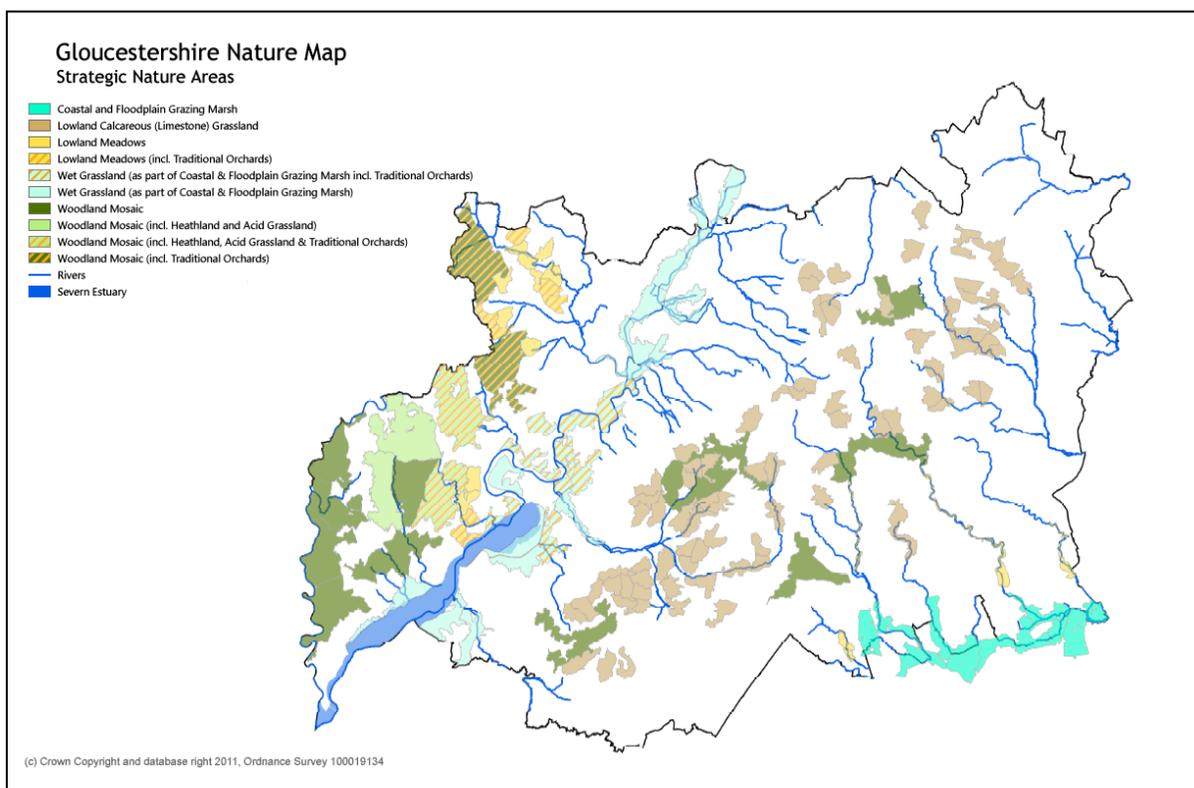


A Guide for Planners on Incorporating the Gloucestershire Nature Map into Local Development Plans

Updated Version February 2013



Edited copy of a version produced by Gloucestershire County Council and the former Gloucestershire Biodiversity Partnership

A Guide for Planners on Incorporating the Gloucestershire Nature Map into Local Development Plans

This guide outlines how to incorporate the Gloucestershire Nature Map into Local Development Plans and help Local Authorities fulfil their general biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act). The Gloucestershire Nature Map, alongside the rivers targeted by the Environment Agency through the Water Framework Directive process, represents a strategic ecological network for Gloucestershire. The National Planning Policy Framework at paragraphs 109, 113, 114, 117 and 165 references ecological networks.

The Gloucestershire Nature Map is a strategic approach to showing the best places to maintain and extend terrestrial habitats at a county scale. It is a refined version of the South West Nature Map and is a detailed local vision for natural environment change. Gloucestershire Nature Map offers a spatial tool for identifying where action to benefit biodiversity should occur. The mapping is based on the inclusion of selected areas of value sitting within locations where the natural environment could be enhanced or restored. It does not include every area of importance for biodiversity such as designated sites, protected landscapes and priority habitats but it has taken the distribution of these into account. For further information on the Gloucestershire Nature Map go to the Gloucestershire Biodiversity website at www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net and follow the relevant links.

The Biodiversity South West partnership produced a South West Nature Map* in 2006 which was commended for use by Local Authorities. A major driver for the map was climate change because unless species and habitats can shift their distributions across land relatively easily then a decline in biodiversity is inevitable. However construction, enhancement and conservation of ecological networks at a landscape scale is very necessary for many reasons to benefit not only biodiversity but also people's well-being (see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/>).

* The South West Nature Map can still be referenced at www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm_pand.html and www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm_dwd.html.

