

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20/06/2022

Title:

Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kika Miryleess Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Services
Cllr Liz Townsend Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Services
Cllr Steve Williams Portfolio Holder for Environment

Head of Service: Kelvin Mills – Head of Commercial Services

Key decision: Yes

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

- 1.1 To inform the Services Overview & Scrutiny committee of progress to date in the writing of the Biodiversity Policy (Annexe 1).
- 1.2 To invite comment and feedback from the committee on the policy.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the committee provides feedback and comment on the current version of the Biodiversity Policy.
- 2.2 That the Committee recommends the Biodiversity Policy (subject to feedback and comment amendments) is considered for adoption by the Council at the next available Executive meeting.

3. Reason for the recommendation

- 3.1 Public, Government and industry awareness of Climate change and the fragile state of our local, national, and international environments have never been higher or the importance of action so urgent. As a responsible local authority, it is our duty to lead from the front and demonstrate real commitment to recognising the great important of our natural environment and our extreme reliance we place upon it in terms of financial activity, mental health and wellbeing.

- 3.2 Therefore, there is a need for a consistent and a comprehensive approach to the Councils management of habitats and wildlife in order that biodiversity is enhanced and increased wherever possible in the borough.
- 3.3 The Council needs a policy that puts the environment at the heart of everything we do, embeds new Legislation such as the Environment Act 2021, and take steps to protect our environments for our future generations.
- 3.3 This biodiversity policy provides the central structure to support the Councils staff and ensure that biodiversity implications are considered central to decision making.
- 3.4 The new Environment Act introduces the requirement for Biodiversity reports, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the examination and approval of biodiversity gain plans.

4. Background

- 4.1 Waverley Borough council owns and manages significant Green Spaces / public access land / Commons across the Borough (Cira 2000ha) and has an obligation to manage these spaces in trust for the public and future generations.
- 4.2 It is necessary to take steps to enhance and improve biodiversity across our Green Spaces and to seek to influence other land holders to improve the environments for all our residents and visitors; whilst managing health and safety risks and improving the potential of Green
- 4.3 This Policy, linked to other relevant policies such as the Tree and Woodland Policy, when adopted will set out the Councils commitment and aspirations for these areas.
- 4.4 Although not a Planning document, it is important that this Biodiversity Policy feeds into or compliments other Strategies, Policies, and guidelines across the Council and vice versa, such as:
- Local Plan Part 1; Policies NE 1 & 2, Local Plan Part 2; policies DM 1 and 11 and the Planning Tree Guidelines (2018).
 - Tree and Woodland Policy and Action Plan
 - Climate Emergency Action Plan
 - Pesticide Policy
 - Woodland management plans
 - Tree Risk Management Framework
 - Green Spaces Strategy (forth coming)

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

- 5.1 This policy directly contributes towards the corporate vision by promoting; a sense of responsibility by all for our environment, promoting biodiversity, championing the green economy, and protecting our planet.

It supports the strategic priorities of the corporate strategy:

- Supporting a strong, resilient local economy by ensuring the Natural Capital of the Borough is supported, improved, and protected.
- Acting on Climate Emergency and protecting the environment.
- Working with partners to ensure the environmental stewardship of our open spaces are of the highest quality including the promotion of biodiversity, rewilding, and the phasing out of pesticide use other than in exceptional and defined circumstances.
- Our aim is to become a net zero-carbon council by 2030, encouraging carbon reduction and the promotion of biodiversity and sustainable homes, businesses, and transport across the borough.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities.

5.2 This policy also supports the delivery of the Councils service plan outcomes:

- SP21-24 CS 11.3 Write and adopt a Tree and Woodland Policy that encompasses all aspects of tree management and a Biodiversity Policy in line with our corporate objectives
- SP22/25 CS10.2 Maintain and attract appropriate levels of volunteers and seek to increase participation wherever possible to support the service priorities and site management
- SP22/25 CS10.3 Deliver action plans from Tree and Woodland Policy, Biodiversity Policy and Pesticide Policy in line with our Corporate Objectives

6. **Implications of decision**

6.1 **Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)**

Should the Council adopt this policy there will be a need to identify sources of income, external funding and possibly internally funded capital budgets to allow for the delivery of the Biodiversity Policy action plan (Annexe 1) in the longer term. Budget requests for these items will come through the usual budget setting process as appropriate.

Examples where resources will be required are:

- Continue to seek external funding to transition our existing Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) grant schemes to the new Environmental Land Management Stewardship (ELMS) grant scheme being planned by Natural England. This will need to be supplemented by similar amounts of Council capital funding, this has been generally be around £50-70k per year over the last 10 years

- Additional funding required to create biodiversity gains on sites when external or developer funding not available. Dependent on how many sites receive works each year and the nature of the works - circa £20k per annum
- Survey habitats – Consultant costs circa £10k per annum over 10 years
- Management plan writing – Consultant costs circa £10k per annum over 10 years
- Replacement vehicles and machinery that are greener – averaged at £10k per annum over 10 years
- Assessment of BNG potential of council sites – Consultant costs circa £20k per year for 5 years via consultants
- New Biodiversity Officer, Grade 5/6 post to provide the necessary expertise and knowledge to deliver elements of the action plan – circa £47-57k per annum
- Audit Biodiversity training needs and deliver training – circa £3k year
- Some additional GIS analyst resources may be required to build a borough wide conservation mapping layer to inform decision making – circa £1k per annum over 5 years
- Monitoring strategies for Biodiversity improvements and SNCI's will require funding – circa £10k over 10 years
- Future lease changes to incorporate policy requirements will incur legal costs as and when required

6.2 Risk management

- All works will be undertaken in line with health and safety guidelines and risk assessed
- All works to be undertaken by suitably qualified operatives
- Without having comprehensive and up to date policies, the Council will struggle to deliver its Climate Change promises and to demonstrate progress
- There is a risk of reputational damage if the Council does not act responsibly and decisively to support the environment and fulfil its commitments

6.3 Legal

The preparation of this policy is being undertaken in order to support compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and its corporate strategy aims and objectives

6.4 Equality, diversity, and inclusion

There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out, when necessary, across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

This Biodiversity Policy directly contributes to the Councils environmental and sustainability objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan following the climate emergency declaration.

The Policy will ensure biodiversity and the natural environment are prioritised, protected, and enhanced embedding the requirements of the new Environment Act 2021.

The policy and action plan sets targets for; enhancing the borough natural capital and improving habitat connectivity, ambitious targets for biodiversity net gain on our land and in developments we control, education, community involvement and engagement with communities.

7. Consultation and engagement

- 7.1 This policy has been written in conjunction with Surrey Wildlife Trust
- 7.2 During 2021 there were two rounds of consultation with Town and Parish Councils, stakeholders and other partners with the feedback has been built into the Policy
- 7.3 The policy has been shared with Councillors Townsend, Williams and D'Arcy and invited feedback and comment
- 7.4 The policy has also been shared with heads of service, planning policy and housing delivery teams
- 7.5 The policy has been to Management Board and Executive Briefing.

8. Other options considered

- 8.1 Do nothing is not an option. The Environment Act 2021 places legal responsibilities on the Council to act and produce plans and policies. The Biodiversity Policy is the first important step in understanding the natural resources in the Borough and building for the future.

9. Governance journey

- 9.1 This policy will be considered by Management Board, Executive Briefing, Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee.

Annexes:

Annexe 1 – *Biodiversity Policy and Action Plan*

Background Papers

There are / are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:

Legal Services: date Dan Bainbridge 31/05/22

Head of Finance: date Rosie Plaistowe 27/05/22

Strategic Director: date

Portfolio Holder: date