

Environment Sub Committee

Tuesday, 6 September 2022

Present: Councillor D Drummond (Chair)
Councillors M Murphy, G Bell, B Burdis, M Fox, M Hall,
C Johnston, L Marshall, P McIntyre and J Shaw

Apologies: Councillors L Bell

E7/22 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members reported.

E8/22 Declaration of Interests and Dispensations

Councillor M Hall declared a registerable interest in the Biodiversity Action Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain report as she was a director of the Rising Sun Farm Trading Company and the Rising Sun Farm Trust.

E9/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair

E10/22 Biodiversity Action Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the delivery of the Newcastle and North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) between 2020 and 2022. The report also provided an update on the responsibilities in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain as part of the planning process.

It was explained that the Biodiversity Action Plan contained a number of individual habitat and species plans and the report outlined the targets for each of the plans and provided examples of the various BAP projects which had been delivered over the previous two years. The projects varied widely from restoring ponds and wetlands, the creation of species rich grassland, woodland and hedgerow planting provision through to botanical surveys and education programmes. Reference was also made to the ongoing work being carried out by community groups to conserve and enhance wetlands and green spaces. It was explained that over the past two years all of the targets set out in the action plan had either been fully met or were ongoing.

Reference was made to the ongoing work in relation to major planning projects in the area, including Murton Gap and Killingworth Moor. It was explained that, in relation to the Murton housing scheme, work had been ongoing to ensure that suitable wildlife corridor landscaping was included in the development and, where necessary, suitable sites had been identified for off-site compensation.

Details of the existing habitat on the Murton Housing Site were set out. This included 14 hectares (ha) of arable land, 0.45 ha of poor field margins, 1.3 ha of amenity grass and 1.116 kilometres (km) of hedgerows. In addition there were 20.5 ha of arable land, 0.75 ha of poor grassland and 2.2 km of native hedgerow off-site. It was explained that after the development had been completed there would be 0.6 ha of broadleaf woodland, 0.5 ha of mixed native shrub, 0.6 ha of sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) and reedbed, 1 ha of neutral and modified grassland and 2.09 km of native hedgerow. Offsite compensation habitat of 4.57 ha of neutral grassland, 2.5 km of native hedgerow, skylark plots and land set aside had been agreed. It was explained that this had resulted in a habitat biodiversity net gain of almost 30% and a net gain of 575% in relation to hedgerows.

Details of the Authority's biodiversity projects were outlined.

These included:

- The creation and management of 84 greenspaces as biodiversity areas;
- The restoration of the education pond at the Rising Sun Country Park;
- The creation of approximately 4 hectares of native woodland at the Rising Sun Country Park, Henley Gardens and Love Avenue through the North East Community Funding;
- Conservation grazing at St Mary's Nature Reserve;
- 500 bluebell bulbs planted at Benton Quarry Park;
- 500 bluebell bulbs, native wildflower seeds and cherry tree provided and planted at the SUEZ waste site;
- Watercourse improvements, scrub planning and meadow creation at Rising Sun Country Park;
- Watercourse improvements at Wideopen;
- The provision of wildflower seed for the lower promenade project at Whitley Bay; and
- The provision of an ecological survey at Stephenson Railway Museum to assist with a Heritage Lottery Fund Bid.

The Sub-committee was advised that under the Environment Act there was a mandatory requirement for all planning applications to deliver a minimum of a 10% biodiversity net gain on development schemes from 2023.

Reference was made to the current situation in relation to the National Planning Policy Framework and policies S5.4 and DM5.5 of the Local Plan which required any development to contribute to and enhance the natural environment and to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity. It was explained that decisions on applications were expected to follow the mitigation hierarchy, which was firstly to avoid harmful impacts, any residual harm should be adequately mitigated on site and as a last resort compensated for off-site. If a scheme could not adequately compensate for the harm it caused the it should be refused. The policy also established that net gains in biodiversity value should be sought. It was explained that the planning team worked closely with the Authority's Ecologist when considering development proposals and applicants were encouraged to engage in pre-application discussions to identify issues at an early stage and ensure that proposals avoid harm where possible

It was explained that under the Environment Act 2021 delivery of net gain would be via a number of different mechanisms which included on or off-site mitigation/compensation. A national register of sites for the delivery of off-site compensation would be developed. It was also explained that as part of the planning process there was a requirement for net gain

sites to be managed and monitored for a minimum of 30-years and this would be monitored and enforced by the local planning authority. There was also a requirement for reports to be provided to central government on the delivery of biodiversity net gain.

Reference was made to the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) set up to drive forward nature recovery and identify areas for habitat delivery and enhancement. It was explained that each LNRS would be composed of a partnership of local authorities, environmental organisations and landowners. In this region the local authorities would be North Tyneside, Newcastle and Northumberland. It was expected that the North of Tyne Combined Authority would be the responsible authority.

It was noted that the current BAP had been running for 10 years and a new system was to be developed. Whilst this was happening it was agreed that the existing BAP document would continue to be used until new guidance was issued on what should replace the BAP and the new reporting systems developed.

Members sought assurances that the system for using off-site mitigation for developments would not result in the loss of green spaces in other wards. It was explained that this would be controlled by the planning process and was addressed in the Local Plan.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation.

It was **agreed** that the report be noted