

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 13 MARCH 2023**

**LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE – 15 MARCH 2023**

**PART I - DELEGATED**

**9. THREE RIVERS NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY**

**(DCES)**

**1 Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the content and implications of the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy, and recommend that the final version of the Strategy is adopted by Three Rivers District Council.

1.2 Appendix A details the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy.

**2 Background and Context**

2.1 The 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, their current value to wildlife and the local community, as well as the challenges they currently face.

2.3 It is important to make clear that the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy is not intended to be one of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies; or to address Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), as outlined in the Environment Act 2021 (Part 6, section 98-106).

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

2.5 A draft version of the strategy was consulted on during December 2022 and January 2023. A brief summary of the main areas of feedback received is provided (Appendix C), including a response from officers.

2.6 Edits have made to the strategy and the final version will be presented to the Policy & Resources committee on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023, and the Leisure, Environment and Community committee on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

**3 Final Strategy**

3.1 The final strategy covers the main areas as follows:

- Biodiversity within Three Rivers District
- Relevant legislation protecting nature and wildlife in the UK
- Biodiversity and Climate Change
- Natural Environments in Three Rivers:
  - Rivers and Wetlands

- Trees and Woodlands
- The Countryside
- The Urban Environment

#### **4 Public Consultation**

- 4.1 Following approval from the Policy & Resources Committee and Leisure, Environment & Community Committee in November 2022, a period of public consultation took place between 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 22<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (6 weeks)
- 4.2 A total of 43 responses were received, outlining a variety of views on the strategy and biodiversity throughout the District.
- 4.3 Appendix C of the report provides a summary of the main issues raised (ranked 1 to 9, from most frequently raised, to least frequently raised) with an officer response to each issue, and how it is addressed in the strategy.
- 4.4 As a result of the consultation further information has been added on climate adaption and rewilding; amendments to the action plan; and a number other minor edits to text and formatting. Details of this are included in the consultation report in Appendix C.

#### **5 Outcomes and Recommendations**

- 5.1 That the Policy & Resources Committee and the Leisure, Environment & Community Committee approve the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy.

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

- 6.1 Option 1 – For P&R to Approve the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy. A final version will then be presented to the LEC Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023. If the LEC Committee also approves the Strategy, it will then be formally adopted by Three Rivers District Council.
- 6.2 Option 2 - Not approve the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy. Officers will make further changes to the strategy, before presenting the final version to a future P&R and LEC committee. This may result in a delay to the implementations of some of the actions within the 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 issues, 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 opens 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 (Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy)  
Impact: Completion following committee approval.

## 8 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Action Plan within the strategy contains high level action points, with a priority on investigating opportunities to realise the biodiversity benefits identified.
- 8.2 It is anticipated that Officers will work closely with partners to deliver the action plan and source external funding to achieve this.
- 8.3 The cost of some of the actions will be assessed during the production of future Management Plans for major open spaces – this will be supported by the recently agreed £142,000 UK Shared Prosperity Fund for 2024/25.
- 8.4 It is anticipated that the majority of 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.
- 8.5 Where additional investment is required a business case will be developed to make the case for funding. All requests for additional funding are evaluated against Council priorities set out in the Corporate Framework and are considered in the context of the Council's overall financial position to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately.

## 9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Policy & Resources Committee and the Leisure, Environment & Community Committee are asked to approve the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy. Consultations took place between 12 December 2022 and 22 January 2023 and the main issues raised by consultees are set out in Appendix C of the Report. There are no legal implication arising from the report.

## 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 It is anticipated that the majority of 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 and resource implications.

## 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.

Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment:

- 12.3 A score of 3.8 was generated when completing the Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment; where a positive and strong score is anything over 3. The implementation of this score via the action plan will be dependent on the available funding as discussed at 8.4.

<b>Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary</b>	
Homes, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and energy	N/A
Travel	N/A
Goods and Consumption	N/A
Ecology	4.00
Adaptation	3.50
Engagement and Influence	4
<b>Total Overall Average Score</b>	<b>3.8</b>

## 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.

- 16.2 A new webpage is also being designed to sit within the Trees & Landscape section of the new Three Rivers District Council website which will be titled "Nature Recovery." The webpage will include information on the biodiversity opportunities audit, biodiversity related news, updates and more.

#### **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 Community Services Plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.
- 17.3 The 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	Legal, Reputational and financial implications	Proactively manage Council owned green spaces in line with national legislation assisted by adopting a new Nature Recovery Strategy	Treat	4
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 Emergency 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
Not adopting the NR strategy would lead to the Council not prioritising actions to assist the recovering of nature in the district	Potential reputational damage  Potentially missed opportunities to make significant improvements to biodiversity	Adoption of the strategy	Treat	2
Adopting the strategy could lead to an increased financial burden on the Council	Potential reputational damage  Biodiversity projects are prioritised over other greenspace improvement project	Careful costing of actions to keep them within agreed budgets	Treat	3

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

**Impact Score**

- 4 (Catastrophic)
- 3 (Critical)
- 2 (Significant)
- 1 (Marginal)

**Likelihood Score**

- 4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
- 3 (Likely (21-79%))
- 2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
- 1 (Remote (≤5%))

17.5 In the officers' opinion none of the risks 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**

18.1 That the Policy and Resources Committee and the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee: Approve the final strategy as outlined in Appendix A.

