

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: CABINET	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/20/06
FROM: Cllr Jessica Fleming - Cabinet Member for Environment	DATE OF MEETING: 09 November 2020
OFFICER: Cassandra Clements – Assistant Director for Environment and Commercial Partnerships	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB230

BIODIVERSITY TASK FORCE – PROPOSALS TO CABINET

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 A Joint Biodiversity Task Force was convened in response to biodiversity commitments made by both Councils at separate meetings in July 2019. Its role is to make recommendations to Cabinet(s) on opportunities and actions to protect and improve biodiversity, both in the way in which the Councils jointly or individually carry out their own operations and initiatives, and through partnership working. Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils recognise that there is an urgent need for action.
- 1.2 The Task Force was established in July 2020 and met on four occasions before completing proposals for consideration by the Cabinets. These proposals have been shaped by the areas of District Council influence, ability to effect change and resource requirements. They represent a first step in achieving both the councils' own operational ambitions, and those to improve biodiversity and natural capital across the county.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is therefore to present the findings of the Task Force to the Cabinets and for the Cabinets to agree the recommended Biodiversity Action Plan that has been informed by the Task Force's work.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The options considered by the Biodiversity Task Force are detailed in the Biodiversity Action Plan, attached at appendix A.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Biodiversity Action Plan, as created by the Biodiversity Task Force, be adopted by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.
- 3.2 That the Biodiversity Task Force group continue to meet to monitor the Action Plan and consider new ideas for increasing biodiversity.

REASON FOR DECISION

This Council recognises the increasing pace with which natural habitat is being lost and that it too, has now become a biodiversity emergency. This decision will enable the Council(s) to include 'biodiversity net gain' as a strategic priority

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 A biodiversity motion presented to Councils in September 2019 resulted in the following resolution:
- 4.2 Creation and development of a Wildlife Network Map from which Wildlife Corridors will be identified and created. The map, available to the public, will assist the District to develop Eco Tourism, thereby attracting much needed tourist revenue to the region.
- 4.3 As part of our commitment to Biodiversity the Council will work closely with our existing Partners, the County Council and other NGO's involved in protecting our natural habitats.
- 4.4 Introduction of the 'Trees for Life' scheme in Babergh District. This offers every family with a new-born baby a tree to plant. The trees to be planted will be native trees and will be locally grown and sourced.
- 4.5 That additional biodiversity resources be provided as necessary, to:
- Support the Task Force
 - Provide more input into supporting planning officers
 - Strengthen the role of the public realm team
 - Provide advice to parishes and any other community landowner
- 4.6 Any funding to maintain and improve the biodiversity of our area for 2019/20 will be recommended to Cabinet for approval. The taskforce would recommend the amount to be spent in future years in a report back to Cabinet by March 2020.
- 4.7 Therefore, these Councils pledge that:
- The Task Force will engage specialists to complete a survey that will identify the range of and the risk to our districts' biodiversity. It will identify sites of value in terms of biodiversity and rank them. This will identify isolated and vulnerable at-risk areas on which to focus.
 - The data from this survey will allow the creation and development of a Wildlife Network Map from which corridors will be identified and created.
 - This map will help us to protect and further develop the biodiversity of the area, allowing creation of wildlife corridors between hot spots where possible.
 - It will provide Planning with accurate information from which to make valued judgements in the planning process.
 - The mapping work will be made available to the public and will assist the districts to develop eco-tourism, thereby attracting much needed tourist revenue to the region.

- As part of our commitment to biodiversity the Councils' will work closely with our existing partners, the County Council and other non-governmental organisations involved in protecting our natural habitats.
- We will help to develop incentive schemes with sponsors and other interested parties to turn appropriate grass verges into wild flower meadow verges, using low growing flowers that stifle the growth of grasses and which provide food and habitat for the bees, butterflies and other insects necessary to maintain a balanced eco system.
- Further enhancement and protection of our biodiversity will be the Trees for Life scheme. The trees to be planted will be native trees and will be locally grown and sourced. It is hoped that a sponsor will be supportive in this area also.

4.8 A Biodiversity Task Force was established in July 2020

4.9 The first meeting of the Task Force took place on 13 July 2020, where the initial Terms of Reference were amended and agreed. The Terms of Reference for the group are attached at Appendix B

4.10 The Task Force met four times: July 13th, August 12th, August 26th and September 11th.

4.11 Whilst it would have been easy for the group to consider many ambitions, it was acknowledged by the Task Force that their focus should be on achievable actions that they have control or influence over. The priority for the Task Force has been to initiate the steps to which the Councils committed when the motions were passed. These centre on understanding and enhancing wildlife corridors and enhancing the Councils' arboricultural and environmental resources and expertise.

4.12 Learning from the Climate Change Task Force, experts, both from the Councils and other organisations, were included in the core group and, in addition, specialists were invited to meetings where their areas of expertise were explored.

4.13 The importance of reviewing and enhancing wildlife corridors was a key action agreed by the Councils in July 2019 and ecological mapping was acknowledged by the Task Force as an essential first step in carrying out its responsibilities. It was recognised that all actions are reliant on the mapping work, so it is crucial that this is funded and completed in order to support the Action Plan: mapping is the equivalent of baseline data on emissions for the Climate Change Task Force. The mapping proposal is attached at Appendix C.

4.14 The Task Force considered how it could improve management of land within its control such as certain grass verges and public open space, these could best support wildflowers by using a cut and collect method. By bringing public realm services in-house in Babergh along with Mid Suffolk, the councils can exert flexibility in the provision of services and the ability to consider all areas of land more holistically. Again, it is essential that such decisions about how grass verges are managed are supported by accurate mapping.

4.15 The second meeting of the Task Force took place on 12 August 2020, where the focus was on protecting and enhancing biodiversity in planning and development.

