
Executive Decision

Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031 : Adoption as Informal Guidance

Report

Decision to be taken by: Deputy City Mayor -Environment
and Transportation

Decision to be taken on: 27th July 2021

Lead director/officer: Andrew L Smith

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All Wards
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

The Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) provides an over-arching framework for habitat and species conservation in Leicester. It recognises the opportunities for biodiversity to be integral to sustainable living and central to achieving net gains in biodiversity across the city.

It recognises the benefits bio-diverse green space can bring to people and will identify better ways to promote and engage people in wildlife conservation. To achieve this, the council will work with service areas within the council, elected members, external partners and the local community to ensure a co-ordinated approach to fulfilling its aims and objectives.

The 2021-2031 BAP builds on previous national and Local Biodiversity Action Plans and reflects the changing agenda for Biodiversity in the UK, including Defra's A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018), the NPPF and the Environment Bill.

The plan is divided into two sections.

Part 1 focusses on the legislation and environmental framework that supports biodiversity from international to local level and the mechanisms in place at a central and local government level to help achieve these ambitious aims.

Part 2 describes the actions for certain habitats and species that are associated with Leicester and the Midlands. It sets actions and targets for the council, stakeholders and their partners together with community groups and individuals to help conserve these habitats and their associated species.

The BAP is a plan for the next 10 years and will be reviewed and revised to update it depending on changing circumstances, legislation/regulation or other changes that occur during that period. It should not be seen as a stand-alone document but part of a suite of environmental documents produced by the council and partners.

2. Recommended Decision

To adopt the Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031 as Informal Guidance to provide an over-arching framework for habitat and species conservation in Leicester.

To share and promote the documents on the council's website and to engage with other parts of the council, elected members, partners and stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the Action Plan priorities and achievement of the BAP targets in species and habitat conservation.

To publish a summary document for Members and the wider public on the importance of Biodiversity and the priorities and targets in the Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

These documents have been subject to extensive internal and external consultation and are now in final draft form for consideration and adoption as informal guidance by the council.

The document will be published on the council's website, possibly with a small number of printed copies, to promote the BAP to the public.

As this is a necessarily long and complicated document, a brief summary document has been prepared to sit alongside the BAP to introduce and explain it to the public. This summary is designed as an attractive document and used to support promotional activities as required.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

The UK government published its first UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) in 1994, last updated in 2007. The UK BAP puts forward plans for conservation of the UK's biological resources. To meet these targets, a network of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) at a regional and county level were published. In 1999, 45 UK Habitat and 391 Species Action Plans were drawn up.

In 2011, the UK BAP was replaced by 'Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. This set out new country-level strategies for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales up to 2020. The Biodiversity 2020 aim was to "halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people."

Defra has recently published A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, (Defra 2018). The aim is to achieve clean air, water, thriving plants and wildlife, reducing risk of harm from environmental hazards, using resources more sustainably and enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

Important and innovative work carried out in the 1980's produced Leicester's first ecology plan, 'Leicester Ecology Strategy Part One' in 1989. Evidence was gathered from a habitat audit undertaken by the City Wildlife Project and helped Leicester to become the first Environment City for its ground-breaking work in this area.

In 2006, the city council and Environ produced the first Leicester BAP, 'Wild About Leicester – Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan' 2006-2009, which identified habitats specific to Leicester. In 2011, the second BAP 'Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan 2011 – 2021' identified a number of specific objectives, separated into Participation, Strategic and Habitat Objectives.

Since that time, there have been significant changes in legislation, government strategies and plans and national and local planning policies relating to biodiversity. The 2021-2031 BAP considers those changes and continues to build on the approach of the 2011-2021 BAP, in response to the changing priorities on a UK and Leicester scale.

5. Detailed report

The Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan, (BAP), sets out a strong vision, aims and objectives and ambitious targets to protect and enhance the city's biodiversity over the next ten years and beyond.

The plan is divided into two sections:

- **Part 1** Sets out the context of Biodiversity planning nationally and locally, aims, objectives and actions in planning and policy, public participation and monitoring and review of the Biodiversity in Leicester.
- **Part 2** Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans specific to the city, containing a programme of actions to be delivered by the council and BAP partners to achieve the aims and objectives of the overall Plan.

The Vision is :

To create a city rich in biodiversity where nature is able to disperse across well connected, diverse and high quality habitats capable of supporting characteristic species and safe-guarding them from further decline with the support of people fully engaged in helping species and conserve areas across Leicester.

The key aims of the BAP are to :

- Conserve and enhance a range of habitats and associated species that characterise the city of Leicester, contributing to the regional and national biodiversity whilst providing an attractive and sustainable natural environment in which to live, work, learn and enjoy,
- Create, conserve and enhance all habitats wherever possible and increase the biodiversity value of designated and/or priority habitats back to favourable status,
- Conserve protected and priority species by highlighting threats and issues, agree targets and actions to address them and help with their recovery,
- Create nature recovery networks by identifying, creating and improving green corridors and by creating and enhancing ecological connectivity,
- Improve ecological resilience by promoting good design to optimise biodiversity and achieve multiple benefits in projects and planning,

- Promote biodiversity conservation as an essential element of sustainable development and adaptation to climate,
- Raise awareness of biodiversity and nature conservation and its importance and encourage active participation at all levels.

