

Item



## **BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY DRAFT PROPOSED FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**To:**

Councillor Alex Collis, Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Sustainable Food and Community Wellbeing  
Environment & Community Scrutiny Committee 01/07/2021

**Report by:**

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**Wards affected:**

All

Key Decision

### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 In 2019 the City Council declared a biodiversity<sup>1</sup> emergency in recognition of the pressures facing our natural world, both locally and internationally. The Council pledged to review its 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy to meet current legislation, policy, initiatives, and challenges.
- 1.2 This report is accompanied by a draft Biodiversity Strategy for Council services for the period, 2021 to 2030. The Strategy sets out a series of

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<sup>1</sup> The term biodiversity describes all forms of life, their interactions and the ecosystems that support them and us. It includes all species, both common and rare, which combine to provide us with the air we breathe, water we drink and the food we eat

objectives to guide our work and groups the subsequent actions under three themes.

- I. **‘Biodiversity Mainstreaming’** seeks to embed biodiversity across all Council services and ensure that protection and enhancement opportunities are considered through the decision-making process.
  - II. **‘The Core’**, identifies and explains how we propose to enhance the key wildlife sites and habitats that we manage, including Local Nature Reserves, Commons, Pieces, Closed Cemeteries, and larger parks. The report includes recommendations that inform the strategy on how to achieve measurable biodiversity net gain from this baseline.
  - III. **‘Nature in your Neighborhood’**, recognises that nature should not be restricted to core sites, that the City Council manage only a small percentage of Cambridge’s green spaces and that we must work in partnership with other organisations and individuals to achieve City wide biodiversity net gain.
- 1.3 Officers request Committee approval to consult on the draft strategy between July and September 2021, with a view to adopting a further revision of the Strategy after scrutiny in the autumn committee cycle.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to:
- a) Approve for public consultation the draft Biodiversity Strategy

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 In 2019 the City Council declared a biodiversity emergency in recognition of the pressures facing our natural world, both locally and internationally. We pledged to review our 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy which had previously provided an ambitious 20-year biodiversity net gain vision for our services and partnerships however, it was in need of updating to meet current legislation, policy, initiatives and challenges.
- 3.2 The 2006 Strategy was written with expertise from the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust and the original document identified the key sites and habitats within the City and

proposed more than 80 projects to deliver enhancements on City Council managed land and influence others through policies and partnerships. Many of the objectives and actions within the 2006 involve ongoing management and will be continuing within the new revised strategy but set within the context of measurable biodiversity net gain and the Cambridge Nature Network<sup>2</sup>.

- 3.3 The Council has delivered much of the original Strategy for our wildlife and communities, however, as demonstrated nationally and internationally, we continue to see local biodiversity loss and not the nature recovery that is required.
- 3.4 A key achievement from the 2006 strategy has been the designation of 12 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) to give these precious sites greater statutory protection. This has been successful in protecting them from inappropriate development, attracting capital funding for projects and revenue resources for habitat management, however, the accompanying habitat baseline report shows that many still require further efforts to enhance their habitat conditions.
- 3.5 The Council also needs to monitor its progress against this baseline to be sure we are delivering on our biodiversity net gain commitments and Natural Cambridgeshire's 'Doubling Nature<sup>3</sup>' ambitions.
- 3.6 As with the climate change emergency the biodiversity emergency requires all City Council services to consider biodiversity within their operations, rather than traditionally just through planning services and land management within the open spaces team. This new strategy attempts to embed biodiversity principles and considerations across all service areas and the communities they serve.
- 3.7 For many years the Council has worked with our Friends Groups, Local Nature Reserve volunteers and partners such as the Wildlife Trust and Cam Valley Forum to maintain and improve the rich diversity of habitats which can still be found in and around Cambridge. We greatly value this

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<sup>2</sup> The Cambridge Nature Network has been prepared by the Local Wildlife Trust and Cambridge Past Present and Future, providing an evidence based spatial plan for protecting and enhancing nature. It includes the best of the remaining habitats within 10km of the city and it identifies the key opportunities and locations for creating new habitats. Through collaboration with landowners and communities it represents an ambitious but achievable vision for local nature recovery.

<https://www.cambridgeppf.org/cambridge-nature-network>

<sup>3</sup> Natural Cambridgeshire is the Local Nature partnership of leaders from businesses, local authorities, the health sector, farming, wildlife and environmental organisations that exists to champion, influence and enable the fulfilment of the Doubling nature vision

<https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Doubling-Nature-LR.pdf>

shared expertise and passion, recognising that we cannot hope to reverse the decline and help our species adapt to a changing climate alone. For this reason, the new strategy seeks to further engage with landowners, businesses, community groups and visitors to respect, protect and enhance our city's wildlife and the multiple benefits it provides.

