

Update to this webpage: [How the Dorset local nature recovery strategy will work with planning policy - Dorset Council](#). The content below will replace the information currently on the Dorset Council website, a new page on the BCP Council website will be added to summarise this information and then link across to the Dorset Council webpage for full information.

- Version 1 published Sept 2025 in the 'Response to the Dorset LNRS consultation report v4'
- Version 2 updated Nov2025 following feedback from Natural England on BNG implementation

Nature recovery in planning and development: how Dorset's local nature recovery strategy works with planning

Purpose and local context

The development plan

The Development Plan consists of the adopted Local Plan, the Minerals and Waste Local Plans and any made neighbourhood Plans. A local plan sets out a strategy for meeting the development needs of an area, it must contain strategic policies (which address the priorities for an area) and can contain non-strategic policies (which deal with more detailed matters). Whereas Neighbourhood Plans can only contain non-strategic policies. Proposals for development are considered against the policies in the development plan. This includes allocations for specific types of development, such as housing, employment, transport infrastructure, education, health or leisure.

In Dorset, there are two Local Planning Authorities, Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council. Their role is to strategically plan to meet the development needs of the area and decide whether to give permission to planning applications for development.

Find out more about the developing [BCP Local Plan](#) or view the [Adopted Local Plans](#).

Find out more about the developing [Dorset Council Local Plan](#) or view the [Adopted Local Plans](#).

Local nature recovery strategies

A local nature recovery strategy identifies shared [priorities](#) for nature recovery and the potential activities that different sectors can do to achieve those priorities. The strategy includes a [local habitat map](#) with three layers showing:

- Nature areas of national importance: sites currently recognised and protected within the land-use planning system for their biodiversity value
- High opportunity nature areas: where effort should be targeted to deliver the most for nature recovery and the wider environment
- Potential activities: a guide to the most beneficial habitat enhancement or creation activities in an area

In Dorset, the local nature recovery strategy covers the whole county and has been co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders, including planning policy officers from both Local Planning Authorities.

Find out more about [Dorset's local nature recovery strategy](#).

Tools to inform sustainable development

Local nature recovery strategies are intended as a new tool to help Local Planning Authorities continue delivering on requirements to protect and enhance biodiversity.

The local nature recovery strategy will be used alongside other planning policy documents and evidence such as:

- local housing needs assessments
- Green Belt Review
- employment needs assessment
- landscape character areas
- design codes and guides
- green infrastructure guidance
- housing and economic land availability assessments
- habitat and species data

There are some similarities between what the Dorset local nature recovery strategy provides and what the local plan must achieve.

Local nature recovery strategy	Local plan
Agree nature recovery priorities	Identify Strategic Priorities for the development and use of land, and to provide strong development management policies and guidance to support the natural environment
Map sites that are recognised and protected within the land-use planning system for their nature value (Nature areas of national importance)	Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats, sites designated for their natural or cultural importance, and wider ecological networks
Map opportunities for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals (High opportunity nature areas and potential activities)	Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of protected species. Identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

The planning balance

In drafting policies and allocations for development the Local Planning Authority balances many different planning issues such as the requirement to provide houses in sustainable locations, or key infrastructure such as new roads and community facilities, against the potential impacts of that development.

Dorset's local nature recovery strategy will become part of this planning balance. It will also inform actions Local Authorities take to meet their biodiversity duty.

Local planning authorities have a legal duty to have regard to the local nature recovery strategy. This may include:

- Considering how the areas identified in the local habitat map should be reflected in the developing local plan
- Referring to the nature recovery priorities and potential activities within local plan policies
- Deciding to use relevant evidence from the local nature recovery strategy as a material consideration to support appropriate planning decision-making, in balance with other evidence about that site
- Using the local habitat map to help in the delivery of biodiversity net gain (BNG) (find out more in the BNG section below)

It is important to note the high opportunity nature areas in the local nature recovery strategy are not a planning constraint or designation, and do not prevent the development of new homes and infrastructure. Instead, the strategy helps guide nature recovery and environmental activities that can be delivered as part of sustainable development. The strategy also does not force the owners and managers of the land identified as high opportunity nature areas to make any changes, they have flexibility to identify what, if any, activities and funding options will work best for them.

