

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: CABINET	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/21/4
FROM: Jessica Fleming, Portfolio Holder for Environment	DATE OF MEETING: 7 June 2021
OFFICER: Cassandra Clements, Assistant Director Environment and Commercial Partnerships	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB298

SPEND AGAINST THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY EARMARKED RESERVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 In 2020/21, the Council recognised a dedicated earmarked reserve for Climate Change and Biodiversity to be used to invest in projects that will support the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030. The purpose of this report is to note the requirement for funding of biodiversity mapping and tree canopy survey work required from this reserve.
- 1.2 Both the mapping and tree canopy work is linked to the Councils Biodiversity Action Plan which was presented and approved by Joint Cabinet in October 2020. There is a requirement to undertake mapping, together with partners, so that the Councils have a clear understanding of land owned by the Councils current wildlife corridors (including animals, plants and ecosystems). Mapping will help identify suitable tree and hedge planting locations and where wildlife corridors need to be established, enhanced or protected.
- 1.3 We have limited data on the numbers of trees on Mid Suffolk land (current estimate 4,000 trees) and even less information about the trees that cover the rest of the district. This project is required to carry out a tree canopy survey using field surveying and satellite data, creating an accurate inventory of our tree stock.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To proceed with the biodiversity mapping and tree canopy survey work and fund from the Climate Change and Biodiversity earmarked reserve.
- 2.2 To proceed with the biodiversity mapping work and tree canopy survey work and fund from elsewhere within the General Fund.
- 2.3 To not proceed with the biodiversity mapping and tree canopy survey work.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That total funding of £38,678 for the biodiversity mapping and tree canopy survey work from the Climate Change and Biodiversity earmarked reserve, be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION

This paper is for noting and to keep members apprised of those initiatives where funding has been approved from the Climate Change and Biodiversity earmarked reserve and to provide an up to date balance of the Climate Change and Biodiversity earmarked reserve.

4. KEY INFORMATION

BIODIVERSITY MAPPING WORK

- 4.1 The Council recognises the increasing pace with which natural habitat is being lost and that it too, has now become a biodiversity emergency. A biodiversity Task Force was established in July 2020. Whilst it would have been easy for the group to consider many ambitions, it was acknowledged by the Task Force that their focus should be on achievable actions that they have control or influence over. These centre on understanding and enhancing wildlife corridors and enhancing the Councils' arboricultural and environmental resources and expertise.
- 4.2 The importance of reviewing and enhancing wildlife corridors was a key action agreed by the Councils in July 2019 and ecological mapping was acknowledged by the Task Force as an essential first step in carrying out its responsibilities.
- 4.3 Members also voted unanimously at the end of March 2021, to launch a review of the district's green spaces, aimed at making best use of the natural environment to improve residents' wellbeing and to tackle climate change.
- 4.4 To support the Biodiversity Action Plan, it was recognised that all actions are reliant on the mapping work, so it is crucial that this is funded (£16,800) and completed first.
- 4.5 The mapping work enables the Council to have a clearer understanding of the land it owns i.e. current wildlife corridors (including animals, plants and ecosystems). The mapping will also help identify suitable tree and hedge planting locations and where wildlife corridors need to be established, enhanced or protected. A copy of the mapping proposal is attached at Appendix A .
- 4.6 Once we have accurate mapping information, this enables the Councils to:
 - Increase understanding of the District's Biodiversity Resources by updating the County Wildlife Site Register with a Condition Assessment.
 - Evaluate ecological assets within Public Realm and opportunities for enhancement.
 - Initiate a pilot mapping scheme to consider how sites with biodiversity value link into the wider ecological network surrounding the Districts

TREE CANOPY SURVEY

- 4.7 Trees provide a multitude of benefits to people. Whilst some of the social and aesthetic benefits can be difficult to measure, there are tools which help quantify and value some of the environmental benefits provided by trees, including carbon storage, carbon sequestration, stormwater reduction, and pollution removal. We have limited

data on the numbers of trees on Mid Suffolk land (current estimate 4,000 trees) and even less information about the trees that cover the rest of the district.

