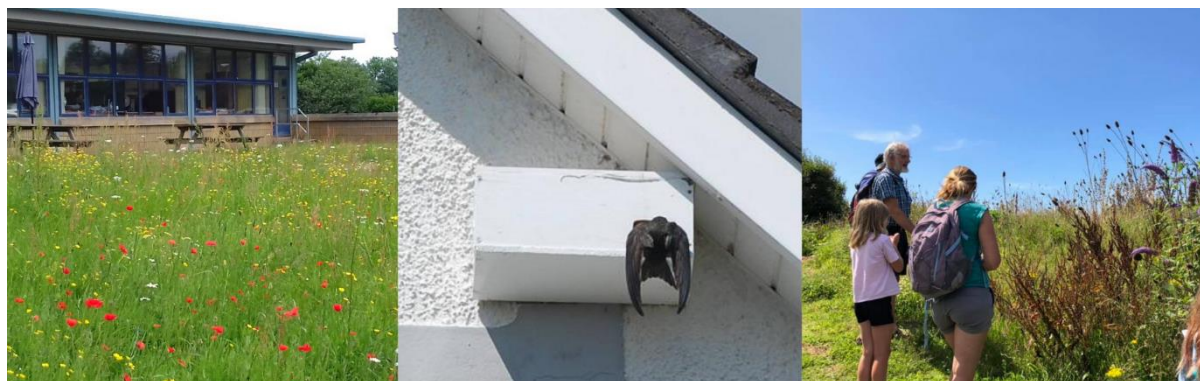


# North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Nature Recovery Plan, 2021-25

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO TACKLING THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

## ACTION PLAN FOR TOWNS AND VILLAGES



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### **VISION FOR NATURE IN OUR TOWNS AND VILLAGES BY 2030**

*By 2030, nature is more widespread, diverse and increasing in our towns and villages. At least half of public open spaces (including parks, churchyards and schools), as well as 200 business premises are being managed to help nature's recovery. Tree canopy cover in urban areas has doubled, providing habitat for nature, shade, carbon capture and fruit for residents. Road verges rich in wildflowers and insects are common, and the Tarka Trail is richer in wildlife for all to enjoy. New housing developments and infrastructure protect valuable habitats and are net nature positive, creating connected wildlife habitats, delivered through exemplary planning systems. They include features for garden birds, insects, bats and hedgehogs, and many older houses also boast these features. Gardens, public spaces and business premises are being managed with minimal use of biocides and no peat-based products, and there are many more garden ponds, wildflower patches, log-piles and scrubby corners. Native and scarce plants like Devon whitebeam are increasingly found and celebrated in public spaces; nesting swifts or house martins are a source of pride for house owners and are increasing in the area, as are hedgehogs, toads and garden butterflies. Nature is supporting healthier and happier communities and is accessible to many more people.*

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Please read this plan in conjunction with the Introduction / Overview chapter

