

Communities Scrutiny Commission

17 November 2022



Report of: John Smith, Director Economy of Place

Title: Update on Bristol City Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan with a focus on the Managing More Green Space for Nature Project

Ward: City-wide

Officers Presenting Report: Kathy Derrick and Becky Belfin

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Recommendation:

To note the progress made with the delivery of the BCC Bristol City Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

To note the progress with the Managing More Green Space for Nature Project and seek feedback from the Commission

The significant issues in the report are:

Good progress is being made with the delivery of the Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan. Additional funding has been made available, but projects have not yet been able to start due to recruitment restrictions.

An update is provided on the Managing More Green Space for Nature Project and initial map results included.

1. Summary

1. The City Council published its Ecological Emergency Action Plan in Sept. 2021 and progress was reported to the Commission in April 2022. This showed good progress across the action plan and that has continued.
2. In June Cabinet approved additional funding for projects in the action plan. These are progressing more slowly than anticipated due to the current recruitment freeze preventing the recruitment/replacement of key personnel.
3. One area which has progressed well is our project “Managing More Green Space for Nature”. This has largely completed its data collection and is progressing with the analysis and the development of proposals based on that evidence. This paper provides a detailed update on that project.

2. Purpose

4. The purpose of this report is to provide an update and seek feedback on the work being carried out by the council to look at managing more green space for nature, as part of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

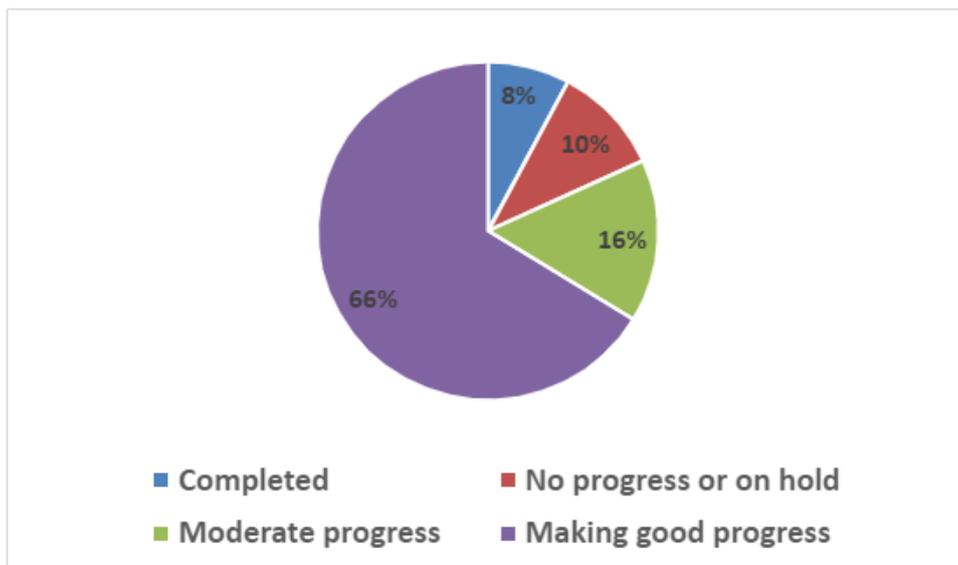
3. Policy

5. In recognition of the current biodiversity crisis, the Council declared an Ecological Emergency and together with partners, produced the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy (OCEES) in 2020.
6. The strategy and resultant BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP) contain several objectives and one of these is to manage a minimum of 30% of land in Bristol for wildlife and this paper focuses on that objective. This objective will be delivered through several actions which aim to:
 1. Ensure we have sufficient ecological data on which to base decisions around changes in land management.
 2. Identify locations for habitat creation/enhancement that contribute to Bristol and West of England scale Nature Recovery Networks.
 3. Review and make changes to operational management of BCC owned green and blue infrastructure to benefit nature and contribute to Nature Recovery Networks;
 4. Embed principles of managing land for nature through other project and programme development;
 5. Embed principles of managing land for nature through other policy and strategy development;
 6. Embed principles of managing land for nature through changes to lease/licence agreements for tenanted land;
 7. Identify funding and partnership arrangements to enable delivery of more green space being managed for nature.

7. Increasing the area of greenspace managed for nature, will also contribute towards the One City Plan target of doubling the abundance of wildlife in Bristol by 2044, and doubling tree canopy by 2045. It will also help deliver objectives from Corporate Strategy Priority ENV2, which references the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan targets around managing more green space for nature.

4. Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan progress – a snapshot and update on some projects

8. Of the 77 activities in the plan seven are completed and 51 are making good progress, with 12 rated as moderate progress, as they may be running late or need additional resources.
9. Eight are rated as red because we have not yet commenced them following approval of additional resources by Cabinet in due to the recruitment freeze and the council’s financial position. These activities relate to the new duty for Biodiversity Net Gain and the Council’s blue / green infrastructure strategy.



10. Significant progress has been made developing the evidence base to inform decision making. This includes support to the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy key actions described by the first two examples below:
 - D1 Bristol’s ecological network mapping - comprehensive mapping of habitats and modelling of habitat networks is almost complete. This will be a powerful tool to enable decisions to be made on the best location to create new and enhance existing habitats.
 - D2 development of Bristol’s Wildlife Index for monitoring change in species diversity and abundance - a task group is overseeing collation of data from various sources to produce a baseline for 2018 and identify gaps.
 - E1 Launched March 2022 grants of up to £5000, managed by Quartet on behalf of council, £95,000 was awarded to climate and ecological projects.

- E9 A summer overheating mapping tool for Bristol was launched in August 2022, see bristol.gov.uk/keepbristolcool. Urban heat risks can be explored spatially across the city which can assist the management of green spaces with predicted rising temperatures and in the planning of green spaces to provide a cooling effect for the city.
- E10 A mapping and review of parks assets for food growing such as allotments and smallholdings is underway. This aligns the work being undertaken on developing the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy and Allotments Strategy. The overarching aim is to increase the yield from land designated for food growing from existing and potential new land. Three new food growing policies have been drafted and will be part of the Local Plan review consultation due out in November. They recognise the importance of food growing for pollination of species and the health of people.
- E18 The Council has been awarded Building with Nature (BwN) for the New Fosseway site in Hengrove. BwN are using New Fosseway as a case study/best practice. BwN is a voluntary approach that enables developers and other built environment professionals to go beyond the minimum statutory requirements to deliver more for wildlife and people.
- E24 Habitat surveys of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest managed by Parks has been completed.
- E39 Funding has been awarded for 32 new eco-moorings at Capricorn Quay in the Harbour that will provide 1000 square metres of floating habitat for wildlife to support stronger fish stocks and be a haven for birds. This is in line with the One City Emergency Strategy goal of 100% of Bristol's waterways to have excellent water quality which supports healthy wildlife. The design and location of this is supported by evidence in the 'Biodiversity in Bristol's floating Harbour Report 2022' and the recent Environmental DNA (eDNA) survey.
- E39 The eDNA survey has identified for the first time the presence of fish species throughout the Harbour . Of note due to it's designated status is the European Eel (critically endangered). A Bristol Avon Fish Recovery Strategy is under development with the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership to build up fish stocks.
- H5 Extinction Silences: exploring legacies of colonial violence and new ecological possibilities, is a new project which has just been awarded a substantial grant from the Esmee Fairbairn Trust and the first phase of development is underway.

5. Managing More Green Space For Nature Project

11. The City Council has been increasingly managing its parks and open space for nature for many years, for example, transforming the park at Brandon Hill into a Nature Reserve over 40 years ago. In setting the targets in the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan we committed to accelerating this process, but to do so with a robust evidence base.
12. We set out a clear approach to determine spatial priorities for managing for nature, to ensure we achieve the most ecological benefits. It is recognised by the Ecological Emergency Action Plan that decisions on changes to green spaces should be informed by ecological data about the current habitats, their condition and their value. This can be used to ensure we are

protecting existing valuable habitats and enable us to measure and monitor increases in the extent and condition of habitats.

13. To prioritise where changes could be made to benefit nature, spatial information about ecological networks in Bristol has been used. This is in-line with recommendations from the report, 'Making Space for Nature', which was a review of nature conservation in England completed by Professor Sir John Lawton. This advocated a landscape-scale approach to conservation, seeking to create "a coherent and resilient ecological network", guided by 4 key principles, summarised as "more, bigger, better and joined".
14. We have used the West of England Nature Recovery Networks (Woodland, Wetland, and Grassland), to help identify priority locations for enhancing or creating these different habitat types. We will also be looking at and incorporating networks from the Bristol Ecological Network mapping which is currently being finalised.
15. Through the project we have targeted information gathering:
 1. Detailed habitat surveys have been carried out on:
 - a. Designated Sites of Nature Conservation Importance managed by the Parks Service and
 - b. Green spaces with a natural or informal typology that are located within the West of England Nature Recovery Networks.
 2. Highly detailed satellite imagery has been used to provide habitat data for all other green spaces. This data has only just become available and still needs to be incorporated, therefore the maps provided below are currently drafts. For mapping work to date we have used other parks data such as current maintenance regimes as a proxy for habitat type, but this will now be replaced.
16. The sites were given a value based on the habitats' distinctiveness as used in the Natural England Biodiversity metric. The distinctiveness value for habitats has been determined by Natural England using the following criteria ([taken from Natural England's 'Biodiversity metric 3.1: Auditing and accounting for biodiversity – Technical Supplement', 2022](#))
17. Total amount of remaining habitat in England (it's rarity)
 - Proportion of habitat protected in SSSI. Where less is protected in SSSIs, it is considered of higher distinctiveness.
 - UK Priority Habitat Status. Priority Habitats are classed as High or Very High distinctiveness.
 - European Red List Categories.
18. Applying this information spatially enables us to protect and enhance sites with a habitat distinctiveness value of very high, or high, and to seek opportunities to enhance sites with a medium or low distinctiveness.

