

# Report of the Director of Place to the meeting of Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 26 March 2019

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## Subject:

12 MONTH UPDATE ON BIODIVERSITY REVIEW

## Summary statement:

The report and appendices update the Committee on a review of biodiversity which was undertaken by the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2018.

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## Portfolio:

Regeneration, Planning & Transport

## Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Regeneration and Environment

## 1. SUMMARY

The report and appendices update the Committee on a review of biodiversity which was undertaken by the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2018.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 At its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to undertake a review of biodiversity in the Bradford District.

2.2 An officer presentation to Committee outlining the main issues relating to biodiversity and the Council's duties in that respect, was followed by an information gathering workshop attended by a range of Council departments and partner organisations.

2.3 The information gathering session focused on 3 main areas for improvement, in accordance with the terms of reference adopted at the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2017. Specifically, the Committee resolved to:

- Examine ways in which the Council can best utilise its own resources, urban and rural to benefit biodiversity
- Consider areas over which the Council has an influence, such as planning and land development
- Explore awareness –raising and education through schools and with the public.

2.4 In April 2018 the Biodiversity Scrutiny Review report was published, which contained a number of recommendations (see Appendix 1). The final recommendation was that an update report be brought back to Committee in 12 months. Section 3 contains the updates per recommendation as requested by the Committee.

2.5 In addition to the progress outlined in Section 3, there have been other significant developments which relate to biodiversity which it is appropriate to bring to the attention of the Committee.

2.6 Biodiversity Officer: Since the review last year, the Countryside and Rights of Way Service has appointed a full-time Biodiversity Officer. The officer's remit is to co-ordinate biodiversity activity across the Department and Council and seek benefits where possible. The main avenue for this is through the Development Management process where advice and comments on planning applications in order to secure, not just no-net loss, but net gains in biodiversity is the key priority. In addition, the officer advises on land management and construction projects which the Council is undertaking, with the same objective. Some recent examples are advising the Highways Structures team on culvert repairs at Otley Road, Baildon; assisting the capital road scheme at Hard Ings, Keighley on bat issues;

and advising on natural flood management works on Harden Moor. Another key role for the officer is take forward some of the Scrutiny Review recommendations – notably the re-formation of the Biodiversity Partnership which has held its first meeting and identified priorities (see Appendix 2).

- 2.7 Biodiversity Net Gain consultation: the Government recently consulted local authorities on how best to secure “net gain” of biodiversity through development. A co-ordinated response has been submitted on behalf of Bradford Council, supporting the principle and offering some ideas as to how it might best be delivered, whilst recognising that a “one size fits all” national approach is probably not the most appropriate where issues such as viability vary from place to place.
- 2.8 Biodiversity across the Council: Perhaps one of the key additional developments since the Scrutiny Review has been the developing awareness and commitment to biodiversity from teams and services across the Council. Within the Department of Place for example, colleagues from Countryside and Rights of Way, Parks and Woodlands, Land Drainage and Landscape Design regularly collaborate on projects and biodiversity is increasingly woven into these initiatives. Services are increasingly identifying and seeking a range of wider benefits from their work (sometimes referred to as “eco-system services”) and biodiversity is key amongst those. The Public Health team for example have joined the Biodiversity Partnership as it is recognised that mental and physical health is closely related to access to the natural world, green spaces and wildlife.

### 3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The update report takes each recommendation from the Biodiversity Review and considers it individually:

**3.1.1 That the Council, along with “Friends of” groups and partner organisations undertake an audit of the District’s biodiversity Progress:**

Auditing the District’s biodiversity is a significant task but there is already a wealth of information about species and habitats that is held either by the Council itself or other partner organisations. The most significant is West Yorkshire Ecology Service, which is a joint local authority databank and holds the majority of records and data about biodiversity in the District and beyond.

The newly re-formed Biodiversity Partnership (see 3.1.5) includes West Yorkshire Ecology Service and a number of other organisations, many of which hold similar data and records. One of the tasks of the Partnership will be to collate all this information so that an audit can be undertaken and gaps in information identified. This will form part of the Partnership’s work programme going forward.

### **3.1.2 That the Council, along with “Friends of” groups and partner organisations consider undertaking meadow management and planting for play in the District’s parks**

#### **Progress:**

The Parks Department has undergone a major re-structure in the 12 months since the Biodiversity Review with the operational management of parks being devolved to Area teams. It is too early to say how this may affect the overall management of parks, but in general Parks Managers are currently looking at altering some mowing regimes and practices which will include leaving specific areas in parks and other green spaces to grow naturally, and also stopping cutting or applying herbicide under tree canopies in some areas.

