



Rutland
County Council

GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE AND
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

BIODIVERSITY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A Review of the RCC Biodiversity Strategy

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1. INTRODUCTION

At its first meeting of the Municipal Year on 13 June 2019 Members of the Growth, Infrastructure and Resources Scrutiny Committee expressed their wish to be involved with the development of a new Environmental Policy for the Council. At a subsequent meeting on 12 September 2019 the Committee decided to initially focus on Biodiversity and recommended that a Task and Finish Group be established to inform the review and development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Rutland County Council.

The Committee also agreed that given the interest in joining the group that there should be a total of 9 group members; 6 members of the Committee and 3 other Councillors, and that the review should be conducted over a period of 3-4 months, with the final report recommendations being presented to Council in March 2020.

Council unanimously approved the formation of the Biodiversity Task and Finish group at its meeting on 14 October 2019.

The Task and Finish Group was comprised of the following Members:

Councillor June Fox (Chairman)

Councillor Nick Begy*

Councillor Andrew Brown

Councillor David Blanksby

Councillor Joanna Burrows

Councillor Miranda Jones

Councillor Marc Oxley

Councillor Karen Payne

Councillor Nick Woodley

Officers supporting the Task and Finish Group were:

Christine Traill

Strategic Director for Places

Mark Loran

Senior Environmental Services Manager

Joanna Morley

Governance Officer

*Councillor Begy stood down from the group in January 2020 due to other work commitments.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 Objectives

- 2.1.1 To gain an understanding of biodiversity issues and explore best practice in other areas in order to identify ways in which biodiversity in Rutland may be improved.
- 2.1.2 To make recommendations to inform the review and development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Rutland County Council.

2.2 Background

The need for the review has been influenced by the national environment agenda. Rutland County Council is committed to protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the County and currently maintains about 65 km of protected verges, being either 'local wildlife sites' or Sites of Specific Scientific Interest. The Council is also aware that its approach to grounds maintenance on its other highway verges, as well as on sites like closed churchyards and public open spaces, is an opportunity to further enhance this biodiversity.

2.3 Scope/Purpose

- 2.3.1 Review of the Council's existing Biodiversity practices
- 2.3.2 Consultation with officers; relevant organisations and experts in order to collate relevant evidence;
- 2.3.3 Investigation into models which may be effective in prevention, timely identification and early intervention;
- 2.3.4 Evaluation of costs in relation to outcomes; and

2.4 Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.4.1 The membership of the Task and Finish Group will be Councillors June Fox, Nick Begy, David Blanksby, Andrew Brown, Joanna Burrows, Miranda Jones, Marc Oxley, Karen Payne, and Nick Woodley.
- 2.4.2 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will be Councillor June Fox (Vice -Chair of the Growth, Infrastructure and Resources Scrutiny Committee)

2.4.3 The Governance team will provide administration support when required.

2.4.4 Chris Traill (Strategic Director for Places) will be kept informed of the Group's progress and will coordinate with the Chair the officer support and information that the Group will require.

2.5 Key Milestones

Activity	Provisional Dates
Agreement of Terms of Reference	31 October 2019
Information gathering	October to December 2019
Development of Recommendations	December 2019 – February 2020
Report to Scrutiny	February 2020
Report to Council	March 2020

3. PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY USED FOR THE INVESTIGATION

3.1 Methodology

- Desktop research – national and local.
- Presentation and advice from the Wildlife Trust
- Presentation from the RCC Tree Officer
- Advice and guidance from RCC Officers
- Comparison with other Local Authority Strategies to determine best practice

3.2 Process

<u>Meeting date</u>	<u>Items discussed/ Guests Attending</u>
12 September 2019	Agreement of terms of reference for a Biodiversity specific Task and Finish Group
14 October 2019	Council approval of the Task and Finish Group
31 October 2019	First meeting of the Task and Finish Group to discuss aims and desired outcomes
6 November 2019	Presentation from Stuart Kidd, Forestry officer on the environmental benefits of trees and the possible contradiction with biodiversity benefits. Update given on current verge maintenance practices for rural, urban and protected verges and discussion on new possibilities to encourage biodiversity. Review of LLR Biodiversity Action Plan
3 December 2019	Presentation from John Clarkson, Head of Conservation at the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Discussion of a user friendly, strategy document which would be underpinned by a Rutland specific BAP, and knowledge and expertise fed in from partner organisations such as the wildlife trust
23 January 2020	Review of draft strategy document
13 February 2020	Presentation to the GIR Scrutiny Committee

