EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
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19 June 2025

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

To: All Members of the Exmoor National Park Authority

A meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority will be held in the **Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton** on **Tuesday, 1 July 2025 at 10.00am.**

The meeting will be open to the press and public subject to the passing of any resolution under s.100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

There is Public Speaking at this meeting, when the Chairperson will allow members of the public two minutes each to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition relating to any item relevant to the business of the Authority or relating to any item on the Agenda. Anyone wishing to ask questions should notify the Corporate Support Officer as soon as possible, or at the latest by 4pm on the working day before the meeting of the agenda item on which they wish to speak, indicating a brief summary of the matter or matters to be raised (contact Committees@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

The meeting will be **recorded**. By entering the Authority's Committee Room and speaking during Public Speaking you are consenting to being recorded. We will make the recording available via our website for members of the public to listen to and/or view, within 72 hours of the meeting taking place.

Members of the public may use forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting. Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairperson so that those present may be made aware.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the National Park Authority's website www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Sarah Bryan
Chief Executive

As set out above, the Authority welcomes public engagement with its work and believes that everyone attending a meeting of Exmoor National Park Authority or one of its Committees has the right to be treated with respect and to feel safe at all times, including before, during and after the meeting they attend.

The Authority understands that some situations can be difficult and lead to frustration; however, the Authority is committed to promoting an environment where everyone feels listened to and respected and is not subjected to unacceptable behaviour. Further guidance is provided in our Customer Notice, available on our website.

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in relation to items on the agenda for this meeting.

3. Chairperson's Announcements

4. Minutes (1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 3 June 2025 (Item 4).

(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes.

5. Business of Urgency: To introduce any business which by reason of special circumstances the Chairperson, after consultation with the Chief Executive, is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency and to resolve when such business should be ordered on the Agenda.

6. Public Speaking: The Chairperson will allow members of the public to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition. Questions of a general nature relevant to the business of the Authority can be asked under this agenda item. Any questions specific to an agenda item can be posed when that item is considered subject to the discretion of the person presiding at the meeting.

7. Corporate Plan 2024/25 Annual Report: To consider the report of the Chief Executive/Head of Climate, Nature & Communities/Head of Access, Engagement & Estates/Head of Enterprise & Operations (Item 7.)

8. 2024/25 Outturn – Budget Performance, Reserves, New Year Monitoring and MTFP Update: To consider the report of the Chief Finance Officer (Item 8).

9. Annual Treasury Management Report: To consider the report of the Head of Enterprise & Operations (Item 9).

10. Exmoor National Park Management Plan 2025-30: To consider the report of the Head of Climate, Nature & Communities (Item 10).

11. Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy Public Consultation Draft: To consider the report of the Head of Climate, Nature & Communities (Item 11).

12. Developing a Youth Voice/Board: To consider the report of Head of Access, Engagement & Estates (Item 12).

13. Members' Allowances Scheme: To consider the report of the Chief Finance Officer (Item 13).

14. Personnel Update:

Starters:

02/06/2025 – Emily Chesterman – Field Services and Estates Worker (6-month fixed term)

30/06/2025 – Claire Callister – Democratic Support Officer

30/06/2025 – Daisy Collier – Pinkery Cleaner

01/07/2025 – Xanthe Waite – Seasonal Information Advisor (Lynmouth)

Leavers:

05/07/2025 – Robin Offer – Treescapes Officer

18/07/2025 – Charity Winfield – Rural Surveyor

31/07/2025 – Carol Carder – Corporate Support Officer (Members)

15. Members' Reports: To receive any updates and reports on meetings or events attended by Members as representatives of Exmoor National Park Authority.

Further information on any of the reports can be obtained by contacting the National Park Authority at the address and telephone numbers at the top of the agenda. Details of the decisions taken at this meeting will be set out in the formal Minutes which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions can be obtained the Corporate Support Officer, at Exmoor House.

ITEM 4

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES of the Annual Meeting of the Exmoor National Park Authority held on Tuesday, 3 June 2025 at 10.00am in the Committee Room, Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Miss A V Davis (Chairperson)
Mr R Milton (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr L Baker
Mr A Bray
Mr T Butt Philip
Mrs M Chilcott
Mr D Elson
Mr W Geen
Mr J Holtom
Mr R Hopley
Dr M Kelly
Mr M Kravis
Mrs C Lawrence
Mrs F Nicholson
Mr J Patrinos
Mr S J Pugsley
Mrs F Smith
Miss E Stacey
Mr N Thwaites
Dr S Warren
Miss L Williams

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Ellicott, and it was noted that Mrs F Smith would join the meeting late due to a dental appointment.

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON:** Miss A V Davis was elected as Chairperson of the Authority for the ensuing year.

2. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON:** Mr R Milton was elected as Deputy Chairperson of the Authority for the ensuing year.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Mr R Hopley, recently appointed to ENPA by Devon County Council, was welcomed to the Authority.

5. **MINUTES**

   i. **Confirmation:** The **Minutes** of the Authority's meeting held on 6 May 2025 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

   ii. **Matters arising:** In relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the meeting was advised that the Authority had now received confirmation from Defra of the level of 2025 National Park Grant and capital payment, as detailed in the report to the May Authority Committee meeting. It was anticipated that 25% of the National Park Grant would be received shortly.

6. **BUSINESS OF URGENCY:** There was none.

7. **PUBLIC SPEAKING:** There were no public speakers.

Miss E Stacey joined the meeting.

8. EXMOOR ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN: The Authority considered the **report** of the Head of Access, Engagement & Estates.

The Authority's Consideration

The Committee welcomed the report and the draft Exmoor Active Travel Plan which outlined a range of strategic proposals and high priority infrastructure opportunities, with the objective of identifying projects eligible for funding bids and a focus on proposals likely to enable the greatest numbers of new active travel journeys.

Members supported the benefits of active travel including improving physical and mental health, reducing carbon emissions, reducing the impact of motor vehicles, providing transport independence and choice, and supporting the Exmoor economy.

In relation to the 11 themes set out in the vision for the active travel network, the meeting commented as follows:

- Theme I - Tackling main road severance: Members concurred that where active travel journeys required the use of sections of main road to reach or connect between traffic-free routes, motor traffic speeds and flows were a key issue which could dissuade or prevent active journeys.
- Theme J - Traffic speeds on rural road in the National Park: Members expressed concern about the statement that traffic speeds in some areas were likely to make rural road sections unsuitable for most active travel. It was their view that traffic speed was not the primary and singular issue on Exmoor's rural roads, with other factors being overgrown roadside vegetation affecting sight lines, damage to road surfaces and lack of mutual respect between user groups. It was suggested that measures to mitigate these issues could be taken forward in conjunction with Parish Councils, and that signage thanking drivers for giving space to other road users might be a positive contribution to the rural road network.

  It was agreed it was important to be mindful of the diversity of road users - whether walkers, cyclists or horse riders; and to recognise that what may not be a concern for one person, may be disconcerting to someone less confident or proficient in their chosen activity.
- Theme K – Active travel welcome and supporting measures: It was suggested that the Travel Plan be specific about the diversity of user groups, for example young people who were not yet old enough to drive or people who did not own a vehicle, and it was agreed that identified projects should aim to be creative in establishing trail routes close to the public transport network and pro-actively encourage behaviour change, and not be limited to passively providing information.

It was agreed that the Authority should prioritise identified "easy win" opportunities, particularly if no dedicated government funding became available.

In conclusion, the meeting approved the Exmoor Active Travel Plan as a strong framework to steer future work and funding bids. In doing so, Members considered there was space on Exmoor's road network for all users, and the introduction of lower speed limits as a blanket approach, or as a first option without clear evidence or trialing alternatives, was not endorsed.

It was emphasised that the Authority's strategic documents including the Partnership Plan and Local Plan should align with the vision of the Exmoor Active Travel Plan.

RESOLVED:

1. To agree to support the general conclusions of the Exmoor Active Travel Plan and pursue its high priority recommendations.
2. To delegate to the CEO to make minor final changes and corrections to the Plan ahead of the grant deadline of 1 July 2025.
3. To congratulate the Access & Recreation Manager on completion of an important piece of work which would support future funding applications.

Mrs F Smith joined the meeting.

9. PLANNING COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES: The Authority considered the **report** of the Head of Enterprise & Operations and the Solicitor & Monitoring Officer.

The Authority's Consideration

Members welcomed the report. It was highlighted that while it was desirable for a substitute to be nominated from the same Member group to maintain the balance of the Committee, this was not a requirement and it was open to Members to nominate a substitute from another Member group.

RESOLVED: To revise Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation to Committees to reduce the notice period required to nominate a Planning Committee substitute from 10 working days before the Committee meeting to 3 working days before the Committee meeting, save for exceptional circumstances when 24 hours' notice would need to be provided.

10. ANNUAL APPOINTMENTS: The Authority considered the **report** of the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED: To make the following appointments to the Authority's statutory committees, partnership boards, working groups and external organisations:

Final Accounts Committee and Finance & Performance Advisory Panel: Miss A V Davis (Chairperson), Mr R Milton (Deputy Chairperson), Mr A Bray, Mrs M Chilcott, Mr M Ellicott, Mr B Geen, Mrs F Nicholson, Mr S J Pugsley, Miss E Stacey

Planning Committee: Mr A Bray, Mr T Butt Philip, Mr D Elson, Mr B Geen, Mr J Holtom, Mr R Hopley, Dr M Kelly, Mrs F Nicholson, Mr J Patrinos, Mr S J Pugsley, Mrs F Smith, Miss E Stacey

Standards Committee: Mr M Ellicott, Mr J Patrinos, Mr S J Pugsley, Miss E Stacey, Mr N Thwaites

Exmoor Local Access Forum: Mr A Bray, Mr N Thwaites

Exmoor National Park Forum: All Authority Members

Exmoor Historic Environment Advisory Group: Mr J Holtom, Dr M Kelly, Mr S J Pugsley

Exmoor Learning and Engagement Network: Mr T Butt Philip, Mrs C Lawrence, Mrs F Smith, Dr S Warren

Exmoor Moorland & Farming Board: Mr L Baker, Mr B Geen, Mr J Holtom, Mr R Milton

Exmoor Nature Conservation Advisory Panel: Mr B Geen, Mr J Holtom, Mrs F Smith, Dr S Warren, Miss L Williams

Exmoor Woodland and Forestry Advisory Group: Mr D Elson, Mr N Thwaites

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Group: Mr T Butt Philip, Mr D Elson, Mr J Patrinos, Dr S Warren, Miss L Williams

External Funding Working Group: Mr A Bray, Mr M Ellicott, Miss E Stacey, Miss L Williams

FiPL Assessment Panel: Mr D Elson, Mr J Holtom, Mr R Milton, Dr S Warren

Planning Policy Advisory Group: Miss A V Davis (Chairperson), Mr R Milton (Deputy Chairperson), Mr S J Pugsley (Chairperson of the Planning Committee), Mr A Bray, Mr M Ellicott, Mr B Geen, Mr J Holtom, Dr M Kelly, Mrs F Nicholson

Rural Enterprise Exmoor Group: Mr A Bray, Miss A V Davis

UK National Parks Chairs Forum: Miss A V Davis (Chairperson), Mr R Milton (Deputy Chairperson)

Campaign for National Parks: Miss L Williams

Exmoor Hill Farming Network: Mr M Ellicott

Exmoor Landscape Advisory Group: Dr M Kelly, Mr M Kravis

Exmoor Rural Housing Network: Mr M Ellicott, Mr B Geen, Mr J Holtom, Mrs F Nicholson, Mr S J Pugsley

North Devon Coast National Landscape: Mr D Elson

Team Devon Joint Committee: Miss A V Davis (Chairperson), Mr R Milton (Deputy Chairperson)

Visit Exmoor CIC: Miss L Williams

11. PERSONNEL UPDATE: The Authority noted the recent staff changes as set out on the agenda.

12. MEMBERS' REPORTS: The Authority received the following verbal reports.

- Mr R Milton, Mrs F Nicholson and Mr S J Pugsley reported on an event at which the Exmoor Young Voices received the King's Award for Voluntary Services.

- Mr A Bray, Dr M Kelly, Mr R Milton and Mrs F Smith reported on attendance at the recent Exmoor Society Conference.

- Dr M Kelly reported on the work of the Exmoor Landscape Advisory Group.

The meeting closed at 11.00am

(Chairperson)

ITEM 7

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

CORPORATE PLAN 2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT

Report of the Chief Executive/Head of Climate, Nature and Communities/ Head of Access, Engagement and Estates/Head of Enterprise and Operations

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT: To inform Members about the progress made in implementing actions within the Corporate Plan 2024/25.

RECOMMENDATION: The Authority is recommended to:

(1) NOTE the progress in implementing the Authority's key commitments set out in the Corporate Plan 2024/25.

(2) DELEGATE to the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel and Leadership Team further scrutiny of Authority performance across all the Corporate Plan actions for the next reporting period to 31 March 2026. A half-year update of the 2025/26 Corporate Plan will be presented to Members in November 2025.

Authority Corporate Plan: The Corporate Plan outlined the priorities for the Authority for the period to March 2025 and how we will help to achieve the priorities in the *Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan*. It continues to closely follow Government priorities set out in the *Environment Act 2021, and Environment Improvement Plan 2023*.

Legal and Equality Implications: Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to *"do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to:-*

(a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]

(b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment."

The equality impact of the recommendations of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s). Engagement through the outreach work within the plan is designed to have a positive impact on protected groups.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendations of this report is as follows: There are no implications for the Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk Implications: No financial or risk implications have been identified. Performance management exerts a positive influence on financial and risk management.

Climate Change Response: A report on the ENPA climate action plan is included in Appendix 2.

1. Introduction

1.1 A three-year Corporate Strategy was agreed by the Authority in May 2023. This sets out the key priorities for the Authority and includes actions for 2024/25. It reflects the emerging themes of the 2025 - 2030 Exmoor National Park Management Plan, and the priorities identified in Government's response to the Landscapes Review.

1.2 Performance is monitored quarterly by Leadership Team to ensure that the actions within the Corporate Plan are being achieved and, if necessary, to provide an opportunity for resources to be re-allocated or to review the proposed action. Oversight is provided by Members through the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel.

1.3 This end of year report provides an overview of key achievements during the year and reports on performance against key corporate indicators.

2. Corporate Plan at a Glance

2.1 The actions within the plan are grouped around the Priorities identified in the Exmoor National Park Authority Corporate Strategy 2023-26 as follows:

1. **A clear response to the nature and climate crises**
2. **A welcoming place for all, improving people's health and well-being**
3. **A cared for landscape and heritage**
4. **A place with flourishing, vibrant, communities and businesses**
5. **A highly performing Estate, delivering National Park purposes**
6. **A great organisation to work for**

3. Performance Report - Overview

3.1 Delivery of the Corporate Plan actions was progressed against a background of changing national policy and legislation, and a challenging funding regime.

3.2 The Government published its response to the Landscapes Review in January 2022 which set out proposals to take forward a number of recommendations by the review Panel led by Julian Glover. Many of the changes require changes to legislation, and the Government sought views via a consultation which ran between January and April 2022. In November 2023 the Government published the outcomes from the consultation and an action plan for Protected Landscapes. This outlined the part that Government expects Protected Landscapes to play in delivering legally binding targets for nature, climate change, natural resources beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment required by the Environment Act 2021 and set out in Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23).

3.3 In May 2023, the strengthened biodiversity duty in the 2021 Environment Act came into force. The intention is that this will help accelerate nature recovery in Protected Landscapes as it places a legal duty on public authorities, including ENPA, to consider and take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Government also published guidance that public bodies should consider Protected Landscapes as part of the duty, particularly if they have functions within or close to the designation. Protected Landscapes are also central to the government's commitment to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030, and guidance on how this will be delivered was published in December 2023.

3.4 Further legislative changes were brought in through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act in October 2023, which requires the management plans of Protected Landscapes to contribute to national environmental targets. In addition, relevant authorities have a strengthened duty to 'seek to further' National Park purposes and are required to help deliver these management plans, as well as the statutory purposes for Protected Landscapes. This is intended to ensure that partners work together to deliver better outcomes for nature, climate, people and place.

3.5 In January 2024, a new Protected Landscapes targets and outcomes framework was published which sets out 10 key targets from the EIP23 that Protected Landscapes will help to deliver. Delivery of the outcomes framework must be embedded within management plans to guide local decision-making and prioritisation. New guidance on National Park Management Plans has been prepared by Natural England. These new legislative requirements, emerging guidance, and Protected Landscapes targets all needed to be incorporated into the next Exmoor National Park Management Plan, which has consequently been delayed.

3.6 Other recommendations from the Landscapes Review have also progressed, including the establishment of the Protected Landscapes Partnership to build on collaboration between National Parks England, the National Landscapes Association, National Trails UK and Natural England. The partnership has two workstreams. The first workstream is identifying opportunities for collaboration on nature recovery and climate change leadership through large-scale projects and sharing knowledge and evidence across the landscapes. The second workstream of the partnership is exploring how to remove barriers to access and promote respect for nature to increase the number of people from all parts of society visiting, volunteering, and working in Protected Landscapes and National Trails.

3.7 Against this national backdrop, there have been some notable achievements by the team this year, including the successful implementation of the Exmoor Pioneers National Heritage Lottery Fund programme, the development phase of Reviving Exmoor Heartlands Landscape Recovery scheme, and allocation of all the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding. Great Bradley Bridge was constructed and opened, the Dulverton National Park Centre relocated into Exmoor House and the successful continuation of the Autumn Dark Sies Festival were other notable achievements. Significant progress continues to have been made with ENPA's decarbonisation plans, greenhouse gas emissions have halved since 2019, and our fleet is transitioning to a low carbon basis.

3.8 Despite the challenges of budget cuts, teams have continued to deliver high quality services and outcomes. 89% (2023/24 93%) of the rights of way network are considered to be open and easy to use, a fall from previous years, but still a high proportion and a great achievement by the team. This was in the context of dealing with the Great Bradley Bridge construction and the significant damage and disruption to the rights of way network caused by Storm Darragh at the tail end of 2025. National Park Centres have achieved another good year for retail spend albeit slightly reduced from the prior year with visitor numbers down by 7% but spend only own by 2.5% to what was a record year in 2023/24. Performance of the planning service remains above national targets, and the new statutory requirements for biodiversity net gain have been implemented. Delivery of the Estate strategy continues, with many projects underway across the Estate including at Driver and the planting of new trees and woodland. The business review was

completed, leading to a new organizational structure, and a new Organisational Development Strategy 2023-2026 has been adopted.

3.9 Delivery of the Corporate Plan is impacted by the current budgetary pressures faced by ENPA. The Authority has experienced many years of decreasing core grant support. Since 2010/11 there has been a 40% reduction in National Park Grant, and for the previous 5 years the Authority has been subject to a flat cash settlement (one off additional grant of £440,000 received in 2022/23). The Medium-Term Financial Plan distributed in early 2023 indicated a budget gap of £270k for 2024/25 and £325k for 2025/26. The Business Review implemented in April 2024 was initiated to ensure the best means of meeting the budget gap and had two key drivers: the need to make savings, and the need to refocus work to match corporate strategy and DEFRA priorities. A further £500,000 of one-off allocation was awarded to all national Park Authorities in April 2024. The opportunity was taken in the approval of the 2024/25 budget to make these changes across the organisation, to realign structures and staffing to deliver the priorities that government expects of National Park Authorities. As a result, it was possible to eradicate the savings requirement for the next two years, however very recent changes in 2025/26 with a reduction in the revenue element of National Park Grant will bring significant funding pressures to the fore again.

3.10 Full details of delivery against the Corporate Plan 2024/25 actions are given in Appendix 1. There have been some significant achievements throughout the year, and good progress against delivery of the majority of the actions. The actions colour-coded amber or red are where there has been lack of delivery, either due to slippage in timescales or actions not progressed, are primarily due to budget restrictions which have placed pressure on staff capacity.

3.11 Analysis of the areas with a lack of progress (amber) shows that of the 60+ targets, the great majority were progressed as planned and an enormous amount has already been successfully achieved. Seven areas of work have been identified as needing attention. These are set out below.

3.12 Target 15 relates to South West Water's decision to focus peatland activity elsewhere, however some work is still taking place on Exmoor.

3.13 Target 19b relates to the creation of a woodland carbon toolkit. This has not been completed due to other priorities in the woodland team and this target will be reviewed.

3.14 Target 19f relates to the installation of public EV charge points utilising BMW Sponsorship provided by the National Parks Partnership. One EV point has been installed at the Blackmoor Gate and is operational. A planned group of 4 chargers within the public car park at Exford is delayed due to wayleave discussions with the National Grid.

3.15 Target 20 is to work with UK National Park Authorities to join Race to Zero and develop action plan. Officers have been working with other National Park Authorities on scoping work on a Race to Zero action plan. This will be progressed in 2025/26.

3.16 Target 21 is to commission a climate adaptation and risk assessment for ENP. This has not been completed due to lack of capacity in this area. This is being addressed through the recruitment of a two-year post to support climate work and provide resilience in the finance team.

3.17 Target 36 is to complete the Exmoor Visitor Survey and publish results. Over 75% of data was collected by year-end - due to a late start due to capacity and other

issues in the team at the start of the summer, the data gathering period has been extended to Q1 25/26 to enable a balanced sample size to be collected. This will mean results are unlikely to be published until Q2 25/26 – i.e. approximately 6 months later than planned.

3.18 Target 41 was to draft and consult on a Design Supplementary Planning Document to encourage high quality, locally distinctive design and take account of national design guidance and code. Design guide content has been drafted; however work has not progressed as hoped due to a lack of staff resources. External support will be sought to complete and progress a final draft in 2025/26.

3.19 The five appendices listed below provide an in-depth review of each of these core areas of Corporate Performance.

Appendix 1 - Delivery of Corporate Plan Actions 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Appendix 2 - ENPA Climate Action Plan Progress Report 2024-25

Appendix 3 - ENPA Employee Profile 31 March 2025

Appendix 4 - Customer Feedback Report 2024-25 (compliments, complaints and Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations Requests

Appendix 5 - Key Corporate Indicators 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Ben Barrett
Head of Enterprise and Operations

June 2025

Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:

Exmoor National Park Authority Corporate Plan 2024/25

Appendix 1

Delivery of Corporate Plan Actions
1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Cross Cutting Actions

1. **Priority action:** Consult on and adopt the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029

✓ ***Consultation on a draft Partnership Plan has been completed, and the final Plan is now being prepared in the light of comments, ready for adoption in July 2025. Delivery Plans are also being developed.***

2. **Priority action:** Submit final application for the 5-year 'Exmoor Pioneers' programme, and if successful begin delivery, including nature recovery, heritage conservation, skills, volunteering, engagement with new audiences and interpretation. This programme is funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the Cynthia Hadley legacy (CareMoor for Exmoor) and BMW

✓ ***The Exmoor Pioneers funding bid was submitted in May 2024 and in October we were awarded £1.25 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The core team has been recruited and the Pioneers programme is now underway.***

3. **Priority action:** Deliver the Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme on Exmoor, supporting farmers to transition to the new environmental land management schemes. Target: allocate £700,000 of funds in 2024-25

✓ ***The total spent on delivery of FIPL projects in 24/25 was £1,198,832.27. This includes £733,597.68 allocated to core FiPL budget, with £71,419.21 of Access project funding (supporting Exmoor Game School, Farm School Exmoor and West Ilkerton Farm) and £395,634.36 of capital spend on Historic Building Restoration Grants over 3 projects (Driver East Barn, Cow House and Machinery Shed at Selworthy, Bank Barn at Great Nurcott). The extension of the programme into 25/26 has been well received by farmers and landowners, with a good number of applications and enquiries coming through already for 25/26.***

4. **Priority action:** Develop overall strategy for income generation, being more commercial across our activities. Update and implement the External Project Funding strategy and Prospectus, and pursue funding opportunities for projects

✓ ***Strategy drafted and consultation started with LT/DT and mini business plans drafted for most areas. Looking to adopt by Autumn 25. Project pipeline reviewed - full update to be completed (incl prospectus) following adoption of new Partnership Plan.***

5. **Priority action:** Initiate 2-year Development Phase of the 'Reviving Exmoor's Heartlands' Landscape Recovery programme

✓ ***The project is progressing well and on track. All consultants have been procured and are active on the project including Farm Facilitator, Carbon Baseline and Blended Finance. Results of ecological surveys from the farmland have been completed and shared with participants who are starting to explore how they can work together to support the aims of the project. Early on an issue was identified with surveying the SSSI moorland component of the landscape. The ecologist and GIS staff have been working on a solution using AI interpretation of aerial photos which is underway.***

6. **Priority action: Progress plans for Driver**

   *** Implement capital works programme for the house**

   *** Apply for national Farming in Protected Landscapes funding for repairing the traditional barn**

* **Develop and confirm the operating model, and**
* **Begin delivery of Countryside Stewardship scheme**

✓ ***Specification being developed for farmhouse refurbishment. A large part of this involves designing the off-grid services. Works to East Barn completed on time and to budget using FiPL Heritage Building Restoration Grant funding. Proposed Development Phase operating model including (Gateway) Farm Business Tenancy now scoped and being presented to Authority in May. Countryside Stewardship now fully operational and grazier recruited for 2025 grazing season.***

Corporate Priority 1: A clear response to the nature and climate crises

7. **New action**: Work with the Local Nature Partnerships to input to the Somerset and Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategies, including local habitat mapping, identifying priorities and opportunities for enhancing biodiversity

✓ ***ENPA is a 'Supporting Authority' for LNRSs, and Officers have been feeding into development of both the Devon and Somerset LNRSs. The target timescales for both counties have slipped however there is no hard deadline from Defra for them to complete by so the emphasis is to get it right. Initially most of the work focussed on the descriptive elements which is mostly complete. The mapping element is taking longer and we have produced our own draft nature recovery map to help inform this. The draft LNRSs will come to ENPA to approve for sign-off sometime in Q2 / Q3 2025-26***

8. Continue to develop landscape scale proposals for the Exmoor coast, to take forward ambitions set out in the Nature Recovery Vision, including:
   a. Developing plans for ENPA Estate within the National Trust Holnicote Landscapes Recovery project

✓ ***ENPA proposals are now being fully developed including scoping out payment rates. Proposals for North Hill are being developed in-house and as a revised management plan - to be complete by May '25, alongside proposals for the woodland estate. NT leading on Deer Management plan with ENPA input. Working towards June/July deadline for completion.***

   b. Developing ideas for a cross-boundary coastal project for National Lottery Protected Landscapes funding with North Devon Coast and Quantock Hills National Landscapes

✓ ***Initial proposals for a project with the National Trust were considered to be too costly. An alternative proposal is being developed and will be discussed with Lottery in Q1 2025/26***

9. **New Action**: Investigate the impact of atmospheric pollution on Exmoor's designated wildlife sites and develop a strategy to mitigate and manage these impacts

✓ ***Useful follow up meeting held with competent authorities in January. Draft evidence report and strategy received from UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and DTA Ecology Ltd in March 2025. Further discussion required to finalise measures. Final report due early May 2025.***

10. Deliver the 2nd year of the Sowing the Seeds project funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and explore ongoing funding. **Target:** 300 ha of meadows established

✓ ***Successfully applied for and have been awarded funding from Farming in Protective Landscapes programme, which will fund the project until March 2026. This including reporting to FiPL on the project activities for the previous year and demonstrating how the project is making an impact. We have set targets to work with an additional***

10 new landowners alongside providing continued support to landowners already working with the project. Target of an additional 200 hectares of grassland restored or enhanced to more species rich condition, contributing to the Nature Recovery Vision target of 1500 hectares of species rich grassland created or restored by 2030. We have started communications with new landowners and will soon get out to visit. Collaborating with FWAG SW and National Trust on a grasslands day for practitioners to skills share in April.

11. Work with partners to progress species recovery projects including the Two Moors Pine Marten Project, White-tailed Sea Eagles, also marsh fritillary butterflies and water vole as part of the Landscape Recovery Scheme and Exmoor Pioneers project

✓ ***Following extensive consultation with stakeholders, a licence application has been submitted to Natural England to carry out a release of White-tailed Sea Eagles on Exmoor to support the southern England population from the Isle of Wight reintroduction. The pine martens project is now preparing for a release on Exmoor this autumn, following a release on Dartmoor last autumn, through practical preparations and continued stakeholder engagement particularly with shoots and woodland owners. A Water vole feasibility study has been commissioned (Derek Gow) and field work will take place this spring/summer. Initial work on a marsh fritillary feasibility study has taken place.***

12. **New Action:** With support from the RSPB, deliver the Exmoor Moorland Breeding Bird Survey covering all Section 3 moorland and including SSSI condition monitoring where breeding bird assemblages are included

✓ ***Completion of full moorland breeding bird survey across all Section 3 moorland covering 17,000ha with data on over 37,000 birds recorded and an additional set of environmental variables collected. Full report completed, pocket guide and individual moorland maps all drafted and awaiting final design stage. Six talks given by Joan Castello to wide audiences.***

13. Implement the Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species (ENNIS) Project funded by FiPL. Consider future priorities for non-native species control, and future funding routes including through Countryside Stewardship. **Target:** treat or monitor 70% of sites that can be treated using herbicide. Conduct at least two treatments on all Rootwave trial sites

✓ ***Another successful year of treatment through the ENNIS Project with over 90% of sites with permission to treat knotweed and skunk cabbage sites and contractor completing all treatment within timescale. Himalayan balsam pulling completed. ENNIS lessons learnt report drafted and in design stage. NE/EA consent applied for treatment season 2025. Planning for upcoming year and looking at funding opportunities.***

14. Work with Natural England on SSSI monitoring programme for North Hill in 2024, and agree a programme for remaining SSSIs with target completion by 2028

✓ ***Discussion underway with NE for monitoring part of North Exmoor SSSI as part of Reviving Exmoor's Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme during 2025.***

15. Support peatland restoration working with the South West Peatland Partnership, including offering support and advice and employing the Historic Environment Officer

≠ ***SW Peatland Partnership are no longer prioritising Exmoor for restoration work and are unable to offer South West Water match funding. Officers continue to liaise with SWPP of use of their data to help us plan restoration proposals for the Exmoor's Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme. Additional funding from Natural England has also been applied for further analysis of the success of previous peatland restoration projects on Exmoor.***

16. Continue delivery of ‘Exmoor’s Temperate Rainforest’ project by increasing tree cover in combes around Simonsbath, including the creation of Kings Wood and delivery of the ‘Recharge in Nature’ project funded by BMW

✓ ***Kings Wood phase 2 complete, Little Halsecombe complete and research project with Plymouth Uni initiated. Phase 1 wood pasture planting at Driver completed. Planning for other sites continues with aim of implementing in 25/26. Scoping for further sites across ENPA owned land continues and private sites via Exmoor Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme being considered.***

17. Work with partners to support delivery of national ambitions for appropriate woodland expansion, increasing canopy cover and management of existing trees and woodland to ensure resilient wooded landscapes delivering a range of public goods

✓ ***ENPA has secured funding from Estee Lauder via National Parks Partnership to commission work on ‘Exmoor Woodland Futures’ to explore opportunities for what increasing woodland and tree cover in the National Park might look like. The contract for this piece of work has been scoped out and confirmed, and the tender for this piece of work will be issued in 2025/6. ENPA is also continuing to explore potential for woodland creation with Somerset Wildlife Trust.***

18. Work with Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Council and National Landscapes on year two of the “Forest for Somerset” partnership funded by the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF). The project aims to expand and connect trees and woodlands across Somerset; embed trees and woodlands as part of the green economy; protect and improve existing trees and woodlands; and connect people with trees and woodlands. Work with Somerset Council, Regional and National Partners to submit a New Forest for the Nation Bid. **Target:** support the creation of 240ha new woodland pa across Somerset

✓ ***Treescapes Officer advised on several schemes amounting to approx 20 ha but none yet progressed. Two schemes advised on outside Exmoor in Somerset which may progress. Two large potential projects advised on in the Exmoor Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme following farmer workshop. New National Forest does extend into the east of the region.***

The total annual figure of 162 ha represents the total area of woodland created throughout Somerset, some of which involved the Treescapes Officer but most were developed by other project partners and organisations elsewhere. The shortfall reflects the deep uncertainties facing landowners and businesses throughout the country.

19. **Priority Action:** Continue to deliver actions in the ENPA Climate action plan to achieve carbon neutral ENPA by 2030:

19a. Implement building decarbonisation options at Driver and explore farm carbon toolkit

✓ ***We are using the baseline carbon accounts at Driver to scope out mitigation ideas. A wider set of carbon accounts are being prepared as part of the Exmoor Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme.***

19b. Explore woodland carbon toolkit to develop best practice in line with Woodland Estate performance and actions to expand woodland and tree cover. Trial revised forestry contract specifications and management as appropriate to align with recommended actions for 24/25 work season

× ***No progress to report***

19c. Continue to replace ENPA fleet vehicles with electric vehicles. Target: 1 in 2024/25

✓ ***A Peugeot 308 Plug-in Hybrid was delivered in Q4 and is in use. PodPoint chased for expansion of Exmoor House and Exford Depot EV charging infrastructure.***

19d. Continue to pursue carbon offsetting opportunities on ENPA Estate including woodland creation and peatland restoration

✓ ***Tree planting has continued across the estate during Q4 including 1,100 trees at Little Halescombe, 3,000 trees at Kings Wood and 300 trees at Balewater. In addition, 220 trees were planted at Driver during Q4 as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.***

19e. Complete replacement of lighting at National Park Centres with LEDs.

✓ ***All works completed in late September 2024.***

19f. Install EV charging points at ENPA car parks utilising BMW funding. Target: 2 in 2024/25

✓ ***The delivery of the installations at Exmoor House and Exford Depot is progressing, with installations planned for late spring. Unforeseen issues with land ownership and the need for a Wayleave have delayed the installation at Exford Car Park.***

20. **New Action:** Work with UK National Park Authorities to join Race to Zero and develop action plan.

≠ ***Officers have been working with other National Park Authorities on scoping work on a Race to Zero action plan. This will be progressed in 2025/26***

21. **Priority Action:** Commission a climate adaptation and risk assessment for Exmoor National Park to feed into the Partnership Plan and action planning

≠ ***Following discussion with Dartmoor NPA and potential contractors, it was agreed that a joint commission was not feasible. A high level Climate Adaptation report was produced by the Protected Landscapes to feed into national adaptation reporting***

Corporate Priority 2: A welcoming place for all, improving people's health & well-being

22. **Priority action:** Deliver an inspiring and inclusive learning and engagement programme, reaching out to people from a wider range of backgrounds and providing opportunities for increased connection to Exmoor's special qualities. Including, if funding successful, Young Rangers programme and Generation Green 2. Target: diversify formal education offer (day and residential visits) by attracting 3 new schools from target audiences

✓ ***Young Rangers recruitment complete and residential planned for early 25/26. The additional funding from Generation Green 2 has enabled us to engage with a wider range of schools and young people while also increasing income. This will be challenging in the next financial year without further funding.***

23. Develop and deliver a volunteer strategy to promote and support a wide range of volunteering opportunities within Exmoor, with a particular focus on removing barriers to engagement. Audit existing volunteer demographics and opportunities and develop links between volunteering and other areas of work including Young Rangers and health and well-being work

✓ ***Attended networking event organised by Seetec Plus in Barnstaple, aiming to work further with them offering their clients volunteering as a route back into employment. Collaborated with Dulverton Healthy Walks group, providing well attended volunteer-led bird spotting walks at Porlock Marsh. Partnered with Butterfly Conservation and SW Lakes Trust on a second habitat improvement day at Haddon Hill. Pre-season preparations for this year's walks programme complete. Walks volunteers have passed bi-annual refresher training and renewed first aid qualifications. Winter and early spring tasks completed at Ashcombe gardens, which now forms part of the Exmoor***

Pioneers project. Youth group from Devon Wildlife Trust joined our tree planting event in Simonsbath, as part of the move to increase opportunities for young people in volunteering through Exmoor Pioneers. Successfully launched a new regular series of volunteer coffee mornings for new and existing volunteers. Attracted a good number of new volunteers who are now signed up as path surveyors/fixers, at Ashcombe, and as backmarkers for walks. Volunteer induction days are back on the calendar and first one was held in mid-March.

24. Promote the health and well-being benefits that Exmoor provides by delivering the 'Nature prescriptions' project; further developing and delivering our "Welcome to Exmoor" days as part of Exmoor Pioneers; and working with partners to actively remove the barriers to targeted groups accessing Exmoor for their health and wellbeing Target: deliver 8 Welcome to Exmoor days

✓ ***Working with the Health Coach Team we have provided a range of nature based activities for patients engaged with Nature Prescriptions in Dulverton. These have been very well received. We are also planning a similar programme with GP Surgeries in the Barnstaple area next, delivered through the Exmoor Pioneers project***
Delivered 28 "Welcome to Exmoor" days – far exceeding the target of 8.

25. Complete relocation of Dulverton National Park Centre to Exmoor House and continue to maximise NPCs' contribution to National Park purposes and income generation. Develop and deliver a revised Retail Strategy. Target: 5% increase in net spend whilst maintaining 40% margins

✓ ***Overall Visitor numbers fell in 24/25 by 7% compared to the previous year - this will in part be due to the challenging visitor economy (many South West destinations citing footfall down by 10%+) but will also reflect a significant drop in winter trading hours (closure of Dulverton at end of Oct and Lynmouth winter hours reduced by 29% as part of our business review). Visitor Spend fell by 2% so while our target was missed given circumstances, and a 30% growth the year before this is not a bad result. The Dulverton NPC relocation has been completed on time and in budget ready for the new summer season. Profit margins across the 3 centres were 42.8% against a target of 40%.***

26. **Continue to expand the Authority's online shop, including integrated marketing alongside core ENPA messages, to generate increased income and engagement with the National Park. Target: 5% increase in gross profit year on year**

✓ ***Website has been redesigned to better reflect corporate site and improve customer experience. Net sales increased by 42%. Profit margin of 66% (NB includes parking permits)***

27. Assist with visitor management in the National Park (including popular locations and large events) to ensure that visitors are able to enjoy Exmoor responsibly and sustainably

✓ ***Ranger weekend visits to popular sites continue, checking for litter, other issues and taking the opportunity to engage with visitors. Large events continue to be monitored with a light touch approach due to reduced staff resources.***

28. **28a - Priority action:** Maintain a safe rights of way and access network with resources focused on the most popular routes to ensure the majority of users enjoy a high-quality experience. Ensure that any works help to make the network more resilient to climate change and to meet the needs of all users. Target: open and easy to use score above 80%

✓ ***Work relating to Storm Darragh is largely complete and we have had a lot of thanks from the local community. This has left Field Services Team extremely behind on normal PROW ticket works which are being managed alongside paid estates work. The Open & Easy to Use score for 2024/25 is 89% - down on last year (93%) and 2022/23***

(99%). This is quite a drop over 2 years but reflects the cuts to resources implemented in 2023. This may be the start of a steep decline, and we don't know how low this will drop with our current resource level and approach. The most urgent and safety related works will be prioritised and completed before paring starts in June.

28b - Special funding provided by Active Travel England for all 10 English National Park Authorities will allow us to develop an Active Travel Plan for the National Park. This study will explore opportunities to make journeys by walking and cycling easier and safer, both within the National Park and from nearby major settlements. In will include community consultation, evidence gathering and feasibility studies for potential infrastructure improvements and aims to develop some 'funding ready' options that can be put forward for future funding opportunities. As well as considering the current road network, the study will consider potential improvements for public rights of way focused around 5 key settlements across the National Park. The interests of all potential users, including horse riders, will be taken into account.

✓ ***Our public consultation is complete, as well as a special online session for young people. Three inclusive face-to-face sessions in Minehead area have just been completed. Onsite audits are now largely complete for both the main Active Travel Plan and for the Active Travel Off Road study in Parracombe and West-of-Minehead areas. Both work streams are in final evaluation and report writing stage and we are on track to complete the work in June***

29. Deliver business change in our Public Access and Field Services Team work – including revised processes and charging to adapt to reduced funding and realignment of staff priorities

✓ ***New policies still need time to bed in, but we will monitor and adjust in line with the Open and Easy to Use results and other measures. Our rise of PROW fees has had an impact on overall income but is reliant upon staff time to support things like Path Diversions, and requests for closures have reduced as a result of new fees. However, initiatives such as Donate a Gate, and Donate a Fingerpost are proving fruitful. FST have completed a successful programme of paid works including support for Great Bradley Bridge, forestry works, tree guards and access improvement works on our estate.***

30. Deliver year 3 of Defra special funding to improve disability access infrastructure relating to routes, facilities, equipment, signage, and supporting information

✓ ***Programme of works are complete – incl. various major path works in popular locations and funding for improvements to National Park Centres and Explorer Walks – A full report will be produced in April/ May.***

31. Open and celebrate the England Coast Path

✓ ***The new routes are all fully open and being enjoyed by thousands of people. A wonderful celebration event was held to mark the opening event at Combe Martin in July.***

32. Implement enhancement works for ENPA car parks with a focus this year on Haddon Hill and Exford

✓ ***Main works at Haddon have been completed successfully. Works at Exford are delayed as we are beholden to National Grid for a wayleave for new electricity supply for EV chargers.***

33. Complete the construction of Great Bradley Bridge. Carry out preparatory work and scoping to replace Hinds Pitt Bridge (Tarr Steps Circuit)

✓ ***No further work carried out on Hinds Pitt Bridge due to other work priorities. Will pick this up once Active Travel Plan project is complete in June 25***

34. **New Action:** Work with Visit Exmoor to ensure Exmoor is adequately represented within emerging Local Visitor Economy Partnerships, (LVEPs) accredited by VisitEngland

✓ ***Exmoor is now included in two LVEPs (Devon + Partners and Somerset & Exmoor) which collectively cover the whole NP, and both have sustainability as a core priority. ENPA is currently represented at an Officer level on both boards. Somerset & Exmoor LVEP application agreed by VisitEngland, subject to the accountable body (Somerset Council) agreeing a collaboration agreement.***

35. Work with the Exmoor Tourism Network to develop a shared good tourism plan

✓ ***Further work on the draft plan has been completed - next step will be to share final draft with the network prior to publication and deepen the engagement of partners, on the back of the new Partnership Plan.***

36. **New Action:** Complete Exmoor Visitor Survey and publish results

≠ ***Over 75% of data collected - due to a late start due to capacity and other issues in the team at the start of the summer, the data gathering period has been extended to Q1 25/26 to enable a balanced sample size to be collected. This will mean results are unlikely to be published until Q2 25/26 – i.e. approximately 6 months later than planned.***

37. **New Action: Scope the establishment of an Exmoor Nature Festival, for potential launch in May 2025**

✓ ***This new festival has been developed with partners from scratch during the year and will take place in May 2025. There has been strong interest from local businesses, the public and the media. A full schedule of over 60 events developed and online / printed programme developed. Sponsorship secured and advertising revenue has covered printing costs.***

Corporate Priority 3: A cared for landscape and heritage

38. Continue the restoration of Ashcombe Gardens with volunteers. Fundraise for new bridges to improve access.

✓ ***The FiPL funding enabled the conservation of the main retaining wall to be completed. Additional work has also been possible.***

39. Review the management of Ashley Combe in the light of recommendations from Bristol University to continue restoration of the designed landscape

✓ ***Ada in Porlock group now established. Two work parties held, viewpoint and path improvements completed. FiPL funded project completed with new trees purchased. Programme of events for 2025 planned.***

40. **Engage people in Exmoor's dark skies though delivery of the 2024 Dark Skies Festival. Work with the Exmoor Dark Skies steering group to develop a community engagement project with grant funding for community lighting actions to target priority areas to reduce light pollution**

✓ ***Overall good progress made with the festival remaining a popular highlight with positive feedback from event hosts, tourism businesses and participants alike. A proposed Dark Sky Protection project outline has been developed but limited capacity available to seek funding for this currently. The Future Landscape Officer has engaged a number of parish councils in the subject and a number of staff have delivered a range of presentations on this subject.***

41. Draft and consult on a Design Supplementary Planning Document to encourage high quality, locally distinctive design and take account of national design guidance and code

≠ ***Design guide content has been drafted, however work has not progressed as hoped due to a lack of staff resources. External support will be sought to complete and progress a final draft.***

42. **Priority Action:** Work with volunteers to build understanding of Exmoor's heritage assets, undertake condition surveys on ENPA's Estate within the Royal Forest, and complete a programme of assessment of Exmoor's Scheduled Monuments and local heritage list sites, funded through Exmoor Pioneers. Target: complete condition surveys on ENPA owned sites on the Royal Forest

✓ ***Condition survey of scheduled sites within the Royal Forest undertaken. Pioneers Heritage Ranger post filled and making good progress on project plan to address heritage at risk across the Royal Forest, including sites that are ENPA owned and in private ownership.***

43. Progress work on Conservation Area appraisals, new designations, guidance for homeowners, and Article 4 directions. Assess the need for Article 4 Directions for Conservation Areas and produce homeowner guidance

✓ ***All 17 conservation areas have recent appraisals but some are in need of minor updates. This work has started and new draft appraisals are being written. This is an ongoing, rolling process. All conservation areas need management plans. These are underproduction but will require public consultation. It is agreed with the planning department that the implementation of Article 4s in Porlock should be explored and public consultation carried out. Homeowner guidance on hold, Historic England guidance widely available and shared.***

44. Maintain the Historic Environment Record (HER)

✓ ***In 2024-25 over 1200 HER records were edited and new sites, events and sources were added to the database, ensuring the dynamic nature of the resource. Over 100 consultations were responded to well within ENPA guidelines for response times. New forms of outreach were developed including a blog series with over 6000 views. Historic England recognised the quality of the ENPHER during our quinquennial audit with the highest grade possible.***

Corporate Priority 4: A place with flourishing, vibrant, communities and businesses

45. Support businesses and partners to deliver the Rural Enterprise Exmoor vision

✓ ***Despite reduced capacity and resources we have maintained strong links with the business community, engaging an increasing number in the work of the NP in a number of different ways from networking and informal education, to signing up as Park Partners and CareMoor Champions. A number of partners have collectively delivered a range of actions contributing to the vision.***

46. Promote philanthropic giving via CareMoor for Exmoor with a focus on promoting legacy opportunities. Target: Increase general donations (excluding large gifts over £1,000) by 5% above 2023/24 figures

✓ ***Donate a fingerpost successfully launched with significant media coverage and a number of dedications made in the first week. A residue legacy of £27k received, finalising affairs of a legacy first notified of in 2021 from the late Elvira Pearson. Overall donations totalling over £66k received. This is an overall reduction of 7% on last year, but a 14% increase on general gifts (those of £1k and under). The profile of CareMoor has continued to rise.***

47. Work with partners to support increased use and promotion of local produce including further roll out of Eat Exmoor branding and supporting the delivery of the 2024 Exmoor Young Chef Competition

✓ ***There is ongoing work to raise the profile and use of local produce in the area. The Young Chef Competition was once again held and a number of new retailers and hospitality providers are promoting local produce.***

48. Through ENPA's planning role, oversee implementation of the Local Plan and work in partnership to support delivery of locally needed affordable housing and produce guidance. Prepare for the review of the Local Plan

✓ ***Preparations for a Local Plan review are underway and a new Local Development Scheme has been adopted. Partnership working to support affordable housing is continuing.***

49. Priority action: Deliver the National Park Planning service, maintaining performance within targets of 60% major applications and 70% of minor applications determined on time. Utilise Planning Delivery Skills funding to address the planning and enforcement backlogs

✓ ***Despite changes to staffing within the team and staff absences, performance around speed of decision has improved since Q1 and are now well within required timescales. The backlog of planning applications has been largely removed and at least 90% of planning applications have been approved. We have typically opened more enforcement cases than we have closed, which is largely a consequence of the absence of a dedicated enforcement officer over the accounting period. Challenges around dealing with a backlog of applications, maintaining performance figures and staffing has delayed progress on updating the local list. it is nonetheless helpful to see that progress is being made.***

50. Implement the new statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements through development management

✓ ***Four applications with BNG have been determined. All have been on site provision secured via planning condition.***

51. **Continue to implement improvements to digitise the National Park planning service in line with government objectives to make the planning process more accessible**
    * **Explore options for a new planning database**
    * **Work with Land Registry to provide digital access to local land charges**

✓ ***Anticipate contract being signed for new planning database in the next quarter. Progress to digitise local land charges continues.***

52. Update the local list of requirements for validating planning applications by end of Q2

✓ ***Internal consultation ended. Document now being updated to reflect comments received.***

Corporate Priority 5: A highly performing Estate, delivering National Park purposes

53. **Priority action: Progress the ENPA Estate Strategy with a particular focus this year on:**
    * **Implementing plans for Driver (see action 6)**
    * **Preparing management plans for specific sites including baseline surveys**
    * **Progress plans for reuse of 7-9 Fore St**
    * **Progress planned disposal of assets as approved by Members**

✓ ***The demolition of the modern farm building has been approved and is programmed for demolition during late spring. A Development Phase operating model, including proposed (Gateway) Farm Business Tenancy and the repurposing of the traditional buildings, has been scoped and will be presented to Authority in May. Management Plans are progressing (but not complete) with an initial focus on areas within the LRS project areas with a push planned for completion during late spring. A new commercial tenant (retail) has been secured for the former NPC at 7-9 Fore Street. No further asset disposals are currently planned.***

54. Continue exemplary management of ENPA woodland estate including continuous cover productive woodland, managing woodland of high biodiversity value, climate resilience and adaptation for priority species, and tree safety. Continue to develop the tree nursery to self-supply planting, restocking, adaptation needs. Introduce low-carbon practices into management. Progress timber sales Target: £14,000 in 2024/25

✓ ***Tree planting projects on ENPA estate completed. Forestry programme completed incl Continuous Cover Forestry selective felling in Moor Wood yielding timber for FST, Hawkcombe coppice, Culbone thinning. Significant work following Storm Darragh occupied many weeks of FST and contractor time. Nursery solar installed and commissioned, irrigation system procured. Timber sales reached £15,320.***

55. Help promote and conserve the iconic Exmoor Pony breed through management of the Authority's pony herds

✓ ***Stallion placed on Haddon Hill in March 2025 and a well bred mare gifted to the Authority added. One of last year's foals is left to inspect. Numbers up to 17 breeding mares on Haddon. Currently working with Moorland Mousie Trust to supply Cornwall Wildlife Trust with halter broke and loadable Exmoor pony geldings. Now the drier weather is here the geldings on East Anstey Common will be moved to Driver and older mares will go to either the Quantocks or North Hill.***

Corporate Priority 6: A great organisation to work for

56. **Priority Action: Implement the Organisational Development Strategy to support our staff team and enable the best use of our knowledge, skills, and experience in delivering National Park purpose. The focus this year will be on updating ENPA's values, reflecting on our culture and reconnecting with each other and the priorities of the organisation through internal communications, staff events and training. We will progress the actions in the Organisational Development Strategy for 2024**

✓ ***A new set of values has been adopted. The appraisal review is complete, and all relevant documents are available to staff.***

57. Take positive action to support the Authority's commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Specific focus this year on adopting an EDI strategy, developing action plans for teams, and raising awareness amongst staff and members through guidance and training

✓ ***The EDI Oversight group have met. We are just waiting for any feedback on Terms of Reference and Strategy before taking to Members.***

58. **New Action:** Formulate an overarching ENPA External Communications Strategy – focusing on our role for the place – identifying key messages, audiences and channels:

- Plan and develop regular Exmoor ParkLife e-news
- Evolution of current Exmoor Parish and Consultative Forum to a twice-yearly National Park Forum
- Maximise PR opportunities associated with our 70th anniversary

✓ ***External Communications Strategy signed off by Members, Successful media coverage on CareMoor appeals including storm damage and fingerposts. Comms strong on Dulverton centre relocating with good attendance at networking event. Huge response on well promoted White Tailed Eagle Survey and associated information events. Well promoted Pine Marten events. Good coverage of Exmoor Nature Festival launch, Apprentice Ranger appointment, FIPL projects etc. Driver comms plan updated. More video work and use of YouTube/Insta Story on a variety of projects. Trialling of new formats to replace X and building up followers on alternative channels such as bluesky and threads.***

59. **New Action:** Fully integrate Risk Management with Performance Management through the mapping of risks to corporate objectives; risk-rate performance delivery and determine the Authority risk appetite

✓ ***No further updates – Risk Management in use***

60. **New Action**: Fully implement the new ESRI Geographical Information System (GIS). Use ESRI products to provide a user-friendly interface creating immersive experiences, maintaining and enhancing our online web-based platform for Planning, Public Rights of Way and Natural Environment Record. Utilise ESRI tools to help staff perform data capture and editing, find assts and information

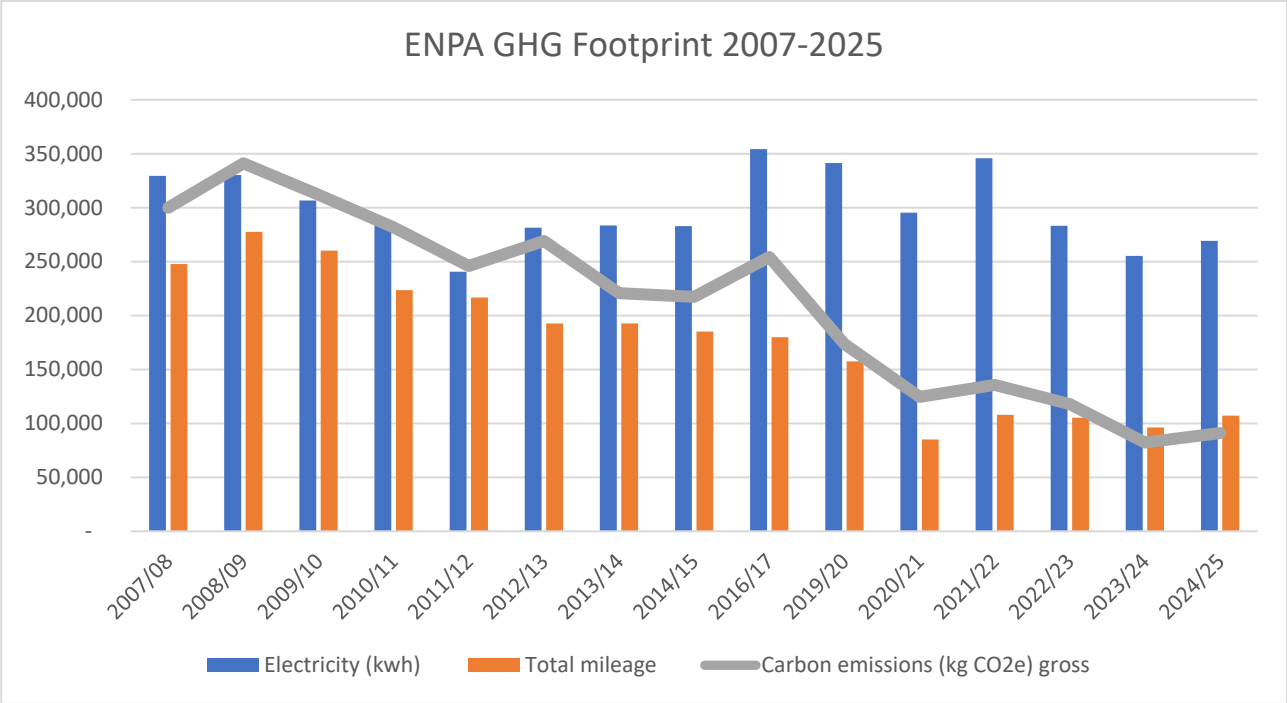
✓ ***Using Field maps for surveys for Listed Building condition surveys, woodland and farmland bird surveys. Expanded to use Experience builder in Planning, PROWS, LCA and Landownership. Starting to use Storymaps in Historic Environment (TIME, TALES, TRADITIONS, TRANSFORMATION). Awaiting to go live with last year's bird survey data (May 25) using a combination of Storymaps & Dashboards to give members of the public a whole array of data that is reflected in the report.***

Appendix 2

ENPA Climate Action Plan reporting 2024-25

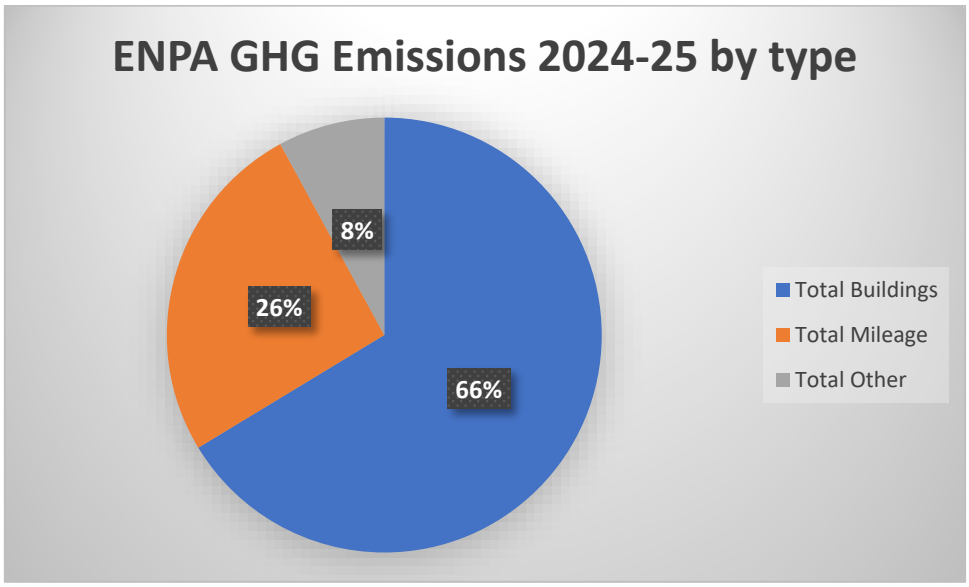
In 2019 ENPA declared a climate emergency with a target of being carbon neutral by 2030. Since then, overall emissions have significantly reduced. Actions taken and progress towards the target are set out below.

ENPA Greenhouse gas footprint



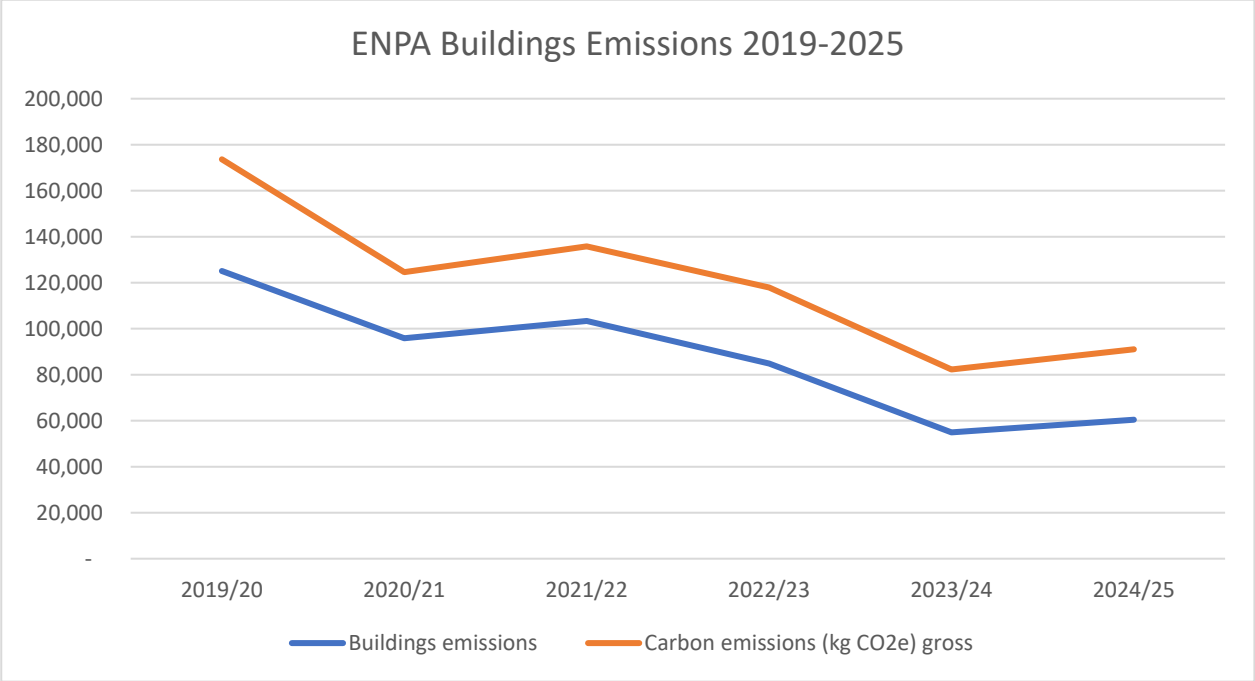
There has been a slight rise in ENPA's greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint in 2024/25 following several years of decline. This is due to a number of factors leading to an increase in building and mileage emissions as set out below.

Breakdown of carbon emissions



ENPA buildings continue as the most significant source of ENPA emissions, followed by mileage. However, as a result of the increase in electric vehicles (EVs) in the ENPA fleet, changes are needed to the way that we report GHG emissions, as currently the emissions from electricity used to charge the EVs is included in the buildings emissions, due to the way the data is recorded. Consequently, there is a slight over-reporting of emissions from buildings, and a slight under-reporting of emissions from vehicles. We aim to separate out emissions from EVs in the next annual report.

ENPA buildings

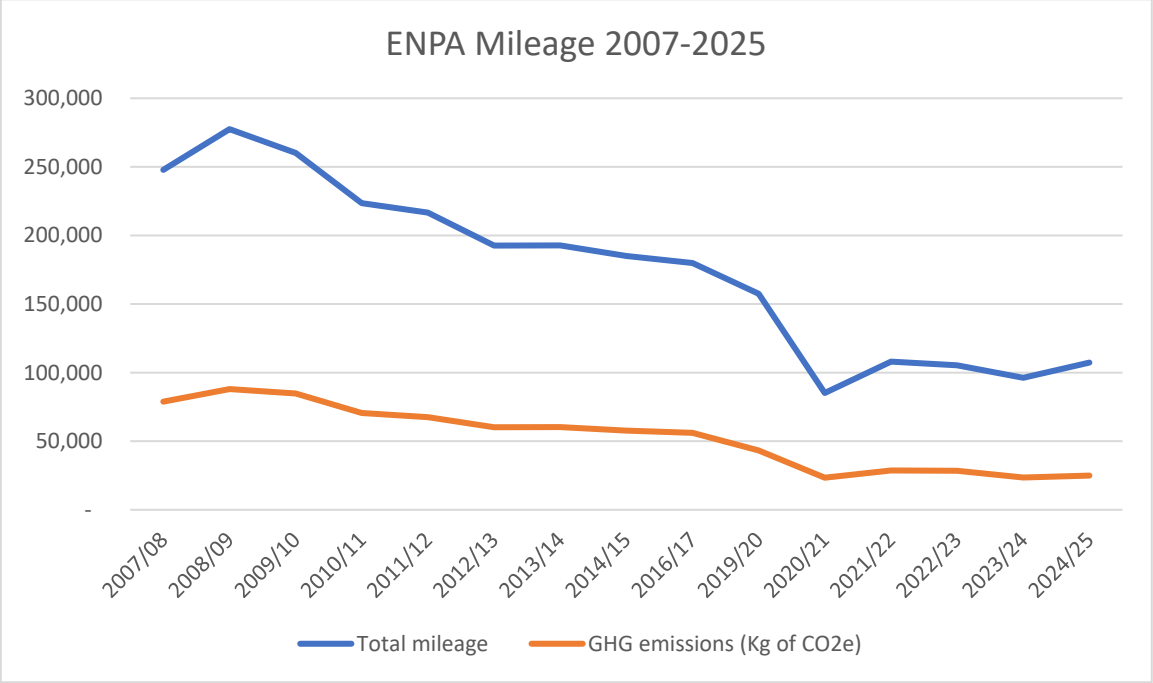


Emissions from ENPA buildings have nearly halved since 2019 due to decarbonisation works including replacing fossil fuel heating systems with renewable energy and installing LED lighting. The vast majority of emissions from buildings continues to be from electricity usage, particularly for heating. The greenhouse gas emissions from electricity usage have also not fallen as predicted due to the continued increase in natural gas use in electricity generation and a decrease in renewable generation, which affects the national conversion factor used to calculate emissions.

There has been an increase in emissions in 2024/25 from previous years. This is due to a number of factors including problems with the heating system at Lynmouth Pavillion Natonal Park Centre which necessitated additional heaters being installed. Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning used more biomass and also more oil for the back-up generator due to a blocking weather front over the winter which led to less generation of solar and wind energy and less storage in the batteries, additionally one of the solar inverters was inoperable for several months.

With Driver coming back in hand, there is also additional use of fossil fuels for the generator to run the electricity and heating for the house, although there are plans to install a biomass boiler and solar panels in 2025/26 as part of the refurbishment of the house.

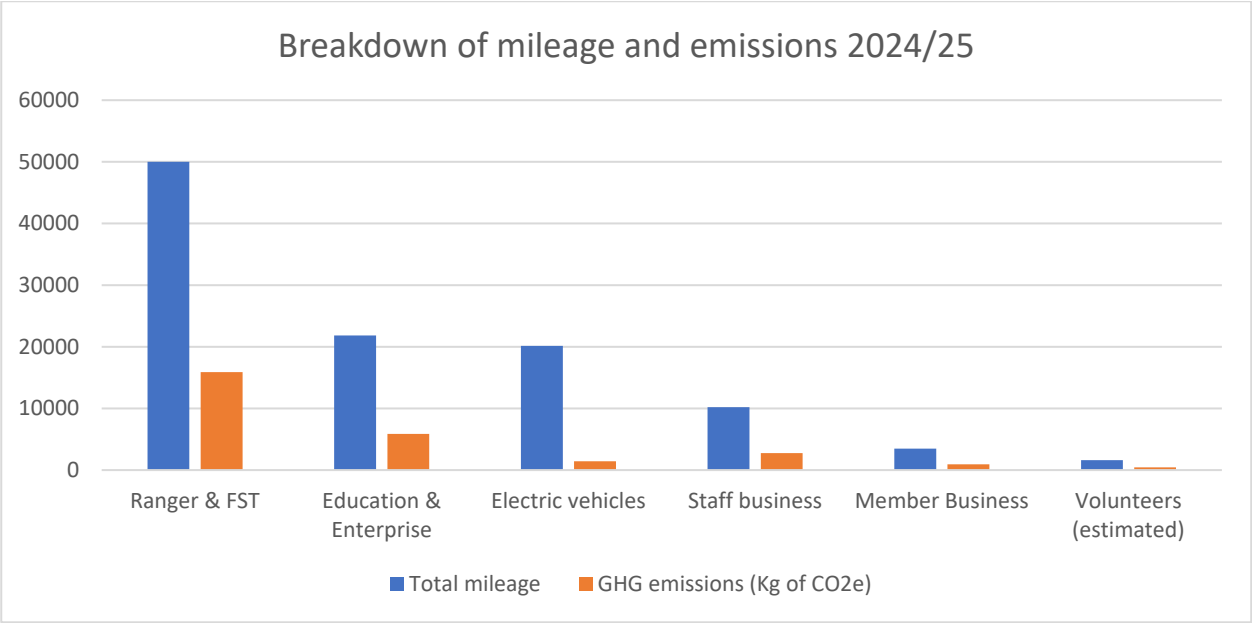
ENPA Mileage



Overall mileage has increased by 11,026 miles in 2024/25 compared to the previous year, including increases in fleet and pool car usage and staff business mileage (where staff use their own cars for business purposes) reflecting more projects and activity, and member mileage claims. Total emissions have also increased as a consequence, although not as much as might have been expected due to the ongoing transition to electric vehicles (EVs).

Since 2023-24, ENPA has been greening its fleet through replacement of pool cars and other vehicles with EVs, and there are plans for 2025/26 to continue this transition as set out below. All pool cars are now electric or hybrid vehicles. As a consequence of additional EVs in the fleet, the mileage undertaken in EVs has doubled this year compared to last year. The EVs are charged by green energy from the grid, and also help to reduce business mileage which would otherwise be undertaken in diesel vehicles. Emissions from the mileage undertaken in EVs totalled 1,427kg CO2e, representing a saving of nearly 4,000kg CO2e if that mileage had been done in a diesel vehicle.

The breakdown of milage undertaken shows the highest emissions from the remaining diesel vehicles in the fleet including the 4 x 4 vehicles used by the Rangers and Field Services Team, and the Caddy vans used for deliveries, outreach and facilities management. Storm Darragh led to an increase in activity for FST to clear the significant number of trees blown down or damaged, blocking paths and roads. This required additional diesel usage for vehicles, tractors and equipment (chainsaws etc).



Staff commuting is not currently included in ENPA's monitoring of GHG emissions. However, an estimate of commuting emissions by the Carbon Trust for Defra's GHG emissions reporting puts this figure at 15 tCO2e annually.

