



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Rowan Longhurst, Service Manager – Countryside

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Report of: *Ajman Ali, Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services*

Report to: *Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee*

Date of Decision: *11th March 2024*

Subject: *Summary of the Task and Finish Group for biodiversity on Council land (in response to the Council's Declaration of a Nature Emergency)*

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

This report seeks agreement from the Committee to endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group which met between July 2023 and January 2024 and to approve the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.

Recommendations:

The Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report and thank everyone involved in the productive and useful discussions had during the Task and Finish Group.
2. Endorse the recommendations proposed by the Task and Finish Group.
3. Approve the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.

Background Papers:

Link to Council motion declaring a Nature Emergency in Sheffield: [Sheffield City Council - Agenda for Council on Wednesday 16 June 2021, 2.00 pm](#)

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Adrian Hart</i>
		Legal: <i>Louise Bate</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>Ed Sexton</i>
		Climate: <i>N/A</i>
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	SLB member who approved submission:	<i>Ajman Ali, Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>Cllr Richard Williams</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Rowan Longhurst</i>	Job Title: <i>Service Manager - Countryside</i>
	Date: <i>14/02/24</i>	

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 Sheffield has declared a nature emergency. The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world and is in the bottom 10% globally. This loss is caused primarily by human population, agricultural and urban expansion, habitat loss, pollution, invasive species and climate change. Nature is our life support system.
- 1.2 However, nature has an extraordinary ability to recover, and we can solve this problem. It is critical that we all focus our efforts towards helping the natural world. Sheffield City Council is combating this issue locally by developing multiple solutions at a local and regional level. These include a review of how we develop, use and manage land across the city and the creation of new nature-based solutions.
- 1.3 The natural history of Sheffield is very special, a unique confluence of geography, geology, climate and ecology. The city and its wider region sits in a fairly central location in the British Isles, nestled in the ‘foothills’ of the eastern Peak District with a hugely varied landform that ranges from very low level (Don Valley <30m) to the moorland line (western moors >500m). The city has very varied habitats, from neutral and acidic grasslands, higher altitude heather moorland and bog and lower-level dry heaths and extensive woodland coverage. Five major rivers (and many lesser watercourses) flow through Sheffield. This natural diversity means that Sheffield boasts a rich and varied natural environment, often supporting species that are at risk and threatened nationally.
- 1.4 Sheffield is also a heavily wooded city, with canopy cover already exceeding the government’s 2050 target. Within the city’s extensive woodland area are over 80 ancient woodlands. Ancient woodlands are woods that have existed since at least AD 1600 and have developed irreplaceable, complex ecosystems. Woodlands in Sheffield comprise the majority of the city’s Local Wildlife Sites – resulting in green arteries that weave their way through the city, often following watercourses and acting as vital habitat corridors.
- 1.5 The Environment Act 2021 has set legally binding targets to halt species decline by 2030, and as a result a number of new legislative requirements are in place which strengthens the Local Authority’s legal ‘Biodiversity Duty’. In addition, the Government’s Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP) builds on the 25 Year Environment Plan and sets out further goals to improve the environment and increase prosperity.
- 1.6 Changes to the planning system with the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies are two of the main mechanisms which will help local and regional authorities take action for nature and meet 2030 targets.

- 1.7 As a city, we're incredibly privileged to access such rich landscapes, however, they are under threat – by climate change, urban pressures and a lack of management caused by continual pressures on resources. In order to effectively meet 2030 and EIP targets we must manage our own resources effectively and maximise partnership working and recognise that holistic ownership and management of Council land is required to deliver on nature recovery.
- 1.8 The Task and Finish Group met five times between July 2023 and January 2024. Membership of the group was drawn equally from the 3 political parties on the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee at the time. All members were from the Communities, Parks and Leisure Committee, though substitutes from outside the committee were sought when required. Officers from various Council Services attended depending on the agenda item.
- 1.9 Following a stakeholder mapping exercise, the group extended the invitation to key partners in the city. These were:
- Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust,
 - Green Estate/Chair of the Green Space Forum (where representatives of the city's community groups/Friends' of convene) and
 - Eastern Moors Partnership.
- 1.10 During these sessions a range of topics was covered to brief Members on the issues impacting the biodiversity crisis, the Council's biodiversity duty and opportunities to work collectively with communities and partners to halt species decline.
- 1.11 These sessions are summarised in Appendix 2, with the key recommendations that stemmed from discussions outlined below:
1. Approve the Council's 'First Consideration' under its enhanced biodiversity duties which is provided in Appendix 1.
 2. A further report be produced on proposed biodiversity objectives and policies no later than Spring 2025, to align with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
 3. A further report be produced to outline the action needed to increase our commitment to give 30% of our land to nature by 2030 (including reference to climate change, land, trees & woodlands and green & open spaces) to 40%.
 4. Note the work already being undertaken to promote biodiversity enhancements in Sheffield – details of this are included in the First Consideration for Biodiversity Report.
 5. Recognise the contributions and expertise offered by officers from the Ecology, Planning, Climate Change, and Parks and Countryside

Teams and the external partners that brought a wealth of knowledge to the Task and Finish Group.

