

RUSHMOOR BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2016 – 2021

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet's approval to go out to public consultation on the updated Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Rushmoor. A copy of the text is attached as Annex 1 to this report, and the final version will be formatted for publication and presented with photographs.
- 1.2 When adopted, the new action plan will continue to provide the framework for initiatives to protect and enhance biodiversity across the borough. It will also provide the basis for joint working with the local community and the voluntary groups who will be key partners. The plan will also be a clear sign of the Council's commitment on biodiversity issues.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Rushmoor BAP 2016-21 has been produced after a key stakeholder meeting held on February 20th 2015 and identifies:
- Key habitats within the borough
 - Priority species associated with different habitats
 - Main threats to local biodiversity
 - Key actions needed to protect and enhance biodiversity

The stakeholder meeting was attended by Rushmoor staff and Members and representatives from partner organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, the Basingstoke Canal Authority, The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, local enthusiasts and members of the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group.

- 2.2 The updated BAP will build upon the work already undertaken during the previous plan, which set out strategic actions at a local level, and will provide a more detailed overview of the local environment and the local threats to priority habitats and species.
- 2.3 In 2006 the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act put a statutory obligation on local authorities to conserve biodiversity. Section 40 of this act sets out the duty to conserve biodiversity:

“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”.

- 2.4 In addition, the Government's "Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services" document outlines a mission for the next decade:

"to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people."

- 2.5 This draft BAP sets out how the Council plans to meet this duty and mission statement through direct action and working in partnership with others in the borough, both individuals and businesses, to make biodiversity a key consideration.

3 PROGRAMME FOR ADOPTION

- 3.1 The Draft BAP will be available on the council website for public consultation for six weeks and will be sent out to local environmental groups.

- 3.2 All comments made during the consultation will be recorded; a report of responses to comments will be produced and made public. Appropriate comments will be taken into account and will be included in the final BAP, which will be brought back to Cabinet for adoption. Comments will also help identify target areas for biodiversity projects over the action plan period (2016 - 2021).

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Cabinet is recommended to agree the Draft Rushmoor Biodiversity Action Plan for public consultation.

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Draft

Rushmoor Biodiversity Action Plan

2016 - 2021

Introduction

The natural environment in Rushmoor has experienced large changes over the past century, in common with most of south eastern England. However, there remains a considerable biodiversity resource in the borough in the form of heathland, woodland, watercourses and even aspects of the urban environment.

The adoption of the Rushmoor Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in 2009 helped translate national and regional targets into local action, whilst also identifying species and areas of local importance. This updated action plan will continue to deliver biodiversity enhancement across the borough by building on the work from the first BAP. It will be necessary for all members of the community, including the council, businesses, volunteer groups and residents, to work together to achieve the aims set out in this document.

As highlighted in the Rushmoor Corporate Plan 2015 the overall aim of the council is "...to improve the quality of life for local residents and businesses". Growing medical evidence shows that access to the natural environment improves health and wellbeing and improving the environment across the borough can only improve life for residents and businesses in Rushmoor. The Council also recognises that it should lead by example in protecting the environment and developing a sustainable environment for future generations.

Biodiversity Achievements 2009-14

Through the period covered by the first action plan there have been many biodiversity achievements and changes across the borough. In planning terms the Aldershot Urban Extension development with its associated green space provision has involved a considerable amount of survey work and the production of detailed management plans. The opportunity to establish positive management in a number of woodland blocks as part of the development will be very beneficial for biodiversity. Rushmoor has continued to play an important role in supporting the Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Partnership which ensures our sensitive and globally important heathlands are protected.

Across the borough the monitoring of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) has taken place on annual basis. While some sites have been lost through natural succession other sites, such as Rushmoor Arena and Queen's Parade in North Camp, have been newly designated. The overall biodiversity resource has remained constant.

The conservation work of partnership organisations such as the Basingstoke Canal Authority, the Cove Brook Greenway Group, Rowhill Copse Nature Reserve, Friends of Brickfields Country Park and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership have ensured

that habitats and sites of high biodiversity value have been managed positively and the biodiversity value enhanced. Rushmoor has a strong background in partnership conservation work associated with the aforementioned groups and other land owners and managers such as the MOD, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Natural England.

