

Item

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY 2022 -2030

To:

Councillor Alex Collis, Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice & Community Development

Environment & Community Scrutiny Committee

30/06/2022

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2019, the City Council declared a biodiversity ¹ emergency in recognition of the pressures facing our natural world, both locally and internationally. The Council in approving its Motion pledged to review its 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy to ensure that Council met current legislation, policy, initiatives, and challenges and made a commitment to undertake a biodiversity audit of our major parks and open spaces.
- 1.2 In July 2021 the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Sustainable Food and Community Wellbeing approved use of a draft Biodiversity Strategy for public consultation.
- 1.3 The Biodiversity Strategy consultation, research and evaluations are now complete, and this report sets out the summary of the findings in relation

¹ 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

to the draft Biodiversity Strategy. The consultation results are available at Appendix A.

- 1.4 This report is accompanied by a Biodiversity Strategy for 2022 to 2030 (Appendix B). The Strategy was informed by the biodiversity audit and consultation completed in July – September 2021. The Biodiversity Strategy identifies seven objectives to guide our work in response to Priority 1 of the Corporate Plan (2022 – 2027): Leading Cambridge’s response to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies. The actions to meet the objectives are grouped 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.
- 1.5 The strategy is accompanied with an Action Plan (Appendix C) detailing proposed projects and actions, lead services and timescales for delivery and reporting.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to:
- a) Note the stated ambitions and approve the adoption of the Biodiversity Strategy (2022 – 2030) and accompanying Action Plan.
 - b) To allocated responsibility for delivery and monitoring of the Action Plan to the Executive Councillor for Climate Change and Biodiversity.

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2019 the City Council in declaring a biodiversity emergency made a pledge in doing so, to review our 2006 Nature Conservation Strategy. The Nature Conservation Strategy had previously provided an ambitious 20-year biodiversity net gain vision for the Council, its services, and its partnerships however, it was recognized that it was in need of updating to reflect changes in current legislation, policy, initiatives and challenges.
- 3.2 The 2006 Strategy 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 Biodiversity Strategy but set within the context of measurable biodiversity net gain and the Cambridge Nature Network².
- 3.3 The Council has delivered much of the original Nature Conservation 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 Nature Conservation 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 ³' ambitions. This commitment transfers to the Biodiversity Strategy.

² 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>

³ 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>

- 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 embeds biodiversity principles and considerations across all service areas and the communities they serve. The strategy identifies principles and projects to deliver the Corporate Plan (2022-2027) Priority 1: Leading Cambridge's response to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies.
- 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 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 Initiative⁴ 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

⁴ 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.

infrastructure⁵ 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 (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 the new shared Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document to guide applicants and planning case officers on how to secure Biodiversity Net gain for all development.

3.12 The seven objectives identified within the strategy are:

- i. To secure a measurable net gain in biodiversity across the city by 2025 and support the Natural Cambridgeshire Doubling Nature Vision by 2030
- ii. To ensure designated sites and priority habitats are in good / favorable condition and connected, where possible, to increase resilience to a changing climate and contribute to the Cambridge Nature Network
- iii. To promote awareness of biodiversity and wellbeing, supporting coordinated action in our communities, business, and institutions
- iv. To ensure that biodiversity is considered by all council service functions and projects
- v. To harness the wealth of local professional and amateur knowledge and experience in identifying and solving local issues
- vi. To establish long term, species and habitats surveys and monitoring to measure the impacts of activities and identify new threats and opportunities across the city

4 Implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The delivery of the 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.

⁵ Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features, urban and rural, which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities.

4.2 Staffing Implications

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

The Council's approved Budget Setting Report (BSR) for 2022-25 includes a proposal to secure budget to enable the extension of the Canopy Project activity, in combination with providing additional biodiversity project support to deliver the new Biodiversity Strategy (approved for public consultation last autumn and to be adopted spring 2022), in a proposed new three-year Biodiversity Project Officer role. The business case for extending or mainstreaming the post will be reviewed in the 3rd year of the fixed term.

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 Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and 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 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 An eight-week public consultation on the draft strategy was held over July, August, and September 2021. A proposed list of key consultees was approved by committee for circulation and included the groups and organisations the council already engages with on biodiversity issues and projects.
- 5.2 The results of the survey and the Councils response are summarised in the appendix A.

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 – Consultation analysis report

Appendix B - Biodiversity Strategy (2022 - 2030)

Appendix C – Action Plan

8 Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Officer, email: guy.belcher@cambridge.gov.uk.