- 4.16 Robert Hobbs, the Council's Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning, presented information to the Task Force, which included information about how biodiversity is being addressed in the Joint Local Plan. The Task Force can identify projects and update mapping to identify opportunities for biodiversity to support the implementation of the Joint Local Plan. This can be done through producing a new green infrastructure strategy for both Councils. Following adoption of the Joint Local Plan, additional specific measures to protect and enhance biodiversity and natural capital could be documented in a supplementary planning document to add material weight to planning decisions. In the meantime, other guidance exists that can be used in informing the determination of planning applications.
- 4.17 At the third meeting of the Task Force, held on 26 August 2020. Andrew Graham, the Council's Assistant Arboricultural Officer, gave a presentation on trees. It is estimated that Babergh has just under 10,500 and that Mid-Suffolk has approximately 2,500 recorded trees. Tree stock and condition surveying is a priority area for the Arboricultural Team.
- 4.18 Andrew Graham explained the risk of Ash die-back to the Task Force and highlighted the need for both Councils to ensure that resource is in place to deal with this in the future.
- 4.19 Andrew Graham referred the Task Force to the 'Right Tree, Right Place' document produced by Suffolk County Council, which gives members of the public guidance on planting trees. Attached as Appendix D.
- 4.20 David Hughes, the Council's Public Realm Officer (Countryside), attended the fourth meeting on 11 September, and presented a paper "Enhancing Grasslands for Biodiversity" in respect of meadow planting on public open spaces, attached at Appendix E. David Hughes' presentation explained how meadow planting and associated management techniques could be introduced into our districts. Proposals are based on pilot studies and best practice from Dorset County Council.
- 4.21 Members also considered green burials and agreed to assess the feasibility of setting up a green burial site in Babergh or Mid-Suffolk.
- 4.22 Members of the Task Force identified the need to communicate the biodiversity programme to the public and to actively engage communities and parish councils in implementing some of the actions going forward.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 The Joint Corporate Plan (2019-27) is designed to address the challenges and seize the opportunities facing the districts and their organisations for the foreseeable future. The Councils' vision is to have 'great communities with bright & healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home.'
- 5.2 The Joint Corporate Plan identifies six strategic priorities as set out in the visual below. Environment is one of those six, and the success of the Councils' ambition on climate change is intrinsically interlinked with the strategies that underpin the other five priority areas of Housing, Communities, Well-Being, Economy and Customers. The response to Biodiversity is not just the business of Environment but just as much the Councils' strategic framework. Conversely, Environment plays a key part in every priority within the Corporate Plan.



6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There will be financial implications associated with the process of gathering and inputting data required to create accurate mapping. Full details of the mapping proposal are attached in Appendix C.
- 6.2 The estimated costs for each action is shown within the action plan at Appendix A. A summary of the proposal costs for each Council is shown below:
- Mid Suffolk: £151,900.00
- Babergh: £147,350.00
- 6.3 Any actions relating to Housing will be funded by the relevant Council's Housing Revenue Account. All other actions will be funded by the relevant Council's General Fund.
- 6.4 The action plan implies an element of uncertainty on costs due to external factors stated within the plan.
- 6.5 The programme supporting bio-diversity is ongoing and therefore will continue to have a financial impact in years to come.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p>1.The Councils do not meet their aspiration to enable net biodiversity gain, habitat and species decline continues unchecked.</p>	<p>Unlikely (2)</p>	<p>Bad (3)</p>	<p>Task Force provides a robust set of options for the Cabinet to consider.</p> <p>Cabinet agree a clear prioritised action plan with milestones.</p>
<p>2. The effects of habitat loss results in irreversible damage to numbers of native species and loss of biodiversity.</p>	<p>Unlikely (2)</p>	<p>Disaster (4)</p>	<p>Approaches are evidence based.</p> <p>The impact of initiatives is monitored closely.</p> <p>The release of finance is based on business cases.</p> <p>Officers to begin giving the Cabinet suggestions around cost; priority; timescales; joint working; external funding.</p> <p>Continue to work alongside our peers both in Suffolk and nationally, collaborating where appropriate and sharing best practice and lessons learned.</p>

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken to date. Representations have been made through the cross-party Biodiversity Task Force and the comments and conclusions of that Task Force have been incorporated into the recommendations to Cabinet today.
- 9.2 Several experts have been brought in to guide the work of the Task Force. These being from Essex County Council and Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT), Public Realm officers have consulted with Dorset County Council, Leicestershire County Council and Butterfly Conservation, feeding in information from these organisations to the Task Force.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Councils' statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The collection and mapping of accurate ecological data will allow the Public Realm team to deliver a range of appropriate, targeted interventions which improve habitats of all kinds for plants and animals across Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and will add to our understanding of natural capital within the Districts.
- 11.2 Well-designed new woodlands not only capture Carbon dioxide (CO₂) but deliver a wide range of other benefits too. Sustainably managed woodlands perform a vital role as carbon sinks and reservoirs by capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere and storing it as a component of wood itself.
- 11.3 Roadside green infrastructure, particularly hedges or a combination of hedges and trees help to cut down the spread of air pollution from roads, including black carbon, harmful heavy metals, and microscopic particles.
- 11.4 A major consideration for the establishment of grass meadows in relation to the Councils' declaration of a climate emergency is their importance in carbon sequestration and increasing biodiversity. Grassland (which includes highway verge and public open space) has a significant role in carbon capture and storage. Research suggests that cutting grass and removing the clippings (best practise for meadow management) does not have a significant negative impact on carbon levels in grassland because most of the carbon is stored in roots and organic matter in the soil. Species rich grasslands are thought to store more carbon than those that are less diverse further highlighting the benefits of increasing biodiversity.
- 11.5 The cut and collect method of mowing reduces the dominance of coarse grasses, ragwort, and thistles. Areas treated in this way will provide a more diverse environment for wildlife, increase wildflower populations, and provide nectar sources for pollinators.
- 11.6 Wildflower meadows and verges require less intensive management resulting in a reduction in CO₂ emissions, carbon sequestration, redeployment of resources and the potential reduction in operational costs.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Biodiversity Action Plan	Attached
(b) Biodiversity Task Force Terms of Reference	Attached
(c) Mapping Proposal	Attached
(d) "Right Tree, Right Place" guidance document	Attached
(e) "Enhancing Grasslands for Biodiversity"	Attached