Additionally numerous small projects have been carried out by conservation groups across the borough. The Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group has been involved in pond restoration projects, the creation of wildlife gardens and wildflower meadows and putting up bird and bat boxes in various locations.

The Purpose of this BAP

This document highlights the continuing threats to biodiversity and aims to identify what can be done to protect the wildlife we have and enhance the area to increase and protect local biodiversity.

The publication of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act in 2006 makes biodiversity an important consideration for all local authorities. Section 40 of this act sets out the duty to conserve biodiversity: "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".

Further to this, in 2011 the government published a "Biodiversity 2020" strategy as a framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity across the nation in a coherent fashion. The broad aims of the strategy are to improve the condition of existing important habitats and create more protected areas to reduce fragmentation.

This updated plan will provide a framework to build upon the achievements across the borough during the first phase of the BAP by targeting the resources available into delivering achievable and tangible environmental enhancements. These will work locally towards the broader aims of the "Biodiversity 2020" UK-wide strategy.

The aims of this BAP are:

- 1) To continue protecting habitats and species within the borough and enhance existing areas for wildlife
- 2) To identify opportunities to create new areas for wildlife and to increase borough biodiversity
- 3) To raise awareness of biodiversity within the community to improve understanding and support for wildlife projects
- 4) To engage with local communities to encourage individuals to take an active part in projects, initiatives and consultations that have an effect on the borough's biodiversity
- 5) To raise awareness of biodiversity among council staff and members and work to make biodiversity a key consideration in council decision making.
- 6) To work in partnership with local businesses, landowners, environmental and community groups to improve local biodiversity
- 7) To monitor and review local biodiversity and this action plan

What is biodiversity?

The word biodiversity was first used at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, it stands for biological diversity and is the term used to describe all variety of life on earth in all its forms. This includes variety or differences in genes and individuals of the same species, between different plant and animal species and within or between entire ecosystems. The term goes far beyond simply the number of species in a given environment or habitat.

Not all habitats are equal in biodiversity terms. Broad-leaved woodland and unimproved flower-rich lowland meadows are rich in biodiversity when compared to habitats such as intensive arable farmland or densely constructed urban conurbations. Even within the urban environment gardens, parks and allotments can all be relatively diverse.

Why is the natural environment and biodiversity important?

The natural world, its biodiversity and its ecosystems are critically important to our well-being and economic prosperity, but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision making (UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011). The government white paper “The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature” published in 2011 highlights the “services” the natural environment provides.

These services are defined as the products of natural systems from which people derive benefits. They loosely fit into four categories: Provisioning services (food, water, fuel); regulating services (pollination, water purification, flood reduction, pollution control); cultural services (spiritual enrichment, health and wellbeing, recreation); support services (soil formation, nutrient cycling).

As well as providing these services the natural environment in Rushmoor supports a wide variety of species in a variety of different habitats. These will be described in more detail in future sections.

Why do we need to conserve biodiversity?

The State of Nature Report published in 2013 and put together by 25 wildlife organisations found that 60% of the studied species in the UK had declined in the past 50 years. The reasons for the declines are many and varied but habitat loss and climate change are two major contributory factors.

Inevitably, there have been declines in species locally within Rushmoor. For example, in the early 1980’s the Marsh Fritillary butterfly was abundant within the borough but it became extinct in the late eighties and has not been recorded here since. This reflects an overall decline in this species across the UK and even beyond in Europe.

By conserving biodiversity we will not only protect the diversity of species in our habitats but also maintain a healthy and interesting environment in Rushmoor for ourselves and future generations to enjoy.

What are the main threats to biodiversity?

There are a number of key factors that could have potentially detrimental effects on the

level of biodiversity in the borough. These are development, climate change, recreation, pollution, changes in land use and changes or lack of management. These factors are not limited to Rushmoor and represent the wider issues facing the environment in the UK as a whole.

