

Wednesday 5th March 2025

**Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder
for Environmental Sustainability, Recycling and Waste**

**Nature Recovery Declaration Briefing Paper and Biodiversity Consideration for
Adoption**

Not Exempt

Purpose

To update the Committee on the authority's work around the Nature Recovery Declaration that was made in November 2023.

Recommendations

It is recommended that scrutiny:

1. Endorses the progress and updates provided with regards to work towards the authority's nature declaration.

Executive Summary

The Borough Council adopted its Nature Recovery Declaration in November 2023 and this briefing paper provides a progress update. The declaration is replicated in the background section of the report.

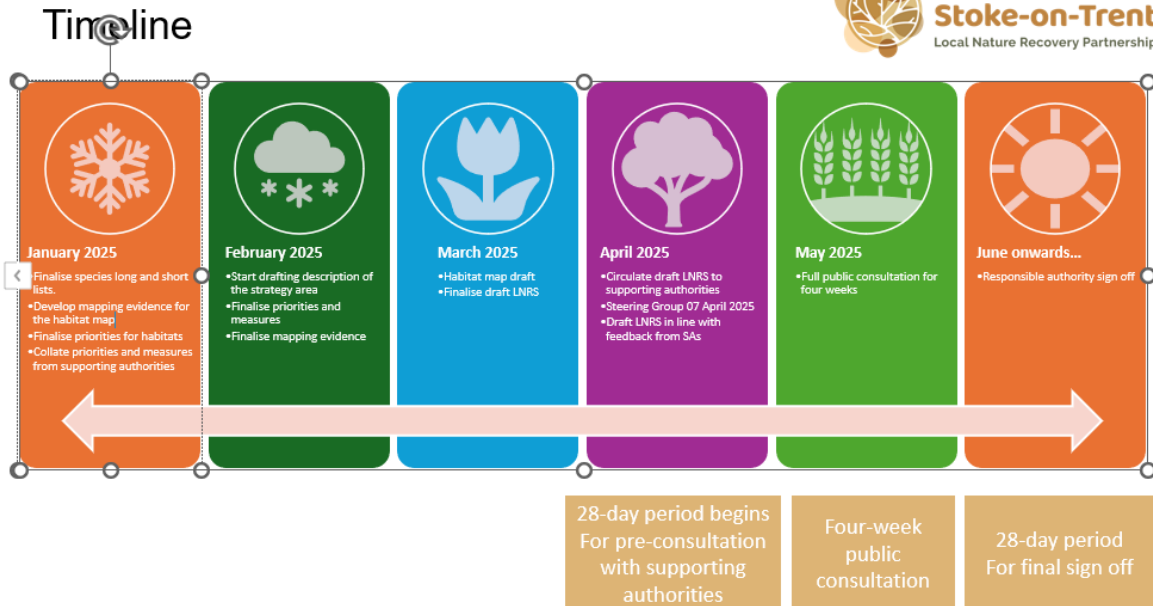
Biodiversity Consideration:

Following its tabling at the ISAG meeting in autumn 2024, the Biodiversity Consideration was subsequently presented to Cabinet, who adopted the proposed draft of this document for the authority. A formal report for progress towards this will be prepared and will be published by 1 January 2026.

Progress on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy:

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) is the responsible body for delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the County and has received Government funding to do so.

The timetable for delivering this work has been revised from March 2025 to June 2025 the diagram below depicts the current timeline trajectory of the work.



The three key work streams being led by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy team are data and mapping, communications and engagement and strategic priorities, which across all themes numerous stakeholder groups and partnerships have been engaged in the development of the strategy to date. The project is being co-ordinated by The LNRS Project Manager of Staffordshire County Council (SCC) who has met with various representatives from both Growth & Regeneration and Environment, Culture and Wellbeing teams. SCC are requiring substantial input into the project from local authorities.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

It is not anticipated there will be large numbers of applications to be liable for BNG, due to the legal exemptions and the spatial picture in Tamworth (householder development, for example, is exempt).