To achieve those aims, the council will work in partnership with others wherever possible to achieve the following:

- Oversee the production and implementation of the Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan
- Seek to strengthen and improve the duty of the local authority to ensure that it is able to carry out its function to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Identify and map the current green network of priority sites and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement that will contribute to an overall Nature Recovery Network
- Seek opportunities for joint projects and partnership working with internal and external stakeholders to create or restore priority habitats and recover important species of animals, plants and fungi
- Seek out ways to commit landowners to binding agreements to secure the long-term sustainability where wildlife-rich sites have been created or restored
- Monitor and review biodiversity trends in nationally and locally and to report on progress and achievements at a national and local level
- Champion and promote Leicester's biodiversity using a range of publicity to fully engage with stakeholders at all.

6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6.2 Legal implications

6.2 The legislative background is set out in part 4 of this report and within part 1 of the Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan. The most recent legislation includes the Defra publication "A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan" (2018); The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 and Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services" which sets out the new country-level strategies for the UK up to 2020.

The Environment Bill was laid before Parliament in October 2019 to further support deliver of the 25 year plan (2018) and sets out key environmental responsibilities of the Government which had previously been held by the EU. This is not yet in force.

The Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan will be closely aligned with the Leicester Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2023 and a suite of biodiversity related strategies and plans.

The Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan is required in accordance with the national legislative framework which requires locally developed strategies and plans.

6.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 also requires that reasonable adjustments be made so that disabled people are not excluded from places that serve the public, including publicly accessible open spaces. This duty is on-going and anticipatory and, therefore, reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers which may impede people with different kinds of disabilities.

The report recommends that the Leicester Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031 as Informal Guidance to provide an over-arching framework for habitat and species conservation in Leicester. There are no direct equalities implications arising from the report recommendations.

Several studies published in the last few years demonstrate that contact with nature and access to natural green spaces is beneficial to people's physical and mental health and wellbeing. More attractive, biodiverse open spaces have the potential to benefit all sections of the community.

Going forward there may be future projects arising from the plan which would benefit from further consideration of the equalities implications and possibly a full equality impact assessment in certain circumstances.

Advice can be sought from the Corporate Equalities team on whether an Equalities Impact Assessment is required for specific projects, as appropriate.

Surinder Singh, Equalities Officer, Ext 37 4148

6.4 Climate Emergency implications

It is widely acknowledged that the world is facing a biodiversity emergency as well as a climate emergency, and that the two are closely linked. For example, the changing climate is putting stress on some species and habitats, threatening biodiversity, while losses of woodland and other habitat are driving further climate change by releasing stored carbon into the atmosphere. Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan and its Climate Emergency Strategy therefore need to work in a joined up way.

In the East Midlands, the effects of climate change will include more intense rainfall events, leading to greater risk of flooding, as well as more heatwaves and periods of drought. These effects are identified throughout the BAP amongst the threats to habitats and species. The council's work to reduce carbon emissions will, as part of global efforts to prevent catastrophic climate change, help to protect biodiversity in Leicester from a worsening of these effects in the long term.

It is worth noting that there are many synergies between actions to protect and enhance biodiversity locally and those to help the city adapt to climate change or to reduce carbon emissions. Examples include the planting of trees and creation of new woodland, which can help moderate the effects of heatwaves and store carbon while increasing habitat for wildlife, and the creation of green roofs which can help reduce the energy demand and carbon emissions of buildings, slow down run-off during intense rainfall and provide new habitat.

In conclusion therefore, implementation of the BAP is expected to have a positive contribution on making the city more resilient to a changing climate, while contributing in a small way to reducing carbon in the atmosphere.

Duncan Bell
Climate Change Manager

6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

Policy
Environment and Sustainability
Health and Well Being

7. Background information and other papers:

7.1 A number of Leicester's strategies and plans cross-reference Biodiversity in their agendas and programmes of work. The most relevant are referenced in Section 4 above and listed below :

- Leicester's Sustainability Action Plan (LSAP) 2011-2019
- Leicester's Climate Change Strategy
- Green Infrastructure Strategy 2015-2025

- Pollinator Strategy 2020 - 2025
- Urban Buzz Project Report (2017–19)
- Pollinator Strategy
- Tree Strategy 2018-2023
- Surface Water Management Plan
- Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 - 2023
- Local Transport Plan 2011 - 2026
- Air Quality Action Plan 2015 - 2026

8. Summary of appendices:

8.1 Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031 Part 1 : Framework for habitat and species conservation

8.2 Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2031 Part 2 : Habitat and Species Action Plans

8.3 Leicester's Biodiversity Action Plan : Summary Document

9. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

9.1 No

10. Is this a "key decision"? If so, why?

10.1 No