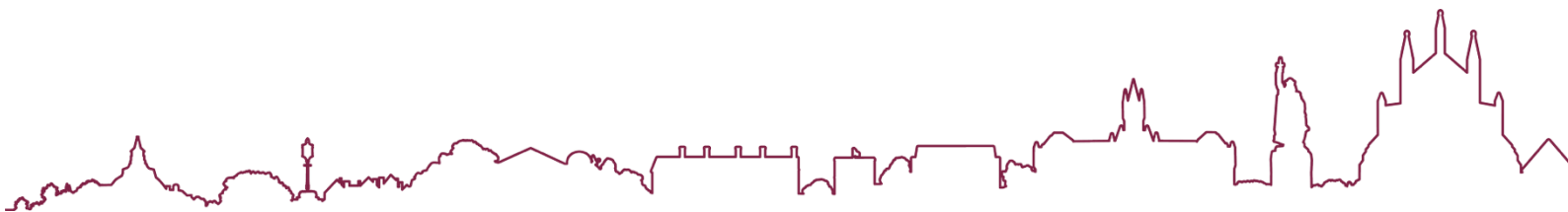


# **Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 Technical Report**

**Winchester City Council  
Sustainability and Natural Environment Team  
September 2025**



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## ii. Foreword

### **Cllr Kelsie Learney – Cabinet Member for the Climate and Nature Emergency**

Winchester district contains internationally important and amazing habitats and wildlife. Our chalk rivers and streams are recognised world-wide with their crystal-clear waters flowing through spectacular meadows, damselflies dancing along the banks and otters slipping in and out of the rapids. Species-rich grasslands support chalkhill blue and marbled white butterflies flitting amongst orchids. Our deciduous woodlands have woodpeckers and Natterer's bats utilising cracks and cavities in mature and majestic oaks.

All this is important to the area's identity, is highly valued by our residents and one of the reasons visitors continue to flock to the area. But it is being put in peril by the climate and ecological emergencies. Never has the need for action been so pressing. We are losing biodiversity at an alarming rate, and the city council is determined to do all it can to reverse this.

By collaborating with partners and stakeholders we can realise significant improvements in nature which in turn can play a role in tackling climate change, creating healthy communities and enhancing quality of life.

While our Biodiversity Action Plan has been effective on city council land, it is time to replace it with this wider Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) setting out a strategic approach across the district and tying in with our Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.

The United Kingdom has committed to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, and our NIP aligns with these targets with ambitious, yet achievable measures. We have the baseline information on the current biodiversity situation, and we need to monitor and report on progress to continue to drive forward nature improvement.

With this plan, we commit to:

- Protect and manage land for nature
- Create new spaces for nature
- Deliver more nature-based solutions for tackling climate change
- Prevent and control pollution better
- Connect more people to nature

One of the key aims of this document is to improve our engagement with everyone who shares our passion for nature improvement. We must all act now to make improvements in biodiversity across our district and beyond. We hope you will join us and help protect, enhance and improve nature throughout the Winchester district.

### iii. Summary

The Nature Improvement Plan (NIP) 2025-2030 sets out our strategic approach to nature improvement, both on council owned land and across the entire district. It aligns with and responds to both local and national drivers, including the council's own Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (CNAP), Green Economic Development Strategy (GEDS) and Tree Strategy. There is also a strong link with 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 we have identified five **pathways** to deliver this:

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

These pathways provide a mechanism for setting measures and prioritising actions.

The NIP supersedes the Biodiversity Action Plan (2019-2025) which focused on specific habitats and species. Instead, the focus of the NIP is on the measures and species included in the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The five pathways also have a stronger link to the Council Plan and CNAP and set the parameters for achieving our 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 will 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

The NIP provides a framework for improving the natural environment and biodiversity within the Winchester district. It does this by identifying the hierarchy of designated sites in Winchester as an all-important factor in nature improvement, allowing us to achieve gains on the district's most important sites (including SACs and SSSIs) through a combination of direct delivery, collaboration, enablement, 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, promoting and achieving nature improvement and recovery across the Winchester district. These pathways lead to measures with numerical actions, which in turn facilitate the delivery of annual actions for nature improvement. These 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 5.3, which are of high importance but against which it is difficult to set numerical measures. 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.

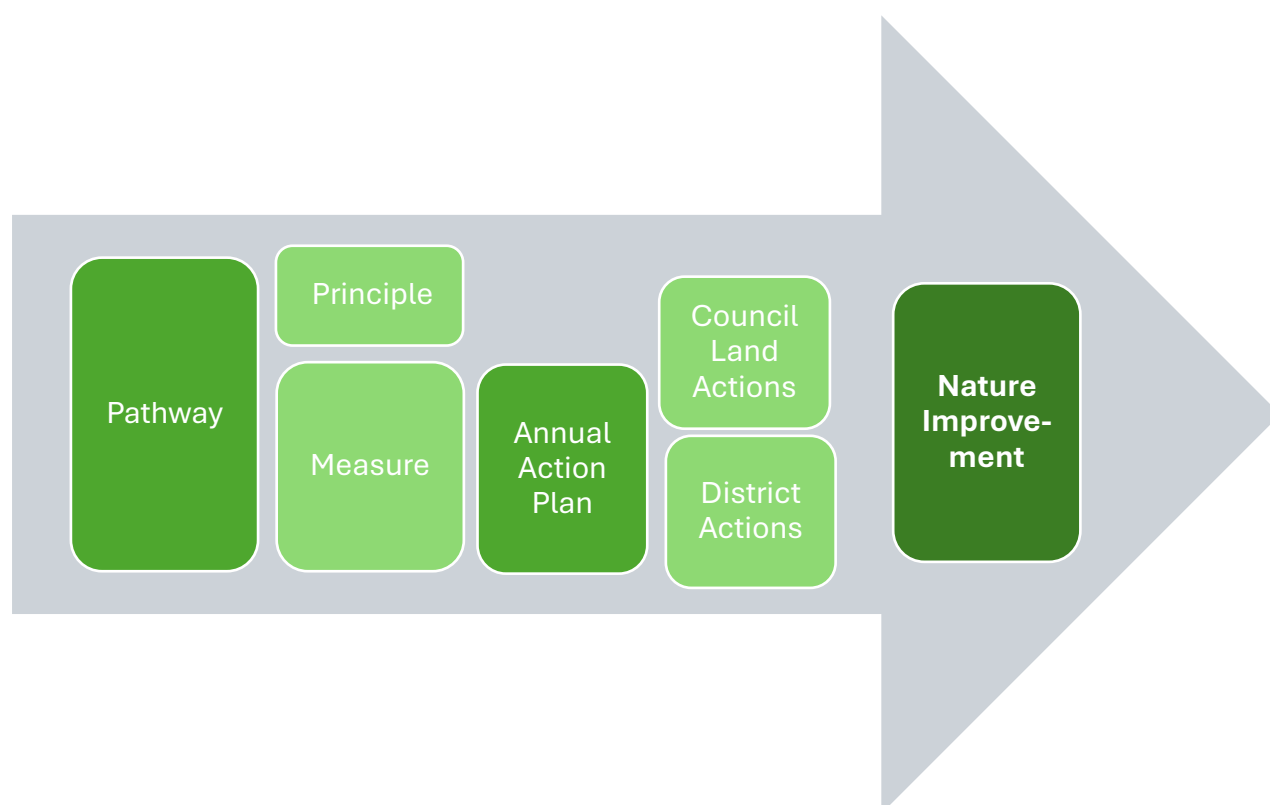


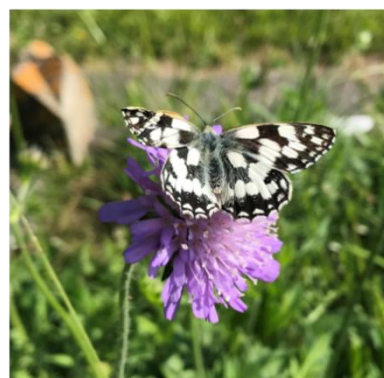
Figure 1 Flow Process for Nature Improvement

# 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. This includes wildlife, plants, soil, water, air and landforms. The interactions between these vital components create a dynamic and sustainable ecosystem, which in turn provides essential ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality improvement, carbon storage, flood management and pollination. Nature is also vital for our 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, with 40% of the district forming part of 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**.



*Figure 2 River Itchen, Abbott's Barton Meadow, Hazel Dormice, Marbled White Butterfly.*

Winchester's natural environment is under pressure and has substantially deteriorated, as highlighted in the Winchester City Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2021<sup>1</sup> (BAP). Our Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 (which supersedes the BAP) describes a more proactive approach to delivering measurable nature improvement across the entire district.

The council is committed to restoring nature, safeguarding essential ecosystem services, and implementing nature-based solutions to help address the impacts of climate change. We are contributing to the concerted effort to combat the decline in nature by delivering conservation and sustainability projects, supporting volunteers and partnership groups, managing land for nature, monitoring biodiversity and implementing policy requirements such as BNG.

This document outlines 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.

## **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<sup>2</sup> places a strengthened duty on local authorities to consider biodiversity in all functions and the Environment Improvement Plan 2023<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [Biodiversity Action Plan - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Environment Act 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan](#)

## 1.3 Council ambition

One of the council's priorities in the 2025-2030 Council Plan<sup>4</sup> 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 deliver a variety of services and 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 services, 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)<sup>5</sup>

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 it's work

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<sup>4</sup> [Strategies, Policies and Plans - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Future of farming in England - GOV.UK](#)

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 (designated 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 <sup>6</sup>(LURA).

Approximately 40% of the Winchester District lies within SDNP so the National Park is an important part of this plan. The council therefore strives to meet the ambitions as set out in the:

- South Downs Local Plan<sup>7</sup>
- SDNP Partnership Management Plan<sup>8</sup>

The council also owns and manages land within SDNP and works with many of the same partners.

### 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)<sup>9</sup>
- Bird Aware Solent<sup>10</sup>
- Nutrient Mitigation<sup>11</sup>
- Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS)<sup>12</sup>
- Great Crested Newt District Level Licencing<sup>13</sup>
- Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#)

<sup>7</sup> [South Downs Local Plan - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Partnership Management Plan - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Home - Partnership for South Hampshire](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Home - Bird Aware Solent](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Potential Nutrient Mitigation Schemes - Partnership for South Hampshire](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy – coastal bird conservation, waders and brent geese data and mapping](#)

<sup>13</sup> [District Licensing - NatureSpace Partnership Limited](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire | Environment | Hampshire County Council](#)

### **1.5.2 Partnership Schemes**

The council works closely with key environmental partnerships, such as 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 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.

An indicative list of partnerships and community groups are provided below. This does not include all groups that the council works with. There are hundreds of fantastic groups, charities, companies, farming clusters, landowners and individuals delivering nature improvements across the district. The council recognises the importance of these groups and strives to collaborate with them and enable projects where possible.



Figure 3 Indicative list of partnerships and community groups

## 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<sup>15</sup>
- Carbon Neutrality Action Plan<sup>16</sup>
- Green Economic Development Strategy<sup>17</sup>
- Tree Strategy<sup>18</sup>
- Air Quality Strategy<sup>19</sup>
- Open Space Assessment<sup>20</sup>
- Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2025

The successes and lessons learnt from the Biodiversity Action Plan 2021, in particular, 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.

The Tree Strategy sets out how the council addresses its legal and management duties in relation to trees, to protect and enhance the district's tree stock in a sustainable and appropriate manner, whilst recognising their value to people and places. The principles and measures set out in the Nature Improvement Plan align with the policies in the Tree Strategy.

In line with the Open Space Assessment, 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.

