

**CLIMATE CHANGE ADVISORY PANEL
25 APRIL 2022
6.30 - 8.45 PM**



Present:

Councillors Virgo, Mrs Hayes MBE, Mrs Ingham, Leake and Temperton

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, Mossom and Turrell

40. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the Climate Change Advisory Panel meeting held on 9 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

Arising from the minutes it was noted that:

- A note had been circulated to update members on cycleways from Highways and Transport.
- A change in maintenance to leave long grass under trees was now happening.
- An engagement event was being held with schools on climate change on 6 May 2022.

42. Urgent Items of Business

There were no Urgent Items of Business.

43. A presentation from Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) - Matthew Stanton

Matthew Stanton from Berkshire, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) attended the meeting to present on the charity's work.

Matthew introduced the Trust's Wilder conversation strategy, which aimed to help wildlife and the climate crisis to work on connectivity between habitats and support people to access the natural works. COVID had highlighted the importance of nature to people in the UK, however this interest needed good management to allow for greater access.

BBOWT agreed with the Government's aspiration to see 30% of land well-managed for nature by 2030. This included thinking wider than BBOWT's own nature reserves and considering how other partners' landscapes could be developed for wildlife to thrive. Matthew explained the change in approach to habitat management from the traditional small oasis of nature reserves to nature recovery networks which identified areas most important to nature for protection.

Matthew explained that BBOWT would be well placed to assist local planning authorities in their development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies which would be developed at county level with one local authority acting as the lead. Buckinghamshire had recently completed a pilot project with DEFRA.

Matthew highlighted a few key projects for BBOWT, including a wild verges project to create a network of wildlife friendly corridors along road verges, and the meadows for climate initiative which focussed on the creation of floodplain meadows.

While BBOWT was a small organisation with few employees, Matthew highlighted that there were thousands of volunteers and the trust aimed to get everyone inspired.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- BBOWT were assessing their land management processes to adapt for the changing climate, including periods of heavy rain and drought. Some of this work would include opening up floodplain meadows to allow rivers to flood.
- BBOWT had an interactive map available to see areas of potential across the region.
- While BBOWT had a suite of projects available with proven success, it would require partnership and enthusiasm from the Council to take on these projects.
- Matthew highlighted the importance of local policy and how local policies could support biodiversity and nature corridors within new developments. Matthew encouraged the Council to investigate biodiversity net gain and to have a policy in place for how net gain should be spent.
- Members invited Matthew and BBOWT to attend the Green Minds Green Lives event with secondary schools.

44. A presentation from Bracknell Forest Council's Natural Estate - Stephen Chown - Head of Natural Estates

Stephen Chown, Head of Natural Estates at Bracknell Forest Council presented on the work the Council was doing to support biodiversity.

Stephen highlighted work to control invasive non-native species in the borough, active woodland management and designing urban environments to ensure connection between natural spaces.

The Council had published a Biodiversity Action Plan for 2018-2023, and a mid-term review had been held in 2020. The plan included 84 targets to be completed during the 6 year period, and a significant amount of progress had been made towards these targets.

Stephen highlighted some particular areas of work for the Parks and Countryside team, including tree planting during Winter 2021/22, grassland cutting regimes and meadow creation at Bluebell Hill, woodland management to manage invasive rhododendron at Longhill Park.

The Council was producing its own definitive map of biodiversity, to make connections and make best use of local knowledge to improve biodiversity in the borough.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- It was recognised that there would always be difference of opinion on matters such as rhododendron clearance, and not all residents would be pleased with work ongoing.
- Members requested regular communications from their local rangers, and Stephen agreed to facilitate greater connection between the two so that members would be aware of scheduled works in their area.
- Stephen noted a local issue with a third party provider and noted that rangers would need to be able to gain access to an enhancement project once the initial work was complete to restore any areas of damage by third parties.
- While it was noted that parks were available for all residents' use for a wide range of activity, incidents of genuine anti-social behaviour would be addressed in a collaborative way with partners.
- Parks and Countryside officers were working to communicate as much as possible with the public. Officers used connections made to pass S106 moneys onto parish councils to support biodiversity in their areas.

45. **A presentation from the Crown Estate - Des Sussex**

Des Sussex, Crown Estate presented on biodiversity work within the Crown Estate.

Des raised the issue of capacity for rangers in Bracknell Forest, coming from a small countryside team.

Des also commented on the pressure put on biodiversity from the housebuilding and expanding population, and how recreational outdoor space often came at the cost of biodiversity. Visitor numbers to outdoor spaces were also putting pressure on key habitats.

It was noted that in Windsor, the Crown Estate were looking at their carbon footprint and water use across the estate. Many areas of the Crown Estate were under pressure due to public access. The ancient trees in Windsor Great Park had been damaged in the past by damage to the rootzones, and recently some had been lost during storms. Des commented that it was important to leave dead trees or their stumps in situ wherever possible to support other organisms.

Des highlighted a few rare species which had been found in Bracknell Forest and Crown Estate ecosystems, including the Royal Splinter Crane fly, Violet Click Beetle, Dartford Warbler and Nightjar. There was also pressure from collectors on nationally important fungi found in the area.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- While ivy would be a nuisance plant and smother trees, it could also be an important wildlife plant to provide pollen and nectar for insects into the Autumn.
- There were some parts of Crown Estate land which were not publicly accessible, and some parts of Windsor forest had restricted public access via gated entrances for local residents only. Parts of Buttersteep Rise were fenced off around the Swinley brick pits, due to their SSSI nature but also the hazards at the site. Swinley Park and Buttersteep Rise both had members only car parks but were accessible to pedestrians via gates. Members recognised there was also a commercial element to the land and car park management.
- Members commented that it was important to maintain the forest elements in the borough.

46. **A presentation from Warfield Environment Group - Sheila Collings**

Sheila Collings, of Warfield Environment Group presented on the Group's work.

Warfield Environment Group had been formed in 2002 by local residents, working closely with Bracknell Forest Council and the biodiversity ranger. The group had taken part in lots of biodiversity activity including rhododendron clearance, organising an ancient tree hunt, litter picking, an annual newt survey and wildflower planting amongst other activity

The group had also supported the development of the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership was hosted by the Council's Biodiversity officer, and the group allowed residents to meet and share ideas for improving biodiversity. Sheila commented that the group had used to have ranger representation which would be useful going forward.

Warfield Environment Group were taking part in the Year of Green Corridors 2022, to support passage for wildlife between green spaces.

Sheila highlighted the group's work on verge management to oversee verges with wildflower mix and to promote an annual mow cutting regime. Orchard maintenance was also highlighted, as the large orchard at Larks Hill had been neglected for some time.

Sheila commented that the main threat to biodiversity was human interaction, including treading on bluebell woods and allowing dogs to disturb ground-nesting bird species.

The Warfield Environment Group was supporting the establishment of other local environment groups.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- It was agreed that the relevant rangers would be better connected into Warfield Environment Group going forward.
- It was suggested that an annual programme of warnings could be developed to warn residents at the right time of year, for example at skylark nesting season or bluebell season.
- Members were encouraged to follow Warfield Environmental Group on social media channels.

47. **Items for future meetings**

- Small companies' efforts to tackle climate change
- Hydrogen power
- Strategy for Climate Change and Environment

Any further suggestions for future agenda items should be sent to Councillors Virgo and Mrs Hayes MBE.

CHAIRMAN