

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Biodiversity Task Group		
DATE:	5 February 2024		
TITLE:	Recommendations of the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Policy development		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Climate Change and Biodiversity		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Stuart Ashworth – Assistant Director		
OPEN		WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:
To report on the recommendations of the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group (UWIWG), and to put together recommendations to be reported to Cabinet at the end of the Biodiversity Working Group cycle.
KEY ISSUES:
Recommendations of the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group (UWIWG), and the implications associated with the recommendations.
OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
To make recommendations relating to carrying forward all or some of the UWIWG recommendations.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
1. That Members of the Task Group agree the recommendations/actions on the way forward on each of the 7 recommendations of the UWIWG, such recommendations/actions to be forwarded to Cabinet at the conclusion of the task group.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:
To allow the council to contribute towards improving biodiversity within the borough.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group was a working group put together to feed back to Environment and Community (E and C) Panel on the issue of urban wildlife. The working group made seven recommendations to E and C, and these are set out below. A copy of the report to E and C is attached as appendix 1. Following a brief Cabinet Report in January 2023, it was considered that it would be best if the recommendations were considered by the Biodiversity Task Group. This report sets out the seven recommendations and some commentary on suggested potential issues around them for the task group to consider.

2.0 Recommendations and associated comments from the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group (UWIWG)

1. Encourage the use of bird boxes, bat boxes and hedgehog highways in new and existing Borough Council properties

To investigate the possibility of adopting a policy of giving the option of installing swift and bat boxes, bee bricks and hedgehog highways in new developments. The group acknowledge that it would be difficult to insist that this was included in new developments, but feel that people should be given the option of having them provided. The group also encourage installation of items to promote urban wildlife in existing council facilities where appropriate.

2. The Council to investigate providing wildflower seeds for redundant allotments and community orchards/gardens and encourage the planting of wildlife seeds in the community

The Group would like the Council to give consideration to planting wildflower seeds in redundant areas such as unused allotments and community areas. They ask that the Council use pollinators and flowers that benefit wildlife where possible. Parishes could also be encouraged to plant redundant areas.

3. The Council to encourage bird feeding stations and nest boxes in schools

This could involve the Men's Shed who have indicated that they would be interested in assisting with the provision of nest boxes for schools.

4. Support of a Nest Box Trail in King's Lynn

This is an initiative by Julian Moulton and his idea is to locate a variety of nest boxes throughout King's Lynn with a map and guide. Boxes could be located at playgrounds, public spaces and various buildings. This could be publicised by having a stand at town centre events.

5. Produce literature advising how residents can help support their urban wildlife and promoting the nest box trail in King's Lynn.

This could include links to local organisations who are interested in promoting Urban Wildlife along with links to useful websites, details of the best types of plants to encourage urban wildlife and helpful hints and tips to support urban wildlife in their own gardens.

6. Engage with local groups to participate in urban wildlife

Organisations such as Men's Shed, In Bloom and schools could be engaged to promote urban wildlife. Stands at events could promote the nest box trail and provide literature as mentioned in recommendation 5 above. Linking with recommendation 3 above, schools could be encouraged to become involved by promoting what they have done for urban wildlife, with the possibility of a competition. The Informal Working Group have also been approached by NVN (Nature Volunteer Network) who have offered to collect wild bird seed for bee highways in the Borough. They are careful only to collect 10-20% of the seed on any given wild plant. This is an example of a local organisation who wants to contribute and also a demonstration of the cooperation the Borough can encourage and develop between outside bodies interested in local wildlife.

7. Encourage Councillors to promote Urban Wildlife in their Wards and Parishes where appropriate.

This could include promoting the benefits of Urban Wildlife and signposting to relevant organisations. Councillors could suggest ideas to their Parishes such as bulk buying wild bird seed, which would bring the cost down to residents, and then could be sold at cost by Parish Councils. Councillors could also provide detail of good work in their Wards which could be circulated to other Councillors via the Members Bulletin and then cascaded down to Parish Councils as appropriate.