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<sup>15</sup> [Planning Policy - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Carbon Neutrality Action Plan - Winchester City Council](#)

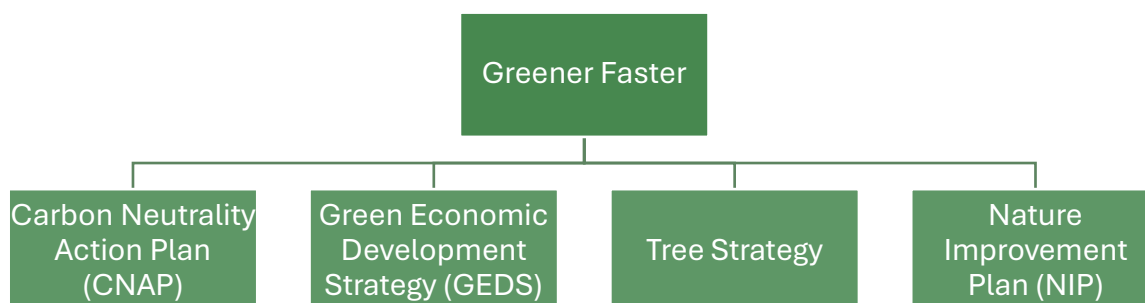
<sup>17</sup> [Green Economic Development Strategy - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Our Tree Strategy - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Air Quality - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Open Space Assessment - Winchester City Council](#)

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.



## 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

The BAP identified and focused on 22 key species, such as hazel dormouse, hedgehog, swift, house sparrow, white-clawed crayfish, chalkhill blue butterfly and bee orchid.

Using the identified list of key habitats and species, an annual action plan outlined a series of actions and outcomes to protect and enhance those habitats and species. Our BAP successes are outlined below.

The BAP described how the council was meeting its obligations relating to biodiversity in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. However, it did not identify measurable nature improvements for delivery across the entire district.

## 2.2 BAP successes

Over the last four years, the BAP has helped us succeed in protecting, enhancing and restoring biodiversity in the following areas:

### Habitat creation and land management

- We created the meadow at Topfield, Kings Worthy (Figure 4) by turning an inaccessible and unmanaged scrubland into a valuable habitat for pollinators, foraging birds, reptiles and bats.
- We created the Biodiversity Grass Verge Management project to improve the way we manage road verges.
- We delivered targeted habitat enhancement for the striped lychnis moth at Chilcomb Recreation Ground, in partnership with the Butterfly Conservation Trust.
- We published a management plan for St Giles Hill Park, which is managed successfully alongside the Friends of St Giles Hill community group.



*Figure 4 Photograph of newly established meadow at Topfield, Kingsworthy.*

### Partnerships and Community Projects

Through the BAP, we 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 and Forward Planning

We have delivered biodiversity training sessions for the council's planning team, new homes team and council members. We published our Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Technical Advice Note<sup>21</sup> which is used by planners, agents and residents (both internally and externally) to provide some certainty and set expectations in relation to delivery of biodiversity gains. Following on from this, as part of the BAP, we established an internal group to prepare for and progress BNG as a mandatory aspect of the planning process.

## Estates and wider council projects

- We published our widely praised Tree Strategy.
- 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. Several bat roosts have been protected through this project, whilst enabling the works to go ahead, avoiding impacts on nesting birds.
- We installed 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<sup>22</sup> on key sites.

## **2.3 BAP 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, and it was realistic and achievable, focusing on what the council could deliver with existing resources.

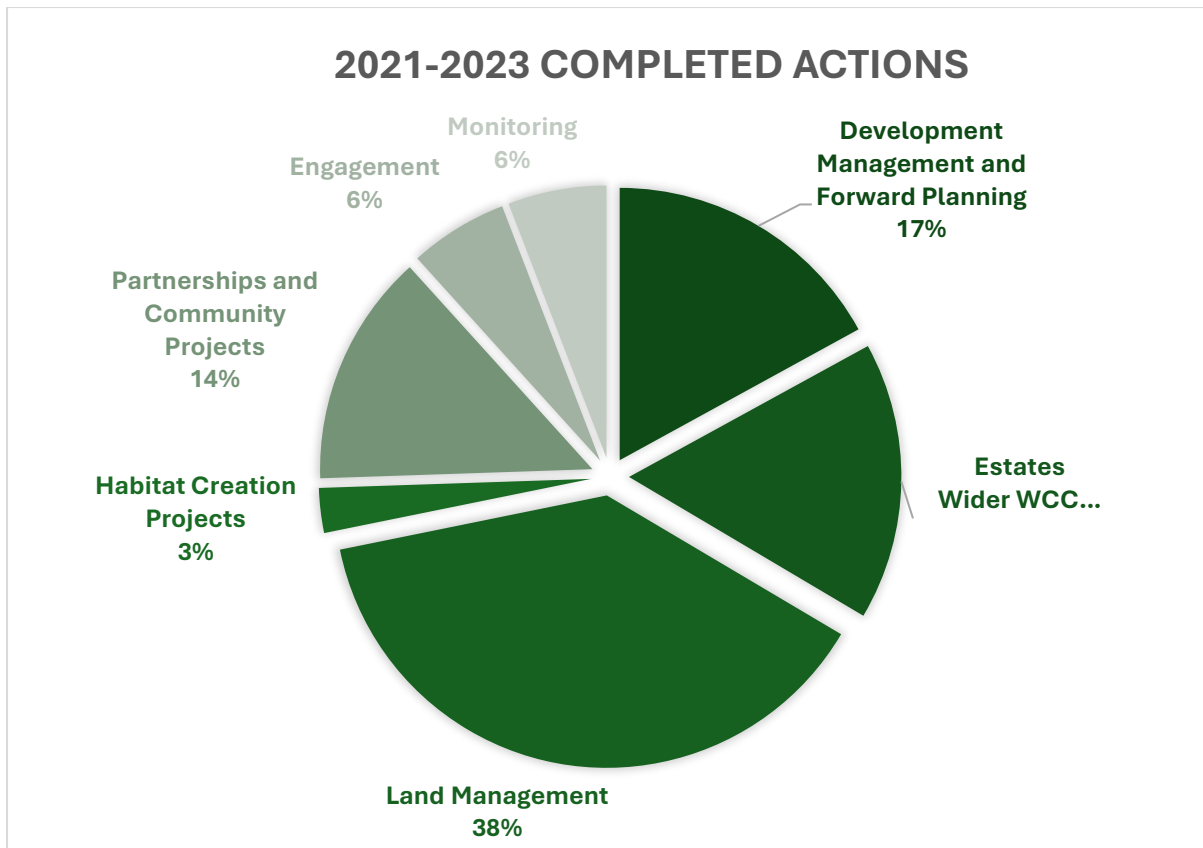
This review focuses on what was achieved in the first three years of the BAP. A total of 188 actions were completed (an average of 87% of agreed actions). These actions were spread across various aspects of work as shown below in Figure 5, with Land Management for example accounting for 38% of the actions. The lists of actions can be found on the council website<sup>23</sup> and some success stories are highlighted in section 2.2.

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<sup>21</sup> [Biodiversity Net Gain - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Biodiversity Action Plan - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Biodiversity Action Plan - Winchester City Council](#)



*Figure 5 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 6 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.

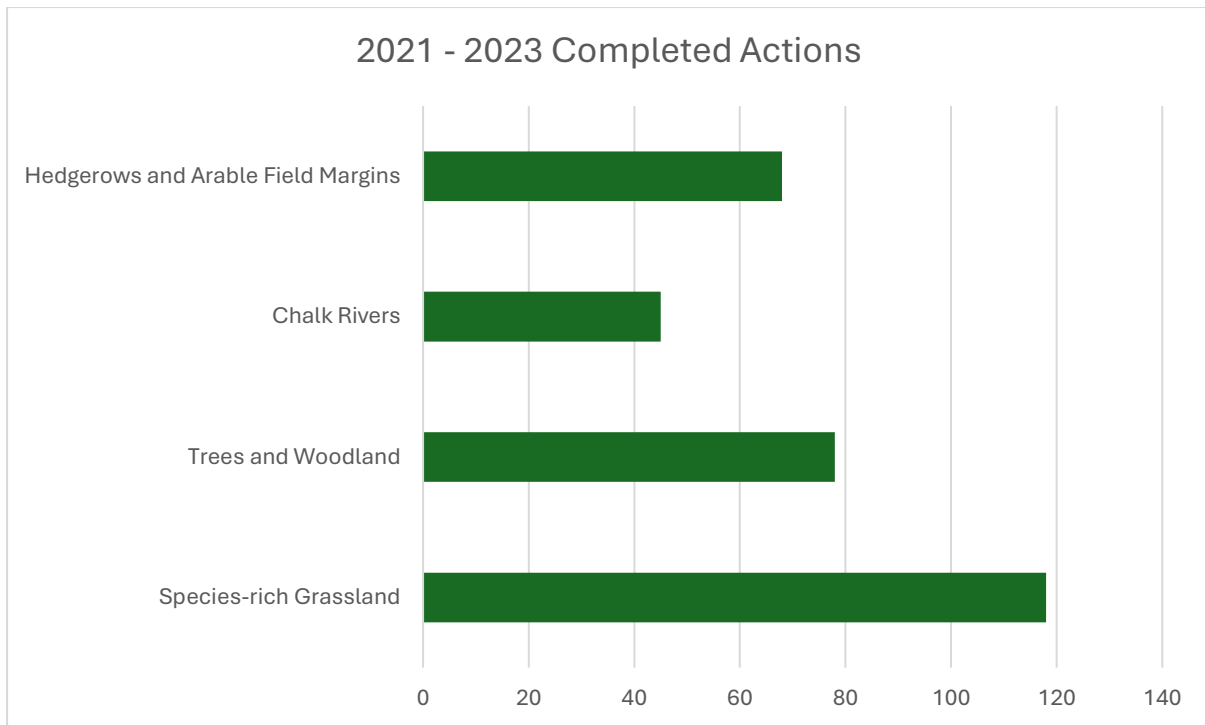


Figure 6 Bar graph showing the habitats associated with BAP actions completed between 2021 and 2023.

## 2.4 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.



*Figure 7 Pyramid Orchid, Bluebell Wood, Bee Orchid.*

#### 3.1 Designated wildlife 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.



Figure 8 Hierarchy of Wildlife Designations

### 3.1.1 International designated sites

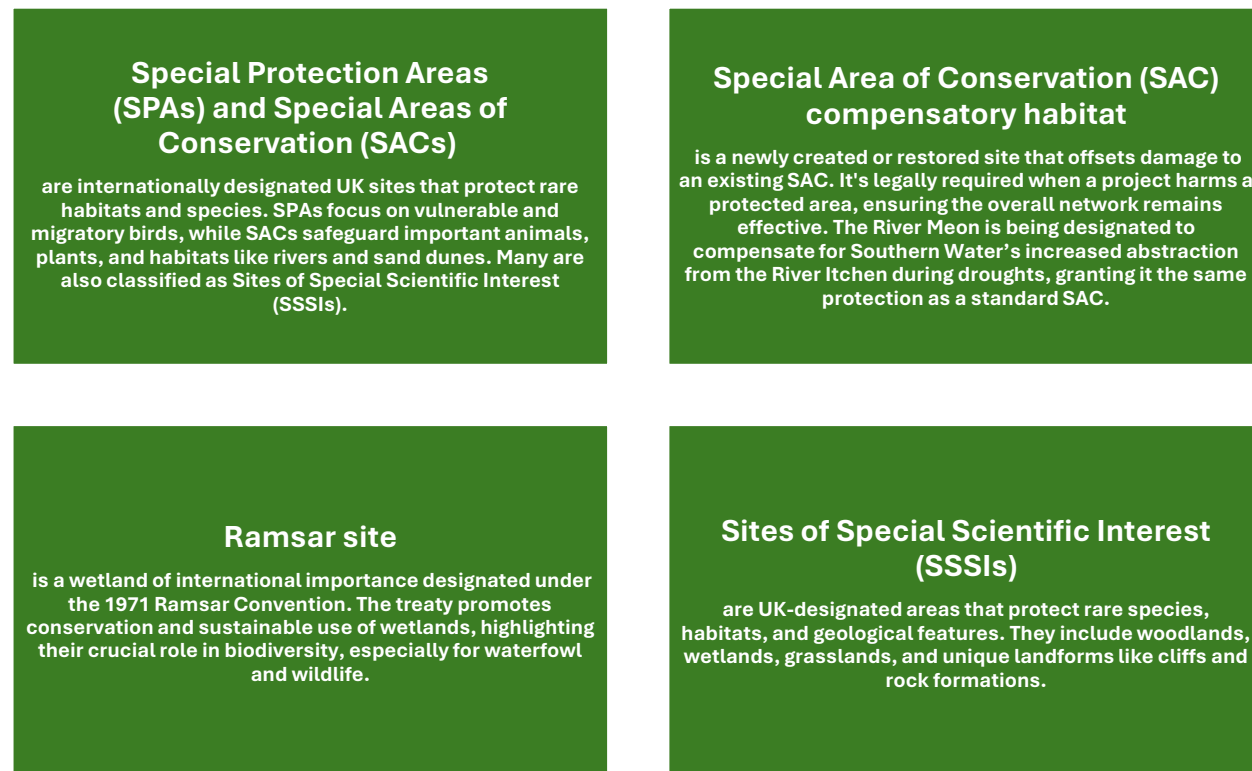


Figure 9 Description of International Wildlife Designations

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

| International/National Designations                                       | Number of Sites |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Special Protection Areas/RAMSAR                                           | 1               |
| Special Areas for Conservation                                            | 3*              |
| Site of Special Scientific Interest                                       | 17              |
| National Nature Reserves                                                  | 2               |
|                                                                           | <b>23</b>       |
| *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             |
| Road Verges of Ecological Importance                                      | 29              |
|                                                                           | <b>728</b>      |

