

Environment Sub-Committee

11 February 2015

Present: Councillor B Burdis (Chair)
Councillors G Bell, L Bell, E Hodson, W Lott and G
Madden

E30/2/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J Cassidy, D Ord and M Reynolds.

E31/2/15 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes reported

E32/2/15 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

E33/2/15 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2015 be confirmed.

E34/2/15 Biodiversity Action Plan - Update

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the implementation of the Newcastle and North Tyneside Joint Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which had been agreed by both councils in 2012. The report provided a progress report on the delivery of the targets set out in the BAP and reviewed the community involvement in helping delivery of the targets.

The report provided examples of BAP projects which had been delivered in North Tyneside in 2014 including:

- Bankside improvements along the Seaton Burn Watercourse in partnership with the Living Waterways Project;
- Watercourse improvements to Brierdene Burn in partnership with the Friends of Brierdene;
- The creation of wildflower meadows to provide habitat for butterflies, bees and other insects at a number of areas including Killingworth Lake Park, Benton Quarry Park, Brierdene, Wallsend Parks and Marden Quarry;
- The planting of 5000 sand dune grasses and the creation of a boardwalk to improve access at Tynemouth Longsands;
- The installation a number of different designs of bird boxes to provide roosting and breeding sites at various locations in the borough. Some of which had been installed as part of community events at Marden Quarry, Springfield Park and Killingworth Lake Park;
- The creation of new wetlands at Love Avenue (Annitsford) and the creation of a new floating reed bed on Killingworth Lake;

- Restoration works on ponds and watercourses, tree management and planting, bulb planting and the creation of insect habitats in various parks in the borough as part of the parks regeneration scheme;
- Improvement works to various watercourses in the area to improve the habitat for otters and water voles; and
- The installation of bat boxes, bat bricks and crevice roost sites at a number of locations in the area.

It was explained that there were a number of schools and community groups across the borough who worked with the Council on biodiversity projects to help deliver the targets set out in the Biodiversity Action Plan. Some of the groups had been established for a long time and had been delivering biodiversity projects over a number of years, other groups had been formed more recently and were just starting to undertake some projects.

Many of the groups were undertaking works such as tree planting, bulb planting, the creation of wild flower meadows, fencing works, the creation of insect habitat and the installation of bird and bat boxes and the creation and improvements to footpaths among other projects. Some of the groups were also engaging with schools and community groups by the provision of educational events.

Representatives of two of the community groups in the area attended the meeting and provided an update on their current projects.

Steve Stone and Tony Lister of the Friends of Brierdene explained that the group had started work in the dene in 2006 and worked closely with officers of the authority to manage and improve the biodiversity of the site. In the lower dene two wildflower meadows had been created along with two new glades at the western end of the site. Work was underway to improve the upper dene with the establishment of wild flowers and grasses. It was explained that by the end of 2014 the friends had put in nearly 22,000 hours covering conservation and maintenance works and had raised over £60,000 in grants and awards to support the work of the group in the Brierdene. This had allowed the group to sow all areas on an annual basis and plant over 1,900 trees, 4,500 spring bulbs and 7,500 wild flower plugs. The site had been awarded, and had maintained, a Green Flag Community Award for the past 3 years, and was one of only 160 sites in the UK to receive the award in 2014.

In 2007 the group had started to keep a record of all sightings of birds, butterflies, bumblebees and ladybirds and had seen a significant increase in the total number of species recorded. The group also carried out annual surveys which showed an increase in the density of species of birds, butterflies and bumblebees in the area. The density of birds had increased by 71% between 2007 and 2014 which appeared to show that the groups work was having an effect in the area. The group had organised a bio blitz in 2014 at which over 200 species were found and recorded and through a successful bid for lottery funding two scientific surveys had been carried out on the dene which had identified over 200 new species, some of which were very rare for the region.

Alasdair Wilson of the Friends of Benton Village Green explained that the group had recently been formed. They had obtained trees from the woodland trust and had introduced a new mowing regime. The group was also creating a new shelter belt, a wildflower meadow and had introduced a pond area habitat for frogs etc. He explained that the group was trying to identify what the community wanted from the area so that appropriate plans could be developed. It was acknowledged that the village green formed an important part of the wildlife corridor.

A presentation was also given which outlined plans to establish additional biodiversity areas across the borough which incorporated bee friendly planting and established swathed grass areas. It was noted that according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) many of Britain's birds, insects and plants were in decline. Amenity areas and especially road verges provided ideal locations for the growth of wild plants which provided a food source for pollinators. The areas identified would be left uncut until October although a balance would be maintained between formally managed areas, frequently cut spaces used for recreation purposes and the less formal infrequently cut areas which are better for diversity. Safety considerations would be taken into account around road junctions. The plan was to select areas of open spaces which could accommodate areas of longer grass without having a major impact on recreational use. It was explained that many residents wanted an increase in biodiversity areas. During March 2015 the trial would be publicised via the Council's website and during April 2015 display notices would be provided at the selected sites which explained the purpose of the trial and the benefits to wildlife. Feedback from residents would be monitored and further information shared with them. The trial would then be evaluated based on the public's response, the impact on biodiversity and wildlife and the efficiency of the use of resources.

Reference was also made to the need to maintain wildlife corridors. It was explained that a mapping exercise was currently being carried out.

The chair thanked the representatives of the community groups for their contribution to the meeting and the officers for their presentation.

It was **agreed** that the report be noted.

E35/2/15 Surface Water and Drainage Partnership – Update

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update of the activities of the North Tyneside Surface Water and Drainage Partnership at its meeting held on 14 January 2015. These activities included:

- Noting the progress of the flood risk implementation plan which highlighted the major and minor projects which had been completed and those which were ongoing including the culvert replacement at Astley Drive and Blue Bell pit heap;
- Noting that the Emergency Plan was to be updated following the successful completion of a number of key schemes; and
- Being advised of an allocation of £2.3 billion to tackle flood risk which had been announced in the Autumn Statement

Consideration was also given to an update on the works being undertaken in the area to address flooding concerns. Details of the existing schemes were outlined together with the works ongoing and currently being developed. A copy of the quarterly update on "Reducing the risk of flooding in North Tyneside" was circulated and members' questions answered.

It was **agreed** that the report be noted