

BIO DIVERSITY TASK GROUP

Tuesday, 14th May, 2024

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BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

BIO DIVERSITY TASK GROUP

Minutes from the Meeting of the Bio Diversity Task Group held on Monday, 15th April, 2024 at 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor M de Whalley (Chair)
Councillors D Heneghan (sub for Cllr Bartrum), P Kunes
and T Parish (sub for Cllr Bullen)

Apologies for absence was received from Councillors M Bartrum and A Bullen

1 **MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED: The minutes from the previous meeting on 2 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

2 **MEMBERS PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillor P Devulapalli attended on zoom under standing order 34.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

4 **ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None

5 **BIODIVERSITY COMPETITION - COUNCILLOR DEVULAPALLI**

Councillor Devulapalli gave a presentation of her draft proposals for the introduction of an annual biodiversity competition intended to promote and encourage greater awareness of biodiversity across the Borough. (a copy of the draft proposals are attached.)

Cllr Devulapalli intended that the competition would be community led relying on community volunteers. She asked that the Council support the introduction of an annual biodiversity competition by:

1. Publicly supporting and endorsing the proposal
2. Providing support and guidance to the group on how to run the competition through preparation of a project plan.
3. Provision of Comms support to highlight the importance of biodiversity and the competition.

The presentation set out a selection of 4 potential categories for the competition which would be subject to agreement – Under 14s, Container garden, small garden and large garden. She also suggested best nature friendly space in work place, schools, parish, and longest bee line.

It was also suggested that best town space should be included. This was supported. It was also suggested that the RSPB had criteria for different sized gardens etc for their birdwatch which could potentially be used. Each category would have potential criteria which could be ticked off for each entry.

G Hall Executive Director explained that if the Group supported the proposal a detailed proposal could be brought to Cabinet. The Group agreed with the proposal.

The logistics of the proposals were discussed and it was suggested that entries be sent in electronically or hard copies either to the Council offices, or to the libraries. with concern raised that there was limited capacity within the officer side to resource the proposal. It was suggested that potentially parish councils could get involved in their areas and forwarding what they felt were the strongest contenders, although it was stressed that a level of expertise in the subject was essential to also ensure the same criteria were being applied across the board as appropriate.

RESOLVED: That cabinet be invited to support a community driven Bio Diversity competition relying on community volunteers with the Council providing the following support:

1. Publicly supporting and endorsing the proposal
2. Providing support and guidance to the group on how to run the competition through preparation of a project plan.
3. Provision of Comms support to highlight the importance of biodiversity and the competition.

6

POLLINATOR ACTION PLANS - SPEAKER - HELEN BACZKOWSKA (NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST)

The Task Group welcomed Helen Baczkowska from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust who gave a presentation on the Trust's new Business Model for wildlife Caring for our nature reserves

- Advice to land managers from farms to communities
- Planning & advocacy
- Research, science & innovation

The presentation gave detail on the decline of pollinators in the country and how that could be improved by the reduction of pesticides, increased connectivity between green areas.

With regard to the Council's increase in b-connectivity sites it was acknowledged that often people complained when grass areas were not cut as often they wished, but it was suggested that the public be made aware that a reduction in cuts was to promote biodiversity in the area.

A discussion was held on the current position the Borough Council was in for biodiversity net gain which was in its early stages. Ms Baczkowska offered to assist where possible to the Open Spaces Team in their planning for increased biodiversity, and also was planning on running some workshops on the requirements for authorities and parishes, and the parishes could sign up to a mailing list on the subject.

Her timely offer of assistance was gratefully accepted and it was agreed that managing the wilding and informing people of it would help the public's understanding of the reasoning behind areas of uncut grass.

Councillor Parish commented that the council should decide what it wants to do and establish how to go about it. A discussion was also held on gardens which were destroyed and replaced with concrete or astroturf.

Further comments were made on walk-throughs carried out in areas before strimming was commenced.

RESOLVED That the presentation from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust be noted, and Ms Baczkowska's offer of assistance be gratefully accepted.

