



Item 2

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document:

Report

To:

Councillor Katie Thornburrow, Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Transport.
Planning & Transport Scrutiny Committee [29/06/2021]

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This new Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (BSPD) has been drafted in consultation with Members and technical officers of the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) and is headed toward public consultation prior to amendment and later proposed adoption by this Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council under the auspices of GCSP. Once adopted, this SPD will provide guidance to users on how to meet the current policy requirements to protect and enhance biodiversity through the planning process as set out in existing Local Plan policy, and national legislation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Councilors are recommended to:

1. Approve this SPD for public consultation phase to begin in July 2021.

3. Background

- 3.1 This BSPD was approved as a project by GCSP Place Board in December 2020, after a period of evaluating the pros and cons of investing in a new SPD for biodiversity, or whether a Technical Note would have met the need for improved guidance. However, it was suggested that the relative weakness of a Technical Note in the planning process did not do justice to the need to have robust, clear and up-to-date guidance around biodiversity matters in the GCSP planning process which carried the weight of an SPD. The age of the existing SCDC SPD for biodiversity (2009), and the lack of a biodiversity SPD for City were also contributing factors in the decision to progress the SPD.
- 3.2 The outline plan for the SPD was taken before SCDC Climate and Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) in January 2021 and the drafting stage of the document began in late January, after meeting with the drafting consultants, Essex Place Services (EPS) and agreeing a scope of work. Since January, EPS have been drafting sections, making these available and getting feedback from a project team which includes technical specialists from Communications, Policy, Ecology, Development Management, Landscape and Trees. In addition, we have sought engagement with Members from both Councils and held meetings to discuss progress and receive feedback.

4. Considerations

- 4.1 Once adopted, this BSPD will supersede the current guidance document (SCDC 2009), but it will only advise on *existing* regulations within Local Plan policies and current national legislation, like the NPPF. As an SPD it will *not* create any new policies around biodiversity but seek to amplify and clarify rules that development schemes must follow in order to protect and enhance biodiversity in Greater Cambridge.

- 4.2 We anticipate that the publication of the UK Gov Environment Bill will take place during the consultation period of this SPD, or, immediately after it, during the second round of Member committees to adopt the SPD. As such, language has been used in the SPD that points to a Biodiversity Net Gain percentage in line with that anticipated in the Environment Bill (10% BNG), as a minimum. However, we have also included language which clearly describes the *aspiration* of both Councils toward a higher percentage (suggested as 20% BNG), for all new development within Greater Cambridge. While not binding, this messaging sets the expectation reflected in the approach of both Councils toward improving biodiversity and Doubling Nature.
- 4.3 The timeline for bringing this SPD before the Member committees in both Councils is extremely tight (throughout June). This is a function of the committee calendar, but also the need to avoid a later Autumn window, as the new Local Plan consultations will be underway then and we have been advised not to clash with that process. As such, there is little wiggle room for delays to approval of this SPD for the next phase, (public consultation).

5. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

No additional costs beyond those previously anticipated as part of preparing an SPD.

(b) Staffing Implications

To progress the BSPD, officer time will be required to ensure that it moves smoothly through the consultation phase, is amended and then bought back to this body for adoption. Staffing requirements were set out in the PID for this project and are on-track.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

Equality Impact Assessment (attached)

(d) Environmental Implications

A Strategic Environmental Assessment has been produced for this SPD.

(e) Procurement Implications

None

(f) Community Safety Implications

None

6. Consultation and communication considerations

Consultation on an SPD is required to be in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement and the consultation period for this SPD is planned for July and August. The timing to avoid consultation overlap with other consultations being run by the Shared Planning Service, interrelated wider council or external partner consultations.

Given that the report is also going to SCDC Cabinet, delegated powers are also sought should there be any minor changes made by that process - to be delegated to the Joint Planning Director in consultation with the Executive Councillor.

7. Background papers

- None

8. Appendices

- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Consultation Statement

9. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact

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