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13.1 None

Babergh & Mid-Suffolk District Councils

Biodiversity Action Plan

Proposal	Cost	Timetable	Viability
<p>Mapping We will undertake mapping work, together with partners by so that we have a clear understanding of land owned by the Councils, current wildlife corridors (including animals, plants and ecosystems); mapping will help identify suitable tree and hedge planting locations and where wildlife corridors need to be established, enhanced or protected.</p> <p>The purpose of mapping will be to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increase understanding of the District's Biodiversity Resources by updating the County Wildlife Site Register with a Condition Assessment. This would also support both LPAs' return to Defra on Government's Single Data List indicator 160-00 for Local Nature conservation/biodiversity. 2) Evaluate ecological assets within Public Realm and 	<p>Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) have offered £1,000 seed funding for this work and, in addition, will undertake initial network mapping as a pilot as part of the current remit to support Babergh and Mid-Suffolk. The mapping will cover public realm sites, local nature reserves (not already included as part of CWS surveys) and county wildlife sites.</p> <p>Anticipated mapping costs based on a joint proposal by SBIS and SWT are as follows:</p> <p>Babergh: £12,250.00 Mid Suffolk: £16,800.00</p> <p>Note that additional funds will be required in future years to infill information. This is estimated at £2000.00 per annum, per District.</p>	<p>Desktop surveys, data gathering and visit scheduling to begin January 2021.</p> <p>Ecological surveys on site to commence April 2021</p> <p>Final reports produced by end September 2021.</p> <p>The Biodiversity Taskforce will be regularly updated on progress as this information is vital in progressing all other actions.</p>	<p>This work is essential for the remainder of the plan to take place.</p> <p>This is the equivalent of understanding our emissions baseline but for Bio-diversity. There are not the skills, nor resource to do this in house and so this element is imperative to the success of the decision to protect and enhance our biodiversity across the Districts.</p>

<p>opportunities for enhancement.</p> <p>3) Initiate a pilot mapping scheme to consider how sites with biodiversity value link into the wider ecological network surrounding the Districts</p>	<p>Further costs may be incurred to widen the scope of the mapping, if indicated.</p>		
<p>Tree & Hedge Planting</p> <p>We will undertake tree planting, and where appropriate hedges on Council-owned land and, where feasible, on other land, such as that belonging to Town and Parish Councils. It is proposed the Babergh & Mid-Suffolk Councils fund the purchase cost and planting of trees but that Town and Parish Councils ensure future care and maintenance.</p> <p>Contact has been made with Town and Parish Councils in order to assess interest in such a scheme and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.</p>	<p>Numbers below based on 500 trees being planted in 2021/22, with 50% of those trees being planted on partner's land.</p> <p>Babergh: £72,500.00 for trees / hedges £32,000.00 inspection / maintenance Council owned trees Total: 104,500.00</p> <p>Mid Suffolk: £72,500.00 for trees / hedges £32,000.00 inspection / maintenance Council owned trees Total: 104,500.00</p> <p>A tree planting and maintenance budget must be established annually from April 2021 to support this action.</p>	<p>Further discussions to be held with interested Towns and Parishes this financial year, so that a tree planting programme may be prepared, starting in April 2021 but continuing thereafter.</p> <p>All trees to be planted in November of each year, or a suitable time for their type and situation.</p>	<p>The mapping work is essential in identifying where additional tree planting is needed.</p> <p>Officers will also contact local nurseries and garden centres to establish if there may be interest in a sponsorship scheme. All species specified by the District Councils will be of native provenance, and where possible locally sourced.</p>

<p>Hedge planting</p> <p>a) We will support and publicise the DEFRA hedge planting grant scheme to those which are eligible to apply. We will help publicise this to assist with awareness.</p> <p>b) We will undertake to help fund hedge planting on land that isn't eligible for the DEFRA hedge planting grant.</p>	<p>a) Externally funded: DEFRA's Hedgerow Planting grant is £11.60 per metre.</p> <p>b) Internally funded: Babergh: £11,600.00 Mid Suffolk: £11,600.00</p>	<p>a) To be accurately costed, based on gaps highlighted by the mapping work, with a bid for budget funding from April 2022.</p> <p>b) Timescale would be in line with Tree Planting above.</p>	<p>a) The first point is reliant on the DEFRA scheme running each year.</p> <p>Data from existing Suffolk wide hedge surveys would be secured and form part of the proposal</p> <p>b) An estimated figure of 1000 metres per District has been used for budgeting purposes.</p>
<p>Meadow planting</p> <p>Where feasible, and in consultation with local communities, we will replace manicured grass and mown verges with meadow planting, to encourage biodiversity.</p> <p>We will encourage developers to include meadow planting in housing developments, in place of the usual grass verges.</p>	<p>To purchase a new cut-and-collect mower and appropriate publicity in trial areas:</p> <p>Babergh: £18,000.00 Mid Suffolk: £18,000.00</p>	<p>Trial sites to be identified and prepared in the final quarter of 2020/ 21, in preparation for seeding in the first quarter of 2021/ 22.</p> <p>Further sites to be identified both by the Councils and by local stakeholders, and, together with the mapping information, officers will produce a meadow planting programme, to include time for consultation with local communities, during 2021/22. This will inform the budget required for an on-going programme over many years.</p>	<p>The mapping will be essential in identifying appropriate sites.</p> <p>Although it is known that meadow planting will improve biodiversity, the need to consult with local communities may mean that some resistance is seen so there will be a requirement to publicise the benefits and educate some people so resources for this need to be considered.</p> <p>Costs are for one mower to cover the trial areas and the appropriate publicity. If the trials are successful a business case will be written to</p>

			understand implementing the full regime across the districts.
<p>Green burial site</p> <p>We will explore the feasibility of setting up a green burial site in one of the districts. If either council doesn't currently own a suitable site, we will search for a suitable site and assess the feasibility of the scheme, based on cost, estimated income and community benefit.</p>	<p>To be confirmed in future business case when suitable land has been sourced.</p>	<p>If a suitable site is found, officers will present a business case to the appropriate Cabinet in 2021/ 22.</p>	<p>There will be a requirement to produce a clear statement which identifies the environmental and ecological aims of the burial ground. This should take account of the existing environmental and ecological value of the site and surrounding area.</p>
<p>Planning</p> <p>As part of the approach to implementing biodiversity actions and achieving 'net gain', the Task Force will engage with the planning directorate for the purpose of preparing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD will set out open space criteria for new developments, design expectations to maximise biodiversity value, planting criteria for trees, hedges, and open space, and will contribute toward climate change objectives as well as the recreational and health and wellbeing needs of District residents.</p>	<p>Minimal capital spend required. Requires significant officer resource.</p> <p>Estimated at approx. £6,000.00 per Council.</p>	<p>Initiate following early results from mapping project and following finalisation of the Joint Local Plan.</p>	<p>This will be a cooperative project involving planning and public realm, as well as health and wellbeing, landscape and climate change considerations.</p>

