

FARMING AND WILDLIFE

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To outline the current issues for farming and wildlife and to highlight work carried out by Leisure Services in this area.

2 Recommendations/for decision

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| 2.1 | That the Committee reviews the points highlighted within this report and provides comments where appropriate for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Leisure in conjunction with the with the Director and the Leisure Services Manager. |
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3 Executive summary (if longer than 2 pages)

- 3.1 The varied geology and topography of Aylesbury Vale creates a countryside rich in landscape and wildlife. Many of the habitats and species are of national and international importance. The essentially rural nature of the district with its mix of arable and livestock management means that the major opportunities to benefit wildlife are on farmland.
- 3.2 Threats to farmland wildlife are many and varied, leading to habitat and species losses and a decline in the quality and value of what remains. Threats arise from changes in farming practices, climate change, loss of land and habitat fragmentation due to major infrastructure and new housing and commercial developments.
- 3.3 This report to Scrutiny follows a review of legislation, policy and research relating to farming and wildlife (see Figure 1, the detail is given in Appendix 1). Sections 4 to 9 set out the Leisure Services response to the main duties, issues and opportunities.

Figure 1 key legislation, policy and research	
1981	Wildlife & Countryside Act
1992	European Habitats Directive
2006	Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act
2011	Lawton Report, Making Space for Nature
2011	Natural Environment White Paper
2012	Biodiversity 2020, a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
2012	National Planning Policy Framework
2013	State of Nature
2013	DEFRA review of agri-environment advice

- 3.4 Three main pieces of legislation relate to farming and wildlife and the role that local authorities have to play. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the main piece of legislation relating to nature conservation and is supplemented by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The 1992 European Habitats Directive places a duty on local authorities to have regard to biodiversity in the exercise of their functions to the requirements of the Directive, which is reiterated in the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
- 3.5 **The 2010 Lawton Report** 'Making Space for Nature' is the main document commissioned by the government on biodiversity which was used to inform the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper and the 2012 'Biodiversity 2020'. It stresses that 'natural capital' is as vital to current and future prosperity as economic and social capital and that nature is fundamental to our wellbeing, health and economy. Recommendations which relate to local authorities and their work relating to farming and wildlife are:
- Ensure ecological networks are identified and protected through Planning
 - Ensure Planning policy should continue to protect important sites
 - Identify ecological restoration zones for landscape-scale conservation

- Take greater steps to reconnect people and nature
 - Take responsibility for the identification and monitoring of Local Wildlife Sites
- 3.6 **The 2011 Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)** outlines policy to mainstream the value of nature across society. It includes the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships and states that protection and improvement of the natural environment must be a core objective of the Planning system.
- 3.7 The **DEFRA 2012 Biodiversity 2020** report is a significant policy document as it draws together the Lawton Report and the White Paper. It sets out a national framework to halt the overall loss of England's biodiversity by 2020 and to move from net biodiversity loss to gain. The key actions include:
- A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation
 - Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy
 - Reducing environmental pressures
 - Improving knowledge
 - Valuing what nature does for us
- 3.8 **The 2012 National Planning Policy Framework** states that the Planning system has an environmental role by contributing to protecting and enhancing the natural environment and helping to improve biodiversity and should facilitate to achieving net gains for nature. It sets out the role that local planning authorities should play in this regard and covers development impacting upon farmland and its wildlife.
- 3.9 An important policy is that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the principles that if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. The NPPF states that the environment must be considered alongside community and economic matters.
- 3.10 Whilst policies designed to protect and enhance biodiversity are important and necessary, there are concerns about the policy to encourage development on poorer areas of land in terms of agricultural productivity as this can often be the richest in wildlife. The protection of important sites for wildlife on farmland is therefore vital.
- 3.11 **2013 State of Nature** a report by leading wildlife organisations says '*the UK's nature is in trouble. We should act to save nature for both its intrinsic value and for the benefits that it brings to us that are essential to our well-being and prosperity*'.
- 3.12 State of Nature stresses the importance of farmland to wildlife. It covers 3100 species showing that 60% of these have declined over recent decades, with over 10% under threat of disappearing altogether. Declines are happening across all habitats and species groups, over 44 million breeding birds have been lost since the late 1960s.
- 3.13 **2013 DEFRA agri-environment advice report** sets out how they intend to change the provision of advice and help farmers produce more food whilst continuing to protect the environment. It recognises commitments within the NEWP and Biodiversity 2020 to biodiversity protection and enhancement.
- 3.14 The key themes which have come out from this review of legislation, policy and research and which relate to farming and wildlife are:
- AVDC has a legislative duty to have regard to biodiversity.
 - The economic importance of ecosystem wellbeing in agricultural practices needs to be better understood e.g. pollinating insects.
 - Farming must remain viable whilst supporting and enhancing biodiversity.

