



Community Biodiversity Toolkit

Appendix 2: Developing your Plans

March 2022





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Introduction

This appendix gives an overarching guide to **developing** your community environmental plans.

Developing your Community Environmental Plans

After you have surveyed areas of land identified in your community, it is important to consider what habitats and species need to be retained and protected, and which areas, if enhanced, could provide the greatest benefits for wildlife.

The [Landscape of South Somerset](#) describes the seven character areas of the district. You should refer to the Landscape Character Assessment for your area and consider which types of habitats are present to understand what habitats you should be aiming to protect, enhance and create.

In addition, Section 41 of the NERC Act (Section 41) provides a list of habitats and species considered a priority to conserve and enhance in England. The habitats include arable field margins, hedgerows, ponds, lowland mixed deciduous woodlands, lowland meadows and wet woodland.

What habitats and species are most appropriate to encourage in your area?

Use the outputs of your research, including any surveys and Parish Maps, to help confirm:

- Current ecological values;
- What actions could be taken to maintain, improve or enhance an area;
- Which species are you trying to encourage; and
- What are their preferred habitats?

Also, consider how different habitats can help to naturally store carbon especially where this role can be enhanced. For example, your survey may have located a species poor heavily managed grassland field, which could be turned into a wildflower meadow or wetland to encourage butterflies and other invertebrates.



Field edge set-aside with wildflower habitat



Shrill Carder bee, [habitat management](#) at Ham Hill



It is important to remember when embarking on a habitat creation project that it takes time and appropriate management for habitats to develop and it will take time to notice changes. It is also important to identify which landowners you could encourage to get involved, as this is key to being able to deliver effective plans.

Identifying the relationships between areas of value for biodiversity

Your surveys will map the local landscape and habitats enabling you to see the relationships between areas of value for biodiversity. For example, woodlands may be separated from each other by large areas of cultivated land, long sections of rivers may have straightened banks with few trees and wetland plants, or you may find hedgerow networks in poor condition perhaps because they have wide gaps or because they are unmanaged with heavy ivy growth which threatens to cause shrubs and trees to collapse.

By providing connected, suitable and diverse habitats, we can counteract habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. There are benefits to increasing the overall size of a habitat enabling it to support a greater number of species.

You may want to consider creating a variety of habitat types on your site as a habitat mosaic will help maximise biodiversity. For example, you may have a field that borders a woodland with a gappy hedgerow running along one edge. You could plant up the hedgerow with native tree and hedgerow species to increase its structure and connectivity, as well as creating an area of species rich grassland with a pond.

Balancing Space for Nature and People

Studies have shown that spending time outdoors in nature contribute to our physical and mental health and wellbeing. As we seek solutions to reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity, there is an increasing demand for access to nature and sustainable transport links including for cycling and walking.



A balance will therefore need to be struck between improving our access to nature and protecting sensitive habitats and species.

As part of developing community plans and projects, efforts need to be made to highlight sensitive areas (including dark wildlife corridors) and then design and locate new or improved infrastructure such as footpaths and cycleways (and any associated lighting) away from these key areas to help maximise the positive effects for people and wildlife.



What can you do for Biodiversity: Plans, Policies and Actions

Planning

When developing your community biodiversity plans, look to prioritise actions that will deliver the greatest benefits from the resources available that are achievable.

Examples for this include creating or updating town and parish plans, policies and actions to take into account biodiversity protection and enhancements, as well as undertaking practical projects in your local area such as tree and hedgerow planting.

Drawing up Policies, Objectives and Action Plans

The following table provides some ideas to consider when taking action to support biodiversity.

Not all will be relevant to your situation depending on your land arrangements in your town or parish but the actions should provide you with some ideas as to the range of options available to you to help protect and enhance your local biodiversity.


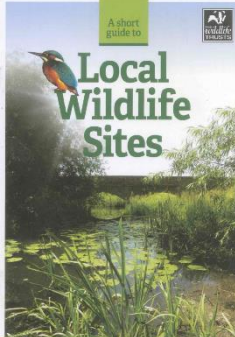


Example of SSDC's sustainable land management policy at Yeovil Recreation Centre; [click here](#) to find out more.



