

Cotswold Water Park Nature Recovery Plan

Summary Document

2021 and beyond

guiding new and ongoing nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement initiatives across the CWP, as part of our response to the global climate and ecological emergencies.

The Vision

It is 2070 in the Cotswold Water Park. The continuous meandering corridors of enriched wetlands, meadows, wet woodlands and scrubland form a resilient mosaic of habitats. The wildlife is flourishing and species can easily move across the landscape. Farmers, land owners and local communities are actively engaged in adopting sustainable ways of living. An array of new footpaths, cycle routes and the restored Thames & Severn Canal are available for visitors and local residents to explore. Carbon is captured and stored in the wetlands, woodland mosaics and arable soils. The improved water quality and flood management has enhanced the lives of wildlife and people in the CWP and communities downstream. Local communities, visitors and businesses continue to work together in harmony to maximise the benefits for humans and for wildlife, ensuring fully functioning ecosystems within the CWP.





Cotswold Water Park Nature Conservation Forum

This is the summary document for the Cotswold Water Park (CWP) Nature Recovery Plan. More detailed information can be found in the Technical Document of the full CWP Nature Recovery Plan by following this link: <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/cwp>

The Nature Recovery Plan is relevant to the following stakeholder groups:

- Developers and agents
- District, Unitary and County Councils
- Parish and Town Councils
- Mineral operators
- Leisure providers
- Landowners and farmers
- The public
- Bodies and organisations such as Natural England, Environment Agency, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Wildlife Trusts, and the Cotswold Lakes Trust

Relevant references, including links to specific information, can be found within the Technical Document.

The Cotswold Water Park

The Cotswold Water Park (CWP) is unique – a vast patchwork of more than 182 lakes created as a result of gravel extraction and restoration. It is a biodiversity hotspot, a valued visitor destination and a great place to live and work.

The lakes support nationally important wetland birds and plants, but there are other valuable habitats as well including the canal corridor, the Thames, wet woodland and lowland neutral grassland, all interconnected by linear habitats such as hedgerows and ditches. The biodiversity value of the CWP has recently been further recognised through the re-notification of the Cotswold Water Park SSSI to further secure the protection of important ecological features. The wealth of wildlife is central to the CWP's economic and social well-being.



The need for a Nature Recovery Plan

There have been unprecedented declines in species and habitats in recent decades. The UK Government has set out a 25-Year Environment Plan with goals including protecting threatened species, creating richer wildlife habitats and mitigating and adapting to climate change. Most councils have now declared climate and ecological emergencies committing them to delivering nature recovery.

The CWP Nature Recovery Plan supports the government's goals and sets out actions to reverse the current declines in biodiversity and to enhance our natural capital.

The Nature Recovery Plan has been developed with the input of key partners within the Cotswold Water Park Nature Conservation Forum (NCF); a representative body that works across the CWP to protect and conserve biodiversity.