- The government is reducing the advice it gives to farmers on agri-environment issues with a movement towards more local advice.
- Planning must take account of biodiversity and aim for a net gain.
- An urgent need for habitat creation and targeted species conservation.
- Greater local action needs to be supported through community involvement in conservation, awareness raising and skills development.
- New initiatives such as biodiversity offsetting and the ecosystem services approach recognise the full value of the natural environment and may offer new income streams.
- Conservation action needs to be evidence-based, be at landscape scale and be able to respond to the changing climate.

3.15 The Leisure Services responses which are grouped under the 5 action areas identified in Biodiversity 2020 and examples are given of delivery:

- A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation
- Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy
- Reducing environmental pressures
- Improving knowledge
- Valuing what nature does for us

3.16 The review demonstrates that AVDC's Leisure Services makes a significant contribution to the protection and enhancement of farmland wildlife and supports farmers to be able to benefit wildlife as part of a commercially sound business. It achieves this by:

- Providing ecological advice to farmers on habitat creation and management
- Building volunteer networks and organising farmland wildlife surveys
- Species specific conservation schemes – barn owls, water voles, otters
- Securing inward investment for farmers through grants
- Influencing and negotiation of Leisure outcomes as part of the Planning process
- Negotiating ecological mitigation of new developments and major infrastructure
- Leading role in the establishment of the new Natural Environment Partnership
- Training and skills development
- Partnership working e.g. RSPB, Hawk and Owl Trust, Bat Conservation Trust

3.17 The work carried out by Leisure Services in regard to farming and wildlife must be set in the context of the New Business Model and the need to reduce costs to the Council. Whilst external grants have facilitated schemes such as the North Bucks Bat Group and the Barn Owl Project, ways to reduce the core costs of Leisure Services must be identified. Work is currently underway to seek ways to reduce costs and increase income, which may require changes to be made to the current service provided.

4 Overview of Leisure Services' role in farming and wildlife

4.1 The following sections demonstrate how Leisure Services meets the challenges and opportunities for farming and wildlife in response to the legislation, policy and research.

4.2 Much of Leisure Services' work in this area is undertaken by its Biodiversity Team which is leading and developing national best practice relating to farming and wildlife. The work attracts positive media coverage and has helped build a national reputation for the Team as a centre of excellence. For instance it developed the 'wildlife hedgelaying' technique which is cheaper and better for wildlife and it set up the UK Black Poplar Conservation Group to coordinate the conservation action for this rare tree on a national basis.

4.3 In 2012 the Biodiversity Team and Planning received national recognition by the Royal Town Planning Institute and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the new publication 'Planning Naturally'. This highlights the AVDC 'Biodiversity and Planning' procedure, which ensures that protected and important habitats and species are properly considered in the planning process.

- 4.4 Over £100,000 inward investment has been secured over the last 5 years to support farmland conservation to protect and enhance wildlife and to engage the local community in active participation. This includes the Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Project grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and DEFRA Higher Level Stewardship schemes.
- 4.5 The work streams have been grouped into the four principal objectives identified in Biodiversity 2020 and set out in the following sections. Specific examples are given under each, although there is significant cross over between them such as securing grant for farmers through Higher Level Stewardship Schemes delivers habitat targets and can be the mechanism to involve volunteers.

