

# Communities Scrutiny Commission

## 27 February 2024



**Report of:** Alex Hearn, Director, Economy of Place

**Title:** Update on Bristol City Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan

**Ward:** Citywide

**Officer(s) Presenting Report:** Kit Beaumont, Ecological Emergency Co-ordinator

### **Recommendation:**

To note progress made with the delivery of Bristol City Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan and progress made against headline targets.

### **The significant issues in the report are:**

Overall good progress has been made with delivery of the Council's Ecological Emergency Strategy (since it was last presented to Scrutiny in Nov 22) despite the EE Coordinator post being vacant for 12 months (due to recruitment restrictions) which impacted delivery of some projects. This post was filled October 2023 along with a new Senior Sustainability Officer (0.5fte) and work is progressing.



## 1. Summary

- 1.1. The City Council published its Ecological Emergency Action Plan in Sept. 2021 and progress was reported to the Commission in April 2022 and again in November 2022. This showed good progress across the action plan and that trend has improved with more actions completed and progressing as planned.
- 1.2. In June 2022 Cabinet approved additional funding for projects in the action plan. These progressed more slowly than anticipated due to the recruitment restrictions. However key personnel have now been recruited (1x Ecological Emergency Coordinator, 0.5 x Senior Sustainability Officer, 1 x Biodiversity Net Gain Officer) and progress has resumed.
- 1.3. The current action plan runs to 2025 and the council will start work updating this action plan later in 2024.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update and seek feedback on progress made against the council's key targets related to the ecological emergency and the 77 actions in the BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan. The report will also highlight key successes, areas that require attention and goals for the coming year.

## 3. Progress against BCC ecological key performance indicators

- 3.1. The Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan is a council-wide programme of activities to deliver on the ambitions of the One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and relevant aspects of the One City Climate Strategy. The council has adopted the key targets from these strategies and embedded them as key performance indicators that it reports on annually.

	Land managed for nature	Pesticide use	Tree canopy	Water quality	QoL indicator = % who have created space for nature.
<b>Reference</b>	BPOM336	BPPM436	MPOM335	BPOM435	BPOM330
<b>Rag/direction of travel</b>					
<b>Target</b>	30% of council land by 2030	50% reduction by 2030	25% increase from baseline by 2035	100% have water qual that supports healthy wildlife by 2030	55%
<b>Baseline</b>	15%	2,034 litres	16.9%	No data	53%
<b>2021/22</b>	-	<b>Total</b> = 1,775 litres (-13%) <b>Street Cleansing</b> = 971 (-19%) <b>Parks</b> = 803 (-4%)	-	No data	53%
<b>2022/23</b>	15%	<b>Total</b> = 1,668 litres (-18%) <b>Street Cleansing</b> = 970 (-19%) <b>Parks</b> = 698 (-16%)	16.9%	No data	53%
<b>2023/24</b>	Due April	Due April	Due April	TBC	55%

### **3.2. Land Managed for Nature:**

- 3.2.1. Parks and Green Spaces Strategy (PGSS) identifies the potential to increase the % of council land managed for nature from 15% to 31%.
- 3.2.2. The council has recently applied for external funding to deliver phase 1 of its land managed for nature plans and has passed the expression of interest phase.
- 3.2.3. All of the land identified through in the PGSS as having the potential to contribute to our land managed for nature target is included in the soon to be published WoE Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This is important as it not only will it be the strategic guide to nature recovery in the West of England, but it will also help to guide investment to this work through its link with the new biodiversity net gain requirements that come into effect February 2024.

### **3.3. Pesticides reduction:**

- 3.3.1. 2022/23 saw a 18% reduction in the use of pesticides (from baseline) across all council operations by careful review of usage in Parks and through the Street Cleansing Service.
- 3.3.2. Achievement of the 2030 target is reliant on a feasible technological solution, and we will continue to explore options. In 2022 Cardiff trialed a new hot foam treatment system and while this effective the trial showed that the cost was 10 times more expensive than using glyphosate. [CARDIFF COUNCIL \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/councils/cardiff/)
- 3.3.3. In addition to exploring new chemical alternatives the council will explore options for mechanical weed removal and trial these where possible.
- 3.3.4. The growth pattern of weeds has changed in recent years to start growing earlier. To mitigate this the Street Cleansing Service are planning to start spraying earlier in 2024 to tackle weeds before they've had a chance to establish.

### **3.4. Tree Canopy:**

- 3.4.1. Baseline data on tree canopy was captured using 2020 canopy data supplied by Bluesky – this was 16.9%. 2023 canopy cover results are due to be published and reported on in April 2024.
- 3.4.2. Headline details of tree planting strategy are included in the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy with a more detailed plan to move towards the target being set out in the One City Tree and Woodland Strategy. This will be considered by the One City Environment Board in February and the Mayor in March this year.
- 3.4.3. There are approximately 30,000 ash trees in Bristol, many of which will need to be removed in the coming years due to Ash Dieback disease. Work has already started, focusing on trees next to paths, roads and other highly populated locations and local consultation will take place. A lot of the current removal is on the edge of woodlands where you can't replant due to shade so reliant on natural regeneration. Areas of mixed

woodland will be less impacted but areas where there are a high number of ash the impact will be significant (e.g. Nightingale Valley). In common with the rest of the country, Ash Dieback is likely to reduce Bristol's tree canopy cover and make the target harder to achieve.

### **3.5. Water Quality:**

- 3.5.1. The Environment Agency monitors river water quality for chemical contamination and ecological status in accordance with Water Framework Directive (WFD). All rivers in Bristol currently rated as 'moderate'. This data could be used to form a BCC indicator and work will be carried out to assess the feasibility of this.
- 3.5.2. In addition, BCC monitors harbour water quality for sewage pollution.
- 3.5.3. Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART) and Wessex Water are creating a dashboard and monitoring site called 'River Hub' which will log Wessex Waters Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO). Combined sewer overflow and is a term used to describe what happens when sewer systems which combine foul sewage drainage with rainwater drainage become overwhelmed by excess rainwater and overflow into nearby streams and rivers.
- 3.5.4. In addition, BART's citizen science river monitoring which will provide a further snapshot of water quality in Bristol.
- 3.5.5. The council will continue to work with stakeholders across the region to identify projects and interventions that can have a positive effect on water quality as well as aquatic habitats and species.

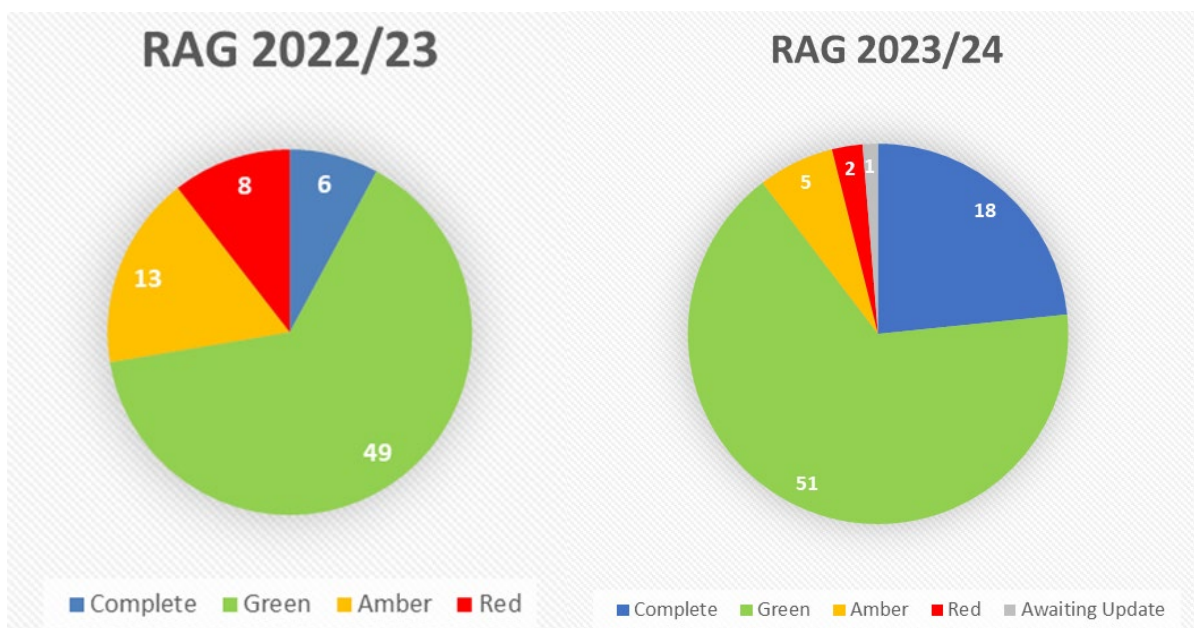
### **3.6. Community Action Quality of Life (QoL) Indicator:**

- 3.6.1. 2023 Quality of Life survey showed that 55% of people have created space for nature, which is in line with previous years. However, as the QoL data doesn't provide details on what these interventions were it only tells part of the story about the exciting work that is taking place in communities across the city.
- 3.6.2. The council recognises the positive impact that residents and community groups can have on a wide range of environmental issues. The council aims to influence this through its engagement and education programmes as well a working with partners, such as Avon Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Consortium, across the city.

## **4. Progress against BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan actions**

- 4.1.1. Of the 77 actions in the BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan 18 are completed and 51 are making good progress, with 5 are rated as moderate progress, as they may be running late or need additional resources. 2 are rated as red and we will set out a reason for this and a way forward. This marks a significant improvement from 2022/23 with many of the actions rated as 'amber' now being progressed and over twice as many actions completed.

## 4.1.2. 2022/23 RAG ratings vs 2023/22 RAG ratings:



## 4.2. Key successes/areas of progress:

- 4.2.1. Three new officers are in post as of November 2023 to help coordinate and deliver work across the council, city and region. They are the Ecological Emergency Coordinator (1fte), Senior Sustainability Officer (0.5fte) and a Biodiversity Net Gain Officer (1fte).
- 4.2.2. New environmental policies have been included in the new Local Plan, Parks and Green Spaces Strategy, Allotments Strategy, Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and local Biodiversity Net Gain guidance for developers.
- 4.2.3. A new Sustainable Procurement Policy and guidance has been produced.
- 4.2.4. The Council has established a city-wide approach to Ash Dieback and other plant diseases and the One City Tree and Woodland Strategy shall be published in March.
- 4.2.5. Habitat creation and enhancement opportunities on Parks land have been identified and were consulted on at a very high level through the Parks and Green Space Strategy in Dec 23 - Jan 24. Funding has been sought to deliver phase 1 of this work subject to further consultation on site specifics.
- 4.2.6. Bristol Ecological Network modelling has been used in the production of the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy maps - consultation on the strategy is due to start mid-March 2024.
- 4.2.7. Bat Friendly lighting is being rolled out across the city. This piece of work will be complete across the city by March 25 and will enable us to control all the lights remotely from an individual column to a whole street, ward, or the entire city. This will reduce the impact street lighting has on roosting and foraging bats.

### 4.3. BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan actions currently rated as ‘red’.

4.3.1 These actions are rated as red because they are significantly behind schedule and resources are not yet in place to complete.

Ref	BCC Activity	Responsible team	Comments Nov 2023	Proposed way forward
E.26	Commission a report to identify suitable reptile receptor sites on Council owned sites and non council owned sites (see also E25). Report to be undertaken with other landowners including Network Railway and Highways England.	Parks/Urban Design	No action currently being taken but could link to proposed habitat creation works or BNG site surveying. No resource or funding to take forward at present.	EE officers to work with Parks and BNG officer to ensure that any relevant survey work feeds into this objective.
E.34	Undertake ecological surveys of Highway land, to inform changes in management to increase biodiversity.	Highways	The adopted highway survey hasn't been done. There wasn't the capacity/resource to implement it due to the ecological emergency co-ordinator leaving and the spending freeze etc. No plan in place to carry out unless funding becomes available, work would need to be commissioned externally. Recommendations for management have been made through M4N and pesticide reduction report.	EE officers to work with Highways team to identify potential funds to carry out survey work.