Loss of habitats

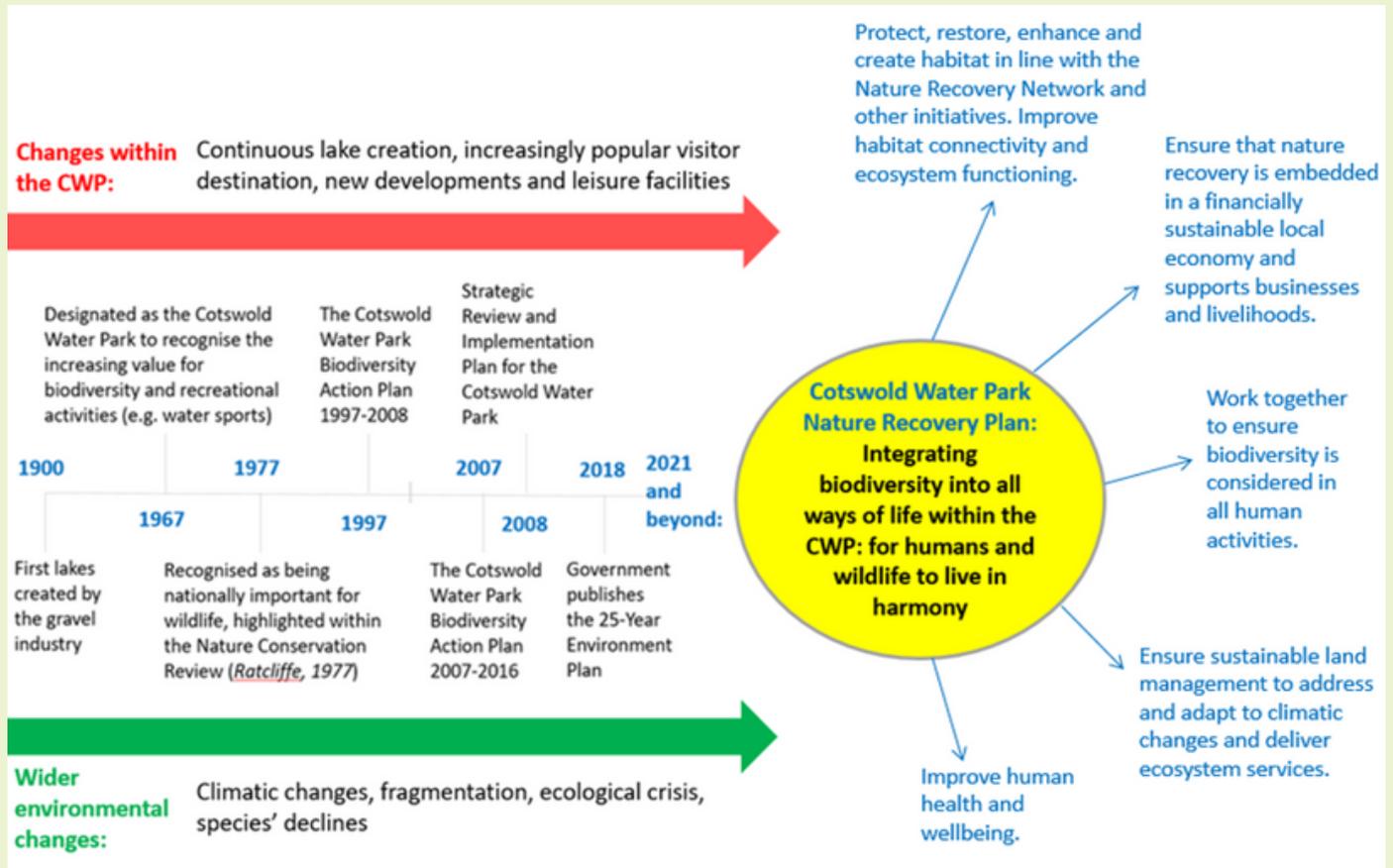
- 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s
- More than 1 million ponds have been lost in Britain over the last 100 years

Decline in species

- 41% of UK species have declined since 1970
- 15% of UK species are threatened with extinction

Past timeline

The image below shows the timeline of events leading up to the new Cotswold Water Park Nature Recovery Plan and a summary of the main objectives.



Securing a resilient ecological network

The CWP Nature Recovery Plan aims to secure a resilient ecological network to benefit wildlife and to also provide a range of “ecosystem services”, such as clean air and water, food provision, water management and improvements to wellbeing and the economy.

Climate change resilience is a key aspect of the plan. Flood risk management and sustainable initiatives (e.g. improvements to cycleways/footpaths) are integrated into projects whilst identifying the need to adapt actions to suit future climatic changes.

It is vital for partners and communities to work together to ensure that biodiversity is protected, restored and enhanced. This will improve the quality of life for both wildlife and people, helping to meet the challenges of the ecological and climate emergencies whilst empowering local communities.

The 50-year vision will be achieved by building on and incorporating previous biodiversity action plans and working alongside current strategic initiatives, such as the national and regional Nature Recovery Networks.

The plan provides an overall picture of where key habitats, such as wetlands, woodland and species rich meadows should be created and enhanced to ensure a resilient network - linking up those habitats at a local and regional level, for example the wetland corridor along the Thames or grassland links between the Cotswolds National Landscape AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB, as part of the “Big Chalk” project (refer to Map 1).

Informed by the Nature Recovery Network (NRN), the Lawton Principles, and other initiatives, a coherent and resilient ecological network will be established and maintained within the CWP.