5 More integrated large-scale approach to conservation

- 5.1 The **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) was formed in 2013**. Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) were proposed in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) and aim to bring together the green infrastructure and biodiversity sectors. During the establishment of the local LNP, the value of bringing in broader environmental issues around sustainability such as flooding and climate change was recognised and led to the creation of the NEP with a wider remit.
- 5.2 The NEP aims to work in partnership working with the agriculture, health, education, business, community and voluntary sectors. Priorities which relate to farming and wildlife include conserving and enhancing biodiversity at a landscape scale and providing a forum to bring together the voluntary sector.
- 5.3 A Shadow Board has been appointed which includes Members from each local authority, and representatives from Natural England, the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, the Chilterns Conservation Board, the education sector, the health sector, the Local Enterprise Partnership and Buckinghamshire Business First.
- 5.4 Leisure Services plays a leading role in the NEP, represented on the Board by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and the Leisure Services Manager chairs the Delivery Group.
- 5.5 The **Aylesbury Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy** sets the framework for the creation and management of green infrastructure (GI). The first part sets out the principles for the creation and management of GI which include ensuring that development results in a net gain in biodiversity and that existing woodlands should be enhanced and new woodlands created. These principles govern the way in which farmland identified for development should be considered e.g retention of important hedgerows as green corridors. The flagship projects include Bernwood Forest and the Regional Wetlands Park (to be created as part of the Aylesbury East development) all of which would involve farmed landscapes.
- 5.6 The **AVDC Barn Owl Project** set up in 2008 was funded by £80,000 grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund and WREN. The Project carried out practical conservation to help increase barn owl populations by providing advice to farmers on habitat creation and the erection of barn owl breeding boxes. In addition to this a programme of education and training was delivered along with the development of a volunteer network.
- 5.7 Critical to the success of the Project is partnership working with farmers to ensure that barn owl habitats are created on a landscape-scale. Working with the Hawk and Owl Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology have enabled the successes of the Project to be disseminated and best practice and research findings shared nationally.
- 5.8 The aim was to create an independent voluntary group, and in July 2013 when the Project ceased, the new Bucks Owl and Raptor Group was formed. This is now run by volunteers who were recruited and trained through the Project and will continue to work with farmers to

benefit barn owls. In only 5 years the project has developed into the second largest of its kind in the country. The Biodiversity Team continues to provide advice to the Group.

- 5.9 **Climatic changes and natural causes** are considered by the Team in giving advice. Ash die-back disease may be a significant issue in Aylesbury Vale with the high number of these trees in the landscape and their value for wildlife. Officers keep up to date with research and spread of the disease so that they are able to give advice. Officers also give advice is also given on new tree planting schemes to farmers and in developments, ensuring that decisions on species selection take account of climatic changes and natural phenomena.

6 Putting people at the heart of biodiversity

- 6.1 **AVDC Biodiversity volunteers** give over 3000 days each year valued at over £300,000. They are supported by the Biodiversity Team who have established volunteer networks for ecological recording and practical conservation, much of which is carried out on farmland. This includes Vale Countryside Volunteers, the North Bucks Bat Group, the Otter and Water Vole Project. The biodiversity volunteering programmes offer a chance for anyone to be involved. Volunteers range from 10 years upwards, people with different interests and backgrounds can all get involved, and it gives the opportunity to meet like-minded people.
- 6.2 In 2013 both the North Bucks Bat Group (NBBG) and Vale Countryside Volunteers celebrated (VCV) their 10 year anniversaries, over which time they have secured many achievements. VCV for instance has planted over 20 km of hedgerows on farms.
- 6.3 Biodiversity 2020 and the State of Nature underline the importance raising awareness of the need for conservation. Leisure Services organises the Junior Springwatch event which brings wildlife to people in an urban area, whilst the voluntary groups supported provide people with the opportunity to visit the countryside and to see wildlife up close. For instance the Bat Group's volunteers meet thousands of people at public events every year and the Barn Owl volunteers visit schools and community groups, to spread the word about the need for conservation and to help spark a lifelong interest in children and young people.
- 6.4 Delivery of the **Health and Wellbeing agenda** is supported by biodiversity volunteering as it offers great physical and mental health benefits. It contributes to the objectives in Public Health, the emerging Physical Activity Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The benefits are summed up by the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' campaign which is promoted as part of the public health agenda (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: biodiversity volunteering and 5 Way to Wellbeing (www.mind.org.uk)
<p><i>Connect – feeling close to and valued by other people</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting like minded people – fellow wildlife enthusiasts ▪ Having an important role to play – supporting the volunteer group, carrying out tasks
<p><i>Be active – regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups and reduced cognitive decline</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practical conservation e.g. VCV tree planting ▪ Barn Owl volunteers – erecting barn owl boxes ▪ Bat Group – carry out surveys of ancient woodlands
<p><i>Take notice – heightened awareness enhances self-understanding and allows positive choices based on values and motivations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Biodiversity volunteering enables people to take active choices about their lifestyles and to have positive experiences
<p><i>Learn – continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life and in adults is strongly associated with higher levels of well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skills development – identification of bats, birds, flowers; practical conservation skills ▪ Training increases employability e.g. team trains Bat Group volunteers to secure Natural England licences

