Motion to: Council

26 September 2023

Subject: Motion for the Ocean

Proposer: Councillor Champion

Seconder: Councillor Francis

Norfolk's wildlife, habitats and ecosystems are vitally important to us and future generations, enhancing our lives, from the insects that pollinate our food crops to our residents' health and wellbeing. The important economic benefits that all of Norfolk's interconnected waterways bring to local communities via recreational use and through tourism, are at risk of being lost.
Norwich City is at the heart of a significant geographical area of ecological importance, the majority of which is built up of designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and therefore has a direct impact on the sustainability of this environment, other councils downstream and on the Norfolk coast. A similar Motion for the Ocean has been adopted by other councils nationally, both coastal and inland, highlighting the interconnectivity of our waterways.

Recognising the critical importance of biodiversity, and the urgent need to address its decline, makes it imperative that we declare our commitment to conserving and restoring biodiversity within Norwich. The Government's Environment Bill has required a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Network and Norwich City Council will need to play its part.

Having adopted a Biodiversity Emergency Declaration, we need to demonstrate our commitment to protecting and enhancing biodiversity within our jurisdiction and setting a precedent for outside partners and businesses. One of the key themes of the current Corporate Plan, is to deliver on the environment. This motion would enable and augment our existing Wensum Strategy by giving clear targets towards the objectives stated in the strategy vision, such as 'enhancing the natural environment, including water quality, biodiversity, and green infrastructure'.

As a Council that has adopted a Biodiversity Emergency Declaration, we must therefore pledge to incorporate collaborative environmental governance, to recognise the interconnected human and biological systems, and build collaboration between actors across multiple scales.

We recognise the harm to the coastal ecosystem caused by the dumping of sewage in our sea, effluent from rivers and that ocean recovery is a key part of our commitment to tackling climate change and ensuring our waters are a safe place for local people to enjoy.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

1) Ask cabinet to consider:

    a) Production of a report to Cabinet within twelve months on the implementation of possible actions and projects that would improve local waterways, such as the ‘floating vegetation platforms’ planned in the Wensum Strategy. This report would need to reflect the impact that decisions about water quality in Norwich City have on sea water quality and therefore lead to ocean recovery in Norfolk and its coastal communities.

    b) Embedding the recovery of waterways connected to Norwich City in all strategic decisions, plans, budgets, procurement and decisions by establishing clearer links between this and Norwich’s Biodiversity Strategy and our Climate Change commitments.

    c) Within 12 months, give evidence of the work with partners locally to deliver increased environmental sustainability in industries that have a direct impact on the waterways that radiate out from Norwich City. This would ensure a sustainable and equitable ‘blue economy’ for our Norfolk neighbours, that delivers ocean recovery and local prosperity, including the local tourist industry.

    d) Revised planning guidance and swift enforcement powers that ensure new development doesn’t jeopardise our waterways and oceans. In accordance with our Corporate Plan, we need work closely with others, such as the Environment Agency, the Broads Authority, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water, and with neighbouring districts, to embed strong links with The Biodiversity Strategy.

    e) Growing ‘ecological literacy’ by ensuring all pupils are given the opportunity to have educational experience of our complex network of wetlands and waterways and the impact humans have on their journey to the ocean. All residents should have first-hand experience of, and equitable access to, these natural habitats through physical experiences that promote their preservation.

    f) Creating an online portal on the Council website to update residents on water quality, enabling them to make informed decisions based on updated information, before they use local sites for water-based activities, such as swimming. This portal could also allow residents to report sites of hazardous waste; and

    g) Apply for areas already popularly used by river swimmers to be designated bathing waters.

2) Write to the Government asking it to:

a) Stop plastic pollution at source - strengthening the regulations around single-use plastics and set standards for microfibre-catching filters to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with a filter that captures a high percentage of microfibres produced in the wash cycle.

b) Increasing the financial penalties on water companies found to be dumping sewage into our sea and setting legally binding targets for them to substantially reduce the use of combined sewage overflows (CSOs) in future.

c) Increase funding to the Environment Agency to carry out enforcement of these higher penalties.

d) Ensure the burden of any new investment in infrastructure is carried by shareholders first and to prevent the senior management of water companies found to have broken the law from serving elsewhere in the industry.

e) Appoint a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities, utilize marine and social scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will enable the recovery of marine ecosystems, rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.

Glossary

- A ‘blue economy’ is one which uses ocean resources sustainably, whilst improving community wellbeing and social equity.
- ‘Ecological literacy’ is the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on Earth possible.