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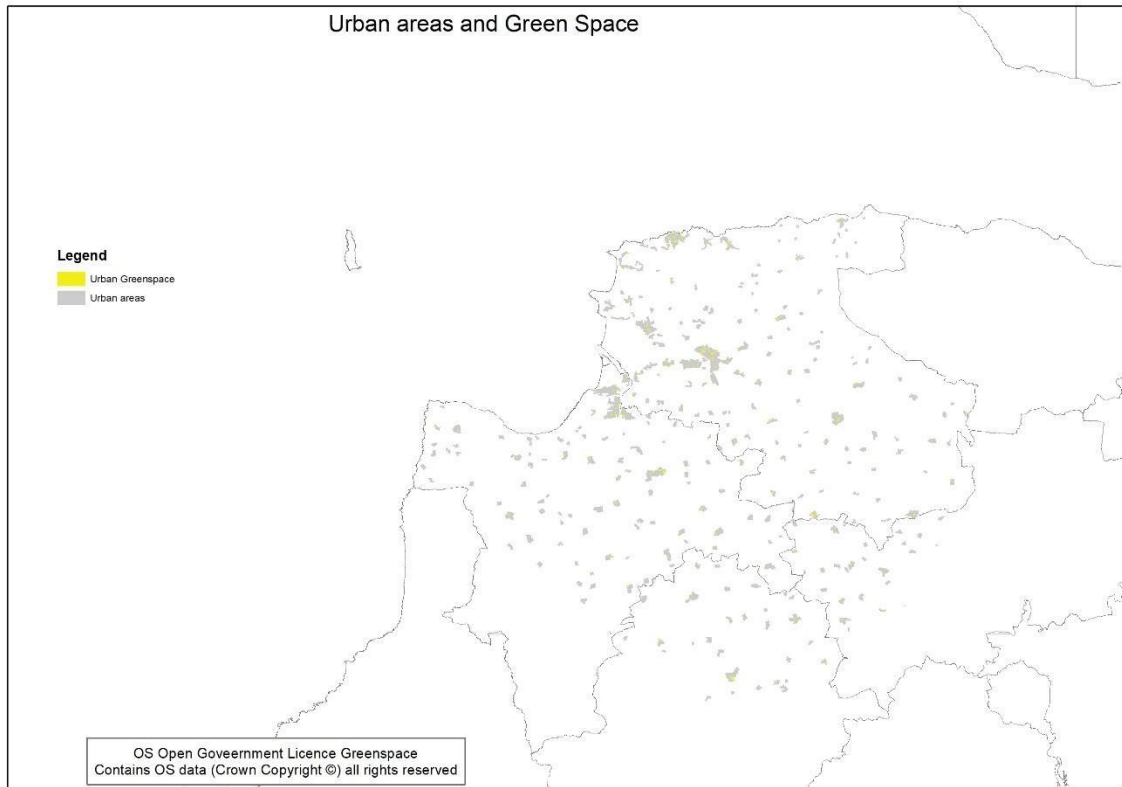
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**PART I: SCOPE AND MAP OF THE HABITATS COVERED BY THIS ACTION PLAN**

This plan covers the towns and villages within the Biosphere and the transport routes between them. Here the majority of the resident and visitor population live, work and travel - and connect with nature, so ensuring nature’s recovery in these areas is particularly important. Settlements are dispersed across the area, with many of the larger towns and villages clustered around the Taw-Torridge estuary. Most of our towns and villages began to form centuries ago, peripheral growth being added incrementally through suburban expansion, predominantly in the form of new housing. Although the hard surfaces and structures of the built environment predominate, including residential, commercial and industrial areas, some more natural areas remain and are important for nature. These include gardens, parts of some business premises and brownfield sites, public open spaces such as parks, churchyards, cemeteries, allotments, school grounds and playing fields. Such areas, sometimes referred to as green infrastructure, are often relatively small, so the connectivity provided by linear features like flower-rich verges alongside roads and lanes and the Tarka Trail is important for the movement of wildlife, even when narrow. This action plan also covers brownfield sites including quarries and waste sites, which are often important for wildlife too.

**MAP OF THE HABITATS COVERED BY THIS ACTION PLAN**



**Figure 1: Urban areas and green space in the North Devon Biosphere**

For specific targeting opportunities, please also refer to the Nature Recovery Network maps for Devon, expected to be published by the Devon Local Nature Partnership during 2021.

**PART II: PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR NATURE’S RECOVERY IN TOWNS AND VILLAGES**

The following actions have been identified as priorities for the period 2021-25 to progress towards the 2030 Vision and overall Goals of the Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan. The lead partner for each action (shown in bold) will actively engage with the other partners to drive implementation and report on progress. In general, resources for the actions are not yet secured and the partners will examine ways to integrate the action into their own programmes, as well as seeking new resources (and partners) where necessary. Therefore, being listed as a lead or partner organisation does not imply a commitment of new resources but does confirm support for collaborating to deliver the ambition and principles of the actions.

These actions have been developed following a careful, fresh examination of the state of nature in the Biosphere and of the underlying reasons for decline and loss, focussing on the current, on-going, factors which are driving nature’s decline. See Part III below for details.