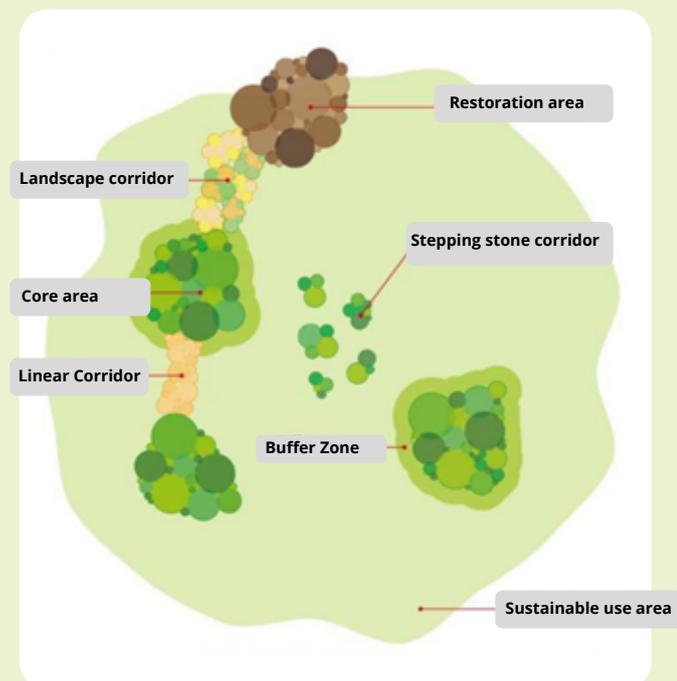
Definition of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN)

The creation of a national network with an aim to expand, improve and connect the wildlife rich places across the countryside as well as towns and cities.

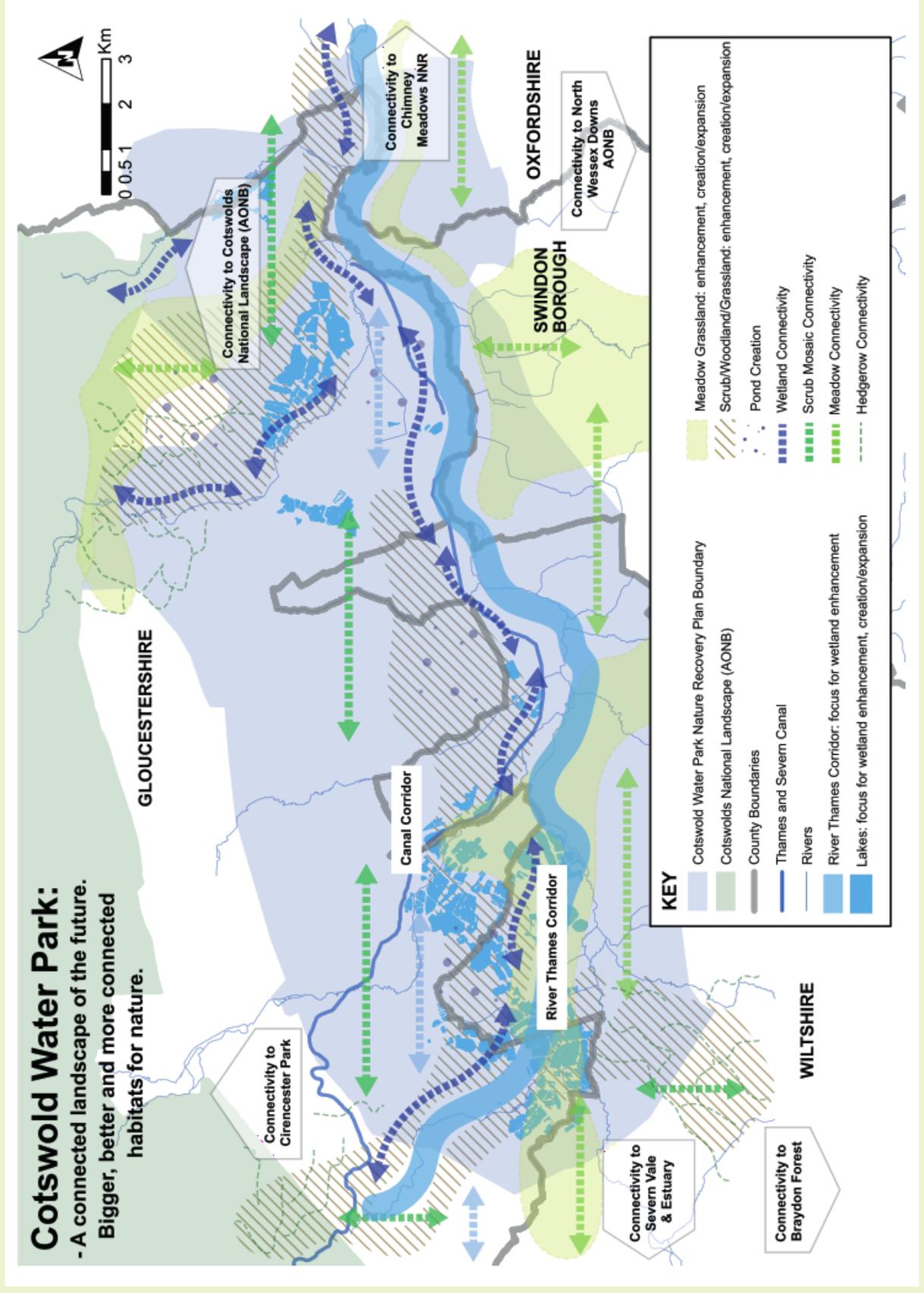
Lawton Principles (based on Lawton et al. 2010):