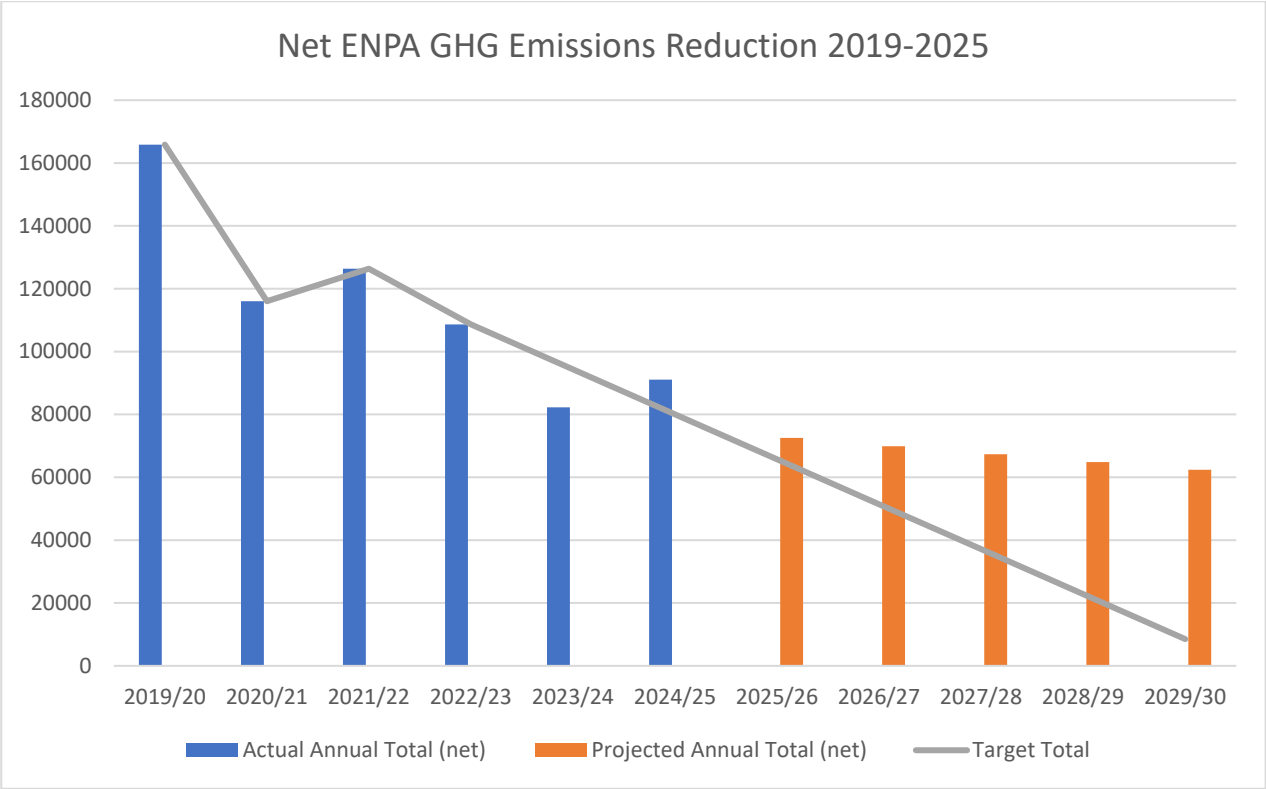
Homeworking

Following the Covid pandemic, ENPA moved to a blended working arrangement, where staff work from their work-base and some may also work partially from home. This has not had any impact on reducing the GHG emissions from ENPA buildings, as they are still open for staff who are coming in to work there. Government guidance is that organisations should estimate the GHG emissions of working from home to include in carbon reporting.

Taking an average of 2 days worked from home in 2024-25 for 62 staff, this gives an estimate of the annual emissions from homeworking at 14,089 kg CO2e. This was a reduction from last year due to the change in assumptions for the number of days working from home which have reduced from 3 to 2. These figures are not currently included in the overall monitoring of ENPA GHG emissions.

ENPA GHG emissions reduction trajectory

Good progress is being made towards meeting the 2030 carbon neutral target for the Authority. Overall emissions have reduced by almost a half since the declaration of the climate emergency in 2019, although there has been an increase in emissions during 2024/25 compared with previous years.



There is a predicted fall in emissions due to measures undertaken during 2024/25:

Measures taken in 2024/25	**Estimated annual CO2e saving (kg)**
Replacement of the Education Caddy Van with an electric Citroen 9-seater Spacetourer	2,300
Replacement of the Duster pool car with an electric Nissan Leaf	1,540
Purchase of an additional electric Nissan Leaf	1,540
Replacement of the Duster pool car with plug in hybrid Peugeot 308	1,500
Completion of replacement lighting in Exmoor House with LEDs	2,864
Replacing lighting in Lynmouth Pavillion NPC with LEDs	3,237
Solar Array at Exford tree nursery	N/A

Further measures are underway or planned in 2025/26 to continue the decarbonisation trajectory:

Measures planned in 2025/26	**Estimated annual CO2e saving (kg)**
Replacement of Facilities Caddy Van with electric Nissan Townstar EV van	2,300
Replace 2 Land Rovers with Isuzu electric 4 x 4 D Max	6,000
Replacement lighting at Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning with LEDs	52
New battery storage at Exford Depot	N/A
Driver biomass	N/A
Driver Solar array	N/A

Renewable energy generation

Renewable energy generation has increased. During 2024/25, around 106,892 kwh of renewable energy was generated, saving around 27,322 kg of carbon. The biomass boiler at Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning was a significant contribution to this.

Carbon sequestration

Tree planting programmes on ENPA land continue with 1,100 trees at Little Halescombe, 3,000 trees at Kings Wood, 300 trees at Balewater, 220 wood-pasture trees at Driver and 50 wood pasture trees at Mt Pleasant.

Due to the low-density planting schemes it is not currently applicable to enter these into the woodland carbon code.

Procurement

The Carbon Trust has completed an initial assessment of the carbon emissions from ENPA's supply chain. This included estimating emissions related to purchased goods and services, capital goods, and upstream transportation and distribution, following the guidelines of the GHG protocol.

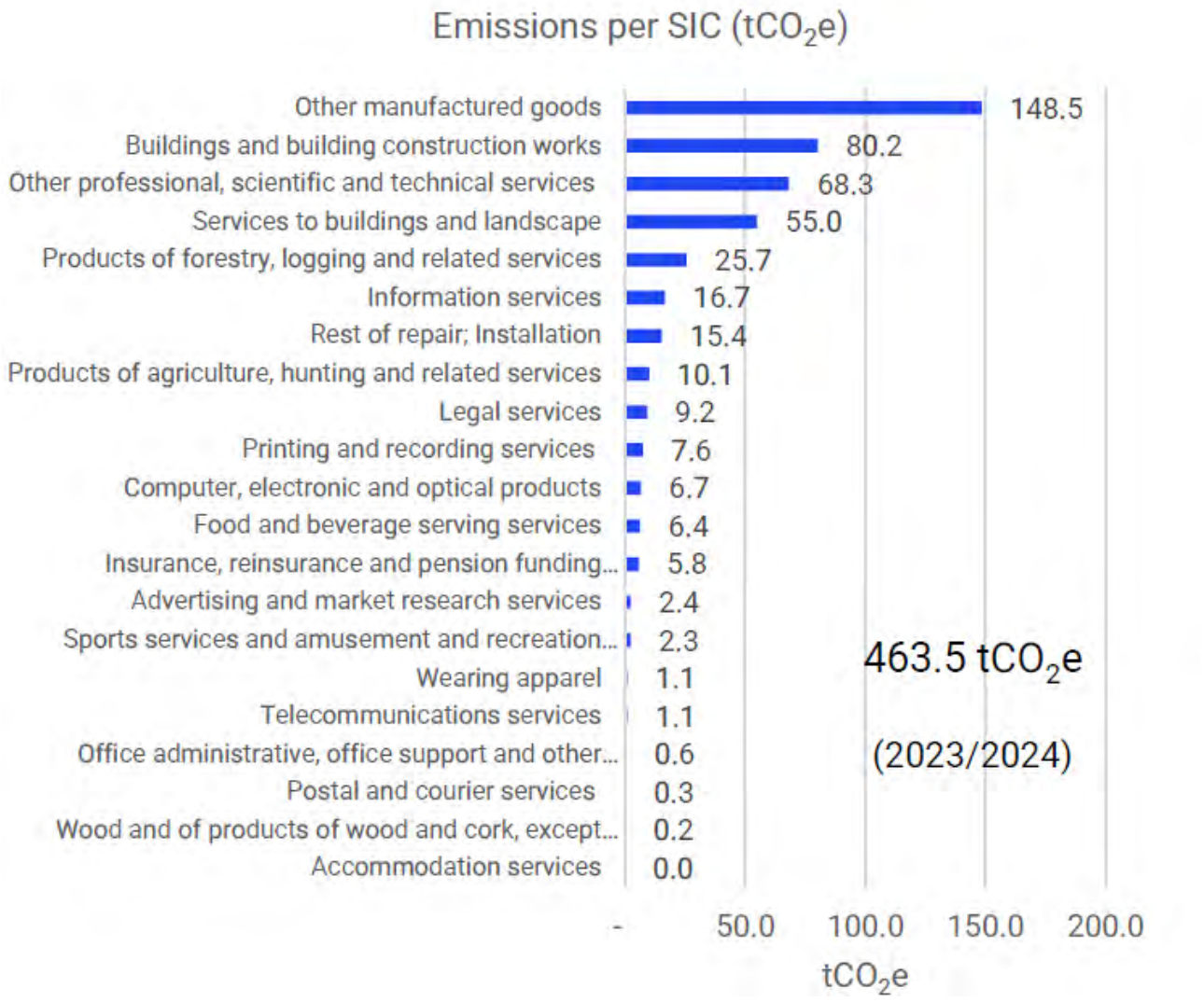
ENPA's supply chain emissions were estimated using a spending-based method, which involves using expenditure data to calculate emissions. Emissions were categorized into groups based on Standard Industrial Classifications (SIC) since the emission factors (i.e., kg CO2e per £) are available for these codes.

Emissions from Exmoor's supply chain were estimated to account for **463.5 tCO2e** in 2023/24.

The report ranked the purchased goods and services by industry (SIC) category, and also suppliers by total emissions and by carbon intensity. Each supplier was categorized based on the type of service or product provided.

The highest emitting service category was "Other manufactured goods" with 148.5 tons of CO2e, followed by "Buildings and construction works" at 80.2 tons of CO2e. These two areas together account for 49% of ENPA's supply chain carbon footprint.

The top 10 industry (SIC) categories shown in the graph below represent 95% of Exmoor's estimated supply chain carbon footprint.



Source: Carbon Trust, October 2024

This was a useful initial exercise to explore how to assess GHG emissions from supply chain procurement, but there are several caveats with the figures quoted due to the limitations of the methodology and data.

The approach using spend-based emission factors provides a quick way to assess supply chain emissions and help identify key areas of concern in procurement. However, they only offer a general picture of emissions for a sub-sector rather than specific goods or activities. To improve the accuracy of the methodology, it is recommended to use these factors initially to pinpoint emission hotspots, and then refine the data by replacing estimates with data provided by suppliers. This process is more resource intensive and therefore a combination of spend-based methods and supplier-specific data is used by most organisations, focusing on the most significant emission areas.

The recommendations from the report include a number of next steps for this area of work:

- Improving the methodology and accuracy of reporting supply-chain (scope 3) emissions
- Target setting to reduce the organisation's indirect emissions across its value chain

- Analyze how feasible it is to reduce supply chain (scope 3) emissions by looking at potential initiatives that suppliers can implement to reduce emissions, and identify any gaps where targets might not be met.
- Supplier engagment programme to identify and prioritise key suppliers to engage with to improve the quality of the footprint and to drive reductions to help achieve reduction targets

These are actions that will be progressed as resources and capacity allow. As a first step, the finance team are working on incorporating SIC climate reporting within the new Access finance system.

ENPA uses the Devon County Council procurement portal and can potentially benefit from work being done more widely by the Council to engage with suppliers over reducing emissions. There is also work underway to develop Defra group wide procedures and mechanisms for supply chain engagement and decarbonisation.

Land use

The current ENPA carbon footprint reporting also does not include emissions from land use.

ENPA commissioned a baseline carbon footprint assessment of land at Driver and North Hill. For Driver, Agricalc carried out an assessment based on a theoretical farm management scenario. This was useful to understand the approach and what this sort of carbon footprint reporting looks like, and provided an example of the levels of GHG emissions that would arise from the type of enterprise assessed. However, the current management at Driver is being carried out in-hand this year, and involves renting out land to a local grazier, consequently the emissions from their stock would not be included in ENPA's carbon footprint reporting as it would be counted as part of the grazier's carbon footprint. Work is also being done through the Reviving Exmoor's Heartlands Landscape Recovery Scheme to assess carbon stocks in land at Driver and the potential for carbon storage and sequestration from land management and habitat creation or restoration.

North Hill

Work on the woodland carbon toolkit has not progressed this year due to capacity constraints.

EMPLOYEE PROFILE - 31 March 2025

A summary of employee demographics and key indicators for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

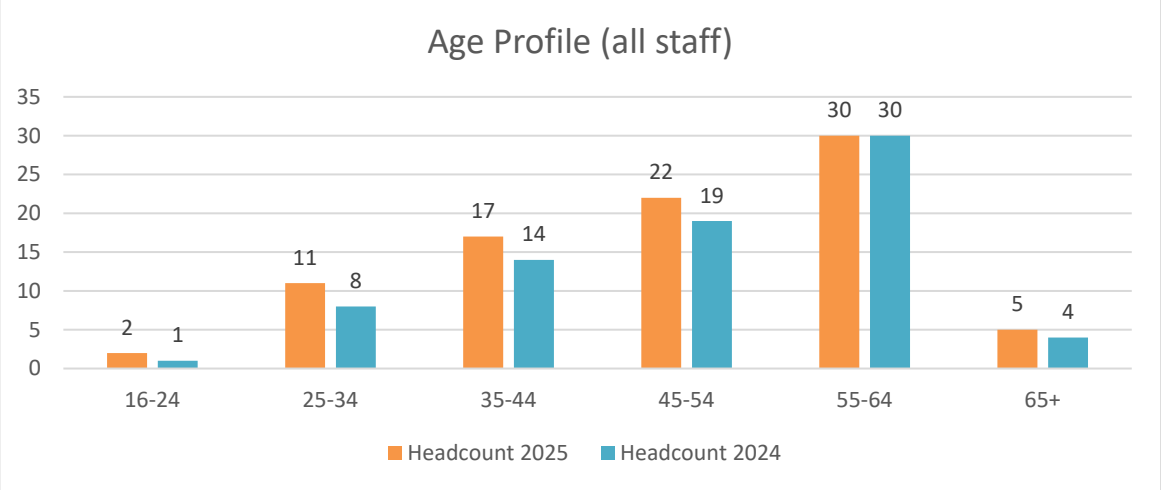
NUMBER OF EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS HELD

Core and non-core staff in post 31 March 2025

SECTION	Headcount	Full Time Equivalent
Access, Engagement and Estates	23	20.52
Climate, Nature and Communities	17	15.70
Enterprise and Operations	20	15.30
Chief Executive	1	1.00
Total (Core staff in post)	**61**	**52.52**
Non-Core (Seasonal/Project/Partnership) contracts	**26**	**20.17**
Total (all staff) 31/03/2025	**87**	**72.69**
Comparable total 31/03/2024	**76**	**64.44**

AGE PROFILE

All staff in post 31 March 2025



The Authority's stability index has decreased again this year (**61%** of staff have over 3 years of service, 66% on 31 March 2024).

Staff aged over 45 with over 3 years' service has also decreased to **69%** this year (72% on 31 March 2024).

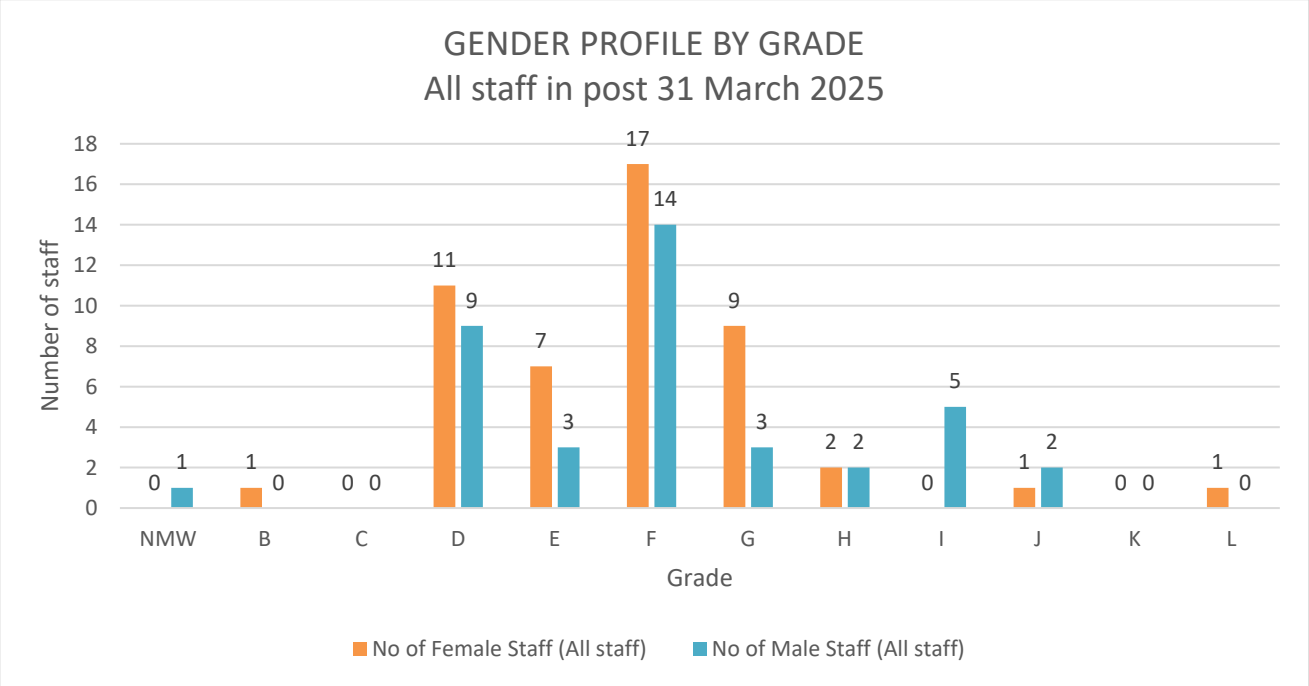
The Authority is hosting one apprenticeship which started in February 2025 funded through the Exmoor Pioneers Programme and we are developing further trainee/internship opportunities this year.

As the risk of losing experienced staff through age retirement increases, strategic succession planning will be an important focus for the Authority.

GENDER PAY REPORTING

All staff in post 31 March 2025

PAY SCALE		ALL STAFF	
Grade	**Top of Pay Scale £**	**Female Staff**	**Male Staff**
Apprentice	19,293	0	1
B	24,404	1	0
C	25,183	0	0
D	27,269	11	9
E	31,067	7	3
F	35,235	17	14
G	40,476	9	3
H	46,731	2	2
I	52,805	0	5
J	61,589	1	2
K		**Not used**	
L	95,708	1	**0**
	Total posts	**48**	**39**
Average (mean) salary 2024/25 (based on top salary point for each grade)		**Female £35,834** £43,688 With CE post included	**Male £37,264**



The Authority's mean gender pay gap[1] for core staff in post on 31 March 2025 has reduced to **2%** (from 5% in 2024). The mean gender pay gap nationally is 7%.

The median pay gap[2] is more typically used as a measure nationally as outliers can skew the mean, particularly in small data sets such as these. According to the ONS[3], nationally the gender pay gap based on median hourly earnings for all employees has declined slowly over time and has now decreased to 13.1%.

The Authority's median gender pay gap remains at 0%.

[1] The difference between the mean hourly rate of pay of male employees and that of female employees.
[2] The difference between the median hourly rate of pay of male employees and that of female employees.
[3] Gender pay gap in the UK - Office for National Statistics

March 2025	Authority median hourly earnings	Change in gap	UK median hourly full-time earnings
Female	**£18.26**	0%	£19.24
Male	**£18.26**	0%	£17.88

QUARTILE DATA (All staff in post 31 March 2025)					
	Women	**Male**	**All**	**% Women**	**% Male**
Lower (A-C)	1	1	**2**	50	50
Lower Middle (D-F)	35	26	**61**	57	43
Upper Middle (G-I)	11	10	**21**	52	48
Upper (J-L)	2	2	**4**	50	50
	49	**39**	**88**	**56**	**44**

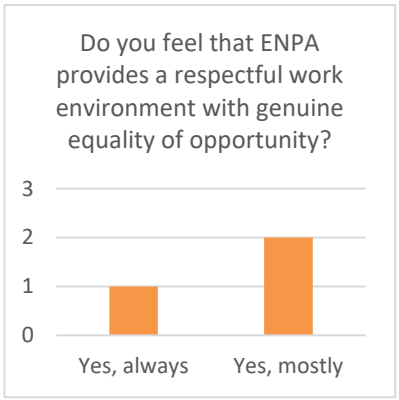
RECRUITMENT AND TURNOVER

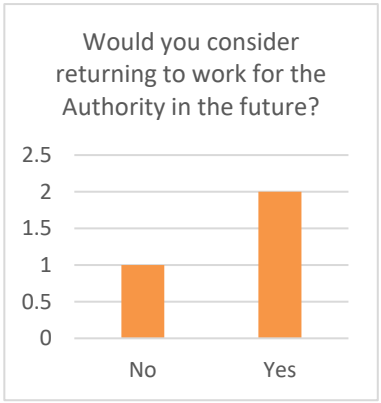
The CIPD's Labour Market Outlook (Spring 2025)[4] reports that hard to fill vacancies continue to be significantly higher in the public sector than the private sector.

The Authority has been successful in all its recruitment campaigns during 2024/25 with all vacant posts being filled. The Authority's offer to job applicants is set out in a Recruitment Pack. Since introducing the Authority's new values, feedback during and after interviews has indicated that applicants applied for the role as they felt aligned to our values, the organisation and the development of exciting projects.

The Authority's turnover rate between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 is **11.3%** (core staff only), a significant decrease from 19.3% on 31 March 2024. Only 3 exit interview questionnaires were completed, and whilst no concerning trends were identified for their reasons for leaving, the Authority will need to improve future response rates to its Exit Interview Questionnaire.

The turnover rate for all staff (including project, fixed term, and seasonal staff) during this period is **20%** an increase from 19.7% reported last year. This is now lower than the current UK average rate of 35% and to be expected as we increase the numbers of project and fixed term staff.





The Authority continues to consider and review its processes and has introduced a new set of values and Appraisal Framework as part of the Organisational Development Strategy. Further work this year will focus on reward, recognition and upskilling staff.

[4] Labour Market Outlook – Spring 2025

DECLARED DISABILITY

All staff in post 31 March 2025

Physical	1	**5.7% of the total staff group declare a disability.** A disability may be defined as "A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".
Progressive conditions e.g., MS, cancer	1	
Recurring conditions, e.g., arthritis	1	
Sensory	1	
Respiratory conditions, e.g., asthma	1	
Mental Health	0	
Learning Difficulties	0	
Other	0	

ETHNICITY

All staff in post 31 March 2025

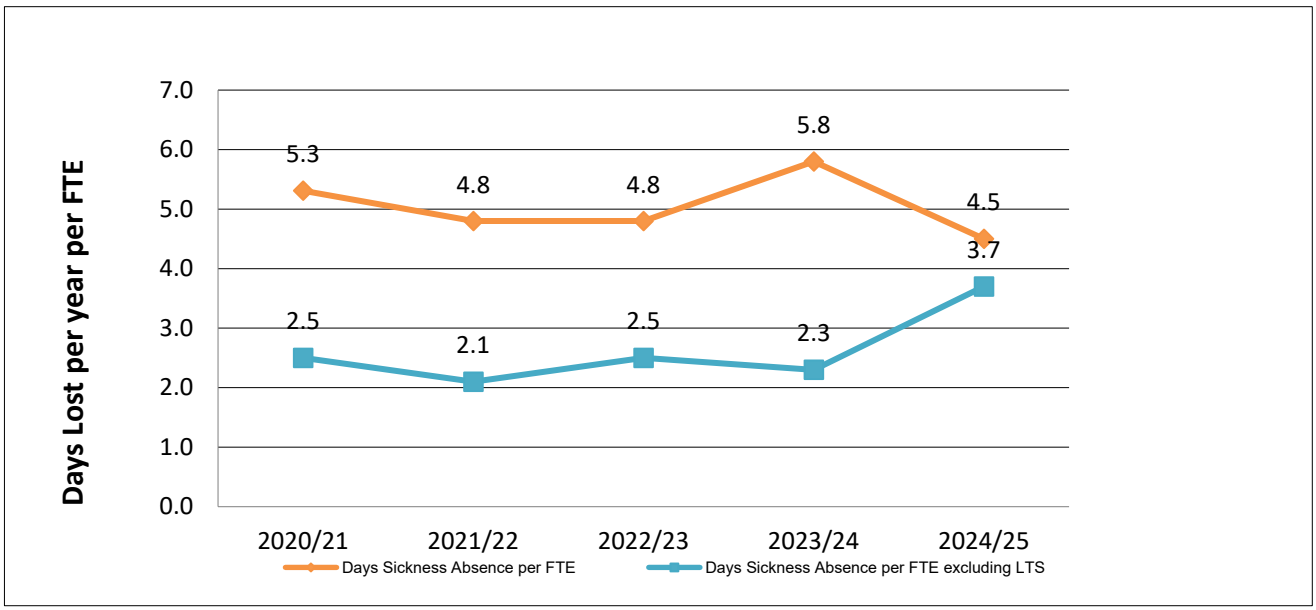
White	British	83	**95.4% of employees identify themselves as white British.** **2.3% any other white background and any other ethnic group** **2.3% prefer not to say.**
	Irish and wider European	0	
Any other white background		1	
Asian/Asian British		0	
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British		0	
Mixed/Multiple ethnic		0	
Any other ethnic group		1	
Gypsy or Irish Traveller		0	
Mixed Ethnicity		0	

SICKNESS ABSENCE

All staff

Year End March	**2024/25**	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Total Days lost through sickness absence	**305**	388	318	314	352
Total Days lost excluding LTS*	**251**	159	168	138	168
Total Days per FTE (Avg. FTE over year)	**4.5**	5.8	4.8	4.8	5.3
Total Days per FTE excluding LTS	**3.7**	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.5

*LTS=Long Term Sick (20 consecutive working days or over)

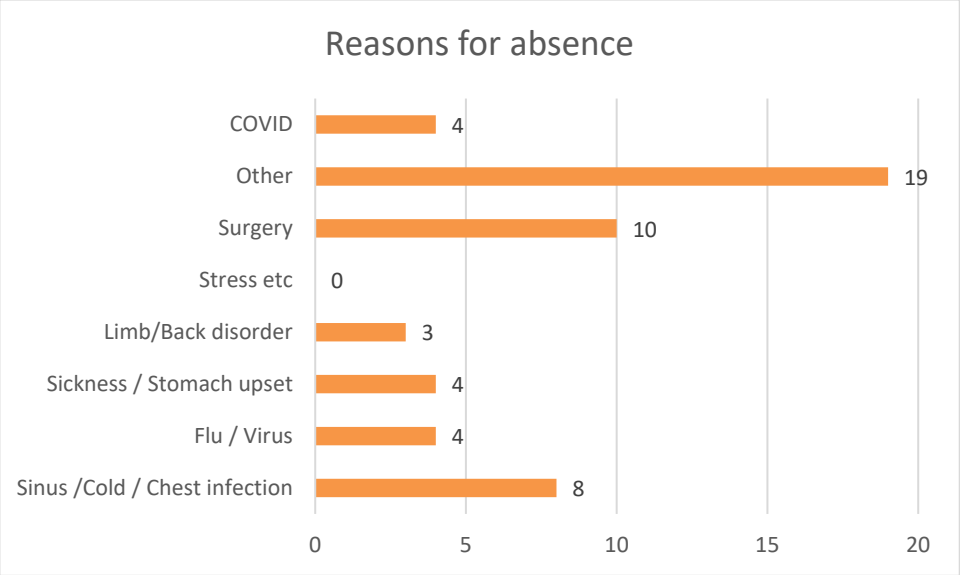


On 31 March 2025 sickness levels per full time equivalent decreased this year to **4.5** from 5.8 at the end of 2023/24. However, sickness levels per full time equivalent excluding long-term sickness absence increased to **3.7**. The Authority experienced some periods of sickness absence that just fell under the 20 consecutive days for long term sickness absence.

The Authority continues to have robust sickness reporting procedures in place and ensures that those on long-term sickness are supported to return to work. Sickness absence forms are monitored as they are submitted to HR and any concerns are immediately raised with the manager, if not already identified in the return-to-work meeting.

There were **52** occasions of sickness absence (compared to 56 in 2024/25).

There were 58 staff who had no sickness absence in 2024/25.



In 2023/24 there were 4 reported absences relating to stress, this year there were none. Occupational health referrals, risk assessments, flexible working, reasonable adjustments, support through discussion and use of the 24-hour confidential helpline service are likely to have helped to bring this number down. The Authority also offers support provided on its Intranet covering mental health and wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, the menopause, and financial wellbeing.

As well as offering 24-hour telephone support, the Authority has upgraded its Employee Assistance Programme to include up to 6 structured telephone counselling sessions, a Wellbeing Hub and Your Care Platform.

The Authority continues to have safe working practices in place in line with current government guidelines and flexible/hybrid working continues to be popular amongst staff. We continue to develop our Wellbeing pages on the staff intranet and to commit to being a Mindful Employer and a Disability Confident Employer.

REPORTED ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS

All staff and volunteers

During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 the following were reported:

Accidents

- 6 staff accidents.
- 2 student accidents at Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning.
- 3 public accidents:
  - Lynmouth Beach where patient presented themselves at the National Park Centre.
  - Public Right of Way where no staff were present.
  - Bridleway near Dunster where patient presented themselves at the National Park Centre.
- 1 accident reported from our volunteers.

Causes

Slips, trips, and falls	6
Manual handling	1
Office equipment	1
Other	3
Vehicle/Machinery/Equipment	1

Resulting injuries

Bruise/cuts	9
Muscular/skeletal	2
Other	1

There were no RIDDOR reportable injuries this year.

Incidents

- 1 staff incident was reported (fire alarm and evacuation).
- 1 public incident was reported (patient feeling unwell whilst at a National Park Centre).

This year the Authority reviewed its policies and procedures in relation to personal safety and customer behaviour reporting. There were 3 incidents of unacceptable behaviour from customers reported. Actions taken included a formal communication from the Chief Executive, advice if a further site visit is required (e.g., take a colleague, or meet in the office), and a reminder to all staff of our Personal Safety and Customer Behaviour policies and guidance.

All accidents and incidents, whether they result in injury or are considered a 'near-miss', are reported at the Authority's quarterly Health and Safety Committee and, where necessary, modifications to processes to prevent reoccurrence and to control risk are put in place.

Ellie Woodcock
HR Officer
16 June 2025

Appendix 4

Customer Feedback Report 2024-25

A summary of the compliments, complaints, freedom of information and environmental information regulations requests for the period 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

Customer Compliments

Below are a sample of the 56 written compliments received in 2024/2025. We receive many more through the visitor books in National Park Centres, calls to our offices or in conversation with officers in the field. It is apparent that our staff take pride in the work they do and strive to offer good service.

Field Services Team – *a selection of comments received following Storm Darragh*

- Exmoor National Park Field Services Team have done a great job clearing and grading the bridleway between Luckwell Bridge and Wheddon Cross
- They must be flat out, their work is very much appreciated, we have used Exmoor footpaths for years and they are better signed and maintained now than ever before, so a big 'thank you' to all of you.
- As daily walkers, we've witnessed the blocked footpaths and how quickly the NP has worked to make them passable again. Whilst devastating to see so much damage, I applauds the ethos of letting nature take over and not tidying up too much!
- I have been asked to pass on a HUGE THANK YOU from the South West Coast Path Association for the incredible work done by the whole team in clearing the Coast Path following Storm Daragh – apparently the local SWCPA volunteers were really impressed by all the hard work done and made a point of asking for thanks to be passed on via the SWCPA Chairman.

Goodness, how very kind of you to reply to my email. I appreciate your words of encouragement. A youth board sounds like a wonderful opportunity for xxxx. Thank you for signposting us to the learning and engagement team. We are most grateful. **HR Officer**

I just wanted to email you to thank you and the team for the most wonderful morning planting and dedicating our trees in the most stunning location. You all showed such a lot of kindness , warmth and empathy and we both felt that you all genuinely cared about each of us and the stories behind each of our dedications. It truly was a very special morning and we can't thank you enough. **Rural Enterprise / Woodlands**

We just wanted to drop you an email to say thank you for your support over the last few months. Although it hasn't been the easiest or quickest process, we would have struggled to even get started without your willingness to hear us out and consider our views on the matter. We're really pleased we have been granted the planning permission, and look forward to pressing on with our self build. **Planning Team**

I am so sad to think that this walking group is coming to an end. I have become so much fitter and now have greater confidence in my ability to tackle longer and tougher walks than before. The group was very friendly, and I enjoyed spending time with a diverse and interesting group of ladies; the walks became the highlight of my week. It was great to have the opportunity to explore some new areas of Exmoor and I would be very happy if funding could be available for these walks to continue. Thanks to Izzy for leading and supporting us all so well. **Learning & Engagement Team**

Formal Customer Complaints

From time to time Officers deal with concerns and issues raised by members of the public but these are usually resolved at an informal stage without the need to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

In 2024-25, the Authority received a total of five Stage 1 formal complaints. Four of these complaints related to Planning matters, of which two were Upheld and two were Not Upheld. The final complaint related to Access & Recreation and was Partially Upheld.

The Authority received two Stage 2 complaints which related to the Planning service, both of which were Not Upheld.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations Requests

The Authority received 36 requests for information using the Freedom of Information Act 2000/Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Type of Request / Area of Work	Number of Requests	Information disclosed	Information not disclosed - exception applied	Information partially disclosed - exception applied	Information publicly available	Information not held
EIR	**14**	**12**	**1**	**1**		
FOI – Access & Recreation	**2**	**2**				
FOI – Estate	**2**	**1**			**1**	
FOI – Finance	**7**	**7**				
FOI – HR	**8**	**6**				**2**
FOI – IT	**3**	**3**				

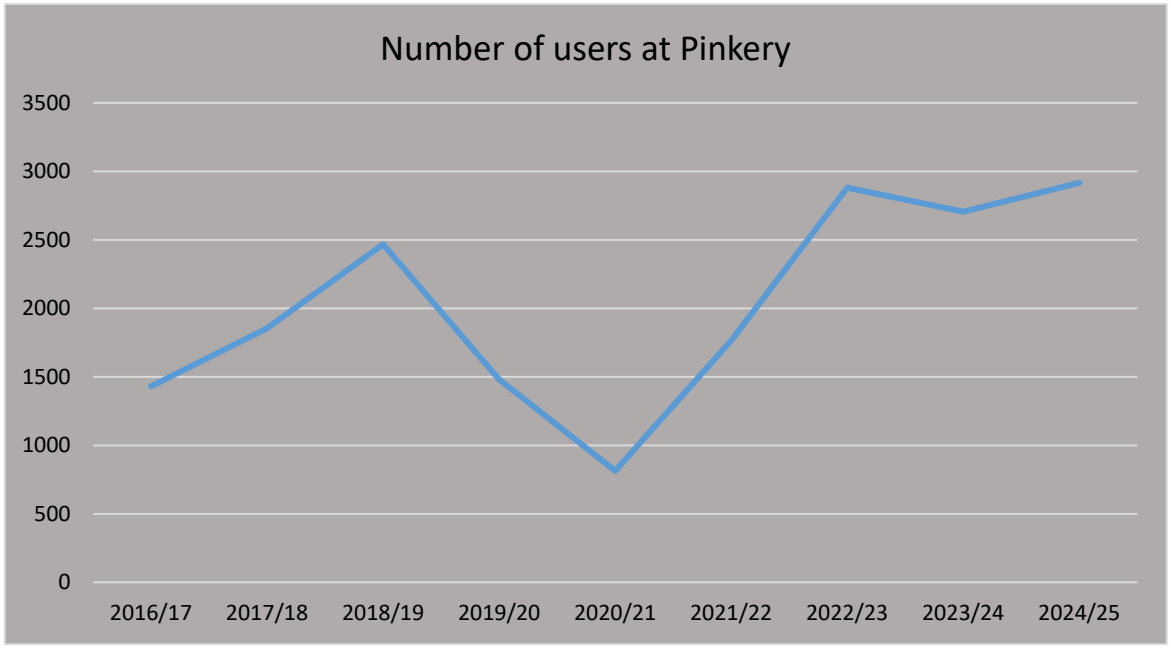
Key Corporate Indicators 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

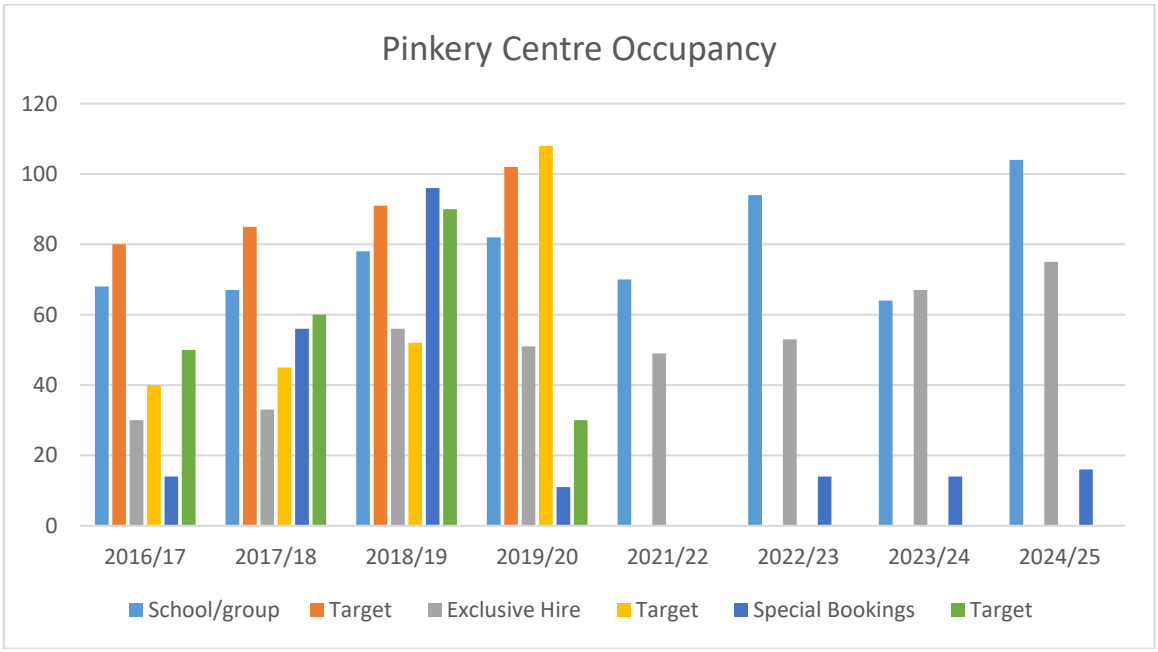
National Park Centres

- Overall Visitor numbers were 162,438 - a fall of 7% compared to the previous year - due in part to the challenging visitor economy but will also reflect a significant drop in winter trading hours.
- Total visitor spend fell by 2.5% to £174,318, so while our 5% target was missed, given the trading circumstances and a 30% growth the year before, this is not a bad result.
- Despite this fall, the spend per visitor was £1.07, an increase of almost 5% on last year's figure of £1.02. Profit margins across the 3 centres were 42.8% against a target of 40%.
- The online shop has been redesigned to improve customer experience and net sales increased by 42% with a profit margin of 66% (N.B. includes parking permits), far exceeding the 5% target.

Learning and Engagement

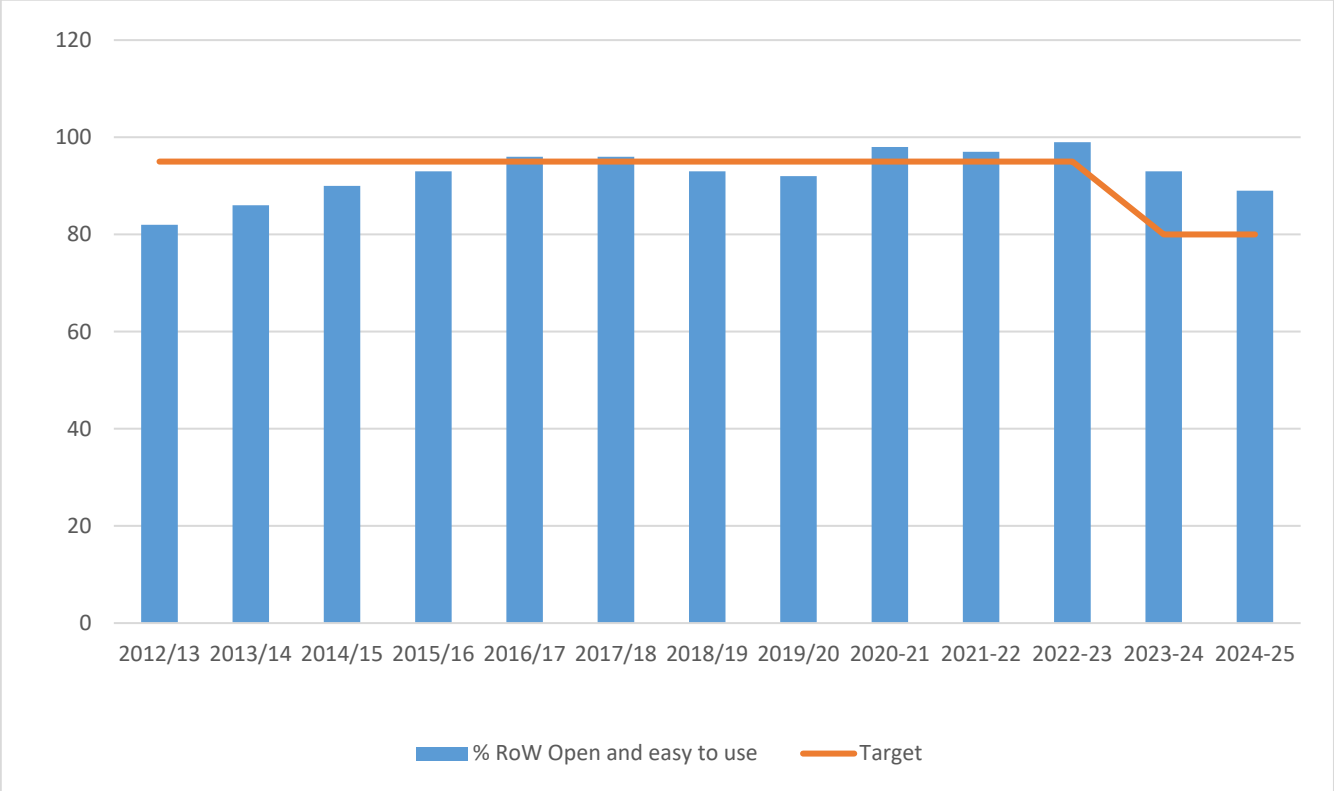
- The total no. of users at Pinkery was 2,917, exceeding the previous highest level of 2,881 recorded in 2022/23.
- The additional funding from Generation Green 2 has enabled us to engage with a wider range of schools and young people while also increasing income. This will be challenging in the next financial year without further funding.
- Young Rangers recruitment is complete and a residential is planned for early in 2025/26.
- We delivered 28 “Welcome to Exmoor Days”, far exceeding the target of 8 days.





Rights of Way Open and Easy to Use Score

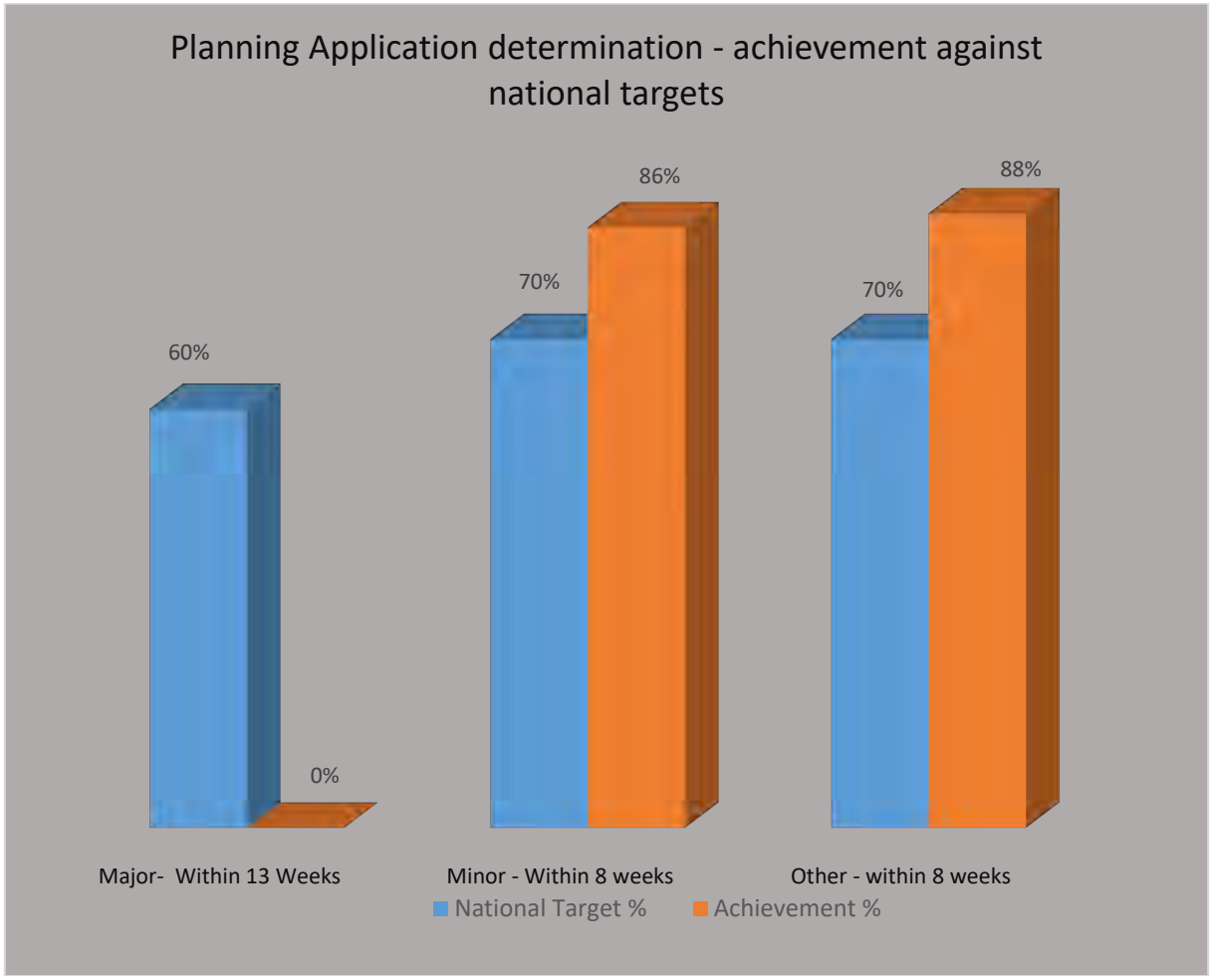
- 89% of our rights of way are open and easy to use - down on last year (93%) and 2022/23 (99%). This is quite a drop over 2 years but reflects the cuts to resources implemented in 2023.
- 628 network faults were resolved but the figure for faults resolved within 3 months was 55%, well below the 80% target. The large backlog of PROW ticket works is mainly due to the damage caused by Storm Darragh and the excellent work the Field Services and Access and Recreation teams carried out to clear paths as quickly as possible.
- 5 major works were completed and 29 legal orders made. Consultations on 23 recreational events were made. This compares to 7 major works, 21 legal orders and 27 recreational events in 2024. A summary of the types of recreational events held is shown below.
- Rights of way income – target £155k in 2024/25 – actual £365k



Type of Event	2024/25
Running	4
Motor Event	9
Road Cycling	2
Mountain Biking	3
Walking	4
Triathlon	1
Equestrian	6
Total	29

Planning Application determination – achievement against National targets

- Figures show that performance was above national targets, with no major applications this year. 86% of minor applications and 88% of other applications determined within statutory timeframes. The compares to national targets of 70% for each category.
- 292 applications were determined, of which 91% were approved. This is an increase on last year's figure of 273 applications determined with a 90% approval rate. In addition, 66 new enforcement sites were recorded compared with just 46 last year. This year a total of 68 cases were resolved, compared to 51 cases last year.
- Two appeals were determined, of which one was successfully defended, and one was allowed, therefore a 50% success rate which fell short of the 75% target. However there were 4 other appeals lodged during the year, which are still to be decided.



Nature and Landscape

- A total of £1,198,832.27 was spent on delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme in 2024-25. The extension of the programme into 25/26 has been well received by farmers and landowners, with a good number of applications and enquiries coming through already.
- The Sowing the Seeds project continued for a second year with 105.8 hectares of wildflower meadows being created, which fell short of the 300ha target. This was mainly due to poor weather affecting harvesting and work to create meadow restoration at Driver. The team have been awarded funding from the FiPL programme to extend the project until March 2026.
- The Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species (ENNIS) Project had another successful year with over 90% of sites with permission were treated within timescale.
- 162 ha of woodland was created in Somerset this year – which was year 2 of the "Forest for Somerset" partnership, with Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Council and National Landscapes. This falls short of the 240ha target and reflects the deep uncertainties facing landowners and businesses throughout the country.
- A sum of £15,230 was achieved from timber sales in 2024/25, exceeding the target of £14k.
- A total of 4 electric vehicles were purchased during the year including a Citroen E-Spacetourer for use by the Volunteer/Engagement team, with the other 3 being pool vehicles for general staff use.
- Install EV charging point at ENPA Blackmoor Gate car park and works are progressing at Exford car park utilising BMW funding: Target 2 in 2024/25
- An EV charging point has been installed at Blackmoor Gate and 2 more will be installed at Exmoor House and the Exford Depot in late spring 2025. Plans for Exford Car Park have been delayed due to land ownership issues.

External Income

- External income (non-National Park Grant) totalled £2,252,293 including Countryside Stewardship, CareMoor, NPC income, external funding etc an increase of almost 37% from the previous year.
- Overall CareMoor donations were down 7.7% to £66,179, which is unsurprising given the massive increase last year due to the Great Bradley Bridge appeal. General donations (gifts of £1k and under) were up 14%, exceeding the 5% target.

ITEM 8

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

2024/25 OUTTURN – BUDGET PERFORMANCE, RESERVES, NEW YEAR MONITORING AND MTFP UPDATE

Report of the Chief Finance Officer

Purpose of Report: To report on the outturn for 2024/25 compared with the revised budgets and also to note the position of reserves.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Authority is recommended to:

(1) NOTE the financial performance for 2024/25

(2) APPROVE the adequacy of the General Fund Balance at 31 March 2025; and

(3) APPROVE the transfers to and from Reserves.

(4) NOTE the Authority spend as at the end of month 2 in Appendix 4 and section 6.

(5) NOTE the spend areas for use of DEFRA one-off Grant in Appendix 5 and section 7

(6) NOTE the prudential indicators as at the end of month 2 in section 8.

Authority Priority: Achieve by providing core services; getting best value from our resources and improving our performance.

Legal and Equality Implications: Local Government Act 2003, Parts 1-3 (Capital Finance, Financial Administration and Grants), Sections 1-39.

Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, Part 2 (Financial Management and Internal Control.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendations of this report have been assessed as having no adverse impact on any particular group or individual.

Financial and Risk Implications: The outturn for the year is within the overall net budget of the Authority which is the National Park Grant from Defra.

Climate Response: No recommendations contained within this report have an adverse impact upon our ability to meet carbon reduction targets. The report describes spend from the Environmental Resilience reserve that occurred in 2024/25.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 2024/25 revenue budget was agreed on 5 March 2024 and was revised by the Authority on the 3 December 2024. The grant settlement from Defra for 2024/25 was another year's cash freeze at £3.2m, however an additional one-off amount was granted in early April 2024 totalling £500,000.

1.2 The finances of the authority are structured in terms of the core budget, contributions to reserves and top sliced programmes. We also separately report capital spend. This report is structured according to those categories. This report will highlight areas of variation or discretion that has been applied in financing in year spend and managing the use of reserves. This report needs to be read in conjunction with the Corporate Plan 2024/25 – Priority Achievements which details the non-financial results for the year.

1.3 In addition to the £3.211m of National Park Grant and £0.500m one-off funding in 2024/25 the Authority earnt another £4.155m (2022/23 £3.131m) across all services and funding streams. This covers traded income, external grants and contributions (e.g. 'Farming in Protected Landscapes'), fees and interest. There was one significant capital receipt in the year totalling £450,000.

1.4 The financial year was characterized by the implementation of our comprehensive business review measures, continued extraordinary spend on legal services and a large variety of capital and other one-off work. In addition, interest earned remained at a considerable level enabling support of several initiatives.

2. CORE BUDGET OUTTURN 2024/25

2.1 Appendix 1 summarises budget performance for 2024/25 and shows the actual spending for the year against the original and revised budgets. The overall position for 2024/25 is a total spend of £7.639m prior to appropriations to and from reserves (2023/24 Total Expenditure of £6.031m). The position after appropriations to and from reserves have been made to meet specific funding requirements and to fund project work throughout the Authority is a surplus of £4,760 (2023/24 Deficit of £93,461).

2.2 The surplus position of £4,760, is transferred to general balances in the first instance.

2.3 The pay award was implemented in November 2024 and was backdated to April 2024. The pay award was higher than the original budget, but additional resources were found when we set the revised budget. Additionally, the Business Review was implemented on the 1 April 2024, there were some transitional effects during 2024/25 which were funded by the Modernisation Reserve. Notably the Dulverton National Park Centre relocated into Exmoor House enhancing the building and our welcome to visitors.

2.4 The Business Review process was implemented to ensure the best means of meeting the budget gap and had two key drivers: the need to make savings, and the need to re-focus work. This process involved regular discussions around the Business Review process and Corporate Plan priority settings. The Business Review was aimed at improving the accuracy of budgets, identifying savings and refocusing work to deliver the priorities that government expects of National Park Authorities.

2.5 Our project work continues to grow with the Heritage Lottery Funded Pioneers Project in full swing, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) project continuing at significant levels and the DEFRA sponsored Heart of Exmoor Landscape Recovery project working through its development phase. Our Estates and Woodlands team

continued to deliver the Estate Strategy, with many projects underway across the Estate including at Driver and the planting of new trees and woodlands and development of the Tree Nursery at Exford.

2.6 There are several variations over £10,000 between the final budgets and the actual spend at cost centre level and these are:

Access & Recreation, Rangers and Field Services Team

- The net underspend across these 3 business areas was £39,000.
- Income received in excess of the revised estimate was £400,000 (2023/24 £318,000). An additional grant of £14k was received in respect of storm damage on the South West Coast Path.
- The Great Bradley Bridge project was completed in 2024/25 with around £115,000 being spent on construction costs.

Conservation of Natural Environment

- This service includes the Woodland Management and Conservation Advice cost centres, as well as the Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species (ENNIS) and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Landscape Recovery projects. Overall, the service overspent by £24,445.
- The Woodlands Management cost centre overspent by £15,000. This was principally due to increased spend on Countryside Stewardship activities over and above the contribution received in year.

Development Management

- The Development Management service ended the year at a break-even position; however this masked the support provided by the Development of Planning Service reserve which contributed £10k to the net under-recovery of income of £29k offset by an underspend on staffing (including agency staffing) of £19k..

Education & Interpretation

- An indicated overspend of £15k is shown. Predominantly due to an over estimation of the contribution provided by the Exmoor Pioneers Scheme towards staffing expenditure. In addition, our website migration totalled £12k.

Legal Support

- Further expenditure has been incurred in respect of the long running planning dispute, both in respect of legal fees and maintaining the repossessed property prior to its sale. There has been an increase in the bad-debt provision for the legal debt of £250k due to the reduction in sales price agreed by the courts.

2.7 As mentioned in 2.1, Appendix 1 shows the revenue outturn position after the take from and contribution to reserves. The net transfer to reserve was £459k prior to the transfer to the general fund reserve of the in-year £5k surplus.

2.8 Within the core budgets are also spend from external revenue grants. The income from these grants and contributions include £1.487m (2023/24 £676k) of FiPL, £255k from natural England towards Landscape Recovery, £409k of Countryside Stewardship (2023/24 £113k) Basic and Higher Level Stewardship Scheme contributions, £80k (2023/24 £61k) HLF Pioneers Project Development, £27k Biodiversity Net Gain Grant and £55k towards grey squirrel management.

3. FIXED TERM PROGRAMMES

3.1 Aside from spend from the Core Budget the Authority also provides budget for contributions to Fixed Term Programmes, Reserves and the small grants scheme. These are detailed in Appendix 2.

3.2 The original fixed term programmes budget for 2024/25 was £300,000 (2023/24 was £247,800). Appendix 2 details the schemes approved against the 2024/25 Budget and their associated spend to the end of the year. There was also spend in 2024/25 against schemes that had been approved in previous years.

3.3 Approvals that are no longer required have been transferred to General Balances or Contingency. Other unspent approvals have been transferred to an alternative reserve if their objectives are closely aligned.

3.4 2021/22 was the last year when a budget (£20k) for small grants was established. This was primarily aimed at community and partnership groups to facilitate delivery of ambitions within the National Park Partnership Plan. From 2022/23 and onwards a one-off pot (£25k) was established with comparable objectives, with an aspiration that this may be topped up if funds allow. Appendix 2 also shows allocations from the small grants pot in 2024/25.

4. RESERVES

4.1 Reserves play a major role in understanding how Exmoor National Park budgets, finances spend, meets future obligations and receives external contributions. A detailed analysis of the reserves held at 31 March 2025 is shown in Appendix 3.

4.2 During 2024/25 reserves increased by £464,039 (2023/24 Increased by £312,285) growing from £3,493,422 to £3,957,461. This, however, grossly oversimplifies the true picture. This total figure includes income not yet received and income received from legacies which is committed.

4.3 The column, 'Transfers to reserves 2024/25 in Appendix 3 shows the contribution to reserves. The main contributions are detailed below:

- Exmoor Pioneers £30k, (and £300k inter reserve transfer from CareMoor in respect of match funding for project lifespan).
- Ecology Projects Reserve £118k, (New) project set-up from a mix of funding sources to support ability of Ecology Team to lever in externally funded projects.
- Planning Policy (Local Plan) £215k, Contributions from Programmes and Partnerships Top-slice as well as from Defra One-Off allocations towards future spend on Local Plan process.
- CareMoor £65k, Full Transfer of income/donations received in 2024/25.
- Section 106 Payments £10k, Monies received in respect of S106 agreements held for a specific purpose.
- Rural Enterprise £8k, Residual Defra One-off allocation towards Media and Communications support in 2025/26.
- Development of Planning Service £25k, Defra One-off allocation towards Planning System Migration to be undertaken in 2025/26
- National Park Centres Spend to Save £40k, £20k from Defra One-off allocations in respect of Lynmouth NPC visitor facilities enhancements planned for Autumn 2025. £20k from NPC surplus to support future initiatives.

- Engagement & Outreach £8k, underspent allocations from Events, Shows and Projects transferred to support spend in 2025/26
- Authority Estate £250k, Contributions from Programmes and Partnerships Top-slice as well as from Defra One-Off allocations towards future spend on Driver and Estates projects.
- Estates Capital Receipts £449k (New), Capital receipt from Land & Property Sales.
- Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Replacement £45k, £25k top slice budget allocation as well as £20k from sales of vehicles, plant and equipment.
- Modernisation Reserve £115k, £100k from Top slice allocation, £15k from Defra One-off allocation to support project management in 2025/26.
- Modernisation & Trainee Fund £20k, from top slice budget allocation to support initiatives in 2025/26
- Environmental Resilience £25k, from underspends on the Finance business area to support environmental initiatives which contribute to carbon saving and Net Zero agenda.

4.4 The column, 'Transfers from reserves 2024/25 shows the take from reserves to finance spend. Key draws from reserves are show below:

- Ashcombe Gardens £10k, released to meet spend on stone walling and other site enhancements.
- Exmoor Pioneers £65k, match funding released to meet spend on Exmoor Pioneers in year.
- Woodlands £38k, released to meet spend on Treescapes Officer (reserve/project funded post)
- Planning Policy (Local Plan) £5k, released to meet spend on consultancy in year.
- Rural Enterprise £7k, released to meet costs of external grant awarded in year.
- Planning Skills Delivery Fund £78k, released to meet costs of planning support during 2024/25.
- Engagement & Outreach £20k, released to meet spend on staffing (reserve/project funded post).
- Authority Estate £80k, drawn down to meet costs of Pinkery water system enhancement £20k, as well as Driver expenditure in year.
- Rights of Way £102k, drawn down to match against expenditure on Great Bradley Bridge project.
- IT and Web Development £15k, meeting costs incurred in year on website development and IT hardware purchases.
- Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Replacement fund £140k, see section 5 below for details of capital spend from this fund.
- Modernisation £127k, drawn down to meet costs of service reorganisation following the implementation of the Business Process Review in April 2024.
- Environmental Resilience Reserve £12k, £2.5k towards Woodlands Solar System, £7k towards LED lighting enhancements at Lynmouth NPC and Pinkery OEC, £2.5k towards Greenhouse Gas Emissions consultancy.
- Contingency Fund – Legal £250k, This is the net increase in the bad debt provision due to a reduction in the sales price of a repossessed property held due to a debt owed to the Authority. External Audit have suggested that we recognise the income

related to the monies owed on the property where we have an order for sale. Rather than risk spending this money in advance of the property being sold, it has been posted to a reserve (less a bad debt provision) and will be released once proceeds have been received.

4.5 Members are asked to approve these transfers to/from and between reserves.

4.6 The balance on the General Fund is the amount held in reserve to meet any unforeseen or exceptional items of expenditure or to provide working capital. Whilst the balance of the General Fund at 31 March 2025 of £232k is below the minimum considered adequate to maintain the financial viability, security and stability of the Authority and provide working capital (£300k), when taken in combination with the Contingency Fund – General, a combined balance of £582k is in place. I consider this combined balance to be sufficiently robust for the purposes of reporting under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 (Estimates made for the purpose of budget calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves)

4.7 Whilst the level of reserves appears robust, please may I draw Members attention to the Contingency Fund – Legal. £177k. As detailed in 4.3, External Audit have suggested that we recognise the income related to the monies owed on the property where we have an order for sale. Rather than risk spending this money in advance of the property being sold, it has been posted to a reserve (less a bad debt provision) and will be released once proceeds have been received. The property is currently being marketed again and until this process has completed, this reserve remains at risk.

5. CAPITAL

5.1 Members will recall the recent recommendation from our external auditors that the Authority formally sets a capital budget each year. The first of these was set for the 2024/25 financial year.

5.2 The principal scheme disclosed in the 2024/25 original budget was in regards Driver with an approved allocation of £765,000 (including FiPL HBRG) , this was subsequently 'topped' up by £100,000 with the allocation of Defra One-off allocations at the July 2024 Authority meeting. Plans are progressing for Driver and Members have been updated both formally and informally on project progress throughout the year.

5.3 The table below identifies the spending of a capital nature carried out during 2024/25 and how it was financed:

Scheme	**Amount £'000s**	**Funding Source**	**Funding Name**
Woodlands, Exford Tree Nursery	8	Part Capital Grant, part General Fund	Forestry Commission
Field Services Team, Kubota Excavator	22	Revenue Reserve	Corporate Equipment
Field Services Team, Sawbench Cover	5	Revenue Reserve	Corporate Equipment
Education & Volunteers Team, Citroen eSpacetourer 9-seat EV	34	Revenue Reserve	Corporate Equipment

Scheme	Amount £'000s	Funding Source	Funding Name
Ranger Team, Isuzu DMax Pickup	33	Revenue Reserve	Corporate Equipment
Facilities, Nissan leaf EV Pool Cars x2, Peugeot 308 Plug-in Hybrid Pool Car	51	Revenue Reserve	Corporate Equipment
Blackpitts, Installation of PV Battery system	9	Revenue Budget	Estates Cost Centre
Wheal Eliza, mine capping	40	Revenue Budget	Estates Cost Centre
Weir Cleeve, cliff face stabilisation works	15	Revenue Budget	Estates Cost Centre
Total	**217**		

5.4 During 2024/25 and following an Estates paper on land and property sales which was brought to authority in February 2023, the sale of a piece of land was completed on. This brought in a sizeable capital receipt of £450,000 to support work on the Driver project.

6. 2025/26 BUDGET MONITORING

6.1 The opportunity was taken in the approval of the 2024/25 budget to make changes across the organisation, to realign structures and staffing to deliver the priorities that government expects of National Park Authorities. The budget set out in Appendix 4 reflects the Business Review structure adopted in March 2024, some of the notes in appendix 4 detail the core change from previous arrangements.

6.2 Appendix 4 details the sections and cost centres across the reclassified subjective headings:

- Conservation of Cultural Heritage
- Conservation of Natural Environment
- Forward Planning & Communities
- Development Management
- Promoting Understanding
- Rangers, Estates & Volunteers
- Recreation Management & Tourism
- Support Services
- Corporate & Democratic Core

6.3 Actual to period 2 (end of May 2025) is shown, alongside the revised 2025/26 budget for income and expenditure. This is then profiled on a 2/12ths basis and compared to the actual to-date. The notes column contains variance analysis for significant positive and negative variations.

6.4 Members will recall the recent recommendation from our external auditors that the Authority receive quarterly monitoring financial statements. Appendix 4 shows actual spending at the end of month 2. Clearly, month 2 is not the end of the first quarter but reporting as at the end of month 2 works more smoothly for the financial reporting cycle.

6.5 It is difficult to draw conclusions about financial performance so early in the financial year. Month 2 data is skewed by the presence of accounting entries rolled over from the previous financial year, seasonality, and the presence of spend that will be funded from reserves. Whilst the budget monitoring shown in Appendix 4 shows a significant variance of £984k There are no areas of concern or interest to direct members attention to other than the delays in receiving the first quarter National Park Grant with a variance to profile of £495k (received 16 June 25) and FiPL Grant (not yet received, due in July) with a profiled variance of £113k. This has had a sizeable impact on cashflow in the early part of the 2025/26 financial year.

6.6 The other significant variance includes Estates where there has been spend on major projects (e.g. Pinkery Drive enhancements) which are funded by reserves/external funding sources; additionally CS income will be received later in the year and the profiled budget.is on a straight 12ths basis.

6.7 2025/26 is the final year when the most recent Local Government Pension Scheme pension fund revaluation affects budgets. This sees a slight increase in our pensions deficit funding (up to £82,000pa) and changes to the National Insurance threshold and percentage. The National Insurance changes are anticipated to impact the authority by around £80,000 in 2025/26. The net effect of these changes is broadly cash neutral. The budget also includes increases for utility bills and further reductions in travel budgets. The other changes to budgets can be explained by the assumptions that underpin it. The main assumption is that staff pay will increase by 3%. This is a key assumption as staff costs are such a high proportion of the Authority's overall costs.

7 DEFRA ONE-OFF ALLOCATIONS

7.1 Following the approval of the 2024/25 Budget and MTFP by Members, DEFRA announced 2 elements of one-off funding for the 2024/25 year, unfortunately formal confirmation of these amounts was received after the 2024/25 budget and MTFP was approved by Members. The funding comprised £250,000 of revenue funding and £250,000 of capital funding. Whilst both amounts were un-ringfenced, there was a steer from DEFRA for the spend to be matched with their current priorities. Delivery Team members were asked to provide potential schemes to utilise these funds, the schemes were then reviewed by Leadership Team. The proposed schemes were approved by Members in July 2024.

7.2 Progress on these schemes during 2024/25 is documented in appendix 5. It should be noted that due to the timing of receipt of these allocations, it has been difficult to progress all projects in-year. The majority of the allocation has been taken to reserves and will be used to support the intended projects during the current (2025/26) Financial Year.

8. QUARTERLY MONITORING OF PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

8.1 For completeness, and to comply with guidance, Prudential limits set, and actual outcomes are to be reported. All treasury activity was conducted within the benchmarks set as Prudential limits for prudent and sustainable capital plans, financing, and investment. Indicators approved for the year are set out in the left-hand columns, with actual outturn on the right. The Authority remained debt free throughout the whole of the 2024/25 financial year.

