



Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Executive	10 September 2020	All

Delete as appropriate:		Non-exempt
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SUBJECT: Adoption of new Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2025

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 A new Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2025 (BAP) has been drafted and went out to public consultation from 1 April to 31 July 2020. 175 responses were received.
- 1.2 The BAP consists of a strategic overview document and four action plans. As a strategic document, it provides background to why key actions are needed to protect wildlife and to enhance people's contact with nature.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the outcomes of the public consultation and resulting changes to the draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2025 as outlined in the consultation report attached at appendix 3.
- 2.2 To agree to adopt the final Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2025, attached at appendix 2.

3. Background

- 3.1 A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a strategic document which outlines how a local authority is committed to protecting and enhancing wildlife.
- 3.2 Whilst the council leads on the BAP, the process is intended to include partners, community groups and the wider public. Representatives of relevant groups have been consulted as part of the development of the latest BAP, the third iteration of such a council document

- 3.3 Traditionally, Local Authority BAPs have been based around Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans. However, reflecting the very urban nature of Islington, we have broken away from this approach and introduced the idea of four key themes:
1. The Built Environment
 2. Designated Sites
 3. Parks and Urban Green Spaces
 4. Access to Nature
- 3.4 A key focus of the Islington BAP (2020-2025) is how to improve quality of life for people by increasing opportunities for them to access high quality green space
- 3.5 The public consultation opened on 1 April 2020 and closed on 31st July 2020. Due to the Covid 19 lockdown, it was not possible to run any consultation meetings or to deliver any paper based materials and so it has had to be exclusively online. Formal adoption of the BAP is being recommended to the Executive on 10 September 2020.
- 3.6 A number of council services, partner organisations and gardening groups were consulted on production of the BAP. To ensure that the wider public have also had the opportunity to feed into the BAP (2020-2025) we have consulted in the following ways:
- The draft BAP was posted on the Council website along with an online survey in April. This was extensively promoted via social media and Islington Life.
 - Direct contact was made with all Friends of Parks and partner organisations that contributed to the production of the draft new BAP.
 - The draft BAP was shared with the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

Consultation feedback:

- 3.7 The consultation report, including the consultation questions, is attached at Appendix 3. 175 people responded in total to the consultation, of which 164 completed the online survey. People responding to the consultation showed a high level of interest and commitment to biodiversity in the borough. Parks and community gardens were particularly important to people's enjoyment of wildlife. A high number of people responding already make a positive contribution to biodiversity, principally through wildlife gardening and participation in Friends of Parks Groups. In terms of offering people increased opportunities to engage with nature, respondents showed a lot of support for activities for children, nature trails and the creation of more wildlife habitats in parks. Some concern was expressed that people were prevented from accessing nature through a lack of knowledge of where to go and a feeling of not being safe.

There was overall support for the BAP priorities and actions, with 62% of respondents agreeing with the key priorities and only two people feeling that they went too far. 32% felt that the BAP priorities did not go far enough and between 11% and 33% felt that the actions in the Action Plans did not go far enough.

Some of the key reasons for this arose from dissatisfaction with the existing legislation and policy frameworks which protect biodiversity, for example through the planning system. It is the Council's intention to ensure that the BAP is implemented to maximise protection and enhancement for biodiversity as far as existing policies, both national and local allow. However the Council cannot commit to actions which are not currently possible within existing legislation.

It is also important to note that the BAP is a five year strategy, and the actions it outlines must be achievable within current levels of capacity and funding. However, it is hoped that the principles laid out in the BAP will help to bring in further funding and will lead to additional actions being undertaken to benefit wildlife, both by the Council and other organisations.

Some respondents felt concerned that wider sustainability issues were not included in the BAP. These issues are all closely linked to biodiversity and the overall state of the environment. However, the BAP is not intended to be an all encompassing sustainability strategy and its remit is limited specifically to biodiversity. The Council is following national guidance in this in terms of what is an accepted BAP template. The Council has set out its efforts to tackle a number of other environmental issues through other complementary action plans, e.g. Vision 2030: Creating a Net Zero Carbon Islington by 2030, the Islington Transport Strategy and the Islington Air Quality Strategy.