- Solent Maritime SAC

The Solent and its inlets are unique in Britain and Europe for their hydrographic regime of four tides each day, and for the complexity of the marine and estuarine habitats present.

The Solent Maritime SAC is the only site in the UK for smooth cord-grass *Spartina alterniflora*. It also contains the second-largest aggregation of Atlantic salt meadows in south and south-west England. It contains a variety of important habitats such as estuarine mudflats, coastal lagoons and sand and shingle spits.

- Solent and Southampton Water SPA & RAMSAR

This supports internationally important bird populations, such as dark-bellied brent goose, ringed plover and little terns. The site is known to be home to assemblages of over 50,000 waterfowl during winter.

- River Itchen SAC

An exceptional chalk river ecosystem, which supports a range of rare and protected species and habitats. These include Pond water-crowfoot, River water-crowfoot Southern Damselfly, freshwater crayfish, Atlantic salmon and Otter.



*Figure 10 River Itchen SAC*

- River Meon SAC compensatory habitat

Another very important chalk river ecosystem which supports similar habitats and species to the River Itchen.

There are also four 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 in sustaining brent geese and wading bird species. At present, there is 1 Primary Support Site, 2 Low Use Sites and 1 Candidate Site in the district. There is a dedicated website for further information and a map of the SWBG sites<sup>24</sup>. The categorisation of these sites is subject to change and therefore sustaining the current area and level of designation is considered an appropriate measure.

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<sup>24</sup> [Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy – coastal bird conservation, waders and brent geese data and mapping](#)

### 3.1.2 National designated sites

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. Table 2 shows the overall condition of SSSIs in the district taken from the Natural England website<sup>2526</sup>. 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'. Units are divisions of SSSIs based on habitat, tenure and management, and are the basis for recording all information on SSSI condition and management. They range in area from 0.004 ha up to 18,000 ha. They are some of the finest sites for wildlife and natural features in England, supporting many characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and natural features.

#### The River Itchen SSSI

The SSSI designation covers 748 ha divided into 141 units made up of the river itself as well as fen, marsh and swamp, neutral grassland and broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland which is nationally important for a wide range of species including its invertebrate assemblage, breeding bird assemblage, Otter, Water Vole, Bullhead, Brook lamprey and Atlantic Salmon to name a few. Whilst 62% of the entire SSSI is meeting favourable or unfavourable recovering condition, 27% is considered to be Unfavourable No Change and 11% Unfavourable – Declining.

It should be noted that the dates the condition surveys were undertaken by Natural England are very variable, with some sites not being assessed for many years. Local Government, within the Environment Improvement Plan (EIP)<sup>27</sup>, has set the interim target to undertake an up-to-date condition assessment for all SSSIs and for 50% of SSSIs to have actions on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028. 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 shows that **88% of SSSI units in the district are achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition**, which is above the national EIP target of 50% of SSSIs on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028. Given the national target, the uncertainty that up-to-date assessments will bring and the limitations the council faces in terms of influencing SSSIs in private or other ownership, sustaining this baseline level is considered an appropriate measure for the district, and essential for halting the decline in nature.

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<sup>25</sup> [Magic Map Application](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Site Search](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Environmental Improvement Plan](#)

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

| SSSI Name                                   | Overall Condition         |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| River Itchen*                               | Unfavourable Recovering   |
| St Catherines Hill                          | Favourable                |
| Crab Wood                                   | Favourable                |
| Beacon Hill                                 | Favourable                |
| Peake Wood                                  | Favourable                |
| Old Winchester Hill                         | Favourable                |
| Galley Down Wood                            | Favourable                |
| The Moors, Bishop's Waltham                 | Unfavourable Recovering   |
| Waltham Chase Meadows                       | Favourable                |
| Botley Wood and Everett's and Mushes Copses | Unfavourable - Recovering |
| Upper Hamble Estuary and Woods*             | Favourable                |
| Cheesefoot Head                             | Favourable                |
| Hook Heath Meadows                          | Favourable                |
| Micheldever Spoil Heaps                     | Unfavourable - Recovering |
| Lye Heath Marsh                             | Unfavourable - Recovering |
| Alresford Pond                              | Unfavourable - Declining  |
| River Test                                  | Unfavourable No Change    |

### 3.1.3 Local designated sites

These sites are designated locally for their substantive nature conservation importance, either for wildlife or geology and 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 allows us to identify sites where such management is lacking. This can 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 3 shows that staggeringly we don't know whether 77% of our SINC's are under positive or negative management. There is real opportunity to increase our understanding of biodiversity in the district by getting SINC landowners on board and collecting this data. Figure 11 shows the location of SINC's across the district. A selection of SINC's are surveyed each year but further resources would be needed to gain a full picture. Based on the SINC's which have been surveyed in the last 10 years, 61% are in positive management. Given the requirement for further surveys, maintaining this figure as a district measure is considered an important part of this plan.

*Table 3 The number of SINC's under positive, negative or unknown management in the Winchester District in 2025. SINC's surveyed prior to 2015 are recorded as unknown management.*

| Management | Number of SINC's | Area          | % SINC's | % SINC's where management is known |
|------------|------------------|---------------|----------|------------------------------------|
| Positive   | 96               |               | 14%      | 61%                                |
| Negative   | 61               |               | 9%       | 39%                                |
| Unknown    | 533              |               | 77%      |                                    |
|            | <b>690</b>       | <b>6398ha</b> |          |                                    |

The majority of designated wildlife sites in the district are under private or other ownership which highlights the importance of working with partners such as charities, organisations, companies, landowners, farming clusters and individuals to protect these sites and deliver nature improvement at a district scale.

### 3.1.4 Land designated for nature

Figure 12 shows that **12.48% of the district is covered by designated wildlife sites** referred to in this plan as '**land designated for nature**'. Whilst this is below the national EIP target for 30% of land to be protected, it 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 designations included are in line with the Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIBs) in the LNRS.

This includes **Irreplaceable Habitat** such as Ancient Woodland which are areas of woodland that have persisted since 1600 in England. They are unique and complex communities of plants, fungi, insects and other microorganisms which has accumulated over hundreds of years. Ancient woodlands are afforded protection under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and within Local Plans.

As these designations are unlikely to change within a five-year period, the council has set a measure to sustain this baseline figure for land designated for nature.

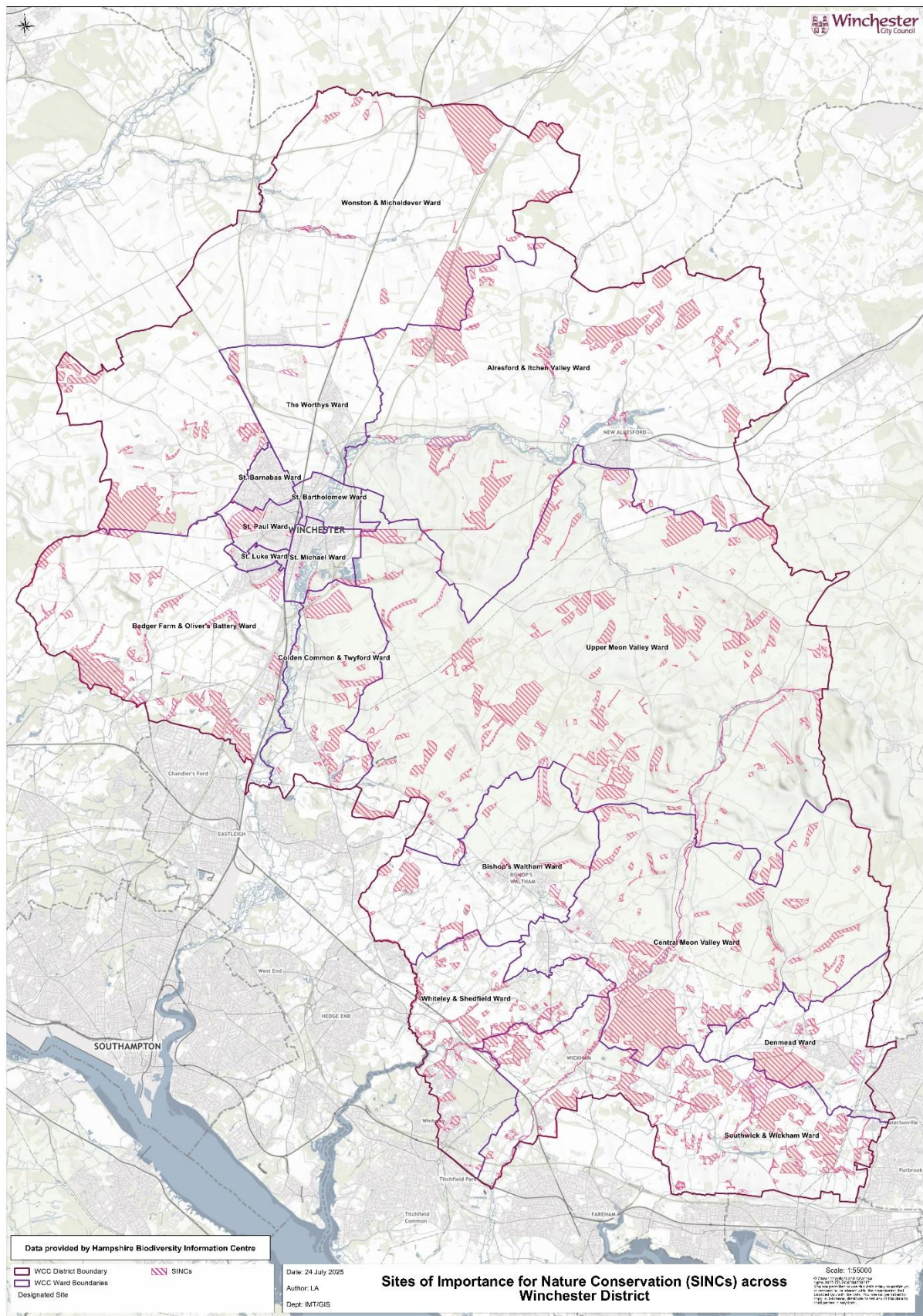


Figure 11 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in the Winchester district.

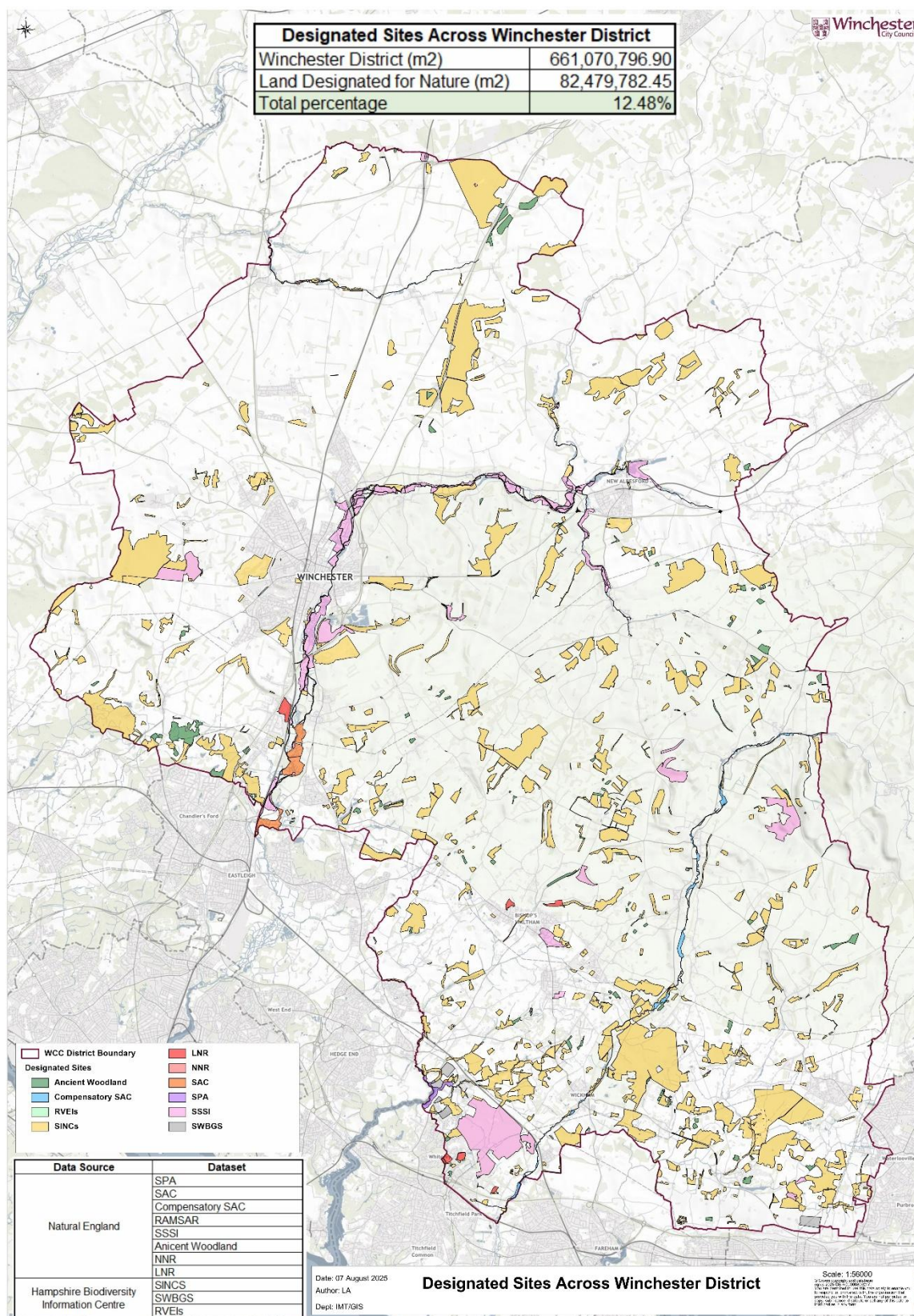


Figure 12 Designated sites within the Winchester District. This includes SPAs, SACs, compensatory SACs, RAMSAR, SWBGS, SSSIs, NNR, LNR, SINCS, RVEIs and Ancient Woodland.

## 3.2 Landscape features

Landscape features are a key consideration in this Nature Improvement Plan, helping us understand and focus nature conservation. These features can't be measured in the same way as the condition of designated sites or the coverage of habitats, but they demonstrate the diversity of landscapes across the district and help inform partnership and cross-boundary working.

### 3.2.1 National Character Areas (NCAs)

These are distinct regions in England that share similar landscape features, wildlife, geology, and cultural history. There are three NCAs in the district as shown in Figure 13, 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.

### 3.2.2 River catchments

There are several main rivers within the Winchester district, including the River Itchen, River Hamble, River Meon and River Dever. These make up a patchwork of **river catchments** as shown in Figure 14. There are Catchment Partnerships within the district including Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership, East Hampshire Catchment Partnership and Meon Valley Partnership which deliver a community-led approach to rivers, to engage people and groups at a local level to help improve our precious water environments. The council is a key member of these partnership groups.

The rivers in the district are unique compared to other areas of the UK, because they are **chalk rivers** which are rare and ecologically important freshwater habitats – internationally designated for this reason (as explained in section 3.1). 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.

Preventing and controlling pollution better is a key part of this plan. This includes the work being undertaken to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading within our Rivers, such as the upgrade to council owned Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTWs) to generate nitrogen and phosphorous credits and limiting the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. Continuing to deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy is therefore a measure for delivery of nature improvement across the district.

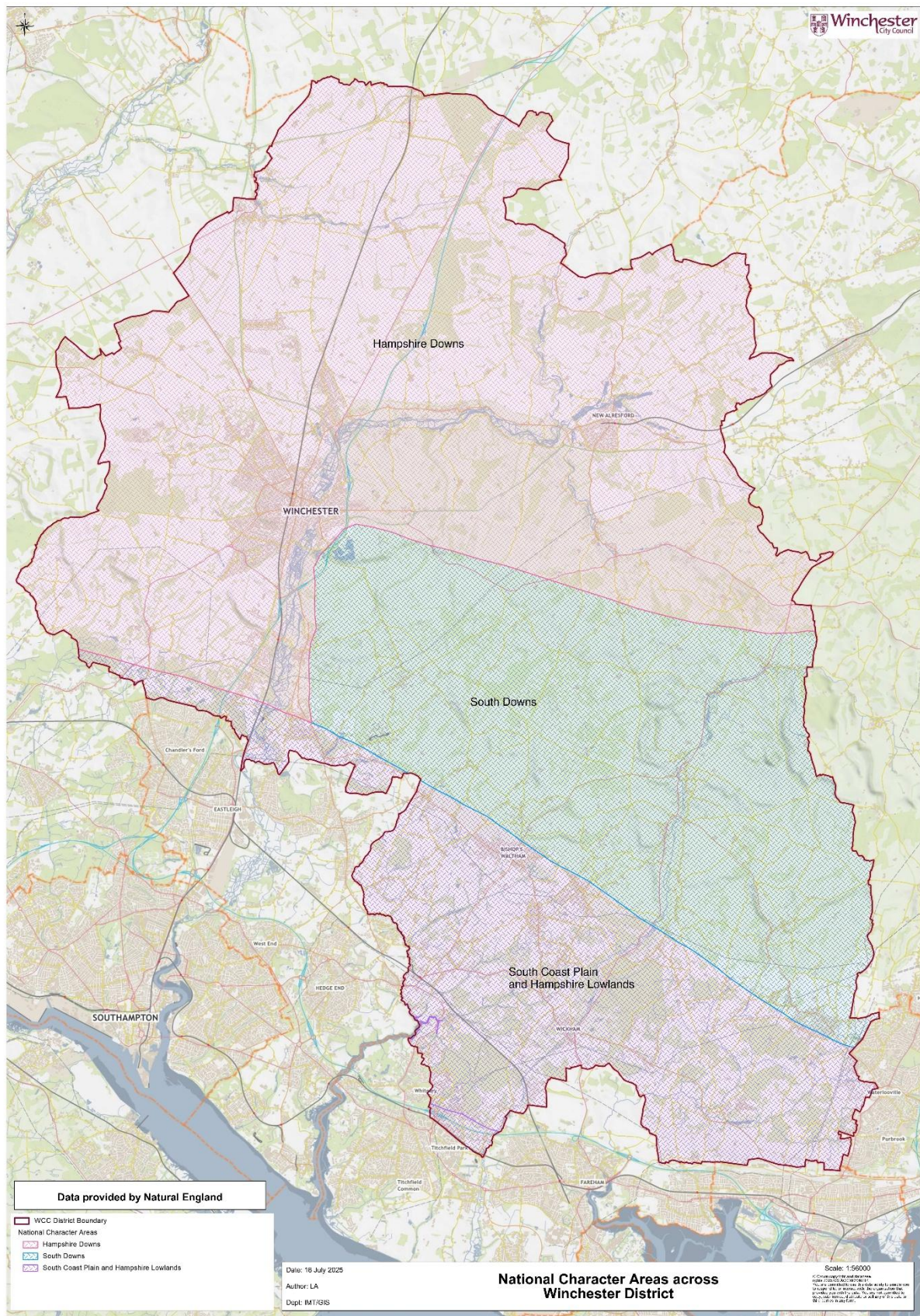


Figure 13 Map of the National Character Areas in the Winchester district.

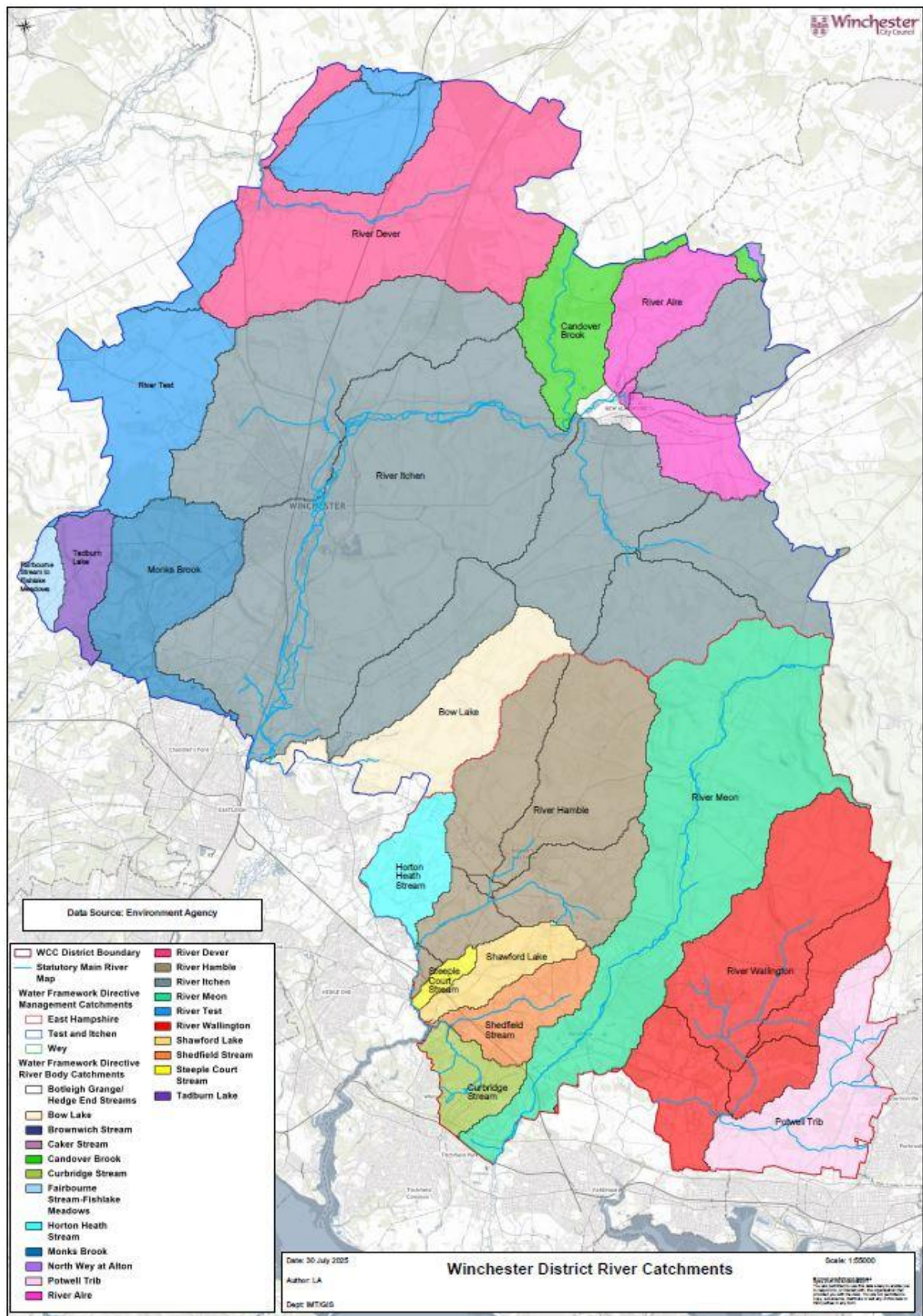
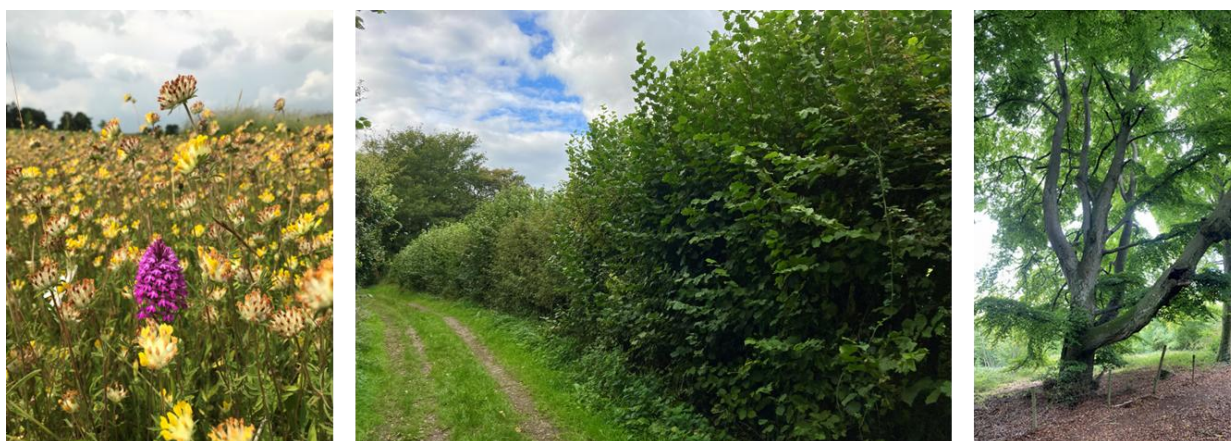