1 Borrowing Limits

		Actual
Authorised	£100,000	**Nil**
Operational	£100,000	**Nil**

2 Maturity Structure

	Upper Limit	**Lower Limit**		**Actual**
	%	**%**	Value	**%**
< 12m	100	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 12m < 24m	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 24m < 5yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 5yrs < 10yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 10yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
			0.00	**0.0**

3 Investments > 365 days 0 **0**

9. UPDATE TO THE 2025/26 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

9.1 When the 2025/26 budget was set by the Authority it contained certain key assumptions such as concerning pay awards, base inflation and movements in National Park Grant. In particular we assumed a common staffing complement, a 3% increase of pay in 2025/26 and a 2% increase in 2025/26.

9.2 Following Members Approval of the 2025/26 Budget and MTFP in March 2025, a letter of intent was received from DEFRA on the 2 April 2025. This contained a reduction in our revenue grant allocation of 8.2% (£265,000) and the introduction of a capital allowance of £1.4m. An early revised budget paper was taken to Members in the May Authority with plans to mitigate the reduction in revenue grant. The 2025/26 grant allocations were formalised in a change control notice in early June.

9.3 Inflation isn't falling as quickly as predicted and whilst the Employer's offer for 2025/26 matches the budget projections, pay negotiations between the NJC employers and unions are ongoing. Additionally, our budgeting process for staffing is moving away from the 'Core' establishment as operated previously. The revised approach will consider all posts as part of the establishment and where these posts are supported by grants, other external funding or income generation, these income sources will also be factored in. Historically these were not included.

9.4 The Governments recent Spending Review has indicated that DEFRA (a non-protected department) has substantial efficiency savings to make over the coming three-year term (2026/27 through to 2028/29) although there is growth funding hinted at within the documents produced. We are not aware of the potential impact of this review on National Parks at this stage, however if the process for 2025/26 were to be mirrored there is likely to be a continued move away from revenue funding to capital 'growth' funding. Leadership Team will keep a watching brief on this as the year progresses, the most significant impact of this would be for another Business Process Review to be initiated.

9.5 The MTFP distributed in May 2025 indicated a budget gap of £45k for 2026/27 and £97k for 2027/28. Through adjustments made during the business review it has

been possible to mitigate savings requirements to date, however another Business Review may add to further savings requirements in the latter years of the MTFP.

9.6 The reduced revenue settlement of 2025/26 has increased our concerns over the long-term sustainability and viability of National Park Authorities. We have achieved significant additional income in recent years; however, this will not continue to grow exponentially, and we continue to challenge DEFRA to add inflationary increased as a minimum to our settlements in future years. Members will receive an Income Generation Strategy in Autumn 2025, the across cutting corporate aim of this is to secure a long-term plan to grow our external income sources and amounts.

9.7 In year pressures continue to arise. For example, we continue to accrue costs in the long running planning dispute in the knowledge that these are no longer recoverable from the property that we have an order for sale on.

9.8 There is still a great deal for the Authority to be financially positive about. We are in a strong position with the continuation of the FiPL scheme this year, the Exmoor Pioneers programme and Landscape Recovery Projects, exciting progress will be made at Driver and across our Estate in accessing the CS schemes from in hand land. We still possess significant revenue resources and land and property assets.

B Barrett
Chief Finance Officer
June 2025

Section	Budget Heading	2024/25 Original Budget £	2024/25 Revised Budget £	2024/25 Actual £	2024/25 Actual £ (After Reserve Appropriations)	Variance between 24/25 Revised and 24/25 Outturn	Notes
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	Archaeology & Historic Environment	105,200	103,100	140,057	98,057	-5,043	Transfer from Modernisation reserve to meet Business Review actions
	Exmoor Pioneers (Project)		0	45,120	377	377	Net reserves transfers in of £44,743
	SWPP MIREs (PROJECT)		0	-415	-415	-415	
Conservation of Cultural Heritage Total		**105,200**	**103,100**	**184,762**	**98,019**	**-5,081**	
Conservation of Natural Environment	Woodlands	68,800	69,300	124,078	84,078	14,778	Cost centre includes one reserve funded post
	Landscape Recovery (Project)		0	125	125	125	
	ENNIS (Project)		0	332	332	332	
	Moorland Bird Survey (Project)		0	-53	-53	-53	
	Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Project		0	-66,814	186	186	Allocation of advice and guidance grant amounts
	Conservation Advice	129,300	129,700	114,777	138,777	9,077	£24,000 taken to Conservation Projects Reserve
Conservation of Natural Environment Total		**198,100**	**199,000**	**172,445**	**223,445**	**24,445**	
Forward Planning & Communities	Planning & Community	100,400	99,500	-140,174	96,633	-2,867	Contribution to reserves (Top sliced budget and Defra 1-OFFs) to support Local Plan process in 2025/26 and 2026/27
	CareMoor (Project)		0	-64,621	0	0	£66k in donations and legacies received in year.
	Rural Enterprise	125,600	123,200	126,724	119,724	-3,476	Contribution from reserve to support the issue of a grant
Forward Planning & Communities Total		**226,000**	**222,700**	**-78,071**	**216,357**	**-6,343**	
Development Management	Development Management	314,800	312,500	363,562	312,507	7	Use of Planning Skills Delivery Fund in year £78k, offset by £35k contribution to reserves to support new Planning System procurement in 2025/26
Development Management Total		**314,800**	**312,500**	**363,562**	**312,507**	**7**	
Promoting Understanding	National Park Centres	187,800	184,400	222,946	182,946	-1,454	Increased income estimates across the three National Park Centres. Reserve transfers from Modernisation Reserve in respect of Business Process Review actions
	Grants and Contributions	3,700	3,700	3,623	3,623	-77	
	Pinkery	300	0	4,748	2,748	2,748	Reserve transfer from Environmental Resilience Reserve
	Media & Communication	98,200	101,400	83,843	99,843	-1,557	Reserve transfer to Rural Enterprise Reserve to support expenditure in 2025/26
	Education & Interpretation	93,100	94,600	139,503	109,503	14,903	Transfers in from reserve in respect of reserve funded post and to support website redevelopment costs
Promoting Understanding Total		**383,100**	**384,100**	**454,663**	**398,663**	**14,563**	
Rangers, Estates & Volunteers	Rangers	128,600	127,000	161,889	128,589	1,589	Transfer from Corporate Equipment and Vehicle Reserve to meet cost of new Ranger Isuzu Dmax
	Field Services	223,800	221,500	240,105	222,855	1,355	Transfer from Corporate Equipment and Vehicle Reserve to meet cost of new Kubota Excavator, and support towards saw bench equipment
	FST Workshop		9,300	18,991	18,991	9,691	
	Estates	-195,200	-178,900	-760,634	-181,434	-2,534	Transfer from Estates Reserve for Pinkery Water System (£20,000). Transfers to reserve include capital receipt from sale of land £450,000 and £150,000 in respect of top-sliced amounts and Defra 1-Offs supporting Estates projects in 2025/26 and 2026/27.
	Driver (Project)		0	-41,517	-1,517	-1,517	Top sliced and Defra 1-Off contributions transferred to reserve.
	Get Involved Programme (Project)		0	1,560	1,560	1,560	
	Volunteer Engagement	68,600	67,300	103,597	69,797	2,497	Transfer from Corporate Equipment and Vehicle Reserve to meet cost of new Citroen 9 seat EV
Rangers, Estates & Volunteers Total		**225,800**	**246,200**	**-276,009**	**258,841**	**12,641**	
Recreation Management & Transport	Access & Recreation	82,800	87,000	141,850	44,850	-42,150	Transfer from Rights of Way reserve in respect of Great Bradley Bridge
	Visitor Facilities	400	400	-5,044	-5,044	-5,444	
Recreation Management & Transport Total		**83,200**	**87,400**	**136,806**	**39,806**	**-47,594**	
Support Services	Finance	94,900	62,300	-75,689	64,311	2,011	Contribution to reserves (Top sliced budget and Defra 1-OFFs) to support Modernisation Reserve, Project Management and Environmental Resilience Reserves
	Human Resources & Performance	171,100	159,800	150,669	160,669	869	Net transfer to Reserves. Internship £20,000 to reserves, £10,000 Transfer from Modernisation Reserve
	ICT & GIS Services	252,100	250,700	255,671	250,671	-29	Draw from ICT Reserve for increased hardware purchases in year
	Legal Services	70,000	70,000	330,267	80,267	10,267	£250,000 Increase in Bad debt provision on long running legal case
	Facilities	188,600	215,100	220,066	204,316	-10,784	Draw from Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Reserve for 3 EV purchases (£51,000). Transfer to reserves for CEVR £25,000 from Top slice and £10,000 vehicle sales.
Support Services Total		**776,700**	**757,900**	**880,984**	**760,234**	**2,334**	
Corporate & Democratic Core	Corporate Management	405,500	405,500	409,855	407,355	1,855	Contribution from Environmental Resilience Reserve to support Greenhouse Gas study
	Historic Pensions Contributions	78,400	78,400	78,450	78,450	50	
	Corporate Subscriptions	18,500	18,500	19,020	19,020	520	
	Members	96,200	96,200	94,044	94,044	-2,156	
Corporate & Democratic Core Total		**598,600**	**598,600**	**601,369**	**598,869**	**269**	
Core Funding & Partnership Fund	National Park Grant	-3,211,500	-3,211,500	-3,711,500	-3,211,500	0	£500,000 Defra 1-Off allocations, utilised in year and taken to Reserves
	Reserves Transactions	270,000	270,000	770,000	270,000	0	Appendix 3, Transfer of DEFRA 1-Off grant totalling £500,000 to cost centres above
	Partnership Fund Top-Sliced	30,000	30,000	36,951	30,000	0	Appendix 3
Core Funding & Partnership Fund Total		**-2,911,500**	**-2,911,500**	**-2,904,549**	**-2,911,500**	**0**	
Total Budget		**0**	**0**	**-464,038**	**-4,759**	**-4,759**	

Appendix 1

Appendix 1

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMMES, PARTNERSHIPS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESERVES

Appendix 2

	2024/25
ORIGINAL BUDGET	**300,000**
LESS: Contributions to Reserves	
Woodlands - Ash Die Back	25,000
Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Replacement	25,000
Estates Capital Projects	50,000
Modernisation	100,000
Internship and Trainee Fund	20,000
Partnership Plan and State of the Park Development & Surveys	25,000
Local Plan	25,000
	270,000

LESS: Top sliced Programmes	**Approval**	**Spend 2025/25**	**Balance Remaining**	**Treatment of Balance on the Scheme**
Tourism	10,000	7,457	2,543	Reallocated to Rural Enterprise Reserve
Hill Farm Network	5,000	5,000	-	
Website Development	5,000	5,000	-	
SERC/DBRC Bio-records	5,000	5,549	- 549	Overspend met by conservaiton budget
STEAM	5,000	3,630	1,370	Reallocated to Rural Enterprise Reserve
	30,000	**26,636**	**3,364**	
Spend from Previous Year's Fixed Term Allocations		**20,000**		
Total Spend in 2024/25 on Fixed Term Priorities		**46,636**		

Small Grants Scheme - In year Approvals	**Approval**	**Spend 2024/25**	**Balance Remaining**	**Treatment of Balance on the Scheme**
BAOTM Exmoor Residential	2,284	1,247	1,037	Unallocated funds transferred to General Balances
Exmoor Hill Farm Network	5,000	5,000	-	
John Barnes Court	1,570	1,570	-	
Exmoor Activity Day - Exmoor Community Youth Club	250	-	250	
			-	
			-	
			-	
	9,104	**7,817**	**1,037**	
Spend from Previous Year's Small Grants Allocations		**2,500**		
Total Spend in 2024/25 on Small Grants		**10,317**		

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY **Appendix 3**

ANALYSIS OF RESERVES

	Balance 31/03/24	Transfers to Reserves 2024/25	Transfers from Reserves 2024/25	Outturn Transfers between Reserves 2024/25	Balance 31/03/25
	£	£	£	£	£
REVENUE EARMARKED RESERVES					
Conservation of Cultural Heritage					
Ashcombe Gardens	**9,743**		-9,743		**0**
Archaeology	**39,670**				**39,670**
Exmoor Pioneers	**73,787**	30,000	-65,000	300,000	**338,787**
Heritage Projects	**27,397**			6,000	**33,397**
Conservation of Natural Environment					
Deer Monitoring Study	**13,424**				**13,424**
Woodland Mgt Reserve	**63,762**		-37,500	5,500	**31,762**
Ecology Projects Reserve	**0**	117,807			**117,807**
Ennis	**14,292**			2,175	**16,467**
Forward Planning & Communities					
Planning Policy (Local Plan)	**135,035**	215,000	-5,000		**345,035**
Caremoor For Exmoor	**456,644**	64,621		-335,675	**185,590**
Section 106 Agreements	**86,400**	9,600			**96,000**
Conserv Area Appraisals & Neighbourhd Plan	**12,283**				**12,283**
Rural Enterprise & Communications	**78,518**	8,000	-7,000		**79,518**
Development Management					
Development of Planning Service	**53,259**	25,000	-7,400		**70,859**
Planning Skills Delivery Fund	**78,255**		-78,255		**0**
Promoting Understanding					
National Park Centres spend to save	**31,236**	40,000			**71,236**
Pinkery Reserve	**0**			20,000	**20,000**
Engagement & Outtreach	**21,306**	8,000	-20,000	3,000	**12,306**
Rangers, Estates and Volunteers					
Authority Estate	**308,277**	250,000	-80,000		**478,277**
Estates Capital Receipts Reserve	**0**	449,200			**449,200**
Recreation Management					
Rights of Way	**192,452**		-102,000	19,000	**109,452**
Active Travel Grant	**100,000**				**100,000**
Support Services					
IT and Web Development	**86,975**		-15,000		**71,975**
Financial Resilience Reserve	**50,000**				**50,000**
Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Replacement	**147,250**	45,000	-140,100		**52,150**
Modernisation	**162,621**	115,000	-127,000		**150,621**
Internship and Trainee Fund	**0**	20,000			**20,000**
Corporate & Democratic Core					
Partnership Plan (Research & Development)	**46,901**				**46,901**
Environmental Resilience	**20,381**	25,000	-12,000		**33,381**
Corporate Subscriptions	**10,000**				**10,000**
Capital Development Reserve	**100,000**				**100,000**
	2,419,868	**1,422,228**	**-705,998**	**20,000**	**3,156,098**
PROGRAMMES & PARTNERSHIPS					
Programmes - fixed term	**39,126**	3,364		-20,000	**22,490**
Partnership Fund/ small grants scheme	**30,748**		-10,315		**20,433**
	69,875	**3,364**	**-10,315**	**-20,000**	**42,924**
GENERAL FUND AND CONTINGENCIES					
General Fund	**227,094**			4,760	**231,854**
Contingency Fund - General	**349,966**				**349,966**
Contingency Fund - Legal	**426,620**		-250,000		**176,620**
	1,003,679	**0**	**-250,000**	**4,760**	**758,439**
TOTAL RESERVES	**3,493,422**	**1,425,592**	**-966,313**	**4,760**	**3,957,461**

Section	Budget Heading	2025/26 Actual to P2 (May 2025) £	2025/26 Revised Expenditure £	2025/26 Revised Income £	2025/26 Net Revised Budget £	2025/26 Profiled Budget to P2 £	Variance between 25/26 Revised P2 Profile and 25/26 P2 Outturn	Notes
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	Archaeology & Historic Environment	31,659	104,800	-1,200	103,600	17,267	14,392	Includes full year HE system cost in Period 1 £16,000
	Ascombe Gardens (Project)	22,680			0	0	22,680	Amounts to be met by Archaeology and Heritage reserves
	Exmoor Pioneers (Project)	30,258	202,900	-202,900	0	0	30,258	Year end 2024/25 Debtor of £85,900 awaiting matching. Remaining £30,000 to met by HLF Claim and Reserves Transfers
Conservation of Cultural Heritage Total		**84,597**	**307,700**	**-204,100**	**103,600**	**17,267**	**67,330**	
Conservation of Natural Environment	Woodlands	28,931	141,600	-77,400	64,200	10,700	18,231	Cost centre includes one reserve funded post (£8,100 to P2), 2024/25 debtor of £5,000 awaiting matching. Countryside Stewardship income brought across at year end.
	Landscape Recovery (Project)	35,468	51,100	-51,100	0	0	35,468	Costs to date to be met by DEFRA in next quarter claim
	ENNIS (Project)	593	42,800	-42,800	0	0	593	Cost to be met from Reserves
	Moorland Bird Survey (Project)	15,006	0	0	0	0	15,006	Awaiting next quarter Landscape Recovery income to match expenditure
	River Barle Restoration (Project)	3,069	0	0	0	0	3,069	New Project - awaiting matched project funding
	Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Project	29,075	675,700	-675,700	0	0	29,075	Awaiting first quarter FiPL income.
	Conservation Advice	56,300	331,300	-165,600	165,700	27,617	28,683	Awaiting matched income from reserves/project funding (£28,000 to P2)
Conservation of Natural Environment Total		**168,442**	**1,242,500**	**-1,012,600**	**229,900**	**38,317**	**130,125**	
Forward Planning & Communities	Planning & Community	16,252	103,800		103,800	17,300	-1,048	
	CareMoor (Project)	-19,179	30,000	-30,000	0	0	-19,179	
	Rural Enterprise	22,392	148,600	-18,200	130,400	21,733	659	
Forward Planning & Communities Total		**19,465**	**282,400**	**-48,200**	**234,200**	**39,033**	**-19,568**	
Development Management	Development Management	64,096	443,500	-121,000	322,500	53,750	10,346	Planning Fee income around 25% below target (adverse impact of £4.5k to date). Spend on planning system front loaded (£12k)
Development Management Total		**64,096**	**443,500**	**-121,000**	**322,500**	**53,750**	**10,346**	
Promoting Understanding	National Park Centres	25,225	310,000	-163,500	146,500	24,417	808	
	Grants and Contributions		200	0	200	33	-33	
	Pinkery	4,989	194,400	-194,400	0	0	4,989	Total income budget includes reserves transfers/extenral project income of £36,400 PA, impact of £6k to date
	Media & Communication	16,632	121,300	-24,000	97,300	16,217	415	
	Education & Interpretation	21,378	131,000	-9,700	121,300	20,217	1,161	
Promoting Understanding Total		**68,224**	**756,900**	**-391,600**	**365,300**	**60,883**	**7,341**	
Rangers, Estates & Volunteers	Rangers	30,797	208,700	-83,000	125,700	20,950	9,847	Majority of income received at year-end. £13k impact at P2
	Field Services	62,455	366,100	-185,200	180,900	30,150	32,305	Majority of income received at year-end. £31k impact at P2
	FST Workshop	9,204	27,300	0	27,300	4,550	4,654	Cost to be recharged to services at end of quarter 1
	Estates	73,041	261,600	-480,900	-219,300	-36,550	109,591	Rental income on target. No contribution income (mainly CS) received to date (usually later in year) impact of £33k on period to date. Large spend on projects £50k and consultancy charges £45k to date to be met from reserves at year end.
	Driver (Project)	5,913	0	0	0	0	5,913	Project costs to be met by Estates Reserve at Year-end
	Get Involved Programme (Project)	360	0	0	0	0	360	
	Volunteer Engagement	10,192	62,200	0	62,200	10,367	-175	
Rangers, Estates & Volunteers Total		**191,962**	**925,900**	**-749,100**	**176,800**	**29,467**	**162,495**	
Recreation Management & Transport	Access & Recreation	60,622	254,600	-143,400	111,200	18,533	42,088	Income is received at Year-End, impact of £24k. Some Active Travel Plan related project costs met by reserve at year-end £30k
	Visitor Facilities	-12,394	100,000	-100,000	0	0	-12,394	Seasonal income profile. Income to date £24k c/f equal profiled budget of £16.7k Parking Permits income.
Recreation Management & Transport Total		**48,228**	**354,600**	**-243,400**	**111,200**	**18,533**	**29,694**	
Support Services	Finance	80,844	223,100	-155,000	68,100	11,350	69,494	Spend includes full year Insurance spend £60k, impact of £50k on profiled spend. Only 1 Month interest receipt included in P2 position, impact of £13k
	Human Resources & Performance	34,622	167,000		167,000	27,833	6,789	HR , Personnel & Procurement charges high c/f to profiled budget. Impact of £4k
	ICT & GIS Services	70,806	250,800		250,800	41,800	29,006	Microsoft licences purchased at start of year £36k. Budget profiled equally , impact of £30k
	Legal Services	7,601	70,000		70,000	11,667	-4,066	No DCC charges received to date. Spend has been on long running legal case.
	Facilities	44,895	196,100		196,100	32,683	12,212	Draw from Corporate Equipment & Vehicle Reserve for 3 EV purchases (£51,000). Transfer to reserves for CEVR £25,000 from Top slice and £10,000 vehicle sales.
Support Services Total		**238,768**	**907,000**	**-155,000**	**752,000**	**125,333**	**113,435**	
Corporate & Democratic Core	Corporate Management	64,844	420,100		420,100	70,017	-5,173	Awaiting first quarter compensation payment invocie (around £7.5k)
	Historic Pensions Contributions	0	82,000		82,000	13,667	-13,667	No secondary pension payment invoices included within first two months.
	Corporate Subscriptions	20,000	39,200		39,200	6,533	13,467	NPE Subscription paid in first two months, budget profiled monthly.
	Members	15,353	96,200		96,200	16,033	-680	
Corporate & Democratic Core Total		**100,197**	**637,500**	**0**	**637,500**	**106,250**	**-6,053**	
Core Funding & Partnership Fund	National Park Grant	0	0	-2,968,000	-2,968,000	-494,667	494,667	Quarter 1 National Park Grant received on 16 June 2025
	Reserves Transactions	0	25,000		25,000	4,167	-4,167	Top-sliced budgets, transactions carried out at year end
	Partnership Fund Top-Sliced	0	10,000		10,000	1,667	-1,667	Top-sliced budgets, transactions carried out at year end
Core Funding & Partnership Fund Total		**0**	**35,000**	**-2,968,000**	**-2,933,000**	**-488,833**	**488,833**	
Total Budget		**983,979**	**5,893,000**	**-5,893,000**	**0**	**0**	**983,979**	

Appendix 4

DEFRA One-Off Grant Funding in 2024/25

CAPITAL ITEMS

Project	Section	Justification	Benefits	Risks	Other Resource Available	Revenue/Capital	Estimated Cost	2024/25 Progress
Pinkery Drive repair/reinstatement	Access, Engagement Estates	Impacting on customer access to Pinkery. Potential liability for vehicle repair claims. Potential to install cattle grid - link to future management at Driver Farm.	Improved access to Pinkery, reduction in potential claims from users	Conservation impact, procurement process	No (although RoW reserve potential?)	Capital	50,000	Allocation transferred to Reserve at Year-end. Works completed in April 2025
Driver Farm contribution to capital works	Access, Engagement Estates	Corporate cross-cutting project.	Corporate Priority	Conservation impact, procurement process	No (hand-in-hand with land sale)	Capital	100,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Planning Agile System Replacement (£53k in Planning Development Reserve at year-end 23/24)	Climate Nature Communities	Support costs for Agile system replacement which is due early 2025.	Support credible Planning System replacement		Yes (Development of Planning Service Reserve)	Capital	25,000	New system procured. Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Pinkery Energy Efficiency and **Accessibility People Flow Arrangements** (Courtyard, corridor, reception arrangements) Also potential for further solar-thermal and additional PV.	Access, Engagement Estates	The full list of required decarbonisation works fell partially outside the Salix loan funding. It was also felt that a reorganisation of the inner courtyard space would greatly benefit accessibility and the visual aspects of the site.	Accessibility, use of other Access, diversity and inclusion. Carbon savings along with enhanced educational offering.	Need to properly scope out required works	Yes (Some Estates reserve pots, Environmental Resilience Reserve)	Capital	50,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Lynmouth Centre Toilet Refurbishment	Enterprise Operations	Toilets are now becoming dated and requiring frequent repair	Improved visitor experience, reduced spend on maintenance	Timing of works is critical as centre is open year round	No (Not really within centre Spend to Save Reserve - fund within other resources)	Capital	20,000	Works planned to be undertaken in Autumn 2025. Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Exmoor House Roof - condition survey	Enterprise Operations	Need to have an understanding of future repairs required and timescale to be able to phase major capital works	Better understanding of repair requirements, being able to phase works and allocate spend across the medium term	Bats may impact on this timing	Minor estates reserves	Capital	5,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
						Total	**250,000**	

REVENUE ITEMS

Air Quality Study	Climate Nature Communities	Natural England will not fund this, essential for support planning policy	Will give clear data on a significant planning and conservation issue.	Timing of works	No (Possible match funding from other bodies)	Revenue	50,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Additional **Communications Support** 1day per week. Could include fundraising /crowdfunding campaign element.	Enterprise Operations	1 day per week additional of Senior Comms Officer to support Comms/ fundraising and crowd-funding element of team/CareMoor legacies and wills	Possibility of supporting Income Generation	Currently reliant on one member of staff	Yes (Modernisation reserve and core budget)	Revenue	15,000	50% spent in 2024/25, remainder transferred to reserve to meet 2025/26 costs.
Additional **Project Management Resource**. Remanufacturing Project pages on SharePoint, bid-writing, linking to Project Pipeline and DT members to develop projects.	Enterprise Operations	Co-ordinating role will provide support and latency across teams and supports Corporate Plan cross-cutting strategic aims	Co-ordinating role will provide support and latency across teams and supports Corporate Plan cross-cutting strategic aims	Dependant on cross-team working.	Yes (possible use of Modernisation Reserve)	Revenue	15,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Contribution to **extra Ecology Resource** (AF/CR). Grade F FT for 2 years to cover Landscape Development Work. SSSI monitoring. Paper inbound)	Climate Nature Communities	Support ecology. Some match funding from other sources (e.g.BNG)	Some budget elsewhere	What happens at end of 2 year period (redundancy costs to be built in). Need ecologist for estate (e.g. bat surveys etc)	Yes (some match funding towards this)	Revenue	48,000	50% spent in 2024/25, remainder transferred to reserve to meet 2025/26 costs.
Local Plan Support (£135k in reserve at year end 23/24 but that includes BNG).	Climate Nature Communities	Extra resource in team to support this required.	Support Local Plan process. Needs to review occupancy criteria, windows (upvc etc)	Needs to be formally costed with pay scales, grades and length of project.	Yes (Local Plan Reserve)	Revenue	100,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26 & 2026/27
Historic Environment - SLA with Cornwall Council to cover until end of June. Hoping to get capacity funding from Historic England for heritage at risk and to cover archaeology advice into planning Historic England advice stalled on this. No progress or provision for archaeology advice after June.	Access, Engagement Estates	25% match funding - a day per week from HER post. If Historic England doesn't go forward then we will be very short on arch support. Possibility of using Modernisation Reserve towards this.	At risk monitoring and repair programme delivery	Will need to find funding for a larger package if HE Capacity Funding is not forthcoming.	Yes (some match funding available)	Revenue	2,000	Spent in year
Complete Design Guide - potentially to include highway / public realm guidance	Climate Nature Communities	Provides a tool-kit of design principles	Helps to maintain the distinctive natural beauty of the National Park area. Provides a framework to ensure that any new development within the park aligns with its unique environmental, historical, and aesthetic values.	May require additional resource. Timing of agreement of the design guide may impact on decisions.	Part (Local Plan reserve exists)	Revenue	15,000	Transferred to Reserve to support spend in 2025/26
Tree Nursery	Access, Engagement Estates	Expecting Pioneers contribution however that project will not have started prior to required spend on Nursery	Ability to complete Tree Nursery on-time and re-assign projected Pioneers contribution to other activities	Delay may impact on the nursery to be set-up within project timescales.	Yes (Timing of resource availability may be the issue)	Revenue	5,000	Spent in year
DEFRA One-Off Grants 2024/25						**Total**	**250,000**	

Appendix 5

ITEM 9

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT

Report of the Head of Enterprise & Operations

Purpose of Report: To report to members on Treasury Management Performance in 2024/25. **Recommendation:** The Authority is recommended to **NOTE** the Treasury Management Outturn for 2024/25.

Authority Priority: Achieve by providing core services: getting best value from our resources; and improving our performance.

Corporate Strategy Reference: The actions contained within this report underpin all six corporate priority areas.

Legal and Equality Implications: Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to *"do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to-*

> *(a) The accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]*
> *(b) The carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment.*
> The Local Government Act 2003 (LGA 2003)

The CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes: 2021 Edition (CIPFA TM Code).

The CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities: 2021 Edition (CIPFA Prudential Code).

Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments was revised as from 1st April 2018.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendations of this report have been assessed as having no adverse impact on any group or individual.

Financial and Risk Implications: Managing and overseeing treasury activities is an important way to reduce financial risk.

Climate Change Response: This report does not have an adverse impact on our ability to respond to climate change.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Authority's Treasury Management activities are defined as follows: -

"The management of the Authority's investments and cash flows, its banking and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

It is acknowledged that effective treasury management provides support to the business and service objectives of the Authority.

1.2 The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires public sector authorities to determine an annual Treasury Management Strategy and as a minimum, formally report on their treasury activities and arrangements mid-year and after the year-end. These reports enable those tasked with implementing policies and undertaking transactions to demonstrate they have properly fulfilled their responsibilities and enable those with ultimate responsibility/governance of the treasury management function to scrutinise and assess its effectiveness and compliance with policies and objectives.

1.3 During 2024/25, Somerset Council (SC) has continued to manage Treasury Management activities under an agreed Service Level Agreement. Investments were made on the basis of aggregating funds in order to maximise the benefits for both parties. Accounting arrangements were in place to divide the interest gained between the Authorities.

1.4 As a result of the second Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II), from 3rd January 2018 local authorities were automatically treated as retail clients but could "opt up" to professional client status, providing certain criteria was met. SC continues to meet the conditions to opt up to professional status and has done so in order to maintain its erstwhile MiFID II status prior to January 2018. As a result, SC will continue to have access to products including money market funds, pooled funds, treasury bills, bonds, shares and to financial advice.

1.5 The Authority delegates responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of its treasury management policies and practices, and the execution of administration of treasury management decisions, to me as Head of Enterprise & Operations.

2. The Economic Background to 2024/25

2.1 All Treasury Management decisions are made in a dynamic environment in which market sentiment, and rates for borrowing and investment are subject to constant change from many varied factors. Any volatility in markets makes risk management, forecasting and decision making more difficult. Here follows a brief review of the key issues for 2024/25.

2.2 Both the UK and US elected new governments during the period, whose policy decisions impacted the economic outlook. The new Chancellor delivered her first Budget in October 2024 and updated her plans in the Spring Statement in March 2025. Based on the plans announced, the Office for Budget Responsibility downgraded its predictions for UK growth in 2025 to 1% from 2%. However, it upgraded its predictions for the four subsequent years. Inflation predictions for 2025 were pushed up, to 3.2% from 2.6%, before seen as falling back to target in 2027. The market reaction to the Spring Statement was more muted compared to the Budget, with very recent market turbulence being driven more by US trade policy decisions and President Trump.

2.3 UK annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation continued to stay above the 2% Bank of England (BoE) target in the later part of the period. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported headline consumer prices at 2.8% in February 2025, down from 3.0% in the previous month and below expectations. Core CPI also remained elevated, falling slightly in February to 3.5% from 3.7% in January, just below expectations for 3.6% but higher than the last three months of the calendar year.

2.4 UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 0.1% between October and December 2024, unrevised from the initial estimate. This was an improvement on the zero growth in the previous quarter, but down from the 0.4% growth between April and June 2024. Of the monthly GDP figures, the economy was estimated to have contracted by 0.1% in January, worse than expectations for a 0.1% gain.

2.5 The labour market continued to cool, but the ONS data still require treating with caution. Recent data showed the unemployment rate rose to 4.4% (3mth/year) in the three months to January 2025 while the economic inactivity rate fell again to 21.5%. The ONS reported pay growth over the same three-month period at 5.9% for regular earnings (excluding bonuses) and 5.8% for total earnings.

2.6 The BoE's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) held Bank Rate at 4.5% at its March 2025 meeting, having reduced it in February. This follows earlier 0.25% cuts in November and August 2024 from the 5.25% peak. At the March MPC meeting, members voted 8-1 to maintain Bank Rate at 4.5%, with the lone dissenter preferring another 25 basis points cut. The meeting minutes implied a slightly more hawkish tilt compared to February when two MPC members wanted a 50bps cut. In the minutes, the Bank also upgraded its Q1 2025 GDP forecast to around 0.25% from the previous estimate of 0.1%.

2.7 The 10-year UK benchmark gilt yield started the period at 3.94% and ended at 4.69%, having reached a low of 3.76% in September and a high of 4.90% in January in between. While the 20-year gilt started at 4.40% and ended at 5.22%, hitting a low of 4.27% in September and a high of 5.40% in January. Gilt yields have a direct correlation to Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates. Over the period, the 5-year PWLB Maturity Rate started at 4.92% and ended at 5.17% but hit a high of 5.54% in January and a low of 4.51% in mid-September. While the 20-year PWLB started at 5.44% and ended at 6.11% but hit a high of 6.34% in January and a low of 5.21% in mid-September.

2.8 Sterling Overnight Interbank Average (SONIA) money market rates moved broadly in step with borrowing rates. The 1-month, 3-month, 6-month, and 12-month SONIA rates averaged 4.87%, 4.87%, 4.85%, and 4.80% respectively over the period, and ended the period at 4.44%, 4.38%, 4.42%, and 4.44% respectively. Base rate averaged 4.95% for the year.

2.9 A summary of PWLB and key benchmark lending rates is included at Appendix A.

3. Treasury Management Outturn for 2024/25

3.1 Debt Management

The Authority is currently debt free. Any potential borrowing is driven by the capital plan. There were no plans that necessitated borrowing during 2024/25.

3.2 Investment Activity

3.2.1 The Guidance on Local Government Investments in England gives priority to security and liquidity and the Authority's aim is to achieve a yield commensurate with these principles.

3.2.2 As mentioned in 1.3, SC has managed Treasury Management activities under an agreed Service Level Agreement. Investments were made based on aggregating funds to maximise the benefits for both parties. The current arrangement strategy of lending all surplus funds to SC represents an investment that is virtually free from risk of counterparty default, as SC is the only counterparty. Also, with MiFID II, SC will continue to have access to products that would be beyond ENP.

3.2.3 Security of capital remained SC's main investment objective. Current SC approved counterparties are listed below. Those used during the year are denoted with a hash.

Bank		**Sterling LVNAV Money Market Funds**	
Barclays Bank Plc		Invesco Aim	#
HSBC Bank Plc		Federated Prime	#
Lloyds Bank Plc	#	Insight	#
National Westminster Bank	#	Aberdeen Standard	#
Santander UK	#	Deutsche	#
Australia & New Zealand Bank	#	LGIM	#
Standard Chartered Bank		SSGA	#
Handelsbanken Plc		Aviva	#
Nordea Bank AB			
Development Bank of Singapore	#		
Toronto Dominion		**Strategic Pooled Funds**	
Landesbank Hessen-Thuringen Girozentrale (Helaba)	#	CCLA Property Fund	#
Bank of Montreal		RLAM Bond Fund	#
DZ Bank		M&G Bond Fund	#
National Bank of Canada		Aegon Diversified Fund	#
		CCLA Diversified Fund	#
Other		Fidelity Equity Fund **- Sold**	#
DMO (Government Debt Management Office)	#	Columbia Threadneedle Bond Fund	#
Other Local Authorities	**# (36 deals)**	Ninety-One Diversified Fund	#
		Paydon & Rygel Bond Fund - **Sold**	#
		RLAM Short-Term Fund **- Sold**	#
		Schroder Equity Fund	#
		UBS Equity Fund	#

3.2.4 SC has continuously monitored counterparties, and all ratings of proposed counterparties have been subject to verification on the day, immediately prior to investment. Other indicators considered have been:

- Credit Default Swaps and Government Bond Spreads.

- GDP and Net Debt as a Percentage of GDP for sovereign countries.
- Likelihood and strength of Parental Support.
- Banking resolution mechanisms for the restructure of failing financial institutions i.e., bail-in.
- Share Price.
- Market information on corporate developments and market sentiment towards counterparties and sovereigns.

3.2.5 In response to an improving outlook for credit markets, in October 2024 Arlingclose, SC's treasury advisors moved away from its previous stance of a 100-day maximum duration and increased its advised recommended maximum unsecured duration limit on most banks on its counterparty list to 6-months.

3.2.6 There were a few movements to ratings that affected the list of approved SC counterparties, most were positive. Fitch Ratings upgraded both Lloyds Bank Plc and Australia and New Zealand Banking Group, from A+ to AA-, and changed the outlook to positive on National Westminster Bank. Moody's revised the Standard Chartered Bank outlook to positive, whilst both Moody's and S&P upgraded National Bank of Canada but downgraded Toronto Dominion Bank.

3.2.7 Credit default swap prices generally trended lower over the period but did start to rise modestly in March, but not to any levels considered concerning. Once again, price volatility over the period remained generally more muted compared to previous periods.

3.2.8 Heightened market volatility is expected to remain a feature, at least in the near term and the Council will continue to monitor and assess credit default swap levels for signs of ongoing credit stress, and, as ever, the institutions and durations on the Council's counterparty list recommended by treasury management advisors Arlingclose, remain under constant review.

3.2.9 In order to increase the diversification of SC's portfolio, some deposits were placed with UK Local Authorities. Thirty-Six deposits were made with Local Authorities during the year (compared to nineteen in 2023/24), with rates offered by Local Authorities generally higher than those offered by banks.

3.2.10 It should be emphasised that the current Authority strategy of lending all surplus funds to SC represents an investment that is virtually free from risk of counterparty default, as SC is the only counterparty.

3.2.11 The Treasury portfolio at the end of this and the previous financial year is set out below.

	Balance on 31/03/2024 £000	**Rate (gross) %**	**Balance on 31/03/2025 £000**	**Rate (gross) %**	**Average Balance £000**	**Average Rate (gross) %**
Cash Balance	2,544	6.26	3,689	4.95	3,704	5.04

There was an increase of £1.145m in overall cash balances held by the Authority at 31st March 2025 as compared with 31st March 2024 (£241k during 2023/24). This was mainly due to enhanced grant income from DEFRA alongside the sale of land mid-year.

3.2.12 The average daily balance of the Authority's cash was around £3.70m, an increase from the £3.12m in 2023/24. Gross interest earned in the year was £186,645 compared to £156,331 for the year in 2023/24. The average rate earned was 5.04%, 0.09% (2023/24 5.0%, +0.03% to base) above the average base rate for the year.

4. Compliance

4.1 During the year, all ENPA treasury management policies, practices, and activities remained compliant with all relevant statutes and guidance, namely the MHCLG investment guidance issued under the Local Government Act 2003, the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management, and the CIPFA Prudential Code.

4.2 The MHCLG's current Guidance on Investments, revised 1st April 2018, reiterated security and liquidity as the primary objectives of a prudent investment policy. All lending was compliant with guidance issued by the MHCLG, and as SC was the only counterparty for all funds for the year, this was achieved at minimal risk.

4.3 For completeness, and to comply with guidance, Prudential limits set, and actual outcomes are to be reported. All treasury activity was conducted within the benchmarks set as Prudential limits for prudent and sustainable capital plans, financing, and investment. Indicators approved for the year are set out in the left-hand columns, with actual outturn on the right.

1 Borrowing Limits		Actual
Authorised	£100,000	**Nil**
Operational	£100,000	**Nil**

2 Maturity Structure

	Upper Limit %	Lower Limit %	Actual Value	Actual %
< 12m	100	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 12m < 24m	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 24m < 5yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 5yrs < 10yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
> 10yrs	0	0	0.00	**0.0**
			0.00	**0.0**

3 Investments > 365 days	0	**0**

Ben Barrett
Head of Enterprise & Operations
June 2025

Table 1: Bank Rate, Money Market Rates -SONIA (Sterling Overnight Interbank Rates - BID)

Date	Bank Rate	O/N SONIA	7-day SONIA	1-month SONIA	3-month SONIA	6-month SONIA	12-month SONIA
01/04/2024	5.25	5.19	5.17	5.27	5.26	5.15	5.11
30/04/2024	5.25	5.09	5.19	5.20	5.22	5.22	5.27
31/05/2024	5.25	5.13	5.21	5.21	5.27	5.31	5.35
30/06/2024	5.25	5.20	5.15	5.18	5.19	5.19	5.19
31/07/2024	5.25	5.20	5.03	5.03	5.08	5.05	4.95
31/08/2024	5.00	4.90	4.92	4.90	4.92	4.89	4.75
30/09/2024	5.00	4.90	4.88	4.92	4.88	4.77	4.56
31/10/2024	5.00	4.82	4.80	4.74	4.80	4.74	4.68
30/11/2024	4.75	4.65	4.64	4.72	4.72	4.71	4.62
31/12/2024	4.75	4.71	4.64	4.69	4.72	4.68	4.79
31/01/2025	4.75	4.89	4.56	4.47	4.52	4.50	4.53
29/02/2025	4.50	4.42	4.40	4.42	4.44	4.45	4.45
31/03/2025	4.50	4.38	4.40	4.44	4.38	4.42	4.44
Minimum	4.50	4.37	4.37	4.42	4.38	4.42	4.40
Maximum	5.25	5.25	5.22	5.27	5.28	5.31	5.37
Average	4.95	4.87	4.84	4.87	4.87	4.85	4.80
Spread	0.75	0.88	0.85	0.85	0.90	0.89	0.97

Table 2. PWLB Rates 2023/24 (Maturity rates unless stated)

Change Date	Notice No	4½-5 yrs	9½-10 yrs	19½-20 yrs	29½-30 yrs	39½-40 yrs	49½-50 yrs
02/04/2024	127/24	4.92	5.00	5.44	5.47	5.40	5.27
30/04/2024	168/24	5.27	5.31	5.70	5.73	5.64	5.51
31/05/2024	210/24	5.33	5.38	5.76	5.80	5.72	5.59
30/06/2024	250/24	5.09	5.16	5.57	5.60	5.51	5.38
31/07/2024	296/24	4.85	5.02	5.47	5.53	5.47	5.32
31/08/2024	338/24	4.80	4.96	5.39	5.46	5.40	5.25
30/09/2024	380/24	4.75	4.99	5.47	5.55	5.48	5.33
31/10/2024	426/24	5.20	5.40	5.78	5.82	5.74	5.59
30/11/2024	468/24	5.02	5.23	5.64	5.69	5.62	5.45
31/12/2024	506/24	5.30	5.60	6.04	6.09	6.02	5.86
31/01/2025	044/25	5.19	5.55	6.00	6.06	5.97	5.76
29/02/2025	084/25	5.12	5.50	5.95	6.02	5.94	5.72
31/03/2025	126/25	5.17	5.62	6.11	6.19	6.10	5.87
	Low	4.51	4.72	5.21	5.29	5.26	5.08
	High	5.54	5.91	6.34	6.39	6.30	6.08
	Average	5.06	5.27	5.70	5.76	5.68	5.52
	Spread	1.03	1.19	1.13	1.10	1.06	1.00

Table 3: PWLB Borrowing Rates – Fixed Rate, Equal Instalment of Principal (EIP) Loans

Change Date	Notice No	4½-5 yrs	9½-10 yrs	19½-20 yrs	29½-30 yrs	39½-40 yrs	49½-50 yrs
02/04/2024	127/24	5.20	4.89	5.02	5.30	5.44	5.48
30/04/2024	168/24	5.48	5.24	5.32	5.57	5.71	5.74
31/05/2024	210/24	5.53	5.30	5.39	5.63	5.77	5.80
30/06/2024	250/24	5.31	5.06	5.17	5.43	5.57	5.61
31/07/2024	296/24	5.04	4.83	5.03	5.32	5.48	5.53
31/08/2024	338/24	4.95	4.79	4.98	5.24	5.39	5.45
30/09/2024	380/24	4.87	4.76	5.01	5.30	5.47	5.54
31/10/2024	426/24	5.27	5.20	5.42	5.65	5.78	5.82
30/11/2024	468/24	5.11	5.02	5.24	5.50	5.65	5.69
31/12/2024	506/24	5.29	5.31	5.61	5.90	6.05	6.09
31/01/2025	044/25	5.10	5.20	5.57	5.86	6.01	6.06
29/02/2025	084/25	5.03	5.14	5.51	5.81	5.96	6.02
31/03/2025	126/25	5.03	5.19	5.64	5.96	6.12	6.18
	Low	4.67	4.50	4.74	5.04	5.21	5.28
	High	5.55	5.56	5.92	6.21	6.34	6.38
	Average	5.16	5.06	5.29	5.56	5.71	5.76
	Spread	0.88	1.06	1.18	1.17	1.13	1.10

ITEM 10

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

July 2025

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-30

Report of the Head of Climate, Nature and Communities

Purpose of Report: To present to Members the draft Exmoor National Park Management Plan 2025-30 to approve for adoption

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Authority is recommended to:

(i) APPROVE the Exmoor National Park Management Plan 2025-2030 (the Partnership Plan) for adoption.
(ii) DELEGATE to the Chief Executive to make final amendments to the final draft Plan including the supporting text, in consultation with the Chairman.
(iii) NOTE that a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment has been carried out.

Authority Priority: The Partnership Plan is the statutory National Park Management Plan for delivering National Park purposes and also provides the framework and priorities for the National Park Authority's corporate plan. A cross-cutting priority action for the 2025-26 corporate plan is to finalise and adopt the Plan and begin its implementation including through preparation of Delivery Plans with partners and establishing a monitoring and reporting process.

Legal and Equality Implications: Section 66(1) of the Environment Act 1995 requires the National Park Authority to *prepare and publish a plan, to be known as a National Park Management Plan, which formulates its policy for the management of the relevant Park and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to that Park*. Section 66(4) states that *A National Park authority shall review its National Park Management Plan within the period of five years of its operational date and, after the first review, at intervals of not more than five years*. The period for preparation of this Partnership Plan was extended by the Government for a year to enable the National Park Authority to take account of new Government targets for Protected Landscapes and guidance on Protected Landscapes Management Plans.

The equality impact of the recommendations of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s). Engagement through the outreach work within the plan is designed to have a positive impact on protected groups. A key aim for the Plan is to deliver a Welcoming National Park for All, building on the Authority's commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendations of this report is as follows: There are no implications for the Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk implications: The preparation of the management plan is funded from within the current medium term budget plan. No financial or risk implications have been identified.

Climate Response: The Plan includes objectives and targets to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

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1. Background

1.1. Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) is required to prepare, and keep under review, a five-year Management Plan for the National Park. This plan is also called the 'Partnership Plan', in recognition of the need to work collaboratively to develop and deliver it.

1.2. The National Park Management Plan 2025-2030 – the Partnership Plan for Exmoor sets out how the statutory purposes will be delivered:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area; and

- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of these qualities by the public.

1.3. The Partnership Plan is the primary document through which the purposes of the National Park can be achieved. While carrying out these purposes, National Park Authorities also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Parks.

1.4. Updated guidance on the preparation of Protected Landscape Management Plans was published by Defra and Natural England on 12 June 2025[1]. Officers have reviewed this guidance to confirm that the Plan that is coming before Members for adoption complies with the guidance. Two amendments to the Plan have been made as a consequence. Firstly, the title of the Plan has been amended to be clear that this is the National Park Management Plan, although the reference to it being a 'Partnership Plan' is retained, as this is important to signify that it is not just a Plan for the National Park Authority, and to recognise that many partners have been closely involved in its preparation and will help to deliver the Plan. Secondly, additions have been made to explain how the Plan applies in and around the Protected Landscape - the 'setting', including an explanation in the glossary and in relation to the responsibilities of relevant authorities (such as public bodies).

2. Preparation of the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2025-30

2.1. The Plan has been prepared following an extensive process of evidence gathering, consultation, and engagement. This included:

[1] Management plans for Protected Landscapes in England - GOV.UK

- Preparation of the State of Park report, which provides a key element of the evidence base for the plan.
- Discussions with Partnership Plan groups, the Steering Group, ENPA members, and staff.
- A dedicated discussion with Parish Councils and stakeholders at the Exmoor Parish and Consultative Forum
- Online and in-person stakeholder workshops, a next-generation workshop, and a webinar on climate change.
- A public opinion survey which ran from April to September 2023, with nearly 1,000 responses.
- A workshop for ENPA members and the Plan Steering Group.
- Consultation on the draft Plan.

2.2. A report of the stakeholder engagement and consultation undertaken during the preparation of the Plan has been prepared and is available on the ENPA website Partnership-Plan-Engagement-and-consultation.pdf.

3. The final Plan for adoption

3.1. The final Plan is set out in Appendix 1. The Plan covers the period from 2025 to 2030, with a vision extending to 2050. It identifies the main challenges facing the National Park and aims to address the following key areas:

- A nature-rich landscape: Enhancing, extending, and connecting wildlife habitats to support greater abundance and diversity of species, contributing to national targets for nature recovery.
- A net zero National Park: Mitigating and adapting to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing carbon sequestration through peatland restoration and woodland expansion.
- Healthy natural resources: Ensuring Exmoor's soils, air, and water resources are healthy and resilient, supporting naturally functioning ecosystems.
- A cared-for landscape and heritage: conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, tranquillity, openness, wildness, and dark night skies of Exmoor, as well as its rich historic environment and cultural heritage.
- A welcoming place for all: Improving accessibility and engagement with Exmoor's special qualities for a broader range of people, enhancing health and well-being; providing well-maintained recreation and access infrastructure; and promoting regenerative tourism.
- A great place for people to live, work, and do business: Supporting sustainable communities and a low carbon economy, providing opportunities, skills, and employment.

- Place-based delivery: Detailed strategies for managing Exmoor's moorland and farmland; woodland and trees; wetlands rivers and streams; and coast, ensuring integrated and sustainable management.

4. Plan Targets

4.1. Each section of the Plan contains a number of targets. These are targets for the National Park, not the Authority, and the plan emphasises the importance of collaboration with various partners, including landowners, local communities, and businesses, to achieve its objectives.

4.2. Amongst the targets are ten national targets from the Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023[2] that the Government wishes Protected Landscapes to prioritise. These will be priorities for delivery. The targets are set out in the table below, with the three targets that are apportioned shown in italics (see para 4.3-4.4).

National Protected Landscape Targets	**Exmoor Partnership Plan Targets**
1. *Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline)*	A2 *Create or restore an additional 4,500ha of wildlife-rich habitat[3] outside of protected sites by 2030, and 6,500ha by 2042*
2. Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 3. For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028	A3 Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 and ensure 60% of SSSIs have 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028
4. Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042	A4 Continue favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042

[2] Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

[3] This target includes actions to establish wildlife-rich habitat on land or water where such habitat is currently absent, outside existing protected sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Environment Act Habitat Target – Definitions and Descriptions - TIN219

5. Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030	A5 By 2030, nature-friendly farming is practised on 50% of enclosed farmland (11,780ha or 17% of the National Park), where land is managed working with nature as part of a sustainable farm business
6. Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels	B1 Exmoor National Park is net zero by 2038, leading the response to climate change and delivery of national net zero targets
7. *Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050*	*B2 Restore 800 ha of deep peat by 2030, and 80% of Exmoor's deep peat by 2050*
8. *Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline)*	*B3 Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of the total area of the National Park (2,080 ha) by 2030, and 10% (6,920 ha) by 2050, to benefit nature and people, ensuring the right trees in the right place*
9. Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme	E1 Improve and promote accessibility to the National Park and engagement with Exmoor's special qualities for all
10. Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes	D4 Reduce the number of nationally and locally designated heritage assets at risk

4.3. Three of the national PL targets have been apportioned (shared) to more accurately reflect the local circumstances of individual Protected Landscapes. Targets A2 on priority habitats, B2 on peatland restoration, and B3 on tree and woodland cover set out the contribution that Exmoor National Park proposes to make to these national targets.

4.4. The Protected Landscapes target on restoring or creating more than 250,000 ha of priority habitats is half the national target of 500,000 ha in the Environment Improvement Plan 2023, as Protected Landscapes cover nearly a quarter of England and contain around half of England's priority habitats and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 60% of deep peat, and nearly 88% of heather and acid grassland habitats. Exmoor has 29 priority habitats[4] which cover around 38% of the National Park. The

[4] The full list of Exmoor's priority habitats can be found in Appendix 1 of the Exmoor Wildlife Research and Monitoring Framework

Exmoor contribution to this target – A2 - is based on the Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision, and includes a range of Exmoor's priority habitats such as species-rich grassland, woodland and wood pasture, hedgerows, orchards and peatland/mires. Target B2 on peatland restoration is based on the work of the South West Peatland Partnership and other schemes such as Landscape Recovery. Target B3 on woodland and tree cover is based on the Nature Recovery Vision to 2030, and a 'stretch' target to 2050 based on the net zero target and to continue benefits for nature. There is overlap between the targets, ie targets B2 peatland and B3 trees and woodland will contribute to target A2 priority habitats, where these are delivered outside existing designated sites.

4.5. In December 2022, the UK Government also committed to protect at least 30% of land and sea in the UK for nature by 2030 (30by30), ensuring that it is effectively conserved and managed. This was part of the Global Biodiversity Framework agreed by global Leaders at the UN Biodiversity Summit. This target was agreed as part of an ambitious framework aiming to halt and reverse global biodiversity loss.

4.6. Government set out expectations that Protected Landscapes are at the heart of this 30by30 commitment, with the focus on the most important areas for biodiversity, ensuring that these most important places, at the core of nature's recovery, have the long-term protection and favourable management needed for biodiversity to thrive. *Our Protected Landscapes will provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation. We recognise that we can, and must, go further within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30. This will be driven by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as well as further action to ensure that these special places are wilder and greener. Through their management plans, existing structures and strong partnerships, Protected Landscapes organisations can also play a convening role to champion, identify and support areas that meet, or have potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria*[5]*.*

4.7. Initially it is expected that 30by30 will be delivered through Natura 2000 sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition, National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and areas of managed broadleaved and mixed woodland. However, this is only considered to account for around 7.1% of land in England, highlighting the challenge of meeting the 30by30 commitment. New contributions to the 30by30 target will be made on a voluntary basis, via existing mechanisms such as Environmental Land Management Schemes or Biodiversity Net Gain, and there is no obligation on landowners or land managers to participate. Government also recognises the importance of ensuring delivery of wider priorities including food production, and that some areas are unlikely to be suitable for 30by30, including highly productive land such as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land.

4.8. The target for Exmoor is 50% of land managed for nature by 2030 (Target B2). This is based on the current area already considered to be effectively managed for nature

[5] 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps - GOV.UK

plus the additional priority habitat that is proposed to be created under the national target B3.

4.9. Together, these targets will help Exmoor deliver against the Government's aspirations for Protected Landscapes. In November 2024, the Government confirmed that it is committed to *empowering Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible to all*[6].

5. Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment

5.1. The Partnership Plan must have a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to test the Vision, aims, objectives and targets against a set of environmental, social and economic objectives. It also undergoes a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) to consider any impacts on European Protected Sites, namely the Exmoor Heaths, and Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

5.2. A series of reports detailing the SA/SEA and HRA have been completed and informed the drafting of the Plan. These are available on the website Partnership Plan 2025-2030 | Exmoor. The reports also accompanied the draft Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan on its public consultation during early 2025[7].

5.3. Overall, the SA has found that implementation of the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan will have likely positive effects or neutral (insignificant or not directly applicable) effects, and no negative effects were identified. The HRA screening stage of the process determined that there would be no adverse likely significant effects (LSEs) on the identified European sties (SACs) – either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects, and no further assessment was required.

5.4. The Partnership Plan also went through an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). Public bodies have a duty to assess the impact of their policies on different population groups to ensure that discrimination does not take place and where possible, to promote equality of opportunity. The EqIA was integrated into the SA, and no negative effects were found for the protected characteristic groups.

5.5. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is not a statutory requirement for public bodies but it is good practice in plan-making; health considerations are a requirement of the SEA process and the health implications of the draft Plan were assessed through the SA process. This concluded that there would be positive effects for health and wellbeing, and no negative impacts.

6. Consultation

6.1. Consultation on the draft Partnership Plan took place from January to March 2025. This was widely publicised via social media, press releases, ENPA's newsletter Parklife, on ENPA's website, and with partners.

[6] Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament

[7] https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enpa/key-documents/partnership-plan-2025-consultation

6.2. There was a total of 50 responses from individuals and organisations to the consultation. Although this was a low number of responses, they included some detailed comments, and the Plan was amended in response. In addition, it was considered that many partners and stakeholders had already had the opportunity to input to the drafting of the Plan, and so did not feel the need to respond to the consultation. For example, the Steering Group met to specifically consider the draft Plan prior to consultation, providing an early opportunity for them to provide feedback and input. A series of meetings were also held with a number of key partners during the consultation period, and also with some of the Partnership Plan Groups to discuss the draft Plan. In addition to receiving feedback on the draft Plan, these meetings also provided an early opportunity to consider potential actions and deliverables from partners that would contribute to achieving the aims and objectives.

6.3. There was overall support for the Plan from the consultation. 86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the vision of the draft Partnership Plan and the majority of respondents also either agreed or strongly agreed with the Aims and Objectives. There was also overall agreement with all the targets and the majority scored more than 4 out of 5 on a weighted score (from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

6.4. A number of amendments have been made to the Plan in response to the consultation. This included reducing the overall number of targets and making them SMARTer where possible. A number of comments highlighted the overlap between targets, and this will be made more explicit in the final online version where it will be possible to link between targets and sections of the Plan. Further supporting text and explanation has been added for a number of targets, particularly the national PLTOF targets. Additional information has also been included about the Partnership Plan groups and partnership working, along with links to further information on the ENPA website. Further information has also been added around how the Plan will be monitored and delivered. The Plan recognises the key role of farmers and land managers in delivering many of the objectives and targets, and this has been further emphasised. A glossary of key terms has been added. The Plan will include a spatial representation of the objectives and targets in the final online version, utilising GIS mapping.

6.5. Details and analysis of the consultation responses is available via the Summary consultation report https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/6144/National-Park-Partnership-Plan-Public-Opinion-Survey-2023-final-results.pdf

6.6. Full details of the consultation comments and ENPA's response to these are also available via https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enpa/key-documents/partnership-plan-2025-2030/Table-of-consultation-comments_final.pdf

7. Plan launch and Partner endorsement

7.1. Following adoption of the Plan by Members, partner organisations will be asked to endorse the Plan and set out their commitments to supporting delivery of the Plan

objectives and targets, including through ongoing participation in the Partnership Plan Groups. For Relevant Authorities (such as statutory agencies and local authorities), this will help to demonstrate their compliance with the strengthened duty to further National Park purposes (under section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) and their support for delivery of the National Park Management Plan. The National Park Authority is also a Relevant Authority, and its commitments to delivering the Plan will be set out in the next Corporate Strategy and annual Corporate Plans.

7.2. An online version of the Plan will be produced including mapping to show the spatial elements of the Plan, alongside a designed hard copy summary. A launch event will be arranged for the autumn, as well as soft launches with sectoral groups and communities on aspects of the Plan relevant to them.

8. Monitoring and Delivery of the Plan

8.1. The plan emphasizes the importance of collaboration with various partners, including landowners, local communities, and businesses, to achieve its objectives. The Partnership Plan groups[8] will have responsibility for developing delivery plans. The Delivery Plans will identify actions, delivery mechanisms and key delivery partners. The aim is to complete the first set of Delivery Plans by the end of the year.

8.2. A monitoring framework of indicators and baseline data for monitoring progress against the targets has also been drafted and will be discussed with the Partnership Groups.

Clare Reid
Head of Climate, Nature and Communities
June 2025

Appendix 1 Exmoor National Park Authority Partnership Plan 2025-30

Accompanying documents on the website: Partnership Plan 2025-2030 | Exmoor

- Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment:
  - Non-Technical Summary
  - Full Report
  - Adoption Statement
- Habitats Regulations Assessment – screening assessment final report
- Public consultation:
  - Engagement and Consultation report
  - Report of Consultation on the draft Plan
  - Consultation comments and responses
  - Public opinion survey report
- State of the Park Report 2023

[8] Partnership Working | Exmoorhttps://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/7880/PPG-Partnership-group-Chairs-and-members-1.8.24.pdf

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Exmoor National Park

Management Plan 2025-2030

The 'Partnership Plan for Exmoor'

Final Draft

Leo Davey
www.leodavey.com

June 2025

Exmoor National Park Management Plan 2025-2030 - the 'Partnership Plan for Exmoor'

Final Draft

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Cover Image: Doone Valley from County Gate, by Leo Davey.
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Contents

Foreword

To be added in final Plan along with list of partners

National Park designation and special qualities

Exmoor National Park was designated in 1954, in recognition of its national and international significance. The National Park designation reflected its: '*spectacular coastline, fine heather, bracken and grass moorland, beautiful, wooded valleys, antiquities in great profusion… including stone circles, barrows, hut circles as well as earthworks… notable wildlife… and is first rate country for motoring, and for walking and riding*' 1947 Hobhouse Report.

Since its designation, Exmoor's **special qualities** have been defined as:

- Large areas of open moorland providing a sense of remoteness, wildness and tranquillity rare in southern Britain
- A distinct and diverse landscape of softly rounded hills and ridges, with heather and grass moors, spectacular coast, deeply incised wooded valleys, high sea cliffs, fast flowing streams, traditional upland farms and characteristic beech hedge banks
- A timeless landscape mostly free from intrusive development, with striking views inside and out of the National Park, and where the natural beauty of Exmoor and its dark skies can be appreciated
- A mosaic of habitats supporting a great diversity of wildlife including herds of wild Red deer, rich lichen communities, rare fritillary butterflies, bats, and other species uncommon in southern Britain
- A complex and rich historic landscape that reflects how people have lived in, exploited and enjoyed Exmoor over the past 8000 years, including burial mounds on ridges, discrete stone settings, ancient farmsteads and settlements, picturesque villages and historic estates
- A deeply rural community closely linked to the land with strong local traditions and ways of life
- A farmed landscape with locally distinctive breeds such as Red Devon cattle; Devon Closewool, and Exmoor Horn sheep, and herds of free-living Exmoor ponies
- An exceptional rights of way network, with paths that are often rugged and narrow in character, along with extensive areas of open country and permitted access, providing superb opportunities for walking, riding, cycling
- A landscape that provides inspiration and enjoyment to visitors and residents alike

Exmoor National Park statutory purposes

The purposes of National Parks are enshrined in law[1]. These are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public

Where there is conflict between these two purposes that cannot be reconciled, the first purpose takes precedence (known as 'the Sandford Principle[2]').

Exmoor National Park Authority was established under the Environment Act 1995[3] as a special purpose body charged with leading action to achieve these purposes, and in pursuing in the purposes set out above has a duty to foster the social and economic well-being of National Park communities.

Purpose of the National Park Management Plan

The National Park Authority is required to prepare and keep under review a Management Plan[4] for its area, setting out how the National Park purposes and duty (the statutory objectives) will be achieved. The Plan is for the National Park as a whole and involves many organisations and people, and so is also called a Partnership Plan to reflect this collective effort. It includes the work of the National Park Authority.

It describes the special qualities of the National Park and sets out:

- The opportunities and challenges facing Exmoor
- A long-term vision and objectives, reflecting the Government's vision and priorities for all National Parks, and demonstrates how Exmoor can help deliver these
- Bold targets to focus partnership action on over the five-year timeframe of the Plan and beyond

What is it?

This five-year Partnership Plan establishes the vision and objectives to maintain the special qualities of Exmoor, and to further the statutory National Park purposes. It is developed in collaboration with partner organisations, communities, visitors and businesses. While the National Park Authority facilitates the Plan, it brings together the work of many partners. It aims to mobilise the shared knowledge and resources of everyone who cares for Exmoor in a collective effort.

[1] National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Section 5
[2] Environment Act 1995, Section 62
[3] Environment Act 1995, Section 63
[4] Environment Act 1995, Section 66

Who is it for?

The sections that follow are for everyone who has an interest in and cares about the National Park.

It's a Plan for:

- The whole National Park
- National Park Authority members, staff and volunteers
- Partners. The Plan can only be achieved if we work together to deliver it. This involves a wide range of partners who all have an important role to play and, in some cases, a statutory obligation to the area, including relevant authorities (see below)
- Exmoor's land and property owners and managers, farmers and foresters, without whose support and co-operation the special qualities of the National Park would not be maintained and enhanced
- The people who live and work here: Exmoor's local communities and businesses
- The nation. The Plan sets out what is important about Exmoor and what is being done to conserve and enhance the National Park as a nationally significant landscape and to ensure that the health and wellbeing benefits from accessing and enjoying the National Park are available to all

Government priorities for National Parks and Management Plans

Seventy years after the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (collectively known as Protected Landscapes), the Government commissioned an independent review led by Julian Glover, to consider whether the protections for Protected Landscapes are still fit for purpose, what might be done better, what changes will help and whether the definitions and systems in place were still valid. The report from this Landscapes Review identified 27 recommendations around a renewed mission to enhance nature; connecting everyone with Protected Landscapes; supporting people who live and work there; adding new designations; and enabling new ways of working through changes in legislation, governance, and funding models. The overall conclusion was that "*We want our national landscapes to work together with big ambitions so they are happier, healthier, greener, more beautiful and open to everyone.*[5]*"*

The Government's response[6] to the Landscapes Review set out a new vision for Protected Landscapes and the role that they should play today as: *'A coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy. Protected landscapes will support thriving local communities and economies, improve our public health and wellbeing, drive forward nature recovery, and build our resilience to climate change.'*[7]

This was accompanied by some significant changes including a strengthened legal duty for relevant authorities to help to further National Park purposes (see below), a greater emphasis on National Park Management Plans, and the creation of a new Protected Landscapes Partnership to strengthen collaborative working at a national level.

The Government's response also highlighted the role of Protected Landscapes in helping to deliver national and international targets on tackling climate change, recovering nature, and

[5] Landscapes Review DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019
[6] Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): government response - GOV.UK
[7] Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): government response - GOV.UK

enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment. In 2024, the Government produced the **Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework** (PLTOF),[8] identifying the Environment Improvement Plan[9] goals that Protected Landscape bodies and other relevant authorities and partners must prioritise. This Partnership Plan sets out how Exmoor National Park will contribute to the delivery of these national targets. The national targets are highlighted in bold under the relevant aims and objectives of the Plan.

Government has also set out the expectation that Protected Landscapes are at the heart of delivering the UK government's commitment under the Global Biodiversity Framework agreed by Leaders at the UN Biodiversity Summit in 2022 to protect at least 30% of land and sea by 2030 (**30 by 30**). "*Our Protected Landscapes will provide the backbone to 30by30 in England, contributing towards the target where they are effectively managed and delivering in-situ conservation. We recognise that* ***we can, and must, go further within Protected Landscapes than other areas to meet our national environmental targets, including 30by30****. This will be driven by the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as well as further action to ensure that these special places are wilder and greener. Through their management plans, existing structures and strong partnerships, Protected Landscapes organisations can also play a convening role to champion, identify and support areas that meet, or have potential to meet, the 30by30 criteria"*[10].

Protected Landscape bodies and their partnerships are being encouraged to maximise their potential contributions to 30by30, including the protection and effective management of existing, restored and new wildlife rich habitat. "*The UK is calling for high ambition and momentum to reach our international targets to protect and restore the natural world*[11]*."*

The Labour government elected in 2024 has also set out its ambitions for National Parks to be **greener, wilder and more accessible to all**: "*Labour introduced National Parks 75 years ago, and introduced the Rights of Way Act that secured public access and preserved natural beauty. This Labour Government is committed to empowering Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible to all. We are actively considering options to ensure Protected Landscapes bodies like National Park Authorities have the tools and powers they need to deliver for people and nature, including through regulation and guidance*[12]*."*

[8] Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, published January 2024.
[9] Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 is the first five-year refresh of the government's 25-Year Environment Plan and acts as one of the core drivers for all National Park Management Plans
[10] 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps - GOV.UK
[11] Environment Secretary Steve Reed "Britain back on global stage to support nature's recovery" - GOV.UK
[12] members.parliament.uk/member/5287/writtenquestion/1741720

Responsibilities of relevant authorities regarding National Parks

Relevant authorities[13] have a legal duty[14] to help **further** National Park purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within the National Park, including helping to develop and deliver National Park Management Plans[15]. This duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area (the 'setting' of the National Park) but impacting on its statutory purposes. If it appears that there is a conflict between the two statutory purposes, they must attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. Relevant authorities must show they have fulfilled this duty.