Development

Development can pose a threat to biodiversity through direct loss of habitats and indirectly through habitat fragmentation and the additional impacts of a development throughout its lifetime on the surrounding environment e.g. changes and demands on natural water systems and pressures from increased traffic and other related infrastructure. The population in the combined Rushmoor, Hart and Surrey Heath area has increased by 18% over the last 30 years, which represents an increase of around 43,000 people. There is a need for increases in future housing to meet the growing demand which can put pressure on the environment and protected sites and species. The increased impact on natural resources from a development are not only from the material required for the construction phase, but also their demand for energy and water once the development is active. Impacts on surrounding habitats also need to be considered as changes in light, wind, drainage and usage of these habitats can affect the type and amount of different species able to survive there. It is important that in setting out actions to improve biodiversity within the borough, we are mindful to reduce our negative impact on the biodiversity of other areas.

Pollution

Air, water, light and noise pollution can all impact on biodiversity, changing local features and species found in different habitats. Different types of pollution can affect different species and habitats in different ways, e.g. light pollution can delay emergence time for bats, reducing the amount of time they have to forage insects, it can also affect natural mating and foraging behaviour in birds. Pollution can come from many different sources and activities and it is important to identify where risks of pollution are most likely and to reduce the negative impact on local wildlife.

Inappropriate land management

When there are changes to how a piece of land is used or the way it is managed this can have detrimental impacts on the local biodiversity. Traditionally much of the borough's land was open heathland, a habitat that was maintained by commoners grazing their livestock, mixed with local farms and their associated grazing fields. With the arrival of the army to the area in 1854 communal grazing was stopped but it is likely that military horses would have continued to be grazed through the early twentieth century. Much of the large areas of countryside within Rushmoor are still owned by the Ministry of Defence who manage these areas of land as part of their training estate. It is important that this plan encourages local businesses and land owners to make biodiversity a high priority when planning and undertaking grounds maintenance and habitat management work. Without the correct management for biodiversity habitats can become degraded or lost entirely e.g. many unimproved grassland sites have been lost due to the use of artificial fertilisers and heavy mowing regimes.

Climate change

One of the biggest concerns for biodiversity over the next century is likely to be climate change. Negative impacts would include extinction of species from the Rushmoor area and the UK, as conditions change and become unsuitable e.g. increased periods of drought will result in ponds drying out, leaving many amphibians with nowhere to spawn. If species are restricted from migrating as the local weather and climate changes, e.g. by developments, they may face extinction, stranded in a habitat that cannot provide them with all the resources they need to survive and reproduce. The local extinction of some species will have knock on effects on other species that rely on them for food, shelter, and breeding. Climate change may also lead to the further invasion of non-native species, which negatively interact with native species e.g. out competing native species for resources such as food, if natural predators do not migrate at the same time a non-native species can often colonise a new area quickly putting further pressure on the entire ecosystem. Biodiversity has an important role to play in the mitigation of the effects of climate change. In areas of towns and cities with a lot of green, open spaces and high tree cover, temperatures are measured at up to 2°C cooler than in parts of cities with less tree cover and natural environments, and they experience reduced flooding during storm events.

The Rushmoor biodiversity resource

Before the development of Farnborough and Aldershot took place over the last century, a mixture of heathland, woodlands, grassland and wetland environments were present within the borough. Today, a large proportion of this land has been developed for housing, retail and industrial purposes and this has resulted in a mosaic of different environments including buildings, gardens, parks and roads that sit between patches of natural habitats e.g. heath/acid grassland, lakes, ponds and woodlands.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan identified priority habitats for conservation work and attention. Those priority habitats for which there is comprehensive mapping information are detailed in the table below. They represent a total of 481 ha of habitat positively identified in Rushmoor.

Priority habitat type	Area in Rushmoor (hectares)
Lowland Grassland	98
Lowland Heathland	108
Woodland, Wood pasture, Parkland	275

In addition to these fully audited habitats there are a number of other habitat types which make a large contribution to the biodiversity resource in Rushmoor. Aquatic habitats such as the Basingstoke Canal, Blackwater River, Cove Brook and the numerous ponds and lakes are all important habitats that support numerous species. Combined together these also cover a considerable area.