A network of wildlife sites in line with 4 key principles:

- Create new sites
- Bigger sites
- Better site quality
- Enhance connectivity

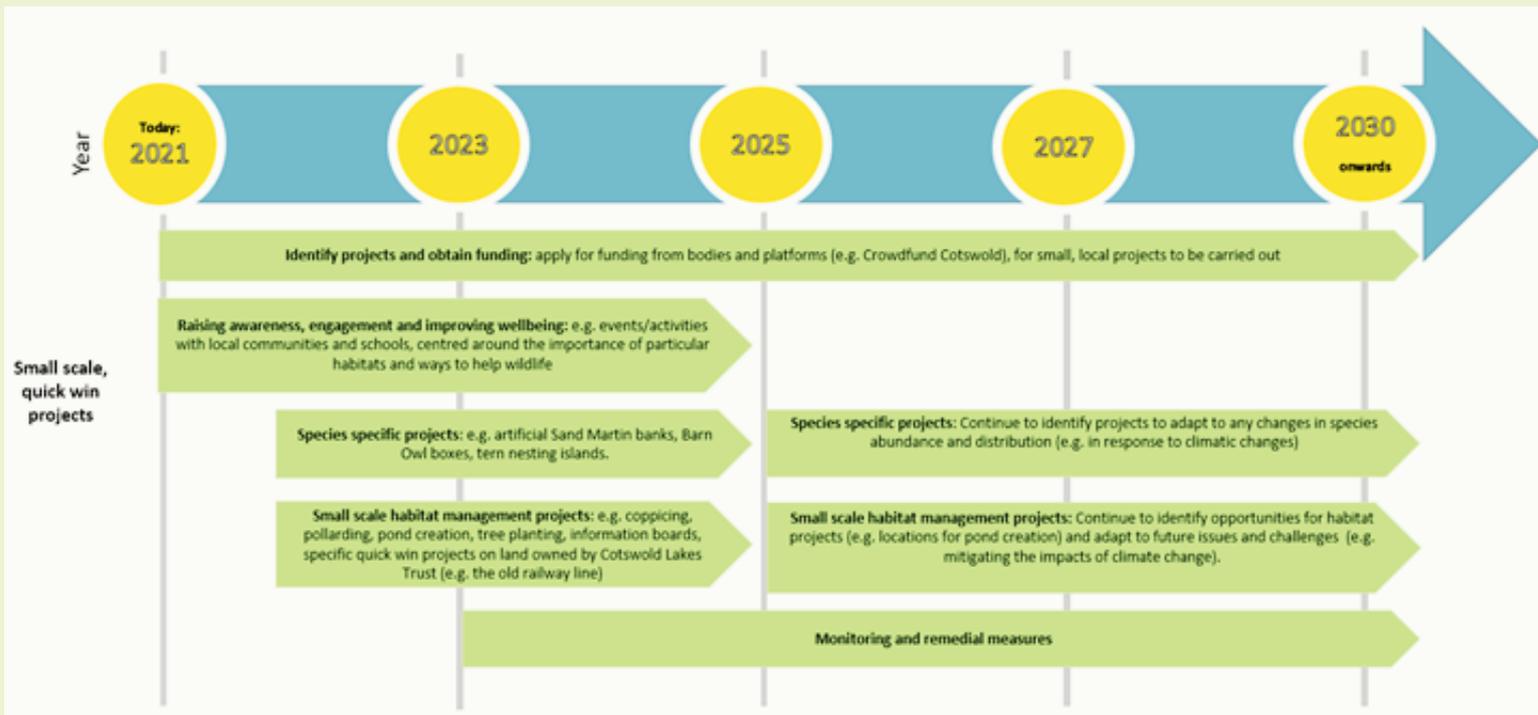


Map 1: A strategic map to demonstrate the 50-year vision - aspiring for habitats to be bigger, better and more joined-up to ensure a resilient landscape and fully functioning ecosystems. Please note that this is not an accurate representation of proposed projects and that specific areas for habitat management will be further identified.



Future timescales for projects

The future timelines below show short-term goals for aspiring 'quick win' small scale projects over a 10-year period and long-term goals for larger, landscape scale projects over a 50-year period. Projects will still continue to be identified into the future, adapting to any issues and challenges. The timeline will be updated depending on the outcomes of regular meetings that the Nature Conservation Forum (NCF) will hold. Specific delivery partners will be identified once projects are confirmed.



Actions for key habitats and species

- Habitats will be protected, restored, enhanced and created in strategic locations in line with the Nature Recovery Network and to ensure that they provide the most ecosystems service benefits.
- More detailed information can be found in the full Cotswold Water Park Nature Recovery Plan – <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/cwp>

Standing Open Water (lakes, ponds and canals)

Actions

- Create wildlife ponds and wetland habitat in strategic locations;
- Further explore local level project mapping to identify opportunity areas for standing open water;
- Monitor and manage the water quality in standing open waters.

Example Species

- Breeding and non-breeding water birds
- Stoneworts



Rivers, Streams and Ditches

Actions