Government guidance on this strengthened duty[16] states that it is an active duty, not a passive one, and is outcomes focused, not just a process. Any relevant authority must take all reasonable steps to explore how the statutory purposes of the Protected Landscape can be furthered, demonstrating how they have done this. They must also avoid harm to the statutory purposes of designation, going beyond mitigation and like for like measures and replacement. Any proposed measures should align with and help to deliver the aims and objectives of the statutory National Park Management Plan. If it is not practicable or feasible to take measures to further the National Park purposes, the relevant authority should provide evidence to show why not. The National Park Authority should be consulted. As part of the duty to further National Park purposes, relevant authorities should consider the effects of their decisions on the setting[17] of the National Park, for example in relation to development, land use change, natural resource use, and other activities[18].

Public authorities[19] also have a duty under section 102 of the Environment Act 2021[20] to consider and take action to conserve and enhance **biodiversity**. Government guidance on complying with the duty[21] states that public bodies should consider Protected Landscapes as part of the duty, particularly if they have functions within or close to the designation, including helping to develop and deliver National Park Management Plans, and making improvements to nature in National Parks.

[13] Relevant authorities include all levels of government and includes government agencies and ministers as well as the National Park Authority. Statutory undertakers (companies who have been given statutory powers to carry out certain public works or services) such as water companies, utilities, telecommunications, are also covered by the duty.
[14] National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 section 11A, as amended by Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
[15] Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 section 90A as amended by Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
[16] Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK; Management plans for Protected Landscapes in England - GOV.UK
[17] See Glossary for further information on the setting of the National Park
[18] Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK
[19] Public authorities include government departments, public bodies, local authorities, local planning authorities, and statutory undertakers (a business that has public authority duties for their land and delivers something of public importance)
[20] Environment Act 2021
[21] Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK

How has the Plan been prepared?

- It's based on evidence from the State of the Park Report[22]
- It's informed by a public opinion survey[23]
- It's been developed with the National Park Authority Board, a Steering Group of Partners, and the Partnership Plan groups[24]
- It's been discussed at online and in-person workshops
- It has included a particular focus on engaging with hard-to-reach groups, including younger people, in line with our commitment to engage with and inspire a wider diversity of communities, recognising that Exmoor National Park is for everyone
- The effect of the Plan on social, environmental and economic objectives have been tested through a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and the effects on Exmoor's Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) have been considered through a Habitats Regulation Assessment[25]
- It's gone through public consultation and been amended in the light of comments received.

How is the Plan used?

- To bring together a wide range of people and organisations around a set of common goals to deliver National Park purposes
- To co-ordinate action amongst partners and develop projects where we can work together on issues of shared interest
- As the basis for the National Park Authority Corporate Plan, guiding our work priorities and resource allocation
- To develop National Park Authority policies and decision making
- To draw in funding to deliver the outcomes identified
- To monitor progress against the Vision, Objectives and Targets

How does it fit with other plans and strategies?

- It's the single most important document for the National Park
- It sits within the context of international and national legislation, policy and strategy and does not override any other specific legislative requirements or consent processes
- It is accompanied by the State of the Park Report which examines the issues and trends affecting the National Park's special qualities, and provides the evidence base for the Partnership Plan
- It links to other plans and strategies relevant to Exmoor such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the climate mitigation and adaptation plans developed in Devon and Somerset, the Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision and so on
- It provides the framework for the Local Plan which sets out the policies for determining planning applications. The Partnership Plan is a material consideration in planning decisions and the Local Plan is a means of delivering aspects of the Partnership Plan – for example through affordable housing provision and good design principles
- It is implemented through separate Delivery Plans

[22] Exmoor National Park State of Park Report
[23] National-Park-Partnership-Plan-Public-Opinion-Survey-2023-final-results.pdf
[24] Partnership Working | Exmoor
[25] https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/enpa/key-documents/partnership-plan-2025-consultation

Delivering the Plan

A wide range of partners have been involved in helping to develop this Plan and a collective effort will be required to deliver the ambitious vision and targets. This includes working with farmers, foresters and land managers, local businesses and communities, voluntary sector organisations, statutory bodies, local authorities, utilities providers, visitors, tourism partnerships, education providers and more. There are a number of Partnership Plan groups that the National Park Authority co-ordinates, or works with, to facilitate delivery of the Plan, details of these groups are given on our website[26]:

- Landscape Advisory Group
- Historic Environment Advisory Group
- Nature Conservation Advisory Panel
- Moorland and Farming Board
- Woodland and Forestry Advisory Group
- Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group
- Exmoor Local Access Forum
- Exmoor Tourism Network
- Rural Enterprise Exmoor Steering Group
- Exmoor Rural Housing Network
- Learning and Engagement Network

As well as this collective effort from partners, delivering the shared vision and targets set out in this Plan will require:

- Appropriate funding and resources
- The alignment of many different plans, policies and projects
- Relevant skills and training
- Communications and engagement
- Supportive regulation, national legislation and policy.

Delivery Plans have been prepared setting out the actions needed to achieve the targets, the funding and delivery mechanisms, and the partners who will be involved in helping to deliver them. These will be kept updated throughout the Plan period.

Monitoring and reporting

Progress against delivering the targets in the Plan will be regularly monitored to assess whether these are on track, enabling delivery plans and actions to be reviewed if needed and solutions found. This will be reported in annual progress reports.

The outcomes from delivering the Plan will be reported through the State of Park report.

[26] Partnership Working | Exmoor

Some of Exmoor's highlights

- Wild, windswept open moorland, one of only three upland areas in southern Britain
- Europe's very first International Dark Sky Reserve
- The tallest tree in England
- The highest cliffs in England
- 58 km of stunning coastline, part of the Bristol Channel with the second highest and lowest tides in the world
- Almost 250 species of birds, 17 of the 18 species of UK bats, and over 1,000 different flowering plants and grasses
- One of the best places to see wild Red deer in England
- Free-living native Exmoor ponies, perfectly adapted to upland conditions and vital for conservation grazing
- Over 10,000 records on Exmoor's Historic Environment Record, representing human activity stretching back 8,000 years
- One of the first National Parks in England to gain the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism
- The longest stretch of coastal temperate rainforest in England and Wales with rare whitebeam trees found nowhere else in the world.
- Over 1,600 veteran trees throughout the National Park, and the highest beech plantation in England
- Over 1,300 km of paths and bridleways and around 17,600 hectares of open access land to enjoy walking, cycling and riding on
- Home to 36 miles of the South-West Coast Path National Trail (part of the King Charles III England Coast Path), a path used by nine million people every year
- One of the most tranquil places in England

Changing landscapes: The challenges and opportunities facing Exmoor

There are many forces for change affecting Exmoor's landscapes, some of them global, others very localised in effect. While we do not have control over all these impacts we need to understand and be aware of them, so that we can respond and adapt to ensure Exmoor is resilient and thriving now and in the future. Details of the trends and changes affecting Exmoor's special qualities are set out in the State of the Park Report[27] that accompanies this Partnership Plan and the Landscape Character Assessment[28].

A summary is given below

Climate change: The impacts of climate change are evident now and will impact all aspects of the National Park so there needs to be greater focus on adapting to a changing climate and increasing resilience. Exmoor also needs to play its part in the global drive to reduce carbon emissions.

Nature recovery: Urgent action is required to restore nature across Exmoor at scale. Statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies are being prepared and will feed into the Plan along with targets from Exmoor's Nature Recovery Vision and those cascaded down from the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan.

Farming and land management: The transition to the environmental land management scheme is ongoing but still holds much uncertainty over the details of how this will be implemented and the funding that will be available. The financial viability of upland farming remains of concern.

Changing landscapes: The National Park designation means that Exmoor has not seen the same level of development as in other areas, but it is not immune to other changes arising from climate change and changing land management. Landscape monitoring has shown incremental but evident change in the nature of the land cover and vegetation and the occurrence of man-made features such as telecommunications masts. There will also be changes in landscape character as a result of nature recovery ambitions and the response to climate change.

Local communities: There are ongoing concerns over the viability of local communities with pressures on affordable housing and local services and high levels of second homes / holiday lets. The need for significant numbers of additional homes nationally may bring pressure for development close to or in the setting of the National Park. An ageing population brings challenges in terms of service delivery, but also opportunities from the positive contribution older people can make to local communities.

Local economy: Exmoor's economy is primarily made up of micro-businesses. Tourism is the largest sector in terms of employment and number of businesses, Farming and land management are also important to the local economy and part of Exmoor's cultural heritage. New technologies are changing the way markets and sectors work, and digital connectivity is more important than ever. The need to change, adapt and

[27] Exmoor National Park State of Park Report 2023
[28] Landscape Character Assessment | Exmoor

learn new skills will be essential for business and economic growth. Exmoor needs to retain and attract young people to visit, live and work here.

Natural and cultural capital: The next few years are likely to see a growing trade in natural capital assets such as biodiversity, clean water, reduced flood risk, and stored carbon. These potentially provide new sources of income for landowners and managers on Exmoor who can provide a supply of these assets but there is uncertainty over the long-term value and credibility of some of these schemes.

Finance and delivery: Action to address these strategic challenges will require resources and partnership working at a time of severe budgetary challenges. New sources of investment and funding will need to be found, including from the private sector.

Policy: With a change of Government in July 2024, there changes in Government policy for the environment, farming and planning, which will all influence priorities for the National Park and how these can be delivered.

Visitor management and experience: Visitors bring economic benefit, and National Parks are designated to give people the opportunity to understand and enjoy these special places. But pressures from visitor activities need to be managed. The number of visitors to Exmoor is relatively stable, and the Plan does not anticipate a significant increase in visitors over it's five year period, but a growing population and increased house building around the National Park may increase day visits in the longer term. Travel to and around the National Park has a high carbon footprint, so developing sustainable transport, and access and recreation opportunities will be essential for the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors, as well as helping to reduce carbon and support a better visitor experience.

Health & wellbeing: The long-term impacts of the covid pandemic are still being felt, and have had a significant impact on people's physical and mental well-being, on top of more general and long-standing health and wellbeing challenges. Rural communities and particularly farming communities feel the impact of loneliness and isolation. The health and well-being benefits of connecting with nature and the outdoors are now widely recognised and provide an opportunity for increased engagement with the National Park. But the people that may benefit the most from better connection to Exmoor are often those that find in hardest to do so.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Inequality in the UK is at the highest level for over 50 years and within and around Exmoor there are many pockets of rural poverty and areas of very high deprivation. Many people face barriers that prevent them from visiting or engaging with the National Park and a proactive approach is needed to reach out to them and work with people within those communities to provide greater opportunities and awareness.

Vision, Aims, Objectives and Targets

Vision

This statutory Management Plan covers the period 2025 to 2030 but its vision, objectives and targets extend to 2050:

Exmoor National Park is a beautiful landscape, leading the response to climate change and nature recovery. It is a place where nature can thrive, that's proud of its cultural heritage, welcoming to all who seek out inspiration and adventure, and where people can connect with this special landscape. It is home to thriving local communities, with a low carbon local economy benefitting from Exmoor's natural and cultural capital.

Aims

A A nature-rich landscape

B A net zero National Park, mitigating and adapting to climate change

C Healthy natural resources

D A cared for landscape and heritage

E A welcoming place for all, that people feel connected to, improving their health and well-being

F A great place for people to live, work and do business

G Bringing it all together - place based delivery

- G1 Moorland & Farmland
- G2 Woodland and Trees
- G3 Rivers, Streams and Wetlands
- G4 Coast

Targets

Targets in green relate to the national Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).]

A A nature-rich landscape

Objectives:

- Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats are enhanced, extended, well-connected, and resilient to climate change, forming a network of nature-rich areas with blurred edges, with corridors linking them and stretching across the National Park boundary
- Wildlife is thriving with a greater abundance and diversity of species that can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate

Many generations of management have contributed to the diversity of Exmoor's natural environment, with spectacular moorland, rich oak woodland, rolling farmland, clear streams and dramatic coastline. These form a mosaic of habitats including heath, blanket bog, ancient woodlands, species-rich grassland, and high-quality freshwater and marine habitats. These habitats support a wide range of species, both common and rare, many of which are conservation priorities. They are one of the key attractions for people visiting the National Park and are also highly valued by people living and working here.

Exmoor currently has 29 habitats and over 200 species identified as a priority for biodiversity conservation[29]. Many are internationally rare, and Exmoor has two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) Exmoor Heaths and Exmoor and Quantocks Oakwoods. There are 3 woodland National Nature Reserves (NNRs) at Tarr Steps, Hawkcombe, and Dunkery and Horner, and 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). There are also just over 500 County and Local Wildlife Sites across the National Park which complement the network of nationally and internationally designated sites. These include important species-rich grassland, ancient woodland, heath and freshwater habitats of high quality or recognised because they support species of conservation importance.

These designations, and ongoing management supported by past agri-environment schemes have helped to conserve Exmoor's wildlife, but this is now under threat alongside widespread declines in nature across the country and globally. The reasons for these declines are many and complex, including the global challenge of climate change, cross-boundary impacts of air pollution, the introduction of non-native invasive species, and the long-term effects of historic policy and management such as land drainage and intensification of agricultural systems and food production.

This Partnership Plan includes ambitious targets to restore, enhance and expand Exmoor's natural ecosystems and wildlife, supporting a beautiful and resilient landscape, with returning native wildlife and rich natural habitats teeming with life. This will be achieved by providing more space for nature alongside regenerative land uses that are sympathetic to nature and still produce high quality local food, timber, energy, recreational activities, and the jobs that go with them.

Currently, many of Exmoor's designated wildlife sites are not in good condition, and one of the Government's priority targets for Protected Landscapes is to bring Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) into favourable condition. This is challenging given the historic pressures on

[29] Exmoor Wildlife Monitoring and Research Framework

some SSSIs and also climate change, and therefore the SSSIs themselves need to be buffered, allowed to expand and natural processes restored to enable them to act as nature rich hubs and link out to surrounding areas.

The Plan includes targets for the creation of new habitat as well as expansion of existing habitats and linkages between them, creating a mosaic of different habitats and wildlife corridors. It will also be important to continue the favourable management of existing priority habitat and any new habitat created. Within the National Park, there will also be opportunities to reinstate natural processes and allow land to naturally regenerate. Increasing the area of wildlife-rich habitats and naturally functioning ecosystems will also help to improve the resilience of wildlife and habitats to climate change, and mitigate climate change through sequestering carbon in soils, peatlands, wetlands, grasslands and saltmarsh.

Enhancing and restoring these habitats and ensuring their ongoing positive management will also benefit a wide range of wildlife. However, there are some species which require additional, bespoke conservation action in order to thrive, and some where positive interventions are needed to return wildlife to Exmoor that has historically been lost. Equally, ongoing efforts are needed to reduce and control invasive non-native species which impact negatively on Exmoor's habitats and native wildlife.

These changes will not be easy to achieve, and will require the right incentives and funding through environmental land management schemes and green finance, new skills, training, and advice, and for a collaborative effort between land managers, funders, regulators and environmental organisations. The delivery of nature enhancements will also need to be done in an integrated way that considers Exmoor's other special qualities, including heritage assets. The challenge is to support land managers and farmers to adopt the kind of practices needed to deliver these targets in a way which also allows rural communities to thrive and prosper and to enable a just transition which responds to the nature and climate crises and also retains the rural communities and cultural heritage that make National Parks so special.

We want everyone to get involved in helping to ensure that nature thrives on Exmoor, and there is much that volunteers, residents and businesses can do to support this, and to increase people's connection with nature, improving their health and wellbeing.

Our aim is for Exmoor, along with the network of other Protected Landscapes, to be at the heart of nature enhancement for the nation, delivering the Government's priorities to be 'greener, wilder and more accessible to all', allowing nature to thrive and expand out to surrounding areas. Exmoor will play a key role in delivering '30 by 30' - the Government's ambitious commitments for 30% of land in the UK to be protected for nature by 2030[30], and the Protected Landscapes targets[31] which will help to deliver the Environmental Improvement Plan for England.

By delivering the targets in this Plan, at least three quarters (51,750ha) of the area of the National Park will be rich in nature, the remaining areas providing wildlife networks and corridors.

[30] 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps - GOV.UK
[31] Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK

As well as the targets in this section, there are detailed targets for peatland and woodland in the climate change section B, and for a range of habitats and species in Section G.

Targets and measures:

A1 By 2030, at least 50% of the National Park is protected and managed for nature, contributing to national 30 by 30 targets

A2 Create or restore an additional 4,500ha of wildlife-rich habitat[32] outside of protected sites by 2030, and 6,500ha by 2042 [*breakdown of this figure covered in other sections – includes species rich grassland, woodland/wood pasture; peatland; hedgerows; wooded corridors]*

A3 Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 and ensure 60% of SSSIs have 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028

A4 Continue favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042

A5 By 2030, nature-friendly farming is practised on 50% of enclosed farmland (11,780ha or 17% of the National Park), where land is managed working with nature as part of a sustainable farm business

A6 By 2030, there are 7,000 hectares (10% of the National Park) of wilder 'nature recovery opportunity areas where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course

A7 Increase the populations of, and areas colonised by, species identified as priorities for Exmoor including threatened species

A8 Develop and deliver species translocation programmes to bring back and boost native species, enhancing the diversity and richness of Exmoor's wildlife

A9 Reduce and control invasive non-native species particularly where they are impacting on the condition of designated wildlife sites

A10 Increase awareness and action among volunteers, residents and businesses to create more wildlife-friendly environments including in gardens, villages and towns

[32] This target includes actions to establish wildlife-rich habitat on land or water where such habitat is currently absent, outside existing protected sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Environment Act Habitat Target – Definitions and Descriptions - TIN219

B A net zero National Park, mitigating and adapting to climate change

Objectives:

- Exmoor is a net zero National Park, reducing greenhouse gas emissions to a minimum level and locking up carbon in peatlands, trees, soils and plants
- Exmoor's natural and historic assets, local communities and businesses are adapted and resilient to climate change

Climate change affects all aspects of this Partnership Plan. A science-based target[33] is being proposed for the National Park to be net zero by 2038, in line with global commitments to keep global warming within 1.5^{0}C. This means that, collectively as a Partnership, we will take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions being re-absorbed from the atmosphere by nature, through increased woodland and tree cover, peatland restoration, improved soil health and other measures. Ensuring that these initiatives deliver cross-cutting benefits for other Aims within the plan will require careful choices and creative solutions. These are challenging targets, but Exmoor National Park, alongside other Protected Landscapes, can also play a part in going beyond zero, through acting as carbon sinks for the nation, and this goes hand in hand with targets to restore and enhance nature.

Some of the actions needed to achieve the net zero target are outside the scope of the Partnership Plan, and will to be driven by national policy, and delivered with partners in the Devon and Somerset climate groups, for example phasing out fossil fuels in heating and transport systems. This Partnership Plan will focus on actions that can be delivered locally including improving energy efficiency in existing buildings, and providing sustainable and active travel options, EV-charging and e-bike networks. Farmers, foresters and land managers will play a key part through sustainable land management and regenerative agriculture, producing food, timber, helping to reduce emissions, and sequestering carbon. Initiatives such as Eat Exmoor will encourage consumption of locally sourced sustainable products, supporting local businesses and livelihoods. The use of local timber in construction, and directing timber into longer term end uses will help to ensure that sequestered carbon is locked up, and reduces the use of high embedded materials such as concrete and steel. In addition, individual choices around heating, travel, diet, and the goods we buy will all help reduce carbon emissions.

The targets for peatland restoration and woodland and tree cover provide significant opportunities to increase carbon sequestration, but they are also a key component of the targets for nature recovery. They are part of the national Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework set by Government, to support delivery of the statutory targets in the Environment Improvement Plan.

An interim target has been set for peatland restoration to 2030, based on work being undertaken by the South West Peatland Partnership, whilst further work is undertaken to provide a clearer baseline for the extent of deep peat on Exmoor, due to different

[33] Exmoor's Carbon Footprint | Exmoor

datasets, and also whilst plans for peatland restoration are being developed through the Landscape Recovery Schemes. The target will be reviewed once there is a better understanding of the scope and extent of peatland restoration required.

Woodland cover in the UK is one of the lowest in Europe, and the Government is looking to Protected Landscapes to help get more trees and woodland in the landscape. This is not just about the establishment of new areas of woodland, but also includes scattered trees, in-field trees, hedgerow trees, small copses, wood pasture, agro-forestry and traditional orchards. Around 18% of Exmoor is currently woodland (14%) and trees (4%)[34]. The target for establishing an additional 2,080 hectares of woodland and trees by 2030 would increase this figure to 21% woodland and tree cover, and the 2050 target of 6,920 hectares would bring this to around 28% coverage, which is much closer to the European average of 30% woodland and tree cover. The target will be delivered through a combination of native woodland establishment, mixed, productive woodland creation, wider tree planting and natural regeneration. It will be important to ensure that the location and design of new woodland and tree cover is appropriate and sympathetic to the National Park's special qualities including landscape character and historic environment. Further details and targets for woodlands and trees are in Section G.2.

Exmoor's communities, businesses and wildlife also need to be resilient and adapt to the changing climate of warmer, wetter, winters and hotter, drier, summers, along with increased risks of extreme weather events, drought, flooding and coastal erosion. This Partnership Plan aims to enable and encourage adaptation through nature recovery, connecting habitats and providing corridors for species migration; increasing trees and woodlands in the landscape for shelter, shade and natural flood management; enabling sensitive adaptation of historic buildings and the recording of heritage assets at risk, including on the coast; and incorporating measures in maintenance and repairs to the rights of way network which will build greater resilience to extreme weather and storm events. A climate adaptation strategy will be produced for the National Park during this Plan period seeking cross-cutting benefits across the plan's Aims, and planning policies will be reviewed and updated in the next few years as a new Local Plan is produced.

Targets and measures:

B1 **Exmoor National Park is net zero by 2038, leading the response to climate change and delivery of national net zero targets**

- Sustainable energy – 10% pa cut in emissions arising from energy usage by residents, visitors and industry for electricity, heating and travel within the National Park
- Sustainable food & drink – 3% pa cut in emissions arising from consumption of food and drink
- Sustainable purchasing – 12% pa reduction in emissions from other goods purchased by residents and visitors
- Sustainable travel – 10% pa reduction in emissions from visitor travel to and from the National Park
- Sustainable agriculture – 5% pa cut in emissions from farming practices

[34] Forestry Commission 2023 data

-	Sustainable land use (excluding agriculture) – 2% increase pa in carbon sequestration and storage
B2	**Restore 800 ha of deep peat by 2030, and 80% of Exmoor's deep peat by 2050**
B3	**Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of the total area of the National Park (2,080 ha) by 2030, and 10% (6,920 ha) by 2050, to benefit nature and people, ensuring the right trees in the right place**
B4	Produce a climate change risk assessment and adaptation plan for Exmoor National Park by 2026 and integrate climate adaptation into all actions and activity
B5	Encourage individuals, communities and businesses to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change

C Healthy natural resources

Objective:

- ❍ Exmoor's soils, air and water resources are healthy, resilient and support naturally functioning ecosystems

Our natural environment is a valuable asset and a major source of national wealth, but our natural resources are under pressure. Only around half of monitored rivers are achieving 'high' or 'good' status, with concerns over a toxic mix of chemicals and impacts on ecology. Extreme weather events are increasing risks of both flooding and drought and soil health is at risk from climate change. Healthy soils produce food, benefit biodiversity, restore well-functioning water cycles, reduce flood risk, help lock up carbon to mitigate climate change, and increase economic profitability. Levels of air pollution, particularly nitrogen and ammonia, are impacting on the conservation status of protected wildlife sites and a partnership approach is needed within the National Park and with neighbouring local authorities to reduce emissions. One of the key goals of the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan is to ensure that we are using our resources from nature sustainably. Protecting and enhancing our natural capital will help deliver benefits for people and nature, including long-term flood risk reduction, improvements to water and air quality, and soil health.

Targets and measures:

C1 75% of Exmoor's monitored rivers, waterbodies and coastal or transitional bodies achieve 'high' or 'good' ecological status (in line with national goals)[35]

C2 Improve water quality (ecological and chemical) by reducing pollution and sedimentation from agriculture and wastewater treatment in line with national goals[36]

C3 Increase natural flood management and nature-based solutions to slow the flow, increase water infiltration and storage and reduce flood risk, water stress and drought and to ensure there is sufficient water and flows for nature

C4 Reduce air pollution (from nitrogen and ammonia) to deliver necessary improvements in air quality within the National Park to achieve the conservation objectives for statutorily designated sites

C5 Improve soil health through good soil management practices in line with national targets, reduce compaction and increase water retention capacity, protect and

[35] Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) Goal 3 'Clean and Plentiful Water': We will achieve clean and plentiful water by improving at least 75% of our waters to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable.

[36] Environmental Improvement Plan (2023) Goal 3 'Clean and Plentiful Water': Reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from agriculture into the water environment by at least 40% by 2038, compared to a 2018 baseline, with an interim target of 10% by 31 January 2028. Require water companies to have eliminated all adverse ecological impact from sewage discharges at all sensitive sites by 2035, and at all other overflows by 2050

improve soil ecosystem services (soil carbon, biodiversity, food production and flood mitigation) and increase resilience to extreme weather impacts

D A cared for landscape and heritage

Objectives:

- ❍ Exmoor's unspoilt natural beauty, tranquillity, openness, wildness and dark night skies are celebrated, cared for, and enjoyed
- ❍ Exmoor's irreplaceable historic environment and cultural heritage is cared for, celebrated and plays a key role in informing our future

National Parks are national treasures, the jewels in the crown of our beautiful countryside. It is the natural beauty of these landscapes that justifies Exmoor's status as a National Park, and is the primary draw for visitors. National Parks are the nation's breathing spaces, and Exmoor is one of the few upland areas in southern Britain, where people can enjoy remoteness, wildness and tranquillity, to refresh their spirits and recharge their batteries.

Exmoor's varied landscape offers the natural beauty of open moorland, steep wooded river valleys, dramatic coast and distinctive farmland shaped by natural and human processes.

"*Nowhere else in Britain can greater variety of scene be found than within the comparatively small territory of the Exmoor National Park*" SH Burton 1975

Exmoor National Park was certified as the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe and provides extensive opportunities and observation sites for experiencing our spectacular starry skies. The designation also helps to reduce light pollution and protect nocturnal residents of the National Park such as bats and moths.

Exmoor's historic landscapes also provide an irreplaceable record of how people have lived here for thousands of years. Exmoor has a long history of human settlement, from small towns and picturesque villages, to tiny hamlets and isolated farmsteads, which reflect the changing fortunes of the communities who have lived here. Each settlement has its own character, with diverse vernacular building styles and materials that reflect local geology and traditions. The use of traditional building materials and techniques all contribute to what makes Exmoor unique. It's vital to support and promote that knowledge and skills if we are to protect and enhance the assets in our Historic Environment.

Within the National Park there are 17 Conservation Areas and over ten thousand archaeological sites and historic buildings, all helping to tell the story of Exmoor and conserving that story for future generations to learn from and enjoy. Exmoor is particularly important because there are so many undisturbed archaeological sites and monuments, and undoubtably more to be discovered. Exmoor's peatlands contain a rich and rare archive charting how the environment has changed over the last 8,000 years.

However, many historic assets are undesignated and lack statutory protection, and there are a growing number of threats to both designated and undesignated heritage assets. The Plan therefore includes a target of increasing designation coverage. Where

other areas of the plan may pose a risk to heritage, such as land use change associated with nature recovery or coastal erosion associated with climate change, the affected areas should be prioritised for review of potential designations.

The National Park is not immune to the pressures of modern life, such as the need for telecommunications masts to enable mobile phone and broadband coverage, or increased number and size of agricultural barns to meet animal welfare standards. Changes to climate and land management are leading to small but incremental changes in vegetation and landscape character.

Exmoor's landscapes and heritage have changed over time and will continue to change, adapt and evolve. This will need ongoing careful management to ensure that changes are sympathetic to the character and history of the National Park. The planning system is an important tool to manage some pressures, and the National Park designation and local planning policies rightly provide protection against unsympathetic or large-scale development, but also allow the changes needed to allow people to continue to live, work and visit. However, there are concerns that some national changes to planning may weaken these protections. Land management changes are not subject to the same controls, but will be influenced mainly by the new funding schemes including the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Environmental Land Management Schemes. Increasingly, the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to restore nature, mean that there will be other changes which will need to be carefully woven into Exmoor's landscape character and cultural heritage, being mindful of how the past may play a significant role in informing future change. Wherever possible the aims of the plan will be pursued in an integrated way, for example by considering potential opportunities and risks for the historic environment when delivering nature recovery and net zero proposals.

Ultimately it is through engaging people with Exmoor's special landscapes, historic and built environment that will build understanding, helping to value, care for and protect these assets, and ensure that the fascinating stories of Exmoor's history, landscape and communities continue to be told.

Targets and measures:

D1 Ensure development and land-use change recognises landscape character and enhances natural beauty including impacts on the setting of and views from the National Park

D2 Conserve and enhance landscape character through management of characteristic features including hedgebanks, hay meadows, stone walls, traditional farm buildings, orchards, ponds, leats and gutter systems

D3 Reduce light pollution across the whole National Park Dark Sky reserve to conserve and enhance the quality of the night sky

D4 **Reduce the number of nationally and locally designated heritage assets at risk**

D5	Improve the protection of heritage assets by designating new national heritage assets (listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments) by 2030 and increasing the local list of heritage assets by 25% by 2030
D6	Promote engagement with Exmoor's historic environment through the Historic Environment Record and increase the number of records accessed by 5% by 2030 (from a 2024 baseline)
D7	Protect the character of Conservation Areas and promote positive management, ensuring all Conservation Areas have up to date appraisals and management plans
D8	Conserve and enhance historic streetscapes and rural roads through maintenance and repairs to historic fabric including bridges, walls and paving, and reduction of unnecessary highway clutter, lighting, and road markings
D9	Improve understanding of the impacts of climate change on heritage assets and support adaptation and resilience measures which balance carbon reduction and energy saving with the conservation of their significance

E A welcoming place for all, that people feel connected to, improving their health and well-being

Objectives:

- More people from a broader range of backgrounds are connected with, inspired by, and care for Exmoor, improving their health and well-being and providing a "Natural Health Service"
- There are more opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to explore and connect with Exmoor, developing skills and knowledge, and taking an active role in the future of Exmoor
- Public paths, open access land, recreational facilities and popular sites are well maintained and accessible for all to experience and enjoy Exmoor
- Exmoor is promoted and managed as a regenerative tourism destination, providing a great visitor experience, leaving the environment in a better state, and positively contributing to the well-being of local communities

Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954 as part of the post-war drive to restore the nation's health by enabling access to the countryside. Today, that mission for National Parks to be the nation's natural health service is just as relevant, if not more needed than ever.

We know that over 1.5 million people visit Exmoor each year, inspired by the natural beauty and tranquillity of the landscape, the coastline and wildlife. They enjoy sightseeing, walking and cycling and watching wildlife, making the most of the high-quality rights of way and access network, with over 1,300km of footpaths and bridleways available on Exmoor. They rate their experiences very highly, with 99% of visitors rating their visit as good or very good.

In addition, hundreds of volunteers donate hours of their time each year to look after the National Park through carrying out practical conservation works, leading guided walks or undertaking wildlife and path surveys. There are many educational visits to Exmoor as well, ranging from immersive residential stays to day trips or Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. All these activities, along with events, information, publications and interpretation and the work of the National Park Centres and other visitor centres, help people to understand, connect with, and care for the National Park.

However, we know that the demographic of people who currently enjoy Exmoor is skewed towards older people, and those from white, British backgrounds. There are many barriers facing young people and those from less represented communities, including practical difficulties getting to the National Park, lacking the confidence to visit or explore the moors, or not feeling that it is a place for them. There are also costs and other practical barriers for some people, particularly those from more deprived

communities, or people with a disability, who are not able to access the benefits that Exmoor offers, even if it is right on their doorstep.

"National Parks are for people of every class and kind, from every part of the country. They are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population but for all who care to refresh their minds and spirits and exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty" John Dower, writing in 1945

During this Plan period, we want to address some of those barriers and help a greater diversity of people to access and enjoy Exmoor. The National Park Authority and partners will take active steps to support access to learning, volunteering and engagement services for targeted communities in and around Exmoor assessed as facing socio-economic, health or other challenges. We will work with health professionals and user groups, taking a targeted approach to enable the health and well-being benefits of access to and connection with Exmoor to be available to those who can benefit the most. This may be through green social prescribing, or through increasing access to and support in using our services. There are some positive signs of change, with increasing numbers of younger people and those from a wider range of backgrounds visiting Exmoor, but there is still much more that can be done. We have set ambitious targets to ensure that more people are connected with and benefit from their National Park. This includes a particular focus on engaging with young people, providing opportunities for them to learn about Exmoor and develop skills.

We also need to ensure that the rights of way and access network continues to be well-maintained, that routes and facilities are improved, and that potentially detrimental developments are managed. This is a challenge during a time of budget cuts and a changing climate, and it will require careful prioritisation, alongside working with partners and volunteers, to continue to provide the infrastructure that enables so many people to explore and experience Exmoor. Enjoyment of the National Park can take many forms including access to water, use of access land and permitted paths and a wide range of activities. Public access needs to be considered as a whole in order to be fully inclusive.

Visitors bring benefits to the local economy and communities, with almost two thirds of employment based around tourism and hospitality. Whilst Exmoor is fortunate in not experiencing many of the impacts from high visitor numbers that other National Parks face, there are still pressures and challenges. This Plan includes a target for regenerative tourism, an approach that is moving from a position of tourism 'doing less harm' to 'helping give back more than it takes'. The National Parks have collectively set out a new vision for regenerative tourism[37]. The aim is to champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates. As well as supporting tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature recovery, while ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone's needs. Part of this challenge is to enable greener modes of travel to the National Park, contributing to the net zero target, and to encourage more people to leave their cars behind whilst here, making the most of the wonderful footpaths and bridleways.

[37] UK National Parks set out new vision for regenerative tourism - National Parks

Targets and measures:

E1 Improve and promote accessibility to the National Park and engagement with Exmoor's special qualities for all

E2 By 2030 at least 50% of engagement with schools is with those schools that have above the south-west average of children eligible for free school meals or pupil premium.

E3 Increase the number of days people volunteer to take action for nature and heritage by 10% by 2030 – with 15% of total hours delivered by young people under 25

E4 Provide a night under the stars for 6,000 children, between 2025-2030

E5 Deliver and develop a Young Rangers programme that supports young people to engage with Exmoor and develop skills and confidence through volunteering

E6 Take positive action to support and enable people from a wider range of backgrounds to access and enjoy Exmoor

E7 Strengthen partnerships with health professionals and communities to promote and enable more people to access the health benefits of connection with Exmoor's nature

E8 Increase the diversity of visitors to Exmoor

E9 Promote engagement with Exmoor's natural and cultural heritage through art

E10 At least 80% of Exmoor's public rights of way are assessed as 'open and easy to use'

E11 Improve the public access network by delivering enhancements to cycling, riding and walking opportunities and improving accessibility

E12 Increase opportunities for green travel and active travel to and within the National Park

E13 Work with local tourism partners and businesses to promote regenerative tourism principles contributing in a positive way to Exmoor's special qualities

E14 Ensure that visitor satisfaction figures remain high (at least 97% consider their experience to be good or very good)

F A great place for people to live, work and do business

Objective:

- Exmoor's communities and economy are sustainable and resilient, supporting the transition to a low carbon economy and lifestyles, and providing new opportunities, skills and employment

Exmoor's environment and its local economy and communities are connected. Exmoor's rural nature and its communities with close links to the land, have created a strong sense of identity and community, and a spirit of self-sufficiency. The high-quality environment makes Exmoor an attractive place to live, work and do business, but it's rurality, geography and National Park designation also provide some unique challenges and opportunities.

Exmoor has a population of around 10,000 with over 1,300 businesses, many home-based, and a significantly higher proportion of self-employment than the national average. Exmoor's communities and businesses, as everywhere, are affected by changes in how we live and work. This includes the need to adapt to the effects of climate change, with more extreme weather; higher rainfall and more flooding. New and existing development will need to adapt to cope with changing conditions. A declining and ageing population; the lack of public transport; the small, scattered nature of settlements; deregulation and privatisation and the rise of online shopping and services all put pressure on local services and facilities. High house prices and low average wages mean that many people struggle to be able to afford to live in the National Park. Fast changing technology means access to digital communication has become a necessity to provide accessibility to information and services and reduce the need to travel.

Change is needed to adapt to the rapidly changing world and to secure a sustainable and viable future for local people and businesses. This Plan seeks to encourage economic activity in the National Park which benefits from and enhances the local environment, helps to achieve National Park purposes, plays its part in responding to the global climate and nature crises, and supports local communities and businesses. Delivery of the Plan's objectives and targets will help to support and create jobs, but will require education and training such as new apprenticeships to develop the necessary skills. A more technologically driven world means that digital connectivity and improved transport are increasingly important to ensure that opportunities are accessible to all, particularly for younger people.

Developing connections between producers and suppliers, and considering whether products can be sourced, processed or marketed locally can add more value – building community wealth. This means that tourism income, agricultural sales, or funding from outside the area are spent and retained locally which helps to strengthen Exmoor's economy. The public sector also has an important role through providing local services, employment, support, grant funding, and local procurement.

It is not the role of this National Park Partnership Plan alone to address all these issues, but it can play a part in helping to respond to some of the challenges through partnership working. Our Rural Enterprise Exmoor vision has been developed with partners and businesses, *for Exmoor to have an economy building community wealth, sitting lightly in its environment, and creating opportunities from its special qualities*[38]. This recognises that we will need to do things differently - being open to new ideas, new types of investment and new entrepreneurs - adding to the rich mix that is Exmoor.

Together, we will focus our efforts on actions that benefit from and enhance the area's status as a National Park. The partnership that has come together under Rural Enterprise Exmoor has identified the key areas for partnership working as: delivering the homes needed for local people; continuing to improve digital connectivity and taking advantage of new technologies; collaboration; good businesses supporting a greener, fairer Exmoor; stronger communities engaged in delivering sustainable housing, energy, transport and local food; a strong Exmoor brand underpinning the hospitality, food, farming, craft and culture sectors; and flourishing farms that deliver prosperous livelihoods, finding new ways to produce food and deliver public goods for the nation (see Section G.1 on Moorland and Farming for more details).

The Partnership Plan also links closely to the Local Plan which sets the policies for how planning and development will be managed[39]. This plays a major role in conserving and enhancing Exmoor's special qualities, and also supporting the needs of local communities, particularly the delivery of affordable housing and protecting local services and facilities.

Targets and measures:

F1	Promote and develop skills to support delivery of National Park purposes via internships, apprenticeships and placements and deliver 20 opportunities for these by 2030
F2	Promote local, sustainable supply chains and buying local to support Exmoor's businesses and create and retain community wealth
F3	Support the housing needs of local communities and increase the number of affordable homes (conversions and new build) available
F4	Support the sustainability of settlements and needs of local communities, businesses and visitors through safeguarding and maintaining access to community services and facilities
F5	Support a sustainable and low carbon economy

[38] Rural Enterprise Exmoor Vision | Exmoor
[39] Exmoor Local Plan 2011 - 2031 | Exmoor

G Bringing it all together - place based delivery

This section of the Plan explores in more detail how the aims and objectives come together on a place basis, focusing on Exmoor's moorland and farmland; woodland; rivers and streams; and coast. Many of the targets are sub-sets of the thematic targets in sections A-F.

G1 Moorland and Farmland

Objective:

- Exmoor's distinctive **moorland and farmed** landscapes are evolving and resilient to climate change. Their natural beauty is enhanced and heritage conserved. Habitats are more diverse, in better condition, extended, connected and richer in wildlife. Some areas are wilder and natural processes are restored. Land is managed sustainably to produce high quality food and timber. People can access and enjoy these special places including the tranquillity and dark night skies

Exmoor's dramatic moors and heaths dominate the landscape, with big, expansive, dark skies, and far-reaching views across the National Park and to surrounding areas. Its wild, rugged remoteness offers escape and tranquillity but it's also a living, working landscape. The open, exposed landscape of Exmoor's upland heath, grass moors and bogs extend in an uninterrupted sweep from Dunkery Beacon in the east to Challacombe Common in the west. Other areas of more fragmented moorland provide the backdrop to the National Park to the south and west, with the high coastal heaths fringing the northern boundary.

The moors are framed by more productive farmland, with Exmoor's climate, soils and elevation favouring extensive livestock farming. This is primarily sheep and cattle, mainly continental cross-breeds, with the majority of livestock sold to lowland areas for finishing, but also some rare traditional breeds such as the Exmoor horn sheep, Devon Closewool sheep, and Devon Red Ruby cattle. These hardy breeds are able to withstand the harsh conditions on the moors, and are also important for conservation grazing. On higher land, where farmland has been carved out of the surrounding moorland, the fields are geometrically shaped, bounded by fences or the distinct beech hedge banks which are strongly associated with Exmoor. These give way to more fertile, rolling hills which form a gentle, enclosed and settled landscape with a more irregular patchwork of hedged fields, woods and villages. To the east, in the Brendon hills and rich soils of Porlock Vale, farming is more intensive.

The moors form a mosaic of habitats including blanket bog, acid grasslands and heath, of which gorse, scrub, scattered trees and bracken are important components. Collectively these moorland habitats are internationally important and provide homes to many species including specialist moorland plants, invertebrates, birds and animals. Peatlands are important carbon stores and essential to meeting targets for responding to climate change, including helping to regulate water quality and flows. However, many

designated wildlife sites are not in good condition and there has been significant vegetation change on the moors over the last forty years, with less heather and more gorse, bracken and purple moor grass resulting in complex mosaics of vegetation being replaced by fewer dominant species. The cause of these changes are multifaceted but are linked to: changes in management, particularly levels of grazing and swaling (controlled burning); heather beetle damage; climate change; and increased nitrogen deposition from air pollution.

Peatland habitats are particularly sensitive to climatic change and hydrological disturbance and have been damaged by centuries of moorland reclamation, agricultural drainage and domestic peat-cutting, historical overgrazing, swaling and nitrogen deposition. Future climate change is likely to increase the drying effect on damaged peatlands. Swaling was a common management tool but is now rare and difficult to carry out in wetter winters. Increasingly, it is seen as contrary to meeting carbon emission targets especially on deep peat where this is banned due to damage to biodiversity and long-term carbon storage. Peatland restoration over the last twenty years has aimed to reverse some of these negative impacts, with over 2,600ha of peatland undergoing restoration to date. Monitoring indicates that restoration on deep peat has been more successful than on shallow peat regarding increasing water levels, reducing runoff and greenhouse gas emissions, and returning the peatland to more natural functioning in the longer term.

In the surrounding farmland, traditional mixed farming provides a range of habitats, including unimproved grassland, hedgerows and areas of scrub, which are important for wildlife as they support a wide variety of species. Exmoor's hedgebanks are one of the elements that make up the distinctive character of the landscape, and most are hundreds of years old, or even prehistoric. They are rich habitats for wildlife and act as corridors through the landscape. Traditional management by hedge-laying provides a wildlife-friendly and stock-proof barrier, but letting hedges grow out can also add to the value of the hedge as a habitat and expanded wildlife corridor. Unimproved grasslands are also important habitats, although they are less well-recognised, supporting for example, ant hills of the yellow meadow ant, butterflies and rare waxcap fungi. Many of these farmland habitats are undesignated, or have limited protection through local designations, and are consequently under greater threat of being lost or damaged.

The wild herds of red deer and free-roaming Exmoor ponies are a quintessential part of the Exmoor experience and are what many visitors come to see. Deer numbers have increased over the last 20 years, as has the density of deer, due to changes in land management in some areas, the erection of deer fences, and more active management, resulting in larger numbers of deer grazing in a herd. This increases the potential for conflict with farming and woodland management, and also nature recovery ambitions, due to increased browsing pressure. The health of deer, particularly levels of Bovine Tb are also a concern. This requires ongoing monitoring and management to maintain good health in the herds and sustainable numbers. Exmoor ponies are a priority on the Rare Breed Survival Trust's Watchlist, although numbers have increased from a historic low of just fifty after World War 2, due to the conservation efforts of many pony

enthusiasts and organisations. There are now around 4,600 registered Exmoor ponies worldwide with 600 living freely on the moors. The ponies are important for conservation grazing, and many are now being used on sites outside the National Park, increasing their value and helping to maintain the breed.

Exmoor is considered to be a premium national and international venue for game shooting, primarily pheasant and partridge, and this is an important part of the local economy. They range from small local shoots to large commercial businesses offering a high-end experience. Around 30% of land on Exmoor is managed or used in some way for game shooting, including rearing and release pens, cover crops, feeding and shooting areas. In some areas, more intensive, large-scale shoots are having impacts, with significant change to the character, condition and visual quality of the landscape from planting of cover crops, a reduction in ground cover vegetation, the introduction of infrastructure such as fencing, tracks, feeders and pens, impacts on tranquillity and other recreational users and potential impacts on water and air quality. The high numbers of gamebirds released can have impacts on invertebrate numbers[40] and ground flora[41] particularly in woodlands. They can also outcompete native species for food creating imbalances in ecosystems and leading to species declines locally. This can affect woodland function and condition. Without careful management, the feeding and release of high numbers of released game birds can also elevate numbers of opportunistic species such as rats, grey squirrels and crows, and feeders can cause disease cross-contamination concerns. At the same time, there can be positive benefits from management for game shooting for habitats and wildlife through winter cover and food for birds, and active woodland management. It is important that the management of land for game shooting follows best practice, delivering positive outcomes for the local environment and communities and that the scale and intensity of game shoots is in keeping with the place.

The moorlands and farmland also hold a deep sense of history, with the landscapes, historic sites and features reflecting the long interaction with people from early prehistoric times to the present day. This is a rich historic landscape, with medieval farms, bridges, churches, lanes and paths still in use today. Moorlands contain some of the best-preserved prehistoric landscapes, often overlain with later influences and contain organic remains and evidence of our past environments preserved in the peat. The industrial heritage of Exmoor is also apparent, with surviving features such as old railway lines, mines, engine houses and the abandoned cottages of miners.

Despite its timeless quality, Exmoor's moorland and farmland are places of change and their fragile habitats have suffered from past management practises, climate change pressures and the deposition of nitrogen-based pollutants. New approaches are needed to address these challenges, trialling different management, and learning from what has been done before. The new Environmental Land Management Schemes are a vital tool, particularly ensuring that higher level schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery, are available to land managers to enhance the moorland and farmland through targeted and effective management, and to fund nature

[40] Releasing of pheasants for shooting in the UK alters woodland invertebrate communities - ScienceDirect
[41] The impact of pheasant release at Exmoor shooting estates - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

recovery including making space for nature where appropriate. Green finance will also play an increasingly important role.

On the moorlands a priority is to improve the condition of designated sites, as well as extending, buffering and linking habitats. This will require a co-ordinated approach working with many land managers and also outside the National Park, for example in relation to addressing the issues around air pollution. In some areas, such as the central grass moorlands, different approaches and trials are needed to support a more resilient mosaic of habitats and reduce dominance of single species like Molinia. This will include restoring or reinforcing heather and dwarf shrub heath, blanket bog and fen, as well as encouraging more scattered trees, gorse and scrub in the combes. Further work is needed to restore natural processes including hydrological function through peatland and river restoration to store more water, slow the flow and reduce flood risk. These changes all need to be carefully undertaken to retain the special qualities of the moorland, it's openness, tranquillity and dark night skies.

The farmland provides great opportunities for nature recovery and climate resilience, whilst also enabling sustainable farm businesses to thrive. Farmers have always evolved their business with the times but they need support to do this, and adapt their businesses and farming systems to all these changes. Some are already leading the way with regenerative practices through restoring and enhancing soil health, which will also benefit biodiversity, restore well-functioning water cycles, adapt to and mitigate climate change, and increase economic profitability. Many farming systems are also already low input, high quality output, with hardy and traditional livestock breeding and selection, avoiding artificial inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers, and allowing areas to be 'roughened up' for nature.

Hedgerows are an important landscape feature and wildlife habitat as well as a practical tool for stock management and shelter, a source of biomass, and a carbon store. Traditional management of hedgerows is a valued skill, and part of Exmoor's cultural heritage. In addition, letting some hedgerows become naturally scrubbier and wider with hedgerow trees, provides additional benefits for wildlife and carbon storage. New hedge planting, in-field trees, and wood pasture all provide future fodder and shade for livestock in a warming world, as well as habitat and wildlife corridors.

As an upland livestock farming area, much of the farmland is permanent pasture, predominately improved grassland, but some small areas of unimproved meadows and pastures remain, which support a variety of wild plants including the scarce mountain pansy and adder's tongue and moonwort ferns. Unploughed grassland supports ant hills of the yellow meadow ant, butterflies, the scarce hornet robber fly and rare waxcap fungi, plus bats, which feed on the insects. The Plan seeks to improve the condition of species-poor grasslands, manage existing grasslands in good condition and expand the overall grassland resource. Hay meadows were a traditional feature of farmland on Exmoor, but have declined in favour of silage, partly as a result less predictable weather. Through collaboration and sharing of equipment and seed between landowners, and more favourable environmental land management payments, species-rich grasslands are now starting to be restored and created and will provide a habitat for many grassland species, as well as a fodder crop for livestock. Exmoor also has unimproved acid grassland which tends to be found on steeper slopes, this requires management to

maintain it which can be difficult due to the topography, and may be threatened by inappropriate tree planting.

Together these landscapes are a core part of what visitors and locals alike come to enjoy on Exmoor, which they are able to explore using the extensive network of paths, bridleways and open access land. Maintaining a good quality public access network is key to enabling people to continue to connect with Exmoor's natural beauty and cultural heritage. In addition, we need to continue to provide and improve more accessible options so that Exmoor can be enjoyed by all.

Targets and measures:

G1.1 Restore heathland and upland moorland ecosystems to be more naturally functioning, with increased diversity of habitats and species

G1.2 Maintain and improve the condition of Scheduled Monuments, Principal Archaeological Landscapes and locally listed sites

G1.3 Manage populations of wild red deer to maintain deer health and enable nature recovery

G1.4 Maintain herds of wild Exmoor ponies contributing to moorland and farmland management, and a nature-rich landscape

G1.5 Continue the use of traditional upland breeds including Exmoor Horn and Devon Closewool sheep, and Red Ruby Devon cattle as part of Exmoor's land management

G1.6 Exmoor leads the way in best practice management of game shoots, delivering positive outcomes for the environment, nature recovery and local communities

G1.7 Maintain a good quality public path network across the main moorland areas, including some promoted and highly accessible options

G1.8 Increase the number and area of orchards with at least 10 new orchards created and area of existing orchards expanded by 25% (12 ha) by 2030

G1.9 Create 100km of new hedgerow and 100km of wooded corridor greater than 20m wide by 2030, to support a wide range of species

G1.10 Support a variety of hedgerow management, encouraging laying and coppicing of hedgebanks as important landscape features, and allowing other hedgerows to grow out to support a diversity of nature. Protect veteran hedges and ancient hedgerows and select a new generation of hedgerow trees to protect from hedge-cutting

G1.11 Restore and create 1,500 ha of species-rich grassland by 2030 and increase connectivity between wildlife-rich grasslands and associated habitats. Extend and connect unimproved grasslands and support the effective management of grasslands to increase species diversity and for the benefit of rare and/or threatened species

G1.12 Increase the planting of individual trees, wood pasture and agro-forestry as part of farming systems

G1.13 Increase the retention of water in ponds and scrapes to slow the flow and create new habitats ,alongside land management that increases infiltration of water to soil

G2 Woodland and Trees

Objective:

- Exmoor's **woodlands and tree cover** are diverse, well-managed, expanded, better connected, more resilient, and productive. They enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and enjoyment of the National Park and play a major role in responding to climate change

Exmoor's woodland is exceptional. Deeply incised wooded valleys, wild ancient coastal woodlands, verdant temperate rainforest, designed landscapes of trees and woods, rare and veteran trees, old estate woodlands and, more recently, productive conifer plantations, all contribute to Exmoor's rich natural beauty, cultural heritage and biodiversity. Trees and woods are important habitats, absorb and store carbon, slow the flow of water over the land, provide wood, timber and livelihoods, provide diverse places to explore, and improve health and well-being.

Around 14 per cent or 9,500 hectares of Exmoor is now woodland, with a further 4 per cent or 3,100 hectares of land under canopy of trees outside woods - in hedges, wood-pasture, historic parkland, orchards and gardens. An extensive network of rights of way and permissive paths means that much of this woodland resource can be enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

At the same time, our trees and woods are at greater risk than ever before. Diseases and pests are already having a dramatic and devastating impact. Combined with climate stresses and the immense damage extreme weather events are causing, our woods and trees are under serious threat.

We want to increase the positive management of existing woodland, and work with communities and our partners to explore opportunities to increase tree and woodland cover, in a way which enhances and respects the special qualities of the National Park.

We will explore innovative techniques to blend trees and farming on a more expansive scale, to blur the edges between woodland and open habitats, to relieve pressures preventing natural tree regeneration and connect and restore habitats, landscapes and people in new and exciting ways.

Temperate Rainforest is a habitat of global significance with rare woodlands rich in lichens, ferns and mosses, which needs a very special kind of climate strongly influenced by the Atlantic Ocan and subject to high rainfall and a damp climate. It supports rich biodiversity and offers numerous benefits including carbon sequestration, natural flood management and climate moderation. Exmoor supports fragments of this special habitat and is highly suitable for the creation of new Temperate Rainforest mosaics.

Due to their longevity, ancient semi-natural and long-established woodlands are more species rich, and therefore need to be well protected and carefully managed. Over the centuries ancient woodland has become reduced in area, size and is increasingly fragmented. Creative and imaginative solutions are needed to re-connect and rebuild

woodland networks, including buffering and extending existing woodlands, to help ensure the habitat and species they support is more resilient. Increasing the amount of woodland in positive management is also important, particularly in those smaller, steeper or isolated woods often overlooked in the past but with great potential. Traditional management practices such as coppicing creates temporary gaps which in some woods favours distinctive plants, in others the dense thicket regrowth supports nesting birds and dormice. In addition, the warm and sheltered open spaces support specialist species such as the heath fritillary butterfly (the Woodman's Follower), and migratory woodland specialist birds such as pied flycatchers, redstarts and wood warblers. Careful restoration of planted ancient woodland sites will also help the survival and recovery of native plants, fungi and animals.

Woodlands have always been an important part of the Exmoor economy, providing coppice products, woodfuel, charcoal, timber, and cover for game birds. As a nation, we currently import more timber than any other country except China. This demand for imported timber from regions with little regulation or control helps drive environmental damage and social problems overseas. We want to see more of our own high- quality timber harvested in genuinely sustainable ways from Exmoor's woodlands. Productive conifer plantations stand over large parts of the Eastern Hills and elsewhere. These yield significant volumes of timber, support jobs, sequester carbon and are habitat in their own right, home to goswawks, crossbills and other wildlife. Many are even-aged and dominated by few tree species, making management more efficient, but leaving them vulnerable to pest, disease and climate impacts. Stands displaying age, structural and species diversity are likely to be more robust and resilient and will help ensure we have a sustainable supply of home-grown timber in the future, taking pressure off fragile habitats elsewhere in the world.

We are now more aware of the important role that woodlands also play in helping to mitigate climate change through absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing flood risk through slowing the flow of water. Given the magnitude and rate of predicted climate change, trees and woodland will be significantly affected. Adaptation is therefore an important issue and should be addressed at the earliest opportunity. Changes in climate create opportunities in terms of the species of tree that can be grown on Exmoor, and the management practices we employ such as continuous cover forestry, but also bring additional threats for our woodlands in terms of changes to landscape character, pests and diseases and potential risks to native wildlife. Simply replacing trees we have lost to pests, disease and climate stress is already a significant task. Recovery from ash dieback alone will take decades.

We also better understand how restoring even low-density canopy cover into some more open landscapes can have a significant beneficial impact in terms of natural flood management and providing habitat networks and connectivity for wildlife, for example supporting birds such as the whinchat which have seen a 60% decline nationally but are thriving on Exmoor. If predicted climate impacts are realised, we need to begin the adaptation process now and increase carefully designed and well considered tree cover

across our landscapes. This does not mean covering moorland with trees, but there are opportunities for more scrub and scattered trees in the moorland combes, enhancing the existing hedgerows and boundary features to provide improved habitat connectivity, and creating a more diverse mosaic of habitats. Similarly, there could be increased in-field trees and wood pasture in farmland which will provide shelter, shade and fodder for livestock in a changing climate. Under more extreme climate scenarios, increased tree cover may be a significant factor in how landscapes continue to function, but it will take decades for canopies and roots to develop for benefits to be fully realised.

Improving the positive management of existing trees, and increasing tree cover in all its forms, from new woodlands, smaller groups of trees, in-field trees, wood-pasture, parkland, hedges, trees in gardens, orchards, scrub and natural regeneration, as well as connecting existing tree cover, creating new woodlands and forming mosaics with other habitats and land-uses, will provide multiple benefits for people, nature, and the economy.

Targets and measures:[42]

G2.1 Restore and create 170 ha of temperate rainforest within the hyper-oceanic zone on Exmoor (areas with high humidity and rainfall above 1.7m) and improve the condition of conifer woodland within this zone to optimise conditions for characteristic temperate rainforest communities

G2.2 Improve connectivity between woodlands, both within Exmoor and surrounding landscapes, and ensure a diverse network of treescapes including broadleaved and conifer woodlands, wood pasture, parkland, coppice, scrub, field trees and pollards, orchards, hedgerows and hedgerow trees

G2.4 At least 75% of all woodland is in sustainable management by 2030

G2.5 Increase the diversity of conifer and productive woodland through continuous cover and climate change adaptation principles to continue timber production, increase access, and support key species

G2.6 All Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to be managed to UK Forestry Standards to halt further decline and 10% of PAWS to be restored by 2030 following best practice principles

G2.7 Conserve existing ancient and veteran trees, encourage positive management, and identify trees for succession and replacement

G2.8 Manage existing woodland and design new woodland to take account of landscape character, wildlife and historic environment, and build resilience to climate, pest and disease impacts

G2.9 Ensure a network of well-maintained footpaths and bridleways provide access to our varied woodlands including some promoted and highly accessible options

[42] See also target C4 on woodland and tree cover

G3 Rivers, Streams and Wetlands

Objective:

- Exmoor's **wetlands, rivers, streams** and their associated valleys are in good condition and function more naturally. Their native flora and fauna is thriving, and flood risk is reduced. Access is managed sensitively

On Exmoor you are never far from the sound of water, and the rivers and streams that flow from the high ground and have cut the many deep combes are one of the defining characteristics of the National Park. The very name, Exmoor - is derived from the source of the Exe, our largest river. The Exe system, which includes the River Barle, rises in the Exmoor forest and drains south into the English Channel at Exeter, whilst the River Lyn and tributaries drain north into the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth. Exmoor also includes the source of the Rivers Tone and the Taw.

Rivers are a key aspect of Exmoor's special landscape qualities, and vital habitat and corridors for wildlife. Clear, oxygen-rich waters are home to some of our most important wildlife including the elusive otter, salmon, brown trout, dipper and kingfisher, as well as mayflies, dragonflies and damselflies that provide a vital link in the food chain. The River Barle is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to it's exceptionally natural character and wildlife importance. Many of the deep valley sides are cloaked in woodland including ancient woodland.

The rivers and streams are an important supply of water for the reservoirs which supply much of Devon and Somerset. Most of our rivers are privately-owned and managed, but luckily there are plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy them from footpaths along the rivers, canoeing down permitted sections, or spending a day fishing, respecting their value as sensitive habitats.

There are increasing pressures on these important natural resources. Only half of monitored rivers are achieving 'high' or 'good' status. Climate change affects river flows, with periods of intense rainfall leading to flooding and erosion, contrasted by periods of drought with low flows, and increased water temperatures impacting on aquatic wildlife. Past modification of river courses and more intense rainfall leads to the deepening and scouring of the riverbed, disconnecting the river from its floodplain, and increasing the risk of flooding downstream. The extremes of high and low flows place pressure on the sewerage systems leading to storm overflows and low dilution levels. There is increasing evidence that the range of chemicals entering the river systems including from pharmaceuticals, veterinary medicines and everyday household products and are creating a toxic mix which is of concern for people and wildlife. Recreational activities can add to these pressures and cause disturbance to wildlife. Non-native invasive species are also a major threat to these sensitive habitats. Inappropriate land management and agricultural practices can lead to soil compaction increasing run-off, as well as pollution for example from livestock barns and farmyard manure heaps.

We want to address these pressures, tackling water management issues at source, which is much more effective than reducing pathway impacts once in-stream. This will help to ensure that Exmoor's rivers, streams and associated valleys are in good condition and function more naturally, providing high quality habitats, bringing back species lost to Exmoor, providing clean water, and reducing flood risk.

It will take a huge collective effort to achieve our objectives for these river systems. There is an increased appreciation of the role that positive land management in the upper catchment of rivers can play in storing water, regulating river flows and boosting biodiversity through nature-based solutions and natural flood management. For instance peatland restoration, woodland management, tree planting in appropriate locations, re-naturalising river courses and installing leaky barriers. We need improved monitoring of water quality to better understand the issues and impacts

Reducing the impact of non-native species is vital to protect the natural function of aquatic ecosystems. We will also explore the potential of species reintroduction such as marsh fritillary butterflies, water voles, and beavers to enhance biodiversity.

We will continue to promote appropriate public access to Exmoor's waterways, balancing recreation with conservation to protect sensitive habitats. Where conflicts between access and conservation cannot be resolved, priority will be given to conservation, in line with the Sandford principle[43].

Through these integrated efforts, Exmoor's rivers and streams will not only support a diverse range of wildlife but also provide many benefits to local farmers, businesses, communities and visitors.

Targets and measures:

G3.1 Restore the natural courses and flows of rivers, reconnecting them to their floodplains, expanding riparian habitats and supporting an increased abundance and diversity of native wildlife

G3.2 Reduce the impact of non-native invasive species on the ecology and natural functioning of wetlands, rivers and streams

G3.3 Increase monitoring and understanding of water quality and reduce impacts on the natural environment, particularly the effects of veterinary medicines on riverine ecology

G3.4 Improve habitat and condition for fish, particularly spawning of migratory Atlantic salmon and sea trout

G3.5 Explore opportunities for reintroduction of aquatic and wetland species such as marsh fritillary butterflies, water vole and beavers

G3.6 Promote responsible access and activities that enable people to enjoy Exmoor's rivers and streams whilst protecting sensitive natural habitats and species

[43] Environment Act 1995, Section 62

G4 Coast

Objective:

- Exmoor's stunning **coast** has access opportunities for all, where people and nature can thrive, heritage is conserved, and we build resilience to coastal change

Exmoor is one of only two National Parks in England with a coastline. The impressive coastal elevations along its 36 mile length include the highest sea cliff in mainland Britain (Great Hangman) and some of the most remote and inaccessible shoreline. This is one of the few places in England where moorland meets the sea, with coastal heaths adorning the cliff tops, interspersed by extensive Atlantic oakwoods which form the longest stretch of coastal woodland in England. Exmoor's coastline also has a rich cultural heritage from Roman fortlets and prehistoric landscapes to historic harbours. It inspired Romantic Poets including Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth. There are also relics of the 19th century fashion for picturesque landscapes such as the Italianate terraced gardens at Ashley Combe designed for Ada Lovelace.

These natural and cultural heritage assets are increasingly at risk from coastal change. Sea level rise and increased risk of coastal flooding puts low lying areas at risk. On Exmoor, this primarily affects the settlements of Porlock Weir and Lynmouth. The low-lying coast around Porlock includes the distinctive breached shingle ridge and salt marsh behind. This part of the coast is dynamic and particularly vulnerable to rising sea level and the effects of storms and tidal surges, which can result in rapid and dramatic change. A saltmarsh has been developing at Porlock Marsh since the breach in the shingle ridge in 1996 opened the land up to daily inundation by the sea. Coastal erosion of Exmoor's high cliffs also threatens heritage assets and public access.

The King Charles III England Coast Path / South West Coast Path starts just outside the National Park at Minehead, and runs for 630 miles around the peninsula to Poole in Dorset. Many people come to walk all or some of the route each year, and it is an important attraction for local tourism businesses. It is therefore important to protect the peaceful environment, seascapes and long-distance views from the path, as well as enhancing the wildlife value of the coastal margin. Coastal erosion and flooding pose significant on-going threats to the long-distance path, so preserving its integrity is paramount, alongside promoting sustainable access and engagement with the coast's unique features.

At the foot of the cliffs are wave-cut platforms, sea caves and rocky bays with hidden, often inaccessible, beaches. Less is known about these inter-tidal and marine areas, although more research is being undertaken to better understand and care for our coastal and marine environments. There is great interest in the opportunities that could arise from off-shore renewable energy, including tidal energy due to the second largest tidal range in the world in the Bristol Channel. We seek to ensure that Exmoor plays its part in these considerations in a way that is compatible with National Park purposes.

Exmoor's coastline is a valuable resource, where people, nature, and heritage can thrive together while building resilience against the challenges of coastal change, sea level

rise and increased flood risks. We aim to protect Exmoor's coast and seascapes[44], while providing opportunities for public enjoyment, understanding, and responsible development, ensuring that the area remains resilient to climate change and accessible for future generations.

Targets and measures:

G4.1 Plan for the effects of coastal change and support communities to adapt to sea level rise and increased flood risk

G4.2 Maintain 'excellent' water quality at designated bathing waters (Lynmouth and Porlock Weir) and support catchment management measures to improve water quality at Combe Martin, Dunster, Minehead and Blue Anchor

G4.3 Restore and enhance 15% of priority habitats along the coast by 2043 in line with national targets

G4.4 Plan for the effects of coastal change on heritage assets including where appropriate, adaptation and resilience measures and preservation by record

G4.5 Maintain and improve the high scenic quality and tranquillity of the coast, protecting important views and seascapes and conserving the character of the undeveloped coast and the National Park setting

G4.6 Maintain the quality and diverse character of the King Charles III England / South-West Coast Path and respond positively to changes required as a result of coastal erosion or inundation. Ensure some highly accessible and promoted routes are available to enjoy the coastal landscape.

G4.7 Ensure that opportunities for offshore renewable energy generation and other marine infrastructure are consistent with National Park purposes, benefit local communities, and support the transition to a low carbon economy

[44] North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Character Assessment

Glossary of terms

30by30: The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30)[45], to support the global 30by30 target agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022. The Government's commitment to this international target is enshrined within the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan (which is under review in 2025)

Habitats Regulations Assessment: The Partnership Plan is subject to The Habitats Regulations[46] which transpose the requirements of the European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)[47] that aims to protect habitats and species of European nature conservation importance. The HRA process is intended to assess whether the impacts of a plan, when considered individually or in combination with the effects of other plans and projects against the conservation objectives of a European Site (and Ramsar site), would adversely affect the integrity of the objectives for that site - either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

National Nature Reserves:[48] These were established to protect important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research.

Nature based solutions: Nature-based solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage, or restore natural ecosystems, that address societal challenges such as climate change, human health, food and water security, and disaster risk reduction effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits[49]

Natural Flood Management: Natural flood management (NFM) uses natural processes to reduce the risk of flooding. These measures protect, restore, and mimic the natural functions of catchments, floodplains and the coast to slow and store water and dissipate wave energy. NFM measures can include: soil and land management; river and floodplain management; woodland management; run-off management; coast and estuary management[50]

Nature-friendly farming: There is no one definition but this broadly covers farming practises which have a positive impact on nature, whilst producing high quality food. Types of nature-friendly farming include regenerative agriculture, agro-ecology, silvo-pasture, permaculture and organic farming.

On Exmoor, the opportunities for nature friendly farming are varied and many are already being used. This includes low input, high quality output, regenerative systems, improved soil management, hardy livestock breeding and selection, improving conditions for nature both within fields and in the uncropped areas around them, avoiding artificial inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers, allowing

[45] 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps - GOV.UK
[46] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017
[47] (92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna [the Habitats Directive]
[48] National Nature Reserves in England - GOV.UK
[49] Nature-based Solutions | IUCN ; Climate Explainer: Nature-Based Solutions
[50] Natural flood management programme prospectus - GOV.UK

areas to be 'roughened up', letting hedgerows grow up and other positive management that works well for wildlife, minimal cultivations, creating field margins for pollinators, allowing scrub and trees to establish and protecting riparian corridors. It could also involve developing wood pasture systems. Extensive grassland farming systems can also protect other elements of natural capital such as healthy soils and peatbogs that lock up carbon, hold back water to reduce flood risk, and provide clean water.

Nature recovery opportunity areas: Areas where land will be given space to regenerate into a more natural state and where nature recovery will be the primary objective. Rivers and their catchments will be managed sensitively, allowing time and space for natural processes to take their course and wildlife to establish or return. Large herbivorous animals, such as livestock and Exmoor ponies will ensure these landscapes are in a state which is diverse and constantly changing. These landscapes will be producing other high quality public goods which are the National Park's life support systems – clean air, fresh water, and productive, healthy soils. There will be space to take a harvest of key products such as timber and also high-quality meat from livestock. Native species once lost to Exmoor such as pine marten, red squirrel and beaver may recolonise these landscapes.

