

To: **Executive**
Date of Meeting: 23 April 2024

Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2029 – Consultation Approval
Executive Director of Place

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To present the draft Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2024-2029, which is a partnership plan with the aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity within Bracknell Forest Borough.
- 1.2. To provide an overview of work completed to produce the plan and detail the proposal to take the plan forward for full public consultation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Executive is asked to approve the draft Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2024-2029 and supporting summary document as the basis for a 4-week public consultation.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The BAP forms part of the statutory duty for all public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- 3.2. The recent Bracknell Forest Council declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency reinforces the importance of action for biodiversity across the borough. The motion includes an item to “Revise the Biodiversity Action Plan to include audits of the state of nature in the borough and to highlight local biodiversity threats due to climate change” which has been taken into consideration in the revised plan.
- 3.3. The Bracknell Forest BAP demonstrates the commitment of the Council and local people to protecting and enhancing nature in the borough.
- 3.4. The draft plan for 2024-2029 builds upon the previous Biodiversity Action Plans. It is a partnership plan, having been co-produced with input from key stakeholders, including the Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership.
- 3.5. A full public consultation will allow the council to gather feedback more widely from anyone who lives in, works in or visits the borough. It will also allow those who have already contributed ideas to see how these have been incorporated into the draft plan and provide further feedback. Feedback will be used to refine and develop the final plan and a detailed action plan. The updated plan will then go to Executive with a recommendation to approve it.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1. The alternative option is to rely entirely on external policies and strategies to help guide and shape the future support for our local biodiversity. This approach would not focus specifically on the needs of Bracknell Forest’s wildlife and residents. It may reduce the opportunities to achieve the council’s objectives.

- 4.2. There is also the alternative option to not go for wider public consultation on the draft BAP. To use the current copy of the plan, which has been created by wildlife specialists and key stakeholders, as the basis with which to present to Executive, with the recommendation it is approved. This would be a missed opportunity to engage communities in delivering wildlife action. There are many local residents and community groups with an interest in nature conservation. It would mean they would miss out on giving their views, and the plan would be published without their important input.
- 4.3. Wide-scale consultations are usually run for 6-weeks. The proposed 4-week length of the BAP consultation takes into account consultation that has already been undertaken with stakeholders. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay progression of the BAP.

5. Supporting Information

BAP background information

- 5.1. The first Biodiversity Action Plan for Bracknell Forest was published in 1997. There has been a BAP in place since then, and the plan is currently reviewed on a 6-yearly cycle. The previous BAP ran from 2018-2023.
- 5.2. The Bracknell Forest BAP is a partnership plan. It demonstrates the commitment of the Council and local people to protecting and enhancing nature in the borough. The Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership oversees the implementation of the plan. The partnership is made up of local people and organisations with an interest in nature conservation.
- 5.3. Bracknell Forest Council acts as a coordinator for the Biodiversity Action Plan. The council hosts and chairs the Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership. The council gathers updates and reports on progress against the BAP targets.
- 5.4. The aim of the BAP is to conserve and enhance biodiversity within Bracknell Forest Borough. The draft plan consists of 10 overarching objectives. These objectives guide the plan and link through to each of the measurable targets. The targets are categorised according to the following:
 - General Themes – targets based on factors that influence the conservation of all species and habitats
 - Habitat Action Plans – targets are based on the 6 key habitat types that can be found in Bracknell Forest (grassland, woodland, rivers and wetlands, heathland, farmland and urban)

Development of the draft BAP 2024-2029

- 5.5. The draft BAP 2024-2029 builds upon the previous BAP 2018-2023.
- 5.6. The draft plan has been co-produced with key internal and external stakeholders (see Consultation Responses section below). The Biodiversity Officer has liaised with key stakeholders via workshops and one-to-one discussions to gather feedback on the previous BAP and ideas for the BAP 2024-2029. These have been used to develop the draft document.
- 5.7. Responses were gathered across the general and habitat themes. Examples of feedback which have been incorporated into the draft plan include a need to:

- Link up strategies (including work on the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity Net Gain and Climate Change)
 - Undertake wildlife surveys with clear aims and strategy
 - Plant trees and manage trees with potential to become veterans
 - Tackle invasive species in rivers/wetlands
 - Raise awareness of biodiversity across different habitats
 - Promote opportunities in gardens & urban areas
- 5.8. Some changes have been made compared to the previous BAP to make the plan easier to follow and make it easier to track progress. These include:
- One set of high-level objectives now links through to the targets in all the habitat chapters
 - More consistency in targets across the habitat themes
 - Some simplification and combining of similar targets to reduce the overall number of targets
 - Clear links with other strategies either through targets or supporting information
- 5.9. To support the declaration of a climate change and biodiversity emergency, the links between climate change and biodiversity have been highlighted much more clearly throughout the plan, in consultation with the Climate Change Officers. The plan also includes a target to produce an annual report on the state of nature in Bracknell Forest (in line with the declaration), and targets to collect key data from across different habitats to support this report.

Plan for consultation and communications

- 5.10. The proposal is for the draft document to go to full 4-week public consultation to gather wider views and use this feedback to develop the plan further.
- 5.11. The consultation will be mainly based online, on the Council's consultation portal. The draft BAP and a summary document will be available with a series of questions to gather feedback on the proposed objectives and targets and regarding the supporting information. Hard copies of the draft BAP and survey will be made available at key locations such as Time Square and libraries. Alternative formats (such as large print) will be provided on request. A phone number/contact details of an officer who can take feedback offline will be provided.
- 5.12. Communications are being planned to promote the consultation. This will include online communications, such as website updates, social media posts and a parks and countryside e-newsletter. The consultation will be promoted to users of parks and greenspaces via site notice boards. The Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership and other partners involved with the development of the draft will be sent the consultation directly via email. The Ranger team and Councillors will be provided with an information pack so that they can promote the consultation and answer questions while out on sites or working in the community.

Policy & legislation

- 5.13. The BAP forms part of the statutory duty for all public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Section 40 of the NERC 2006 Act has been updated by the Environment Act 2021 to bring in an 'enhanced biodiversity duty'. Section 40A brings in associated reporting for public authorities. An extract of Section 40 is:

“40 Duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity

(A1) For the purposes of this section “the general biodiversity objective” is the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England through the exercise of functions in relation to England.

(1) A public authority which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

(1A) After that consideration the authority must (unless it concludes there is no new action it can properly take)—

(a) determine such policies and specific objectives as it considers appropriate for taking action to further the general biodiversity objective, and

(b) take such action as it considers appropriate, in the light of those policies and objectives, to further that objective.

...”

- 5.14. The BAP contributes to the priority within the Council Plan 2023-2027 for a “Green and sustainable environment”.
- 5.15. The Council recently declared a climate and biodiversity emergency. One of the items within the declaration is to “Revise the Biodiversity Action Plan to include audits of the state of nature in the borough and to highlight local biodiversity threats due to climate change. Reports of these will be presented annually.”
- 5.16. Section 4 of the draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2029 further describes key areas of legislation and policy which relate to the Biodiversity Action Plan. The plans and objectives of partner organisations have also been incorporated into the plan where possible. A list of relevant legislation, plans and policies is in Appendix 5 of the draft plan.

6. Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1. A Biodiversity Action Plan is not a statutory requirement. A Biodiversity Action Plan is used to deliver policy and statutory requirements for biodiversity at a local level. The Bracknell Forest BAP is a partnership plan delivered by a range of stakeholders, coordinated by Bracknell Forest Council.
- 6.2. As a matter of good practice, the consultation process for the draft plan should reflect the following guiding principles set out in case law:
 - The consultation must be undertaken at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
 - The Council must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response.
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
 - The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any proposals.

Financial Advice

- 6.3. There will be no direct financial implications as the BAP is a strategy for guiding work for biodiversity across the borough
- 6.4. There may however be financial implications of delivering the targets. This will be explored over the plan period as projects are worked up and agreed. Where possible the Council will look to use existing revenue budgets or try to secure external funding to support larger projects. Where this is not possible the BAP will ensure the timely identification of budget requirements to be included within future years budget cycles.
- 6.5. Though not explored in detail in the BAP, there are wider economic benefits of biodiversity. A diversity of healthy habitats and species supports the delivery of ecosystem services such as pollination, flood risk reduction, carbon sequestration and recreation. The costs of not tackling the biodiversity crisis are likely to be greater than the costs of measures identified in the BAP.

Other Consultation Responses

Consultees involved with the co-production of the draft:

- 6.6. Workshop attendees: Crowthorne Village Action Group, Binfield Environment Group, Binfield Parish Council, Warfield Environment Group, Easthampstead Living Churchyard Group, Bracknell Forest Natural History Society, Priestwood Environment Group, Crowthorne Parish Council, Bracknell Forest Council - Rangers, Bracknell Conservation Volunteers, Wildlife in Ascot, Sandhurst Town Council, Involve, Moor Green Lakes, Crown Estate, Thames21 (Maidenhead to Teddington Catchment Partnership host), TVERC, Bracknell Forest Council – Climate Change Officer, Natural England
- 6.7. Feedback received outside of workshop from: Warfield Environment Group, Environment Agency, Hedge and Woodland Conservationists, Natural England (Thames Basin Heath Partnership)
- 6.8. Internal feedback on initial draft received from: Rangers, Climate Change Officers, Planning Policy, Tree Officers

Proposed public consultation:

- 6.9. The 4-week consultation on the draft plan is aimed at the general public.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.10. An Equalities Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken (see Annex 1).

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.11. As the report and recommendation seeks to undertake a consultation process, there are no strategic risk management issues to address currently.

Climate Change and Ecological Impacts

- 6.12. The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have positive impacts to biodiversity and climate change by allowing an action plan to be developed which will guide activity to improve biodiversity. Some of the targets will also help with mitigation and adaptation to climate change, as indicated within the plan.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

6.13. The Biodiversity Action Plan includes objectives and targets to improve biodiversity across the Borough. Examples of how delivery of the targets may benefit health and wellbeing include:

- More wildlife attracted to the habitats, allowing residents to get close to nature. Access to nature has been proven to promote health and wellbeing.
- Getting volunteers involved with nature conservation and surveying, improving physical and mental health and community cohesion.
- Some of the targets will also help with mitigation and adaptation to climate change, as indicated within the plan.

Background Papers

Annex 1: Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Attached separately:

- BAP 2024-2029 Draft for public consultation
- BAP 2024-2029 Draft Summary for public consultation

Contact for further information

Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer, Parks & Countryside

Email: bio.diversity@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Tel: 01344 354441 (general enquiries line for parks & countryside service).

Annex 1: Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Date of Screening:	Directorate: Place, Planning and Regeneration		Section: Parks and Countryside service
1. Activity to be assessed	Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2029 – Consultation Approval		
2. What is the activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change		
3. Is it a new or existing activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Existing		
4. Officer responsible for the screening	Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer		
5. Who are the members of the screening team?	Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer Rose Wicks, Data & Communications Officer		
6. What is the purpose of the activity?	Approval of draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2029 as basis for public consultation. The public consultation will be aimed at the general public and allow everyone (including staff, councillors, stakeholders who have already been involved and wider stakeholders) to give their views and these will be used to refine the document. The Bracknell Forest BAP is a partnership plan for protecting and enhancing nature in the borough.		
7. Who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	The Biodiversity Action Plan includes actions to improve biodiversity across the Borough. Access to nature has been proven to promote health and wellbeing, therefore everyone in the borough should benefit.		
Protected Characteristics	Please tick yes or no	Is there an impact? What kind of equality impact may there be? Is the impact positive or adverse or is there a potential for both? If the impact is neutral please give a reason.	What evidence do you have to support this? E.g. equality monitoring data, consultation results, customer satisfaction information etc Please add a narrative to justify your claims around impacts and describe the analysis and interpretation of evidence to support your conclusion as this will inform members decision making, include consultation results/satisfaction information/equality monitoring data
8. Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.	Y	N Accessibility checks within Microsoft Word have been used to make the draft document as accessible as possible. The same will be done when the document is converted to a PDF and provided on our website. There is a potential for adverse impact where those with a sight impairment are not able to interpret drawings, figures and illustrations in the same way that someone without a visual impairment would be	These webpages explain how the accessibility checkers flag issues and allow them to be fixed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make your content accessible to everyone with the Accessibility Checker - Microsoft Support • Create and verify PDF accessibility, Acrobat Pro (adobe.com)