Consideration will be given to such areas to perhaps introduce some plug planting of wild flower species or even look to procure some ‘specialist’ turf that consists of perennial flower species that can be easily introduced to such areas.

Peel Park will be used this year as a trial area and consequently rolled out across the wider district too. Consideration is also being given to the creation of meadows in parks and altering the maintenance regime on some roadside verges to better promote them as habitat for pollinators.

### **3.1.3 That the Council, along with “Friends of” groups and partner organisations explore funding streams that are available with EA through Water Framework Directive**

#### **Progress:**

The Council works closely with Environment Agency (EA) and the Land Drainage team across a number of work areas and funding streams, not necessarily confined to the Water Framework Directive. Through this link, the Countryside and Rights of Way team, working with Woodlands team, Landscape Design and Land Drainage team, have secured two funded projects in collaboration with the EA. Both of these are exploring opportunities to reduce flooding by carrying out natural flood management projects on moorland sites – one above Wharfedale (Ilkley Moor) and one feeding into Harden beck and the River Aire (Harden Moor). Both these projects seek to “slow the flow” and keep water on the moors for longer, thus reducing flood events further down in the valley. As well as assisting with flooding, these approaches secure biodiversity benefits by creating wetland habitat. Funding for these projects is through the DEFRA pilot Natural Flood Management (NFM) project and Leeds Flood Alleviation Strategy (FAS2) pilot NFM project. They also support the Council’s own local flood risk management strategy.

The Council also supports groups such as the Friends of Bradford Beck and the Aire Rivers Trust – both of which are active in the District and funded via a Local Levy through the Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. Bradford secured £850k of Local Levy in 2016 and groups have bid through the Flood Programme Board Resilience Group to secure funding for river stewardship. Such projects seek to improve riverside habitat by carrying out

clean-ups and de-culverting sections of Beck, which will result in biodiversity benefits and reconnect the public with the waterbodies.

Similarly, groups such as the Forest of Bradford have been working with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust on WFD projects relating to tree planting along riversides upstream of the main Airedale settlements. Again, this has flood alleviation and biodiversity benefits. The aim is to continue this relationship with the EA.

It is worth noting that sometimes the funding processes are onerous and do not cover the costs required. For example, the Aire Rivers Trust recently turned down Water Environment Grant funding (which is part of the WFD) because they were offered only 35% of their bid total with a requirement to deliver 75% of the required outputs –something that proved impossible for a small charity.

Nonetheless the Council and its partners will continue to seek opportunities for funding via the range of DEFRA and EA sources.

**3.1.4 That Bradford Council proactively ensures that conditions relating to biodiversity are adhered to by developers and that enforcement activity is taken when such conditions have not been met.**

**Progress:**

There are two levels of control over planning conditions which relate to biodiversity. One is the “discharge” of a condition after its implementation. So, for example, if certain biodiversity benefits are to be included in an application and agreed as part of the planning process, they then need to go through an approval stage themselves before the Council releases the condition as having been met. Council officers can therefore have a degree of control whereby conditions would not be discharged until implemented in a satisfactory way. This is the pro-active element which the recommendation seeks to ensure.

The enforcement regime generally comes into play reactively, after this stage, if somehow the planning obligation has not been met or fully/properly implemented. In this situation, the Council would consider taking enforcement action. Given the scale of enforcement enquiries and issues dealt with by the planning service, it is not always possible to monitor and enforce every planning condition pro-actively.

**3.1.5 That Bradford Council, along with “Friends of” groups and community organisations form a Biodiversity Partnership. The Partnership should develop a Biodiversity Action Plan which could –**

- **Audit the Districts biodiversity**
- **Raise the awareness of biodiversity through more engagement with schools, local residents including the use of social media**
- **Protect and enhance the District’s biodiversity resource by improving the quality of the local environment**
- **Develop an on-going programme of biodiversity projects and activities across the District**

## **Progress:**

The Biodiversity Partnership has been re-formed and held its first meeting in January 2019. Present were representatives of a broad range of local and regional organisations and community interest groups. These included: Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, West Yorkshire Ecology Services, Bradford Urban Wildlife Group, Bradford Botany Group, Aire Rivers Trust, Canals and Rivers Trust, Bradford Environmental Education Services, Oakenshaw and Low Moor Conservation Group, Addingham Environment Group, Bradford Ornithological Group, Bradford Council Public Health Team, Bradford Council Woodlands Team, Bradford Council Local Plans Team, and Environment Agency.

