

AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Democratic Services

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5 September, 2013

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee will be held at **6.30 pm on 18 September, 2013**, in **The Olympic Room at The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury**, when your attendance is requested.

Membership: Councillor Hunter- Watts (Chairman); Councillors Adams, Mrs Bloom, Bond, Mrs Brandis, Cashman, Mrs Chapple, Fealey (Vice Chairman), Foster, Mrs Russel, Mrs L Smith, Stuchbury, Mrs Takodra, Vick and Winn

Contact Officer: Craig Saunders (01296) 585043.

L White
Head of Administration

Members:

Ms Pam Bibby, Mr Derek Willmer, Committee Clerk (Generic Author), Web Master (IT), Cllr Chris Adams, Cllr Ashley Bond, Cllr Jenny Bloom, Cllr Judy Brandis, Cllr Corry Cashman, Cllr Sue Chapple, Cllr Brian Foster, Cllr Patrick Fealey, Cllr Paul Hughes, Cllr Tom Hunter-Watts, Cllr Barbara Russel, Cllr Lisa Smith, Cllr Robin Stuchbury, Cllr David Vick, Cllr Mark Winn, Miss Alice Fisher, Mr Bill Ashton, Ms Bryony Roberts (Audit), Mr Craig Saunders, Mr David Lamb (Audit), Mr Douglas Gray (Audit), Mr Les White,

AGENDA

1 **APOLOGIES**


2 **TEMPORARY CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**

Any changes to be reported to the meeting.

3 **MINUTES**

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2013,

copy attached as Appendix A.
Documents Attached:

 environment and living minutes 12 06 2013.pdf


4 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members to declare any interests.

5 **AUDIT OF LEISURE FACILITIES**

To consider the report attached as Appendix B coloured green.


Contact Officer: Lesley Davies (01296) 585721
Documents Attached:

 App B - Audit of Leisure Facilities report.pdf

6 **FARMING AND WILDLIFE REPORT**

To consider the report attached as Appendix C coloured white.


Contact Officer: Lesley Davies (01296) 585721
Documents Attached:

 App C - Farming and Wildlife report.pdf

7 **VALE OF AYLESBURY PLAN (VAP) - DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

To consider the report attached as Appendix D coloured pink.


Contact Officer: John Byrne (01296) 585678
Documents Attached:

 App D - DM policies report for Scrutiny Ctte 18.09.2013.pdf

8 **ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK
PROGRAMME**

To note the current Work Programme attached as Appendix E coloured blue.

Contact Officer: Craig Saunders (01296) 585043
Documents Attached:

 App E - ELSC Work Programme (September 2013 meeting).pdf

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 June 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Hunter-Watts (Chairman); Councillors Adams, Mrs Brandis, Cashman, Monger (for Mrs Takodra), Mrs F Roberts (for Mrs L Smith), Mrs Russel, Stuchbury, Vick and Winn.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Bloom, Bond, Mrs Chapple, Fealey, Mrs Paternoster, Mrs Pearce, Mrs L Smith, Sir Beville Stanier and Mrs Takodra.

1. PERMANENT CHANGE TO MEMBERSHIP

The Committee was informed that there had been a change to the Liberal Democrat membership of the Committee, with Councillor Mrs Takodra replacing Councillor Hughes.

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

With regard to minute 2 (xxii) of the meeting held on 26 March 2013, Councillor Vick stated that he had not been satisfied with the responses given relating to the level of resourcing provided for planning enforcement activities.

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 26 March 2013 and 15 May 2013, be approved as correct records.

3. PUBLIC HEALTH

The Committee received a report and presentation which provided Members with an overview of the public health reforms and the new structure in Buckinghamshire. Councillor Mrs Birchley (the County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Well-Being), Dr Jane O'Grady (Director of Public Health) and Tracey Ironmonger (Assistant Director of Public Health) attended the meeting to provide information about the County Council's role, the health profile of Aylesbury Vale, and to discuss the contribution that the district council, and local Members can make to public health.

The last 2 years had seen changes within the health service generally and public health specifically. A graphical representation of the new national health system was provided at Appendix 1 to the Committee report, which detailed the relationship between various bodies including local Government, the NHS, other Government bodies, Public Health England and the new GP Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

GP consortia, or CCGs, were now responsible for the combined budgets of the member GP practices, and had the freedom to buy in services from external organisations, including local authorities, to deliver a range of services. The CCGs were also being supported in their role by a Commissioning Support Unit (CSU). Locally, the south central CSU – covering Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Portsmouth and Hampshire – supported the Aylesbury Vale CCG.

NHS England was an independent body at arms length to the government. It funded the CCGs to commission services, as well as commissioning some services directly, for example dentistry. It was currently overseeing the CSUs nationally.

Primary Care Trust responsibilities for health improvement had transferred to upper tier local authorities, funded by a government grant, which was ring fenced for two years. The list of commissioning responsibilities is long and can be found on the Department of Health's website.

Health and Wellbeing Boards had been established to bring together local authorities and partners to address health inequalities and improvements to the health and wellbeing of the population. Boards were to be treated as if they were a committee of the lead authority (locally this was the County Council). Certain Members were specified in the legislation (ie: representatives from upper tier councils – e.g. adult social care and children's services, public health; CCGs, and Healthwatch). Other Members including District Councils could be considered by the lead authority as appropriate.

