

## London Borough of Sutton

Report to Executive Committee 15 March 2010)

### Report of the Executive Head of Environmental Sustainability

#### Sutton's Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 – 2015 and Achievements under the 2005-10 BAP

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**Area Served:** Borough-wide **Executive Councillor:** Colin Hall

#### Key Decision Report

##### Summary

This report details achievement against Sutton's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2005-10 and introduces the new BAP 2010 -15 for approval. Achievements against the BAP 2005-10 are detailed in the report (section 2.2) and include improvement of Anton Crescent Wetland to a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation Grade 1, declaring Belmont Pasture as a Local Nature Reserve, improving access to nature by making sites more accessible and hosting events such as the "bat walks" at Beddington Park.

The Biodiversity Action Plan provides a focus for community engagement through the Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers (SNCV), 18 separate interest groups and an overarching Biodiversity Partnership comprising of key stakeholders. The SNCV provides volunteering opportunities for the whole community involving over 80 people each year

The BAP 2010-15 sets out targets and action plans, developed through the Biodiversity Partnership, that link with the Community Strategy, Planning Policy and One Planet Action Plan and Local Area Agreement. There are 6 action plans for priority habitats and one species action plan for bats. The priority habitats are - Woodland and Scrub, Parks and Open Spaces (including Cemeteries & Churchyards), Chalk Grassland, Rivers and Wetlands, Private Gardens and Allotments. Targets within the BAP 2010-15 seek to engage the whole community by focussing on schools, gardens, priority sites and volunteering.

##### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive:

- a) note the achievements to date,
- b) agree the Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-15 attached with this report
- c) welcome and support the work of the Sutton Biodiversity Partnership and SNCV
- d) agree that Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-15 is published and publicised,
- e) refer this report to the Local Committees to encourage community engagement in biodiversity activities.

## 1. Background

1.1 The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets out the vision and proposed actions for the protection, conservation and enhancement of Sutton's biodiversity with measurable

targets. The BAP has been prepared through the Sutton Biodiversity Partnership and will be co-ordinated by the Biodiversity Team within the Environmental Sustainability leads on the overall implementation with 27 separate internal and external partners leading on specific actions.

1.2 At regional level the Mayor of London has published The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy "Connecting with London's Nature", which sets out a framework for biodiversity in the Capital. The Mayor encourages Boroughs to develop their own Biodiversity Action Plans as local BAPs reflect the values of local people and cater for local distinctiveness. Protection of local biodiversity is increasingly important, not just for the intrinsic value of flora and fauna, but also for its contribution to people's wellbeing and the role it has mitigating climate change.

1.3 In 2008 Sutton adopted National Indicator 197 as part of the Local Area Agreement with the Government Office for London; this indicator set a target to improve the nature conservation value of 9 local sites; the BAP assists in delivering this target. The Biodiversity Action Plan also forms a key contribution towards fulfilling the Local Authority Duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising our functions.

1.4 Sutton's One Planet Action Plan, adopted in December 2009 will allow biodiversity to be promoted within the context of our vision for a sustainable borough by 2025 and align biodiversity with other principles particularly Local and Sustainable Food, Water and Health and Happiness.

## **2.1 Development of new targets**

2.1.2 The review of Sutton Biodiversity Action Plan coincides with the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010. Sutton's first BAP was adopted in 2006 and contained six habitat action plans and one species action plan. The updated BAP retains the existing format, however, in line with the Regional Plan; two habitat action plans (Parks & Open Spaces and Cemeteries) have been merged into one whilst one habitat action plan (Gardens and Allotments) has been split into two.

2.1.3 The targets in Sutton's Biodiversity Action Plan have been updated to contribute towards the updated targets in the London Biodiversity Action Plan 2015.

2.1.4 The new targets and actions have been developed in consultation with the Sutton Biodiversity Partnership, set up in 2005 with the following partners: LBS Biodiversity team, LBS Parks department, Environment Agency, Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers, Downlands Countryside Management Project, London Wildlife Trust, Eco Local and Wandle Trust. The London Biodiversity Partnership has been actively involved in the development of the targets.

