Policy Title:

LPS11 - Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure and the Natural Environment

Existing Policies Which adopted Core Strategy or Policies Sites and Places (PSP) policy would eventually be replaced?	**Core Strategy Policy CS2 – Green Infrastructure, and parts of Core Strategy Policy CS9 – Managing the Natural Environment**
Non-Strategic / Strategic	**Strategic**

Purpose

This policy provides protection for the strategic Green Infrastructure (GI) network at a landscape scale. The principles in this policy can also be applied to local green infrastructure and criteria to ensure that existing and new green infrastructure is planned, delivered and managed, including the principles and requirements relating to Biodiversity Net Gain.

South Gloucestershire's Strategic Green Infrastructure Network comprises nine corridors and is strongly linked to the West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which was based on the West of England nature recovery network mapping and underlying ecological designations. The LNRS seeks to take a strategic approach maintaining and enhancing habitat networks, and plans for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale, including across local authority boundaries.

The character, diversity, and distinctiveness of the South Gloucestershire landscape forms an integral part of the strategic green and blue infrastructure. The nationally designated Cotswold National Landscape (CNL), previously known as the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, comprises one of the district's most important landscape areas. The strategic principles relating to consideration of landscape are set out in this policy and linked policies in the Local Plan.

The Council has a central responsibility for the provision, delivery and planning of Green Infrastructure, given its role as local planning authority and direct provider of significant areas of open spaces. This role is enhanced by acting in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors, to ensure that delivery of Green Infrastructure is based on a strategic view of what is required to serve the needs of the community.

Joint working with neighbouring local authorities, and partners, will help to ensure that GI is integrated and interlinked across the sub-region to maximise its benefits for biodiversity and people.

Policy wording

Acceptable development proposals will be required to;

1. **Maintain, protect and enhance the integrity, connectivity and function of any Strategic Green/Blue Infrastructure corridors in which the proposed development is physically situated, or where its location, scale or prominence may physically or visually influence these. Proposals that sever or harm the connectivity and function of individual corridor(s) and key GI assets will be refused. The Strategic Green Infrastructure Network Corridors are defined on the policies map; and**
2. **Conserve and enhance the character, quality, distinctiveness, and amenity of the landscape; and**
3. **Protect visually important hillsides in terms of their relationship to, and distinctive appearance in, the landscape and townscape, and the green skylines and backdrops they form in views. Visually Important Hillsides are defined on the policies map; and**
4. **Protect and enhance views from identified strategic viewpoints and incorporate appropriate design and mitigation measures to reduce any adverse impacts. Strategic Viewpoints are defined on the policies map; and**
5. **Have high regard for the Cotswold National Landscape and conserve and enhance its setting, natural and scenic beauty, tranquillity, biodiversity interest, cultural heritage, and other special qualities; and**
6. **Protect designated heritage sites and their setting; and**
7. **Provide a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain unless exempt; and**
8. **Protect, enhance and buffer designated nature conservation and geological sites. Create new habitats, restore existing habitats and create more, bigger, better joined areas and linkages between them; and**
9. **Development proposals within 12.3km of the Severn Estuary Internationally Designated Habitats, which create potential for impacts on the integrity of habitats and features associated with the international designations, will need to provide an appropriate level of contribute towards SAMM (Strategic Access Management & Monitoring) and/or offsite SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace); and**
10. **Plan for the retention of veteran and good quality trees and hedgerows. Where valuable trees are necessary to be lost to secure sustainable and high-quality development, mitigate their loss in line with the tree replacement standard; and**

11. **Reduce and manage the impact of flood risk, including consideration of climate change through location, layout, design, choice of materials and the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS); with agreed long-term management regime, with appropriate ongoing maintenance secured from the outset; and**
12. **Protect the quality and quantity of the water environment and its margins; and**
13. **Deliver an appropriate level of public open space(s), which maximises the potential for multiple functions and connections to the strategic and local networks of Green Infrastructure; and**
14. **Major development proposals will be expected to demonstrate the provision of high-quality GI and ensure that the GI and nature conservation provisions of this policy are met; and**
15. **Incorporate and deliver an appropriate long-term management regime for the green infrastructure, open space and biodiversity proposals with appropriate ongoing maintenance secured from the outset; and**
16. **New development should demonstrate through a Green Infrastructure Statement and accompanying strategy plan how it will address these provisions.**

Supporting text

Strategic Green Infrastructure Network and Landscape

The Strategic Green Infrastructure Network is designated on the policies map. This can be viewed here.

1. The term ‘green infrastructure’, which includes 'blue infrastructure' can create a strategic network of natural and semi natural features, green spaces and waterbodies that intersperse and connect villages, towns, urban areas and rural assets. Individually, these elements are GI assets, and the roles that these assets play are GI functions. These assets and functions, when planned well, can deliver multiple environmental, social and economic benefits including mitigation of and adaption to climate change, nature recovery, improved access and recreation opportunities, economic growth, protection of designated cultural heritage, landscape and ecological sites and their associated landscape setting and/or buffers, flood attenuation, and support sustainability, quality of life and energy production.
2. The landscape of South Gloucestershire is visually diverse. In the west, lies the estuary and the flat, low-lying levels, contained to the east by the pronounced slopes of the Severn Ridges. Gently rolling agricultural 'vales' and broad valleys characterise the central landscape of the district, before the shallow ridges extend to the east, providing a transition to the prominent escarpment and plateau of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL). This results in open, elevated ridgelines affording long views across South Gloucestershire and beyond, or green backdrops and skylines in views. In contrast to the enclosed valleys and wooded farmland where hillsides and mature vegetation provide containment. It is important that the most valuable views within

South Gloucestershire are protected, and that the notable landscape features, landmarks, and scenic qualities that make up their composition, are retained and not diminished by inappropriate forms of development.