The Boards built on the power local authorities already had to promote wellbeing and their role would be to join up commissioning in relation to local health care, social care, health improvement, and children's services including safeguarding. Boards should develop a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for their area, informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA); and the Strategy for Buckinghamshire was agreed in February 2013. The priorities of the local strategy over the next 3 years and beyond were listed at Appendix 2 to the Committee report, and were identified against five aims, namely:-

- Every child has the best start in life.
- Everyone takes responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and that of others.
- Everyone has the best opportunity to fulfil their potential.
- Adding years to life and life to years.

There were a number of objectives beneath each aim that would assist in achieving the Strategy's priorities.

AVDC was currently represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Councillor Mrs Pearce who was one of two district representatives on the Board. It was possible that membership would change in the future as the terms of reference and practical issues around governance were finalised.

The public health priorities would be delivered by the Healthy Communities Partnership. Councillor Hunter-Watts was AVDC's representative on the partnership which includes membership from each District Council, County Council services, and other partners such as the voluntary sector and health sector. Task and finish groups would be established to deliver the four priorities agreed by the Healthy Communities Partnership, which were:

- Supporting the implementation of the Physical Activity Strategy.
- Producing a healthy eating strategy.
- Identifying and implementing the next steps for the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' Programme (to support mental wellbeing).
- Establishing a local work programme to co-ordinate cross cutting activity on the Big 4 health behaviours (smoking, excessive consumption of alcohol, poor diet and low levels of physical activity) and to addressing multiple risk behaviours and the clustering of unhealthy behaviours

A District Council Member champion had been identified for each priority. Councillor Hunter Watts was champion for the priority to address clustering of unhealthy behaviours.

To aid in their considerations, Members had also been provided with a copy of the NHS health profile for Aylesbury Vale 2012 which detailed the difference in life expectancy (2007-2011) by ward within Aylesbury Vale, and that instances of infant death were significantly worse in Aylesbury Vale than the national average.

The Committee was informed of the vital and important role that District Councils had on the wider determinants of health, health improvement and health protection through areas such as environmental services and housing inspections, the provision of leisure facilities and through supporting economic growth.

Appendix 4 to the Committee report highlighted how some of AVDC's services helped to deliver the priorities in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Work was now underway to review our contribution to the priorities and to assess the current, and potential future, offer of all Council services to the public health outcomes and indicators.

Members requested further information and were informed:-

- (i) on the types of initiatives that could be supported in their Wards to increase the level of physical activity and mental wellbeing of people.
- (ii) that the Director of Public Health would be attending some Local Area Forum meetings to explain to people what they could do to take responsibility for their health and wellbeing.
- (iii) on initiatives that were being trialled to increase the number of people aged 40-75 years who attended for health checks.
- (iv) on the initiative relating to developing Health trainers and Health Champions, who would help to disseminate information relating to healthy lifestyles.
- (v) that Public Health was looking to work with employers, which could include Councils, who wished to develop a Health Strategy for their employees.
- (vi) that Buckinghamshire had more money now for public health initiatives, compared to when public health was in the hands of the NHS, however, they also had increased responsibilities so budgets were still very tight.
- (vii) that a health checks' initiative was to be piloted with the Asian community in Chesham, following discussions with elders from the mosque. If successful, the pilot would be expanded to Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- (viii) that more work was being done to establish the reasons for the higher than average number of infant deaths in Aylesbury Vale.
- (ix) that an internal AVDC Officer health group was being established to ensure that activities which currently contribute to improving public health are identified and future opportunities are considered.

Members also commented:-

- (a) that they were supportive of leaflets being made available which compared motor vehicle maintenance with taking care of the health of your body. It was suggested that this message could also be included in a future Aylesbury Vale Times.

- (b) and suggested a number of ways to better reach men, and get them to participate in health checks.
- (c) that they would be supportive of any effort that might be made to promote Aylesbury as a healthy town, as part of overall efforts to change people's behaviour.
- (d) that proposals to reduce the cost of District Council funding for the 'Nifty Fifty' session held at the Cheddington Village Hall may have led to a reduction in the number of people attending the sessions.
- (e) that the Council should give consideration to undertaking Health Impact Assessments as part of policy development and during the budget setting process.
- (f) that planning had an ability to influence issues such as housing density, narrow streets, number of fast food shops in an area, which all had the potential to negatively impact on healthy outcomes.
- (g) that greater efforts needed to be made to build healthy leisure options into daily life.
- (h) that it would be helpful for local authorities to be able to charge a lower level of business rates to healthier food establishments.
- (i) that more could be done in schools to educate young people on healthy lifestyles.
- (j) that local people could be allowed to use public land that was not currently being used for community gardens.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Well-Being), Director of Public Health and Assistant Director of Public Health be thanked for the time and effort put into providing a clear and succinct information on the recent structural changes made to the health service.
- (2) That the work being done in Aylesbury Vale and more widely across the County to improve health outcomes and to improve healthy lifestyles be noted.
- (3) That the Committee would welcome the opportunity in the future to further discuss opportunities for the council to work more closely with local partners to improve the health of residents, and of AVDC employees.