The development management team will be liaising with ecology teams at SCC when considering applications and post-determination submission of Gain Plans. The development management team have access to a weekly BNG drop ins run by the Planning Advisory Service should any questions arise.

It remains for TBC to set a policy threshold for “significance” in the context of on-site gain given the spatial constraints of the borough and the likelihood that small gains are in fact more “significant” to nature recovery in Tamworth than elsewhere. The council has commissioned an ecology consultant to help set the threshold for local “significance” in the context of on-site gain, aligning with national policy on this. This work is currently on-going

In order to ensure that development in Tamworth also leads to gains in Tamworth, the ecology consultant is also looking at the spatial picture of the area and advising on whether any land we hold could be managed to improve its biodiversity value and provide the potential for BNG gains within Tamworth, that could be offered to developers to assist them in meeting their obligations. This work is still at an early stage, but sites have been identified that lie in transport corridors that would assist with linking green and blue spaces. This work is anticipated to be substantially completed by the end of March 2025.

SWT trust have estimated that 75 biodiversity units should provide sufficient habitat banking capacity to cover the boroughs needs. This estimate is also being tested by the ecology consultant to ensure we have as accurate a picture as possible. Some work done by West

Midlands Combined Authority gives a “rule of thumb” indication of BNG unit value per hectare by land type, as presented in a previous briefing note.

Options Considered

In terms of Biodiversity Net Gain delivery, the planning team, working with an ecology consultant, are looking at options for off-site biodiversity unit generation (habitat banking).

Resource Implications

Any future financial impacts will be brought back to this committee for consideration if there are any impacts on the MTFs.

The Government has committed to funding all new burdens on local authorities arising from the Environment Act, including those due to the biodiversity duty on public authorities, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for Tamworth and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) for SCC. Officer time is being invested into this work to support a collaborative and partnership approach to its application.

Legal/Risk Implications Background

By undertaking this work, the council is in a stronger position to understand and fulfil the full requirements and legal obligations of the Environment Act 2021.

All public authorities have a duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity and must “have regard” to relevant local nature recovery strategies in the process.

The council is actively working to create, restore, and enhance the boroughs local wildlife, which will positively impact the environment and respond to the climate and nature crisis. Staying ahead and involved with the collaborative work from the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB) can lead to bigger/better environmental outcomes.

The council continues to be committed in nature recovery and not complicit in nature’s decline. Failing to act on adopted Declarations could leave us open to reputational challenges if progress is not being made.

The authority could be subject to challenge if they are unable to fulfil the statutory duties, such as the Biodiversity Duty.

Equalities Implications

The most vulnerable to the climate crisis will benefit from nature recovery.

Nature deprivation can be closely linked with general deprivation and so working to enhance nature and biodiversity in the borough may positively support our residents’ sense of wellbeing and the mental health benefits that engaging in such spaces can bring. Within Tamworth, the good array of nature reserves and public open spaces means there is access to nature for many on the doorstep.

Supporting all our residents to feel safe within our open spaces will enable them to gain the maximum wellbeing benefits from engaging within them.

An impact assessment was presented when the policy was written, this is attached in appendix 4.

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

The Nature Recovery Declaration and this area of work is intended to develop and build on the work already being undertaken by the council and increase collaboration with other authorities of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board with regards to the climate and nature crisis.

The work will help focus on the important commitments to the environment by helping create more, bigger, better, and joined up habitats. Investing in nature recovery and nature-based solutions will also help alleviate and resolve impacts of Climate Change.

Background Information

In November 2023 the Council adopted the Nature declaration which is provided below and also updates on the progress made to date for Members.

TBC's Nature Recovery Declaration progress has been added under each area where appropriate below.

Declaration:

Tamworth Borough Council recognise that:

- Nature is in long-term decline, and the requirement to take action to halt and reverse this is urgent;
- Nature provides us with vital support systems, and severe declines in biodiversity are undermining nature's productivity and adaptability, posing excessive uncertainty for our economies and wellbeing;
- A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, happy, prosperous society;
- The impacts of climate change are driving nature's decline, while restoring nature provides a wide variety of cost-effective benefits to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Many of our areas of work across the Borough have an impact on nature, and we have responsibilities to make decisions to protect and enhance it.
- That the 'Bigger, Better, More and Joined-up' principles of the 2010 Lawton Report – 'Making Space for Nature' - should be followed to help rebuild nature:

Tamworth Borough Council will:

Putting Nature into Recovery:

1. Create and implement an evidence-based Local Nature Recovery Action Plan for Tamworth that will support the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), when available, in collaboration with partners.

