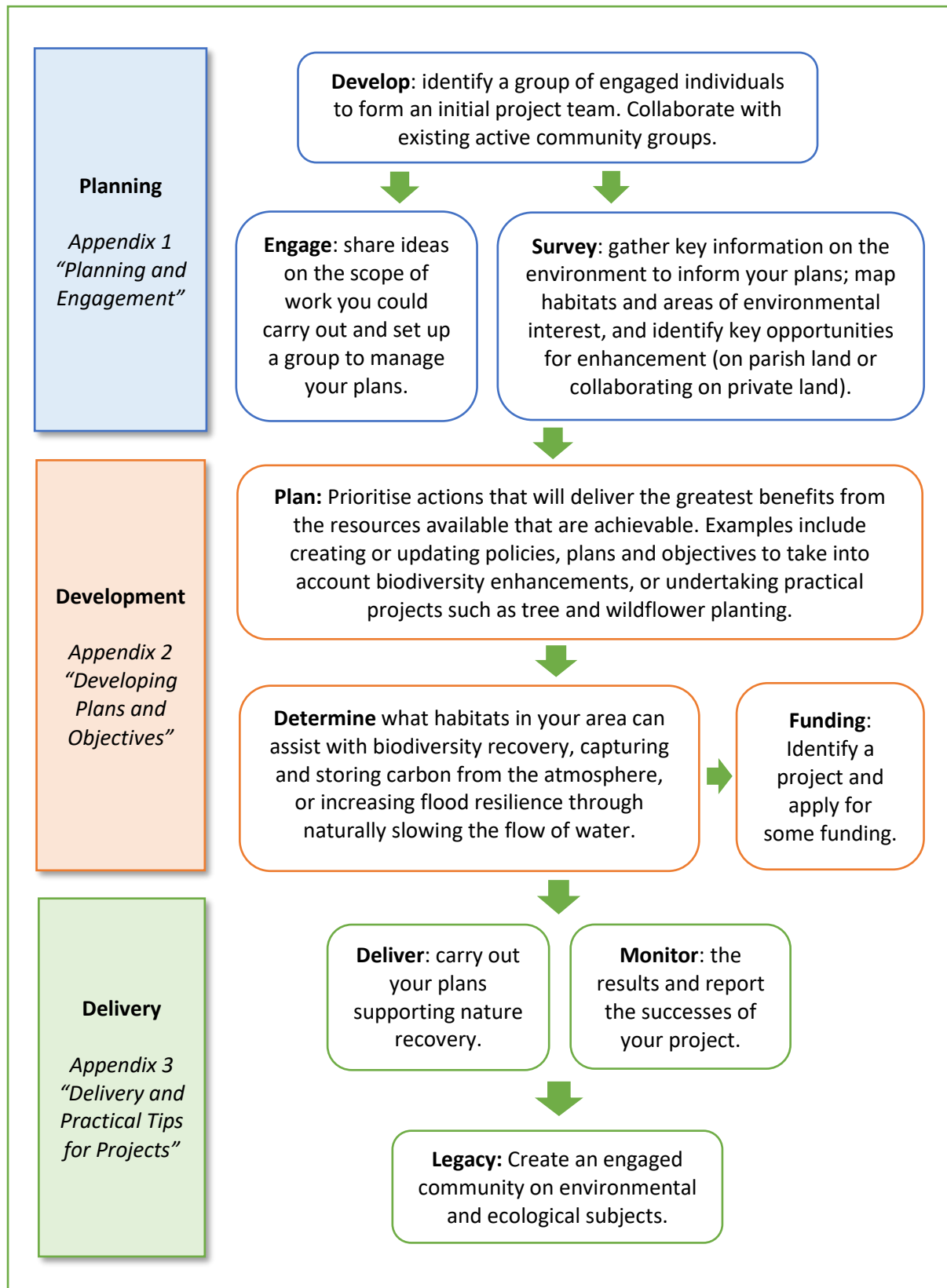
- Ideas for delivering your project and monitoring the results;
- How to make your plan effective and long-lasting; and
- A list of practical tips on managing land for biodiversity, including a number of local case studies for inspiration.

Further information on each of these items can be found in Appendix 1-3.

The following flow diagram shows the key things to consider when developing your plans.



