



Communities Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 7 October 2020

Draft Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 -2025

Report of the Executive Manager - Communities

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report presents the draft Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy - Aims and Objectives, developed by the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group (RNCSIG) on which the Council are represented.
- 1.2. The Group is being consulted on the issues within the updated strategy, for the period 2021 - 2025 to allow councillors to influence its development, to ensure it meets the needs of the Council and allow the Council to subsequently adopt this Strategy. It is planned that the updated Strategy be completed by the end of 2020.
- 1.3. The Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2016 - 2020 was presented to Cabinet on 10 November 2015, following consultation with the Community Development Group on 14 July 2015. This incorporated tree and woodland policies both in a dedicated section and as a recurring theme throughout the document. It was resolved that the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2016 - 2020 be adopted and endorsed the approach of incorporating a tree and woodlands policy into this Strategy.
- 1.4. In January 2020, the Government reintroduced the Environment Bill, which is currently making its way through Parliament. The draft provisions indicate the Government's current intentions to introduce "mandatory biodiversity net gain". Biodiversity net gain follows on from the Government's aim in its 25 Year Environment Plan to "leave the environment in a better state than we found it". Broadly speaking, "biodiversity net gain", as set out in the Environment Bill, requires development to deliver at least a 10 per cent improvement in "biodiversity value".
- 1.5. Council resolved, in July 2020, to scrutinise the feasibility of sowing native wild flower seeds along the road verges that it manages and to put forward recommendations to Cabinet.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) consider the draft Nature Conservation Strategy - Aims and Objectives
- b) make comment and input into the developing Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 - 2025

- c) endorse that the RNCSIG commit to develop guidance on Bio-Diversity net gain related to planning development in response to the Environment Bill currently making its way through Parliament.

3. Reason for Recommendation

- 3.1. The object of this Strategy is to protect and enhance Rushcliffe's wildlife interest, whilst helping achieve the Nottinghamshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan objectives.
- 3.2. The current adopted Nature Conservation Strategy runs to the end of 2020 and needs updating for its work to continue.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. The Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy is a partnership document of the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group (the Strategy Group), which brings together statutory agencies and voluntary bodies, with the Borough Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust playing leading roles, but encompassing the results of wide-ranging consultations with individuals, groups and organisations.
- 4.2. The Council is represented on the Strategy Group by the Environmental Sustainability Officer.
- 4.3. The Strategy is produced by the Strategy Group, guiding the work of all the partners. Previous iterations have been adopted by the Borough Council and directs the Council's work on Biodiversity and Nature Conservation.
- 4.4. It is expected that the Strategy covers the following:
 - Overview of Rushcliffe's Wildlife
 - Successes of the 2016-2020 Strategy
 - Principal Habitats Found in Rushcliffe
 - Nottinghamshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)
 - Designated Wildlife Sites
 - Nature Reserves
 - Rushcliffe's Landscapes
 - Green Infrastructure
 - Climate Change
 - Community Involvement
 - Planning Policies and the Protection of Wildlife and Habitats
 - Other Policies Drivers
 - Nature Conservation Aims and Objectives
 - Key Target Indicators.
- 4.5. The section on Principle Habitats will set out the importance of the main habitats found in Rushcliffe, including for Woodland and Trees and Species Rich Grasslands. It suggests what policies partners should take to protect and enhance these habitats. It is proposed to include a commitment to:
 - Promote appropriate new woodland planting, particularly where linked to existing woods

- Develop tree-planting schemes, carbon offset schemes and community orchards
- Promote sympathetic woodland management
- Use tree preservation orders for threatened valuable amenity trees
- Encourage sympathetic management of other grassland and examine options to create/extend native species rich grassland
- Support the County Notified Road Verge scheme and seeking to ensure road verges receive appropriate mowing regimes and are protected from excessive winter salting.

