

EPSOM AND EWELL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Head of Service:	Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Epsom and Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30.

Summary

This report asks the committee to agree the next 10 year Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30, which builds on the successes and knowledge gained from the original 10 yr plan 2010-20. The key objectives of the new plan are to:

- Raise awareness and engagement in Biodiversity and develop our partnerships
- Ensure the protection and enhancement of our current Biodiversity resource.
- In line with the Local Plan, identify and realise new opportunities for Biodiversity.
- Seek to secure sustainable long-term funding.
- Identify further opportunities to act locally where managing biodiversity can assist with global priorities of environmental sustainability e.g. climate change.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) **Recommend that the Council adopts the Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30, as currently drafted and agrees that this Council should support the working group to work in partnership with locally based organisations and individuals to implement and develop the plan.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 Biodiversity provides the support systems that sustain human existence. It provides many of the essentials of life, our oxygen, water, food, clothing, health and relaxation. Protection and enhancement of Epsom and Ewell's Biodiversity is vital. We must 'act locally and think globally'.

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- 1.2 The Biodiversity Action Plan will help inform the Local Plan and it reflects targets laid out within the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.
- 1.3 Implementing the plan will also help to fulfil seven Key Service Priorities (see section 6) and ensure we adhere to our statutory responsibilities (see section 5).

2 Background

- 2.1 The Borough's first biodiversity action plan was produced by the Epsom & Ewell Local Biodiversity Action Plan Working Group and approved by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in 2010.
- 2.2 The 2020-30 plan builds on the successes and knowledge gained over the previous 10 yrs. The objectives and targets have been honed to provide clear guidance to protect and enhance the Borough's Biodiversity.
- 2.3 The new plan has 5 overall objectives and 27 targets. It should be noted that the 'Working Group' has no set budget to directly assist in implementing the plan and consequently is restricted to a coordinating/prioritising role with the plan as an essential guide and tool. That said, all members of the 'Working Group' continue to be able to contribute to the implementation of the plan through the course of their normal duties.
- 2.4 It is a target within the new plan to ensure adequate resource is found for the continuing protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Epsom and Ewell.
- 2.5 This plan is so important because Epsom and Ewell is an amazing place! It contains 13 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, 2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 4 Local Nature Reserves, 13 Ancient Woodlands, 2 reserves managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust and 2 managed by the Woodland Trust, 12 out of the 19 priority habitats found in Surrey, and 113 species of principal importance!
- 2.6 New additions to the plan include reference to the upcoming Environment Bill, which will mandate Biodiversity Net-Gain (current policy is no net loss of Biodiversity.) Biodiversity Net Gain means the delivery of infrastructure and housing is not at the expense of biodiversity. Biodiversity net gain requires development to ensure habitats for wildlife are enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development.

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- 2.7 Another new addition refers to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 (chapter 15), which requires biodiversity objectives to be included in local development documents. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment; a key method will be improving the management and protection of land within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, of which there are three in Epsom and Ewell. Ensuring habitat connectivity and 'coherent ecological networks' is vital to a well-functioning ecosystem.
- 2.8 The plan highlights the recognition over the last 10 years, of the further benefits of biodiversity known as Ecosystem Services. Not only is it good for wildlife but it provides us with oxygen, water, food through pollination, clothing. It is also so important to our health and well-being, highlighted during the covid-19 pandemic. Access to well-managed green spaces is vital to us all.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Impact Assessment

- 3.1.1 If we do not implement the Biodiversity Action Plan, the authority may be considered not to be fulfilling its Biodiversity Duty as outlined in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. (See section 5)

3.2 Crime & Disorder

- 3.2.1 By implementing the Biodiversity Action Plan, we will ensure our green spaces are well looked after, it will help our residents to understand and appreciate the importance of their local biodiversity and therefore the sites will be valued and respected. It may help towards decreasing anti-social behaviour.

3.3 Safeguarding

- 3.3.1 A great deal of the work outlined in the plan and our site management plans rely on our regular volunteering groups. It is a great opportunity for everyone to become involved in the green spaces in the community. Over the lifetime of the last plan, we have provided opportunities for vulnerable adults to volunteer with us, which has proved very successful and enjoyable for them. Our volunteering policies ensure their welfare is safeguarded.

3.4 Dependencies

- 3.4.1 None for the purposes of this report

4 Financial Implications

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- 4.1 Officer time will be needed to implement this plan. This includes time involving the working group meetings and attending the Surrey Nature Partnership Biodiversity Working Group and other partnership's meetings.
- 4.2 One potential income stream could come from the Community Infrastructure Levy. Another is the Green Infrastructure Fund, which will be provided from the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain. It is recommended that the spending of these funds be guided by this plan. Other external sources of funding will also be sought.
- 4.3 However, to successfully implement this plan it may be necessary for the Council to consider appropriate levels of funding.
- 4.4 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Officer time required by the plan will be met from within existing resources. No further Council funding is currently available for allocation to the plan.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council has a duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) to have regard to Biodiversity in exercising all its functions.
- 5.2 Under the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, like all public bodies who own a SSSI, has a duty under section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI.
- 5.3 The forthcoming Environment Bill will mandate 'Biodiversity Net Gain' – meaning the delivery of infrastructure and housing is not at the expense of biodiversity.
- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 (chapter 15) requires biodiversity objectives to be included in local development documents. By agreeing the Biodiversity Action Plan, these legal obligations will be adhered to.
- 5.5 **Monitoring Officer's comments: None arising from the content of this report.**

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:
 - Maintain clean and attractive streets and open spaces.
 - Enhance the borough's natural assets, preserving and increasing biodiversity.

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Work with partners to reduce our impact on the environment and move closer to becoming carbon neutral.

Encourage high quality design, which balances the built environment with new open green spaces.

Work with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities, focusing in particular on those who are more vulnerable.

Enable community and voluntary sector run activities, which enhance wellbeing and community safety outcomes.

Promote Epsom & Ewell as a great place to live, work and study, and encourage inward investment

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan:-

Council's Biodiversity Action Plan to reflect commitment to climate change.

Understand how the Council can increase the level of carbon capture from Council owned and managed land.

Work with relevant specialist groups in the community to drive up sustainable practice both inside and outside the organisation.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:**

By agreeing the Biodiversity Action Plan, there can only be positive outcomes for the Borough's environment. The plan also reflects the Borough's Climate Change Action Plan.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

Managing the Biodiversity resource of the borough is inherently sustainable.

Having well-managed open spaces for wildlife and people encourages more people to use, respect and value them and therefore makes them safer places to be.

6.5 **Partnerships:** The working group itself is a partnership between different departments of the EEBC, Surrey County Council, Surrey Biological Records Centre and a local environmental expert.

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Over the last 10 yrs firm partnerships have been made between organisations such as City of London, South East Rivers Trust, Natural England, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Surrey Botanical Society, Butterfly conservation, British Dragonfly Society, to name a few. All of which have resulted in benefits for the management of Biodiversity within Epsom and Ewell and will be continued in to the future.

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Other papers:

- Epsom and Ewell Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-20
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 (chapter 15)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Environment Bill 2020
- EEBC owned site management plans