

REPORT TITLE: BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2021

20 JANUARY 2021

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Lynda Murphy. Cabinet Member for Climate
Emergency

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

For Members to consider and approve the Biodiversity Action Plan as set out in appendix A (draft document).

The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets the strategic direction for how the City Council will deliver actions which protect, enhance and restore key biodiversity within the district, with a particular focus on the Council's own operations. This document replaces the Winchester City Council Biodiversity Action Plan written in 2005 which is out of date and no longer fit for purpose.

It is primarily a document for internal Council use and focuses on those actions the City Council has direct control over and can deliver within its work programmes. This will allow the council to undertake direct action in a timely manner. It will also ensure the Council can monitor and report on work undertaken through Key Performance Indicators and quarterly highlight reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet approve the draft Biodiversity Action Plan as set out in appendix A-C and that the Natural Environment and Recreation Team Manager be authorised to make minor changes to enable updates that may occur from the cabinet meeting and any other minor editing changes, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency.

IMPLICATIONS:**1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME**

- 1.1 Tackling the Climate Emergency and Creating a Greener District
- 1.2 The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) focuses on protecting, enhancing and recreating biodiversity, thereby helping to meet the priority of “tackling the Climate emergency and creating a greener district” within the Council Plan. As part of this, the BAP is a key delivery mechanism for priority actions set out in the Council’s Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.
- 1.3 Living Well
- 1.4 The BAP supports the priority of "Living Well" by helping to enhance open spaces and parks, thereby supporting good mental and physical health for residents of all ages.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The production of the BAP has been undertaken within existing resources. However, the delivery of the BAP will require funding. This funding will initially be delivered using existing resources, mostly within the Natural Environment and Recreation team budget. This will be supplemented by resources from team budgets as appropriate. Likely expenditure forecasts (all within existing budgets) over the next 3 years are as follows:-

	2021/22 £k	2022/23 £k	2023/24 £k	Total for 3 years £k
General Land Management work	10	10	10	30
Tree works (including planting)	140	140	140	420
Wildflower creation and maintenance	28	28	28	84
Grants re management of land and maintenance of biological data base	45	45	45	135

- 2.2 Any future work which cannot be delivered within existing budgets will need to secure funding before it can proceed. This is likely to be from external sources, certainly in the initial years. One of the key aims of the BAP is to identify and secure different funding sources going forward.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 By approving and delivering the BAP, the Council will be able to clearly demonstrate how it is meeting its legal obligations in terms of the ‘biodiversity duty’ in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act

2006, as well as various wildlife laws including the Wildlife and Countryside Act and as the owner and manager of estate and land assets.

- 3.2 Any requirements for procurement in terms of project delivery will be undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and in conjunction with the Procurement Team.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All annual actions will be delivered within the existing workforce in the first instance. The Council employs 2FTE Ecologists, as well as other officers who will help deliver the work i.e. tree officer, housing officers etc.
- 4.2 The scope and actions of the BAP have been written to ensure that the work can primarily be delivered within existing resources in the longer term, although the Council will seek opportunities for additional resources through volunteers, students, community groups, partners and additional funding etc when appropriate.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Undertaking the actions identified in the BAP will help support the sound management of Council owned and managed property and assets.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Consultation has been undertaken in a slightly different way than anticipated due to current constraints imposed by Covid. Discussion and consultation has taken place with:

- a) The Cabinet Member for the Climate Emergency
- b) Members;
- c) Internal teams and colleagues;
- d) Partners, Parish Councils and stakeholders; and
- e) Residents.