4. VALE OF AYLESBURY PLAN (VAP) – DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

The Vale of Aylesbury Plan had been agreed by Council in October 2012 and was currently undergoing statutory publicity (8 May – 19 June 2013) before it was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination.

Whilst the overriding priority of the Forward Plans Team was to support the earliest possible submission of VAP and the examination process, work had also started to prepare and progress the Development Management (DM) policies that would come forward as the next component of VAP.

Many of the policies used in dealing with planning applications were likely to remain broadly unchanged, whilst others would need to evolve. There would also be new areas for DM policy development. It would be imperative for any policy that was put

forward to be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other Government guidance, to be supported by evidence as appropriate, and to not prejudice the overall viability or deliverability of development in VAP.

The DM policies review would need to be undertaken in a structured and robust manner and would build on a “template” approach for each policy area which asked:-

- Given NPPF and VAP Strategy policies, is a further detailed policy required?
- What do we want the policy to achieve?
- What are the ‘reasonable’ policy options for doing this?
- Which is our preferred option and how is that justified?
- Were there any duty to cooperate issues?
- Were neighbourhood plans also likely to be addressing this issue?
- If any further action was required?
- How might a draft policy be worded?
- Who were the implementation and delivery partners?
- Which saved AVDLP policies would it replace?

An explanation was provided on the work being done to prepare the DM policies that would come forward as the next component of the VAP. Members were asked to explore with Officers how the work of the Scrutiny Committee could most usefully add to this process. It was suggested that it would be unrealistic to become involved in them all. However, an alternative way forward might be for Members to establish a Research Group of perhaps 4 or 5 Members, who could work on these “template” questions with Officers, looking at maybe 2 to 4 policies. It was likely that the greatest value would be added by focussing on new policy areas rather than areas where the existing policies remained relevant and sound and were unlikely to require much change.

Members were provided with a Policy Schedule that detailed Topic, Policies Unlikely to change, Significant Change or New Policy. They were also provided with a proforma template for assessing delivery policy options.

Following discussions and consideration of scrutiny’s involvement in development of the DM policies, it was –

RESOLVED –

- (1) That, rather than particular policies, a Task and Finish (Research) Group be set up to look at the following 3 areas within the DM policies:-
 - (i) Impact on the aging population, including in rural areas.
 - (ii) Where the policies might help to increase health outcomes such as healthy life expectancy and the broader determinants of health.
 - (iii) Relating to sustainable construction and renewable energy.
- (2) That 2 places on the Research Group be offered to Members who did not sit on this scrutiny committee but who had a particular interest and wished to participate in this piece of scrutiny work.
- (3) That the DM Policy Schedule be sent to all Members and they be asked to suggest any particular issues that they believed the DM Policies Research Group should also be scrutinising.

(In making any suggestions Members would need to be mindful that, given that Research Group would need to report back with recommendations to the 18 September 2013 meeting, it would only be possible for the Group to look at 3-4 policy issues.)

5. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE DIGEST: JANUARY TO MARCH 2013

The Council's new Corporate Plan had been adopted in October 2011 and set the direction for the administration up to the elections in May 2015. The Corporate Plan was based on four themes:-

- Improving our communications and interaction with our customers.
- Protecting and improving the living experience of the Vale.
- Delivering efficient and economic services.
- Growing the economy of the Vale.

There were a number of objectives that needed to be achieved for the four themes to be realised. The Committee was provided with a quarterly monitoring report on the actions and targets within their remit and informed that one action – reduce crime and the fear of crime had not achieved its milestone for the last quarter. The target to reduce serious acquisitive crime (SAC) by 5% and to reduce all crime by 2.5% had not been achieved. While there had been a small 2% increase in SAC, there had been a 5% reduction in overall crime, which was the 8th consecutive year that this had happened for the Vale.

Members had asked for affordable housing figures to be included in the covering report and these were detailed as follows:-

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Affordable Homes Delivered	124	137	70	37
Target	100	50	20	30

Members requested further information and were informed that the Council had to take viability into account as part of the planning process and in any negotiations with property developers.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the contents of the Quarterly Performance Digest (January to March 2013), insofar as they apply to the work of the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee, be noted.
- (2) That they would like to receive further information and customer feedback on Aqua Vale following the completion of the refurbishment works, and for this to include information on cleanliness standards / changing room facilities.

6. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Committee considered their future Work Programme and were informed on the progress with the Research Group work on the 'Local Building List', for which work was still on-going.

With respect to the future work programme, Members' provided the following information to assist in reporting issues to future meetings:-

- (i) Cycle / pedestrian safety (18/9/2013) – looking at conflicts that might exist between cycle/pedestrian and road users. This could also look at accident ‘hot spots’ and how safer conditions could be provided for pedestrians and cyclists in the Vale.
- (ii) Farming and wildlife (18/9/2013) – that scrutiny committee Members be asked to provide more information to the Chairman and Officers, so that the scope for this item could be determined.
- (iii) Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (16/12/2013) – Members were asked to specify questions that they wished to put to VAHT’s Chief Executive when he attended the scrutiny committee meeting in December 2013.

RESOLVED –

That the current position of the Work Programme be noted, as updated at the meeting.