<p>Bio-Diversity Campaign</p> <p>To raise awareness for residents to understand what they can do in their own homes to make a difference to bio-diversity.</p> <p>This will be a campaign within year one however could become an annual activity if successful.</p>	<p>Babergh: £5,000.00 Mid Suffolk: £5,000.00</p>	<p>Qtr 4 20/21</p>	<p>The biggest impact we could have would be if every household knew what habitats surrounded them and how to make a difference. Many people have a passion for making a difference. This campaign would help people understand what that could be, even as small as what to plant in your window box.</p> <p>If successful this could be widened next year to include a programme of education for schools hosted in our public realm sites.</p>
<p>Totals:</p>	<p>Babergh: £157,350.00 Mid Suffolk: £161,900.00</p>		

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils' Biodiversity Task Force

Terms of Reference

1. Title of Task Force

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils' (BMSDC) Biodiversity Task Force.

2. Purpose

The Task Force has been convened in response to biodiversity motions passed by both Councils in 2019. Its role is to make recommendations to Cabinet(s) on opportunities and actions to protect and improve biodiversity, both in the way in which the Councils jointly carry out their own operations and initiatives, and through partnership working.

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils recognise that there is an urgent need for action.

Mid Suffolk – The council pledges that:

- 1. a task force reviews recognised and potential wildlife corridors in the District, and brings forward proposals to enhance these corridors.*
- 2. additional arboricultural and bio-diversity advisory resources are made available, as necessary, to:*
 - Support the task force*
 - Provide more input to support planning officers*
 - Strengthen the role of public realm team*
 - Provide advice to parishes and other community landowners.*
- 3. additional resources and biodiversity proposals during 2019/20 would need to be funded from the Growth and Efficiency Fund and then considered in preparing the budget for future years*

Babergh – The council pledges that:

- 1 Creation and development of a Wildlife Network Map from which Wildlife Corridors will be identified and created. The map, available to the public, will assist the District to develop Eco Tourism, thereby attracting much needed tourist revenue to the region.*
- 2 As part of our commitment to Biodiversity the Council will work closely with our existing Partners, the County Council and other NGO's involved in protecting our natural habitats.*
- 3 Introduction of the 'Trees for Life' scheme in Babergh District. This offers every family with a new-born baby a tree to plant. The trees to be planted will be native trees and will be locally grown and sourced.*
- 4 That additional biodiversity resources be provided as necessary, to:*
 - Support the Task Force*
 - Provide more input to support planning officers*
 - Strengthen the role of public realm team*
 - Provide advice to parishes and other community landowners*
- 5 Any funding to maintain and improve the biodiversity of our area for 2019/20 will be recommended to Cabinet for approval. The task force would recommend the amount to be spent in future years in a report back to Cabinet by March 2020.*

3. Rationale

The Councils along with Suffolk County Council and other local authorities recognise the need to act decisively to respond to the commitments they have made. One of the first steps must be to ensure that there is clarity about the current position and to understand where the most potential lies for improvement. This will enable resources to be prioritised

to achieve maximum benefit. Further work, beyond the scope and term of this Task Force, will be required with partner organisations to improve biodiversity across Suffolk.

4. B&MSDC Priorities

The work of the Task Force provides the opportunity to contribute to all priority areas of the Corporate Plan:

- Economy
- Housing
- Communities
- Customers
- Environment
- Wellbeing

5. Sponsoring Cabinet Members and joint Chair of the Task Force

Councillor Elisabeth Malvisi

Councillor Jessica Fleming

6. Task Force Members

There will be three seats available on the Task Force for each Council additional to the cabinet members of each Council. These seats will be filled by invitation from the Chair only.

7. Lead Officer

Cassandra Clements - Assistant Director of Environment & Commercial Partnerships

8. Supporting Officers

Nominated officers from Countryside and Public Realm, Law and Governance and Strategic Planning teams.

9. Short description of issues to be covered

Meetings to cover (subject to amendment by the Task Force):

- Biodiversity mapping
- Management of the public realm, council-owned land and roadside verges - managing for the benefit of biodiversity
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity in planning and development
- Encouraging biodiversity on agricultural and private land
- Consideration of proposals for Cabinet.

10. Outcome

Recommended actions to avoid biodiversity loss, conserve and enhance existing habitats and species and achieve biodiversity net gain.

11. Outline Timescale

- Meetings to cover the issues shown in 9. above commencing July 2020 and completing by mid-September 2020.
- Presentation to Cabinet for approval in October 2020.

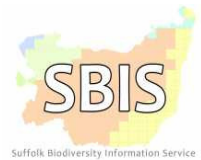
The Chairman and Supporting/Lead Officers may choose to set up a task and finish group to address specific areas of work. The composition of any such group would be at the respective Chairman's discretion and may involve members outside of the Task Force. The Chairman and Supporting/ Lead Officer may invite guest speakers and/ or third parties to widen the expertise and advice available to the Task Force as the work of the group

dictates. The Chairman and Supporting/Lead Officers must ensure the Panel adheres to all relevant dates in respect of submitting reports to Cabinet. This will include a date for Cabinet briefing of the draft final report and deadline for submission of the final report to Democratic Services. It will also include submission of the Key Decision Forward Plan Request.

