

Report to the Cabinet



**Epping Forest
District Council**

**Report reference: C-121-2007/08.
Date of meeting: 10 March 2008.**

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development.

Subject: Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Responsible Officers:

Ian White	(01992-564066).
Paul Hewitt	(01992-788203).
Lisa Ingwall	(01992-564357).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations:

- (1) To adopt the Local Biodiversity Action Plan; and**
- (2) To receive an annual report on progress with the Plan and the achievement of its targets.**

Report:

1. Biological diversity or biodiversity is defined as the variability among living organisms from all habitats including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part. It therefore includes diversity within and between species, and of ecosystems.

2. In 1992 during the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, the UK was one of 159 countries that signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. This was the first treaty to provide a legal framework for biodiversity conservation. It called for the creation and enforcement of national strategies and action plans to conserve, protect and enhance biological diversity.

3. Biodiversity is a core component of sustainable development, underpinning economic development, community wellbeing, and local quality of life. Biodiversity contributes to the delivery of key services such as food production, provision of clean air and water and flood management, and adds considerably to people's sense of enjoyment and wellbeing.

4. To fulfil the Earth Summit commitment the UK Government published its first Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in 1994. This included a description of the UK's key biological resources, and strategic plans for the protection of these resources. It recognized that the national objectives could only be achieved if there was action at all levels and by all sectors of the community, and the principal means of achieving this is through the preparation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs).

5. LBAPs therefore have two broad functions:

(a) to ensure that national action plans are translated into effective action at local level; and

(b) to establish targets and actions for species and habitats characteristic of each local area.

6. There is now a duty to conserve biodiversity. Section 40 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 states "*Every 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*".

7. In June 2006 an officer steering group was formed to produce Epping Forest District's LBAP. Conservation organisations operating in the district have been invited to become part of the steering group and to help formulate the LBAP – they are listed in an Annex to this report. The aim for EFDC LBAP is to describe the key habitats and species of the district and to establish a five-year action plan with targets aimed at conserving and enhancing this biodiversity. The LBAP will build on work already being carried out by Countrycare and the other steering group organisations and aims to promote further community involvement. It is also intended to build stronger links with the Sustainable Community Strategy once this has been revised.

8. Members are requested to endorse and adopt the LBAP as a template for coordinated action over the next five years.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

9. The LBAP is a practical expression of this Council's commitment to promote sustainable development throughout the district, and to reinforce the nature conservation policies of the Local Plan. It will also contribute to the achievement of the national targets of the UK BAP and will achieve further benefits through more co-ordinated working with other conservation organisations and the local community. It is a positive response to the duty introduced by the NERC Act.

Other Options for Action:

10. Not to adopt the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. This would run counter to the Council's aims of promoting sustainable development and protecting the special character of the district. It would also conflict with the first objective of the LSP Green and Unique Action Group which is to "*accommodate appropriate levels of growth whilst protecting the rural landscape and further enhancing the extensive, attractive and valued network of large and accessible outdoor areas for the benefit of people and wildlife*".

Consultation Undertaken:

11. The conservation organisations listed in the Annex contributed to the development of the LBAP.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: From existing resources.

Personnel: From existing resources.

Land: Management of Council-owned sites.

Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference: GU1,FL3, EP3, IP4/L1, L7, L8.

Relevant Statutory Powers: The Epping Forest Act 1878, The Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966, The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Background Papers: LBAP, Consultation responses.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Environmental benefits from a more co-ordinated approach to managing and conserving biodiversity with direct links to local quality of life.

Key Decision Reference (if required): Key Decision – Biodiversity Plan.