



**Committee name:** Climate & environment emergency executive panel

**Committee date:** 08/11/2022

**Report title:** Biodiversity Strategy 2022–2032 (post consultation) and Biodiversity Development Plan

**Portfolio:** Councillor Giles, Cabinet member for community wellbeing

**Report from:** Head of strategy, engagement and culture

**Wards:** All wards

**OPEN PUBLIC ITEM**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to brief members of the panel on the post-public consultation draft of the Biodiversity Strategy 2022-2032 (hereafter ‘the Strategy’) and its associated Biodiversity Development Plan 2022-2025 (hereafter ‘the Plan’, and previously referred to as the Biodiversity Action Plan).

The new Strategy and Plan set out a city-wide response to the Biodiversity Emergency motion of 2019, whilst creating a state of readiness for meeting the new requirements of the Environment Act 2021.

The Strategy is a Corporate Plan commitment for 2022 and the Strategy and Plan are due to be considered for adoption by cabinet at its meeting on 16 November 2022.

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that this report provides members with an opportunity to consider and comment on the Biodiversity Strategy 2022-2023 and the Biodiversity Development Plan 2022-2025 and recommend them to cabinet for approval.

**Policy framework**

The council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.

- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city corporate priority

This report addresses Aim 2, Protect and invest in our parks, green spaces and biodiversity priority or action in the Corporate Plan

This priority proposes an activity to publish a new Biodiversity Strategy and to report annually on its progress.

## Report details

### The Strategy

1. The Strategy, appended to this report, is premised on the following new policy statement:

*Create a city where biodiversity can sustainably recover and thrive, halt species decline and increase species diversity and abundance by 2030 or sooner*

which updates and strengthens the existing policy statement set out in Annex A of the *Environmental Strategy 2020-25 which is*

*Protecting and enhancing habitat and biodiversity*

2. It is a citywide strategy which positions the Council as leader; a similar model to the Norwich Economic Strategy 2019-2024. It requires the voluntary contribution of assets and resources of strategic partners and interested parties (defined below) as well as alignment of Council operations.
3. An integrated strategic approach is defined which recognises the need to identify dependences with other internal and external strategies and successfully coordinate/integrate with them. A schedule of strategies with known dependencies is included in the appendix of the Strategy.
4. The need for partnership working is also recognised with two broad types of partner defined. Strategic Partners are organisation with responsibility for significant nature assets e.g. Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Interested Parties are businesses, institutions, VSCEs and residents. These definitions enable targeted communications, engagement, and coordination of action.
5. Regarding management and assurance, the Strategy requires the establishment of a Biodiversity Working Group of Council officers. The Working Group's role is to manage, measure and report biodiversity action and outcomes, principally by means of the Plan, with CLT as the ultimate decision maker. The Working Group has been convened, with 14 officers attending from across the Council to discuss and approve the Plan.
6. The Strategic objectives are:
  - (a) Develop a Nature Recovery Network (hereafter 'NRN') in the city. The NRN comprises:
    - Existing and new nature cores (aka 'hubs') which are areas of highest biodiversity value
    - Nature corridors and stepping stones which allow movement and interaction
    - Restoration areas – areas where biodiversity can be restored

The NRN will be developed using nature assets owned and operated by Strategic Partners, and through the voluntary contributions of, for example, the green spaces around buildings owned/operated by Norwich

housing providers, businesses and institutions. Resident's gardens can also be included in the scheme.

The main strategic objective is for the NRN to be significantly complete and increase species diversity and abundance by 2030.

(b) The Strategy requires alignment of council activity including:

- In relation to facilities management, ensuring compliance with legislation concerned with biodiversity protection;
- Reducing negative impacts on biodiversity through measures relating to how the council procures goods and services;
- Reducing interventions in tenants' gardens through changes to the tenancy agreement, to achieve cost savings;
- Rewilding of a significant portion of parks – the rewilding scheme is intended, amongst other objectives, to bring about biodiversity improvement through the intelligent reduction in grounds maintenance, and
- The development of new policies and procedures such as managing Biodiversity Net Gain proposals, which are an obligation and opportunity brought about by the Environment Act 2021;

(c) Other objectives include:

- Reducing heat, drought, flood risk and improving air and water quality, through biodiversity improvement schemes and nature-based solutions;
- Improving wellbeing through improved access to nature;
- Creating educational opportunities;
- Producing food, albeit with the emphasis on biodiversity improvement;
- Enhancing tourism and improving visitor experience, and
- Growing the green economy with regards promoting biodiversity and ensuring alignment between this Strategy and strategies and plans for economic growth

(d) The Strategy recognises the need to flex the detailed design of the NRN according to influences such as the evolution of the Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy and the emerging detail around the national NRN.

