

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	19th June 2013
3.	Title:	Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012
4.	Directorate:	Environment and Development Services

5. Summary

This report seeks support for the adoption of the revised Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended that

1. the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 is adopted; and
2. support be given for the continuation of RMBC involvement in the delivery of the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan.

7. Proposal and Details

The term **Biodiversity** covers the variety of all life on earth; it includes all species of animals and plants, everything that is alive on the planet. **Biodiversity** is important for its own sake, and because it is comprised of fully integrated and inter-dependent ecosystems, human survival depends on it.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 introduced a 'Biodiversity Duty' for public authorities under which "**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.**" The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan (RBAP) is the statement through which the Council seeks to discharge its duty.

The first RBAP was produced and published by the Rotherham Biodiversity Forum which includes the Council and partners such as statutory agencies, local landowners and natural history societies. The Council adopted the RBAP in 2004.

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. The 2012 review work was able to take stock of delivery to date, the new thinking and increased Government focus.

The scope and content of the RBAP has now been reviewed and a second edition (dated 2012) produced which is now proposed for adoption by RMBC. This proposal has been supported by Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (14/01/2013, item K40) and by the Rotherham Local Plan Steering Group (18/01/2013, item 59). The key changes in the 2nd edition are:

- The acknowledgement of recent legislation, strategies and other plans that influence biodiversity action;
- The addition of new habitat action plans for Traditional Orchards and Inland Rock & Brownfield Land
- The expansion of the water-based action plan group to include running water;
- The identification of additional local authority habitats associated with each key habitat group;
- The change from the specific 'Ancient and species-rich' hedgerows to a more general hedgerow habitat which acknowledges their importance;
- The identification of locally recorded species within each key habitat group;
- The alignment of actions and delivery timescales with regional and national plans and strategies.

An executive summary of the RBAP is attached as appendix 1.

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, geo-diversity, green infrastructure and landscape. It 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 adoption of the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 will demonstrate the commitment of RMBC in the delivery of the plan. Once adoption has been formalised it will be possible to prepare a delivery plan and to consider action needed for those species with additional conservation requirements.

8. Finance

The cost of the 2012 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. Support for the delivery of the RBAP falls within the role of the RMBC Ecology Development Officer.

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.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

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 and contributes to performance against the Local Nature Conservation/Biodiversity measure on the governments 'Single Data List', i.e. Proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management is being achieved.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The draft Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 documents were prepared in partnership with the Rotherham Biodiversity Forum which includes representatives of statutory agencies and local interest groups. The documents were made available for public consultation via the RMBC website during October and November 2012; the consultation documents were shared with a range of organisations including Parish Councils, Area Assemblies and voluntary organisations and the positive responses indicate that future involvement will be increased. Only one response was received via the online consultation website and this was supportive. All comments received during the consultation have been incorporated into the final documents.

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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 2nd 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.