

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 27/06/23	Meeting Name: Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Southwark Nature Action Plan & Tree Planting Progress	
Wards affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Catherine Rose Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks, Streets and Clean Air	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Committee notes the progress made on delivery against the Southwark Nature Action Plan (SNAP), in relation to the planning and management of biodiversity in the borough.
2. That the Committee notes the progress of Southwark's tree planting programme.

BACKGROUND

3. The Southwark Nature Action Plan was adopted in 2020. The SNAP builds on the successes of the two previous biodiversity action plans and sets out a vision for the continued protection, conservation and enhancement of nature across the borough.
4. The Council's previous biodiversity action plans "Making Space for Natural Neighbours" 2013 - 2019, and "Work for Wildlife" 2006 - 2010, delivered considerable gains for nature in Southwark. The plans delivered a number of key actions including creation of new habitats, conservation of flora and fauna, improved management of parks and open spaces and increased engagement with nature.
5. The plans recognise that there are many opportunities for improving our natural environment in Southwark – noting that urban environments can support high levels of biodiversity and offer opportunities for many species.
6. Following Southwark's climate emergency declaration in May 2020 £5million was dedicated to tree planting across the borough in order to significantly increase tree stock numbers and canopy cover. Three annual tree planting programmes have since been completed and performance mechanisms established and this paper updates the progress made during those planting programs.

THE COUNCILS ROLE IN IMPROVING BIODIVERSITY IN AN URBAN AREA

7. The SNAP provides the framework to increase biodiversity in Southwark and informs the protection, enhancement and promotion of the natural environment.
8. The SNAP also directly relates to policies in
 - a. The Council Plan,
 - b. Southwark Plan
 - c. Open Spaces Strategy
 - d. Climate Change Action Plan
 - e. Tree Management Policy
9. The SNAP also contributes to national and regional targets for conserving and enhancing biodiversity, which are detailed in the plan.

10. The SNAP has been developed in partnership with the Southwark Biodiversity Partnership (SBP) and outlines how the public, private and voluntary sectors will work together to deliver quantifiable results for biodiversity and the environment.
11. The Southwark Biodiversity Partnership (SBP) meets quarterly to discuss and inform the delivery of the SNAP. The core partners such as The London Wildlife Trust and The Conservation Volunteers manage key ecological sites in the borough.
12. This SNAP includes three key themes and habitat and species focused action plans incorporating key environmental policy in development by the UK Government.
13. The three themes are:
 - Making Nature Accessible for all
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Nature Recovery Network
14. The habitat action plans are:
 - Built Environment Habitat Action Plan
 - Gardens and Grounds Habitat Action Plan
 - Parks and Open Spaces Habitat Action Plan
 - Woodland Habitat Action Plan
15. The Species Action Plans are:
 - Bats Species Action Plan
 - Hedgehog Species Action Plan
 - Stag Beetle Species Action Plan
 - Amphibians and Dragonflies and damselflies Species Action Plan
 - Birds Species Action Plan
 - Native trees, woodland flora and fungi Species Action Plan
 - Pollinators Species Action Plan

STRATEGIC LINKS FOR BIODIVERSITY AND TREE PLANTING

16. The following section sets out the strategic Corporate Delivery Plan targets and Climate Action Plan Targets (please note, many of the targets feature in both plans and are measured through KPI's) and provides an update on progress so far with the delivery of the KPI's related to those targets. Where possible, officers have linked the targets.
17. Corporate Delivery Plan Targets related to the SNAP are;
 - Make Southwark the first inner London council to have over 100,000 trees, so every neighbourhood in Southwark gains more tree canopy cover
 - Working with local people and schools to find locations for and plant 20,000 trees
 - Work with local people to create more nature sites, woodlands and urban planting
18. The Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) has strong links to biodiversity and the SNAP. Nature based solutions can mitigate the impacts of Climate Change. THE CCAP has a core theme to create greener streets with more planting and Increase tree coverage across the borough.