Much good work has been done over the last decade and this is also outlined in Part III, along with issues that are shared between this and the other four plans.

Habitat-related actions	Lead / Partners	Budget Source	By when
A1. Ensure Councils (working alongside DCC as Highways Authority) are managing all verges for wildlife where resource and health and safety requirements allow, with use of biocides minimised if not eliminated, and with community support	<b>DCC</b> , District, Town and Parish Councils Wildlife Wardens	£10k	2025

where appropriate through the Life on the Verge Project.			
A2. Work with the community to achieve nature gain over 200ha of public spaces, including minimising/eliminating pesticides and peat-based products and creating new wildlife habitat. Target locations include: expansion of Yeo Valley community woodland in Barnstaple, enhancement of Pilton Park, Castle Green and Rotary Gardens all in Barnstaple; Bicclescombe Park, St James Park and Larkstone all in Ilfracombe; churchyards and the Tarka Trail.	<b>District, Town and Parish Councils</b> Community groups	Developers, District and Town councils. NLHF Volunteers £200 per ha?	2025
A3. Manage at least 15 school grounds for nature gain, through the creation of habitats, school composting and avoidance of biocides and peat products, with education programmes in place.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> Schools, Academies, DCC, DWT, Students	£30k (£2K each)	2025
A4. Create new wildlife habitat features in at least 300 gardens: ponds, log piles, native wildflower patches, bushy hedges and fruit/native trees. Take part in no mow May and avoid using biocides and peat-based products.	<b>Biosphere team</b> Households	£5K (e.g. for seeds and nest box challenges)	2025
A5. Manage at least 15 active churchyards for nature gain, avoiding the use of biocides and adding bat and bird boxes. Provide guidance provided for churches.	<b>DWT</b> Diocese Volunteers	£15K	2025
A6. Ensure at least 100 business premises and brownfield sites are managed for nature gain. Avoid use of biocides.	<b>Biosphere team</b> (Business Partner scheme) Businesses and employees	Businesses	2025
A7. Ensure at least 1,000m of river corridors in both Barnstaple and Bideford are managed to achieve nature gain and increase public engagement (e.g. Coney Gut).	<b>Town Councils, EA,</b> WRT	Developers	2025
A8. Design and establish at least 1,500m of wildlife corridors to overcome barriers between green spaces in urban areas.	<b>Town, District and Parish Councils</b>	Developers	2025
A9. Improve the Tarka Trail for nature along at least 5km of its length (wildflower verges, tree planting, nest boxes, ponds) as part of a nature plan for the Trail.	<b>DCC, Community Groups</b>	£25K DCC	2025
<b>Species-related actions</b>	<b>Lead / Partners</b>	<b>Budget Source</b>	<b>By when</b>
B1. Integrate swift, house martin and bat boxes into at least 100 new house builds; ensure that all towns have a swift nest box scheme; work with 20 villages to ensure at least five houses within each have house martin and swift nests or boxes.	<b>Devon Birds</b> District, Town and Parish Councils Devon Mammal Group Householders	£10K Developers	2025

B2. Plant 10,000 new urban trees on public land by 2025 and double urban tree canopy cover by 2030.	<b>District, Town and Parish Councils</b> Volunteers	£10K Councils Businesses developers	2025
B3. Plant Devon whitebeam in 50 community spaces to raise awareness of this iconic Biosphere species and the need to support local nature recovery.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> Biosphere Land Management partners, schools, parish councils etc	Saving Devon's Treescapes, Pledge for Nature, private investment	2025
B4. Engage 20 communities in promoting 'hedgehog highways' and ensure all new housing developments are hedgehog friendly with permeable fences and other barriers.	<b>District Councils,</b> Biosphere team, Town and Parish Councils	£4K	2025
<b>Enabling actions</b>	<b>Lead / Partners</b>	<b>Budget Source</b>	<b>By when</b>
C1. Approve and implement the Biodiversity net gain planning document being prepared by local councils as a supplementary design document.	<b>District Councils,</b> DCC, Developers	£0	2025
C2. Adopt <i>Building with Nature</i> version 2.0 standards and best practices and apply to all new builds.	<b>District Councils,</b> Developers	£0	2025
C3. Integrate the bat-friendly lighting measures and a requirement for boxes for bats, swifts and house martins into housing development plans.	<b>District Councils,</b> Developers	£0	2025
C4. Record every village and town ancient tree on the Ancient Tree Inventory (hosted by Woodland Trust) and ensure policies are in place to protect them.	<b>Town, Parish and District Councils,</b> Woodland Trust	£0	2025
C5. Adjust grounds and parks maintenance contracts to ensure plans are prepared and implemented to protect important habitats and achieve nature gain, working with local communities.	<b>District, Town and Parish Councils,</b> DCC, Communities	£10K	2025
C6. Promote the use of nectar-rich and night-scenting varieties of flowers and of appropriate food plants for the larvae (e.g. caterpillars) of pollinators and other insects. Justify species selection for all new landscaping schemes. Promote through design guidance.	<b>District Councils,</b> Wildlife Wardens, Butterfly Conservation, DWT (promotions)	£5K	2025
C7. Educate and raise awareness of all contractors and relevant Council staff on the nature-friendly management of hedges and wildflower verges, including for use of strimmers.	<b>District Councils,</b> DCC	TBC	2025
C8. Build a network of community Wildlife Champions and support 20 town/parish councils and community groups to protect important habitats and achieve nature gain through the preparation of nature plans building from the existing parish biodiversity audits., facilitated by a simple guide prepared by the Biosphere as part of the evolving Devon Local Nature Partnership's	<b>Biosphere team,</b> <b>AONB,</b> LNP Parish and Town Council Wildlife Network, Community Groups	Pledge for Nature project	2025

wider community wildlife network (Wild about Devon, including the LNP Parish and Town Council Wildlife Network).			
C9. Build a network and support 100 Biosphere Business Partners to protect important habitats and deliver nature gain on their sites and through their work, facilitated by a simple guide prepared by the Biosphere.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> Businesses	Bio-Cultural Heritage Tourism project	2025
C10. Build a network and support 15 churches to protect important habitats and deliver nature gain through preparing nature plans, supported by a simple guide prepared by the Biosphere.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> Living Churchyards Project	As habitat actions	2025
C11. Build a network and support 15 schools to protect important habitats and deliver nature gain through preparing nature plans, supported by a simple guide prepared by the Biosphere.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> Academies, schools	As habitat action	2025
C12. Ensure developers follow biosecurity measures including planting trees that have been sourced and grown in the UK.	<b>District Councils, DCC,</b> Developers	£0	2025
<b>Monitoring priorities</b>	<b>Lead / Partners</b>	<b>Budget source</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
M1. Baseline survey and 5-year update for extent of nature positive activities in community spaces, businesses and gardens.	<b>Biosphere team</b>	Baseline: Pledge for Nature special survey	2021 and 2026
M2. Assessment of tree canopy cover including age and quality of existing trees within urban spaces.	<b>District, Town and Parish Councils</b> DCC	£2K Student project	2021 and 2026
M3. Encourage greater participation in Big Butterfly Count and new transects to be walked in urban areas as part of this, to gather baseline data.	<b>Butterfly Conservation,</b> Biosphere team	Volunteers	Annual
M4. Survey and monitor condition of County Wildlife Sites, as these sites are increasingly important high nature value spaces within urban areas.	<b>DBRC</b>	£2k	Annual
<b>Research priorities</b>	<b>Lead / Partners</b>	<b>Budget source</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
R1. Effectiveness of planning process in delivering net gain.	<b>District Councils, DCC</b>	Student project on case studies of development (Petroc)	2026 (every 5 years)
R2. Create a baseline for mammals and bird distribution and/or abundance in urban areas in northern Devon through citizen science projects.	<b>Biosphere team,</b> DBRC, Churches Count on Nature scheme	£10k Student project (Petroc)	2022

## INDICATORS

These three outcome indicators will be monitored to track the overall impact of plan implementation.

Indicator	Baseline 2020	Targets	Means of verification	Responsible for monitoring
Area and percentage of council managed land being managed for nature gain, with a plan in place.	Council managed area baseline for nature: TBC	2025: 25% (~20ha) 2030: 50% (~40ha)	Council management plans	<b>Councils</b>
Area of public spaces (parks, schools, SuDS, cemeteries, verges etc) being managed, with a plan in place, for nature gain and an increase in tree cover.	0 ha	2025: 200ha 2030: 400ha	Baseline survey and updates	<b>Biosphere team</b>
Area of habitat enhanced for nature through net gain from new developments.	0 ha	2025: 100ha 2030:200ha	Record of net gain from developments	<b>Councils</b>

## PART III: SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE

Urban areas can support a wide range of wildlife, including species protected under law and through the planning system. All 16 species of Devon's bats utilise towns or villages to some degree, for roosting or foraging, as do a wide range of birds including some birds of prey such as sparrowhawk and peregrine falcon. Good design and mitigation for these species is rare in practice, and an effective planning system must ensure future developments provide for them.

Trees in urban areas have been under-invested in by local authorities and are often undervalued by residents. The positive benefits trees can deliver in built-up areas are now better understood, including for climate change mitigation, offering opportunities for future planting schemes and small-scale interventions. For example, Devon whitebeam (a Devon Special Species) is an attractive small tree for gardens.

Small mammals like mice, voles and shrews can colonise suitable habitat in urban areas such as river and railway banks and verges. The hazel dormouse (a Devon Special Species) will use gardens and even bird feeders, provided the gardens have suitable habitat features such as hedges and are connected to hedge networks, patches of scrub and woodland in the surrounding landscape. Hedgehogs use built-up areas, where access to multiple gardens through permeable borders provide them with suitable habitat and range.

Pollinators including bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths all have a place in our towns and villages but need the right plants to support both larval and adult life stages. Shelter is required and features like long grass edges and log piles provide habitat for overwintering species. Exposed cob walls are very valuable for nesting solitary bees. Brownfield sites can be of high nature conservation value for rare plants and invertebrates: they are often lost through redevelopment.

In some areas, green infrastructure including gardens and verges form the only sources of nectar-rich habitat for many miles, as intense farming practices remove semi-natural habitat, wildflower margins and hedge margins. Gardens and public spaces can help restore this resource and support a wide range of invertebrates, while churchyards and cemeteries can be excellent for wildlife, including grassland herbs, waxcap fungi and rare lichens. There is huge potential for road verges managed as wildflower strips to connect green spaces.

Grass snakes and slow worms rely on patches of undisturbed grassland, compost heaps and other such features found in our towns and villages. These mini-habitats are often eroded by our over-indulgence in tidy gardens, with solid boundaries and little naturalness. Areas of green space with rough edges, mosaics of

grassland heights and good structural diversity are needed, as are damp and wet garden areas with frequent ponds.

Many birds can benefit from gardens and through the provision of supplementary food and water, although predation from domestic pets can be a problem. Towns and villages are especially important for nesting swifts, house martins and swallows. These birds can be encouraged by providing artificial nesting sites, as can a range of other species like spotted flycatchers, tits and robins.

#### BASELINE IN 2021 AND ESTIMATED CONDITION AND TRENDS SINCE 2010

The settlements and transport links within the Biosphere cover approximately 11,736 ha or 5% of its total area (see Annex 3 of Introduction).

