



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL - 15 JULY 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM (7)
Subject	DECLARATION OF ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr. Clive Webster - Cabinet Member for Planning, Town and Parish Council Email: clive.webster@cotswold.gov.uk Cllr. Rachel Coxcoon - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Forward Planning Email: rachel.coxcoon@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Sophia Price, Heritage and Design Manager sophia.price@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To gain Council approval to declare an ecological emergency to complement the climate emergency declared by the Council in 2019 and to establish an ecological emergency action plan.
Annexes	Annex A - Emergency Action Plan
Recommendation/s	<i>a) To declare an ecological emergency for the District;</i> <i>b) that the Council approve the “Cotswold District Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan – leading the way towards nature recovery” (Annex A)</i>
Corporate priorities	The declaration of an ecological emergency would help to deliver on all the corporate priorities.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Relevant Cabinet Members. Informal discussions with key external partners Relevant Officers

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1. Cotswold District Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019. In parallel to that declaration it is crucial that the Council also declares an ecological emergency. The need to recognise the importance of the natural environment has been starkly highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis. Scientific research indicates that COVID-19 itself arose because of environmental degradation and our changing relationship with nature. In addition public awareness of nature and the importance of green spaces, including parks, gardens and the countryside, has increased significantly over lockdown and many people have acknowledged the mental and physical health benefits of contact with nature during this difficult time. COVID-19 has also been shown to transfer less easily between people outdoors.
- 1.1.2. By declaring an ecological or nature emergency the Council will be acknowledging the huge and unprecedented declines in species, habitats and natural capital caused by humans over the last hundred years. This loss of nature is not simply of academic or aesthetic interest, the natural environment provides a wealth of benefits that underpin our economic and social wellbeing. Natural capital is a term used to describe the sum of our ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, soils, minerals, air and seas. These are all elements of nature that either directly or indirectly bring value to people and the country at large. They do this in many ways but chiefly by providing us with food, clean air and water, wildlife, energy, wood, recreation, improved health outcomes, flood protection, carbon sequestration etc.
- 1.1.3. The climate emergency and ecological emergency are inextricably linked. The impacts of climate change are altering the distribution of habitats and species and are one of the causes of ecological declines as species are unable to survive increasing temperatures, changes in rainfall and so on. Nature-based solutions are a very effective way to address both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Good habitat management and creation can help to reduce carbon emissions for example through carbon sequestration in soils and trees/woodland. The natural environment can also help to address the impacts of climate change, including through Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems and natural flood management, the provision of shade by trees etc.

1.2. Some key statistics

The global picture

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) stated on World Environment Day (5th June 2020) that “Species are going extinct at a rate that is tens to hundreds of times faster than the average historical rate over the last 10 million years – and humanity has significantly altered 75% of the Earth’s lands and two-thirds of the ocean area” and “encourage everyone to place greater priority on biodiversity in every aspect of our lives, to share this appreciation for nature with those around us, and to learn more about the evidence of our harmful impacts on nature and the options for positive action that we still have within our means.”¹

The IUCN red list highlights that more than 31,000 species worldwide are threatened with extinction, that is over a quarter of all species assessed and includes over 40% of all amphibian species, a quarter of all mammal species and nearly 15% of all bird species.²

¹ <https://ipbes.net/statement-world-environment-day-2020>

² <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>

The UK

The State of Nature report (2019) identified that over a third of English species studied had declined since 1970 and over 10% of species in England are threatened with extinction. Since 1970, the indicator of abundance for 214 priority species has declined by 60%.³

Cotswold District

Unfortunately there is a lack of robust data illustrating changes in species and habitats at the District level; however national data on some key species groups can be extrapolated to indicate what is occurring locally.

- The abundance of countryside butterfly species has declined by 30% since 1976.
- The numbers of farmland birds has declined more severely than birds from any other habitat, with a fall of 54% in the Farmland Bird Indicator since 1970.
- Since 1980, 44% of pollinator species have become less widespread (20% showed a strong decrease).

1.3. Duties and commitments

- 1.3.1** Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires the Council to conserve biodiversity. The declaration of an ecological emergency and implementation of a related action plan will clearly illustrate the Council's commitment to meeting that biodiversity duty and taking action. There are also a range of new legal requirements related to biodiversity coming forward, including in the Environment Bill, which should receive royal assent this year.
- 1.3.2** Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires the Council to "*have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*" Nature forms a key part of that natural beauty and the recent Glover Review highlighted that the ecological value of protected landscapes was declining significantly; given that 80% of the District lies within the AONB this is an important issue. The Cotswolds Conservation Board has signed up to the Colchester Declaration, which states that "Nature recovery is central to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty" and sets some ambitious nature recovery targets.
- 1.3.3** Declaring an ecological emergency and acting upon it will help the Council deliver on the commitments laid out in the government's 25 year Environment Plan - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018).⁴
- 1.3.4** It will also show commitment to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Aichi biodiversity 2020 targets⁵ (2010); of which it is thought that the UK will only meet 5 of the 19 targets by the end of 2020, as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15⁶ – Life on Land.
- 1.3.5** The draft Local Industrial Strategy⁷, produced by the Local Enterprise Partnership – GFirst - emphasises the importance of a natural capital approach to economic growth – "*Natural capital can unlock environmental constraints to growth and*

³ <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁷ https://www.qfirstlep.com/downloads/2020/gloucestershire_draft_local-industrial-strategy_2019-updated.pdf

productivity. Good management of natural capital is essential to building resilience of existing economic activity against the impact of climate change, which will, for example, include flooding and unpredictable water provision.”

