

Golden Valley SPD



Policy Name: Golden Valley Supplementary Planning Document

Location: Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Applicant: Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils

BwN Assessor: Carol Somper, SoSustainable

BwN Award: Policy (Excellent)

The Golden Valley SPD was created in direct response to the Joint Core Strategy, a strategic planning framework for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury, set out in 2017 by Gloucester City Council and Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils. The Golden Valley SPD was prepared by the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils to facilitate the vision of the Golden Valley development as a place offering diverse living options and a centre for innovative businesses. The SPD ‘provides a roadmap to achieve sustainable, inclusive economic growth and to create an inspirational place to live, work and play against the backdrop of a world-class environment.’

The development features two primary objectives across its total 143 hectares. The first is to deliver more than 1100 new homes featuring a mix of affordable housing, including a Development Cluster. The second is to include 45ha of mixed-use

land to bring in cyber businesses and innovators, alongside academic facilities to cement Cheltenham as the heart of the ‘Cyber Valley.’

A key target of the SPD and the development is to achieve a high level of sustainability from an environmental perspective, while integrating diverse housing options into the natural environment. These goals serve to create a thriving garden community. The SPD was assessed for the BwN Policy Award before publication and won it while they took on the Assessor’s advice to improve the elements of green infrastructure for the finalised publication.

A Building with Nature Policy Award externally certifies that a policy document meets the BwN Standards and will ensure delivery of high-quality green infrastructure.

Introducing Building with Nature

At Building with Nature our mission is to put high-quality green infrastructure at the heart of placemaking in the UK, maximising benefits for people and wildlife. By bringing people closer to nature and building great places for us to live, work and play, development can make a major contribution towards better health and wellbeing in our communities and tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.

Building with Nature is the first evidence-based benchmark for high-quality green infrastructure in the UK. The BwN Standards Framework has been created in partnership with planners, developers, and other key stakeholders, providing a shared understanding of ‘what good looks like’ throughout the whole lifecycle of green infrastructure – from the policy framework and early-stage design, through to implementation, and long-term management and maintenance. The BwN Standards are free to use and can be downloaded from the BwN website. Building with Nature also provide a voluntary accreditation process, helping developers and other stakeholders move through the planning process more effectively, and providing an independent verification of quality when it comes to green infrastructure assets.

This case study demonstrates how this policy’s green infrastructure requirements meet the BwN Standards, illustrated through the BwN themes of Core, Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife.

Scheme Green Infrastructure Objectives

The two local authorities featured two key elements from the Garden Communities bid in the SPD to help secure funding for the development. These elements also serve to cement green infrastructure policies throughout the development.

The first of these key elements is ‘Healthy – creating a green development that enhances health and wellbeing.’ The second is ‘Environmentally Innovative – develop an ecologically-friendly site that restores and enhances its natural surroundings.’ Additionally, the document promotes elements such as: Sustainability, Land Use Activities, and Landscape and Movement.

As green infrastructure is integral to all of these, the elements lend themselves well to the BwN Standards.

The SPD sets out to improve climate resilience by creating microclimates and enriching biodiversity while integrating existing natural assets into the site. Biodiversity net gain on the site focuses on retaining high-value ecosystem features, such as hawthorn hedges and hedgerow trees and woodlands.

Numerous policies and objectives within the SPD support the management of flooding. There are specific mentions of a ‘Sponge City’ principle, creating using SuDS techniques to mitigate flood risk across the landscape.

The SPD itself is a management and pathway document. It incorporates all aspects of stewardship for the site from cradle, through construction, to finalised daily management. There is also an objective to involve a Community Land Trust to secure the long-term future of the site.



Image 1: Currently the site is agricultural land with limited biodiversity



Image 2: The SPD highlights the importance of integrating the development into the existing community

CORE Standards

- Standard 1** Optimises Multifunctionality and Connectivity
- Standard 2** Positively responds to the Climate Emergency
- Standard 3** Maximises Environmental Net Gains
- Standard 4** Champions a Context Driven Approach
- Standard 5** Creates Distinctive Places
- Standard 6** Secures Effective Place-keeping

The Golden Valley SPD has numerous references to the need to deliver green infrastructure in a way that creates a **multifunctional and connected network** on the site. A key example from the masterplan that shows the joint Councils understand green infrastructure's importance is seen:

'create new environments which integrate existing landscape assets; provision of generous and flexible network of formal and informal open spaces of varying scales which help to integrate with and connected to new and existing communities; create landscapes which help to minimize and mitigate flood risk...'