- 6.2 Consultation consisted of face to face meetings prior to March 2020 and on line presentations and publications on the website post March 2020. In addition, the draft document has been circulated internally for comment. The BAP is seen as a 'living document' and consultation and communication will continue indefinitely.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The BAP is a vital part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency declared by the City Council in June 2019. Biodiversity is a tremendous asset to those who live, work and visit the District, partly through its abilities to help reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change and also for the range of benefits it provides. Biodiversity is being lost at an alarming rate locally and nationally.
- 7.2 The Winchester City Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2021 sets the strategic direction for how Winchester City Council will respond to the need to protect, enhance and restore key biodiversity across the district, with a particular focus on the Council's own operations.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Any projects undertaken as part of the BAP will be based on biodiversity priority and need. However, when identifying projects the Council will abide by equality requirements.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 As part of the actions identified in the BAP, there will be a need to collate the names and address of interested people. This will be held by the City Council and only used for the purposes of updating people on the progress of the BAP and current Council data protection policies and processes will be followed.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 The key risks relate to the absence of having an adopted and up-to-date BAP which would potentially result in:
- a) The biodiversity works programme lacking strategic direction and not delivering policy requirements relating to biodiversity.
 - b) The lack of prioritisation of work and resources.
 - c) The lack of a cohesive monitoring programme for biodiversity which would impact on programme delivery and policy, including the Local Plan review.
 - d) Opportunities being missed for coordinating projects with partners and securing financial support.
 - e) Reputational risk in relation to the delivery of biodiversity and climate emergency work programmes.
 - f) Failure to respond to legal requirements and national drivers.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Property		
<i>Contravention of wildlife legislation</i>	Identifies opportunities for joint working to reduce likely breaches of wildlife legislation	The BAP will help identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement in relation to our property and estate.
Community Support		
<i>Risk of over promising and under delivering, resulting in a loss of community support and reputational risk</i>	Ensure the annual action plan is deliverable within existing resources.	Work with communities to help with the delivery of the BAP where appropriate, particularly in relation to monitoring, surveys, information dissemination, volunteer groups, and community projects. Pursue opportunities for external funding.
Timescales		
<i>Not securing approval in January, leading to a delay in project delivery and action on the ground.</i>	Ensure procedures are followed and the report is submitted for January Cabinet consideration.	
Project capacity		
<i>Risk of over promising and under delivering.</i>	As resources are limited, the action plan has been written to ensure the work is deliverable within existing resources.	Work with communities to help with the delivery of the BAP where appropriate, particularly in relation to monitoring, surveys, information dissemination, volunteer groups, and community projects. Pursue opportunities for external funding.
Financial / VfM		
<i>Identifying work which has no budget</i>	Projects will only be taken to the delivery stage where funding has been identified	Seek external funding, work in partnership and look for funding opportunities where possible.
Legal		
<i>Failure to comply with wildlife legislation</i>	The BAP will identify actions needed to ensure the Council complies with wildlife legislation	
Innovation		

<i>Undertaking new ways of working to deliver biodiversity benefits.</i>	When trialling new approaches and methodology, pilot projects are undertaken and feedback sought.	Seeking new ways to deliver work which has biodiversity benefit.
Reputation		
<i>Over promising and under delivering</i>	As resources are limited, the action plan has been written to ensure the work is deliverable within existing resources.	Opportunities to enhance reputation through better engagement and communication work.
Other		There is a clear opportunity for delivering biodiversity benefits within the development management arena, working in partnership with developers and securing biodiversity enhancements.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

11.1 Introduction

11.2 The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets the strategic direction for how the City Council will deliver actions which protect, enhance and restore key biodiversity within the district, with a particular focus on the Council's own operations. This document replaces the Winchester City Council Biodiversity Action Plan written in 2005 which is out of date and no longer fit for purpose.

11.3 It is primarily a document for internal Council use and focuses on those actions the City Council has direct control over and can deliver within its work programmes. This will allow the Council to undertake direct action in a timely manner. It will also ensure the Council can monitor and report on work undertaken through Key Performance Indicators and quarterly highlight reports.

11.4 This does not exclude the Council working in partnership with others and continuing to seek wider benefits and actions where feasible. In addition, it is intended that the document will enable the Council to use its influence to help others achieve biodiversity gain and demonstrate the desire for the Council to be an exemplar when managing our own habitats and assets.

