

**REPORT TITLE: WILDLIFE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
ACTIVITIES UPDATE
REPORT OF CHIEF OFFICER (ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH)**

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL WARDS



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To advise Scrutiny of the activities of the Council relating to wildlife and natural environment over the previous 12 months and future actions.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

Scrutiny Commission note the activities undertaken relating to wildlife and natural environment.

3. **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

3.1 The report is in response to Cllr P Hall's request for details on what the council is doing with regards to wildlife and the natural environment along with specific requests for future activities. Many of the functions relating to wildlife including the keeping of records, are delivered at County Council level and like most Districts, HBBC do not employ an individual officer solely responsible for wildlife issues. The functions below are carried out by officers within several service areas and are as part of their substantive role. Following Cllr. Hall's enquiry it was agreed that Rob Parkinson Chief Officer (Environmental Health) would act as the lead officer for such matters.

3.2 The key document for the protection of existing and development for the future of wildlife is the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan. (Space for Wildlife 2010-2015) The Lead authority on this is the Leicestershire County Council supported by the Districts and voluntary organisations of which the Lead is the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Previously monitored through ENABLE the delivery of the plan and other related policies and strategies will be reported through the new Environment Board of Leicestershire Together which Cllr Gould or Crooks attend with officers.

3.3 **Sources of Wildlife Information**

3.4 The Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust provides an invaluable source of information and advice on wildlife in the area for officers and the public. <http://www.lrwt.org.uk>. Supported by LRWT, LCC and Leicester City, Naturespot is a voluntary organisation (Ratby based) promoting wildlife conservation and reporting across Leicestershire. Their website <http://www.naturespot.org.uk/home> provides an excellent information source on plant and animal species across Leicestershire. Detailed information on species including local and national distribution and plotting of known locations within the area. Members of the public and professions are encouraged to report sightings which are then validated and plotted on the interactive map. A lot of the information is provided through the LCC and LRWT staff working within the Brocks Hill Records Centre and enthusiasts. It also has a forum for asking questions and discussion and details on sites of particular wildlife interest.

3.5 The County Council holds the main archive of ecological and geological information going back fifty years or more, plus many individual historic going back much farther. A lot of this information has come from local surveys undertaken by local experts,

some national experts and local groups and LCC expert staff; they have over 40,000 source documents. A lot of the more modern information has been digitized and they have about 600,000 records in their databases and 10,000 site records – for the whole county, they don't know the number of records just for Hinckley and Bosworth.

- 3.6 Any individual (non-commercial) enquirer can ask to see these records, at County Hall, by appointment, and they can supply copies of their digital records for parish or other significant projects. Commercial users are charged a fee, and they have informal data exchange agreements other non-commercial users like the Wildlife trust and bird recording groups for example.
- 3.7 They publish data on their own websites in a) LEO <http://leo.leics.gov.uk/ismart/1App/pages/jsp/map.jsp> for both natural and historic sites, b) RIGS <http://www.leics.gov.uk/website/rigs-home/> for geology sites and c) the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) <http://data.nbn.org.uk/> for a range of different groups of animals listed on this webpage <http://data.nbn.org.uk/datasetInfo/customDatasetList.jsp?dsType=T&grpType=2&orgKey=122> . The NBN also receives data from other sources than ourselves.
- 3.8 Members may remember the Phase 1 Habitat survey carried out by White Young Green in February 2012 which identified key habitats across the borough to advise the Local Development Framework Core Documents. Copies of the maps and detailed information behind them are available off the Councils website enabling residents to check what is in their locality. http://www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/downloads/download/690/extended_phase_1_habitat_survey
- 3.9 In addition the Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy identifies areas of the borough providing green spaces or corridors many of which also have ecological interest and require protection wherever possible through the LDF. Copies of the report and maps are available for viewing at http://www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/downloads/download/208/green_infrastructure_strategy. For further information please contact the Planning Policy team.
- 3.10 **Natural and Natural Environment Group** Lead Manager **Sally Smith** Lead Officer **Andy Killip** (Officers Group)
- 3.11 The group now has Local Nature Partnership status and is constituted with local authority and voluntary sector representatives from Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, Natural England, LCC Staff- Nature Conservation, Historic and Natural Environment, Waste management, Records centre curator, English Heritage, Leicester Groundwork Trust, Geology Trust to name a few.
- 3.12 The group supports development of policies for the National Planning Policy Framework and Biodiversity Strategy for the County. It seeks to oversee and collates habitat survey data held by the LCC Records Centre, acts as consultee for Health and Wellbeing Boards, Coordinates mapping of ecological surveys e.g Green Infrastructures.
- 3.13 Reporting progress through the Environment Board the group has recently proposed the following developed indicators to show future progress of the various strands.
 - Percentage of recently surveyed land (biodiversity)
 - Land with High-Level Stewardship data
 - Heritage at risk – coming off the register (performance); going on to the register (planning)
 - Geological sites of specific interest

3.14 The **Natural and Historic Environment Partnership Forum** – is an associate membership role and open to anyone who has an interest in Leicester and Leicestershire's natural environment and the work of the LNP. Interested residents can be advised of this forum which is a useful exchange network for persons with specific interests showing the wide range of specialist interests groups operating across the area.