7

NOTE ON POLLINATOR ACTION PLANS - CLAIRE WIGGS

Claire Wiggs, Senior Ecologist presented a paper she had prepared on developing a Local Pollinator Strategy. It explained that a Local Pollinator Strategy or Plan should sit alongside other Local Biodiversity Action Plans, greenspace and green infrastructure strategies, and link into existing Local Development Plans or policies. It should outline a range of positive principles and associated actions which could be applied across the management of local authority projects, assets and decision-making processes. At its core, it should be about providing pollinator food and shelter across all types of land so that our pollinators will survive and thrive.

It was suggested that the Plan highlights examples of what was being done well and it be split into themes: threats, what the pollinators needed, connection and community engagement.

She had commented on a number of strategies which were currently in circulation and commended Cornwall's approach to a Plan.

A further discussion was held on biodiversity net gain (BNG) and the potential for banking land for BNG as some local providers had come forward. It was noted that a variety of habitats would be needed for such endeavours, and a site would receive a higher ranking the more local it was. It was noted that at this stage the council was concentrating on what it had to do legally to ensure it was compliant.

The question was raised as to whether there was a point to register large areas of planting of hedgerows etc, it was confirmed that from a BNG point it was not required, but potentially advisable from a tree and hedges point of view.

8 **OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIODIVERSITY - SPEAKER - GUEST SPEAKER (NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST)**

This item was not considered as the guest speaker could not attend.