- Training of graduate ecologists and support of studies e.g. MSc dissertations

Give – individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy and having increased wellbeing.

- 3000 plus volunteer days per year given
- Range of opportunities created – running a group, surveys, practical conservation, talking to schools

7 Reducing environmental pressures

- 7.1 Biodiversity 2020 sets out how to reduce environmental pressures under four categories: agriculture, forestry, planning and development and water management.
- 7.2 **Agriculture: farming and wildlife.** The State of Nature underlines that farmland is home to many much-loved species such as skylarks and provides people with their closest connection to nature as they live in, travel through or visit farmland. It stresses that if farming systems, practices and policies change, this can have a massive impact upon farmland wildlife. By working with farmers it is possible to help them protect and enhance wildlife whilst securing food production. The impacts upon wildlife are summarised as:
- Changing farming practices - timing of ploughing, harvesting, mowing and grazing; less mixed farming; less crop rotation; increased drainage
 - Loss of habitat - hedgerows, mature trees, ponds, uncultivated field margins
 - Chemical input - fertilisers, pesticides, veterinary drugs
 - Cumulative impacts – loss of habitat mosaics, habitat fragmentation
- 7.3 The Biodiversity Team works with farmers in number of ways to address these impacts, including providing ecological advice, creating a network of volunteers and specialist contractors, and supporting inward investment.
- 7.4 **Agriculture: Local Wildlife Sites** are the best areas for wildlife in the District outside of SSSI. The Biodiversity Team survey these, then pass the information to the landowner so that they are aware of their value and encourage them to adopt beneficial management regimes. Beneficial management can come at a cost to the landowner so the Team provides advice and assistance to landowners to access grant money and support from volunteers that can offset the decrease in farming intensity that these changes may imply.
- 7.5 **Agriculture: securing inward investment.** The Biodiversity Team are very creative in seeking opportunities to give monetary value to farmland conservation land. Examples of this include helping landowners to secure Higher Level Stewardship and English Woodland Scheme agreements through advice and ecological data.
- 7.6 The Team has facilitated arrangements between owners of wildflower meadows to sell the seed to developers and wildflower suppliers, thus placing an economic value on the meadow and ensuring that developers use locally sourced, appropriate seed. Good relations created with local landowners provides AVDC with thousands of pounds worth of wildflower seed which is used in habitat restoration schemes on AVDC land and in the wider countryside.
- 7.7 Money secured through grant assistance brings income into the rural economy for management and land acquisition. The connections provided with skilled contractors ensures good ecological management and further support for the local economy.
- 7.8 The 2013 DEFRA review of environmental advice, incentives and partnership approaches for the farming sector sets out that government agencies will only provide advice where there is a compelling need and that any advisors will be required to cover all matters which relate to farming. Whilst the direction of advice from advisors who understand the local concept, these proposed changes may impact upon the demands upon the Council's

Biodiversity Team for increased time for advice and the specialist ecologist advice which would formerly have been given by DEFRA.

