



Subject:	Update on Local Biodiversity Action Plan Development
Date:	14th January 2025
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard – Director of Resources, Fleet and OSS
Contact Officer:	Eiméar McCullough, Lead Officer, Open Space & Streetscene Edel Gowdy, Lead Officer, Open Spaces & Streetscene

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on the ongoing work to scope and develop the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), including an update on additional resources required to support development and ongoing delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and associated Belfast Implementation Plan (BIP).
1.2	This report should also be considered as an update on the Notice of motion put forward in February 2024 titled 'Biodiversity in Council Parks and Open Spaces'.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main report
	Background and Context

3.1	<p>Members will be aware that since the development of the original Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) in 2007, there have been a number of policy and legislative changes including the introduction of a statutory biodiversity duty on the Council to further the conservation of biodiversity.</p>												
3.2	<p>At People and Communities Committee in November 2024, members were provided with a six-month update report on the 2024 – 25 committee plan. Within the report officers noted the delayed progress on the development of a Local Biodiversity Plan. Since then, officers have been working to progress work on this matter. These are detailed in the table 1 below.</p>												
3.3	<p>Furthermore, a Notice of Motion was submitted by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Brooks in February 2024:</p> <p><i>‘Officers are asked to submit a report outlining how the Council could commission a survey of parks and green spaces to create a list of priority habitats and species within them, this survey should be robust enough to inform future work of incorporating recommendations for new zoning of parks and introduction of appropriate management prescriptions into site management plans, to protect and enhance biodiversity in our parks and green spaces in accordance with the Lawton principles of "bigger, better and more joined up".</i></p> <p>This paper is to be considered by way of update to that Notice of Motion.</p>												
3.4	<p>Table 1: Biodiversity - Priority Forward Work Programme</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="272 1077 1465 1980"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="272 1077 608 1137">Item</th> <th data-bbox="608 1077 1034 1137">Purpose</th> <th data-bbox="1034 1077 1465 1137">Action(s)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1137 608 1429">Recruitment of Biodiversity Officer</td> <td data-bbox="608 1137 1034 1429">To support the LBAP work programme delivery, recruitment of an additional officer recently agreed by Members is key. We anticipate recruiting to this post in early 2025.</td> <td data-bbox="1034 1137 1465 1429">Officers will continue to work closely with HR to ensure additional officer post can be advertised in January 2025, with recruitment to complete in March 2025.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1429 608 1861">Development of Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Belfast</td> <td data-bbox="608 1429 1034 1861">To deliver on statutory responsibilities aligned to biodiversity protection and enhancement.</td> <td data-bbox="1034 1429 1465 1861">Re-submit application to Council’s Climate Resilience Fund for consideration early 2025, should additional funds become available. If unsuccessful, alternative options for one off pot of funding (circa £30k) to be explored to support development of LBAP</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="272 1861 608 1980">LBAP baseline preparation</td> <td data-bbox="608 1861 1034 1980">Establishment of up-to-date ecological data for all (89) BCC open space sites, for</td> <td data-bbox="1034 1861 1465 1980">To prepare a costed five-year delivery plan baselining and ecological study update and</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Item	Purpose	Action(s)	Recruitment of Biodiversity Officer	To support the LBAP work programme delivery, recruitment of an additional officer recently agreed by Members is key. We anticipate recruiting to this post in early 2025.	Officers will continue to work closely with HR to ensure additional officer post can be advertised in January 2025, with recruitment to complete in March 2025.	Development of Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Belfast	To deliver on statutory responsibilities aligned to biodiversity protection and enhancement.	Re-submit application to Council’s Climate Resilience Fund for consideration early 2025, should additional funds become available. If unsuccessful, alternative options for one off pot of funding (circa £30k) to be explored to support development of LBAP	LBAP baseline preparation	Establishment of up-to-date ecological data for all (89) BCC open space sites, for	To prepare a costed five-year delivery plan baselining and ecological study update and
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		prioritisation and delivery over a five-year period. Includes updating existing suite of ecological studies as well as development of new where required. Initial focus to be on Green Flag accredited and those where opening hour pilots are being considered.	review work. On completion of each study, site specific recommendations within reports to be considered within relevant management plans.				
	Herbicide Reduction Policy	Work to commence on developing the herbicide reduction policy to outline our commitment to reduce the use and reliance on herbicides across the council estate, in line with best practice regarding weed control and land management.	Progress once additional internal resourcing/support in place				
	Resourcing - additional requirements	It is recognised that current resources are insufficient to deliver. At this stage officers estimate that a one-off cost of £35k is now required to scope and develop the LBAP; with additional £50k per annum required to support development of associated baseline ecological studies in parallel, including delivery of site-specific actions identified within.	Preparation of growth proposal submission to support delivery of statutory biodiversity responsibilities including LBAP development and delivery. Officer with explore requirement for funding development of associated Belfast Implementation Plan (BIP) once LBAP is in place				
3.5	<p>Ongoing Biodiversity Work Programme</p> <p>The work programme above is in addition to ongoing work strands delivered across OSS aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity across our estate. These are detailed in table two below.</p>						
3.6	<p>Table 2: Biodiversity – Ongoing Work Programme:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Project</th> <th>Outcome/ status</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Climate Action Programme funded projects: Carbon</td> <td>Work on key Climate Action Programme funded biodiversity projects (Carbon retention assessment at Cavehill; Species</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Project	Outcome/ status	Climate Action Programme funded projects: Carbon	Work on key Climate Action Programme funded biodiversity projects (Carbon retention assessment at Cavehill; Species
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	retention assessment at Cavehill & Species rich grassland pilots (phase one)	rich grassland pilot) successfully complete pending submission of close out reports.
	Grassland Management	Delivery of sixteen hectares of wildflower and species rich grassland habitat across Council sites in partnership with Bugslife through 'Belfast is Buzzing' project as well as associated management plans. Sites include Clement Wilson Park; Lagan Lands East; Belmont Park; Barnetts Demesne; Sharman Road Open Space; Lower Botanic Park (Upsurge site); Annadale Embankment; St James' Park, Orangefield Park; and Andersonstown Leisure Centre site. Management workshop to identify potential further sites in advance of 2025 planting season scheduled.
	Pollinator Awards	Musgrave Park Pollinator Award and Falls Park Pollinator Award (Green Flag 2024) - recognising best practice support of pollinating insects through pollinator-friendly site management
	Control of invasives	Ongoing monitoring and management across Council Estate (NIEA requirement)
	Strategic Partnerships	Monitoring biodiversity outcomes delivered via partnership arrangements with Lagan Valley Regional Trust (for Lagan Valley Regional Park) and Belfast Hills Partnership (for Belfast Hills)
	Capital Projects	Ongoing provision of design advisory function for Council capital projects
3.7	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> Officers estimate that an additional £50k per annum will be required to support delivery of the LBAP and BIP. Furthermore, officers estimate that an additional one-off cost of £35k will also be required to scope and develop the LBAP. None of these costs are included within the revenue estimates for 2025/26.	
3.8	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u> There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report.	
4.0	Appendices	
	None.	