**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>

3	High	
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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy – separate document provided

**Appendix B:** Relevance Test

**Appendix C:** Public Consultation Report

**Appendix D:** Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary – separate document provided



## Appendix B: Relevance Test

### Function/Service Being Assessed: Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy

Officer completing form: Jess Hodges Date of completion: 16/02/2023

#### 1. Populations served/affected:

- Universal (service covering all residents)?  
 Targeted (service aimed at a section of the community –please indicate which)?

#### 2. Is it relevant to the general equality duty?

Which of these three aspects does the function relate to (if any)?:

- 1 – Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation  
 2 – Advancing equality of opportunity  
 3 – Fostering good relations

Is there any evidence or reason to believe that some groups could be differently affected?

- Yes  
 No

Which equality categories are affected?

- Race  
 Age  
 Sexual Orientation  
 Disability  
 Gender  
 Religion  
 Gender reassignment  
 Marriage / civil partnership  
 Maternity / Pregnancy

#### 3. What is the degree of relevance?

In your view, is the information you have on each category adequate to make a decision about relevance?

- Yes

Are there any triggers for this review (for example is there any public concern that functions/services are being operated in a discriminatory manner?) If yes please indicate which:

- Yes  
 No

#### 4. Conclusion

On the basis of the relevance test would you say that there is evidence that a medium or high detrimental impact is likely? (See below for definition)

- Yes  
 No

## Appendix C: Public Consultation Report

Consultation Response Theme	Rank	Background	Officer Response
Planning	1	Number of concerns raised relating to the green belt, green infrastructure and the new Local Plan. Request to take into account biodiversity when building, for example including nest boxes on all new buildings.	Issues relating to planning will be addressed in the Local Plan and are not covered within the scope of the Three Rivers Nature Recovery Strategy. Where applicable Herts Ecology assess planning applications to advise planning officers. In addition to this, the Environment Act: including both Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (to be developed at a larger scale) will also address the impacts of developments on biodiversity. The Guide to Greening Your Home is a document related to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy which is distributed and advises on options to incorporate biodiversity within the home and garden.
Action Plan	2	Desire for the action plan to include greater level of detail with timescales, quantifiable targets and budgets to achieve the actions.	The strategy contains a 5-year action plan and aims to implement all of the actions within these years. Throughout the 5 years, the action plan will be reviewed and then new targets will be set at the end of the action plan timeframe. Officers will review the action plan to outline the actions that can be incorporated within current budgets and then the actions that will require further funding to be sought.
Habitat issues (E.g. management, loss & connectivity)	3	A variety of comments highlighting need for habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors and preventing habitat loss. This included comments to reduce grass cutting especially on verges and suggesting converting conservation cut areas to hay meadow management.	The Council commissioned a Biodiversity Opportunities Audit throughout the District outlining opportunities for ecological gains and improved connectivity District-wide through Council owned land. Several other documents assist in addressing this issue including the Hertfordshire State of Nature Report by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, the Biodiversity Baseline created at Hertfordshire County Council and the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy as part of the Environment Act 2021 which will be created in the future.
Climate Change	4	Concerns raised regarding the impact of climate change and suggestions to mitigate it including: adaptation of drainage, managing grassland as carbon stores and making space for nature to naturally adapt. Also a request for more detail on the climate emergency.	As a result of this consultation officers have drafted an additional section on Adaptation to Climate Change. The Council's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy also covers in detail this topic and the intention is for the strategies to dovetail in with each other.

Community/ Engagement	<b>5</b>	Many comments highlighting value of education, engagement and partnership working.	The Strategy highlights some examples of current partnership working especially within the Rivers & Wetlands section. There are also several actions covering partnership working and education throughout the District within the Action Plan.
Trees	<b>6</b>	Desire for more action regarding hedgerows and planting of trees on pavements to create "tree-lined streets."	The Council's approach to trees are outlined in the Tree Strategy 2022-2027. Hedge planting and hedge restoration are also management prescriptions within the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit.
Enforcement	<b>7</b>	Concerns raised in regards to pollution of watercourses, in particular the chalk streams and the consequences of this.	The District Council does not hold the authority to prosecute water companies; this would lie with the relevant authority for example: the Environment Agency, Natural England or the Police. However, the Environment Act 2021 addresses the issues with discharging sewage into watercourses and plans to reduce this.
Pesticides	<b>8</b>	General comments regarding pesticides, encouraging people and businesses within the District to stop using them.	The Council only uses pesticides to treat non-native invasive species and on occasion tree stumps when there is no other option- in this instance only a specific dose is used to limit impact.
Rewilding	<b>9</b>	Various comments on the topic of rewilding, including opportunities for land to be allocated for "biological rewilding" and protect areas that can springboard recovery via a mix of approaches.	As a result of this consultation officers are drafting an additional section on the topic of rewilding.