LEISURE FACILITIES AUDIT

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To outline the key findings of the Audit of Leisure and Cultural facilities that was carried out in 2012/13. Members' attention is drawn in particular to Section 1 Executive Summary, Section 5 summary of needs and provision assessment and to Section 6 the summary of recommended standards. Members may wish to review these sections ahead of the meeting along with other elements of the report to help identify any matters that require further explanation.
- 1.2 The table of recommended standards is given in Appendix 1. The full report be accessed by via the AVDC website at the following link <http://www.aylesburyvalecd.gov.uk/leisure-culture/leisure-and-culture-facilities-audit/>.

2 Recommendation

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1 That the Committee reviews the Audit of Leisure Facilities and provides comments for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Leisure in conjunction with the Director and the Leisure Services Manager. |
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3 Supporting information

- 3.1 An Audit of Aylesbury Vale's leisure and cultural provision was carried out in 2012/13 and followed previous assessments of leisure and cultural provision in the Vale based around the Planning Policy Guidance (now National Planning Policy Framework) requirements.
- 3.2 The Audit covered a wide range of built and green leisure provision, including indoor and outdoor sports, arts and entertainment centres, community buildings and green spaces. For the first time, the Audit also considered commercial Leisure provision and existing and committed provision beyond the district boundaries.
- 3.3 The purpose of the Audit is to guide leisure and cultural provision across the Vale, and in particular to inform provision associated with new housing growth. The Audit took account of the forecast housing growth associated with the Vale of Aylesbury Plan and provided guidance on the gaps in current provision and what would be required based on the forecast growth:
- 3.4 The Council recognises that a high quality and diverse leisure offer contributes to the economic growth of the Vale, the physical and mental health and well-being of residents (as highlighted at the last meeting of this Committee within the presentation of the Director of Public Health) and visitors and to delivering sustainable growth.
- 3.5 The Audit report includes a summary of nationally recommended standards. Where suitable the national standards have been applied to assess the current and future need, including Sport England for sports facilities and Natural England for green infrastructure. The standards form the basis for provision on site or off site through financial contributions elsewhere in the Vale. Creating a schedule of leisure and cultural standards enables developers to take into account the leisure and cultural provision required at

the earliest opportunity of their planning delivery, including their viability assessments.

- 3.6 Whilst a wide range of leisure provision was considered, the audit cannot realistically capture all that the Vale has to offer. The Vale has high quality and diverse leisure and cultural interests which reflect its heritage and landscape such as National Trust properties, equestrian centres and museums, equally some sports such as angling have not been included as there are no standards that cover this.
- 3.7 Similarly the Audit does not capture the huge range of leisure and cultural activities which are on offer, which include AVDC's leisure programme, town centre events organised by the Aylesbury Town Partnership, town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sector.
- 3.8 The main findings in the report are that there are some gaps in provision. This includes 6 badminton courts, a synthetic turf pitch, and 8 outdoor tennis courts in the Aylesbury area, and a community centre, 3 grass pitches and 3 outdoor tennis courts in the Buckingham area.
- 3.9 In some categories sports, such as swimming pools, entertainment and arts facilities, outdoor bowls and athletics, rather than developing further provision, the audit has identified a need for improved management of existing facilities.
- 3.10 The provision of some facilities such as cinemas, snow centre, ice rink and bowling alleys would be commercial decisions, based for instance on drive time catchments. Likewise there are some sports facilities such as cricket pitches where the provision is more closely linked to the tradition of rural communities, than a fixed standard. These are therefore not included in the standards table set out in Section 6 of the Audit report.
- 3.11 Standards are not set for heritage interpretation or public art but these should be sought as integral parts of the design of new developments.
- 3.12 The Audit will be used to inform local standards which will inform leisure provision associated with housing growth in the Vale of Aylesbury Plan and other Planning decisions. The findings have been included in the Infrastructure Planning process that underpins both VAP and the future Community Infrastructure Levy work.
- 3.13 Leisure Services will use the findings to guide the future provision of leisure and cultural in, for example, the use of S106 developer contributions. Similarly it also serves to inform parish and town councils who are considering their leisure and cultural provision and wish to understand identified gaps in provision.
- 3.14 The information and conclusions regarding additional commercial facilities have been fed into the draft improvement plan for Aylesbury Town Centre.

4 Resource implications

- 4.1 The findings of the audit will be used to inform future leisure and cultural provision in the Vale. It can be used to support grant applications for capital projects and therefore serves as a tool to assist the securing of inward investment.

5 Response to Key Aims and Objectives

5.1 The Audit supports the two of the Corporate Objectives in particular:

- Protecting and improving the living experience of the Vale
- Growing the economy of the Vale.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Lesley Davies, Leisure Services Manager, 01296 585721
None

Appendix 1: extract from the Audit report: Table of recommended standards

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
Sports Halls	No part of the district should be outside of a 20 minute travel time.	0.28 badminton courts per 1,000 population; facilities should be delivered in four court units with ancillary hall of no less than 1,500sqm and relevant support facilities.	The minimum acceptable quality standard for indoor sports halls and their associated facilities will be to meet the most <i>current (at time of provision) Sport England Design Guidance – Sports Halls Design and Layouts recommendations for a public use facility.</i>
Swimming Pools	No part of the district should be outside of a 20 minute travel time.	0.19 pool lanes per 1,000 population. Provision should be accompanied by the necessary support facilities (changing, plant, reception etc.)	The minimum acceptable quality standard for indoor swimming pools and their associated facilities will be to meet the most <i>current (at time of provision) Sport England Design Guidance Swimming Pool Design recommendations for a public use facility.</i>