- Leicestershire Entomological Society
- Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society
- Leicestershire Badger Group
- Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network
- Leicestershire Fungi Study Group
- Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group
- Botanical Society of the British Isles local group
- Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society
- County Recorders in the following Groups:
 - Higher Plants
 - Fungi
 - Lichens
 - Birds
 - Reptiles and Amphibians
 - Lepidoptera
 - Myriapods
 - Bats
- Heritage Wardens
- Archaeology Wardens
- Tree Wardens

3.15 Charnwood Forest Steering Group Lead Manager Sally Smith Cllr Cartwright

3.16 This members level steering group delivers the aims of the National Forest and Charnwood forest including improving natural sites and tree planting. As members will be aware area of the borough lie within the National Forest. Policy 22 of the Core strategy underpins development within the forest to enhance woodland and habitat provision and connectivity.

3.17 The objectives of the Steering Group are:

- To manage and promote landscape and settlement character, including biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and industrial heritage features
- To promote sustainable leisure and tourism
- To support agricultural diversification and woodland and rural economy uses which respect local character.

3.18 Reporting to the above is the **Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Board**. The most significant actions recently have been the proposed Landscape Partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund due in by 31 May 2013. This is for a significant range of bids to support the following some of which will be delivered within the borough or will be accessible to our residents.

- Small vernacular structures grants
- Charnwood Forest garden legacy
- Charnwood Forest building stones
- Ulverscroft Manor - country house to charitable estate
- Geology community events
- Quarries in our communities
- Beacon Hill Estates sites interpretation
- Past Ways, Lost Ways, New Ways (volunteer recording project)
- Geology/heritage cycling/walking trails
- Support and mentoring for Friends groups

- Skills training - landscape/forestry management and traditional building skills.

3.19 **Stepping Stones Partnership Project** Lead Manager **Paul Scragg Cllr Crooks, Cllr Camamile**

3.20 This group oversees the strategy for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment on the urban fringe of Leicester including management of Green wedges and open spaces within this area. The project has been running since 1992. Project boards run the projects such as dry Stone walling training at Billa Bara Hill, “plugs for Bugs” (wild flower initiative) with possible location at Manor Farm Barlestone along with interpretation Boards, Hedge planting project possibly at Billa Bara Hill.

3.21 **Council Owned Land** Lead Manager **Caroline Roffey – Lead Officer Paul Scragg**

3.22 The Council has an important stewardship role through promoting biodiversity on its own land through the general duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The lead team on this is Green Spaces through the management of the council's open spaces. The Green Spaces Delivery Plan has 5 Priorities including increasing meadowlands and woodland in each area. All sites have management plans detailing the required actions and timescale. The GSDP will be refreshed during this year and will be reflecting increased biodiversity for sites. Schemes currently being delivered include:

- Wild flower/grass planting in urban parks such as Clarendon Park and Langdale Park,
- Natural woodland planting in Brodick Park.
- Natural Burial Ground at Ashby Road Cemetery – Native species wherever possible including a wild flower area.
- Cattle grazing on meadows- Burbage Common and Billa Barra Hill- increased biodiversity from management of the grassland.
- £70k investment to date on Burbage Common through the Higher Stewardship Fund from Natural England, Woodland Grant supporting a 10 yr plan.
- Investigating managing the Harrow Brook as a green corridor.
- Green Flag award for Hollycroft Park – includes requirement to use peat free and recycle wastes. Wildlife area and gardening club- utilising Friends of Hollycroft Park as Volunteers.

3.23 Particularly pleasing is the annual Burbage Common Open Day which allows the Council, its volunteers and voluntary groups to promote all matters green and environmental and has been popular for many years.

3.24 In addition to the Green Spaces Team the council does have the services of a part time tree officer Julian Simpson providing specialist advice to both the service, Development Control and the public. The restructuring of the service has allowed the creation of the Green Spaces Parks and Countryside Officer. This post will be managing the grounds maintenance team and developing the biodiversity across our parks and open spaces through the delivery of the Green Space Delivery Plan..

3.25 Officers will be consulting on the Green Space Delivery Plan and would welcome input from members.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [KB]**

The Council holds existing budgets to cover its work on wildlife and natural environment. For 2013/2014 these include:

- £157,540 gross expenditure budget for “Countryside Management” matched by £15,300 of income received from fees and contributions
- £35,000 Capital Scheme for works on Burbage Common

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [AB]**

The Council has a duty to promote biodiversity through its actions from the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

6. **CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

Cleaner & greener neighbourhoods : promotion of biodiversity preserves and protects the current fauna and flora and also provides for improving for the future generations

7. **CONSULTATION**

8. **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

It is the Council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.

It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

Management of significant (Net Red) Risks		
Risk Description	Mitigating actions	Owner
Loss of habitats could lead to adverse publicity for HBBC	Careful management of the sites controlled by HBBC through the Green Spaces Delivery Plan	[Lead Officer]

9. **KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

The rural and urban environment is important to all and access for disabled should be included in all projects where feasible.

10. **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community Safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset Management implications
- Human Resources implications
- Planning Implications
- Voluntary Sector

Background papers: Various

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