

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 March 2023
Report of: Climate and Environment Panel
Title of Report: Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Cllr Jemima Hunt, Climate and Environment Panel Chair
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice;
Corporate Priority:	Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Climate and Environment Panel met on 09 March 2023 to consider a report on the Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford. The report recommends that Cabinet notes the report and the proposed establishment of a steering group in connection with the preparation of the Biodiversity Strategy.

Summary and recommendations

2. The Panel was grateful to Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice, for attending to present the report as well to Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy, and Mai Jarvis, Environmental Sustainability Lead, for attending to answer the Panel's questions.

3. The Panel was pleased to note the recognition that collaboration across the City was key to the success of a Biodiversity Strategy and that the Council was committed to its success. The Panel noted that the report explained the Council expected the steering group to “include representatives from the Local Nature Partnership, health, universities, businesses, wildlife groups, planning and community groups.” The Panel considered that it would be particularly appropriate for Oxford University’s Biodiversity Network and the HERO project to be represented on the steering group. The Panel was grateful to the member of the public who addressed the Panel for drawing attention to these groups.

Recommendation 1: That the Council seeks to ensure that, amongst others, Oxford University’s Biodiversity Network and the HERO project are represented on the steering group.

4. The Panel recognised the importance of the Baseline Exercise as being fundamental to the success of the Strategy. The Panel considered it vital that, in conducting the Baseline Exercise, the Council and its partners must be aware of, and take account of, shifting baseline syndrome and the impact that would have on individual expectations.

Recommendation 2: That the Council, in conducting the baseline exercise, takes account of shifting baseline syndrome.

5. The Panel noted that the second bullet point in paragraph 11 referred to one potential area of focus including that of “considering the appropriateness of the use of pesticides including glyphosates.” The Panel considered that it would be appropriate to go further than that and argued that, rather, the Council should be seeking to stop the use of pesticides and herbicides on Council-owned land as soon as possible and discouraging their use more widely.

Recommendation 3: That the Council considers how best to move away from the use of chemicals in land maintenance as a matter of urgency.

6. The Panel established that Natural England has not had the capacity to audit the eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the city for some years. The Panel noted that the report suggests that an audit “could be undertaken to better understand how favourable condition can be retained/achieved across these sites” and considered that it was important that this should be done as soon as possible.

Recommendation 4: That the Council commissions or conducts its own audits of the eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the near future in order to understand their current condition.

7. The Panel regretted the absence of an explicit reference to trees in the report. The Panel considered it essential that the Council commit explicitly to preserving and protecting mature trees wherever feasible, in line with the Urban Forest Strategy.

Recommendation 5: That the Council ensures that the protection of mature trees is prioritised wherever possible.

8. The Panel considered it would be inappropriate for any Biodiversity Strategy drawn up not to take account of the internationally agreed Global Biodiversity

Framework and considered it important that the Council commits to adhering to it. Similarly, the Panel considered that the Council should commit to, at the least, meeting the Government targets on halting the decline of species.

Recommendation 6: That the Council commits to ensuring that the Biodiversity Strategy is developed in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and, also, at least in alignment with Government targets to halt decline of species under the Environment Act 2021.

9. The Panel recognised that the Local Plan is required to take account of biodiversity. The Panel considered that the interlinkage of the Biodiversity Strategy and the needs of the Local Plan should be emphasised and highlighted in the drawing up of the Strategy and the development of the Local Plan.

Recommendation 7: That the Council takes account of the interconnectedness between the policies in the Local Plan and the Biodiversity Strategy when developing both documents and ensures that these links are emphasised and appropriately cross-referenced.

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