12. Details of other parties that may be involved

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust
- Essex County Council – Place Services

Proposal for the Biodiversity Task Force: Understanding the Districts' Biodiversity Resources



19th October 2020

Simone Bullion: Suffolk Wildlife Trust, also working in Partnership with Martin Sanford at Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

As well as supporting the Joint Local Plan, the following recommendations are relevant in the light of the proposed planning reforms. I believe this work would greatly assist in understanding which areas should be 'protected' and 'enhanced' for wildlife and people. Further consideration would also establish the role of such areas in the wider ecological network.

Proposed outcomes:

- 1 Increase understanding of the District's Biodiversity Resources by updating the County Wildlife Site Register with a Condition Assessment. This would also support both LPAs' return to Defra on Government's Single Data List indicator 160-00 for Local Nature conservation/biodiversity.
- 2 Evaluation of ecological assets within land within Public Realm and opportunities for enhancement.
- 3 Initiate pilot mapping scheme to consider how all the sites with biodiversity value link into the wider ecological network.

1 County Wildlife Sites

The hierarchy of sites of biodiversity value

In terms of its known biodiversity resource, within the Babergh-Mid Suffolk Districts there are statutory designated sites of international importance such as the Stour and Orwell Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site, Redgrave and Lopham Fens National Nature Reserve, part of the Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a number of sites which are of national biodiversity importance, designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The ecological value of these sites is generally well understood.

There are also non-statutory designated sites. These are known as County Wildlife Sites (CWS), some of which may also be Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs). Some of the CWSs are also designated as Local Nature Reserves by the local authority.

County Wildlife Sites - The rationale behind this non-statutory designation

County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) are areas known to be of county or regional importance for wildlife. The designation is non-statutory but is recognition of a site's high value for biodiversity. Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) and Natural England manage the Suffolk County Wildlife Site system in partnership.

- CWSs contain important resources of UK Priority Habitats and Species under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.
- CWSs complement the statutory protected areas and nature reserves by helping to buffer and maintain habitat links between these sites.

CWSs are implicitly recognised by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as having a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets. In the NPPF 2019 they are described as 'Locally Designated Sites'. CWS are not protected by legislation, but their importance is recognised by local authorities when considering planning applications. Under current planning policy there is a presumption against granting permission for development that would have an adverse impact on a CWS.

The high wildlife value of many CWSs has developed through land management practices that have allowed wildlife to thrive, for example traditional and historical management such as rotational coppicing of woodland, hay cutting or grazing of grasslands. Ensuring the continuation of such appropriate management is vital to maintain the wildlife value of a site. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with landowners and managers is therefore essential.

County Wildlife Sites: The resource

Suffolk currently has 934 County Wildlife Sites representing approximately 2.6% of the county's land area. They represent a mixture of woodlands, grasslands, wetlands including sections of rivers and also sites designated for their habitat mosaic. Woodlands, most of which are ancient, represent the majority of the sites.

With a register of over 900 sites, many of which were designated nearly 30 years ago, it is necessary to visit them on a rolling programme to assess whether they still maintain the features for which the site was originally designated. Where there has been a change, then there is also consideration whether the citation should be reviewed. There is also the opportunity at this stage to provide management advice to the landowners as required. Over the years, various local authorities have supported CWS surveys and management advice, with some additional 'seed' funding being provided by SBIS.

County Wildlife Sites in Babergh - Mid Suffolk

Achieving the best outcomes for biodiversity requires credible evidence derived from a site visit (ground-truthing) and justifiable choices based on ecological knowledge.

Babergh has 204 sites (covering 1714 hectares)

Mid Suffolk has 227 sites (covering 1367 hectares)

Of these there are **23** CWS in Babergh for which we have no recent information and **31** CWS in Mid Suffolk. These 67 sites are considered 'Red' priority because they have not been visited for a number of years, so their current biodiversity value is unknown. They also contain habitats other than woodland, so their potential for change through time is higher.

The list of potential sites is included in Appendix 1.

Proposed costs of site visits and reporting

The purpose of the site visit is to enable the following to be achieved:

- evaluate the current biodiversity value including priority habitats and species and position in the ecological network;
- provide a report with map, photos, summary of ecological assets and management advice as required to the CWS panel and the landowner.

To undertake the above would require at least a day per site. The site visits could be spread over more than one ecological survey season if necessary.

The costs for Suffolk Wildlife Trust, through its Trading Company (SWT Trading Ltd) to undertake each site visit and summary report is as follows:

Unit cost	Babergh 'red list' CWS	Babergh Total Cost	Mid-Suffolk 'red list' CWS	Mid Suffolk Total cost
£350	23	£8050	31	£10850
Total costs combined				£18,900 ex VAT

SBIS has offered 'seed' funding of around £1000.

SWT contribution to the project **in addition** to the above would be to

- Arrange access to the site by finding out who landowner is and connecting them;
- Review the site's original citation and recommend amendments as required;
- Produce a summary condition assessment to the CWS panel;
- Provide management advice to landowners after survey to as required;
- Submit species records to SBIS.

2 Evaluation of assets within Public Realm sites

Following discussions with Will Burchnall (Corporate Manager – Public Realm), it was noted that there are over 600 public realm sites in Babergh (including some very small areas) and around 70 in Mid Suffolk.

is was agreed that focusing on the areas with high biodiversity potential in the first instance – which is probably the woodland – and to set a minimum area to cut down the numbers. Woodlands over 100m² number around 44, so as a contingency to allow for some additional sites, the list should be expanded to 50 public realm sites to be assessed (Final list to be supplied by Will Burchnall).

The following is recommended:

- Undertake site visit of selected public realm sites to assess current biodiversity value and opportunities for enhancement (which could include change in management or the site's capacity for additional tree planting)
- Provide a brief report for each site – approx ½-1 page of A4

The costs for Suffolk Wildlife Trust, through its Trading Company (SWT Trading Ltd) to undertake each site visit and summary report is as follows:

Unit cost	Babergh and Mid Suffolk Public Realm sites	Total cost
£175	50	£8750 ex VAT

The reduced cost is dependent on the above site visits being 'batched' with CWS surveys, thus reducing travel time and incorporated mileage costs.