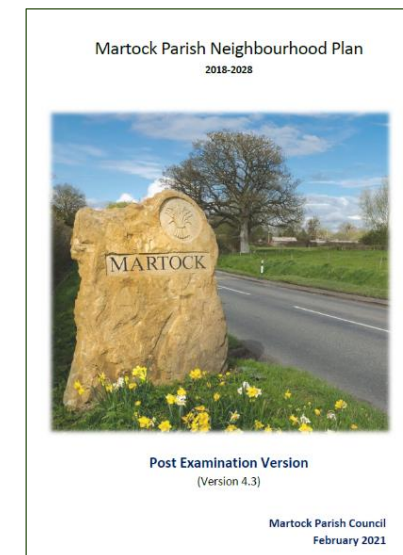
Measure	Summary
Formally declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency	<p>Make this a Town or Parish priority and set up an action group to discuss ideas and initiatives. <i>Local examples include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In September 2019, Frome Town Council passed a resolution recognising the Climate and Ecological Emergency and resolved to take action with others to reduce its causes. They published a Climate Emergency Strategy, and key learnings from this experience include the importance of community buy-in and input into initiative planning to generate momentum. For more information, visit their website here. • In January 2020, Timsbury Parish Council, NE Somerset, recognised the Climate Emergency and established a Green Action Working Group to instigate change in the parish; see details here.
Create a Biodiversity or Environmental Plan	<p>Environmental Plan or Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a document that reviews every Parish activity that could impact on the environment, it considers opportunities for habitat restoration and nature recovery, the reduction of carbon emissions and the sustainable use of resources etc., and then it provides actions to address those impacts. For example, see: Plumpton Parish Council's Environmental Policy. <p>Biodiversity Plan or Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This details how a town or parish aim to protect, record, enhance and promote an understanding of biodiversity within the parish. For example, see Hackleton Parish Council's Biodiversity Policy.
Create a Parish Biodiversity Map	<p>Creating a Parish Biodiversity Map or visual record is a good way to involve the community in charting the local wildlife features and places that matter to them. Features such as meadows, woodlands, hedgerows, ponds and rivers can be included in the map, which will be a useful current resource and an excellent reference point in the future. This can then be reviewed against Nature Recovery Network (NRN) mapping from the Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP) when it becomes available to towns and parishes (see section below on <i>Linking Nature Recovery Objectives at County Level</i>).</p> <p>The Parish Wildlife Map Toolkit is an excellent guide to getting started, whilst the following link provides an example of how to create a hand drawn wildlife map and guide, originally produced for Wellington, Somerset.</p>



Measure	Summary
<p>Designate valuable sites as Local Wildlife Sites</p>	<p>Consider working with the Somerset Local Wildlife Sites Panel to determine whether any valuable sites in your area may merit designation as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Designating land can give it more 'official' status as a site that is important for biodiversity. Consider paying professional ecologists to review your site; alternatively contact suitably qualified and independent volunteers to assess the value of a site. Some universities and higher education institutions may also be able to assist.</p> <p>There are currently about 2,200 LWS's in Somerset, encompassing important habitats such as flower-rich meadow and pasture, ponds, wetland, heathland, and ancient broadleaved woodland. A short guide to LWSs can be found here.</p> <div data-bbox="1473 395 1973 743" style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>
<p>Implement a Town or Parish Plan</p>	<p>The development of Town or Parish Plans has a clear role to play in the conservation of biodiversity, as it can set out clearly how town and parish councils intend to incorporate this duty, and how it would like the district to account for wildlife when planning for the wider area.</p> <p>For example, Curry Rivel PC have produced a Parish Plan here. Whilst many councils will have already written their Parish Plans, it is important that when writing new plans or reviewing existing plans, this legal duty is accounted for. The drawing up of parish plans is a collaborative and consultative process. You will need to understand what the key biodiversity issues are in your parish and then prioritise them. This can be assisted by asking some simple questions, for example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Where are the most valuable wildlife resources of your parish? b. Are they threatened? c. Can you influence these threats? d. Can you map your resources? <p>Following consultation, and agreement on the priorities for your parish you can then vocalise them through the Town or Parish Plan by setting out a vision for the biodiversity of your parish, setting aims for biodiversity conservation, setting actions and objectives to achieve the aims, and setting timescales and agreeing responsibility.</p>