Using this tool to deliver nature recovery within development

Planners, developers, agents and consultants can all use the local nature recovery strategy in their work to deliver sustainable development. This may include considering:

- how a development can contribute to achieve the nature recovery priorities and deliver some of the potential activities e.g. urban greening, sustainable drainage systems, and natural darkness.
- how a development site may impact on existing habitats, especially those in the nature areas of national importance layer in the local habitat map
- how a development site could contribute to creating or enhancing habitats and increasing habitat connectivity, in particular by referring to the high opportunity nature areas in the local habitat map
- how the activities shown in the potential activities layer in the local habitat map could be delivered within the development site. For example, if the activity shown for a development site is woodland or wood pasture, designs could make an additional effort to include native trees and wooded corridors.
- how natural features could be used within the development site design to deliver ecosystem service benefits such as flood management or cooling and shading, to benefit people and wildlife
- how any off-site biodiversity gains could be delivered in locations identified in the local habitat map

Site-specific assessments and expert inputs will continue to inform exactly what nature recovery activities would be best to deliver as part of a development, the local nature recovery strategy simply provides a new tool and evidence base to guide this across the county.

The local nature recovery strategy is not definitive or exhaustive, some of the mapping is based on modelling that will not produce an exact prescription for action on the ground, and some of the important nature recovery activities included in the written strategy are not shown on the map. It is a high-level strategy to guide delivery, the finer detail of exactly what nature recovery activities will be best to deliver on the ground will come from site-based information, such as:

- ecological and environmental surveys of the site
- advice from the applicants' ecological consultants
- wildlife data searches from Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC)
- expertise from the Local Planning Authority ecologist

Biodiversity Net Gain

The local habitat map can be used to guide [biodiversity net gain](#) (BNG) delivery, both on-site and off-site.

Delivery of nature recovery activities in the locations proposed in the local habitat map is incentivised by an uplift in the biodiversity metric, as long as all other elements of the metric have been completed correctly.

Once the LNRS is published, a “strategic significance” uplift can be applied post-intervention, but only if the intervention is:

- in a location where a potential activity has been proposed
- consistent with the potential activity proposed in that location

For example, if an applicant is proposing a broadleaved woodland intervention in an area identified with a primary activity of woodland in the potential activities layer of the local habitat map, then this uplift would apply.

The potential activities layer is colour coded according to the primary activity, with secondary activities also provided when you click/tap on an area on the map to open a pop-up box. If the applicant is proposing an intervention consistent with the ‘habitat’, ‘rivers’ or ‘small wetland features’ sub-headings of the secondary activities, then the strategic significance uplift would also apply.

If the applicant is proposing an intervention that does not match the primary activity or the ‘habitat’, ‘rivers’ or ‘small wetland features’ secondary activities then the strategic significance uplift cannot be applied. The applicant may still be able to deliver BNG with their proposed intervention without the strategic significance uplift, as long as other required elements of the BNG metric are completed correctly.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) agrees that the applicant is proposing an intervention that is ecologically appropriate for the site, but the intervention cannot receive the strategic significance uplift because it does not match what's on the map, we will keep a record of these cases. This will be used to inform future review of the local habitat map and shared with Defra to inform the future development of BNG policy.

If a development site is covered by multiple primary activities in the potential activities layer, the site-based assessments should consider whether a mixture of all or some of these habitats should be included in the design. This can then be considered as part of the planning application.

Further information

For those working across multiple local nature recovery strategy areas, the table below shows the names given to the layers in the local habitat map in Dorset, alongside the names Defra gives these layers in the statutory guidance.

Dorset name	Defra calls this layer
Nature areas of national importance	Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB)
High opportunity nature areas	Areas that could become of Importance for Biodiversity (ACB)
Potential activities	Potential Measures (PM)

Useful links

- [Dorset Council Biodiversity Net Gain](#)
- [Incorporating Local Nature Recovery Strategies when planning for Biodiversity Net Gain – GOV.UK Environment](#)
- [Sell biodiversity units as a land manager - GOV.UK](#)
- [Savills UK | Webinar: Local Nature Recovery Strategies: a new factor in Planning and Development](#)
- [Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice Principles for Development, a Practical Guide](#) by CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA
- The [Building with Nature standards](#)
- [Homes for People and Wildlife - The Wildlife Trusts](#)
- [BS8682:2021 Process for designing and implementing BNG](#)