Habitat	Baseline Area (ha)*	Trend** QUANT	Trend** QUALT	Comments (e.g. main reasons and sources of information)
Gardens	Not known	? Stable	? Stable	Residents are increasingly aware of the importance of gardens for nature. However, tidiness and loss of habitat for parking in front gardens remain particular issues.
Verges	16 Special Verges, 42 with Life on the Verge signage	Stable	Increasing	Special Verges are designated by DCC to reflect their exceptional wildlife value or their value to communities. These were re-surveyed as part of the <i>Life on the Verge</i> project and together with further verges have been signposted and are managed by local communities.
Public Open Spaces	tbc	Increasing	Increasing	NDC – 50 ha of grass of which 9 ha are meadows. TDC – 78.31 ha of green infrastructure MDDC – 1.1 ha Chawleigh, 3.57 ha Lapford, 6.91 ha Morchard Bishop WDBC - tbc 9 LNRs in the Biosphere covering c.114 ha. Tarka Trail – 31 miles, former railway line.
Parish churchyards	Not known	? Stable	Not known	Devon Living Churchyards Project has over 30 churches registered in Devon between 2018 - 2020 and there are over 130 churches in northern Devon.
School grounds (no general public access)	Not known	? Stable	Increasing	NDC - 57 schools. TDC – 27 schools within the Biosphere Reserve MDDC – 2 Primary Schools within the Biosphere Reserve (Lapford and Morchard Bishop) WDBC - 10 schools within the Biosphere Reserve At least 5 schools have planted trees and created bug hotels in 2020 ( <i>Pledge for Nature</i> ).
Business premises	Not known	Not known	Not known	A Biosphere Business Partner scheme is being revitalised in 2021, including commitments for nature.



\*For baseline areas refer to Annex 3 in the Introduction regarding confidence assessments

\*\* Trend estimates from expert opinion unless otherwise evidenced

Indicator species	Trend QUANT	Comments (e.g. main reasons and sources of information)
<u>Mammals</u> Hedgehogs	Declining	Hedgehog Preservation Society, Hedgehog Hospitals
<u>Birds</u> House martins Swifts	Declining Declining	Devon Bird Atlas, 2007-13
<u>Amphibians</u> Toads	Declining	
<u>Invertebrates</u> Butterflies	Declining	Butterfly Conservation
<u>Higher Plants</u> Trees	Declining	Ash dieback is causing the loss of many trees. Mature trees in urban areas are being cut down and often not being replaced.