While a significant portion of the borough could be considered to be urbanised it is not without biodiversity interest. Allotments, parks and gardens are all well known as habitats that can support a wide range of insects, birds, mammals and common reptiles. Railway and major road corridors are also often overlooked biodiversity resources.

The next sections provide more detail on the specially designated nature conservation sites in Rushmoor and the habitats they contain. These are linked to the specific actions in the plan in the next section of this report.

Designated sites

Many areas of natural habitats described above have local, national and, or, international designations to protect them from further fragmentation and decline; often providing a refuge for wildlife in close proximity to the densely urban areas of Aldershot and Farnborough. These sites have been designated for the habitats present there or for the rare species they support. These areas provide the opportunity to experience an environment that is in decline in other areas. Together all areas designated at different levels form part of a semi-natural landscape and help to maintain biodiversity in the borough.

Rushmoor currently has 942 hectares of land designated for its nature conservation value (see table). Different areas are given protection at different levels, dependent upon the importance of their features at European, national and local level.

Designated Site type	Total area in Rushmoor (ha)	
Local Nature reserve	2	
National Nature Reserve	0	
Ramsar	0	
Special area of conservation (SAC)	0	
Special protection area (SPA)	451	
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	471	
Site of importance for Nature conservation (SINC)	469	
	Total area =	*942 ha

* note that all designated SPA is included within SSSI land

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA)

The highest level of protection is awarded to areas of international importance, these areas are known as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Areas designated under European law represent the best examples of habitats that are severely restricted throughout Europe or areas that support internationally rare species. Part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA falls within Rushmoor's boundary.

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA was designated in 2005 under the EC Birds Directive and covers a total area of 8,284 hectares across land in Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire. The areas in Rushmoor are one part of this ecosystem and over the coming years it will be important for all those involved in their maintenance to work together to ensure the heaths are restored and maintained to favourable condition for the wildlife they support.

Areas of heathland have been designated because their habitats support breeding populations of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler. All three birds are listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive and as such these areas are covered by strict legislation. Due to the sensitivity of the Thames Basin Heaths, potential impacts through development should be avoided by providing Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at a rate of 8

hectares per 1000 new residents. Additionally there is a buffer zone of 400m around the SPA within which no development can occur.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The borough contains areas designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These sites are designated because of their importance at a national level. Some of these areas are also designated units for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

There are five SSSI's that lie either wholly or partly within Rushmoor borough (present condition in parenthesis), these are:

Yateley & Hawley Common (Unfavourable recovering)

Foxlease & Ancell's Meadows (Unfavourable recovering)

Eelmoor Marsh (Favourable)

Bourley & Long Valley (Unfavourable recovering)

Basingstoke Canal (units variously unfavourable declining, unfavourable recovering, favourable)

Natural England is responsible for assessing the condition of these sites. More detail on their current condition can be found at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>. The government has committed to having 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition by 2020 while maintaining at least 95% in favourable or recovering condition.

Local Nature Reserves

There is one Local Nature Reserve owned by Rushmoor Borough Council, Rowhill Copse. The Copse straddles the administrative boundary between Rushmoor and Waverley Boroughs, and although the majority of it falls outside Rushmoor's administrative boundary, it is still an important area for our residents and local wildlife, and is an important site for educating schools and local groups.

A Local Nature Reserve is a statutory designation, and these areas are protected from damaging activities. Rowhill Nature Reserve is managed by the Rowhill Conservation Volunteers and provides a good example of traditional woodland management. Funding to enable positive management at Rowhill will come through developer contributions as the site has been designated as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation

Locally important examples of habitats and species are protected through the designation of Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The Council works in partnership with the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) to identify and designate Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in the borough and then to monitor and help maintain these sites. HBIC assesses each site individually against a series of criteria drawn up by Hampshire County Council, Natural England and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. These sites are important because they contain habitats and features that cannot be recreated or species that are rare within Hampshire.

