Severn Vale Catchment Partnership

Catchment Management Plan

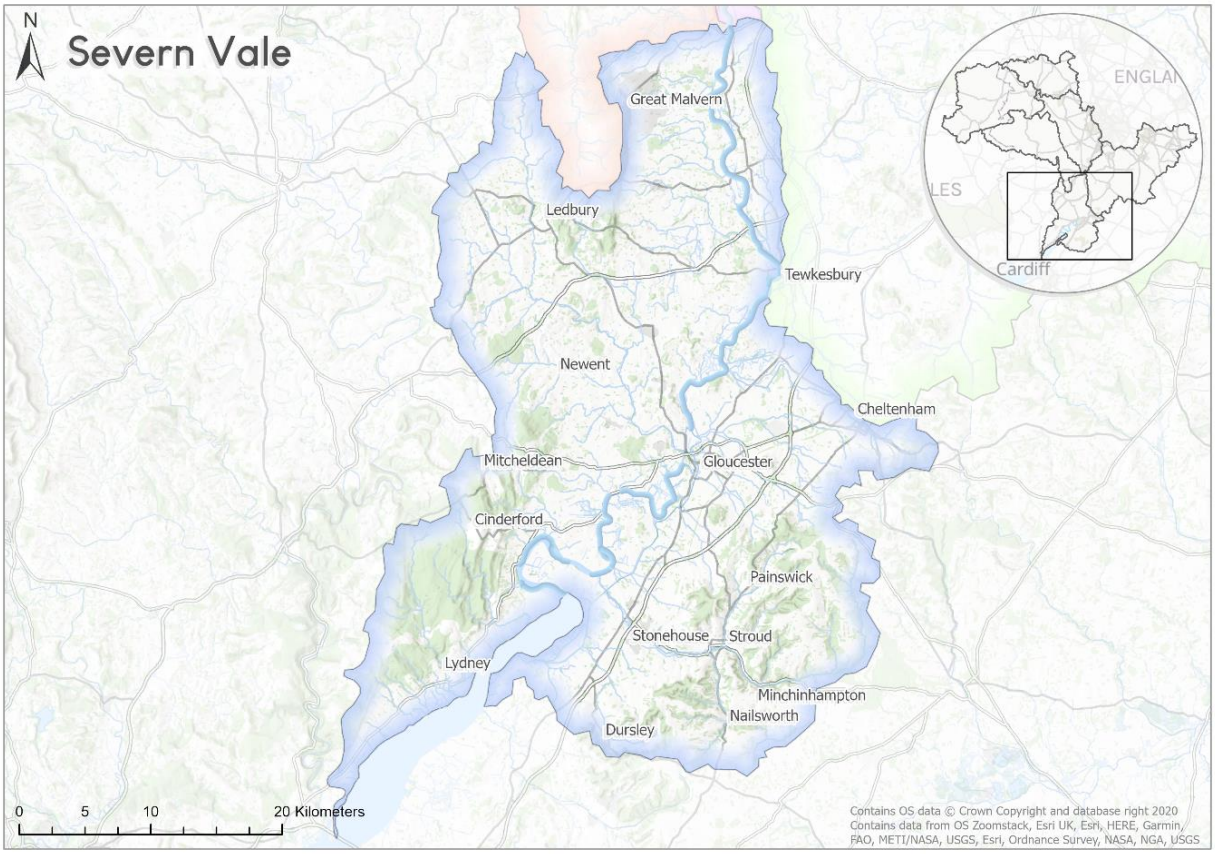
V5.0 2024

Picture a rich mosaic of floodplain meadows, wetlands and woodland, supporting a plethora of breeding wading birds, alive with an abundance of invertebrates and supporting an intricate food web. Extensive and regenerative livestock farming supports the management of grassland, wetland and scrub mosaics. Farmers have improved soil health, enhancing infiltration and increasing organic matter so that crops are healthy and resilient, and water moves through the catchment more slowly. Vibrant clear waters, full of life, flowing freely through restored river channels. The brooks and streams reap the benefits of woody material left in channel, forming vital habitat for young fish and invertebrates. Flooding, whilst a natural seasonal occurrence, doesn't impose extensively on communities as it once did – the floodplains are now a fully functioning store for both water and carbon. The Cotswolds' clear limestone rivers bursting with life run down into the vale and towards the estuary. Imagine the meandering lower reaches of the Severn - a bountiful, complex wildlife haven as it makes its way south towards its final destination at the Severn Estuary, flowing on into the sea.