With regards to suggestions to strengthen involvement from schools and housing estates and to encourage more action from individuals; the Council accepts that these are positive ideas and the BAP does lay out a framework for action to be taken in these areas. However in order to do more, the Council would need access to resources (for example staff) that are not currently available.

Changes made to the BAP following consultation and prior to adoption by September Executive.

3.8 As a result of the consultation response as well as feedback from internal stakeholders, a number of additions have been made to the BAP:

- The links were strengthened between the Vision 2030 Carbon Zero Strategy and the BAP detailing the role the BAP will play in helping the borough achieve this vision. Actions in the BAP that support carbon reduction were clearly identified.
- A reference has been added to the London National Park City initiative and Islington's desire to engage with it, for example in organising events during National Park City Week.
- A reference has been added to the Community Food Growing Strategy that Octopus has been commissioned to produce.
- A reference has been added to planning policy which encourages the temporary use of development sites for nature conservation, including the creation of pocket parks and the use of parking spaces as parklets.
- More emphasis has been placed on the opportunities for enhancing biodiversity on housing estates.
- An explanation of the successful action we are already taking and the resources that we currently put into this work (e.g. volunteer and staff resources) has been added.
- More information has been included about the ecological value of the cemeteries we manage and the actions that we can take to enhance them.

3.9 These changes have been shared with the Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration and the Executive Member for Environment and Transport for final approval.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications:

The BAP does not make any specific commitments in terms of extra spending and does not have a budget associated with its implementation. Actions outlined in the BAP can either be achieved within current budgets or by external fundraising efforts in liaison with partner organisations. The BAP itself will assist fund-raising efforts as funders are often happy to see that projects are set within a wider strategic framework

4.2 Legal Implications:

The BAP itself does not have any legal standing. However, it is capable of being a material consideration in the determination of planning applications through the Local Plan process. The Council has a legal duty to deliver section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) which imposes a general duty for an organisation to have regard to conserving biodiversity when exercising its functions. The BAP helps Islington to demonstrate its commitment to the NERC act. In summary, the BAP can help the Council to meet its legal obligations.

4.3 Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

Biodiversity plays an important role in climate control. Islington's green infrastructure is essential in reducing the impacts of climate change on the lives of our residents. Vegetation has been shown to reduce the effects of raised urban temperatures through evaporative cooling, shading surfaces, and allowing natural drainage. This can work in reverse in winter where greenery such as green roofs and walls can reduce the heat lost by buildings by providing better insulation and thus lowering energy use. Street trees and urban greening are also a major contribution to the capture and storage of CO₂ and improvement of air quality.

The BAP helps the Council to show its commitment to many of the objectives in the Mayor's London Environment Strategy, for example the protection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and enhancing access to green spaces.

The actions within the BAP will not result in any increase in carbon emissions. The BAP encourages the enhancement of our existing green spaces which should support greater carbon absorption.

4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment was completed in October 2019 and is attached at Appendix 1. In summary, no negative impacts on people with protected characteristics were identified. The BAP is very much about people as well as wildlife. The document puts forward a clear evidence base for the many benefits that contact with nature has for

people, especially children and people suffering from poor physical and mental health. Areas of the borough which are "deficient in access to nature" are identified, and actions have been devised to try and address these deficiencies.

5. Reason for recommendations

- 5.1 The consultation results clearly demonstrate public support for the BAP and the actions outlined within it.
- 5.2 The BAP 2020-2025 is a positive move towards protecting and enhancing the green spaces and wildlife of Islington. It is a partnership document and will allow us to work towards the same goals with community-based organisations. The adoption of a new Biodiversity Action Plan will demonstrate the Council's readiness to comply with national standards of good practice in relation to biodiversity. Implementation of the BAP will benefit both our environment and our residents, including those most disadvantaged in society. Many of the actions outlined in the draft BAP link closely to the Council's key priorities of providing the best start in life for children and creating a healthy environment for all.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Resident Impact Assessment
- Appendix 2 - Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2025
- Appendix 3 – BAP Consultation Report

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



28 August 2020

Executive Member for Environment
and Transport

Date

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