



Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 APRIL 2026</b>
Subject	<b>Ecological Emergency Action Plan – Progress Update</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning Email: <a href="mailto:Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk">Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Geraldine LeCointe, Assistant Director - Planning Services Email: <a href="mailto:Geraldine.LeCointe@cotswold.gov.uk">Geraldine.LeCointe@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
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Summary/Purpose	Update the Committee on progress in implementing the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.
Annexes	Annex A – Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2026: Progress Update
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolve to: 1. Note the progress made in implementing the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responding to the Climate Emergency</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The purpose of this report is to update the committee on the progress achieved to date in delivering the Ecological Emergency Action Plan. The report has undergone internal review by the Corporate Leadership, Finance, and Legal teams.



## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This report outlines the actions already taken to deliver the Ecological Emergency Action Plan, as well as the ongoing work and future opportunities that will support its continued implementation.
- 1.2** It also provides an update on the Council's performance in The Woodland Trust's Nature Emergency Scorecard, which has assessed 395 UK councils against four criteria.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** Cotswold District Council declared an Ecological Emergency on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2020 to complement the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in 2019. Consequently, an Ecological Emergency Action Plan was agreed as part of the Ecological Emergency declaration.
- 2.2** There have been significant declines in biodiversity across the UK, with the 2023 State of Nature Report identifying that one in six species is now threatened with extinction. The natural environment - often referred to as natural capital - provides a wide range of benefits, known as Nature's Contributions to People (formerly called ecosystem services), that underpin our economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. These include the provision of food, clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and natural flood management.
- 2.3** The climate emergency and ecological emergency are deeply interconnected. Climate change is a major driver of ecological decline; however, a healthy natural environment also plays a crucial role in both mitigating and adapting to climate change. For example, effective habitat creation and management can reduce carbon emissions and lower flood risk through enhanced carbon sequestration and the use of natural flood management techniques.

## **3. MAIN POINTS – Progress overview**

- 3.1** Annex A outlines the actions taken to date to deliver the Ecological Emergency Action Plan. Although the Action Plan was designed to apply across all Council functions, its delivery is primarily led by the Development Management, Planning Policy, and Infrastructure and Natural, Built and Historic Environment Teams, working in collaboration with a range of external partners, including the Habitat First Group,



Cotswold Lakes Trust, the National Trust, Natural England, and the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund.

**3.2** The focus over the last 12-18 months has been:

- **Habitats Regulations Assessment (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring - SAMM):** The National Trust has recently appointed a warden on a two-year fixed-term contract to deliver SAMM mitigation for the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. This role is fully funded through developer contributions secured by Cotswold District Council and neighbouring authorities from new housing developments located within the 15.4 km zone of influence around the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. Similarly, a warden post for the North Meadow SAC will shortly be advertised by Wiltshire Council. This role will be funded jointly by Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, and Cotswold District Council to support the delivery of SAMM mitigation at the North Meadow SAC.
- **Habitats Regulations Assessment (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace - SANG):** The National Trust has recently submitted a third bid for funding from developer contributions secured to deliver SANG mitigation. This follows two previously successful bids that are supporting the delivery of SANG mitigation at the Sherborne Estate to help relieve recreational pressures from new development on the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC. At a recent meeting with the National Trust and the Council, Natural England confirmed that they are satisfied with the approach being taken to deliver SANG at the Sherborne Estate.
- **Strengthened Biodiversity Duty:** The Council has published its first Biodiversity Duty Report, outlining actions already taken to meet its statutory obligations and setting out further opportunities for the next reporting period. The report also details the biodiversity net gain achieved, or expected to be achieved, through approved biodiversity gain plans.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** Biodiversity Officers have continued to support the Development Management team in embedding BNG within the planning system. Most recently, officers have reviewed the Council's BNG monitoring fees and updated the Council's website to provide clearer, more concise guidance for developers and planning applicants.