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
Community Centres and Village Halls	<p>No provision required at Hamlet or Rural Parish 1 level;</p> <p>At Rural Parish 2 level a small community centre with main hall up to 100m² with foyer, small meeting room, adequate storage, kitchen, toilet facilities and parking;</p> <p>At Rural Parish 3 level a medium sized community centre up to 250m², as above with addition of meeting room(s), and stage;</p> <p>At cluster and Larger Sustainable Settlement level a minimum 18m x 10m main hall and ancillary facilities suitable for sporting activities to standards set in Sport England Design Guidance Note <i>Village and Community Halls</i> plus small fitness room to relevant Sport England guidance; and a minimum 18m x 10m main hall with fixed or demountable stage and ancillary facilities suitable for arts and performance activities to standards set in Sport England Design Guidance Note <i>Village and Community Halls</i>. These two halls may in practice be the same if either meets the other's specification.</p> <p>For the Aylesbury and Buckingham Sub Market no part of the sub market should be further than one mile from a community centre. The quantitative standard is one centre per 5,000 population, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hall 14m x 10m • Hall/Meeting Room 7m x 6m • Kitchen with server • Toilets • Storage for chairs, cleaning equipment, kitchen requirements, refuse • Parking to meet the full requirements of the range of uses. 		<p>The minimum acceptable quality standard for community centres will be to meet the most <i>current (at time of provision) Sport England Design Guidance recommendations for these facilities</i>, accepting that the facility mix may not be directly the same as the Guidance, together with such environmental standards relating to sustainability, energy consumption and recycling, and building construction as required by the Council at the time of provision.</p>

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
<p>Entertainment and Arts Facilities</p>	<p>No specific provision required at Hamlet or Rural Parish 1 and 2 levels;</p> <p>At Rural Parish 3 and Cluster level, there should be provision to enable viewing and participation in community based arts and entertainment activities;</p> <p>At Larger Sustainable Settlement level and Buckingham Sub Market level there should be access to facilities for larger scale productions and participation in other arts activities;</p> <p>At Aylesbury Sub Market level there should be access to major event productions and events, and participation in other arts activities.</p>	<p>At Rural Parish 3 and Cluster Areas provision is as set out within the Community Centres/Village Halls requirements;</p> <p>For Larger Sustainable Settlements and the Buckingham Sub Market there should be a Community Hall / Theatre with stage and capacity for 200 people, preferably located within a community school. This facility need may also be met by a Community Centre if the facilities meet the recommended standard;</p> <p>At Aylesbury Sub Market level there should be a multi purpose auditorium with capacity for 1,200, and a secondary theatre with capacity of 200;</p> <p>In terms of arts centres, the standards are for Aylesbury and Buckingham Sub Market and Larger Sustainable Settlements a minimum of four arts workshop areas including wet room and kiln.</p>	<p>For entertainment facilities delivered through Community Centres/Village Halls then the qualitative standards are those set out earlier for these facilities. For Aylesbury Sub Market and arts centres new facilities should be designed to the highest standard for the uses for which the facilities are intended and the best level of audience experience possible at the time of delivery.</p>

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
Heritage and Interpretation	<p>For Rural Parish 2 and 3 levels there should be an appropriately sited multi media information point that covers interpretation relating to local history and heritage and is designed and provided to a high standard;</p> <p>For Larger sustainable Settlements there should be a multi media information point to include interpretation relating to local history and heritage, parish/town map and visitor guide designed and provided to a high standard;</p> <p>For the Aylesbury Sub Market Level there should be the above plus a Nationally Accredited Museum recording settlement history, library link to centre for local studies, visitor guide and town map.</p>		
Synthetic Turf Pitches	<p>No part of the district should be outside of a 6 mile radius of an STP.</p>	<p>0.03 STP's per 1,000 population. Delivery should be as a minimum a full size floodlit STP to the dimensions appropriate for the sport(s) it is being used for and as set out in the Sport England Design Guidance Notes <i>Selecting the Right Artificial Surface</i> and any specific sports National Governing Body requirements appertaining at the time of delivery. Provision should be accompanied by the necessary support facilities (changing, plant etc.) as set out in the qualitative standards.</p>	<p>The minimum acceptable quality standard for STP's and their associated facilities will be to meet the most current (at time of provision) Sport England Design Guidance Notes <i>Selecting the Right Artificial Surface</i>, or such replacement or updated guidance, and any specific sports National Governing Body requirements.</p>

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
<p>Grass Playing Pitches</p>	<p>A variety of accessibility standards for grass pitches have been used in the Study, depending on the specific sport. For football and cricket the geographical hierarchy described earlier has been used to evaluate accessibility. For rugby union this is a 15 minute drivetime.</p>	<p>Aylesbury Urban Area – 0.49 adult size grass pitch per 1,000 population, 0.03 cricket wickets per 1,000 population;</p> <p>Aylesbury Rural Area (including Secondary settlements) - 0.73 adult size grass pitch equivalent per 1,000 population, 0.28 cricket wickets per 1,000 population In terms of provision, delivery should be as a minimum equate to a full adult size football pitch to the maximum recommended dimensions (including run offs) of the Football Association. Provision should be accompanied by the necessary support facilities (changing, showers plant etc.) as set out in the qualitative standards.</p>	<p>The minimum acceptable quality standard for grass pitches and their associated facilities will be to meet the most <i>current (at time of provision) Sport England Design Guidance Notes on Natural Turf Pitches</i> and any specific sports National Governing Body requirements. Pavilion standards shall be as set out in the Sports England Design Guidance Note <i>Pavilions and Clubhouses</i> and any specific sports National Governing Body requirements.</p>

