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Date: 29 November 2023

Cllr Caro Wild
Cabinet Member, Climate Change



By email

Annwyl Cyng Wild / Dear Cllr Wild

NATURE EMERGENCY & BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee held on 16th November 2023, I would like to thank you and officers for attending Committee to facilitate our consideration of the Nature Emergency and Biodiversity update, the Committee appreciated officers attending and facilitating the discussion at short notice. Members agreed that I pass on the following observations, and you will find our requests listed at the end of the letter.

Status of the Nature Emergency

Whilst the commitment and enthusiasm of officers was applauded, the committee expressed concern that following the declaration of the Nature Emergency in 2021 that the profile of nature and biodiversity remains comparatively unseen and rarely referenced when compared with 'climate change' when policy decision are being made. It is noted that in the Single Impact Assessment there is a single question relating to the 'Habitat Regulations Assessment' that refers to European sites designated for nature conservation.

The Committee recommend that consideration is given to the development of a wider nature & biodiversity assessment for inclusion in the Single Impact Assessment

The challenge in growing the profile of nature and biodiversity was accepted by you, however, limited funding and resources were noted as impacting the delivery of 'corporate' awareness raising. Officers informed the committee that training in relation to duties under section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 was being developed to be delivered to members in 2024.

It is recommended that this training is also delivered to senior Council Officers.

You and officers were also confident that the development of the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty (BRED) Plan and the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) would raise awareness of biodiversity and nature issues.

Funding & Resources

Members noted the difficulties in recruiting to the Planning Ecologist post and that additional funding had been required to attract suitably qualified and experienced candidates. The Committee's previous Scrutiny 'Managing Biodiversity & Natural Environment in Cardiff', in 2019, recommended the recruitment of an additional Ecologist/Section 6 Officer which was partially accepted. Officers would welcome an additional post to focus on the 'corporate' work. Although the additional post has not been recruited to the Committee noted that the Local Nature Partnership Co-ordinator post was grant funded and that this will end in 2025 and concerns were voiced about the continuation of the post after this date and the work and projects that they have been successful in delivering being able to continue without investment by the Council.

The additional recurrent revenue funding to support the Community Rangers team was welcomed along with their recent 'Best of the Best' award.

The Committee acknowledged the challenging financial times ahead but felt that any reduction in budgets that support work and projects that grow nature and biodiversity would be detrimental to the wider Council, given the benefits that nature and biodiversity have.

Members were also advised that seeking funding to support their work is included in the roles of many of the officers rather than one role who's responsibility is to seek appropriate grant funding and apply for it.

Planning Issues & Challenges

Members queried if gardens proposed on development are of a sufficient size to accommodate the owners planting small tree and shrubs to support local biodiversity and nature. Officers responded that overall a 'net gain' on development was worked towards, although members also noted that this does not stop 'astroturfing' of lawn areas, or the creation of additional parking by paving over lawns by homeowners. The increasing number of 4G pitches was also raised by the committee and officers confirmed that mitigating actions are usually included in these cases.

The need to balance protecting and enhancing biodiversity and nature with the need to build more houses to address the growing needs of the city was acknowledged however members commented that as it appears a lot of the ecologists time is spent being reactive, if we made the right decisions in the first place and maybe consulted/engaged with him earlier in the process we would also avoid needing to take mitigating action.

Enforcement of planning breaches was also raised as a challenge as officers noted we have the powers to enforce however we have limited resources to deliver the service. Officers also noted that the Ecologist is able to and does object to planning applications.

The maintenance and preservation of trees and shrubs on new developments was raised as a concern, as they have been seen to die following dry spells if not properly looked after, and local residents could support the trees if they are accessible.

Replacement Local Development Plan

The Committee asked if the Replacement Local Development Plan would protect and enhance nature and biodiversity. Officers were confident that following the update to Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales 'Addressing the nature emergency through the planning system' regarding, Green Infrastructure, Net Benefit for Biodiversity and the Step-wise approach, Protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Trees and Woodlands

that the RLDP would strengthen the long term vision for green and blue infrastructure in Cardiff.

Officers also commented that the Planning Policy Wales (PPW) requirements for the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) on new developments and the local authority acting as the SuDS Approving Body (SAB) would enhance local biodiversity and nature.

Partnership working / Behaviour Change

Members asked about the extent of partnership working, and officers responded that at an officer level there was a lot of working happening with neighbouring authorities, although this was not the case at a strategic level. Good working relationships with schools was also noted which includes their involvement in the Coed Caerdydd initiative. Green Walls have also been built at a number of schools in Cardiff which has improved air quality and privacy for pupils while decreasing road noise levels, although unfortunately the walls are currently under attack from vine weevils!

A members asked about the process if a piece of land locally is identified that is not being used that could be used for planting or growing as a community managed (Managing Biodiversity & Natural Environment in Cardiff recommendation 18(b)). Officers responded that the public can contact the community rangers, but acknowledged that more could be done, and I suggested that this could be something to consider including on the Cardiff App.

To confirm a response to the letter which responds to the following points is requested:

- Information regarding the number of planning application objections that the Ecologist has submitted and how many of these were accepted/supported, since he has been in post.

Please see below for the recommendation that the committee is making:

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Action Date
Any training in relation to duties under section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 is also delivered to Senior Council Officers, across all Directorates.				
Consideration of identification of land use by communities to support biodiversity and nature for inclusion on the Cardiff App				

Once again thank you once more for attending Committee and for considering our comments and observations.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely / Yn gywir



Councillor Owen Jones

Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

cc: *Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee*

Jon Maidment, OM Parks, Sport & Harbour Authority

Steve Ball, Development Manager, Strategic & Placemaking

Justin Groves, County Ecologist

Sam Eaves, Local Nature Partnership Co-ordinator