- **Habitat Banks:** The Legal Team, working in collaboration with the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund, the National Trust, and the Council's Biodiversity Officers, has completed two Section 106 agreements to establish habitat banks within the District, one at Sherborne Estate and the other at Saintbury Grounds Farm. The Council is also working with the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund to bring forward a third habitat bank.
- **Gloucestershire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** As a supporting authority, Cotswold District Council has worked closely with Gloucestershire County Council, the responsible authority, alongside other key stakeholders, including the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership and the Cotswold National Landscape, to help deliver Gloucestershire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The strategy is a spatial tool that identifies where and how nature recovery can be most effectively achieved across the county. This spatial tool will be used to inform both plan- and decision-making.
- **Local Plan Update:** The Natural, Built and Historic Environment Team has been working with the Planning Policy and Infrastructure Team to review existing Local Plan policies and the Cotswold Design Code in support of the Council's "green to the core" agenda. In addition, the county-wide Climate and Planning Manager has been reviewing the Council's climate-related planning policies to help deliver ambitious and consistent local plan policies.
- **Collaboration with External Stakeholders:** The Natural, Built and Historic Environment Team continues to work with a range of external stakeholders on smaller, ongoing projects that support nature conservation across the District. For example, the Cotswold Lakes Trust was recently successful in securing funding from the "para 20" pot - financial contributions collected from the developer of the Lower Mill Estate development - to deliver nature conservation initiatives across the Estate and the wider ecologically and hydrologically connected land. This bid will support efforts to conserve the nationally important population of black poplar trees within the Cotswold Water Park. In addition, the Council's Tree Officers have recently secured trees from Gloucestershire County Council to deliver infill tree planting across the District.



#### **4. MAIN POINTS – Nature Emergency Scorecard**

**4.1** The Woodland Trust, working in partnership with the Wildlife Trusts, Wildlife and Countryside Link, and Climate Emergency UK (the organisation responsible for the Climate Emergency Scorecards), has developed a Nature Emergency Scorecard. A total of 395 councils across the UK have been assessed against four criteria. Cotswold District Council currently meets three of these four criteria:

- Whether the council has declared an ecological or nature emergency - only 28% of Councils have made this declaration.
- Whether the council has committed to producing an evidence-based action plan for nature recovery - just 14% of Councils have produced an Ecological Emergency Action Plan or equivalent.
- Whether nature recovery has been embedded into the council's strategic plans and policies - only 37 out of 395 Councils (around 9%) have achieved this.

**4.2** These results provide strong evidence that Cotswold District Council is both considering and actively progressing the ambitions set out in the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

**4.3** The only criterion the council does not currently meet is the "30 by 30" commitment, which requires councils to protect and manage 30% of their landholding for nature recovery by 2030.

**4.4** However, a comparison of performance across local authorities shows that only three other rural councils in England currently meet the same criteria, and none have yet achieved the "30 by 30" commitment. In addition, Cotswold District Council is the only rural council in the southwest to meet three of the four assessment criteria.

#### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

An alternative option would be to withdraw the Ecological Emergency declaration and take no further action to implement the action plan. However, this would mean that the Council would, at a minimum, fail to meet its statutory obligations. For example, integrating Biodiversity Net Gain and Gloucestershire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy into plan- and decision-making.



## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

**6.1** The Ecological Emergency Action Plan continues to be delivered, with work primarily centred on fulfilling the statutory duties associated with the Communities and Place directorate. Nevertheless, progress has also been made on non-statutory services of the action plan, including the establishment of two habitat banks and infill tree planting across the district. Additional resources would, however, be required to expand this work further.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1** The Ecological Emergency Action Plan can continue to be delivered at its current pace using existing resources.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**8.1** The report raises no direct legal implications.

**8.2** Biodiversity net gain is now a statutory requirement within the planning process. Other than the use of Section 106 legal agreements, which secure all off-site gains as well as monitoring fees for significant on-site and off-site gains, and the establishment of habitat banks, there are currently no further implications to report.

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

**9.1** There are no risks associated with noting the report for information.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**10.1** The report raises no direct impacts.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**11.1** The report is presented for noting; however, it clearly demonstrates a positive response to both the climate and ecological emergencies.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**12.1** None.

(END)