

Report to: Environment Committee

Report Ref: ENV1918
Meeting Date: 9th March 2020
Agenda Item: 9
Prepared By: Town Clerk



Subject: Nature Action Plan

1.0 BACKGROUND

The committee has previously resolved to look at developing ideas for habitat reinstatement and has expressed a desire to undertake more environmental projects. In September, Cllrs Power, Abel and the Town Clerk met with a representative from the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, a local conservation specialist and the former lead member of the Environment and Open Spaces working group of the Neighbourhood Plan to discuss *'What can Knutsford do for Nature?'*.

The committee has previously endorsed the three missions detailed in section two. These have been expanded into a series of actions for the committee to consider. Section three provides a more detailed action plan to deliver on the actions and section four suggests some initial projects to utilise the 2019/20 budget.

2.0 THREE MISSIONS

2.1 MISSION TO PLANT [1,000] TREES

What we will do:

Knutsford will plant [1,000] new trees over the next three years.

How we will do it:

- Action One: The council will identify suitable spaces for trees to be planted on public land in Knutsford and the council will fund the planting of a number of trees each year. Trees will predominantly be native species and those with fruits/berries for wildlife. Where possible the council will plant trees with the community.
- Action Two: The council will pressure Cheshire East Council to permit the planting of trees on highway verges and fund the planting of a number of trees on suitable verges in Knutsford.
- Action Three: The council will encourage residents to plant trees in their gardens. This will include publishing advice on tree planting and writing to planning applicants applying to fell trees to encourage replanting where appropriate and writing to planning applicants where trees could be included in schemes to encourage tree planting.

Action Four: The council will set up a 'tree tracker' on its website to log the number of trees planted. The council will encourage residents to log trees planted in their own gardens.

2.2 MISSION TO INCREASE WILDLIFE FRIENDLY PLANTING

What we will do:

Knutsford Town Council will lead projects to increase the amount of wildlife friendly planting in Knutsford.

How we will do it:

Action Five: The council will ensure that any planting schemes it creates are predominantly pollinator friendly perennial flowers.

Action Six: The council will work with Cheshire Wildlife Trust to reinstate the wildflower meadow on the Barncroft using perennial and locally sourced seed.

Action Seven: The council will identify areas of public open space and highway verges to introduce wildflower/pollinator planting which where appropriate will include signage to educate why 'grass isn't being cut'.

Action Eight: The council will lead bulb planting projects on open spaces and verges every autumn.

2.3 MISSION TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY AND CONNECT GREEN CORRIDORS

What we will do:

Knutsford Town Council will increase the range of habitats in Knutsford and connect green corridors.

How we will do it:

Action Nine: The council will promote the installation of hedges rather than fences and/or the installation of hedgehog holes to promote permeability.

Action Ten: A working group will identify open spaces where hedges could replace /compliment fencing on open spaces.

Action Eleven: The council will contact landowners around Knutsford to encourage the planting of trees and hedges around their holdings, particularly where these will connect green corridors.

Action Twelve: The council will work with landowners to plant trees/shrubs to connect Bluebell Wood to the Heath and Booths Mere to St John's Wood.

Action Thirteen: The council will work with landowners to encourage the planting of wetland plants around ponds.

Action Fourteen: The council will install and encourage the installation of bird and bat boxes and bug/bee hotels.

3.0 ACTION PLAN

The below action plan details a series of specific actions to be taken to meet the fourteen actions detailed in section two.

It is recommended that the committee establishes a *Nature Action Plan working group* to work with the Planning and Facilities Officer on identifying locations and designing projects. The working group could include a representative of Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the lead resident from the Environment and Open Spaces working group of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Ref	Action	Task	Responsible	Target
1	One	Potential tree planting locations identified tree planting proposal prepared for committee.	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
2	One	Committee to agree tree planting plan	Committee	Sept 2020
3	Two	Town Clerk to write Cheshire East Council urging permission be given for tree planting on suitable highway verges	TC	Mar 2020
4	Two	Subject to agreement from Cheshire East Council, verges to be included in the tree planting plan	PFO/ Committee	Sept 2020
5	Three	Tree Mission page set up on Town Council website	PFO	May 2020
6	Three	Launch of the tree mission	PFO	May 2020
7	Three	Planning logs to be monitored and letters sent to applicants regarding replanting of trees	PFO/ASO	Ongoing
8	Four	Tree tracker to be included on mission page	PFO	May 2020
9	Five	Review of planting areas to be undertaken and planting schemes to be prepared to comply with the policy	PFO	April 2020
10	Six	Cheshire Wildlife Trust to be commissioned to create meadow annually from 2021	PFO	2021
11	Seven	Potential verges for planting schemes identified and proposals prepared for committee	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
12	Seven	Committee to agree verges improvement plan	Committee	Sept 2020
13	Eight	Bulb planting areas to be identified	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
14	Eight	Annual bulb planting events to be organised	PFO	Oct 2020
15	Nine	Information to be published on council website promoting hedges and hedgehog holes	PFO	May 2020
16	Nine	Hedgehog highway campaign to encourage creation of hedgehog holes	PFO	Nov 2021
17	Ten	Open spaces where hedges could replace or complement fences identified and planting plan prepared	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
18	Ten	Committee to agree hedge planting plan	Committee	Sept 2020
19	Eleven	Target landowners identified to encourage planting of trees and hedges to connect green corridors	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
20	Twelve	Project established with landowners to create wildlife corridor from Bluebell Wood to the Heath	WG/PFO	June 2020