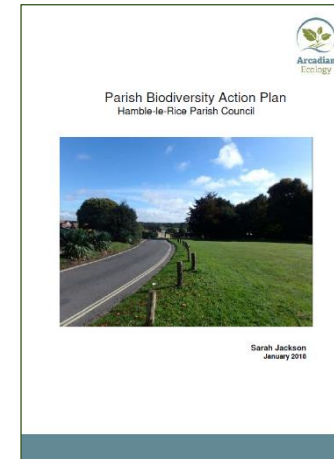


Measure	Summary
<p>Neighbourhood Planning and integrating biodiversity</p>	<p>Many communities in South Somerset have already produced Local Community Plans (<i>Town or Parish Plans</i>). While these can act as a foundation for future development ideas, a Neighbourhood Plan is a separate document.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans can be created by town or parish councils under the Localism Act 2011 and are a valuable way to seek protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the local area (for example, see Martock Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan, and associated Environment Manual). This is because if passed by local referendum, they then have legal status and form part of the wider local authority's development plan.</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans can contain a vision for your area as well as specific planning policies. It is therefore important to consider biodiversity when drawing up your Plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Produce an environmental map of what you already have; b. Create policies and plans to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect wildlife already present on sites chosen for development; • Enhance existing wildlife areas in your neighbourhood (for example, by creating wildlife corridors to link up habitats); • Protect designated sites and protected species from new development, for example by recommending 'buffer zones' around sites to minimise the impacts of nearby developments; and • Improve habitats for wildlife on development sites. c. Ensure that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included within Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders. This should strengthen the obligation for developers to make provision for wildlife within the development before they are granted planning permission. <p>Click here to find out more about the Neighbourhood Plan process.</p>







Measure	Summary
<p>Create a Biodiversity Action Plan</p>	<p>A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a strategy for protecting and enhancing biological diversity in a local area, and can be developed by an organisation or authority in relation to property, land and activities that are under their control.</p> <p>Even if you choose not to develop a BAP, undertaking some or all of the processes outlined below can still be very useful. For an example, see Hamble-le-Rice Parish Council's BAP, or this high-level template produced by South Gloucestershire Council for local parishes to use.</p> <p>Consider the following factors when developing a BAP:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Assess habitats and species present</i> – firstly, conduct an overview of the sites for which you are responsible for or have influence over (such as churchyards and fields) and assess the types of habitat and species found there. This could include desk-based research and/ or commissioning a habitat and species survey for sites identified as being of particular importance (see <i>Appendix 1</i> for more details); <i>Set priorities, objectives and targets</i> – The BAP should include objectives and measurable targets. Objectives could include, for example, conserving and enhancing pollinating insects by allowing wildflowers to flourish on roadside verges and in greenspaces by reducing the grass-cutting regime. The increase in area is a measurable outcome; <i>Implementing the BAP</i> - Be specific about what needs to be done, how to achieve targets and in what timescale, and decide who has responsibility for implementing, monitoring and measuring each action; <i>Measuring and monitoring</i> - A baseline against which to measure progress and outcomes is vital, and this can be achieved via initial site surveys and/or desk-based assessment. Ongoing monitoring of progress is also essential; <i>Communication</i> – Promote the BAP by adding it to your webpage or publish an article in your Parish Magazine. This can encourage your community to appreciate their local habitats and get involved with activities. Having a BAP may also put the town or parish council in a favourable position when applying for environmental grants and funding.