Introduction

A river catchment, sometimes known as a watershed, is a natural drainage basin, collecting water from various sources and channelling them to a low point. All the water that falls within the catchment will gather in smaller watercourses, channelling the water downhill into the bigger rivers, then on to the sea.

Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) partnerships are inclusive groups, combining the knowledge, expertise, and passion of conservation charities, local authorities, statutory bodies, community groups, water companies and more to maximise the natural value of our environment. Actively working in all 100+ river catchments across England and cross-border with Wales, CaBA partnerships are directly supporting achievement of many of the targets under the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. CaBA partnerships are for everyone, using the initiative of passionate people within a catchment to affect meaningful change for our water environment.



The Severn Vale catchment encompasses the lowest part of the River Severn. Water flows into the Severn from the Malvern Hills to the north, the Cotswolds National Landscape in the east, the river Frome in the south, and the Forest of Dean in the west. Many small rivers and streams are encompassed by the Severn Vale catchment including the Leadon, Chelt, Frome, Cinderford Brook, and Cannop Brook. The landscape is diverse with mixed urban, agricultural, and forested areas as well as the estuary itself. The main urban areas include Gloucester, Cheltenham, Cinderford, Ledbury, and Stroud. The River Severn is one of the most important river systems in the UK for wildlife, and it is home to the famous Severn Bore. An important part of the area's history and culture it is also a focal point for many recreational activities.

There are several sites of international importance for wildlife conservation in the Severn Vale. Both Walmore Common and a part of the Severn Estuary are designated Ramsar sites due to the internationally important numbers of wildfowl that use them. These sites are also designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive and EU Habitats Directive. A larger part of the Severn Estuary is designated as Special Area of Conservation (SAC), particularly for its fish assemblage, and there are 120 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) across the Vale. There is one National Nature Reserve (Cotswold Common and Beechwoods) and eleven Local Nature Reserves within the catchment, and many more key wildlife sites and smaller reserves being managed by partners and private landowners across the region.

Many rare and threatened water dependant species are found in the Severn Vale. From water voles, otters, and white clawed crayfish, to twaite and allis shad, great crested newt, marsh fritillary, bittern, and several species of bat. Notable flora includes ribbon-leaved water plantain, true fox sedge, tassel stonewort, and black poplar.

Our partnership approach

The Severn Vale Catchment Partnership seeks to enhance and maintain the water environment within the catchment to the highest possible standard for the benefit of wildlife and local communities.

By working collaboratively and identifying priorities within the catchment, the partnership aims to:

- Develop Flagship Programmes to provide areas of focus to build engagement, gain momentum and target our collective efforts. We will listen to and work with local stakeholders to maximise impact for the water environment.
- Provide opportunities for networking, skills sharing and knowledge building for the partnership, enabling the development and delivery of bigger, more impactful projects to improve our water environment.
- Work together to secure funding for catchment-scale projects as well as delivering nature-based solutions at a local level.
- Actively seek opportunities for wildlife and biodiversity gains and implement changes to benefit habitats and species.
- Work with communities in the area to increase awareness and enjoyment of the water environment. Encourage participation in the monitoring and maintaining of a healthy river catchment.

The Catchment Partnership will review this plan annually and revise it in full every five years.

Data and evidence

This catchment plan is based on a weight of evidence approach. We have created a Severn Vale StoryMap which draws together data on the landscape character of the catchment and sets out the key challenges for the water environment. The partnership gathers insight from partners to better understand the pressures and impacts around the region. Through consultation with partners, and use of wider datasets such as the CaBA Data and GIS package, we work to build a clearer picture of the local water environment, establish and highlight priority areas and opportunities for project development.