21	Twelve	Planting undertaken on open space on Longridge to extend wildlife corridor from St Johns Wood	PFO	Mar 2020
22	Twelve	Engagement with Cheshire East Council and Developer to link Booths Mere to wildlife corridor from St Johns Wood	WG/PFO	June 2020
23	Thirteen	Identification of suitable ponds for planting schemes	WG/PFO	Sept 2020
24	Fourteen	Bird / bat boxes to be installed in Wallwood	Committee	Mar 2020
25	Fourteen	Bird / bat boxes to be installed on Higher Town Green	Committee	Mar 2020
26	Fourteen	Bird / bat boxes to be installed near Obelisk	Committee	Mar 2020
27	Fourteen	Bird / bat boxes to be installed in Cemetery	Committee	Mar 2020
28	Fourteen	Bug hotels to be installed in Wallwood and Higher Town Green	Committee	Aug 2020

4.0 POTENTIAL PROJECTS

4.1 EXPANSION OF ST JOHN'S WOOD

This 0.3 acre space is adjacent to St Johns Wood, shielded from the rest of the open space by a dense tree line. This space could support the planting of around 150 trees as an expansion to existing the woodland.



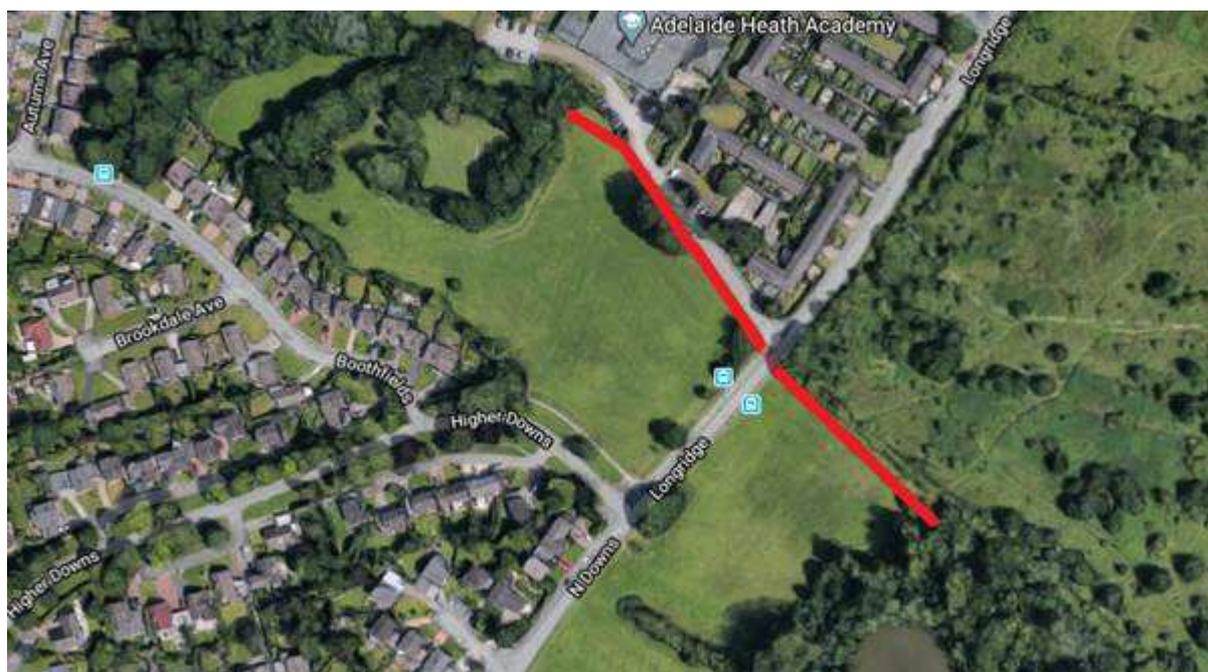
The woodland trust offers free saplings to communities (next being offered in November 2020). This would be the lowest cost method of expanding the woodland but the smaller trees will take longer to establish and may be more prone to vandalism.

Initially the committee could look to purchase larger specimen trees (2-3m trees) to plant in the current planting season, with smaller saplings obtained for planting in the autumn. A budget of £800 would fund around 25 trees of this size.

Permission would need to be obtained from Cheshire East Council.

4.2 EXPANSION OF ST JOHN'S WOOD WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Wildlife Corridor C-004 is recorded in the green corridor study as "A corridor through the site of St Helena's Ancient Monument and the public open space between Higher Downs and Longridge to Booths Mere and the open countryside. It is vital for maintaining the biodiversity of St. John's Wood. Its current ecological value is low as it is mainly open grass but it can easily be enhanced by suitable planting of trees and shrubs."



Whilst it would be premature to undertake work on the southern section (as this borders a strategic development site and it is currently intended that a road will be created) work could commence on improving the northern part of the corridor (approx. 125m) by planting a mix of trees and shrubs. The cost for 25 2.75m bareroot trees would be in the region of £800.

Permission would need to be obtained from Cheshire East Council.

4.3 PLANTING PROJECTS

The committee could look to progress small planting projects for the current or next financial year. These can be discussed and prioritised at the meeting.

5.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The committee should consider:

- a) The approval of the three missions and key actions
- b) The approval of the actions detailed in the action plan
- c) The establishment of a Nature Action Plan working group and appointment of members
- d) Potential immediate projects to utilise current budgets.