3 Evaluation of Local Nature Reserves

The list of LNRs is shown in Appendix 1. Most of the LNRs are designated as CWS, two are SSSI.

Four LNRS are either part CWS or undesignated. It is recommended that these are assessed to see if they meet CWS criteria and also to assess how they contribute to the wider ecological network.

The following is recommended:

- Undertake site visit of selected non CWS or partly designated LNRs to assess current biodiversity value and opportunities for enhancement;
- Consider whether they meet CWS criteria and should be put before the CWS panel;
- Evaluate their role in the ecological network;
- Provide a brief report for each site with photos, map and text.

Unit cost	Babergh part or non-designated LNRs	Babergh Total cost	Mid Suffolk part or non-designated LNRs	Mid Suffolk Total cost	Total cost
£350	2	£700	2	£700	£1500 ex VAT

4 Timing of work

It is anticipated that ecological surveys will commence from April 2021. However, if it is agreed that the project is to go ahead, then advance preparation work would take place to contact CWS landowners to request a site visit. Occasionally there can be a delay in finding out ownership.

Production of reports will take place up until Autumn 2021.

5 Mapping of sites and ecological networks

Martin Sanford, Manager at SBIS, is interested in being involved as a partnership project and start to draw together all the evidence relating to the statutorily designated sites, the CWSs and key public realm sites, as well as other important corridors in the landscape such wildlife corridors including rivers and other linear features.

By buffering the above sites, it would be possible to create a broad-brush map indicating areas that should be protected and where the key ecological networks are located. This would be very much an iterative process which could be updated as required as more information comes forward in future years.

Martin has indicated that the pilot to commence the above work could initially be undertaken within his current remit to support Babergh-Mid Suffolk District Councils.

Appendix 1

Babergh non-woodland CWSs not recently surveyed

Acton churchyard
Assington Meadow
Bushey Ley Farm Arable Fields
Cuckoo Tye Farm Pond
Dodnash Brook Pond
Higham (East) Meadow
Hill Farm Meadow
Hitcham Hall Meadows
Laurel Cottage Meadow/Grassland
Lower Holbrook Reedbed
Maria Martin's Cottage Meadow
Newton Road Allotments
Paddock Plantation Pond
Polstead Acid Grassland
Rattlesden Airfield
Sherbourne House Meadows
Stowe Hill
Tendring Park Marshes
Thorington Street Pit & Reserve
Valley Farm Meadow (Hadleigh)
Wasses Marshes
Whatfield Meadow
Wherstead Heath

Babergh LNRs

Bourne Park Reedbeds (CWS)
Millennium Wood CWS
Spring Wood (CWS)
Bobbits Lane (CWS)
Sudbury Common Lands (CWS)
Arger Fen (SSSI)
Tiger Hill (SSSI)
Railway Walk Hadleigh (CWS)
Broom Hill Hadleigh (CWS)
Riverside Walk Hadleigh (CWS)

The Railway Walks (CWS) Long
Melford Country Park – no designation
Shawlands Wood (No designation)

Mid Suffolk non-woodland CWSs not recently surveyed



Alderson Lake
Barham Pits
Bavilham Churchyard
Bavilham Fishpond
Broad Boarder
Chalkeith Road Meadow
Combs Lane Cornflower Site
Coronation Meadow
Creeping St Mary Meadows
Crowfield Churchyard
Cubitts Pit
Drinkstone Meadow
Fen Acre Meadow
Gt Blakenham Churchyard
Hall Farm Meadow (Wortham)
Hessett Nature Reserve
Hoxne Meadow
Laxfield Cemetery
Manor Farm Meadows (Coddenham)
Railway Meadows (Thrandeston)
Redgrave Lake
River Waveney Meadows
Sharnford Mere
Shrubland Park
Southolt Churchyard
Stradbroke Cemetery
Tassel Stonewort Site
Topcroft Farm Meadows
Turkey Hall Meadows
Westhorpe Green
Weybread Gravel Pits

Mid Suffolk LNRs

Church Meadow (CWS)
Fen Alder Carr (CWS)
Rede Wood (CWS)
Bramford Meadows (part CWS)

Needham Lakes (No designation)
The Pennings Eye (No designation)

RIGHT TREE - RIGHT PLACE

Choosing optimal and suitable trees and shrubs in urban areas can minimise the negative influences, increase the positive effects and the aesthetic acceptance by residents. Additional challenges in the selection of trees and shrubs are user requirements and growth conditions at urban sites.

We will select and use trees in the appropriate context to enhance certain outcomes for everyone and improve opportunities to achieve a mature working landscape while avoiding costs of remedial work.

We will consider the full range of factors for long-term success. As the Tree Council puts it, the overriding consideration for successfully choosing a tree is that “unborn generations should thank you for it” (Trees in Your Ground, p40). Factors to consider relate to the tree, the location and the people who will maintain it.

These might include:

- a) Function: the desired benefit from the tree – see seeking multiple benefits Character: the historic and landscape character of the area.
- b) Diversity: the characteristics and profile of the wider tree population – see knowing our tree resource.
- c) Design: the scale, balance, impact, texture, colour expected from the tree. – Site constraints, including:
- d) Soil types and conditions, rainfall, amount of sun, surrounding building heights, and available space both above and underground.
- e) Potential nuisance, including: pollens, obstruction of light to habitable rooms, sight-lines for CCTV, highway and street lighting, clearances for overhead cables and vehicles.
- f) Risk of damage to structures the tree might cause – this requires an awareness of soil type, the tree species and its characteristics as well as of the design of foundations.
- g) Support capacity: alignment with community’s aspirations as well as with long-term management and maintenance capacity.

BS 8545 is a new British Standard to assist people involved in planning, designing, resourcing, producing, planting and managing new trees in the landscape. It describes a process for planting young trees that will result in them achieving 'independence in the landscape'. This means that they are healthy and have every chance of survival.