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
Outdoor Tennis	The accessibility standard used is access to floodlit courts within a 10 minute drivetime.	<p>Aylesbury Sub Market – 0.4 floodlit outdoor tennis courts per 1,000 population;</p> <p>Aylesbury Rural Area (including Buckingham Sub Market and Larger Sustainable settlements) - 0.7 floodlit outdoor tennis courts per 1,000 population.</p> <p>In terms of provision, delivery should be to Lawn Tennis Association recommended dimensions for the number of courts concerned, and provision should be located in four court blocks</p>	<p>The minimum acceptable quality standard for outdoor tennis courts and their associated facilities will be to meet the most <i>current (at time of provision) Lawn Tennis Association Technical Guidance</i>. Facilities in four court blocks should be suitable for other sporting uses if required.</p>
Public Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On sites of less than 25 dwellings, developers will explore artistic additions to the development by seeking to employ local artists and crafts people in the construction of features within the site such as signage, gates and door furniture. • Medium schemes (25 dwellings or more or 100 sq m footprint commercial) will contribute towards Public Art proposals, medium sized schemes (25-500 dwellings) will include public art as an integral part of the proposal and • Large schemes (500 + dwellings or 1000 sq m footprint commercial) will also include a public artist as part of the design team. • Provision of Public Art will also be required in relation to public buildings, schools and sports centres. On other developments or mixed use developments, Public Art will be required on sites of 0.5ha or more. <p>The provision of Public Art should be an integral part of a development scheme, not an after thought. The Council wishes, therefore, to work in partnership with developers, architects, landscape architects and designers, including artists and arts officers, at an early stage of the development process to identify and work up possibilities for art provision. The artists, where appropriate, should work in consultation with the people who will be affected by the site and the installation and facilitate a sense of meaningful contribution.</p>		

Typology	Accessibility Standard	Quantitative Standard	Qualitative Standard
	<p>As a general rule the budget for public art commissions within a project should be between 1% and 2% of the total construction costs. This figure is used as a starting point and ensures that there is always a minimum expenditure on public art within a scheme and its value and scale is directly related to the size of the project. Contributions will also be expected towards the long term maintenance of any commissions, this is usually set at 5% of the commissioning budget or £500, whichever is the larger amount.</p>		
<p>Green Infrastructure</p>	<p>No person should live more than 300m from their area of natural green space of at least 2ha in size, and that there should be at least 2ha of accessible natural green space per 1000 population;</p> <p>There should be at least one accessible 20ha site within 2km of peoples' homes;</p> <p>There should be one accessible 100ha site within 5km of peoples' homes;</p> <p>There should be one accessible 500ha site within 10km of peoples' homes;</p> <p>There should be 1.4ha per 1000 population as incidental open space (incorporates amenity/landscaped planted areas, green corridors);</p> <p>There should be 2.4ha per 1000 population as major open space (parks, formal gardens and public open space which is broken down to 1.6ha of outdoor sport space (1.2 pitch sport) and 0.8ha for children and young people playing space).</p>		<p>For development purposes – both of existing and future green space facilities – the qualitative standards set out in the nine Strategic principles of the <i>Aylesbury Vale Green Infrastructure Strategy</i> should therefore apply with specific principles being utilised according to the size, nature and location of the development.</p>

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

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 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. |
|-----|--|

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

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES UPDATE

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To update Members of the Committee on discussions held between the Committee Research Group and Officers regarding future Development Management policies for VAP.

2 Recommendations

- | |
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| 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the update provided by this report. |
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3 Development Management policies update

- 3.1 As Members will recall at the Environment & Living Scrutiny Committee on 12 June, it was agreed that a Committee Research Group would act as a Member Sounding Board in the development of DM policies for the Vale of Aylesbury Plan. The group has looked at 4 policy topics -

- Impact of housing policy on the ageing population, including in rural areas.
- Where the policies might help to increase health outcomes such as healthy life expectancy and the broader determinants of health.
- Relating to sustainable construction and renewable energy.
- The historic environment.

- 3.2 The group has met on both the 1st and 15th August 2013. The above topics have been discussed at some length and example policies adopted by other Authorities have been studied as part of the information gathering exercise. Subsequently the has agreed to research further the following –

- That minimum space standards (both internal and external) are very desirable given the problems experienced on some recent developments within the District. The group considered this will help fulfil the commitment to both improving peoples health both physically and mentally.
- Strong support be given for adopting Lifetime Homes Standards in the VAP Delivery Policies document, which may help the ageing population to remain in their own homes should they develop mobility problems etc in later life.
- Need for design polices that cover issues such as car parking, materials, street lighting, bin storage, reducing street clutter, design of public buildings etc. The group considers that we should be aiming for the highest possible design standards within the District.
- We should seek to have a proactive policy for solar power generation provided that proposals do not have a detrimental impact on landscape setting and other constraints. We should consider producing design standard/guidance note for this i.e. panels should be height adjustable to enable grazing beneath.
- We need additional policies for dealing with the historic environment and not rely solely on the NPPF. We should also seek to protect non-listed heritage assets together with buildings/places that are local 'landmarks'.