Overarching guide to developing your Biodiversity Plans

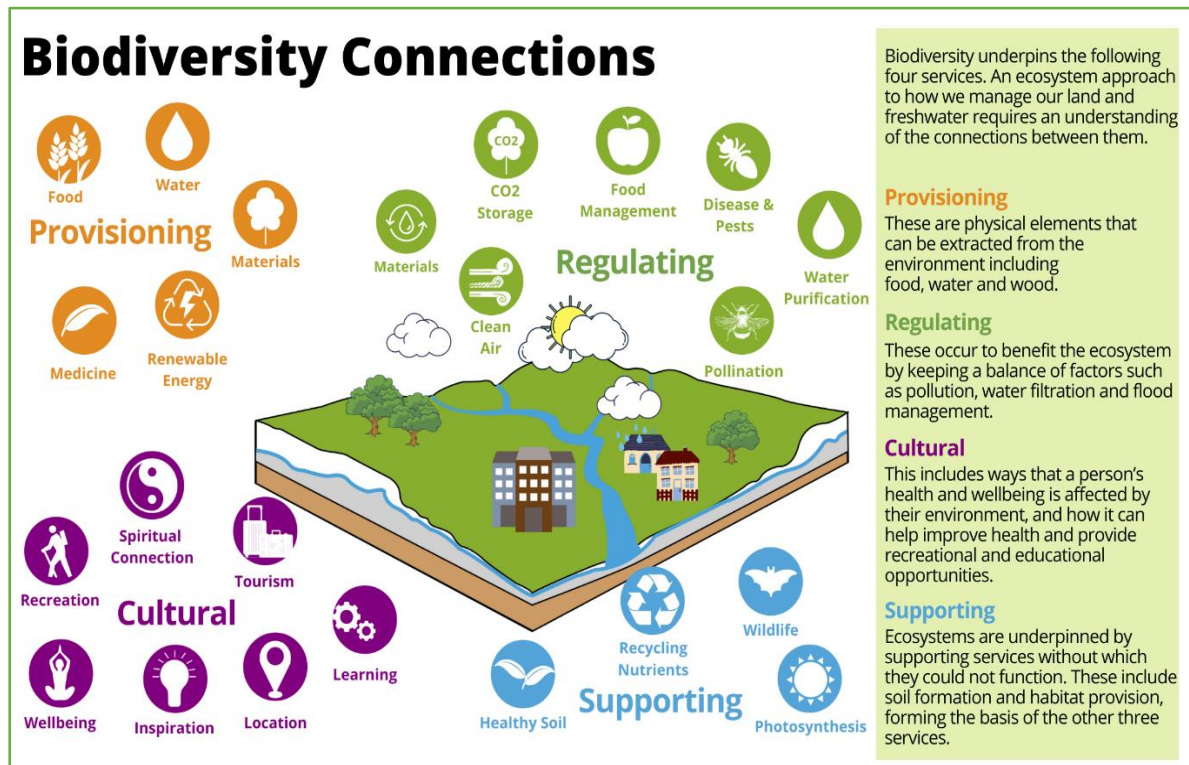




What is biodiversity and why is it important?

Biodiversity includes all of the species of plants and animals, as well as the natural systems that support them. Conserving biodiversity provides benefits for wildlife, the landscape, our cultural heritage, our health and wellbeing, socio-economics, and the health of the planet through what are known as 'ecosystem services'. Nature is also critical in our current response to climate change.

See below for an explanation of the services nature provides:



The problem?

The UK's [State of Nature](#) (2019) report has highlighted a critical decline in biodiversity in Britain. Its headline finding was that both the abundance and distribution of British species have declined dramatically since 1970, with less nature, in fewer places.

To help reverse this trend of decline we will need to work towards incorporating habitat restoration and nature recovery in all that we do across South Somerset and beyond.



How Town and Parish Councils can support biodiversity in South Somerset

Town and parish councils, alongside our communities, have an important role to play in local biodiversity conservation. South Somerset is blessed with a rich and varied natural environment and we all have an obligation to maintain these important natural areas by restoring and improving habitats where possible.

There are five main areas where town and parish councils, alongside our communities, could make the biggest difference for local wildlife and the environment. We have included a summary of these in the table below, alongside several examples. Further details can be found in **Appendix 1-3**.