9 **DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

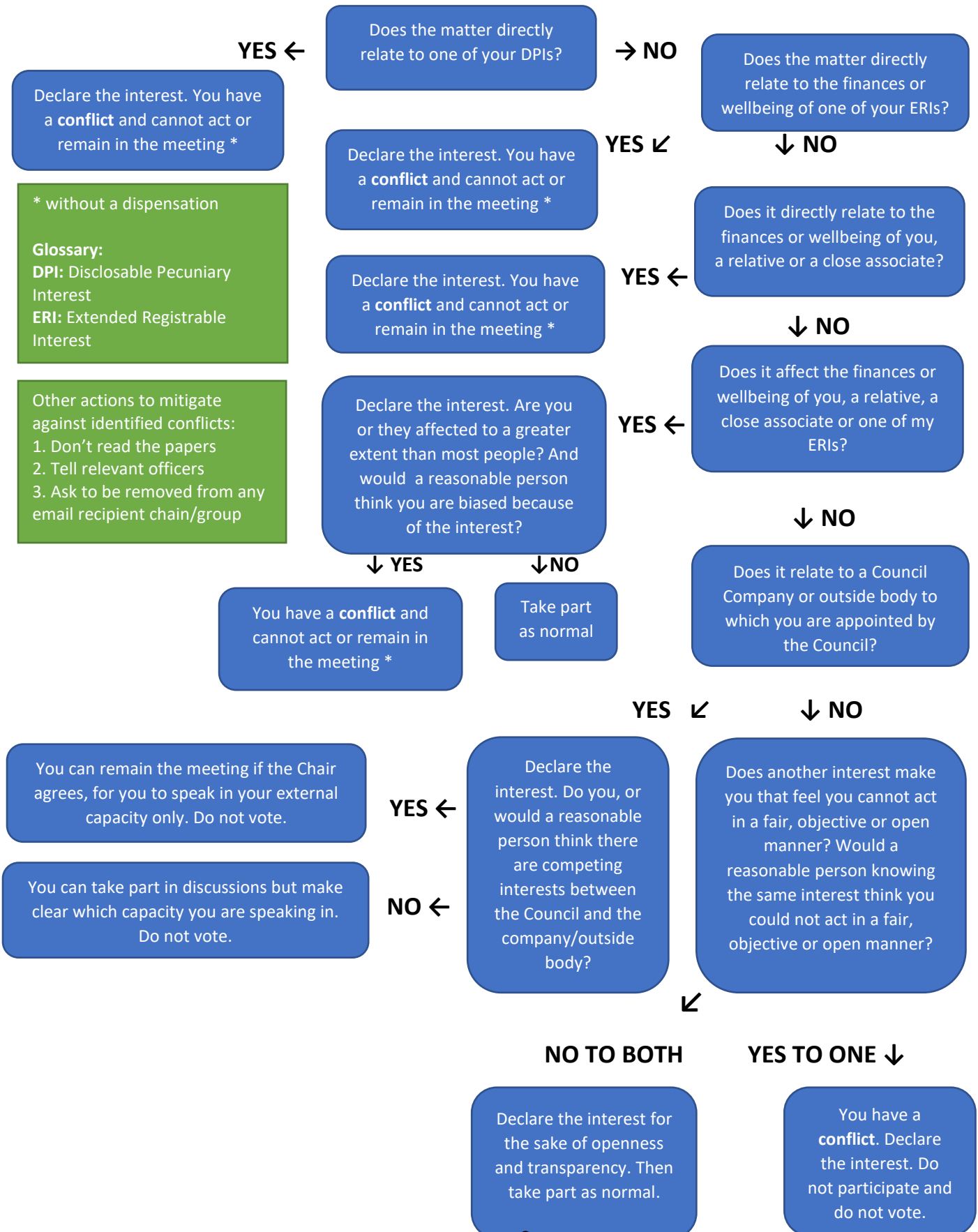
14 May and 25 June at 4.00pm

The meeting closed at 5.34 pm

DECLARING AN INTEREST AND MANAGING ANY CONFLICTS FLOWCHART



START



Declare the interest. You have a **conflict** and cannot act or remain in the meeting *

* without a dispensation

Glossary:

DPI: Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

ERI: Extended Registrable Interest

Other actions to mitigate against identified conflicts:

1. Don't read the papers
2. Tell relevant officers
3. Ask to be removed from any email recipient chain/group

Biodiversity Areas Wildflowers

Public Open Space



Borough Council of
King's Lynn &
West Norfolk

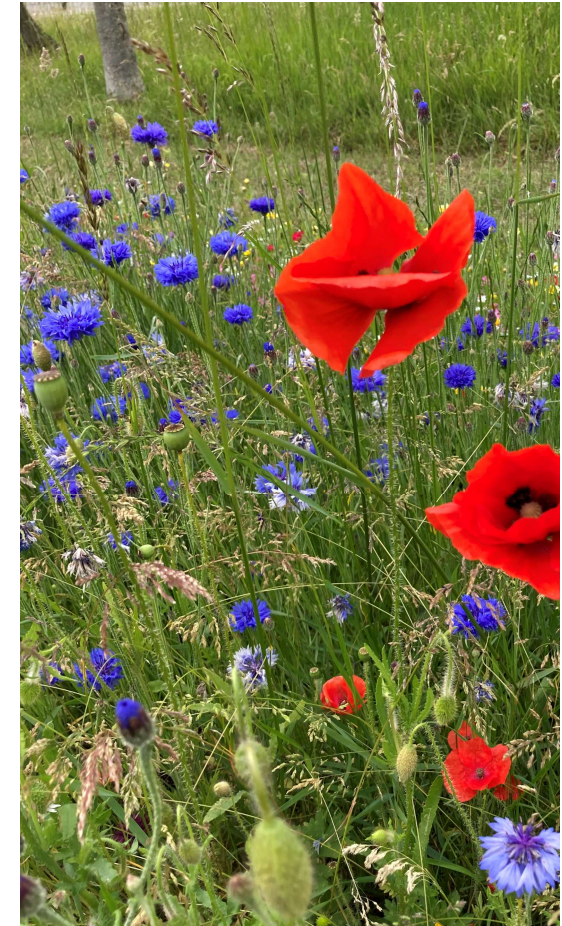


Wildflower Facts

- Types of wildflower areas
 - Annual
 - Perennial
 - Natural
- There is no simple strategy for creating wildflower meadows in urban environments.
 - Scattering seed on unprepared ground will not succeed
- To create a wildflower meadow from seed, you need to start with bare, weed-free ground.
 - Herbicide application – we prefer to avoid
 - Topsoil removal/excavation/rotovation
- The type of meadow created, and method used to create and manage them will vary with the ground conditions, type of habitat, available budget, labour resources and community/volunteer involvement.
- It is extremely important to remember that all grasslands and meadows require some form of management for them to be successful.