6. Acknowledge the role that the Council plays in bringing stakeholders together, sharing knowledge, promoting best practice and inspiring the city to take action for nature.
7. Recognise the rich and diverse natural environment in Sheffield, and the importance of both managing what we already have, as well as what can be created.
8. Support the ‘Lawton Principles’ and that we should strive for habitats that are “*More, bigger, better and joined*” in order for nature to thrive.¹
9. Propose that the Parks and Countryside Service works with City Future colleagues to develop an organisational response to the findings. This should outline resourcing structures, a strategic lead for nature recovery and commit to establish a group that continues the work of the Task and Finish Group and wider stakeholders. This work should shape a Nature Emergency Action Plan and progress other policies, projects and plans already in motion.
10. Build on evidence from the Sheffield State of Nature report and forthcoming South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and priority species lists to set local species recovery targets and work plans with partners.
11. Note that high quality, biodiverse, accessible, safe and resilient green spaces are not evenly distributed across the city and often more deprived communities are most adversely impacted by the climate and nature emergencies. A more prosperous city is one where nature thrives in an equitable way and can support a thriving community through the benefits it provides.
12. Recommend the Parks and Countryside Service continues to review land management practices (including mowing regimes) and prioritise opportunities for habitat restoration, creation, and enhancement in the city’s green spaces.
13. Support changes in land management that maximise practical opportunities for Nature Based Solutions, whilst acknowledging change can be difficult in some situations. This should focus on Natural Flood Management, so green spaces contribute to ‘slowing the flow’ and also help to sequester carbon and increase biodiversity.
14. Propose that appropriate resource is allocated to meet the Council’s enhanced biodiversity duties. Note that this resource will not sit within one Policy Committee. This will support the production and delivery of the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

¹ Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network, Submitted to the Secretary of State, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 16 September 2010, can be accessed [here](#)

and enable the revenue potential of Biodiversity Net Gain to be maximised and an associated policy produced.

15. Recommends that apprentices and Parks and Countryside staff continue to be trained to play a key part in building and maintaining productive relationships with communities and groups engaged with nature recovery on council land. And recommends that they are supported with appropriate site-specific land management plans to encourage good ecological practice and empower communities to take action for nature.
16. Recommends that Parks and Countryside produces an update report on glyphosate use on Council owned and managed land.
17. Agrees to develop a communication plan that shares the vision for Sheffield to be a city where nature thrives alongside a thriving community, so that communities are empowered and included. This could include biodiversity awards similar to the allotments awards.
18. Recommends that opportunities for initiatives that enhance wellbeing through human engagement and connection to the natural environment and nature are explored. Recognises that fast growing, widely accessible and cost-effective initiatives are used by other local authorities and relevant external funding sources should be utilised.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 Responding to the Nature Emergency was a public commitment made by Sheffield City Council in June 2021. Understanding the city, its existing makeup and the opportunities that exist on various land will be key in responding to both the nature emergency, and the linked climate emergency.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 Following a stakeholder mapping session three external partners were invited to join the Task and Finish group to provide their expertise and help shape discussion and recommendations. They were the:
 - Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust,
 - Green Estate/Chair of the Green Space Forum (where representatives of the city's community groups/Friends' of convene) and
 - Eastern Moors Partnership.

- 3.2 These partners brought a wealth of direct experience and were able to share the views of other community groups from around the city.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

- 4.1.1 Whilst an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required for this report, we recognise that more disadvantaged communities are disproportionately impacted by Climate Change and by association the Climate and Nature emergencies.

- 4.1.2 Individual projects, proposals or other initiatives requiring a committee decision will include their own EIAs as appendices to reports.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 There are no specific financial or commercial implications arising from this report however, the recommendations each carry with them a degree of resource requirement. Whilst many reflect current and ongoing work and part of various services day to day workloads, in most respects they require further resources to deliver. Council departments proactively seek and apply for funding that helps deliver on this work. Workstreams associated with new legislative requirements such as implementing Biodiversity Net Gain are particularly resource intensive and are not yet fully known due to their complexity. Any requirement will be brought in a future report.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 The Council's duties in relation to species abundance and Biodiversity Net Gain are summarised in Appendix 1.

The Task and Finish Group was formed in line with the Council's Constitution.

There may be legal implications arising from future decisions and actions to implement proposals. Future proposals and their legal implications will be the subject of further reports where required.

4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 There are no specific climate implications arising from this report however, it is widely accepted that there are strong links between the climate and nature emergencies, in many instances they are inextricably linked. Climate Impact Assessments will be completed as required throughout the process and for any resulting actions.

4.4 Other Implications

4.4.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Do nothing. Not responding to the nature emergency declaration and working across the Council and with partners across the city would prevent us capturing the work being undertaken and understanding the scale of the challenge going forwards.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Task and Finish Group brought together a focused group of Members, Officers and external partners to examine key challenges around the nature emergency and provide clear advice and direction to officers developing an action plan for the Council and city.

The breadth and scale of the challenge means that the work of the Task and Finish Group represents one stage in a wider strategy that the Council and city work on to support nature recovery and the scale and cross cutting nature of this agenda is not yet fully understood.