Figure 14 Map of the main rivers and river catchments within the Winchester district.

### 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, 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 16, 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, and to improve connectivity between habitats.

Figure 16 also demonstrates the type and number of priority habitats that exist currently in the Winchester District. The full extent of priority habitats is somewhat unknown due to the dynamic state of our countryside and the difficulties of obtaining access to all land. A large extent of priority habitats are also located outside of designated wildlife sites and are therefore afforded no protection. For these reasons no measures have been set relating to the quantity of priority habitat but none the less they are an important part of the district's biodiversity.



*Figure 15 Pyramid Orchid, Native Hedgerow, Mature Beech Tree*

### 3.4 Tree canopy cover

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 and therefore forms an important part of this plan and the measures set for both the district and the council. Figure 17 shows that the Winchester district currently has a coverage of **22.991%**. This is substantially higher than the national target and therefore it's an achievement to maintain these high levels of tree canopy/woodland cover. It should be noted that individual trees have not been included because the mapping is area-based and therefore this figure is likely to better reflect woodland cover rather than tree canopy cover. However National Trees Outside of

Woodland (TOW) have been mapped by Forest Research's Earth Observation for Trees and Woodlands (EOTW)<sup>28</sup>.

### **3.5 Development and Biodiversity Net Gain**

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), brought forward by the Environment Act. 2021, is a way of developments contributing to the recovery of nature. This legislation requires most new developments to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state. It is also a mechanism for enabling the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Hampshire. Further information is provided in Appendix B.

A statutory biodiversity metric is used to calculate the biodiversity value of habitats in 'biodiversity units'. We have a duty to record the number of biodiversity units delivered through developments and therefore this forms another crucial element of this plan. BNG is still a relatively new process and consequently there is a lack of baseline data, however measures are based on the metrics coming forward and the predicted gains which are likely to be delivered.

At present there are no offsite habitat banks in the Winchester district but we endeavour to support potential offsite solutions as these come forward, particularly where these contribute to the LNRS.

The Local Plan also requires new development to provide 1 ha of Natural Green Space for every 1000 new residents. Therefore, a measure has been set for this based on the housing requirements for the district.

### **3.6 Projects, events and engagement**

There are many other landowners, land managers, farmers, groups, charities, partnerships, businesses and developers across the district which play a significant and valuable role in nature improvement. We already work with many partners to deliver nature conservation, for example by providing support and advice, awarding grants and helping run events. As part of this plan, we will endeavour to record and report back on the number of projects, events and partnership work we are directly involved in, whether this be directly or through collaboration or influence.

This Nature Improvement Plan recognises that individuals and groups make a difference to nature's improvement in the district which is why they are an important part of this plan. Unfortunately, it is not practical for the council to be able to record and measure all the work these groups do for improving nature. However, there are other reporting schemes which do measure and record the work undertaken for nature (such as the government's agro-environmental scheme ELMS). There are also many positive campaigns and resources for guiding individuals and groups. Through this plan, the council aims to better signpost people to these beneficial schemes by running additional events, regular communications and updating our website.

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<sup>28</sup> [Trees Outside Woodland Public Map](#)

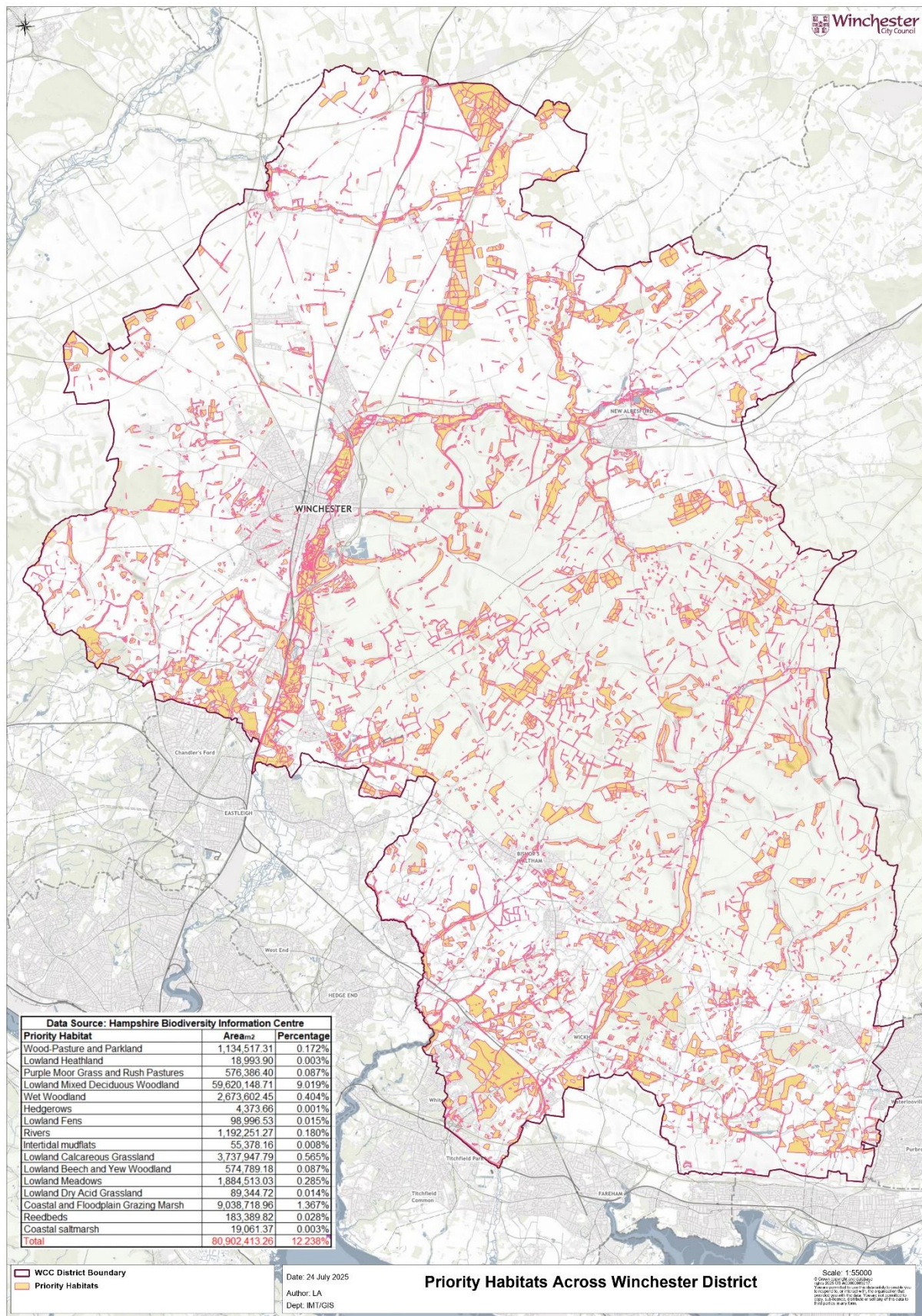


Figure 16 Map showing priority habitat coverage across the district.

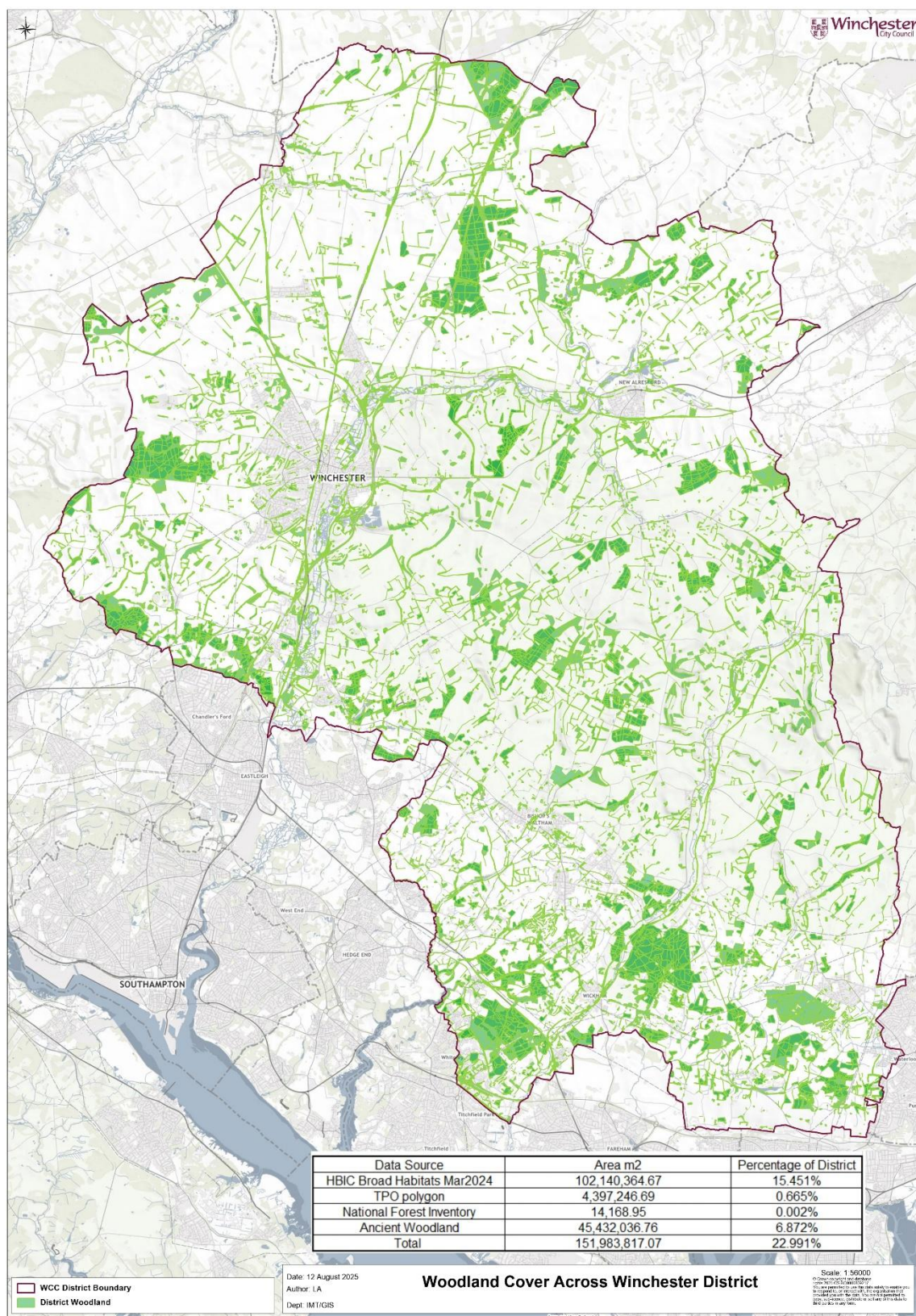


Figure 17 Map showing tree/woodland canopy cover across the district. This includes data for ancient woodland, TPOs, conifer, broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland habitat layers and the National Forest Inventory England 2023.