19. Create greener streets with more planting
 1. Improved urban greening and biodiversity
 - Review the current approach to the use of pesticides in the public realm to better protect residents, wildlife and promote biodiversity
 2. Key sites for biodiversity are identified and protected
 - Identify potential green corridors between key green spaces/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
 - Develop, support and expand Southwark's Biodiversity Partnership and their capacity to bid for and deliver local schemes

20. Increase tree coverage across the borough
 1. Tree coverage is maintained and increased, with tree planting encouraged amongst residents
 - Make Southwark the first inner London council to have over 100,000 trees (as per CPD target) and endeavour to increase tree canopy to cover 24% of public land
 - Work with local people and schools to find locations for and plant 20,000 trees (as per CPD target)

21. Residents have greater access to nature
 1. Work with local people to create more nature sites, woodlands and urban planting
 - Develop a community garden plan which includes a new right for residents to have a community garden or food growing plots on their estates
 - Designate more land in the borough for allotments

PROGRESS ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS LINKED TO THE CDP THE CCAP

22. **Review the current approach to the use of pesticides in the public realm to better protect residents, wildlife and promote biodiversity**

Action:

Since 2018, Parks have had no scheduled use of Glyphosate or other pesticides.

During the 2021 growing season:

23. The Cleaning Service reduced the number of applications of Glyphosate from three to two. The Cleaning Service trialled a non-Glyphosate based herbicide on selected roads in the borough.

During the 2022 growing season:

24. The Cleaning Service reduced the number of applications of Glyphosate from two to one. The Cleaning Service continued the trial of the non-Glyphosate based herbicide on selected roads in the borough.

25. The Pesticide Reduction strategy aims to review the use of pesticides in Southwark and find alternative methods of weed control.

26. **Identify potential green corridors between key green spaces/Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Action:

1. Borough SINC's (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) have been reviewed. The report and map are available on the ecology pages of the council website.

27. Develop, support and expand Southwark's Biodiversity Partnership and their capacity to bid for and deliver local schemes

Action:

The partnership continues to be managed by the council. Third sector partners fed back that this was their preference in terms of support from the council. The group continues to welcome new members and explore opportunities for third sector partners to apply for all types of funding to deliver biodiversity projects across the borough.

28. Work with local people and schools to find locations for and plant 20,000 trees (Also a CDP Action)

Action:

1. Engagement with Friends of Groups, TRAs, Trees for Bermondsey, Herne Hill Tree Watch, Southwark Nature Action Volunteers to name but a few have all assisted with identifying potential tree planting sites.
2. 107 volunteers were actively engaged in spring 2023 with planting the Peckham Rye Park Tiny Forest initiative. 6 schools have been engaged in tree planting this season.

29. Make Southwark the first inner London council to have over 100,000 trees and endeavour to increase tree canopy to cover 24% of public land, so every neighbourhood in Southwark gains more tree canopy cover (Also a CDP Action)

Action:

1. Approximately 8000 additional trees and whips planted from April 2022 to March 2023.
2. 20,000 trees are planned for planting by 2026. Southwark is on target to deliver this action. A tree canopy cover assessment is to be updated in Q3 2023/24. Currently the tree canopy cover is 19.8%.
3. 17,000 trees were planted in the borough 2020/21-2021/22 at the start of the funding cycle.

30. Develop a community garden plan, which includes a new right for residents to have a community garden or food growing plots on their estates. Also a CDP Action.

Action:

Community garden plan created (Please refer to the Housing section of the Gardens and Grounds HAP below for details of the community food growing initiative).

31. Designate more land in the borough for allotments

Action:

1. Since 2020, 199 allotment / gardening plots created.
2. In 2023 a further 20 growing plots are being created.

DELIVERY OF SOUTHWARK'S SNAP

32. Below is a summary of the SNAP outcomes from 2020 - 2023 which have been delivered by the council and its partners.

Built Environment Habitat Action Plan

33. The built environment habitat action plan focuses on biodiversity actions that can be included in new developments and on housing and highways. Where applicable major applications (9 or more dwellings) have provided green infrastructure and ecological features via planning conditions.

