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Biodiversity Sub-Committee

Minutes of a Biodiversity Sub-Committee meeting held at 6.00 pm on Tuesday, 24th October, 2023 in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Matlock, DE4 3NN.

PRESENT

Councillor Matt Buckler - In the Chair

Councillors: Martin Burfoot, John Bointon, Stuart Lees, Roger Shelley and Peter Slack

Dr Claire Mead and Dr Andy Broadhurst (Derbyshire Swift Conservation Project)

Tim Braund (Director of Regulatory Services), Joanna Hill (Climate Change Project Officer) and Angela Gratton (Democratic Services Officer)

Note:

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APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

178/23 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was moved by Councillor Peter Slack, Seconded by Councillor Roger Shelley and

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the minutes of the meeting of the Biodiversity Sub-Committee held on 13 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

The Chair declared the motion **CARRIED**.

179/23 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The following statement and question were submitted by Ms Sue Bliss, Matlock Local Resident

"I'm hoping that the destruction of wildflowers, (on many sites within a few metres of my home on Morledge) which are a valuable habitat and source of sustenance for insects won't be repeated next spring.

Please could the Biodiversity Sub-Committee let me know what progress has been made in changing the mowing regime to help reverse the decline in biodiversity."

The following response was provided:

Thank you for your question.

Your recommendation to alter the mowing regime to enhance biodiversity is one that the District Council has already undertaken. The District Council operates a monthly cut rather than on all verges that has been proven to enhance diversity. In addition, areas that have been identified under the Biodiversity Project has been left to two or three cuts a year.

The Biodiversity Sub-Committee will look to continue the Biodiversity Project under a new Biodiversity Action Plan. The subject of mowing regimes will likely be covered in the plan. Fortunately, mowing season has ended and the Council has six months to put forward a new management regime. This will be done in a structured manner to include highway safety, local users, accessibility and encompass other perspectives.

180/23 - INTERESTS

Item 6 - Biodiversity net gain update:

Councillor Matthew Buckler declared a pecuniary interest in Item 6 due to his role with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.

Councillor Peter Slack declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 due to being a member of Wilder Wirksworth.

Councillor Martin Burfoot declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 due to being a Member of Matlock in Bloom.

Councillor John Bointon declared a pecuniary interest in Item 6 due to having a contract to cut verges and pathways for Doveridge Parish Council.

181/23 - PROPOSAL FOR A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN DERBYSHIRE SWIFT CONSERVATION PROJECT AND DERBYSHIRE DALES DISTRICT COUNCIL

The Climate Change Project Officer introduced two members of the Derbyshire Swift Conservation Project, Dr Claire Mead and Dr Andy Broadhurst who gave a presentation to Members outlining a project which would be undertaken in collaboration with the District Council to address the loss of common swift nesting sites across the district.

Members were informed that the common swift had declined across the UK by more than 65%, it was noted that the main factor for this decline appeared to be the ongoing loss of suitable nest sites on existing buildings as building repairs, renovation and replacement gradually results in the loss of access holes to their nest sites.

The three phases of the Derbyshire Dales Swift Project were detailed as follows:

Phase I: surveying

Objectives:

- 1) To provide accurate data to determine the distribution of nesting swift colonies.
- 2) To provide accurate data to determine estimates of swift population numbers.
- 3) Establish areas and types of buildings used and preferred by swifts.

Phase II: risk assessment

Objectives:

- 4) Identify high risk areas where nest sites will be lost.
- 5) Raise awareness of swift decline and the importance of nest availability working with the project co-ordinator and local volunteers, the Derbyshire Dales Swift Project would fund events (meeting rooms, printing costs etc) and help raise local awareness of the project and what we're trying to achieve. The aims would be to identify high risk areas, establish contact with landlords, social housing managers and householders and plan the distribution and extent of nest box installation.

Phase III: mitigation

Objectives:

- 6) Establish nest installation programme.
- 7) Monitor impact of nest box programme.

Once the target number of boxes is identified, based on the evidence collected, Derbyshire Dales Swift Project would set up a nest installation programme. By providing a recognised, credible source of advice, and installation service, we would be able to instigate a successful nest box programme across the Derbyshire Dales.

Examples of actions to encourage uptake could include:

- a) Pay installation costs.
- b) Subsidise box costs for householders who take part in the scheme.
- c) A fund to be allocated for free provision of boxes to households unable to pay.

Monitoring: householders would be encouraged to take part in a citizen science project to record the uptake of swift nest boxes. We would also use a nest box webcam to create public awareness on our websites and social media.

The proposal focused on creating and replacing nesting sites on our existing housing and buildings. It was noted within the report that the opportunity presented was at a significant scale and less time constrained than interventions on new built development. It was also noted that the installation of Swift boxes – phase 3 of the proposed project - is a simple and relatively inexpensive process but it is important that the preceding phases are undertaken to ensure the interventions have the most impact.

Swift boxes are referred to as 'universal nesting boxes'. They can accommodate house sparrows, starlings, tree sparrows, blue tits, great tits, and occasionally house martins, therefore offering nesting sites to a variety of native bird species. Stabilising and reversing species loss has a clear benefit to biodiversity – both locally and globally.

It was moved by Councillor Martin Burfoot, Seconded by Councillor Stuart Lees and

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That a delivery plan and costings are prepared for the project and presented to the appropriate committee for consideration.

The Chair declared the motion **CARRIED**.

182/23 - BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN UPDATE

The Climate Change Project Officer presented Members with an update on Biodiversity Net Gain. On the 27th September 2023 DEFRA confirmed that the Government was delaying the introduction of the mandate to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all sites, contained in the 2021 Environment Act.

BNG was meant to become part of the planning system in England in November 2023. However, DEFRA had announced that under its 'updated timetable' developers would be required to deliver net gain on all sites from January 2024. DEFRA also announced that by the end of November they would publish all guidance and the regulations.

Members were informed that a further update on the Council's activities in preparation for the delayed launch of BNG would be provided as part of a wider Biodiversity update report at the next Biodiversity Sub-Committee meeting in November, as agreed at the Sub-Committee meeting on 13 September 2023.

Meeting Closed: 6.45 pm

Chairman