There are 35 SINCs in Rushmoor covering 467 ha and they vary greatly in size and reason for designation, from small roadside verge sites that support nationally scarce species, to larger areas of heathland and grassland habitats. The SINC monitoring and designation program is undertaken annually. It is a dynamic system and new SINCs can be designated

or existing ones removed from year to year. SINC boundaries are also amended as new survey information becomes available.

Green Networks

This framework of protected sites contribute towards a network of green spaces across the borough and region, representing a link between urban areas and the surrounding countryside in neighbouring boroughs and districts.

Networks of green spaces are important for many species to aid dispersal and migration. These networks not only include the areas identified as being of importance for particular species and habitats, but also other more common green areas such as public parks, cemeteries, road verges and domestic gardens. Road and rail corridors such as the M3 and London to Weymouth railway line are also important green links due to their extensively wooded or grassed embankments. When combined, all these green spaces can help form green corridors and stepping-stones that provide the opportunity for species to migrate.

The Habitats

Introduction

Rushmoor Borough supports a wide mix of habitats and species in its heathland, woodland, grassland and wetland sites and throughout the more urban areas. It is important that priority habitats are protected and that action is taken to enhance and recreate habitats to support local wildlife species. In each section National Biodiversity Action Plan species found in specific habitats in Rushmoor have been identified.

Woodland

There are some areas of natural woodland within the borough. Good examples of this habitat can be seen at Rowhill Copse and Southwood Woodland, but there are also many other small pockets of woodland habitat adjacent to urban parks. Rowhill and Heron Wood would have been much larger woodlands in Victorian times, now only small patches remain. The areas of woodland present today are important and add to the diversity of habitats in Rushmoor. Although most of Rowhill lies within Surrey it is still enjoyed by the residents of Rushmoor and represents a useful resource for educating people about woodland habitats and management. Southwood Woodland supports a high number of invertebrates, in particular those that depend on dead wood environments, which is unique in the borough and important at a county level.

The secondary woodland supports species strongly associated with ancient woodlands (e.g. native bluebells) and is an important habitat for many species of bat for roosting and feeding. To increase the biodiversity of woodlands their management is very important to encourage natural regeneration. Management for other habitats may have a negative effect on woodland in the borough, e.g. removal of trees for heathland regeneration. Coniferous plantations are among the poorest for wildlife in terms of species diversity, often with greatly reduced ground flora. However, they do support some speciality species such as firecrests.

While woodland is often found in discrete blocks there is also a significant amount of tree cover along linear features such as the M3 motorway, railway corridors and the Basingstoke Canal. Much of this woodland has been unmanaged for a number of years but projects such as the Aldershot Urban Extension have created opportunities to establish positive management in some of this woodland.

Priority species associated with woodlands:

Lesser spotted woodpecker
Spotted flycatcher
Song thrush
White admiral
Festoon moth
Wood ant
Green flowered helleborine

Grassland

There are different types of grassland habitat present in Rushmoor, representing underlying ground conditions. Dry acid grasslands are included in the Heathlands section of this document. Management of grasslands has an impact on which species will be present and how diverse the overall habitat will be. Unimproved grasslands are the most diverse grassland habitat, this is because they have not been treated with fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides. They are now an extremely scarce habitat across the entire United Kingdom.

The practice of agriculturally improving grasslands through fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides allows only some of the plant and insect species to survive because they introduce high levels of nitrogen into the habitat. In improved grasslands the high nitrogen levels provide conditions where a few species will out compete the others and dominate the area. One of the most attractive qualities of unimproved neutral grasslands, and the reason for their high biodiversity value, is their diversity of wildflowers, which in turn attracts a large number of insects such as butterflies and bees.

Most priority grassland habitats in the borough have been included within the boundaries of designated areas and with correct management, their biodiversity can be maintained and enhanced. There are almost certainly other areas of grassland across the borough which retain a raised level of floral diversity. These can even include areas which are presently heavily mowed such as road verges or amenity spaces. In some cases there could be substantial enhancement opportunities by making relatively small changes to current management regimes.