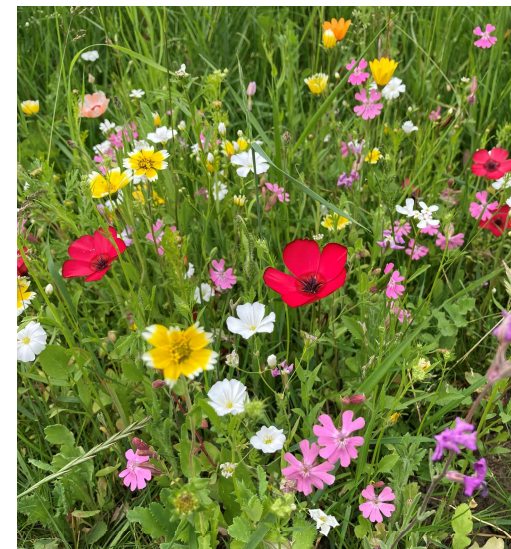
Planting Facts

- 1kg of Annual Wildflower Seed
 - Range £100 - £200 depending on the mix (seasonal variability)
 - Coverage 1kg - Approx 300 - 350 sqm
 - Sowing Rate 3 – 4 g/m²
- Labour Costs
 - Volunteers can reduce the cost for maintaining small areas
 - More labour intensive than expected
- Plant and Machinery Costs
 - Tractor drawn equipment
 - Rotovate and Roll Machinery
 - Cut and Collect Machinery



Biodiversity Areas King's Lynn

- St Margarets Churchyard
 - Small section maintained by POS; seed provided by The Minster
- St Faiths Churchyard Gaywood
 - Small section maintained by church volunteers; seed provided by St Faiths
- Walks (BCKLWN)
 - Tennyson Bund – Planted with Daffodil Bulbs, cut once per year to encourage biodiversity
 - Behind Red Mount and St Johns Church, cut once per year to encourage biodiversity
 - Walks Island – GVCG Biodiversity Area
 - In Bloom Initiative – Greyfriars School wildflower seed planting/seed bombs
 - Involvement from the newly formed Friends of the Walks to partake in Biodiversity projects within the Park
- St Edmundsbury POS (BCKLWN)
 - POS Initiative for In Bloom Campaign
 - Annual wildflower strip
 - Swathes of long grass to encourage local biodiversity
- Edward Benefer Way (NCC)
 - Verge left longer, cut less frequently
- North Lynn Industrial Estate (BCKLWN)
 - POS Initiative and maintained by POS
 - Annual wildflower strip
- South Wootton (South Wootton in Bloom Committee)
 - The Common/St Marys Church/Wootton Park – Maintained by volunteers
- Lynnsport Meadow (BCKLWN)
 - Semi-improved grassland to be maintained as perennial wildflower meadow



