

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

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| <b>1.</b> | <b>Meeting:</b>        | <b>Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing</b>        |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>Date:</b>           | <b>15th January 2013</b>                              |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>Title:</b>          | <b>Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 review</b> |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Programme Area:</b> | <b>Environment and Development Services</b>           |

### **5. Summary**

This report seeks support for the revised Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan and acceptance of the plan within the environmental evidence base of the Rotherham Local Plan.

### **6. Recommendations**

- That the 2012 Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan be accepted within the Local Plan system;
- That support be given for the 2012 Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan to be submitted for adoption by Rotherham MBC via Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing;

## Proposal and Details

Rotherham Biodiversity Forum partners published the first Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan (RBAP) in 2004, which was adopted by RMBC. The plan was based on the protection and enhancement of habitats and species prioritised both nationally and locally; the plan provided a comprehensive assessment of the nature conservation value of the borough. The 2004 RBAP has been successful in enabling delivery of biodiversity action via targeted site management, project development, guiding survey and monitoring effort. The 2004 RBAP has also formed a key element of the environmental evidence base within the planning framework to highlight the need for habitat and species protection, retention and enhancement.

Since 2004 the national priorities for conservation action have expanded and been refined and new legislation and Government information has been published to guide the next era of biodiversity delivery. This makes it an appropriate time to review the RBAP to take stock of delivery to date and in light of the new thinking and increased Government focus.

The review process has involved reassessment of national, regional and local priorities in terms of habitats and species and consideration of a number of key Government documents. The presence of nationally prioritised habitats in Rotherham has been identified, data has been obtained on which prioritised species have been associated with these habitats and again their presence in Rotherham has been identified.

The following are the key changes in the 2012 RBAP document:

- The addition of new habitat action plans for Traditional Orchards and Inland Rock & Brownfield Land arising from new national habitat priorities;
- The expansion of the pond action plan to cover all water based habitats;
- The identification of additional local priority habitats associated with each key habitat group;
- The grouping of habitats into groups in line with national principles;
- The change from Ancient and Species-rich Hedgerows to Hedgerows acknowledging the importance of all hedgerows;
- The identification of locally recorded species with each key habitat group
- The acknowledgement of recent legislation, strategies and other plans that influence biodiversity action;
- The alignment of actions and delivery timescales with regional and national plans and strategies.

The 2012 RBAP will continue to support the preparation and delivery of the Rotherham Local Plan providing supporting evidence for core strategy policies and for future development management policies, particularly in respect of biodiversity, geodiversity, green infrastructure and landscape.

The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan (2012) will support biodiversity action and delivery until at least 2020 in line with the England Biodiversity Strategy; objectives, targets and programmes of action will be prepared with this date in mind but it is acknowledged that action will be needed to continue beyond 2020. The executive summary of the 2012 RBAP is included as Appendix One.

## **8. Finance**

The cost of the review of the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan has been met within existing staffing costs and the voluntary involvement of members of groups represented on the Rotherham Biodiversity Forum.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

The preparation and adoption of a current local Biodiversity Action Plan demonstrates compliance with the principles of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and its 'Biodiversity Duty' for public authorities.

The 2012 RBAP will also provide support for the production and delivery of the Rotherham Local Plan as an element of the environmental evidence base for policy production and site allocation decision making.

The 2012 RBAP will continue to support the Rotherham Local Wildlife Site system which underpins the Local Wildlife Site designation within the planning system.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

**Contact Names: Carolyn Jones, Ecology Development Officer 822462.**

## Appendix One: Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 - Executive Summary

***Biodiversity is our most precious resource. The Earth's biological resources are vital to humanity's economic and social development. They provide the very systems that support our existence on this planet and are global assets of tremendous value to both present and future generations. We simply cannot live without a planet rich with biodiversity - we must protect it now and in the future.***

Rotherham Biodiversity Forum partners published the first Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan (RBAP) in 2004. Based on the protection and enhancement of habitats and species prioritised both nationally and locally the plan provided a comprehensive assessment of the nature conservation value of the borough. The 2004 RBAP has been immensely successful in enabling delivery of biodiversity action via targeted site management, project development, guiding survey and monitoring effort and also within the planning framework to highlight the need for habitat retention and enhancement. Since 2004 the national priorities for conservation action have been expanded and refined and new legislation and Government information has been published that will guide the next era of biodiversity delivery. It is appropriate to review the RBAP to take stock of successes and constraints encountered to date and in light of the new thinking and increased Government focus.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan builds on all the work of the previous decades to set Rotherham challenging, but necessary, new targets for the protection and restoration of the natural environment. The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan identifies the priorities for the conservation and enhancement of Rotherham's biodiversity. It is the result of the work of Rotherham's Biodiversity Forum, a partnership of naturalists, landowners, conservationists and RMBC staff.

The over-riding principles of Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan delivery are as follows:

1. To maintain, enhance, expand and connect the biodiversity of Rotherham by:
  - protecting the natural populations and distribution of species;
  - conserving natural and semi-natural areas within which species can be maintained, and;
  - identifying opportunities for habitat creation, expansion and connection
2. To involve local people and develop effective partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are successful and can be sustained in the long-term.
3. To contribute towards the conservation of UK and global biodiversity by monitoring actions and reporting to established systems.
4. To fully integrate biodiversity action as a central principle of the Rotherham Local Plan

A healthy natural environment contains a mosaic of wild and managed spaces; this enables different plants and animals to find all they need to survive. It will also support movement and expansion so that they can react and adapt to changes in climate and from human impacts. Natural habitats are usually more diverse and can support many kinds of wildlife but semi-natural, landscaped and amenity open spaces are valuable and also support wildlife. All our wildlife will benefit from our efforts to keep, expand and connect open spaces.

A healthy natural environment makes human life possible and provides quality of life; it provides food, fuel, clean air and water, medicine and climate regulation. These products are not just from exotic rainforests and remote jungles; Rotherham's woodlands and street trees help to keep our air clean, our agricultural products are pollinated by bees and other insects that need local woodlands, grasslands and wetlands to survive, our country parks and canals are great tourist attractions improving our local economies and employment levels, our urban parks and nature reserves provide free, healthy recreational and spiritual spaces improving our health, fitness and mental well-being.

To conserve and improve Rotherham's natural environment, and all the benefits we get from it, we need to follow the national approach of 'More – Bigger – Better – Joined'; we need to:

1. Improve the quality of current core wildlife sites by better habitat management
2. Increase the amount and size of core wildlife sites
3. Enhance and create connections between wildlife sites, through physical corridors or 'stepping stones'
4. Reduce pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan will guide the delivery of these actions.