



Minutes of the meeting of the Climate Policy & Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 17 September 2024 when there were present:-

Chair: Cllr A Edwards

Cllr T Copsey

Cllr P May

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr B Campagna and Cllr S Ainsley.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Parrott	- Assistant Director, Climate & Growth
S Worthington	- Democratic Service Manager
M Hennessy	- Senior Planning Policy Officer
H Boyd	- Democratic Services Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

2 LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY (LNRS) PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director, Climate & Growth setting out a draft response to the Essex County Council (ECC) consultation on a draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Officers advised that the Environment Act 2021 introduced the Nature Recovery Networks which is the Government's National Goal to reverse nature decline. From that 48 responsible authorities were identified for local nature recovery strategies to link up habitats to create more connected, strategic and coherent networks across the country.

ECC is the responsible authority for the greater Essex area. ECC has drafted the LNRS which looks to identify strategic networks and opportunities to create bigger, better and more connected habitats across Essex. LNRS links to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) by providing a way to direct biodiversity into the areas identified; it provides incentives for directing biodiversity in those locations and disincentivises development in those locations.

ECC is consulting and Castle Point is a supporting authority, along with other authorities within Essex, and Natural England. Once adopted, the LNRS will cover Castle Point and impact planning decisions in the future.

The consultation commenced on 30 August 2024 and a response is due by 25 October 2024. A report from the Sub-Committee will go to Cabinet recommending a formal response within the consultation deadline.

The suggested draft response highlights the following:

- Clarification on the mapping; some errors were noted
- Potential missed opportunities
- Potential issues of delivery in some areas identified
- Details on the impact the LNRS will have on planning
- Points on Council owned land such as the Waterside leisure centre
- Further details on implementation, monitoring and review
- Clarification on delivering the actions in the LNRS

Members asked whether there had been any interaction with the Forestry Commission or the Police. It was emphasised that planting trees in residential areas could help with anti-social behaviour, as well as reducing rubbish and improving the area and also was beneficial for wildlife and the environment. Could residential areas be included noting the issues that may arise with pipes etc.

Officers advised that Essex had included Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIBs) such as sites already designated as nature areas, such as SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), with plans to connect these areas. However, due to the built-up nature of certain areas, Essex had introduced 'urban opportunity locations'. While these urban opportunity locations did not fall within the strategic areas, they had nevertheless been identified in the document. There was the potential to include additional urban opportunity locations, though it could be more appropriate to include 'Urban Greening' in the Castle Point Plan.

Members acknowledged that it is a valuable project, especially given the current decline in nature. Many of the key points were addressed in the suggested draft response. However, they made particular reference to the difficulty of interpreting the mapping and requested more emphasis on the Daws Heath area in paragraph 5.7. Daws Heath features living landscapes with interconnected nature areas linked by green pathways, providing a strong foundation that could be designated for protection.

Officers advised that some of this area is designated as an APIB in the LNRS but the response could request including the additional area around Daws Heath within the living landscape as a site selected by a local authority.

Members also alluded to the point made in the draft response about land south of Glyders being noted in the strategy as a prime spot for marine life. The draft response states that clarification is needed, as Glyders is on a hill,

making it unlikely to support marine habitats. This could be an error. South of Glyders was an area of mixed woodland and grassland rich in wildlife but lacking formal protection. This area had previously been identified as a potential local wildlife site. Members requested that this area be addressed either through the LNRS or the Castle Point Plan. The Sub-Committee queried if the area was meant to be something other than marine habitat; the map should be updated accordingly.

Members also requested that more APIBs be identified and designated, as there are additional sites within the borough that had not been recognised.

Officers clarified that APIBs have specific requirements, making it challenging to designate further sites unless those criteria are revised.

Clarification was needed on the link between the LNRS and development decisions.

Additionally, a habitat creation opportunity was identified around the oil and gas terminals on Canvey Island, but this is a busy port. Further confirmation of the viability of this site and potential options for additional habitats was requested.

The Sub-Committee asked that all wildlife sites put forward in the current Castle Point Plan process be included in this strategy to avoid any duplication of effort in identifying sites or omission of sites the Council is aware of.

Officers confirmed that the designation of the Glyders area was inconsistent with local knowledge and clarification would be sought on its habitat use. They advised that they would also include living landscapes in the Daws Heath mapping, along with marine habitats around the oil and gas terminals.

It was also emphasised that the National Planning Policy Reforms were nearing completion, and a request had been made for LNRS-related issues to be prioritised, although this would ultimately be a national decision.

Members commended the draft response. They made reference to APIBs in the borough, including, for example, Thundersley Glen, Thundersley Common, land between Benfleet and Thundersley water towers, Felstead Road and an area behind Kents Hill Junior School and land north of Church Road, and asked that these also be included as there was an opportunity to connect these further. A lot of these areas were wooded and including them within the Strategy as a strategic site selected by a local authority would help create a network for this wildlife corridor.

It was also emphasised that more detailed mapping with smaller hexagons would be helpful and could address many of the questions about specific areas and would allow more accurate representation of areas in Castle Point's relatively dense urban areas.

Overall, the response was well-received, but clarification on implementation and funding is still needed.

Officers responded that the use of hexagons in the mapping was due to land ownership boundaries but agreed that, as a small authority, it would be beneficial to request a more detailed map. They confirmed that the Local Plan’s evidence work, including the wildlife site review, is ratified by the local nature partnership, which is Essex County Council (ECC). This review will be updated in October 2024, and the APIs should be revised in the latest version. It was agreed to include this in the response.

A Motion moved by Cllr A Edwards and seconded by Cllr T Copsey to agree the response set out at Appendix 1, revised to include the observations above, was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

Resolved

To agree the response set out in Appendix 1, revised to reflect Members’ observations above.

The meeting closed at 7.29 pm.

Chair

Date

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