

SUBJECT	Proposed Landscape Scale Habitat Enhancements at Littleworth Common and Burnham Beeches.
RELEVANT MEMBER	Councillor Luisa Sullivan, Portfolio Holder for Environment
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Chris Marchant, Head of Environment
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WARD/S AFFECTED	Burnham

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Members about a proposed landscape scale project centred on Littleworth Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - owned by South Bucks District Council - and Burnham Beeches, owned by the City of London Corporation, to be progressed with support and possible funding from the Heathrow Airport Limited extension project.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Cabinet give support for the project at SBDC owned land at Littleworth Common and at Burnham Beeches.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The proposed project would enhance the habitats at Littleworth Common and surrounding areas.

2.2 SBDC has a duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 to enhance biodiversity. (The NERC Act states that "The public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.")

2.3 The project would also help towards the 20% target for Biodiversity Net Gain in Buckinghamshire (stated in the Bucks Natural Environment Partnership - NEP - Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 – 2020.)

2.4 This project would involve no funding from the Council other than officer time and would help to achieve the Councils environmental objectives.

2.5 The SBDC area of the proposed project is shown on the map in Appendix A.

3. Content of Report

3.1. As part of proposals to extend Heathrow airport, external funding (exact amounts are not known at this time) has been proposed to enhance habitats at the airport

and in surrounding areas, to offset the impact of the proposed third runway and associated buildings/ infrastructure.

- 3.2. It is estimated that 500 – 700 Hectares will be needed to achieve this biodiversity offsetting.
- 3.3. Ecology specialists at Burnham Beeches, Bucks County Council, Plantlife (a British conservation charity) and Natural England have proposed linking the landscapes at Littleworth Common and Burnham Beeches, to provide net gain in the biodiversity of the area. Littleworth Common, as an SSSI, and Burnham Beeches as a SAC (Special Area of Conservation) are ideal sites to support further gain in perpetuity through animal grazing.
- 3.4. Current Ecology practise includes the 'Offsetting' of new biodiversity in one area to compensate for the loss of biodiversity in another area, where it is not possible to enhance the area of development, in order to achieve a Net Biodiversity Gain.
- 3.5. The proposed habitat enhancements will help to compensate for losses due to the Heathrow expansion in other parts of the district such as Iver and Richings Park and possible impacts on landscape areas such as Black Park.
- 3.6. Littleworth Common and Burnham Beeches lie within the South Bucks Parks and Heathlands 'Biodiversity Opportunity Area' which has been identified as an area of the district best suited to habitat enhancements.
- 3.7. Habitat surveys will be carried out to locate existing and potential habitats such as woodland, wetland, meadow, grassland, and important/ endangered species.
- 3.8. Existing habitats will be enhanced and where possible suitable new habitats, such as grazed wood pasture will be encouraged, with methods such as virtual fences, recently used successfully at Burnham Beeches.
- 3.9. Other sites within the South Bucks district may be identified for additional Biodiversity enhancements.

4. Consultation

4.1 Natural England, adjacent landowners and other partners will be engaged further with the proposals.

4.2 A draft discussion document has been prepared which sets out initial thoughts on the vision, aims, outcomes and partnership structure that will be needed to deliver the project. It provides a wider description of the project and a brief assessment of each potential land parcel. It begins to describe the potential scale of this project and starts the thinking process about what different areas of land might look like in the long term. This will be expanded and discussed with potential landowner partners.

5. Options

Option 1: Engage with partners to progress the project. This is the preferred option, as it will enable the Council to demonstrate that it is promoting biodiversity and habitat enhancement.

Option 2: Do nothing and pass up this opportunity to enhance some of the valued landscape in the South Bucks district.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Financial. Initially, the cost of this project to the Council will be limited to officer time. Further financial implications may be assessed as the project progresses.

6.2 Legal. No implications.

7. Links to Council Policy Objectives

This project aims to promote the well-being of residents, and to meet the Key Council objectives of:

- Delivering cost- effective, customer- focused services
- Striving to conserve the environment and promote sustainability.

8. Next Steps

Officers will continue to discuss the proposals with the landscape management team at Burnham Beeches, consultants and environmental specialists at Heathrow Limited and other partners to progress the project. It is envisaged that the project will commence in 2020/ 21 with further documents such as Environmental Impact Assessments and documents setting out detailed proposals such as costings, habitat restoration/ creation methods and landscape infrastructure such as fencing, water supply etc.

Background Papers:	None.
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Appendix A.

Map showing Littleworth Common with part of Burnham Beeches to the east.