11.5 Background

11.6 Biodiversity (i.e. the variety of life that can be found on Earth as well as the communities they form and the habitats in which they live) is essential to life. But the world is losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. Winchester City Council has both a legal duty and a moral responsibility to consider biodiversity across all its functions, to help halt the loss of biodiversity and seek opportunities to reverse the decline. In particular, under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, all Local Authorities have a statutory duty to conserve biodiversity.

11.7 The City Council has already made significant advances in terms of protecting and enhancing biodiversity including:

- a) Having a dedicated internal resource to deliver key projects and work programmes including 2 FTE Ecologists/Biodiversity Officers as well as tree officers and others.
- b) Creating a new Nature Reserve in Winchester in partnership with CALA Homes and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.
- c) Changing the management at key sites owned by the City Council including Whiteshute Ridge, West Hill Cemetery and Hilliers Haven, to achieve biodiversity gain.
- d) Ensuring no net loss of biodiversity when undertaking reroofing works on social housing and creating biodiversity gain through additional nesting sites for protected species.
- e) Creating new areas of wildflower meadows.
- f) Undertaking an annual tree planting programme

11.8 However, in light of likely changes in legislation in relation to the proposed Environment Bill 2020 (which sets out how the Government will put the environment at the centre of policy making), the production of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan and the publication of the latest Council Plan, there is need to provide a strategic approach to ensure the Council sets priorities within its work programme in relation to biodiversity. In addition, there is a need to communicate its achievements effectively and seek opportunities for delivering more within limited resources.

11.9 BAP Objectives and Actions

11.10 The adoption of the BAP demonstrates how the City Council is helping to address the issue of biodiversity loss and communicating the Council's commitment to making a difference to partners, residents and others. It identifies how we intend to help protect, enhance and restore key biodiversity within the district, with a particular focus on the Council's own operations.

11.11 The plan has a number of key aims:

- a) Provide a strategic direction for the City Council in terms of how it will help halt the biodiversity loss and deliver enhancements to restore key biodiversity over a 5 year period, as part of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.
- b) Identify short and long term actions, focussing on:
 - (i) Halting the loss of habitat and species
 - (ii) Recreating habitat to restore biodiversity (including off-setting & Biodiversity Net Gain).
 - (iii) Adaptation and resilience for species and habitats.
- c) Provide clear evidence, support and input into key policy documents such as the Local Plan, and other Council documents including the Council Plan and the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.
- d) Monitor changes in levels of biodiversity and the effectiveness of the work undertaken.
- e) Engage with others and communicate the work of the council to a wider audience; to promote and demonstrate what can be done; and help inspire others to do the same,
- f) To identify opportunities for working in partnership to achieve maximum benefits.
- g) To find opportunities for delivering more within limited resources.

11.12 The BAP will be a 'living document' and will adapt and change to take account of new information. In particular, the City Council will prepare and deliver an annual action plan (see appendix C) and the wider BAP will be reviewed more fully in 2026.

11.13 Conclusion

11.14 The approval of the Biodiversity Action Plan marks the next step in the Council's response to the loss of biodiversity and will result in the implementation of an annual action plan which benefits biodiversity.

11.15 It is primarily a document for Council use and focuses on those actions the City Council has direct control over and can deliver within its work programmes. However, the Council will work in partnership with others and officers are continuing to seek wider benefits and pursue opportunities to work collaboratively with external groups and organisations. In addition, it is intended that the document will encourage others by targeting our resources to achieve the greatest benefit and demonstrating what can be done independently but which together makes a real difference on the ground.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1 Continue with current arrangement. Whilst the work the Council has been undertaking is making a difference, work programmes have not been set within a strategic framework, thereby potentially limiting their benefits and the Council's ability to make the best decisions going forward.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

None

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix A - Draft Biodiversity Action Plan

Appendix B – Key Species and Habitats to be included in the Action Plan

Appendix C – Action Plan for year 1 – 2021