

REPORT TO:	ENVIROMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	26 JANUARY 2023	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRISTOPHER WORMAN PARKS AND GREEN SPACES MANAGER	DOC:
SUBJECT:	REVISION TO ACTION PLAN FOR NATURE WORK PROGRAMME	
WARD (S) AFFECTED:	ALL WARDS	TERMS OF REFERENCE: EDS

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Committee acknowledges the work completed under the Action Plan for Nature (APN) Work Programme, during 2022.
- 1.2 That the Committee approves the revised Work Programme for 2023 (Appendix 1).

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To provide a summary of the key works undertaken during 2022 under the original Work Programme.
- 2.2 To present the revised 2023 Work Programme for approval (Appendix 1).

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The South Derbyshire Action Plan for Nature (APN) and Work Programme was approved by the Council ahead of the Environment Act gaining Royal Assent in November 2021.
- 3.2 The Act contains provisions to implement nature recovery across England, under which Local Authorities will be required to undertake leading roles.
- 3.3 The APN was produced by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and defines a baseline for biodiversity within South Derbyshire and the opportunities that are available to the Council to deliver strategic nature recovery.
- 3.4 The APN provided an evidence base for the Council's Biodiversity Work Group to produce a Work Programme to begin the progress in achieving this aim.

- 3.5 A Biodiversity Officer was appointed by the Council at the start of February 2022 to deliver the Work Programme.
- 3.6 This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Biodiversity Officer in 2022 with the support of other Officers within the Council.
- 3.7 Whilst the original Work Programme has provided initial direction 2022, the 2023 Work Programme has been principally revised to define **73 measurable** and **quantifiable** Targets to focus the delivery of nature recovery within South Derbyshire.
- 3.8 This approach not only outlines clear a direction of travel for Officers and Managers in 2023 but also provides a method under which progress of the 2023 Work Programme can be made accountable to the Council.
- 3.9 The Work Streams and Strategic Approach set out within the original Work Programme has been incorporated into the 2023 revision, however, the wording and format has been streamlined and set within a formal document.
- 3.10 Officers and Managers across all relevant services have been consulted on the 2023 Work Programme and provided input as appropriate.
- 3.11 The 2023 Work Programme is provided in **Appendix 1**.

4.0 Original Work Programme – Summary of Work Undertaken in 2022

Swadlincote Woodlands Improvements

- 4.1 Swadlincote Woodlands has now achieved Local Nature Reserve status.
- 4.2 Capital Grant works to fully replace all original entrance, directional, waymarker and interpretation signs across the Woodlands are in an advanced stage and proposed for full installation at the start of 2023, led by the Biodiversity Officer and supported by the Park Life Officer. This will include new waymarked fitness/exercise trails, designed by the Active Communities team, principally the Get Active in the Forest Officer.
- 4.3 x12 volunteer work party sessions have been undertaken facilitated by the Park Life Officer and Biodiversity Officer, to continue the delivery of the Biodiversity Management Plan for the Woodlands.
- 4.4 The Park Life Officer and Environmental Education Project ran a grant funded Forest School and two wildlife identification events for local communities within the Woodlands. The events were well-attended. It is the intention to expand the range of events in 2023 (i.e. post-Covid).

Woodville By-Pass Biodiversity Net Gain Project

- 4.5 As part of the Woodville by-pass, the Council offered three of its sites for biodiversity improvements to offset the ecological impact of the scheme. This was agreed by Committee and a monetary contribution of £147, 000 was paid to the Council by County to implement the improvements and manage and monitor the sites for a period of 32 years.
- 4.6 The work to implement these improvements has now been undertaken, led by the Biodiversity Officer:

- Swadlincote Woodlands (1.2ha) – glade creation, woodland wildflower/bulb planting and tree/shrub planting.
- Sandholes Park, Midway (2ha) – the first phase of wildflower seeding has been completed (approx. 1ha) with the final phase to be completed in autumn 2023. A phased approach was undertaken to avoid ground disturbance across the whole of the park area, so this would be more acceptable to park users.
- Old Hall Meadow, George Street, Church Gresley (1.3ha) – similarly, the first phase of wildflower seeding has been completed (approx. 0.7ha).

4.7 We look forward to seeing the results of the biodiversity improvements in spring and summer 2023.

4.8 The Biodiversity Officer presented at a national conference on Biodiversity Net Gain, on the Woodville By-Pass biodiversity improvements and the positive work undertaken by the Council.

Other Site Improvements for Biodiversity

4.9 At the request of the Cemeteries Officer, a small area of wildflower meadow has been sown within Church Gresley cemetery, led by the Biodiversity Officer (near the York Road entrance).

4.10 Autumn hay meadow management has continued in 2022 on wildlife meadows across various Council sites led by the Biodiversity Officer, totalling over 6ha. The hay meadow management removes the grass cuttings from site, preventing nutrient enrichment and promoting wildflower development.

4.11 1ha of unmanaged wildlife meadow has been identified by the Biodiversity Officer and brought into hay meadow management in 2022.

4.12 A 'No Mow' grass trial was implemented during April to mid-July 2022 at over 30 Council public open spaces. The trial was successful with minimal complaints, largely due to a strategic approach to choosing sites and effective working relationships between Parks & Green Spaces (led by the Biodiversity Officer) and Operational Services (led by the Street Scene Supervisor).

4.13 3000 native trees and shrubs have been planted in Cadley Park, organised by Parks & Green Spaces & the Environment Education Project, funded by East Midlands Airport.

Biodiversity Recording

4.14 Over 25 of the Council's 'Core Nature Sites' have been subject to detailed habitat surveys utilising a national recording system (UK Habs), by the Biodiversity Officer.