4. INFORMATION SOURCES

- https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/2014/8241/1184/Threatened_Arable_Plants_Guide_2008.pdf
- <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/road-verge-management-guide>
- <https://www.biodiversityinplanning.org/resources/publications/>
- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/planning-hub/good-practice-planning-for-invertebrates/>
- <https://www.nfuonline.com/nfu-online/news/united-by-our-environment-our-food-our-future/>
- <https://hawkandowltrust.org/>
- <https://www.kingscrops.co.uk/products/conservation-crops/wild-bird-seed-mixes>
- <https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/documents/s37354/8.%20Appendix%202%20-%20Peterborough%20City%20Council%20Biodiversity%20Strategy.pdf>
- https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/a_partnership_approach_to_open_spaces_and_biodiversity_in_westminster_-_march_2019.pdf
- http://www.inspiringhealthylifestyles.org/wigan/_assets/biodiversity/biodiverse.pdf
- <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dorset-Biodiversity-Strategy-2003.pdf>
- <https://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-policy/archaeology-biodiversity-and-landscape/documents/PDF%20Documents/Northamptonshire%20BAP%202015-2020.pdf>
- https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/1/25/LLR_BAP_Space_for_Wildlife_2016-26_part_1.pdf
- https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/1/25/LLR_BAP_Space_for_Wildlife_2016-26_Part_2.pdf

- https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/1/25/LLR_B AP Space for Wildlife 2016-26 Part 3.pdf
- https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Welshgrasslands_eng_web.pdf
- <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Obtaining-native-seed-Flora-locale-advisory-note.pdf>
- <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

5. BACKGROUND

The term Biodiversity is a contraction of the words “biological diversity” and refers to the different kinds of life found in one area; the variety of animals, plants, fungi and microorganism like bacteria and the complex interactions between species and the ecosystems in which they live. Its importance cannot be underestimated as fundamentally it affects the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat.

In addition, at a local level, it is recognised that Biodiversity and the natural environment are important for people’s wellbeing and quality of life; enhancing the places in which we live, work and play, can have a beneficial effect on both mental and physical health. Local green spaces can serve as a focus for local activity encouraging community cohesion as well as increasing community engagement with the environment and they can also provide economic benefits through tourism and the production of quality local produce.

It is evident however that Biodiversity is increasingly under threat from habitat and population fragmentation, climate change, invasive non-native species as well as development and land pressures and that action must be taken to counter these threats.

In 2011 the Government published its strategy for biodiversity (Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services – DEFRA (2011)) for the period to 2020 which aim was

“to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better spaces for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people”

The Task and Finish Group have developed a biodiversity strategy which looks to uphold these aims by working, alongside partners, to protect the key habitats, species and habitat networks in Rutland, create new habitats where possible and mitigate against potentially damaging impacts.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That Cabinet approve the proposed Biodiversity Strategy as attached at Appendix A. Specific actions have been identified and included in the document in order to deliver the objectives. The following objectives/areas form the basis of the draft strategy:

1. **Biodiversity in Planning:**

Ensure that biodiversity is protected and enhanced within the planning system in Rutland and deliver the key principles for biodiversity set out in national planning guidance.

2. **Biodiversity Data:**

Ensure that up to date biodiversity data is available and used appropriately to support this approach

3. **Green Spaces:**

Increase and diversify wildlife interest in green spaces and provide access to sites of wildlife interest for all sections of the community

4. **Non-native invasive species:**

Take action to deal with invasive non-native species, prioritising where these are present on sites of wildlife importance; or where these are on land under RCC control and threaten habitats and species of importance or the coherence of habitat networks

5. **Priority Habitat and Species Targets:**

Contribute to the achievement of the Priority Habitats and Species Targets relevant to RCC's functions and areas.

6. **Awareness raising:**

Make every attempt to ensure that employees and members of RCC are aware of the importance of and need to safeguard, enhance and promote Biodiversity through RCC's activities.

7. **Wider understanding:**

Promote wider understanding and enjoyment of Rutland's wildlife and habitats

8. **Involvement:**

Promote active interest and involvement in wildlife issues at the local, national and international levels by all sections of the community, at home, in the workplace, in schools as a leisure activity and as part of the local economy.

9. Statutory Sites:

Take reasonable steps consistent with the proper exercise of RCC's functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), International Sites and Local Nature Reserves.

10. Non-Statutory Sites:

Work with the Wildlife Trust, and Local Sites Partnership to further the conservation and enhancement of Local Wildlife and Geological Sites. Also to ensure that up-to-date information is available for all local sites in Rutland and work with partners to deliver the targets of the Environment Action Plan with respect to Local Sites

11. Support Biodiversity Initiatives

Continue to provide support and advice to the Partnership Board and associated initiatives within Rutland

12. Biodiversity Knowledge

Keep abreast of developments in the field of biodiversity and maintain regular links with wildlife organisations to ensure best practice.

13. Develop a RCC Tree Strategy

Develop a separate Tree Strategy to sit alongside the Biodiversity Strategy and as part of the overall Environmental strategy

Recommendation 2

Following adoption of the Strategy that officers provide an annual update report to the Growth, Infrastructure and Resources Scrutiny Committee with respect to progress against the actions and targets contained in the Strategy.

7. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED DURING THE INVESTIGATION

- Policy Paper: 2010 to 2015 government policy: biodiversity and ecosystems
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-biodiversity-and-ecosystems/2010-to-2015-government-policy-biodiversity-and-ecosystems>
- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services – DEFRA (2011)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-2020-a-strategy-for-england-s-wildlife-and-ecosystem-services>
- Making Space for Nature
• [Making Space for Nature](#)