



Cabinet

Tuesday, 9 February 2021

Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 – 2025

Report of the Executive Manager – Communities

Portfolio Holder for Community and the Environment, Councillor A Brennan

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report presents the new Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy developed by the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group (RNCSIG) on which the Council is represented.
- 1.2. Related to the Strategy, Council resolved, on 5 March 2015, that Cabinet investigate the possibility of a Trees and Woodlands Policy, in consultation with the Community Development Group. On 16 July 2020, Council resolved that scrutiny should review the feasibility of sowing native wildflower seeds along the grassland areas that it manages and put forward recommendations to Cabinet.
- 1.3. A draft Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 - 2025 was presented to the Community Scrutiny Group on 7 October 2020. This incorporated the tree and woodland policies in a dedicated section and as a recurring theme throughout the document. It also covers the promotion of wildflower rich grasslands including on roadsides. The Group considered the draft Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy, and resolved that the Strategy be considered, funding for the Free Tree Scheme be extended for the Strategy period, and Biodiversity Net Gain be developed. The Group also suggested that the Strategy should specifically refer to the Grantham Canal and to its continued maintenance.
- 1.4. Cabinet is requested to consider the Strategy, confirm whether it meets the needs of the Council, and if the Council should adopt it.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that:

- a) the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 – 2025 be adopted;
- b) the funding for the Free Tree Scheme be extended to include funding of £50,000 over 2021 – 2025 within the Strategy to cover planting of trees and to support the introduction of wildflowers seed distribution in line with the Strategy lifecycle; and

- c) that the Council should work with neighbouring local planning authorities and partner organisations to introduce biodiversity net gain policies that complement the Nature Conservation Strategy's objectives.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To meet the resolutions of Council of 5 March 2015 and 16 July 2020, and the recommendation the Community Scrutiny Group on 7 October 2020.
- 3.2 The current adopted Nature Conservation Strategy ran to the end of 2020, an updated Strategy is therefore recommended for its work to continue to meet the Council's environmental aspirations.
- 3.3 The recommendations would support a target of planting 2000 trees and 500 square metres of wildflower grassland creation per annum.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. A community developed Nature Conservation Strategy was first produced in 2003, and then updated in 2010 and 2015; these were adopted by the Council.
- 4.2. 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, "biodiversity net gain", as set out in the Environment Bill, requires development to deliver at least a 10 per cent improvement in "biodiversity value".

- 4.3. This Strategy has been developed by a partnership organisation, the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group (RNCSIG), led by Rushcliffe Borough Council and the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, with members from nature conservation groups, community groups, parish councils and other interested bodies.
- 4.4. The Strategy aims to protect and enhance nature conservation in Rushcliffe, help mitigate the effects of climate change on wildlife and provide ready access to wildlife rich green spaces. There will be a particular emphasis on species-rich grassland, wetland, trees and woodland habitats, and species characteristic of the Borough such as grizzled skipper butterflies, great crested newts and brown hare. This will be achieved through forming effective partnerships, brought together through the RNCSIG.

4.5. This 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 and Nature Reserves;
- Rushcliffe's Landscapes;
- Green Infrastructure;
- Climate Change;
- Community Involvement;
- Planning Policies and the Protection of Wildlife and Habitats;
- Nature Conservation Aims and Objectives; and
- Key Target Indicators.

4.6. The section on Principle Habitats sets out the importance of the main habitats found in Rushcliffe, including wildflower grasslands and woodland and trees and what policies partners should take to protect and enhance these habitats.

This includes a commitment to:

- Protect, enhance and expand appropriate tree and woodland cover in Rushcliffe working towards achieving the national targets for woodland and urban tree cover and woodland access;
- Support programmes to benefit national priority species and habitats and Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Plan Priority species and habitats (especially neutral and calcareous grasslands, native woodlands and wetlands) as appropriate;
- Support the development of the holistic Nature Recovery Network concept and plans for Rushcliffe and the county in order to make our wildlife sites better, bigger and more connected; and
- Support projects that benefit our freshwater environment (rivers, ditches, ponds, lakes, canals and reservoirs), tackling water quality issues and benefiting aquatic habitats and species.

4.7. Achievements of the 2016 – 2020 Strategy are listed on page 8-9 of the new Strategy.

4.8. Targets for new management and creation of habitats in the 2021 – 2025 Strategy are 20 hectares of woodland, 30 hectares of grassland and 10 hectares of wetland.

4.9. Other targets of the 2021 – 2025 Strategy are listed on page 30 of the Strategy detailed in the Appendix.

4.10. The Strategy was publicly consulted on in December 2020 and January 2021.

- 4.11. The Strategy provides an evidence-based approach to biodiversity management, which supports a balanced approach to development, and natural land management throughout the Borough.

5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection

- 5.1 The Council could choose not to continue to participate in the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group partnership.
- 5.2 The Council could choose to develop its Nature Conservation Strategy in house; however this would require increased resources.

6. Risks and uncertainties

Not adopting the Strategy could result in nature conservation being inadequately considered during major new developments and beneficial management not being undertaken.

7. Implications

7.1. Financial Implications

7.1.1. The costs of supporting this Strategy are partially met within existing budgets. This includes a Service Level Agreement with Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust for £16,500 per annum and a 'Biodiversity Support Grant' with a budget of £6,000 per annum.

7.1.2. A £50,000 grant scheme over a four-year period would support tree protection and promotion, and wildflower planting in Rushcliffe and will enable the continued delivery of the Rushcliffe Free Tree Scheme and Community Tree Scheme. A budget of £12,500 per annum from 2021/22 to 2024/25 would be needed to support this.

7.2. Legal Implications

The Strategy supports the Council in exercising its duty to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

7.3. Equalities Implications

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

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

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.

8. Link to Corporate Priorities

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
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	It is critically important that 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

9. Recommendation

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- c) that the Council should work with neighbouring local planning authorities and partner organisations to introduce biodiversity net gain policies that complement the Nature Conservation Strategy's objectives.

For more information contact:	Dave Mitchell Executive Manager – Communities 0115 9148267 dmitchell@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2016 – 2020 • The Nature of Rushcliffe 2018 Annual Report – published August 2019 • Minutes of Cabinet, 9 January 2018 – Options for Tree Protection and Promotion in Rushcliffe • Minutes of Council, 16 July 2020 (Item 20b.) Notices of Motion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minutes of Communities Scrutiny Group, Wednesday, 7th October 2020 (Item 26.) Rushcliffe Nature Strategy
List of appendices:	Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021-2025