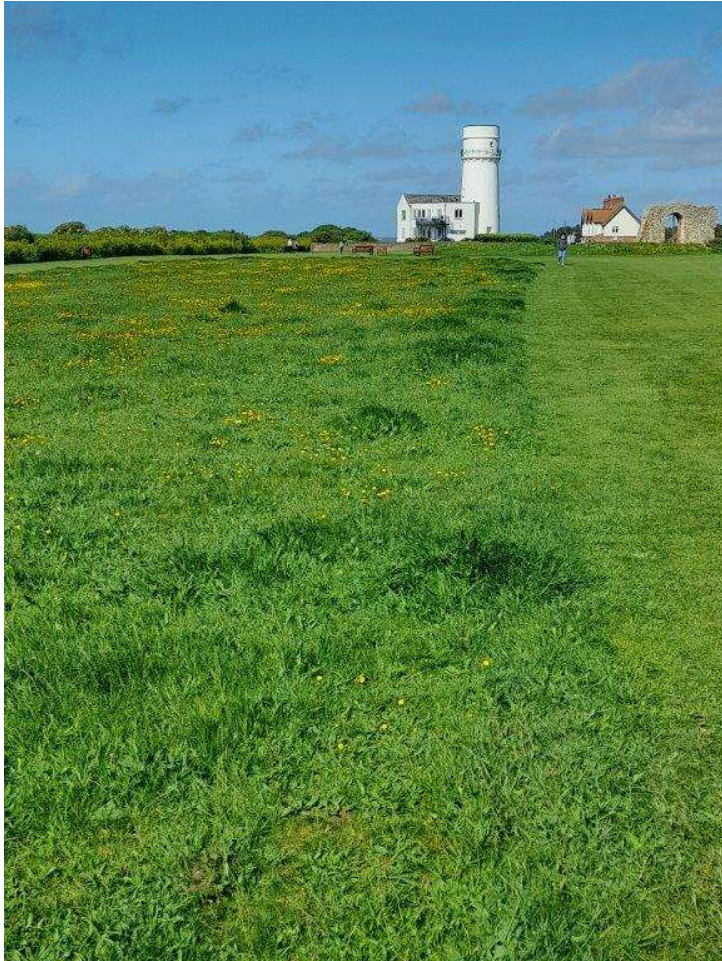


St Edmundsbury POS

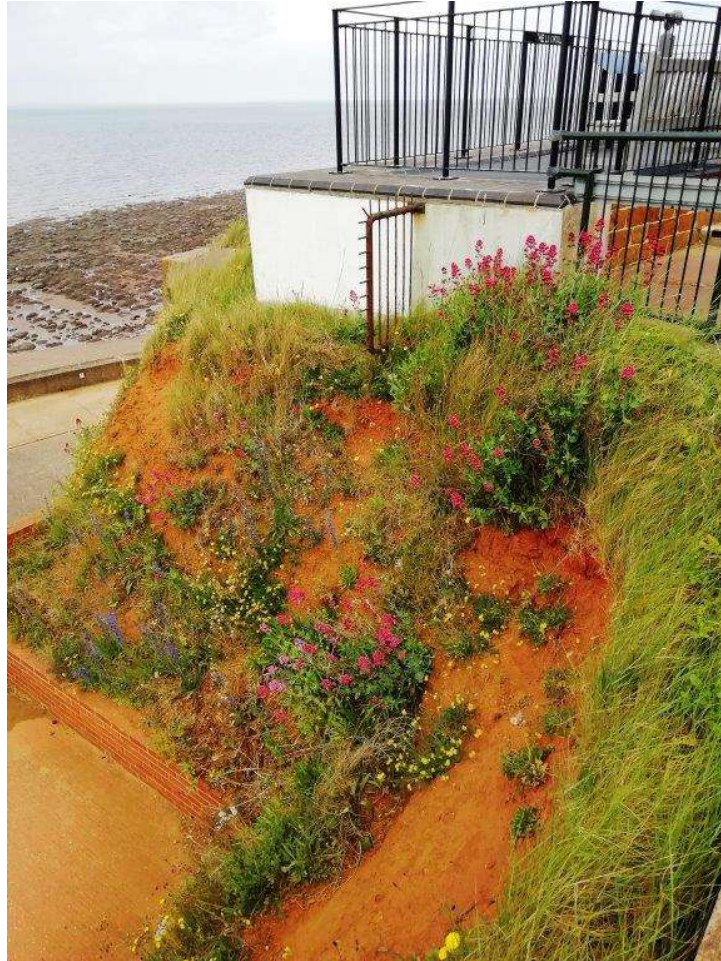
Biodiversity Areas Northern Area (Hunstanton)

- 11,580 m2 of wildflower landscape
 - Cliff Top (POS maintained)
 - Swathes of long grass to encourage local biodiversity – B line
 - Community Engagement through signage
 - Cliff Zig/Zag Path
 - Left to grow natural with minimal maintenance requirements
 - Boston Square (POS maintained)
 - Areas of long grass to encourage local biodiversity
 - Lighthouse (NCC cultivation licence required / POS maintained)
 - Annual wildflowers
 - Visual impact / Public attraction
 - Oasis Way (NCC cultivation licence)
 - Annual wildflowers
 - Visual impact / Public attraction
 - Supported by local businesses financially and through physical resource
 - A149 (NCC cultivation licence / POS maintained)
 - Annual wildflower
 - Visual impact / Public attraction
 - Grass banks left to grow long to encourage local biodiversity





Cliff Top – Grass Swathes



Zig/Zag Cliff Path – Native Species

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



These areas have been designated to encourage
Biodiversity and improve Ecology.

The grass will be cut and removed in the autumn period.

In leaving the grasses and plants to grow, both flower
and seed create important habitat
and food sources for insects and birds.