(e) Important contributions are required from Norfolk County Council, who are obligated by the Environment Act 2021 to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

## The Plan

7. The Biodiversity Development Plan (BDP), referred to as the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in previous drafts, is described in the separate and appended document entitled Biodiversity Development Plan 2022-2025, Structure Process and Programme (hereafter 'the Plan document').
8. The Plan is the principal means by which the Strategy will be delivered. The Plan will flex and evolve according to internal and external conditions, opportunities and constraints, over time.
9. The Plan document gives details around the modus operandi of the Working Group including a set of management tasks required to deliver the Strategy's objectives. It sets out that the Environmental Strategy Team will act as the secretariat of the Working Group and that the Working Group will form a consensus around options for developing and delivering the programme, making recommendations to CLT for comment/approval. The Working Group has been convened and has met to discuss and agree the content of the Plan document; members of the Group are detailed in part 15.
10. The Plan document also discusses funding based on the terms set in the Financial and Resources section below.
11. With regards the Structure of the Plan, it comprises a programme of interdependent and time-based tasks, scheduled on a rolling three year ahead basis; hence the initial iteration of Plan is dated 2022-2025. The Plan is structured into the following series of thematic workstreams:
  - Working Group administration and reporting
  - Funding and budget management
  - Town and Country planning
  - Council operations
  - Species & nature recovery strategies
  - Biodiversity measurement
  - Engagement with Interested Parties, including residents
  - Promotion of education opportunities
  - Engagement with Strategic Partners to develop the NRN

Numerous tasks are proposed under each workstream with detail of the internal team or external body who is nominated to undertake the tasks.

12. In terms of timescales, the tasks are organised into four broad stages:
  - (a) A communication and engagement stage, where existing and potential new nature assets are identified for the development of the NRN, as well as VCSE management and labour resources;
  - (b) A mapping and coordination stage where existing and potential new nature assets are mapped/prioritised into a cohesive NRN to ensure sufficient coverage to meet the objectives of the Strategy. This stage also coordinates the Local Nature Recovery Strategy work of Norfolk County Council and identifies further opportunities to create, connect and enhance habitats to increase species diversity and abundance;

- (c) A programme development stage where action and funding plans are developed for new nature assets, and
- (d) An implementation period where new and existing nature assets are created, connected and enhanced.

Broadly speaking 2022 and 2023 will see the delivery of enabling tasks, with 2024 being when mobilisation and implementation begin, although for specific tasks, implementation will already be underway.

13. Delivery of individual tasks and projects, which are incumbent upon the Council to deliver, require funding and action plans to be developed and signed off according to established decision-making protocols.

## **Consultation**

14. Key to the success of the Strategy and Plan are effective Council leadership and the coordination of Strategic Partners and Interested Parties (defined in part 4). An initial physical consultation event was held at the Halls in November 2021 with ongoing online engagement, via the Get Talking Norwich platform, providing further ideas. These initial consultation exercises gave rise to the key themes and outcomes necessary for the development of the new Strategy and Plan.
15. A further consultation exercise was undertaken in August 2022 allowing members of the public, Interested Parties and Strategic Partners to provide views on a draft version of the Strategy via the online Get Talking Norwich platform. Feedback was strongly supportive:
  - The consultation received 90 formal responses on Get Talking Norwich, with a further 10 by email. Engagement on social media was also positive.
  - Alongside the consultation responses, a total of 1,076 individuals visited the Get Talking Norwich page and were aware of the Strategy, 295 of which downloaded the Strategy in pdf format.
  - 11 Strategic Partners and Interested Parties provided views, including: Norwich Friends of the Earth; the Norfolk Wildlife Trust; Norfolk County Council Natural Environment Team; Flagship Group.
  - >80% of responses strongly agreed or agreed that the new statement (see part 1) was sufficient.
  - >80% of responses strongly agreed or agreed that a Nature Recovery Network is the best way to support biodiversity.
  - >90% of responses strongly agreed or agreed that a portion of our parks should be rewilded.