- 7.9 **Forestry:** Survey data and advice has been used to secure grant schemes for management and planting of woodland. The local and national conservation priority species the Native Black Poplar has benefited hugely from this this association with the Biodiversity team and thousands of trees have been planted. The genetic diversity of the species has been captured by the Biodiversity Team in the national collection of the species held in Aylesbury, these clones are then propagated by a local nursery and used to ensure the highest genetic diversity available for new planting schemes, developers are compelled through the planning system to plant Black Poplar where appropriate thereby using development to secure the future of the species.
- 7.10 By way of practical examples the ARLA development will create the largest Black Poplar woodland in the UK and the Olympic Park is planted with hundreds of Black Poplar gathered from the AVDC collection. The Biodiversity Team has negotiated a partnership with a local grower in which it receives a contribution for every Black Poplar supplied to new schemes.
- 7.11 **Planning and development: housing and commercial developments.** Leisure Services influences the design, delivery and management of new developments to ensure that protected and important habitats and species are properly considered and mitigated for. This includes contributing to policy writing in the Vale of Aylesbury Plan, negotiation of leisure provision in new developments, negotiation of ecological mitigation schemes and commenting upon amenity landscape schemes and individual planning applications.
- 7.12 In terms of farmland where developments are proposed, assessments of the current value wildlife and mitigation are assessed. Aylesbury East is an example where negotiations between Leisure Services, Planning and the developers have resulted in the creation of a major wetlands park which will improve the area for wildlife and be a tourist destination. Leisure Services has played a significant role in negotiating the ecological mitigation and ensuring that the Scheme was acceptable to the Council in this regard.
- 7.13 Leisure Services negotiated the Farmland Species Mitigation Scheme for the Berryfields development without which Natural England would not have withdrawn its objection to the development. Over £300,000 was secured which is now used as a grant fund to enable the delivery of habitat improvements on farms, and is being run in partnership with the local Wildlife Trust. 36 hectares of species rich wildflower meadow gathered from local sites are currently being created by this scheme, with more to follow.
- 7.14 In August 2013, the government initiated a consultation on 'Greater flexibility of change of use'. One of the proposed changes involves the 'Re-use of existing redundant agricultural buildings for a dwelling house' becoming Permitted Development. Agricultural buildings can be important habitats for roosting bats which are European Protected Species and both bats and their roosts are protected by law. Taking the change of use of agricultural buildings out of the planning system by making it Permitted Development has the potential for significant adverse impacts on bat populations within Aylesbury Vale. Currently AVDC Biodiversity Officers request bat surveys of such developments (currently requiring planning permission) and assess submitted mitigation strategies to ensure that that the favourable conservation status of bats is maintained. Under Permitted Development, there would be no such requirement for the Local Authority to consider protected species and ensuring the protection of bats would largely fall to the discretion of the developer. As bat roosts can be present in agricultural buildings with little obvious sign of their presence, bats are especially vulnerable to development works in the absence of specialist ecological advice. The Biodiversity Team will be responding to the government consultation.

- 7.15 **Planning and development: major infrastructure:** Leisure Officers play an important role in assessing the impacts of major infrastructure and the design of ecological mitigation schemes, such as High Speed Two and East West rail much of which is on farmland wildlife. For High Speed Two Biodiversity Officers have provided specialist input to consultation responses for AVDC, Bucks County Council and the 51M group of local authorities who all oppose the scheme, and have recently set up the HS2 Ecology Technical Group whose remit is to provide the means for engagement, consultation and information sharing in order to achieve the best possible outcome for ecology. HS2 will run through the heart of Aylesbury Vale's farmland and potential impacts could be from direct land take, farm and habitat fragmentation as well as potential impacts on farming from both ecological and landscape mitigations (which may necessitate land being taken out of production). Through engagement and consultation Leisure Services seek to minimise the impacts of HS2 on biodiversity whilst securing appropriate ecological mitigation and compensation whilst taking into account the needs of the farming communities in the Vale. The same process is being undertaken for the East West Rail project proposed through the district.
- 7.16 AVDC has also advised landowners on how to register their land for Biodiversity Offsetting in connection with the scheme which may require land to provide an ecological enhancement from the proposals. This could potentially enable landowners to receive payment in perpetuity for habitat creation and beneficial management.
- 7.17 **Water management: landscape scale schemes.** AVDC works with farmers on landscape scale schemes in river corridors. This includes the River Thames and the River Great Ouse, working with farmers and the Environment Agency.
- 7.18 **Water management: species specific schemes.** The AVDC Otter Spotter and Water Vole project is concentrated on the River Great Ouse to the west of Buckingham. Advice is given to landowners on how best to manage the habitats for wildlife, which can have direct benefits to water quality. Such measures may include retention of bank side vegetation, stock fencing to prevent damage to river banks, creation of fish spawning habitats (such as riffles and backwaters) and the control of invasive predators such as mink which can devastate native wildlife such as waterfowl and the water vole.
- 7.19 Through this support and advice to landowners AVDC has managed to conserve and expand the only remaining water vole population in the vale. This species would certainly be extinct if not for the actions of the team.