Table 1: Key areas where you can support biodiversity

Activity	Examples / Case-studies
<p>1. Through engaging and supporting local community groups and local environmental initiatives.</p>	<p>Further details can be found in <i>Appendix 1: Planning and Engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a group of engaged individuals to form an initial project team; or collaborate with existing active community groups to formulate your environmental plans; • Inform and share ideas on the scope of work you could carry out with local residents and set up a group to manage plans; • Ask a wildlife organisation to give a talk locally; • Install signage explaining the wildlife value of an area and why it is being managed in a particular way; • Use town and parish newsletters to share environmental content; • Consider running a monitoring and survey session to engage the community (this is also known as “<i>citizen science</i>”); • Make grants or funds available for local projects or research grant opportunities such as: SSDC’s Community Environment Grant.
<p>2. When you are preparing Town and Parish plans, policies, objectives and action plans.</p>	<p>Further details can be found in <i>Appendix 2: Developing Plans & Objectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declare a climate & ecological emergency, for example: Timsbury PC • Create an Environment Plan or Biodiversity Plan • Incorporate biodiversity into your Parish Plan: Curry Rivel PC • Create a Parish Biodiversity Map: Parish Wildlife Map Toolkit • Create a Biodiversity Action Plan: Hamble PC or use this template • Incorporate biodiversity into your Neighbourhood Plan, for example: Martock PC and their Environment Manual • Create a Parish Tree Policy, for example: Baltonsborough PC • Designate valuable sites as Local Wildlife Sites by contacting the LWS Panel



Activity	Examples / Case-studies
<p>3. When you are managing land for biodiversity or collaborating with local landowners.</p>	<p>Further details can be found in <i>Appendix 3: Delivery and Practical Tips</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider forming an environmental sub-group to oversee the management of parish land to support biodiversity, for example on your verges, amenity, leisure and sports spaces; • Manage a churchyard for wildlife under Somerset Wildlife Trust’s Wilder Churches initiative, for example: Langport TC • Construct or restore a village pond: How to Build a Pond • Plant trees on parish land, find an area of land you already own, or collaborate with a local landowner (although be careful not to damage a site with existing biodiversity interest): see the Ash Millennium Wood and Langport Trees for 2020 project for inspiration; • Create or enhance an existing woodland: Curry Woods Conservation • Create a community orchard; • Carry out a hedgerow or tree survey in your town or parish; • Plant and infill gaps in hedgerows or create new ones; • Create a wildlife meadow: SSDC’s wildflower verge scheme • Make suitable native wild plant seed bombs and deploy them; • Make and/or install bird, mammal, bug or bee homes, see here; • Reduce chemical fertiliser and pesticide usage in your land management, and reduce the mowing regime to allow wildflowers to set seed in early summer; • Start a wildlife gardening and maintenance group in your community. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div data-bbox="539 1310 938 1624" style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div data-bbox="959 1310 1348 1624" style="text-align: center;"> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <i>Conservation verge management</i> <i>Community tree planting, Langport</i> </div>
<p>4. Creating bylaws</p>	<p>Consider creating bylaws to help conserve wildlife – see Local Nature Reserves in England: a Guide to their Selection</p>



Activity	Examples / Case-studies
5. When you are commenting on planning applications	<p>Biodiversity is a material consideration in planning, which means it is something that planning officers have to take into account. Key questions to ask when responding to applications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will the proposed development result in harm to the wildlife of your town or parish? <i>Understand the habitats and species that may be effected and actively discourage developments that do not safeguard or enhance local and important biodiversity;</i>• Does the proposed development result in benefits for the wildlife of your town or parish?• Are there opportunities for enhancements to local wildlife? <p>Further details can be found in <i>Appendix 2</i>.</p>

In addition to the list of ideas above, visit Friends of the Earth’s guide to [‘20 actions parish and town councils can take on the climate and nature emergency’](#) for further inspiration.



The role of Town and Parish Councils and the ‘Biodiversity Duty’

We all have an important role to play in the conservation of biodiversity and this is recognised and formalised within Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act where:

“Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”.

As part of our Government’s commitment to reversing the decline in biodiversity, the [Environment Act](#) (2021) has strengthened this commitment, seeking *“to conserve **and enhance biodiversity**”* where it is within the proper exercise of parishes’ functions. This commitment should not be seen as an onerous one; instead, it provides an exciting opportunity to re-think the way we work.

National guidance setting out how public bodies can fulfil this duty is available from Defra [here](#).