Priority habitats and species: these are of particular importance for nature conservation and are included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. A full list of priority habitats and species can be found on Gov.uk. Exmoor has 29 priority habitats and over 200 priority species. These are listed in the Exmoor Wildlife Research and Monitoring Framework.[51]

Regenerative agriculture: There is no one definition of regenerative agriculture, but it is broadly understood to mean restoring and enhancing soil health, which will also benefit biodiversity, restore well-functioning water cycles, adapt to and mitigate climate change, and increase economic profitability. Regenerative agriculture is also used as a term describing **nature-friendly farming**. Recent guidance from the Advertising Standards Agency[52] sets out that regenerative farming typically involves some mix of the following farming practices:

- Limiting soil disturbance
- Maintaining year-round soil cover
- Promoting biodiversity and crop rotations
- Keeping living roots in the soil
- Integrating livestock and arable systems

Not all 'regenerative farmers' will necessarily employ *all* of these practices, and nor does their use provide any guarantee of soil or nature restoration. Ultimately, regenerative farming is coalesced around both key *actions taken* (as outlined above), but also key *outcomes*, which go beyond agricultural productivity alone and

[51] Exmoor Wildlife Monitoring and Research Framework
[52] Sowing the seeds of compliance: communicate your regenerative farming initiatives with confidence - ASA | CAP

encompass consideration of other natural resources and public goods such as biodiversity and water quality.

Regenerative tourism: an approach that is moving from a position of tourism 'doing less harm' to 'helping give back more than it takes'. The National Parks have collectively set out a new vision for regenerative tourism[53]. The aim is to champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates. As well as supporting tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature recovery, while ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone's needs.

Relevant authorities: include all levels of government and includes government agencies and ministers, National Park Authorities, and Statutory undertakers (companies who have been given statutory powers to carry out certain public works or services) such as water companies, utilities, telecommunications. Under Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, relevant authorities have , a legal duty to help further National Park purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within the National Park.

Setting of the National Park: is the area whose landscape character compliments that of the National Park itself, either through similarity or contrast, and in some way supports or enhances its landscape through views into or out of the National Park. The setting is also defined by the intervisibility of the landscapes on either side of the park boundary such as views and approaches towards the park; views out from summits, routes, rights of way, access land and visitor attractions within the park; and views from the park towards other important sites or landmarks outside the park, which may include other Protected Landscapes.

However, setting is not just about views, it also includes the experience of the landscape, for example in relation to qualities such as tranquillity and remoteness, dark skies, a sense of wildness and cultural heritage all of which may draw upon the landscape character and quality of the setting. Functional connectivity is also important where there are flows or close interconnection between the Protected Landscape and its setting, for example:

- a shared water catchment and management of water resources
- ecological connectivity where species are able to move across and between the designated and non-designated area
- Rights of Way, Open Access Land and other recreational links joining the designated area to the wider countryside

The setting of the National Park is not a simple buffer zone based upon a set distance from the boundary but varies in depth according to the Landscape Character Types and the topography. Changes in the setting can affect the landscape and natural beauty of the National Park. Development or land use change may also impact upon peoples' enjoyment of the special qualities of the area, for example its tranquillity, openness or uninterrupted views. Development in the setting of the National Park therefore needs to be carefully considered, and the National Planning Policy Framework[54] states that *'The*

[53] UK National Parks set out new vision for regenerative tourism - National Parks
[54] National Planning Policy Framework December 2024, para 189

scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas'. Development in the immediate setting should avoid creating a hard edge to the National Park boundary. Further policy and guidance is given in the Exmoor National Park Local Plan,[55] Landscape Character Assessment and Seascape Assessment[56]. As part of the duty[57] to further National Park purposes, relevant authorities should consider the effects of their functions and decisions on the setting of the National Park including planning and development, land management and use change, use of natural resources, and other activities[58].

Sites of Special Scientific Interest: These are the UK's best wildlife and geological sites. They cover a range of important wildlife habitats and species such as woodlands, rivers, heathland, peat bogs, flower-rich meadows, exposed cliffs and shingle beaches, and saltmarsh. They are notified and protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England and Wales. Many of these sites are also designated as National Nature reserves, Special Areas of Conservation under other pieces of legislation and so may have multiple layers of protection for their conservation interest.

Special Areas of Conservation[59]: These are protected areas in the UK designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) in England and Wales and form part of the UK's national site network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the habitats and species identified in the European Habitats Directive[60].

Strategic Environmental Assessment: The Partnership Plan is subject to Regulations for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to ensure that potential environmental effects are given full consideration alongside social and economic issues. The SEA process informs plan-making by assessing developing elements of the plan, evaluating and describing the likely significant effects of implementing the plan, and suggesting possibilities for mitigating significant adverse effects and enhancing positive effects

[55] Exmoor Local Plan 2011 - 2031 | Exmoor
[56] Landscape Character Assessment | Exmoor
[57] National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 section 11A, as amended by Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
[58] Further guidance on the setting of Protected Landscapes is given in the Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK
[59] Special Areas of Conservation | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation
[60] European Council Directive 92/43/EEC

ITEM 11

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy Public Consultation Draft

Purpose of the report: To provide members with a briefing on the Somerset Local Nature Strategy, produced by Somerset Council.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Authority is recommended to:

(1) Approve the Draft Somerset Local Nature Strategy for wider public consultation.

(2) Delegate authority to the CEO to make suggested minor final changes and corrections to the strategy following public consultation.

Authority Priority:

Partnership Plan Ambitions:

- Exmoor is richer in wildlife. Habitats are in good condition, expanded, connected, and support a greater abundance of species
- Implementation of the plan will support our Climate Emergency ambition to reduce carbon emissions across the National Park

Legal and Equality Implications:

The equality impact of the recommendation(s) of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no equality impacts for this decision.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendation(s) of this report is as follows: There are considered to be no human rights issues in relation to this report.

Financial and Risk Implications: The strategy does not commit the Authority to any specific proposal or associated financial risk. Media releases and information about the strategy needs to be carefully managed so as not to create unrealistic expectations.

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Under the Environment Act 2021, 48 responsible authorities across England have been tasked with producing Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to collectively address the decline in nature, based on county boundaries. Somerset Council (SC) and Devon County Council are the responsible authorities that cover Exmoor, and each are producing an LNRS for their respective counties. Exmoor National Park Authority is a supporting authority and a formal consultee for each LNRS, alongside Natural England. ENPA officers have liaised with the councils of both counties to

ensure the plans are relevant to Exmoor and are compatible across the county boundary.

1.2 The LNRS gives guidance as to what action is needed within a county for nature to recover and where actions are likely to be most beneficial. It will be published online and will include interactive mapping.

1.3 This paper is to approve the draft Somerset LNRS for pubic consultation, in ENPA's capacity as a supporting authority. The Somerset LNRS is the first of the two strategies that cover Exmoor to reach this stage. Currently we are within a formal 28-day consultation period allowed by the LNRS development process and granted by SC for the supporting authorities to approve this stage and this will expire in early July 2025.

1.4 The format for all LNRSs is set by Defra and must include the following:

- A written statement of biodiversity priorities, consisting of:
  - a description of the strategy area and its biodiversity.
  - a description of the opportunities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity in the strategy area.
  - priorities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity.
  - proposals of potential measures relating to those priorities.
- A local habitat map consisting of:
  - national conservation sites and local nature reserves in the strategy area.
  - areas which are of particular importance for biodiversity.
  - areas which could become of particular importance for biodiversity
  - areas where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits (eg reducing flood risk or improving water quality).

1.5 Areas that are of particular importance for biodiversity are also those that are already afforded protection. Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity are the focus areas for delivery of the strategy's measures. There is no statutory requirement for the measures to be implemented. There is also little funding opportunity identified to deliver the measures identified in the strategy, other than to target the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain projects.

1.6 LNRSs determine where habitat creation or enhancement for BNG will be of 'high strategic significance'. This means that when habitat is created or enhanced to generate biodiversity units for the purposes of BNG, it gets a 15% uplift in the biodiversity metric if it follows what was set out in the LNRS. In addition, Local Planning Authorities have a legal requirement to 'take account' of the content of the LNRS, to ensure nature recovery is properly reflected in the planning system and will need to reflect mapped areas in the local plan.

1.7 LNRSs are not prescriptive and do not require landowners to take them forward. Similarly, they will not be used to identify areas for legal protection.

1.8 Guidance on reviewing and updating the strategies is expected to be published by DEFRA later in 2025.

2. The Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy

2.1 Development of the Somerset LNRS has been undertaken by SC in partnership with a wide range of local stakeholders including environment professionals, farmers and growers, foresters, wildlife experts, local businesses and others though a series of workshops, surveys and events. It has been based on combining local ecological data, national biodiversity datasets, and stakeholder input to identify key areas for intervention.

2.2 It identifies eight main habitat types across the county and sixty-four priority species. For each of the habitat types and some of the species, measures are proposed to ensure their recovery.

2.3 The eight habitat types are:

- Coastal
- Farmland
- Freshwater
- Grassland (species rich)
- Lowland wetlands
- Moorland and Heath
- Urban
- Woodland and hedgerows

2.4 The strategy uses the 4 key principles of creating “better, bigger, more and joined” spaces for nature to guide the outcomes and measures. This is as outlined in the Making Space for Nature report led by Professor Sir John Lawton in 2010, now often referred to as the Lawton principles.

- Better – improve the quality of existing habitats
- Bigger – increase the size of the most valuable and important habitat sites
- More – establish new nature rich sites
- Joined – enhance connections between, and join up, sites

3. Significance for Exmoor

3.1 Exmoor is identified through initial public consultation as one of the areas most valued for nature in Somerset. Chapter 3.4 is a spotlight on Exmoor recognising the particular significance and contribution that the national park has to make to the county. It highlights the key habitats of moorland, woodland and traditional farming, as well as the dark sky reserve status. It also identifies some of the biodiversity issues we face such as loss of species rich grassland and deterioration in the condition of moorland heath and mires. Similarly, some important species that have strong populations on Exmoor are highlighted along with those that have suffered decline.

3.2 Exmoor’s unique coastal cliffs are also highlighted in Chapter 3.5 on Somerset’s Coast, with the ancient temperate rainforest identified as a key feature.

3.3 Chapter 4.1 identifies the Areas that could become important for biodiversity alongside the core areas that are already important. The mapping used in the draft strategy is purely visual however the completed online document will have interactive mapping.

3.4 The most significant habitat type for Exmoor is Moorland and Heath, where hyper dominance of purple moor grass is recognised as a significant issue that is difficult to address alongside the loss of moorland moss. Many of the measures cited for restoring the habitat are applicable on Exmoor.

3.5 Woodland and farmland are also a significant habitat types for Exmoor and the range of measures proposed are consistent with good practice for their expansion (woodland only) and enhancement.

3.6 Target species relevant to Exmoor include endemic whitebeam trees, water vole, fritillary butterflies. Bird species include nightjar, whinchat, grasshopper warbler, reed bunting, lesser redpoll, tree pipit and cuckoo, all of which feature strongly on Exmoor.

3.7 Case studies showcasing good practice include Horner Farm, the Exmoor non-native invasive species project, the Exmoor Sowing the Seeds project and the Holnicote estate.

4. Habitat map

4.1 The mapping in the consultation document is indicative only at this stage but broadly represents the existing habitat on Exmoor and areas where restoration and enhancement would have most benefit. ENPA officers will continue to liaise with SC through the remainder of the development phase to ensure its accuracy.

5. Next steps for the Somerset LNRS

5.1 Following formal feedback from the supporting authorities, ENPA and Natural England, it is planned that SC will commence the public consultation phase in July 2025 for up to eight weeks. Public consultation hosted on a web platform and will be publicised via both local and social media.

5.2 This will be followed by a review period and a report back to the supporting authorities for any further discussion. It is expected the complete strategy will be published by the end of November 2025.

6. Proposal

6.1 In ENPA's capacity as a supporting authority, members are asked to approve the Draft Somerset Local Nature Strategy for wider public consultation by Somerset Council.

6.2 Members are also asked to delegate authority to the CEO to make suggested minor final changes and corrections to the strategy following public consultation.

Alex Farris
Natural Environment Manager
June 2025

Somerset Council

Naturally Somerset
Somerset Local Nature partnership

A Vision for Somerset
Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Statement of Biodiversity Priorities

Map of Somerset's strategy area

Contents

Foreword

Nature has its own value, and we have a responsibility to protect it. A healthy natural environment is key to our own health and wellbeing. It is the foundation of a productive economy and provides us with food, water, timber, carbon storage, flood control, attractive neighbourhoods, and great recreational and business opportunities.

Protecting and enhancing our natural world could not be more important. England is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, ranking 233rd out of the 240 countries.

The LNRS will help address both the climate and ecological emergencies that have been declared by Somerset Council, and will help deliver on our council mission to build a fairer, greener, resilient, and more flourishing Somerset.

We're delighted to have collaborated with so many talented and passionate organisations and people working for nature to develop this strategy. Together we can make this strategy a powerful tool for restoring our natural habitats so that nature and people can thrive together.

Whilst the opportunity maps give a focus to our nature recovery efforts, we also know that every square inch of Somerset represents an opportunity for nature recovery, and anything anyone can do to help nature anywhere in the county is to be welcomed and encouraged. We all can, and should, try to make a difference wherever possible.

Cllr Graham Oakes
Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change and Environment, Somerset Council

Anyone who lives in or visits Somerset will know it is a truly special place. We are fortunate to have some beautiful landscapes with a variety of wildlife including bitterns, egrets, dormice, and water voles. People come to visit Somerset to experience wildlife spectacles such as starling murmurations and to benefit from a connection to the natural world.

But, as set out in the Somerset State of Nature 2023 report, and reflecting global trends, nature is in trouble.

The decline of nature has profound implications for the long-term health, wellbeing and livelihoods of Somerset communities.

The causes of decline, well documented in this report, include significant land use change for agriculture and development. Somerset currently has two of the biggest building projects in Europe (Hinkley Point C and the Agratas gigafactory).

A restored natural environment can contribute to the creation of vibrant, healthy communities and economies with clean air & water, healthy soils with ample pollinators leading to secure food supplies, resilient housing and healthy people.

This groundbreaking nature recovery strategy has been developed in wide-ranging consultation. Together we have thought about what nature in Somerset needs to recover.

The challenge is great but working together to deliver this strategy we can do great things.

Georgia Dent
Head of Somerset Local Nature Partnership

Executive Summary

Wildlife is disappearing at an alarming rate, and nature in Somerset has suffered significantly over recent decades due to habitat and species loss, and increased habitat fragmentation. There are multiple causes of this, including changes in land use, invasive species, pollution, and climate change.

To address this, the government has committed to halting and reversing biodiversity decline. Under the Environment Act 2021, 48 responsible authorities across England have been tasked with producing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Each strategy will describe local biodiversity and outline opportunities and priorities for enhancing it, in terms of habitats and species. Together, these strategies will form a nationwide Nature Recovery Network.

This first LNRS for Somerset outlines a comprehensive strategic, landscape scale approach for enhancing and restoring biodiversity across the strategy area. The strategy covers all the land and freshwater, up to the inter tidal zone as far as mean low water.

Developed in collaboration with local authorities, government agencies, environmental organisations, farmers, land managers, communities, residents, and many supporting organisations and individual stakeholders, the strategy is designed to address the urgent challenges of habitat loss, species decline, wider environmental benefits and climate change.

The LNRS guides us all as to what action is needed and where taking this action is likely to be most beneficial. It will therefore direct action and investment to areas where it is needed the most, and will achieve the most

The strategy sets out what, where and how we can take collective action to deliver our shared target of at least 30% of land and inland waters in Somerset to be well managed for nature by 2030, known as '30 by 30'.* Creating more space for nature will help wildlife to recover and create places that are more resilient to climate change. We recognise that coordinated landscape-scale conservation and restoration is required to slow and reverse species decline. This approach is based on Professor Sir John Lawton's 2010 report, 'Making Space for Nature,' which called for more, bigger, better, and joined-up wildlife sites. These Lawton principles provide a framework for our LNRS, emphasising the extension and enhancement of existing habitats and the creation of new or restored habitats to better connect important landscapes identified as crucial for nature recovery

The Strategy:

- **Outlines opportunities and priorities** for what, where and how we can protect and grow nature;
- **Maps a series of specific actions** that can be delivered now to have the most impact for nature across the region; and
- **Lays out the journey** for realising the long-term recovery and growth of nature across the region.

This LNRS points to the potential actions (measures) that can be taken to restore nature in each of the eight overarching habitat types around the county. These are coordinated actions which could be taken by local people and organisations to recover habitats and species in Somerset.

These measures are habitat based and will in turn benefit many species found in the county, but above and beyond this the Strategy identifies some 64 priority species from a long list of 422 species assessed as rare, threatened or significant within the county. Some species at threat have very specific habitat requirements, which cannot be met by the other measures (actions) in the LNRS. These very specific habitat requirements (niches) have been captured in the species shortlist.

The Local Habitat Map for Somerset is a key part of the LNRS, comprising of the "Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity" (APIB), areas already afforded protection, and the "Areas that Could become of particular Importance for Biodiversity" (ACIB), the target areas identified by the LNRS as the focus for the delivery of the strategy's potential measures. Many of the potential measures identified in the LNRS have also been mapped, targeting their delivery to where they would best be implemented with a focus on greatest need or opportunities for greatest benefit.

The LNRS is expected to help people and organisations across the county to co-ordinate future efforts and funding opportunities towards delivering a shared ambition for nature recovery, supporting local people to create a bigger, better and more joined up network for biodiversity to recover. Whilst the Strategy makes no requirement for its measures to be implemented, it offers a comprehensive guide to nature recovery that will present many strategic and financial benefits to farmers, landowners, planners, developers, community groups and others, in taking forward the measures.

To meet our goals, it is critical that we measure and monitor our progress. The Somerset State of Nature Report 2023 sets out a baseline for nature in Somerset and along with this strategy, they form a framework for nature recovery efforts in Somerset. From here, we will be able to track trends of change, both positive and negative, for the quality, quantity, distribution, connectivity, and resilience of our habitats and species. This will help us assess the state of nature, enabling us to demonstrate how well Somerset's LNRS is being implemented. The Strategy itself will be reviewed and updated as instructed by Defra. Details of how strategy delivery will be coordinated, monitored and supported will be published by the government in 2025

The Strategy is indebted to the extensive contributions of all partners and stakeholders who contributed so much time, expertise and support throughout the process. This now established framework of collaboration for the LNRS provides a firm footing on which to take the strategy forward following publication.

'30 by 30'

At least 30% of land and inland waters will be well managed for nature in Somerset by 2030

*UK government commitment to support the global 30by30 target agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15)

Introduction and Vision

A vision for nature in Somerset

This chapter sets the scene for nature recovery in Somerset. It outlines the purpose and vision for collective action.

1

Background

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) are a new, England-wide system of spatial strategies established by the Environment Act 20211. The main purpose of these strategies is to help reverse the ongoing decline of nature in England by establishing priorities for nature recovery, identify locations to create or improve habitat where this is most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment, and in doing so contributing to the national Nature Recovery Network. The aim is to coordinate local action to support the delivery of the national 25 Year Environment Plan, which aims to create a Nature Recovery Network of 500,000 hectares of new or restored wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites in England by 2042.

Somerset Council was appointed a Responsible Authority by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to lead on preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the area. Somerset Council chose to create the strategy in partnership with the Somerset Local Nature Partnership, who have acted as overall Steering Group. The LNRS has been locally led and is informed by a wide range of local interested parties, including environment professionals, farmers and growers, foresters, wildlife experts, local businesses and others though a series of workshops, surveys and events.

The methodology guiding the Local Nature Recovery Strategy involved a rigorous, evidence based process, combining local ecological data, national biodiversity datasets, and stakeholder input to identify key areas for intervention

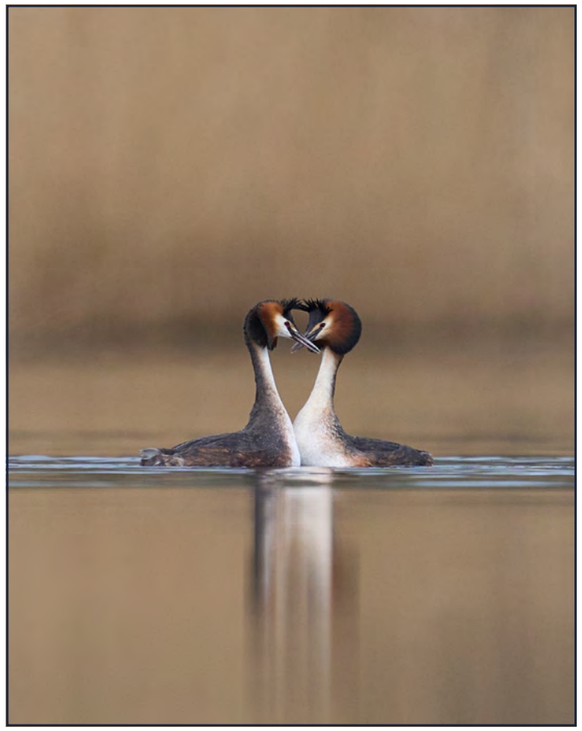
As with all of the 48 LNRSs prepared across England, the LNRS is formed of two key parts:

1. A written Statement of Biodiversity Priorities, which identifies the priorities for nature's recovery, and includes:

- A description of the strategy area and its biodiversity.
- Opportunities for recovering or enhancing biodiversity in the strategy area.
- Proposals for potential measures to deliver the identified priorities.

2. A Local Habitat Map, which maps:

- The most valuable existing areas for nature.
- Specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals



Nature is in crisis

We are in a climate and ecological emergency the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with monitoring since the 1970s indicating a decline in species abundance of 19% and nearly 1 in 6 species threatened with extinction (State of Nature 2023).

Nature in the UK, and more locally in Somerset, has declined significantly in recent times. The UK's State of Nature reports have sought to quantify the scale of nature's decline, with alarming results indicating that:

- Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by a third (32%) on average since 1970.
- Of 8,840 species assessed, 16% are classified as threatened with extinction.
- 8% of plant species assessed have seen decreases in their distribution.
- The distributions of invertebrate species have decreased by 13% on average since 1970.
- Hazel Dormouse has declined by 51% in Britain since 2000, and Water Voles have declined by 47% in the period 1998/00 to 2016.
- In a global context, England has a Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) score of 41%, amongst the lowest in the world (and against an average global BII of 77%).

A number of long-term national datasets also illustrate substantial declines of many species:

- Trends for the abundance of breeding birds on farmland show a decline of 61% in the period 1970 to 2022, and in the same period, the abundance of woodland birds declined by 37%.
- Some bird species have declined significantly in the period 1970-2018, including Turtle Dove (- 98%), Willow Tit (- 94%), Tree Sparrow (- 90%), Corn Bunting (- 89%), Spotted Flycatcher (- 88%), Little Owl (- 69%), Lapwing (- 64%) and House Martin (- 54%).

- Habitat-specialist butterflies have declined in abundance by 27% and lost 68% of their distribution in the period 1976 to 2019, and amongst all species, butterflies have lost 42% of their distribution in the same period

The Somerset State of Nature report 2023 provided a crucial benchmark for assessing how wildlife is faring across Somerset, and mirrored this national trend of species decline, with species continuing to go extinct from the county and many more threatened, along with their habitats. The report's findings highlight a stark reality: despite significant efforts, we have not succeeded in halting biodiversity decline.

In Somerset, quantitative data is more difficult to come by, but evidence indicates that:

- Terrestrial insects are faring particularly badly within Somerset, with butterfly distribution declining by 874km^2 over 30 years. Fritillary butterflies have suffered drastically with a 60% decline in distribution from 1990-2021; the marsh fritillary butterfly is now considered extinct from Somerset.
- Common mammal species are seeing a decline in reporting. Analysis of hazel dormice records in particular, indicate a reduction in the probability of seeing a dormouse, suggesting a decline in the population.
- Non-native invasive species cover has increased by 260%, from 354km^2 to 923km^2, between 1990-2021.
- Somerset habitats have also seen declines in species richness, as well as quality and quantity. Somerset has lost 201.94km^2 of grassland in 25 years, a 5.75% loss on top of previous already significant declines

The consequences of nature decline are extensive and affect our everyday lives. Beyond its crucial role in sustaining basic life-support systems through the supply of air, water and food, nature also significantly contributes to our overall quality of life

Some examples of the consequences of the decline in nature include:

- Food production - the absence of pollinators and degradation of soil quality threatens the production and quality of our food.
- Ecosystem services - pollination, water purification and soil fertility are affected by the loss of biodiversity, leading to increased costs of man-made water treatment and alternative systems.
- Health and Well-being - Loss of green spaces reduces access to nature, which has been shown to lower stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Economic impact - Loss of wetlands, forests, and coastal ecosystems increases vulnerability to flooding and erosion, leading to higher insurance costs and public infrastructure spending. New studies have shown domestic and global damage to the environment could lead to an estimated 12% loss of GDP in the UK by 2030.
- Social inequality - Marginalised and low-income communities are disproportionately affected by loss of green space, exacerbating health and opportunity disparities.

"The truth is: the natural world is changing. And we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have and we need to defend it."

- David Attenborough

Chapter 1.3

The State of Nature in Somerset

With a general trend of declining biodiversity in Somerset there are, however, good news stories. Through collaboration and working together success is possible with concerted effort, landscape-scale vision, and cohesive partnerships. Positive case studies, such as the Somerset Wetlands and Mendip Hills 'Super' National Nature Reserve, demonstrate the power of collective action. You can read about these in Section 4 - Working together.

The first Somerset State of Nature report gives valuable information on the current state of Somerset's species and habitats in 2023, sets a baseline for future efforts to be measured against and emphasises that it is not too late to act collectively for nature recovery. This LNRS follows on from The Somerset State of Nature report with guidance on how we can achieve nature recovery together.

Document user guide

This document is interactive and designed to help you easily navigate to relevant content while viewing it online.

This icon will send you to The Somerset State of Nature report 2023 to find out more baseline data on species and habitats in Somerset

The icon in the top-right corner will bring you back to the contents page

Clickable text to find out more

West of England Combined Authority

10% of Somerset is woodland, of which almost one third is ancient woodland

Exmoor and Quantock Oak Woodlands, the remaining fragments of our 'temperate rainforest'.

73km of coastline with 80% environmentally designated

more than 30,000km of hedgerow

Frome

122 waterbodies across 5 catchments, and **under 15% are of 'Good' ecological status**

Minehead

Exmoor

1 National Park, Exmoor 485.12km² in Somerset

60% decline in distribution of Fritillary Butterflies over 30 years

Bridgwater

Around 15% of Somerset is either at or just above sea-level

Taunton

74% of the land is farmland in Somerset

Devon

Wellington

97% reduction in species-rich grassland between 1932 and 1984

Yeovil

Dorset

Ilminster

An estimated 576,900 people live in Somerset (Nov 2023)

Population has increased by 36.9% in 42 years

Distribution of **non-native invasive** species cover has increased **260%** over 30 years

11 million tonnes of carbon are stored in the county's peat and the Somerset Levels and Moors; equivalent to **10 years'** worth of the county's emissions.

The purpose of the LNRS

The Strategy identifies a range of priority habitats that are essential for supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services. Each of these habitats play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, supporting species, and providing environmental and social benefits to our communities.

Our approach focuses on protecting, creating and enhancing, managing and connecting these habitats to ensure their resilience and sustainability for future generations.

By focusing on key indicators of ecological health and leveraging the expertise of local stakeholders, the LNRS aims to create a landscape that is more resilient to climate change, more connected for wildlife, and more accessible for the people who live and work in Somerset.

The purpose of the LNRS can be summarised as follows:

- Identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment
- Provide clear priorities, proposed activities and mapped high opportunity nature areas for a wide range of people to use as a guide to support nature recovery across Somerset
- Direct action and investment to areas where it is most needed and will derive the greatest benefits
- Support people and organisations putting together land management plans, funding bids, landscape recovery projects and other related plans
- Maximise the opportunities for development, land use and land management to make a positive contribution nature recovery.

The primary purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment.

A Nature Vision for Somerset

What makes Somerset distinct

Somerset boasts a variety of landscapes which forms a rich tapestry of habitats, from our famous hills to our diverse coastline and iconic wetlands, all of which provides our impressive setting, a strong identity and vital support for our local nature and biodiversity.

The peatlands and wetlands of the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the moorlands of our National Park are home to rare and unusual plants, birds and insects, and store vast amounts of carbon. Our woodlands are precious, with nearly a third being ancient woodland, and which include fragments of temperate rainforest

The grasslands habitats of Somerset are varied and echo the geological and soil diversity. With 74% of our land being agricultural, we're well known for our farmed exports including world renowned cheeses and cider.

Our coastline includes sand dunes, rocky shores, cliffs, salt marsh, tidal estuaries and coastal deciduous woodland, with 80% of our coastline having some form of environmental designation. The rivers and waterways of Somerset form fundamental components of our landscape, including the network of ditches and rhynes across one of the most extensive areas of reclaimed wet pastures in the UK.

The problem

Over hundreds of years, human activities have shaped our landscapes. Despite Somerset's relatively low population and the idyllic image of its lush green pastures interwoven with waterways and hedgerows, the region has experienced substantial biodiversity declines.

Changes in land use have led to habitat loss and increases in habitat fragmentation. Pollution has led to degradation of habitats, waterways and species loss. Additionally, poor management and over exploitation of natural resources, such as peatlands, have strained the land and caused release of carbon. Climate change impacts have compounded loss and disruption of nature.

Somerset has the second highest number of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in the UK. However, since 2009, we have lost 48 sites, representing 7% of our land. These losses include vital habitats like flower-rich meadows and pastures, wetlands, heathlands, and ancient woodlands. The widespread habitat loss across Somerset has resulted in declines in species, including mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, marine life, plants, and fungi. Terrestrial insects are particularly struggling, with the marsh fritillary butterfly now considered extinct from Somerset.

The opportunity

Our vision for a nature-rich Somerset is to restore and conserve the rich tapestry of Somerset's landscapes by weaving in more nature to create healthy and functioning habitats. We want our rivers, seas and waterways to run pollution free and be climate resilient to mitigate future flooding, areas important for nature to be in their best condition and expanding, and wildlife to recover and flourish throughout the whole county in rural and urban areas, alongside providing wider benefits to the current and future communities of Somerset.

Through this we aim to:

- **Focus on the extent and condition** of our existing habitats;
- **Expand** existing core habitat areas;
- **Create and restore** additional habitat patches; and
- **Enhance habitat connectivity** and facilitate species movement by linking up existing habitats

Guiding principles for decision making:

- **Understand your site** within the landscape and seek professional advice to deliver the best outcomes for nature;
- **Implement Nature-based Solutions** to restore natural processes and build resilience against climate change;
- **Develop green and blue infrastructure** in urban areas to create networks of natural and semi-natural areas;
- **Promote nature-friendly farming and forestry** to protect and improve soil and water resources;
- **Practice sustainable management** for the benefit of present and future generations;
- **Document and share knowledge** to ensure future generations benefit from our learnings; and
- **Foster partnership and collaboration** to sustain and restore nature. We must work together to integrate nature into our lives, support ecological recovery, and reverse biodiversity loss.

A Nature Vision for Somerset

Coastal

A resilient coast, safeguarding marine life and vital intertidal and sub-tidal habitats. We envision a coast that sustainably adapts to climate change, ensuring its long-term health and diversity. It will be a place where wildlife can thrive, from the coastal birds that arrive in their thousands in winter, to clean pollution-free waters that support healthy assemblages of fish, shellfish and marine mammals.

Moorland & Heath

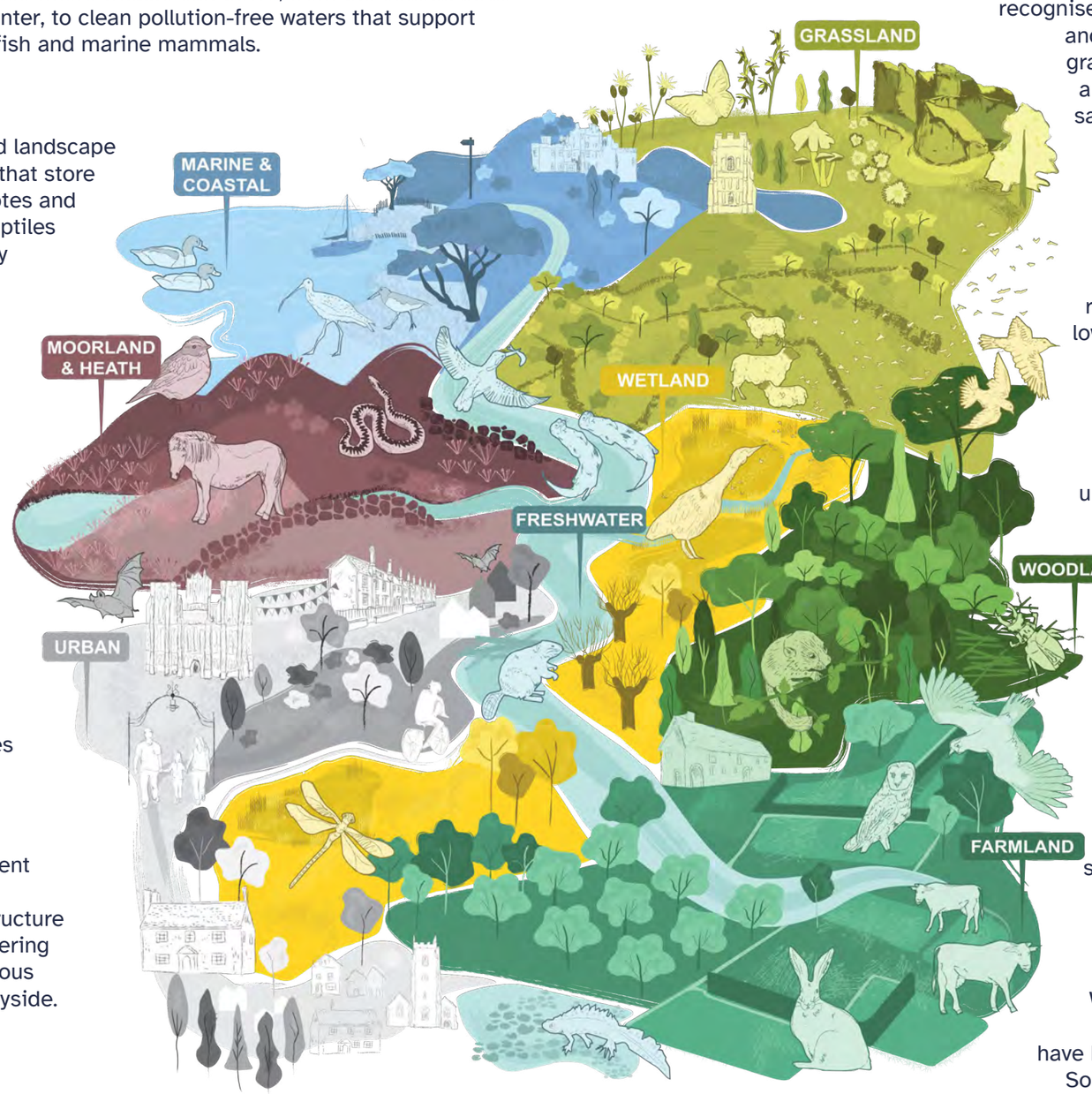
A thriving heathland and moorland landscape with a diverse mosaic of habitats that store more carbon. Management promotes and provides a vital haven for birds, reptiles and insects. This natural sanctuary will be a place of wild and open habitats that has successfully brought back many of the heathland rarities from the brink of extinction.

Freshwater

Waterways will have healthy flow rates and good water quality, supporting a diverse fauna and flora the likes of the colourful kingfisher and the charismatic otter. Waterways will be better connected to their floodplains with restored natural processes helping protect our communities from flooding and create better connected wet habitats for species recovery.

Urban

A flood and climate change resilient environment with nature on our doorstep. Green and blue infrastructure integrates nature into towns, fostering interconnectedness and harmonious existence with our diverse countryside.



Grassland

A thriving biodiverse and interconnected network of species-rich grasslands that are full of wildflowers and insects has been restored and created. People recognise and value wildlife-rich grasslands and all that they do for us. The varied grasslands of Somerset, support rare and endemic species and provide a sanctuary for wildlife and pollinators to support our farming industry.

Lowland Wetlands

Lowland wetlands are protected, restored and re-wetted to re-establish and expand this iconic lowland landscape. Dynamic, healthy and interconnected wetland habitats have been created that stores more carbon, with peat extraction ended, and provides a haven for wetland birds, and unique and diverse plant and insect communities.

Farmland

Farmland thrives from intertwining agriculture with space for nature. Nature-based Solutions and regenerative agriculture improves soil health, enhances water storage and reduces run-off, soil erosion and flooding. This approach fosters a sustainable, symbiotic relationship with nature, supporting productivity and nature in abundance.

Woodland & Hedgerows

Woody habitat networks of woodlands, wood pastures, hedgerows and trees have been expanded and diversified across Somerset, with irreplaceable and mature woodlands safeguarded for wildlife. Our enriched, resilient woodlands foster healthy trees and soils, capable of defending and nurturing our most precious and valuable woodland ecosystems.

How to use the LNRS

Using the strategy to inform nature recovery

This chapter explains the components of the LNRS, and how to use the potential measures and mapping to inform nature recovery

2

Understanding the elements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is a set of agreed priorities for Somerset's nature recovery, with spatially framed potential measures to deliver these.

A **priority** is the **outcome** we want to see for nature – you can find Somerset's priorities for nature for each of the eight overarching habitat types in Chapter 3 of the Strategy.

A **potential measure** is the proposed action to deliver the priority – these must be practical and achievable. You can find Somerset's potential measures for each of the eight overarching habitat types in Chapter 3 of the Strategy.

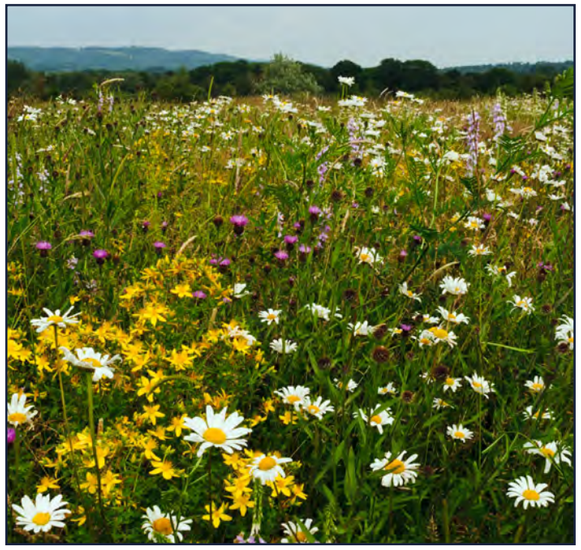
These measures are habitat based and will in turn benefit many species found in the county, but above and beyond this the Strategy identifies some 64 priority species from a long list of 1000 species assessed as rare, threatened or significant within the county. It is expected that the identified targeted action for these priority species will also offer benefits to the wider species of the county.

The **Local Habitat Map**. The Nature Recovery Network is made up of the areas which are currently being protected for nature, and those areas which could be doing more for nature – as shown on the Local Habitat Map. It is a key part of this strategy and can help to guide action for nature and should be used in conjunction with this document. An interactive version of the Nature Recovery Network maps is available through Somerset Council's interactive mapping tool and via the Council's website [link to online map]. These maps can be downloaded, printed, and shared, and layers can be toggled on or off to support effective project planning. For more details on how the maps were created, refer to Appendix x. The Local Habitat Map includes:

Areas of particular importance for biodiversity (APIB) are the mapped national conservation sites, local nature reserves, local wildlife sites and irreplicable habitat. The areas eligible for inclusion in this map are tightly defined by the LNRS regulations.

Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity (ACBI) are the mapped opportunity and target areas (measures) for nature recovery. These are the areas of the county that have been identified as in greatest need of action and/or delivering the greatest benefit. It includes areas where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits.

You can view both the APIB and ACBI online at [link to online map]



Bigger, better, more and joined up - the overarching principles for nature recovery in Somerset

Somerset's local nature recovery strategy uses the 4 key principles of creating "better, bigger, more and joined" spaces for nature, as outlined in the Making Space for Nature report led by Professor Sir John Lawton in 2010, now often referred to as the Lawton principles.

This strategy uses the Lawton principles as a basis for nature recovery across Somerset, and outlines how we will commit to making better, bigger, more and joined up space for nature.

In applying these principles across the Strategy, we will not only support the recovery of nature but also ensure that our habitats and species have the ability and space to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change, by enabling dynamic habitats and increasing resilience. It also means that there is room for nature, alongside the many competing demands for land in our county, and that the many pressures facing nature are tackled in a more strategic and ecosystem led approach

The principles are explained in the boxes below:

Better

Improve the quality of our existing habitats and ensure they are in a healthy and functioning state, by applying and resourcing better and appropriate management. We also need to better conserve and safeguard what we already have.

Bigger

Increase the size of our most valuable and important habitat sites, not only extending but buffering, to protect them from the pressures of human influences

More

Through habitat restoration and creation, establish new, nature-rich sites that not only provide more space for nature but also provide connectivity between existing core sites.

Joined up

Enhance connections between, and join up, sites, through improving the quality of the land that exists between, creating new physical corridors, and establishing 'stepping stones'.

Click here to read more on Lawton's principles in Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network (2010)

How to use the potential measures an mapping to inform nature recovery

The Strategy has identified the priorities for nature recovery in Somerset, the potential measures that could be taken to support the delivery of these and where in the county these would be best delivered.

Delivering potential measures

The Strategy recommends a number of management measures to increase the functionality or biodiversity of a habitat – some mapped, some not.

The Strategy map indicates all areas where the potential measures could be delivered. In some instances these are wide ranging areas, in others they are specific areas depending on the mapping capability. The purpose of mappin the measures is to create a shared vision of locations where habitat action could be focusec by local people and organisations to create a connected network of nature and achieve the local biodiversity priorities. Whilst many measu could be possible in a variety of locations, the Local Habitat Map only shows the locations whe these measures could have the greatest impact on achieving the priorities and would achieve greater connectivity of biodiverse habitats acro the landscape.

By mapping specific locations to take such actions, the LNRS aims to drive funding towards achieving action in these areas. Where a potential measure could feasibly be delivered ir many locations across the county, responsible authorities were not expected to map specific locations unless it was clear that the measure(s would have great benefit to biodiversity if delivered in particular locations. In all cases, the mapped areas are indicative. They are a guide not a prescription, and are not intended t replace landowner choice, good site surveys, lo knowledge and project planning.

Furthermore, whilst this strategy picks out key priorities, actions, and locations, there are still other actions that people can deliver in other locations to support nature across the county. There are a lot of initiatives that tackle differen elements of nature's recovery and each has its own role in the overall recovery of biodiversity.

An important caveat to take into account when using this strategy is that this is a high level strategy developed using the current best existing information. However, for all detailed decisions about habitat management or creation on any particular site, the general recommendations of this strategy should be supplemented with site-specific advice from ecologists, land agents, and land managers, and within protected landscapes the National Landscape / National Park teams.

The Strategy and associated maps do not dictate actions, nor instruct their implementation – they are a guide for how landowners and managers could use or manage the land, or approach their operations, in a way that could support the recovery of nature.

Chapter 2.2

Delivery Mechanisms

This section aims to provide landowners and managers a clearer understanding of what LNRS means for them and their land.

Uses for LNRS that are based in law

Targeting Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) - LNRSs will determine where habitat creation or enhancement for BNG will be of **'high strategic significance'** This means that when habitat is created or enhanced to generate biodiversity units for the purposes of BNG, it gets a 15% uplift in the **biodiversity metric** if it follows what was set out in the LNRS.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy can be used as a key source of information e.g. regarding strategic approaches to off-site biodiversity net gain delivery and connections to existing habitat, when local planning authorities are carrying out their functions in respect of Biodiversity Net Gain. As part of this the biodiversity hierarchy will need to be considered; the **Biodiversity Net Gain planning practice guidance** sets out further information on this.

Duty on Public Authorities to Conserve and Enhance the Environment - LNRSs will inform how all public authorities in England meet their **legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity**. The duty applies to a long list of national and local government organisations as well as some private utilities such as water companies. Public authorities must understand which LNRSs are relevant to them and how they can contribute. This could be through:

- Managing areas of land that they are responsible for in a way that supports what the LNRS proposes
- Using the LNRS to inform relevant regulatory decisions

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a particularly important role to play in supporting the delivery of actions proposed in LNRSs.

Planning Law - Planners have a legal requirement to 'take account' of the content of the LNRS, to ensure nature recovery is properly reflected in the planning system. The key documentation is available at **www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment** but is summarised below:

- **For local plan development:** Local planning authorities should be aware of mapped areas and proposed measures in the relevant LNRS and consider how these are reflected in their local plan.
- **For planning decisions:** The LNRS is an evidence base that may be a '**material consideration**' in planning; the decision-maker determines its relevance based on circumstances.

Other ways in which LNRSs will be used

LNRS will also be used:

- **To provide information to farmers and land managers** to help them choose which Countryside Stewardship and Sustainable Farming Incentive options are appropriate for their land.
- **To help groups of farmers and land managers shape nature recovery priorities** for their area, and to encourage collaboration across holdings and landscapes.
- **To identify opportunities for Landscape Recovery project proposals**, and to provide evidence to support their application and project development.
- **To help Government when considering applications for funding** for specific nature recovery activities, by acting as criteria in applications.
- **To help responsible authorities and/or local partnerships leverage and target funding for environmental projects** to areas where they could have the most impact for nature and the wider environment.
- **To inform how Defra arms-length bodies carry out existing functions to better support nature recovery** – for example, by drawing on LNRS priorities and proposals when providing land management advice to farmers, or when selecting locations for nature-based solutions such as natural flood management and tree planting.
- **To inform the development and implementation of Protected Landscape management plans**, by identifying locations and measures that will drive delivery of the agreed targets and outcomes set out in these plans.

Ways in which LNRSs might be used in future

Government is keen to add to the list above to provide further encouragement and support for the delivery of actions proposed in LNRSs.

Below are some further opportunities for how LNRSs could be used in future, but which require further exploration to determine whether this will be the case.

LNRSs might be used:

- **To identify where funding could be made available** to encourage farmers and land managers to carry out the most environmentally impactful actions on their land.
- **As required criteria in future government nature recovery funding schemes**, meaning that actions proposed in the LNRS would be eligible for funding.
- **To inform the identification of areas that could potentially contribute towards Government's 30by30 commitment** following appropriate action for nature recovery.
- **To inform where private companies choose to provide corporate donations** for habitat creation or enhancement projects that deliver LNRS proposals.
- **To guide private finance investments in nature and carbon markets** – for example, targeting action on tree-planting as part of the **UK Emissions Trading Scheme**.

How LNRSs will not be used

LNRSs are not designed to be prescriptive. They are tools to drive forward action to recover nature. The following list sets out the ways that Defra have told us in writing, they don't intend LNRS to be used. and which they at time of writing, do not foresee changing in the future.

LNRSs won't be used to:

- **Require owners or managers of land to make specific proposed land use changes** – this will remain their choice.
- **Place new restrictions on developing land** – LNRSs will be one source of evidence used to inform the preparation of plans that will determine where development should occur (these plan preparation processes have their own consultation and engagement requirements so that different needs for land can be balanced by the plan maker).
- **Identify areas to be given legal nature protections that create restrictions on how land can be used or managed** – LNRSs do not propose new nature reserves or any other kind of legal designation.
- **Prevent nature conservation work** in areas not prioritised by the LNRS (e.g. by restricting funding in areas that are not mapped).
- **Determine regulatory decisions**, such as the result of Environmental Impact Assessments – LNRSs can be a source of evidence to inform decision making but determination must still be made on the basis of relevant legislation and statutory guidance.

Step-by-step guide to use this LNRS

This step by step guide is to help you put this strategy into action.

1.

Identify which Zone your site or project is located

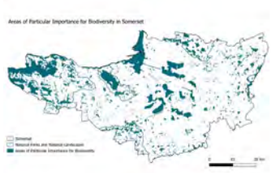
The opportunity maps help identify if your land or project is in:

Zone 1: Core areas of high nature value. Actions should focus on extending and improving condition of habitats.

Zone 2: Areas that could become important for biodiversity. Actions should focus on creating and restoring habitats to connect core areas and create resilient habitat networks.

Zone 3: Sustainable use areas. Actions should focus on implementing sustainable practises and management, and creating spaces for nature.

Clicking on the principle opportunity maps below will take you to the interactive mapping database where you can find out which Zone your project or land is located.



Map of areas of particular importance for biodiversity (APIB) (Zone 1)

Map of areas that could become of particular importance (ACIB) (Zones 2 & 3).

2.

Identify your goals to help create a coherent and resilient ecological network

Ecological networks consist of high-quality sites protected by buffer zones and connected by wildlife corridors and habitat-rich stepping stones.

The LNRS priority outcomes aim to create better, bigger, more, and joined-up habitats, forming a coherent and resilient ecological network.

Each site is unique, so goals should be tailored to the location of your project or land to focus on the most relevant priority outcomes and measures.

- **Core areas of high nature value** in Zone 1 should focus on priority outcomes and measures to manage and improve habitat conditions, extending these core areas.
- **Corridors and stepping stones** enable species movement and support ecosystem functions. Zone 2 sites should focus on priority outcomes and measures to enhance connectivity through creating and restoring habitats.
- **Restoration areas** in Zone 2 where nature-rich habitat is lost or degraded, should focus on priority outcomes and measures which create and restore habitat. Historic land mapping can help identify remnant or fragmented habitat.
- **Buffer zones** protect core areas, corridors, stepping stones, and restoration areas. Sites in Zone 2 should focus on priority outcomes and measure which create these buffer zones.
- **Sustainable use areas** in Zone 3 should focus on promoting wildlife-friendly practices and Nature-based Solutions.

3.

Determine the most suited habitat type for your site

By following steps 1 and 2, you can identify the most suitable habitat type for your site. If unsure, use the habitat opportunity maps in Chapter 4 for guidance.

If you're already involved in a project focused on a specific habitat, start there and then use steps 1 and 2 to find suitable locations and set goals from the outcomes and measures in Chapter 4.

4.

Take action in helping nature recover

Chapter 4 of the LNRS details priority outcomes and measures for each habitat type, including additional species-specific measures.

We recommend you **consult an ecologist through the CIEEM directory of registered consultants,** to survey existing habitat and species, and advise on the best habitat creation or enhancement actions. Opportunity areas (Zones 2 and 3) depend on land use and ownership, and mapping inclusion does not guarantee habitat creation or restoration.

6.

Monitoring

Record your starting baseline, what actions you are delivering and monitor the results.

This strategy will be reviewed based on actions that are being delivered and updated to reflect progress and changing circumstances to ensure this LNRS remains relevant and ambitious.

5.

Identify funding available to you

The user guides in Chapter 2 help you identify funding and support that might be available.

We recommend reading the case studies to see how you can work with others to help achieve conservation at a landscape-scale.

Somerset's Natural Environment

A description of our strategy area and its biodiversity

This chapter provides a summary description of nature in Somerset. It describes the areas that are already playing an important role in nature recovery with spotlights on some of these key areas.

3

Strategy Area Description

Somerset's landscape is varied, from farmland and grassland to ancient woodlands, heathlands, and the picturesque coastline. This landscape contains many important habitats, with 22.7% of Somerset nationally or internationally protected, ranging from the uplands of Exmoor National Park to the rolling Mendips, Blackdown, and Quantock Hills, and to the low-lying flat Somerset Levels and Moors. Somerset boasts varied geology and soils, yielding a range of habitats.

Moorland & Heath

Some of Somerset's most recognisable landscapes are heathlands. These wild, open areas are characterised by the eye-catching purple haze of heather in late summer. Their mosaic of grassland, shrubs, and bare ground is home to a wide range of wildlife, including rare and endangered species such as merlin, heath fritillary, and adder. Exmoor National Park provides a prime example of this diverse and precious habitat.

Freshwater

Rivers, ponds, and lakes are crucial components of Somerset's ecosystems, provide habitat for a great diversity of species, connecting communities and linking terrestrial habitats with the coastal environment. However, less than 15% of Somerset's rivers are in 'Good' ecological condition. Maintaining good water quality is key to ensuring a broad range of species that rely on the waterways for food and shelter can survive and thrive.

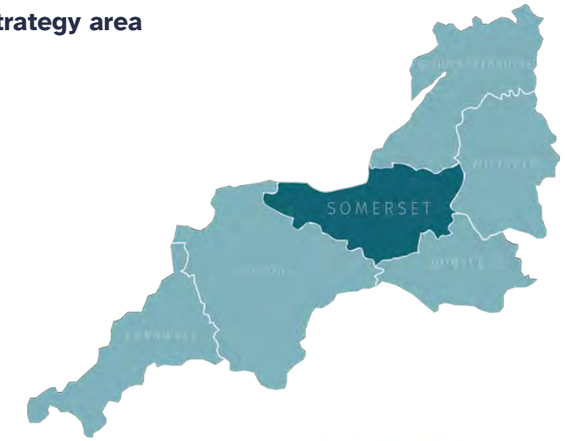
Woodland & Hedgerows

Woodland covers only 10% of the land in Somerset, with one-third being ancient, and much lost over hundreds of years. Somerset is home to fragments of temperate rainforest and Exmoor has the longest stretch of coastal woodland in the UK with rare whitebeam trees unique to Exmoor. Wood pasture, wet woodlands, and over 30,000km of hedgerows are also found in Somerset.

Grassland

Somerset supports a great range of grassland types due to the geography and soils, and grasslands, including agricultural grasslands, cover the largest area of Somerset. However, our species-rich grasslands and meadows, home to rare and unique species, are in decline with 5.74% lost in the last 25 years. The area with the most drastic decline has been the Mendips.

Map of Somerset's strategy area



Coastal

Somerset's 73km coastline features soft shores with salt marsh, dunes, and shingle banks in the east that support diverse wildlife, including those associated with the Severn Estuary, one of the UK's most significant marine environments. Further west the shore is of harder substrate with lower shore kelp forests, home to diverse species including molluscs, crustaceans, fish, porpoises and grey seals. Maritime cliffs provide nesting for seabirds, while grasslands and scrub on the slopes support rare invertebrates and plants.

Lowland Wetlands

Lowland wetlands are one of the key landscapes in Somerset. The Somerset Wetlands NNR covers over 6,000ha, the third largest in England, and includes much of the iconic Somerset Levels and Moors, the largest remaining lowland wetland area in England and the UK's second-largest lowland peat area. Lowland wetlands support diverse habitats and species, including nationally important bird populations and the declining water vole.

Farmland

Agriculture is vital to Somerset's heritage and economy, with nearly three-quarters of the county covered by farmland. Somerset does have semi-natural habitats (e.g. woodlands, hedgerows and rhynes) threading through the farmed landscape, however quality spaces for nature have diminished. Ensuring a harmonious relationship between agriculture and nature is crucial for healthy ecosystems and food systems.

Urban

The increasing population in Somerset is putting strain on nature and green spaces. Nature is essential not only for biodiversity but also for human health and well-being. Green and blue infrastructure is vital to maintaining Somerset's urban areas' richness in nature and their connectivity to the broader green and blue network.

Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity

To consider where ambitious nature recovery measures can take place, the locations of the important and diverse habitats that make up the existing nature network across Somerset need to be established. This is achieved within this strategy by creating a single map, identified as the **Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB)** map. This acts to provide a framework of core sites to help identify locations and opportunities for targeting creation of new habitat, or improving, expanding and linking the existing areas.

Internationally designated sites:

- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Ramsar

Nationally designated sites:

- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

It also includes:

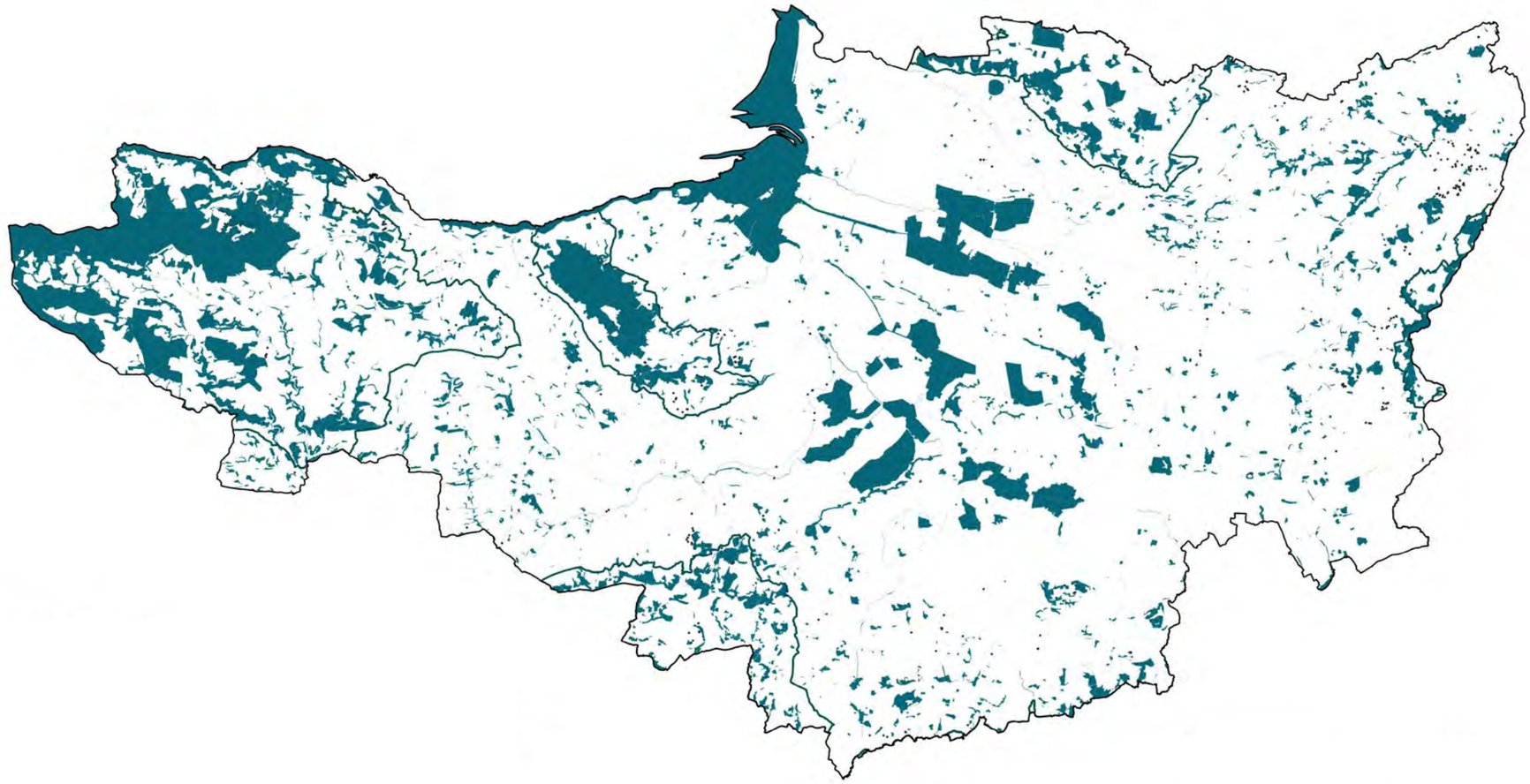
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)
- Irreplaceable habitats (as defined in the 'Biodiversity Gain Requirements Regulations 2024'

Whilst the APIB's need active protection, enhancement and in some cases concerted restoration to reach a more favourable condition, it is not within the remit of the Strategy to map potential measures to the nationally designated protected sites for nature, since these are all subject to existing national and local policies and legislation which must be adhered to when considering any activity.

Potential measures can however be mapped to our Local Nature Reserves, County Wildlife Sites and Irreplaceable Habitat, since these have a different level of protections.

APIB's cover a total area of XX km^2, which constitutes XX% of Somerset. Many of these core areas are set within already protected landscapes. The boundaries of Somerset's protected landscapes, Exmoor National Park, p.30-31) Mendip Hills, Blackdown Hills, and Cranborne Chase National Landscapes are also shown on this map (see also map on p.30-31).

The following pages provide a spotlight on some of these relatively nature rich landscapes, although there is still more we need to do to reverse biodiversity decline in these areas.



National Parks and National Landscapes

0 5 10 20km

Areas of particular importance for biodiversity

Opportunities to extend and improve the condition of these core habitat areas through effective management for nature recovery.

Find out more:

For further information, click on the map to visit the online interactive map.

Spotlight on...

Somersets Hills our National Landscapes

Of the 46 National Landscapes in the UK, four are in Somerset, although one, Cranborne Chase, is predominantly in Dorset and Wiltshire but does merge into the chalkland of Somerset. Important habitats for the three 'Somerset Hills' National Landscapes include woodland, heathland, meadows and calcareous grassland, as well as special features such as spring-line mire habitats.

The Quantock Hills is one of the smallest National Landscapes, but what it may lack in size, it makes up for in diversity and delights. It consists of heathland, oak woodlands, and ancient parklands. Hilltops are covered in heathland of heather, gorse and bracken, amongst which sit scattered, mixed conifer plantations. The western side of the Quantocks are steep scarp slopes of pasture, woods and parkland.

On the Somerset/Devon border lies the Blackdown Hills, which have a greensand geology unique in Britain. The grasslands, lowland heathland, meadows, wet woodlands, wood pasture and mire mosaic habitats support important populations of fauna, most notably scarce butterflies.

The Mendip Hills, formed from carboniferous limestone has an array of landscape features including gorges, caves, valleys, lakes, woodlands and grasslands. Ash–maple woodland, calcareous grassland and mesotrophic grassland which can be found across the Mendip Hills provide nationally important semi-natural habitats.

What is special?

Quantock Hills National Landscape

The Quantock Hills showcases a remarkable diversity of habitats and species within a compact area, and is protected by 4 SSSIs, a SAC, numerous LWSs and an Important Bird Area, and boosts three key priority habitats: woodland, heathland and grassland. The Quantock Hills is important for its assemblages of heathland and farmland birds with iconic species such as the Dartford warbler and nightjar. Other important species include the brown hairstreak butterfly and Barbastelle and Bechstein's bats where populations within the Quantock Hills remain strong.

Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Within the Blackdown Hills, several priority habitats are protected by 16 SSSIs and 1 SAC, and which stand out as exemplifying the value of the area for nature, including woodlands, hedgerows, lowland heathlands, neutral grasslands and spring-line mire habitats. Due to the mosaic of habitats, the hills are also a hotspot for rare and important species such as rare bats species (lesser and greater horseshoe, and Bechstein's bat), hazel dormouse, brown hairstreak and rare fritillary butterflies, and orchid species that are locally abundant (green-winged, lesser butterfly and early marsh orchids).

Mendip Hills National Landscape

The unique habitats and species of the Mendip Hills are recognised as important for nature and heritage, which have been shaped by the limestone geology, creating stunning gorges, rocky outcrops, grasslands full of endemic species such as the Cheddar pink, and hidden habitats in the cave systems for nationally important numbers of roosting horseshoe bats, whilst also acting as an aquifer for our water supplies. Hedgerows, dew ponds and over 400km of drystone walls weave through the landscape providing lifelines for wildlife and connecting 3 SACs, 1 SPA and 29 SSSIs and associated vital habitats, including lowland heathland, ancient woodland, and acid, neutral and calaminarian grasslands. The Mendip Hills and the newly designated Mendip 'super' NNR span the county border, offering a chance to unify nature recovery efforts between Somerset and the West of England.

What have we lost?

Specialist plants of heathlands and bogs are in decline, and many species, such as adders are only found in significant numbers on the Mendip Hills, Quantock Hills and Exmoor. Invertebrates and birds have suffered from declines in heathland and moorland habitats extent and conditions, with fritillary butterflies suffering a 60% decline in distribution from 1990-2021. Priority grassland has been lost, particularly dramatically in the Mendip Hills. Extensive surveying on the Mendip Hills has shown that populations of great crested newts are fragmented into small isolated pockets too far distant from one another for any interaction to occur, and with populations often reliant on a single breeding pond, local extinctions are increasing in probability.


Adder


Cheddar pink


Brown hairstreak butterfly


Bechstein bat

Spotlight on...

Exmoor National Park

Exmoor National Park spans 692km² across Somerset and Devon. It features spectacular and diverse habitats including heathlands and moors, bogs, woodlands, grasslands, freshwater waterbodies and a dramatic coastline.

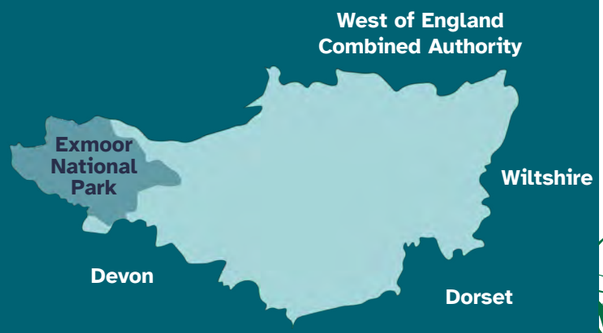
The moorland habitats are internationally important and provide homes to many species including specialist moorland plants, birds and animals.

Traditional mixed farming provides a range of habitats, including unimproved grassland, hedgerows and areas of scrub, which are important for wildlife as they support a wide variety of species.

Exmoor's diverse woodland resource includes deeply incised wooded valleys, and unique coastal woodlands that face the Bristol Channel. The ancient sessile oak woodlands contain rare lichens and one of the densest collections of veteran trees in Europe.

Exmoor was the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe, where its nocturnal wildlife such as the hazel dormouse and Barbastelle bat benefit from the lack of light pollution.

Exmoor has a Vision for Nature Recovery 2023, where it aims to have at least 75% of the National Park in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing corridors for wildlife to connect beyond its boundaries.



Why is Exmoor important for nature recovery?

Thanks to careful management much of Exmoor's wildlife is faring well compared with other parts of the country. However, Exmoor has not escaped the declines in biodiversity with losses of habitat including species-rich grassland, dwarf shrub heath and upland mires and reductions in characteristic species including many songbirds and butterflies.

Clean waterbodies are needed to support varied communities of flora and fauna, including the internationally vulnerable Atlantic salmon.

Notable species include various bat species, dormice, and some of the UK's rarest butterflies including the heath and high brown fritillary.

As a National Park, there is a special responsibility to safeguard Exmoor's wildlife and recover what has been lost. Exmoor could be more nature-rich and help mitigate the impacts of climate change, while remaining productive and viable for land managers. However, continued partnership working is needed to deliver this vision.

What is special?

Exmoor's moors and heaths support nationally important populations of whinchat, stonechat, Dartford warbler, cuckoo and heath fritillary butterfly.

Dartford Warbler

Whinchat

Cuckoo

They are nationally important for the presence of a wide combination of upland heath types, including two rare types of heathland (bristle bent/western gorse heath and ling/western gorse heath) which are of international importance.

Ancient sessile oak woodlands contain rare lichens and one of the densest collections of veteran trees in Europe.

195km² of Exmoor is designated as 15 SSSIs, equating to 28% of the national park (71% of which is in Somerset), of which over half is also designated as 2 SACs (Exmoor Heaths and Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods).

Notable species in Exmoor include 16 of the 17 breeding British bat species found in the UK.

What have we lost?

Birds such as the curlew are now at the edge of extinction on Exmoor and other species such as yellowhammer, willow tit and greenfinch have seen a big drop in numbers across the National Park.

Targeted management has helped populations of high brown and heath fritillaries to stabilise. However pearl-bordered and marsh fritillary butterflies are now extinct in Exmoor.

The red squirrel has not been seen since 1947 as grey squirrels rapidly increased in numbers. The reintroduction of pine marten and white tailed eagle is being investigated, with long term aspirations for red squirrels.

Centuries of moorland reclamation, agricultural drainage, peat-cutting, overgrazing, and swaling have dried out much of the peat, leading to dominance by moorland grasses and loss of wildlife.

There is less than 25km² of species-rich unimproved grassland left, covering just 3.6% of the

Nightjar

Barbastelle bat

Unsea Florida

Heath fritillary butterfly

Spotlight on...

Somerset's Coast

There is an amazing diversity of habitats and wildlife along Somerset's 73 km coastline, with 80% of the area enjoying some level of environmental designation from 2 SACs, 1 SPA, 1 Ramsar site, 6 SSSIs, 2 NNRs and 1 LNR. This diverse coastline features sand dunes, sand flats, salt marshes, tidal estuaries, and mud flats. You'll also find shingle banks and ridges, rocky shores, boulder beds, coastal woodlands, fossil-filled cliffs and intertidal bedrock that rival the Jurassic Coast to the south.