Measure	Summary
<p>Manage your land for biodiversity (or collaborate with local landowners)</p>	<p>Consider managing your land for biodiversity, or if you do not have responsibility for any land collaborate with a local landowner. Actions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a wildlife sub-group to oversee the management of parish land, for example your verges, amenity, leisure and sports spaces can be managed for environmental gain; • Manage a churchyard for wildlife (see SWT’s Wilder Churches scheme); • Construct a pond or restore an existing village pond; • Plant trees or a woodland (although be careful not to damage a site with existing biodiversity interest); • Create a community orchard; • Carry out a hedgerow or veteran tree survey in the parish; • Plant native shrubs to infill gaps in hedgerows or create new ones; • Create a wildlife meadow; • Make suitable native wild plant seed bombs and deploy them; • Make mammal, bug or bee homes; • Start a wildlife gardening/ maintenance group; • Declare land as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or Wildlife Site (LWS). <p>For more details, see Appendix 3, section: <i>‘Practical Tips for managing land’</i>.</p> 
<p>Creating bylaws</p>	<p>Town and parish councils have a function that relates to the creation of bylaws. As one of the few bodies with a power to make bylaws, you should consider whether, as part of this function, you could have an impact on the conservation of biodiversity. For more information on creating bylaws to help conserve wildlife see: ‘Local Nature Reserves in England: a Guide to their Selection and Declaration’, as well as the Government’s guidance website located at this link.</p>



Measure	Summary
<p>Commenting on Planning Applications</p>	<p>Under the Town & Country Planning Act (1990), councils have the right to be notified of local planning applications. This is where you have the chance to make a difference for wildlife and there are three broad questions to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the proposed development result in harm to the wildlife of your parish? <i>Actively discourage developments that do not safeguard or enhance local and important biodiversity;</i> • Will the proposed development result in benefits for local wildlife? • Are there opportunities for enhancements to the wildlife of your Parish? <p>Biodiversity is a material consideration, which means it is something that planning officers have to take into account when deciding a planning application.</p> <p>Understand the habitats and species that may be affected by the development, including whether any of these are afforded legal protection and how measures can be put in place to “<i>protect and enhance</i>” biodiversity. This includes important sites for wildlife that you have close to the development. Resources to help with this are identified in <i>Appendix 1</i>.</p> <p>Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development and land management that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. For a simple overview, view Natural England's Introduction to Biodiversity Net Gain or read more here. The Environment Act, which is likely to become law in 2023, sets out the following key components to mandatory BNG:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum 10% gain will be required, to be calculated using Defra’s Biodiversity Metric; • Habitat is to be secured for at least 30 years via a conservation covenant; • Habitat can be delivered on-site, off-site or via statutory biodiversity credits; and • There will be a national register for net gain delivery sites. <p>Opportunities for net gain may include the provision of new habitat on a site such as woodland, ponds, grassland and other wildlife habitats; in addition green roofs or walls can contribute significantly to creating habitat on a site.</p> 



Measure	Summary
General environmental actions	<p>Finally, the following are some general actions that your community could take in response to the wider climate and ecological emergency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage your land to enhance nature: designate sites for tree planting, nature conservation and local food growing, and reduce chemical fertiliser and pesticide usage;• Renewable energy: switch to a renewable energy tariff for your community property (e.g. village halls);• Install renewable energy generation, including solar PV panels on properties;• Aim to reduce energy use (and costs) by retrofitting your buildings (for example, converting building or street lights to lower energy LED lamps and insulating properties);• Encourage sustainable transport in the community – push for zero carbon housing in close proximity to local services, identify safe walking and cycle routes, and support electric car charging facilities; and• Minimise waste by encouraging the setting up of Share & Repair Café schemes, outdoor Freecycle events to pass on second-hand items, and the reduction of single use plastics.

For more detail on these actions (and more) visit Friends of the Earth’s guide [‘20 actions parish and town councils can take on the climate and nature emergency’](#).