Priority species associated with unimproved grasslands:

Skylark
Grizzled skipper butterfly
Chamomile
Quaking grass
Potter flower bee
Common lizard

Heathland

Heathland habitat is characterised by a mixture of dwarf shrubs such as heathers, gorse, acid grassland, bare sand and gravel and may include everything from parched ground to bog pools. As a habitat, it supports many species that depend upon the special conditions it provides, including protected and BAP priority species. Heathland soil is generally acidic and poor in nutrients restricting the plants that can colonise and persist in these areas. Heathlands are one of the UK's most important but threatened habitats; rare elsewhere in Europe the heathlands remaining in the South of England represent an important stronghold for this habitat. Good examples of heathland habitat are found at Hawley Commons and Bourley & Long Valley.

In the past, much of the borough area would have been heathland and this habitat was maintained by the grazing of cattle, ponies, sheep etc. on the land. The cessation of grazing, introduction of conifer plantations to the area and loss through development have caused a large decrease in the borough's heathland. In recent years cattle have been reintroduced to areas of heathland in the borough with positive effects on the biodiversity of those areas and the regeneration of heathland.

The majority of heathland in Rushmoor is MoD training land, with large areas open to the public and the MoD have been working closely with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Hampshire County Council to restore heathland areas to favourable condition where this does not impede upon military activity. Eelmoor Marsh is owned by QinetiQ and managed by Marwell wildlife. This site has no public access but is the subject of a long history of positive management and biological recording which is reflected in its "favourable" condition assessment.

Priority Species associated with heathlands:

Silver studded blue butterfly

Grayling

Adder

Nightjar

Woodlark

A Ruby-tailed wasp

Pale heath violet

Marsh clubmoss

Nail fungus

Wetland Habitats

There is great diversity of wetland habitats within Rushmoor, and these support high levels of biodiversity and a variety of important species. From rivers and streams to lakes and ponds, these habitats do not exist in isolation and are often found together with other habitats such as wet grassland and wet woodland areas.

The range of habitat structure within wetland environments is one of the reasons they can support large numbers of species, often making these areas biodiversity hotspots. The river, brooks and canal also serve as green wildlife corridors through the borough and are important in helping species migration.

The high number of invertebrate species found along the river and canal are important for attracting other species, such as bats, as they are an important source of food. There are many pressures on wetland habitats from changes in hydrology of the area, from development and water extraction, and it is important to maintain wildlife corridors in light of the expected effects of climate change and the increased likelihood of species migration.

Wetland habitats within Rushmoor borough are often within close proximity to highly urban areas which can cause conflict and make them prone to pollution events. It will be necessary for all members and groups in the community to stop pollution of the waterways and help enhance these areas for wildlife and people.

Lakes & Ponds

Ponds can be all shapes and sizes and be manmade or natural. A variety of ponds can be found in Rushmoor from the gravel lakes along the Blackwater River, small garden ponds and larger ones e.g. Brickfields Park pond.

In 2006 a category was added to the UK BAP priority habitats list to recognise the importance of ponds in maintaining biodiversity. Priority ponds are considered those that represent over two hectares of eutrophic standing water, or if under this size they support internationally, nationally scarce species or habitats listed under Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive.

With increasing temperatures there is concern that many smaller ponds may dry out, leading to a loss of many species of invertebrates and amphibians that rely on them for food and as spawning grounds. Ponds of all sizes are important and even garden and school ponds will be colonised by locally prominent species, as well as supporting dragonflies and damselflies. There are a number of old gravel lakes on the eastern border of Rushmoor that are excellent sites for bird watching, especially throughout winter months when they host wintering and migrating wildfowl.

Basingstoke Canal

The canal is an SSSI and has an unusual change in pH along its length, which has led to a variety of different habitats. It was designated because it supports one of the widest ranges of wetland and aquatic plants in Britain.