Somerset's coastal deciduous woodland, the longest in the country, hosts many threatened species. The dramatic cliffs from Porlock Weir to Foreland Point span nearly 11km, with the wooded slopes and maritime heaths contrasting with the low cliffs and sandy beaches in the east.

Coastal fringe habitats such as the salt marshes at Steart and Porlock, the dunes at Berrow, the kelp forest at Porlock and coastal woodland along the Exmoor cliffs are also vitally important both for biodiversity and as carbon sinks and natural sea defences in the face of increasing climate change.

Although our coastline has a number of national and international protection designations, it remains under pressure from urban expansion and development, and tourism, as well as the need for coastal defences - all compounded by the accelerating changes in our climate and more extreme weather events. The ecological significance of this complex and diverse range of habitats, combined with its role as the 'frontline' defence against climate change and sea level rise, makes it increasingly vulnerable.

What is special?

Somerset's coastal habitats are a vital part of the county's nature recovery network. Marginal, increasingly threatened ecosystems such as salt marsh, sand dunes, shingle ridges and cliff tops act as a refuge for rare and important plant, invertebrate and bird communities, whose numbers have declined in the last 100 years.

Often seen as wasteland, targeted for drainage schemes, these habitats actually act as buffer zones providing a cost-effective, natural way of coping with higher seas and storm surges, such as Steart Marshes, created to protect neighbouring villages from high tides and nature recovery.

Berrow Dunes

The coastal habitat at Berrow Dunes are the last remaining dunes in the county and one of the most botanically rich areas in Somerset, with at least 270 species of flowering plant being recorded on this site. Local conservation volunteers, the Berrow Conservation Group, help safeguard the wildlife of the dunes. They have regular work parties to clear the invasive Sea-buckthorn.

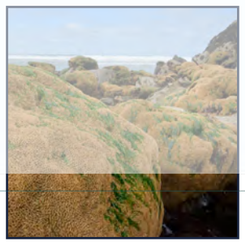
Exmoor cliffs

The Somerset Exmoor sea cliffs are the highest in England and extend for around 14km between Minehead and the Devon border. Much of it is ancient woodland with temperate rainforests which have been compared to tropical rainforests because of their luxuriant growth of lichens, ferns, mosses and liverworts.

Saltmarsh

Saltmarshes, part land and part water, are home to plants and animals specially adapted for these salt-rich lands. Muds and saltmarsh exposed at low tides, including those of Bridgwater Bay, are a super-rich in marine invertebrates and fish which provide feeding grounds for a range of over-wintering wading birds and wildfowl. A resident breeding population of harbour porpoise are also present within this diverse area of coastline. Saltmarsh is also one of the best habitats for carbon sequestration

White rock-rose



Honeycomb worm

What have we lost?

Our coast has been eroded by historical sea defences and reclaiming land for agriculture and development. Our softer coast features like sand dunes, shingle ridges and salt marshes are increasingly falling victim to more frequent storm events and coastal squeeze, whereby intertidal habitats are unable to migrate landward as sea levels rise, and in the case of our softer cliffs, some sections are retreating by at least two metres per year.

Common redshank

Common restharrow

Spotlight on...

Somerset Levels and Moors

The Somerset Levels and Moors covers an area of approximately 400km² of low lying land, located within the floodplains of a number of main rivers that flow between Glastonbury, Street, Bridgwater and Taunton, out to the sea at Bridgwater Bay. The majority of this landscape is made up of lowland wet grassland, with smaller areas of other habitats, such as lowland fen, lowland raised bog, lowland meadow and deciduous woodland.

The wetland nature of many of the habitats here means it is internationally and nationally important for a range of species associated with aquatic features, such as breeding and wintering birds, including cranes and bitterns, aquatic invertebrates, including dragonflies, as well as riparian mammals, otters and water voles.

The area also contains nationally significant areas of lowland peat, which are home to their own unique assemblage of species, such as sundew plants. The landscape is highly designated, containing SPA and Ramsar site, as well as 25 SSSIs covering 80km², 1 NNR and 7 LNRs.

Why is Somerset Levels and Moors important for nature recovery?

The Somerset Levels and Moors is one of the most important wetland landscapes in England. It is a refuge for many rare and threatened species that have been lost from elsewhere in the county. As a result, it has enormous nature recovery potential, with care and dedicated effort it could become one of the greatest wetlands in Europe.

Much of the wildlife here is being held back from achieving its full potential, due to the way the land is used and managed. However it persists, and therefore the potential for recovery is huge, if the will is there to provide more space for the wetland wildlife to thrive.

What is special?

It contains the magnificent Somerset Wetlands NNR which is home to wonderful booming bitterns and starling murmurations.

Large areas of deep peat remain, which when in good condition lock in carbon and create unique species-rich vegetation and invertebrate communities.

Huge numbers of birds migrate here in the winter months, including species such as lapwing, golden plover, wigeon and teal.

There are reasonable areas of open water habitat left, which mean aquatic plants can spread and invertebrates such as dragonflies can reach large numbers.

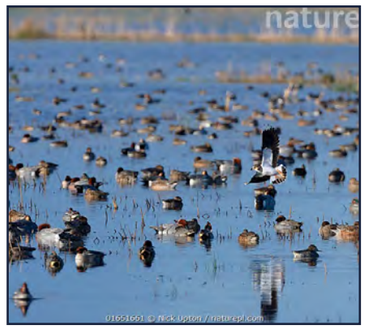
What have we lost?

Large areas of lowland fen and lowland raised bog have been lost due to land drainage and peat extraction, which has led to a release of carbon and only small fragments of fen and bog remain, primarily confined to the NNRs.

Agricultural intensification, due to food demand, has led to areas of species-rich lowland meadow being lost.

Breeding wading bird numbers have declined, with the majority now being restricted to a few nature reserve sites.

Eutrophication of the rivers and rhynes, due to phosphate pollution, had led to a loss of aquatic life, including plants and invertebrates.

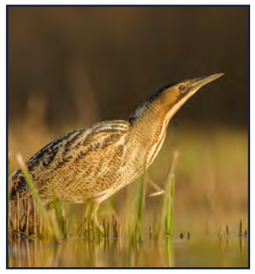


Teal

Four-spotted chaser dragonfly

Green-winged orchid

Curlew



Bittern

Chapter 3.7

Threats to Nature

Somerset's habitats have been shaped by centuries of human interaction. They have been continually managed in ways to provide us with shelter, food, water, fuel, natural materials and recreation. Over time, the majority of our habitats and species have undergone significant dynamic changes shaped by a range of environmental and social factors. Evidence from the last 50 years indicates that nature is in decline and we have experienced a significant loss of biodiversity.

The UK has suffered extreme losses of biodiversity, with a 32% decline in average species abundance since 1970. Somerset is no different and its picturesque landscapes are facing significant challenges. Climate change is altering habitats and weather patterns, making it difficult for many species to survive.

Habitat loss due to urban expansion, some agriculture practices, and infrastructure development is another major threat, leading to the fragmentation of ecosystems and the decline of native species. Pollution, including plastic waste and agricultural runoff, further degrades natural environments, affecting both terrestrial and aquatic life.

In addition to these pressures, invasive species introduced by human activity are out competing native flora and fauna, further exacerbating the problem.

The cumulative impact of these threats is profound, leading to a significant reduction in the resilience of natural ecosystems. As the health of these ecosystems diminishes, so too does their ability to provide essential services, such as clean air, water purification, and carbon sequestration.

For more information on drivers and threats to nature, click on the icon to read The Somerset State of Nature report 2023.

Climate change

Climate change in the UK is causing warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers, leading to more frequent droughts, flooding, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels.

This significantly threatens Somerset's natural environment, and with around 18% of Somerset either at or just above sea-level, this makes it one of the UK's most climate-vulnerable areas. Climate change also exacerbates other environmental challenges like habitat fragmentation, pollution, and habitat loss, further endangering wildlife and ecosystems.

With mean annual temperatures projected to rise by 2-5% by 2100, more frequent and intense climate-related issues are likely to impact nature, including increased disease rates, degraded habitats, higher extinction risks for threatened species, disrupted migratory patterns, loss of species-rich habitats, and reduction in species ranges.

Ongoing and future developments

Ongoing and future developments, such as urban expansion and infrastructure projects, are poised to exert further pressure on biodiversity.

Government targets to increase house building each year put pressure on local authorities to find available spaces. The need for improved infrastructure and economic development to support population growth has historically led to impacts on nature, such as loss of habitat to support development, over capacity on sewage networks leading to spillages, increased traffic on roads leading to runoff pollution and animal collisions – all leading to species loss and habitat degradation.

Additionally, linear infrastructure developments like road and railway expansions create physical barriers that hinder wildlife movement. Such barriers fragment populations, isolate species, and disrupt genetic flow, potentially increasing vulnerability to local extinctions.

The introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for new developments, where developers are required to deliver at least 10% biodiversity gain, aims to contribute to nature's recovery and leave a positive legacy for people and wildlife.

Intensive agriculture and resource use

Agriculture for food production are vital to Somerset's economy and community, supporting various farming types, with dairy and grazed livestock being predominant, contributing over £1 billion to the southwest economy.

However intensive agriculture and certain farming methods pose significant pressure on habitats and biodiversity in Somerset, particularly through habitat loss and fragmentation. Intensive farming practices, including monoculture cropping, contribute to a loss of habitat complexity, limiting resources for wildlife and increasing vulnerability to pests and diseases. This decline in biodiversity also impacts key ecosystem services such as pollination and soil health, vital for both natural systems and agriculture itself.
In addition to habitat loss, agricultural intensification leads to soil degradation and water quality issues. The heavy use of fertilisers and pesticides results in nutrient runoff, causing eutrophication in nearby rivers and wetlands, harming aquatic ecosystems. Sustainable farming practices are critical to mitigating these pressures and preserving biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

Resource extraction (water, peat, and aggregate and mineral extraction) and poor forestry has also led to significant land-use changes and losses to nature.

There is potential for positive change in the UK agricultural and natural resource sector, focusing on nature and climate recovery. Policy changes provide a mechanism for landowners to receive finance for nature recovery through nature markets, trading in biodiversity, carbon and nutrients, and other ecosystem services.

Invasive non-native species and diseases

There are 37 non-native pecies that have been recorded in Somerset and their distribution has surged by 260% since 1990. Common invasive species include American mink, Signal crayfish, grey squirrel and Turkey oak. Rocky shores now host the Australian star barnacle and the Pacific oyster.

Aquatic plants like floating pennywort and water fern, exacerbated by nutrient overloads, reduce water quality and habitat availability for native flora and fauna whilst increasing flooding and leading to the degradation of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Invasive flora such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, and rhododendron threaten native habitats, including Somerset's only temperate rainforest. Ash dieback has led to significant tree felling, especially in the Mendip Hills, which has led to impacts to biodiversity, despite best efforts to minimise impacts. A list of significant invasive species, pests and diseases is given on the following page. It is anticipated there will be as yet unidentified plant diseases presenting additional but currently unrecognised pressures. Monitoring, habitat restoration, prevention are essential.

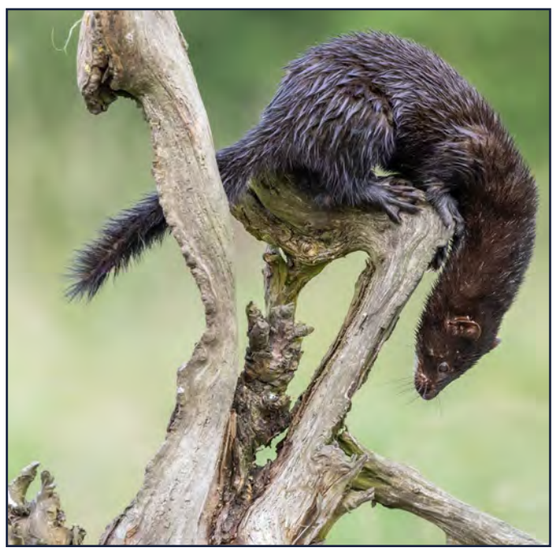
Pollution

Water, air and light pollution put pressures on nature.

Most rivers in Somerset are of 'poor' or 'moderate' quality. Contaminated rivers and waterways, especially those polluted by sewage, pose health risks, harm agriculture, damage soils, and reduce biodiversity, causing species and habitat loss. Increased nutrients result in algal blooms, blocking light penetration, which in turn causes submerged plants to decompose, depleting oxygen levels, which can cause fish and invertebrate mortality. This is evident on the Somerset Levels and Moors, suffering poor water quality from high phosphate levels, leading to duckweed and algal blooms.

An increase in air pollution over the last 100 years has negatively impacted habitats. Highlighted by the loss of lichens, an indicator species for air quality, across Somerset. Specifically, 38% of lichen species are inferred to be lost since 1960 in Exmoor.

Increased light pollution from development and urban areas can affect the breeding and foraging of birds, bats, and other mammals, such as the otter and dormouse.



Significant invasive non-native species and pests and diseases in Somerset

Vascular Plants

Floating pennywort (Hydrocotyle ranunculoides)
A highly invasive aquatic plant that poses a significant threat to waterways in Somerset. It rapidly forms dense mats, impacting water flow, native plant life, and aquatic ecosystems.

Giant hogweed (Heracleum mantegazzianum)
A relative of cow parsley, it is found growing in a range of habitats, including riverbanks, common land, woodland margins and gardens bordering these . Contact with the plant, particularly the sap, can lead to severe blistering and scarring.

Parrot's feather (Myriophyllum aquaticum)
an aquatic plant that is highly invasive and is capable of 'choking' water bodies and outcompeting native vegetation.

Himalayan balsam (Impatiens glandulifera)
An annual that is very prolific and spreads quickly along rivers and waterways. Given how common it is, it won't be easy to get rid of, but it could be managed much better. It's easily pulled and the seed bank isn't persistent.

Rhododendron (Rhododendron ponticum)
If left unchecked, this non-native species can become very invasive and lead to a significant loss in biodiversity in woodland and heathland areas, outcompeting our native shrubs, and squeezing out our native species.

New Zealand pigmyweed (Crassula helmsii)
This aquatic plant grows prolifically on the water surface, smothering plant life and blocking light and oxygen for other organisms.

Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica)
a fast-growing perennial with tall, dense stems that will often re-emerge even after it has been removed by hand and typically requires specialist contactors and tools to fully eradicate.

American skunk-cabbage (Lysichiton americanus)
an invasive species found in wet woodland and along waterways, this plant has huge leaves that spread widely, blocking light from other species.

Water primrose (Ludwigia grandiflora)
Can rapidly colonize ponds, lakes, and watercourses, forming dense mats that disrupt aquatic life and navigation. It was introduced as an ornamental garden plant, but has now been banned from sale. A government priority species for eradication.

Turkey oak (Quercus cerris)
The turkey oak is not home to the variety of species that are found in the native oaks. It is host to a parasitic wasp that also forms galls on native oaks.

False Acacia (Robinia pseudoacacia)
Sometimes called 'black locust'. Timber is excellent for external use such as fencing posts. Spreads rapidly through suckering and outcompetes native species.

Vascular Plants

Water fern (Azolla filiculoides)
It forms dense floating mats on the surface of still or slow-moving water, shading out other aquatic plants and reducing light and oxygen levels. The Canal & River Trust uses biocontrol methods, like introducing weevils that eat the fern, to manage its spread.

Cheery laurel (Prunus laurocerasus)
Its dense, evergreen foliage can shade out native plants and prevent woodland regeneration. It was first recorded in the wild outside of gardens in 1886 and has since spread.

Vascular Plant Diseases

Acute oak decline
Caused by a bacteria carried by the Agrilos bigutteris beetle. Once infected, mature oak trees can die withing six years. Our two native oaks Q petraea and Q robur are particularly susceptible.

Ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus)
Ash dieback is widespread and has had a significant impact in Somerset. The problem affects the whole county but is most prevalent on and around the Mendip Hills where the proportion of ash is particularly high.

Phytophthora (Various species)
These fungus-like plant pathogens cause damage to trees, shrubs, and other plants.

Sweet Chestnut Blight (Cryphonectria parasitica)
Sweet chestnut blight, caused by the fungus Cryphonectria parasitica, is a significant threat to sweet chestnut trees, particularly in southern England, including Somerset. The disease can be fatal and has caused devastating losses in North America

Horse chestnut bleeding canker
Caused by the bacteria Pseudomonas syringae. Horse chestnut also suffers from a fungal disease known as Guignardia aesculin leaf blotch. This reduces their ability to photosynthesise and makes them more prone to other infections.

Invertebrates

Asian hornet (Vespa velutina)
Starting to gain a foothold in England. Recent research has found significant reduction in insects in areas where the Asian Hornet is established, polymorpha with a knock on effect on insect eating birds, bats, and pollination of native plants. It is crucial all possible sightings are reported so experts can take quick and effective action.

Zebra mussel (Dreissena polymorpha)
Found in various parts of Somerset, Zebra mussels can smother native freshwater mussels, alter fish populations, clog pipes and affect water clarity. Zebra mussels are prolific and can quickly colonize hard surfaces, posing a threat to infrastructure and wildlife.

Invertebrates

Signal crayfish (Pacifastacus leniusculus)
They can cause significant damage to river banks and infrastructure by burrowing, potentially leading to erosion and destabilization. Additionally, they are known to carry crayfish plague, which can decimate populations of the native white-clawed crayfish.

Killer shrimp (Dikerogammarus villosus)
It has become a significant concern in the UK, particularly in Somerset, due to its predatory nature and ability to disrupt aquatic ecosystems. These shrimp are voracious predators, consuming native shrimp and other aquatic life, and can drastically alter the ecology of the habitats they invade.

Australian star barnacle (Austrominius modestus)
Has become common in many parts of the UK, including coastal areas of Somerset and other regions in southwest Britain. Its presence can alter the structure and composition of intertidal communities.

Fish

Top mouth gudgeon Pseudorasbora parva plantarius
They are extremely invasive, causing great harm to local ecosystems. They breed successfully in large numbers, out-compete native fish and predate on invertebrates and the eggs and larvae of other fish.

Sunbleak Leucaspius delineates
Native to continental Europe, it inhabits weedy water bodies and will colonise rivers, ponds and canals. It is found throughout Somerset. The sunbleak reproduces rapidly and out-competes native fish such as roach and rudd.

Mammals

American mink (Neovison vison)
Mink are active predators, feeding on a variety of prey, including water voles, birds, and fish, which can negatively impact the local ecosystem. There are efforts to control mink populations, including trapping and culling programs, but they are still present in Somerset

Muntjac (Muntiacus reevesi)
Muntjac deer are notorious browsers, feeding on shoots, herbs, and brambles, contributing to the decline of species like nightingales by clearing woodland understory. Woodland with muntjac will often have an obvious browse line at 60-80cm, with little vegetation below

Grey squirrel (Sciurus carolinensis)
The grey squirrel was introduced into the UK in the 1800s. It provides an easy encounter with wildlife for many people, but can be damaging to woodlands and has contributed to the decline of the red squirrel.

Perceptions of Nature in Somerset

Through a range of workshops, surveys and questionnaires we asked local farmers, community groups and the general public what they thought of nature in Somerset and suggestions for what actions might be needed to help nature recover.

We considered these responses alongside outcomes and measures identified through working with conservation and environmental specialists.

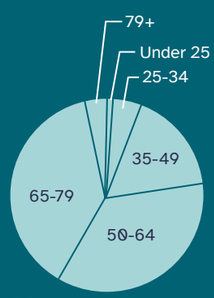
Priority outcomes and measures for nature recovery are set out in Chapter 4 - Opportunities for Nature Recovery.

On this page we have captured a snapshot of what people in Somerset care about most and what people feel needs to be improved to help nature recovery.

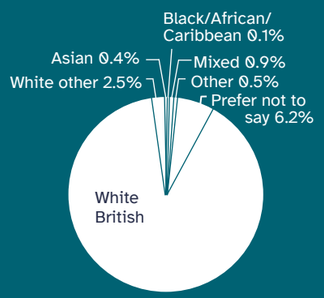
Respondents to our survey were:

Geographic distribution of respondents

Age



Ethnicity



I care about nature because...

"Nature is fundamental to our very survival and existence as well as our health and wellbeing."

1. It has its own intrinsic value
2. It's important for tackling climate change
3. It's important for our mental health and wellbeing

Public perceptions of actions required to help nature include...

- Education & awareness
- Legislation & planning
- Financial incentives & support
- Community & stakeholder engagement
- Monitoring & adaptation
- Habitat enhancements

Key ways that farmers help nature

"We have a moral responsibility to be in balance with nature."

Most common response

- Establishing new wildlife areas
- No use of pesticides or fertilisers
- Participation in agri-environment schemes
- Pond creation or restoration
- Tree and woodland planting
- Flower rich margins

Most valued nature areas in Somerset

Places that people said they cherish include...

These are the special landscape features that people value in Somerset:

Peat wetlands

Clean flowing rivers

Coastline and beaches

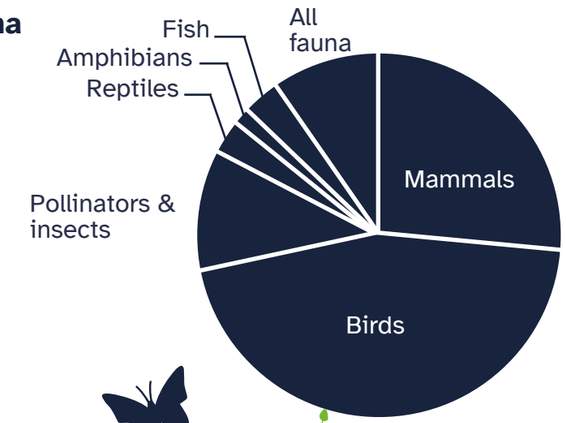
There is a recurring theme of concern for specific wildlife species that are perceived to be under threat, such as hares, red deer, badgers, and various birds.

"Over the last 20 years, I have seen a reduction in biodiversity in coastal waters, which concerns me deeply."

What would farmers like to see more of?

Flora

Fauna



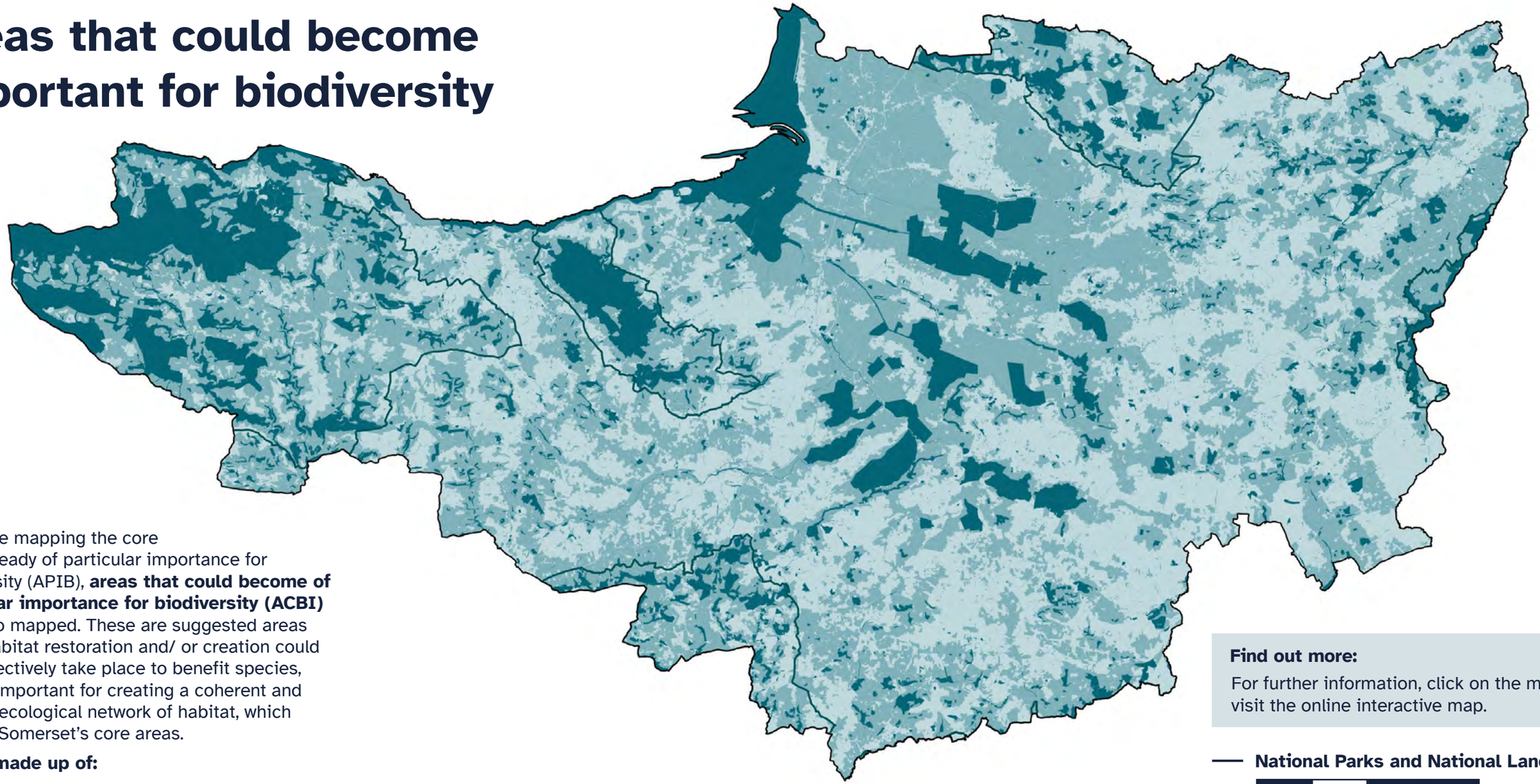
Opportunities for Nature Recovery

Habitat and species priority outcomes and measures

This chapter outlines the priorities for each habitat type, focusing on creating more extensive, improved habitats to better connect our landscapes in Somerset. It details the measures needed to achieve these goals, as well as those targeted for specific species.

4

Areas that could become important for biodiversity



Alongside mapping the core areas already of particular importance for biodiversity (APIB), **areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity (ACBI)** were also mapped. These are suggested areas where habitat restoration and/ or creation could most effectively take place to benefit species, and are important for creating a coherent and resilient ecological network of habitat, which connect Somerset's core areas.

This is made up of:

- Non-statutory designations and irreplaceable habitats within the Existing Nature Network
- Priority habitats which are not currently designated and should be retained and restored as part of any project or development
- Areas of existing habitat which can be restored and enhanced to provide greater benefits to wildlife
- Areas which could be suitable for new habitat creation

The ACBI covers approximately xx% of the land area of Somerset, to help provide choices of where to deliver nature recovery to achieve our 30 by 30 target.

The interactive map shows where action can have the most impact. Each Opportunity on the map is accompanied by suggestions of the actions which could be considered in the approximate location.

Areas which fall outside of APIB and ACBI are still important for nature recovery efforts. These are classified as Sustainable use areas and are also vital to the overall picture of nature recovery effort across Somerset. These areas include agricultural land which prioritises productivity. However these areas still provide opportunities for nature including implementing sustainable practices such as the reduction of fertilisers and pesticides.

The following pages set out the priorities and measures for different habitat types

Find out more:

For further information, click on the map to visit the online interactive map.

National Parks and National Landscapes

0 5 10 20km

Areas of particular importance for biodiversity

Opportunities to extend and improve the condition of these core habitat areas through effective management for nature recovery.

Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity

Opportunities to create and restore habitat to connect core areas through a network of linear and stepping stone corridors.

Sustainable use areas

Opportunities to implement sustainable practises and management, and creating spaces for nature.

Our Approach

Habitat and species descriptions and their opportunities for nature recovery

Lawton's principles of more, bigger, better, and joined-up provide a framework to create a robust network of habitats that can better support biodiversity and withstand the impacts of climate change.

More **Bigger**

Better **Joined-up**

The following pages describe each habitat type and targeted species, and outline priority outcomes and measures to create and restore new habitats (more), extend (bigger) and improve (better) existing habitats, and to connect (joined-up) important landscapes for nature.

The priorities and measures, described in the following pages, are grouped consistent with UK Habitat Classification and the Vision (Chapter 1). However, it is important to note that habitat mosaics, edge habitats, and transitional habitats are essential for biodiversity. They create diverse microenvironments that support various species, promoting higher diversity of flora and fauna. These habitats enhance ecological connectivity, enabling species to move, interact, and adapt, thus fostering resilient ecosystems.

The **Measures Appendix** shows cross-cutting measures from habitat types that will benefit each of the priority outcomes.

Wider environmental benefits and co-benefits of nature recovery

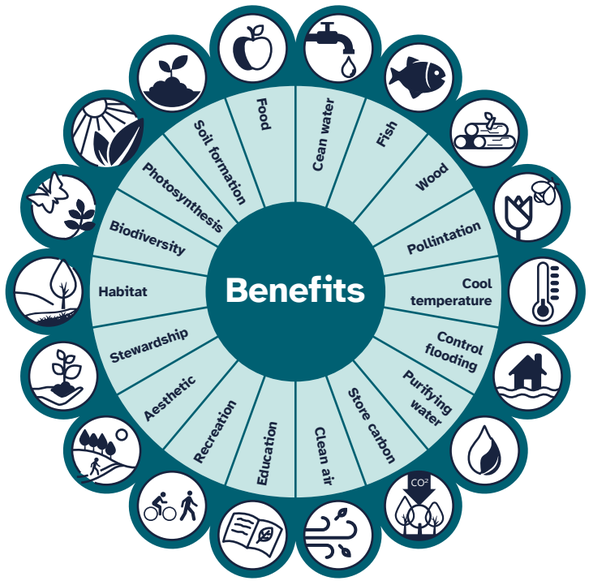
Restoring natural habitats boosts biodiversity, which supports essential functions like pollination, water purification, and soil fertility. This biodiversity creates stronger ecosystems capable of withstanding environmental stressors such as climate change and pollution. In addition, diverse plant communities sequester more carbon, helping to mitigate climate change, regulate water cycles to reduce flood and drought risks, reduce soil erosion which maintains productivity of farm businesses and improve air quality, benefiting overall environmental health and human well-being.

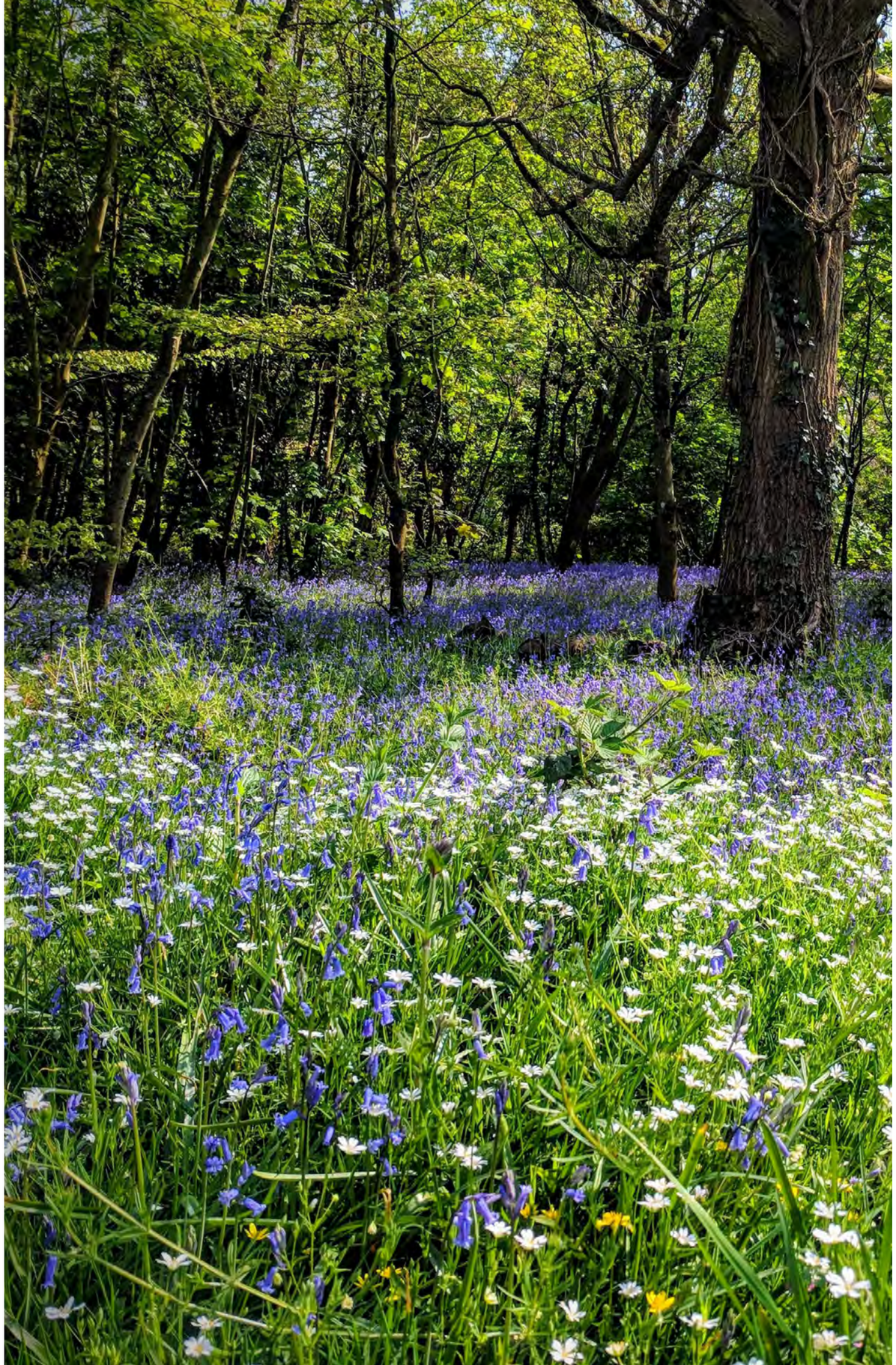
Greater access to nature also has significant health benefits, ranging from reduced stress to improvements in physical health. By enhancing aesthetic and recreational values, nature recovery promotes ecotourism, generating economic benefits while encouraging sustainable land use.

Overall, nature recovery supports more resilient ecosystems and communities, addressing critical challenges society faces.

Different habitats provide a variety of benefits which are shown under each habitat type in the following pages.

Types of ecosystem service can be defined in several ways, but a common approach (originally proposed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005) is shown in the ecosystem wheel below. Those that are highlighted blue are relevant to the measures within each habitat type.





Chapter 4.3 A

Coastal

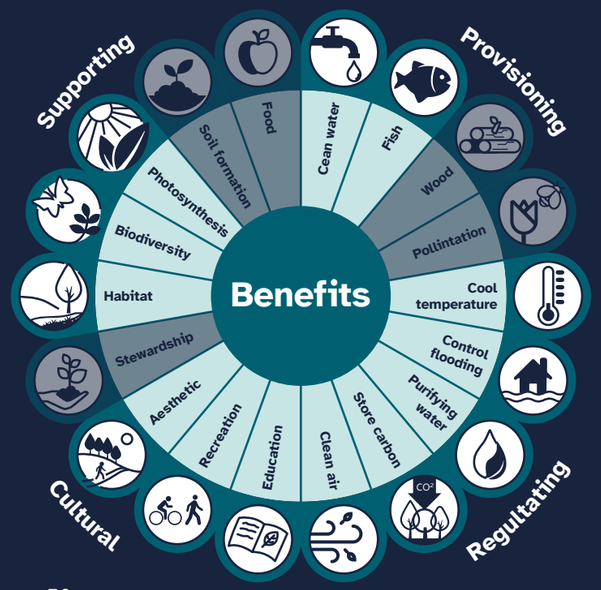
Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Somerset's coastal environment contains important transitional habitats, linking coastal areas with the offshore marine environment. Habitats include coastal saltmarsh and mudflats, sand dunes, shingle banks, maritime cliffs and slopes, kelp forests, as well as coastal woodlands. Some habitats support wildlife of international importance, and provide flood defence.

Coastline habitats develop through different intertidal processes and have different functions. For example, coastal saltmarshes are the vegetated upper portions of the intertidal mudflats and contain specialised species that are tolerant to salt water and store carbon. Dune systems and dune slacks support unique and diverse range of plant species, invertebrates and amphibians.

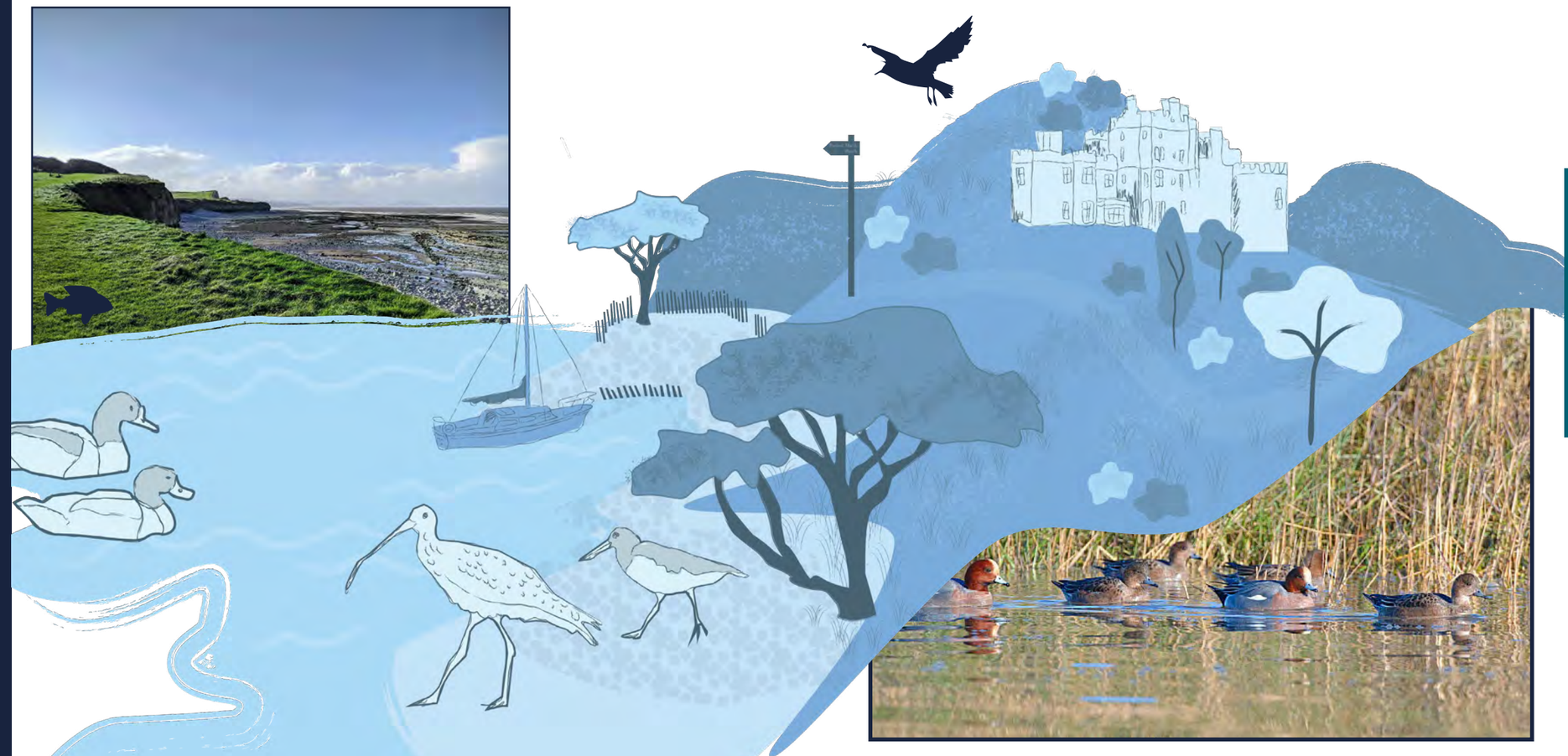
The rocky coastline is dominated by various seaweeds, however Porlock Bay contains a kelp forest that supports a huge array of life from marine worms, sponges and crustaceans; to fish and even large mammals such as grey seals and harbour porpoise.



Pressures on habitat

Many of Somerset's coastline habitats are being squeezed into smaller and smaller areas as the sea level rises and they are increasingly confined in a smaller and smaller zone between high tide and man-made infrastructure (roads and car parks) and development (housing and tourism). Some of the key pressures and threats for coastal sites include:

- **Sea level rises**, which have risen by 12 to 16cm since 1900, are projected to continue to rise. Rising sea levels coupled with increased winter flow rates from rivers may lead to loss of coastal habitats.
- **Excess nutrients** entering coastal waters from inland waterways as a result of farming practice, development and wastewater treatment, impacts on mudflats, saltmarsh and shallow waters.
- **Development and human actions** which encroach intertidal habitats, resulting in coastal squeeze, such as man-made hard-engineered defences. The Bristol Channel has much potential for energy generation schemes such as tidal barrages to add to its existing contribution to key energy provision such as the new Hinkley C Nuclear Power Station. Such major infrastructure projects, without careful consultation and evidence based ecological monitoring can lead to major conflicting pressures on the already highly designated habitats and ecosystems of its marine and coastal environment.
- **Warmer air temperatures and higher CO2 levels** are also leading to warmer waters, lower oxygen levels, increased acidity, salinity and reduced mixing of waters which can disrupt vulnerable intertidal ecosystems.
- **Non-native invasive species** arrive in our coastal waters through shipping activity, and once established they can outcompete our native species causing extinction in extreme cases.

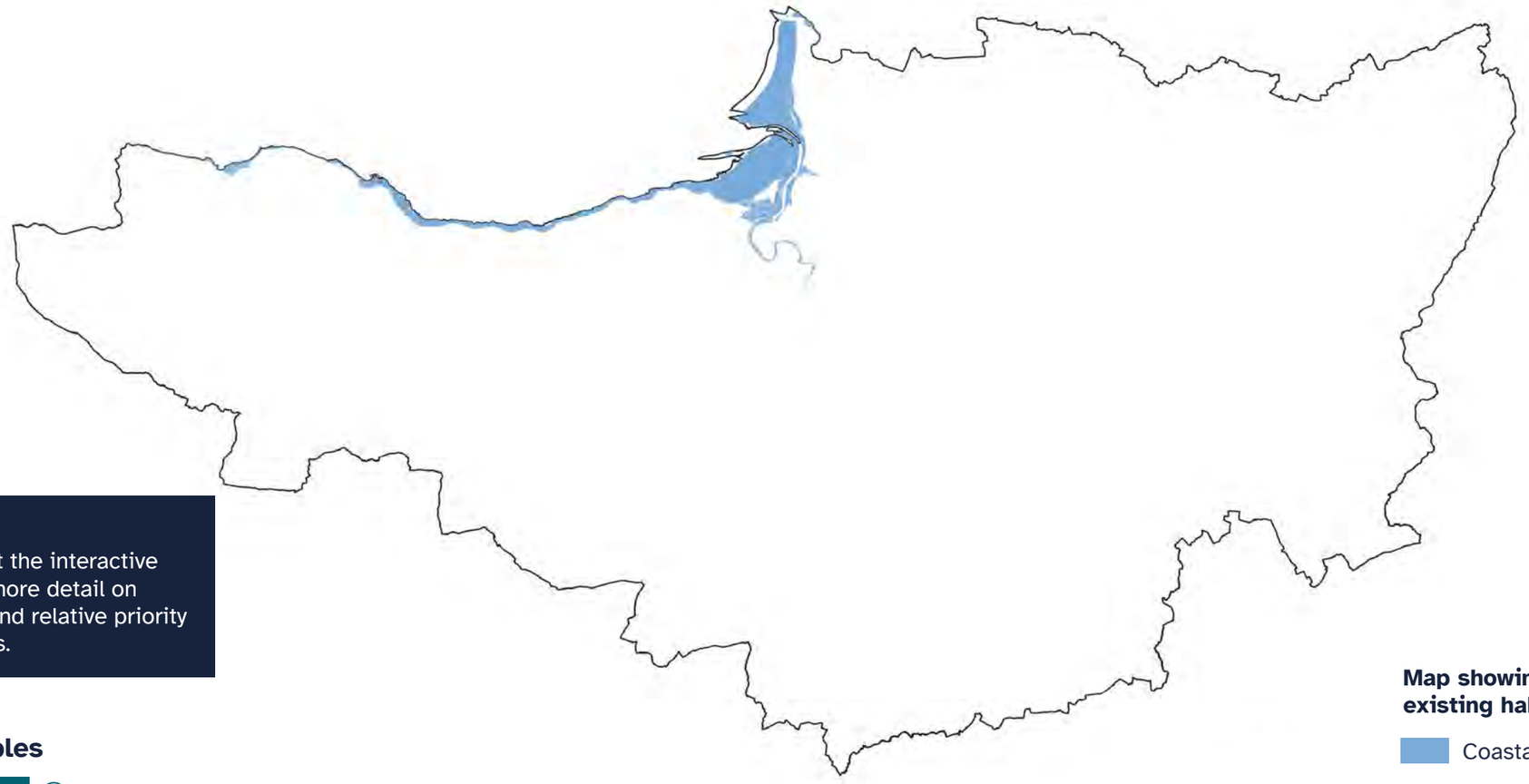


Coastal

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Click on the map to visit the interactive mapping database for more detail on habitat classifications and relative priority outcomes and measures.



Map showing distribution of existing habitat type

Coastal

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

Priority outcomes

Coastal and intertidal habitats are more extensive, more biodiverse, in better condition, and more joined-up.

There are more and better managed coastal and intertidal habitats along the Severn Estuary, supporting healthy species populations.

An adaptive, resilient network of coastal habitats has been created, that are managed with a catchment to coast approach that acknowledges the connection between marine, coastal, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems.

Coastal and intertidal habitats and species populations are benefiting from cleaner waters, less disturbance in sensitive locations and a more sustainable use of our coastlines.

Coastal and intertidal habitats are allowed to evolve, with nature dynamic processes and progression restored, to enable adaptation and resilience to climate change and minimise loss.

Supported species

Outcomes for coastal habitats will help support these important species:

Slender hare's-ear

Peregrine falcon

Dune tiger beetle

Curlew

Coastal

Habitat typologies

The vision

A resilient coast, safeguarding vital intertidal and sub-tidal habitats. We envision a coast that sustainably adapts to climate change, ensuring its long-term health and diversity. It will be a place where wildlife can thrive, from the coastal birds that arrive in their thousands in winter, to clean pollution-free waters that support healthy assemblages of fish, shellfish and marine mammals.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing coastal habitat, create and restore new coastal habitat and to connect coastal habitats.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

C1 Protect and restore habitats

C1.1 Create, restore and manage saltmarsh and mudflat habitats (e.g. through coastal realignment, managed retreat and appropriate grazing regimes) to mitigate and compensate the impacts of coastal squeeze and reconnect fragmented areas, where feasible

C1.2 Manage saltmarshes to retain a full transition of vegetational stages, from open saline pools and salt pans, brackish dune slacks, to vegetated terrestrial fringes in upper saltmarsh areas. This will support species of varying salinity tolerance, create a diversity of microhabitats, and provide winter hibernation sites

C2 Create additional habitat above high tide to act as high tide roost

C2.1 Create additional habitat above high tide to act as high tide roost, such as wetlands, saline lagoons, and coastal grazing marsh, to provide places above mean high-tide levels where waterbirds can rest and recover and to help respond to sea-level rise. Habitat creation should have regard to and enable the implementation of shoreline management plans

C2.2 Link existing areas of coastal habitats with other wetland and freshwater habitats to form a landscape mosaic of wetlands, improving the condition of the coastal and intertidal ecosystems.

C3 Manage and safeguard existing habitat to promote coastal species

C3.1 Protect and restore shingle bank and saltmarsh habitats from the impact of coastal squeeze. Restore and manage degraded shingle banks. Recognise their importance as natural, but dynamic coastal defences

C3.2 Identify and monitor saltmarsh and mudflat recreational disturbance in order to better target preventative measures.

C3.3 Protect important nesting grounds of coastal birds from recreational disturbance (e.g. through limiting access to important areas of shingle ridge and sand dunes to allow ground nesting birds to breed such as oystercatchers and ringed plover). Cordon off shorebird and wader nesting areas and use signage to remind dog owners to walk their dogs on leads during ground nesting bird season, in accordance with national legislation.

C3.4 Protect and restore rare, notable and sensitive coastal habitats (e.g. saltmarsh) from pollution and over-nutrification. Reduce nutrients entering coastal waters through changes to development, wastewater treatment and farming practices and greater use of nature-based solutions, such as creation of riparian buffer zones and wetland restoration and creation.

C3.5 Ensure important inter-tidal biotopes such as honeycomb reef worms, lower shore shingle and cobble communities (including the kelp forest at Porlock) are not disturbed in coastal developments

C3.6 Protect important sea mammal populations (e.g. resident breeding harbour porpoise) from coastal and subtidal developments (e.g. underwater infrastructure noise disturbance).

C3.7 Monitor and take action to limit the spread of invasive intertidal and subtidal marine species and their potential impact (e.g. the Pacific Oyster)

C3.8 Ensure coastal habitat management is informed by and aligns with the recommendations in the latest version of the Shoreline Management Plan.

C4 Protect, restore and manage cliff top and slope plant communities

C4.1 Protect, restore and manage cliff top and slope plant communities (e.g. through creating wider natural buffer zones between cliff-top/slope edges and adjacent arable or grazed fields)

C5 Protect, restore and manage sand dunes

C5.1 Restore and manage sand dunes. Recognise their importance as natural, but dynamic coastal defences

C5.2 Management of sand dunes aims to encourage natural dune dynamics which include a balance between newer areas, successional habitats and older habitats. Management takes into account the whole dune system and connecting systems to develop a site-specific approach which benefits a range of wildlife . Invasive species such as sea buckthorn and Japanese rose are removed using techniques such as hand pulling. Sea Buckthorn will require hand tools or even machinery to remove. Refer to 'Dynamic Dunescapes – sand dune management Handbook' for further info.

C5.3 Access points are carefully managed to prevent unwanted erosion.

C5.4 Periodically fence off vulnerable areas, such as young sparsely vegetated foredunes and ground nesting bird sites, to prevent damage by excessive disturbance or overuse.

Chapter 4.3 B

Moorland & Heath

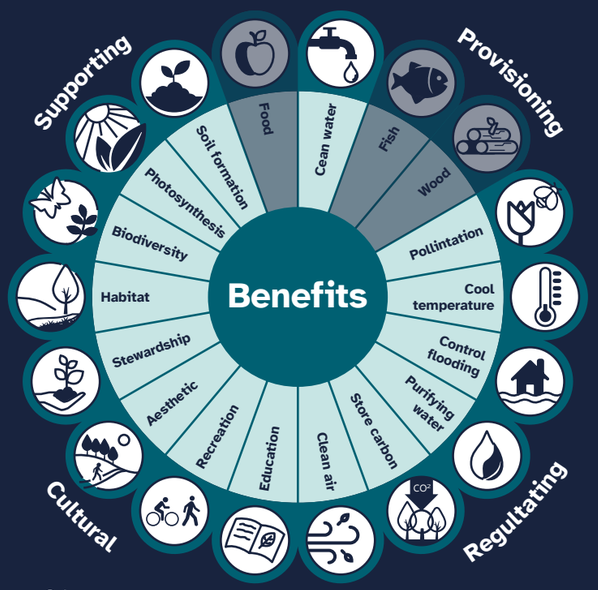
Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Moorlands and heath are open semi-natural habitats found on nutrient-poor, acidic soils. They are generally dominated by heathers and other dwarf shrubs such as gorse and bilberry. Moorlands are dynamic mosaic habitats which include heathers and other dwarf shrubs such as gorse and bilberry, blanket bog, upland peat, valley mires, purple moor grass and bracken slopes as well as acid grassland and bare ground. Heathlands are also dynamic habitats which include a mosaic of bare ground, grassland, and dense heather or other shrubs. Lowland heathland is generally found below 300m altitude and on freely draining sands and gravels.

Lowland heathland is found in north and west Somerset including Cheddar Complex SSSI and Exmoor Coastal Heaths SSSI, respectively. Upland heathland (moorland) in Somerset is limited to upland areas of the Quantocks SSSI and Exmoor Heaths SAC. The moorland is grazed by free-roaming ponies, cattle and sheep.

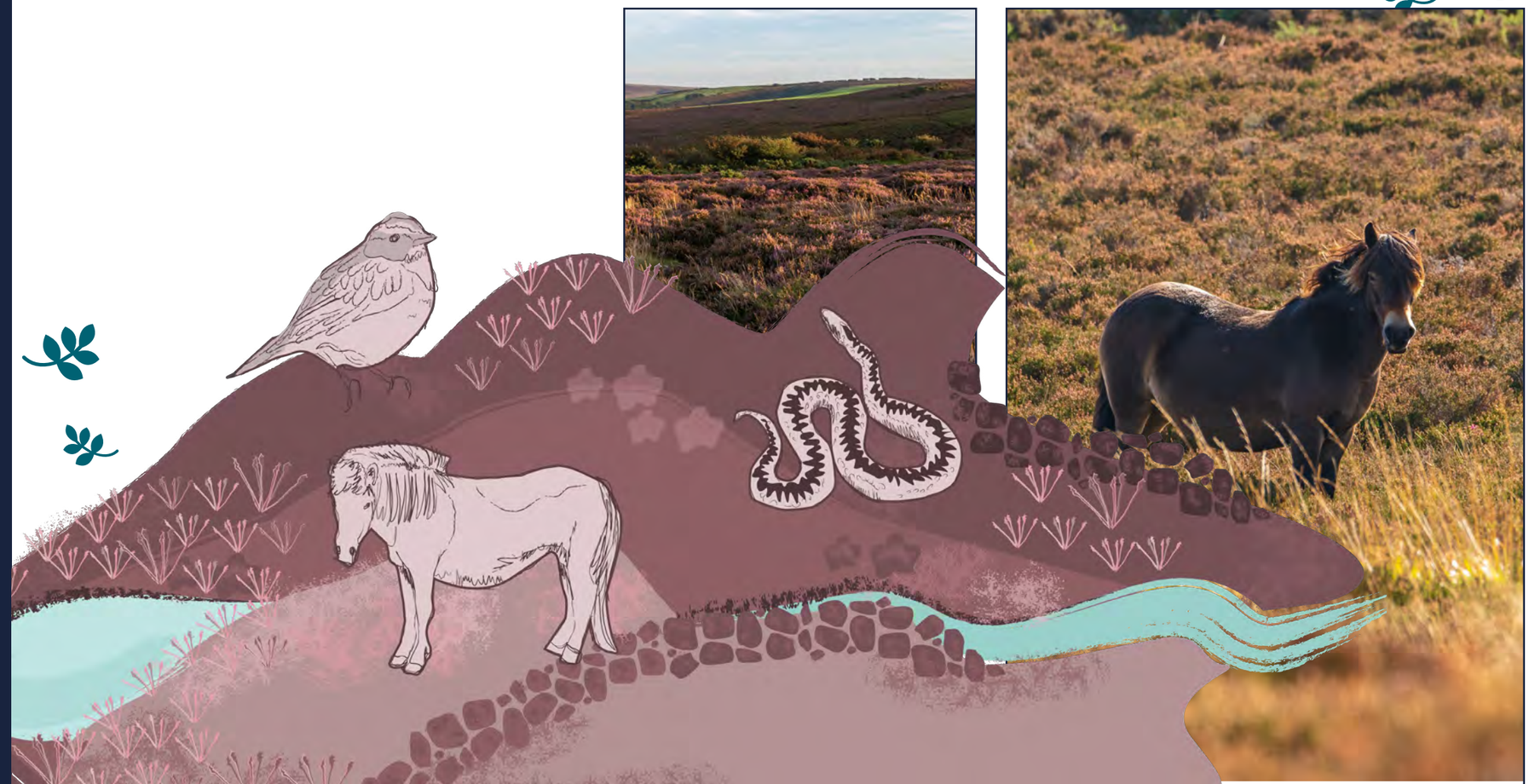
Moorlands and heath are particularly important for plants, lichens, bryophytes, reptiles, invertebrates, and birds.



Pressures on habitat

Large areas of moorland and heath have historically been lost to forestry and agriculture. Nowadays, we're better at recognising the unique characters of our priority habitat heathlands and many of these areas are protected. But moorlands and heath are still under threat with some of the main pressures including:

- **Direct loss** still occurs on moorland and heath outside of the Protected Lanscapes where the habitat is used for development and infrastructure.
- **Lack of appropriate management** of moorland and heath habitats (usually in the form of too much or too little grazing) can lead to habitat loss and the development of scrub.
- **Heavy access and recreation** use in open access moorland and heath areas can damage the habitat and is a particular threat for many ground nesting birds.
- **Hyper-dominance of purple moor grass** caused by a combination of insufficient grazing, warming climate with wetter winters, and atmospheric deposition of nitrogen compounds, has led to a severe decline in moorland habitats, including the function of peatlands. Once established this is very difficult reverse.
- **Heathlands** are especially vulnerable to fires from discarded cigarettes and rubbish or unwatched barbecues, combined with increased summer droughts, can quickly cause an uncontrollable fire and be devastating for heathland.
- **Air pollution** can be devastating for bryophytes and lichens associated with heathlands, with approximately 38% of the lichen species in Exmoor inferred as lost since 1960.



Moorland & Heath

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Click on the map to visit the interactive mapping database for more detail on habitat classifications and relative priority outcomes and measures.

Map showing distribution of existing habitat

Moorland and heath

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More	Bigger
Better	Joined-up

Priority outcomes

There is greater species diversity and abundance of upland heathlands and peatlands habitats, within a dynamic mosaic of habitiats such as blanket bog, valley mires, heath, and acid grassland, supported by healthy hydrology.

Moorland, peatland and heath ecosystems are functioning naturally, better connected hydrologically, with new areas expanding existing ones and providing stepping stone habitats.

Moorland mosaic habitat includes trees and scrub particularly within steep sided combes and valleys, linking and expanding adjacent areas of temperate rainforest

Heathland and peatland ecosystems support more biodiversity, improved water quality and carbon storage, reduced flood risk, and enhanced wildfire resilience.

Upland and lowland heathlands and peatland ecosystems are appropriately managed to achieve good condition and habitat areas that are bigger and better connected.

Invasive non-native species are controlled, and eradicated on specified sites through a collaborative approach at a landscape scale.

Supported species

Outcomes for moorland & heath will help support these important species:

Dartford warbler

Bilberry bumblebee

Emperor moth

Adder

Moorland & Heath

Habitat typologies

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

The vision

A thriving heathland and moorland landscape with a diverse mosaic of habitats that store more carbon. Management promotes and provides a vital haven for birds, reptiles and insects. This natural sanctuary will be a place of wild and open habitats that has successfully brought back many of the heathland rarities from the brink of extinction.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing moorland and heath habitat, create and restore new habitat and to connect existing habitats.

MH1 Manage existing unenclosed upland habitats - including moor, heath and mire -sustainably, so they are in good condition, and supporting a thriving and diverse community of species

MH1.1 Diversify and improve the condition of moorlands, and create dynamic mosaics, through bespoke and appropriate grazing regimes (e.g. grazing season, stock density and duration of grazing, and species and breed of grazing animal).

MH1.2 Manage moorlands to have a mosaic of vegetation types, structure and composition (e.g. damp grasslands, bare ground, lichens, mosses, dwarf shrubs, gorse, and bracken and trees where appropriate) providing diverse niches for a wide range of species

MH1.3 Use native-breed hill ponies such as the hardy Exmoor pony to graze moorland sites. Avoid, or reduce, use of ivermectin drugs to treat stock which can damage moorland communities. Protect some ungrazed areas of mature heather to avoid damage and preserve a range of vegetation structures

MH1.4 Manage Molinia to reduce it's dominance and promote diversity in vegetation structure and species via targeted cutting and grazing for example including no-fence technologies

MH1.5 Reduce wildfires and their spread through creation of firebreaks, re-wetting areas and raising the water table, restoring structural diversity to slow fire spread.

MH1.6 Reduce the extent of, and where appropriate, eradicate invasive species such as rhododendron and montbretia across moorland and heathland habitats, with landowners working together, ensuring coordinated efforts across the landscape

MH1.7 Promote better coordination between landowners and managers allowing more cohesive grazing regimes benefiting the moorland and heath habitats, promoting clusters of landowners/managers to benefit from payment schemes, share knowledge and develop a shared ambition (for example Quantock Commons Management Group).

MH1.8 Promote better awareness on impacts and risks to moorland and heathland habitats associated with visitor pressures, risk of wildfires and illegal burns. Promote the development of visitor management strategies to reduce the impact on habitats and species.

MH2 Restore unenclosed moor, heath and mire ecosystems so that they are more naturally functioning, with dynamic habitat mosaics underpinned by functioning hydrology

MH2.1 Restore heath and mire habitats where soils are suitable, using techniques to improve hydrological function, rewet areas and reduce erosion by slowing run-off (e.g. ditch blocking and creating pools), as well as considered reseeding and management regimes.

MH3 Expand unenclosed moor, heath and mire habitats where soils are suitable for restoration

MH3.1 Expand unenclosed moor, heath and mire habitats where soils are suitable for restoration, via rewetting, reseeding and appropriate grazing so they are bigger and better connected, reducing fragmentation

MH3.2 Identify, survey and map unrecorded mire sites, to facilitate appropriate management, alongside landowner engagement.

MH4 Create, restore and manage wood pasture and meadows around unenclosed moor and heath

MH4.1 Create, restore and manage flower-rich, diverse wood pasture and meadows around unenclosed moor, heath and mire sites to create soft edges and improve connectivity, using regenerative agricultural principles and allowing longer grasslands throughout the year.

MH4.2 Manage successional habitats, Including applied nucleation and fencing, and no grazing exclosures, to kick start natural succession and to create soft edges

MH4,3 More extensive grazing approaches are adopted, using regenerative agricultural principles on the edges of moorland where longer grass is permitted throughout the year.

MH5 Restore peatlands (blanket bog, valley mires) through re-wetting and low input farming

MH5.1 Restore blanket bog / valley mire using re-wetting techniques such as ditch blocking, willow planting, hag re-profiling etc and subsequent targeted grazing management. Habitats include mosaic with wet heath, scrub and standing water.

MH5.2 Protect valley mire from erosion by slowing run off from plateaux blanket bog.

MH5.3 Increase opportunities for sphagnum growth on upland peat and mire sites by re-wetting and reducing the dominance of Molinia, bracken, gorse and other undesirable species within these wet habitats through a combination of targeted control techniques e.g. rotational cutting, grazing regimes (including no-fence technologies).

Freshwater

Habitat typologies

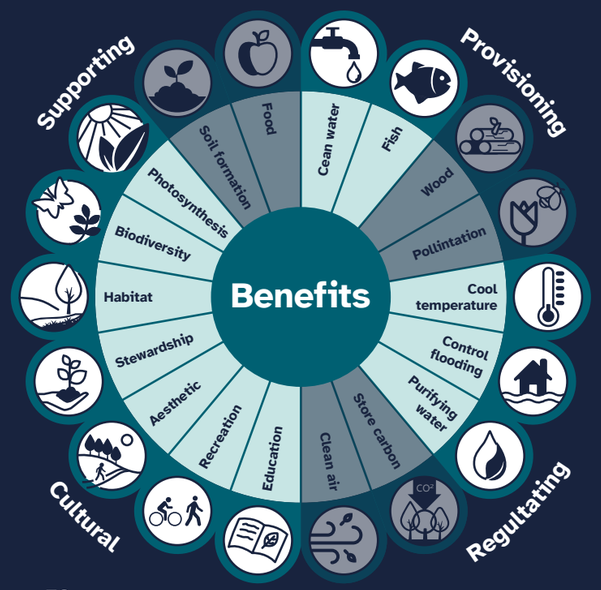
Habitat description

Freshwater habitats include rivers and streams, and still water, including ponds and lakes. These habitats typify some of Somerset's most unique landscapes. They provide freshwater habitats for plants, fish, invertebrates, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals and connection between habitats.

Somerset has many operational river catchments including the Brue and Axe, Parrett, Tone and West Somerset Streams. Many rivers have been historically modified to prevent flooding and to drain low lying areas.

Ditches and rhynes in the Somerset Levels and Moors were created to drain the land for agriculture. Healthy ditches and rhynes can support a huge diversity of aquatic plants and invertebrates. The freshwater networks also provide critical habitat for the declining European eel and water vole.

Standing freshwater habitats are critical for wildlife and some ponds are considered priority habitats as they support protected or notable species.



Pressures on habitat

Water supply and good water quality is key for all freshwater habitats, however, with changes in weather patterns and alarming issues with water quality due to pollution across the UK this is not always the case. Less than 15% of rivers in Somerset are in 'good' ecological condition. The key pressures on watercourses and associated freshwater habitats include:

- **Climate change** is leading to more extreme weather. Intense rainfall can cause flash flooding events with more pollution washed into rivers. Hotter and drier summers cause water levels to drop, concentrations of pollutants to increase and temperatures to rise which can lead to harmful algal blooms and decreases in oxygen levels, with devastating effects on river ecology.
- **Pollution,** of which the three main sources are household sewage and storm overflows, agricultural land use, and built environment and transport. Nutrient enrichment leads to algal blooms, blocking light penetration, causing submerged plants to decompose, which depletes oxygen levels, causing fish and invertebrate mortality. Increased phosphate levels in Somerset have caused significant harm.
- **Loss and fragmentation of habitats** from waterway modifications such as straightening, realignment of rivers for quick water disposal to the sea, and installing weirs and culverts. These alterations can change the freshwater ecosystem and create barriers for fish migration.
- **Non-native invasive species** such as American mink and American signal crayfish have significantly impacted native species, and Floating pennywort can choke waterways and deplete oxygen levels on the Somerset Levels.
- **Habitat loss** from infilling of ponds, including from lack of management

Freshwater

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Click on the map to visit the interactive mapping database for more detail on habitat classifications and relative priority outcomes and measures.

Map showing distribution of existing habitat type

Freshwater

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More **Bigger**

Better **Joined-up**

Priority outcomes

Rivers and streams have the space and energy to develop natural forms, driving natural channel processes, are better connected both longitudinally and laterally within their floodplains, supporting an abundance of wildlife.

Water quality and quantity has improved in rivers and associated wetland features so that 'good ecological status' is consistently achieved.

Rivers, streams, rhynes and ditches, through a catchment-based approach, have increased abundance and diversity of native plant, invertebrate, fish and mammal species.

Riparian habitats are more extensive, healthy, connected and diverse, providing corridors for wildlife.

Existing standing water features (e.g. lakes, ponds and other standing water) have been retained, restored and enhanced alongside the creation of new good condition standing water features, so that they can support an abundance of wildlife.

Supported species

Outcomes for freshwater habitats will help support these important species:

Otter

Brown/sea trout

Great crested newt

Kingfisher

Freshwater

Habitat typologies

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

The vision

Waterways will have healthy flow rates and good water quality, supporting a diverse fauna and flora the likes of the colourful kingfisher and the charismatic otter. Waterways will be better connected to their floodplains with restored natural processes helping protect our communities from flooding and create better connected wet habitats for species recovery.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing freshwater habitat, create and restore new freshwater habitats and to connect habitats.

Running water

FW1 Create, restore and manage habitat features to increase biodiversity and connectivity in waterways

FW1.1 Remove redundant artificial in-channel barriers and redesign waterway systems Increase longitudinal connectivity, to promote free fish passage (e.g. bypass channels, rock ramps or boulder weirs). Where not possible, installation of technical fish passes

FW1.2 Establish riparian buffers across floodplains around rivers and waterways, through natural regeneration, tree planting and management of open habitats, to create a diverse structure of shady areas to keep rivers cool and warmer open areas for fish spawning (new one to map)

FW1.3 Reintroduce licensed beavers to help manage wetland mosaics. Beavers are effective at creating and enhancing varied and dynamic habitats for a wide range of wildlife, increasing water storage and drought resilience, slowing flows and helping flood prevention

FW1.4 Restore and manage rhynes and ditches to increase their value for aquatic wildlife (e.g. great silver water beetle) through appropriate management (e.g. rhyne/ditch dredging and bank reshaping at appropriate intervals and season, reducing bank failure caused by stock with fencing and alternative waterings, and effective management of water levels).

FW1.5 Establish uncultivated grassy buffer strips alongside rhynes/ditches to provide additional habitat for species including water vole.

FW2 Restore natural processes by reconnecting rivers to their floodplain, through a range of approaches, ensuring this does not cause flood risk but allows inundation of floodplains during higher flows

FW2.1 Undo historical physical modifications which have disconnected rivers and floodplains to improve the lateral connectivity between the river and its floodplain, allowing floodwater to spill naturally onto adjacent land, securing flood risk and wetland habitat benefits.