Case Study: Martock Neighbourhood Plan

The [Martock Neighbourhood Plan](#) describes how Martock should develop in the future, in line with the South Somerset Local Plan. Amongst other things, it includes policies on green spaces, access to the countryside, and biodiversity conservation. Alongside the Plan, sits the [Martock Environment Manual](#), which provides a record of the natural environment of the parish; a Phase 1 biodiversity survey was completed, which provides an overview of the most significant habitats.



Martock Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Cartgate Nature Area, Environmental Manual

The two combined provide an increased level of protection for important local green spaces and can be used to provide guidance to planners, Parish Councillors and developers on how to ensure that compromising the environment by any development is minimised and how developments might achieve a net gain in biodiversity.

As part of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan, it was generally agreed that existing legislation around green spaces in Martock were weak; for example, there are a number of areas in the parish, which are of significant biodiversity value but because they are not designated, are deemed of little value. This is a gap in the current legislative framework and the Plan sought to identify and highlight these.

Recent and active projects in the Parish have included:

- the on-going management of Ash and Martock Millennium Wood;
- planting new woodland areas in Martock Recreation Ground (including the important “green corridor” surrounding Bower Hinton Brook);
- managing the Cartgate Nature Area in agreement with Highways England;
- surveying the parish waterways for high phosphate nutrient levels; and
- completing a basic Phase 1 biodiversity survey of the two parishes to identify important habitats and corridors.



Linking your plan to regional and national networks

Your community environment plans will form part of a wider district level, regional and national plan to restore and enhance the environment and support a sustainable future for ourselves and nature. A wide range of resources are available on the internet to help you understand these links further.

We recommend reading a range of plans and policy documents and links to these are provided at the end of this document. In particular, look at:

- The government's 25 Year Environment Plan (Our Green Future);
- South Somerset's Environment Strategy;
- Somerset's joint Climate Emergency Strategy, in particularly *Appendix 10: Natural Environment*; and
- Relevant Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management plans.

Somerset's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are considered an important part of the Environment Act 2021 to help reverse nature's decline. Environmental Improvement Plans and legally binding targets, including an additional target for species abundance for 2030 will establish long-term policy direction and ambition for the UK.

At a local level, the [Somerset Local Nature Partnership](#) (LNP) leads on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The LNP brings together local organisations, businesses and people from across Somerset who want to improve their local natural environment.



The LNP are also leading on the production of Local Nature Recovery Network (NRN) mapping. The NRN maps will highlight target areas for conservation and habitat protection, and will help direct our local efforts on the ground. Once the NRN mapping is made available, it will be circulated to help parishes understand where they have opportunities to make gains for nature and to start linking up the identified corridors through targeted nature-based interventions.

Look to engage with the Somerset Local Nature Partnership to understand the priorities in your area.

National objectives

Local conservation projects can also contribute to wider targets, including DEFRA's Biodiversity 2020 strategy, as well as objectives under the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. For example, local projects will be making a key contribution to the strategy if they involve:

- Improving the quality of existing habitats so they are able to better support biodiversity; i.e. parish owned land, recreational spaces, churchyards and fields;
- Creating new areas of priority habitat; by identifying areas for species rich wildflower grassland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and ponds;
- Identifying and managing ways for habitats to be linked together to create new networks for wildlife; via the NRN mapping which is being produced by the Somerset LNP;



- Managing biodiversity at a larger scale; for this, consider linking in your plans with regional and national projects such as the [B-Lines pollinator project](#) and Plantlife's [No Mow May](#) which has an aspiration for creating wildflower corridors between local parishes; and
- Engaging people in new ways that increase the number of people who value nature; through conducting local habitat surveys, or by organising events and volunteering opportunities.

Case Study: Curry Woods Conservation Trust

The [Curry Woods Conservation Trust](#) (CWCT) was set up in 2020 for the preservation and enhancement of an area of ancient woodland, pasture and grassland north of the village of Curry Rivel. The site, situated on a high point above the Levels, became available to purchase, and the Trustees agreed with the owners that they would look to raise the money needed to buy the land (approximately £60,000).