- 3.3 As the Committee will see from the above much has been discussed at the research meetings. It was the view of the whole group that this has been a very useful exercise and that these joint meetings with Members and Officers should continue as the proposed DM policies develop.
- 3.4 Since the meeting of the 15 August, the Government has published a consultation document looking at housing standards nationwide. Officers will be responding to this consultation in the normal manner. This document is available on the DCLG website.
- 3.5 An initial review however suggests that this guidance may significantly constrain what we can require in future by way of planning policy.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To update Committee on detailed discussions of research group.

5 Resource implications

- 5.1 The DM policies are being produced within operational budgets.

6 Response to Key Aims and Objectives

- 6.1 The preparation of the Vale of Aylesbury Plan is a key action in the Corporate Plan.

Contact Officer
Background Documents

Roger Newall (01296) 585403

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –WORK PROGRAMME 2013

Date of meeting	Item	Scrutiny Indicator *	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
13/2/2013, 26/3/2013, 12/6/2013, 18/9/2013	'Scoping' forms appraisal		Committee	To review 'scoping' forms submitted on any of the other issues identified at the work programme event held on 25/10/2012 that are not already being scoped		TBA
12/6/2013	County Health agenda	5	Committee	To look at the work of the healthy communities partnership, what role AVDC will likely have, and what contribution this Committee can make to overall health aims?	TBA	Cabinet Member for Environment and Health
12/6/2013, 18/9/2013	Vale of Aylesbury Plan – Development Management policies	4	Cabinet Member	To identify the involvement scrutiny wish to have in the preparation of DM policies (Roger Newall)	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member and Officers	Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning
12/6/2013, 18/9/2013, 6/11/2013	Research group reports	1, 4	Committee	Subject to agreement on 13/2/2013, to receive report(s) of Research Groups for discussion & consideration of any recommendation(s)		
18/9/2013	Quarterly Performance Digest	2	Cabinet	To review performance against Corporate Plan objectives (within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee)	To identify issues that might benefit from future scrutiny / Member involvement	As indicated in QPD

* Scrutiny Indicator Key

1: Holding to account	2: Performance management	3: Policy review	4: Policy development	5: External scrutiny
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Date of meeting	Item	Scrutiny Indicator *	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
18/9/2013	Audit of leisure facilities	2	Committee	To review facilities (commercial and Council) for needs / growth and gaps in provision (Lesley Davies)	To identify issues that might benefit from future scrutiny / Member involvement	Cabinet Member for Leisure
18/9/2013	Farming and wildlife	3	Committee	Review – subject to agreement of ‘scoping’ form (Lesley Davies)	To identify issues that might benefit from future scrutiny / Member involvement	Cabinet Member for Leisure
6/11/2013 or 16/12/2013	Cycling safety	2, 3	Committee	Review of cycle lanes in/out of Aylesbury & across the rest of the District, (could also look to include the issues of signage, street furniture and street marking identified by the Committee)		Cabinet Member for Planning, Design and Conservation
6/11/2013	Housing and Homelessness Strategy	3	Cabinet	To comment on the new policy prior to it being submitted to Cabinet and Council	To make recommendations to the Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Community Matters.
6/11/2013	Community cohesion	2	Committee	To look at the Strategy (adapting our Diversity Strategy), finding ways to improve communication specifically with regard to crime and democratic involvement		Cabinet Member for Community Matters

* Scrutiny Indicator Key

1: Holding to account	2: Performance management	3: Policy review	4: Policy development	5: External scrutiny
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Date of meeting	Item	Scrutiny Indicator *	Requested by	Purpose of Review (Responsible Officer / Member)	Expected Outcome	Relevant Cabinet Member
16/12/2013	Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust	1, 2	Committee	Review of performance against the Housing Stock Transfer agreement promises	To make recommendations to VAHT and the Cabinet Member.	Cabinet Member for Community Matters
16/12/2013	Thames Valley Police	1, 2	Committee	Review latest re. crime and disorder & community safety		Cabinet Member for Community Matters

* Scrutiny Indicator Key

1: Holding to account	2: Performance management	3: Policy review	4: Policy development	5: External scrutiny
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Environment (sustainability)

- Farming and wildlife
- AVDC to be the business providing: loft insulation, solar PV, solar hot water heat pumps (possibly!) (large scale discounts – mass community involvement if AVDC is driving, trust of AVDC) (Councillor Vick scoping for 13/2/2013 meeting)
- Strategies for energy saving (how much energy are we using?)