8 Improving knowledge

- 8.1 **The AVDC Ecological Training Programme** ensures that highly skilled conservationists are consistently produced who then have the skills to maximise biodiversity benefits to the district. The Team trains volunteers, professional ecologists and landowners in a range of skills which directly benefit farmland nature conservation. It provides a vehicle for graduate ecologists to gain experience and at the same time contribute at no expense to the effectiveness of the council's biodiversity conservation efforts.
- 8.2 45 volunteers have been trained by AVDC officers to attain a Natural England bat license in the last 10 years, more than any other bat group in the country. The Team facilitates scientific research: five Masters Degrees, two Bachelor Degrees and a PhD have been conducted on Biodiversity team projects and findings are disseminated to the national conservation movement through papers and seminars.
- 8.3 The establishment and support of the North Bucks Bat Group and the Barn Owl Project are good examples where little was known about these species before AVDC took the initiative. Thanks to the work of volunteers, the data gathered is now being used to inform national species and habitat conservation.

- 8.4 The Biodiversity Team has been working with Springhill Open Prison for a number of years which offers a number of benefits. Inmates from the Prison make bird boxes free of charge and in return the Biodiversity Team offers work experience to inmates, thus increasing their skills and employability. The majority of the work experience is carried out on farmland wildlife projects such as putting up barn owl boxes.
- 8.5 The Team provides training to farmers in money saving management techniques with beneficial ecological consequences e.g. wildlife hedgelaying.
- 8.6 **Training network:** The Biodiversity Team has created a network of surveyors and practitioners of good conservation practice which it uses to provide the best possible advice to landowners wishing to conduct good conservation management. In this way landowners can be put in direct contact with specialist surveyors, volunteers and contractors that can help them achieve their aims of enhancing the natural environment.

9 Valuing what nature does for us

- 9.1 **The ecosystem services concept** was developed to aid understanding of human use and management of natural resources. Our health and wellbeing depends upon the services provided by ecosystems and their components: water, soil, nutrients and organisms. Much of these values depend upon sensitive farming systems such as water management. An ecosystems approach provides a framework for looking at whole ecosystems in decision making, and for valuing the services they provide, to ensure that society can maintain a healthy and resilient natural environment now and for future generations.
- 9.2 **The Biodiversity Offsetting concept** is linked to the ecosystem services approach and was identified in the Natural Environment White Paper. Through biodiversity offsetting a financial value is placed on all land use types (including arable land and wildlife habitats) so that an overall financial compensation scheme is produced. For its response to the HS2 consultation, Leisure Services commissioned a Biodiversity Offsetting report to assess the likely required ecological mitigation and compensation. Clarity from HS2 Limited is currently being sought whether they will use biodiversity offsetting as a means to deliver the requisite ecological mitigation and compensation.

10 Resource implications

- 10.1 The work streams highlighted are delivered by Leisure Services officers who bring in grant aid to enable projects to take place. The work undertaken to secure external funding is particularly important given the unavailability of Council capital funding unless linked to cogent business cases.
- 10.2 The delivery of the current Leisure work in relation to farming and wildlife must be considered in the context of the New Business Model and the need to reduce the costs to the Council of running the service and which may require changes to the current service.
- 10.3 The time required by Leisure Officers to consider the impacts upon farmland wildlife will be influenced by the level of development that is agreed. Each major development requires a significant amount of time to ensure that wildlife is properly considered and that mitigation schemes are appropriate and are delivered.
- 10.4 The requests for advice to the Biodiversity Team from farmers may increase with the government's drive towards reducing centralised agri-environment advice.

11 Response to Key Aims and Objectives

- 11.1 The report responds to the Corporate Plan Aim of improving the environment and engaging the community.

