

REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	11 AUGUST 2022	CATEGORY: Delegated
REPORT FROM:	ALLISON THOMAS STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	STEFFAN SAUNDERS HEAD OF PLANNING AND STRATEGIC HOUSING	DOC:
SUBJECT:	BIODIVERSITY CONSULTANCY SERVICES	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee agrees to the Council entering into a revised Service Level Agreement with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to 31 March 2023 (Appendix 1) for the provision of biodiversity advice to assist in the determination of planning and other applications.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To seek authorisation for the continued use of the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to assist in the determination of planning and other applications.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Town and Country (1990 and 2004) and Environment (2021) Acts to provide specific protection for biodiversity with increased emphasis on this duty in the Environment Act which carries additional protections for Special Areas of Conservation (including the River Mease) and introduces the need to achieve biodiversity net gain.
- 3.2 The over-riding consideration for the Council is to secure a service so that it can ensure that it can discharge its responsibilities. The Council does now have in house expertise in biodiversity with the appointment of the Biodiversity Officer earlier this year. Collaborative work is already underway between the Planning and Parks and Open Spaces teams to develop planning policies for inclusion in the Local Plan Review, and to provide advice with regard to the determination of planning applications. There may come a time when the services of the Wildlife Trust are no longer required, but the pressures on the Planning Service and specifically the volume of planning work largely with planning applications, but also with the early

stages of a local Plan review, it is not considered that now is the appropriate time to end the agreement with the Wildlife Trust.

- 3.3 The Service level agreement provides services including biodiversity opportunity mapping, planning advice and surveys of existing and proposed Local Wildlife Sites. Particularly in the early stages of a Local Plan review, it is considered necessary to retain this service in addition to the in house expertise referred to above.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The current Service Level Agreement has recently expired and a new one is needed to continue with the current arrangements. The coming year is an important one with work to assemble a lot of the evidence on biodiversity for inclusion in the Local Plan. However, with the potential to undertake some of this work in house, it is considered the extension of the agreement to cover the 2022/ 23 financial year is appropriate with a review to be undertaken in early 2023 to ascertain if this remains value for money and a report back to committee at that time.
- 4.2 The current cost to the Council is £17,573, and this figure is anticipated to remain relatively stable over the coming years. This cost can be met from the Planning Service Budget.

5.0 Employment Implications

- 5.1 There are no employment implications.

6.0 Corporate Implications

- 6.1 The arrangement provides the necessary biodiversity advice in relation to planning applications, survey work on Local Wildlife Sites and biodiversity opportunity mapping. These are necessary functions to preserve and enhance the environment, and also assist in the transition to a low carbon economy and eventually net zero.

7.0 Community Implications

- 7.1 Continuation of the delivery of sustainable development to South Derbyshire residents and businesses.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The provision of expert biodiversity services should be sourced by the Council as the service offered by the Wildlife Trust has a proven track record and remains good value for money.