Land Use / Transportation(AVDC policy re. physical development)

- GPS3 (how applied to structures e.g. wind turbines)
- Gypsy and traveller sites

Planning and Design Services

- Better conservation area street furniture and signage
- Examining the potential for a local list of buildings not 'listable' but of historic / local interest (looking into the potential for community involvement to identify such a list) (Councillor Cashman scoping for 13/2/2013 meeting)
- Looking at present provision for Town and Parish Council planning training? How effective is this? (training for Clerks)
- Review enforcement in the Vale (strengths and weaknesses)

Housing

- AVDC being the developer (full spectrum of housing)
- Bucks Home Choice (submitted to Committee, 20 November 2012)

Environmental Health

- County Health agenda

Crime and Disorder / Community Safety

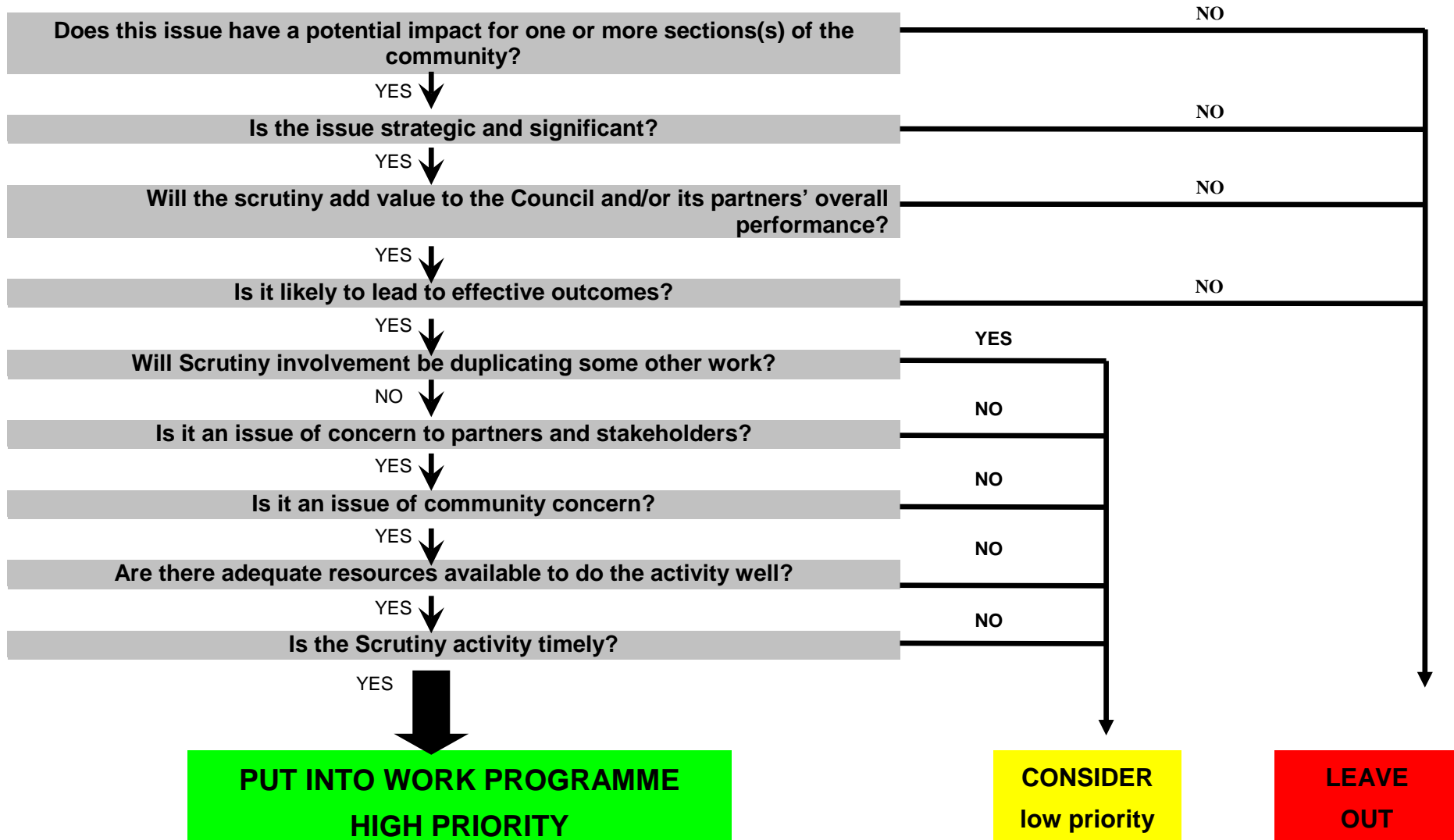
- Cycling safety (cycle lanes in/out of Aylesbury)
- Community Cohesion Strategy (adapting our Diversity Strategy, finding ways to improve communication specifically with regard to crime and democratic involvement)

Leisure

- Audit of facilities (commercial and Council) for needs / growth and gaps in provision

WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITISATION GUIDE

Appendix 2



Purpose of the review	
Review membership	
Background	1-2 short paragraphs of the background, leading up to the Scrutiny Committee wishing to review this issue
Key questions for the review to ask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ? • ? • ? • ?
Resources	Both in terms of Officer time, Member time, and of witnesses / public who might be asked to participate in the review
Out of scope	What the review IS NOT looking at, although this might be of interest.
Anticipated outcomes	What are Members hoping to achieve during the review (it might also be helpful to identify the people to whom any recommendations might be presented).
Outline timetable	Of meeting dates and Officers / witnesses that the review would like to speak to, or evidence that Members would like to consider