Connectivity is one essential feature that can be pulled from the document. The statement that the development should be an 'integrated and connected extension of West Cheltenham' makes this clear. It will help improve networks of sustainable travel and highlight enhancements beneficial to the environment and health and wellbeing of residents.

Furthermore, the respect for the **existing natural context** is shown throughout the site. A policy specifically supports this in Section 5 when it states, 'existing assets within the site such as waterways, trees and hedgerows are incorporated into the planning of site-wide green and blue infrastructure.'



Image 3: Retaining the existing hedgerows forms part of the strategy for improving the green infrastructure of the site

WELLBEING Standards

- Standard 7** Brings Nature Closer to People
- Standard 8** Supports Equitable and Inclusive Places

The development's green infrastructure features were heavily influenced by **public consultations** while the SPD was in the planning stage. The workshops, meetings and public exhibitions shaped the SPD masterplan framework to ensure that the subsequent development directly aligns with the needs of the community.

Due to the influence of the community as well as the Council's understanding of the importance of green infrastructure, the document ensures that green infrastructure is integrated through every level of the development. That means it is part of the housing unit, the mixed-use commercial zone, and access links available to new residents and local communities.

Members of the community are encouraged to use methods of **sustainable transport** to engage with the natural features. Walking and cycling are highly promoted, evidenced in the SPD with 'pedestrian and cycle connectivity, including the integration and expansion of Public Right of Way and the promotion of nearby regional and local cycle routes.'



Image 4: The network of Public Footpaths will be expanded



Image 5: The SPD highlights the importance of creating opportunities for the community to utilise the green infrastructure

The **permeable approach** to the design of the entire development, highlighted in supporting policies, ensures these linkages have improved accessibility for people of all ages and motor abilities.

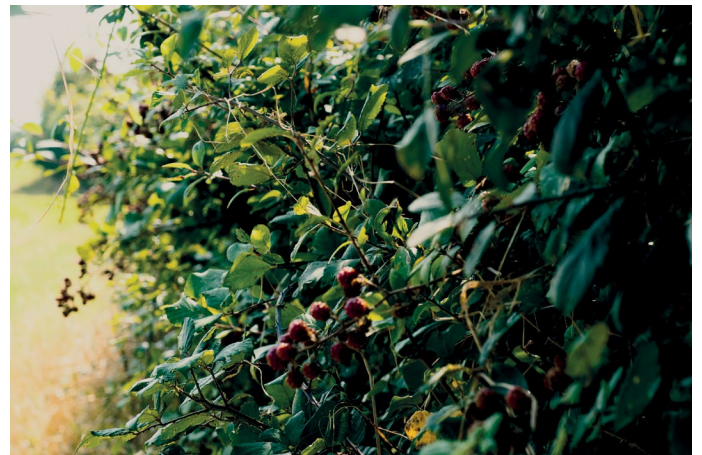


Image 6: Hedgerows providing wildlife corridors

WATER Standards

Standard 9 Delivers Climate Resilient Water Management

Standard 10 Brings Water Closer to People

A commitment to the widespread integration of SuDS and the development as a **'Sponge City'** is incorporated throughout the SPD. Strategic Objective C highlights the need to work with the natural landscape to create climate resilient environments.

The integrated permeability throughout the site is what earns it the name 'Sponge City.' The SuDS requirements are meant to 'minimise the risk of flooding through the incorporation of sustainable drainage measures while improving climate change resilience.'

Examples of **multifunctional green infrastructure features** demonstrate this requirement through 'provision of street trees, landscape verges, swales and permeable surfaces... across all scales, from how surface water is managed as it moves across the site to how rainwater and greywater could be harvested.'