FW2.2 Where appropriate give the river room to change naturally by allowing it to spread out over its floodplain and create multi-threaded systems, with full floodplain reconnection - this approach is often termed stage 0 restoration

FW2.3 Introduce woody material, to encourage flow diversity and "spillage" into adjacent floodplain areas, allowing this to remain in the channel where not causing flood risk.

FW2.4 Promote morphological complexity within modified and straightened rivers by restoring natural sinuosity, re-creating in-channel features such as meanders, pools, and riffles, and enhancing habitat diversity through the introduction of natural materials such as gravels and woody debris.

FW2.5 Reintroduce licensed beavers to help manage wetland mosaics.

FW2.6 Raise the channel bed and regrade river banks to create shallow edges and reconnect the river with the floodplain to form mosaics of water meadows, wet grasslands and wet woodlands.

FW3 Adopt Natural Flood Management (NFM) techniques to improve habitat extent, diversity and connectivity, and to slow the flow of water and increase water storage in the landscape, helping to reduce the risk of flooding and reduce the impacts of drought

FW3.1 Slow the flow and store water in the catchment in areas of low agricultural productivity or where there is space in urban areas. By using natural features such as ponds, wet woodland, swales, leaky woody dams and tree and hedgerow planting, water is slowed and stored which reduces the risk of flooding downstream while also helping to restore natural habitats and improve biodiversity.

FW3.2 Cross-slope (following a contour) planting of trees, woodland strips and hedgerows to intercept flows of water, providing natural flood management and capturing pollutant run-off. Woodland strips should be up to 10m wide, or 30m wide for steeper slopes

FW3.3 Create swales (shallow, linear, vegetated drainage features) following natural contours to store and redirect surface water flows, providing natural flood management.

FW3.4 Create in-field bunded scrapes or ponds that store and slow the flow of water throughout the landscape, providing natural flood management

FW3.5 Restore or improve management of existing wetlands, including floodplain grazing marsh or floodplain meadows, including permitting seasonal flooding, to allow natural silt deposition within the floodplain, especially where this would provide benefits to flood management. Ideally, sites would be managed using an extensive grazing regime to maintain species and structural diversity.

FW4 Reduce input of diffuse pollutants to safeguard freshwater habitats and restore them to achieve favourable ecological status

FW4.1 Reduce phosphate and nitrate pollution and fine sediment to surface and groundwater bodies to reduce pollutants, including chemicals, nutrients and sediment, before it enters rivers and streams from farms, livery yards and similar land uses

FW4.2 Reduce run-off of pollutants from farmland through the use of best practice in applying fertiliser, manure and slurry

FW4.3 Create 10m buffer zone along all main rivers. Establish unsprayed buffer strips alongside watercourses in areas with high levels of diffuse pollution and surface water runoff to hold runoff and remove pollutants. (new one to map)

FW4.4 Establish a buffer strip (which can contain long grasses, trees, and shrubs) of 4-12m on field boundaries or runoff channels to hold runoff and remove pollutants

FW4.5 Instal of interceptors and other features.

Freshwater

Habitat typologies

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger | Better | Joined-up

FW5 Prevent or reduce the impact of point source pollution to safeguard freshwater habitats and restore them to achieve favourable ecological status

FW5.1 Reduce urban run-off by upgrading existing drainage infrastructure, and installing sustainable urban drainage (SuDS) features.

FW5.2 Interception features on highways, local roads, and existing and new developments.

FW5.3 Reduce the risk of combined sewer overflows by reducing surface water entering the drainage system for example through the use of SuDS.

FW5.4 Use constructed wetlands in wastewater treatment to reduce the amount of pollutants entering the freshwater environment, while providing wetland habitat.

FW5.5 Ensure correct management of private septic tanks to reduce leakage of pollutants into the environment; and investigate and resolve drain misconnections in homes.

FW5.6 Establish riparian buffers across floodplains around rivers and waterways, through natural regeneration, tree planting and management of open habitats.

FW6 Slow or stop the spread of invasive and non-native species that affect freshwater species

FW6.1 Prevent spread of invasive species, including American Mink, American Signal Crayfish, New Zealand pygmyweed, and Himalayan balsalm , though awareness, monitoring and mapping (e.g. INNS Mapper), biosecurity and appropriate control and eradication, including the use of approved biocontrols.

FW7 Collaborative working

FW7.1 Promote and support catchment partnerships and collaborative working between landowners, stakeholders and community groups to restore, create and protect freshwater habitats (e.g. beaver re-introduction projects to restore waterways, and promote and increase awareness of Natural Flood Management)

Open water

FW8 Create ponds for wildlife

FW8.1 Create new ponds for wildlife in locations with restricted public access and a clean water source, including on agricultural land, gardens and green spaces. Use the Freshwater Habitats Trust pond creation toolkit and risk assessment.

FW8.2 Design ponds to maximise diversity at the landscape scale, with varying depth profiles, hydrological regimes, different stages of succession, shapes, sizes and shading.

FW9 Manage and improve ponds for wildlife

FW9.1 Manage for a diverse pondscape of different ages, shading, sizes and designs. Pond management and restoration is very individual to the type, age, and structure of your existing pond. Use Freshwater Habitat Trust pond management guidance.

FW9.2 Safeguard ponds from agricultural runoff and road runoff by implementing and maintaining wide buffers around them, including consideration of livestock fencing and to reduce access for people and dogs.

Urban

Habitat typologies

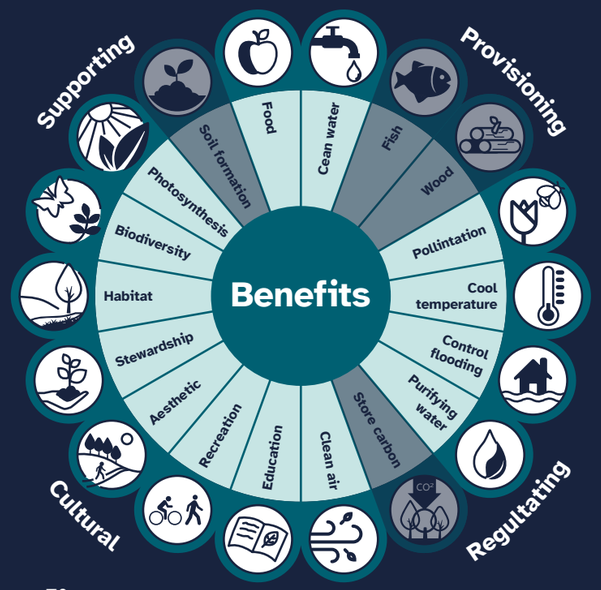
Habitat description

While development can pose a risk to many of the habitats mentioned in this strategy, as well as the species these support, urban spaces can also be key places for wildlife.

Buildings can provide habitats for nesting birds, including red listed species such as house sparrow and swifts, as well as roosting opportunities for bats. Green spaces (e.g. gardens, parks and allotments), urban trees and woodlands provide habitat and ecological connectivity for wildlife through urban spaces.

Former industrial areas can provide the conditions required for priority habitats, such as open mosaic habitat. Disused mines and tunnels (found particularly in the Mendip Hills) provide habitats for bat species including greater horseshoe bat, which has led to designation of the Mendip Bats SAC.

Natural vegetated areas and waterways (green and blue infrastructure) provides ecological linkages, creating commuting and foraging habitats for pollinators and other species.



Pressures on habitat

The population of Somerset has risen by 36.9% since 1981, with just over 50% of Somerset residents living in urban areas. Urban spaces are expanding as the population increases which poses risks to other natural habitats, and good quality greenspace and green infrastructure within urban areas. Some of these factors include:

- **Direct and indirect habitat loss and fragmentation** from residential and industrial development, the transport network and increased light pollution impacting light sensitive species. Many green spaces are not well managed for nature. They are often over-mown and manicured, with planting that offers little or no food source or shelter. Natural grassed areas are being lost to parking spaces, artificial grass, paving stones, decking, and gravel.
- **Intensive management** of greenspaces such as verges and parks can negatively impact biodiversity, including excessive cutting and clearing to maintain ‘tidiness’, and use of pesticides and weedkillers removes valuable habitat for invertebrates which can be devastating to pollinators.
- **Species habitat loss in buildings** such as house sparrows and swifts, and several species of bats that suffer when older buildings are refurbished or lost because many new or repaired buildings don’t allow access to or provide opportunities for their traditional nesting and roosting sites.
- **Fences and walls** divide many of our gardens and parks which disrupts passages for species such as hedgehog.
- **Removal of green infrastructure** features such as large, mature avenues of trees or hedgerows due to conflict with residents and damage caused to buildings and roads. It can take many tens or hundreds of years to replace this loss.
- **Pollution, drought and extreme rainfall** events all degrade blue infrastructure and their habitats such as waterways and canals, as well as sustainable urban drainage features.

Urban

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Click on the map to visit the interactive mapping database for more detail on habitat classifications and relative priority outcomes and measures.

Map showing distribution of existing habitat

Urban

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More		Bigger	
Better		Joined-up	

Priority outcomes

There are more well-designed and connected nature-rich, equitable green and blue spaces in urban environments that are appropriately managed, including multi-functional spaces.

Nature is recognised as essential for improving health and wellbeing, and people are encouraged to take meaningful action to deliver nature recovery and protection.

There is greater tree canopy cover in towns and cities, benefiting urban wildlife, helping adapt to climate change, and improving people's wellbeing.

There are more Nature-based Solutions used in urban environments creating more resilient towns and cities, resulting in greater biodiversity, reduced flooding and urban heat.

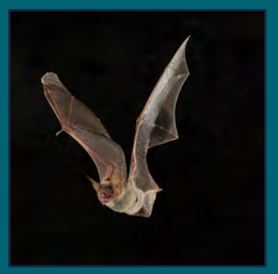
Areas important for nature within and surrounding the urban environment are recognised, recorded, managed and appropriately protected.

Supported species

Outcomes for urban habitats will help support these important species:

Hedgehog

Common toad



Lesser horseshoe

Swift

Urban

Habitat typologies

The vision

A flood and climate change resilient environment with nature on our doorstep. Green and blue infrastructure integrates nature into towns, fostering interconnectedness and harmonious existence with our diverse countryside.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to extend and improve existing green and blue infrastructure within our towns, create and restore habitat, and connect green infrastructure within our towns and into the wider network.

Drawing upon national and local guidance including Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles and the Somerset BNG Principles.

U1 Improve connectivity, ensuring urban species can freely move about and developed areas and infrastructure does not impede passage

U1.1 Create more nature-rich and appropriately managed habitats at a range of scales, to increase the diversity and condition of public green and blue (waterways and wetlands) spaces. Establish a connected network aligned to green and blue infrastructure strategies where developed, that permeates urban areas including new developments, providing opportunities for people and place to connect with nature, while respecting nature's needs and reducing recreational pressure (e.g. maintaining clear paths and setting aside non-accessible areas for wildlife).

U1.2 Create more and improve management of habitats bordering infrastructure (e.g. road-side verges, SuDS) for nature (e.g. cutting regimes to encourage floral diversity) and improve connectivity for wildlife across infrastructure (e.g. green bridges and wildlife underpasses) to reduce habitat fragmentation

U1.3 Employ conservation cuts, and minimise mowing, on verges and grass areas in areas known to be of importance for pollinators connectivity.

U1.4 Increase tree canopy cover and improve condition of urban trees to benefit wildlife, people and place by providing habitat corridors and connectivity. Establish new trees within new and existing streets, public spaces and river corridors, targeting areas of deprivation, low levels of canopy cover, and where wider placemaking and climate resilience benefits can be achieved. Right tree, right place to be guided by the Somerset Tree Strategy and local design guidance.

U1.5 Enhance, increase and create green spaces, ponds, canopy cover, green roofs and walls and wild verges/swathes to establish wildlife corridors and provide habitat stepping stones across urban and developed landscapes.

U1.6 Replace hard river banks with native buffer verges and tree planting and divert some river networks to form long, linear habitats for the benefit of wildlife.

U1.7 Green bridges and tunnels installed (or existing crossings modified) to traverse new and existing barriers to wildlife movement in the urban environment.

U1.8 Ensure that landscaping, green infrastructure, mitigations and Biodiversity Net Gain delivered within development sites provide appropriate and compatible habitats well connected to the wider ecological network, relevant to the site location and context.

U2 Deliver benefits for wildlife through urban public greenspace and land management

U2.1 Manage areas of urban greenspace specifically for nature recovery, to provide a greater complexity of habitats, with year-round shelter, forage and food, focussing on where benefits are most needed.

U2.2 Employ conservation cuts, minimise mowing and leave wild strips, buffers and corners on verges and grass areas in areas known to be of importance for pollinators. Create wild patches and meadows, and areas for insects to overwinter.

U2.3 Incorporate pollinator-friendly species in urban green spaces including parks and road-side verges, and promote such interventions in private gardens in line with the Somerset Pollinator Action Plan.

U2.4 Restore urban watercourses to improve conditions for aquatic and riparian biodiversity (e.g. restore and create riparian zones, de-culverting and daylighting watercourses and removal of hard engineered structures where appropriate), whilst sensitively balancing public access and wider placemaking benefits of urban watercourses where appropriate.

U2.5 Increase and promote the integration of artificial habitat features, such as bat and bird boxes, swift bricks, hedgehog corridors and insect hotels, into existing and new buildings, and other green infrastructure / multi functional spaces.

U2.6 Reduce pesticide, herbicide and artificial fertiliser use in urban spaces, both public and private (e.g. parks, road-side verges, private gardens and allotments, and multi-functional spaces).

U3 Safeguard and increase the extent of green space, trees and hedgerows within urban areas

U3.1 Appropriately manage and protect urban green sites, informed by ecology survey, to improve condition, increase biodiversity and provide a suitable mosaic of habitats across the urban landscape.

U3.2 Prioritise planting native and climate resilient species for developments and public spaces, and implement long-term management and monitoring plans appropriate to habitats, recognising environmental stressors.

U3.3 Make nature recovery a key consideration in development, following policy and guidance on, green infrastructure, urban greening, sustainable drainage systems (SuDs), sustainable/active travel, suitable alternative natural greenspace (SANGs), and biodiversity net gain.

U3.4 Reduce further loss of ecologically valuable urban green space to hard surfaces, and promote the improvement of permeability and greening of existing hard surfaces, that would benefit wildlife while addressing localised flooding reducing flood risk.

Urban

Habitat typologies

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

U4 Increase the integration of Nature Based Solutions to deliver nature and wider benefits

U4.1 Plant trees to deliver air quality, temperature regulation/cooling and surface water management benefits and targeted to areas where it is most needed and will deliver the greatest impact, by focusing action in neighborhoods with low 'tree equity' scores

U4.2 Prioritise the use of natural flood management/nature-based solutions over engineered, (SuDS) hard solutions, to manage areas at high risk from surface water flooding.

U4.3 Increase the integration of Nature based Solutions to improve storm water management, water and air quality, reduce flooding and the urban heat effect, and further losses to biodiversity (e.g. SuDS, green roofs and walls, street trees).

U4.4 Establish new and retrofitted green walls and roofs to enhance biodiversity, whilst also providing temperature regulation in settings most at risk from urban heat island effects.

U4.5 Increase green and blue infrastructure, and more natural space, targeted to communities where it is most needed to deliver health and wellbeing benefits and greater connection with nature.

U4.6 Identify and map priority areas that have severe heat stress, in order to target the use of green infrastructure.

U5 Increase biodiversity, habitats and habitat connectivity potential of gardens

U5.1 Increase biodiversity, habitats and habitat connectivity potential of gardens, for example by planting a range of nectar source plants including fruit trees, creating small ponds, avoiding the use of slug pellets, herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and peat-based garden products, planting native species in preference to non-native if there is an option, and having gaps in fences between gardens to allow species movement, including hedgehogs.

U6 Promote and enable community involvement

U6.1 Mobilise the population of Somerset to help support connectivity through wildlife friendly gardening measures, retention of grass, hedgerows and trees, and ensuring any boundary features are passable.

Wells recreation ground, free public access

Chapter 4.3 E

Grassland

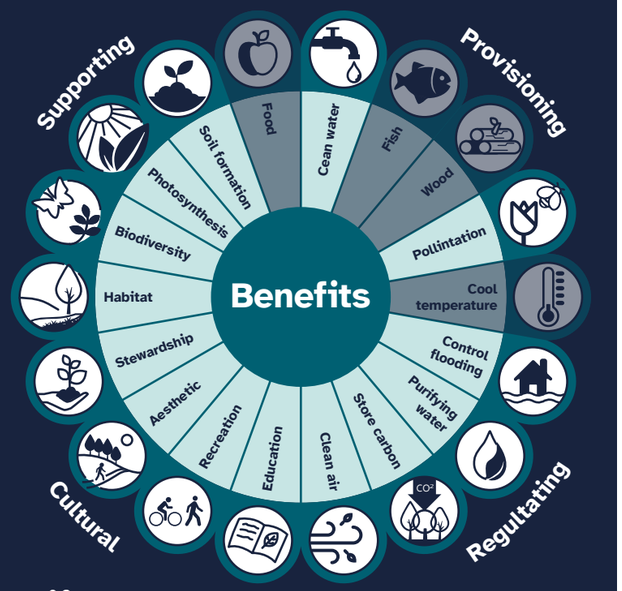
Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Grassland habitats are a familiar, open habitat type, found on free draining soils, dominated by grasses and sometimes rich in wildflowers. Species-rich grasslands have huge importance particularly for invertebrate species including pollinators, as they provide nectar and larval food plants.

There are five key priority habitats in Somerset: calcareous grassland, lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadows, purple moor grass and rush pasture, and calaminarian grassland. Key sites have been designated for the good quality grassland and associated features. Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC contains calcareous grassland which supports rare species (e.g. white rock rose and Somerset hair-grass). There are many other designated sites, particularly SSSIs, in Somerset which contain priority grasslands.

Wet grasslands, purple moor grass and rush pasture, and semi-improved grasslands are covered in Wetland and Farmland below.

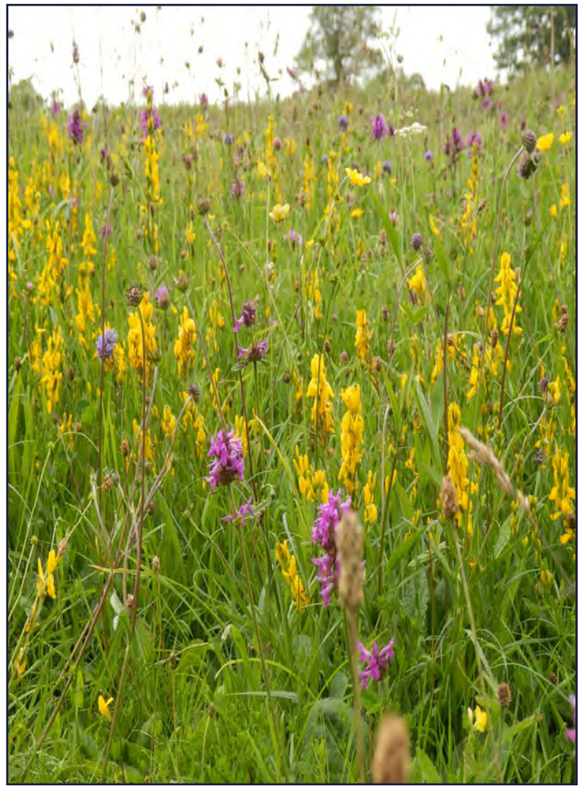


Pressures on habitat

Species-rich grassland habitats are highly vulnerable to human activity and environmental change. Fragmentation from historical habitat loss has reduced these habitats to small, isolated patches, making them more prone to degradation. These habitats are decreasing in the county, with particular losses in Mendip. This trend echoes a bigger picture, with 97% of the UK's species-rich grasslands being lost since the 1930's.

Some of the key pressures and threats that have led to this include:

- **Changes in farming practices** including conversion of hay meadows and other semi-natural grasslands into productive grassland for livestock, silage and crops, and management practices such as increased use of fertilisers, ploughing and seed drilling.
- **Habitat loss and fragmentation** from housing development, road development, agriculture, forestry. Nationally, 96% of lowland hay meadows have been lost over the last 150 years.
- **High nutrient runoff and atmospheric pollution** from farmland and infrastructure affects vegetation and can alter habitat composition (eg by encouraging more grass growth which outcompetes flowering plants).
- **Lack of managment** of priority and species-rich grasslands can lead to the habitat being lost to natural succession and colonised by scrub or bracken.
- **Inappropriate management** also poses a risk to grassland, for example, tree planting on priority grassland and over- or under-grazing or mechanical management which impacts habitat structure which can degrade and ultimately lead to loss of the habitat.
- **Climate change** which can lead to changes in species composition - linked to changes in hydrological conditions, more frequent droughts and warmer temperatures causing grass species to become more dominant or allowing invasive species to establish, and, due to higher temperatures, a higher frequency of fires.

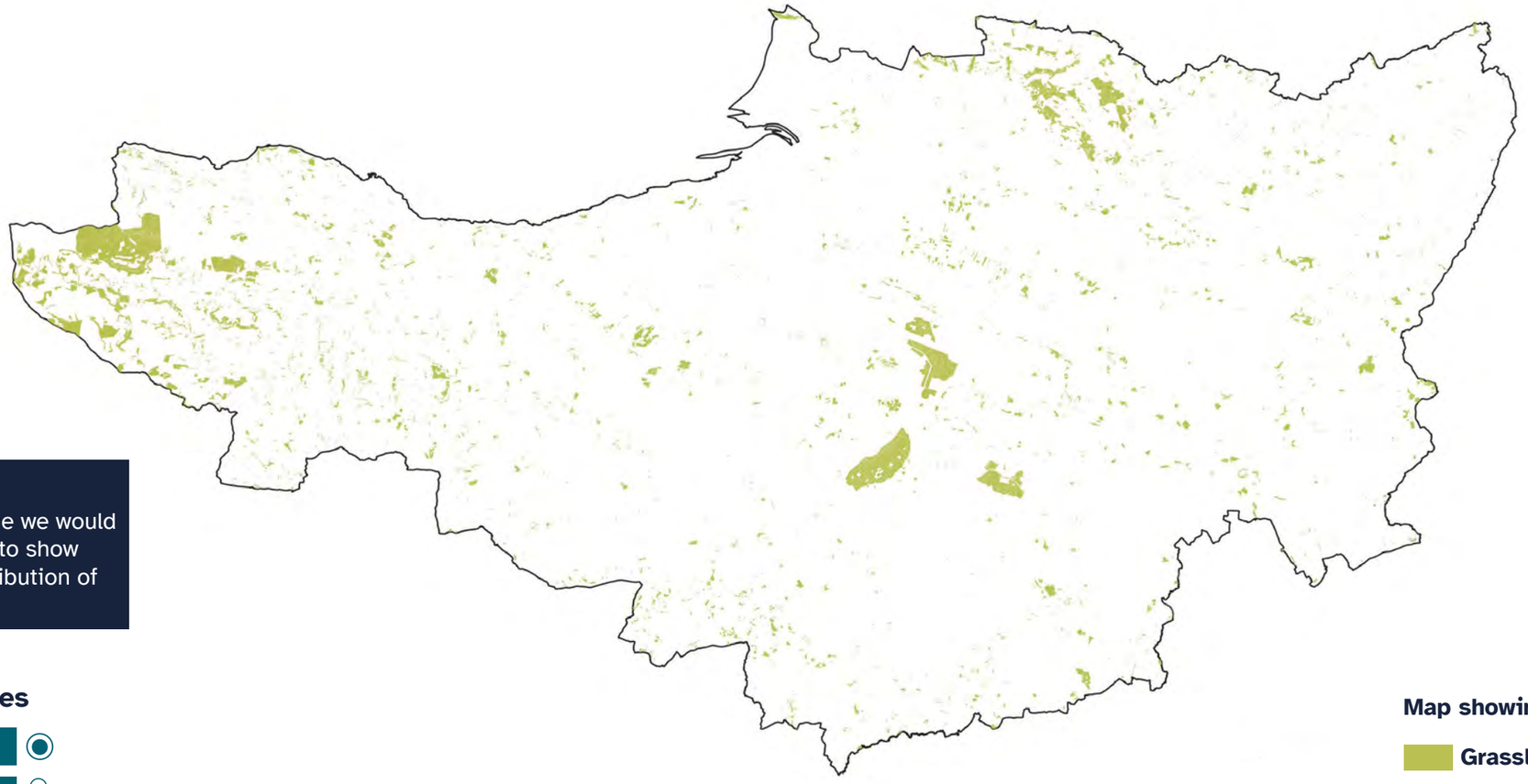


Grassland

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Through the passage of time we would expect the interactive map to show changes in extent and distribution of grassland habitats



Map showing distribution of existing habitat

Grassland

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More **Bigger**

Better **Joined-up**

Priority outcomes

Extent and condition of priority habitat and species-rich grassland sites has increased and existing sites protected and restored.

Targeted creation and enhancement of connecting grassland has helped support increased grassland diversity and the resilience and coherence of the wider ecological network.

Grassland restoration, enhancement and creation has commenced at scale, prioritising sites that bring most benefits for nature.

The condition and value of grassland sites is better understood and monitored to inform future management and respond to change.

Species diversity and abundance of pollinators and invertebrates has increased as a result of restored and enhanced species-rich grasslands across the county.

Supported species

Outcomes for grassland habitats will help support these important species:

Marbled white

Skylark

Green winged-orchid

Pink waxcap

Grassland

Habitat typologies

The vision

A thriving biodiverse and interconnected network of species-rich grasslands that are full of wildflowers and insects has been restored and created. People recognise and value wildlife-rich grasslands and all that they do for us. The varied grasslands of Somerset support rare and endemic species and provide a sanctuary for wildlife and pollinators that support our farming industry.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing grassland habitat, create and restore new grassland habitat and to connect grassland habitats.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

G1 Maintain existing wildlife rich grasslands for nature

G1.1 Increase the diversity and species richness of grasslands including amenity grasslands such as playing fields, churchyards and road verges through the introduction of appropriate wildflower grassland seed mixes or green hay application (preferably locally sourced), to suitable sites, and appropriate management.

G1.2 Increase diversity and species richness across all grassland habitats in Somerset by reducing the application of herbicides, pesticides and other artificial inputs, reducing excess slurry use, and reducing repeated mowing and dropping of cuttings on amenity grassland sites

G1.3 Improve the structural diversity and condition of grasslands that provide benefit and varied structure for a range of species through appropriate and targeted management. For example, through actions such as conservation grazing, rotational cutting, thatch removal and later hay cuts.

G1.4 Manage grasslands within a diverse landscape mosaic, integrating scrub, scattered trees, heath, and wetland habitats to extend habitat edges and promote transitional changes between ecosystems.

G1.5 Enhance grassland biodiversity in transitional infield areas through management changes like diversifying grazing practices, herbal leys, introducing a variety of grasses and forbs, and maintaining a mosaic of vegetation types, while also protecting existing species-rich areas.

G1.6 Manage field margins to provide graduated field edges, with wider and cultivated margins.

G1.7 Manage road verges using 'cut and collect' to restore and maintain wildflower-rich habitat.

G2 Create and restore wildlife-rich grassland

G2.1 Restore and create new areas of wildflower grassland, especially by increasing size, variety and connectivity of existing grassland. Consider translocation, seeding and plug planting of rare/endemic/target species (e.g. Cheddar pink and forage species of the shrill carder bee). Green hay from similar wildflower meadows can be spread as an alternative to seed.

G2.2 Increase the extent and diversity of all types of species-rich grassland (e.g. calcareous, lowland dry acid, neutral and calaminarian grassland, and purple moorgrass and rush pasture) through habitat restoration and creation, and appropriate management techniques (e.g. conservation grazing and hay meadow cutting).

G2.3 Improve the connectivity of species-rich grasslands across the county, increase the extent of existing sites and provide stepping stone grassland habitats to improve the resilience of the habitat network, using management practices such as herbal leys and field margins in arable field systems and associated habitats such as hedgerows.

G2.4 Create new grassland habitats along road verges. Aim for floral biodiversity in road verges, through natural recolonisation, by strewing local green hay in late summer, potentially from adjacent conservation road verges, or by planting native species. Avoid using topsoil for new verges.

G2.5 Identify and restore degraded grasslands through re-seeding with native wildflower and grass species that are beneficial to pollinators and other wildlife

G2.6 Integrate grassland creation and enhancement with other habitat types, such as woodland edges, to create transitional zones that are valuable for a range of species.

G3 Enhance species poor grasslands to improve diversity for wildlife

G3.1 Increase species-richness of semi-improved grassland. For example, by reducing agricultural inputs, adding in different native plant species, or using rotational grazing. Semi-improved or modified grasslands can be diversified by harrowing and over seeding with appropriate species mix for the soil and geohydrology. Arable can be reverted to wildflower grassland through seeding, following site preparation. Plants grown as plugs can be used for species that do not spread well as seed. Use brush-harvested seed or plug sources of local provenance and similar soil conditions.

Chapter 4.3 F

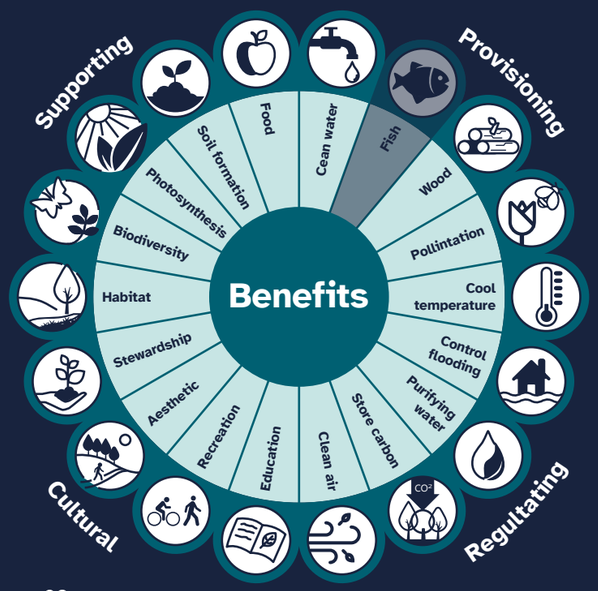
Woodland and Hedgerows

Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Woody habitats in Somerset include broadleaved and coniferous woodland, temperate rainforest, wet woodland, orchards, wood pasture, individual trees and hedgerows. These habitats support diverse wildlife and aid in water purification, climate change mitigation, and flood risk reduction.

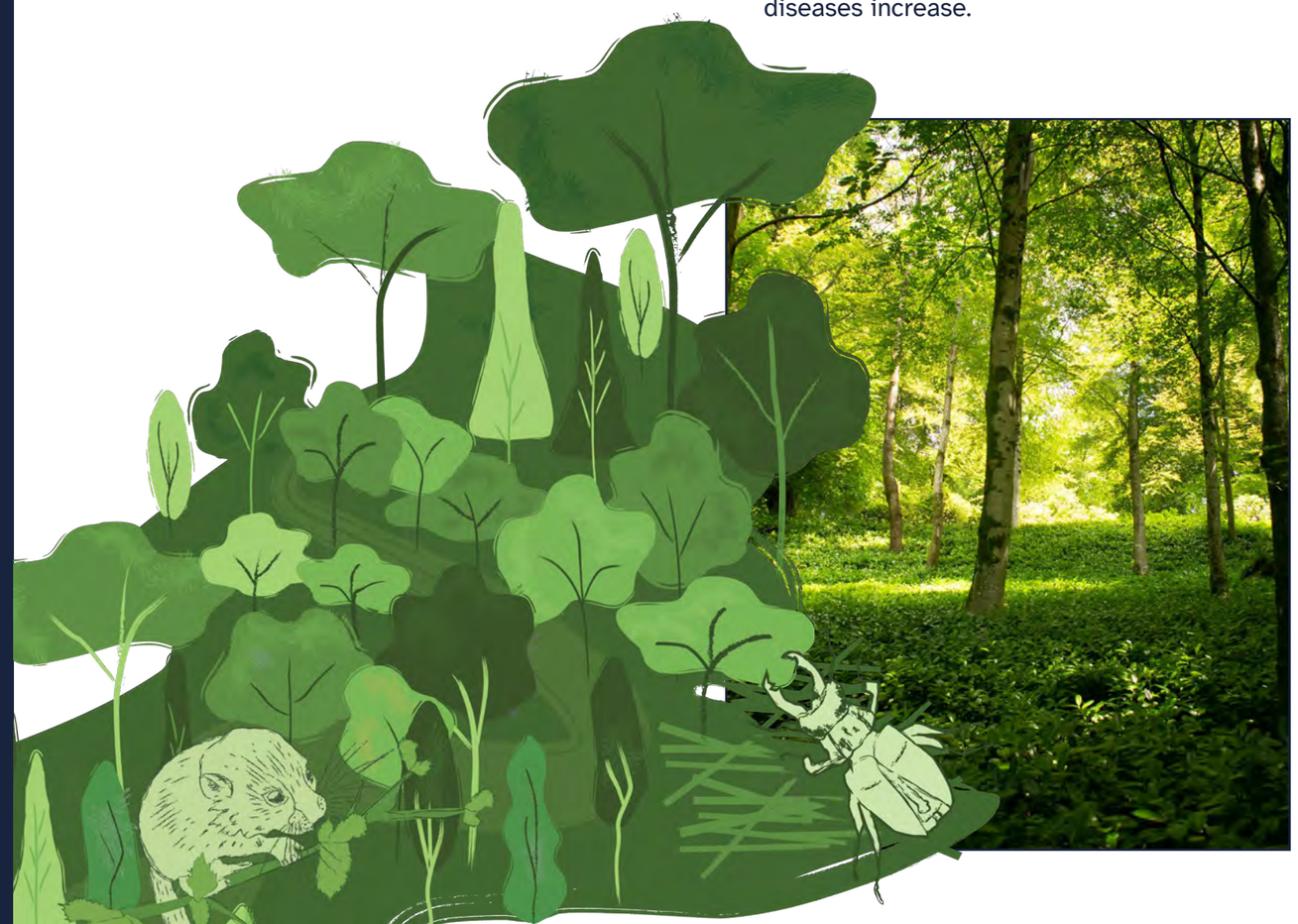
Somerset's woodland covers approximately 285km^2, with over two-thirds being broadleaf and the rest conifer. The county has around 95km^2 of ancient woodland, with just over half being ancient and semi-natural. The remainder is plantation on ancient woodland sites. Forestry Commission data indicates that nearly two-thirds of Somerset's woodland is managed sustainably. Traditional orchards, covering about 0.5% of the county, have cultural and historical significance, but more than half have disappeared in the last 50 years.

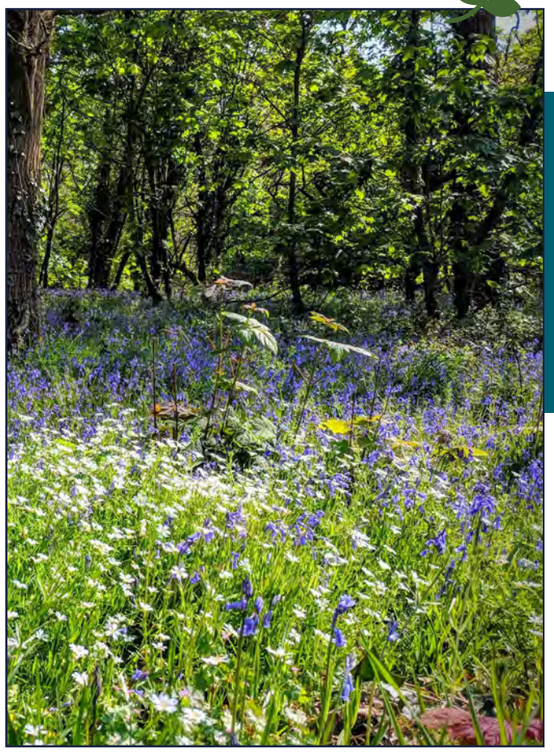


Pressures on habitat

These habitats can take hundreds of years to reach maturity and create the ecological niches to support other species, and therefore any loss and degradation can take years to recover. Increasing pressures creating vulnerabilities to these habitats include:

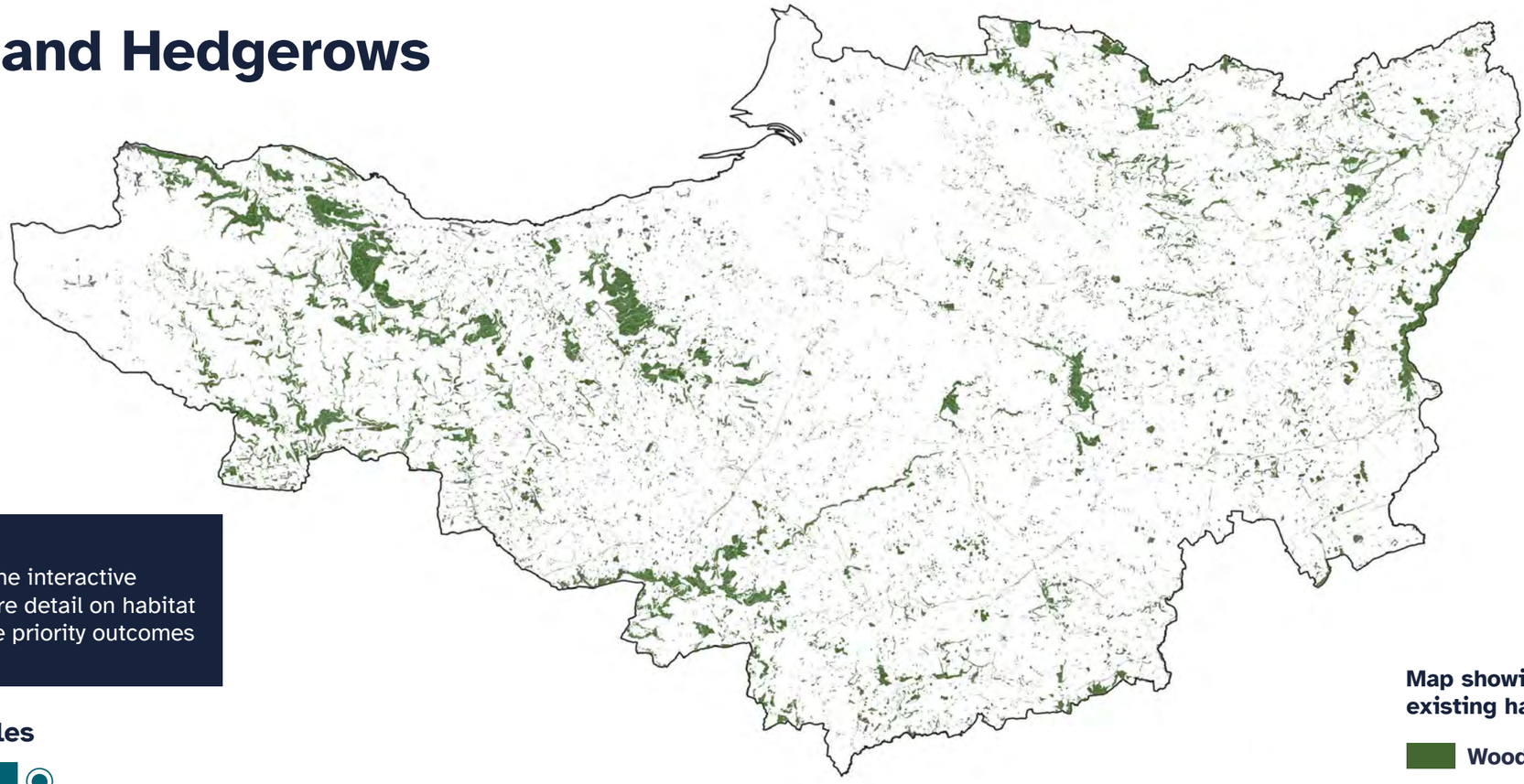
- **Isolation and fragmentation** of woodlands and hedgerows puts species at risk of local extinction as natural processes are limited, for example mobile species may be unable to migrate between locations.
- **Inappropriate development** in proximity to trees, woodland and hedgerows can cause long-term impacts by affecting root health.
- **Increased pests and diseases** resulting from the international plant trade and poor biosecurity, have surged across the UK, threatening tree populations e.g. ash dieback.
- **Uninformed management and/or neglect** resulting in poor age, species and canopy diversity, reducing the ecological condition and resilience of all woody habitats.
- **Climate change** increasing the frequency of the storm, drought and flooding events that cause harm to trees, hedgerows and woodlands. Resulting in reduced vitality and resilience to other threats. A changing climate also affects which tree species can best thrive and may thus change the composition of our woodlands, removing niche habitats for specialist species. It can also mean pests and diseases increase.
- **Neglecting to replace losses** or to plant future generations, erodes woody habitats and prevents ecological continuity.
- **Browsing pressure** from herbivores, deer species, grey squirrels and livestock preventing natural regeneration and damage to establishing trees in woodlands.
- **Inappropriate planting and invasive species** such as rhododendron can reduce diversity within woody habitats.





Woodland and Hedgerows

Habitat typologies



Map showing distribution of existing habitat type

Woodland

0 5 10 20km

Find out more:

Click on the map to visit the interactive mapping database for more detail on habitat classifications and relative priority outcomes and measures.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

Priority outcomes

The diversity and abundance of native species, both flora and fauna, associated with woody habitats has increased and are appropriately protected and managed.

The extent and condition of woody habitats, in both rural and urban environments, has been improved through successful restoration, creation and appropriate management, resulting in improved soil health, and carbon sequestration and storage.

Natural processes within woody habitats have been successfully restored, including the reintroduction and establishment of sustainable populations of keystone native species and ecosystem engineers, such as pine martens.

Existing woody habitats are buffered and linked through the creation and appropriate management of transitional and mosaic habitats and hedgerows.

There is a larger, more biodiverse, interconnected, resilient mosaic of woody habitats across rural Somerset that are better connected to our improved urban treescapes.

Supported species

Outcomes for woodland habitats will help support various important species:

Stag beetle

Hazel dormouse

Barbastelle bat

Bluebell

Woodland and Hedgerows

Habitat typologies

The vision

Woody habitat networks of woodlands, wood pastures, hedgerows and trees have been expanded and diversified across Somerset, with irreplaceable and mature woodlands safeguarded for wildlife. Our enriched, resilient woodlands foster healthy trees and soils, capable of defending and nurturing our most precious and valuable woodland ecosystems.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing woodland and hedgerow habitats, create and restore new woody habitats and to connect habitats.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

Wo1 Improve structure and diversity of existing woodlands

Wo1.1 Restore, enlarge and manage semi-natural woodlands to improve connectivity and resilience, using best practice techniques that diversify and increase native tree, shrub, and ground flora cover. Support natural regeneration, and actions that promote diversity of age, species and canopy structure.

Wo2 Enhance conifer and mixed woodlands

Wo2.1 Through the management of commercial and multifunctional woodlands, maximise opportunities for biodiversity, implementing sustainable best practice. Both retain and enhance existing open habitats and natural features, and secure species, age and structural diversity. Adopt low impact silvicultural systems, such as continuous cover forestry and coppice where appropriate.

Wo3 Enhance ancient woodland and temperate rainforests

Wo3.1 Restore and appropriately manage ancient woodland and temperate rainforests (including plantation of ancient woodland sites) to improve their condition and diversity using best practice guidance and well-informed management plans.

Wo4 Conserve and restore traditional orchards

Wo4.1 Conserve and restore traditional orchards and manage all types of orchards (e.g. traditional, community and commercial) for biodiversity using best practice approaches (e.g. use of appropriate local varieties and cultivars, restorative pruning, retain deadwood and avoid using pesticides).

Wo5 Control invasive species and protect from disease and pests

Wo5.1 Improve the biodiversity and resilience of woody habitats to pests and diseases, wildfires, and extreme weather events through best practice management approaches (e.g. creation of firebreaks, allowing natural regeneration, and diverse planting and re-stocking).

Wo5.2 Manage and remove invasive species and prevent their spread.

Wo5.3 Landscape scale, sustained and co-ordinated grey squirrel management to improve ecological condition of woodlands, improve sustainable production of native hardwoods and prepare for future reintroduction of red squirrels.

Wo5.4 Landscape scale, sustained and co-ordinated management of deer populations to secure successful establishment of trees and woodlands, to protect crops and to secure the natural regeneration of herb, shrub and tree layers within existing woodlands.

Wo6 Manage wood pasture, ancient and veteran trees

Wo6.1 Restore and protect wood-pasture and appropriately manage as a holistic system, e.g. conserving veteran and future veteran trees (including pollard willows), plant or allow natural colonisation of appropriate species, and low intensity grazing that allows establishment of a mosaic of woody and open habitats.

Wo6.2 Secure and implement management plans for ancient and veteran trees across landscapes (where not within wood pasture), establish trees to ensure continuity of habitat.

Wo7 Establish new woodland

Wo7.1 Establish new semi-natural woodlands to improve connectivity. Support natural regeneration.

Wo7.2 Through natural colonisation, direct seeding and/or planting, establish UKFS compliant mixed, multifunctional woodlands. Utilising a diverse and resilient pallete of species, to be informed by landowner objectives.

Wo7.3 Increase the supply of locally sourced and grown native stock through support of existing and establishment of new tree nurseries. Ensure that both native and non-native stock are procured through a bio secure supply chain i.e. demonstrating Plant Healthy Certification or 'Ready to Plant' assessment.

Wo8 Establish trees outside of woodlands

Wo8.1 Create and manage transitional and mosaic habitats to buffer woodlands, increase connectivity, and increase diversity both within and surrounding woodlands (e.g. open space creation within woodlands to allow natural colonisation, and cyclic scrub management and coppicing to support structural diversity).

Wo8.2 Create and manage riparian and wet woody habitats to increase diversity, buffer watercourses, provide natural flood management, and provide suitable habitat for keystone species and ecosystem engineers, such as beavers.

Wo8.3 Increase the area of farmland that follows the principles of agroforestry systems, both in pasture and arable. Incorporate more in field trees, copse, hedgerows and shelterbelts within farm systems.

Wo9 Create and restore hedgerow networks

Wo9.1 Create and restore hedgerow networks by planting new and restocking gaps with a diverse mix of native and honorary-native species (as defined in the "Managing ancient and native woodland in England – Forestry Commission Practice Guide"), and use appropriate management approaches (e.g. allowing hedgerows to grow tall and wide, rotational winter cutting, and applying traditional techniques such as hedge laying and pollarding).

Chapter 4.3 G

Lowland Wetlands

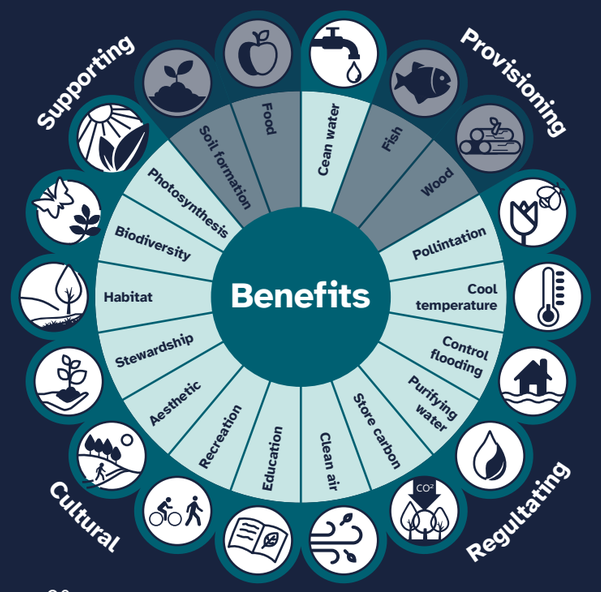
Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Lowland wetlands are characterised by high water levels and waterlogged soils rich in organic matter. They may be permanently wet or only seasonally flooded. Wetland habitats include marshes, wet grasslands, fens and bogs. Lowland wetland habitats are typified by the Somerset Levels and Moors. Peat is often a key underlying feature of the wetlands found in Somerset which has formed over thousands of years and supports a range of unique and rare plants and insects.

Lowland wetlands play a vital role in storing carbon, with the Somerset Levels and Moors alone storing approximately 11 million tonnes of carbon. They are also important tools in flood alleviation and maintaining water quality as they slow and filter water as it moves through the landscape.

Many of the wetlands in Somerset are rich in biodiversity, supporting rare species for which they are internationally and nationally protected.



Pressures on habitat

Lowland wetlands are vulnerable to rapid degradation. Over 80% of the UK's wetlands and peatlands are damaged and degraded. The key pressures in Somerset are:

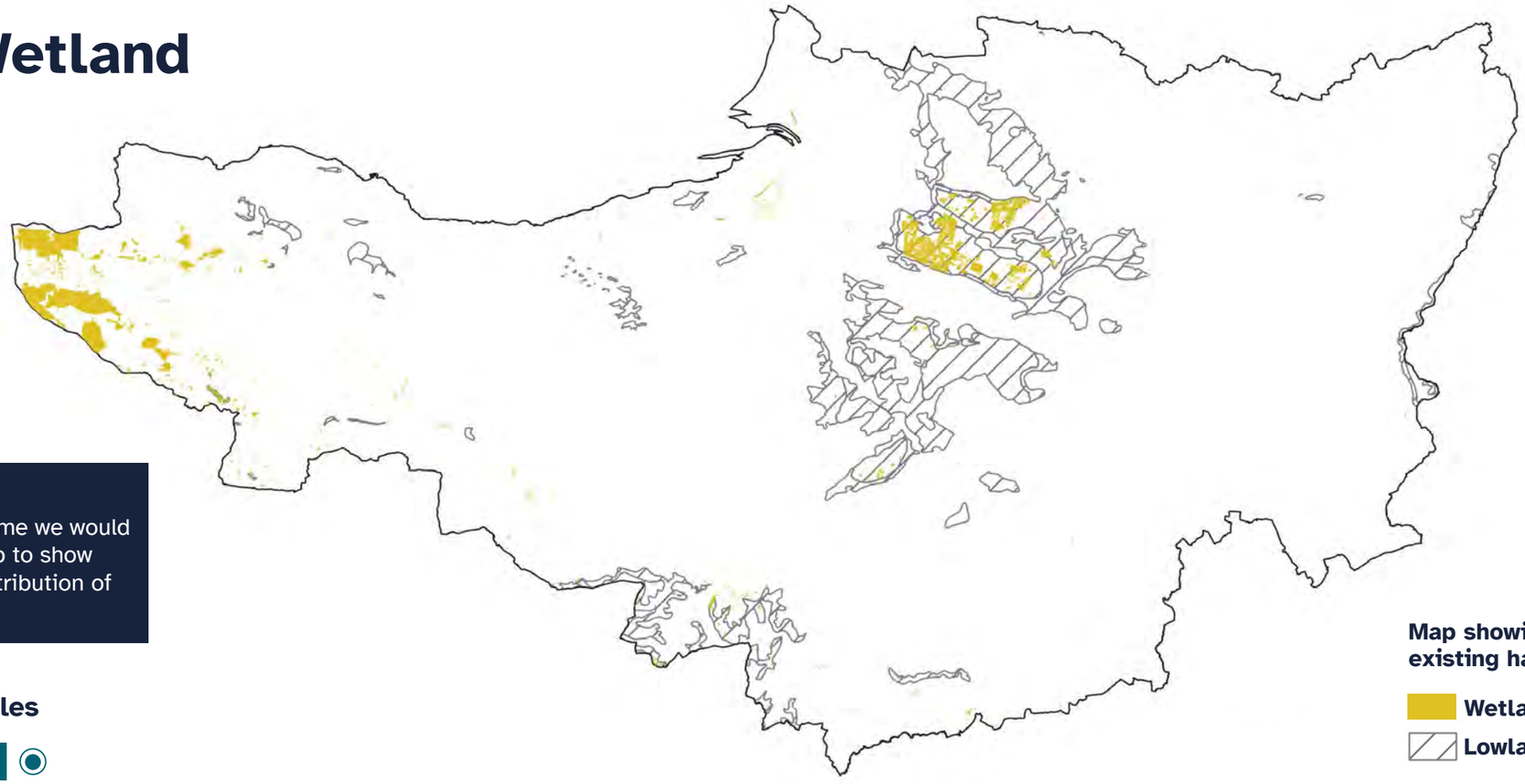
- **Direct draining of peatlands and wetlands** causes peat and wetland soils to dry out and degrade. Large areas of lowland fen and lowland raised bog have been subjected to land drainage and now only small fragments remain. When peat is drained and dried it causes the land to shrink, the lowering of field levels and an increase in flooding, resulting in greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Peat extraction for horticulture** is ongoing within the Somerset Levels and Moors, causing direct loss of peat. Data is incomplete on the volume of peat already lost and future extraction.
- **Development and land use changes** in or near wetlands can lead to habitat fragmentation, pollution and altered water flow in wetland areas.
- **Some of the farming practices undertaken on peatlands and wetlands** such as ploughing, tilling, intensive grazing, inappropriate cropping (e.g. maize) and fertiliser application can all cause degradation.
- **Climate change** can exacerbate drying of peaty soils. Wetlands are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with drought and flooding causing negative impacts. The artificial engineering that defines much of this landscape has removed much of its resilience to cope with such pressures.
- **Pollution** from sewage works and storm overflows, as well as run-off from agricultural land, development and roads, causes degradation of wetlands and loss of biodiversity.

Lowland Wetland

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Through the passage of time we would expect the interactive map to show changes in extent and distribution of wetland habitats



Map showing distribution of existing habitat type

- Wetland
- Lowland peat

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

Priority outcomes

There are more, bigger, better and more joined-up wetland habitats, including wet woodland, reedbeds and swamps, fens, wet meadows and raised bogs.

Wetlands are species diverse, supporting a full range of plants and animals associated with these habitats, and can adapt to climate change, store carbon, reduce flood risk and improve water quality.

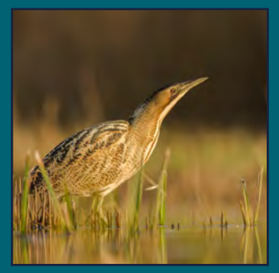
Wetlands provide vital connectivity for wildlife at river catchment scale, particularly between core protected nature sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones' of high-quality wetland habitat.

The catchments are managed to ensure that water supply to wetlands, including sensitive peatlands and their peat formation, is of sufficient quality and quantity to support an increase of current extent and improve habitat and species diversity.

Land use of wetlands, including peatlands, is compatible with nature recovery and climate adaptation, and peat extraction has ceased and peat voids are restored to nature-rich habitats.

Supported species

Outcomes for wetland habitats will help support these important species:



Bittern

European eel

Variable Damselfly

Lesser silver diving beetle

Lowland Wetland

Habitat typologies

The vision

Lowland wetlands are protected, restored and re-wetted to re-establish and expand this iconic lowland landscape. Dynamic, healthy and interconnected wetland habitats have been created that stores more carbon, with peat extraction ended, and provides a haven for wetland birds, and unique and diverse plant and insect communities.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve existing wetland and peatland habitat, create and restore new wetland habitat and to connect wetland habitats.

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

We1 Restore and manage wetlands, incorporating a mosaic of wetland features to benefit a wide variety of fauna and flora

We1.1 Maintain and protect existing areas of wetlands and secure their appropriate long-term management (e.g. eliminate fertiliser run-off, draining or diverting/abstracting water from wetlands, ground compaction, and implement ecologically-sensitive grazing and cutting regimes)

We1.2 Restore and manage wetland habitats to improve their value to wildlife, whilst also enhancing their capacity to store carbon and flood management function, using techniques such low input hay cuts and extensive (low-intensity) grazing, sensitive watercourse maintenance, management of high water levels, and minimising the requirement for infrastructure (barriers) and pumping

We1.3 Enhance wetland habitat diversity to include a mosaic of conditions (e.g. seasonally wet areas and muddy pools, deeper and permanently wet ponds and ditches, and reedbeds and swamp), which benefit the needs and recovery of priority species.

We1.4 'Increase and promote biodiversity-focused Natural Flood Management schemes, that support landscapes that are more resilient to winter flooding and summer drought, slowing the flow and re-wetting areas which both restore historic and create new wetlands, creating natural water storage to prevent flooding.'

We1.5 Undertake phosphate and nutrient reduction upstream of wetlands, across different sources and users, from sewage networks to agricultural practises, including using complimentary mitigation at strategic locations (e.g. the creation of artificial wetlands to filter water upstream of lowland wetlands).

We1.6 Consider wetter farming (paludiculture) on peaty soils where full peatland habitat restoration is not available, particularly buffering existing peatland habitat.

We1.7 Reduce extent of, and where appropriate eradicate, invasive and undesirable species such as invasive aquatic plants and undesirable scrub encroachment in wetland habitats.

We2 Create wetland habitats which contain a matrix of various habitat types which are suitable for the site (e.g. wet grassland, ponds, ditches, hedgerows, trees, or wet woodland)

We2.1 Reduce the fragmentation of wetlands through the restoration and creation of new wetlands, where ecologically and hydrologically appropriate, creating landscape-scale networks of wetland mosaics, which provide optimal conditions for important species and assemblages, and provide other ecosystem services.

We3 Expand and manage Fen, lowland grazing marsh and lowland bog

We3.1 Expand areas of fen. lowland grazing marsh and lowland bog, grazed by appropriate stock levels and type of cattle, by linking isolated sites to facilitate functioning floodplains which are favourable for wildlife interests.

We3.2Manage existing fen and bog sites to reduce encroachment, including through scrub management and appropriate grazing.

We3.3 Create and maintain wide buffers around existing fen and bog sites to safeguard them from diffuse pollution.

We4 Protect and manage habitats on Peat

We4.1 Eliminate peat extraction, supporting landowners/ managers to access funding opportunities for alternative landuse practices, and explore innovative techniques to restore peat voids.

We4.2 Use adaptive water level management plans or peat restoration techniques to prevent loss of peat through erosion and oxidation, benefiting wetland biodiversity and carbon storage.

We5 Work together and share knowledge

We5.1 Promote and increase community co-creation and restoration of wetlands, and promote the uptake of public and private payment schemes for ecosystem services.

Farmland

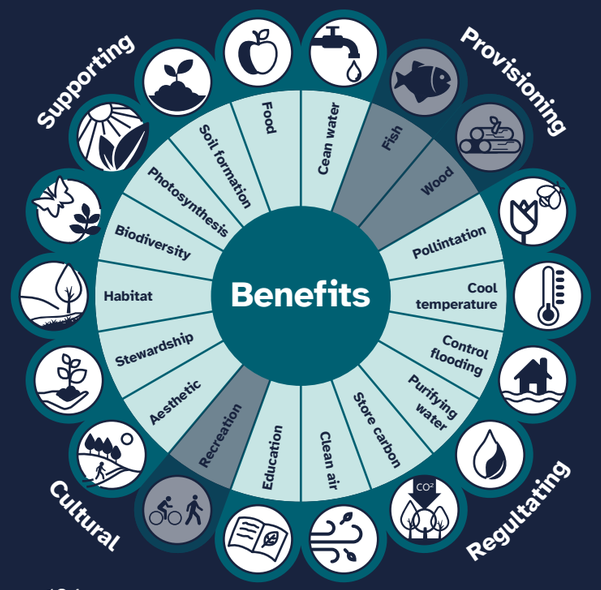
Habitat typologies

Habitat description

Somerset is predominantly shaped by farming, with around 75% of land in agricultural use, and farming is critical to the county's culture, economy and rural heritage. A high proportion of this farmland is grassland pasture and the dominant farm type is dairy and grazed livestock. Approx. 640km2 is arable land used for growing cereals and general cropping, and horticulture and orchards account for approx. 1.5% of arable land in the county.

Farmland is home to habitats important to many species, and its productivity is reliant on nature for many things, including pollination of crops, healthy soils and availability of clean water. Additional habitats (e.g. hedgerows, freshwater and wetlands) described in this LNRS are present throughout the farmed landscape. This co-existence makes the farmed landscape essential to nature recovery.

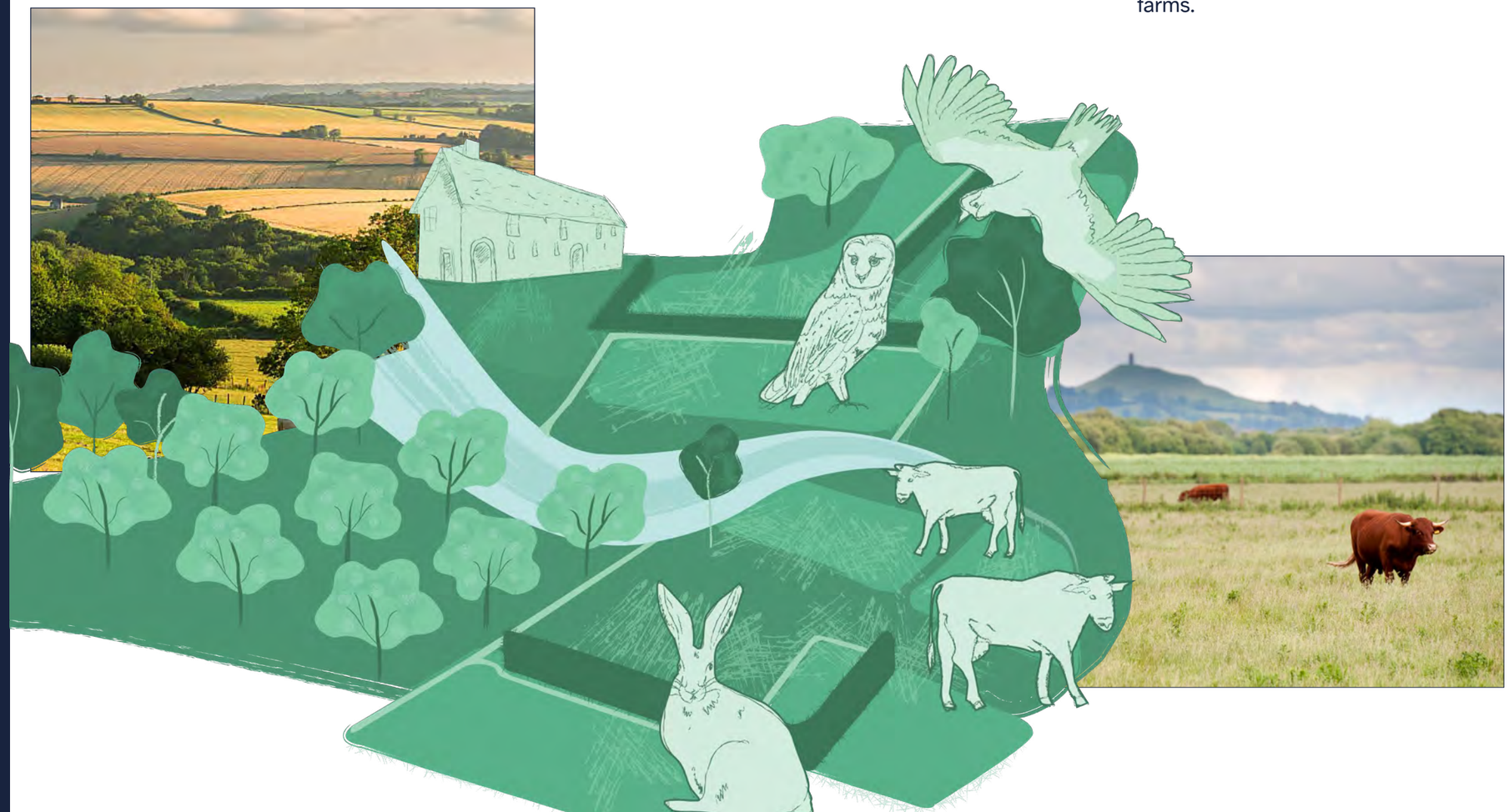
When managed sensitively and integrated into farming practices with the right incentives, advice and support, productive farmland can support a wide range of wildlife, help to combat habitat fragmentation and improve soil health.



Pressures on habitat

Agriculture uses land to produce commodities (food, materials, etc.). When land is used unsustainably, farming can have a negative impact on habitats, wildlife and can even jeopardise ongoing farming. Some of the potential pressures on the condition of the farmed landscape and the habitats this encompasses include:

- **Intensive farming practices**, such as use of pesticides and fertilisers, negatively impact soil biodiversity and health, as well as invertebrates, including pollinators, and can also impact freshwater wildlife as the chemicals run-off into our waterways
- **Soil erosion** due to a variety of factors including stock pressures, regular soil tillage and ploughing, lack of ground cover and use of unsuitable land types for agricultural practices.
- **Loss of traditional field margins, small copses, isolated hedgerow trees** limits habitats and wildlife corridors that allow species to traverse agricultural land.
- **Removal and/or poor management of hedgerows** removes vital habitat for many species and increases disease introduction.
- **Regular grass cutting** for haylage and silage reduces the diversity of grasslands, and decreases the habitat of ground nesting birds such as skylark or lapwing.
- **Monocropping** and other modern farming practices such as increased specialisation diminishes plant diversity, and can make crops more vulnerable to pests and diseases. It also contributes to habitat loss and fragmentastion and loss of habitat complexity.
- **Climate change** causing an increase in frequency and extremity of weather events that will significantly impact the farming community and biodiversity on farms.



Farmland

Habitat typologies

Find out more:

Through the passage of time we would expect the interactive map to show changes in extent and distribution of farmland habitats

Map showing distribution of existing habitat type

Farmland

0 5 10 20km

Key - Lawton's principles

More | **Bigger**

Better | **Joined-up**

Priority outcomes

There is greater diversity, extent and abundance of wildlife habitats and their associated species, across farmed landscapes.

Somerset has healthier soils. As a result, soil biodiversity, soil organic matter and water carrying capacity has increased.

The farmed landscape actively contributes to the recovery of our rivers and wetland habitats.

Farmers collaborate to increase knowledge and deliver nature recovery and habitat connectivity on a landscape-scale.

Supported species

Outcomes for farmland habitats will help support these important species:

Yellowhammer

Brown hairstreak

Brown hare

Harvest mouse

Farmland

Habitat typologies

Key - Lawton's principles

More | Bigger

Better | Joined-up

The vision

Farmland thrives from intertwining agriculture with space for nature. Nature-based Solutions and regenerative agriculture improves soil health, enhances water storage and reduces run-off, soil erosion and flooding. This approach fosters a sustainable, symbiotic relationship with nature, supporting productivity and nature in abundance.

Measures

The following measures are actions that will help to deliver outcomes to extend and improve habitats for nature within existing farmland, create and restore new nature-friendly habitats that connect to surrounding wildlife landscapes.

Fa1 Undertake regenerative practices that maintains or improves soil health, biodiversity, water quality and reduces flood risk

Fa1.1 Apply regenerative principles of land management including limiting soil disturbance; maintaining soil cover; fostering agricultural diversity and rotations; keeping living roots in the soil; integrating livestock and arable systems

Fa1.2 Increase the extent of environmentally sensitive agricultural practices that provide additional wildlife resources (e.g. introduce flowering herb-rich leys within rotations for invertebrate nectar sources, leave over-winter stubble for wintering farm birds)

Fa1.3 Increase the use of mixed farming and the diversity in crops, livestock and wildlife. For example, having a mix of grazing livestock and crops, improving crop rotations and increasing structural and species diversity of plants, trees and hedgerows on farm

Fa1.4 Livestock to be managed through regenerative grazing and husbandry practices such as maintaining permanent pasture, herbal leys, riverside buffer strips, tree establishment and mob grazing where appropriate.

Fa1.5 Increase the plant species diversity within grazed, hay and silage fields by changing grazing/ cutting regimes and using more diverse seed mixes.

Fa1.6 Adopt arable land management practices such as such as cover crops aiming for 60-100% soil cover, and rotations and integrating livestock for diversity. This can improve soil health and improve soil biodiversity for species such as earthworms. Management practices should be dependent on local conditions and species. No till or low till can help improve soil health and structure

Fa1.7 Improve the management of farm soils through a range of management approaches. For example, reduce soil compaction and disturbance (e.g. ploughing and tilling) and increase soil cover in winter (e.g. stubbles and cover crops).

Fa1.8 Reduce agricultural run-off that impacts wildlife habitats through a range of measures (e.g. improved slurry and silage storage and management, cover crops, arable field margins, plant trees and hedgerows and riparian buffers).

Fa1.9 Reduce use of pesticides to increase biodiversity (including within soils and waterways) through management and biological control approaches (e.g. appropriately designed arable field margins to enhance natural pest control).

Fa1.10 Reduce use of artificial fertilisers and reduce nutrient levels within the soil to lower runoff into waterways by using appropriate management approaches (e.g. use natural organic matter to feed soils, catch crop planting and leave areas unfertilised such as arable field margins).

Fa1.11 Create a tailored integrated pest management plan to reduce the use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides.