- Ensure appropriate land management alongside river corridors to control for water quality;
- Ensure flood risk management is integrated into future projects;
- Support the continuation of restoration and enhancement work along corridors, including ditches.

Example Species

- Water vole
- Otter



Fen, Marsh and Reed Swamp (and ditches)

Actions

- Enhance structural diversity through creating habitat mosaics;
- Create reed bed along river corridors (e.g. River Thames corridor) and within new ditches created through mineral restoration schemes.

Example Species

- Bittern
- Invertebrates



Scrub, Trees and Wet Woodland

Actions

- Allow scrub growth within existing woodland patches and create corridors or 'stepping stones' across the CWP of scrub and wet woodland;
- Promote the importance of scrub for biodiversity.

Example Species

- Nightingale
- Mammals of wetland mosaics



Active Sand and Gravel Quarries & Bare Ground and Early Successional Habitat

Actions

- Ensure specific habitat enhancement, creation and restoration when quarries are active and after use;
- Encourage natural succession and structural diversity in restoration schemes.

Example Species

- Sand Martin
- Dragonflies



Lowland Neutral Grassland

Actions

- Protect and restore from pro-longed water logging;
- Expand, extend and connect existing sites;
- Reduce recreational pressure.

Example Species

- Snakes Head Fritillary
- Bats



Thematic Action Plans

Invasive Non-native species (INNS)

Actions

- Raise awareness of the 'check, clean and dry' protocol
- Monitor, map and manage INNS species where required.



Built Structures

Actions

- For all developments to achieve significant biodiversity net gain (BNG) on site. If BNG is required off-site, it should be delivered in the CWP;
- Ensure all compensation/enhancement measures are designed to benefit locally characteristic species.