Update: Budgets and funding streams are being investigated to enable this work to commence.

The Tamworth Action Plan will include short and long-term targets.

2. Embed nature's recovery into all strategic plans and policy areas, not just those directly related to the environment. Use the council's Nature Recovery Network map (Appendix 2) to inform strategic plans and policy areas, and to help guide development and land allocation decisions. Ensure the Nature Recovery Network map is embedded within the authority's Local Plan, ensuring that there are dedicated, joined-up spaces for nature as well as housing, industrial areas and other land uses.'
3. Ensure local nature recovery is well understood across the authority and complements other relevant plans and strategies. Provide training and resources for councillors and council employees about the ecological emergency.

Update: Some Members received training on Biodiversity Net Gain prior to Christmas.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

4. To ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legislation delivers real benefits for nature, the council will develop a locally specific BNG policy which requires developers to take into account the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan for Tamworth when selecting locations and delivering both on- and offsite BNG.'

Update: This work will be undertaken as part of the local plan; the draft sustainability appraisal for biodiversity, geodiversity and open space setting out the current picture is underway.

There are currently a couple of applications within the planning process that if approved will contribute to BNG in the borough, but these are on a very small scale. If these are approved the details on value of BNG can be reported back in the next appropriately timed member briefing paper.

30 by 30:

5. Seek to manage at least 30% of council-owned greenspace for the benefit of wildlife by 2030.

Update: An open space / green space network project with SWT is currently ongoing. The current percentage that nature reserves represents is 34% of the 3,588m² open space within Tamworth owned by the council.

Protected and Designated Landscapes:

6. Produce a monitoring plan for all council-managed protected and designated nature sites, eg. SSSIs, LNRs and LWSs, with a view to achieving favourable condition status by 2030.

Road Verges

7. After satisfying safety and visibility priorities and the Highway Code, develop highways verge cutting regimes that maximise potential for biodiversity, carbon storage and sequestration.

Update: Future work in this area will support the development of residents, staff and Members understanding of this action, with potential cost implications being investigated as part of this process.

Tree-planting

8. Formulate a tree policy and strategy which is underpinned by Nature Recovery Network mapping across the local authority area, pursuing a "right tree, right place" approach.

Update: This is currently a work in progress and will have input from numerous departments.

Protecting Peatlands

9. Consider the adoption of a peat-free policy for all council contracts and supplies.

Update: Where appropriate peat-free composts are now being utilised in the borough, and any planting that is received is requested to be delivered in peat free compost where possible

Nature Based Solutions

10. Carry out a carbon audit of local authority sites to establish how carbon storage and sequestration can be improved.

Update: This will potentially form part of a wider environmental management plan, and the relevant departments will agree the most appropriate way forward to progress this element of the work.

Access to Nature

11. Improve access to good quality natural spaces for Tamworth Borough residents by following Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework.'

Communications

12. Begin sharing joint nature-based communications created by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

Update: The communications team will share relevant information from partners such as Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

13. Demonstrate leadership by championing Nature Recovery and supporting and educating residents as well as the local business and communities to take action to put nature into recovery.

Responsibility and Governance

14. That the Leader of the Council is responsible for ensuring the delivery of the declaration.

15. Appoint the Assistant Director Operations and Leisure as the Lead Officer for coordinating council operations in relation to local nature recovery.

An Assistant Director of Environment, Culture and Wellbeing has been appointed in replacement to the above position.

16. That the Infrastructure Safety and Growth Scrutiny Committee monitor the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan.

17. Work closely with Staffordshire County Council and other local partners to form a Staffordshire-wide Local Nature Recovery Partnership.

This group has now been established and is meeting quarterly.

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