- 3.8 The strategy is intended to support the Cambridge Past Present & Future and Local Wildlife Trust proposed Cambridge Nature Network, which incorporates our iconic riverside commons and LNRs and seeks to work in partnership to improve these sites' habitat condition. The strategy also recognises the uniquely placed Cambridge Conservation Initiative<sup>4</sup> partners ambitions to collaborate more on local biodiversity issues, including their 2020 Biodiversity Action Plan for the university estate.
- 3.9 Due to the economic success of Cambridge and the local region, the city has seen considerable development; major growth sites, which were identified within the 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy, have now been built, along with new Country Parks and habitats to complement the existing network of LNRs, woodlands and water courses.
- 3.10 These previous schemes demonstrate that with good design and planning policies, biodiversity net gain is achievable on multifunctional spaces. The new Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils allows us to plan strategically, on a Greater Cambridge geography, for new green infrastructure and measurable biodiversity net gain within our emerging shared local plan. Identifying land not just for new homes but for new habitats and connections to meet our duty under the Environment Act due Autumn 2021.
- 3.11 The strategy references Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Services commitments to biodiversity, mirroring those laid out within South Cambridgeshire District Council's 'Doubling Nature' Strategy, including the adoption of a new shared Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to guide applicants and planning case officers on how to secure Biodiversity Net gain for all development

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<sup>4</sup> The Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI) is a collaboration between the University of Cambridge and leading internationally focused biodiversity conservation organisations based in and around Cambridge, UK.

## **4 Implications**

### **4.1 Financial Implications**

The delivery of the draft Strategy will be resourced, in the main, from within existing service budgets. However, there may be specific capital project needs arising from the proposed strategy, which will need either Council and/ or external investment. Any Council investment needs will be considered as part of the annual Budget Setting Report process.

### **4.2 Staffing Implications**

The management and delivery of the draft Strategy will be resourced from within existing staffing resources.

### **4.3 Equality and Poverty Implications**

Positive impact. A thriving biodiverse environment is critical for our well-being with a growing evidence base to suggest that we lead healthier lives, both mentally and physically, if we have more opportunities to interact with nature. Therefore, this strategy has the potential to positively impact on all groups through preventing disability or long-term illness. Where we identify sites for potential recreational zoning, then the balance between public accessibility and wildlife protection will be subject to separate EQIA assessment.

### **4.4 Environmental Implications**

The strategy is deemed to provide a high positive rating due to the associated climate change adaptation scores. The strategy proposes actions to improve habitat condition and connectivity across the City which will improve its resilience to a changing climate and give species it supports the greatest opportunity to adapt and disperse. By increasing the vegetation cover, species, and structural diversity of our city's natural and built environment we will harness the multifunctional ecosystem service that these provide, including reducing flood risk and reduction of the urban heat island effect.

### **4.5 Procurement Implications**

There are currently no procurement implications identified with this recommendation.

### **4.6 Community Safety Implications**

The actions proposed within the draft strategy include Council site management plan reviews, with a view to making our parks and open spaces more biodiverse. The changing of management practices and creation of new habitats to achieve this will need to be considered against the sites multifunctional needs and ensure that community safety is enhanced and not compromised.

Depending on the scale of the proposal this will be achieved through careful design, following consultation with other services, site users and wider local community.

## **5 Consultation and communication considerations**

- 5.1 We propose to consult stakeholders and members of the public for an eight-week period over July, August and September 2021. A proposed list of key consultees has been provided in the Appendices and includes the groups and organisations the council already engages with on biodiversity issues and projects.
- 5.2 We will provide an online public consultation on our web site and advertise through our social media channels during the consultation.
- 5.3 The results of the survey will be collated and presented with a final amended Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for approval by the Executive Council for Open Spaces, Sustainable Food and Community Wellbeing in the autumn committee cycle.

## **6 Background papers**

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- a) Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Strategy (2006) Prepared by BCN Wildlife Trust:  
<https://files.cambridge.gov.uk/public/ldf/coredocs/RD-NE/rd-ne-080.pdf>
- b) Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Report (2020) Prepared by BCN Wildlife Trust and Wild Trout Trust:  
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/9067/greater-cambridge-chalk-streams-project-report.pdf>
- c) Biodiversity Audit (baseline survey for key City Council owned and managed sites) prepared by MKA Ecology 2021:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/9597/biodiversity-audit.pdf>.

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix A - Draft Biodiversity Strategy (2021)

Appendix B - Parks Biodiversity Toolkit (2021)

Appendix C - List of proposed stakeholders consultees

## **8 Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Officer, tel: 01223-458532, email: [guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk).