

# NATURAL ASSETS

## Scale of the challenge...

Natural Assets, which can be described collectively as Natural Capital, play a critical role in providing services that are vital for the physical wellbeing of the population, such as clean air, water, and healthy soils. This is as well as the natural regulation of hazards, such as flooding.

The productive capacity of our Natural Assets underpins the whole economy. And how we manage the demands on our Natural Capital is key to ensuring the quality and diversity of our ecology.

Biodiversity – the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems – is declining globally. The world's 7.6 billion people represent just 0.01% of all living things by weight, but humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of all plants.

The significant proportion of Dorset (53%) has been designated for conservation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Dorset is one of the most important counties for wildlife, with 141 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, covering an area of 199.45 km<sup>2</sup>, 11 National Nature Reserves (NNRs), and 1,254 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs).








In addition, 23 sites are recognised to be of international or European importance (SACs, SPAs, and RAMSAR sites) and there are also 63 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and 45 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

Therefore, in order to protect our Natural Assets, Dorset Council must work towards meeting several objectives, which include raising funds

to facilitate habitat gain and furthermore improve the quality and protection its species.

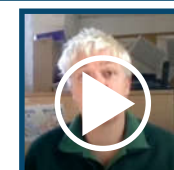
This is as well as increasing sequestration, using land to increase resilience to climate change, and ensuring that future management and maintenance are financially sustainable.

## Dorset's progress so far...

-  AONB & Natural Environment teams within the Council are leading on a variety of projects to protect & enhance biodiversity
-  Natural England has developed Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt), providing local authorities with a detailed guide as to what constitutes accessible green space
-  Dorset AONB team are currently looking at how future agricultural support from government can help deliver their ambitions
-  Dorset Council currently meeting mitigation requirements by off-setting impact of residential development
-  Biodiversity Appraisal Protocol (BAP) set up to ensure there is an integrated approach to planning & development
-  In 2016 Dorset County Council adopted Pollinators Action Plan to reduce the decline in pollinating insects—which DC now operate
-  New ecologically beneficial approach to verge management approved by Dorset County Council in 2014 & has been progressively rolled out across the County



Hear more about Dorset Council's changes to verge management from our [Greenspaces Team Manager...](#)



# NATURAL ASSETS

## Key Issues...

- Nationally**
- **Biodiversity (the diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems) is declining globally**, faster than at any other time in human history
  - **The use of land for more intensive agriculture, urbanisation, and afforestation** resulted in the loss and fragmentation of many semi-natural habitats
  - **Climate change, combined with other social, economic, and environmental pressures, will present significant risks** to the services provided by the land
  - **The UK population is predicted to increase by nine million by 2050**, increasing the area of land required for settlements



- In Dorset**
- **Intensive agriculture reduces the flows of most ecosystem services**, including flood protection, water quality, carbon storage, soil quality, and provision of habitat for wildlife
  - **Carbon storage by changes in land use has increased** by 98% from -53 ktCO<sub>2</sub> in 2005 to -105 ktCO<sub>2</sub> in 2017, resulting in net sequestration of carbon
  - **Overall, 47% of local Dorset businesses stated that they were dependent on ecosystem service flows** in some way

## Key Opportunities...









- **Increase use of non-intervention management/rewilding techniques on Council land** to improve connectivity of high ecological value areas
- **Increase area of land owned and managed for ecological and carbon sequestration outcomes** using various planning gains
- **Ensure ecological quality is considered in flood management & highway schemes** - e.g. Weymouth Relief Road
- **Work with tenants of County Farms** to promote and ensure best environmental practices are upheld
- **Promote the Health and Wellbeing benefits** of publicly accessible high ecological value land
- **Prioritise ecological & carbon sequestration value in the design of the built environment** through planning process
- **To ensure community tree planting initiatives are ecologically robust** and sensitive to the local landscape 'right tree in the right place'
- **Increased tree planting where suitable** to avoid detrimental effects on other habitat types or landscape



## Areas for Action...

Natural Assets play a critical role in providing services that are vital for the physical wellbeing of the population, such as clean air, water, and healthy soils, as well as the natural regulation of hazards, such as flooding. Therefore, Dorset Council must work towards meeting several direct, indirect, and influential objectives to protect these Natural Assets.