Defra’s guidance states that you could look to **integrate** biodiversity when:

- *“developing town and parish policies and strategies;*
- *managing the planning system;*
- *managing your land and buildings for biodiversity (or collaborating with others);*
- *managing your woodlands, nature reserves, parks and public open spaces e.g. sports grounds and cemeteries; and*
- *when developing infrastructure, such as roads, buildings or flood management.”*

In practical terms, this could be **demonstrated** where:

- biodiversity (e.g. species or habitats of importance locally present) is protected and enhanced in line with statutory obligations where land or buildings are being managed, or planning applications responded to;
- support is being given to local biodiversity initiatives, such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Biological Records Centres and Local Wildlife Sites, perhaps through survey programmes or grant funding opportunities;
- local people are inspired to engage with and increase their understanding of biodiversity issues, for example by becoming tree wardens, recording wildlife, or setting up community action groups; and
- all staff and elected members of town and parish councils clearly understand how biodiversity issues relate to their own decisions and actions.



Summary

This *Community Biodiversity Toolkit* will help you to develop a **community biodiversity plan** and deliver it. In summary, you should consider the following when developing your plans:

1) Planning your project (see Appendix 1):

- *Identify* a group of engaged individuals to form an initial project team; collaborate with existing active community groups and local landowners;
- *Survey* and gather key information on the environment to inform your environmental plan, map habitats and areas of environmental interest in your community; and
- *Engage* with your community and share ideas on the scope of work you could carry out and set up a group to manage your community environmental plan.

2) Developing plans (See Appendix 2):

- *Prioritise* those plans and actions that will deliver the greatest benefits from the resources available that are achievable;
- *Determine* what habitats in your area can assist with helping to naturally capture carbon from the atmosphere, or increase flood resilience through naturally slowing water flow; and
- *Research* funding opportunities for your project.

3) Implementing and monitoring (See Appendix 3):

- *Deliver* and carry out your plan, monitor the results and report back your successes; and
- *Consider the legacy* of an engaged community on environmental and ecological subjects.

By improving your local environment, parishes will not just be helping to conserve biodiversity, but will also be improving the sustainability and quality of life of your parishes. Feel free to share this guide more widely; others that may find it useful could include grounds teams (or contractors), leisure providers, local schools and community groups!

Get in touch

- Email: SSDCEnvironment@southsomerset.gov.uk
- You can find out more about the environment in South Somerset by visiting our website: www.southsomersetenvironment.co.uk
- Keep up to date on the latest environmental news across South Somerset and subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, [Get SuSSed](#).



Parish Environment Champion Network

Finally, SSDC's **Parish Environment Champion** network is a growing group of local residents, passionate about the environment, who volunteer their time to share best practice, and support each other to deliver local eco projects in their community. Consider working with your local Environment Champion or if you do not already have a nominated Champion in your parish get in touch if you would like to nominate yourself or someone else.

For more information about how to get involved, to network with others, and to see a map of where are Champions are currently located visit our website [here](#), or contact us at the details above.



Useful organisations and further links

Overarching guidance

- [Defra](#) - Government guidance for public authorities on exercising their biodiversity duty.
- [Wildlife Trust](#) - Local Authority Services and Biodiversity - Your Statutory Obligations.
- [Friends of the Earth](#) – 20 actions parish and town councils can take on the climate and nature emergency.

Useful organisations

Where possible, we have provided links to additional resources in each of the appendices.

In summary, other organisations who you could contact to seek support and advice from include:

- [Climate Resilient Somerset](#) – Combined authorities.
- [Somerset Wildlife Trust](#) – Wilder Somerset;
- [Natural England – Publications](#)
- [RSPB](#) – South Somerset;
- [Plantlife](#) – the wild plant conservation charity;
- [Somerset Environmental Records Centre](#)
- [Somerset Local Nature Partnership](#)
- [Friends of the Earth](#)
- [Bat Conservation Society](#)
- [Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West](#)
- [Re-imagining the Levels](#) – a Somerset based tree planting charity;
- [Carymoor Environmental Centre](#) – environmental education charity based near Castle Cary;
- [Magdalen Farm Environmental Trust](#) – based near Chard;
- [Woodland Trust](#)

Don't forget to involve local community groups and volunteering organisations in your practical activities. Further information and links to relevant organisations can be found in **Appendix 1 to 3**.