## 4. Biodiversity on council land

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

### 4.1 Designated wildlife sites

#### 4.1.1 International and national designated sites

Of the 23 internationally/nationally designated sites, two parcels are within Winchester City Council's ownership. These two sites, **St Faith's Meadow** and **Winnall Moors**, 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 4 below. This shows that 100% of SSSI units on council land are achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition. This is far above the national EIP target of 50% of SSSIs on track to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028. Sustaining this figure at 100% is an important measure for nature improvement on council land.

*Table 4 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 |

**St Faith's Meadow** is a tranquil, former water meadow which forms part of a vital network of floodplain habitats that support a rich diversity of wildlife. Managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on the council's behalf, the site features fen vegetation with species such as marsh marigold, ragged robin, and yellow flag iris, and is home to water voles, swallows, and grasshopper warblers.



*Figure 18 Cows at St Faith's Meadow*

**Winnall Moors** is a 64 ha nature reserve nestled in the heart of Winchester, where the River Itchen meanders through a mosaic of wet grassland, reedbeds, wet woodland, and chalk streams. Managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in partnership with Winchester City Council, the site is a vital refuge for wildlife within the urban landscape. Species such as kingfisher, water vole, roe deer, and Daubenton's bat, as well as a vibrant array of wetland flora like ragged robin, yellow flag iris, and marsh marigold have all been found there.



*Figure 19 Reedbeds at Winnall Moors*

### 4.1.2 Local designated sites

Of the 690 SINC in Winchester, three SINC are under council ownership and management.

1. **Whiteshute Ridge** is located on the southern edge of Winchester, near Badger Farm. It features extensive areas of lowland calcareous grassland, a habitat of high ecological value that supports a diverse range of plant and animal species. The site is known for its populations of slow worms and common lizards, alongside a rich botanical assemblage including several positive indicator species.

Although last surveyed by HBIC in 2013, it is subject to a management plan, and detailed botany surveys in 2015 and 2023 showed that positive management is benefiting the condition of the site.



*Figure 20 Whiteshute Ridge*

2. **West Hill Cemetery** is a historic and ecologically significant site located on the western edge of Winchester city centre. We manage the 5.2 ha as a biodiversity-rich chalk downland habitat, supporting wildflowers, pollinators and reptiles such as slow worms.

Recent botany surveys have also been carried out confirming that the management is having a positive impact on the priority grassland habitats present on site.



*Figure 21 West Hill Cemetery*

3. **Bramdean Common** is a historically rich and ecologically diverse area of common land located in the district. Managed by the council, the common is a good example of a Lowland Meadow. It's 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. As such, the management of this site is recorded as 'unknown' in Table 5, in recognition of an update survey being required.



*Figure 22 Bramdean Common*

Ensuring council owned designated sites, including SINC's are in favourable management and condition, is a priority for delivering nature improvement on council owned land. Therefore, the measure for 2025-2030 is to ensure 100% of council owned SINC's are under favourable management.

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        |

## 4.2 Land managed for nature

Given the council's direct control over its land ownership, baseline data has been used to provide a figure for 'land managed for nature' to inform council measures, rather than 'land designated for nature' used to inform district measures. This includes designated sites: SSSIs, SINCs, RVEIs as well as other council sites managed for biodiversity, TPOs, natural green spaces, locally registered parks and gardens, and public open spaces (with sports/play/allotments removed). Figure 26 shows that **27.61% of the land under the council's ownership is managed for nature.**

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 this land is designated or protected, the council has set a measure to at least sustain this level of land as 'managed for nature' which means that it will be maintained over the five-year period to provide value for wildlife and access to nature.



Figure 23 St Gilles Hill

It is considered likely that ‘land managed for nature’ includes most areas of priority habitat owned by the council, but there is potential for some woodlands, wetlands and other habitats to fall outside of this measure if they are not currently managed for biodiversity or located within parks or open spaces. The council strives to ensure that valuable habitats are managed for biodiversity and will be exploring future opportunities for nature improvement within its land ownership, particularly where these have multiple benefits for other ecosystem services and aid climate resilience.



*Figure 24 River Itchen at Winnal Moors*

### 4.3 Projects, events and engagement

Whilst designated wildlife sites are considered our top priority, we recognise the value of gardens and verges for wildlife. The council has an active road verge project<sup>29</sup>, and the areas under the council's ownership are included in the 'land managed for nature' figure.



*Figure 25 Joyce Gardens*

Through the Biodiversity Action Plan the council has created many new habitats for wildlife, including wildflower areas, sustainable flower beds and tree planting as well as installing swift boxes and bat boxes on council properties. We already have a well-established re-roofing and biodiversity procedure which includes installing one swift box for every re-roofed council property. This is done in partnership with Hampshire Swifts and is helping to halt the decline and recover this species locally. The measures set for 'creating new spaces for nature' is based on this existing work and ambitions for future projects such as Miyawaki forests, hedgerow planting and expansion of the verge project.

A key part of this plan is also to connect more people with nature, for example by enabling community groups, communications, supporting beneficial campaigns and running events.

The measures we will report back on for 'connecting more people to nature' includes volunteer hours on our land to support nature conservation and the number of events which promote connection to nature and green spaces. This includes the vital conservation work done by volunteers, in partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.winchester.gov.uk/nature-emergency/road-verge-management>

Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) at Winnall Moors and St Faith's Meadow, and in partnership with Friends of St Giles Hill.

#### 4.4 Tree canopy cover

With the current data available it has only been possible to calculate an area-based figure for tree canopy cover on council owned land. This does not include individual trees and is therefore more aligned with woodland cover rather than an accurate reflection of tree canopy cover. It may be possible in future to more accurately map tree coverage on council land through the ongoing tree survey programme. It should also 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. Measuring and monitoring tree canopy cover more accurately on our land is a potential future work area coming out of this plan and would provide a better understanding of this valuable ecosystem service.

#### 4.5 Carbon sequestration

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 council land (excluding built-up areas) have a minimum defensible carbon flux of approximately **-125 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year (tCO<sub>2</sub>e y<sup>-1</sup>)**. 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 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, 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. Sequestering more carbon is an important measure for nature improvement on council land. No numerical figures have been set because it is predicted that changes in management practices will slowly change the levels of carbon sequestered over many years.

#### 4.6 Wastewater Treatment Works

The council is 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 upgraded 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 and therefore the council has set the measure to upgrade 10 Wastewater Treatment Works by 2030.

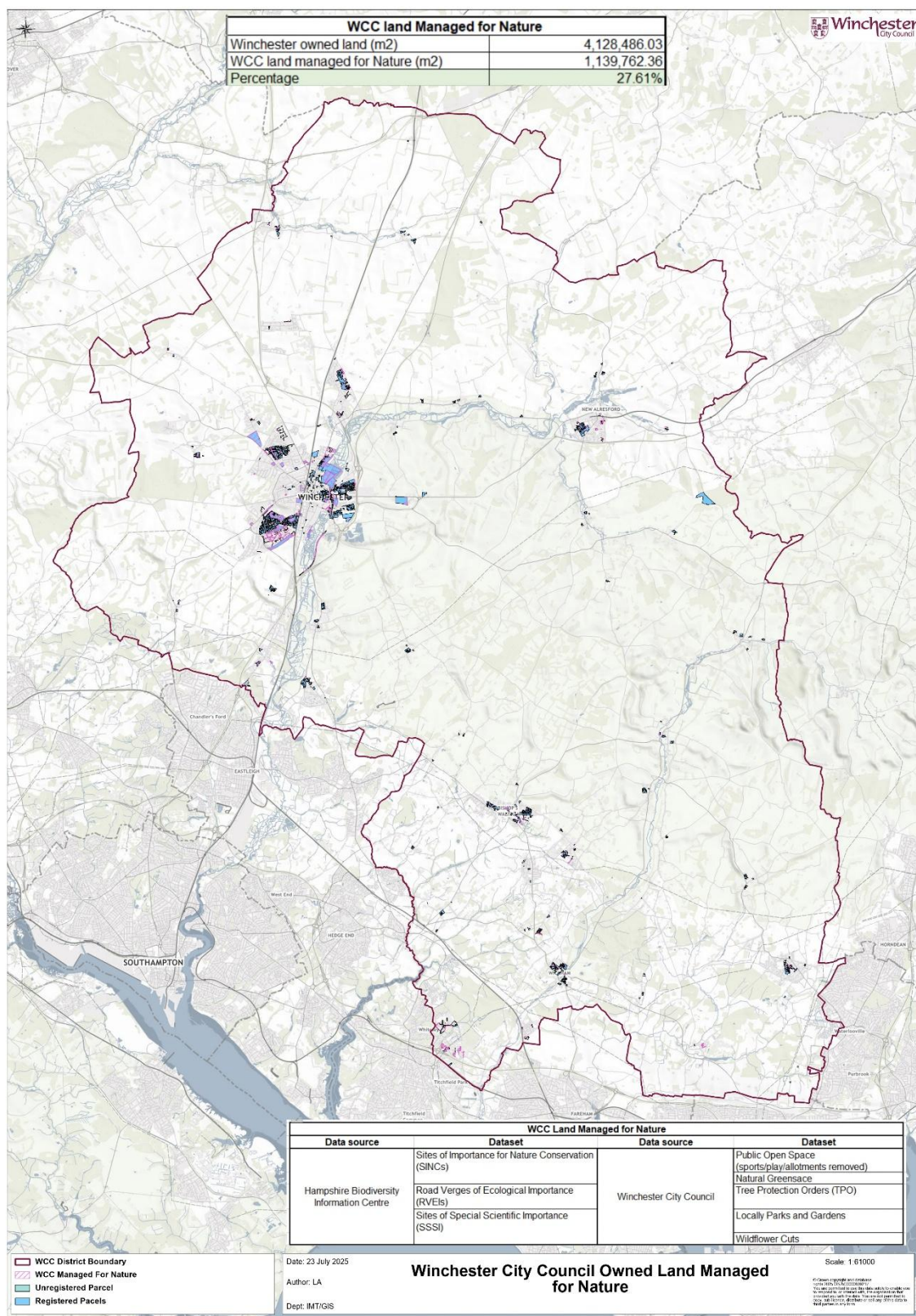


Figure 26 Map showing the land managed for nature under Winchester City Council ownership.