			able to. A written description of pictures, maps etc. are provided as Alt text but in this context may not be as detailed as needed to give a comprehensive description of the concept. A phone number/contact details of an officer who can give further verbal guidance or explanation of the content of the document will be provided. Hard copies of the draft BAP and questionnaire will be made available key locations such as Time Square and libraries. Alternative formats (such as large print) will be provided on request.	
9. Racial equality	Y	N		
10. Gender equality	Y	N		
11. Sexual orientation equality	Y	N		
12. Gender re-assignment	Y	N		
13. Age equality	Y	N	There may be older residents who don't have access to online communications. Hard copies of the draft BAP and questionnaire will be made available key locations such as Time Square and libraries. Alternative formats (such as large print) will be provided on request.	Evidence from this research shows that this audience, while not necessarily opposed to ever going online, have many deeply entrenched barriers to using the internet. Overall for this group, the downsides of going online outweighed the perceived advantages. See full report for key barriers experienced. Microsoft Word - Life Offline - Report prepared by BritainThinks for Age UK FINAL.docx
14. Religion and belief equality	Y	N		

15. Pregnancy and maternity equality	Y	N		
16. Marriage and civil partnership equality	Y	N		
17. Please give details of any other potential impacts on any other group (e.g., those on lower incomes/carers/ex-offenders, armed forces communities) and on promoting good community relations.	The consultation will be mainly based online which may disadvantage those without access to the internet or who cannot use such technology for any other reason. Hard copies of the draft BAP and questionnaire will be made available at key locations such as Time Square and libraries. The Ranger team and Councillors will be provided with an information pack so that they can promote the consultation and answer questions while out on sites or working in the community. A phone number/contact details of an officer who can take feedback offline will be provided with the online documents, hard copies and in the information pack.			
18. If an adverse/negative impact has been identified can it be justified on grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or for any other reason?	N/A			
19. If there is any difference in the impact of the activity when considered for each of the equality groups listed in 8 – 14 above; how significant is the difference in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?				
20. Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination in relation to any of the Equality Duties?	Y	N		
21. What further information or data is required to better understand the impact? Where and how can that information be obtained?				
22. On the basis of sections 7 – 17 above is a full impact assessment required?	Y	N	Please explain your decision. If you are not proceeding to a full equality impact assessment, make sure you have the evidence to justify this decision should you be challenged. If you are proceeding to a full equality impact assessment, please contact Harjit.Hunjan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk	
23. If a full impact assessment is not required; what actions will you take to reduce or remove any potential differential/adverse impact, to further promote equality of opportunity through this activity or to obtain further information or data? Please complete the action plan in full, adding more rows as needed.				

Action	Timescale	Person Responsible	Milestone/Success Criteria
Use accessibility checker feature within Microsoft Word to ensure the draft BAP document and draft summary document are as accessible as possible. Also conduct accessibility checks when converting the doc to PDF format	Ahead of consultation	Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer and Rose Wicks, Data and Communications Officer	No accessibility warnings present for draft full document or draft summary document.
Provide hard copies of consultation documents at various publicly accessible locations. Alternative formats (such as large print) to be provided on request.	During consultation period	Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer	Documents are in place when the consultation commences. Contact details provided with online consultation and hard copies.
Publish details of suitable contact who can provide further information/explanation or take feedback offline for those who require it.	During consultation period	Rosie Lear, Biodiversity Officer	Contact details provided with online consultation, hard copies and information pack for Councillors.
24. Which service, business or work plan will these actions be included in?			
25. Please list the current actions undertaken to advance equality or examples of good practice identified as part of the screening?	See above.		
26. Assistant Director/Director signature.	Signature:		Date: