

# Communities Scrutiny Commission

26<sup>th</sup> April 2022



**Report of:** Zoe Willcox, Director, Development of Place

**Title:** Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021-2025 - Progress Report

**Ward:** All

**Officer Presenting Report:** Alex Minshull, Sustainable City and Climate Change Manager and Sarah Jackson, Ecological Emergency Project Manager

**Contact Telephone Number:** 0117 922 2000

## Recommendations:

To note that Bristol City Council was the first local authority of a major UK city to develop and Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

To note the good progress on the Bristol City Council, Ecological Emergency Action Plan with over three quarters of the actions having been completed or their delivery is on-track.

To note that the administration has allocated an additional £1m of reserve funding to extend the ecological work in the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme.

To consider the Ecological Emergency Action Plan priority projects proposed for that new funding and comment on the proposals being developed for Cabinet in June 2022.



## 1. Summary

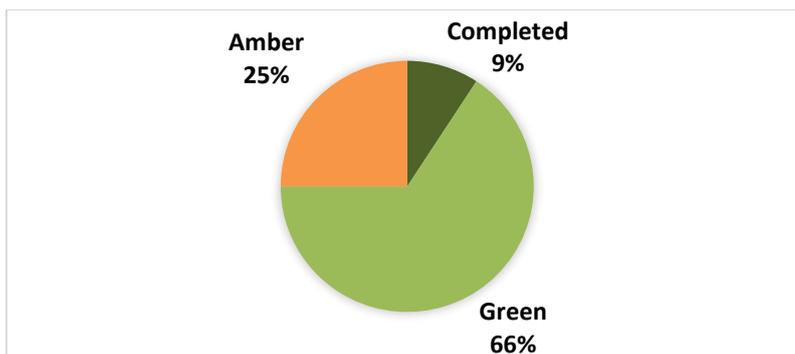
1. The report provides a summary of the progress in delivery of the Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP). It identifies actions within in the plan that are currently being delivered. It also identifies priority actions which will need additional funding to ensure progress in a timely and effective manner. These priority projects are proposed to be funded through the use of earmarked funds of £1m allocated by the administration to strengthen the council’s response to the ecological emergency.

## 2. Context

2. In 2020 the Council declared, with partners, an ecological emergency and co-created a One City Ecological Emergency Strategy. To ensure that the council played its full part in the delivery of that strategy, BCC developed its own Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021-2025. This was published in September 2021, sets out clearly what the Council will contribute to goals of the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and also those of the One City Climate Strategy 2020 linked to nature.

### 2.1 Overview of Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan and progress

3. The Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP) 2021-2025 identified actions that were already in train in 2021 and added new actions for the coming years. It demonstrates BCC’s commitment to the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy, enables prioritisation of BCC action, facilitate joint working, and provides evidence to secure external funding to deliver our priorities.
4. The Council has statutory duties and requirements with regard protecting and enhancing wildlife and does so through strategic plans, policies and everyday operations. The Action Plan includes a response to new statutory requirements (e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy legislation in the Environment Act). However, the Action Plan goes well beyond the statutory minimum requirements on the council and sets out an ambitious response to the ecological emergency.
5. The attached Table, based on the published EEAP Appendix, provides comments on progress to date on the 77 activities. Seven are completed and 50 are on track, with 19 rated as Amber, as they may be running late or need additional resources and 1 paused awaiting completion of a third-party project. The following figure shows this progress. The proposed additional funding set out in Section 2.3 will bring many of the amber rated projects into green status.