The Partnership was able to identify a range of priorities, opportunities and threats, which will be used to inform its Action Plan and projects and going forward as follows:

### 1) Priorities

- a. Engage/encourage people – raise awareness of biodiversity
- b. Habitat and species focused – eg re-naturalising Bradford Beck, protecting white clawed crayfish, re-wilding on verges, survey and monitoring.
- c. Development related – raise awareness with developers, influence through the planning process, monitor mitigation and enhancements
- d. Invasive species management and monitoring
- e. Partnership focused – eg. develop website, sharing information, events
- f. Big Picture – getting to zero carbon, landscape scale projects with landowners, promoting a diverse and resilient landscape

### 2) Threats

- a. Development –failure by local authorities and developers to adhere to biodiversity policies and ensure protection and enhancement of biodiversity within developments.
- b. Lack of awareness/lack of value placed on biodiversity
- c. Invasive species
- d. Fragmentation/ lack of connectivity of habitat
- e. Lack of resources/co-ordination/maintenance/survey and monitoring.
- f. Big Issues – eg pollution, climate change, barriers to movement, general decline in global biodiversity.

### 3) Opportunities

- a. Site /species specific projects – S Bradford wildlife network, country park at Marley, crayfish project, DNAire project
- b. Engagement/ education – through schools, groups, social media, events, volunteering – could use invasives as a hook for engagement - eg. “hunt the skunk” (cabbage) events.
- c. Link to health agenda – physical and mental, social prescribing

- d. Review/change management practices – eg roadside verges
- e. Secure biodiversity gains through development
- f. Big Stuff – landscape scale exemplar projects, Green Infrastructure networks, strategic mapping exercises, focus on “bio-abundance” as well as “biodiversity.”

**3.1.6 That Ward Councillors are encouraged to work with schools in relation to biodiversity activity and projects. Officers from Bradford Council to facilitate this.**

**Progress:**

There is a significant amount of interaction with schools in relation to biodiversity activity and projects. This is generally organised by officers and, where appropriate, Ward Councillors are at least informed or invited to participate.

Commencing in December 2018, for example, a joint project between the Countryside and Rights of Way team and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (the Bradford Urban Discovery Project) has generated significant support from Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holders. This includes a number of projects with schools in Wyke, Great Horton and Royds Wards and Councillors are updated on a regular basis and invited to engage wherever possible.

**3.1.7 That, where possible, biodiversity activity and projects taking place in schools should be linked to the National Curriculum**

**Progress:**

The Council realistically has little control over the way in which schools deliver the National Curriculum, but where relevant services work with schools on wildlife or biodiversity projects, the link to the National Curriculum is made clear.

**3.1.8 Report back in 12 months (March 2019) to Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This report.

**4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

No significant financial or resource implications from the Review recommendations, although some changes in Council land management (eg. mowing regimes) to benefit biodiversity will be less costly than current approaches. This is difficult to quantify as a full cost-benefit analysis has not been undertaken, and will start on a limited basis, but over time will result in cost savings on that operation.

**5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

None

## **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

None

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

None

### **7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

One of the fundamental principles of sustainability is the interaction between the social, economic and environmental aspects of human activity. The Council and its partner's efforts to improve and enhance biodiversity across the District, support this interaction – not simply for environmental reasons, important though they are – but for the economic and social benefits that also come with it.

### **7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

A number of projects and land management practices which the Council and its partners are pursuing seek to maximise “eco-system” services which these sites provide. These can range from biodiversity to recreation to cultural benefits. Where sites are managed for extended tree cover, or to create or enhance wetland and blanket bogs (such as on many of our moorlands), another benefit is flood mitigation and carbon capture. The ability of trees and peat moorland to store carbon, directly reduces greenhouse gas emissions and assists in slowing the rate of climate change.

### **7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None directly, although it could be argued that encouraging local people to enjoy their local greenspaces (which is part of the remit of the Biodiversity Partnership), increases surveillance and safety.

### **7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

None.

### **7.6 TRADE UNION**

None

### **7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

None specifically, although all Wards should benefit from activity outlined in the report

**7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS  
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A

**7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

None.

**7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

N/A

**8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None

**9. OPTIONS**

The Committee considers the report in general

The Committee request further action and/or updates on specific items

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee considers the progress outlined in the report

**11. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee Biodiversity Review Report, April 2018