

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

NATURE ACTION PLAN 2020-2023 REVIEW

Report Reference ET-23-08
Meeting Date 24th July 2023
Agenda Item 14
Prepared by Town Clerk



1.0 BACKGROUND

The Nature Action Plan was adopted in March 2020 and set out 29 specific the council would be taking to further biodiversity and ecology in Knutsford. The implementation of the plan has been led by the Planning and Facilities Officer and volunteers and overseen by the Nature Action Plan working group.

The Nature Action plan set out three main missions:

- 1) To see 13,000 trees planted by 2024
- 2) To increase the amount of wildlife friendly planting in Knutsford
- 3) To increase the range of habitats and connect green corridors

Under each mission, the council set out actions to deliver. These are appraised in section two.

Particular thanks must go to Messrs Kevin Griffiths and Malcolm Thomas, co-opted resident leads on the working group who have contributed a significant amount of time supporting the implementation of the plan and in particular delivering the survey of mature trees.

2.0 REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF NATURE ACTION PLAN

2.1 MISSION TO PLANT 13,000 TREES

Action One: The council will identify suitable spaces for trees to be in 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.

The council has undertaken three tree planting programmes (2021/2022/2023). For the 2022 and 2023 programmes grants from the Tree Council were secured to contribute towards costs. To date the council has planted over 1,500 whips across 3 sites, and 179 feature trees across 35 sites. There are 5 sites which have permission to plant and are currently in progress and a further 1 site awaiting permissions, these will be included in a plan for the winter of 2023/2024. There are currently 22 sites allocated for tree planting which are pending Highways permission. 13,000 was an over ambitious plan for the number of sites available for planting.

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.

Following work from the Town Council supported by Cheshire East Ward Councillors tabling a motion, Cheshire East Council's Highways and Transport Committee is currently developing a new policy that would enable the planting of trees on suitable verges.

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.

The council published advice via its website. Writing to planning applicants regarding tree felling has been inconsistent due to changes in administration staffing. The council has not yet run a planned campaign to encourage mass tree planting by residents; this will be delivered as 'plant a tree in 23' during the winter planting season.

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.

A tree tracker is on the Nature Action Plan page of the council website. The resident log has not been implemented as the campaign has not.

Action Fifteen: The council will undertake a survey of mature trees on public land.

Led by Messrs Griffiths and Thomas, volunteers undertook a survey of all mature trees, creating a record of what trees exist in the town including their size, species, condition and location. The data can inform future actions and projects.

2.2 MISSION TO INCREASE WILDLIFE FRIENDLY PLANTING

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

This has been part implemented. Some planting schemes are still predominantly annual plants but the Council Offices flower beds are now part perennial, the new cemetery memorial gardens are predominantly perennial.

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

The council created this meadow which is thriving. It has further created meadows at Steeple Field by St John's Wood and on Ladies Mile.

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'.

The council has created a number of small 'wildflower patches' and continues to explore new areas each year. These include outside St Vincents School, at the top of Thorneyholme Drive, along the River Lily and on Higher Town Green.

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

The council has run 'the big bulb plant' twice (2021/2022) which has seen community led bulb planting on a range of spaces. 2021 was very well supported, but 2022 was less well supported, greater promotion and buy in from councillors to lead plants in their wards would assist.

2.3 MISSION TO IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY AND CONNECT GREEN CORRIDORS

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

A campaign to promote the creation of hedgehog holes has been planned but not yet implemented, this includes to work with local schools. This will be furthered for the autumn term.

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

The working group identified two areas for hedges to be planted, these have both been completed at the green at the obelisk and the green adjacent to 2nd Knutsford Scout Hut.

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.

This action is outstanding. Some preliminary work on identifying landowners see has been undertaken.

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.

This action is outstanding. Engagement regarding the Booths Mere to St John's Wood route is awaiting the determination of the Longridge strategic planning application. A proposal for the Bluebell Wood to Heath route was agreed and is pending a further meeting with the Crown Estate.

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

This action is part complete. The council's website signposts to guidance on creating ponds but the working group determined not to further explore direct engagement with pond owners on wetland planting.

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

The council installed bat/bird boxes across the open spaces it is responsible for (Wallwood, cemetery, obelisk green, higher town green and council offices). Bug hotels were created at Wallwood and Higher Town Green

3.0 NATURE ACTION PLAN 2023-2027

Subject to the committee's approval under the relevant items, the Nature Action Plan working group will develop a new four-year action plan. Subject to their review, this would include addressing outstanding items from the 2020-2023 plan.

To aid deliverability, it is suggested the working group be encouraged to identify specific projects to deliver across each year.

The committee should consider giving direction to the working group on:

- a) Examples of projects it would like to see explored
- b) Missions or objectives it would like to see the working group address

The working group would develop a new Knutsford Nature Action Plan for the 2023-2027 period and present this to the committee for approval.