34. The Ecology Service is a consultee for Development Management. The ecological input to individual planning cases has resulted in protection of species and significant increases in urban greening and biodiversity features as listed below.

35. This is an ongoing process delivered through planning conditions. Biodiversity Net Gain and Urban Greening Factor reports are regularly reviewed and gains are secured through the approval process.

36. The types of Green Infrastructure include:

- Green and biodiverse roofs
- Sustainable drainage systems
- Green and living walls

37. Ecological Features include

- Swift bricks
- Bat bricks and tubes
- Bee bricks and insect hotels
- Nature rich amenity space
- Bat friendly lighting

Gardens and Grounds Habitat Action Plan

38. Actions for this HAP have been delivered through collaboration with the street and housing maintenance, SBP, friends groups and the community Gardeners.

39. Key actions include:

Relaxing Mowing on housing estates and road verges. This has been achieved on several estates and road verges and is delivered through engagement with TRA's and residents and the maintenance teams. Relaxing mowing helps biodiversity by providing refuge and more pollen and nectar for invertebrates. Many butterflies rely on long grass as part of their life cycle. Birds such as House sparrows rely on insects to feed their young.

Housing:

40. Housing estates offer good opportunities for habitat creation and engagement with nature. The community gardeners have created new growing plots as part of the corporate plan to provide new growing space for residents.

41. Between June 2020 and June 2023 199 new growing plots have been installed on housing estates. A further 20 plots are in development.

42. Community orchards help meet the tree planting targets and provide a great resource for nature. Since 2021 Orchards have been planted in Brandon (3) Estate and Rouel Estate.

Parks and Open Spaces Habitat Action Plan

43. Actions for this HAP have been delivered through the Parks Service, Trees service, SBP and third sector contractors. A selection of actions delivered for the SNAP and tree planting across our local nature reserves and parks are set out below.

Actions in our Local Nature Reserves 2020-23

One tree Hill

- New meadows
- Restoration of the acid grassland
- Bramble management

Russia Dock Woodland

- New stag beetle loggeries
- New glades
- Management of vegetation around the ponds
- Meadow creation

Sydenham Hill Wood

- New paths
- Pond management
- Hedge planting

Lavender Pond

- Large revetment project to restore the dock walls improving health and safety and biodiversity
- New Nesting Rafts
- Restoration of the community garden

Dulwich Upper Wood

- Restoration of the retaining wall on Farquhar Road.
- New meadow and improved access

Actions in parks and green spaces 2020-23

44. Improved management of meadows in parks - Southwark Council fundraised for two cut and collect flails from the Rewilding London Fund. The aim is to improve the grassland management in our parks and increase species diversity by reducing soil fertility. Repeated cutting and removal of cuttings helps take nutrients out of the soil and encourages the development of a finer sward where the dominant plants such as dock, thistle and bramble will not tolerate the low nutrient conditions. The flails cost £20,000 and have been in use since 2021.

45. Wildflower meadows - Wildflower meadows are great resources for pollinators and help maintain a diversity of flora and fauna. Wildflower meadows have been created in many park including Russia Dock Woodland, Burgess Park, Dulwich Park and Camberwell Old Cemetery.

46. Woodland planting - As part of the tree planting programme a new area of woodland was planted in Burgess Park in 2020. This created a mix of woodland types including broadleaf planting and coppice planting. In Peckham Rye Park two tiny Forests planted in the last financial year – 1200 trees and a natural outdoor classroom were created.

47. Hedge Planting - Hedges provide important habitat for flora and fauna and provide links between habitats, for example, bats often use hedges for commuting and foraging. Over 1400m of Native hedging has been planted in parks including Burgess Park, Southwark Park, Dulwich Park and GMH.

