

Appendix A
Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of
the Climate and Environment Panel of the Scrutiny Committee

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Panel on 29 November 2023 concerning the Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council, in collaboration with partners who hold relevant data, maps data relating to landscape and habitat type onto a centralised system (e.g. GIS) and populates with information about particular sites or projects which require funding; and makes this publicly accessible so that Members, community groups and the general public can find and support local projects near to them.	No	We recognise the benefits of this in line with the Scrutiny recommendation, however it would unfortunately require a significant amount of specialist officer time to coordinate, design, deliver and for ongoing review which is currently not budgeted or has identified officer capacity for. An option might be linked to the recent introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and this might be able to provide funding for much of the habitat enhancement projects required in future years.
2) That the Council explores how volunteer coordination could be delivered within existing resource as part of the Council's core 'business as usual'.	In Part	There will be ongoing work by the ODS Countryside Team to facilitate volunteering opportunities where possible as part of their day-to-day work, and also through the City Council's Green Spaces team with Friends of park groups. It would be challenging to expand this further without additional resource as the majority of people tend to volunteer at the weekends when there isn't dedicated resource. Officers would be able to continue to explore external funding opportunities that may link to this.

<p>3) That the Council reviews the structure of its contracts with Oxford Direct Services in relation to parks and green space management in the longer-term, to ensure that there is clarity within those contracts as to whether the management of parks and green spaces is led by prescriptive inputs (certain amount of work over a defined period of time) or outputs (supporting, protecting and enhancing biodiversity).</p>	No	<p>There is a high level of commitment and expertise within ODS around the management of the green spaces for biodiversity. The OCC Biodiversity Review for its green spaces provides the Council's agreed approach and highlights the many habitat improvement projects and other conservation work successfully delivered over recent years.</p> <p>Whilst creating or completely renewing detailed specification contracts requires a significant amount of resource which isn't currently in place, the Council does have an OCC/ODS Client officer review meeting which might be appropriate to discuss key strategic areas within this.</p>
<p>4) That the Council ensures the most appropriate approach for enhancing biodiversity is taken in its parks and nature areas according to environment on a site-by-site basis – with a focus on the right approach in the right place, rather than a uniform approach across all sites.</p>	Yes	<p>This is very much already in place for the many habitats and other non-recreation and sports areas in OCC's parks and nature areas. This is particularly important in a location like Oxford where there is a significant variation in geology, hydrology and soil types. If managed empathetically these different topographies develop their own distinct habitats, flora and fauna, and thereby increase the overall range of biodiversity.</p>