



COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 10 SEPTEMBER 2026
Subject	SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE NATURAL GREENSPACE SPENDING 2026
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member & Deputy Leader for Housing & Planning Email: Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Helen Martin, Director of Communities & Place Email: Helen.Martin@Cotswold.gov.uk
Report author	Ruby Moore, Infrastructure Delivery Officer Email: Ruby.Moore@Cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	For Cabinet to review officer recommendations on external bids for funding from the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (Cotswold Beechwoods SAC) funds held by the Council.
Annexes	Annex A – Scoring Matrix
Recommendation(s)	That Cabinet resolves to: 1. Agree to fund the following bid: • Sherborne Big Nature, Better Access (National Trust)
Corporate priorities	• Responding to the Climate Emergency • Supporting Communities
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** From 1 March to 7 June 2026, the Council invited bids from infrastructure providers and other relevant partners to access available Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation) funds.
- 1.2** The Council received one bid for the SANG fund: Accessibility improvements at Sherborne Park from the National Trust.
- 1.3** The bid would create a project that the Council supports. The officers' panel recommends that the Council funds the bid as it scored above the minimum of 75/100 (86/100) and enough funds are available.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** From 1 March to 7 June 2026, the Council invited bids from infrastructure providers and other relevant partners to access available Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation) funds.
- 2.2** The CDC Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Fund is funded from financial contributions from planning applicants. These contributions are provided in order to deliver the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreational Mitigation Strategy, ensuring that new development does not lead to increased recreational impacts on this internationally important wildlife site. The fund is aimed at delivering mitigation that will encourage potential users of the SAC to visit other sites and not the SAC itself. Not only will this help prevent impacts on the SAC but should also benefit biodiversity and local communities by creating new and improved existing greenspaces that will be accessible to all.
- 2.3** The Council received one bid in total:
 - One bid from the National Trust to access funds from the *CDC Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Fund*.
- 2.4** The bid was reviewed by an Officers' panel consisting of Harrison Bowley (Head of Planning Services), Danielle Berry (Head of Natural, Built and Historic Environment),



Allan Keller (Sustainable Transport Lead), James Tyson (Tree Officer), Harry Brown (Infrastructure and Housing Monitoring Officer), and Ruby Moore (Infrastructure Delivery Officer).

- 2.5** A scoring matrix was used to assess the bid; the matrix had been made public in advance for transparency. A completed matrix showing the scoring for the bid can be found in Annex A.

3. Sherborne Big Nature, Better Access (National Trust)

- 3.1** A bid was received from the National Trust for £20,000 from the CDC Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Fund.
- 3.2** The bid if successful, will be used to improve accessibility across the Sherborne Estate as part of the National Trust's Sherborne Big Nature Better Access project. The proposed works include upgrading a 425-metre section of path ("missing link") by replacing the existing poor-quality woodchip path by installing a fully accessible permanent gravel surface. The aim of this improvement is to increase the attractiveness of the site as a destination in the Cotswold District, thereby diverting recreational pressure away from the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC.
- 3.3** Officers recommend funding the bid.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1** The bid would deliver mitigation consistent with the mitigation outlined within the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy (2022) and scores highly against the scoring matrix. The officers' panel recommends that the Council funds the bid as it scored above the minimum of 75/100 (86/100) and sufficient funds are available:
- One bid from the National Trust to access funds from the *CDC Cotswold Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace Fund*.
- 4.2** The total amount of funding proposed in £20,000 in regards to SANG.
- 4.3** Officers will continue to collaborate with potential partners to develop further SANG projects.



5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There are no direct financial implications on the Council's base revenue budget as a result of this report.
- 5.2** Funding is held by the Council from financial mitigation contributions received under the habitats regulations assessment legislation. The funding will be used for the purpose(s) made in point 2.2 of this report. The report proposes to allocate £20,000 in SANG funds.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The Council has a statutory duty in relation to European Protected Sites, known as Habitat Sites under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017 (as amended). To enable the Council to discharge this duty, all new residential and holiday accommodation developments located within 15.4 km Zone of Influence (ZoI) of the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC are required to provide mitigation measures to address the increased recreational pressures arising from additional housing.
- 6.2** To support applicants and developers in meeting this requirement, the Council in collaboration with neighbouring local authorities has prepared and adopted the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC Recreation Mitigation Strategy (2022). The Council, working in partnership with neighbouring authorities and external stakeholder deliver the mitigation measures identified within the strategy through the collection of financial contributions from applicants and developers.
- 6.3** In order for the Council to fulfil its statutory obligations, two key mitigation elements must be delivered. This section relates to the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) element of the mitigation strategy.

- 6.4** Any funding agreement will require review and advice from the legal services team.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1** If no suitable SANG projects come forward (or the Council does not agree to support suitable projects from the fund) the Council will not be able to show that potential



recreational impacts on the SAC are being mitigated and therefore, under the relevant legislation, planning applications may have to be refused.

7.2 As noted in Section 6 of this report, the Council has a statutory duty in relation to European Protected Sites (Habitat Sites). To fulfil this duty, the Council must be able to demonstrate that financial contributions secured from development are being used to deliver mitigation measures in accordance with the adopted Recreation Mitigation Strategy.

7.3 If the Council is unable to evidence that these contributions are being appropriately applied and therefore cannot demonstrate that the necessary mitigation is being delivered, it may be considered to have failed to discharge its statutory obligations. In such circumstances, Natural England, as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body, may object to planning applications that would result in a net increase in residential or holiday accommodation within the identified Zone of Influence (ZoI) around the Cotswold Beechwoods SAC.

7.4 Failure to deliver the required mitigation could also have wider implications for the Council's planning functions, including potential consequences for the progression and soundness of the emerging Local Plan.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 The proposal will have a positive impact on a wide range of users, particularly people with disabilities and limited mobility, by improving access along the route. Replacing the existing surface with a fully accessible path will provide a more reliable route for wheelchair users, families with pushchairs, and dog walkers. The enhanced accessibility will help ensure that a wider range of users can safely access and enjoy the site throughout the year.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The proposal will replace the existing woodchip path with a fully accessible gravel path. The current woodchip surface requires annual replacement therefore the proposed gravel path will provide a longer-lasting, more sustainable solution.



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- 9.2** No significant negative climate or ecological impacts have been identified.
- 9.3** In Gloucestershire, the Local Nature Partnership and Climate Leadership Gloucestershire advocate for all residents to live within 15 minutes of accessible, biodiversity-rich green space. The ambition seeks to reduce inequalities in access to nature, improve public health, boost the local economy, and enhance biodiversity. This bid, if successful, will support this ambition.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

(END)