4.15 This will provide the Council with a baseline to eventually create an inventory of habitats across its landholding to:

- quantify the range and type of habitats present

- identify opportunities for biodiversity improvement particularly through developer contributions
- produce an Ecosystems and Natural Capital study to determine the environmental value of its landholding across a range of quantifiable measures

4.16 This work is in progress and will be continued into 2023. It is intended that the habitat inventory and associated data will be uploaded to the Council's GIS system for wider Officer and Manager use, with support with the GIS Officer.

Biodiversity Working Group

4.17 The Biodiversity Officer has led three Biodiversity Working Group meetings and provided presentations to Officers and Managers principally on the new Environment Act and the challenges and opportunities presented to the Council, as well as progress on the delivery of the Work Programme.

Procedure Documents

4.18 A Biodiversity Procedure document has been produced by the Biodiversity Officer with support from the Corporate Environmental Coordinator. A requirement of the Council's ISO 14001 Environmental Management System, the document sets out the Council's overarching legal and policy duties in respect of biodiversity and its directly linked to the APN and Work Programme.

4.19 An Invasive Plant Species Procedure document is at a final stage of production by the Biodiversity Officer with support from Environmental Services. The purpose of the document is to create a framework through which invasive plants reported to or identified by the Council can be investigated and if necessary remediated, following an agreed Council-wide process and format.

4.20 The Invasive Plant Species Procedure will be issued to the Committee for comment and approval early 2023.

Biodiversity Net Gain

4.21 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a legal provision of the Environment Act which requires developers to attain a measured uplift of biodiversity improvements (10%) either within a development site, off-site or both. This legal provision will present challenges and opportunities to all Local Planning Authorities.

4.22 To assist the Council in preparing for BNG, the Biodiversity Officer has:

- Attended over 20 BNG workshops/seminars provided by the Planning Advisory Service/DEFRA/Natural England/Derbyshire County Council
- Lead the Council's response to the DEFRA BNG Consultation in the spring
- Facilitated regular liaison and update meetings with Council Officer's in Planning Policy, as well as the Derbyshire County Ecologist

- Wrote to x30 organisations who may have an interest in setting up and managing biodiversity offsetting land, to understand future supply within South Derbyshire and create a database of potential offsetting providers
- Identified potential Council land which could be used for biodiversity offsetting
- Updated the Biodiversity Working Group on key findings

Planning

4.23 The Biodiversity Officer has worked with Planning Policy Officers to identify and incorporate 8+ new biodiversity questions into the Issues and Options document to inform the new Local Plan, such as mandatory swift boxes in new houses and hedgehog highways in gardens.

4.24 The Biodiversity Officer has advised on 60+ planning applications (biodiversity and trees) and supported Planning Policy with their viability assessments.

Other

4.25 The Biodiversity Officer has provided specific advice, guidance and face-face meetings with four Parish Council's, Melbourne Sports Partnership and Rosliston Forestry Centre to improve biodiversity on Council leased/owned land.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from the report.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

6.1 There are no employment implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

6.2 The Action Plan for Nature (APN) and Work Programme provides a measurable and accountable strategy for the Council to adhere to its legal 'Biodiversity Duty' under the Environment Act 2021 to 'conserve' and 'enhance' biodiversity, as well as adhere to other statutory biodiversity legislation including:

- Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Habitats Regulations 2019 (as amended)

Corporate Plan Implications

6.3 The APN and Work Programme contributes to the Corporate Plan Priorities and Key Aims including:

Our Environment

- a. Improve the environment of the district
 - i. Enhance biodiversity across the district
- b. Tackle Climate Change
 - i. Strive to make South Derbyshire District Council carbon neutral by 2030
- c. Enhance the attractiveness of South Derbyshire
 - i. Improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy

Our People

- d. Engage with our communities
 - i. Support and celebrate volunteering, community groups and the voluntary sector
- e. Supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable
 - i. Promote health and wellbeing across the district
- f. Deliver excellent services
 - i. Invest in our workforce

Our Future

- g. Support economic growth and infrastructure
 - i. Enable the delivery of housing across all tenures to meet Local Plan targets
 - ii. Influence the improvement of infrastructure to meet the demands of growth
- h. Transforming the Council
 - i. Provide modern ways of working that support the Council to deliver services to meet changing needs

7.0 Risk Impact

7.1 The Action Plan for Nature and Work Programme provides a measurable and accountable strategy of The Council's legal 'Biodiversity Duty' under the Environment Act 2021 and therefore reduces the risk of not complying with this legislation.

8.0 Community Impact

8.1 Key objectives of the Work Programme are to encourage local communities to connect with nature through environmental projects, work parties, events and education programs, to contribute to the improvement of societal well-being.

9.0 Equality and Diversity Impact

9.1 None known.

10.0 Social Value Impact

10.1 The APN and Work Programme promotes 'investment in nature' which can create opportunities for nature-based solutions such as climate adaptation and resilience, flood alleviation, the improvement and expansion of green spaces, the creation and enhancement of opportunities for recreation, exercise and connection to nature.

Nature-based solutions therefore have the potential for significant positive impacts to society.

10.2 Use of local environmental contractors in delivering nature-based solutions can promote local businesses.

10.3 Effective deliver of Biodiversity Net Gain and nature-based solutions through the planning system will assist creating desirable places to live and further assist in effective delivery of housing targets under the Local Plan.

11.0 Environmental Sustainability

11.1 The APN and Work Programme promotes Environmental Sustainability at its core. Investing in nature is critical to sustaining a healthy environment for generations to come.

Appendix 1 – Work program for 2023

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