Fig 1. Map of habitat distinctiveness values for sites managed by Parks.

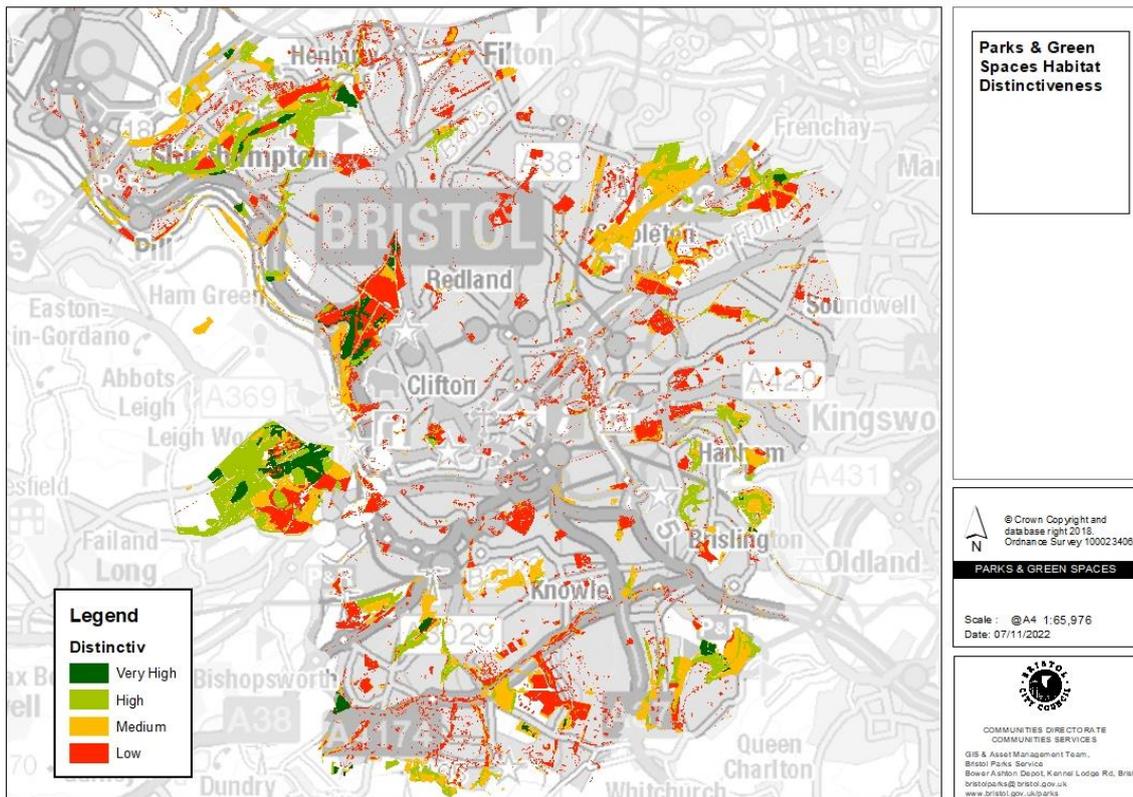
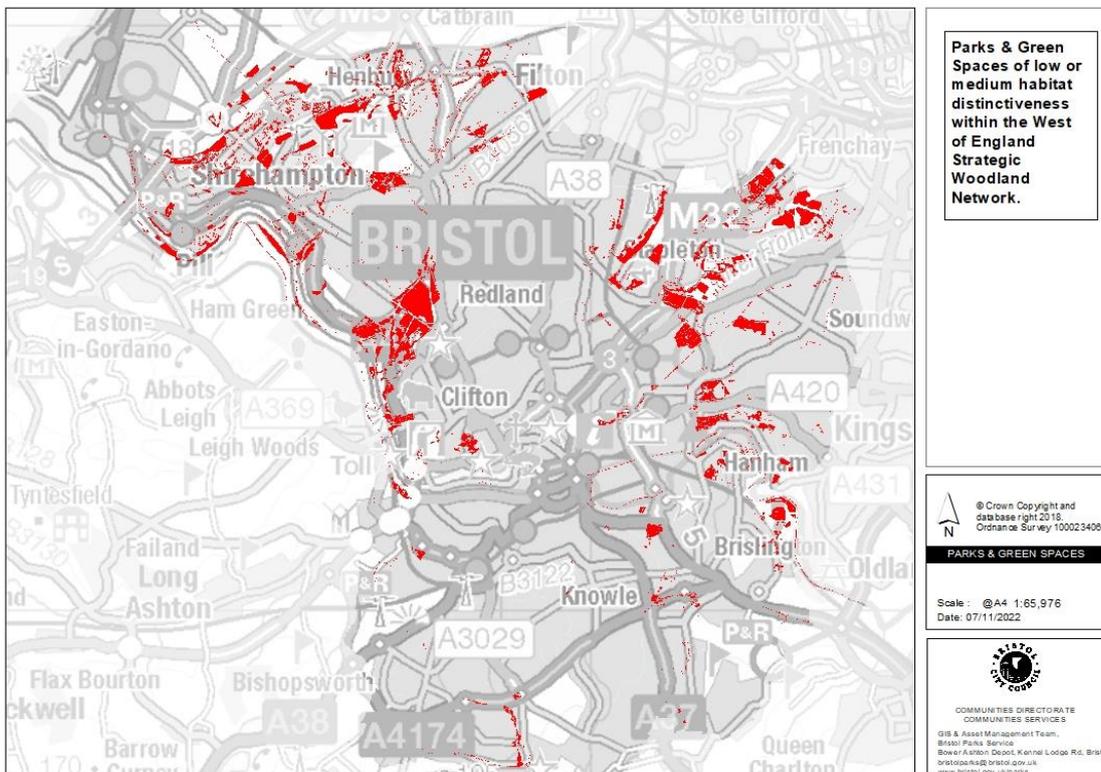