- 4.8 Our tree officers are managing an incredible natural capital asset, but until now we have had no way of quantifying what the combined asset is worth in terms of financial value or what the trees are providing us as ecosystem services. The tree canopy survey work will give us a complete picture and also makes the information easily available for all to see and understand.
- 4.9 Outputs from the tree canopy survey are expected by September 2021. The survey will:
- create an accurate inventory of our tree stock – using field surveying and satellite data.
 - identify the % canopy cover in each ward.
 - quantify ecosystem services in each ward – carbon storage, carbon sequestration etc.
 - assess the resilience and composition of the current tree population in each ward,
 - make planting projections necessary to compensate for the loss of trees due to disease e.g ash dieback and chronic oak decline.
 - produce a tree planting strategy which categorises the areas where tree planting will benefit the existing tree stock or improve habitat networks.
 - quantify the asset value of the trees in each district, define replacement costs for asset management and planning guidance.
- 4.10 Appendix C includes an aerial map of the Councils current data on tree canopy cover along with sample data from Bristol City Council whom we used as an exemplar for this particular piece of work.
- 4.11 The asset value of our trees or the volume of air pollution and CO₂ removed annually has never been calculated for Mid Suffolk. These figures are expected to be significant.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 The Joint Corporate Plan identifies six strategic priorities as set out in the visual below. Environment is one of those six, and the success of the Councils' ambition on climate change is intrinsically interlinked with the strategies that underpin the other five priority areas of Housing, Communities, Well-Being, Economy and Customers.



5.2 The response to Biodiversity is not just the business of Environment, but just as much the Councils’ strategic framework. Conversely, Environment plays a key part in every priority within the Corporate Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

BIODIVERSITY MAPPING WORK

6.1 Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) have offered £1,000 seed funding to support the biodiversity mapping work. In addition, they will undertake initial network mapping as a pilot, part of the current remit to support both Mid-Suffolk and Babergh District Councils. The mapping will cover public realm sites, local nature reserves and county wildlife sites.

6.2 Anticipated mapping costs based on a joint proposal by SBIS and Suffolk Wildlife Trust are £16,800. A breakdown is shown in the table 2 below.:

Table 2

	Cost (£)
County Wildlife Sites	£10,850
Evaluation of ecological assets	£5,250
Mapping of local nature reserves	£700
	£16,800

TREE CANOPY SURVEY

6.3 The costs outlined in Table 3 are based on the competitive tender process.

Table 3

Item	Cost (£)
• Blue Sky National Tree Map data	£5,255
• Ward by ward assessment of tree canopy cover and ecosystem service delivery	£3,250
• Ward by ward assessment of tree inventory	
• Report on breakdown of composition of inventory	£4,250
• Report on impact of Ash dieback disease	
• Tree planting strategy based on opportunity mapping	£4,498
• Online publicly accessible mapping system	£4,625
Total Cost	£21,878

6.4 Table 4 below shows the anticipated reserve balance following approval of the biodiversity mapping work and the tree canopy survey.

Table 4

	£
Balance @ 31 March 2021	(500,000)
Planned contribution to reserve - budget setting 2021/22	(500,000)
Use of reserve in 2021/22	
Biodiversity Mapping work	16,800
Tree Canopy Survey	21,878
Balance @ 31 March 2022	(961,322)

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No.18 – the Council will not be carbon neutral by 2030. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
The Councils do not meet their aspiration to enable net biodiversity gain, habitat and species decline continues unchecked.	2 – unlikely	3 - bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Biodiversity Task Force provided a robust set of options for Cabinet to consider. Cabinet then agreed a clear prioritised action plan with milestones. • Approaches are evidence based. The impact of

The effects of habitat loss results in irreversible damage to numbers of native species and loss of biodiversity.	2 – unlikely	4 - disaster	initiatives is monitored closely.
Failure to undertake such an exercise could result in liability, regulatory and reputational risks for the Council.	2 - unlikely	4 - disaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The release of finance is based on business cases. • Officers to begin giving the Cabinet suggestions around cost; priority; timescales; joint working; external funding. • Continue to work alongside our peers both in Suffolk and nationally, collaborating where appropriate and sharing best practice and lessons learned

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 No formal consultation has been undertaken to date.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

10.1 In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Councils' statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The collection and mapping of accurate ecological data will allow the Public Realm team to deliver a range of appropriate, targeted interventions which improve habitats of all kinds for plants and animals across Mid Suffolk and will develop our understanding of natural capital within the district.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
APPENDIX A – Mapping proposal	Attached
APPENIDX B – Tree Canopy Survey	Attached

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

MCa/19/66 6 July 2020 – Environment and Climate Change Task Force

MCa/20/06 9 November 2020 - Biodiversity Taskforce, Proposals to Cabinet

MC/19/38 20 February 2020 - General Fund Budget 2020/21 and Four-Year Outlook

MC/20/24 18 February 2021 – General Fund Budget 2021/22 and Four-Year Outlook