### Direct

-  Identify opportunities to use Dorset Council land to increase resilience to climate change
-  Increase biodiversity on identified areas of Council land
-  Increase area of Council owned or managed land for ecological & carbon sequestration outcomes
-  Creation of wildlife friendly areas on council land (incl. bee-friendly zones)
-  Increase hedge & woodland planting through Dormouse District Licence project
-  Review all chemical use to ensure no harm to unintended species
-  Expand cut & collect verge management
-  Increase tree planting where suitable to avoid detrimental effects on other habitat types or landscape

### Indirect (through services)

-  Develop / adopt biodiversity, green & open spaces supplementary planning document to ensure a consistent approach for developers to take up protection & enhancement measures of key biodiverse areas
-  Use the financial contributions from development raised through Nitrates Supplementary Planning Document to buy land for rewilding / tree planting / creation of rough grassland and scrub
-  Ensure all decision making around use of natural assets is based upon ecological value
-  Manage heathlands SPD – SANGS in-house to provide additional areas for ecological & carbon sequestration purposes
-  Work with tenants of County Farms to promote and ensure best environmental practices are upheld

### Influence & Partnership

-  Communicate to residents, business, & landowners good practice
-  Develop guidance to ensure community tree planting initiatives are ecologically robust & sensitive to local landscape ('right tree in the right place')
-  Promote tree planting through partnership working & use of Council tree planting checklist
-  Promote the health & wellbeing benefits of publicly accessible high ecological value land
-  Work in partnership with Children's & Adult Services to ensure natural environment is fully utilised in social care offer
-  Work with partners to connect fragmented habitats across county
-  Work with town & parish councils to promote best practice within their greenspace & communities

## Case Study: Verge Management

Since the 1930s the UK has seen a 97% reduction in wildflower meadows. The management of verges offers a huge opportunity to help compensate for this loss.

Over the last few years, **Dorset Council** has significantly changed the way we manage our verges to do more to protect, conserve and enhance the verges in Dorset for biodiversity. One of these changes is the increase in 'cut and collect' mowing - where we collect grass clippings instead of letting them rot down into the soil. Collecting clippings reduces the soil fertility, resulting in lower growth rates, longer periods between cutting and a far better environment for wild-

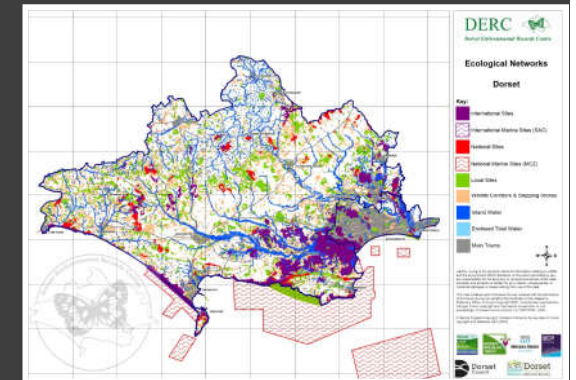


flowers to establish and thrive; in some examples a reduction from 7 cuts a year to just 2 has been achieved within towns and verges full of wildflowers. This reduction in cutting allows wildflowers the time to complete their

life cycles which benefits bees and other pollinators. It also reduces emissions from mowers and vehicles transporting clippings. [Read more here](#)

## Case Study: Dorset LNP - Ecological Network Map

**Dorset Local Nature Partnership (LNP)** works to maximise the benefits of Dorset's environment for wildlife, people and the economy. Developed by Dorset Environmental Record Centre, Dorset LNP has published an update to its Ecological Network Maps. These maps show the existing network of known sites of wildlife importance, habitats that are valuable for wildlife and areas that are not currently of high nature value but offer the highest potential to be managed or enhanced.



These maps will be used to support work on both nature-based climate solutions and nature recovery to address the climate and ecological emergencies. They will inform planning decisions to ensure we enhance our environment and guide action to restore nature within the county, such as large-scale restoration projects or improved connectivity with existing sites.

[Read more here](#)