The Gloucestershire Biodiversity Partnership (now disbanded and incorporated into the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership) produced, through a series of technical workshops, a county refinement of the regional map called the Gloucestershire Nature Map which was launched in 2008. It gives a local strategic vision for a robust ecological network across the landscapes of the county. It, together with main river systems, is a blueprint, showing those with potential to deliver biodiversity conservation and enhancement at a landscape scale, should prioritise their activities. Clearly the forward planning system has a role to play in this. Further information on the Gloucestershire Nature Map can be found on the Gloucestershire Biodiversity website at www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net/actionplan/imap.php.

The Gloucestershire Nature Map selects blocks of land known as ‘Strategic Nature Areas’ or SNAs. The aim of SNAs is to link existing areas rich in wildlife and to improve a percentage of intervening land for biodiversity. This means that within an SNA a mix of habitats alongside other land uses such as agriculture, forestry, recreation or development can co-exist. There is a lead priority habitat (see www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net/actionplan/priority-habitats.php) identified for each SNA with targets determined for maintenance, restoration and recreation of this particular habitat. It is important to understand that land outside of the SNAs also contains designated sites, priority habitats and species (see www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net/actionplan/priority-species.php).

The overall policy approach to take account of the Gloucestershire Nature Map in Local Development Plans in Gloucestershire is recommended as follows:

“The Development Plan will identify how it can contribute to biodiversity enhancement and conservation in Gloucestershire. Where major developments are proposed within or close to Strategic Nature Areas (SNAs) of the Gloucestershire Nature Map they will be required to assess and maximise a net gain for biodiversity.”

National Character Area profiles produced by Natural England (see www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca) specifically mention the Gloucestershire (or the related South West) Nature Map. Where Nature Improvement Areas* (NIAs) are proposed and agreed locally they should, where possible, be based on the SNAs of the Gloucestershire Nature Map. This will avoid dilution of effort and maximise resources towards achieving a robust strategic ecological network for Gloucestershire. Development Plans may wish to reference NIAs alongside the Gloucestershire Nature Map and its SNAs.

* Introduced as a new way of working in a given area by the Natural Environment White Paper 2011 – see www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/nia/ or www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/aimsandobjectives.aspx for further details.

Steps for incorporating the Gloucestershire Nature Map (GNM) and its SNAs into Gloucestershire's Development Plans

(Adapted from Figure 1: Biodiversity South West (2007) 'South West Nature Map – A Planners Guide')

1. Obtain the GNM.

Visit the Gloucestershire Biodiversity website at www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net/actionplan/imap.php to download the latest digital file version for your Geographic Information System. Note SNAs viewable on-line on the website may have been subject to some revision so use of the GIS file is recommended. Alternatively contact the Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental Records (GCER at www.gcer.co.uk/) who may be able to provide alternative options.

2. Identify and access sources of information in order to build a sufficient 'Evidence Base' for SNAs within the Administrative Area.

The use of GIS software is recommended to clip the GNM to give the distribution of SNAs within/next to the Administrative Area. GCER can facilitate this through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) or other data supply arrangement. Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) should agree with GCER what information can be provided for SNAs. Presence of priority habitats and priority/legally protected species plus designated sites within SNAs would probably be the minimum requirement. Key Wildlife Sites (KWSs) will be an important aspect of some SNAs. SNAs unlikely to be affected by development need not be subjected to a detailed trawl of information. LPAs could work together to share the information trawl.

3. Reference all SNAs within the LPA area in the Core Strategy.

Ideally SNAs would be mapped on a Key Diagram or illustrative map in a Development Plan Document.

4. Identify all relevant Development Documents where SNAs should specifically be considered.

SA/SEA documents plus Site Specific Allocations, Area Action Plans and Proposals Maps are likely to be relevant but will depend on the location of SNAs and nature of proposals. Compile list of documents where SNAs need highlighting and then consider the SNAs and the GNM in these documents.

5. Where SNAs may be affected by proposed new development, it may be appropriate to:

a) use an Area Action Plan document as the vehicle for forward planning the impact on SNAs where significant areas or features are involved

and/or

b) include detailed development related biodiversity objectives, targets and policies for SNAs within certain Site Specific Allocations.

Consider if these are relevant and worthwhile approaches.

6. Prepare Development Documents that provide applicants with sufficient information to understand how they may make tangible and reasonable contributions to SNAs.

For all Development Documents determine how SNAs will be protected and what are the opportunities that could be progressed to benefit biodiversity within them. Spell out what developers could contribute in their proposals. Consider if there is need for a Supplementary Planning Document to assist developers and/or check the guidance behind validation checklists for planning applications.

7. Establish with the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) a means of monitoring progress of positive delivery within SNAs. Include results relevant to the Development Plan in the Annual Monitoring Report.

Requires future action

Key References

- Biodiversity South West (2007), 'South West Nature Map – A Planners Guide' www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/docs/South%20West%20Nature%20Map%20Planner's%20Guide.pdf
- Gloucestershire Biodiversity Partnership (2008), 'Gloucestershire Nature Map' www.gloucestershirebiodiversity.net/actionplan/nature-map.php
- Department for Communities & Local Government (2012), 'National Planning Policy Framework' www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

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