On the Basingstoke Canal, disused side waters provide additional habitats for increased biodiversity, examples of these are Eelmoor, Claycart and Rushmoor Flashes that are managed by the HIOW Wildlife Trust. The vegetation and species found in these areas are those adapted to occasional flooding.

Blackwater River

Starting in Rowhill Copse in the southeast of the borough the Blackwater River runs from south to north and is an important green corridor for species migration. The river and surrounding gravel lakes provide food and shelter for many bird species, throughout winter months visiting wading birds can be seen overwintering on the lakes. A number of nationally and regionally scarce plant species are supported along the river and continued management for conservation will help maintain populations of these species.

Cove Brook

This is an interesting and important habitat that runs through a very urban area. The Cove Brook provides residents with an excellent opportunity to interact with wildlife on their doorstep and it is important to manage this area for wildlife as well as people.

Southwood Meadow, a traditional area of water meadow, is an important area for invertebrates and amphibians, the meadow is located by Hazel Avenue in Cove. The brook and the surrounding open spaces is an area identified for priority conservation action to ensure the diversity of the grassland is maintained and increased.

Priority species associated with wetland habitats:

Reed bunting

Otter

Grass snake

Common toad

Downy emerald dragonfly

6 stamened Waterwort

Hair-like pondweed

Pillwort

Urban Environments

The urban environment represents at best a mosaic of habitats that provide an important refuge for many species. Relics and small patches of the habitats discussed in the previous chapters can be found within Farnborough and Aldershot, linking these patches with the wider countryside will help local wildlife populations. The urban environment is included in this plan because the range of environments within the urban landscape helps support a wide variety of species, making an important contribution to the overall biodiversity of the region, and provides the easiest opportunity for residents to access nature in their day to day lives.

The urban environment is not a priority UK BAP habitat but some UK BAP species can be found in our towns. Stag beetles are now commonly found in urban areas despite being dependent upon dead wood for larval development. Their adaptation appears to be helping the population of stag beetles in the South East flourish. Approximately 27% of urban land use is currently identified as used for gardens; in the highly developed areas of Rushmoor, gardens may provide an important resource for biodiversity. Urban gardens help aid dispersal of biodiversity by acting as green corridors and as stepping-stones for species moving between larger green spaces. Street trees not only protect our neighbourhoods from extremes of weather they are also important for urban wildlife, home to many insect and bird species.

The verges alongside roads and railway embankments create wildlife corridors through urban areas and can support rare plant species. Larger green spaces within the urban environment are often represented by parks, playing fields, cemeteries and allotments and provide the most accessible areas for local residents to access and appreciate wildlife and nature.

Priority species associated with the urban environment:

Stag beetles
Bats (serotine, brown long eared & pipistrelle)
House sparrows
Common starling
Hedgehog
Slow-worm

Action Plan 2015-20

The government's Biodiversity 2020 strategy for the UK highlights that “..conserving biodiversity in England has long depended on partnership, involving statutory, voluntary, academic and business sectors”. This situation is reflected in Rushmoor where partnership work between council departments, volunteers, statutory bodies and the local business sector have all come together to deliver conservation work in the borough. In the current financial climate partnership working is only likely to become more important.

This updated five-year plan outlines a series of actions to provide a framework for the delivery of conservation and enhancement across Rushmoor until 2021. The actions are intended to make a genuine positive contribution to the borough's biodiversity while being realistic and achievable.

The actions fall into three broad categories: protecting the existing resource, raising awareness of biodiversity in the community and within the council and enhancing biodiversity through partnership projects. The specific actions are also linked in the tables to the relevant protected sites and species where relevant. The document also has a section allowing for review of the plan as it progresses and evolves.