Green Infrastructure (GI)

Actions

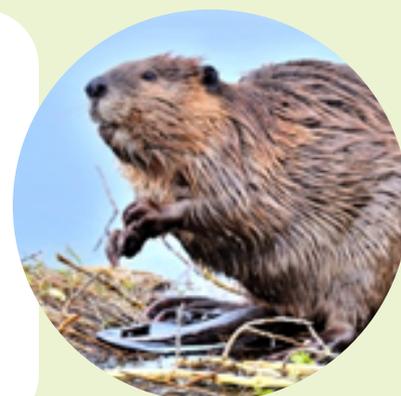
- Promote high quality GI in all new developments;
- Deliver the objectives of local green infrastructure strategies.



Natural colonisations and re-introducing the Eurasian Beaver

Actions

- Consult landowners and communities to understand local opinions on re-introductions;
- Review the results of the 2005 beaver trial in Lower Mill Estate as well as others in the UK to gather evidence for future re-introductions;
- Support future releases of species within surrounding areas and adapt management in the CWP to suit any potential natural colonisations.



Funding the actions

It will cost money to deliver the outcomes of the nature recovery plan and an imaginative approach will be required – encouraging nature-based solutions to a range of issues; using external funding such as off-site biodiversity net gain payments, grants and crowdfunding, as well as agri-environment schemes. There are opportunities to work in new and innovative ways to enable nature's recovery.

The 1 million people visiting the CWP each year offers an opportunity for biodiversity to also benefit through eco-tourism (e.g. through a Visitor Giving Scheme), generating income to create, enhance and manage habitats within the CWP whilst improving the environment for visitors and residents at the same time.



Photograph: Habitat First Group



Photograph: Sharon Pilkington/Cotswold Lakes Trust.

Implementing the actions

For the CWP Nature Recovery Plan to be successful and to deliver on its ambitions, everyone will have to work together and to take a proactive approach to biodiversity. This includes land managers, local communities, local businesses, universities etc. Through joint working, the Cotswold Water Park will become a much better place, empowering local communities and creating valuable opportunities for wildlife.

The Nature Conservation Forum (NCF) will set up regular meetings and workshops to discuss how to prioritise the actions over specific periods, identifying short-term goals (e.g. achievable within 5-years of publication) and long-term goals (e.g. larger, landscape scale projects). Larger, landscape scale projects will be segmented so that self-contained elements of the full project can be delivered. The NCF will monitor the success of projects through the regular meetings/workshops and will share the success and progress widely.

Example of small, short-term actions:

This photo is of Ashton Keynes Primary School celebrating receiving a successful grant from the Lower Mill Estate S106 Nature Conservation Fund (administered by CDC) which allowed them to enhance their wildlife garden and outdoor learning facilities.

Future short-term project examples:

- Specific species projects: Artificial Sand Martin Banks, tern nesting islands, Barn Owl boxes;
- Open day events to raise awareness;
- Habitat creation and enhancement: e.g. pond creation and enhancing specific areas such as the old railway line.



Photograph link: <https://www.wiltsglosstandard.co.uk/news>



Examples of long-term, landscape scale projects:

A past large scale project in the CWP involved restoring Priors Ham from species-poor pasture to species rich hay meadow. The partners included landowners, farmers, Natural England and the Floodplain Meadows Partnership. Further information is available at: <https://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk>

Future long-term, landscape scale project examples include:

- The Greater North Meadow Project;
- Thames Corridor Enhancement Project;
- Wet woodland and scrub creation and enhancement;
- Landscape scale pond creation.

Further Information

For more information or to become involved and help deliver the actions, please visit:

- https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/cwp_
- [Crowdfund Cotswold:
https://www.spacehive.com/movement/cc](https://www.spacehive.com/movement/cc)

You may wish to seek advice from relevant partners within the Cotswold Water Park Nature Conservation Forum before undertaking your own actions. Advice can be found on the relevant websites of partners, such as:

- Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Wildlife Trusts
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
- Cotswold Lakes Trust

The full list of the Cotswold Water Park Nature Conservation Forum can be found within the Appendix of the Technical Document.



Photograph: Habitat First Group



Photograph: Habitat First Group