6. As a significant number of the Action Plan activities were new and required further scoping and funding to be secured. As a result, some will now continue beyond the original time period published in 2021 as indicated in purple in the year columns. Actions are referenced in the following paragraphs by their reference number in the plan e.g. D1.
7. One key area of work has been developing the evidence base to inform decision making. This includes support to One City Ecological Emergency Strategy key actions i.e.:
  - D1 Bristol’s ecological network mapping,
  - D2 development of Bristol’s Wildlife Index for monitoring change in species diversity and abundance, and
  - E24 survey of council owned Sites of Nature Conservation Interest that has been completed.
8. Significant progress on to support action by citizens (E2) has been made with the recent launch of the councils new £200,000 grant fund to support community action to make changes to benefit wildlife and reduce carbon emissions. The first call for applications is open until 23rd June 2022 and provides grants of up to £5,000. – see <https://quartetcf.org.uk/grant-programmes/bristol-climate-and-ecological-emergency-community-grant/> for further details
9. The Action Plan states the council’s aim to embed nature in its decision making. We have therefore been undertaking inhouse training (C1) and ensuring that all council led plans and strategies including the Local Plan (E22/E23), Flood Risk Management Strategy (G2), Harbour Place Shaping Strategy (E39) or Allotment Strategy (E11), take account of the Ecological Emergency and the council’s ecological targets.
10. The Council has set an ambitious target reduce its use of Pesticides by 50% by 2030. Current applications of herbicide made by the council are to control weed growth to meet a specific objective, for example, to protect infrastructure like footpaths from damage from weeds. To develop an effective long-term reduction plan we have created a dedicated project. A project manager has been embedded in the Parks Service to create the plan, assess the costs and benefits of different options and develop the business case for changes in practices. This post covers the council’s use of herbicides in all areas, including Highways.
11. The project is undertaking the following activities:
  - Detailed assessment of use to understand in detail the products used, their location and frequency of use and reason for use. This information will be used in the production of a Pesticide Policy.
  - Information is being collated on the alternatives for managing weed growth and the methods and approaches being used by other local authorities.
  - Work is underway to find contractors to work with in trialling one of these alternatives on highways. The review and results from the trials will assess alternatives against the following criteria:
    - Their cost/affordability in relation to effectiveness
    - That they are efficient and safe (for people and environment)
    - The need to avoid increasing our carbon footprint as much as possible

- The need to protect from damage to infrastructure
  - The need to ensure equality of access is preserved and BCC’s equalities duties are met
  - To continue to deliver grounds maintenance standards and performance including excellence where required
  - To deliver agreed minimum standards relating to statutory duties.
12. The Natural & Marine Environment Service, Parks, produced the first update information for the councils ecological emergency web page(H.10) [Nature Recovery Leaflet \(bristol.gov.uk\)](http://bristol.gov.uk) The leaflet explains the work undertaken using the WoE Nature Recovery Map to survey 130 parks and green spaces in Bristol to identify where the best opportunities are to create new wildlife spaces and improve existing.
13. Through the Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme a Sustainable Procurement Policy (I.4) has been produced. Amongst other things, this requires would-be suppliers to describe how they will reduce pesticide use and consider alternative methods of management within the delivery of their services.

## 2.2 BCC Ecological Emergency targets & indicators and the actions in hand to address

14. We have translated the goals of the strategy into corporate performance targets as part of the Business Plan reported publicly from 22/23.

### ***Corporate - Reduce the use of pesticides on council land***

Baseline: 20/21 Volume used data

### ***Corporate: Increase % of ALL Council's land managed for the benefit of wildlife\****

Baseline: 21/22 \*BCC land covered by active nature conservation management plans, and/or with a nature conservation grounds maintenance specification’.

### ***Corporate: Increase the City's tree canopy cover***

Progress will record trees planted rather than canopy cover because obviously that takes many years for the trees to mature.

## 2.3 Expanding the Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme.

15. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme approved by Cabinet in Nov 2020 includes some initial work on ecological matters, for example the development of the BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan and the initial work planning pesticide reduction.
16. The administration has decided to add extra impetus to the council’s operational, strategic and enabling actions within the Action Plan. This will help to deliver our ambitious corporate targets and respond to emerging opportunities such as the Biodiversity Net Gain regulations following the Environment Act 2021. The administration has allocated an additional £1m of reserve funding.
17. We have reviewed the actions in the EEAP and identified several priorities which both deliver short term impacts and more importantly enable changes that will bring long term benefits for nature.