15



A149 Wildflowers

Biodiversity Areas

Southern Area (Downham Market)

- Memorial Field – Nature Volunteers Network (NVN) funded with limited input from POS for rotovating the area
- Howdale – Tree planting and wildflowers proposed for this year funded by NVN

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Planning funded biodiversity projects

Background

- Borough's Habitat Regulations Assessment Monitoring and Mitigation Strategy – began in 2016 through the Local Plan
- 17 • Included collecting a tariff (originally £50 per dwelling) to go towards mitigating the effects of residential development on European protected sites
- Has funded a range of projects including physical works to visitor facilities, fencing and other infrastructure, and studies of impacts of visitors on sites such as Roydon Common (Up with the Larks)

Plovers in Peril programme

Record-breaking year for ringed plover chicks at Heacham and Snettisham

Conservationists in Norfolk are celebrating a fourfold increase of ringed plovers this year, thanks to efforts led "Funding for the project has come from the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk via the habitats mitigation fund".

18



Planning funded biodiversity projects

- Moved over to Norfolk Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation (RAMS) Programme. Currently around £217 per dwelling
- 19 • Joint strategy across all Norfolk authorities
- Based on Norfolk wide studies of recreational impacts on protected sites
- Will be used on specified projects on protected sites across Norfolk

Biodiversity Task Group meeting

14 May 2024

Agenda item 7 - Options for further biodiversity enhancements on Borough Council land and buildings going forward

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Environment Act 2021 sets out new legislation, which includes a biodiversity duty for public bodies. This means that, as a public authority, the council must:
1. Consider what to do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
 2. Agree policies and specific objectives based on the council's consideration.
 3. Act to deliver the policies and achieve your objectives.
- 1.2 The council will therefore need to agree policies and specific objectives to show how it is meeting this duty.
- 1.3 Norfolk County Council has separate duties under the Environment Act, and as the 'responsible' authority', is tasked with producing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). This has been covered at a previous meeting of the task group, and NCC will be starting that process, including consultation, in the near future. The council will need to consider this strategy when it comes into force, and how we comply with it.
- 1.4 The biodiversity duty is separate to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), which is now a statutory function of the planning process. BNG came into force in February 2024 for major developments, and at the beginning of April 2024 for all other qualifying development.
- 1.5 Whilst BNG could theoretically provide opportunities for the council as a landowner, through the creation of new habitats and then the selling of credits, in the short-medium term, this is not considered to be a realistic option, as it will likely take a lot of resources to bring forward. A full review would need to be commissioned if this was to be pursued by the council.

1.6 At an earlier meeting, there was discussion about production of a Pollinator Action Plan for the council to adopt in relation to its own land, although there was no recommendation to do this. This should form part of a recommendation to Cabinet. There was also the offer of help from the NWT on such a plan.

1.7 There are clearly further opportunities for the council to improve the activities it undertakes to improve biodiversity.

2.0 Public Open Space (POS)

2.1 It is clear there are a number of existing biodiversity initiatives taking place within the POS team. However, as the council looks after approximately 2,604,583 m² of land, which includes public open space, NCC verges, land at Mintlyn crematorium etc., much of which is directly under the control and influence of the BCKLWN, there will be further opportunities to build on this.

2.2 Options that could be taken forward include:

- Identify areas of POS for possible biodiversity projects now and in future.
- Consider extending the semi-improved grassland and wildflower areas within our parks and open spaces
- Filling in gaps in existing native hedging to improve and promote wildlife habitats.
- Progress and promote seasonal flowering (year-round pollinators) by planting suitable species within our parks and gardens. This would be in accordance with a Pollinator Action Plan should one be approved.
- enhance working to assist existing community groups/volunteers with biodiversity projects and resource permitting encourage and nurture new community groups and volunteers to take on biodiversity projects within their locality. It should be noted that this will need a specific resource.

3.0 Major Housebuilding Project

3.1 There are already biodiversity actions that are taking place on the council's housing sites. These include bat roost boxes, various types of bird nest boxes to cater for various species, bee bricks, and hedgehog highways on the Parkway scheme.