3. A key characteristic of the South Gloucestershire landscape are the hills, ridges, pronounced scarps and valley sides which may provide an important backdrop in views, form focal features or provide points of reference in the landscape. It is important that hillsides considered to be visually important are protected and that their function within the landscape is retained and not diminished by inappropriate forms of development.
4. Landscape character and the more detailed approaches to consideration of applications which may impact landscapes including the Cotswold National landscape (CNL) are covered by currently adopted and saved policy PSP2 - Landscape, here.

The Cotswold National Landscape

5. The Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) Management Plan sets out detailed policies for the management of the National Landscape. Where development is proposed in a location which would affect or within the Cotswold Landscape, the CNL Management plan will be a material consideration.

Heritage and Historic Environment

6. Current adopted and saved policy PSP17 - Heritage Assets and the Historic Environment gives further information for proposals which should protect heritage assets and their settings, here.

Biodiversity Net Gain

7. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a measurably better state than it was before the development occurred. BNG is calculated through the Statutory Metric and can be achieved by retaining and enhancing existing habitats and creating new ones.
8. BNG works alongside the LNRS and details are provided in the new Local Plan Policy Lp28 - Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain. As the planning process evolves around the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, the council may produce further guidance and polices to reflect latest national, subregional and local best practices, to secure the most effective pathway and approaches for stakeholders and biodiversity.
9. Application drawings and supporting information should show how the green infrastructure proposed forms an integral part of the proposed design.

Local Nature Action Plans (LNAPs)

10. SGC is working with Parish and Town councils to develop Local Nature Action Plans (LNAPs) which seek to protect, enhance and link GI assets, as identified at a local and community level, which will complement the strategic GI network strategy. South Gloucestershire's database will be regularly updated as new LNAPs are produced, so that these can be referred to alongside those already in existence, to inform positive development proposals which respond to local community approaches to GI and Nature.

Trees and Woodland

11. For replacement of valuable trees where their loss is considered appropriate to enable sustainable development, refer to the currently adopted and saved policy PSP3 – Trees and Woodland.

Flood Risk and Water Environment

12. Currently adopted and saved policy PSP20 - Flood Risk, Surface Water and Watercourse Management sets out criteria for reducing and managing the impact of flood risk, with agreed long-term management regime, with appropriate ongoing maintenance secured from the outset. For more details see here.

Public Open Spaces

13. Currently adopted and saved policy CS24 - Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation Standards in the Core Strategy sets out the standards that are applied to major development of 10 dwellings or more, to establish the level of public open space that needs to be provided or contributed to, by development proposals. Where the evidence has established a shortfall in the quantity, quality and/or accessibility of existing provision in the surrounding locality, the Council requires a range of public open space to be provided in accordance with the standards set out in Appendix 5 d. CS24 relates to the provision of strategic, local and community open space and facilities. For requirement and details see here.

Long-Term Management

14. Currently adopted and saved Policy CS24 - Green Infrastructure, Sports & Recreation, and Local Plan Policy - LP29 Stewardship Arrangements, prescribe long-term management requirements, including securing open space management in perpetuity.

Green Infrastructure Statements

15. New Local Plan policies LPS12 - Creating Well Designed Places, this policy Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure and the Natural Environment as well as currently adopted and saved policy PSP2 Landscape include principles for local and community scale green infrastructure (GI) and criteria to ensure that existing and new green infrastructure is planned, delivered and managed. Development proposals should seek to deliver the aims of the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework including the use of Urban Greening Factor and/or Building with Nature to demonstrate robust GI provision, as well as delivering the required level of Biodiversity Net Gain (Policy LP28 - Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain).
16. Green Infrastructure is most effective and can maximise quality and benefits when planned for in the early stages of development design, as part of a ‘landscape led’ site design, with consideration of local networks and wider strategic GI networks to ensure opportunities are appropriately identified.

17. To demonstrate compliance with this policy, Green Infrastructure Statements proportionate to the scale of development proposed (e.g. shorter documents for smaller and simpler developments) should be submitted with planning applications. These statements should set out how the development will incorporate green and blue infrastructure that provides for a range of functions as set out in this policy. The statement should draw upon the constraints and opportunities provided by the development to ensure that the most appropriate and beneficial outcomes are being pursued, as well as identifying baseline data considered and any surveys and/or assessments undertaken. These include, but are not limited to:
    a. Draft Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP), metric calculation and pre and post-development habitat maps. A draft Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) will be required if significant onsite gains are achieved
    b. Arboricultural surveys and assessments
    c. Sustainable drainage statements
    d. Landscape and ecological management plans (LEMPs)
    e. Open space assessments
    f. Green space provision and active travel links
18. Further guidance is set out in: South Gloucestershire Council's Green Infrastructure Guidance for new Development SPD Adopted April 2021, and Greener Places - Green Infrastructure Strategy 2021, which may be found here.

Additions	
Key evidence	
Other relevant policies to cross-reference?	LPS12 - Creating Well Designed Places LP29 - Stewardship Arrangements LP28 - Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain Saved policy PSP17 - Heritage Assets and the Historic Environment Saved policy PSP2 - Landscape Saved policy PSP3 - Trees and Woodland Saved policy PSP20 - Flood Risk, Surface Water and Watercourse Management Saved policy CS24 - Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation Standards