2.1.5 The new targets and actions are consistent with Sutton's Vision and Values in the Sutton Plan to protect and improve biodiversity and contribute towards achieving the targets and aspirations set out in Sutton's One Planet Action Plan and the emerging Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

2.1.6 Sutton's Local Development Framework contains Strategic Objective 9: To control urban sprawl and protect Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land, back gardens and rivers, to improve the provision and quality of open spaces, and, to protect and enhance biodiversity and habitats throughout the Borough. This is reflected in Sutton's Core Policy

PMP9 (The Open Spaces Network) which states “The Council will protect and seek to enhance the Borough’s biodiversity through supporting measures, which meet the objectives of the London and Local Biodiversity Action Plans and will seek to improve access to nature”.

## 2.2 Achievements to Date

2.2.1 Some of the key achievements of the BAP 2005-10 include:

- Restoring Anton Crescent Wetland to improve biodiversity and access in partnership with the Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers (SNCV) and the Environment Agency, resulting in an upgrade as Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) from Borough Grade II to Grade I. Anton Crescent Wetland and Belmont Pastures were also declared Local Nature Reserves in 2006, the strongest protection a Local Authority can afford to sites.
- In 2008 the Biodiversity team received funding through Natural England’s Access to Nature Fund and the GLA. With this funding and partnership work with SNCV and Downlands Project (DCMP) a project was carried out clearing scrub and removing fences to open the Warren Railway lands to the public. An interpretation board was installed and the wildlife site extended into the Warren Park. Events were held at the Warren as part of the Chalk Festival run by LB Sutton, Croydon and Bromley.
- Successful public events include the very popular bat walks in Beddington Park with over 40 participants on individual events to raise awareness of bat protection. The Biodiversity team has encouraged members of the public to participate in Bat/ Bird box making events and distributed over 100 bird/ bat boxes to be placed in Sutton’s private gardens.
- Of course, there are also BAP achievements that are not immediately visible on the nature conservation sites, but represent significant contributions to safeguarding and enhancing Sutton’s biodiversity. This involves holding training events for Sutton development control officers on legal obligations in wildlife law and protecting wildlife sites in planning policy.

2.2.2 Overall, of Sutton’s Biodiversity Plan 2006-2010, 86% of the 132 specific actions were fully achieved (the updated BAP contains 91 actions working towards achieving 22 targets).

2.2.3 Those targets not achieved included a number of very ambitious targets such as gaining Forestry Stewardship Council certification for sustainability of Sutton’s woodlands. This turned out to be not viable due to the small sizes of individual woodland areas. Also the creation of habitat and introduction of water voles on the River Wandle has been delayed due to lack of external funding, but will still be an action in the revised Action Plan.

2.2.4 Similarly, we did not have the resources to develop and implement management plans for all of Sutton’s nature sites. However, further work towards this end is included in the revised BAP and reflected in NI 197. The targets for NI 197 will be achieved.

2.2.5 Sutton’s Biodiversity Action Plan and progress reports will be publicly available at [www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk](http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk)

## 2.3 Key changes to the Action Plan targets

2.3.1 The BAP 2010-15 targets fall into four main categories: 1) maintain, 2) enhance 3) create habitats for nature 4) raise public awareness of habitats. In line with the London Biodiversity Action Plan the habitat and species actions plans include a target to maintain habitats in Sutton, and improve the quality where possible.

2.3.2 Raising awareness is still a key element in the Biodiversity Action Plan, and current regional initiatives for food growing, eco schools and wildlife gardening provide opportunities to create further partnerships to do this. The recognition that raising awareness for wildlife in private gardens requires a different approach than for allotments and school gardens led to the decision to split the former Gardens and Allotments Action Plan into two separate plans. Key actions are:

- Creation of wildlife gardens in school grounds through the Eco Schools Scheme.
- Raising awareness of wildlife friendly food growing at Sutton's community farm and teaching allotment.
- Running workshops and events to encourage wildlife gardening in private gardens.

2.3.3 The revised actions recognise the need to draw in external funding for habitat creation projects. However, specific sites for habitat creation have been identified in the development of the new BAP actions to allow a more focused approach in applying for external funds. Key habitat creation or restoration projects for which funding will be sought in partnership with other organisations are:

- Improving structure and under storey plants at Roundshaw Woods and in Beddington Park.
- Developing Orchards at Devonshire Avenue Nature Reserve and Old Lodge Farm.
- Establish a wet meadow at Sutton Common (funding has been secured).
- Biodiversity improvements on the Beverly Brook.
- Removal of obstacles for fish movement and create backwater habitats in the River Wandle (in partnership with the Environment Agency, Wandle Trust and London Wildlife Trust).

## 3. Financial Implications

3.1 The revised Biodiversity Action Plan 2010-15 sets new targets for biodiversity improvements in the Borough. The previous targets 2005 – 2010 have been delivered within the existing biodiversity budget and through partnership work. The revised targets have been developed in discussion with partner organisations to ensure delivery within existing structures. The revised actions detail specifically where additional external funding is required to achieve more ambitious targets for habitat creation. Details of external funding received during the Action Plan Period 2005 -2010 are detailed below.

3.2 The Biodiversity Team will lead on the BAP targets and will deliver the targets within the existing staff structure and through partnership work plans will be delivered within the existing budget.

3.3 It is intended to seek external funding to deliver ambitious targets on habitat creation, and the BAP actions reflect the need to identify new resources, including S106 developer contributions. Sutton's Biodiversity team has a good track record for successful funding applications.

3.4 Sutton currently receives funding from the Rural Payments Agency under a Countryside Stewardship agreement (2003-2013) of approximately £6,000 annually and Single Farm Payment of £4,000 annually. It is planned to enter into a Higher Level Stewardship agreement after 2013.

3.5 LBS works in partnership with the Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers, who support the implementation of the BAP and NI197 with volunteer labour and provision of volunteer training and tools. This volunteer contribution is worth £45,000 annually in equivalent staff time and is not only extremely valuable as workforce, but is also important as match funding contribution for external funding bids. Donations to the SNCV have funded the first part of the orchard creation at Devonshire Avenue LNR.

3.6 In partnership with five other Local Authorities, LBS core funds the Downlands Countryside Management Project/ Old Surrey Downs Project who carry out work to fulfil the Countryside Stewardship Agreement such as sheep grazing and scrub clearance. The Old Surrey Downs Project has provided funding to install interpretation boards (£4,000) and fencing (£2,000) in the past two years.

3.7 External funding received during the BAP period 2005 -2010 includes

- Heritage Lottery £50,000 (Ecology Centre Grounds), incl. 50% volunteer match funding.
- Environment Agency £10,000 (Anton Crescent Wetland) incl. 50% volunteer match funding.
- Access to Nature £10,000 (The Warren), incl. 50% volunteer match funding.
- Transport for London £15,000 (Sutton Countryside walk and Oaks Park Nature Trail).
- Veolia £ 5,000 (Nonsuch Park in Partnership with Epsom& Ewell Council).
- SITA Trust £12,000 (Sutton Common).

3.8 Since 2007 an officer in the Biodiversity Team is funded through S106 developer contributions (£30,000 annually). Further S106 funding for the BAP period has been negotiated and is expected from the Orchards Hill Development (maintenance of Queen Mary's Wood over 12 years) and the Kimpton Development subject to final legal agreement.

#### **4. Influence of the Council's Core Values**

4.1 The BAP is a partnership document with internal and external partners from statutory and voluntary organisations supporting the Biodiversity team in implementing the BAP actions.

4.2 The BAP aims to provide access to nature for all members of Sutton's community.

4.3 The BAP aims to encourage groups and individuals to contribute towards the enhancement of Sutton's biodiversity. The separation of the Private Gardens and Allotments Action Plan intends to focus the BAP actions towards achieving participation.

#### **5. Equality Impact Assessment**

5.1 The BAP aims to provide good quality nature areas for every member of the public to experience nature/ wildlife. Actions will not only be delivered by the Local Authority, but also through volunteer groups and training placements participating in site maintenance

and education events. These groups take part in work placement schemes for jobseekers, students and work placements for disabled people.

5.2 The BAP aims to raise awareness and educate all members of the public about biodiversity.

## **6. Background Papers**

Adopted BAP 2005 – 2010.