- 3.2 Again there are considered to be further opportunities for biodiversity enhancements, and it is considered these can be done at a relatively low cost, when compared to the cost and selling price of a house.
- 3.3 The majority of the council's housing developments will come with an ecological survey and recommendations through the planning process, and it is these recommendations that are already followed in the council's new developments. The local planning process will be strengthened and enhanced once the new Local Plan is adopted, as that has a policy requiring further specific biodiversity enhancements.
- 3.4 However, additional enhancements on the council's own housing projects can form part of an overall biodiversity strategy and be built into 'business as usual' going forward.

4.0 Property Services

- 4.1 Property services are responsible for the council's land and buildings. There will potentially be opportunities therefore with regards to both.
- 4.2 It is considered that there will need to be an initial assessment of the council's land and buildings, with a need to catalogue what we have & what potential there is for biodiversity. This will enable opportunities to be identified.
- 4.3 A resource will be needed for this, which is discussed in 5.2 – 5.3 below.

5.0 Resources

- 5.1 There will be particular resource implications within the POS department associated with expanding biodiversity projects on Borough Council land. The POS department is a traditional operational department, and if biodiversity projects are to be effectively implemented, they will require more specialist skills and less generic equipment.
- 5.2 As mentioned above the POS teams have an operational bias, and whilst we have several successful interactions with community groups this is not an area of their expertise. To promote further a number of projects in the borough a dedicated resource is recommended, whose "day job" is focused on the softer skills associated with volunteer and community engagement which is considered the best way to ensure delivery. Such a Biodiversity Project Officer role would also liaise with other sections of the council, including POS teams as necessary. This engagement work is

both successful and rewarding but can be time consuming. This seems to be role that is becoming more common within councils, likely as a result of the higher profile of biodiversity, and the new biodiversity duty.

- 5.3 A Biodiversity Project Officer could work to organise/lead on community projects. Working with community groups, volunteers, schools and the POS operational team to identify suitable areas/projects and help to develop management plans, consult with residents and co-ordinate future proposals. The role would also need to be involved in other tasks including aiding other officers in biodiversity related projects, for example the tree officer in POS in delivering the tree strategy, and Property Services in collating a catalogue of potential borough council sites for biodiversity. Such a role would likely cost around - £35,000 - £40,000 per annum with on costs, and it is proposed that this is a 2 year fixed term post initially. It is proposed that this could be paid for out of the climate change budget.
- 5.4 Whilst we are suggesting a specific Biodiversity Project Officer, there could also be the potential to offer internships to further support this role, offering general work experience, training and development for young people in our communities.
- 5.5 Whilst specialist equipment is not proposed at this time, it would no doubt be required in the future if large areas of open space were to be converted for biodiversity. In addition consideration should also be given to future maintenance costs, and it is important that any areas that the borough provide, can be properly and suitably maintained. This will likely have an impact upon the maintenance budget, although is difficult to quantify at this time.
- 5.6 There will no doubt be a call on the council's ecologist based within planning, employed to deal with the new statutory BNG regime, who can add her expertise as and when required, whilst noting this will be an addition to her main duties, so will need to fitted in around these.
- 5.7 As above, the production of a biodiversity strategy to set out the required biodiversity policies and specific objectives will need to be produced in some format. It can be a very high-level document, with broad statements, through to a more detailed document. However, if it is to be the latter, it will require a dedicated resource to produce it, and a

sum set aside for this, as there is no existing resource to produce it. Officers recommend the former at this stage. This can always be revisited in the future, and there is a requirement to review these policies every 5 years.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The new biodiversity duty will mean the council will need to take steps to conserve and enhance biodiversity in its area. A key part of that will not only be producing policies and specific objectives (a strategy), but also delivering on improved biodiversity outcomes for our communities. Alongside planning policy changes in the new Local Plan and initiatives through the major housebuilding schemes, the council is in a good position to do this given the land and buildings that it already owns.
- 6.2 However as described in the report resources will be required to ensure the council can deliver on its aims and objectives that would be set out within its strategy and plans.

7.0 Suggested recommendations for the task group to make to Cabinet:

- 1) That consideration be given to the appointment of a Biodiversity Project Officer role, for a fixed period of 2 years to carry out the duties set out in the report;
- 2) That biodiversity policies and specific objectives are agreed to show how the council is meeting the biodiversity duty;
- 3) That a Pollinator Action Plan be produced.

Stuart Ashworth

Assistant Director – Environment & Planning