OTHER KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020 - 2023

48. The following actions have been delivered for biodiversity as part of the SNAP from 2020 until present.

- Bees and butterflies – new forage provision in numerous sites – Southwark is working with Butterfly Conservation on the Big City Butterflies project.
- New ponds in Rockingham Estate, Rouel Rd Community Garden, Paper Garden.
- 89% of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in positive management. We have been in the top 10 England Councils for this national indicator since 2007
- 50 Management plans produced for Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) sites out of 64 sites
- We have a programme of eradication of Japanese Knotweed. In 2011 we had 34 parks with Knotweed present to date Japanese Knotweed has been eradicated in 30 parks. We will continue to treat any Knotweed in our parks.
- Over 20,000 saplings planted for woodland and hedgerow creation
- 984 Volunteer days delivering over 55,876 Volunteer hours in parks and open spaces from 2020 to 2023, worth £667,718.20 @ £11.95
- 347 Ecological surveys including Birds, Dragon Flies and damsel flies amphibians, Bats and stag beetles,
- 127 Environmental Events including bat walks, tree and woodland walks, pond dipping, Sound Camp and big social events in Bankside.
- 31,439 attendees at events.
- 217 Training days – Training includes Project Leadership, Habitat management, Tree care, Dye workshops, Fungi identification, Spoon making and Ecological monitoring.
- 220 SNAP actions delivered between 2020 and 2023 – SNAP actions can range from installing nest bricks, creating meadows and ponds to habitat management. Habitat management and habitat creation are key to addressing biodiversity loss and increasing access to nature. Habitats provide the opportunities for species to prosper.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

49. Seasonal changes spring and summers are now experiencing sustained periods of drought. This can heavily impact the establishment of meadows and hedge and tree planting. Moving forward, officers will be working with partners to see how we can plan planting schemes for this and adjust operations that address drought issues.

50. Biodiversity decline – many species of flora and fauna are declining with once common species such as the Starling and common Frog being listed as species of conservation concern. Southwark will plant 4 more Tiny Forests between 2023 and 2024, Plant a wood meadow in Belair Park in 2023, continue to work with housing estates and other stakeholders promoting opportunities for improving biodiversity and create more habitats in our parks and open spaces.

51. Urban Heating and air quality - The impact of a warming climate raises significant health issues. Southwark will deliver SNAP actions linked to the Climate Change action plan, Air Quality action plan, Flood risk management strategy and corporate plan through urban greening. In parks more trees and hedges will be planted.

52. Meeting the requirements of the Environment Act including Biodiversity Net Gain, Local nature recovery and monitoring and reporting requirements. This is going to require significant resourcing due to the requirements attached with the BNG process. Multiple teams are currently working on this to plan for the Southwark response. Southwark will produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Identify and consult on options for green corridors and supporting policy within the early review of the Southwark Plan in 2023.

53. Funding and resources - Southwark has recognised the need to increase resources to deliver greater biodiversity outcomes. An additional Ecology Officer will be employed in

order to facilitate Climate Change funded projects and Identify and deliver climate change associated ecological enhancement projects (£1 Million budget) over the next 2 years. Southwark will also support London Wildlife Trust with their £1.08m bid to deliver a project that reunites Dulwich and Sydenham Hill Woods.

TREE PLANTING PROGRESS (2020/21 – 2022/23)

54. Following Southwark’s climate emergency declaration in May 2020 £5m was dedicated to tree planting across the borough in order to significantly increase the tree stock and canopy cover. Three annual tree planting programmes have now been completed with capital funding.
55. There are two distinct types of tree planting currently undertaken:
- **Standards** (including heavy standards, approx. 2m in height and half standards, approx. 1m in height)
 - **Saplings** (up to 50cm in size)
56. Standard category trees are planted as standalone specimens across highways, housing estates and parks. These are relatively expensive to plant and establish and are therefore subject to bespoke annual contracts delivered by multiple suppliers.
57. Saplings (whips) are usually planted on mass in order to create woodland and hedgerows. Saplings are very cost effective and can be planted by volunteers (with supervision), including school children.
58. The following table illustrates progress made across all site types and categories since 2020-21:

Site/Cat	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
Highways	514	412	608	1534
Housing	258	721	461	1440
Parks	69	180	189	438
Other	0	76	181	257
COVID delayed/memorial	254	16	-	270
QI delayed 2020-21	0	300	-	300
Saplings	7120	7421	6653	21194
Total	8215	9126	8092	25433

NET GAIN

59. In order to effectively grow a tree stock it is vital that standard trees are used in order to maximise establishment rates. By using the numbers of standard trees planted versus the number of trees removed we are able begin to interrogate the effect of the programmes and Southwark’s investment to produce net figures.

Trees removed verses standards planted:

Summary	Insurance mitigation related removals	Total Removed	Trees Planted	Standards planted	Net +/-
2020/21	27	460	8215	1095	635
2021/22	22	802	9126	1405	603

2022/23	19	682	8092	1439	757
Total		1944	25433	3939	1995

60. It should be noted that it takes several years before a significant impact is experienced in canopy cover figures whilst the trees establish and mature. Canopy cover can also be adversely effected by the impacts of development.
61. By the end of summer 2023 investment in the Confirm asset management system will result in reporting ecosystem services values for the entire tree stock. This will enable tracking the investments made in tree planting to the ambitions of the climate action plan.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

Procurement

62. Currently, annual programmes are procured with up to 4 suppliers in order to deliver tree planting and establishment maintenance. The rationale for using multiple suppliers being the large volume of trees being planted (in comparison to programmes post 2020), and to mitigate the risk by diversifying programme delivery.
63. Each annual programme consists of 2 delivery elements.
- Planting – November to March
 - Establishment maintenance (watering, mulching, etc.) – 3 years (spring and summer following planting)
64. This means that there are multiple suppliers servicing up to 3 annual programmes at any given time, which brings challenges for monitoring performance.

Action

65. Preparations are currently underway to establish the procurement strategy for the 2023/24 tree planting programme. This will once again be an annual programme, however suppliers previously demonstrating poor performance will be excluded from tendering. The number of contract lots will also be reduced in order to simplify management where risks are tolerable.
66. For future programmes alternatives models for delivering planting programmes will be considered to avoid poor contractor performance. Any new procurement strategy will be required to synchronise with any potential future funding. The suggestion would be that this is linked to Southwark's roadmap to carbon neutrality by 2030.

Watering (establishment maintenance)

67. The drought of summer 2022 brought renewed focus to the importance of adequate watering maintenance to enable establishment (the ultimate measure of success).
68. The tree service became aware of under resourcing issues with 2 suppliers at the start of the drought and immediately acted by setting up an in house emergency watering programme. Although this mitigated a great deal of damage, recently conducted monitoring has confirmed mortality rates at unacceptable levels, which can be directly attributed to these contractual failings. Mortality rates are generally expected to be just under 5% in non-drought years, however rates of 10% have been recorded overall for trees planted in 2020/21 and 2021/22 programmes. As part of contractual obligations suppliers must replace dead trees at their own cost, however this mitigation still results in the loss of one year's growth net and is therefore sub optimal.

Action

69. The current 2022/23 programme now has a new system embedded in the programme which tracks contractor attendance in real time allowing officers to act quickly to address any gaps in service. This is currently working well, and the emergency watering service continues to be employed in periods of dry weather.
70. The team has also recently employed a Tree Planting and Ecological Projects Officer to bring the required resource for managing tree planting at high levels to a commensurate level and drive performance improvement.
71. Although achievements and opportunities for ecological improvements and tree planting have been communicated successfully to date through third sector partners, friends of groups and our communications team, it is expected that the new officer will expand the reach of our work and the opportunities to engage a wider range of communities.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Southwark Nature Action Plan 2020	Ecology - Southwark Council	J Best 50876
Southwark Tree Management Policy 2020	Southwark Tree Management Policy 2020.pdf	J Fowgies 07925 637218