Several grant applications were successful, including from The Fairfield Trust, SSDC's environment grant scheme, and Curry Rivel Parish Council. Further fundraising efforts amongst the community raised the remaining funds needed.



Community tree planting events held by CWCT

The site is important to the community of Curry Rivel for three main reasons (*linking in with wider regional and national biodiversity and flood mitigation strategies*):

- The site is at the highest elevation in the Parish and it helps control water flow into the built environment, therefore by planting trees the project aims to control and slow the flow of water towards the village during high-rainfall events;
- it includes an area that the community will use to plant up to 1,000 trees to help biodiversity and capture carbon on the site; and
- it will protect and enhance the existing woodland, as well as the rich biodiversity already present on the site through enhancing an existing green network.

An independent ecology report was completed to provide evidence that the site should be protected. Being able to evidence what you are talking about is vitally important, in this case, the report helped frame the project and support grant applications. The project has engaged volunteers from the local school and other local community groups, and further grants have been received from Reimagining the Levels and the Aviva Community Fund to purchase the trees and guards.



Think of a project and apply for some funding

Once you have a project in mind, you may require funding to support the project get off the ground. It may be useful to combine projects with neighbouring parishes, which may appeal to funders.

There are a number of funding sources which town and parish councils, community groups and charities can apply for to help carry out environmental projects, some of which do not require any match funding. Funds could also be available through formal management or operational obligations by certain organisations (such as Wessex Water, the MoD, environmental charities and trusts, and private landowners who have a legal duty or interest in managing environmental resources).

A list of grant and funding opportunities for nature and conservation projects is maintained on the South Somerset Environment website [here](#). These include:

- [SSDC's Community Grants](#) (50% matched funding);
- [National Lottery](#) – Awards for All Climate & Nature Hub;
- [Woodland Trust](#) - Tree planting for communities;
- [Reimagining the Levels](#) –Tree planting charity;
- [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) – DEFRA;
- [SSDC Environment](#) – a general list of grant opportunities;
- [Aviva Community Fund](#)
- [The People's Postcode Trust](#)
- [The Grants Hub](#);
- [National Biodiversity Network](#) – links to funding organisations;
- [Countryside Stewardship Schemes](#);
- Local businesses may offer funding or sponsorship.





Resources available to parishes and links to other organisations

Where possible, we have provided links in each of the sections above to additional resources. In addition to these, some important resources available are:

- [SSDC's South Somerset Environment website](#);
- *Parish Environment Champion Network* – South Somerset District Council facilitates a network of Environment Champions across the parishes in South Somerset; consider working with your local Champion or if you don't have one in your area consider nominating yourself or someone else – for more details, click [here](#).

Other organisations who you could contact to seek support and advice from include:

- [Somerset Wildlife Trust](#) – Wilder Somerset;
- [RSPB](#) – South Somerset;
- [Plantlife](#) – the wild plant conservation charity;
- [Somerset Environmental Records Centre](#)
- [Somerset Local Nature Partnership](#)
- [Re-imagining the Levels](#)
- [Carymoor Environmental Centre](#) – environmental education charity based near Castle Cary;
- [Magdalen Farm Environmental Trust](#) – based near Chard;
- [Natural England – Publications](#)

Don't forget to involve local community groups, schools and volunteering organisations in any practical activities.

Further information and links

Linking your plan to wider networks

- [25 year Environment Plan](#) – The Government's nationwide plan (Our Green Future).
- [Environment Act 2021](#) – legislation to improve our natural environment.
- [NERC Act 2006](#) - Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- [SSDC Environment Strategy](#) – sets out the vision for SSDC's 2030 Net Zero target, including improvements to biodiversity.
- [Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy](#) - the strategy sets ambitious goals to become a carbon neutral county by 2030 and outlines what the five councils intend to do to collaboratively to address the most important issues around the Climate Emergency.
- [Neighbourhood Plans](#) – neighbourhood planning advice in South Somerset.