4.6. Work by partners on the 2016-2020 Strategy highlights include:

- The introduction of active management of Dewberry Hill and Lily Ponds in Ratcliffe on Trent
- The establishment of tree wardens in Rushcliffe and supply of 5,329 free trees to the public and 363 trees to parishes and communities between April 2018 and April 2020
- An increase in nature conservation volunteering to 12,591 hours in 2018 in comparison to 8,378 hours in 2014 and 3,138 in 2004
- 23 projects supported with Rushcliffe Borough Council bio-diversity grants
- Barn Owl which is an indicator of a health environment with population growth - 126 chicks ringed in 2019 in comparison to 4 in 2000 and 47 in 2015.

4.7. An annual report is produced on the progress of the Strategy. The latest report, published in 2019 covering the work carried out in 2018, is available for inspection as a background paper.

4.8. The Strategy Group is now consulting on the developing Strategy and would value the input and comment of members of the Communities Scrutiny Group.

4.9. A wider public consultation will follow; this will be primarily via partner websites (including the council's website) and social media. Interested organisations including parish councils and the Borough Council will be written to and invited to contribute.

4.10. A final draft version of the Strategy will be returned to Communities Scrutiny Group in 2021 for endorsement and to seek commitment in the delivery of the Strategy.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

5.1. The Strategy provides an evidence-based approach to biodiversity management which supports a balanced approach to development throughout the Borough.

5.2. Not adopting the Strategy could result in nature conservation being inadequately considered during major new developments.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

6.1.1. The officer support costs of assisting the delivery of this Strategy are met within existing budgets. This includes a Service Level Agreement with Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust for £15,750 per annum.

6.1.2. The Council also provides Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Support Grants with a budget of £6,000 per annum to assist in delivering the Strategy's aims and objectives.

6.1.3. On the 9 January 2018, Cabinet resolved to establish a £50,000 grant scheme for a three-year period to support tree protection and promotion in Rushcliffe which enable the delivery of a free tree scheme and parish tree scheme. This grant is due to conclude at the end of financial year 2020/21.

6.2. Legal Implications

6.2.1 Supports the Council in exercising its functions, to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity, enacted by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

6.2.2 The emerging Environment Bill 2019-2021 is likely to extend the requirement of the 'Environment Duties' under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and require the provision of Biodiversity Net Gain to planning permissions.

6.3. Equalities Implications

6.3.1 Provision of high-quality nature conservation resources across the borough supports all residents and can help address health inequalities.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

6.4.1 Section 17 highlights that local authorities, when carrying out their core activities, can significantly contribute to reducing crime and improving the quality of life in their area. It is therefore important to give due consideration to community safety issues in the development of nature conservation strategies.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

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| Quality of Life | Although the environment is usually discussed within the context of sustainability, it is equally important for an individual's quality of life. Indeed, environmental conditions not only affect human health and well-being directly, but also indirectly, as they may have adverse effects on ecosystems, biodiversity, or even more extreme consequences such as natural disasters |
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| Efficient Services | |
| Sustainable Growth | It is critically important the significant growth projected in the Borough is sustainable and takes into consideration nature conservation and the bio-diversity net gain targets from developments as required by the emergent Environment Bill |
| The Environment | The report supports all aspects of the Environment theme of the Corporate Strategy |

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) consider the draft Nature Conservation Strategy - Aims and Objectives
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- c) Endorse that the RNCSIG commit to develop guidance on Bio-Diversity net gain related to planning development in response to the Environment Bill currently making its way through Parliament

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| Background papers available for Inspection: | Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2016 – 2020 The Nature of Rushcliffe 2018 Annual Report – published August 2019 Cabinet, 9 January 2018 – Options for Tree Protection and Promotion in Rushcliffe |
| List of appendices: | Appendix 1 – Draft Nature Conservation Strategy 2021-2025 – Aims and Objectives Appendix 2 – Draft Nature Conservation Strategy 2021-2025 forward, contents and acronyms |