Fig 2. Map showing sites with low or medium distinctiveness, within the West of England Strategic Woodland Network, which could be prioritised for tree planting.



Changes to current operational maintenance regimes

19. Over recent years the City Council has been evolving its parks and open space maintenance regimes, particularly around grass cutting, to improve biodiversity in our open spaces. This is more complex than simply stopping mowing areas and this project is investigating the changes we could make to current maintenance regimes and the consequences of these. These regimes include:
- Cut and collect – removal of the cut material lowers nutrients which then enables wildflowers to compete with the more vigorous grasses, leading to a more species-rich/flower-rich grassland.
 - Tussocky grass – reducing the frequency of cutting to every other year, or every three years, to provide overwinter habitat for invertebrates such as butterflies which enable them to complete their lifecycles.
 - Hand cut – working with volunteers using traditional meadow management (scything and raking) to increase the species-richness of smaller sites.
 - Flowering Lawn – reducing the frequency of cutting and adjusting the timing on more intensively mown grass to allow more flowering of species that can tolerate regular mowing, such as clovers and bird's-foot trefoil.
20. The potential to apply these new maintenance regimes across parks and green spaces is currently being mapped. We will then model the resource requirements, including the need for any new machinery, and use the prioritisation mapping discussed above to inform final proposals on which sites could or should be managed for nature going forward. Change would need to be phased and some measures if implemented at scale will be dependent on having appropriate capital and revenue funding and the support of communities. Any practical implications arising from the new budget position from 23/24 onwards would therefore need to be understood.

Next Steps

21. The project has largely completed its data collection and is progressing with the analysis and the development of proposals based on that evidence. Most of the land under consideration is also well used by local communities and we will need to find way to speak with them, to gather new ideas and a response to proposals, to help with implementation and to help generate acceptance of change by providing the right information, support and guidance.

6. Consultation

a) Internal

The BCC EEAP was developed and is being delivered by services across the council. The Managing More Green Space For Nature Project is being developed in conjunction with colleagues in Parks and other services.

b) External

Engagement with communities will take place but details are not yet confirmed.

7. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 7a) 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.
 - iii) 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.
- 7b) An equality impact assessment will be undertaken on final proposals.

Appendices:

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

[One City Ecological Strategy](#)

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