3.0 Recommendations/Actions

Recommendation/actions in response to 1.

- **That the council's project teams publish the measures that have been taken on current developments to incorporate enhanced levels of biodiversity.**
- **That an Action Plan be prepared, within 6 months, as to how the council will seek to enhance biodiversity in new council developments.**
- **That the council commit to all new developments being exemplars in biodiversity provision in order to set a positive example and encourage the private sector to incorporate such measures into their developments.**
- **That future design guides produced by the borough council include guidance on how biodiversity should be included within new developments.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 2.

- **That the council's Public Open Space team publish the measures that have been taken on current open spaces they maintain, to incorporate enhanced levels of biodiversity. This includes existing partnership working already taking place.**
- **That as part of an Action Plan to be prepared (see recommendation 1) as to how the council will seek to enhance biodiversity, the POS team will feed into that in relation to public open spaces.**
- **That the POS team give special consideration to pollinators and flowers that benefit wildlife where possible, when undertaking planting schemes.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 3.

- **The council contact (email) schools to encourage the use of nest boxes and feeding stations in schools, and signpost to best practice.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 4.

- **The council be willing to participate in this initiative, where nest boxes are placed on council properties.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 5.

- **Amend the biodiversity pages of the website to signpost best practice.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 6.

- **POS team to contact the Nature Volunteer Network (NVN) to investigate whether they could contribute wild bird seed.**

Recommendation/actions in response to 7.

- **Councillors to consider how to carry this element forward.**

4.0 Other issues for the task group to consider

4.1 The task group will need to consider and agree or otherwise the suggested recommendations/actions put forward by officers on the seven recommendations put forward by the UWIWG. Set out below are some suggestions of other issues that could be part of the discussion relating to the above recommendations.

4.2 Resources

4.2.1 Most of the above will require borough council resources, either officer time, or money, so that will need to be factored into any recommendations to Cabinet. At present there is no budget set aside for biodiversity, to pay for the likes of bird boxes and feeding stations, put forward as part of the UWIWG recommendations.

4.2.2 Attached at appendix 2 is the current list of actions being taken on our active housing sites. Clearly this illustrates that urban wildlife is already a consideration for the major housing team, and is already factored into scheme costs.

4.2.3 It is clear that there are already existing wildflower planting schemes going on with volunteer groups, such as with NVN in Downham Market, which can help with regards to resources.

4.3 Website

4.3.1 There is already a great deal of advice available to schools, parish councils etc. covering best practice for urban wildlife. That said, there is an existing Biodiversity page on the council's website, but that is focussed on planning processes, so members may wish to consider altering that emphasis to change it more of an encouraging and signposting good practice webpage.

4.4 Local Plan

- 4.4.1 In terms of an overall policy covering new developments, the new Local Plan, which is currently at Examination, does have policies dealing with biodiversity. Those policies are due to be tested at Examination, with Hearings due to reconvene in March, but ultimately it is unlikely to be adopted until around January '25. So in essence there is policy coming forward, although it will not be brought into force until the Local Plan is adopted.

5.0 Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 Relates to key priority 'protect our environment', and within protect our environment, that "we will increase biodiversity where we can and create wildflower and pollinator opportunities".

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 There will be resource implications associated with some of the recommendations. There is no budget currently set aside for biodiversity improvements.

7.0 Any other Implications/Risks

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 Equal Opportunity Considerations

- 8.1 There are none.

9.0 Environmental Considerations

- 9.1 These are positive.

10.0 Consultation

- 10.0 N/A

11.0 Background Papers

Local Plan review – policies covering biodiversity (draft policies LP18, LP19 & LP23)
Cabinet report on recommendations from the environment and community panel's urban wildlife informal working group - 17 January 2023
Environment and Community Panel report from the urban wildlife informal working group - 5 October 2021