

**SERVICES, CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

11 March 2026

5.30 - 7.46 pm

Present: Councillors Young (Chair), Divkovic, Glasberg, Griffin, Hauk and Swift

Officers:

Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Manager

Alistair Wilson, Assistant Director Public Realm & Environment

James Goddard, Democratic Services Officer

Justin Long, Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Other councillors in attendance:

Councillor Martin Smart, Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Space and City Services

Councillor Rosy Moore, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Environment

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

26/8/SC&C Apologies

Apologies had been received from Councillor Pounds, Councillor Gardiner-Smith and Councillor Payne (with Councillor Martinelli substituting).

26/9/SC&C Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26/10/SC&C Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

26/11/SC&C Public Questions

- i. The Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Environment responded to the [public question](#) received on the recycling contract with Re-Gen in Northern Ireland.
- ii. The procurement process that had been undertaken for the waste contract and the decision to award the contract to Re-Gen was summarised. The Cabinet Member confirmed that bids were assessed against several criteria including quality of service, environmental impacts and costs; location was important but only one of many aspects considered.
- iii. A supplementary was asked on how a site “over 400 miles away” had been chosen. The Cabinet Member responded that the contract was working well and decisions on any extension to the existing contract or procurement of a new contract would likely be taken by a successor unitary authority rather than Cambridge City Council.

26/12/SC&C Biodiversity Strategy Mid-Term Review

- i. The Biodiversity Manager introduced the item on the revised Biodiversity Strategy. He reported that the strategy reflected the results of the mid-term review, new legislation and the adoption of the Cambridge and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- ii. Results from the 2025 site audit had shown a mixed but generally positive picture of habitat conditions on commons and local nature reserves. Some core sites such as Logan's Meadow and Hobson's Park were showing clear improvement following targeted investment and partnership working. Several others remained stable, and where sites had been assessed as declining targeted action had been taken, for example interventions over the winter at Byron's Pool and Bramblefields.
- iii. Positive progress had been made on herbicide reduction across the city, improving habitats and water courses, delivery of major habitat creation projects, including new wetlands at Logan's Meadow and ongoing chalk stream restorations.
- iv. The public consultation had shown 92% support for the draft strategy's direction and strong backing for the Nature City Accreditation aspiration. The strategy aimed to further embed biodiversity into council services,

including through the requirement of a 20% biodiversity net gain on developments.

- v. It was noted that the proposed action plan included explicit improvement targets for each core site, and proposed designation of two new Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), both within Cherry Hinton.
- vi. Following the presentation, members were invited to discuss the draft strategy. The Committee was generally supportive of the proposals, and members asked officers and the Cabinet Member questions on various aspects of the strategy and associated documents.
- vii. Topics covered included: the ratings assigned to each nature site, how deliverable the plan was, the multi-use nature of the sites, whether the 20% measurable net gain target was ambitious enough and what it meant in tangible terms, the Council's herbicide-free approach, the need for partnership working with the county council to identify where biodiversity could be delivered without compromising highway safety (e.g. verges), consultation on the two proposed sites in Cherry Hinton, the funding and resources needed to deliver the strategy including current and future staffing levels, the need to protect sites through the planning process, links to other areas of council activity including allotments and dog-control, the importance of effective communication and engagement with local groups, ongoing managements and maintenance of sites, and the various types of ecological corridors detailed in the papers.
- viii. Following this, the Committee agreed the following:
 - To note the progress made in the midterm review of the Biodiversity Strategy (2026 – 2031), including the public consultation.
 - To recommend the Strategy (and Action Plan) to the Cabinet for adoption subject to the following points:
 - the definition of 'measurable net gain' should be strengthened;
 - there was a continuing need to focus on communications with residents when carrying out work on nature sites; and
 - effective joint-working (including within the council on areas such as allotments and dog control as well as with external partners) was crucial to the delivery of the strategy.

- To support the proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR) designations of Fulbourn Road and Church End in Cherry Hinton.

26/13/SC&C Urban Forest Strategy

- i. Joanna Davies, from the Urban Forest Consultancy, joined the meeting online and introduced the item.
- ii. She reported that Cambridge has had a citywide tree strategy in place since 2016, and it had delivered significant progress. The city now proactively managed around 30,000 council trees, had expanded planting across streets and open spaces, strengthened community engagement, and successfully attracted substantial external funding to support this work.
- iii. However, the majority of Cambridge's tree canopy (around three quarters) was outside direct council ownership. At the same time, the challenges facing the city had evolved since 2016 with increased pressure from climate change, urban heating, development, pest diseases, and competing demands on urban space. Evidence showed that canopy cover had increased slightly but remained unevenly distributed across the city.
- iv. The focus was moving from managing council trees alone to recognising trees collectively as part of the city's critical green infrastructure requiring collaboration across services and with partners.
- v. Planting alone would not have a meaningful impact on canopy change quickly enough. Therefore, protecting existing trees and allowing them to mature as well as working beyond council land ownership were essential to secure long-term benefits.
- vi. The strategy included achieving at least 20% canopy cover by 2050. That ambition was evidence-led, realistic, and intentionally framed as a minimum aspiration rather than a fixed ceiling.
- vii. Both internal and public engagement had shown strong support overall for the direction of travel, and following feedback the strategy had been clarified, shortened, and simplified.

- viii. Following the presentation, Members were invited to discuss the draft strategy. The Committee was generally supportive of the plans outlined, and asked officers and the Cabinet Member questions on various aspects of the strategy and associated documents.
- ix. Topics covered included: whether the 20% biodiversity net gain was ambitions enough, the benefits of large canopy trees (compared to smaller trees and shrubs), the gender of trees and corresponding impact on pollen levels and allergies, the key risks and constraints in delivering the strategy, how the strategy dealt with issues such as subsidence and structural damage caused by trees, planning policy, and how existing trees can best be protected including the process around TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders).
- x. Following this, the Committee agreed the following:
 - To note the progress made in developing the Urban Forest Strategy 2026-2036
 - To recommend the Strategy to the Cabinet for adoption.

26/14/SC&C Work Programme

The Work Programme was formally noted and the Chair encouraged members to suggest topics to herself, the Vice-Chair or the Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

The meeting ended at 7.46 pm

CHAIR