18. The priority projects are set out in the following table. Work is underway to produce a Full Business Case for an extension of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme for consideration by Cabinet in June and scrutiny are invited to provide comments on the proposed priority EEAP Projects.

<b>Project</b>
<p><b>BCC Land Habitat Improvement Project (E36)</b> The existing project will create a plan for changes to land management. This additional resource will enable implementation of some practical measures immediately, including tree planting. (£75k allocated to Tree Planting by Decision of Cabinet in Feb 22)</p>
<p><b>BCC Herbicide Reduction Project (F1)</b> The existing project will create the overall pesticide reduction plan. This additional resource will enable trials of alternatives to pesticides and generate evidence of costs and benefits to inform long term pesticide reduction.</p>
<p><b>Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Framework and action plan (A3, A4, C2, E25, E26)</b> We need to respond to the new legal requirements from the Environment Act. We therefore propose to create a BCC BNG Framework enabling the council to be clear on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Planning policy and processes for BNG, eg Practice Note and guidance</li> <li>* BCC policy and process for investment in BNG on council land</li> <li>* Mechanisms for achieving BNG for Council Projects</li> <li>* Training for BCC staff on BNG</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ecological Network and Wildlife Index (D1)</b> To inform BNG, investment planning and our strategies we need good data and mapping of our ecological resources and their changes over time. This will also help us engage with citizens, for example through citizen science projects.</p>
<p><b>Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (E13, E14, E15, E17)</b> Develop a 'Blue &amp; Green Infrastructure Strategy for the city, to enable us to guide and secure additional investment in green and blue (water) environments.</p>
<p><b>Bristol Tree Strategy, Tree Planting Plan (E42)</b> This was approved by Cabinet in Feb 2022</p>
<p><b>Supporting Partner action on the One City Ecological Strategy including public engagement (Corporate Priority ENV2)</b> Informing and inspiring citizens to take action to protect and improve nature is a key part of programme and we will work with the Natural History Consortium and Avon Wildlife Trust to expand their work in these areas.</p>

### 3. Policy

19. The Corporate Strategy makes a clear commitment: [Corporate Strategy Priority ENV2](#) : *Drive delivery of the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and the council's own action plan. Increase space for nature, reduce the use of pesticides, make waterways cleaner and reduce everyone's use of products that undermine the health of wildlife and wider ecosystems. Double the city's tree canopy by 2045.*
20. The progress of the action plan reported here and the proposals for additional resources to enable the delivery of the action plan and wider strategy are in line with the corporate priority.

### 4. Consultation

#### a) Internal

21. The Action Plan was co-created with colleagues across the council in the services responsible for delivery of the actions. This update draws on progress reports from those colleagues.
22. Similarly, the relevant services were consulted in the selection of the priority actions and the costs of delivery.
23. Through this paper the Scrutiny Commission is being invited to comment on the proposals.

#### b) External

24. We consulted a number of stakeholders in the development of the action plan and continue to do so as projects are delivered.

### 5. Public Sector Equality Duties

25. Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
  - i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
  - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
    - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
    - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
    - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

- ii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to -
  - - tackle prejudice; and
  - - promote understanding.
  
- 26. In the delivery of each project within the EEAP the lead officers consider equalities issues in line with the duties and BCC policies. A business case for the expansion of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme, with additional ecological actions as set out in this paper, is being developed and an equalities impact assessment being undertaken as part of that.
  
- 27. Many of the activities are evidence, strategy, and policy work which are unlikely to have direct adverse impacts on communities. The Pesticide Reduction project is one which will make practical changes to the city environment, and could have equalities impacts, for example the impact of increased weed growth on footpaths may adversely affect people with limited mobility. This will be a key factor in the evaluation of options and changes to the use of herbicides.

**Appendices:**

Ecological Emergency Action Plan- Update April 2022

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**Background Papers:**

[Bristol City Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021-2025](#)