

To: City Executive Board

Date: 17December 2014

Report of: Head of Environmental Development

Title of Report: Corporate Biodiversity Strategy

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To agree the adoption of Oxford City Council Corporate Biodiversity Strategy 2015 -2020

Key decision? Yes

Executive lead member: Councillor John Tanner, Executive member for Cleaner, Greener Oxford, Climate Change and Transport

Policy Framework: Sustainability Strategy 2011-2020

Recommendation: That the City Executive Board approve the Corporate Biodiversity Strategy for public consultation.

Appendices to report:

Appendix 1: Draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy
Appendix 2: Risk Register

Introduction

1. Oxford City Council has a duty to conserve biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Section 40 of the Act states that:

"Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity".

2. Delivering positive biodiversity outcomes contributes to all the City Council's core priorities. Biodiversity underpins all human life and is central to providing natural benefits which are the natural processes that we rely on, such as food and fuel production, maintenance of air, soil and water quality and the regulation of climate and flooding. It also provides opportunities for community engagement and recreation and contributes to

healthier communities and stronger local economies. It is an essential element of 'Building a World Class City for Everyone'.

3. The draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy aims to act as a practical tool for Oxford City Council to influence and encourage biodiversity work within the council's direct influence and to demonstrate how Oxford City Council is fulfilling its duties as set out in the NERC Act.

Background

4. In December 2011 CEB approved a Sustainability Strategy for Oxford 2011 - 2020. The Sustainability Strategy focuses on a number of core themes including biodiversity, climate change, flooding, land quality and managing our waste. This report presents and recommends adoption of a Corporate Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford in line with the aims of the Sustainability Strategy. The Sustainability Strategy was approved following public consultation. As the draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy is subordinate and is a document it is not proposed to hold a public consultation on this strategy.
5. Oxford City Council published a document entitled "A Nature Conservation Strategy for Oxford" in 1996. This strategy documented Oxford's biodiversity resource and identified the threats and opportunities for biodiversity in the city. Whilst this strategy presented a lot of information about our biodiversity resource and its management, its wide scope presented a challenge in order to effectively deliver it. This draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy keeps a clear focus on the potential impacts that our service areas have on biodiversity and identifies achievable actions from within existing resources.

Strategy Aim

6. The aim of the strategy is to ensure that our responsibilities to conserve and enhance biodiversity are integrated into all Oxford City Council's policies and service areas. It also aims to achieve a clear understanding across all staff on the importance of conserving biodiversity and how biodiversity relate to their own decisions and actions.

Strategy Objectives

7. The strategy contains the following objectives:

Objective 1: To act as a responsible **landowner and manager** for the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Objective 2: To undertake our duties as a **regulator and policy maker** to ensure the continued protection of biodiversity resources in accordance with legislation and to ensure that new policies are formulated to promote new development that allows biodiversity to flourish.

Objective 3: To promote the benefits of conserving and enhancing our biodiversity resource to local communities through our role as an **advocate and facilitator**.

Review

8. It is proposed to review the strategy every five years and report progress on an annual basis to the Cleaner Greener Board.

Risk

9. The draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy sets out our responsibilities and how we intend to meet them. The adoption of the strategy itself should reduce reputational risk to the council by communicating our roles and responsibilities clearly. It is particularly important to ensure that the city council do not cause damage to legally protected habitats or species as set out in the Habitats Directive. It is important to note that there have been cases where local authorities have been fined for causing damage and disturbance to protected habitats and species.
10. Commitment has been sought and gained from all relevant service areas to help to deliver the actions presented in the strategy. This will help reduce the potential reputational risk of not delivering what we said we would.
11. A risk register has been completed and is available to view in Appendix 2.

Financial Implications

12. The actions proposed within the consultative draft can be delivered within present funding levels. Further commitments are likely to have financial impacts and are not resourced within existing budgets.
13. The Council do currently not have dedicated staff resource available in order to support actions within the strategy and hence actions are devolved to individual service areas.
14. There are potential cost savings from altering management practices. For example, the Parks Service Area has reduced grass cutting in our parks. This has saved the council money and also provides new habitats for species. Furthermore, planting perennials rather than annual bedding plants has also saved the council resources.
15. Biodiversity is essential for sustaining the natural ecosystems on which humans and, therefore, human economic systems depend. Green spaces contribute to our local economy in a variety of ways for example; they provide important opportunities for tourism and recreation and contribute to reducing the impacts of flooding by providing essential flood storage capacity.

Climate Change / Environmental Impact

16. The environmental benefits of improving biodiversity are numerous. Biodiversity is central to our ecosystem services which are the natural processes that we benefit from, such as food and fuel production,

maintenance of air, soil and water quality and the regulation of climate and flooding.

17. The draft Corporate Biodiversity Strategy links closely to the City Councils Sustainability Strategy adopted at CEB in December 2011

Equalities Impact

18. The social benefits of implementing a strategy include community development opportunities and health benefits that can be enjoyed by all. Effective delivery of the strategy would have equality benefits. No significant adverse equality impacts have been identified.

Legal Implications

19. We have a duty to conserve biodiversity under the NERC Act and to not disturb or damage particular habitats and species protected under the Habitats Directive. This strategy will help the City Council demonstrate compliance with our legal duties.

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Background Papers: None