Feedback from subject matter experts has improved some of the phraseology in the Strategy and suggestions, which have been adopted into the latest draft, include principles around food production and educational outcomes.

16. Internally, the following teams have been consulted with regarding both the Strategy and action plan:

- Environmental Strategy Team
- Finance
- Planning and Regulatory Services
- Environment Services
- NCSL
- Citywide Services
- Fringe Project
- Housing and Community Safety.

## Implications

### Financial and resources

Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan 2022-26 and budget.

17. The Strategy recognises the need to integrate with the Economic Development Strategy to promote the growth of the green economy.

18. Regarding financial and resource implications, the following principles are set out in the Strategy (a) and Plan (b):

(a) The Council shall.....*Manage financial decisions associated with the NRN in line with our Corporate Plan priorities and internal planning processes.*

(b) With regards Council operations..... *the BDP will be funded using existing and agreed budgets and new funds from internal spend to save schemes, external sources including grants from government, charitable bodies, Community Infrastructure Levy, and the private sector.*

19. Although not explicit, the Strategy and Plan aims to create cost savings and biodiversity improvements, which are mutually inclusive, with regard to specific service areas. This will be achieved by intelligently aligning and coordinating action and sharing knowledge across Council teams, by means of the Working Group.

20. With regards external funding and resources to develop the NRN, the following sources have been identified:

- Management and labour resources of VCSEs in the city
- Funds leveraged by Strategic Partners
- Grants from government and charitable bodies
- Private sector Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) funding, such as the recent purchase of Sweet Briar Marshes by Norfolk Wildlife Trust, supported by Aviva.

21. The Climate Commission is producing a paper to identify funding sources for both biodiversity and climate action projects.

## Legal

NA.

## Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	NA
Health, Social and Economic Impact	This strategy is intended to have a beneficial impact on health
Crime and Disorder	NA
Children and Adults Safeguarding	NA
Environmental Impact	The strategy will enhance the city's environment, creating positive impacts by improving biodiversity and mitigating and adapting to climate change

## Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
Political and reputational risks relating to the rewilding of parks and changes to NCSL grounds maintenance.	Consequences are political and reputational.	<p>The rewilding of portions of our parks has the potential to have both positive and negative political and reputational risks.</p> <p>Thorough public consultation has already been undertaken, demonstrating existing strong public support for rewilding (part 15).</p> <p>Close engagement with local communities on any rewilding scheme would need to be undertaken to ensure local buy-in.</p> <p>Effective communication with all relevant parties will need to be undertaken to convey the environmental and social benefits of rewilding and to mitigate potential risks.</p>



<b>Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Controls required</b>
Delivery risks; if communities do not want parks to be rewilded justifying this would be difficult.	Delivery of the strategy could be impeded.	<p>Close engagement with local communities on any rewilding scheme would need to be undertaken to ensure local buy-in.</p> <p>Effective communication with all relevant parties will need to be undertaken to convey the environmental and social benefits of rewilding and to mitigate potential risks.</p>
National policy context risk, relating to changing priorities from central government affecting the priorities of key stakeholders.	Delivery of the strategy could be impeded.	<p>While the extent to which we can influence priorities from central government is limited, by continuing close communication and collaboration with local partners we can attempt to ensure that these partner's priorities continue to align with the Biodiversity Strategy.</p> <p>Staying on top of policy news and developments from central government will allow the council to remain responsive and ensure that plans can be adapted if necessary and/or feasible.</p>

### **Other options considered**

22. No alternative recommendations.

### **Reasons for the decision/recommendation**

23. Members are asked to consider and comment on the Biodiversity Strategy 2022-2023 and the Biodiversity Development Plan 2022-2025 and recommend them to Cabinet for approval. These documents set out the council's approach to tackling the biodiversity crisis and adoption allows the council to begin this work.

### **Background papers:**

None

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A Biodiversity Strategy 2022–2032  
Appendix B Biodiversity Development Plan 2022-2025  
Appendix C Biodiversity Development Plan Gantt Chart

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