## 5. Vision & goals - 2025-2030

### 5.1 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 for:**

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

## 5.2 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 more nature-based solutions for tackling climate change
4. Prevent and control pollution better
5. Connect more 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.

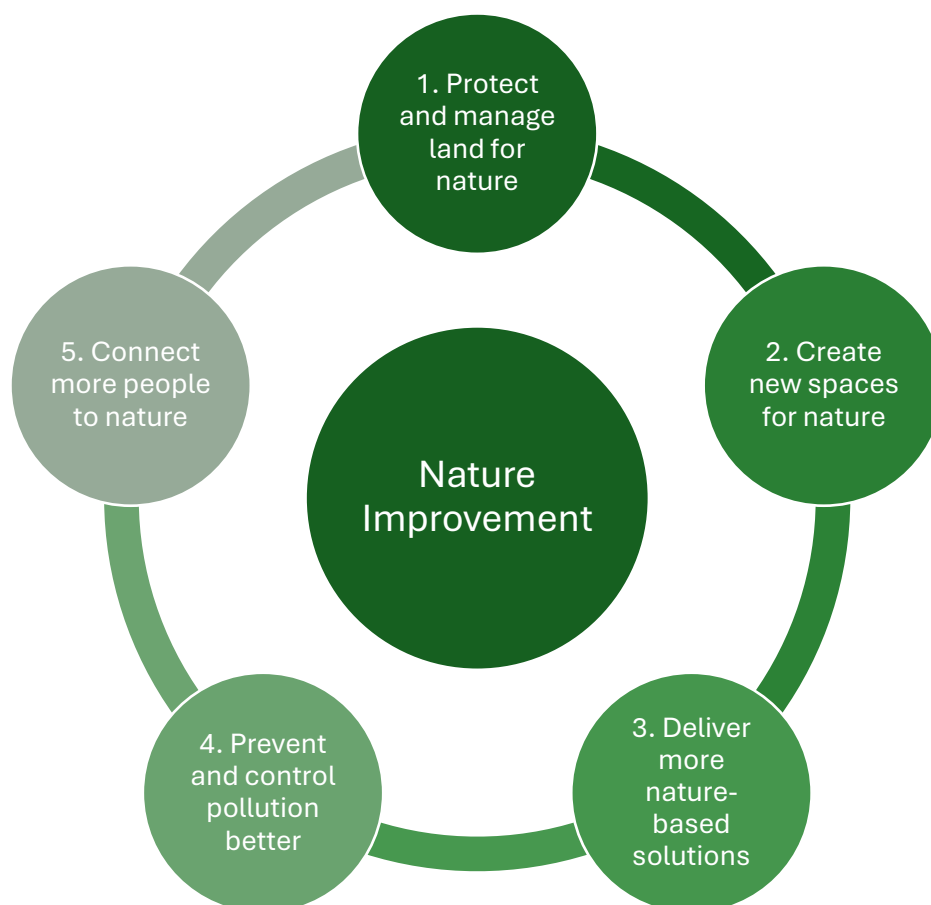
Pathway 1 is crucial for the protection, maintenance and improvement of our international, national and local sites designated for nature conservation. It also includes non-designated sites such as open spaces or buildings where we have existing biodiversity projects or features which are valuable to 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 including ecosystem services and tackling climate change. This incorporates tree canopy cover, urban greening and carbon sequestration.

Pathway 4 includes all initiatives which reduce pollution including upgrades to Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTWs) as well as limiting the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. Upgrades to WWTWs reduces nitrogen and phosphorous loading which is crucial for the recovery of our rivers and estuaries.

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 utmost importance and is essential for the long-term delivery of nature improvement across the district.



*Figure 27 The five pathways of the Nature Improvement Plan.*

### 5.3 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. These principles relate to how we behave, our standards, and serve as a foundation for how we act and work.

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.

Achieving these ambitions alongside competing priorities such as ensuring a wide range of services and facilities are available to our residents, is a considerable challenge for the council. These principles are also limited by existing contracts, however the Nature Improvement Plan and associated principles will be referenced in our Sustainable Procurement Guide and Employer's Requirements for future contracts, to ensure they are being followed. The council will also be looking for greater flexibility within new contracts to maximise benefits to nature where possible.

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.

*Table 6 Guiding Biodiversity Principles*

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PRINCIPLE 1</b> | <b>BIODIVERSITY DUTY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                    | 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.                                                                                                   |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 2</b> | <b>HIERARCHY OF SITES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                    | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>                |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 3</b> | <b>CHEMICAL USE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                    | <p>Pesticides and herbicides will only be used on biodiversity sites where considered absolutely necessary, for example to remove invasive species.</p> <p>Strive to reduce herbicide, pesticide and non-organic chemical fertiliser use, on all council owned sites by 2030.</p>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 4</b> | <b>WATER USE &amp; WATER QUALITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                    | <p>Minimise water use and introduce water recycling methods and sustainable drainage solutions where possible, as part of projects, development or land management practices.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 5</b> | <b>BIOSECURITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                    | <p>Follow biosecurity best practice guidelines and remove invasive and non-native species (INNS) from council owned land.</p> <p>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.</p>                   |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 6</b> | <b>MULTIPLE BENEFITS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | <p>Consideration will be given to the combination of benefits and ecosystem services, which can be delivered through land management, development or specific projects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements to biodiversity</li> <li>• Improvements to ecosystem services such as pollination, clean air production, water purification and flood alleviation</li> <li>• Delivery of nature-based solutions for tackling climate change such as increased carbon sequestration and urban greening</li> <li>• Improvements to health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Better access to nature, open space and recreation</li> </ul> <p>Where possible these benefits should be stacked to ensure the best outcomes are delivered.</p> |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 7</b>  | <b>PARTNERSHIP WORKING</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                     | The council will work in partnership with external stakeholders and established community groups to meet the 2030 measures.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 8</b>  | <b>HAMPSHIRE NATURE RECOVERY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                     | 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).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 9</b>  | <b>PROTECTED SPECIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                     | <p>Support the delivery of species recovery strategies, referenced in the Environment Act 2021 and LNRS, as they emerge.</p> <p>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.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>PRINCIPLE 10</b> | <b>PLANTING FOR BIODIVERSITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                     | <p>Prioritise use of native, fruiting, and pollinator-friendly species for planting schemes.</p> <p>Flower beds will be created using sustainable planting.</p> <p>Soil health will be considered when designing and implementing planting plans and all compost used will be peat-free.</p> <p>Green waste such as wood chippings will be re-used where possible for example for mulch.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Case studies of how these principles have been implemented will be produced over the course of the five-year plan.

## **5.4 Measures**

There will be two sets of measures for 2025-2030, one for council-based actions on council owned and managed land (Table 6), and one for district wide actions (Table 7). 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 and 4. 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, which is why the principles are considered an equally important part of this plan. Five years is also a short time frame when it comes to nature conservation with grassland restoration works and newly created woodlands taking decades to reach their potential in terms of benefits for nature. Nevertheless, the council aims to be transparent and report back on nature improvement and recovery in the Winchester district by 2030 and sets the building blocks for nature improvement in decades to come.

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 | 100% of SSSI units achieving “favourable/unfavourable-recovering” condition                       |
|                            |                                      | 1.2 | 100% SINC's in favourable management                                                              |
|                            |                                      | 1.3 | Achieve a minimum of 27.61% of WCC land managed for nature                                        |
| 2                          | Create new spaces for nature         | 2.1 | 1 ha new green or blue 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 more nature-based solutions  | 3.1 | Additional carbon sequestered on 3 sites                                                          |
| 4                          | Prevent and control pollution better | 4.1 | 10 Wastewater Treatment Works on council land upgraded to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading |
| 5                          | Connect more 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 | Support the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy and protect the sites included                                                    |
|                        |                                      | 1.2 | Deliver a minimum of 88% of SSSI units in the district achieving “favourable/unfavourable-recovering” condition                    |
|                        |                                      | 1.3 | Maintain the achievement of a minimum of 61% SINC's (surveyed in last 10 years) under positive management                          |
|                        |                                      | 1.4 | Achieve a minimum of 12.48% land designated for nature                                                                             |
| 2                      | Create new spaces for nature         | 2.1 | Discharge Biodiversity Gain Plans via Development Management to deliver habitat creation and enhancement of 500 biodiversity units |
|                        |                                      | 2.2 | 100 biodiversity units secured through signing agreements with habitat banks                                                       |
|                        |                                      | 2.3 | 10ha of natural green or blue space created                                                                                        |
| 3                      | Deliver more nature-based solutions  | 3.1 | Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 22.991%                                                                                   |
| 4                      | Prevent and control pollution better | 4.1 | Continue to deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy.                                                                    |
| 5                      | Connect more 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)                         |

## 5.5 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.

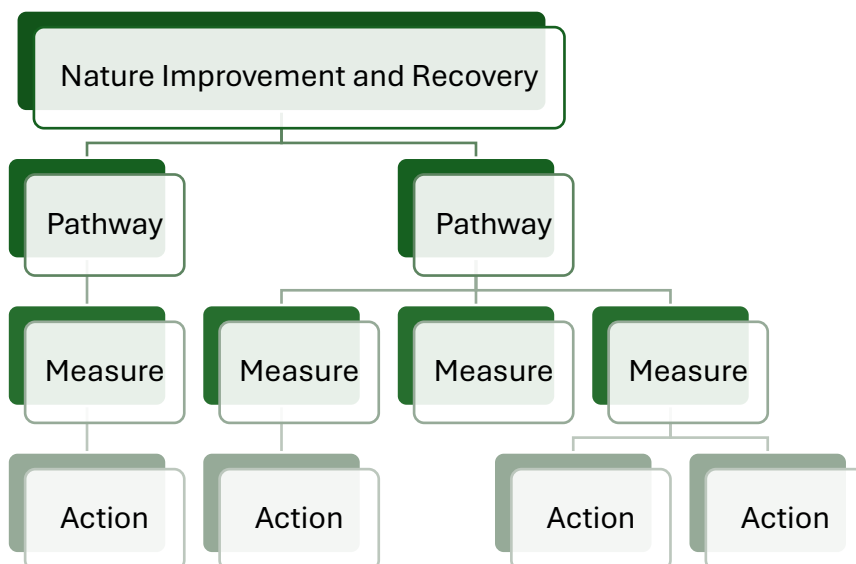


Figure 28 Pathways to actions

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.

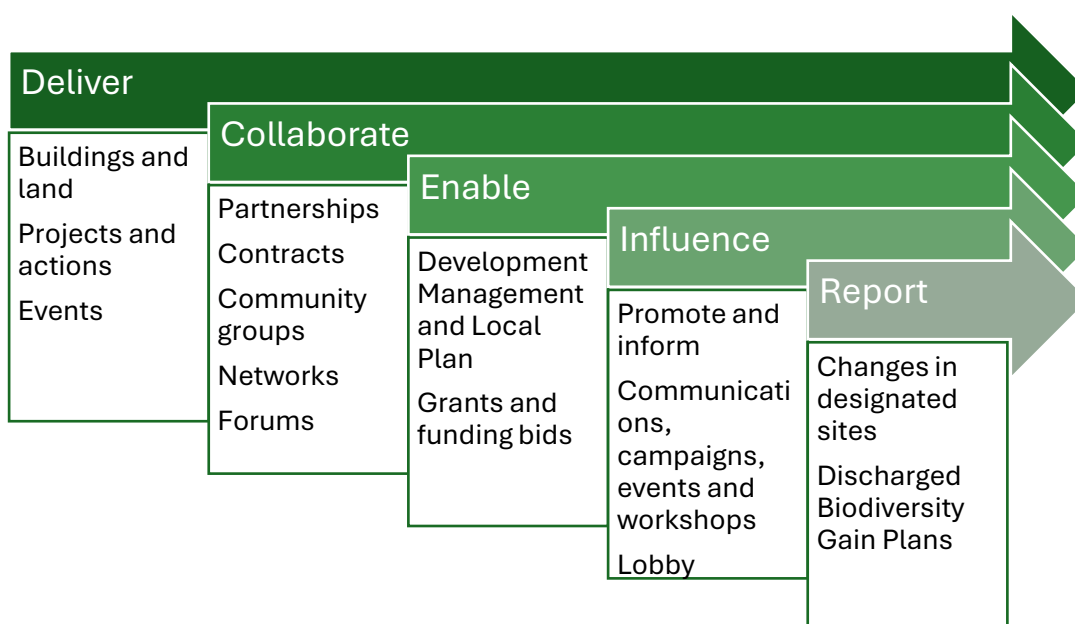


Figure 29 Five key levers for delivery of the Nature Improvement Plan

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.

