

Question from Councillor Paul Barrow to Councillor Catherine Webber, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Environment

Given the aspirations outlined in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Defra's Biodiversity 2020 Strategy, what is being done or is planned for the next five years in terms of increased biodiversity and nature recovery in the Vale?

Answer

1) What is being done?

- A draft Nature Recovery Network map has been produced for Oxfordshire by a partnership of organisations including Officers from all Oxfordshire Local Authorities, wildlife charities and statutory bodies.
- A feasibility study into the potential for the Vale to get involved in Habitat Banking is underway.
- The Vale is actively involved in ongoing work to re-establish a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire.
- A Tree Opportunities Map is being prepared (joint funded by Vale and all Oxfordshire LPA's). This will be a resource available to all to help identify suitable tree planting opportunities. The project will develop maps showing not only where trees might be established but also where they would have the highest impact. They will cover the placement of trees in both rural and urban areas and in the widest variety of forms - as trees in or outside of woodlands; hedgerows; orchards; agroforestry; parks; and gardens.
- The Vale is delivering biodiversity net gain for all major developments. Each application is assessed for its impacts on biodiversity which are measured using a metric. All development proposals are then required to deliver more biodiversity than is lost when planning permission is granted.
- Work is underway to develop projects to be funded from s.106 money from the Grove Airfield development. This is being developed in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust.
- *A Guide to Planting Trees for Community Groups* has been produced and is available on the Councils web site.
- The Council has a District Licence for Great Crested Newts which has delivered 14 new ponds and 74 Ha of high-quality terrestrial habitats in the last year.

2) What is planned for the next 5 years?

- The Strategic Property Review will consider all the Vale's landholdings and will link in with the production of an Open Spaces Strategy to determine where there are opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and tree planting.
- The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership will be formally established. The LNP will seek to:
 - Develop a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire

- Develop a biodiversity net gain targeting strategy.
- Develop and deliver a Tree Planting Programme on Council owned land to enhance biodiversity and sequester carbon
- The Council is working with the Letcombe Brook Project and the Environment Agency to deliver biodiversity enhancements at Willow Walk in Wantage.

3) What else Could the Council do to help meet the targets in the Corporate Plan, these projects would be subject to further agreement and appropriate resourcing?

- Develop a Biodiversity Steering Group involving both key officers and members to oversee and develop the Councils approach to nature's recovery.
- Develop a district wide tree planting programme to deliver projects such as 'Tiny Forests' in Market towns and to facilitate and support the set-up of community tree nurseries.
- Develop new planning policies setting targets for % of Biodiversity Net Gain from new Development
- Fund partner organisations to deliver nature recovery (funding could come from CIL or other sources).