

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 12 September 2006
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director/Ecology Officer

SCDC BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

Purpose

1. To present to members of the Cabinet the final draft of the SCDC Biodiversity Strategy and to seek support for adoption of the document as Council Policy.

Background

2. On the 26 January 2005 the Conservation Advisory Group considered a report on the developing *Biodiversity Strategy* that was to be a statement of the Council's policy with respect of the preservation and enhancement of the district's biodiversity.
3. A further version of the Strategy was presented to the Group on the 27 April 2005 where the content and vision of the document was considered.
4. A final pre-consultation draft of the Strategy was presented to the Group on the 14 December 2005 for consideration and comment prior to its final draft production and undertaking of the consultation exercise.
5. Following printing of the draft Strategy, it was issued for public consultation via Members, all parish councils and selected conservation bodies and development organisations on the 10 March 2006. It was also published on the Council's website. The consultation period closed on 14 April and a report was presented to the Group on the 26 April 2006. A number of comments were received after the end of the consultation period, most significant were those received from the County Council relating to Local Sites as presented in the Defra guidance April 2006 *Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management*.
6. On the 12th July 2006 an amended version of the Strategy was presented to the Conservation and Design Group incorporating amendments responding to the consultation exercise. The following recommendation was made, "Support the Strategy and recommend that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder presents the South Cambs. Biodiversity Strategy to Cabinet to seek its approval and adoption as Council Policy, subject to reference being made in it to the continuing need to adapt to the impact of climate change on biodiversity, and the addition of wording reflected in the fourth paragraph of Minute no. 5 of the Conservation Advisory Group meeting held on 26 April 2006."
7. All of the requested amendments are contained in the version now put before Cabinet.

Considerations

8. All relevant comments from consultees have been incorporated and tables published upon the SCDC website to illustrate how the comments were taken into account. The

version of the Strategy presented is in accordance with Government's policy guidance.

9. The Strategy is now considered suitable to be adopted as Council Policy in support of biodiversity both within development schemes and through the council's own actions and initiatives.
10. The Strategy has been promoted in the South Cambs magazine and is also placed upon the council's web site. www.scambs.gov.uk/biodiversitystrategy
11. The format of the Strategy is such that it can be adapted to become Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) under the LDF once the latter has been approved in 2007. It will serve to guide development from adoption as Council policy.

Options

12. Cabinet is requested to either:
 - (a) approve the adoption of the SCDC Biodiversity Strategy as Council Policy, or
 - (b) require officers to bring a further revised version of the SCDC Biodiversity Strategy to a future meeting of the Cabinet incorporating additional amendments as agreed by Cabinet.

Implications

13. The production of the Strategy in its printed form has financial implications due to its cost of approximately £10 to produce. A minimum number of copies will therefore be produced in-house.
 - (a) All parish councils and local libraries will be supplied with copies as will the following partnership bodies:
 - (i) Environment Agency
 - (ii) Natural England
 - (iii) Cambridgeshire Horizons
 - (iv) Cambridgeshire County Council
 - (v) Cambridge City Council
 - (vi) Wildlife Trust
 - (vii) Woodland Trust
 - (viii) RSPB
 - (ix) National Trust
 - (b) The Strategy will also be provided to the planning teams and appropriate council officers. This is likely to result in the provision of 120 copies. This is considered to be a necessary expenditure in order to ensure that the Strategy reaches a wide range of persons and organisations.
 - (c) Councillors will be encouraged to download the Strategy from the web. However, paper copies will be provided if requested.
 - (d) The Strategy will be available to download from the web for the general public and development companies. Copies will also be available for sale.

14.	Legal	The Strategy sets out requirements to be met by development proposals. Following adoption of the new LDF (due 2007) the Strategy will be reviewed and cross-referenced to the relevant policies contained within the LDF. The Strategy provides information the level of protection afforded to certain species and sites.
	Staffing	None specific, but the adoption of a clear policy on the conservation of biodiversity will assist the Ecology Officer and planning staff in the consideration of planning applications.
	Risk Management	Through the emerging LDF the council has identified the need to strengthen biodiversity conservation and to produce detailed biodiversity guidance for the development control process in accordance with PPS9: <i>Biodiversity and Geological Conservation</i> . Failure to complete the publication and adoption of the Strategy may result in a lack of clear guidance and missed opportunities for biodiversity conservation as well as undermining the LDF.
	Equal Opportunities	None specific

Consultations

15. Externally the draft SCDC Biodiversity Strategy has been considered by a wide group of organisations including all parish councils and local environmental groups as well as selected development companies and agents. In spring 2006 the results were presented to the Conservation and Design Advisory Group on the 26th April 2006.
16. Internally consultation was with all area planning teams, the planning policy team, the Land Drainage Manager, the Strategic Development Officer and the staff of Milton Country Park as well as members of the Conservation and Design Advisory Group.

Conclusions/Summary

17. Adoption of the SCDC Biodiversity Strategy initially as Council Policy will help to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the district's biodiversity through the following means:
 - (a) Providing clear *Biodiversity Statements* to explain the Council's approach to biodiversity conservation.
 - (b) Providing information on the variety of species and habitats within the district – *the biodiversity resource*.
 - (c) Production of a *Council Biodiversity Action Plan* to focus the conservation activities of the Council and its partners.
 - (d) Provision of *planning guidance*, particularly through Local Development Control Principles and good practice guidance and examples.
 - (e) Requirement for applicants seeking planning consent to complete the *South Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Site Checklist* in order to ensure that planning decisions are based upon the relevant up-to-date information about a site and its possible species.
 - (f) Detailing the range of *partnership activities* that the Council is currently involved in with a view to establishing further partnerships.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that the Cabinet approve the adoption of the SCDC Biodiversity Strategy as Council Policy.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

19. Affordable Homes	None specific. However, appropriate provision for biodiversity within new developments will be expected inline with Government Planning Policy Statement 9.
Customer Service	The Strategy will improve customer service by explaining the requirements for biodiversity conservation within the planning system and setting a programme for action and enhancement.
Northstowe and other growth areas	The Strategy will be an important document for shaping and ensuring adequate biodiversity provision within, and around, the growth areas.
Quality, Accessible Services	The Strategy develops planning policy and provides guidance to clearly explain what is expected in support of development applications through the SC Biodiversity Site Checklist.
Village Life	The Strategy will assist in the conservation of biodiversity within the villages thus enriching village life.
Sustainability	The conservation of biodiversity is a key test of sustainability and the implementation of key targets will contribute to addressing climate change.
Partnership	The Strategy identifies existing partnerships and sets a timeframe for positive action to facilitate future partnership action to enhance village life.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Report to the Conservation and Design Advisory Group on the 26 April 2006.

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