

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 7 NOVEMBER 2022**

**LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE - 23 NOVEMBER 2022**

**PART I - DELEGATED**

**7. DRAFT THREE RIVERS NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY**

**(DCES)**

**1 Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the content and implications of the draft Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy, and recommend that the draft Strategy is released for a period of public consultation.

1.2 Appendix A details the draft Nature Recovery Strategy.

**2 Background and Context**

2.1 The draft Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy is a new document for the Council, which will address the authority's approach to nature conservation and habitat management and enhancement within the District.

2.2 The strategy broadly sets out the natural environments present within the District, and their current value to wildlife and the local community as well as the challenges they currently face.

2.3 It also identifies a number of actions for the Council to achieve over the next five years to ensure it continues to fulfil its duties and responsibilities to biodiversity and the local community.

2.4 The strategy will be reviewed and updated in five years' time and any new actions identified.

**3 Draft Strategy**

3.1 The draft strategy covers three main areas as follows:

- Biodiversity within Three Rivers District
- Relevant legislation protecting nature and wildlife in the UK
- Natural Environments in Three Rivers:
  - Rivers and Wetlands
  - Trees and Woodlands
  - The Countryside
  - The Urban Environment

**3.2 *Three Rivers Biodiversity***

3.2.1 The draft Strategy sets out TRDC's current biodiversity.

- 3.2.2 A background to the District is provided, including underlying geology, National Character Area profiles and Local Character Assessments.
- 3.2.3 Designated land is also outlined, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), Local Nature Reserves (LNR's) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS's).
- 3.3 *Legislation*
  - 3.3.1 The draft Strategy describes legislation related to the protection of the natural world; however, it is far from an exhaustive list of all relevant legislation.
  - 3.3.2 An overview of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, the Environment Act, statutory protection of land (SSSI's & LNR's) and legislation related to the protection of Trees is provided.
- 3.4 *Natural Environments in Three Rivers: Rivers & Wetlands*
  - 3.4.1 This section of the draft strategy focuses on the water courses passing through the District: including the River Colne, River Chess, River Gade and the Grand Union Canal.
  - 3.4.2 A summary of freshwater wetland environments in the District (including lakes, reedbeds, floodplains and ditches) are described along with a case study on The Withy Beds: a series of wetland environments adjacent to the River Colne.
- 3.5 *Natural Environments in Three Rivers: Trees & Woodlands*
  - 3.5.1 As a major tree and woodland owner, this section of the draft strategy covers the District's tree related habitats including: Ancient Woodland, Hedgerows and Wet Woodland.
  - 3.5.2 Further information on the Council's approach to managing Council owned tree stock is detailed within the Three Rivers Tree Strategy 2022-2027.
- 3.6 *Natural Environments in Three Rivers: The Countryside*
  - 3.6.1 The draft strategy also recognises the countryside and related habitats including agricultural land in the District using the Agricultural Land Classification in an attempt to quantify it.
  - 3.6.2 A case study on Chorleywood House Estate presents the value of farmland habitats and connectivity between them.
- 3.7 *Natural Environments in Three Rivers: The Urban Environment*
  - 3.7.1 This section of the draft strategy highlights the value of the urban environment, its impact in relation to Climate Change, wildlife adapting to thrive and the ecosystem services they provide.
  - 3.7.2 A summary of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA) provides a helpful case study to this theme.

## **4 Consultation**

4.1 Following approval from the Policy & Resources Committee and Leisure, Environment & Community Committee, a period of public consultation will be carried out between 12 December 2022 and 20 January 2023 (6 weeks).

4.2 *Post consultation* further edits would be made to the strategy, where appropriate, before the final version is presented to the Policy & Resources Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and the Leisure, Environment & Community Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

## **5 Outcomes and Recommendations**

5.1 That the Policy & Resources Committee and the Leisure, Environment & Community Committee approve the draft Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy for a period of public consultation for six weeks between 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

5.2 The draft Strategy can be viewed in Appendix A.

## **6 Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

6.1 To enable a wide range of stakeholders to consider the content and implications of the draft Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy it is advised that a draft version be issued for public consultation.

6.2 The results of the consultation will be used to inform any amendments or additions to be made prior to formal adoption by the Council of the final Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy.

## **7 Policy & Budget Reference and Implications**

7.1 The purpose of this strategy is to clearly set out the Council's approach to a wide range of nature conservation and habitat management, and identify areas for change and improvement according to best practice.