Aim 1: Protecting the existing biodiversity resource

Action	Timescale	Potential partners	Relevant habitats/sites/species
Development Management			
Provide pre-application advice to developers and DC officers to ensure that biodiversity is a consideration early in the process	2016-2021	RBC, NE, EA, HCC	Potentially all habitats/species
Ensure planning applications are accompanied by appropriately detailed ecological survey work	2016-2021	Biodiversity officer	Potentially all habitats/species
Provide biodiversity comments on relevant planning applications	2016-2021	Biodiversity officer	Potentially all habitats/species
Planning Policy			
Continued support for the Thames Basin Heaths Strategic Partnership Board	2016-2021	Biodiversity Officer, Planning Policy	SPA/Heathland species
Preparation and implementation of relevant planning policies (including adoption of a new Local Plan)	2016-2021	Planning policy	-

Action	Timescale	Potential partners	Relevant habitats/sites/species
Investigate the possibility and value of producing a supplementary planning document (SPD) for biodiversity	2016	Biodiversity officer, planning policy	-
Ensure new SANG sites have relevant management plans to include enhancements for biodiversity	2016-2021	Biodiversity officer, various partners	Grassland/woodland and associated species
Monitoring the existing resource			
Maintain Service Level Agreement with Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) to provide current biodiversity information for the borough	2016-2021	RBC, HBIC	SINC sites and protected species where specific surveys required
Facilitate annual monitoring scheme for existing SINC sites and surveying new areas	2016-2021	Biodiversity officer, HBIC	SINC sites
Attend HBIC partnership meetings (two per year) with rotational representation on steering group	2016-2021	Biodiversity officer	-

Aim 2: Enhancing the Rushmoor Biodiversity Resource

Action	Timescale	Potential partners	Relevant habitats/sites/species
Land management opportunities			
Develop wildflower planting scheme on RBC sites	One new scheme per year 2016-2021	RBC, Veolia, Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group	Grassland and associated invertebrates
Promote biodiversity friendly management on verges and open space	Input into new management contracts as appropriate	RBC, Veolia	Grassland and associated invertebrates
Catalogue small areas of greenspace in Rushmoor, establish ownership and produce GIS mapping layer	2016	Biodiversity Officer, Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group	Urban environment and associated species
Offer biodiversity advice to private landowners (e.g. business parks, housing associations) in the borough: develop partnership work	Ongoing 2016 - 2021	Biodiversity officer, Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group	Urban environment and associated species
Support Parks and Open Spaces Manager in implementing biodiversity enhancement projects in Manor Park and Brickfields Country Park	2016 - 2017	Biodiversity Officer, Parks and Open Spaces Manager	Grassland and wetland habitats and associated species
SANG acquisition and management	Ongoing 2016 - 2021	Biodiversity Officer,	-

Action	Timescale	Potential partners	Relevant habitats/sites/species
		Planning Policy	
Partnership work			
Support and facilitate species conservation and reintroduction programmes with partnership organisations across the borough	Ongoing as projects develop	Various partners incl. HIWWT, Marwell Conservation Trust	TBC
Continue to chair Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group and undertake small projects	Four meetings annually	Biodiversity Officer, Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group	Potentially any habitats of value
SANG acquisition and management	Ongoing 2016 - 2021	RBC, NE	-

Aim 3: Awareness, communication and education

Action	Timescale	Potential partners
Rushmoor Web Pages		
Keep web pages up to date with relevant biodiversity information	Annually 2016-2021	Biodiversity officer
Provide a link to the "living record" website	2016	Biodiversity Officer
Create link to electronic version of updated BAP	2016	Biodiversity Officer
Community Work		
Give talks to community groups or other interested parties on biodiversity topics	At least one annually 2016-2021	Biodiversity officer and various partners
Attend events to promote biodiversity projects and encourage participation	At least one annually	Biodiversity officer, Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group
Continue to support the wildlife gardening category for Rushmoor in bloom	Annually	Biodiversity Officer
Media		
Produce articles for Arena highlighting biodiversity projects and opportunities to be involved	At least one annually	Biodiversity Officer

Aim 4: Monitoring and Review

Action	Timescale	Potential partners
Hold annual Biodiversity Action Plan partnership day to review all project work occurring in the borough	One Annually 2016 -2021, April	Various
Produce summary report from partnership day as an annual review	One annually 2016-2021, May	Biodiversity officer
Full five year review	2021	Biodiversity Officer