This standard assists practitioners in making balanced and informed tree planting decisions. Ideally, all newly planted trees need to be able to grow with vigour appropriate to the species and situation, in good health, and with minimal nuisance to achieve the desired planting objectives. BS 8545 gives recommendations for transplanting young trees successfully from the nursery, through to achieving their eventual independence in the landscape, specifically covering the issues of planning, design, production, planting and management. It sets out good practice in strategic and policy formation and then follows the whole transplanting process through to independence in the landscapeⁱ:

Figure 42 - Lack of soil volume and compaction has harmed the tree growth rates in this car park



- *MAKING TREE-FRIENDLY PLACES*

We will establish priority locations for new tree planting (in line with the Right Place - Right Tree principles), taking into account such factors as levels of social deprivation, transport corridors (including rail and water) and gateways, derelict land, biodiversity objectives, areas of regeneration and community forests (as well as identifying habitats inappropriately planted for tree removal).

- *TREES IN HARD LANDSCAPE*

We will utilise TDAG 'Trees in Hard Landscapes' to meet the practical challenges and solutions to integrating trees in 21st century streets, civic spaces and surface car parks, detailing process, design and technical options. This will be of particular use for our highway engineers, public realm professionals and tree specialists. This is in line with Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure Highways (2016 - A.9.9.4)ⁱⁱ.

ⁱ

- Policy and strategy.
- Site evaluation and constraints assessment.
- Species selection.
- Nursery production and procurement.
- Handling and storage.
- Planting.

-
- Post-planting management and maintenance.

ⁱⁱ For producing this guide, TDAG joined forces with the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE), the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT), the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), and the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF), that have all been active members of the steering group reviewing and advising throughout the development process. *Trees in Hard Landscapes: A Guide for Delivery* has also benefited from the input of over 100 built environments professionals and organisations from wide ranging disciplines and sectors who have taken part in interviews, contributed case study materials and/or offered feedback on earlier drafts. *Trees in Hard Landscapes: A Guide for Delivery* received the 2016 Landscape Institute Award for Policy and Research explores the practical challenges and solutions to integrating trees in 21st century streets, civic spaces and surface car parks, detailing process, design and technical options will be of particular interest to highway engineers, public realm professionals and tree specialists.

Enhancing Grasslands for Biodiversity

Grasslands maintained by the Council's Public Realm Team fall into two main types

Short-mown Grassland Management

Much of the land maintained by the Public Realm team consists of grassland, especially grasslands within housing developments and along roadsides that are traditionally kept short mown.

The reasons for this are likely to be a combination of 'tradition', tidiness and road safety.

These short mown open spaces do provide a rather sterile environment for residents to walk in, play in or picnic in but have little value for wildlife other than those species that can withstand regular cutting. Dandelions and Daisies are common but are often cut in full flower on a regular 'grass cutting round.'

In Stowmarket over 240,000 sq m of grass is maintained by cutting it regularly throughout the year. In Sudbury, over 265,000 sq m and in Great Cornard over 165,000 sq m. Whilst many of these grass areas are small roadside verges within the towns, there are large grass areas that are routinely cut



Sudbury – new open space on Cranworth Road prior to cutting.

This area would be cut once every 3 weeks. In between, a range of flowers appear – including Pyramidal Orchids.



Stowmarket – wide mown grass verge along Chilton Way.

This area is cut every 3 weeks. No flowers evident other than 'lawn weeds'

Cut and Collect – Grassland Management

In a number of larger open spaces and nature reserves, the Councils have, for many years managed a number of grassland sites by allowing the grass to grow, cutting it in late Summer and collecting and disposing of the collected material.

This method allows flowers to develop, bloom and set seed whilst the removal of the cut material helps reduce soil fertility and discourages vigorous grass growth in subsequent years.



Hadleigh Railway Walk – meadow cut once a year and arising removed.

Meadow supports a variety of plants and butterflies. Grass Snake and Common Lizard present.



The Pennings LNR – meadow cut once a year and arisings removed

Main Sites where cut and collect grassland management takes place

The Mid Suffolk Grounds Maintenance Team undertake a cut and collect on the following countryside sites

- Needham Lake Local Nature Reserve – annual cut of meadows on Station Field (approx. 2.5ha).
- The Pennings LNR – annual cut of both paddocks. (approx. 1.4ha)
- Church Meadow LNR – annual cut of unfenced meadow (approx. 0.7ha)

The cuts have been taking place most years for at least 16 years. Some years were missed due to machinery issues or weather conditions. The impact has been varied due to the nature of the sites.

Needham Lake – annual cutting has seen a reduction in the amount of False Oat Grass (indicative of unmanaged meadows) present in the drier parts of the site and a shorter grassland is now present over half of the site. In the lower lying areas along

the river (which are prone to flooding) a taller vegetation is present. Both areas support typical flowers and insects though these are not 'flower rich meadows' yet.

The Pennings – annual cutting has produced a mosaic of vegetation in the two meadows that were once arable fields. Both meadows flood so nutrient enrichment from the river is ongoing and results in vigorous grass growth. One meadow supports a mix of plants associated with damp meadows (yellow flag, meadowsweet, rush and sedge). The second meadow has stands of reed and sedge in the damper areas amongst the taller grasses.

Church Meadow – annual cutting is having little impact on the meadow in terms of grassland structure. Tall grasses still dominate – probably due to high nutrient levels in the soil and infrequent cutting in the past. Annual cutting does reduce the thatch and minimises further nutrient build up

Hadleigh Railway Walk (c800 sq m) – a section of railway embankment is cut and raked each year with the arisings removed. This section is a flower rich meadow and maintenance minimises scrub encroachment and nutrient build up.

Purcell Road, Stowmarket (c1200sq m) - a section of open space has been left to grow long to enable a meadow to develop. This was agreed with the local community. The meadow will be cut and collected.

Ash Road, Onehouse (750 sq m). A small green within a housing development has been left to grow into a meadow at the request of local residents. One resident who objected continues to cut part of this as short grass. Too early to tell what impact this will have but it does highlight one of the main issues that if everyone is not on board then the scheme does cause neighbourhood tensions

Elmswell – The local ' Elmswild' Community Group have identified areas of MSDC open space that they wish to leave as wildflower meadows and we have ceased cutting those areas to enable flowers to develop

What more could we be doing to improve grassland management?