- 1.3.6** Cotswold District Council is a signatory to the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (GLNP) Green Infrastructure Pledge, which promotes a variety of nature-based solutions and initiatives.⁸

1.4 Public Opinion

- 1.4.1.** Recent surveys of the public indicate that green spaces and the natural environment have been crucial in supporting their well-being during lockdown. The National Trust (NT) Summer Solstice Poll⁹ found that nearly 70% of adults in the UK said that spending time noticing nature around them has made them feel happy during lockdown and that since lockdown interest in nature has risen by 33%, particularly in the 25-34 year old age group. The RHS Survey¹⁰ for the virtual Chelsea Flower Show showed that 71% of people with a garden felt that this had helped their mental health during lockdown. 74% of respondents to a Gloucestershire survey¹¹ spent more time in nature during lockdown.
- 1.4.2.** Opinion surveys indicate that this increased interest in nature will be maintained in the long-term. For example, the NT survey found that over 55% of people said that they plan to continue to spend more time in nature after lockdown. During the recovery period, 57% of people in Gloucestershire planned to spend more time in green spaces with family and friends.
- 1.4.3.** The lockdown has increased awareness of the lack of access to green spaces. Nationally, 79% of the public felt that the pandemic highlighted the inadequate provision of local green spaces¹². Nearly 40% of those surveyed in Gloucestershire felt that increased provision of public natural green space was a priority for new housing. 73% of people in the food and farming sector also believed people need easier access to nature.
- 1.4.4.** In Gloucestershire people are also concerned about wider ecological impacts - 83% of people are concerned about the impact of food production on wildlife. 78% felt that economic growth targets must be sustainable by accounting for the protection and restoration of nature.
- 1.4.5** A Youth Survey¹³ carried out by GFirst in 2019 found that over 75% of those surveyed agreed that *“to live and work in pleasant surroundings”* and *“I get outdoors and enjoy nature”* were key measures of personal success.

⁸ <https://www.gloucestershirenature.org.uk/green-infrastructure-pledge>

⁹ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/uk-values-nature-more-as-a-result-of-lockdown-according-to-summer-solstice-poll->

¹⁰ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/press/releases/RHS-Announces-Appreciation-of-Gardens-doubled-duri>

¹¹ Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (2020) Life after lockdown survey of public opinion in Gloucestershire on environmental recovery post-covid

¹² https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf

¹³ <https://www.gfirstlep.com/downloads/2019/gfirst-lep-youth-survey-2019v2.pdf>

1.5. Ecological Emergency declarations by other Councils

Several other Councils have already declared an ecological emergency, for example Forest of Dean District Council¹⁴; West Oxfordshire District Council¹⁵ and Bristol City Council¹⁶.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1 To address the ecological emergency and to help reverse it, a wide range of actions are required of the Council and many others, from individual householders, public sector organisations and businesses to nature conservation organisations, community groups and the agricultural sector. The key nature recovery actions for the Council over the next 12 - 24 months are listed in the ecological emergency action plan (appendix A).

2.2 These actions will help the Council to deliver on the duties and commitments listed above, for example the 25 year Environment Plan goal - *“Creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network, focusing on priority habitats as part of a wider set of land management changes providing extensive benefits.”*

2.3 The importance of working in partnership to achieve nature recovery cannot be under-estimated and the action plan has been developed in collaboration with the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership¹⁷ (the key partnership of natural environment organisations, local government, Gloucestershire First and the health sector in the county) and some of its individual member organisations, such as the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1. There are currently no financial implications arising from this report. Decision making reports include alternative options and the financial implications of these options.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. There are currently no legal implications arising from this report, other than that the delivery of the action plan will help the Council meet its legal duties.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. The main risk arising from the declaration of an ecological emergency is that it may raise expectations of increased action that the Council might not be able to deliver at present.

¹⁴ <https://www.fdean.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/our-route-to-carbon-neutral/>

¹⁵ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/climate-action-and-what-we-are-doing/>

¹⁶ <https://news.bristol.gov.uk/news/bristol-declares-ecological-emergency>

¹⁷ <https://www.gloucestershirenature.org.uk/>

6. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1.** The ecological and climate change emergencies are inextricably linked and it is key to ensure that any actions taken to address one, also maximise opportunities to address the other.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1.** No relevant alternatives other than “do nothing”.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1.** None.

(END)