



Report to: Environment Committee, 2nd November 2021

Report of: Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy

Subject: BIODIVERSITY ACTION PROGRAMME

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Committee approves the proposed Biodiversity Action Programme (Appendix 1).**
- 1.2 That the Committee allocates £20k funding from the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Enabling Budget for the proposals outlined within this report. That authority to spend that allocation is delegated to the Deputy Director, Corporate Policy and Strategy in consultation with the Chair of Environment Committee.**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council declared a biodiversity emergency in September 2020, and agreed to:
- Strategies and plans to be formulated in conjunction with the declared Climate Emergency.
 - Prioritisation of sustainable land management, sympathetic to wildlife.
 - Prevention of wildlife habitats being unnecessarily destroyed.
 - Creation and care for wildlife-rich spaces, in every part of the city and across the region.
- 2.2 Globally, it is recognised that biodiversity has declined very significantly, and this has wide ranging impacts. Human activity has led to this change, but can also work to increase biodiversity.
- 2.3 As a local authority, the council also has a statutory duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 2.4 This report outlines the current status of biodiversity in the city, with an action programme to improve biodiversity over the next few years (Appendix 1).

Current status

- 2.5 As noted in the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan, which is led and managed by Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire has suffered huge losses of natural habitats and species, in common with the rest of the UK, and indeed the planet.

The 2018-2027 Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) identifies 17 habitats and 26 species, or species groups, which are of particular conservation priority in the county.

- 2.6 This action programme seeks to support and complement the work of the BAP, with a focused approach on the Council's own land, as described in the aims and objectives.
- 2.7 More detail can be found on individual habitats and species within the Worcestershire BAP, with aims and objectives for the conservation of each individual habitat or species.
- 2.8 The Unlocking the Severn project to re-open the River Severn to fish migration has led to significant investment with both Diglis Island and Bevere fish passes now open and the rare twaite shad has already been observed at Diglis.
- 2.9 There has been a widespread return of otters to waterways across the county and Worcester is no exception. In the winter 2020/21, many local residents had close sightings of otters on the River Severn and on Barbourne Brook.
- 2.10 With other species, the picture is bleaker. Ash dieback threatens many woodlands and invasive weeds such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam continue their presence.
- 2.11 The Council is responsible for 24 conservation sites over 37 parcels of land, covering 260 acres in total. Eight of these sites have Local Nature Reserve status and one (Lyppard Grange Ponds) is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation. The Council therefore has an ongoing and key role in nature conservation.

Partners and existing projects

- 2.12 The Council benefits from strong partners across the city which are all also active in promoting and seeking to improve habitats for biodiversity. The Council will be seeking to continue to work with these partners as the action programme is implemented and to strengthen relationships where possible.
- 2.13 Some of these partners include:
 - Worcestershire County Council – ecologists, and countryside service
 - Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
 - Duckworth Worcestershire Trust
 - Canal and River Trust
 - Worcester Canal Group
 - Worcester Environmental Group
 - Transition Worcester
 - Severn Rivers Trust
 - University of Worcester
 - Environment Agency
 - Natural England/ DEFRA
 - Trees for Cities

- 2.14 An exciting project which is being led by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and which has recently received funding under a Nature Recovery Programme is the 'Wilder Worcester' project. This project has significant potential in engaging communities on biodiversity and habitat management.
- 2.15 The Council has a number of existing projects, including the wildflower trial on Dugdale Drive being led by Worcester Environment Group and a significant tree planting initiative which took place in the winter 2020/21.
- 2.16 The action plan has been developed by officers under the guidance of the Environmental Sustainability Steering Group, consisting of Councillor Andy Stafford, Councillor Tom Collins and Councillor Neil Laurenson (Environment Committee Chair, Vice Chair and Green Party representative).

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 The Biodiversity Action Programme in Appendix 1 outlines the Council's proposals to improve biodiversity.
- 3.2 The programme focuses primarily on actions the City Council can take to improve biodiversity on its own land. With 24 conservation areas in the City Council's management, alongside the many parks and roadside verges, the Council owns or is responsible for a significant proportion of the green space in Worcester. Enhancing biodiversity on Council managed land will therefore have a significant impact on the overall biodiversity of the City.
- 3.3 Two clear priorities have emerged from discussions for this action programme. One is the existing priority species for the city, such as slow worms and great crested newts. The other is the need to maintain areas in a way which enhances biodiversity more generally, benefiting a range of wildlife including birds, pollinators and other insects, plants, marine life and small mammals.
- 3.4 The action programme is therefore structured to reflect this. On some sites, such as the Council's allotments, there is a priority species which should be the focus of efforts. On other identified sites, such as our Parks, it is a more general approach which will be targeted, in order to benefit a range of species. Therefore, the action programme is structured around different sites owned by the City Council, with the target clearly identified – either a priority species or a general need to improve the area for a range of species.
- 3.5 A budget of £20,000 is requested from the Environmental Sustainability Strategy enabling budget in order to progress some of the actions outlined in the Action Programme in Appendix 1.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Given the significant area of land under Council management attention on the Council's own land has been selected as the initial priority for action.

Whilst action to promote biodiversity on business and private land and gardens could be taken, at this stage it is recommended that the maximum impact and most effective use of resources will be achieved by focussing on land in the Council's control.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The action programme identifies a number of estimate budget costs and in some cases, a budget for these to be funded from. Where a budget is not identified, then funding from the Environmental Sustainability Strategy enabling budget may be requested.

A budget of £20,000 is requested, in order to progress with actions to be decided through officer delegation.

The enabling budget currently has £20,000 committed from a total budget of £100,000.

Recommendations for additional future resources will be made through reports to Environment Committee.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Governance of the delivery of the action programme will be through the performance reports to Environment Committee, as with the delivery of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy Action Plan, which is reported as a key project. The proposals align with the Council's statutory duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

5.3 Risk Implications

At this stage there are no specific risks identified with the projects proposed in this action programme.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The proposed action programme supports the City Plan objective of sustaining and improving our assets and delivers on the commitment made by Council on 30 September 2020.

5.5 Equality Implications

At this stage there are no equality implications identified with the projects proposed in this action programme. All projects will undertake an equality impact assessment before progressing.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

There are no human resources implications arising directly from the content of this report. No additional staff resource is proposed at this stage but this will be kept under review.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no health and safety implications identified with the projects proposed in this action programme.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

This work closely links to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and associated Action Plan and will have a direct and positive environmental impact

Appendix 1: Biodiversity Action Programme 2021-2023

Ward(s): ALL
Contact Officer: Ruth Corrall, 01905 722364,
ruth.corrall@worcester.gov.uk
Background Papers: None