Fa2 Create and improve wildlife-rich habitat that supports biodiversity, helping species to spread through fields, edges, and corridors

Fa2.1 Increase habitat complexity on farmland, with mosaic habitats, and strategically considered field margins and hedgerows, providing connectivity across the landscape. Utilise: wider, higher, bigger hedges; smaller fields, with grass margin buffers; more scrub, cover crops, arable wildflowers; more trees in hedgerows and worked fields; and ponds.

Fa2.2 Create and manage graded margins up to hedgerows to support birds and other farmland species.

Fa2.3 Create wildflower arable field margins to help with pest control, pollination, nesting areas for birds, soil health and water management

Fa2.4 Maximise the diversity of field margins to provide a range of habitats within margins. Aim to vary management of margins to increase diversity. For example, annual cutting of the strip nearest the crop but with less frequent cutting nearer the field boundary. Variety could also be introduced by managing blocks, strips or whole margins at different intervals.

Fa3 Introduce trees and hedges within productive farmland

Fa3.1 Create, restore and manage wooded habitats (e.g. woodlands, orchards, hedgerows and trees) to increase biodiversity and wildlife corridors within and between farms and surrounding landscape.

Fa3.2 Maintain or introduce in-field trees or agroforestry systems on farms, this involves growing trees, hedges and shelterbelts on farmland alongside crops and grazing livestock. For example, silvopasture or silvoarable. . Introducing trees within productive farmland can provide food, shade and shelter for livestock and diversify income sources.

Fa3.3 Enhance, create and manage hedgerows as important wildlife corridors between farmland and other habitats, including a diversity of hedgerow trees. Incorporate hedgerows into livestock management practices.

Fa4 Create, restore and manage ponds and other wetland features

Fa4.1 Create, restore and manage ponds and other wetland features (e.g. scrapes, ditches, lakes) with biodiversity features, such as shallow margins, deeper areas and grassland buffers.

Fa4.2 Safeguard ponds from agricultural runoff and road runoff by implementing and maintaining wide buffers around them, including consideration of livestock fencing and to reduce access for people and dogs.

Fa5 Work together and share knowledge

Fa5.1 Continue and grow Somerset's strong history of partnership working. For example, farm clusters, catchment-based approach, and landscape recovery projects. Use this strategy as a tool to help target collaborative efforts, working together across sectors by sharing knowledge and pooling resources, and exploring opportunities for future finance and markets

Fa5.2 Use existing and new clusters, and other means, to connect farmers with those already employing nature friendly farming.

Fa5.3 Provide effective advice and signposting to funding for land managers to enable them to adopt wildlife-friendly land management practices.

General Measures

Key - Lawton's principles

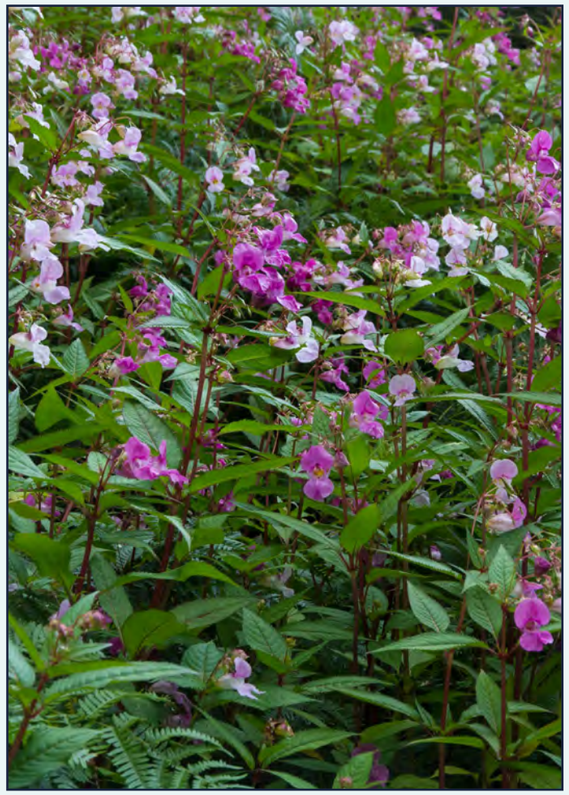
More | Bigger | Better | Joined-up

Note that these generic measures should apply in all appropriate priority habitats - they require widespread implementation across different land types and habitats

These priorities address issues that affect large areas of the landscape and cannot be confined to specific mapped locations. Instead, they require widespread implementation across different land types and habitats.

Invasive Non-Native Species and Pest Management

Invasive non-native species and pests pose a significant threat to native biodiversity by outcompeting native species, altering habitats, and spreading disease. Sustainable pest management is essential to maintaining balanced ecosystems and preventing adverse impacts on biodiversity and food production.



Himalayan balsam

GM1 Implement coordinated efforts to monitor, control, and eradicate invasive non-native species to protect native biodiversity and restore ecological balance

GM1.1 Establish a comprehensive monitoring program to identify the presence of invasive non-native species (INNS) early, particularly in sensitive habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, and along waterways.

GM1.2 Form rapid response teams that can act quickly to control new infestations before they become widespread.

GM1.3 Focus on eradicating the most harmful invasive species first, which have the greatest negative impact on native biodiversity.

GM1.4 Follow best practice guides to choose the correct methods to manage invasive species, ensuring that the methods used are safe for the environment and non-target species.

GM1.5 After removal of invasive species, promptly revegetate the area with native plants to prevent re-invasion and restore the ecological balance.

GM1.6 Improve habitat conditions that favour native species over invasive ones, such as enhancing soil health, water management, and light conditions.

GM1.7 Implement long-term monitoring and management plans to ensure that eradication efforts are sustained and that areas cleared of invasive species do not become reinfested.

LNRS Targeted Species and Species Assemblages

Species abundance and diversity are crucial indicators of the health of the natural environment. The habitat outcomes and measures described above will benefit many species in Somerset. However, some key species will require more targeted actions to improve their chances of survival, beyond those provided in the habitat measures.

The measures outlined below provide specific actions to aid in the recovery and enhancement of the LNRS Priority Species Shortlist. These actions will help to deliver the overarching priority outcome: an increase in the geographical distribution and abundance of the LNRS Target Species and Species Assemblages, contributing to more dynamic, natural, intact, and climate-resilient ecosystems.

The Species Measures Appendix summarises the habitat measures and species specific measures that will benefit all species on the shortlist, as well as the LNRS Priority Species.

Species / species assemblage	Measures
Plants	
 **S1 - Cheddar pink**	**S1a:** Increase the abundance and distribution of Cheddar pink through translocation and re-introduction programmes to suitable receptor sites. **S1b:** Carefully manage areas of Cheddar pink to ensure suitable balance of grazing and reduce pressure from trampling by goats and recreation.
 **S2 - Bare ground plant species assemblage** Upright chickweed and chaffweed	**S2a:** Manage suitable sandy habitats (e.g. cliff-tops, dunes, heathland tracks) to create areas of low competition and open ground, ideally through natural processes (e.g. large herbivore grazing and human disturbance), encouraging dynamic systems to create stepping stones for dispersal.
 **S3 - Wall bedstraw**	**S3a:** Identify, map, monitor and protect locations of suitable habitat for wall bedstraw and maintain for their growth. **S3b:** Retain stone walls across their distribution (e.g. cemeteries, footpaths and lanes) and manage to allow growth of plants.
Trees	
 **S4 - Endemic whitebeams** Cheddar whitebeam, Gough's Rock whitebeam, Twin Cliff's whitebeam, Bloody whitebeam and Devon whitebeam	**S4a:** Identify, map and monitor locations of these species. **S4b:** Appropriately manage the sites containing these species, including reduced pressure from recreation and grazing goats. **S4c:** Increase the abundance and distribution of the endemic whitebeams through seed collection, propagation and habitat improvements.
 **S5 - Black poplar**	**S5a:** Identify, map, monitor and protect locations of native black poplar. **S5b:** Increase the number of female black poplar trees in close proximity to male individuals through tree planting, ensuring genetic diversity is increased and avoiding hybrids.
Reptiles & Amphibians	
 **S6 - Herpetofauna hibernacula assemblage** Adder, common lizard and great crested newt	**S6a:** Create and appropriately maintain hibernation sites for reptiles and amphibians in lowland and upland habitats (e.g. adders, common lizards and great crested newts), which can include log piles, large stones and organic material.
Mammal	
 **S7 - Water vole**	**S7a:** Coordinated American mink removal and monitoring.

Species / species assemblage	Measures
Invertebrates	
 **S8 - Hairy click beetle**	**S8a:** Identify partners to complete captive breeding trials of hairy click beetle. **S8b:** Increase abundance and distribution of hairy click beetle through translocation and re-introduction programmes to suitable receptor sites, and manage and monitor these areas appropriately (e.g. limiting access of grazing animals and avoid sensitive periods during bankside management and dredging).
 **S9 - Shrill carder bee**	**S9a:** Create, restore and protect flower-rich meadows allowing a diverse range of late-flowering forage species for the shrill carder bee to be present through appropriate management, aiming to link suitable sites. **S9b:** Manage the banks and margins of ditches, rhynes and hedgerows to allow for late-flowering forage species, and the development of tussocky grasslands for nesting sites (e.g. leaving areas undisturbed and uncut from April to October, and cut on a 3-5 year rotation).
 **S10 - Short grassland species assemblage** Rare spiders Cozyptila blackwalli, Typhochrestus simoni and Walckenaeria monoceros	**S10a:** Manage suitable grassland sites to maintain an open stoney grassland on cliff tops and under-cliff, control scrub growth and ensure adequate levels of grazing on chalk grassland sites for Typhochrestus simoni. Reduce insecticide use to relieve pressures of these species and their prey species. These measures will also benefit Roman chamomile.
 **S11 - Patchy calcareous grassland butterfly mosaic** Large blue, chalk hill blue and adonis blue	**S11a:** Appropriately manage areas of calcareous grassland that allow patchy sward length mosaic, including bare ground, to develop that creates ideal conditions for the target species and their host species (e.g. red ant, black ant, sainfoin, horseshoe vetch) including, variable grazing regimes, stocking densities and timings and sensitive scrub and bracken management. **S11b:** Increase the abundance of the larval food plants of the target species through seeding, plug planting and appropriate management.
 **S12 - Bracken-woodland edge mosaic fritillaries** High brown, pearl-bordered, small pearl-bordered and dark green fritillary	**S12a:** Create, protect and manage a well connected network of violet-rich bracken edges on moorland slopes and moorland-woodland edge habitats with appropriate bracken litter depth to create a warm micro-climate for rapid larval development. **S12b:** Appropriately manage areas of suitable habitat to create edge habitat and ensure bracken does not get too dense or tall (e.g. grazing with cattle or ponies, periodic cutting of bracken, bracken bruising and raking). **S12c:** Promote collaboration between landowners and conservation groups to create networks to aid dispersal, specific identification and consideration of suitable sites, targeted management, and consideration of translocation and re-introduction programmes where suitable habitat present but limited potential of natural colonisation.
 **S13 - Wet grassland invertebrate assemblage** Marsh fritillary, silver nomad bee and narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth	**S13a:** Appropriately manage suitable habitats for the target species (wet grassland, springline mire mosaic and damp moorland grassland) to increase the abundance of larval food plants of the target species (e.g. devil's-bit scabious), including extensive cattle and pony grazing at suitable stocking densities, scrub management and preventing
 **S14 - White clawed crayfish**	**S14a:** Targeted signal crayfish removal and monitoring. **S14b:** Create in-water refuges in locations of known / potential White clawed crayfish populations through placing cobbles, boulders, bricks, breeze blocks or hessian sacks on river banks and margins.

Species / species assemblage	Measures
Birds	
 **S15 - Lapwing**	**S15a:** Retain existing suitable nesting habitat in fields traditionally used for nesting. **S15b:** Ensure farming practices do not destroy/remove nests (e.g. cultivation, hoeing or rolling operations) and allow safe re-nesting. **S15c:** Where late-sown spring crops are no longer practiced or spring cropping is no longer a viable option, create fallow plots. **S15d:** Plan field rotation to ensure some spring-sown plots are located next to grazed pasture every year.
 **S16 - Nightjar**	**S16a:** Identify, map, monitor and protect locations of nightjar. **S16b:** Create, restore and protect a mosaic of heathland, grassland and woodland habitats through sympathetic forestry management practices and promote extensive nature friendly agriculture (e.g. appropriate grazing by cattle, ponies and pigs, felling and re-stocking).
 **S17 - Whinchat**	**S17a:** Maintain coombes to have a very low density of trees. **S17b:** Manage bracken to allow dense bracken to form by not cutting or rolling until late July or early August to allow for dispersal of fledglings.
 **S18 - Grasshopper warbler and reed bunting**	**S18a:** Protect and manage mires and marshy grasslands to maintain ground wetness throughout the breeding season and thick areas of Juncus are protected and promoted.
 **S19 - Lesser redpoll**	**S19a:** Manage gorse, birch scrub, wet woodland and mixed woodland to allow tall, dense structure to provide good nesting habitat.
S20 - Tree pipit	**S20a:** Maintain and increase broad woodland edges as well as scattered trees and shrubs in open habitat to create edge habitat.
 **S21 - Cuckoo**	**S21a:** Maintain the presence of the cuckoo host species, meadow pipit, reed warbler and dunnock.
Mixed taxa assemblages	
 **S22 – Woodland edge and calcareous grassland patchy mosaic species assemblage** Duke of Burgundy, fly orchid, lesser butterfly orchid and frog orchid	**S22a:** Manage woodland edge habitats to create a mosaic of micro-habitats, including clearings and rides, and manage and graze grasslands appropriately depending on target species present to maintain open grassland. **S22b:** At known sites for the target orchid species, identify and monitor locations of orchids and protect during flowering. Use appropriate management that creates suitable habitat for dispersal. Consideration should be given to seeding and/or plug planting.

Working Together

Everyone has their part to play in helping nature to recover and reverse the loss of biodiversity.

In this chapter, you'll discover ways to help nature recovery in Somerset. It includes guidance tailored for various users on effectively implementing the strategy, along with case studies that showcase inspiring stories of nature recovery in action.

5

Farmers, Foresters, Landowners and Managers

How to use this strategy

Farmers, foresters and landowners are the stewards for over 75% of our land area and will be vital to help achieve ambitions for more nature and for areas to be bigger, better and more joined up. You know your land better than anyone and your stewardship and involvement is essential to a successful LNRS. We therefore encourage you to be informed by the strategy and use it with your knowledge of the land to inform decision-making where appropriate.

The Opportunity Area maps are there to support land managers and farmers in their decision making. The maps are based on best available published evidence but should be ground truthed and considered alongside local knowledge. Effective management planning is still needed to decide the best options and this should be informed by local knowledge. Farmers and land managers can consider different options for nature recovery and make decisions that best suit their land, budget and farming practices. No strategy can replace the intimate knowledge we know farmers and foresters have of their land. The strategy is high-level and intended to support decision making, not to prescribe.

Farmers recognise the benefits of sustainable farming that works with nature and good soil health. Many have been involved in countryside stewardship and are embarking on Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes which provide positive outcomes for nature, as well as public goods and services. The LNRS can serve as a channel for effective use of ELM funding, achieved through co-design with landowners, managers and foresters, to meet landscape-scale priorities.

In addition, land managers are diversifying, with some benefiting from carbon and net gain markets, as well as deploying Nature-based Solutions to address issues such as flood risk mitigation and managing the impacts of climate change on their land.

For farmers, foresters, land owners and managers this Strategy can be used to:

- **Identify key priorities and opportunities.** Aids in pinpointing habitat opportunities across farmland, offering initial guidance on the most suitable habitat types for those areas.
- **Identify the priority opportunity area** your land falls within and what measures you can action to support recovery in that habitat. If you are in an opportunity area for a priority habitat, consider whether you can take action to support recovery in that habitat.
- **Provide information to help access grants and incentives.** Many government grants and agri-environment schemes (such as Environmental Land Management Schemes in the UK) align with LNRS priorities.
- **Provide information to foresters** to help access grants and incentives. Many funding schemes (e.g., England Woodland Creation Offer, Woodland Carbon Code) are linked to LNRS objectives.
- **Help groups of farmers and land managers** shape nature recovery priorities for their area, and to encourage collaboration across holdings and landscapes.
- **Identify opportunities for Landscape Recovery project proposals**, and to provide evidence to support their application and project development.
- **Guide woodland management and tree planting** in ways that enhance biodiversity, support climate resilience, and align with local conservation priorities.

Nature friendly farming

Case Studies

Home Farm, Curry Rivel

Over the last 30 years there has been a decline in biodiversity on farms, notably a fall in the abundance of cowslips, skylarks, butterflies and bees. Home Farm made changes to protect and encourage wildlife for future generations, while continuing to run a commercially successful farm.

Areas of low agricultural productivity were identified for habitat enhancement using stewardship options, which helped promote biodiversity and operational efficiency, with low impact on agricultural output.

Home Farm, an arable farm, enhances biodiversity with wild flower margins and sustainable practices.

Buffer strips and wildflower margins, or 'linear hay meadows', have been established around all arable fields (48km) to protect water quality and promote biodiversity. No insecticides are sprayed in spring or summer. The margins, planted nearly 20 years ago with traditional wildflower hay meadow seeds, support voles, the main food for barn owls. The Hawk and Owl Trust monitors barn owl numbers, which are among the highest in the UK. The farm's rotation includes wheat, linseed, oilseed rape, beans, and legume fallow to build fertility and minimize weeds and disease. Eight ponds, lakes, 15 acres of woodland, and nesting plots for skylarks and lapwings have been created.

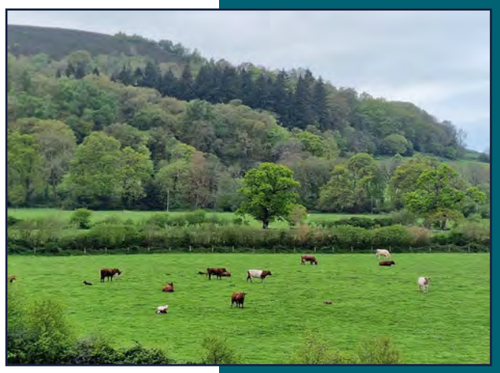
There is a hay meadow that has not been ploughed and has never been sprayed. It is managed with a late hay cut and grazed by sheep over winter only, making for an impressive and diverse spot that replicates the meadows of old that used to be such an important part of this landscape.

Lower Haydon Farm

Rob Lunnon, a mixed farmer on Mendip, is transitioning to regenerative agriculture on his 300-acre farm. He raises 170 dairy and beef animals and produces 600 turkeys annually. Rob joined the Mendip Hills Farm Cluster for training and support, entered a Sustainable Farming Incentive agreement, and plans to plant hedges and reduce stocking pressure. He aims to diversify into wildlife safaris and ice cream experiences, and will shift to an all-grass farm, exploring sustainable mixed agriculture with pigs and vegetables.

Horner Farm, Porlock Vale

Case Studies



Horner farm over the past 6 years has been building a farm that brings nature into the heart of what they do. They are working to create a farm that not only supports nature but learns from nature, recognising the strength in diversity in our habitats and farming systems, which in turn supports good animal welfare. Equal importance is given to all elements of the farm to bring balance to the land that feeds our community and rebuilds our environment.

Horner farm is predominantly a livestock farm but also has a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) veg plot onsite, with an emphasis on selling their produce into their local community.

Over the past 6 years Horner Farm has returned poor degraded soils from previous arable management into a grassland farm planting woodpasture, silvopasture, new orchards, herbal lays and undergoing species rich grassland meadow restoration.

The Cattle, Sheep, Goats and Chickens play an intrinsic part in the restoration, ensuring natural processes take place on the land with a mix of species, that in turn helps support and build the ecosystem at the farm from the swallows feeding from the dung to the barn owls utilising the varied grasslands sward.

The farm has undertaken butterfly, grassland, bird and reptile surveys to monitor change over time with their Landlord the National Trust to ensure the positive change and impact can be monitored.

Neroche Wild Core Area

Case Studies

Neroche ‘Wild Core Area’
Blackdown Hills

Neroche features a complex mosaic of habitats, including ancient woodland, plantation woodland, wood pasture, ancient and veteran trees, heathland, grassland, and wetlands.

Forestry England have adopted a landscape scale approach delivering ecological enhancements in collaboration with partners and neighbours.

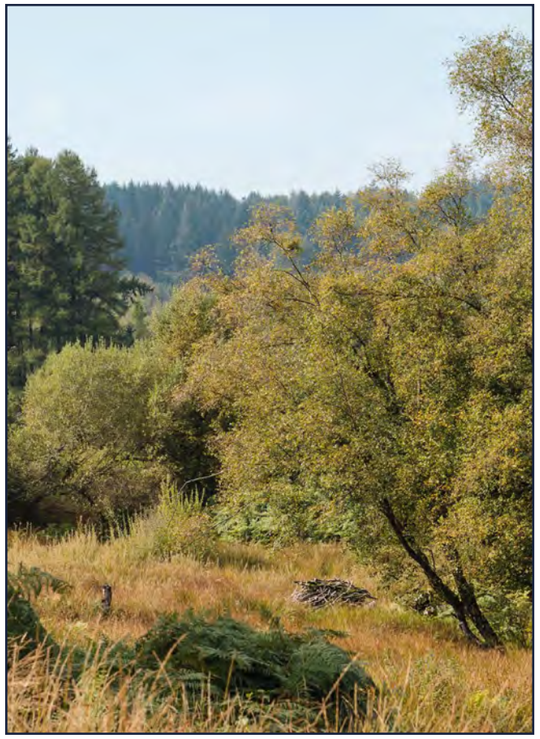
A fully-functioning forest ecosystem will be resilient to future environmental conditions.and a diverse forest will likely be better able to cater to future human needs.

A fully-functioning forest ecosystem resilient to future environmental conditions and catering to human needs.

Forestry England aims to deliver landscape-scale ecological enhancement with partners and neighbours by replicating natural processes. Creating water-defined landscapes, climate-resilient woodlands, and habitats for invertebrates, mosses, liverworts, lichens, fungi, and dynamic ecosystems where animals and plants move freely.

Feasibility studies assess missing natural processes and how these might be enhanced, reinstated or replicated. Interventions include reinstatement of natural hydrology, removal of invasive species and use of natural grazing regimes. Baseline surveys will monitor changes and impacts.

Forestry England manage a complex of forest blocks, consisting of mixed productive woodlands, heathland, pasture, ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and SSSIs. They use low impact silvicultural systems to maximise opportunities for nature and open space, alongside sustainable timber production.



Being led by natural process means we cannot fully predict how the project will develop, but this uncertainty is a key part of the Wild Areas.

Developers and Planners

How to use this strategy

Developers and Planners have a key role in shaping the local environment and supporting nature recovery. This strategy provides important guidelines on where and how new developments should occur to benefit the environment.

The LNRS shows developers and planners where development could have the biggest impact on nature. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) like Somerset Council and Exmoor National Park Authority will use this strategy to support land use planning both in terms of Local Plan Development and making planning decisions. Alongside the interactive maps, the strategy will ensure that new developments take nature into account. Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate how they will maintain and enhance nature recovery.

The Levelling up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 states that any Local Plans and Spatial Strategies must 'take into account' the relevant LNRS for the planning authority, making clear that the LNRS plays a role in place-making and planning.

Although LNRS areas do not prevent development, they highlight potential impacts on nature and suggest measures for mitigation. By considering location, minimizing environmental impacts, incorporating net gains, collaborating with stakeholders, and fostering long-term stewardship, developments can contribute to resilient, nature-rich landscapes benefiting wildlife and communities.

For LPAs, planning agents and developers, this Strategy can be used to:

- Guide landowners and developers in considering appropriate sites to bring forward for development in Somerset. Assists in determining suitable locations for development through data-driven site identification for nature recovery, and supports links between green growth and economic policy.
- Guide how and where developers will deliver their Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) duties in Somerset, including the delivery of any off-site requirements
- Act as an evidence-base document and material planning consideration for the local planning policy context for Somerset, with potential to inform the new sustainability and environmental impact assessment framework (due to be introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) when this comes into force).
- Support LPAs in the designation of any new local wildlife sites or areas of biodiversity importance, Local Green Spaces (LGS) (as defined by paras 105-107 of the NPPF) and other strategic development allocations within the policy-making and local plan development process.
- Inform local decision-making and the development management process relating to planning applications received by the LPAs as a material planning consideration, including recommendations for strategic BNG delivery and where necessary to mitigate the effects of development.
- Provide information to LPAs on the nature recovery priorities in their area and best practices for enhancing biodiversity

Steart Marshes

Case Studies

Steart Marshes

Completed in 2014, Steart Marshes is one of Europe's largest wetland creation schemes and plays a major role, nationally and internationally, as a demonstration and wetland exemplar site. Having spent a decade developing Steart Marshes into a site with the potential to offer transformative impact, the reserve is firmly established as a community asset, with key connections throughout the local area.

Steart Marshes came into being as a habitat creation scheme to compensate for the loss of internationally important intertidal habitat within the Severn Estuary due to coastal squeeze, that was set to increase as a result of rising sea levels and climate breakdown.

Saltmarsh is a cheaper and more sustainable way to protect against flooding into the future and it creates much needed space for wildlife.

Development across the Severn Estuary has caused considerable habitat loss. Projects such as The Bristol Port Company's development of its Avonmouth container terminal identified Steart as an ideal location for compensatory habitat. The site at Steart is large enough to compensate for 40% of the total losses in the region.

Public Bodies and NGO's

How to use this strategy

Public bodies

As well as a statutory obligation, public bodies have a major role to play in the delivery of nature recovery. Public bodies must have due regard to the strategy in all decision-making. Many are already taking action for the climate emergency and acting for the ecological emergency will complement that.

As policy makers, landholders, enforcers, investors and leaders, public bodies should demonstrate best practice consideration of the strategy. The LNRS should be used to shape policies and local outcomes, prioritise public funding and the delivery of environmental investment. The Opportunity Maps help to highlight the places where public funding will yield the most public good and benefits for nature.

This document will help shape local strategies, place-shaping, master planning and project design for maximum benefit to One and All.

Non governmental organisations (NGO's)

The knowledge and expertise of environmental NGOs will be fundamental to the successful implementation and monitoring of this LNRS. Their roles include providing expertise, facilitating community engagement, supporting implementation, monitoring, and ensuring long-term sustainability. By bringing expertise, resources, and public engagement to the table, they help ensure that local initiatives to protect and restore nature are effective and sustainable over the long term.

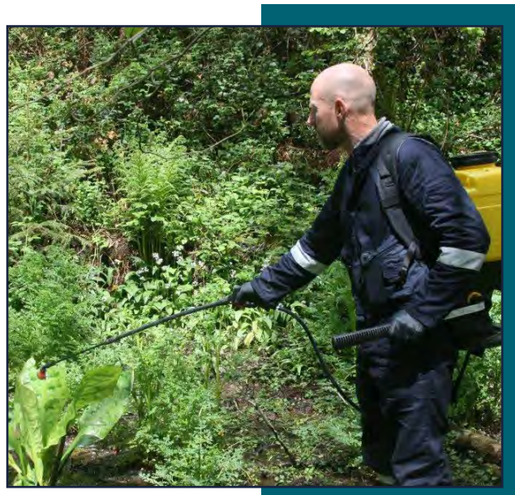
Some bodies such as the Somerset Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and National Trust are significant landowners in Somerset and also fall into the category of landowners and managers.

For public bodies and NGO's, this Strategy can be used to:

- Inform how public authorities meet their legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This could be through managing areas of land they are responsible for that supports what the LNRS proposes; or using the LNRS to inform relevant regulatory decisions.
- Consider potential habitat restoration and creation projects that are aligned with this LNRS and its biodiversity priorities. Will help towards the ambition of achieving '30 by 30'.
- Raise awareness of the importance of the LNRS among local communities, policy makers, businesses, landowners and other stakeholders and engage them to take action for nature recovery through participation.
- Facilitate partnerships between different stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, landowners, land managers and foresters, and community groups to join forces on nature recovery initiatives.
- Support funding applications for nature recovery projects. The strategy can be used to inform opportunities for local action utilising public and/or private investment.
- Conduct ecological assessments to evaluate or advise on the potential impacts of development projects, land use changes, and other human activities, to minimise negative impacts of disturbance to nature.

ENNIS Project

Case Studies



ENNIS Project

Through collaboration, the Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species (ENNIS) Project is reversing the spread of invasive flora such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, montbretia, and American skunk cabbage, while also monitoring and controlling populations of invasive fauna such as signal crayfish.

The ENNIS Project aims to bring about a greater awareness of the issues of invasives, and lessons learnt will be shared widely both at a local and national level.

Since 2019, the ENNIS Project has been at the forefront of controlling non-native invasive species.

Invasive species threaten Exmoor National Park's ecology, including its Special Areas of Conservation and six Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme, the ENNIS Project combats these species with local communities, volunteers, and organisations like the National Trust and Natural England. Partnering with Nicky Green Associates, they also manage invasive signal crayfish. Annually, over 800 invasive plant sites are treated, covering 90% of known sites. The project trials innovative methods like electricide treatment and aims to protect Exmoor's wildlife, habitats, and economy while raising public awareness.

THE EXMOOR NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES PROJECT

Mendip NNR

Case Studies

Mendip NNR

A new, large ‘super’ National Nature Reserve (NNR) predominantly along the south-facing grasslands and woodlands of Mendip will bring together organisations committed to improving space for wildlife, help develop collaborations and joined-up management approaches.

This new NNR will enhance biodiversity, making the Mendip hills a bigger, better and more joined up place for wildlife to thrive. It will support a sustainable future for local communities, farmers, and businesses through the development and promotion of a nature rich landscape.

The new Mendip NNR, created in 2023 will join up 14km² of land managed for nature conservation.

The project will link ecologically important sites along The Mendip Way, including over 4km² of land not previously managed for conservation. It will conserve and restore limestone slopes, wildflower grasslands, ancient wooded combes, gorges, and rocky outcrops. The initiative will unite 31 existing nature reserves and over 4km² of new conservation land, enhancing access to nature for locals.

Creating larger, connected spaces is crucial for halting nature’s decline and boosting populations. The site spans the Mendip Hills National Landscape, from Wells woodlands to Brean Down in the Severn estuary. The new NNR will demonstrate collaborative efforts among land managers, locals, and visitors to aid nature recovery.

Sowing the Seeds Project

Case Studies

Sowing the Seeds, Exmoor

The Exmoor Sowing the Seeds Project has been working to revive and restore meadow landscapes across Exmoor National Park.

The Project is helping to support farming businesses in nature recovery and diversification, focusing on species rich grassland which currently covers just 3.6% of the National Park. The project supports landowners and community groups to create wildflower rich habitats in their areas, which collectively is helping to restore and connect this valuable habitat.

Helping to create or restore over 4km² of species rich meadows, increasing this rare habitat across the National Park.

Launched in 2021, and funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme, the project has worked with over 70 landowners and groups across Somerset and Devon, helping to create or restore over 4km² of species rich meadows, increasing this rare habitat across the National Park.

The Project provides support to landowners and community groups, with practical actions to increase wildflowers in grasslands. The project provides bespoke advice depending on the lands specific situation, botanical and soil surveys, management plans, and donations of wildflower seed which are harvested from local species rich grassland on Exmoor.

The project works with schools and community groups to develop educational, technical, and wellbeing activities. These include wildflower identification and monitoring, promoting effective grassland management to support biodiversity, and botanical drawing and writing, deepening knowledge and connection to meadow landscapes.

Holnicote Estate

Case Studies

Holnicote Estate, West Somerset

The National Trust has adopted a catchment-based, landscape-scale approach to manage land and water sustainably on the Holnicote Estate. Partnering with local farm tenants, volunteers, and the community, they aim to create a resilient, nature-rich, and productive environment. The project spans 12,500 acres, restoring natural processes and ecological functions across five schemes, including the River Aller and Horner Water catchments.

The River Aller Floodplain Reconnection scheme is the first large main river restoration scheme of this scale implemented in the UK.

The work was designed to take the River Aller back to a natural state from being a single thread channel to a system of multiple, cross-connected channels. This technique reconnects the river to its floodplain, helping to hold back floodwater during high flows and protect downstream communities. Groundwater levels are raised to store more water throughout the year. This helps the river become more resilient during times of prolonged dry weather and drought.

Many smaller interventions have also been delivered in the area at catchment scale.

The new wetland created will slow the flow of water through the landscape, combat flooding and become a haven for wildlife. In addition, two beaver families were introduced to Holnicote Estate and they have developed the sites into complex wet woodland habitats. Beavers are nature's engineers, re-building the lost wetland habitats and offering Nature-based Solutions to existing environmental problems.

The work ensures Holnicote Estate is a more

climate resilient and sustainable landscape, achieving improvements for the environment, biodiversity, and local residents.

The Meads Bridgwater

Case Studies

The Meads, Bridgwater

The Meads in Bridgwater is an example of floodplain grazing marsh that was drained in the past to meet agricultural needs. Today, the imperative is to use these places to once again store floodwaters for longer. This is a 20-hectare floodplain grazing marsh, which was historically drained for agriculture and could only store floods for a short while. Careful restoration is now protecting people and property in Bridgwater, through new wetland features, including reedbeds, and restoration of a historic river channel.

The Friends of the Meads have been working closely with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) to create a wetland meadow and spaces which everyone can enjoy.

New water control structures are improving water levels, especially during summer months. This is also helping invertebrates, so providing food for waders, as well as offering new habitat for water voles.

New conservation grazing regimes are managing the landscape and creating microhabitats, and habitat created for wildlife and future generations.

Work is ongoing to provide a constant source of water from river or stream to make the wetland resilient to drought, introduce more water control structures, and deliver continuing citizen science.

These measures are attracting new wetland wildlife to the area like wading birds, water voles, otters, birds and wetland plants. The Meads is now also proving itself to be a great place where people can find out about wetlands.
Restoring the Meads will help improve the wellbeing of local people by creating more opportunities for nature-based healthy activity. Although the current open spaces in Bridgwater are enjoyable for recreation, they have so much

more potential as habitat filled with wildlife, not just around the outside but urban pockets of wildness in the town.

Individuals, Community Groups and Businesses

How to use this strategy

Individuals and community groups

Everyone can contribute to nature's recovery. As an individual or member of your community take time to find out more about your local greenspaces and the challenges to people and nature in your area. Explore our Opportunity Maps to see what nature recovery options might best suit your area and read through our case studies to see what inspires you.

Residents, schools, and local groups can use LNRS to apply for funding and grants for tree planting, habitat restoration, or nature-based activities. Communities can use LNRS to advocate for nature-friendly development in planning applications and ensure biodiversity is considered in new housing or infrastructure projects. It strengthens community campaigns to protect vital wildlife corridors and greenbelt land. It can inspire local schools and groups to participate in wildlife monitoring (e.g. bird counts, wildflower surveys) to track biodiversity changes over time.

Speak to your local Councillor to ask them to support your ideas. There is additional support and funding available from a range of sources and you can use our nature recovery principles to shape the design of your project.

Businesses

Nature is 'critical infrastructure' for the economy. Nature loss presents systemic risks to businesses and the financial system, from disrupted supply chains to diminished economic growth. In contrast, investing in nature recovery offers significant opportunities in sustainability-linked markets and nature-based solutions

Taking action on nature can deliver multiple business benefits, but certainty and clarity are needed to drive investment at scale. The LNRS can give businesses confidence on what actions to take for nature recovery and nature-based climate change adaptation and mitigation, where and how.

The LNRS will play an important role in bringing green investment into the county from national and international funding sources, and creating local opportunities for Somerset businesses to achieve their environment and social governance (ESG) objectives

For individuals, community groups and businesses this Strategy can be used to:

- Explore our opportunity maps to identify what opportunities there are in your community for nature recovery. The maps are a starting guide so use them to generate ideas.
- Assess your community spaces to understand which opportunities will work best for your land. Evaluate what opportunities you have and if you need any more information or permissions to deliver for nature recovery
- Decide what projects you want to pursue and explore funding opportunities such as the Climate and Nature Fund. Think about what you need to deliver your project or actions and align your priorities with the right funding.
- Develop an action plan for nature recovery, think about what works for your community and what's feasible to deliver. Take guidance from our nature recovery principles and consider the short and long-term, and how you could monitor positive impacts
- Help set up or join an existing local community nature recovery group, friends of or voluntary group working to manage local greenspaces for the benefit of both wildlife and people.
- Align business operations with nature recovery priorities where possible.

Stowey Wood

Case Studies

Stowey Wood

Stowey Green Spaces Group (SGSG), formed in 2016 in Nether Stowey, Somerset, conserves local green areas. Stowey Wood, dating back to 1700 or earlier, contains ancient woodland indicators. In 1970, half the wood was felled and replanted with Sitka Spruce by the Forestry Commission.

Stowey Wood, 4.5 hectares of ancient woodland possibly dating back to 1700, saw half its area felled and replanted with Sitka

From 2014, forestry students began felling some of these trees. In 2018, Somerset County Council licensed SGSG to manage the wood for wildlife and community benefit, initiating native broadleaf replanting. In 2021, horse-logging funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund removed more Sitka, creating glades and boosting biodiversity. By November 2022, SGSG and partners planted around 2,500 trees.

Volunteers also dammed a stream, forming pools for frogs. Wildlife, including foxes, rabbits, badgers, roe deer, birds, and butterflies, has returned, and flowers now carpet the woodland floor.

In your garden

Case Studies

Bryony Slaymaker's Garden

Bryony Slaymaker, who works at Somerset Wildlife Trust, re-managed her garden in October 2022 to make it a haven for wildlife.

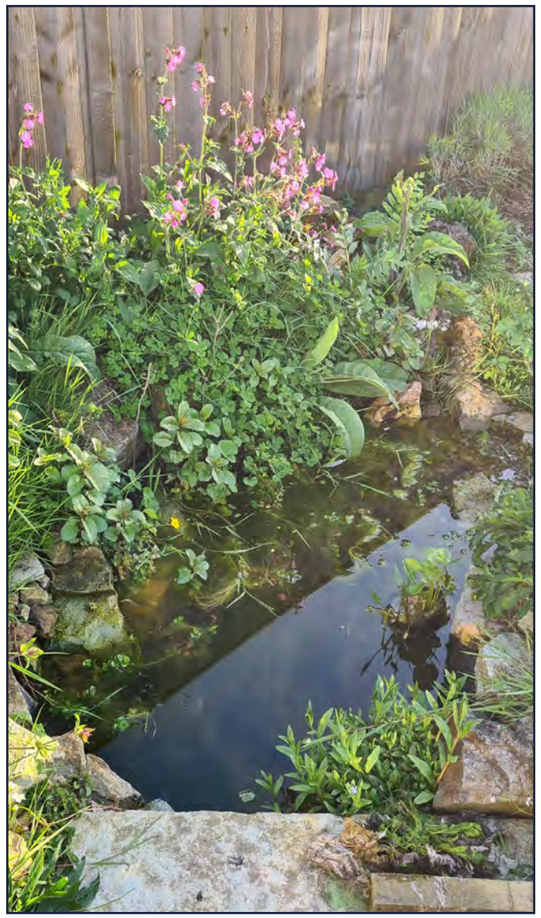
Small interventions including replacing the leylandii hedge with a native hedge, creating a pond and bog area, replacing the rye lawn with meadow mix and pollinator friendly plants in the beds has gained large wins for biodiversity.

Small interventions in gardens can lead to significant increases in biodiversity.

In less than a year, Bryony recorded 51 moth species, amphibian species including toads, frogs and newts. 10 different butterfly species, 7 species of dragonflies and damselflies. Numerous bird species including blackbirds, robin, wood pigeon, sparrows and tit species.

Today, the native hedge continues to grow, providing food and shelter for birds and small mammals. The perennials in the meadow lawn put on a visual display along with the bulbs which provide early food for pollinators. The pond has been re-sculpted to create a bigger draw down zone and a secondary small pond created which the water butts run into. There are loads of frogs and lots of dragonfly larvae. Toads everywhere, they like the stumpery next to the pond and even the veg patch too which helps to keep the slugs down. Families of birds are regularly seen enjoying the garden.

Gardens and private spaces may seem inconsequential on their own but together they can have a large and positive impact for nature and biodiversity across Somerset.



Drayton Wildlife Group

Case Studies

Drayton Wildlife Group

We are a group of locals of all ages who love our natural world. We work to improve local habitats: plant trees, sow wildflower seeds, record trees and hedgerows, share interests and learn from experts about the wildlife around Drayton.

The group grew from a desire to educate neighbours about nature by giving insight into our local wildlife.

Drayton Wildlife Newsletters have been delivered, as time allows, since January 2021 and it became clear people wanted to learn more.

Since then they have enjoyed several expert-guided walks: birds, bumblebees and wildflowers, also illustrated talks in the village hall: David Ramsden of the Barn Owl Trust, Damon Bridge of RSPB, Bryony Slaymaker of Somerset Wildlife Trust, Jo Chesworth of Bumblebee Conservation and Catherine Mowat previously of Plant Life and a highly accomplished botanist and ecologist.

Last November culminated in a day-long wildlife fair with experts from a variety of wildlife organisations, officers from Somerset Council and several nature-based charities. Visitors were educated and enthralled by engaging talks and slide shows, displays and wildlife goods: bat boxes and hedgehog boxes, otter mugs and much more!

Fox’s Field and beyond

Case Studies

In 2019, an 8.5-acre patch of open field next to Tonedale Mill was bought by Somerset West and Taunton council to protect as an open, green space for the community. Since then, thanks to thousands of volunteer hours from Transition Town Wellington (TTW), Fox’s Field now boasts a forest garden with over 400 trees, a food-hedge or ‘fedge’, hundreds of bulbs, edible and medicinal herb area, perennial veg, woodchip pathways, green manure patches.

The popularity of this project prompted the council to think about more ambitious plans for boosting biodiversity and connecting people with the land. Fox’s Field now forms part of a 65.5-acre ‘green corridor’, owned by Somerset Council on a 150-year lease to Wellington Town Council. The Woodland Trust has worked with the council to design and enable the planting over 3,000 trees across the site though their MOREWoods scheme, to create and extend new areas of woodland. Wellington also now has its own community farm, supplying fresh, chemical-free veg boxes to families in town. New hedges have been laid and wildflower meadows planted. All of which aims to increase biodiversity, help flood mitigation, build soil health and sequester carbon.

TTW’s key to success is to involve the whole community, work in partnership with others and in harmony with nature. Get people involved early on in the design stage, celebrate your successes and learn from your failures. Start small, demonstrate your impact, then take a step up and do a bigger project. The positive energy around Wellington’s green corridor is spreading outwards, with a new local nature reserve being planned, and a wildlife corridor to Wiveliscombe and beyond, eventually – the dream is – connecting the Quantocks, the Brendons and the Blackdown Hills.

Town and Parish Councils

How to use this strategy

To tackle the ecological emergency and reach 30 by 30, we need everyone, at every level of society, to be taking action. In addition to local community groups and residents, Parish and town councils will know their area best, and the this strategy helps enable them to take action for nature.

Parish and town councils can use this Strategy to support sustainable local development, protect biodiversity, and enhance green spaces for the benefit of residents. It can be used to shape the positive management of their local green spaces for nature and people, along with helping to inform environmental and land use policies and Neighbourhood Development Plans.

The Strategy can help Public bodies, including Town & Parish Councils, who now have an enhanced duty (The Environment Act 2021) to 'maintain and enhance' biodiversity, rather than just 'conserve' biodiversity. The new extended duty requires public authorities to include the enhancement of biodiversity alongside conservation by way of creating 'the general biodiversity objective'.

A Parish or Town Council may wish to consider creating a Local Nature Action Plan (LNAP), informed by this strategy. This is simply a way for parish and town councils to plan the action they will take to help nature in their area. They are intended to help parish and town councils identify their existing assets for nature and opportunities for restoring nature in their area. Opportunities may exist on land they own and arise through engaging with residents and communities, businesses and local landholders. the concept first developed by South Gloucestershire Council. For examples of completed plans by parish and town councils, visit **South Gloucestershire Council Local Nature Action Plans.**

For Town and Parish Councils, the LNRS:

- Aids in developing Local Nature Action Plans (LNAPs): Councils can create tailored action plans that align with the broader LNRS objectives.
- Aids in Implementing Biodiversity-Friendly Practices: Councils can adopt practices on land they manage such as creating wildflower meadows, planting hedgerows, community orchards, and establishing community composting sites.
- Aids in shaping local planning and development. Councils can include biodiversity considerations in their comments on planning applications, ensuring that development proposals minimize harm to biodiversity and contribute to nature recovery.
- Helps in Applying for Funding and Grants for environmental projects, such as tree planting, pond restoration, and hedgerow creation.
- Helps support Climate Resilience and Flood Prevention. Councils can use LNRS to implement nature-based solutions to climate challenges, such as tree planting for carbon sequestration and shade, and Restoring wetlands and planting hedgerows to reduce flooding and soil erosion.
- Helps in engaging the Community in Environmental Stewardship: LNRS can help councils raise awareness and involve residents in environmental initiatives, such as educational workshops, wildlife surveys, and conservation projects, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for local natural resources

Frome Town Council

Case Studies

Frome Town Council declared an ecological emergency in 2021, and has launched a number of initiatives, including: the Frome Community Wildlife Mapping Project, which encourages people to connect with nature while also generating valuable ecological data; the Pocket Meadows Project (see below); and the Wild About Trees project, a community-led tree planting initiative to showcase the Council's commitment to planting trees and hedgerows while also encouraging the community to engage with the green space and woodland areas in the town.

The Pocket Meadows Project is about turning small areas of Frome Town Council's owned spaces like roadside verges, community greens and private gardens into vibrant wildflower meadows that support bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Launched in 2025, the project is a collaboration between the Community Interest Company Meadow in My Garden, who generously offered free seeds, Frome Town Council, and Frome Wild Bunch. The focus is on giving people seeds and guidance to create and look after their own mini meadows in spaces managed by the town council, and in private gardens.

As part of this pilot project approximately 900msq worth of Pocket Meadows have been planted in spring 2025.

Looking ahead, the plan is to expand the project further and include native bulb planting involving local schools and the wider community.

Thanks to Frome's commitment to boosting insect populations through habitat creation, pollinator-friendly planting, and a no-pesticide policy, the town has been recognised as a 'Bee Friendly Town' by the Bee Friendly Trust.

Appendix

Cross-cutting habitat and species measures to benefits multiple outcomes.

This chapter provides the cross-cutting measures from the habitat types and targeted species measures that can benefit each of the priority outcomes. These tables can be used to ensure the best outcomes are achieved holistically within the landscape.

6

Measures appendix

Grassland

Outcomes	Measures/Actions													
Extent and condition of priority habitat and species-rich grassland sites has increased and existing sites protected and restored.	G1	G2	G3	Fa1	FW2	We3	MH4	Wo6						
Targeted creation and enhancement of connecting grassland has helped support increased grassland diversity and the resilience and coherence of the wider ecological network.	G1	G2	G3	Fa1	Fa2	We3	MH4	We6	U1					
Grassland restoration, enhancement and creation has commenced at scale, prioritising sites that bring most benefits for nature.	G1	G2	G3	We3	MH4	U1	U2							
The condition and value of grassland sites is better understood and monitored to inform future management and respond to change.	G1	G2	G3	Fa1	MH4	U6								
Species diversity and abundance of pollinators and invertebrates has increased as a result of restored and enhanced species-rich grasslands across the county.	G1	G2	G3	Fa1	Fa2	MH4	U1	U2						

Woodland & Hedgerows

The diversity and abundance of native species, both flora and fauna, associated with woody habitats has increased and are appropriately protected and managed.	Wo1	Wo2	Wo3	Wo4	Wo5	Wo6	Wo7	Wo8	Wo9	Fa3				
The extent and condition of woody habitats, in both rural and urban environments, has been improved through successful restoration, creation and appropriate management, resulting in improved soil health, and carbon sequestration and storage.	Wo1	Wo2	Wo3	Wo4	Wo5	Wo6	Wo7	Wo8	Wo9	Fa3	U1	U3	FW3	MH4
Natural processes within woody habitats have been successfully restored, including the reintroduction and establishment of sustainable populations of keystone native species and ecosystem engineers, such as pine martens.	Wo1	Wo2	Wo3	Wo7	Wo8									
Existing woody habitats are buffered and linked through the creation and appropriate management of transitional and mosaic habitats and hedgerows.	Wo1	Wo2	Wo3	Wo6	Wo7	Wo8	Wo9	Fa3	MH4					
There is a larger, more biodiverse, interconnected, resilient mosaic of woody habitats across rural Somerset that are better connected to our improved urban treescapes.	Wo1	Wo2	Wo3	Wo6	Wo7	Wo8	Wo9	Fa3	U1	U3	FW3			

Farmland

Outcomes	Measures/Actions													
There is greater diversity, extent and abundance of wildlife habitats and their associated species, across farmed landscapes.	Fa1	Fa2	Fa3	Fa4	Fa5	We1	G1	G2	G3	MH1	MH4	MH5	Wo4	Wo6
	Wo7	Wo8	Wo9	C1	C2	FW8	FW9							
Somerset has healthier soils. As a result, soil biodiversity, soil organic matter and water carrying capacity has increased.	Fa1	We1	We4	G2	MH5									
The farmed landscape actively contributes to the recovery of our rivers and wetland habitats.	Fa1	Fa2	Fa3	Fa4	We1	We2	We3	G1	MH5	Wo8	FW3	FW4	FW8	FW9
Farmers collaborate to increase knowledge and deliver nature recovery and habitat connectivity on a landscape-scale.	Fa5	We5												

Lowland Wetland

There are more, bigger, better and more joined-up wetland habitats, including wet woodland, reedbeds and swamps, fens, wet meadows and raised bogs.	We1	We2	We3	We4	We5	Fa4	Wo8	FW1	FW2	FW4	FW6	FW8	FW9	G1
Wetlands are species diverse, supporting a full range of plants and animals associated with these habitats, and can adapt to climate change, store carbon, reduce flood risk and improve water quality.	We1	We2	We3	We4	We5	Fa4	Wo8	FW1	Fw1	FW4	FW6	FW8	FW9	
Wetlands provide vital connectivity for wildlife at river catchment scale, particularly between core protected nature sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones' of high-quality wetland habitat.	We1	We2	We3	We5	Fa4	FW1	FW2	FW8	FW9					
The catchments are managed to ensure that water supply to wetlands, including sensitive peatlands and their peat formation, is of sufficient quality and quantity to support an increase of current extent and improve habitat and species diversity.	We1	We2	We3	We4	We5	Fa1								
Land use of wetlands, including peatlands, is compatible with nature recovery and climate adaptation, and peat extraction has ceased and peat voids are restored to nature-rich habitats.	We1	We2	We3	We4	We5									

Coastal

Outcomes	Measures/Actions													
Coastal and intertidal habitats are more extensive, more biodiverse, in better condition, and more joined-up.	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5									
There are more and better managed coastal and intertidal habitats along the Severn Estuary, supporting healthy species populations.	C1	C2	C3	C5										
An adaptive, resilient network of coastal habitats has been created, that are managed with a catchment to coast approach that acknowledges the connection between marine, coastal, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems.	C2	C3	C5	Fa1	FW4	We1								
Coastal, intertidal and marine habitats and species populations are benefiting from cleaner waters, less disturbance in sensitive locations and a more sustainable use of our coastlines.	C1	C2	C3	Fa1	FW1	We1								
Coastal and estuarine habitats are allowed to evolve, with nature dynamic processes and progression restored, to enable adaptation and resilience to climate change and minimise loss.	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	FW2	FW3	We1						

Moorland and heath

There is greater species diversity and abundance of upland heathlands and peatlands habitats, with dynamic mosaics of habitats such as blanket bog, valley mires, heath, and acid grassland, supported by healthy hydrology.	MH1	MH2	MH5											
Heathland and peatland ecosystems are functioning naturally, better connect hydrologically, with new areas expanding existing and providing stepping stone habitats.	MH2	MH5												
Heathland and peatland ecosystems support more biodiversity, improved water quality and carbon storage, reduced flood risk, and enhanced wildfire resilience.	MH1	MH2	MH3	MH5	We4									
Upland and lowland heathlands and peatland ecosystems are appropriately managed to achieve good condition and habitat areas that are bigger and better connected.	MH1	MH2	MH3	MH4	MH5	We4								
Invasive non-native species are controlled, and eradicated on specified sites through a collaborative approach at a landscape scale.	MH1													

Freshwater

Outcomes	Measures/Actions													
Rivers and streams have the space and energy to develop natural forms, driving natural channel processes, are better connected both longitudinally and laterally within their floodplains, supporting an abundance of wildlife.	FW1	FW2	FW7											
Water quality and quantity has improved in rivers and associated wetland features so that 'good ecological status' is consistently achieved.	FW2	FW3	FW4	FW5	FW6	FW7	FW9	Fa1	Fa4	U4				
Rivers, streams, rhynes and ditches have increased abundance and diversity of native plant, invertebrate, fish and mammal species.	FW1	FW2	FW3	FW4	FW5	FW6	Fa1	U4						
Riparian habitats are more extensive, healthy, connected and diverse, providing corridors for wildlife.	FW1	FW3	FW4	FW5	U2	Wo8								
Existing standing water features (e.g. lakes, ponds and other standing water) have been retained, restored and enhanced alongside the creation of high quality standing water features, supporting an abundance of wildlife.	FW6	FW8	FW9	Fa1	Fa4	We1								

Urban

There are more well-designed and connected nature-rich, equitable green and blue spaces in urban environments that are appropriately managed, including multi-functional spaces.	U1	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6	FW1	FW4	FW5	G2				
Nature is recognised as essential for improving health and wellbeing, and people are encouraged to take meaningful action to deliver nature recovery and protection.	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6									
There is greater tree canopy cover in towns and cities, benefiting urban wildlife, helping adapt to climate change, and improving people's wellbeing.	U1	U3	U4	U6										
There are more Nature-based Solutions used in urban environments creating more resilient towns and cities, resulting in greater biodiversity.	U4	FW1												

Species measures appendix

Cheddar Pink

Lapwing

Herpetofauna Hibernacula

Water Vole

Species & Species Assemblage	Measures with direct support
Black poplar	S5, Wo1, Wo5, Wo7
Cheddar pink	S1, G1, G2
Hairy click beetle	S8, FW1, FW4
Lapwing	S15, Fa1, Fa2, MH1, MH2, MH3, We1
Nightjar	S16, Wo2, MH1, MH4
Shrill carder bee	S9, C3, G1, G2, G3, Wo9
Wall bedstraw	S3, Fa1, G1, U2
Herpetofauna hibernacula	S6, MH1
Upright chickweed	S2, C1, C3, MH1
Chaffweed	S2, C1, C3, MH1
High brown fritillary	S12, MH1, MH5, Wo1, Wo7, Wo8
Pearl-bordered fritillary	S12, MH1, MH5, Wo1, Wo7, Wo8
Small pearl-bordered fritillary	S12, MH1, MH5, Wo1, Wo7, Wo8
Dark green fritillary	S12, MH1, MH5, Wo1, Wo7, Wo8
White clawed crayfish	S14, FW1, FW4, FW6
Water vole	S7, FW1, We1
Cozyptila blackwalli	S10, MH1, C1

Endemic whitebeams Cheddar whitebeam, Gough's Rock whitebeam, Twin Cliff's whitebeam, Bloody whitebeam and Devon whitebeam

Short grassland species

e.g. rare spiders Cozyptila blackwalli, Typhochrestus simoni and Walckenaeria monoceros

Cuckoo

Typhochrestus simoni	S10, MH1, C1
Walckenaeria monoceros	S10, MH1, C1
Roman chamomile	S10, MH1, C1
Cheddar whitebeam	S4, Wo1, Wo3, Wo7, Wo8, Wo9, C1
Gough's Rock whitebeam	S4, Wo1, Wo3, Wo7, Wo8, Wo9, C1
Twin Cliff's whitebeam	S4, Wo1, Wo3, Wo7, Wo8, Wo9, C1
Bloody whitebeam	S4, Wo1, Wo3, Wo7, Wo8, Wo9, C1
Devon whitebeam	S4, Wo1, Wo3, Wo7, Wo8, Wo9, C1
Duke of Burgundy	S22, G2, Wo6, Wo8
Fly orchid	S22, G2, Wo6, Wo8
Lesser butterfly orchid	S22, G2, Wo6, Wo8
Frog orchid	S22, G2, Wo6, Wo8
Whinchat	S17, MH1, MH2
Lesser redpoll	S19, MH1, MH2
Tree pipit	S20, MH1, MH2
Cuckoo	S21, MH1, MH2
Grasshopper warbler	S18, MH1, MH2
Reed bunting	S18, MH1, MH2

Sainfoin

Adonis blue

Grasshopper warbler and reed bunting

Adonis blue	S11, G1, G2, G3
Sainfoin	S11, G1, G2, G3
Man orchid	S11, G1, G2, G3
Bilberry bumblebee	MH1, MH2, MH3, MH5
Marsh fritillary	S13, G2
Silver-sided nomad bee	S13, G2
Narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth	S13, G2
Large blue	S11, G1, G2, G3
Red ant	S11, G1, G2, G3
Black ant	S11, G1, G2, G3
Chalk Hill blue	S11, G1, G2, G3
Hornet robber-fly	S11, G1, G2, G3
Black oil-beetle	S11, G1, G2, G3
Rugged oil beetle	S11, G1, G2, G3
Weasel's-snout	Fa1, Fa5
Upright goosefoot	Fa1, Fa5
Corn buttercup	Fa1, Fa5
Shepherds needle	Fa1, Fa5

Hairy click beetle

Narrowleaved cornsalad	Fa1, Fa5
Broad Fruited cornsalad	Fa1, Fa5
Field gromwell	Fa1, Fa5
Purple ramping fumitory	Fa1, Fa5

Woodland edge and calcareous grassland patchy mosaic species

Duke of Burgundy, Fly orchid, Lesser butterfly orchid and Frog orchid

List of abbreviations

ACBI - Areas that could become of particular importance for biodiversity

AONB - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape)

APIB - Area of Particular Importance for Biodiversity

BNG - Biodiversity Net Gain

CIEEM - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

CO2 - Carbon dioxide

ENNIS - The Exmoor Non-Native Invasive Species Project

FiPL - Farming in Protected Landscapes

FWAG - The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

INNS - Invasive Non-Native Species

LGS - Local Green Spaces

LNR - Local Nature Reserve

LNRS - Local Nature Recover Strategy

LPA - Local Planning Authority

LURA - The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

LWS - Local Wildlife Site

NFM - Natural Flood Management

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NL - National Landscape

NNR - National Nature Reserve

OS - Ordnance Survey

RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

SAC - Special Areas of Conservation

SFI - Sustainable Farming Incentive

SGSG - Stowey Green Spaces Group

SoBP - Statement of Biodiversity Priorities

SPA - Special Protection Area

SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest

SuDS - Sustainable Drainage Systems

SWT - Somerset Wildlife Trust

WWT - Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Datasets used to identify APIB's and ACBI's

Datasets used to identify APIB areas include:

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

Ramsar sites

National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)

Irreplaceable habitats

Datasets used to identify ACBI areas include:

Class 4 & 5 agricultural land

National Landscapes (previously known as AONB)

Exmoor National Park

Statutory Main Rivers

Ordnance Survey (OS) Open Greenspace

Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) reserves

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reserves

Woodland Trust sites

Hawk and Owl reserves

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) reserves

Private and Community Nature Reserves

Priority Habitats

EcoNet woodland/wetland/heathland/grassland

EcoNet woodland/wetland/heathland/grassland dispersal

Woodland/wetland/heathland/grassland cost paths (least cost paths to connect area of woodland/wetland/heathland/grassland)

ITEM 12

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

DEVELOPING A YOUTH VOICE/BOARD

Report of the Learning and Engagement Officer

Purpose of the report: To agree the terms for establishing a new Youth Board within ENPA.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Authority is recommended to:

(1) Approve the steps set out in Section 2 of the report.
(2) Commit to work with the Learning and Engagement Officer to develop effective interaction between the Youth Board and Members

Authority Priority: Support delivery of the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan - *Connecting people and places* - specifically

Partnership plan

- **There are more opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to explore and connect with Exmoor, developing skills and knowledge, and taking an active role in the future of Exmoor**
- **Take positive action to support and enable people from a wider range of backgrounds to access and enjoy Exmoor**
- **More people from a broader range of backgrounds are connected, with, inspired by, and care for Exmoor, improving their health and well-being and providing a "Natural Health Service"**

Specific Targets

D1 Improve and promote accessibility to the National Park and engagement with Exmoor's special qualities for all, in line with national targets

D3 Increase the number of days people volunteer to take action for nature and heritage by 10% by 2030 – with 15% of total hours delivered by young people under 25

D6 Take positive action to support and enable people from a wider range of backgrounds to access and enjoy Exmoor

Legal and Equality Implications: *Set out relevant legislation* [*Refer to Guide to the Powers and Duties of the National Park Authority for relevant legislation*.]

The following to be used where appropriate: Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to *"do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to-*

(a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]

(b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment."

The equality impact of the recommendation(s) of this report has been assessed as follows There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s). This work is designed to have a positive impact on protected groups through an inclusive recruitment process.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendation(s) of this report is as follows: There are no implications for the Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk Implications: The current proposal is deliverable within existing budgets, although limited funds for travel, and other expenses will be required. We will explore external funding options that will support further development of this work going forward.

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1. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 In line with UK National Parks, we are seeking approval to establish a new Youth Board housed within ENPA.

1.2 **Our aim**

To work collaboratively with young people to effect change, overcome barriers to engagement, increase age diversity within our organisation, have a trusted board of young people to consult with and future proof our National Park, so we can remain relevant. The group will be a platform to empower young people to take action on behalf of the National Park in line with our strategic purposes.

1.3 **The role of the group will be as follows**

- To Increase engagement and understanding of young people within our work
- To act as a conduit for younger voices to be heard
- To act in a consultancy capacity as appropriate
- Increase the diversity of voice within the authority
- To act as ambassadors and champions for our work
- To represent ENP on a national level as part of collective youth voice work
- To shape and influence policy and decision making on a local and national level

1.4 **Membership of the group**

- Age range – 18-26 years upon joining
- Informed and interested young people, graduated young rangers, staff, interns, apprentices and partner organisations
- Strong connection to Exmoor and/or have interest in nature, conservation, heritage, education, access, tourism and rural economy.
- No geographical limits or educational standards.

1.5 **Consultation to date**

The proposal was presented to Leadership Team and Members Forum. As a result of those discussions a meeting was arranged with representatives of Exmoor Young Voices, who have given their full support and back our proposal. They agreed that our membership/interests of the proposed group were diverse enough from what they do to not cause conflict, and they saw it as a strength to have more young voices heard.

2. Implementation

2.1 Financial year 25/26

- Create a fair recruitment process
- Appoint two new Youth Board members to the EDI working group – this group will then set out recommendations for further recruitment
- Co-design the terms and conditions/actions of the new Youth Board in line with ENPA strategic oversight.

2.2 2026 and beyond

- Further recruitment to take place estimating 6-12 new participants on a rolling basis.
- Regular meetings will take place utilising both online platforms and in person meetings as defined by the group
- All hours registered as volunteer hours in line with volunteer strategy.
- Annual report submitted.

2.3 Risk factors

- Unable to recruit suitable candidates
- Unmanageable expectations for both parties
- *Buy-in* across the authority

3. Considerations for the future after approval.

3.1 Interaction with ENPA/Members

- What methods of communication between members and a youth board might work well?
- How will young people's contributions be acknowledged and valued?
- What decision-making can young people be involved in, for example consultation on grant giving, awards, minor project approvals/design? Will this counter the risk of tokenistic consultation and communications?
- What themes of work and decision-making can young people become involved in (without making assumptions about their areas of interest), e.g. access, fundraising, heritage, volunteering, planning, governance?

Sophie Tyler
Learning and Engagement Officer (Outreach)
10/06/2025

ITEM 13

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 July 2025

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Report of the Chief Finance Officer

Purpose of Report: To publish the amounts paid to Members during 2024/25 by way of the Members' Allowances Scheme adopted by the Authority for that year.

RECOMMENDATION: The Authority is recommended to NOTE the amounts paid to Members in 2024/25 through its Scheme for Members' Allowances.

Authority Priority: Achieve by providing core services; getting best value from our resources; and improving our performance.

Legal and Equality Implications: Publication of the amounts paid to members through the Members' Allowance Scheme is required under The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendation of this report has been assessed as having no adverse impact on any particular group or individual.

Financial and Risk Implications: No financial or risk implications have been identified in publishing the amounts paid to members of the Authority by way of the approved scheme of allowances.

Climate change response: Nothing contained within this report will impact upon the Authority's ability to meet its climate change targets.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Members agreed the Scheme of Members' Allowances to be operated in 2024/25 at the Authority's meeting held on 5 March 2024. The scheme adopted provided for future in-year adjustments to Basic Allowances and Special Responsibility Allowances to be linked to staff pay cost of living awards.

1.2 The final pay award for allowances for senior officers and Members for 2024/25 was 2.5%. This was agreed by the National Joint Council for local government services on 22 October 2024 and backdated increases were processed at the end of November 2024.

2. **Scheme of Allowances 2024/25**

2.1 The total allowances paid to Members for meetings attended during the year are set out in Appendix 1.

2.2 The allowances and reimbursements paid in 2024/25 totals £91,087 (2023/24 = £88,595). This is an increase of £2,492 from the previous year (2023/24 increase of £1,692).

2.2 The financial data in the Appendix is supplemented by columns which show for each Member the actual mileage claimed, the number of main meetings of the Authority Committee, Planning Committee, Standards Committee and Final Accounts Committee attended by Members in the year.

2.3 The number of other meetings and training/awareness events attended by Members on the first Tuesday of the month is also recorded; however, it is recognised that Members may also have attended additional meetings throughout the year, including meetings of any working groups to which they were appointed.

Ben Barrett
Chief Finance Officer
June 2025

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF ALLOWANCES PAID TO MEMBERS 2024/25

Member (*Home town*)	Basic Allowance £	Special Respons-ibility Allowance £	Sub-sistence £	Re-imbursement for Fares, Tickets etc £	Mileage Allowance £	Total Allowances paid £	Miles claimed in connection with Authority business	Main business meetings attended Actual/Possible	Other meetings and training events attended
Mr Lee Baker *(Taunton)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**4 / 6**	**5**
Mr Andrew Bray *(Tivington)*	3,173	0	0	193	201	**3,567**	207	**11 / 15**	**12**
Mr T Butt Philip *(Wells)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**3 / 6**	**3**
Mrs M Chilcott *(Minehead)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**9 / 9**	**12**
Miss A Davis *(Kentisbury)*	3,173	6,346	21	167	331	**10,038**	855	**8 / 8**	**17**
Mr M Ellicott *(Exford)*	3,173	1,587	0	27	125	**4,912**	287	**10 / 15**	**14**
Mr D Elson *(Combe Martin)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**11 / 13**	**12**
Mr W Geen *(North Molton)*	3,173	0	0	32	80	3,285	60	**13 / 16**	**10**
Mr J Holtom *(Parracombe)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**13 / 13**	**15**
Mr M Kelly *(Barnstaple)*	3,173	0	0	0	249	**3,422**	520	**11 / 13**	**12**
Mr M Kravis *(Blue Anchor)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**5 / 6**	**9**
Mrs C Lawrence *(Minehead)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**12 / 13**	**14**
Mr R Milton *(West Anstey)*	3,173	4,760	0	19	67	**8,019**	126	**8 / 8**	**15**
Mrs F Nicholson *(East Anstey)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**13 / 15**	**13**
Mr J Patrinos *(Parracombe)*	3,173	793	0	0	93	4,059	104	**9 / 14**	**10**
Mr S Pugsley *(Withypool)*	3,173	4,760	0	3	104	**8,040**	224	**16 / 16**	**14**
Mrs F Smith *(Taunton)*	3,173	0	0	0	313	**3,486**	722	**11 / 13**	**14**
Mrs E Stacey *(Chudleigh)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**9 / 16**	**8**
Mr N Thwaites *(Dulverton)*	3,173	0	0	17	0	**3,190**		**6 / 6**	**14**
Dr S Warren *(Ottery St Mary)*	3,173	0	0	39	261	**3,473**	516	**5 / 6**	**12**
Miss L Williams *(Bristol)*	3,173	0	0	250	443	**3,866**	1,310	**6 / 7**	**7**
Mr J Yabsley *(Witheridge)*	3,173	0	0	0	0	**3,173**		**13 / 13**	**12**
TOTALS	**69,806**	**18,246**	**21**	**747**	**2,267**	**91,087**	**4,931**		

NB:

- Mileage allowances paid vary because of the distances members have to travel to attend meetings
- Those members in particular who receive a special responsibility allowance attended a range of other meetings and events outside the recognised Authority meetings
- Some details of "Other meetings and training events attended" are noted from claims submitted by members. If members have chosen not to claim, it may mean that some meetings attended by that member are not included.