#### 4.4. BCC Ecological Emergency Action Plan actions currently rated as ‘amber’.

4.4.1. These are actions which are behind schedule and require further action which is planned and resourced.

Ref	BCC Activity	Responsible team	Comments Nov 2023	Proposed way forward
C.1	Develop an in-house training programme on biodiversity legislation and ecological emergency for officers across all departments and levels, and councillors including training module.	Learning and Development	There are currently two training courses related to the ecological emergency on the Learning Hub. Completion of these is low as they are not mandatory. Eco emergency = 56 / Our OCEES = 67.  No current plan to make ecological training mandatory like climate change training.	Review modules to make them snappier if possible and look to market online training through corporate comms email (potentially linked to events like the Festival of Nature as a way of promotion).  Next step to target specific teams and create bespoke modules which focuses on relevance to teams’ work. This could include new training for incoming councillors.
E.32	Identify opportunities for ecological enhancements on council buildings/ facilities as part of Climate Resilience Estate Project.	Corporate Landlord	A climate resilience estate scoping report was commissioned and delivered setting out a range of recommendation for how a city-wide climate resilience estate project could be taken forward. There were 5 key recommendations some of which could be delivered through the emerging BGI strategy in 2024. Beyond that there would need to be more funding and a new piece of work commissioned or carried out.	Through development of BCC Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategy identify opportunities to include recommendations set out in report.
E.38	Scale up / relaunch Meadow Bristol; Sponsor a Meadow initiative for parks green spaces, highway verges, central reservations, roundabouts	Parks	This scheme was set up by a Head Gardener in the Parks service many years ago and focused mainly on creating 'pictorial' meadows and is currently paused.	Programme could be re-launched but not until we have started to trial a smaller cut and collect regime. The focus would have to switch to species-rich grassland creation rather than pictorial meadows, as the later aren't particularly sustainable.
G.5	Establish better maintenance regime for BCC-owned SuDS	Highways	All BCC owned SUDs are highways features and are currently managed by the highways team, although it is felt that these could be managed more effectively. There was a plan to be include	Work with Highways and the Flood Team to ensure that SUDs are being maintained effectively.

## 5. Key areas of work for 2024/25

5.1.1. The following are key areas of work for the coming financial year:

- development of the Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategy
- delivering the first phase of our land managed for nature programme
- establishing an approach to implement Biodiversity Net Gain
- embedding ecological practices in work programmes for services across the council.

## 6. 2025 onwards and refresh of Action Plan

6.1.1. The current BCC EE Action Plan runs until March 2025. Work will commence summer 2024 (following the introduction of the new committee system and councillors) to update and develop an action plan for 2025 onwards.

## 7. Policy

7.1.1. 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.

7.1.2. 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.

## 8. Consultation

### 8.1. Internal

8.1.1. 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.

8.1.2. Similarly, the relevant services were consulted in the selection of the priority actions and the costs of delivery.

8.1.3. Through this paper the Scrutiny Commission is being invited to comment on the proposals.

### 8.2. External

8.2.1. A number of stakeholders were consulted in the development of the action plan and continue to be as projects are developed and delivered.

## 9. Public Sector Equality Duties

9.1. 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.

9.2. Many of the activities are evidence, strategy, and policy work which are unlikely to have direct adverse impacts on communities.

9.3. In the delivery of each project within the EEAP the lead officers consider equalities issues in line with the duties and BCC policies. For example, 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:**

1. Ecological Emergency Action Plan – update 2023

[Bristol Ecological Emergency Action Plan](#)

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

##### **Background Papers:**

[CARDIFF COUNCIL \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)