Flagship Programmes

Our current plan focuses on five Flagship Programmes - areas that direct our efforts to the most pressing issues across the region. As resources allow and as they are developed, the Programmes will have a working group that regularly meets to discuss progress, decide on priorities, and feedback to the wider partnership. These are changing and evolving, and as projects progress, we hope to engage and include a wide range of stakeholders across each area.

Flagship Programme	Description	Working Group Members	Start Date
The Wilder Frome	Focused on the river Frome in the Stroud District, one of the highest quality rivers in the Severn Vale and highly important for migratory fish. A co-written Vision and Strategic Action Plan outlines 8 environmental priorities for the river Frome, tackling issues including barriers to migration, pollution, and connectivity with 27 ambitious objectives for 2030.	Environment Agency, FWG South West Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Severn Rivers Trust, Stroud District Council, Stroud Valleys Project, WWT	2023
Forest to Sea (Forest of Dean)	Several tributaries flow through the Forest of Dean into the Severn Estuary. There are small populations of the endangered white clawed crayfish still present in some tributaries. There is great potential to create better connected water-based habitat and improve water quality and flood risk throughout. Rewetting areas and extending existing lowland peat bogs will also provide refuge for wildlife, reduce flood risk, and store carbon.	Environment Agency, Forest of Dean District Council, Forestry England, FWAG SW, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Severn Rivers Trust, WWT	2025
The Wilder Leadon	The Leadon flows through the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire countryside and joins the river Severn at Gloucester. There is potential to tackle water quality, barriers to fish, and low-flow in the catchment. Many issues stem from agricultural pressure, so working with farmers will be a priority for us for this flagship.	TBC	~2027
Gloucester's Waterscapes	The largest urban area in the Severn Vale is the city of Gloucester, where many of the waterbodies originating in the Cotswolds run in concrete channels with little good quality habitat for wildlife. Misconnections and flooding are also major issues in this area which we plan to tackle with nature-based solutions and active involvement from local communities.	TBC	~2026
Flourishing Floodplains	Although there are widespread floodplains in the Severn Vale, many are not well connected to their rivers. This Flagship will look to support the restoration of functional wetland habitat along the Severn corridor and tributaries to store water and build climate resilience as well as supporting a richer abundance of wildlife.	TBC	~2028

Monitoring and Evaluation

We will use multiple approaches to monitoring and evaluation including:

- Citizen science programmes to engage local communities; these will gather data to provide baseline information, monitoring and post-project appraisal. Sampling water quality, habitat condition and biota using current, standard methodologies including simple techniques will be core to this approach.
- Digitise results and reports for incorporation into quality datasets, where possible using established schemes. Where practicable these will be made publicly available and promoted for use amongst the CaBA Partnership. The Gloucestershire Water Watch Collective (a citizen science project) led by WWT will lead on this work and the partnership will seek to secure sustainable funding for this.
- Utilise the extensive open-access resources available for planning and comparing catchment activities and monitoring. Utilise GIS information, for example; Environment Agency hydrological, LiDAR, and ecological data.
- Subject to available resources, use specialist contractors where necessary for providing high quality data generation or project delivery to achieve the best outcomes.
- Collate data on partnership projects and share best practice and lessons learnt with the partnership.

Catchment Partnership Members

Anyone can be a member of the catchment partnership – we have a mailing list and post out newsletters four times a year. We also hold two in-person meetings each year in different areas of the catchment to enable as many people as possible to contribute to the partnership.

The Severn Vale Catchment Partnership is constantly growing and evolving. If you would like to become a member or learn more about projects going on across the Severn Vale visit catchmentbasedapproach.org/get-involved/severn-vale.

Co-hosts

- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
- Severn Rivers Trust

Steering Group

- Environment Agency
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (South West)
- Forestry England
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
- Natural England
- Severn Rivers Trust
- WWT