

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Full Council - 5 July 2022**

### **Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Cllr Dixie Darch**

**Report Author: Katherine Church, Project Manager, Climate Change**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan (EEVAP) is a joint initiative between Somerset West and Taunton and Sedgemoor District Councils. The vision sets out our ambitions for nature recovery and the action plan is the framework through which we will deliver these ambitions. This work builds on the nature-based actions listed within the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan (CNCR) with a particular focus on nature recovery.
- 1.2 If approved, the vision and action plan will embed ecological actions across work streams and will deliver ecological enhancement and protection across the two districts and beyond. In the advent of unitary, the EEVAP sets a precedent and a template for collaboration which can be duplicated across the county after vesting day.

#### **2 Recommendations**

Full Council are invited to comment on the recommendations:

- 2.1 The ecological vision and action plan are approved.
- 2.2 Existing governance arrangements identified in the Somerset West and Taunton /Sedgemoor District Council Joint Climate Change Delivery Partnership are maintained and used as a framework for delivery and monitoring of the action plan.
- 2.3 Somerset West and Taunton with Sedgemoor District Council lead the creation and delivery of ecological recovery.
- 2.4 Annual reporting will be undertaken in conjunction with CNCR reporting.

### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 The action plan is an extensive list of aspirational activities to be completed by 2030 whereby many of them will be delivered after unitary. The EEVAP is included within the LGR (Local Government Reorganisation) Environment and Climate Change Sub Group 1 workstream to ensure it remains within the ongoing workplan under the new Somerset Council.
- 3.2 The action plan is ambitious and requires the council to go above and beyond business as usual with a considerable amount of work to deliver its desired outcomes. Any draw on operational teams outside the agreed business plan will impact delivery performance. Immediate actions are therefore based on existing commitments although it is recognised that more resource is required as part of the council's statutory requirements to meet its obligations under the Environment Act 2021
- 3.3 The EEVAP requires adoption by both Sedgemoor District Council and Somerset West and Taunton to succeed. The plan has been developed in close collaboration with operations teams and input from Members from both councils with the partnership consultation panel being a critical point for review.

### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 In September 2020 Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) declared an Ecological Emergency (EE) complementing its Climate Emergency declaration made in February 2019.
- 4.2 SWT and SDC formed the Joint Climate Change Delivery Partnership in August 2021 optimising resources to deliver their joint ambitions to tackle climate change and the ecological emergency. A joint consultation panel forms part of the governance arrangements for this partnership and allows cross party members the opportunity to review activity and make recommendations to portfolio holders.
- 4.3 The EEVAP is owned by the Climate Change team, however actions are assigned to and delivered by services across SWT. Some of the actions will also be delivered by or in collaboration with partners.
- 4.4 The vision and action plan has been developed through an extensive collaborative process with input from both Members and staff across both SWT and SDC. SWT Members were briefed in January 2022 and this was followed by a Members' workshop in which ideas were captured and fed into an action plan draft prior to consultation with operational services. The inclusive approach means that we have been able to work quickly so that the action plan can be adopted in July 2022 and immediate actions delivered in financial year 22/23 prior to unitary. The plan also includes existing nature and ecological actions from the Council's Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience plan, as well as formalising activities the Council is already undertaking.
- 4.5 The vision provides a succinct overview of the challenges our natural world faces and our commitment to deliver ecological recovery. It sets out our four overarching

ambitions:

- **Wildlife and habitats**  
Wildlife flourishes across our district's designated sites and wider ecological networks
- **Assets and Opens spaces**  
Our open spaces and buildings are maintained and enhanced to enable wildlife to thrive and be more resilient to climate change
- **Our values**  
We value the natural environment, and the ecosystem services it provides, informing our decision making.
- **People and nature**  
Citizens engage with the natural environment through our well managed, accessible open spaces and through their informed lifestyle choices.

4.6 These four pillars are underpinned by our collaboration with partners at a national, regional and local community level.

4.7 There are a number of targets under each ambition that we are committed to achieving by 2030. This aligns with national and international ambitions. These sit within the vision document.

4.8 The actions within the plan are categorised under four main themes:

- ***Embedding nature recovery throughout all our own work within SWT and SD councils.***  
Actions that the council can deliver directly through its decision making, policies and operational work streams.
- ***Working with partners including businesses to deliver ecological enhancement and protection.***  
Actions that identify projects and initiatives in which SWT will influence and support other organisations to deliver shared goals for nature recovery across the district and further afield.
- ***Enabling citizens to connect and take action for nature***  
Actions that work enable the local community and householders to engage with nature through direct action and through lifestyle choices.
- ***Governance: funding, measurement and reporting progress over time***  
Actions that focus on building the framework through which all actions will be monitored and progress towards our targets and ambitions can be reported.

4.9 The action plan is structured into high level actions, which are broken down into projects and then sub-projects depending on the scale and strategic importance of the action. This structure supports delivery and reporting going forwards.

- 4.10 Many actions are not within the control of the Council to directly deliver and will be carried out by external partners and bodies. Council has a role to enable and support. In addition, there are a number of lobbying and awareness raising activities that appear in the plan.
- 4.11 Each action has a time scale assigned to it. 'Immediate' will be delivered by end of 2022/23, and 'long term' by 2030.
- 4.12 This work demonstrates how we can work collectively across districts and shows leadership and commitment to nature recovery. The EEVAP provides a framework which is compatible with Local Nature Partnership outcomes and has the flexibility to be adopted by the new unitary Council.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 This work falls under our Environment and Economy strategic priority “A low-carbon, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyle.”

The document links to the following objectives:

Shape and protect our built and natural environment, supported by a refreshed Local Plan and develop our heritage, cultural and leisure offer including a clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town.

Provide and maintain green open spaces and parks, enhanced public spaces, as well as additional opportunities to safely walk or cycle in order to encourage active and healthy lifestyles

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 Immediate actions are within the work plan and therefore do not have additional financial implications. However, there are several short – long term actions (post 2023 delivery) where additional resources will be required and will need to be agreed by the unitary authority from 2023/24 e.g. planning will require more resources to deliver the Local Plan and Biodiversity Net Gain.

## **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 There are no identified implications from this report.

## **8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 The EEVAP is the Council's comprehensive commitment to ecological protection and enhancement.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

9.1 There are no identified implications of this report.

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

10.1 There are no identified implications of this report.

## **11 Social Value Implications**

11.1 There are no identified implications of this report

## **12 Partnership Implications**

12.1 The Council continues to work in partnership with other bodies to deliver ecological recovery, particularly through the Local Nature Partnership.

12.2 This is a joint piece of work with Sedgemoor District Council and timelines for adoption are slightly different. In Somerset West and Taunton, we aim to achieve adoption at Full Council scheduled on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022 whilst in Sedgemoor District Council this is to be 20<sup>th</sup> July.

## **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

13.1 Access to nature and open spaces plays an important role in our health and wellbeing. The EEVAP includes actions that will support this.

## **14 Asset Management Implications**

14.1 Some of the actions require use of existing assets such as Somerset West and Taunton local nature reserves and open spaces, however the extent of our assets is limited and therefore ecological improvements will be delivered beyond the boundaries of our assets.

## **15 Consultation Implications**

15.1 A Members' briefing was held in January 2022, with a subsequent workshop in February. The action plan has been developed in consultation with participants of **these events**.

## **16 Scrutiny Comments**

16.1 Scrutiny committee heard and discussed this report on 25<sup>th</sup> May and they unanimously agreed to support the EEVAP. There was positive feedback from members regarding the content of the report such as local actions addressing the global challenges of resource use and biodiversity loss, and the benefits nature recovery brings to people. There was some concern about the EEVAP only covering

Sedgemoor and SWT councils whilst we move to a unitary council in April 2023. It was explained that the decision to create EEVAP was made prior to unitary being confirmed. This work sets a precedent and framework which can be adapted for the new council and is included in the LGR within the Environment and Climate Change Sub Group 1 workstream

- 16.2 A couple of comments were made which will be addressed in the vision document. These included concern of the focus being predominantly on Redlist species at the expense of other species that are currently faring well. It was confirmed that the former are indicator species and other species will not be ignored.

## 17 Executive Comments

- 17.1 The Executive heard this report on 15<sup>th</sup> June and unanimously supported the EEVAP. Members praised the collaborative approach taken to create the action plan.

## 18 The Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny Committee – Yes (25/05/22)**
- **Executive – Yes (15/06/22)**
- **Full Council – Yes (5/07/22)**

**Reporting Frequency: Annually**

### List of Appendices

Appendix A	Ecological Emergency Vision
Appendix B	Ecological Emergency Action Plan

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