Image 7: The inclusion of street trees is encouraged to help surface water management

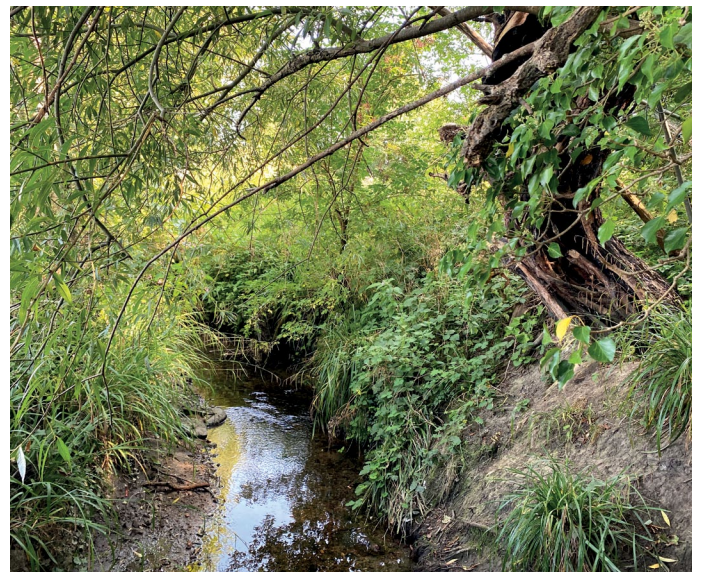


Image 8: Water management strategies will utilise green infrastructure features

Further policies promote the integration of interconnected green roofs. These aid in the multifunctionality of all the SuDS features to 'enrich local biodiversity' and 'maximise amenity.' All the SuDS features and site permeability combine to demonstrate a best practice in terms of **sustainable water management**. These serve to secure the flood risk mitigation of the site well into the future.

WILDLIFE Standards

Standard 11 Delivers Wildlife Enhancement

Standard 12 Underpins Nature's Recovery

The SPD highlights the importance of preserving the existing biodiversity and enhancing the ecological opportunities and networks on the site. There is a target to work collaboratively with the **Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership** to deliver biodiversity net gain.

The recommendation of the BwN Assessor included a prominent focus on the **integration of ecological networks** in and outside of the site. This would demonstrate a commitment to restoring the local Nature Recovery Network. It would be done by recognizing key strategic ecological corridors throughout the site. A landscape principle supports this by stating 'boundaries ... shall be carefully planned and designed to maximise opportunities for physical and visual integration.'

This strategy allows for the interface of existing homes to be considered within the new landscape provision, so that old and new facilities and connections are made widely available to residents.

New habitat creation is also an integral feature of the SPD, which states 'Opportunities for habitat creation will be integrated at all scales from site wide, to the design of development layouts, public spaces, streetscapes, and buildings, including natures reserves.' The inclusion evidences the joint Councils understanding of the need for green infrastructure at all stages.



Image 9: The SPD highlights the importance of preserving the existing biodiversity

Policy Applications

The Golden Valley SPD was created in direct response to the long-term economic challenges and necessity for employment land highlighted in the 2017 Joint Core Strategy. It also met numerous key Sustainable Development and Infrastructure Policies, and Strategic Allocations.

Specific policies that the SPD and planned development meet and support include; SD3 Sustainable Design and Construction, SD9 Biodiversity and Geodiversity, SD14 Health and Environmental Quality, INF2 Flood Risk Management, INF3 Green Infrastructure, and INF4 Social and Community Infrastructure.



Image 10: The Golden Valley SPD

Summary

The finalised Golden Valley SPD is an exemplar case study of a strategic planning document that understands and enforces a 'Building with Nature' approach to green and blue infrastructure within a site of this scale and diversity.

During the development of the document, recommendations from BwN suggested an inclusion of wording which further commits the development to support and enhance green infrastructure of adjacent land to the site. It would also highlight improvements to visual material to better illustrate integration of site-specific green infrastructure with features outside the site's boundaries. This was taken onboard and included in the final publication, further improving the already excellent commitments to green infrastructure in the Golden Valley.

“ At the outset of commissioning the Golden Valley Development SPD, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils were both clear that we wanted to raise the bar in the place making of strategic sites. Alongside appointing a specialist consultancy team, we engaged with Building with Nature as a key part of the check and challenge part of the drafting process. The feedback we received helped us to push the policy context and ensure that the SPD provided a practical, but challenging steer on how the quality outcomes can be achieved. We are currently in active engagement with developers across the Golden Valley Development area and the SPD is driving those conversations. ”

Tracey Crews, Director of Planning, Place & Growth, Cheltenham Borough Council

Useful Links

Building with Nature: www.buildingwithnature.org.uk

Applicant: www.cheltenham.gov.uk and www.tewkesbury.gov.uk

BwN Assessor: www.sosustainable.co.uk

Download the BwN Standards: www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/standards-form



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