7.2 The proposed policy will have the impacts stated below on the following performance indicators:

- CP01 – Satisfaction with parks and open spaces  
Impact: To provide more information on the management of green space with the aim of benefitting biodiversity and the local community.
- CO02 – Public perception of how well informed they feel about public services  
Impact: An improved ability for the public to gain an understanding of the Council's approach to habitat management and conservation in the district.
- EP16 – Satisfaction with quality/provision of parks and open spaces  
Impact: To provide more information to the public on management of the Council's open spaces, parks and nature reserves.
- LL34 – To maintain accreditation for Green Flag  
Impact: To ensure all the Council's open spaces are safe and managed in accordance with best practice meeting the standards of Green Flag.
- LL35 – To ensure that all of our key parks and open spaces are in positive management.  
Impact: Support the production of new management plans for TRDC open space
- LL39 – Number of new trees planted by TRDC  
Impact: Contribute to the planting of trees within TRDC open spaces

- LL40 – Production of a new Biodiversity Strategy  
Impact: Completion following committee approval, public consultation and returning to committee in March 2023.

## **8 Financial Implications**

8.1 The cost of implementing the actions within the strategy has not yet been fully assessed. The final costs will be dependent on the outcome of development work and a review of a number of areas of the Trees and Landscape work.

8.2 It is anticipated that the majority of the development work and the review would be carried out by existing Trees & Landscape staff. However parts of the strategy will be dependant upon the success of external funding bids and if funding is not forthcoming it may be necessary to reassess priorities.

## **9 Legal Implications**

9.1 None specific.

## **10 Equal Opportunities Implications**

10.1 Relevance test:

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact?	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required?	No

## **11 Staffing Implications**

11.1 The development of the Nature Recovery Strategy will be managed by the Community Biodiversity Officer and the Principal Trees and Landscapes Officer.

11.2 At present, no additional staffing resource is required, however as outlined in section 7, the findings of the development work and reviews may indicate that additional staff resource is required to implement changes.

## **12 Environmental Implications**

12.1 The adoption and implementation of the strategy will help ensure the Council's parks, open spaces and nature reserves are managed to the highest environmental standards.

12.2 The strategy will ensure that the natural world is protected within the District, and is maintained and enhanced while delivering co-benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation in-line with the Council's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy.

## **13 Public Health Implications**

13.1 A body of evidence is growing which explains the benefit people can experience from contact with the natural world; for example, increased prominence of social prescribing by clinicians for walking or gardening to alleviate symptoms.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/state-of-the-environment-health-people-and-the-environment>

13.2 During a recent (2021) survey of people using Leavesden Country Park, over 80% said that being able to use the park was either very important or important to their health and wellbeing and 98% of people said using the park enhanced their quality of life.

13.3 Trees and greenery may boost lifespan, this has been studied for 8 years by Harvard researchers and published in April Environmental Health Perspectives.

<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>

#### **14 Community Safety Implications**

14.1 None Specific

#### **15 Customer Services Centre Implications**

15.1 The strategy will assist CSC, providing call centre staff with clear guidance on the Council's approach to approach to nature conservation and habitat management.

#### **16 Communications and Website Implications**

16.1 Information contained with the strategy will also be placed on the Council's website to enable residents to self-serve, rather than rely on CSC staff to answer queries.

#### **17 Risk and Health & Safety Implications**

17.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk> In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

17.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Environmental Protection and Leisure and Landscapes Service Plans. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

17.3 The draft strategy sets out clear processes for dealing with Council owned and managed green space, so that the risk of these sites is managed effectively.

<b>Nature of Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response</b> <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	<b>Risk Rating</b> <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
The Council fails in its legislative duties as outlined in 3.3	Legal, Reputational	Proactively manage Council owned green spaces in line with national legislation and	Treat	4

	and financial implications	by adopting a new Nature Recovery Strategy		
Negative impact on the natural environment within Three Rivers	Reputational implications Significant impact on the biodiversity of Three Rivers	Proactively manage Council owned green spaces and by adopting a new Nature Recovery Strategy	Treat	4
Negative impact on the Council's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy	Reputational implications Significant impact on the biodiversity of Three Rivers	Proactively manage Council owned green spaces and by adopting a new Nature Recovery Strategy	Treat	4

17.4 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

<b>Very Likely</b> ----- <b>Likelihood</b> ----- <b>Remote</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
	<b>Impact</b>			
	<b>Low</b> ----- <b>Unacceptable</b>			

**Impact Score**

4 (Catastrophic)

3 (Critical)

2 (Significant)

**Likelihood Score**

4 (Very Likely (≥80%))

3 (Likely (21-79%))

2 (Unlikely (6-20%))

1 (Marginal)

1 (Remote (≤5%))

17.5 In the officers' opinion none of the risks in paragraphs 12.3 and 12.4 above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational

**18 Recommendation**

That the Policy and Resources Committee and the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee:

- 18.1 Approve the draft strategy as outlined in Appendix A
- 18.2 For the draft strategy to undertake a 6-week period of public consultation
- 18.3 For the final strategy to be presented at the 13 March 2023 Policy and Resources Committee and the 15 March 2023 Leisure, Environment and Community Committee.

Report prepared by:

Jess Hodges, Community Biodiversity Officer

**Data checked by:**

Alex Laurie, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer

Data rating:

<b>1</b>	<b>Poor</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Sufficient</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>High</b>	

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Draft Nature Recovery Strategy