Background Documents

None

Appendix 1: Legislation, policy and research

KEY LEGISLATION

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 –principle piece of legislation relating to nature conservation, supplemented by Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 – places a duty on local authorities to have regard to biodiversity in all aspects of its work -

EC Habitats Directive 1992 implemented in the UK through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) – AVDC’s statutory duties under the Regulations include:

- “to have regard (in the exercise of their functions) to the requirements of the Habitats Directive so far as they may be affected by the exercise of those functions”; and
- "to take such steps in the exercise of their functions as they consider appropriate to contribute to the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds".

LAWTON REPORT ‘MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE’, 2010

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage

Objectives and actions

- To protect and restore species and habitats to levels that are sustainable in a changing climate, and enhanced in comparison with those in 2000.
- To restore and secure long-term sustainability of ecological and physical processes that underpin the way ecosystems work, to enhance the capacity of the natural environment to provide ecosystem services such as clean water, climate regulation and crop pollination, as well as providing habitats for wildlife.
- To provide accessible natural environments rich in wildlife for people to enjoy.
- To encourage landscape scale conservation schemes, new habitats to link existing sites of wildlife value and the creation of buffer zones around sensitive areas.

2011 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHITE PAPER

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/newp.aspx>

Policies

- Establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) to strengthen local action, enable local leadership and raise awareness of the services and benefits of a healthy natural environment. They should contribute to the green economy and complement Local Enterprise Partnerships, with which they should form strong links.
- Creation of Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) to enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale.
- Protection and improvement of the natural environment is a core objective of the planning system
- Reform of the planning system to take a strategic approach to planning for nature to guide development to the best locations, encourage greener design and enable development to enhance natural networks.
- New, voluntary approach to biodiversity offsets will be established
- Greater local action to protect and improve nature is needed.
- Strengthening the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both.

BIODIVERSITY 2020: A STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND’S WILDLIFE AND ECOSYSTEMS, DEFRA, 2012

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-2020-a-strategy-for-england-s-wildlife-and-ecosystem-services>

Key actions

A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation

- More Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable condition.
- Programme of targeted action with partners for the recovery of priority species.

Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy

- Working with key stakeholders on how the nature conservation sector can engage the public more effectively in future and how government might support this.
- Getting more children learning outdoors, removing barriers and increasing schools' abilities to teach outdoors.

Reducing environmental pressures

- Deliver environmental outcomes whilst increasing food production.
- More woodlands should be in sustainable management
- Expand the area of woodland in England expanded.
- Implementation of the planning system reforms to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Improving knowledge

- Increased knowledge through supporting national and local organisations and volunteers to record data on wildlife
- Develop new and innovative approaches to biodiversity recording.
- Identify actions to secure best value from ecosystems, for nature and for people and develop practical tools to assist decision-makers.

Valuing what nature does for us

- Develop the Ecosystems Services concept which recognises that natural resources such as water and clean air are vital support services for our wellbeing and security and are themselves sustained by biodiversity.
- Decision makers should take account of all the economic and non-economic benefits derived from these services to inform judgements about how we use our environment.
- Develop new and innovative mechanisms to direct more funding towards biodiversity

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2012

Key policies

- Recognise the wider benefits of ecosystem services.
- Minimise impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible.
- Establish ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.
- Protected species are a material consideration in Planning.
- Local planning authorities to set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- Local planning authorities to take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.
- In determining planning applications, local authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the principles that if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

STATE OF NATURE, 2013 <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/stateofnature/>

Key findings

- The ability to monitor wildlife and to respond with appropriate conservation action is hampered by a lack of knowledge on the trends of most of the UK's plant and animal species and the report highlights the importance of volunteers in this role.
- Training volunteers to record wildlife is required and needs support
- Conservation and agricultural sectors need to work together to help protect and enhance farmland wildlife
- Sites that have high value for wildlife need to be protected through designations recognised in the planning system

DEFRA review of environmental advice, incentives and partnership approaches for the farming sector in England, March 2013

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-environmental-advice-incentives-and-partnership-approaches-for-the-farming-sector-in-england>

Policy direction

- The government agencies will only provide advice where there is a compelling need.
- Delivery at local level by trusted sources works – more advice should be provided by professionals and trusted organisations that understand local issues and concerns
- Better local knowledge exchange and networks are needed where farmers can share ideas and learn about best practice in a practical setting.
- Agri-environment schemes need to be targeted at clear goals and objectives