- We could stop the widespread mowing of open spaces as short mown grass and leave areas as longer areas of grassland. This will not necessarily produce flower rich meadows just long areas of amenity grassland if that was the grass seed mix original planted there
- We could introduce a cut and collect method of grassland management on specific sites so that we reduce soil nutrient and reduce grass growth. Flowering plants can then establish naturally. Additional scarifying and overseeding with a wildflower seed mix would add wildflowers to the sward.
- We could delay cutting on selected open spaces where wildflowers are already present (eg Cranworth Road – see above). The back edges of some

of the wider verges in Cedars Park support good numbers of Bee and Pyramidal orchids so could be left uncut early in the season to allow the flowers to bloom and set seed before cutting later

- We could positively enhance grassland areas by adding wildflower seed mixes either directly into existing grass swards or by preparing specific areas and sowing colourful mixes to create eye-catching displays in key areas.



Planted and natural road side verges images from elsewhere in the Country

Can we identify some potential sites to improve?

Road verges can support a range of wildflowers naturally but ‘enhancements’ can be made through planting of wildflower seed mixes. These do however require maintenance and may not necessarily result in cost or time savings (information sought from other Councils re their schemes). There could be opportunities to manage some of the wider grass verges within urban areas (eg Cedars Park, Stowmarket) as wildflower verges without impacting on visibility. If this type of scheme is considered, then I believe sites need to be prominent so they can be viewed by many passing members of the public.

There is a long established ‘Roadside Nature Reserve Scheme’ managed by SCC (20+ RNRs in both Babergh and Mid Suffolk).

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/suffolks-countryside-and-wildlife/landscape-and-wildlife/> Parish Councils and volunteers assist the Council's contractors in maintaining these sites. These are all natural verges and designated due to the presence of one or more rare plants in Suffolk

Creating 'Wildflower Meadows'

Advice was sought from Durham County Council and Swansea City Council who have both established wildflower verges and meadows across their areas.

Durham use two methods to establish wildflower meadows:

- 1) Sowing into existing grassland. Grassland cut very short, area then scarified (heavily raked) to expose 50% bare soil and then oversown. Would recommend that yellow rattle is added to whatever wildflower seed mix is used if mix does not specifically contain it. Yellow rattle is a parasitic plant. It sends out roots that grow into those of neighbouring grasses which reduces the vigour of grass and allows other plant species to develop.
- 2) Sowing into a prepared bed. Areas were cut short then sprayed with a total weedkiller to completely kill off existing weeds / vegetation. Area were then cultivated, prepared to create a seed bed and then sown.

Wildflower seed mixes can be easily obtained from many seed suppliers. The 'Restore and Enrich' seed mix used by DCC was chosen to enrich existing grassland areas by sowing into existing grassland, prepared as in 1. (above) at a rate of 3g/m². 1kg of wildflower seed would cost £100 - £125 and would cover an area of 330 sq m of existing grassland by over-sowing. With the huge areas of short mown grassland present across the Districts creation of meadows by over-sowing would need to target key areas – but would create long term meadows if managed correctly.

<https://www.bostonseeds.com/library/BSRE-Restore-and-Enrich-Wildflower-Seed-Mixture.pdf>

Costs can be reduced by sowing a mix of 80% grasses and 20% wildflowers. A typical 1kg pack costs around £40. This would be a more suitable mix where new grassland is being established as in 2. above. A 1kg bag covers around 200 sq m

<https://www.bostonseeds.com/products/wildflowers-seed/wildflower-seed-mixtures-20/>

If a brightly coloured mix is needed to provide an attractive roadside verge then a 'cornfield annual mix' or similar could be planted. As annuals, these plants bloom, seed, then die so the area would need to be resown annually – though some seeding from the original plants would be expected if the seed is allowed to fall and the ground is prepared for the following year.

<https://www.wildflower.co.uk/wildflower-seed-mixtures/cornfield-annuals.html>

Possible sites Mid Suffolk.

A number of sites in Mid Suffolk and Babergh have been identified where meadows or colourful verges could be created. There will be many more – these are just a few I have identified on maps or that I know about:

Verges

- **Cedars Park** – Guncotton Way and Mortimer Road, Stowmarket
- **Needham Road Central reservations**, Stowmarket (main road in from Needham Market)
- **Stowmarket Road verges**, Needham Market
- **Church Road, Elmswell**. Part of a wider open space. Possible opportunity to work with Elmswild who are supportive of changing mowing regimes
- **Norton Road, Thurston** – wide short mown verge on edge of village.
- **Church Street, Stradbroke**. Wide verge between main road and access road to housing

Possible sites in Babergh

- **Waldingfield Road, Sudbury**. Wide grass verge alongside main road close to 'Homebase Roundabout'
- **Acton Lane, Sudbury**. Wide grass verges
- **Newton Road, Sudbury**. Use existing herbaceous flower beds to create cornfield annual mix. (Need to involve Sudbury in Bloom)
- **Ann Beaumont Way, Hadleigh**. Either side of the entrance to the estate
- **Lady Lane, Hadleigh**. Enhancements of some of the long grass banks
- **Little St Mary's, Long Melford**. Wide grass verge alongside main road

Open Spaces across Mid Suffolk and Babergh

There are a number of larger open spaces in the main towns that could be enhanced by creating wildflower meadows.

- Cedars Park, Stowmarket
- Purcell Road, Stowmarket
- Beaumont Park, Hadleigh
- Easthouse Meadow Hadleigh
- First and Second Avenue, Sudbury
- Aubrey Drive area, Sudbury
- Cordell Road, Long Melford
- Wells Way, Debenham

There are also numerous smaller open spaces within developments. Many newer schemes include wildflower meadow mixes within their landscaping scheme. If the Councils adopt these areas there should be a maintenance plan to follow to allow the development of the wildflower meadows on these developments.

Prepared by the Babergh Mid Suffolk Public Realm Team