Table 8 gives an indication of potential future work streams and projects coming out of the Nature Improvement Plan which may feed into future annual action plans from 2026/2027 to 2029/2030.

*Table 9 Potential future work areas to come out of the Nature Improvement Plan from 2026 to 2030*

| Pathway |                                      | Future work area                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Protect and manage land for nature   | Project investigating SINC management and opportunities                                                                                                          |
| 2       | Create new spaces for nature         | Assessment of potential Biodiversity Net Gain habitat banks within the district and on council land.<br>Creation of management plans to deliver BNG on WCC land. |
| 3       | Deliver more nature-based solutions  | Assessment of potential for creating carbon credits on WCC land.<br>Creation of management plans to deliver CC on WCC land.                                      |
|         |                                      | Assess, measure and monitor tree canopy cover to allow continued successful management of existing and new tree stock and woodland.                              |
| 4       | Prevent and control pollution better | Assessment of nutrient neutrality and potential for creating credits on WCC land.<br>Creation of management plans to deliver NN on WCC land.                     |
| 5       | Connect more people to nature        | Signpost people to relevant opportunities, groups, advice and campaigns.                                                                                         |

## 5.6 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, abbreviations and data assumptions

### i) Glossary

| Term                   | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Biodiversity site      | An area of land or water that the council recognises for its biodiversity value and therefore implements favourable management.                                                                                                                                                                |
| Open space             | An 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.                                                                                 |
| Habitat bank           | 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). |

### ii) Abbreviations

| 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                 |

### iii) Data assumptions for measures

| Pathway | Metrics to inform measures                                        | Definition and data assumptions                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | SWBG site area and status                                         | Solent Wader Brent Goose (SWBG) site data provided by Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC)                                                                                                 |
|         | SSSI units achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition | Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition status taken from Natural England. An average condition is presented for SSSIs with multiple units.                                               |
|         | SINCs under positive management                                   | Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) positive management data from HBIC.                                                                                                                   |
|         | SINCs in favourable management                                    | SINCs are considered to be under the most favourable management practices possible for the site and survey data suggests this is benefiting the condition of the site.                                 |
|         | Land designated for nature                                        | Designated sites within the Winchester District. This includes SPAs, SACs, compensatory SACs, RAMSAR, LNR, NNR and Ancient Woodland data from Natural England and SINCs, RVEI and SWBG data from HBIC. |
|         | Land managed for nature                                           | Designated sites data including SSSIs, SINCs and RVEIs from HBIC, as well as council data on sites managed for biodiversity (wildflower cuts), TPOs, Natural Green Spaces, Locally Registered          |

|   |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|   |                                                                                                                | Parks and Gardens, and Public Open Spaces (with sports/play/allotments removed).                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2 | Habitat created or improved for nature                                                                         | New planting or habitat creation on council land, which is considered beneficial for nature such as tree planting, wildflower planting, sustainable beds and pond creation. It also includes the improved management of existing areas for example reduced cutting of grassland and collection of arisings. |
|   | Hedgerow planted for nature                                                                                    | Native hedgerow planting on council land                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|   | Swift boxes and bat roost features installed on council properties                                             | Any features installed specifically for swifts or bats, including bat access tiles or purposely created gaps in soffits for swifts.                                                                                                                                                                         |
|   | Biodiversity units secured through habitat creation and enhancement through discharged Biodiversity Gain Plans | Total 'post site intervention' BNG units delivered through the statutory biodiversity metric of any discharged Biodiversity Gain Plans in the district, not just the net change or 10% uplift.                                                                                                              |
|   | Biodiversity units secured through signing agreements with habitat banks                                       | Total 'post site intervention' BNG units delivered through the statutory biodiversity metric of any habitat banks the council has a signed legal agreement with.                                                                                                                                            |
|   | Natural green or blue space created                                                                            | Any new natural green spaces as defined in the Open Space Assessment (including rivers and wetlands) created in the district                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 3 | Tree canopy/woodland cover                                                                                     | Data for ancient woodland from Natural England, council data on TPOs, conifer, broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland habitat layers from HBIC and the National Forest Inventory England 2023.                                                                                                                 |
|   | Additional carbon sequestered                                                                                  | Changes in management practices on council owned sites which enable greater carbon sequestration and climate mitigation as recommended by Arcadian in the desktop study.                                                                                                                                    |
| 4 | Wastewater Treatment Works upgraded to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading                                 | Upgrades or changes to council owned Wastewater Treatment Works which reduces pollution levels.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|   | Deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy                                                             | Continue to aid the supply of nutrient and phosphorus credits across the district.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 5 | Volunteer hours of nature conservation activities                                                              | Time spent by volunteers doing any activities which are considered beneficial for nature on any council owned sites.                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Events which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing)                                      | Any events on council green space which are either nature themed or provide health and wellbeing benefits including running events, park yoga and bat walks.                                                                                     |
| Nature events/forums                                                                                    | Events or talks delivered by the council to the public or external partners which are nature themed for example nature engagement at Green Fair and a launch event for the NIP.                                                                  |
| Farmers/land managers supported with nature-friendly practices                                          | Advice provided by the Economy/Ecology Team to members of farming clusters on projects related to nature.                                                                                                                                        |
| Businesses supported with nature-based projects                                                         | Advice provided by the Economy/Ecology Team to businesses on nature, for example as part of Employment Skills Plans.                                                                                                                             |
| Grants given to nature conservation groups to create spaces for nature and connect people to nature     | Any grants provided which aid nature related projects or activities.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Partnerships collaborated with to deliver restoration projects                                          | Projects which aid nature recovery which are delivered by partner organisations of which the council is a stakeholder, anywhere in the district, for example restoration projects delivered by the Solent Forum and River Catchment Partnerships |
| Community groups collaborated with to deliver nature conservation activities                            | The number of community groups, which undertake work that is considered to benefit nature, that the council actively supports and/or provides advice to.                                                                                         |
| Event/programmes delivered through partners which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing) | Events or programmes delivered by partners, on any green space in the district, which are either nature themed or provide health and wellbeing benefits, for example the Healthy Walk Programme.                                                 |

## 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 administered 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 land use 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 to 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 to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. 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 of 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 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 the 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 roll 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 above. 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          | 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          | 100% SINC's in favourable management                                      | • Deliver the annual actions within the management plans for SINC's                                                               | Deliver                |
|                                                         |                                                                           | 1.3          | Achieve a minimum of 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<br>• Continue to deliver biodiversity management of 'non biodiversity open spaces' | Collaborate<br>Deliver |
| 2                                                       | Create new spaces for nature                                              | 2.1          | 1 ha new green or blue 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                                          | • Install 50 Swift boxes on council properties<br>• Install 10 bat features on council properties                                 | Deliver                |
| 2.3                                                     | 250 swift boxes and 50 bat roost features installed on council properties |              |                                                                           |                                                                                                                                   |                        |
| 3                                                       | Deliver more nature-based solutions                                       | 3.1          | Additional carbon sequestered on 3 sites                                  | • Deliver the Tree Strategy with regards to replacement tree planting                                                             | Deliver                |
|                                                         |                                                                           |              |                                                                           | • Explore potential for woodland management to both sequester more carbon and improve biodiversity                                | Collaborate            |

|   |                                      |     |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                    |                              |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 4 | Prevent and control pollution better | 4.1 | 10 WWTWs on council land upgraded to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous loading      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upgrade 2 WWTWs</li> </ul>                                                                                  | Collaborate                  |
| 5 | Connect more people to nature        | 5.1 | 10,000 volunteer hours of nature conservation activities on our land              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable 2000 volunteer hours on our land</li> </ul>                                                          | Collaborate/Enable           |
|   |                                      | 5.2 | 20 events on WCC land which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable 2 nature/health and wellbeing events and deliver 2 reoccurring programmes on council land</li> </ul> | 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          | Support the SWBG Strategy and protect the sites included                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to apply the SWBG mitigation guidance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                           | Report                     |
|                                                                |                                    | 1.2          | Deliver a minimum of 88% of SSSIs units in the district achieving favourable/unfavourable-recovering condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report any degradation concerns to NE and understand when condition assessments will be undertaken</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                       | Report                     |
|                                                                |                                    | 1.3          | Maintain the achievement of a minimum of 61% SINC's (surveyed in last 10 years) under positive management      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to deliver SINC survey programme through HBIC</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                   | Collaborate                |
|                                                                |                                    | 1.4          | Achieve a minimum of 12.48% land designated for nature                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain the existing extent of designated land by ensuring that any development impacts to SINC's are adequately compensated</li> <li>Report back on SINC amendments, creation and deletion</li> <li>Report back on TPO and HRNs served</li> </ul> | Enable<br>Report<br>Report |

|   |                                      |     |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                        |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2 | Create new spaces for nature         | 2.1 | Discharge Biodiversity Gain Plans via Development Management to deliver habitat creation and enhancement of 500 biodiversity units | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to assess BGPs through Development Management</li> <li>Report back on discharged Biodiversity Gain Plans</li> </ul>                                                           | Enable<br>Report       |
|   |                                      | 2.2 | 100 biodiversity units secured through signing agreements with habitat banks                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine council position to habitat banks. Assess 1 habitat bank proposal</li> <li>Report back on amphibian habitat delivered through the District Level Licensing scheme</li> </ul> | Deliver<br>Report      |
|   |                                      | 2.3 | 10ha of natural green or blue space created                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to deliver the Local Plan and assist with land transfers</li> </ul>                                                                                                           | Enable                 |
| 3 | Deliver more nature-based solutions  | 3.1 | Sustain Tree canopy/woodland cover above 22.991%                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure appropriate replanting plans for development and TPO applications</li> </ul>                                                                                                    | Enable                 |
| 4 | Prevent and control pollution better | 4.1 | Continue to deliver the council's nutrient mitigation strategy.                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report back on the number of credits provided through the council scheme</li> </ul>                                                                                                    | Enable                 |
| 5 | Connect more people to nature        | 5.1 | 50 farmers and land managers supported with nature-friendly practices                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with 10 farmers and land managers through cluster work</li> </ul>                                                                                                               | Deliver                |
|   |                                      | 5.2 | 5 businesses supported with nature-based projects                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support 1 business to deliver a nature-based project</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        | Enable                 |
|   |                                      | 5.3 | 6 nature events/forums delivered                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver NIP launch event</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                    | Deliver                |
|   |                                      | 5.4 | Grants given to nature conservation groups to create spaces for nature and connect people to nature                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver nature engagement as part of Green fair</li> <li>Provide grants to appropriate nature conservation groups</li> </ul>                                                           | Collaborate<br>Deliver |

|     |                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                            |             |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 5.5 | 4 partnerships collaborated with to deliver 5 restoration projects                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver 1 restoration project through a partnership group</li> </ul>              | Collaborate |
| 5.6 | 10 community groups collaborated with to deliver nature conservation activities                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support 2 community groups</li> </ul>                                             | Enable      |
| 5.7 | 10 event/programmes delivered through partners which promote connection with nature (health and wellbeing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable 2 nature/ health and wellbeing event/programmes across district</li> </ul> | Enable      |