#### ROOT CAUSES TO BE ADDRESSED

Root Causes	Potential Solutions
<p><u>Inappropriate planning</u>: Some instances where the wrong thing is built in the wrong place, including new infrastructure and housing. This decreases connectivity and increases physical barriers such as roadways and light pollution, especially in urban fringes. Whilst guidance exists, good design and mitigation for many species is rare in practice, and an under-resourced enforcement system cannot currently ensure developers are held to account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect existing valuable habitats to avoid or minimise harm; then deliver net nature gain.</li> <li>• Incorporate nature gain as a key objective in planning documents.</li> <li>• Establish wildlife corridors.</li> <li>• Adopt <i>Building with Nature</i> standards.</li> <li>• Ensure adequate monitoring and enforcement are in place.</li> <li>• Ensure well-designed above ground sustainable drainage systems are included in applications at an early design stage.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Re-development</u>: Loss of green infrastructure and redeveloping derelict brownfield sites has contributed to a decline in nature (NB. Planning authorities are encouraged to develop brownfield ahead of greenfield sites). The impacts of increasing population and the intensification of human activity in the built environment is harder to reverse than within the wider landscape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess nature impacts and opportunities in all re-development plans, including loss of brownfield as a habitat.</li> <li>• Adopt <i>Building with Nature</i> standards.</li> <li>• Enable more urban trees through planting and natural regeneration.</li> <li>• Develop biodiversity net gain skills within local authorities.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate Tree Preservation Orders to protect valuable trees and ensure that all veteran trees are identified and submitted for inclusion in the Ancient Tree Inventory.</li> <li>• Create opportunities for new above ground sustainable drainage systems.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Density of housing:</u> Higher densities in new housing developments have increased pressure on existing green spaces, as smaller gardens generate recreational overspill. Front gardens are now parking spaces, meaning loss of habitat and increased surface water runoff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create more green infrastructure in all urban areas to meet national standards.</li> <li>• Adopt <i>Building with Nature</i> standards.</li> <li>• Promote wildlife-friendly gardening.</li> <li>• Establish more urban trees.</li> <li>• Incorporate appropriate sustainable drainage systems in new developments.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Tidiness:</u> Parks and gardens, school grounds and business premises have historically been sanitised or over-tidied as low maintenance and design-led spaces, with neat borders resulting in the loss of wildlife habitat and eroding the connectivity of green spaces. A radical change in approach is needed to support nature recovery in these areas, together with buy-in from users.</p> <p>Pesticides have been overused and need to be phased out. The use of peat-based compost has been widespread.</p> <p>Public spaces have not typically been managed for wildlife, even though this may save money.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use parks as exemplars for nature gain, accompanied by education programmes for gardens, schools and business premises.</li> <li>• Phase out use of biocides.</li> <li>• Phase out use of peat-based products and promote use of peat-free composts.</li> <li>• Recognise their ecosystem value and the public goods they generate. This will promote increased community investment and cost saving.</li> <li>• Increase awareness that management for wildlife such as less mowing often reduces costs.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Disturbance pressure:</u> Increasing urban populations without sufficient green infrastructure create undue pressure on high quality green spaces outside of the towns. (NB. Planning authorities do aim to support increases in urban population with green infrastructure capacity).</p> <p>Increasing numbers of dogs and cats lead to more wildlife disturbance and mortality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implement management plans with the community to reduce impacts on nature.</li> <li>• Education programmes.</li> <li>• Raise awareness of the impacts of domestic pets, and of ways to reduce harm to wildlife.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Pollution:</u> Run-off from farms and flooding due to under-capacity in sewer and drainage systems, can severely impact habitats within towns and villages.</p> <p><u>Litter:</u> Fly tipping can degrade and pollute urban wildlife habitats.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify sources of external pollution, raise awareness and call for solutions.</li> <li>• Promote sustainable drainage systems to remove storm water from combined public sewers</li> <li>• Use education and awareness campaigns.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of better land management practices.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Inappropriate species selection:</u> Although well-intentioned, often plants that are of little value to wildlife are used in public open spaces, such as double-petalled varieties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use locally sourced native flower mixes in roadside verges, parks, etc. and only after managing the space to see what is already growing there.</li> <li>• Work with DCC and the LNP to encourage town and parish councils to promote appropriate wildlife-friendly mixes.</li> <li>• Ensure developers abide by sound biosecurity measures including planting trees that have been sourced and grown in the UK.</li> <li>• Use native species suitable to their surroundings within the design of sustainable drainage systems.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Infrastructure:</u> The current strong focus on cars and road transport, large parking areas and street lighting, leads to loss of habitat, adversely affects natural behaviour and reduces the ability of wildlife to move and disperse freely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use local planning documents to facilitate and protect the connectivity of green infrastructure networks.</li> <li>• Encouraging alternative modes of transport.</li> <li>• Reduce street lighting or introduce more wildlife-friendly technology, using warm LEDs at less than 3000 Kelvin.</li> <li>• Take every opportunity to consider nature-based solutions and otherwise integrate green and grey infrastructure.</li> </ul>

## BENEFITS / ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Within towns and villages, the many small habitat patches, such as those within individual gardens, cumulatively serve to deliver appreciable ecosystem services.

Provisioning services: food production in gardens and allotments; water supply through water butts and garden ponds; provision and enhancement of soils through compost heaps; and the provision of renewable energy through solar panels on roofs.

Regulating services: sustainable drainage systems reduce risks of flooding downstream, provide opportunities for habitat creation and help to regulate water quality; regulation of soil erosion through terracing of slopes and retaining walls; trees growing in parks, gardens and along roadsides capturing carbon; trees reducing noise and air pollution along main roads and paths; and trees providing summer shade to reduce urban heat islands effects.

Facilitating services: pollination of plants within gardens, parks, allotments, hedges and community orchards.

Cultural services: opportunities for recreation and leisure within gardens, public open spaces (parks, sports pitches and equipped play areas) and along green infrastructure networks such as footpaths and cycleways; a

sense of place through the local historic identity of a place and its distinctive qualities and characteristics; and conservation of identified heritage assets such as listed buildings and conservation areas. Public access to the natural environment provides benefits for people's physical and mental health.

#### MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS 2010-2020

Community projects: Many community groups have been set up in response to the climate and ecological emergencies including Sustainable Chulmleigh, Regen Braunton and the Winkleigh Environment Group, or have existed for a longer period (e.g. DWT local groups). These are actively involved in nature-related projects such as tree planting. During the *Life on the Verge* project (2016-2020), 42 community verges were managed for wildlife, with 161 volunteers actively involved. In 2020 the *Pledge for Nature* project received over 200 pledges for nature of which approximately 80 were garden-related actions such as installing bird or bat boxes or creating bug havens and wildflower patches. 12 small community orchards were also established (9 as community spaces and 3 at schools). This has helped to increase engagement from Biosphere residents.

Local Nature Reserves: Several LNRs have been designated since 2010. In North Devon these are Yeo Valley woodland in Barnstaple (2013) (also a Green Flag Award site), the Cairn in Ilfracombe (2016), and in Torridge Ford Woods (2013) and Kynoch's Foreshore (2011). The Meeth Quarry nature reserve has been established by the Devon Wildlife Trust on a 150ha brownfield site. It is exceptional for wood white butterflies, damselflies and other invertebrates.

#### Enabling actions by Councils:

A green infrastructure strategy for North Devon and Torridge District Councils sets out new and improved public open space standards, thereby identifying areas deficient in existing urban green space provision. Planning Obligations have been used to create new urban green spaces and enhance existing open spaces, but these features continue to be sparse in some urban areas. North Devon Council has added additional meadow sites to its grounds maintenance contract each year. A reduction in annual bedding has resulted in more sustainable and permanent planting being undertaken.

The Biosphere Reserve was selected in 2012 as one of six pilot areas nationally to trial biodiversity offsetting, initially for 2 years. This included the development of an accounting method for ecosystem services. Since then it has become a more formal requirement informed by Defra biodiversity metrics 1 and 2. Planning policies require new developments to deliver a net gain in biodiversity as well as protecting existing open spaces from inappropriate development to mitigate adverse effects from planning proposals. Ten new swift boxes have been added to new buildings.

The Councils in partnership with Devon County Council and Natural England have started to prepare a supplementary planning document to provide guidance to developers on how to quantify biodiversity net gain resulting from new development. Best practice methodologies and principles are being developed across Devon to facilitate consistent approaches. The document will also provide guidance on appropriate net gain delivery for smaller sites and where off-site contributions should be prioritised when biodiversity net gain cannot be delivered on site.

Devon County Council as the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority has secured restoration of former quarries and landfill sites once operations have ceased. Restoration can take place over a number of years and in some cases, third party organisations like the Devon Wildlife Trust have taken control of the ongoing maintenance and aftercare of a site.

#### CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES WITH OTHER ACTION PLANS

The following issues should be taken into account during implementation:

Coast: a) Urban areas affecting water quality downstream in the estuary; b) Disturbance to identified high tide shorebird roosts around the Taw-Torridge estuary arises from recreational activities of residents in the main towns and will require awareness raising.

Grassland and arable: a) Nutrient run-off, spray-drift and ammonia emissions from intensive farmland can have a severe impact on nature and water quality within towns and villages; high risk areas should be identified.

Wetlands: a) Meeth Quarry DWT nature reserve, which was formerly a large brownfield site, is an excellent demonstration of what can be achieved through rehabilitation of such areas; b) Invasive species can be transmitted to and from towns and villages by rivers and streams (e.g. Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam); c) Natural flood management projects to hold more water in the upper sub-catchments to reduce risks of flooding within settlements.

Trees, Woods and Hedges: a) Community woodlands such as Yeo Valley (a local nature reserve on the edge of Barnstaple) and South Molton Community Woodland, are an important resource for nature and contribute to overall tree canopy cover; b) Garden hedges are also important for nature and could potentially be managed better (species composition etc); c) Natural flood management in the Umber catchment by planting woodland upstream to protect homes from flooding.

#### DRAFTING GROUP FOR THIS ACTION PLAN

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